

Can Subversive-Fulfilment Provide a Fresh Approach to Understand the  
Engagement between the Christian Assembly and the Surrounding Cultures  
(Judaism, the Nations, and the Roman State)  
within the Narrative Flow of the Acts of the Apostles?

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## ABSTRACT

The engagement between the Christian assembly, Judaism, the Nations and the Roman State in Acts has been a subject of scholarly discussion resulting in different solutions and contradictory conclusions. In this thesis I contend that a fresh approach is necessary to understand this multi-faceted engagement; an approach that can complement the strengths of other perspectives but which effectively addresses their weaknesses and limitations. Such an approach is subversive-fulfilment as developed by Daniel Strange. Developed from a close engagement with Scripture and within a twentieth century Reformed theological perspective this approach reflects Strange's desire to engage with non-Christian religions and worldviews.

Subversive-fulfilment is founded on a covenantal redemptive-historical methodology. Created in God's image but distinct from God, people choose idolatrous rather than theocentric worship and this results in a tension. Since people are made in the *imago dei* there is a continuity, but that image is marred and people look to worship other things, creating a discontinuity. This tension develops within the meta-narrative of Scripture and looks to the promised fulfilment of God's salvation. It develops at the metaphysical, epistemological and ethical levels. Subversive-fulfilment recognises and accounts for these continuities and discontinuities in the extra-ecclesial and intra-ecclesial engagements in Acts. Subversive-fulfilment functions by discerning points of contact between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. By entering and exploring the surrounding cultures, the assembly provides points of contact by which to expose and subvert the idolatry and by which it can proclaim the gospel, the promised fulfilment of God's salvation which in Acts is christological.

Thus, fulfilment is found in the present and eschatologically. Such engagement occurs by appropriately contextualising the Christian message within its surrounding cultures. It is argued that such an approach can be seen in Acts, specifically through a close reading of the narrative from Acts 13-17, and as a hermeneutical lens can provide a valuable means for a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the engagement between the Christian assembly and its surrounding cultures in Acts.

Key Words: Acts of the Apostles, subversive-fulfilment, reformed theology, engagement, idolatry, discontinuity, continuity, metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, subvert, fulfil(ment).

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentary Series
AOTC	The Apollos Old Testament Commentary Series
ASMA	Aarhus Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity Series
ASMS	American Society of Missiology Series
AUS	American University Studies
AYBRL	The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gringrich, 4 <sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BECNT	The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
BUP	Baylor University Press
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>

CBQ	<i>The Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CPSSup	Cambridge Philological Society Supplement Series
CSNTCO	Claremont Studies in New Testament and Christian Origins
CTDG	Cambridge Translations from Greek Drama
CUP	Cambridge University Press
ECAM	Early Christianity in Asia Minor
EMSS	Evangelical Missiological Society Series
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HUP	Harvard University Press
<i>IRM</i>	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
IUP	Indiana University Press
IVP	Inter-Varsity Press
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBLSym	Journal of Biblical Literature Symposium
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement

<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplement Series
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTM	New Testament Monographs
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OBMR</i>	<i>Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research</i>
<i>OGIS</i>	<i>Orientis Graecae Inscriptiones Selectae</i>
OTNT	Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament
OUP	Oxford University Press
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>

SAIACS	South Asian Institute of Advanced Christian Studies
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDiss	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SCM	Student Christian Movement
<i>SFM</i>	<i>St Francis Magazine</i>
SIHC	Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
SP	Sacra Pagina
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
TTL	Theological Translation Library
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
VCSup	Vigilae Christianae Supplements
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YUP	Yale University Press
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Why a Fresh Approach?

A central feature of Christian Scripture is the portrayal of the engagement between the people of God and the surrounding cultures. This engagement has been of significant interest within Christian history, but previous interpretive approaches appear unable to effectively address these engagements. What is required is a fresh approach which provides a coherent, nuanced, and integrated understanding of the engagements. This is the aim of this thesis.

Previous scholarly interest has been wide-ranging, multi-disciplinary, and provides a variety of angles and foci. Old Testament scholarship has focused upon the cross-cultural engagement in Israel's subversion and re-contextualisation of Canaanite literature,<sup>1</sup> Israel's monotheism acting as a contrast against the pluralism of the nations,<sup>2</sup> and the translatability of Yahweh with the gods of the surrounding nations.<sup>3</sup> New Testament scholarship has studied topics such as: the engagement of the Christian assembly with Judaism,<sup>4</sup> considering it to be anti-Judaic or pro-Judaic;<sup>5</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> Hutton writes, "I argue that many in the community of mainstream Yahwism had subverted contemporary Canaanite literature through their reuse of a Canaanite hymn for this specifically Yahwistic purpose...In short, I believe that this reuse and recontextualization of Canaanite mythic themes and vocabulary were intentional, methodical, and purposeful at both levels of the 'double subversion.'" J. M. Hutton, "Isaiah 51:9-11 and the Rhetorical Appropriation and Subversion of Hostile Theologies," *JBL* 126 (2007): 274-275.

<sup>2</sup> M. S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 182-188.

<sup>3</sup> M. S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 275-300.

<sup>4</sup> For how I use the term 'Christian assembly' within this thesis see Introduction: 4. 'Distinguishing Terms'.

<sup>5</sup> S. Freyne, "Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, 'Others' in Late Antiquity* (eds. J.



Graeco-Roman beliefs and structures,<sup>6</sup> such as the imitation and Hellenisation of writing styles in the Acts of the Apostles,<sup>7</sup> how mission is understood in relation to human powers and authorities, and the divine beliefs of the Graeco-Roman world;<sup>8</sup> as well as the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State, for example developing a sense of place for the Christian community in the Roman

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Neusner and E. S. Friechs; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 117-143; A. F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1986); E. A. Judge, "Judaism and the Rise of Christianity: A Roman Perspective," *TynB* 45 (1994): 355-368; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: SCM Press, 2006); M. A. Beavis, *Jesus and Utopia: Looking for the Kingdom of God in the Roman World* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006); G. A. Klingbeil and M. G. Klingbeil, "The Prophetic Voice of Amos as a Paradigm for Christians in the Public Square," *TynB* 58 (2007): 161-182; and A. Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intra Group Conflict," *JBL* 127 (2008): 95-132.

<sup>6</sup> H. Weiss, "The Pagani among the Contemporaries of the First Christians," *JBL* 86 (1967): 42-52; R. Morton, "Glory to God and to the Lamb: John's Use of Jewish and Hellenistic/Roman Themes in Formatting his Theology in Revelation 4-5," *JSNT* 83 (2001): 89-109; W. T. Wilson, "Urban Legends: Acts 10:1-11:18 and the Strategies of Greco-Roman Foundation Narratives," *JBL* 120 (2001): 99; and C. L. Brinks, "'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians': Acts 19:23-41 in Light of Goddess Worship in Ephesus," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 776-794.

<sup>7</sup> T. L. Brodie, "Towards Unraveling the Rhetorical Imitation of Sources in Acts: 2 Kgs 5 as One Component of Acts 8, 9-40," *Bib* 67 (1986): 41-67; T. L. Brodie, "Greco-Roman Imitation of Texts as a Partial Guide of Luke's use of Sources," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (ed. C. H. Talbert; New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1984), 17-46; and Wilson, "Urban Legends," 99.

<sup>8</sup> S. Walton, "What does 'Mission' in Acts Mean in Relation to the 'Powers that Be'?" *JETS* 55 (2012): 538; and Brinks, "Artemis," 776-794.

world,<sup>9</sup> engagement with the Roman emperor and the imperial cult,<sup>10</sup> and subverting the Roman world.<sup>11</sup>

Other scholarship has focused upon the engagement of the Early Church Fathers with the surrounding cultures,<sup>12</sup> the engagement between the Christian assembly

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<sup>9</sup> G. Gilbert, "Roman Propaganda and Christian Identity in the Worldview of Luke-Acts," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (JBL Symposium 20; eds. T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele; Atlanta, Georg.: SBL, 2003), 237.

<sup>10</sup> "Whatever the origin or derivation of the various terms used, say, to describe the character of Christ's dominion and achievements, there seems little doubt that at some points at least these terms coincide with comparable terms used to express the nature of the Roman emperor's rule and devotion to his cult. Given the advertisement of the Empire's ideology in material as well as literary forms - in buildings, statues, coins and so on - we must take it with full seriousness as the context in which early Christian claims were heard, by both Christians and non-Christians." D. G. Horrell, "Introduction," *JSNT* 27 (2005): 254. See also K. Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1986); E. P. Janzen, "The Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor's Clothes," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. H. Lovering; Atlanta, Georg.: Scholars Press, 1994), 637-661; K. T. Hun, "The Anarthrous υἱὸς θεοῦ in Mark 15,39 and the Roman Imperial Cult," *Bib* 79 (1998): 221-241; P. A. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John," *JSNT* 77 (2000): 99-121; D. Burk, "Is Paul's Gospel Counterimperial? Evaluating the Prospects of the 'Fresh Perspective' for Evangelical Theology," *JETS* 51 (2008): 309-338; J. K. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult: A Critical Analysis of the First-Century Social Context of Paul's Letter* (WUNT II/237; ed. J. Frey; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 23; S. Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008); Walton, "'Mission'," 537-556; C. Bennema, "The Ethnic Conflict in Early Christianity: An Appraisal of Bauckham's Proposal on the Antioch Crisis and the Jerusalem Council," *JETS* 56 (2013): 763; C. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for a Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul* (WUNT II/392; ed. J. Frey; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); T. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford: OUP, 2015); and M. Kochenash, "'Adam, Son of God' (Luke 3.38): Another Jesus-Augustus Parallel in Luke's Gospel," *NTS* 64 (2018): 307-325.

<sup>11</sup> Skinner insightfully writes, "What they teach about Jesus Christ asks people to embrace new religious, social, political, and economic values, sometimes putting both the proclaimers and their audiences at odds with the established social order. That social order - 'the world' consisting of various cultural pockets that together make up the Roman Empire - doesn't appreciate being turned upside down. So it usually strikes back, not out of blind bigotry or petty disagreements over personal religious convictions but out of keen awareness of just how influential this new religion will be if it is allowed to settle into a community and change how people live, worship, think about themselves, and spend their money. This gospel creates new realities among those who join it, even as it occasionally upsets their pre-existing convictions about what's proper. Or what's possible. The gospel is, in a word, disruptive." M. L. Skinner, *Intrusive God, Disruptive Gospel: Encountering the Divine in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2015), xi-xii.

<sup>12</sup> J. Danielou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (vol. 2 of *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*; ed. and trans. J. A. Baker; London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1973); R. H. Nash, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984); R. Lane-Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London: Penguin Books, 1986); G. Keith, "Justin Martyr and Religious Exclusivism,"

and other religions,<sup>13</sup> modern mission and the concept of contextualising the Christian message,<sup>14</sup> the Christian assembly's engagement with and in a post-modern, pluralistic, twenty-first century environment;<sup>15</sup> addressing the challenge of pluralism,<sup>16</sup> avoiding syncretistic beliefs and practices,<sup>17</sup> and subverting the modern world. Even as recently as October 2019 John Stevens writes, "More importantly as

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*TynB* 44 (1993): 57-80; N. McLynn, *Christian Politics and Religious Culture in Late Antiquity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); and C. K. Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven: YUP, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: OUP, 1964); and J. Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996); C. H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979); R. O. Costa (ed.), *One Faith, Many Cultures: Inculturation, Indigenization, and Contextualization* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1988); L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989); L. Newbigin, "Confessing Christ in a Multi-Religion Society," *SBET* 12 (1994): 125-136; A. S. Moreau et al., *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2004), 52-61; L. W. Caldwell, "Diaspora Ministry in the Book of Acts: Insights from Two Speeches of the Apostle Paul to Help Guide Diaspora Ministry Today," in *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World* (EMSS 23; eds. M. Pocock and E. Wan; Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2015), 91-105; and V. Ramachandra, *Gods that Fail: Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> A. Fernando, *The Christian's Attitude Toward World Religions* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988); H. Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: The Conflict of Christian Faith and American Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990); D. F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993); S. A. Rhodes, *Where Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1998); A. J. L. Menuge, *Christ and Culture in Dialogue: Constructive Themes and Practical Applications* (Saint Louis, Miss.: Concordia Publishing, 1999); D. T. Koyzis, *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2003); R. Inchausti, *Subversive Orthodoxy: Outlaws, Revolutionaries, and Other Christians in Disguise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2005); R. J. Sudworth, "Missional Discipleship: Following Christ the Lord in a Multi-Faith Society," *Anvil* 25 (2008): 85-94; J. M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P. & R. Publishing, 2008), 853-908; A. Young, "A P(new)matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World," in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths: A Reader* (eds. A. Race and P. M. Hedges; London: SCM Press, 2009), 33-40; and T. Keller, *Loving the City: Doing Balanced Gospel-Centred Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2016), 195-293.

<sup>16</sup> B. W. Winter, "Theological and Ethical Responses to Religious Pluralism - 1 Corinthians 8-10," *TynB* 41 (1990): 209-226; D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996); H. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001); and G. L. Sitter, "The Early Church Thrived Amid Secularism and Shows How We Can, Too," n.p. [cited 27 October 2019] [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/october-web-only/early-church-thrived-amid-secularism-we-can-too.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/october-web-only/early-church-thrived-amid-secularism-we-can-too.html).

<sup>17</sup> G. Van Rheenen (ed.) *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* (EMSS 13; Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2006).

Christians our task is to try to ensure that it is the gospel message that will subvert and change the culture, by persisting in faithful gospel ministry. We need to have confidence that the gospel message is the most subversive and revolutionary ideology, capable of changing and transforming not just individuals but whole societies.”<sup>18</sup>

Within the scope of these studies much scholarship has focused upon Luke’s Acts of the Apostles as a starting point, significant setting, or model for understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and its surrounding cultures.<sup>19</sup> Craig Keener writes, “It is thus not surprising that contemporary missiologists and others interested in contextualization find in Acts important models for mission. Many of the growing churches in the global South and East are using Acts as a model for their present mission and empowerment.”<sup>20</sup> The engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts is an important aspect of the Lukan narrative.<sup>21</sup> The focus of scholarship has been the various contexts in which the Christian community developed: the Christian assembly in its relationship with

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<sup>18</sup> J. Stevens, “Gospel Ministry: We Need to Persist with Confidence because we are ‘On His Majesty’s Secret Service’,” n.p. [cited 15 October 2019] [www.john-stevens.com/2019/10/gospel-ministry-we-need-to-persist-with.html](http://www.john-stevens.com/2019/10/gospel-ministry-we-need-to-persist-with.html).

<sup>19</sup> See Penner’s work which provides a substantial overview of the different methodological approaches to Acts. T. Penner, “Madness in the Method? The Acts of the Apostles in Current Study,” *CBR* 2 (2004): 223-293. I am using ‘Luke’ as the name of the author of the Third Gospel and Acts but without any necessary implications as to the author’s identity.

<sup>20</sup> C. Keener, *Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (vol. 1 of *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2012), 510. See also B. R. Wilson, “The Depiction of Church Growth in Acts,” *JETS* 60 (2017): 317; and R. T. George, “Reconstructing Early Christian Posture in Lukan Historical Writing from a Postcolonial Perspective,” in *Religious Freedom and Conversion in India* (eds. A. V. John et al.; Bangalore: SAIACS Press, 2017), 118-138.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 3: A Theological Orientation to Luke-Acts for comment on the historicity of Acts, its date of composition, the genre, Lukan unity, the different texts, the author’s purpose, Luke’s sources, the Paul of Acts, and the ‘We’ passages.

Judaism, from which it emerged, the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world, and the Christian assembly and the Roman State. James Edwards writing of Luke and Acts summarises thus,

Luke 3.1-2 frames the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus with reference to the major potentates of the day - a Roman emperor, a Roman governor of Palestine, three Roman tetrarchs of Palestine and two Jewish high priests in Jerusalem... The Third Gospel portrays Christian beginnings in the context of dominant institutions and leaders of the day. Attention to authorities continues in Acts, demonstrating that the appearance of the gospel before authorities is not accidental but typical, a fulfilment of Jesus' eschatological discourse that disciples 'will be brought before kings and governors on account of my name' (Luke 21.12).<sup>22</sup>

To understand these engagements scholarship has used multiple and varied hermeneutical perspectives including historical analysis, literary, rhetorical, narrative, and sociological analysis, feminist approaches, postcolonial approaches, canonical and theological interpretations, and synthetic interpretations utilising a combination of perspectives.<sup>23</sup> The result of this scholarship has been varied and has led to contradictory conclusions about the purpose, means, and result of the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> J. R. Edwards, "Public Theology' in Luke-Acts: The Witness of the Gospel to Powers and Authorities," *NTS* 62 (2016): 227-228.

<sup>23</sup> These approaches are identified by E. J. Schnabel, "Fads and Common Sense: Reading Acts in the First Century and Reading Acts Today," *JETS* 54 (2011): 251. See also L. T. Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (AYBRL; New Haven: YUP, 2009), 15-17 and C. H. Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts in its Mediterranean Milieu* (NovTSup 57; eds. M. M. Mitchell and D. P. Moessner; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 11-14.

<sup>24</sup> A representative sample of previous scholarship will be outlined and examined in chapter one. As brief examples, in the engagement with the Roman State scholars disagree whether it is an apologia to Rome about the assembly or to the assembly about Rome. Other scholars reject the apologia totally and posit an alternative. In the engagement with the Graeco-Roman world Kauppi, for example argues that in Acts people are to repent and turn away from Graeco-Roman worship and yet that Graeco-Roman culture can be 'baptized' or 'christianised' and included as part of the Christian perspective. In the assessment of the engagement with Judaism some scholars have concluded that Acts is anti-semitic whilst others have concluded it is pro-Jewish.

It is clear from such contradictory conclusions that to better understand the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism, the Graeco-Roman world, and the Roman State as depicted in Acts a fresh approach is required, one that can complement the strengths of previous research but also address their limitations. Further, such an approach needs to give priority to the theological framework of Luke-Acts, interpreting the socio-historical contexts as settings that are theologically conceived.<sup>25</sup> This approach will then provide a sufficiently sophisticated way to understand and carefully address the variegated nature of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. I would contend that the hermeneutical lens of subversive-fulfilment as developed by Daniel Strange is a potential model to achieve this.<sup>26</sup>

This perspective can provide a fresh approach because it is a potential framework which can coherently integrate and account for the theological vision of Luke-Acts and the social, political, and cultural elements found in the narrative. A subversive-fulfilment approach can also address engagements as they occur within an unbroken naturally developing section of narrative and enable a reading of both the extra- and intra-ecclesial engagements in Acts. My proposal is that this model provides a more coherent, nuanced and subtle analysis of these engagements than previous scholarship, enabling it to avoid the weaknesses of previous scholarship and to offer fruitful exegetical and theological insights.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The theological setting of Luke-Acts is addressed in chapter three of this thesis.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Daniel Strange is Director of Crosslands Forum, a training college situated in the North of England. He lectures on Culture, Religion and Public Theology.

<sup>27</sup> Horrell notes the need for such a nuanced and subtle analysis when considering the engagement between New Testament literature and Rome. He writes, "Yet the diversity and character of New

## 2. Methodology

The methodological approach adopted in this thesis for reading the text of Acts is narrative-theological, an approach that effectively combines the central literary and theological features found in Acts. Sean Adams notes that an approach that appreciates these features of Acts has been recognised as providing “new and insightful interpretations.”<sup>28</sup> In scholarship there is an elasticity to the term ‘narrative’. It is applied to the analysis of how the biblical literature functions - for example the use of rhetoric, setting, or plot,<sup>29</sup> as a means for creating paradigms to illuminate good and evil,<sup>30</sup> through to a way of discovering and addressing the stories which have, or may have, influenced the New Testament writers.<sup>31</sup> The use of the term

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Testament material, and the various ways in which this material echoes, parallels, or opposes Roman claims, combine to require rather more nuanced and subtle analyses.” Horrell, “Introduction,” 255.

<sup>28</sup> S. A. Adams, “The Characterization of Disciples in Acts: Genre, Method, and Quality,” in *Characters and Characterization in Luke-Acts* (LNTS 548; eds. F. E. Dicken and J. A. Snyder; London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 155. Kurz notes that there has been a paradigm shift toward multi-disciplinary and more holistic approaches. W. S. Kurz, “Narrative Approaches to Luke-Acts,” *Bib* 68 (1987): 195. See also R. C. Tannehill, *The Gospel According to Luke* (vol. 1 of *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); F. G. Downing, “Theophilus’s First Reading of Luke-Acts,” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (JSNTSS 116; ed. C. M. Tuckett; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 100; P. J. Achtemeier et al., *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 249-250; L. C. A. Alexander, *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles* (LNTS 298; ed. M. Goodacre; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 181-182; R. P. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 241; and P. R. Rodgers, *Text and Story: Narrative Studies in New Testament Textual Criticism* (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick Publishers, 2011), 11.

<sup>29</sup> For example see Witherington’s discussion about rhetoric in Acts. B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 45. See also D. Marguerat and Y. Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1999), ix.

<sup>30</sup> W. S. Kurz, “Narrative Models for Imitation in Luke-Acts,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds. D. L. Balch et al.; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 172-173.

<sup>31</sup> See chapter five of this thesis and the reference to the story of Baucis and Philemon. See also Rodgers, *Text and Story*, 4; and S. S. Bartchy, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (eds. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1997), 787-788. For a work that attempts to combine these three understandings of ‘narrative’ see O. W. Allen, Jr., *The Death of Herod: The Narrative and Theological Function of Retribution in Luke-Acts* (SBLDiss. 158; ed. E. E. Johnson; Atlanta, Georg.: SBL, 1997), 25-26.

'narrative' in this thesis attempts to combine each of these definitions as well as maintaining that Acts is to be read as a story<sup>32</sup> - recounting the events that happened - but with an ultimate intention of using the story to affect the listener.<sup>33</sup> This narrative approach takes seriously the historical, social, political, literary, and cultural setting of Acts in its first-century context.<sup>34</sup> Paul Duff rightly comments,

In order to understand the Jesus movement, we must first understand something about the political and cultural environment of the society in which it took root...Hellenism, Judaism, and Roman power contributed significantly to the world in which the Jesus movement came into existence. Each also influenced the Jesus movement as it later spread throughout the empire.<sup>35</sup>

Complementing the narrative of Acts is a strong theological framework, for Acts is a narrative theology, "Luke's theological story", in which the primary character is

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<sup>32</sup> Burrus holds that Luke-Acts should be considered novelistic. V. Burrus, "The Gospel of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (ed. F. F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajab; London: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 144-147.

<sup>33</sup> Marguerat and Bourquin note that "every narrative is composed with a view to having an affect on the reader." Marguerat and Bourquin, *Bible Stories*, 3. See also T. Wiarda, "The Jerusalem Council and the Theological Task," *JETS* 46 (2003): 241; C. Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2014), 1 n. 1; J. A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville, Kent.: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 17, 53-54; and M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, India.: IUP, 1987), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Schnabel critiques those who focus on the theological to the exclusion or detriment of the historical. He writes, "Scholars who do not want to engage historical reality of the first century should, perhaps, seek other objects of inquiry than the Acts of the Apostles." Schnabel, "Fads," 258, 259. See also G. D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Louisville, Kent.: John Knox Press, 2002), 96-97; J. Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (SNTW; eds. J. Barclay et al.; London: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 17; S. Walton, "ὁμοθυμαδὸν in Acts: Co-location, Common Action or 'Of One Heart and Mind'?" in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B. W. Winter on His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (eds. P. J. Williams et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 89; C. K. Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 9; and A. J. Köstenberger and R. D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2011), 93.

<sup>35</sup> P. Duff, *Jesus Followers in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 13. See also D. W. J. Gill, "The Roman Empire as a Context for the New Testament," in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 389; M. Green, *30 Years that Changed the World: A Fresh Look at the Book of Acts* (Leicester: IVP, 2002), 7; and C. Forbes, "The Acts of the Apostles as a Source for Studying Early Christianity," in *Into all the World: Emergent Christianity in its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (eds. M. Harding and A. Nobbs; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 6.



God,<sup>36</sup> “who acts in history.”<sup>37</sup> Thus whilst taking seriously the various cultural settings of Acts in its first-century context this reading places them within a theological framework.<sup>38</sup> Eckhard Schnabel justifiably draws together these two features:

Acts presents part of the history of the early church, and thus must be interpreted with the full range of historical methods, taking into account Jewish and Greco-Roman social, cultural, and political history. Acts is a literary work and thus must be interpreted with literary methods. Acts consists of a narrative and must be read with narrative concerns in mind. The author of Acts wants to convince readers, just as the characters of his narrative seek to convince various audiences through speeches, thus his work deserves to be analyzed with rhetorical methods. The author of Acts presents theological convictions, thus his work needs to be interpreted in the context of early Christian theology.<sup>39</sup>

Such an approach is open to interacting with other perspectives as they have engaged with the narrative of Acts and can incorporate these, enabling them to make important contributions to understanding the engagement in Luke-Acts.<sup>40</sup> Such

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<sup>36</sup> D. L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012), 28. See also R. B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (London: SPCK, 2015), 57; and R. C. Tannehill, “The Story of Israel within the Lukan Narrative,” in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke’s Narrative Claim upon Israel’s Legacy* (ed. D. P. Moessner; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press, 1999), 326.

<sup>37</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 492. Keener also writes, “Luke’s theology is not a traditional systematic theology; it may be understood, however, as a work of narrative theology.” Keener, *Introduction*, 497. See also B. R. Gaventa, “Toward a Theology of Acts: Reading and Rereading,” *Interpretation* 42 (1988): 152; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 372; and C. R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kent.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 34-35.

<sup>38</sup> Brighton writes, correctly in my view, “If we desire to understand the NT, we must learn all that we can about the world in which Jesus, the disciples, and the earliest Christians lived. The reason why is easily understood but often overlooked: the biblical authors did not write to a modern Western world but rather to those who lived in first-century imperial Rome. We, therefore, simply cannot read any NT passage and then ask directly, ‘What does this mean to us?’ because that question cannot be answered until we have determined as far as possible, what the text meant to the original readers. So those who would bring God’s word to bear on 21st-century lives have no choice but to learn the ancient Greek language, rhetoric, culture, and history, for these comprise the world of the NT authors.” M. A. Brighton, “The Sicarii in Acts: A New Perspective,” *JETS* 54 (2011): 547. See also Marguerat and Bourquin, *Bible Stories*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Schnabel, “Fads,” 277-278.

<sup>40</sup> Kurz, “Narrative Approaches,” 200-201. Bovon notes the necessity of integrating the theological with the literary, historical, and textual. F. Bovon, *Luke the Theologian* (Rev. ed.; Waco, Tex.: BUP, 2006), vii.

a multi-disciplinary approach can indeed provide a nuanced and sophisticated reading of Acts. For example, this narrative-theological approach acknowledges that the narrative works simultaneously at the level of the characters in the story and the level of the Lukan audience. Thus, there are moments in the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures when the narrative portrays the assembly's opponents as dishonest and untrustworthy, or where the characters in the narrative do not understand the engagement with the assembly. At the same time, the Lukan audience must understand the narrative's function in such a portrayal or an inability to understand. The narrative also draws upon Old Testament echoes,<sup>41</sup> allusions, explicit scriptural references, as well as references to Hellenic and Roman beliefs, stories, and practices which the Lukan audience are expected to understand and apply to the situation unfolding in the narrative. In that sense this narrative-theological approach provides a blending of authorial intent and reader-response. The author is not just describing events but situating events within the framework of the ascension and continuing reign of Jesus with the aim of affecting the audience.<sup>42</sup> Thus, implicitly, the authorial intent assumes an educated and aware reader-response - the Lukan audience responding first to the christological reframing of the scriptures and the way in which the surrounding cultures perceive themselves - and also to the exhortatory nature of the narrative - the Lukan audience taking the word out themselves to the ends of the earth.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The use of the word 'echo' here is "a word or phrase imbedded in the a [sic] gospel or letter which evoked a much larger context, known and understood by writer and readers." Rodgers, *Text and Story*, 10.

<sup>42</sup> J. Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 37, 39; and A. C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Bible Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> Marguerat and Bourquin, *Bible Stories*, 7; Kurz, "Narrative Models," 174, 189; and Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 14-18. Barrett argues that Acts is written as an apologia to make a case. Only this makes

### 3. Dialogue Partners

Such a reading of the engagements in Acts will clearly benefit from a dialogue with other scholars who have examined and approached the engagements with the surrounding cultures from a different perspective. Chapter one of this thesis provides a critical survey of previous scholarship. The ten scholarly positions chosen are influential upon the study of Acts, provide a significant analysis of the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding culture(s), and are representative of a wider body of scholarship. I have also chosen two further dialogue partners with whom I will engage in a closer and more sustained conversation. These scholars, Craig Keener and C. Kevin Rowe, are current and influential in their research in Acts and have made a substantial and original contribution to the discussion. In their recent works both have developed more nuanced and careful arguments about the nature of the engagements - providing both similarities with subversive-fulfilment but also substantial differences. Such a dialogue with these two scholars provides the potential for this thesis to demonstrate not only that it can address the limitations of a wider field of scholarship but also engage with those scholars who have produced recent, nuanced, and ground-breaking accounts of the engagement between the Christian assembly and its surrounding cultures.

#### 3.1. C. Keener

Craig Keener is Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary. His commentaries on Acts are current, contemporary with the work of Rowe, and

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sense “of those polemical features and controversial events.” C. K. Barrett, “How History Should be Written,” in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. B. Witherington III; Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 37.

substantial.<sup>44</sup> His multi-volume work is recognised as a most significant and original contribution to the study of Acts.<sup>45</sup> Keener is a valuable dialogue partner because he represents the dominant perspective about the purpose of Acts, that is, Acts as apologia, and he attributes the apologia to Luke's theological vision and purpose.<sup>46</sup> Yet Keener nuances the apologia perceiving it as an intra-ecclesial model for engagement with the authorities and surrounding cultures. Keener asserts that Acts is to be read within the theological framework of promise-fulfilment and perceived as socially transformative not politically subversive. This perspective means that Keener is distinct from both the positions of myself and Rowe and this creates the potential for a triologue.

### 3.2. C. Kavin Rowe

C. Kavin Rowe is Professor of New Testament at Duke University Divinity School and his contribution to Acts' scholarship has been recognised as original and significant to understanding the engagement between the Church and the surrounding cultures.<sup>47</sup> Rowe rejects the common assertion of Acts as *apologia*, whether *pro ecclesia* or *pro imperio*, and posits a more sophisticated argument that the theological vision of Luke results in a tension through the collision of cultures -

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<sup>44</sup> S. A. Adams, "Book Review," *Themelios* 40 (2015): 311-312.

<sup>45</sup> Mittelstadt writes, "Graduate students engaged in thesis/dissertation research as well as seasoned Lukan scholars who choose not to employ Keener's scholarship do so to their own detriment." M. W. Mittelstadt, "Craig Keener's Acts: An Exegetical Commentary Encyclopedia in Four Volumes: An Almost Exhaustive and Exhausting Work," Pages 1-17. [cited 10 October 2018] [https://www.academia.edu/23038358/Review\\_Essay\\_Craig\\_Keeners\\_Acts\\_An\\_Exegetical\\_Commentary\\_Encyclopedia\\_in\\_Four\\_Volumes\\_An\\_Almost\\_Exhaustive\\_and\\_Exhausting\\_Work](https://www.academia.edu/23038358/Review_Essay_Craig_Keeners_Acts_An_Exegetical_Commentary_Encyclopedia_in_Four_Volumes_An_Almost_Exhaustive_and_Exhausting_Work).

<sup>46</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 435.

<sup>47</sup> M. Sleeman, "The Vision of Acts: World Right Way Up," *JSNT* 33 (2011): 327-333; and S. Walton, "World Upside Down? A Conversation with C. Kavin Rowe," *JSNT* 33 (2011): 317-319.

those of the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world. This tension is exacerbated since the narrative declares Christianity to be innocent of sedition against Rome. Rowe is a helpful dialogue partner because he takes the theological vision of Luke seriously whilst recognising the cultural impact the theological vision has and his choice of pericopes, Acts 14, 16, 17, and 19, provides significant overlap with my own analysis of Acts.

There are potential limitations with any dialogue partner. These might include that the approach of some scholars has been subject-focused, drawing on a selective and limited set of verses rather than on an unbroken section of narrative. As we shall see in chapter one, some scholars take a narrow focus and only examine the engagement with one of the surrounding cultures - the Christian assembly and Judaism, or the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world, or the Christian assembly and the Roman State. Thus, they have not engaged with Acts as a developing narrative and have limited their ability to analyse the complex and multiple engagements that occur in the narrative of Acts. A further limitation is that scholars select specific pericopes and episodes that fit the methodology being applied. Whilst limitations to the dialogue are important, they do not make such a dialogue illegitimate or redundant. On the contrary they re-emphasise the need for a fresh approach to understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures that is sufficiently sophisticated to deal with the various engagements and which can allow the narrative to be read as it naturally develops. Such a fresh approach is subversive-fulfilment with the concept of *possessio* at the heart of the reading which provides a means for different engagements to be examined and assessed across an unbroken section of the Lukan narrative.

## 4. Distinguishing Terms

Within the Acts of the Apostles there are various terms that are debated in scholarship. Such variety is difficult when these terms may carry wider connotations than perhaps they did in the first century. Therefore I have sought to distinguish and define two terms that I shall use regularly throughout this thesis. They are ‘Christian assembly’ and ‘the nations’.

### 4.1. The Christian Assembly

Whilst both the terms “Christian” (Χριστιανός) and “Church” (ἐκκλησία) occur in Acts, the intervening centuries have given them new meaning and established them as monolithic groupings.<sup>48</sup> This means it is difficult to use them without some form of misunderstanding.<sup>49</sup> The term ἐκκλησία is used by Luke in Acts twenty-three times.<sup>50</sup> Scholars dispute whether the use of this word was primarily influenced by the LXX or the Graeco-Roman world. Trebilco, Dunn, and McCreedy argue for the former whilst van Kooten argues that it is the civic assemblies of the Greco-Roman world that influence the New Testament understanding of the term.<sup>51</sup> Beale and Bruce argue

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<sup>48</sup> D. M. Scholer (ed.), *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 2. See A. von Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (TTL 20; 2 vol.; ed. and trans. J. Moffat; London: Williams & Norgate, 1904), 1:60. In my interaction with other scholarship I do use the terms ‘Christianity’ and ‘Church’. This reflects the use of these terms by the scholars I am engaging with.

<sup>49</sup> J. T. Hughes, *Ecclesial Solidarity in the Pauline Corpus: Relationships between Churches in Paul’s Letters* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Acts 5:11; 7:38; 8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 19:32, 39, 40; 20:17, 28.

<sup>51</sup> See P. Trebilco, “Why Did the Early Christians Call Themselves ἡ ἐκκλησία?” *NTS* 57 (2011): 440-460; P. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 164-207; P. Trebilco, “The Significance of the Distribution of Self-designations in Acts,” *NovT* 54 (2012): 43-45; J. D. G. Dunn, *Beginning From Jerusalem* (Vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 600-601; W. O. McCreedy, “Ekklesia and Voluntary Associations,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (eds. J. S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996), 60; and G. H. van Kooten, “ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ: The ‘Church of

that it is influenced by both the Jewish and Graeco-Roman backgrounds and this position is adopted in this thesis.<sup>52</sup>

There is also a debate amongst scholars about the use of the term 'Church.'

Witherington remarks that "ἐκκλησία in Acts should not be considered a technical term and thus not be translated as 'church' but 'assembly' or 'congregation' since Luke uses it of both Christian believers and the civic gatherings of the surrounding cultures (Acts 19:32, 41)."<sup>53</sup> Knox writes that the emphasis in the New Testament is that "the word 'church' always means 'a gathering' or 'an assembly,'"<sup>54</sup> and Johnson that the ἐκκλησία corresponds well with 'assembly of believers' in Acts 4:32.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, Seccombe argues that Luke "uses every art to avoid the word,"<sup>56</sup> using

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God' and the Civic Assemblies (ἐκκλησίαι) of the Greek Cities in the Roman Empire: A Response to Paul Trebilco and Richard A. Horsley," *NTS* 58 (2012): 522-548.

<sup>52</sup> G. K. Beale, "The Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited," *JSNT* 38 (2015): 151-168; and F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 166. See also T. Rajak, "The Jewish Community and Its Boundaries," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians* (eds. J. Lieu et al.; London: Routledge, 1992), 11.

<sup>53</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 219. See also K. N. Giles, "Church," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (eds. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1997), 197 and Dunn, *Jerusalem*, 599.

<sup>54</sup> D. B. Knox, *Sent by Jesus: Some Aspects of Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 55. Seccombe concurs with Knox's view writing, "Given its strongly Christian significance it is therefore strange to find that Luke can use the word in a purely secular context, to describe both the official Ephesian assembly and the unlawful protest gathering of Demetrius and the silversmiths (19.32, 39, 41). Clearly the word has not lost its plain meaning of a gathering or meeting, to become a purely technical term like our word 'church'." D. Seccombe, "Luke's Vision for the Church," in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J. P. M. Sweet* (eds. M. Bockmuehl and M. B. Thompson; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 53-54.

<sup>55</sup> L. T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (SP 5; ed. D. J. Harrington, S.J.; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 89.

<sup>56</sup> Seccombe, "Luke's Vision," 47-48.

instead ‘brothers and sisters,’<sup>57</sup> ‘believers,’<sup>58</sup> ‘disciples,’<sup>59</sup> ‘congregation,’<sup>60</sup> ‘the Way,’<sup>61</sup> ‘the saints,’<sup>62</sup> and ‘the Nazarenes.’<sup>63</sup> The Lukan use of the term ἐκκλησία, first introduced by Luke in Acts 5:11, appears to be a narrational device used to differentiate this new grouping, the Christian assembly, as it emerges from Israel.<sup>64</sup>

Thompson writes,

The narrative of the first twelve chapters depicts these diverse people - both those who have historically been identified as God’s people and those who have not been so identified - as part of the Christian community or the church in which the presence of God is found as a result of their belief and acceptance of the gospel message.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore throughout this thesis I have chosen to use the phrase “Christian assembly,” rather than the word “church,” since this captures the general sense of the term ἐκκλησία - providing a means for understanding the role of the Christian assembly structurally - and distinguishing it from other political or civic bodies that it

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<sup>57</sup> Acts 1:6; 6:3.

<sup>58</sup> Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:14.

<sup>59</sup> Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:1, 25, 26; 11:26; 15:10.

<sup>60</sup> Acts 4:32; 5:16; 6:2, 5; 15:12, 30.

<sup>61</sup> Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10.

<sup>63</sup> Acts 24:5. See E. Schnabel, *Acts* (ZECNT 5; ed. C. E. Arnold; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012), 289-290.

<sup>64</sup> D. G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC; ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 92-93; and Schnabel, *Acts*, 289. Horbury writes that the term ἐκκλησία is used in the LXX (Deut. 32:1) to distinguish the people of God from the use of synagogue in Genesis to Numbers which has as its emphasis the congregation of the Israelites. W. Horbury, “Septuagintal and New Testament Conceptions of the Church,” in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J. P. M. Sweet* (eds. M. Bockmuehl and M. B. Thompson; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 12-13.

<sup>65</sup> A. J. Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in its Literary Setting* (LNTS 359; ed. M Goodacre; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 161.



might encounter in the engagement with the surrounding cultures.<sup>66</sup> The Christian assembly as depicted by Luke should be understood as part of the surrounding cultures - using recognised first-century structures and customs - and also distinct from the surrounding cultures at the metaphysical and epistemological levels, for example, in its christological interpretation of Scripture and christological understanding of salvation.

#### 4.2. The Nations Associated with the Synagogue and The Nations

Throughout Acts there are various terms relating to those who are considered by the Lukan narrative as outside of Judaism and the Christian assembly. The two most common terms are 'the God-fearers' (οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν),<sup>67</sup> and 'the nations' (τὰ ἔθνη).<sup>68</sup> Defining the God-fearers in Luke-Acts is a multi-generational scholarly problem with scholars disputing the depiction and social reality of the God-fearer.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> W. S. Campbell, "Church as Israel, People of God," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (eds. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1997), 204, 207, 210.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Acts 11:1, 18; 13:19; 14:5, 27; 15:3, 7; 17:26; 21:21; 26:17.

<sup>69</sup> De Boer gives a brief historical survey of the discussion. As early as 1933 Lake writes of this subject as "a long and complicated discussion of which the outcome is not clear as yet and perhaps never will be." Wilcox's article from 1981 entitled "The 'God-Fearers' in Acts - A Reconsideration" demonstrates the length of time this subject has been discussed. Nearly forty years on from Wilcox and the issue continues to be debated, as shown by a wealth of secondary literature over that period of time. M. C. de Boer, "God-Fearers in Luke-Acts," in *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (JSNTSS 116; ed. C. M. Tuckett; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 50 n.1; K. Lake, "Proselytes and God-Fearers," in *The Beginnings of Christianity. Part 1: The Acts of the Apostles* (vol. 5; eds. K. Lake and F. J. Foakes-Jackson; London: Macmillan, 1933), 84; and M. Wilcox, "The 'God-Fearers' in Acts - A Reconsideration," *JSNT* 13 (1981): 102. Other secondary literature includes Johnson, *Acts*, 182; Witherington, *Acts*, 341 n. 47; J. J. Collins, "A Symbol of Otherness: Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, 'Others' in Late Antiquity* (eds. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 179-185; J. Reynolds and R. Tannebaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias* (CPSSup. 12; Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987), 48-66; I. A. Levinskaya, "The Inscription from Aphrodisias and the Problem of God-Fearers," *TynB* 41 (1990): 312-318; D. L. Bock, "Athenians who have never Heard," in *Through No Fault of their Own: The Fate of Those who Have Never Heard* (eds. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991), 123; J. T. Sanders, "Who is a Jew and Who is a Gentile in the Book of Acts?," *NTS* 37 (1991): 437-439; P. F. Stuehrenberg, "Devout," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 2; ed. D. N. Freedman; New York:

Lieu argues “that there is no single definition of the God-fearer, no single set of criteria by which either we or contemporary society might classify them.”<sup>70</sup> Other scholars disagree. For example, Tyson writes:

For the most part, God-fearers are described as devout Gentiles who are attracted to Jewish religious life. In Acts they are often grouped with Jews. In some cases they probably should be perceived as proselytes, who nevertheless are not the same as Jews...It is not clear that Godfearers have made a public renunciation of pagan religion, nor that they have accepted key Jewish rites such as circumcision.<sup>71</sup>

Tyson’s typological depiction of the God-fearer is recognised by other scholars including Conzelmann, Wilcox, Blue, and Bock.<sup>72</sup> God-fearers in Acts who fit Tyson’s depiction include Cornelius (Acts 10:1-5); Sergius Publius (Acts 13:7, 12); the Philippian jailer (16:25-34); Gallio (18:12-14); and Publius (28:7-10).<sup>73</sup> I would contend that the Ethiopian eunuch should most likely be included as a God-fearer - that is someone from the nations who is associated with Judaism: who is depicted as worshipping in Jerusalem (8:27),<sup>74</sup> reading Isaiah but not understanding it (8:28, 30-

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Doubleday, 1992), 184; B. Blue, “Acts and the House Church,” in *Graeco-Roman Setting* (vol. 2 of *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*; eds. D. Gill and C. Gempf; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 178-179; J. B. Tyson, “Jews and Judaism in Luke-Acts: Reading as a Godfearer,” *NTS* 41 (1995): 25; S. McKnight, “Proselytism and Godfearers,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000), 846; J. K. Aitken, “Jewish Tradition and Culture,” in *The Early Christian World* (vol. 1; ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 2000), 92-94; Lieu, *Jew nor Greek*, 68; Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 6; and S. Walton, “Turning Anthropology Right Side Up: Seeing Human Life and Existence Lukewise,” in *Anthropology and New Testament Theology* (LNTS 529; eds. J. Maston and B. Reynolds; London: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2018), 108.

<sup>70</sup> Lieu, *Jew nor Greek*, 34. See also Collins, “Symbol of Otherness,” 180.

<sup>71</sup> Tyson, “Jews and Judaism,” 25.

<sup>72</sup> H. Conzelmann, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Hermeneia; trans. J. Limberg, et al.; Minn.: Fortress Press, 1987), 332; Wilcox, “‘God-Fearers,’” 102; Blue, “House Church,” 178-179; and D. L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; eds. R. W. Yarborough and R. H. Stein; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007), 451.

<sup>73</sup> Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 6.

<sup>74</sup> Reeves positions the eunuch as “a Jewish person on the fringes of Jewish society because of a disability that makes him unfit for worship in the Temple” but this creates a difficulty with his lack of understanding of the scriptures. K. H. Reeves, “The Ethiopian Eunuch: A Key Transition from Hellenist to Gentile Mission,” in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (ASMS

31, 34), and having heard of Jesus is baptised (8:35-38), and leaves rejoicing (8:39).<sup>75</sup> Since there is such a debate about the status and role of the God-fearers and without trying to resolve the issue - since that is out of the scope of this thesis - I have chosen to use the phrase ‘the nations associated with the synagogue’ throughout this thesis. Such a term incorporates Tyson’s definition and also represents the narrational inclusion of those people who are not portrayed as Jewish but who relate to the synagogue, Jewish religious customs and ethics, and their scriptures. Within this thesis these are primarily found in Acts 13-17 - Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Thessalonica, and Beroea.

The term τὰ ἔθνη also connects Acts with the Old Testament covenantal promises and Scripture regarding the nations - that is those people groups outside of Israel and with no obvious connection with the Jewish scriptures or customs.<sup>76</sup> This is consistent with how this term, the primary term in the New Testament, is used to describe those outside of Israel (e.g. Deut. 4:27; 18:9) - and a term familiar within Acts.<sup>77</sup> Using the Old Testament Luke depicts a universality of salvation - to both

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34; eds. R. L. Gallagher and P. Hertig; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 115. This follows the positions of Haenchen, Marshall, and Tannehill. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 314; I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 5; Leicester: IVP, 1980), 160; and R. C. Tannehill, *The Acts of the Apostles* (vol. 2 of *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*; Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1990), 2:107.

<sup>75</sup> Keener argues that the Ethiopian’s conversion is significant as the first Gentile convert but that he is less significant than Cornelius because Luke’s focus is the “conversion of the Jerusalem church” in their perspective of Gentile Christians. Thus Keener notes that the Jerusalem church may have been unaware of the Ethiopian’s conversion and would have been less significant because he did not live in Israel and neither did he have table fellowship with Philip. C. S. Keener, *3:1-14:28* (vol. 2 of *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2013), 1728.

<sup>76</sup> I. Rosen-Zvi and A. Ophir, “Paul and the Invention of the Gentiles,” *JQR* 105 (2015): 4.

<sup>77</sup> V. D. Verbrugge, “ἔθνος,” in *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (ed. V. D. Verbrugge; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 369. This contrasts with λαός which denotes “the chosen and covenanted people/tribes of Israel, especially as they are gathered as God’s people.” D.

Jews and the nations - and demonstrates the fulfilment of these promises - or their partial fulfilment - in Acts.<sup>78</sup> Christensen writes:

The first Christians knew that the risen Christ has sent them to the nations on a mission in line with the eschatological signs of the earthly ministry of Jesus (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8), the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah, the royal (messianic) theology, the Sinai covenant, and the ancient promise to Abraham.<sup>79</sup>

This term τὰ ἔθνη also complements the narrational structure of Acts, with the gospel moving to the ends of the earth and the inclusion of the nations, and the theological theme in Acts, that regardless of people's social and theological proximity to Judaism all peoples, whether Jews, the nations associated with the synagogue, or the nations outside of the synagogue, are called to repent and to turn to a christological salvation (Acts 13:46-48; 14:1, 15; 17:1-4, 12, 30).<sup>80</sup> Thus this term 'the nations' (τὰ ἔθνη) will be used to describe those outside of Judaism who are depicted as having no contact with the synagogue, no obvious knowledge of the Jewish scriptures, and are not influenced by the Jewish scriptures or religious customs and ethics. Within the scope of this thesis these are primarily found in Acts 14-17, Lystra, Philippi, and Athens.

## 5. Outline of Chapters

The purpose of the survey of scholarship in chapter one is to demonstrate the need

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P. Moessner, "Luke-Acts," in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (eds. J. J. Collins and D. C. Harlow; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 897.

<sup>78</sup> See P. M. Cook, "Nations," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (eds. M. J. Boda and J. G. McConville; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2012), 563-568; D. L. Christensen, "Nations," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 4; ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1047; and A. J. Köstenberger, "Nations," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (eds. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 676.

<sup>79</sup> Christensen, "Nations," 1048.

<sup>80</sup> Keener, 3:1-14:28, 1728.

for a fresh approach to the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts. This is because previous scholarship has failed to reach a consensus or to integrate the diverse features of the engagements that occur within the narrative. Underlying the varied conclusions of this scholarship are some methodological weaknesses. These include focusing upon a single engagement, isolating and exegeting texts away from their immediate and wider narrational context, treating cultures as monolithic entities, and inadequately integrating the continuities and discontinuities that result from the engagements between Christianity and the surrounding cultures. Due to the plethora of scholarship I have chosen twelve different readings of the various engagements.<sup>81</sup> These have been chosen because they have been influential upon the study of Acts, provide a significant analysis of the engagement, and are representative of a wider body of scholarship.

Chapter two introduces subversive-fulfilment as an alternative hermeneutical lens. This chapter demonstrate how a subversive-fulfilment reading can provide a new and improved framework for understanding the engagements that occur between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures by coherently integrating and accurately accounting for the interaction in the engagements. Placing subversive-fulfilment within its historical and theological context this chapter focuses on two Dutch missionary scholars, Hendrik Kraemer and Johan Bavinck, and one English scholar, Daniel Strange. Kraemer coined the phrase 'subversive-fulfilment' but left it tantalisingly undeveloped. Bavinck never used the term 'subversive-fulfilment' but,

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<sup>81</sup> Chapter one accounts for ten scholars and chapter three accounts for two scholars.

seemingly influenced by Kraemer, developed the concept in his own work. Ignored by much of Reformed and evangelical scholarship these two missiologists were utilised by Daniel Strange as he re-developed subversive-fulfilment as a means of equipping the Western Church in the twenty-first century to engage with the multiple and varied cultures with which it is surrounded. Having outlined and described the theological positions of these three scholars I then provide three examples of how subversive-fulfilment has been applied as a hermeneutical lens in the fields of Biblical Studies and Missiology. Finally this chapter identifies and outlines some potential weaknesses of Daniel Strange's subversive-fulfilment model. These suggest the potential need to modify Strange's model and to suggest alternative features which may enable this perspective to be more effective in interpreting the engagements in Acts, in particular making *possessio* a more prominent and central concept.

The purpose of chapter three is to provide a wider context prior to a subversive-fulfilment reading of a section of Acts. The first aspect introduces my two dialogue partners: Craig Keener and C. Kavin Rowe. The survey in chapter one sets out the contours of previous scholarship in respect to the engagement of the Christian assembly with the surrounding cultures. In this chapter I provide a close engagement with Keener and Rowe when turning to the detailed readings of Acts 13:13-17:34, found in chapters four to eight of this thesis. As noted above these two dialogue partners were chosen because they are current and influential in their research in Acts and have made a substantial and original contribution to the discussion. The second area of context provides a theological orientation to Luke-Acts with particular reference to three theological themes: the theological character of Luke-Acts, the

fulfilment of Scripture and covenant promises in Luke-Acts, and covenantal faithfulness and repentance in Luke-Acts. These themes provide a framework with which to read the narrative of Luke-Acts including the section of narrative under examination.

Chapters four to eight seek to show how using subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens can provide fresh insights to reading the narrative and a more satisfactory way to understand the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. To do this, subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens will be applied to an unbroken section of narrative: Acts 13:13-17:34. This section of narrative is significant because it is regularly used by previous scholarship to argue for and defend their varied and contradictory conclusions for the engagements that occur. This section of narrative also provides examples of varied and nuanced engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Each chapter follows the same structure and engages closely with the text and Acts' scholarship so as to provide a short description of each pericope and place it in the appropriate narrative context; to outline and critically analyse how the pericope has been interpreted by my two main dialogue partners, Keener and Rowe; and to provide a subversive-fulfilment reading of the pericope.

# CHAPTER ONE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP WITH RESPECT TO THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY AND THE SURROUNDING CULTURES IN ACTS

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this critical analysis is to demonstrate that previous scholarship has failed to reach a consensus or to integrate the diverse features of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts.

Fascinated by the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts, previous scholarship has sought to characterise the engagement and explain its meaning and significance for understanding the Christian assembly both in the first century and through the ages. Yet the overall result of this previous scholarship is a plethora of varied and contradictory conclusions. Many scholars have focused on reading Acts as an *apologia* yet they disagree whether it is an *apologia pro ecclesia* or *apologia pro imperio*. Other scholars have rejected the *apologia* completely, arguing that Acts is an intra-ecclesial document legitimating the identity and practices of the Christian assembly or as a contrast to Roman beliefs and values so as to transform this culture. Meanwhile some scholars note that in an engagement with the Graeco-Roman world Christians are to repent from Graeco-Roman worship and yet can christianise the culture - poaching, mirroring, and paralleling the beliefs and ideas of the Graeco-Roman world. Yet still others have concluded that Acts is anti-semitic whilst others have concluded it is pro-Jewish.

Fundamental to these varied and contradictory conclusions are a number of



methodological weaknesses. These include focusing the engagement upon a single culture, for example the engagement with Judaism or the Roman State alone. Such a reading potentially limits the conclusions drawn since they may not be applicable to the other engagements found in the narrative. Further weaknesses stem from this methodology: the narrative is dissected with different texts being isolated from their immediate and wider narrational context and read within a thematic setting.<sup>1</sup> Such an approach ignores the dynamic and integrated relationship between the different cultures as they engage *with each other* as well as the Christian assembly.<sup>2</sup> Such multiple engagements are found, for example, within Acts 13-17 with an interplay between Judaism and the nations associated with the synagogue, Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world, and Judaism and the Roman State. A second methodological weakness is the examination of the cultures as monolithic entities, for example the variegated nature of the Jews in Acts is reduced to 'the Jews' whilst 'Graeco-Roman'

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<sup>1</sup> See Penner, "Madness in the Method," 233. Penner later writes of the Jewish, Roman and Greek cultures in Acts, "These categories are heuristic modes of analysis, but do not represent pure historical or cultural expressions/manifestations in the ancient world. Rather, these backgrounds are actually intermixed and intertwined in different ways and to varying degrees depending on a diversity of factors, including social location in the empire...There is in this sense, for instance, no explicitly Jewish context for Acts, or even a Greek or Roman one for that matter. Rather, Jewish, Greek and Roman worlds are intertwined in very specific and unique ways, so Acts, like many ancient texts, takes part in the creation of new cultural modes of expression through the reconfiguration of its material resources." Penner, "Madness in the Method," 255; 256-257. See Blomberg who makes this criticism against scholarship that have examined Luke's attitude to the Law. C. Blomberg, "The Christian and the Law of Moses," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 399.

<sup>2</sup> Some modern scholarship that recognises the interplay between cultures include Achtemeier, *New Testament*, 18; E. S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 2002), 6; J. S. McLaren, "Jews and the Imperial Cult: From Augustus to Domitian," *JSNT* 27 (2005): 257-278; Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 26-28; S. D. Charlesworth, "The Use of Greek in Early Roman Galilee: The Inscriptional Evidence Re-examined," *JSNT* 38 (2016): 374; C. Breytenbach, "Zeus und Jupiter auf dem Zion und dem Berg Garizim: Die Hellenisierung und Romanisierung der Kultstätten des Höchsten," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 28 (1997): 377; E. N. Ostenfeld (ed.), *Greek Romans and Roman Greeks: Studies in Cultural Interaction* (ASMA 3; Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2002).

is commonly understood as anything outside of Judaism.<sup>3</sup> Such a proposal does not account for the nuanced distinctives of the individual cultures nor how these distinctives affect the narrativ development. For example Acts 13 creates a distinction between Jerusalem and diaspora Jews and Acts 17 between Thessalonican and Berean Jews.<sup>4</sup> Most significantly whilst previous scholarship does recognise the twin areas of continuity - the similarities between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures - and discontinuity - the dissimilarities between the Christian assembly and the surrounding nations - this scholarship does not understand or interpret the relationship between them nor adequately integrate them. This results in multiple weaknesses. These include over-emphasising one to the detriment of the other, recognising the tension created at the intersection of the continuity and discontinuity but not addressing the tension or its contribution to the narrative, or commenting upon the tension but not developing its significance for understanding the engagement within the immediate or wider narrative. These methodological weaknesses result in an inability of previous scholarship to properly explain or address what is truly occurring in the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts, to consistently explain the various kinds of engagement represented, to resolve the tensions that are created through the engagement, or explain the significance of the engagement within the immediate or wider narrative of Acts. The rest of this chapter seeks to demonstrate these

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson writes, "just as 'Christianity' was conceived in unitary terms - as one easily identified reality, however internally divided - so there was a tendency to think of 'paganism' as well as 'Judaism' in similarly unitary fashion. Little attention was paid to the internal complexities of Greco-Roman religion, still less to the complexities of first-century Judaism, and less still to the variety of ways of being Christian in the time before Constantine." Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, ix; 13. See also Lieu, *Jew nor Greek*, 19 and B. Chilton and J. Neusner, *Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Whilst there are different spellings of this city (Berea and Bereoa) I have chosen to use the one closest to the Greek.

claims.

This chapter surveys ten different readings of the various engagements. These have been chosen since they are representative of previous scholarship's accounts of the engagements within Acts between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. These ten examples of scholarship that I engage with have been chosen for at least one of three reasons: this scholarship has been influential upon the study of Acts; it provides a significant analysis of the engagement; and it is representative of a wider body of scholarship. All of the selected scholars engage substantially with the narrative of Acts and all engage with at least some parts of my chosen sections of text, Acts 13-17, in their analysis.<sup>5</sup>

Structurally this chapter is broken into three sections reflecting how scholarship has previously analysed the engagement of the Christian assembly: with the Roman State; with the Graeco-Roman world; and with Judaism. Within each section I will outline the scholar's position focusing upon their methodology, presuppositions, main arguments, and conclusion before critically analysing their stance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Whilst this survey in chapter one sets out the contours of previous scholarship, in chapter three I shall also set out and critically analyse the positions of my two dialogue partners which are essential for addressing in chapters four to eight of this thesis. This allows me to engage with both a wide range of existing scholarship and to situate my reading of the narrative particularly in relation to these dialogue partners, who are both current and influential in their research in Acts and have made a substantial and original contribution to the discussion.

<sup>6</sup> Esler's comment here is helpful, though in the context of social-scientific methodology. He writes, "The vital role of description (the first level of research) results from the fact that only after the scrutiny and comparison of a wide range of material is it possible to develop appropriate explanations of it." P. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (SNTSMS 57; ed. G. N. Stanton; Cambridge: CUP, 1987), 7.

## 2. The Engagement between the Christian Assembly and the Roman State<sup>7</sup>

The engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State has been of considerable interest to New Testament scholarship, and, as Walton notes, has extended to Acts.<sup>8</sup> Such scholarship has traditionally resulted in polarised conclusions - the Acts of the Apostles as anti- or pro-empire. More recent Acts' scholarship has adopted varied and nuanced positions to interpret the engagement, a shift which Kochenash attributes to the work of Walton.<sup>9</sup> The dominant scholarly perspective regarding this engagement between the Christian assembly and Roman State in Acts has been that of an apologia.<sup>10</sup> Whilst many scholars adopt this general position there is disagreement about the precise details.<sup>11</sup> This has led to nuanced

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst there is clearly overlap between the Graeco-Roman world and the Roman State, this section reflects the scholarly interest specifically in the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State.

<sup>8</sup> Walton, "Mission'," 538.

<sup>9</sup> Kochenash writes, "The publication of Steve Walton's 2002 essay marks a shift in the way most scholars approach the issue of Lukan attitudes toward the Roman Empire." M. Kochenash, "Taking the Bad with the Good: Reconciling Images of Rome in Luke-Acts," *RSR* 41 (2015): 43. See S. Walton, "The State they were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire," in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church* (ed. P. Oakes; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2002), 1-41. Carter calls this article "an important discussion of scholarship on the relationship between Acts and the Roman Empire." W. Carter, "Aquatic Display: Navigating the Roman Imperial World in Acts 27," *NTS* 62 (2016): 95-96. For other examples of a nuanced approach in Acts see D. J. Strait, *Hidden Criticism of the Angry Tyrant in Early Judaism and the Acts of the Apostles* (Lanham, Mary.: Lexington Books, 2019), 4. For examples within the wider New Testament see D. G. Horrell, *Becoming Christian: Essays on 1 Peter and the Making of Christian Identity* (LNTS 394; ed. M. Goodacre; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 236-238; and T. B. Williams, "The Divinity and Humanity of Caesar in 1 Peter 2, 13," *ZNW* 105 (2014): 131-147.

<sup>10</sup> P. Walaskay, *'And so we came to Rome'* (SNTSMS 49; ed. R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge: CUP, 1983), 50. See Esler for a historical outline of the development of the apologia argument. Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 205. See also Alexander, *Acts*, 183-187.

<sup>11</sup> Conzelmann notes, "It cannot be disputed that Luke's apologetic aims are political, but there is room and variety of opinion concerning their exact nature and purpose." H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke* (repr. 1969; trans. G. Buswell; London: Faber & Faber, 1960), 137. Walaskay also makes the same point. Walaskay, *Rome*, ix. See Keener for an overview of different possibilities regarding apologetic purposes for Acts. Keener, *Introduction*, 436-458.

adaptations and alternatives.<sup>12</sup> Such is the abundance of literature that even in 1983 Walaskay notes “it would be a lengthy and redundant exercise to review the position of each scholar.”<sup>13</sup> To capture the breadth of these different positions, I have selected four scholars, Conzelmann, Walaskay, Cassidy, and Esler, all of whose work has been influential in presenting the engagement as an apologia or in presenting a significant alternative argument.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.1. H. Conzelmann: Acts as *Apologia Pro Ecclesia*

Conzelmann positions Acts as an *apologia pro ecclesia* - that is, a central purpose of Acts is to persuade Roman officials that Christianity is politically harmless.<sup>15</sup>

Conzelmann places the historical events in Acts within a framework of salvation history and these events can only be interpreted within this framework.<sup>16</sup> Salvation history for Conzelmann contains three epochs of which Acts is situated within the third, the time of the Church.<sup>17</sup> This epoch is characterised in Luke-Acts between the

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<sup>12</sup> Esler writes, “For several generations the extensive material in Luke-Acts bearing upon the relationships between Rome and Christianity has excited much critical attention. Luke’s unmistakable sensitivity to the involvement of Jesus and the early Christian missionaries, especially Paul, in the political and judicial realities of the Roman Empire is a significant aspect of his theology.” Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 201.

<sup>13</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> I note that there are other positions which though once influential have since become minority positions. For example, the Tübingen approach posited Luke-Acts was written for the reconciliation of Church factions and R. Pickett who positions Acts as an intra-Jewish dialogue about the future of Israel in the light of the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. in which the purpose of the assembly is to transform the beliefs and values of the Roman State. See E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (trans. B. Noble and G. Shinn; Rev. trans. R. McL. Wilson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 15-49; W. W. Gasque, “The Historical Value of the Book of Acts: An Essay in the History of New Testament Criticism,” *EQ* 41 (1969): 68-88; and A. Neagoe, *The Trial of the Gospel: An Apologetic Reading of Luke’s Trial Narratives* (SNTSMS 116; Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 1-21.

<sup>15</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, xlvi. Conzelmann in presenting the apologia rejects the idea of the *religio licita*. Conzelmann, *Luke*, 142-144.

<sup>16</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, xlvi.

<sup>17</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, xlv and xlvi. Such a framework is, according to Conzelmann, established in Luke and presupposed in Acts.

twin points of the resurrection and the parousia.<sup>18</sup> Conzelmann notes that the perspective of the Church in Luke-Acts altered towards the Roman State. Believing the parousia was imminent relativised the significance of the Roman State to those moments when it engaged with the Church or impinged on its mission.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as it appeared that there was a delay of the parousia the engagement between the Church and Roman State needed to be re-addressed and alternative action taken by the Church. Conzelmann writes, "Whereas in the original eschatological perspective it was felt that the State had to be withstood, now the attempt is made to enter the conversation with it, in order to achieve a permanent settlement."<sup>20</sup> This change of engagement was displayed in two ways - that the Church should not perceive itself as a threat to Rome because the resurrection and parousia were not matters with which Roman law concerned itself,<sup>21</sup> and that the Church was non-political and its members could be loyal citizens of the State since being a Christian meant a heavenly citizenship and implied no crime against Roman law.<sup>22</sup> Beyond this, Conzelmann also argues that the Roman State was not interested in Christians and

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<sup>18</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, xlvi, Conzelmann, *Luke*, 137; H. Conzelmann, *Gentiles, Jews, Christians: Polemics and Apologetics in the Greco-Roman Era* (trans. M. E. Boring; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), 243; and H. Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity* (trans. J. E. Steely; London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1973), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, xliii.

<sup>20</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 138. Conzelmann writes later "That fact the End [the Parousia] is no longer thought of as imminent, and the subsequent attempt to achieve a long-term agreement as to the Church's relation to the world show how closely this question is to the central motifs in Luke's whole plan." Conzelmann, *Luke*, 149. See also Conzelmann, *Acts*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, xlvii and Conzelmann, *History*, 60.

<sup>22</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 138-140 and Conzelmann, *Acts*, 203. Dunn agrees with the view that the apologetic is to present the theological identity of the Christian assembly, rather than its social identity or its political status, within the Roman Empire. This emphasis argues that Christianity poses no threat to the empire and can be left alone. Further to this, it argues that Roman law and government is of no real threat to the assembly. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2016), xiii.

only acted when Christianity was “brought to their attention [with an occasion] such as a disturbance.”<sup>23</sup> For Rome, says Conzelmann, it was public security that drew the response not an interest in Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

To support his thesis Conzelmann draws upon two key areas. First, he demonstrates from Luke and Acts how key Christian protagonists act in a non-political or positive way towards the State. Conzelmann notes that John the Baptist instructs his listeners in “good morals, in which loyalty to the State is implicit,” and whose arrest is non-political (Luke 3:19).<sup>25</sup> He also identifies Jesus’ programmatic sermon (Luke 4:16-19),<sup>26</sup> and Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:38) as non-political. He writes, “the concept of Davidic Lordship is replaced by the simple title of King, the non-political sense of which is preserved.”<sup>27</sup> Second, Conzelmann posits that Luke portrays the Roman State positively and that the attitude of the State should be construed as positive towards the Church.<sup>28</sup> As examples, Conzelmann notes that the first convert from the nations is a Roman centurion and that Sergius Paulus “presents the exemplary conduct of the Roman official.”<sup>29</sup> Further, the State through the exercise of law “acts as a saviour,”<sup>30</sup> repeatedly declaring the innocence of the

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<sup>23</sup> Conzelmann calls these “accidental factors.” Conzelmann, *History*, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 129.

<sup>25</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 139.

<sup>27</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 139; and Conzelmann, *History*, 60. Conzelmann also does this with the title Messiah (Luke 22:67-70). He writes, “The title Messiah is here interpreted as synonymous with the title Son of God, in other words, contrary to the Jewish understanding of it, in a non-political sense.” Conzelmann, *Luke*, 141.

<sup>28</sup> Conzelmann cites the following passages: Acts 10:1-11:18; 13:12; 16:39; 17:9; 19:31, 35-41; 24:23-27. Conzelmann, *Luke*, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 141.

Christian assembly (Acts 16:11).<sup>31</sup> Conzelmann does recognise a tension in the engagement since the Christian assembly has an alternative agenda and one which Rome does not accept. In writing about Jesus' words in Luke 20:25, Conzelmann remarks, "In Luke's opinion there is no real conflict between God and Caesar...Luke knows that this does not in fact avoid a clash, because Rome does not accept this alternative."<sup>32</sup> Conzelmann though believes that this strengthens his argument since Luke does not develop or state the tension explicitly "because he is pursuing an apologetic aim."<sup>33</sup>

Conzelmann's perspective has significant weaknesses, the most obvious that he creates a false division between the religious and the political.<sup>34</sup> The first-century world did not sharply divide these features but rather integrated them into a cohesive worldview. Thus Jesus' kingship should not be understood as non-political but as a position that integrates the religious and the political.<sup>35</sup> This is accentuated by Luke in Jesus' programmatic statement (Luke 4:16-19) where Jesus' activity and Jesus' identity, the Son of God (Luke 1:35) and King (Luke 2:11, 26), are integrated.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Luke 23:4, 13-14, 22; 23:15, 47; Acts 21:31-32, 37-40; 23:29; 24:5-6, 22. Conzelmann, *Luke*, 143-144 and Conzelmann, *History*, 128.

<sup>32</sup> Jesus says, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Conzelmann, *Luke*, 148-149.

<sup>33</sup> Conzelmann, *Luke*, 149 and H. Conzelmann and A. Lindemann, *Interpreting the New Testament: An Introduction to the Principles and Methods of N.T. Exegesis* (trans. S. S. Schatzmann; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988), 239-240.

<sup>34</sup> This is recognised by Walton, "Roman Empire," 17. See also Walaskay, *Rome*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Such integration was readily accepted in first-century Roman culture. For example Suetonius notes Augustus as Emperor was not only responsible for the civic aspects of the empire but as Pontifex Maximus was also responsible for both increasing the number and status of priests. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 60-61.

<sup>36</sup> C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 78.



Further, such an integrated perspective would argue that the Lukan narrative presents Jesus as the alternative, and greater, Lord.<sup>37</sup> Walaskay, writing critically of Conzelmann's argument, states, "We have already noted the piling up of kingly titles in the birth narrative was not likely to evoke a positive response from a Roman official."<sup>38</sup> This is made more explicit in Acts where Jesus sovereignly reigns over all nations from heaven.<sup>39</sup> Thus, in Acts the Christian assembly is presented as an alternative community living in an alternative kingdom under an alternative Lord and with alternative values (Acts 16:20; 21:38).<sup>40</sup> Such a reading of the Lukan narrative perhaps unsurprisingly results in the challenge of the gospel to the surrounding cultures. Schnabel writes, "while encounters with Roman officials indeed end 'positively' for Christians, suggesting the political 'innocence' of the followers of Jesus...other texts demonstrate how the reality of the gospel disrupts and challenges pagan values and the pagan way of life."<sup>41</sup> Beyond this, a final and separate issue is whether a Roman official would have read Acts, or read it in this way. Whilst Conzelmann hints at this point,<sup>42</sup> Barrett writes, "No Roman official would ever have filtered out so much of what to him would be theological and ecclesiastical rubbish in

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<sup>37</sup> Rowe, *World*, 151.

<sup>38</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> A. J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (NSBT 27; ed. D. A. Carson; Nottingham: Apollos, 2011), 49-50.

<sup>40</sup> This also therefore addresses the position of Jervell who believes that whilst Acts recognises the existence of the Roman State as a political reality, Christianity is politically harmless. J. Jervell, *The Theology of Acts and the Apostles* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 86-88.

<sup>41</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 33.

<sup>42</sup> Writing of Jewish apologists Conzelmann writes, "That Gentile readers did not in fact become very aware of this literature is no argument against the idea that Jewish authors hoped that what they wrote would be read by Gentile readers and that they wrote specifically with this in mind." Conzelmann, *Apologetics*, 140.

order to reach so tiny a grain of relevant apology."<sup>43</sup> If the *apologia pro ecclesia* was the intention of Luke then he was far too subtle about it and made it far too complicated to follow.<sup>44</sup>

Conzelmann's position attempts to address the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State. His assertion is that Luke-Acts is an apology for why the assembly can be left alone by Rome. This, he suggests, is because it is non-political and Christians can act as loyal subjects. Such an assertion ignores the reality of Luke-Acts and the first-century world because it attempts to separate the nature of religion and politics, concepts that were concretely integrated within the Graeco-Roman world. As a lens for understanding properly the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State that occurs in Luke-Acts Conzelmann's position is an inadequate one.

## 2.2. P. Walaskay: Acts as *Apologia Pro Imperio*

Having surveyed the historical development of the view of Acts as an apologia, Walaskay presents a number of objections to the *apologia pro ecclesia* thesis,<sup>45</sup> noting that other scholarship has considered this perspective problematic.<sup>46</sup> Instead

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<sup>43</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (London: Epworth Press, 1961), 63. See also R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; ed. J. Riches; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 20; 93; and D. Peterson, "Luke's Theological Enterprise: Integration and Intent," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 532.

<sup>44</sup> Maddox, *Luke-Acts*, 20; 93 and Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 25. See also Peterson, "Theological Enterprise," 532; Schnabel, *Acts*, 32; Keener, *Introduction*, 444, and Walton, "Roman Empire," 30.

<sup>45</sup> Walaskay surveys the historical development in pages 1-10 and provides objections in pages 10-13. Walaskay, *Rome*, 1-13. Esler notes the similarities between Walaskay's position and that of Maddox. See Maddox, *Luke-Acts*, 96-97. Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 208-209.

<sup>46</sup> Walaskay writes "the uneasiness about this pillar of faith seems to be growing." Walaskay, *Rome*, 11.

Walaskay presents Acts as an *apologia pro imperio* arguing that Luke was pro-Roman and that Acts was written to persuade Christians, who were suspicious of the empire,<sup>47</sup> of Luke's own positive view of the Roman Empire.<sup>48</sup> According to Walaskay, Luke's purpose in writing Acts was "To steer his community along a precarious path which cuts through the tempting fields of overly accommodating conformity and non-compromising confrontation with the state."<sup>49</sup>

Having addressed potential 'anti-Roman' passages in Luke-Acts, concluding that even when there are negative angles, such as the local magistrates in Acts 16, the Roman judicial system is still presented positively,<sup>50</sup> Walaskay asserts that Luke "has a high regard for the imperial government and for those who administer it."<sup>51</sup> He then develops his argument through an analysis of five Lukan passages.<sup>52</sup> These, he concludes, show that there was no "challenging the ideal of *pax Augusta*,"<sup>53</sup> that Old Testament and Augustan ethics can be interwoven,<sup>54</sup> that Roman officials, including soldiers, can be full members of the Church,<sup>55</sup> that the *pax Romana* means that

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<sup>47</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 66.

<sup>48</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 12. Walaskay writes that, "Luke was decidedly pro-Roman and he intended, in part, to present an apologetic on behalf of the empire to his own church." See also Walaskay, *Rome*, 24, 25 and Maddox, *Luke-Acts*, 96-97.

<sup>49</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 12, 65.

<sup>50</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 22-25. He concludes, "in reporting the encounters between representatives of the Christian movement and the Roman empire, Luke has often glossed over the negative perspective regarding the empire...while actively promoting a positive representation of Roman rule."

<sup>51</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> The five are Luke 2:1-5; 3:10-14; 7:1-10; 20:20-26; 22:24-27. Walaskay, *Rome*, 25-37.

<sup>53</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 28.

<sup>54</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 35.

Christians should pay their taxes,<sup>56</sup> and that the rulers, as benefactors, are not to be oppressors.<sup>57</sup> Such a positive view means that Luke neutralises any anti-Roman sources and emphasises the positive aspects of Rome.<sup>58</sup> These include the positive view of the legal system, reflected in the trial scenes of Paul,<sup>59</sup> the relationship between Paul and the Roman centurion (27:1, 31, 43),<sup>60</sup> and the end of Acts which leaves out the knowledge of Paul's death at the hands of the emperor (28:30-31).<sup>61</sup>

Walaskay's work provides some helpful points. First, his critique of the *pro ecclesia* perspective is useful and thorough. Most particularly Walaskay identifies a significant tension for the Church, conformity to or confrontation with the State. Yet, Walaskay's position does not adequately account for the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State because it contains a number of weaknesses.

Walaskay's primary weakness is to identify Luke-Acts as a political document. As will be explored more fully in chapter three of this thesis, I would contend that Acts is primarily a document with a theological purpose and not a political one. Acts is founded upon and provides continuity with the scriptural and covenantal narrative of the Old Testament which emphasises God's activity in the world through the

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<sup>56</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 37. A summary of Walaskay's position is given in Walton, "Roman Empire," 5-7.

<sup>58</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> This, despite the personal failings of the Roman authorities. Walaskay, *Rome*, 24, 59.

<sup>60</sup> Walaskay writes, "Paul and Julius worked together in fulfilling their mutual salvation, but also for the preservation of the gospel message and imperial justice. The Christian community, especially the community at Rome, may rejoice that God has worked out his purposes and extended the gospel to them by means of the imperial order. Walaskay, *Rome*, 62.

<sup>61</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 63.

Christian assembly.<sup>62</sup> As the assembly engages with the surrounding cultures so one aspect of that engagement is with governance, rule, and law of both Judaism and Rome.

A further weakness is that Walaskay separates Roman officials from the imperial legal system.<sup>63</sup> He argues that the officials are presented as weak but the legal system is portrayed as effective and durable.<sup>64</sup> Such a division is unworkable since the narrative portrays the officials as representatives, and an integral part, of the state system. For example, Walaskay acknowledges that the death of Jesus is a Roman decision but seeks to mitigate it, suggesting that Pilate's treatment of Jesus was positive compared with that of the Jewish leadership.<sup>65</sup> In reality because of Pilate's weakness the system fails to deliver justice (Luke 23:4, 13-16, 23-25). This is also found in Acts 16 and 24. Acts 16 presents officials who are weak - they do not properly investigate (v.22), order a beating and imprisonment (v.22), and fearfully release the prisoners (vv.35-39). In Acts 24 Paul is placed in custody by Felix (v.23), who hopes for a bribe and to gain favour leaves Paul in prison (vv.26-27). Both examples portray weak officials but also a system that is open to abuse and which

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<sup>62</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 15-16; Keener, *Introduction*, 494-496; J. Pelikan, *Acts* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2005), 25; M.C. Parsons, *Acts* (Paideia; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2008), xiii-xiv. D. Peterson, "The Motif of Fulfilment and the Purpose of Luke-Acts," in *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting* (vol. 1; eds. B. Winter and A. Clarke; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993), 83-104; and Walton, "Roman Empire," 30.

<sup>63</sup> He writes, "It is certainly true that in Luke-Acts the local magistrates appear weak and indecisive at times. Yet Luke consistently presents these magistrates against the backdrop of (1) jealous Jews who constantly pressure the authorities to act against Christians and (2) a durable imperial legal system that transcends local administrative waffling." Walaskay, *Rome*, 23-24.

<sup>64</sup> Walaskay blames the weakness of the authorities on Judaism, writing, "the civil authorities succumbed to Jewish pressure; most often, they acted out of ignorance; and at best, the Roman juridical system protected the apostles from the chaos and caprice of an unruly mob." Walaskay, *Rome*, 24.

<sup>65</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 48-49.

does not provide adequate or proper protection or justice. Walton writes critically, “this unflattering presentation of the Romans hardly allows Walaskay’s approach.”<sup>66</sup>

Beyond these I will draw on just one of Walaskay’s pro-Roman conclusions, regarding the *pax Augusta*. In Luke 2:1-5 Walaskay argues for a positive Lukan perception of Rome - the *pax Augusta* complementing the *pax Christi*, a united world experiencing political and salvific peace.<sup>67</sup> Yet in his claim Walaskay has omitted a close reading of Luke chapters 1 and 2. Luke 1, rich in Old Testament imagery, reminds the Lukan audience that God is the true King, that he has remembered his promises, and from him come all blessings and salvation in the form of “the Son of God.” Luke 2 reminds the audience, through the angels, Simeon, and Anna, that divine peace has come through a saviour who is King and Lord for all the peoples. Such imagery invites close comparisons with the Priene Calendar Inscription, an inscription about Augustus.<sup>68</sup> This Lukan imagery challenges Walaskay’s pro-Roman position because the Lukan narrative seems forcefully to imply that Jesus provides a

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<sup>66</sup> Walton, “Roman Empire,” 12. Esler highlights other situations in which Romans treat Paul and other Christians unfairly or badly. Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 207-210.

<sup>67</sup> Walaskay, *Rome*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> The description of the emperor Augustus in the Priene Calendar Inscription includes the following: (i) one who was the agent of the gods and who manifested the presence of the gods on earth; (ii) the one who exceeds the anticipations of the peoples; (iii) the saviour of the peoples; (iv) the one who ends all war; (v) the one who is greater than all those who came before him. which is Augustus’ own account of his achievements. See *OGIS* 458. For translations and commentary on the inscription see R. K. Sherk, *Roman Documents from the Greek East: Senatus Consulta and Epistulae to the Age of Augustus* (Baltimore, Mary.: The John Hopkins Press, 1969), 328-337; F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis, Miss.: Clayton Publishing House, 1982), 215-222; and S. J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 32-36. See also C. A. Evans, “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000): 69; and J. R. Harrison, “Paul, Eschatology and the Augustan Age of Grace,” *TynB* 50 (1999): 79. Related to this is Augustus’ *Res Gestae*. See A. E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 58-101.

supremely better alternative to Augustus.<sup>69</sup> Such a presentation undermines the emperor and the empire and to that extent constitutes a threat. A final point, and agreeing with Keener, I note that Acts “contains too much defence of Christians before authorities for his *primary* interest to be the defence of authorities.”<sup>70</sup>

Walaskay provides some helpful pointers in his work regarding the engagement of the Christian assembly and the Roman State, most notably that the engagement between the Church and the surrounding cultures may lead to the Church either conforming to or confronting the State. Yet Walaskay begins his project by categorising Acts wrongly - as a political project rather than a theological one. By doing so, he engages the text through an inadequate hermeneutical lens which is not sufficient to address the multiple theological nuances found in the narrative. Such an approach cannot then properly account for how Jesus is portrayed as a contrast to Caesar and the means for salvation and blessing for the whole world.

### 2.3. R. J. Cassidy: Acts as Allegiance-Witness

In engaging with earlier readings of Acts, in particular Conzelmann's,<sup>71</sup> Cassidy's work rejects Acts as either *pro ecclesia* or *pro imperio*.<sup>72</sup> Instead, by using a

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<sup>69</sup> J. Diehl, “Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament,” in *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (eds. S. McKnight and J. Modica; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2013), 49 and L. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Porcupine Press, 1975), 186, 241.

<sup>70</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 442, 444. See also Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 208-210

<sup>71</sup> R. J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), 7.

<sup>72</sup> R. J. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 145-157.

redaction criticism hermeneutic,<sup>73</sup> Cassidy reads Acts as an “allegiance-witness” document,<sup>74</sup> that is, Acts is written to demonstrate the allegiance of God’s people to their risen Lord which results in the Church’s testimony to the surrounding cultures. In Cassidy’s first work he examines Jesus’ social stance, his response to how people and groups should live together,<sup>75</sup> his political stance, and his response to Jewish and certain Roman rulers.<sup>76</sup> Cassidy posits that Jesus frequently contravenes the existing social patterns and does not defer to political authority, rejecting the violence and exploitation exercised by Rome and introducing new social patterns.<sup>77</sup> For example, with reference to Luke 20:20-25 Cassidy writes,

Jesus was indicating how the Roman social order was to be critically evaluated. It was not to be supported and submitted to simply because it was firmly established and because the Romans possessed a high degree of military power and political organisation. On the contrary, its policies and practices were to be evaluated and responded to from the standpoint of the social patterns that God desired.<sup>78</sup>

Cassidy further asserts that whilst neither Herod nor Pilate considered Jesus a threat,<sup>79</sup> Jesus’ refusal to cooperate with the various officials and his introduction of “radically new social patterns,”<sup>80</sup> made him a potentially serious threat to Rome.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 1-4.

<sup>74</sup> Cassidy, *Acts*, 159.

<sup>75</sup> Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 20.

<sup>76</sup> Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 50. For a similar argument through the same hermeneutical approach see R. F. O’Toole, “Luke’s Position on Politics and Society in Luke-Acts,” in *Political Issues in Luke-Acts* (eds. R. J. Cassidy and P. J. Scharper; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 1-17.

<sup>77</sup> Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 61-62, 84.

<sup>78</sup> Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 59.

<sup>79</sup> Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 76.

<sup>80</sup> Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 79.

<sup>81</sup> Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 78. For a summary of Cassidy’s position on the social and political stances of Jesus in Luke see Cassidy, *Acts*, 1-20.



Cassidy follows this social and political stance, and the associated conclusions, into Acts where the Church in Jerusalem and Paul in relation to the Roman State both echo the social and political stance of Jesus and are therefore a threat to Rome.<sup>82</sup> Such contrary allegiance would be considered a challenge to the empire and from Acts 17:6, Cassidy suggests the narrative indicates that the Church was “alert to the possibility that deeply held allegiances to other lords could bring a person into conflict with the rule of Caesar.”<sup>83</sup> From this Cassidy recognises that this Lukan approach, allegiance-witness, does lead the Church into conflict with the Roman authorities because there is a conflict over social and political priorities.<sup>84</sup>

Cassidy’s work provides a meaningful critique of the *pro ecclesia* and *pro imperio* positions allowing him to situate his work as a more nuanced perspective. He draws out the social and political distinctions of Jesus in Luke, and the mirroring of Jesus’ stance by the Church and Paul in Acts. Though Cassidy considers Jesus to be innocent he recognises that such a stand against the political and religious rulers results in conflict. Yet Cassidy’s understanding of the engagement has some serious weaknesses. First, Cassidy does not account for the various engagements outside of the political relationships such as an overarching engagement between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God and engagements with variants of Judaism and the Graeco-Roman belief system. Next, Cassidy wrongly assumes that the narrative records the Roman State’s perception of the Church. Rather, as Rowe rightly notes,

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<sup>82</sup> Cassidy, *Acts*, 38, 50, 68-69, 108, 124.

<sup>83</sup> Cassidy writes, “Nevertheless, Acts leaves no doubt that, in the event of a clash between these two loyalties, Paul’s allegiance to Jesus would unquestionably take precedence over his allegiance to Caesar.” Cassidy, *Acts*, 124.

<sup>84</sup> Cassidy, *Acts*, 159.

Luke is writing about the Church from an insider's perspective and Luke interprets the Roman State through this Christian lens.<sup>85</sup> Therefore Cassidy's position is based on a case of mistaken identity. A final issue with Cassidy's position is that if Acts is a document modelling the rejection of the Roman Empire through the lives of Jesus and Paul then why was it not suppressed? Such writing would have been considered seditious and it seems remarkable that Acts can finish with Paul preaching in the heart of Rome. Both Bruce and Esler note that the evidence for understanding Acts in this way is absent from the text. Bruce writes, "During this period the gospel was proclaimed freely in Rome through the lips of its chief messenger. The apologetic value of this fact was considerable. It is unlikely Luke means to suggest that if the gospel were illegal and subversive propaganda, it could have been taught for two years in the heart of the empire without let or hindrance."<sup>86</sup>

Cassidy provides a helpful alternative to the apologia in considering the engagement between Jesus and the Church with the Roman State. He rightly acknowledges the challenge Jesus and his followers present to Rome and its values. Yet Cassidy's argument needs more nuancing to address the variety of other engagements that occur in the narrative. Beyond these Cassidy does not adequately answer why the tension that would have resulted from such a document, and inevitably in the lives of the Christian assembly, is considered either politically innocent or innocuous by the Roman State.

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<sup>85</sup> Rowe, *World*, 57.

<sup>86</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 535. Esler writes, that there is no evidence in Luke-Acts, apart from "the questionable inferences they draw from the political material, that Luke's community, or part of it, was behaving in a provocative way towards Rome or was looking forward hopefully to its apocalyptic demise." Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 209.

#### 2.4. P. Esler: Acts as an Intra-ecclesial Legitimation

Penner remarks that Esler's work should be viewed as part of a "watershed collection," a group moving towards a more holistic model of interpretation for ancient texts.<sup>87</sup> Esler begins by critiquing Conzelmann's proposal, that Luke's theology determines the approach to the social and political aspects of the first century engagement.<sup>88</sup> He posits a reverse approach - that the social and political pressures experienced by Luke's community provided a central means of developing Luke's theology.<sup>89</sup> Adopting a socio-redaction criticism perspective Esler claims that this methodology understands and relates to the theological and sociological aspects of Luke's aim.<sup>90</sup> Esler outlines the methodology of the social sciences. These include 'description', "the scrutiny and comparison of a wide range of material,"<sup>91</sup> 'classification', "the grouping together of similar phenomena" as discovered from the descriptive phase,<sup>92</sup> and 'explanation', "the ability to test a hypothesis empirically."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Penner, "Madness in the Method," 229.

<sup>88</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 1.

<sup>89</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 1-2. Esler writes, "He [Luke] emerges as someone stirred to take up his pen not from an interest in theologizing for its own sake, but because he fervently believes that the Gospel, properly interpreted and presented, is a message of salvation for his fellow Christians across the whole range of their troubled existence." He later writes, "it has become increasingly clear to the present writer in the course of this work that it is entirely unrealistic to expect to be able to appreciate the purely religious dimension of Luke-Acts apart from an understanding of the social and political realities of the community for which it was composed." Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 61.

<sup>90</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 2-3. Esler critiques redaction critical views for not being able to account effectively for the social aspect of the Lukan narrative. Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 3-4.

<sup>91</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 7.

<sup>92</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 7-8.

<sup>93</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 8. Esler also notes objections to the application of social sciences to the New Testament. The first, is that social sciences claim to provide an explanation of the biblical data apart from religious factors. The second, that due to their contemporary cultural patterns, that cannot help in exegesis. Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 12-16.

Esler's chief argument is that the purpose of Acts is to legitimate Christianity - that is to explain and justify Christianity to its group members.<sup>94</sup> The reason for such legitimation, says Esler, is that Christians were being "exposed to social and political pressures which were making their allegiance waver."<sup>95</sup> To achieve this legitimation Esler suggests that Luke develops the community's symbolic universe, a position based on the social construction theory of Berger and Luckmann.<sup>96</sup> The symbolic universe is a set of ideas and beliefs that makes both consistent and coherent sense of the world in which the believers find themselves and a lens by which they may decide how to act. This construct acts as a protective canopy to the community because it provides the certainty that everything is orderly and correct and it links the present community with their predecessors and successors.<sup>97</sup> Esler posits that Luke offers legitimation to two distinct groups within the community - Jewish Christians, who have residual loyalties to their heritage and people but which they have largely forsaken, and Roman Christians - including Roman soldiers - who have not separated from Rome and who need reassurance that faith in Jesus Christ is not incompatible with allegiance to Rome.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 16. Other scholarship, whilst differing from Esler, see identity as significant. See G. E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; eds. D. P. Moessner and A. J. Malherbe; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 380, 386.

<sup>95</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 222.

<sup>96</sup> P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967).

<sup>97</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 18.

<sup>98</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 217, 222. Esler highlights the significance of the Naaman story which created the possibility of joint allegiance to Rome, that it did not necessitate withdrawal from public life and even suggested that it was permissible for Christians to be present whilst others carried out sacrifices, so long as they did not actively take part in the process. Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 218-219, 222. See also M. Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* (trans. A. Bedini; London: Croom Helm, 1986), 173.

Esler's position is an attractive one addressing the social and political concerns that the early assembly may well have faced. I would also, though, note some concerns. To establish his approach, that the social and political dimensions shape Luke's theology, Esler caricatures the alternative position. He writes that to view Luke's theology as shaping the social and political outlook makes Luke a "glorified armchair theorist, who ponders over purely religious questions before issuing forth from his scriptorium to enlighten his fellow-Christians."<sup>99</sup> Such a perspective appears to ignore the theological dimensions inherent within the Lukan narrative. The references to the Old Testament in Luke and Acts demonstrate the strong theological foundation through which the activity of Jesus and the Christian assembly is interpreted. It is this theological foundation that provides the framework for interpreting correctly the social and political dimensions of the narrative. In Luke 1 and 2 Zechariah and Mary praise God for he is acting in history. Their words are grounded in the theology of the Old Testament which reflects strong social and political overtones for God is "Lord," "Saviour," and "Most High," who "has filled the hungry," "raised up a horn of salvation," that Israel "should be saved from our enemies."<sup>100</sup> This is repeated in Luke 3 for John the Baptist first calls people to repent and then teaches about the social implications of that repentance (3:3, 10-14). This theological emphasis is developed in conflict with Satan and through the kingdom of God. This kingdom manifests itself in Jesus and then the Church and it is within this dimension that the social and political issues are interpreted. Dunn, writing of this theological priority, states, "[the] definition of believers' social identity as such

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<sup>99</sup> Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Luke 1:46, 47, 53, 68, 69, 71, 74, 76.

does not seem to have been a major interest for Luke.”<sup>101</sup>

Next, Esler establishes the social identity of the assembly by the process of mirror reading. The narrative provides no explicit clues about the community and Walton notes in light of the lack of evidence that mirror reading is a doubtful procedure.<sup>102</sup>

Whilst Esler suggests that there is “quite a body of evidence” for Roman Christians in Luke’s community, Walton notes that eight passages, three in Luke and five in Acts, does not constitute such a body especially when compared with Esler’s examination of the interaction of Christians and the Roman Empire for which he provides forty-two instances, predominantly from Acts.<sup>103</sup> A further concern is Esler’s view that for Roman Christians faith in Jesus Christ is compatible with allegiance to Rome. Whilst Jews were exempted from the imperial cult, a Roman citizen, particularly one in a public role, would have been expected to adhere to the strictures of this cult. To call one other than Caesar ‘Lord’ would not have been compatible with this and yet throughout Luke-Acts Jesus is presented as *the* Lord, that is one greater than Caesar whom Jews, Greeks, and Romans call ‘Lord’ (Acts 10:1-4). Along with this is Luke’s clarity regarding Roman responsibility for the death of Jesus (Acts 4:27-29) which is an act done in opposition to the ‘Sovereign Lord’ (Acts 4:24).<sup>104</sup> Pickett writes, “It would appear that Luke-Acts was written to promote an allegiance to a Divine kingdom that was at cross purposes with the imperial world order. Throughout the narrative, Luke often describes how Roman society works, only to contrast it with

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<sup>101</sup> Dunn, *Acts*, xiii.

<sup>102</sup> Walton, “Roman Empire,” 8.

<sup>103</sup> Walton, “Roman Empire,” 9 and Esler, *Luke-Acts*, 201-205, 210.

<sup>104</sup> Walton, “Roman Empire,” 9.

the values and practices of Jesus and his followers.”<sup>105</sup>

In presenting an alternative to the *apologia* Esler argues that Acts is a legitimization of the Christian faith enabling Christians to navigate their relationship with Rome.

Whilst such a reading is beneficial I would contend that this perspective cannot adequately address the engagement because Esler’s prioritising of the social and political to determine the theology is misguided - given the priority of theology in Luke-Acts and also Walton’s comments about the risks of mirror-reading. Further, the compatibility between Rome and Christ cannot work since both claim an alternative lordship and exclusive worship.

### **3. The Engagement between the Christian Assembly and the Nations**

Whilst Penner’s view that “contemporary scholarship has sometimes misinterpreted Graeco-Roman religion in Acts or, more frequently, all but ignored it” is true, it might be more accurate to say that the *engagement* between Graeco-Roman religion and the assembly in Acts has frequently been noted but rarely investigated properly.<sup>106</sup>

Scholarship which has interacted with this engagement provides varied interpretations and conclusions yet rarely, if ever, explains how it helps the audience to understand the engagement occurring nor how the engagement affects a reading of the wider narrative of Acts. Scholarship has focused on the discontinuity - the

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<sup>105</sup> R. Pickett, “Luke and Empire: An Introduction,” in *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley* (eds. D. Rhoads, et al.; Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 19.

<sup>106</sup> T. Penner, “Contextualizing Acts,” in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (JBLSym 20; ed. T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele; Atlanta, Georg.: SBL, 2003), 8. See also Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, ix and S. E. Porter and A. W. Pitts, “Greco-Roman Culture in the History of New Testament Interpretation: An Introductory Essay,” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (eds. S. E. Porter and A. W. Pitts; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 2-4.

gods are both demonic counterfeits and imitations of Christ -<sup>107</sup> or the continuity, paralleling Jesus with the Greek and Near East gods and heroes,<sup>108</sup> for example Mithras,<sup>109</sup> and Heracles.<sup>110</sup> Others recognise the tension that develops between the Christian assembly and the nations but cannot adequately address the role of the tension in the narrative. Such examination results in varied and contradictory conclusions. For example, Harnack concludes that the parallelism revealed a syncretic relationship between Christianity and the nations even though Christianity was distinct in its syncretism by unconsciously using the beliefs and values of other religions for its own end.<sup>111</sup> Yet Neyrey suggests that these parallels should be understood as missional points of contact allowing engagement with the nations.<sup>112</sup> Three works which seek to undertake an analysis of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the nations and which fulfil the criteria as representative and significant examples of this kind of approach are by Klauck, Kauppi, and Grant and it is to these we turn.

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<sup>107</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr with Trypho, a Jew* 69 (ANF 1:233). Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:321.

<sup>108</sup> D. E. Aune, "Heracles and Christ: Heracles Imagery in the Christology of Early Christianity," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds. D. L. Balch et al.; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>109</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 2:447-451. See also C. S. Keener, "The Nativity Cave and Gentile Myths," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 7 (2010): 59-67.

<sup>110</sup> Aune, "Heracles," 3-4. Aune writes, "Both Jesus and Heracles, it is claimed, were born to maidens who had no previous sexual intercourse with their husbands...both were called 'Son of God'...the phrase 'it is finished'...is uttered by Heracles just before his death." Aune, "Heracles," 11 n. 43. See also D. W. J. Gill and B. W. Winter, "Acts and Roman Religion," in *Graeco-Roman Setting* (vol. 2 of *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*; eds. D. Gill and C. Gempf; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 87-91.

<sup>111</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:391-392.

<sup>112</sup> J. H. Neyrey, "Acts 17, Epicureans, and Theodicy: A Study in Stereotypes," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds. D. L. Balch et al.; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 118.



### 3.1. H-J. Klauck: Magic and Paganism<sup>113</sup>

Klauck is praised by Stenschke “for writing the first monograph-length study of the Gentiles in Acts.”<sup>114</sup> Klauck’s thesis presupposes that Acts is an intra-Christian polemic against a remnant of pagan belief within the Christian community.<sup>115</sup> The purpose of Acts is to reveal how the Christian faith had to assert itself among rival religious views and to provide stability to the Church’s identity whilst living in a polytheistic and pagan world.<sup>116</sup> This ecclesial stability and identity enables the Church to avoid syncretism with paganism and to hold in tension missional inculturation - the ability to transmit the gospel in appropriate modes of cultural understanding - and evangelisation, as the Church engages with the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>117</sup> The ability to hold these together is, according to Klauck, a “difficult balancing act” because it seeks both contact and common elements whilst also identifying contradictions and contrasts.<sup>118</sup> Klauck proposes that Luke uses the narrative to speak at two levels. The first is the direct speech in the narrative, and the

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<sup>113</sup> Whilst not essential to this analysis, Klauck defines the first-century understanding of magic in three ways: a highly respected, learned and wise member from a priestly caste, astrologers, interpreters of dreams, and soothsayers, or a charlatan, trickster, or con-man. H-J. Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles* (trans. B. McNeill; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 15, 48. See also E. M. Yamauchi, “Magic in the Biblical World,” *TynB* 34 (1983): 169-200.

<sup>114</sup> C. W. Stenschke, *Luke’s Portrait of Gentiles Prior to Their Coming to Faith* (WUNT II/108; eds. M. Hengel and O. Hofius; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 8. For another work on Magic in the New Testament see R. Connor, *Magic in the New Testament: A Survey and Appraisal of the Evidence* (Oxford: Mandrake, 2010).

<sup>115</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 23.

<sup>116</sup> For example: Klauck, *Magic*, 2, 23.

<sup>117</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 121. Klauck writes of the list of nations in Acts 2: “In the narratives of Alexander [the Great], such lists were designed to provide an overview of conquered territories. In Luke’s work, a new world-view is just beginning to conquer a world empire, not with a mighty army and the force of weapons, but only by means of itinerant messengers of the gospel and by the might inherent in the word they proclaim.” Klauck, *Magic*, 11. See also Klauck, *Magic*, 32, 35.

<sup>118</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 117.

second, an alternative, perhaps subversive, message which the author hopes to convey to his readers.<sup>119</sup>

To demonstrate his argument against syncretism in the Church Klauck focuses on a number of short sections of text in Acts.<sup>120</sup> The chosen texts draw out four elements: the development of the identity of the Church; engagements between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world which results in a conflict and resolution by which Christianity is demonstrated to be superior; the mediating role of Judaism between the Graeco-Roman world and the Christian assembly; and missional inculturation and evangelisation. In respect to identity Klauck positions Christianity as a continuation of the Old Testament promises and as a fulfilment of both Jewish and Graeco-Roman hopes.<sup>121</sup> He uses examples such as Jesus' ascension as a parallel to the Old Testament narrative and Graeco-Roman myth; the Jerusalem community as the fulfilment of desired Jewish and Graeco-Roman social utopias; the giving of the Spirit which reverses Babel and provides points of contact with other Old Testament motifs, particularly Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16-19);<sup>122</sup> and the Ethiopian as the symbolic fulfilment of Acts 1:8 and the Isaianic promises (Isa. 56:4-8).<sup>123</sup> Such an identity enables the Church to avoid syncretism but also results in engagement with the Graeco-Roman world.

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<sup>119</sup> For example in reading Acts 17 Klauck notes that in the narrated communication Paul appears to be flattering the Athenians but to his readers he is highlighting the problematic aspect of "Gentile religiosity." Klauck, *Magic*, 81.

<sup>120</sup> Klauck focuses on Acts chapters 1, 2, 8, 10-12, 13-14, 16-18, 19, 27-28.

<sup>121</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 5.

<sup>122</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 6, 8, 12.

<sup>123</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 24, 27, 29.

Klauck provides examples of engagements between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world in Acts which results in both conflict and resolution by which Christianity is demonstrated to be superior. Noting the similarities with the engagement between Philip and Simon Magus in Acts 8, Klauck focuses upon the Bar-Jesus episode (Acts 13:6-12).<sup>124</sup> The narrative portrays Bar-Jesus as a charlatan magician and Jewish false prophet,<sup>125</sup> Bar-Jesus as the antithesis to Jesus.<sup>126</sup> Paul engages here to prove the falsity of Bar-Jesus and show the Christian faith to be superior.<sup>127</sup> For Klauck this episode is pivotal since Bar-Jesus acts a mediator between the Christian message and the Graeco-Roman world and that this is illustrative, for Klauck, of the role of Judaism in Acts.<sup>128</sup>

The fourth element Klauck highlights are examples of inculturation and evangelisation. The Lystran pericope with its “pure paganism” and “pure polytheistic

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<sup>124</sup> In Klauck’s treatment of Acts 8 he writes that the narrative portrays Simon Magus as a “divine human being” but also as a charlatan magician. Simon’s interest in Philip’s leads to a conflict. Through the use of mirrorings [The mirrorings include that the people “gave heed to” Simon and then Philip, both Simon and Philip perform great deeds of power and the people are astounded at Simon’s power and rejoiced at Philip] Philip is presented as superior to Simon since the work of the Spirit is the means for real transformation. This is reinforced by Peter’s engagement with Simon and Klauck concludes that “Simon Magus is lost forever to the Church.” Klauck, *Magic*, 14-23.

<sup>125</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 48-49.

<sup>126</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 49.

<sup>127</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 15, 54. Another example is Acts 16. Klauck links the πύθωνα spirit with Apollo and that it can “denote a common ventriloquist who worked by various tricks,” a type of oracle perceived negatively in the Old Testament. The slave girl’s words appear affirmatory of Paul’s message but are instead syncretistically ambiguous, possibly referring to Zeus or the cult of the Theos Hyphistos. This conflict is resolved in the removal of the spirit which authenticates the name of Jesus as the name of power. Klauck, *Magic*, 63-72.

<sup>128</sup> Klauck identifies the readers of Luke as “those pious Gentile worshippers of God who may already have experienced the attractiveness of the Jewish faith in God.” In the engagement with Bar-Jesus and the subsequent conversion of the Roman Proconsul, Klauck writes, “Sergius Paulus had already learned something from Bar-Jesus about the God of the Bible, and the Christian proclamation can build more easily on this kind of prior knowledge.” Klauck, *Magic*, 4, 51.

belief,<sup>129</sup> reveals inculturation through points of contact being made with the Lystran culture. Yet evangelisation is also at the heart of this speech with Paul critiquing the Graeco-Roman belief system.<sup>130</sup> Klauck also addresses Acts 17:16-34 in which Paul uses appropriate cultural knowledge to engage the Areopagus arguing that divine revelation and repentance are necessary as opposed to philosophical discussion (17:21).<sup>131</sup> For Klauck this pericope marks a high point of inculturation and demonstrates the need for the “evangelisation of cultures, which involves subjecting the forms of Gentile religion to a critique generated by the gospel.”<sup>132</sup>

Much of Klauck’s work is helpful to understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world. Through this approach Klauck recognises that there are continuities and discontinuities between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world and that these result in a tension. Klauck argues for a resolution of the tension which always demonstrates the superiority of Christianity. Yet Klauck’s work raises various issues of which the primary one is the mediating role of Judaism. Returning to the example of Bar-Jesus I would argue that the purpose of this pericope is not to argue for Judaism as a mediating force but to demonstrate the continuing theme in Luke-Acts that not all Jews are true followers of Yahweh (Luke 3:8-9) and that the word of God will go out despite opposition (8:25,

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<sup>129</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 56. The Lystran episode is Acts 14:8-18.

<sup>130</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 57-61.

<sup>131</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 83, 86.

<sup>132</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 94.

35; 9:15; 11:18, 20-21; 12:24).<sup>133</sup> A second point is that whilst positing a positive mediation Klauck neglects to note the negative descriptions about Bar-Jesus who is described as a “false prophet” (13:6) and “a child of the devil” (13:10), and who demonstrates a lack of repentance (13:11; cf. 9:1-19). Such a depiction questions how effective a mediating force Bar-Jesus would have been.<sup>134</sup> Klauck also omits other negative mediations between Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world. In Acts 14 the unbelieving Jews stir up the nations and poison their minds (vv. 1-7) and incite the stoning of Paul (Acts 14:19). Klauck argues that this latter incident was only done by Jews and not the Lystrans,<sup>135</sup> but this is rejected by Keener, Johnson, Rowe, and Bock who all argue for a mob action incited by these Jews.<sup>136</sup> Such a portrayal demonstrates that this type of Judaism cannot be a mediating force, even to itself, since it cannot understand or accept the message of the Christian assembly.

Klauck’s assertion of Jewish mediation introduces the issue of how other religions are to be perceived and interpreted in Luke-Acts - in short the need for a Lukan theology of religions. Whilst Klauck asserts that Judaism is a mediating force he does not address the logical implication that derives from this - namely the nature of truth in religions. If Judaism is a mediator it must present the same truth as the Christian assembly at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels. Yet

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<sup>133</sup> Further to this, Klauck’s assertions concerning the conversations between Bar-Jesus and Sergius Paulus are in fact left unrecorded by the narrative and we simply do not and cannot know what has been said.

<sup>134</sup> B. H. M. Kent, “Curses in Acts: Hearing the Apostles’ Words of Judgment alongside ‘Magical’ Spell Texts,” *JSNT* 39 (2017): 416. See also Witherington’s commentary who notes that “Luke sees the non-Christian form of Judaism as competition.” Witherington, *Acts*, 397.

<sup>135</sup> Klauck writes, “but it is carried out by the Jews from Iconium.” Klauck, *Magic*, 60.

<sup>136</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2172-2173; Johnson, *Acts*, 253; Rowe, *World*, 23, and Bock, *Acts*, 479.

Klauck is clear that this does not occur and that the Christian gospel is needed for salvation. Klauck's assertion also questions how the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism should be understood in Acts. Such an argument also raises issues about truth in Graeco-Roman religions - why a mediating force is needed, and how this affects the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world in Acts. Unfortunately Klauck does not address any of these issues in his work.<sup>137</sup> The idea of truth in religions also impacts Klauck's work on inculturation and evangelisation. Klauck aptly recognises the continuities through the use of "fulfilment," "parallels," and "points of contact,"<sup>138</sup> and the discontinuities in the resulting "conflict,"<sup>139</sup> "poach[ing],"<sup>140</sup> and "polemics." Yet what is not clear is how Klauck adequately integrates these contrasting tendencies into a coherent perspective for understanding the engagement between the Christian message and the Graeco-Roman world.

With an emphasis on Acts being an intra-Christian polemic Klauck's work provides a helpful analysis towards understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world. In particular it recognises the continuities and discontinuities that develop in the engagement due to the inculturation and evangelisation. Yet Klauck's work fails to adequately account for the continuities and discontinuities and how they integrate with one another. Beyond that, he over-

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<sup>137</sup> The idea of truth in Judaism is also raised obliquely by Boyarin who states, "Judaism is not the 'mother' of Christianity; they are twins, joined at the hip." D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 5.

<sup>138</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 46.

<sup>139</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 46.

<sup>140</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 46.

emphasises the role of Judaism as a mediator, something that is not supported in Acts. Such an argument draws out questions about the nature of truth in Judaism and other religions, and therefore how Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world relate to, and engage with, the Christian assembly. Such questions are left unanswered by Klauck.

### 3.2. L. A. Kauppi: A Graeco-Roman Reading of Religion in Acts

Kauppi's work offers a significant example of understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world in Luke-Acts. The scope of his work emerges from his critique of previous scholarship which uses selective passages and "are cursory surveys of Graeco-Roman religion, or lack in-depth analysis."<sup>141</sup> The purpose of Kauppi's work is to explore how a Graeco-Roman person might perceive Luke's depiction of Graeco-Roman religion. This exploration might allow the modern reader to understand more clearly the theology and purpose of Luke's work.<sup>142</sup> Kauppi recognises that the engagement between the Christian assembly and Graeco-Roman religion in Acts is substantial,<sup>143</sup> and develops a tension since for both sides the others' god(s) is the foreign one.<sup>144</sup> Whilst Kauppi does not explore this engagement, he does comment that such an engagement

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<sup>141</sup> L. A. Kauppi, *Foreign but Familiar Gods: Greco-Romans Read Religion in Acts* (LNTS 277; ed. M. Goodacre; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 5, 13.

<sup>142</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 2. Kauppi writes, "By reconstructing the assumptions and understanding of Luke's world regarding Greco-Roman religions, we can better understand Luke's message and his first-century audience's understanding of his message." Kauppi, *Foreign*, 8.

<sup>143</sup> He defines a Graeco-Roman person as "a first-or second century resident of the eastern Mediterranean who could speak, read, and write Greek and was familiar with the early imperial Greek and Roman culture as found in the eastern Mediterranean." Kauppi, *Foreign*, 16.

<sup>144</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 1. Focusing on Acts 17:18 Kauppi writes, "For the Greek philosophers, Jesus and 'Resurrection' are 'foreign gods', because the city did not formally recognize them to receive public worship. For Luke and the early Christian members of his audience, the 'foreign gods' are the diverse gods of the Greco-Roman world."

implies the need to develop a Lukan theology of religions.<sup>145</sup> Kauppi understands Graeco-Roman religion as dynamic and varied and “not a single, monolithic entity.”<sup>146</sup> He writes, “For my purposes, ‘Greco-Roman religion’ is the sum total of religious practices encountered by a Greco-Roman in the daily course of civic life.”<sup>147</sup> Kauppi’s work interacts with multiple Graeco-Roman engagements in Acts: the sacrificial cult (14:8-19); the ‘unknown’ god (17:22), the personified abstraction of Justice (28:1-6); Graeco-Roman oracles and divination (1:17-26; 16:16-18); the imperial cult (12:20-23); and Aeschylus’ *The Eumenides* (17:18, 33).<sup>148</sup> These passages were chosen by Kauppi since they “are not adequately investigated elsewhere and are in need of further explanation.”<sup>149</sup> Kauppi’s methodology integrates various approaches including a social description approach - cataloguing details about Graeco-Roman religions through different forms of evidence,<sup>150</sup> the authorial audience, aiming to understand how the Lukan audience understood Luke’s references to Graeco-Roman religion,<sup>151</sup> and the intertextuality proposed by

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<sup>145</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 2, 127.

<sup>146</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 16. Kauppi defines ‘religion’ following Geertz who writes, “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, long-lasting moods and motivations in men [sic], by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” C. Geertz, ‘Religion as a Cultural System,’ in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (San Francisco: Basic Books, 1973), 90 cited in Kauppi, *Foreign*, 14. Of Graeco-Roman religion Kauppi writes that it involves “the scrupulous sense of fulfilling obligations to the gods in ritual, an emphasis upon public expressions of piety or fulfillment of the obligations to the gods, and the structuring of corporate identity around shared cults and rituals.” Kauppi, *Foreign*, 14-15.

<sup>147</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 18.

<sup>148</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 13.

<sup>150</sup> See J. E. Stamburgh and D. L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment* (LEC 2; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

<sup>151</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 8. Following Rabinowitz, Kauppi suggest four audiences: actual, authorial, narrative, ideal narrative. See P. J. Rabinowitz, *Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), 15-46.



Hays and Robbins.<sup>152</sup> Implicit in this approach is the shared cultural and literary 'competencies' which allow the audience to understand the meaning in a text particularly when there are gaps.<sup>153</sup>

In Acts 1:15-26 and 16:16-18 Kauppi examines kleromancy and the use of oracles.<sup>154</sup> He posits that Luke's Graeco-Roman audience would have understood the parallels between Graeco-Roman kleromancy and the casting of lots to replace Judas (Acts 1:26) since this was a common means "to fill cultic offices, to learn future events, and to determine future courses."<sup>155</sup> Such a parallel, Kauppi asserts, would have been perceived positively because kleromancy demonstrates it is God's sovereign choice but in the light of clear Christian prophecy is now defunct.<sup>156</sup> Kauppi argues that the πνεῦμα πύθωνα (Acts 16:16-18) provides a recognisable parallel with Graeco-Roman oracles although the ambiguity of the slave-girl's pronouncement and the eviction of the spirit would create for Luke's audience, says Kauppi, a contrast between ambiguous Graeco-Roman oracles and "the clarity of Christian prophecy throughout Acts" leading to their rejection.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 7-12.

<sup>153</sup> Kauppi highlights four overlapping competencies: "(1) commonly known historical events and personalities, (2) the audience's literary canon, (3) standard literary conventions and (4) social norms and structures." Kauppi, *Foreign*, 9-10. See also Darr, *On Character Building*, 19-20.

<sup>154</sup> Kauppi defines kleromancy as "divination performed using lots, dice, or other items subject to forming random patterns." Kauppi, *Foreign*, 20. See also W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination: A Study of its Methods and Principles* (Repr., 1967; Chicago: Argonaut, 1913), 205-235.

<sup>155</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 21, 25.

<sup>156</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 38.

<sup>157</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 39, 40, 41.

Turning to Acts 12:1-23 Kauppi notes allusions to the imperial cult made prominent under Augustus,<sup>158</sup> a system providing stability and “a definition of the world.”<sup>159</sup> Kauppi notes that the Lukan audience may have understood this pericope as contrasting the Christian assembly and the ruler cult,<sup>160</sup> in particular that the abuse of power found in Acts 12 “is antithetical to God’s proper use of power.”<sup>161</sup>

Kauppi then analyses Acts 14:8-18, which he describes as a parody and reversal of the Graeco-Roman sacrificial system.<sup>162</sup> Ignoring the possible allusions to Ovid, Kauppi focuses on the sacrificial ritual.<sup>163</sup> He notes three ironic reversals: within the social structure it is the crowd instead of the priest who are responsible for the events;<sup>164</sup> within the sacred space Paul and Barnabas are acclaimed as divine but make a claim to humanity;<sup>165</sup> and whilst Paul is acclaimed as Hermes, messenger of the Greek pantheon, he is actually the messenger of Jesus.<sup>166</sup> Such reversals would have led Luke’s Graeco-Roman audience, says Kauppi, to conclude that such

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<sup>158</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 43-44.

<sup>159</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 44. He outlines three ritual elements in Acts 12; a designated festival day, ritual objects and symbols, and an acclamation of Agrippa’s divinity. Kauppi, *Foreign*, 45.

<sup>160</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 51.

<sup>161</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 58.

<sup>162</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 64. Kauppi considers his focus on the sacrificial unique since other scholarship “virtually ignore the elements of sacrificial ritual in this text.” Kauppi, *Foreign*, 65.

<sup>163</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 65. Kauppi recognises several ritual elements including the priest, the bull, the procession, and the use of ritual ornamentation.

<sup>164</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 78.

<sup>165</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 79.

<sup>166</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 80-81.

religion as practised by the Graeco-Roman world “is pointless and worthy only of comedic parody.”<sup>167</sup>

Moving to Acts 17:16-34 Kauppi asserts that Luke’s Graeco-Roman readers would have recognised allusions to *The Eumenides*, in particular the resurrection, the Areopagus, and the introduction of new gods.<sup>168</sup> The use of *The Eumenides* suggests to Kauppi that Luke’s readers would have understood this allusion as “both a commendation and condemnation of Greek culture and religion.”<sup>169</sup> Paul’s use of Aeschylus recognised that Greek culture could be “baptized” or “christianised.”<sup>170</sup> The condemnation would result from the challenge of the gospel and the need to turn from Graeco-Roman worship.<sup>171</sup>

In Acts 19:23-41 Kauppi assesses how the Lukan audience might have interpreted the votive offerings and the sacred stone. He argues that the audience would have perceived this episode as a “polemic against idolatry,”<sup>172</sup> and that the gods are fundamentally impotent and can be ignored by Christians as a threat.<sup>173</sup> This pericope would have enabled the Lukan audience to acknowledge the activity of demons but to conclude that it was only through God’s power that they could be

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<sup>167</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 82.

<sup>168</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 83-85, 91. He notes but chooses not to focus on natural religion, the ‘unknown’ God motif, Graeco-Roman philosophical religion and historical questions.

<sup>169</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 92.

<sup>170</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 93.

<sup>171</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 93.

<sup>172</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 122.

<sup>173</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 94, 106, 122.

defeated.<sup>174</sup>

Finally, Kauppi turns to Acts 28:1-11 and the Graeco-Roman associations of the snake, the personification of justice, and the Διοσκούροι. Kauppi notes that snakes were associated with divine justice - something paralleled in the Maltese perception of Paul (28:4).<sup>175</sup> He further notes that the audience would have understood δίκη as a deity who relentlessly pursues the guilty.<sup>176</sup> Then Kauppi turns to the Διοσκούροι who were saviour gods most especially of sailors and travellers on the sea.<sup>177</sup>

Kauppi asserts that these three aspects would have been interpreted by Graeco-Roman readers as Paul being declared innocent (28:1-6), and that Paul's safety was bound in the sovereignty of the living God.<sup>178</sup> Kauppi further contends that Acts 28 would not be perceived as a polemic against the gods or religiosity for "Greco-Roman religion finds no fault with Paul and [it] is adopted and 'transvalued' for Christian use" particularly when "their traditional religious concepts...agree with and promote the themes of Acts."<sup>179</sup>

Kauppi draws out a number of significant conclusions from his work in particular recognising that the engagements that occur are considerable and at times have been overlooked by scholarship. Yet Kauppi's work also demonstrates significant

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<sup>174</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 122.

<sup>175</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 108-109.

<sup>176</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 111-112.

<sup>177</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 113.

<sup>178</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 114-116.

<sup>179</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 116-117. See also pages 122-123, 125-126. This final point is very important to Kauppi and he returns to it a number of times in his conclusion.

weaknesses. First, Kauppi does not place his thesis within the overall narrative structure of Acts but selects certain, and often very short, parts of the text to support his arguments. Whilst this is understandable - since he wants to focus on elements that other scholarship has avoided - his choice of texts means he does not account for more nuanced considerations of Graeco-Roman religion and culture, particularly when it engages closely with Judaism.<sup>180</sup> Kauppi's work also results in an inability to adequately account for what is occurring in the engagement. He recognises that there is both a comparison and contrast and that there is both an openness to and a rejection of Graeco-Roman religions. Thus Kauppi can talk simultaneously of the "christianising," "baptizing," "transvaluing," or "transmuting" of Graeco-Roman religion whilst stating that Graeco-Roman religion should be understood as idolatrous and powerless and its rulers guilty of abusing their power.<sup>181</sup> Yet Kauppi does not address this obvious tension for understanding either the engagement or a wider reading of Acts. Rather, Kauppi's inability to adequately address the engagement leads instead to him noting areas for future research - both of which reflect this inadequacy. Two key areas that Kauppi notes, and which bear relevance to this thesis, are how the "references to Graeco-Roman religion and their narrative context structure and advance Luke's narrative?"<sup>182</sup> and whether it is possible to "outline and develop a synthetic Lukan theology of religion including both Judaism,

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<sup>180</sup> Remembering that Kauppi defines a Graeco-Roman person as "a first-or second century resident of the eastern Mediterranean who could speak, read, and write Greek and was familiar with the early imperial Greek and Roman culture as found in the eastern Mediterranean." Such a definition would incorporate some Jews and certainly those Graeco-Roman persons who attend the synagogue. Kauppi, *Foreign*, 16.

<sup>181</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 93.

<sup>182</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 127.

early Christianity”, and “the pluriform varieties of Greco-Roman religion.”<sup>183</sup> Such questions reflect Kauppi’s lack of appropriate framework for interpreting the engagements he studies and demonstrate the relevance and importance of this thesis. Finally, Kauppi’s analysis of Acts 12 appears to twist the narrative to fit his analysis. Throughout his work Kauppi uses the name “Agrippa” to reflect the Graeco-Roman interest.<sup>184</sup> Yet Acts 12 only uses the name ‘Herod’ and the pericope is framed within a strongly Jewish setting.<sup>185</sup> Kauppi, having himself raised Hays’ warnings about inter-textuality,<sup>186</sup> then appears to ignore them. I would argue that it is more likely that Acts 12 is a substantial critique against the Jewish political hierarchy with perhaps some allusions to the imperial cult.<sup>187</sup>

Kauppi’s study recognises the complexity of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world in Acts. Yet whilst Kauppi’s language - “christianising,” “baptizing,” “idolatry” - reflect his awareness of the tensions, he never answers what is occurring in the engagements nor how these engagements affect the reading of the wider narrative. As such Kauppi is not able to provide an integrated and holistic approach to the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world.

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<sup>183</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 127.

<sup>184</sup> Kauppi uses ‘Agrippa’ over 60 times and “Herod” just once which even then is “Herod Agrippa.” Kauppi, *Foreign*, 60.

<sup>185</sup> Herod is king (12:1), the death of James pleases the Jews (12:3), and it is Herod and all that the Jewish people were expecting (12:11).

<sup>186</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 12.

<sup>187</sup> I take note of Rowe’s comment, “The interpreter who wishes to study the theme of Luke-Acts and the imperial cult will be met immediately with several, rather large difficulties.” C. K. Rowe, “Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult: A Way through the Conundrum?” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 279.

### 3.3. R. Grant: The Growth of Christianity in a Graeco-Roman World<sup>188</sup>

Grant's work is recognised as significant by Kauppi who notes that Grant is one of only six scholars who have "attempted to study Luke's use of Greco-Roman religions as a whole."<sup>189</sup> Grant begins by painting a Graeco-Roman world with a complexity of different beliefs, reflected in the art and architecture of cities such as Athens and which he suggests is more complex than Paul's sermons about idolatry would suggest.<sup>190</sup> Grant posits the purpose of Acts as "Luke setting forth an ideal pattern for pagan and Christian relations."<sup>191</sup> It is for this reason, says Grant, that whilst "magic and self-divination are self-evidently wrong,"<sup>192</sup> the engagements that occur do not result in a putting down of paganism since this "could not have produced a favourable response" from the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>193</sup>

Grant examines four pericopes and presents the religious context of each - Acts 13 in Paphos, Acts 14 in Lystra, Acts 17 in Athens, and Acts 19 in Ephesus.<sup>194</sup> He describes the wider religious context - identifying gods such as Isis,<sup>195</sup> Dionysius,<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> R. M. Grant, *Gods and the One God: Christian Theology in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: SPCK, 1986).

<sup>189</sup> These are B. Tremel, B. Wildhaber, R. M. Grant, G. Soffe, H. J. Klauck, and D. W. J. Gill. Kauppi, *Foreign*, 2.

<sup>190</sup> Grant, *One God*, 20.

<sup>191</sup> Grant, *One God*, 22.

<sup>192</sup> Grant, *One God*, 22.

<sup>193</sup> Grant, *One God*, 22.

<sup>194</sup> Grant, *One God*, 22-28.

<sup>195</sup> Grant, *One God*, 34-35.

<sup>196</sup> Grant, *One God*, 39-40.

and Mithras,<sup>197</sup> and exploring the function and deeds of the gods, emphasising the giving of oracles and blessing as their most significant functions.<sup>198</sup> Grant then develops the Christian perspective of other religions in the Graeco-Roman world as idolatry.<sup>199</sup> Idolatry in the Old and New Testament was considered breaking the covenant with God.<sup>200</sup> Grant writes,

Jews...and Christians attacked the idols as impotent, notably unable to defend themselves from robbers or animals...Since the idols lack perception, they are 'dead' and 'false.' They are made of matter, whether expensive or cheap; they are made by human sculptors and do not deserve worship because of the bad characters of their makers or priests. Demons inspire them and give the illusion that they work miracles.<sup>201</sup>

Grant asserts that this perspective about other religions in the Graeco-Roman world is what underlies Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17:16-34).<sup>202</sup> Yet Grant also notes that there is a connection between the pagan Graeco-Roman world and Christianity in the way in which they interpret the divine.<sup>203</sup> This similarity occurred because Christians were trying to address the pagan environment in which they were living. Therefore Christians were presenting a united front to the State and the Graeco-Roman belief system whilst also trying to ensure that there was discipline and harmony in the Church.<sup>204</sup> Such an engagement led to the Church standing against

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<sup>197</sup> Grant, *One God*, 40-41.

<sup>198</sup> Grant, *One God*, 54.

<sup>199</sup> Grant, *One God*, 45.

<sup>200</sup> Grant, *One God*, 46.

<sup>201</sup> Grant, *One God*, 46.

<sup>202</sup> Grant, *One God*, 50-51.

<sup>203</sup> Grant, *One God*, 169.

<sup>204</sup> Grant, *One God*, 170.



the plethora of pagan deities and insisting on the unity of the one God.<sup>205</sup> Yet whilst insisting on this differentiation Grant concludes that there was a relationality between Christianity and the pagan religions. He writes, “We have no intention of equating Christian theology with pagan analysis of the various pagan deities. Nevertheless, it is clear that there were resemblances.”<sup>206</sup> Such resemblances provided the genuine encounters found in Acts 14 “between the new Christian mission and the old ideas about the gods and their epiphanies.”<sup>207</sup>

Grant’s work highlights the engagement of the Christian assembly with the Graeco-Roman world in which it emerged. He rightly recognises that the Graeco-Roman world and its belief system had an impact on the Christian assembly and that the assembly simultaneously adapted around and resisted the Graeco-Roman world. Grant identifies as the substantial distinction between the Graeco-Roman world and the Christian assembly its definition of other religions as idolatry. Yet in recognising these continuities and discontinuities between Christianity and the Graeco-Roman world, Grant does not develop his argument clearly enough. He argues that the encounter is one between the new, Christianity, and the old, the Graeco-Roman world. Grant notes that in both Acts 14 and 17 Paul is explicitly working against the charge of newness by emphasising that Yahweh is the Creator. It is the Graeco-Roman religions that are new in that they derive from the desire to worship God but do so by idolatrous means. Therefore Paul’s address identifies what is true religion and what is false religion. Grant also cannot adequately account for the engagement

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<sup>205</sup> Grant, *One God*, 173.

<sup>206</sup> Grant, *One God*, 175.

<sup>207</sup> Grant, *One God*, 26.

that is occurring. He does highlight the similarities between Christian thought and Graeco-Roman religion along with the Christian concept of idolatry. Yet he does not address the tension that develops in the engagement in the first century context nor how the tension helps today's reader understand either the engagement or the narrative development of Acts. Beyond this, Grant positions Judaism and Christianity as the antithesis to Graeco-Roman religion, the first two as monotheistic, the latter as polytheistic. The result of this is that Grant cannot adequately account for the concept of idolatry outside of a Graeco-Roman polytheistic religion, such as the potential for idolatry to be found in Judaism or Christianity, and nor can he interpret correctly the engagement between Judaism and the Christian assembly in Acts because he does not provide a sufficiently nuanced christological distinction between them.

Grant's work recognises both the continuity, discontinuity and resulting tension between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world. Polytheistic religion is, from a Christian perspective, idolatrous and there can be no syncretism. Yet, his assertion of Christianity being new and challenging the older, polytheistic religion, is opposed by the narrative which asserts exactly the opposite. Beyond that, his conflation of Judaism and Christianity as monotheistic raises an issue of how his work would allow him to adequately address the other engagements that occur in Acts, particularly the engagement with Judaism.

The previous scholarship that addresses the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world provides a number of helpful means to understand aspects of the Acts' narrative. Yet, each work contains weaknesses that

result in them not providing a coherently integrated explanation of the engagement. With his assertion of Judaism as a mediator, Klauck's work raises issues of what kind of truth different religions have and further what the engagement between Christianity and Judaism looks like in Acts. Kauppi's framework is not sufficiently deep to answer significant questions relating to the engagement and his conflicting use of language means he cannot address adequately the tension the engagement creates. Grant mistakes the main engagement as new against old and raises questions about how his reading would enable him to apply the same perspective to Judaism.

#### **4. The Engagement between the Christian Assembly and Judaism**

In the late twentieth century Wills writes that "Luke's attitude toward Jews and Judaism, especially as reflected in Acts, has been anything but clear in recent scholarship."<sup>208</sup> Reflecting this opaqueness three influential but contrasting scholarly positions are here presented: Harnack's perspective that Luke-Acts uses Judaism as a preparation for Christianity which is positioned as both a distinct and superior religion to Judaism; Jervell's position that Luke-Acts offers a positive stance towards Judaism,<sup>209</sup> and Sanders' view that Luke-Acts is essentially anti-Semitic.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> L. M. Wills, "The Depiction of the Jews in Acts," *JBL* 110 (1991): 631. He later writes, "A whole host of scholars, for example, following Conzelmann and Haenchen, see consistency in the overall plan of Luke-Acts to blame the Jews for killing Jesus and rejecting God's gospel. But many other scholars have suggested other interpretations that would soften the charge of anti-Semitism or, more properly, anti-Judaism." Wills, "Jews in Acts," 644. See also Tyson, "Jews and Judaism," 19; and B. W. Longenecker, "Moral Character and Divine Generosity: Acts 13:13-52 and the Narrative Dynamics of Luke-Acts," in *New Testament Greek and Exegesis: A Festschrift for Gerald F. Hawthorne* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 163-164.

<sup>209</sup> Tyson notes that the approaches of Jervell and Sanders "appear to stand at opposite poles from one another and establish the limits within which other scholars customarily work." Tyson, "Jews and Judaism," 19.

<sup>210</sup> Beck agrees with Sanders' conclusion. N. A. Beck, *Mature Christianity: The Recognition and*

#### 4.1. A. von Harnack: Christianity as a Superior Religion to Judaism

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century German scholarship, particularly from Tübingen,<sup>211</sup> identified Acts as significant for comprehending the historical rise of Christianity and its engagement with and separation from Judaism.<sup>212</sup> This position became a dominant means for scholarship to understand the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism as well as interpreting Acts.<sup>213</sup> Significant within this project was Harnack who developed this perspective, influencing scholars like Haenchen and Hengel.<sup>214</sup>

Harnack's overarching framework was historical - the development of the primitive Christian missionary movement and its general characteristics between 1 C.E. and 300 C.E. Pertinent to the rise of Christianity was its relationship with and separation

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*Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (London: Associated University Presses, 1985), 270. Whilst Blanchetière agrees with Sanders he rejects the use of "anti-semitic," preferring "anti-Judaic," since the former is "a modern concept with racialist connotations, and therefore anachronistic and inadequate." F. Blanchetière, "The Threefold Christian Anti-Judaism," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (eds. G. N. Stanton and G. G. Stroumsa; Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 198. For other work on anti-semitism, see J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (New York, N. Y.: Atheneum, 1934); H. A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (trans. J. I. Porter; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); B. Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (London: Phoenix, 1997); and J. G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 1985).

<sup>211</sup> For a useful outline of the work of Tübingen scholars see H. Harris, *The Tübingen School: A Historical and Theological Investigation of the School of F. C. Baur* (Leicester: Apollon, 1990) and Barrett, "History," 33-57.

<sup>212</sup> F. C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (1845. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 3.

<sup>213</sup> It was so influential that despite fresh appraisals of the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism Alexander notes, nearly ninety years after Harnack's work, that "the belief that Christianity has transcended Judaism, that it stands over against Judaism, remains a pillar of Christian self-definition and self-understanding." P. Alexander, "The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (ed. J. D. G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 1.

<sup>214</sup> Haenchen, *Acts*, 100 and M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1979), 63.

from Judaism and the reasons for it. Harnack argues that Judaism acted as a preparatory religion for Christianity.<sup>215</sup> This preparation occurred through the promises of the Old Testament which would be fulfilled by Christianity,<sup>216</sup> and also through Judaism's syncretic approach to other religions.<sup>217</sup> For Harnack Judaism is the "husk," the outward religion, whilst Christianity is the "kernel."<sup>218</sup> Christianity is a new religion founded by Jesus,<sup>219</sup> and should be understood as "the new grade on which human history reaches its consummation, a grade which is to supersede the previous grade of bisection, cancelling or annulling not only national but also social and even sexual distinctions."<sup>220</sup> This move occurred by Paul interpreting the Old Testament "with a greater reverence and strict obedience than his predecessors,"<sup>221</sup> and also by his universalism, taking the gospel from Israel to the Gentiles and in doing so making Christianity an explicitly Gentile religion.<sup>222</sup> Harnack notes that this movement from Judaism to the Gentiles occurs in Luke-Acts and is accomplished through the kingdom of God, the risen Jesus being the Messiah, and the explanation

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<sup>215</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:19.

<sup>216</sup> Harnack talks of it being the "culmination and fulfilment of the proclamation, the law and judgement found in Judaism." Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:17.

<sup>217</sup> Harnack writes, "The extent to which Judaism was prepared for the gospel may also be judged by means of the syncretism into which it had developed. The development was along no mere side-issues. The transformation of a national into a universal religion may take place in two ways; either by the national religion being reduced to great central principles, or by its assimilation of a wealth of new elements from other religions. Both processes developed simultaneously in Judaism...But the former is the more important of the two, as a preparation for Christianity." Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:17.

<sup>218</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:74.

<sup>219</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:48, 1:64.

<sup>220</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:304. Lieu also argues that this is the historical perspective of Christianity's view of Judaism in the first century. J. Lieu, "History and Theology in Christian Views of Judaism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians* (eds. J. Lieu et al.; London: Routledge, 1992), 83.

<sup>221</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:63.

<sup>222</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:64-65.

that Jesus was the fulfilment of Torah.<sup>223</sup> Harnack further emphasises the role of the Roman State in contradistinction to Judaism, interpreting the State as “the sphere marked out for the new religion.”<sup>224</sup>

Within his work Harnack notes continuities and discontinuities between Christianity and Judaism along with some of the tensions that develop. Harnack notes a continuity in Judaism and Christianity’s missionary outlook towards polytheism since both exhort pagans to reject idolatry and to recognise Yahweh as the true God.<sup>225</sup> A further continuity is the syncretic nature of both Judaism and Christianity, adapting and incorporating the belief systems from a wide range of nations.<sup>226</sup> Yet Harnack’s understanding of syncretism is nuanced since he means the borrowing and use of ideas to promote Jewish or Christian thinking.<sup>227</sup> He writes, “Every force, every relationship in its environment, was mastered by it and made to serve its own ends - a feature in which the other religions in the Roman Empire make but a poor, a meagre, and a narrow show.”<sup>228</sup> Such a nuanced syncretism also develops a distinct discontinuity for Harnack argues that Christianity is the ideal religion pre-eminent amongst the surrounding cultures.<sup>229</sup> Harnack writes of the relationship between

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<sup>223</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:106-107.

<sup>224</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:326-327.

<sup>225</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:12.

<sup>226</sup> Harnack notes the Parthians, Medes and Elamites, Greeks and barbarians. Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:392.

<sup>227</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:38.

<sup>228</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:391.

<sup>229</sup> Harnack writes, “Could there be any higher or more comprehensive conception than that of the complex of momenta afforded by the Christians’ estimate of themselves as ‘the true Israel,’ ‘the new people,’ ‘the original people,’ and ‘the people of the future,’ i.e. of eternity? This estimate of themselves rendered Christians impregnable against all attacks and movements of polemical

## Christianity and Judaism:

Paul firmly and unhesitatingly recognized the gospel to be the new *level of religion*, just as he felt himself to be a new creature in virtue of his Christianity. The new religious level was the level of the Spirit and regeneration, of grace and faith, of peace and liberty; below and behind it lay everything old, including all the earlier revelations of God, since these were religions pertaining to the state of sin.<sup>230</sup>

This pre-eminence of Christianity also occurs in respect to Hellenic and Roman beliefs which Harnack contends was due to Christianity's view of salvation.<sup>231</sup>

Christian salvation was distinct because it referred to the sickness of both the body and the soul. It was also a salvation which surpassed that offered by the surrounding cultures,<sup>232</sup> seen in the release of people from demon possession (Luke 4:1-13, 31-36; 8:26-39; 11:14-28);<sup>233</sup> the healing of people and visions and prophecy;<sup>234</sup> in exercising love and charity in a way which drew people together and united the person with God (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37),<sup>235</sup> and in being "the religion of the Spirit and power."<sup>236</sup> Such discontinuity creates for Harnack a tension between Christianity and Judaism. The establishment of Christianity as the consummation and fulfilment

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criticism, while it further enabled them to advance in every direction for a war of conquest." Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:301.

<sup>230</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:61-62.

<sup>231</sup> Harnack writes, "Into this world of craving for salvation the preaching of Christianity made its way. Long before it had completed its triumph by dint of an impressive philosophy of religion, its success was already assured by the fact that it promised and offered salvation - a feature in which it surpassed all other religions and cults." Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:131. See also R. G. Clouse et al., *Two Kingdoms: The Church and Culture Through the Ages* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1993), 41.

<sup>232</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:132-133.

<sup>233</sup> According to Harnack the belief in demonic activity was a late development in Judaism but in the second Temple period it was in "full bloom" not just amongst Judaism but also within Hellenic and Roman beliefs. Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:156, 1:159; cf. Mark 1:21-28; 3:20-30; 5:1-20.

<sup>234</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:251.

<sup>235</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:184-185.

<sup>236</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:250.

of Judaism produces a sharp anti-Judaism and the unsurprising negative response from Judaism.<sup>237</sup> Such discontinuity though, according to Harnack, does not create a tension with the Graeco-Roman world, or at least within the political sphere. Drawing upon Luke and Acts Harnack adopts the *apologia pro ecclesia* claiming that

Luke hardly intended to set Augustus and Christ in hostile opposition; even Augustus and his kingdom are a sign of the new era. This may also be gathered from the Book of Acts, which in my opinion has not any consciously political aim; it sees in the Roman empire, as opposed to Judaism, the sphere marked out for the new religion, it stands entirely aloof from any hostility to the emperor, and it gladly lays stress upon the facts which prove a tolerant mood on the part of the authorities towards Christians in the past.<sup>238</sup>

Harnack's work helpfully distinguishes between Christianity and Judaism and in doing so recognises both a continuity and discontinuity between them.

Despite this there are substantial weaknesses in Harnack's analysis of the history of Christian mission and how it engages with Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world.

The primary weakness is the separation and supremacy of Christianity over Judaism resulting in an anti-Judaic conclusion.<sup>239</sup> Such a perspective develops from

Harnack's presuppositions - some of which are unsupported by Scripture, including Luke-Acts. Firstly Harnack views 'the Jews' and 'Judaism' as a monolithic body

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<sup>237</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:75. He writes, "Little wonder that the thoroughgoing reaction of Judaism against the gospel now commenced - a reaction on the part of Jews and Jewish Christians alike. The hostility of the Jews appears on every page of Acts, from chap. xiii. onwards." Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:64-65. Harnack also cites that the later allegorical methodology of reading the Bible created a strong anti-Judaic feeling for it meant that the Jews "had been forsaken by God, and had fallen under the sway of the devil. As this was quite clear, the final step had now to be taken, the final sentence had now to be pronounced: the Old Testament, from cover to cover, has nothing whatever to do with the Jews." Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:77. See also Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:50-52, 1:53, 1:82, 1:300.

<sup>238</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:326-327.

<sup>239</sup> Race writes, "In both mainline Churches and the academy the view that Christianity was intended by God to supersede Judaism has been overturned." A. Race, "Judaism," in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths: A Reader* (eds. A. Race and P. M. Hedges; London: SCM Press, 2009), 115.



whose dominant response to the Christian gospel is a negative one. Yet Luke-Acts provides a variegated portrayal of Judaism in the first century, with its various cultural, social, religious, and political relationships.<sup>240</sup> There is also a variegated response to the gospel amongst the Jews both in Jerusalem and in the diaspora. This response nearly always includes a positive response, even if it is limited (2:41; 5:14; cf. 13:42-45). Beyond that, Harnack appears to detach the development of the Christian assembly in the first century from its Jewish roots. This is contrary to the narrative of Acts which situates the assembly powerfully and consistently within a strongly Jewish framework. Key protagonists - Peter, Stephen, James, and Paul - use familial language in addressing other Jews (2:14; 3:17; 5:30; 7:2; 13:15; 24:14), they follow Jewish customs (3:1; 21:24, 26), submit themselves to Jewish religious authorities (4:8; 23:5), and follow the Jewish Scriptures (24:15-16). In the latter part of the narrative Paul's custom is to first visit the synagogue before going to those nations outside of Judaism or its influence. Those from within the assembly are considered by both Jewish and Gentile rulers as a sect within Judaism (18:15-17; 24:5, 14; 28:22) even though they are called Χριστιανοί (11:26; 26:28).

This reading of the Lukan narrative challenges Harnack's assumption that the gospel is explicitly for the nations and not the Jews along with his anti-Judaic reading of the history of Christian mission and its engagement with Judaism.<sup>241</sup> Such a reading also

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<sup>240</sup> There are distinct religious groupings, the political and royal elite, geographical differences, and different responses to the Christian gospel. Some scholars also contend that the assembly is itself an intra-Jewish sect and the narrative supports this both in the use of covenant framework, Scripture, familial language, and the remarks of Gallio for example (Acts 18:14-15). See J. D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek: A Contested Identity* (vol. 3 of *Christianity in the Making*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015), 12; and Aitken, "Jewish Tradition," 80-83.

<sup>241</sup> Lieu questions whether Harnack actually believed that Judaism had really "received a self-inflicted mortal blow." J. Lieu, "'The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct or Historical Reality?" *JSNT* 56 (1994): 102; and J. Lieu, *Jew nor Greek*, 12.

challenges Harnack's conclusion that Christianity is a new religion. The narrative positions both Jesus and the Christian assembly as the fulfilment of Scripture within a recognisably Jewish salvation-history (Acts 13:16-41). Such a positioning challenges the idea that the Christian assembly is new. This is further reinforced in the engagements in Lystra (Acts 14) and Athens (Acts 17) when Paul refers to God as Creator so as to avoid any accusations of presenting a new religion. Harnack alludes to these areas but he does not develop them.<sup>242</sup> This fulfilment of Scripture is both for Judaism and the nations rather than for the nations alone. Such a position challenges Harnack's work since it asserts that the gospel is not torn from Israel but the identity of early Christianity and its gospel is rooted in the prophetic fulfilment of the Old Testament.<sup>243</sup>

Throughout Harnack's work, he recognises that there are continuities and discontinuities between Christianity and Judaism which result in a tension and, in his reading, the Christian overthrow of Judaism. This tension and the resulting demise of Judaism, at least within Harnack's view, results from his assertion that Christianity is new and that the day of Judaism has expired. Such a perspective misinterprets the theological setting of Luke-Acts which is placed within a strongly covenantal framework. The argument in Luke-Acts, to both Jews and those from the nations, is that Christianity is old since it is both the continuation and the fulfilment of the covenant since creation (Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-27) and through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:25), Moses (3:22), and David (13:33-36) as revealed through the scriptures (1:16; 2:17-21, 25-28; 4:25). This theological narrative redefines the matrix of belief

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<sup>242</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:300.

<sup>243</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:64-65.

rejecting ancestry and genealogy as markers of salvation for faith and belief (Luke 3:8-9; 17:9-10). Thus in Luke-Acts, Judaism has not expired, rather the promises to it have been fulfilled.

In addressing the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism Harnack demonstrates some of the methodological weaknesses highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. First, whilst identifying a continuity and discontinuity between the Christian assembly and Judaism, Harnack over-emphasises the discontinuity leading to his assertion that the gospel is for the Gentiles not Jews, which results in an anti-Judaic conclusion. He also depicts Judaism as a monolithic body rather than the variegated approach of the Lukan narrative. This makes his conclusions stark for all of Judaism rather than the more nuanced approach of Acts. Such an approach means that Harnack is not able to adequately to address the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism.

#### 4.2. J. Jervell: Luke-Acts and the Christian assembly as the Fulfilment of Judaism<sup>244</sup>

Jervell's work consists of a number of essays and is representative of a position which engages critically with those who have concluded that Luke-Acts is anti-semitic in nature.<sup>245</sup> The centre of Jervell's thesis is a Lukan ecclesiology and how

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<sup>244</sup> J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1998), 92; and J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1972).

<sup>245</sup> Jervell's work does not specifically address J. T. Sanders as Jervell's work is written some 15 years earlier. Jervell writes, "The interpretation of Luke's theology of mission most widely advocated today may be described as follows: Luke describes the rejection of the Christian proclamation on the part of the Jewish people. Only after and because Israel rejected the gospel, and for that reason has itself been rejected, do the missionaries turn to the Gentiles." Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 41.

Luke resolves the identity of the Church “which claims to be Israel but which includes uncircumcised Gentiles within its membership.”<sup>246</sup> Jervell rejects previous arguments, that the rejection of the gospel leads to the mission to the Gentiles,<sup>247</sup> and proposes a three part alternative argument: that a majority of Jewish people do not reject the early Christian message, that in Acts, ‘Israel’ refers to both Jewish believers and those Jews who reject the message with the Gentiles being “non-Jewish people”; and that the Gentiles share the promises of salvation that have been fulfilled to the Jews.<sup>248</sup> Jervell qualifies his understanding of the term ‘Israel’ by positing a ‘divided Israel,’<sup>249</sup> but in contradistinction to Harnack’s ‘divided Israel’, Jervell argues that the division is the separation between Jews who do and do not believe in the Christ.<sup>250</sup> He writes, “the church has not separated itself from Israel, nor has it gone beyond the boundaries of Judaism. Rather, the unrepentant portion of the people has forfeited its membership of the people of God.”<sup>251</sup> Therefore, Jervell presents Luke-Acts as providing a positive image of Judaism.

Jervell, through the fulfilment of the covenant promises of Torah to Israel, recognises

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<sup>246</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 17.

<sup>247</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 41.

<sup>248</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 42-43. See also D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 2012), 42.

<sup>249</sup> ‘A divided Israel’ is a division between those who reject the gospel and are purged from the people of God and those who repent and are shown to be the “one and only Israel.” Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 15, 68.

<sup>250</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 42-43. See also J. Jervell, “Retrospect and Prospect in Luke-Acts Interpretation,” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1991* (Atlanta, Georg.: Scholars Press, 1991), 391.

<sup>251</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 15, 43. See also J. Jervell, *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1984), 135.

a continuity and discontinuity in the engagement.<sup>252</sup> He develops these arguments by highlighting the strongly Jewish character of Acts in which the Old Testament promises are fulfilled amongst the Jews and then the Gentiles.<sup>253</sup> Jervell also remarks upon the Samaritan episodes as part of the fulfilment of promises to Israel identifying the Samaritans as part of a restored Israel. Therefore for Jervell the movement to the Gentiles develops within a mission to the Jews.<sup>254</sup> From this he deduces that the Church in Acts is portrayed not as a new Israel but “the restored Israel,”<sup>255</sup> or “as authentic Judaism.”<sup>256</sup> This positive view of Israel also means that Jervell rejects the supposition that Luke-Acts is either anti-semitic or that there is a rejection of the gospel en-bloc by Israel.<sup>257</sup> For Jervell such a positive view of Israel continues into the later chapters of Acts outside of Jerusalem. The continued mission of the Christian assembly is to the diaspora Jews and this enables Gentiles to share in the promises of Scripture.<sup>258</sup> Jervell nuances the term ‘Gentiles’ at this point noting

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<sup>252</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 17. Reflecting on this Jervell identifies the Jewishness of Luke-Acts: 1. Luke’s Christology is clearly Jewish in language and content; 2. Israel is distinct from the nations because of the mass conversions in Acts; 3. All the promises in Luke-Acts are given to the Israel; 4. The Law of Moses continues to be valid; 5. Jewish words, conceptions and customs appear from Luke 1 to Acts 28; 6. Acts presents the apostle to the Jews and to the world; 7. Much of Luke’s work is influenced by the Septuagint. He writes, “Christianity cannot be separated from the religious, political and cultural fate of Israel.” Jervell, “Retrospect and Prospect,” 384, 386.

<sup>253</sup> Jervell cites Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:42; 12:24; 13:43; 14:1; 17:10; 21:20. He writes, “Luke does not describe a picture of the Jewish people who en-bloc have rejected the gospel, which would itself occasion the Gentile mission. It is likewise not correct, in referring to Luke’s point of view, to say that the overwhelming majority of Jews have opposed the message.” Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 48; cf. Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 15, 45, 46.

<sup>254</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 122-123.

<sup>255</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 95. He writes, “The author sketches a picture of Israel for whom the promises are fulfilled; he does not show us a new Israel arising out of the rejection of the old, but he speaks of the old Israel for whom the promises are fulfilled, since a great portion of the people has been converted.” Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 51.

<sup>256</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 187. See also Chilton and Neusner, *Judaism*, 5.

<sup>257</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 41, 44.

<sup>258</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 158-159.

that it is the Gentiles who are God-fearers or who have a connection with the synagogue who experience the fulfilment of Scripture for the nations (13:43; 14:1; 17:4, 12).<sup>259</sup> Outside of this Jewish framework Jervell notes that there is no mass conversion of Gentiles (14:8-18; 17:18-34; 19:23-41).<sup>260</sup> Thus, Jervell contends that Jewish Christianity was not subsumed by Gentile Christianity after 70 C.E.,<sup>261</sup> and that Luke-Acts provided a defence of Paul by providing “an account of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, or Christianity, Judaism and the Roman State.”<sup>262</sup>

Much of Jervell’s work is carefully nuanced and allows the theological framework of Acts to breathe whilst not overtly suppressing the social, cultural or historical setting. Jervell recognises the continuity and discontinuity that occurs in the narrative; the positive response to the gospel by some of the Jews, which Harnack and Sanders play down, whilst also holding the tension between those who reject and those who accept the gospel. Yet in establishing these points Jervell omits key texts within the narrative and this selectivity is a weakness. Most notably in supporting a pro-Jewish reading Jervell omits Acts 12:1-24. Whilst Schnabel notes that this Herod presented

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<sup>259</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 43, 44. See also Jervell, *Unknown Paul*, 15.

<sup>260</sup> Jervell, *Unknown Paul*, 15.

<sup>261</sup> Jervell, “Retrospect and Prospect,” 384. See also Jervell, *Unknown Paul*, 16-17.

<sup>262</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 156. Jervell notes three key aspects relating to the defence of Paul: 1. Paul was a Pharisee and a Jew who is faithful to the law (22:3; 23:1, 3, 5, 6; 24:14; 26:4-5); 2. He believes everything that is written in the law and the prophets, and he teaches only what Scripture says. Nothing in his preaching and teaching is un-Jewish (24:14; 26:22); 3. He is charged because he preaches the resurrection, where by it should be observed that the resurrection expresses God’s promise to the people and the hope of Pharisaic Israel (23:6; 24:21; 26:6-8). Belief in the resurrection means fidelity to Scripture, law and people (24:14; 26:22). Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 163. Trocmé rejects the idea that Acts was written as a defence of Paul. E. Trocmé, “The Jews as Seen by Paul and Luke,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, ‘Others’ in Late Antiquity* (eds. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 147.

himself as “a law-abiding king who loved the Jewish people,”<sup>263</sup> in this pericope the narrative portrays him as acting in opposition to the model king pictured in Deuteronomy. He is vindictive - persecuting the Church (12:1), murderous (12:2), a crowd pleaser (12:3), and merciless (12:19) - the law of Yahweh is clearly absent from Herod’s lap and lips.<sup>264</sup> In welcoming the idea of divinity Herod is portrayed as proud and is directly contrasted with Peter, Paul and Barnabas.<sup>265</sup> This is an unfavourable picture of Israel’s King highlighting the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem’s royal and political elite towards Yahweh. It may also go further. The King acts as a representative of the people. If the King is unfaithful, how so the people? This omission raises a question of Jervell’s methodology. Such an omission questions how accurate Jervell’s methodology is, particularly when the scope of his work is to contest previous scholarship and position his own approach as a more authentic reading of the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism. Beyond this, the suppression of the natural development of the narrative and Jervell’s focus on the Jewish problem obscures how the ecclesiology and identity of the Christian assembly engage with the interplay of Judaism with the nations and the Roman State.<sup>266</sup>

Jervell’s work responds to other readings of the engagement between the Christian

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<sup>263</sup> E. J. Schnabel, “The Persecutions of Christians in the First Century,” *JETS* 61 (2018): 532.

<sup>264</sup> Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Wright comments on kingship in Deuteronomy 17: “Thus even when the sociopolitical contours of the people of Gd had changed radically from the early theocracy to the institutionalized royal state, the controlling paradigm for political government was still that of the law and the covenant . . . The king was subject to, and correctable by, the covenant law. Ultimately, the monarchy itself was as subject to the covenant threats (its curses) as the whole nation.” C. J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2004), 237.

<sup>265</sup> Peter: Acts 10:25-26; Paul and Barnabas: Acts 14:14-15.

<sup>266</sup> Jervell, *Luke-Acts*, 160.

assembly and Judaism. With an emphasis on the identity of the Church Jervell highlights the continuity between the assembly and Judaism whilst also accounting for the discontinuity and resulting tension that occurs. Yet, Jervell over-emphasises the continuity of the engagement. First, he notes that those who reject the gospel forfeit their place in a spiritual Israel. Such an approach does not adequately account for the identity or spiritual status of those people before and as the gospel is preached - are they Israel or not? Nor does it account for how those people relate to Yahweh before the gospel is preached and whether they are part of the covenant or outside of it.

#### 4.3. J. T. Sanders: Acts as Anti-Semitic

Sanders' main work, *The Jews in Luke-Acts*,<sup>267</sup> posits that the narrative of Luke-Acts is constructed to depict the Jews negatively, such that Luke-Acts contains substantive "anti-Jewish sentiment" and is in conclusion anti-semitic.<sup>268</sup> Sanders' methodology adopts a social-scientific approach with a historical emphasis,<sup>269</sup> since for him theology "cannot explain early Jewish-Christian relations satisfactorily."<sup>270</sup> Sanders divides his study into a thematic investigation with an emphasis on the

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<sup>267</sup> J. T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (London: SCM Press, 1987).

<sup>268</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, xvi. See also J. T. Sanders, "The Parable of the Pounds and Lucan Anti-Semitism," *TS* 42 (1981): 667. He is not the only scholar that maintains this position - see A. M. Bibliowicz, *Jews and Gentiles in the Early Jesus Movement: An Unintended Journey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), xxi - but both Dunn and Keener recognise Sanders as the scholar who is "one of the most consistent voices supporting this position." J. D. G. Dunn, "The Question of Anti-semitism in the New Testament Writings of the Period," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (WUNT 1/66; ed. J. D. G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 187-188; and Keener, *Introduction*, 460. See also Tyson, "Jews and Judaism," 21; and R. Chazan, "Christian-Jewish Interactions Over the Ages," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (eds. T. Frymer-Kensky et al.; Oxford: Westview Press, 2000), 8-9.

<sup>269</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, xv.

<sup>270</sup> J. T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM Press, 1993), xx.



characters and geographical locations within Luke-Acts and a systematic analysis of the Lukan narrative before providing his conclusions. Sanders' key presupposition is that Luke-Acts is constructed to demonstrate the rejection of the gospel by the Jews and to show its acceptance by the Gentiles as "the intended objects of God's salvation."<sup>271</sup> Sanders' central questions are to understand how Luke portrays the Jews as a grouping and as constituent groups within Acts, and why Luke portrays them as such.<sup>272</sup>

Within this study Sanders recognises a clear narrational tension within the engagement of the Christian assembly and Judaism: Why does the author of Luke-Acts both condemn the Jews and yet attempt to persuade them to be converted to Christianity?<sup>273</sup> In examining the different responses of Jews through the narrative Sanders' argument is that the narrative portrays a uniformly hostile Jewish response to the early Church. Beginning with the Jewish religious leaders Sanders asserts that the Lukan narrative presents them as paradigmatically hostile to Jesus and his followers and as solely culpable for the death of Jesus.<sup>274</sup> He argues that the role of Rome in Jesus' death is incidental - a role that is manipulated by the Jewish authorities.<sup>275</sup> Sanders pays particular attention to the Pharisees within Luke-Acts

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<sup>271</sup> J. T. Sanders, "The Prophetic Use of the Scriptures in Luke-Acts," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee* (eds. C. Evans and W. Stinespring; Atlanta, Georg.: Scholars Pres, 1987), 195. See Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 128.

<sup>272</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, xv.

<sup>273</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, xv.

<sup>274</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 3, 18, 22. What Sanders calls "'architectonic' parallelism." Sanders asserts that this parallelism is theological and not historical. Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 17, 19, 23.

<sup>275</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 13-15. Sanders writes, "Better, in the passion narrative, to do just enough rewriting to emphasise Gentile innocence and to imply Jewish guilt."

whom he categorises as non-Christian Pharisees and Christian Pharisees.<sup>276</sup> The Lukan portrayal of the non-Christian Pharisees is as friendly to Jesus and the Christian assembly.<sup>277</sup> These are portrayed by Luke as friendly because he is choosing to “underscore the linkage between Christianity and the ancestral Israelite religion” which is “just one small step removed from the religion of the ‘very best party’ in Judaism.”<sup>278</sup> This, says Sanders, helps to make “Luke’s point about Christianity as the authentic Judaism.”<sup>279</sup>

The Christian Pharisees, Sanders argues, are portrayed by Luke negatively since they reflect a Jewish Christianity that Luke “does not like.”<sup>280</sup> Sanders achieves this by intertwining Jesus’ parable in Luke 12, in which he argues the leaven of hypocrisy is aimed at Christian Pharisees within the church,<sup>281</sup> with the Pharisee believers in Acts 15. These he considers depicted as “obstructionist” and whose proposal regarding circumcision and the law is “unacceptable and even abhorrent” to the

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<sup>276</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 96-97.

<sup>277</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 85-86, 94, 112. Sanders writes, “Thus the Pharisaic friendliness to Jesus and to the church in Luke-Acts has two sides, an active and a passive. On the active side, they display overt friendliness and attempt to protect Jesus and his followers; on the passive side, they have nothing to do with any of the martyrdoms.” Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 87.

<sup>278</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 97.

<sup>279</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 98. Sanders writes of the non-Christian Pharisees, “These Pharisees however...help Luke to show the bridge, the link, the continuity between the religion of the ‘Old Testament’ and Christianity...he uses the non-Christian Pharisees in Acts to help remind his readers that there is more than one road that leads from pre-Christian Judaism into the present time, and that Christianity is surely the right one.” Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 112.

<sup>280</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 98

<sup>281</sup> Sanders writes, “The hypocrisy of the Pharisees is within the church, not outside it...The portrait of the Pharisees in Acts supports this understanding and, indeed, renders it unavoidable; for it is clear that a charge of hypocrisy could scarcely be levelled at the non-Christian Pharisees in Acts, who could hardly behave better towards Christians if they were the church’s fairy godmother.” Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 111.

church.<sup>282</sup> The hypocrisy of Luke 12:1 is revealed in Acts 15:5 - “the attempt of traditionally Jewish Christians to get Gentile Christians to follow the Torah.”<sup>283</sup> Such hypocrisy leads Sanders to a powerful conclusion, that for Luke their belief is not true, that “they are in reality promoting self-justification and self-exaltation,”<sup>284</sup> and that they are “not true members of the Christian community.”<sup>285</sup>

Sanders then argues that the Jewish political leaders act in a more subtle fashion than their religious counterparts. He asserts that whilst there are different Herods in Luke-Acts they all act in the same way. Therefore “In this sense, there is only one Herod in Luke’s account.”<sup>286</sup> The portrayal of Herod by the narrative depends on if he is acting like a Jew, therefore hostile to the assembly, or a Roman, friendly to the assembly.<sup>287</sup> Associated with Jewish leadership is Jerusalem, a city that is central to Sanders’ interpretation since it is “the geographical pivot in the divine plan of salvation” with the temple as the “heart of Jerusalem.”<sup>288</sup>

Whilst Sanders acknowledges that there are some who are friendly to the Christian assembly, he portrays the population of Jerusalem as hostile to the gospel,

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<sup>282</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 94-95, 111.

<sup>283</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 111.

<sup>284</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 113.

<sup>285</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 114.

<sup>286</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 21.

<sup>287</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 7, 21-22, 37. Sanders writes, “To the degree that Herod is Jewish he is hostile to the purposes of God. When he embraces Rome, however, he also embraces the Roman attitude towards Jesus and the church: acquittal.”

<sup>288</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 25, 33.

particularly in the temple narratives (2:47; 5:13; 23:9).<sup>289</sup> It is inevitable for Sanders that there will be a rejection of the gospel because Jerusalem always kills the prophets and always rejects God's word.<sup>290</sup> For Sanders it is the deaths of Jesus and Stephen that become the defining moment - Jerusalem rejects God and the mission moves away from Jerusalem to the Gentiles.<sup>291</sup> Sanders continues by examining the attitudes of the Jewish people. He rejects two other positions, a universal condemnation of the Jews,<sup>292</sup> and 'divided Israel,' distinguishing between those Jews who rejected Christianity and those who became Christians.<sup>293</sup> Instead Sanders presents an alternative model in which he separates the speeches in Acts, which he suggests are negative against the Jews, and the narrative, with its more positive emphasis towards Judaism. His conclusion is that Acts presents the Jews as "irredeemably resistant to God's will and his offer of salvation" whilst having an opportunity, which they do not take, to convert to Christianity.<sup>294</sup> This leads Sanders to two stark conclusions, that the message to the Jews in Acts 1-6 is "inconsequential in view of the overall soteriological plan of Luke-Acts,"<sup>295</sup> and that "In Luke's opinion, the world will be much better off when 'the Jews' get what they deserve and the world is rid of them."<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 30, 33; cf. Luke 19:48.

<sup>290</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 26.

<sup>291</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 26-27.

<sup>292</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 38-41.

<sup>293</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 43.

<sup>294</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 54.

<sup>295</sup> J. T. Sanders, "The Salvation of the Jews in Luke Acts," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (ed. C. H. Talbert; New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1984), 117.

<sup>296</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 317. See also Sanders, "Who is a Jew," 434.

Sanders' position is illuminating insofar as it identifies the need for a careful examination and nuancing of the term 'the Jews' within Luke-Acts. He is also right to point out that there is strong language used in Acts of the Jewish people (3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39; 13:27) and that it is most often Jews who persecute the Christian assembly (7:54-58; 13:50; 14:2; 17:5-9, 13; 18:12-17; 22:22). Yet Sanders' approach is fundamentally flawed. First, Sanders' controlling questions are not central to the direction of the narrative.<sup>297</sup> The emphasis in Acts is not Luke's portrayal of Judaism but rather the Lukan depiction of the Christian assembly and the way in which it engages with the surrounding cultures and itself. Such an emphasis is consistent throughout the narrative (2:5-14; 3:11-16; 4:1-2; 12:1-5; 13:43-50; 14:1-5; 17:1-9). Second, Sanders' position is based on an over-emphasis on the discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity resulting in an anti-semitic or anti-Judaic position, one which is opposed by numerous scholars.<sup>298</sup> Dunn sums up the inadequacy of Sanders' position:

To sum up, Sanders must be judged to have greatly overstated his case. He has been selective in his choice of evidence and tendentious in his evaluation of it. He has not given enough weight to the positive elements of Luke's presentation of Jews and Judaism...the continuity between (second temple) Judaism and Christianity is a much more living reality for Luke than Sanders allows, and Luke portrays a Gentile Christianity in the person of its great apostle as much more positive about its Jewish heritage and as more effective among and open to Jews to the last, than Sanders allows. In short, Luke's anti-semitism is much more in Sanders' reading of the text than in the text itself.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> These are to understand how Luke portrays the Jews as a grouping and as constituent groups within Acts, and why Luke portrays them as such. Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, xv.

<sup>298</sup> There are a number of scholars from across the theological spectrum who oppose this characterisation of Luke-Acts as 'anti-Jewish' or 'anti-semitic'. See Hengel, *Acts*, 64; Dunn, "Anti-semitism," 183; Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:2.

<sup>299</sup> Dunn, "Anti-semitism," 195. See also C. Blomberg, "The New Testament Definition of Heresy (or When do Jesus and the Apostles Really get Mad?)," *JETS* 45 (2002): 60; and J. B. Chance, "The Jewish People and the Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts: Some Implications of an Inconsistent Narrative Role," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, Georg.: Scholars Press, 1991), 74-75.

This over-emphasis of the discontinuity between the Christian assembly and Judaism results in a number of issues. The first issue is Sanders' conclusion that Jews are "irredeemably resistant" to God's salvation. A close analysis of the narrative recognises substantial positive responses from Judaism to the gospel - a good number believing the message (2:37-41, 47; 5:14; 6:7), reacting in wonder at the Apostles (2:43; 3:9, 11, 21), and looking favourably upon the assembly (2:47; 5:13). In the later narrative, Paul faces a mixed reception. There is persecution but there is also acceptance of the message (13:48; 14:1; 17:4, 12).<sup>300</sup>

A second issue raised by the over-emphasis on the discontinuity is the trajectory of the gospel moving away from Judaism and towards the nations. A close analysis of the wider narrative demonstrates this to be untrue. Paul's 'usual custom' is to go to the synagogue first and only when rejected go on to the nations (18:4-8; 19:8-9). This is clearly highlighted in Acts 28 where it is only after the rejection of the Jewish leaders that the narrative indicates that he speaks with others (28:1, 23-31).<sup>301</sup>

Beyond this, Sanders' assertion that the speeches are uniformly negative towards Jews and Judaism is incorrect. Paul speaks positively about his own Jewish heritage and ongoing faithfulness to Judaism albeit christologically interpreted (13:42-43; 22:1, 3; 23:1, 6; 26:4, 6, 7; 28:19). Whilst Sanders recognises these positive factors, and those scholars that present the situation positively, he suppresses them to present a uniform and consistent argument.<sup>302</sup> Where these more positive responses

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<sup>300</sup> J. Weatherly, "Jews in Luke-Acts," *TynB* 40 (1989): 109.

<sup>301</sup> A. J. Köstenberger and P. T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2001), 154-155.

<sup>302</sup> Sanders notes that Brawley and he agree on both the setting and on many of the details of Luke-Acts "But we draw opposite conclusions about the attitude of the author of Luke-Acts toward Jews

occur Sanders has, according to Weatherly, to adopt a number of “ad hoc methods” to account for them.<sup>303</sup>

Related to this issue is Sanders’ view of a Lukan move away from Jewish Christians towards Gentile Christianity. Sanders’ most significant problem is that he does not acknowledge the result of the ἐκκλησία in Acts 15. The mention of Pharisees in Acts 15 is only the second mention in Acts. This time the term Pharisees is qualified as those who had believed (πεπιστευκότες). This is significant, as Ziesler notes, for “no other NT writer even hints at such a thing” and nor do the theological differences in Acts 15:5 - at that point - preclude “membership of both groups at once.”<sup>304</sup> Building on this is the conclusion of the ἐκκλησία where there is a unity in agreement - that is, the Pharisee believers have accepted an alternative position to their own. Marshall writes,

There is no suggestion that the unanimity here excludes the Pharisees of 15:5. They too must have acquiesced to the majority opinion, opposing the circumcision of Gentile converts. The Christian Pharisees demonstrate their unity with other Christians and prepare the ground for the friendly appearances of non-Christian Pharisees in later chapters.<sup>305</sup>

Therefore this result demonstrates that it is not that Jewish Christianity is annihilated in Acts 15 - as Sanders asserts - but that both Jewish and Gentile Christianity can

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generally. Brawley maintains that the author holds out the branch of reconciliation; I say that he looks forward to the time when the Jews are all wiped off the earth.” Sanders, “Who is a Jew,” 437-438.

<sup>303</sup> Weatherly, “Jews,” 114.

<sup>304</sup> J. A. Ziesler, “Luke and the Pharisees,” *NTS* 25 (1979): 147-148.

<sup>305</sup> M. Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts* (FRLANT 254; eds. J. C. Gertz et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2015), 160-161. Interestingly as Sanders emphasises the discontinuity, so Marshall emphasises the continuity between Judaism and Christianity. Marshall, *Pharisees*, 181-182.

find accommodation and unity within the Christian assembly.<sup>306</sup> Such a perspective negates Sanders' view that Luke does not like Jewish Christians, that they are hypocrites and unbelievers, and that there is now a legitimate move to Gentile Christianity.<sup>307</sup>

A substantial reason for Sanders misunderstanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism is because his methodology takes no account of the theological nature of the narrative. His social-scientific approach with its historical emphasis can only provide a limited interpretation of the narrative. For underlying the Lukan narrative are the covenants given to Israel and through Israel to the nations (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 61). The Lukan use of this covenant framework in Acts demonstrates God's continued faithfulness to his word (2:25-35; 3:13, 25; 7:1-53; 13:16-23; 16:32-41, 47; cf. Luke 1:33; 9:30; 20:36-38), a continuation of Israel's acceptance and rejection of that word, and a continuation that shows that not all Israelites are truly children of faith - that is children of Abraham (Luke 3:8-9; cf. 13:16; 19:9-10). This framework is supported by the fulfilment of Scripture in Acts (1:15-17, 20; 2:16-21; 4:25-26).<sup>308</sup> Such a perspective produces contradictory conclusions to those of Sanders since it affirms the positive *and* negative responses

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<sup>306</sup> Marshall, *Pharisees*, 161-162.

<sup>307</sup> This relates to chapter six of this thesis.

<sup>308</sup> Including the replacement of Judas, the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, the death, resurrection, ascension and Lordship of Jesus and the entry of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God (Acts 9:15-16; 11:18, 20; 15:3, 7-9; 20:21; 21:19; 22:21; 26:17-18, 20; 28:28; cf. Luke 2:29-32; 3:4-6; 4:18-21; 7:1-10; 16:16, 31; 20:41-44; 22:37; 24:25-27, 44-47; Acts 8:32-35; 15:15-18; 17:2-3; 18:28; 26:6-7; 28:25b-27). Litwak writes, "Luke ties his narrative to the Scriptures of Israel. Luke-Acts forms the continuation of the history of God's salvific acts and the outworking of the divine plan, to which the Scriptures of Israel witness." K. D. Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (JSNTS 282; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 206.



of Jews,<sup>309</sup> and the gospel for *both* Jews and the nations as the fulfilment of Scripture.<sup>310</sup> If Sanders is correct that this portrayal of the Jews in Acts is anti-semitic then the portrayal of the Gentiles is equally anti-gentilic. It would be truer to say that in Acts the distinction is not between Jews and Gentiles but between those who believe in Jesus as “both Lord and Christ” (2:36; cf. 5:31) and in whom “salvation is found” (4:12), and those who do not.<sup>311</sup> This challenges Sanders’ anti-Judaic view and his non-theological bias because the narrative establishes that there are a great number of believers from within Jerusalem including the religious leaders (6:7; cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 15:5).<sup>312</sup> The theological nature of the narrative further challenges Sanders’ view that Acts is a polemic against Judaism.<sup>313</sup> Whilst the language of the believers in Acts, for example Peter, Stephen,<sup>314</sup> and Paul, has a polemical edge the

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<sup>309</sup> Both Jews and Gentiles reject the message (7:57-58; 14:2), stir up trouble (14:5-6), are left unpersuaded or want to hear more (13:42; 17:32), and believe and become part of the assembly (14:1; 17:34). See R. F. O’Toole, “Reflections on Luke’s Treatment of Jews in Luke-Acts,” *Bib* 74 (1993): 529, 554-555.

<sup>310</sup> Acts 9:15-16; 11:19; 20:21; 28:17-31; cf. 1:8; 2:21. Bruce, *Acts*, 9-10; J. Jervell, “The Future of the Past: Luke’s Vision of Salvation History and its Bearing on his Writing of History,” in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. B. Witherington III; Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 107, 123; B. T. Arnold, “Luke’s Characterizing use of the Old Testament in the Book of Acts,” in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. B. Witherington III; Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 301; Conzelmann, *Acts*, xlvi-xlvii; R. Brawley, “The Blessing of all the Families of the Earth: Jesus and Covenant Traditions in Luke-Acts,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, Georg.: Scholars Press, 1994), 263-267.

<sup>311</sup> For example, Timothy’s parents (Acts 16:1). Witherington writes, “Both Jews and Gentiles *need* to repent, believe, and be saved through faith in Jesus.” Witherington, *Acts*, 141.

<sup>312</sup> Sanders, in a later book, which reflects an implicit engagement with Jervell’s position, notes that in spite of the success of the mission to the Jews in Jerusalem, a substantial persecution still breaks out against the Church: “we must again remain incredulous in the face of an account that tells us, in effect, that almost the entire population of the city is either Christian or pro-Christian and that then tells us that all elements of the city turn viciously on one of the Christian leaders.” Sanders, *Schismatics*, 3.

<sup>313</sup> Keener notes that there is genuine anti-Jewish polemic in antiquity but that “it is difficult to think that Luke’s contemporaries would have seen as anti-Judaism his attempt to lay claim to the Jewish heritage for a Jewish movement that included uncircumcised Gentile converts.” Keener, *Introduction*, 465.

<sup>314</sup> Whilst there is not a call to repentance in Stephen’s speech my view is that the only reason there is not is because Stephen did not get to finish his speech. That it is not a polemic sideswipe only is

context is within a positive view of Israel's heritage and with the intention of calling people to repentance using the language of the Prophets who called Israel back to covenant faithfulness (3:26; cf. 2:37-40; 3:19-20, 36-39; 17:1-4).<sup>315</sup>

Sanders' reading of the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism over-emphasises the discontinuity and gives no proper account for the continuity in the engagement between them. This results in an overly-negative assessment of Judaism in Luke-Acts which results in a stark and unconvincing conclusion regarding the supposed anti-semitism of Luke-Acts. Such a conclusion is exacerbated by Sanders treating Judaism as a monolithic entity and thus drawing conclusions for all of Judaism - including the Jewish believers in Acts 15. Such an approach does not adequately understand the nuanced engagement that is occurring within the Christian assembly in that pericope.

This selection of previous scholarship is representative of three influential but contrasting scholarly positions regarding the engagement of the Christian assembly and Judaism. As has been shown each attempts to account for the engagement but cannot do so adequately. Harnack and Sanders over-emphasise the discontinuity leading them to assert that Luke-Acts is anti-Judaic or anti-semitic in its emphasis whilst Jervell over-emphasises the continuity leading to questions about the way in which Israel's identity should be depicted in the Lukan narrative.

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confirmed in 7:60 where Stephen, following Jesus' example says, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." See P. A. Blair, "The Death of Stephen," *The Tyndale House Bulletin* 2 (1956): 2-3.

<sup>315</sup> See also Keener, *Introduction*, 491. See also D. L. Tiede, "'Glory to Thy People Israel': Luke-Acts and the Jews," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee* (ed. J. Neusner et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 331; Wilson, *Gentiles*, 210.

## 5. Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to critically examine previous and influential scholarship that has addressed the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. The result of this analysis is that scholarship has produced varied and contradictory conclusions even when addressing the same passages in Luke-Acts. These conclusions occur due to a number of substantial weaknesses. These include the focus on individual engagements, for example the Church and Roman State alone; a lack of recognition of the dynamic and integrated engagements of the cultures as they interact with each other as well as the Christian assembly; treating the various cultures as monolithic entities with a lack of attention paid to their variegated nature; the removal of texts from their narrative context to exegete them; and not addressing the significance of both the continuity and discontinuity found in the narrative. Whilst all of the previous scholarship analysed has positive elements none of them fully addresses the nuanced nature of the multiple engagements and cannot integrate the diverse features of the various engagements in Acts, and certainly not within an unbroken section of the narrative.

Thus in the assessment of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State Conzelmann and Walaskay posit contrary apologetic readings of Acts; Conzelmann as *pro ecclesia*, Walaskay as *pro imperio*. Cassidy, challenging these perspectives, places Acts as “allegiance-witness”; the allegiance to Jesus leads to the testimony of the Church. Esler situates Acts as an intra-ecclesial legitimation - Luke develops his theology in light of the social and political pressures to justify Christianity to its group members. Along with drawing contradictory conclusions, often whilst using the same passages, the emphasis of Conzelmann and Walaskay

is on the political and social continuity between the Christian assembly and the Roman State - the Christian assembly is not a threat and the State is positively portrayed even if not all its officials are. This means neither Conzelmann nor Walaskay can properly account for the tension that occurs between the Christian assembly and the Roman State. Both deflect the problem, Conzelmann by stating that Luke does not explicitly highlight the tension and Walaskay by creating a false division between the State and its officials. Cassidy and Esler both recognise a social and political discontinuity but deduce two distinct conclusions. Both also understate the theological nature of Luke-Acts which I would argue is foundational for understanding the social and political aspects in the narrative and not the other way round. Furthermore, the focus on one engagement - the Christian assembly and Rome - means that these scholars do not interact fully with the engagements between Judaism and the State, or individual officials, and nor do they apply their thesis to the wider engagements of the Christian assembly and Judaism or the Graeco-Roman world. Finally these scholars develop their arguments from selected pericopes, episodes, or verses, which may suit their argument, rather than analysing an unbroken section of narrative.

Klauck, Kauppi, and Grant also come to a variety of conclusions about the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world. Klauck positions Acts as an intra-ecclesial work seeking to avoid syncretism and engaging in inculturation and evangelisation. He recognises continuities and discontinuities between the Church and the Graeco-Roman world with the result of any conflict being that Christianity is shown to be superior. Yet Klauck cannot address some fundamental issues. These include the nature of truth in religions and how religions

relate to one another. Kauppi, critiquing previous scholarship for its shallowness in understanding the engagement with the Graeco-Roman world, focuses on the likely Graeco-Roman perception of Luke's depiction of Graeco-Roman religion. He recognises the need for a theology of religions but does not develop one and neither can he adequately account for the simultaneous confirmation and condemnation of Graeco-Roman religion. Grant, recognising the complexity of Graeco-Roman religion, argues that Acts presents the ideal relation between pagans and Christians. Grant argues that the tension in the engagement develops from the new, Christianity, encountering the old, Graeco-Roman religion, whilst Acts 14 and 17 argue the opposite. He also creates two monolithic blocks, monotheism and polytheism, which cannot then account for idolatry outside of polytheistic religions nor allow for nuances in the engagement which are found in the narrative of Acts. These multiple perspectives result in varied conclusions. Examples of scholarship that focuses on the engagement between the Christian assembly and Judaism were taken from the work of Harnack, Sanders, and Jervell. Harnack examines the engagement historically - the reasons why Christianity was depicted as superior to Judaism. Jervell contends that Luke-Acts portrays many of the Jews positively and Sanders argues that Luke-Acts was written to depict the Jews negatively. Harnack and Sanders both over-emphasise the discontinuity resulting in a sharp division: Judaism is defunct whilst Christianity is for the Gentiles. Jervell's argument recognises a more nuanced continuity and discontinuity between the Christian assembly and Judaism but over-emphasises the continuity.<sup>316</sup> As with previous scholarship all three are selective as to the texts they use. Notably Jervell omits Acts

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<sup>316</sup> Tyson writes, "At first glance, one may well wonder if Jervell and Sanders are reading the same books." He then notes that Acts contains both positive attitudes towards Judaism and negative attitudes towards Judaism. Tyson, "Jews and Judaism," 22, 37.

12 which highlights Herod as a negative picture of Judaism and who acts as a representative of the Jewish people.

In light of these conclusions and the weaknesses identified in previous work from them, there is, I believe, a need for a fresh approach to properly understand the Lukan depiction of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Such an approach needs to encompass the strengths of previous scholarship while being able to address their weaknesses and be theologically nuanced whilst taking seriously the cultural processes of the first-century context. Most particularly this approach needs to address the engagements as the narrative develops naturally. My proposal is that subversive-fulfilment is just such an approach and it is to this we now turn in chapter two.

## **CHAPTER TWO: A FRESH APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SURROUNDING CULTURES IN ACTS: SUBVERSIVE-FULFILMENT**

### **1. Introduction**

In chapter one it was shown that despite previous scholarship examining the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures the result was varied and contradictory conclusions due to a number of methodological weaknesses. The contention of this thesis is that a fresh approach is required, one that can address the limitations and weaknesses of previous scholarship whilst providing a more holistic and integrated interpretation of the Lukan depiction of the engagements found in Acts. Such a perspective is subversive-fulfilment, a concept developed by Daniel Strange.

Subversive-fulfilment offers a fresh approach because it offers an approach that coherently integrates and accounts for the theological vision of Luke-Acts, can be used across an unbroken narrative, provides a holistic approach to the engagements, can address the continuity and discontinuity simultaneously, and can adequately account for the tensions that arise within the engagements. Such an approach avoids the weaknesses and limitations of previous scholarship and its inability to properly explain or address what is occurring in the varied engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts.

By placing *possessio* - a Christ-centred capturing and renewing of the beliefs and practices of the varying cultures - at the heart of the subversive-fulfilment framework

my contention is that this model can appropriately identify and account for the continuities and discontinuities between the differing cultures as well as the resulting tensions found in the engagements. These aspects occur at three levels - the metaphysical, the epistemological, and the ethical. The metaphysical level is reflected in the beliefs and religiosity of the surrounding cultures about the divine; the epistemological level in the nature of knowledge and revelation about the metaphysical; and the ethical level, the way in which the metaphysical and epistemological are made manifest in the structures, values and customs of the culture.

To demonstrate the appropriateness of subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens I will first place subversive-fulfilment within its historical and theological context - that is the framework of Reformed and specifically Dutch Reformed theology. After this, I will examine the work of two Dutch missionary scholars, Hendrik Kraemer and Johan Bavinck, on whom Strange's work is consciously dependent.<sup>1</sup> I will then provide examples of the application of subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens in Biblical Studies and its use in Christian mission engaging Sunni Islam.<sup>2</sup> Finally I will outline the potential weaknesses and limitations of subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens in its current form and suggest modifications that might improve the model or where modifications may occur as this framework interacts with the Lukan narrative.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised* (Paternoster Theological Monographs; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 288 n. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Mission is used in this thesis in the broadest sense - related to the *Missio Dei*, it refers to everything the church is doing that points towards the kingdom of God. Moreau, *World Missions*, 17.



## 2. The Development of Daniel Strange's Subversive-Fulfilment Perspective

### 2.1. The Historical and Theological Context

The historical development of Reformed theology can trace its roots to the late medieval period. During this time Europe experienced social, economic, and religious discontent. The Roman Catholic Church experienced challenges to its authority from groupings across different countries; the Waldenses,<sup>3</sup> the Lollards,<sup>4</sup> and the Hussites.<sup>5</sup> The challenge to authority came from the desire to reform the Church and this continued into the early sixteenth-century under Martin Luther.<sup>6</sup> Over time this desire for reformation spread throughout Europe. Zwingli and Calvin, engaging with Luther's work, believed that his theology started anthropologically, using the question, 'What must I do to be saved?'<sup>7</sup> Zwingli and Calvin insisted theology must begin with God and so emphasised the electing counsel of God which resulted in salvation.<sup>8</sup> Calvin's influence in the European low-countries, France, and

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kissack, "Waldenses," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (eds. J. Douglas and E. E. Cairns; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 1025-1026.

<sup>4</sup> R. G. Clouse, "Lollards," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (eds. J. Douglas and E. E. Cairns; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 601-602.

<sup>5</sup> M. Spinka, "Hus, Jan," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (eds. J. Douglas and E. E. Cairns; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 492-493.

<sup>6</sup> Linder writes, "In the coming of the Reformation, Martin Luther was the catalytic individual, and the sale of indulgences near his parish at Wittenberg the precipitating event." R. D. Linder, "Reformation, The," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (eds. J. Douglas and E. E. Cairns; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 830.

<sup>7</sup> Such a position is disputed. See Luther's preface to his commentary on Romans. M. Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. J. T. Mueller; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), xiii-xxvi. See also A. Beutel, "Luther's Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (ed. D. K. McKim; Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 5; A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 221, 227; and M. Thompson, "Luther on God and History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (eds. R. Kolb et al.; Oxford: OUP, 2014), 134

<sup>8</sup> H. Bavinck, "Prolegomena," (vol 1. of *Reformed Dogmatics*; ed. J. Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), 175.

Great Britain was substantial.<sup>9</sup> By 1560 his *Institutes* had been translated into Dutch and a number of Dutch theologians and pastors studied in Geneva. During the late sixteenth century the Dutch Reformed Church became a beacon of Dutch resistance against the Roman Catholic Spanish and Austrian authorities.<sup>10</sup> The Dutch Reformed Church followed Calvinism - the systematisation of Calvin's theology but which developed beyond Calvin's own theology - continuing through into the twentieth century. Three significant twentieth century Dutch Reformed churchmen were Abraham Kuyper,<sup>11</sup> Cornelius Van Til,<sup>12</sup> and Herman Bavinck.<sup>13</sup> These men developed a neo-calvinist position, that is a "properly formed and as importantly a *consistent* Calvinism."<sup>14</sup> One significant element of Dutch Reformed neo-calvinism concerned the Church's engagement in the public sphere, that is how the kingdom of God relates to the role of the Church in the spheres of politics, education, defence, justice or hygiene.<sup>15</sup> This theology has significantly influenced theologians within the

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<sup>9</sup> Bavinck writes of Calvin, "His teachings were generally accepted and his works translated into French and distributed far and wide. People sought advice and comfort from him, and many went to Geneva to be trained for the ministry of the Word." Bavinck, "Prolegomena," 178. Linder writes, "Calvinism became the most important expression of the Reformation, historically speaking, and by the middle of the century Geneva replaced Wittenberg as the main center of the Protestant world." Linder, "Reformation," 831.

<sup>10</sup> Bavinck, "Prolegomena," 179.

<sup>11</sup> Kuyper was a polymath. Along with being a Church leader and theologian, he was Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901-1905. See A. Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto* (1879; ed. and trans. H. Van Dyke; Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015); and J. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> See J. M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of his Thought* (Phillipsburg: P. & R. Publishing, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Herman Bavinck wrote a substantial four-volume systematic theology. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (ed. J. Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> His Italics. R. J. Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 209.

<sup>15</sup> For a modern public theology covering these topics see M. Schluter and J. Ashcroft (eds.), *Jubilee Manifesto: A Framework, Agenda, and Strategy for Christian Social Reform* (Leicester: IVP, 2005).

Western world. In North America it has particularly influenced John Frame, the J. D. Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Timothy Keller, the senior minister at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, and Richard Mouw, Professor of Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary.<sup>16</sup> These theologians have in turn influenced other Western Church leaders and academics one of whom is Daniel Strange.<sup>17</sup> These theologians, separated over the course of the late nineteenth to early twenty-first century, hold a common faith which is expressed in the Westminster Confession,<sup>18</sup> a confession representative of Reformed Theology.<sup>19</sup> This confession begins with an emphasis on the priority and authority of Scripture.<sup>20</sup> Whilst God's qualities are recognisable in and through creation, creation itself is not sufficient to reveal God's divine salvation to people. The means for such revelation is Scripture. Since Scripture is divinely revealed it is therefore self-referential and authoritative and so Scripture alone is sufficient for people's "salvation, faith, and life" including the ability to understand and engage with other religions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Mouw's chapter on "Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America," in Mouw, *Cultural Discipleship*, 206-234.

<sup>17</sup> D. Strange, *'For their Rock is not as our Rock': An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014), 28-32.

<sup>18</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (1796; Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1988). This is a confession that represents a model of Calvinism.

<sup>19</sup> A. McPherson, "Foreword," in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (1796; Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1988), 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Westminster Confession*, 19-24. See also T. Watson, *A Body of Divinity Contained in Sermons upon the Westminster Assembly's Catechism* (1890; London: Banner of Truth, 1960); and Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 19, 33.

<sup>21</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (trans. D. H. Freeman; New Jersey: P. & R. Publishing, 1960), xx-xxi, 5, 79; J. H. Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), 90; and Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 46-48.

The confession remarks that Scripture reveals a Triune Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> The Father, Son and Spirit are one in essence but they are three distinct persons with distinct roles.<sup>23</sup> Scripture depicts a meta-narrative in which God is the sovereign ruler,<sup>24</sup> outside of time and space and distinct from the creation because he is the creator and sustainer of all the world.<sup>25</sup> In the Edenic creation Reformed theology perceives a covenantal framework which is reflected in the salvation-historical narrative of Scripture.<sup>26</sup> God's redemptive plan for the whole world is seen through God's activity in the world when he makes covenantal promises with the Patriarchs and Israel.<sup>27</sup> Despite the Fall and Israel's repeated unfaithfulness,<sup>28</sup> these promises are fulfilled in the incarnation and mission of Jesus. Such promises have an eschatological telos and are to be completely fulfilled in the consummation of the kingdom of God.<sup>29</sup> This covenantal framework provides both a

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<sup>22</sup> Bavinck writes that "The seeds that developed into full flower of New Testament Trinitarian revelation are already planted in the Old Testament. Elohim, the living God, creates by speaking his word and sending his spirit. The world comes into being by a threefold cause." H. Bavinck, "God and Creation," (vol 2. of *Reformed Dogmatics*; ed. J. Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), 256.

<sup>23</sup> John 16:5-16; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:23-28.

<sup>24</sup> Psa. 5:2; 10:16; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 2:47.

<sup>25</sup> Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 26. See Isa. 40:12-31.

<sup>26</sup> A covenant is understood as "God's initiated self-obligation (grace) as a necessary first movement and to an obligation which God imposes on human beings for conduct and action that will bring blessing to themselves and their world." W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 2.

<sup>27</sup> P. R. Williamson, "Covenant," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (eds. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 419-420. See Gen. 12:1-3; Exo. 20:1-21; Deut. 5:1-22; 2 Sam. 7:1-16; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-36; Dan. 7:13-14.

<sup>28</sup> Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant*, 1 and Williamson, "Covenant," 427. Kraemer notes that "In Biblical realism fulfilment means always the fulfilment of God's promises and of His previous preparatory doings." H.

continuity and discontinuity between the covenantal framework in the Old Testament and that of the New. Thus the christological - or new - covenant provides continuity with previous divine covenants but it also “incorporates novel elements in radical discontinuity with the past.”<sup>30</sup> These include the complete removal of sin and the eternality of the new covenant.<sup>31</sup>

From a Reformed theological perspective the Fall is the result of idolatry - the Serpent distorting God’s words and Adam and Eve disbelieving them.<sup>32</sup> Through this all humans share an imputed guilt and are throughout their whole being “defiled” and “dead in sin.”<sup>33</sup> Such corruption finds its concrete expression within the structures, customs and values of individuals and their communities.<sup>34</sup> God’s redemptive activity towards and for humanity is recognised in the scriptural redemptive-historical meta-narrative through the Adamic, Noachide, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants.<sup>35</sup> In the New Testament these covenantal promises are fulfilled

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Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938), 123. See 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> Williamson, “Covenant,” 427.

<sup>31</sup> Williamson, “Covenant,” 427. See also Frame, *Christian Life*, 558.

<sup>32</sup> C. M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 231; Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 241; and G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 127-140. See also Gen. 3:1-12.

<sup>33</sup> *Westminster Confession*, 39. See also Rom. 5:12-14.

<sup>34</sup> Eph. 2:1-3. C. J. H. Wright, “Biblical Paradigms of Redemption: Exodus, Jubilee and the Cross,” in *Transforming the World? The Gospel and Social Responsibility* (eds. J. A. Grant and D. A. Hughes; Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 71.

<sup>35</sup> D. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), 20-21.

christologically (Luke 4:14-21; 24:44; Acts 2:30-36; 4:12; 13:23-33).<sup>36</sup> For the Reformed tradition salvation is christocentric.<sup>37</sup> Such salvation is not understood in Scripture to be solely the redemption of an individual from sin but also the redemption of creation.<sup>38</sup> One result of salvation is the establishment of a missiological and eschatological community called the Church. These people live, individually and corporately, under the rule of Jesus as Lord and such living involves the redemption of structures and customs of the surrounding cultures.<sup>39</sup> This wider idea of salvation is emphasised by means of the kingdom of God.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.2. Key Figures in the Development of Subversive-Fulfilment

Standing within this Reformed tradition were two Dutch missionary theologians, Hendrik Kraemer and Johan Bavinck. Contemporaries, though they lived in different countries, Bavinck actively engaged with Kraemer's work whilst developing his own missiology.<sup>41</sup> Such engagement from within the same theological tradition meant there was a substantial overlap in their presuppositions and methodology. They are significant figures because Strange's work is consciously dependent on them though

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<sup>36</sup> Heb. 8:3-6; Acts 2:25-36; cf. *Westminster Confession*, 43-44.

<sup>37</sup> Acts 3:17-26; 13:16-41; cf. *Westminster Confession*, 45-51.

<sup>38</sup> Rom. 8:19-23; 1 Cor. 15:20-28.

<sup>39</sup> Bavinck, *Impact*, 46. The Westminster Confession notes the importance of the religious and civic duties of the Christian. *Westminster Confession*, 87-104.

<sup>40</sup> Luke 4:43; 9:11; Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:42; 28:23, 31.

<sup>41</sup> Interestingly both have been largely neglected by theologians in the latter half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. See R. J. Plantinga, "Defender of Orthodoxy and Pioneer of World Christianity: The Legacy of Hendrik Kraemer," in *For God so Loved the World: Missiological Reflections in Honor of Roger S. Greenway* (ed. A. C. Leder; Belleville, Ontar.: Essence Publishing, 2006), 155-156; and G. D'Costa, "Foreword," in T. Perry, *Radical Difference: A Defence of Hendrik Kraemer's Theology of Religion* (Editions SR 27; Waterloo, Ontar.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), vii.

not uncritically. To fully understand subversive-fulfilment as presented by Strange it is necessary to situate these two theologians who have substantially influenced his thought and writing.

### **2.2.1. H. Kraemer<sup>42</sup>**

Hendrik Kraemer coined the phrase 'subversive-fulfilment', using it within a Christian-Hindu context but leaving it tantalisingly undeveloped.<sup>43</sup> His meaning can best be glimpsed through his seminal work *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, described by Plantinga as "a classic work in the missiological literature of the twentieth century."<sup>44</sup> Written to enable discussion at the International Missionary Conference in 1938 this work addressed the different and conflicting attitudes among Christians concerning the engagement of the Church with other religions.<sup>45</sup>

For Kraemer the engagement was both essential and inevitable arguing that Western society had removed Christian religion from the centre of life and replaced it

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<sup>42</sup> See the following for more information about Hendrik Kraemer. L. Hoedemaker, "The Legacy of Hendrik Kraemer," *OBMR* 4 (1980): 60-64; W. A. Bijlefeld, "Kraemer, Hendrik," *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (vol. 8; ed. M. Eliade; New York: Macmillan, 1987), 380-381; O. V. Jathanna, *The Decisiveness of the Christ Event and the Universality of Christianity in a World of Religious Plurality: With Special Reference to Hendrik Kraemer and Alfred George Hogg as well as to William Ernest Hocking and Pandipedi Chenchiah* (SIHC 29; Berne: Peter Lang, 1981), 62-69; T. Perry, *Radical Difference: A Defence of Hendrik Kraemer's Theology of Religion* (Editions SR 27; Waterloo, Ontar.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), 30-51; and V-M. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2003), 181-186.

<sup>43</sup> H. Kraemer, "Continuity or Discontinuity," in G. Paton (ed.), *The Authority of Faith: International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras* (London: OUP, 1939), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Plantinga, "Hendrik Kraemer," 148. Perry writes of Kraemer's significance, "For at least three decades, one could not begin seriously to unpack Christianity's relationship to other religions without reference to the work of Hendrik Kraemer." Perry, *Radical Difference*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, v and 1. Kraemer writes that fundamentally he was trying to answer the way in which the Church engaged with "the world and all its spheres of life." He was also engaging with earlier Western works which took a different position on the engagement. In particular Kraemer was engaging with W. E. Hocking's work, *Rethinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper, 1932). Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 30. See also, H. Kraemer, *Why Christianity of all Religions* (trans. H. Hoskins; London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), 9, 12; and H. Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 17.

with the concepts of “race, nation, classless society, a ‘holy’ or ‘eternal’ country.”<sup>46</sup> Western thought now perceived the State as the absolute power providing ultimate stability and which all other agencies were to serve.<sup>47</sup> Such an exchange was predicated on the rise and growth of human autonomy combining the belief in human intellectual development and the unification of the world.<sup>48</sup> This provided a vision of faith and hope.<sup>49</sup>

Yet Kraemer notes that the outcome of this exchange resulted in multiple instabilities. Fundamentally, autonomy from God resulted in a religious uncertainty - “*the* ultimate problem of modern man [humanity].”<sup>50</sup> From this, states Kraemer, by rejecting God rather than having no gods, people create other gods because they are made by God,<sup>51</sup> and in exercising autonomous human freedom people destroy themselves by destroying God.<sup>52</sup> Such instabilities mean the Church must engage with all aspects of the world but it begins, according to Kraemer, with the Church understanding its own identity enabling it to recognise the instabilities and to

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<sup>46</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 15, 29, 44. Kraemer noted that this issue in the twentieth century reflected the engagement between the Church and the State in the first-century: “One might say that the situation of the Christian Church in the world at large begins to resemble that in which it was placed in the world of the Roman Empire, in the distinction of an official State-cult and a great mass of local cults and mystery-religions.” Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 38.

<sup>48</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 9. Kraemer includes liberty of thought, tolerance and individualism as key factors in the intellectual development. See also M. W. J. Geursen, “Proclaiming the Gospel in an A-Theistic Time,” *RTR* 26 (1967): 97-98.

<sup>49</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 10. See also Kraemer, *Christian Faith*, 146.



demonstrate the relevance of God to real life.<sup>53</sup> Kraemer argues that Scripture is the foundation for the Church's self-identification. Scripture portrays the Church as a redeemed people,<sup>54</sup> of which one part is a redemption from their autonomy.<sup>55</sup> This redemption is christological and has to be revealed at the epistemological level - supernaturally through the Spirit by faith.<sup>56</sup> Such redemption occurs at the epistemological level - this redemption is divinely revealed - and at the metaphysical level - for the person experiences "new life" and is a "new creature."<sup>57</sup> By inhabiting the kingdom of God this new life results in an ethical outworking within the structures, customs, and values of their cultures.<sup>58</sup> For Kraemer both the Christian faith and the Christian ethic are "entirely incommensurable with all other ethics in the world."<sup>59</sup>

Having established the Church's identity Kraemer asserts that an effective engagement with the surrounding cultures must occur at the level of the metaphysical, reflected in the beliefs and religiosity of the surrounding cultures about the divine, the epistemological, the nature of knowledge and revelation about the

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<sup>53</sup> Kraemer writes of the Church, "They are ultimately undermined by uncertainty although they keep their loyalties." Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Faith*, 145-146.

<sup>55</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Kraemer writes, "Revelation in its proper sense is what is by its nature inaccessible and remains so, even when it is revealed. The necessary correlate to the concept of revelation is therefore faith. It lies in the very nature of divine revelation that the only organ for apprehending it is faith; and for the same reason faith, in this strictly religious sense, can only be appropriately defined as at the same time a divine gift and a human act." Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 69.

<sup>57</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 85.

<sup>58</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 81-82, 101.

<sup>59</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 85.

metaphysical, and the ethical, the way in which the metaphysical and epistemological are made manifest affecting the structures, values and customs of the culture.<sup>60</sup>

Kraemer notes that a central aspect of the engagement develops from a continuity and discontinuity that occurs at the metaphysical and epistemological levels between Christianity and other religions. The continuity occurs because all people reflect the *imago Dei* and experience God's common grace. For Kraemer the result is that all other religions are "shot through with stronger or weaker Christian threads,"<sup>61</sup> and that all people reflect both a "God-rooted origin" and "splendid God-given qualities" demonstrated in their pursuit of beauty, truth, and goodness within the structures and customs of their culture.<sup>62</sup> Thus the whole world provides a general revelation bearing witness to God.<sup>63</sup> Yet people cannot properly recognise these elements of continuity because the world has been corrupted by sin which creates a discontinuity between Christianity and other religions.<sup>64</sup> This corruption results in a human autonomy that turns away from God to humanly created things. It is precisely because other religions begin from this perspective that, according to Kraemer, they

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<sup>60</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 123.

<sup>62</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 120.

<sup>63</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 125. Later Kraemer comes to dislike the term 'general revelation' calling it "one of the most misleading and confusing terms possible [which] ought to be abolished." Yet he also recognises that this term is unlikely to be abolished. He writes, "It is very difficult to find satisfying, generally acceptable new terms. The most feasible way is a persevering struggle for their purification." Kraemer, *Christian Faith*, 342, 355.

<sup>64</sup> Kraemer writes, "The perversion of sin, which permeates all his [people's] achievements with the will that makes for god-likeness, causes that in all things, not excepting the greatest and sublimest in any sphere of life man is trying to evade his fundamental problem, namely, this perversion of sin." Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 125. See also Kraemer, *Christianity*, 96. See also J. Threlfall, "The Doctrine of the *Imago Dei*: The Biblical Data for an Abductive Argument," *JETS* 62 (2019): 544.

cannot be true either metaphysically, in their beliefs about the divine, nor epistemologically, in what they reveal about the divine.<sup>65</sup> He calls other religions “pseudo-religions.”<sup>66</sup> In a later work Kraemer states that other religions are “all noble, but misguided and abortive attempts to take the fundamental religious questions...and to answer them in their own terms.”<sup>67</sup> Such a discontinuity rejects the idea of syncretism between Christianity and other religions.<sup>68</sup>

Kraemer highlights Acts 14, 17, and 19 as providing examples of this continuity and discontinuity.<sup>69</sup> Focusing on Acts 17 the continuity is evident since the Athenians acknowledge there is someone/thing greater than themselves, yet the discontinuity is the Athenian response through the creation of altars and temples to other gods. Recognising this continuity and discontinuity creates a dialectical tension in the narrative resulting in offence. Since Kraemer recognises that this tension will cause offence,<sup>70</sup> he is insistent that the Church must have the appropriate knowledge of a person’s religion and culture and a manner in which genuine love and interest is

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<sup>65</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 85-86. Kraemer also notes that “The Church is emphatically reminded that it, alone of all human institutions in the world, is founded on divine commission.” Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Kraemer writes, “when he has annihilated God, man [humanity], the inveterate god-maker, creates new gods or makes himself god. However, just because the absolutism of these new ‘religions’ is self-made, it is void and false. The salutary unbreakable law for man is that real absolutes can only be received by him as a gift; those he makes are pseudo-absolutes. Consequently these religions are pseudo-religions.” Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Kraemer, *Christianity*, 93. See also Kraemer, *Christian Faith*, 341.

<sup>68</sup> H. Kraemer, “Syncretism as a Religious and Missionary Problem,” *IRM* 43 (1954): 254.

<sup>69</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 127-128.

<sup>70</sup> Kraemer, *Christianity*, 100.

manifested.<sup>71</sup> Kraemer terms this 'adaptation' - the ability to express Christian truths concretely in indigenous terms both to expose the inadequacy of human religious effort and to reveal Jesus Christ.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, adaptation requires the Christian person to understand the theology, history, psychology, and anthropology of the indigenous community in order to appropriately contextualise the Christian gospel within the indigenous community's social, political and religious structures.<sup>73</sup> To effectively do this Kraemer develops the concept of 'points of contact.'<sup>74</sup> These points are the continuities found in general revelation, as highlighted above, which are used to lead the culture toward the divine revelation and redemption found in Jesus Christ.<sup>75</sup>

### **2.2.2. J. Bavinck**

Johan Bavinck's main work, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*,<sup>76</sup> was written

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<sup>71</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 146. See also Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 303-307 and Kraemer, *Christianity*, 125.

<sup>72</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 308, 323.

<sup>73</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 92, 95, 98, 342, 445.

<sup>74</sup> Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 140. For example, human autonomy may be a point of contact for, says Kraemer, the ideals of this movement "expressed in terms of liberty of thought, tolerance, individualism, etc., are to a certain extent distorted and derived elements of Christianity." Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Jongeneel notes that Bavinck published a summary of Kraemer's *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* and that Bavinck was influenced by Kraemer. J. A. B. Jongeneel, "Bavinck, Johan Herman," *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (ed. G. H. Anderson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 48. See also Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 110; Kraemer, *Christianity*, 70-80; and Perry, *Radical Difference*, 61.

<sup>76</sup> For a helpful analysis of Johan Bavinck's life see P. J. Visser, *Heart for the Gospel, Heart for the World: The Life and Thought of a Reformed Pioneer Missiologist Johan Herman Bavinck [1895-1964]* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2003). Moreau writes of this work, "Though a product of its times in terms of the one-way orientation to missionary work, it is still a masterful blend of Bavinck's psychological, biblical, and religious interests." A. S. Moreau, "Bavinck, Johan Herman," *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (ed. A. Scott Moreau; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 115. Sung-Ho Ahn writes, "Bavinck's missiological understanding of the religions, including Islam, may help the modern global missiological enterprise to situate itself between 'Temple and Mosque' and to thus

to enable Christian missionaries to engage with other religions whilst avoiding the twin dangers of extractionism - living apart from the culture - or syncretism - merging with the culture, its beliefs and practices.<sup>77</sup> Bavinck closely engaged with Kraemer's work as he developed his own writings,<sup>78</sup> although he does not use the term 'subversive-fulfilment' in his works. Bavinck's presuppositions and methodology of engaging with Scripture and with other religions reflect his Reformed theological background and demonstrate substantial overlap with Kraemer. As with Kraemer, Bavinck posits a biblical meta-narrative with God as creator and Lord. Yet people desiring autonomy have rebelled against God which Bavinck notes is the founding and central problem to human existence.<sup>79</sup> Bavinck interprets this rebellion as idolatry. He writes, "idolatry is despicable, a terrible rebellion against the only true God; it is satanic pride, self-idolatry, self-deification, an attempt to pull God down to the world, and to make God a servant of one's self."<sup>80</sup> This idolatry distorts both general revelation and common grace as witnesses to God so neither can be salvific or lead people to Christ.<sup>81</sup> The result of this distortion is that humanity "always and

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embrace a respectful posture toward other religions while it processes its mission." D. Sung-Ho Ahn, "Johan Bavinck's Missiology and Its Implications for the Term Question in Korean Bible Translation," *The Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 122.

<sup>77</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 285.

<sup>78</sup> Bavinck was a missionary in Java, Indonesia, before returning to the Netherlands to become Professor of Missions at the Free University, Amsterdam. Bavinck used to discuss Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* with his students. Visser, *Heart*, 20, 30-31.

<sup>79</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End: A Radical Kingdom Vision* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2014), 12.

<sup>80</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 226. See also J. H. Bavinck, "Human Religion in God's Eyes: A Study of Romans 1:18-32," *SBET* 12 (1994): 45. This latter article was originally published posthumously and was reprinted by *SBET*.

<sup>81</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 65. See also Bavinck, "Human Religion," 50. Bavinck writes, "There is to be sure a thirst for salvation, a search for a savior in practically all non-Christian religions, but the savior is never the one who was crucified." Bavinck, *Missions*, 64. See also Bavinck, *Missions*, 54, 224, 227; Bavinck, *Impact*, 35; and Bavinck, *Kingdom Vision*, 12.

necessarily craves for God and at the same time flee[s] from Him.”<sup>82</sup> For Bavinck other religions are perceived as “worshipping and serving of the creature,” and “rebellion against the Creator.”<sup>83</sup>

Like Kraemer, Bavinck believes that Scripture has a redemptive trajectory and actively demonstrates a concern for the whole world.<sup>84</sup> This salvation is completed christologically, interpreted as the renewal of an individual’s inner life and the renewal of relationships, communities and society.<sup>85</sup> As with Kraemer, this salvation occurs epistemologically, through divine revelation, and metaphysically, since the person is a new creation.<sup>86</sup> Such a change subverts the old culture at the ethical level for it provides “a new outlook upon life, a new sense of duty and responsibility.”<sup>87</sup>

In establishing this missiological model Bavinck sought to avoid the twin dangers of extractionism and syncretism to enable Christian missionaries to effectively engage with their surrounding cultures. Bavinck argues that effective engagements occur

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<sup>82</sup> Bavinck, *Impact*, 101.

<sup>83</sup> Bavinck, *Impact*, 101 and Bavinck, *Kingdom Vision*, 37.

<sup>84</sup> Defined by Bavinck as the salvific covenantal promises applied to Israel and through Israel to the nations. Exod. 32:12; Psa. 67:2; 99:1. Bavinck, *Missions*, 12, 14-17, 61.

<sup>85</sup> Acts 9:15. Bavinck, *Missions*, 36-37, 55, 67. See also Bavinck, *Impact*, 19, 28.

<sup>86</sup> For Bavinck this is demonstrably seen in the Acts of the Apostles, which he calls the “missions document par excellence.” Bavinck, *Missions*, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Bavinck, *Impact*, 58. Bavinck writes, “Not only is the inner life renewed, but every relationship in which we stand is also fundamentally altered and as a consequence the whole of society is reborn. Nothing in human life is indifferent, nothing lies outside the power of sin, but also there is nothing which is excluded from the salvation of God. God will rebuild our whole existence from the ground up.” Bavinck, *Missions*, 55-56. See also J. Bavinck, “The Problem of Adaptation and Communication,” *IRM* 45 (1956): 311.

through the use of 'magnetic points' which connect with the religious consciousness of all people. These five magnetic points are: people's relationship with the universe; the sense of the religious in people's inmost being; the desire to understand the riddle or purpose of existence; people's craving for salvation and a saviour; and the course of life as a tension between action and fate.<sup>88</sup> These magnetic points allow for continuity between Christianity and other religions, since they ask metaphysical questions, and discontinuity for according to Bavinck other religions provide answers to these questions through an idolatrous perspective.

From this Bavinck developed his work on *possessio*. For Bavinck the establishment of a new church left a fundamental question about accommodation: "To what extent must a new church which has developed within a specific national community accommodate and adjust itself to the customs, practices, and mores current among a people?"<sup>89</sup> In answering this question Bavinck presented the model of *possessio*, from the Latin referring to possession, which he preferred to the term "accommodation."<sup>90</sup> Bavinck presented *possessio* as the means to transform the beliefs, structures, customs and values of a culture as they are brought under the Lordship of Christ. According to Bavinck prior to Christian redemption the beliefs, structures, customs and values of a culture serve idolatrous tendencies but in redemptive transformation they are filled with new, Christian, content, re-making the

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<sup>88</sup> J. H. Bavinck, "Defining Religious Consciousness: The Five Magnetic Points," in *The J.H. Bavinck Reader* (ed. J. Bolt et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), 151-198. Bavinck also recognises these magnetic points as points of contact between Christianity and the surrounding culture. See also J. H. Bavinck, *The Church between the Temple and the Mosque: A Study of the Relationship between the Christian Faith and Other Religions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 32-34.

<sup>89</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 169.

<sup>90</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 179.

practice in a new and Christ-centred direction. He writes, “Christ takes the life of a people in his hands, he renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated; he fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction.”<sup>91</sup> This means that in the engagement between Christianity and other religions Bavinck recognises both continuity - in the beliefs, structures, customs and values of a culture - and discontinuity - that these elements need to be christologically transformed. Yet Bavinck also asserts that because of idolatry people answer the questions raised by the magnetic points by moving away from the Christian God.

This model, largely forgotten, has been recognised for its importance. Conn, critiquing evangelicalism in the early 1990s for its silence as to how it relates to other religions, notes that the idea of *possessio* is an “exciting...model.”<sup>92</sup> Nearly twenty years after Conn, Nesbitt writes that *possessio* retains “a pregnant potential, which could be harnessed if it was updated and enhanced,”<sup>93</sup> and Strange comments that *possessio* is “a guide that is indeed able to steer us safely between the dangers of extractionism and syncretism.”<sup>94</sup> Most appropriately to this thesis Goheen, assessing the similarities of the missionary models of Newbigin, Kraemer, Bavinck, and

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<sup>91</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 179. See also Bavinck, *Impact*, 22-23; and Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 283-284.

<sup>92</sup> H. M. Conn, “Do Other Religions Save?,” in *Through No Fault of their Own: The Fate of Those who Have Never Heard* (eds. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991), 207. Conn’s work clearly influenced Strange’s own theology of religions and the similarities can be seen in the questions that Conn concludes his work with when compared with Strange’s own work.

<sup>93</sup> G. Nesbitt, “Your Kingdom Come: An Examination of the Compatibility of Johan H. Bavinck’s concept of *Possessio* and Charles H. Kraft’s Model of Christian Transformational Culture Change as a means of achieving an Indigenous Expression of Christianity,” (M.Th. diss., Oak Hill College, 2007), 26-27.

<sup>94</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 284. See I. A. Levinskaya, “Syncretism - The Term and Phenomenon,” *TynB* 44 (1993): 117-128.



Griffioen, highlights the function of Bavinck's *possessio*, connecting it with Paul's work in Acts. Goheen writes,

What each is doing with differing terminology is noting the way in which missionary communication today, as was the case with Paul in Lystra and Athens in his day, will proclaim the fulfilment of common human aspirations and religious longings while at the same time challenging the idolatry that twists those aspirations and longings with a demand for repentance and conversion.<sup>95</sup>

To ensure an effective missional engagement Bavinck asserts that Scripture must be contextualised appropriately within the culture.<sup>96</sup> Done properly this will avoid the dangers of cultural assimilation, the loss of the gospel, or preaching the gospel without the appropriate contextualisation.<sup>97</sup> For Bavinck good contextualisation means that though Scripture has the dominant voice in the engagement other aspects such as psychology and ethnology are of "great significance."<sup>98</sup> Bavinck contends that the engagement must contain a clear explanation of the Christian gospel which teaches that other religions are false, and are specifically interpreted as idolatry. Such a gospel proclamation must also assert the only true God and be done in a manner of love for the person.<sup>99</sup> Bavinck's engagement with other cultures

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<sup>95</sup> M. W. Goheen, "Bible in Mission: Missiology and Biblical Scholarship in Dialogue," in *Christian Mission: Old Testament Foundations and New Testament Developments* (eds. S. E. Porter and C. L. Westfall; Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock Publishing, 2010), 220. See also M. W. Goheen, "Is Lesslie Newbigin's Model of Contextualization Anticultural?" *Mission Studies* 19 (2002): 150-151.

<sup>96</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 80. Bavinck writes, "In the mission field of Central Africa or somewhere on an island in the South Seas, it is impossible to follow the method chosen by Paul in his day and world, under the circumstances he faced. Nor can the gospel be preached in the manner Paul used on the Areopagus. The missionary must carefully take into account the specific situation and circumstances of the people with whom he is dealing."

<sup>97</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 80; cf. 94-95.

<sup>98</sup> Bavinck, *Missions*, 81, 82, 87-88.

<sup>99</sup> This is what Bavinck calls *elentics* but he does not develop it fully in his *Science of Missions*. Bavinck, *Missions*, 247. Bavinck, "Human Religion," 52. Blomberg in his analysis of heresy in the New Testament writes, "Our inspired authors clearly oppose non-Christian religions and their practitioners, but their dominant strategy is to call them to repentance via making the gospel as winsome as possible." Blomberg, "Heresy," 71. See also R. S. Greenaway, "Success in the City: Paul's Urban

reveals striking similarities to Kraemer. They both view other religions as idolatrous, displaying continuities with Christianity and yet the discontinuities are greater. Such discontinuity prevents any syncretism. Bavinck's use of *possessio* is pivotal as a model for understanding the way in which Christian engagement with other religions may be approached, allowing for both subversion and fulfilment.

### **2.2.3. D. Strange**

In his foreword to Strange's earlier work concerning the fate of the unevangelised from a Reformed Evangelical perspective and in dialogue with the inclusivism of Clark Pinnock, Gavin D'Costa calls the theology of religions "a major issue pressing all Christian communities."<sup>100</sup> Building on the earlier work of Kraemer and Bavinck, Strange constructs his framework for his theology of religions and summarises his theology of religions with the following statement:

From the presupposition of an epistemologically authoritative biblical revelation, non-Christian religions are sovereignly directed, variegated and dynamic, collective human idolatrous responses to divine revelation behind which stand deceiving demonic forces. Being antithetically against yet parasitically dependent upon the truth of the Christian worldview, non-Christian religions are 'subversively fulfilled' in the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup>

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Mission Strategy (Acts 14:1-28)," in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (ASMS 34; eds. R. L. Gallagher and R. Hertig; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 190.

<sup>100</sup> G. D'Costa, "Foreword," in D. Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised* (Paternoster Theological Monographs; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), xiii. One conclusion Strange makes for further study from his writing in the fate of the unevangelised is "for a comprehensive evangelical 'theology of religions' which not only says what other religions are not, but offers some detailed suggestions as to what other religions are." Strange, *Salvation*, 288. In 1991 Conn notes that "the evangelical world seems almost silent on this crucial issue." Conn, "Religions," 207. See Netland, *Religious Pluralism*, 310-348.

<sup>101</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 42. I recognise the difficulty that this language may create for some people. I also note the distinction that needs to be made between saying that something may be 'parasitically dependent' and calling someone a 'parasite'. It may be that in future editions of his work Strange may consider alternative language.

Such a statement derives from Strange's Reformed presuppositions and echoes the theology held by Kraemer and Bavinck. As with Kraemer and Bavinck, Strange identifies the continuity between Christianity and other religions through the concept of general revelation, which is "the witness of God in creation, providence and the *imago Dei*,"<sup>102</sup> and in common grace related to general revelation as a "non-salvific manifestation of God's grace,"<sup>103</sup> given to all people.<sup>104</sup> This common grace functions as a divine restraint on sin and the effects of sin, as well as divine favour "whereby creation receives divine blessing, non-Christians receive divine favour and goodness, 'good' is attributed to non-Christians, and non-Christians receive benefits from the presence of the gospel."<sup>105</sup>

Strange also identifies the discontinuity. General revelation is, because of the Fall, "distorted,"<sup>106</sup> "suppressed," or "substituted,"<sup>107</sup> "not able to contain redemptive truth."<sup>108</sup> Strange therefore concludes that general revelation can only lead to a non-

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<sup>102</sup> Strange, *Salvation*, 111.

<sup>103</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 93.

<sup>104</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 92.

<sup>105</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 89. Strange takes common grace as starting from the Noachide covenant in which God "promises to sustain, preserve and restrain the world through his ordinary works of providence and by preserving and not exterminating creation." Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 87-88. See also Strange, "Perilous Exchange," 118. Gen. 8:20-22.

<sup>106</sup> Strange, "Perilous Exchange," 99-100. Visser, commenting on Bavinck's work, writes of general revelation, "In Bavinck's view, when God manifest himself to man through general revelation, man becomes knowledgeable in a de jure (judicial) sense but proves, in that revelatory encounter with God, to be so profoundly sinful that de facto (actual) attainment of knowledge does not occur." Visser, *Heart*, 144.

<sup>107</sup> D. Strange, *Plugged In: Connecting your Faith with what you Watch, Read, and Play* (Epsom: The Good Book Company, 2019), 66-72.

<sup>108</sup> Strange, *Salvation*, 113. This is Strange's critique of Clark Pinnock. See Strange, *Salvation*, 111 and A. B. Spencer, "Romans 1: Finding God in Creation," in *Through No Fault of their Own: The Fate of Those who Have Never Heard* (eds. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991), 133-134.

specific sense of the divine, or something greater than oneself.<sup>109</sup> The result of this conclusion is that Strange is very cautious of speaking about truth in other religions.<sup>110</sup> Instead Strange accentuates the role of special revelation, found in the person of Jesus Christ and in the scriptures, which for Reformed Christians is “the ultimate authority in all metaphysical, epistemological, ethical and soteriological issues.”<sup>111</sup> This special revelation consistently provides a Creator/creation distinction in which the Triune God is sovereign and self-dependent whilst the creation is completely dependent on the divine.<sup>112</sup> Strange writes, “Metaphysically, we are dependent on God; epistemologically, we were created to depend upon and obey God's authoritative and benevolent revelation.”<sup>113</sup>

Strange's means for identifying and interpreting the continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and other religions is the concept of idolatry. Distinct from Kraemer and Bavinck, Strange regards idolatry as the “primary Old Testament category of the religious Other” and “*the* hermeneutical master key with which to unlock the nature of non-Christian religion and religions.”<sup>114</sup> This significance of

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<sup>109</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 222. As Bavinck writes “it only leads to a philosophic notion of God as first cause.” Bavinck, “Human Religion,” 50.

<sup>110</sup> Strange, “Perilous Exchange,” 117, 242.

<sup>111</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 50, 118.

<sup>112</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 58-60. Strange cites Van Til, “God is in no sense correlative to or dependent upon anything besides his own being. God is the source of his own being, or rather the term source cannot be applied to God. God is absolute. He is sufficient unto himself.” Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 59, 61-62. See also G. R. McDermott, “How the Trinity should Govern our Approach to World Religions,” *JETS* 60 (2017): 49.

<sup>113</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 57.

<sup>114</sup> His italics. Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 205; cf. 98, 156. Bavinck, “Prolegomena,” 175. Strange notes that his own understanding of other religions and subversive-fulfilment is “largely a description and re-articulation of their [Kraemer and Bavinck] articulations.” Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 238. Despite this Strange does not agree with them with them in everything. For example, see Strange,

idolatry in Scripture is recognised in scholarship - though not held as “the hermeneutical master key” as Strange does. For example, Grant develops the Christian perspective on other religions in the Graeco-Roman world as idolatry,<sup>115</sup> and Wright comments that idolatry is both “in danger of shallow understanding and simplistic responses,” and “a fundamental, if negative, aspect of a fully biblical and missional account of biblical monotheism.”<sup>116</sup>

Strange argues that idolatry originates at the Fall. Adam and Eve believe that they can become like God (the metaphysical level) and can know good and evil (the epistemological level). Their response has significant ethical consequences for the person becomes like the idol they worship.<sup>117</sup> Strange applies this trajectory to all humankind writing that: “It is under the category of ‘idolatry’ that we are to interpret all beliefs/worldviews (both those demarcated as ‘religious’ and those not) that do not cohere with God’s own [special] revelation of himself, including all ‘other religions’.”<sup>118</sup>

In defining idolatry in both the Old and New Testament Strange identifies a number of significant markers. These markers include a covenant unfaithfulness seen in the

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*Theology of Religions*, 39 n. 39, 239 n. 4.

<sup>115</sup> Grant, *One God*, 45.

<sup>116</sup> C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006), 136.

<sup>117</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 50. See also Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 77; and Beale, *Idolatry*, 16.

<sup>118</sup> Strange, “Perilous Exchange,” 112. He writes, “We might say that despite the plethora of worldviews and religions that exist in the world, in reality there are only two: those rooted and built up in Christ, and those founded on ‘philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ’ (Col. 3.6-10).” Strange, “Perilous Exchange,” 114-115. I recognise that such an interpretation may be somewhat uncomfortable for many people.

acceptance of non-scriptural words<sup>119</sup> and a self-determined autonomy - both metaphysically and epistemologically<sup>120</sup> - which results in doubt, disobedience, and disbelief;<sup>121</sup> the mimicking of true worship towards something other than God, the blurring of the Creator-creature distinction;<sup>122</sup> and in the New Testament not recognising the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is.<sup>123</sup>

By applying these features of idolatry Strange identifies and interprets the continuity and discontinuity found between Christianity and other religions. Strange highlights that the continuity and discontinuity occur at three levels: first, the metaphysical level, reflected in the beliefs and religiosity of the surrounding cultures about the divine; second, the epistemological level, in the nature of knowledge and revelation about the metaphysical and ethical; and finally, the ethical level, the way in which the metaphysical and epistemological are made manifest in the structures, values and customs of the culture.<sup>124</sup> Thus from Genesis 3 Strange applies the *imago Dei* to humanity and identifies the continuity of humanity's religious nature - the worship of

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<sup>119</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 74, 240.

<sup>120</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 78, 207.

<sup>121</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 75.

<sup>122</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 207, 208, 210. Following Posten, though aware that he is being theologically speculative, Strange develops this further that idols have behind them demonic angels who "assume the role of various deities for the purpose of receiving worship themselves and keeping people from the knowledge of the One true God." Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 148-149. Johnson makes reference to this when he notes that the Septuagint changed the Hebrew of Psalm 96:5 from "The gods of the nations are idols," to "The gods of the nations are demons." He also notes the Early Church Fathers who wrote of the connection between idols and demons. Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 2, 7. See also Strange, "Perilous Exchange," 116; and J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth* (BST; ed. J. R. W. Stott; Leicester: IVP, 1990), 287.

<sup>123</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 220. Strange writes, "In considering this 'false faith' in the Son the conclusion to which we are drawn is that not to recognize the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is, is an act of idolatry and again provokes divine wrath." See Wright, *Mission of God*, 164-176.

<sup>124</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 83-84.

someone or something considered ultimate<sup>125</sup> - which is revealed throughout human life including all of culture.<sup>126</sup> Yet because of the distortion of the *imago Dei* which occurs at the Fall a discontinuity is created between Christianity and other religions because true religious faith can only be interpreted in a particular and not generic religiosity. This true faith is defined as “our relationship, worship and obedience or disobedience to the self-contained ontological Trinity, *the* living God of the Bible.”<sup>127</sup> Strange posits that the continuity and discontinuity cannot be held in isolation from one another but must be held in continuous tension for the distortion of the *imago Dei* means that people seek to become like God even as they distort, deny, disbelieve and then disobey the truths of God.<sup>128</sup> Strange asserts that accounting for and addressing this continuous tension is what makes his work more nuanced and sophisticated than other scholarship.<sup>129</sup>

Strange then develops his methodology of subversive-fulfilment which provides a Reformed theological perspective on the means for a Christian engagement with the concept of idolatry and the surrounding cultures.<sup>130</sup> This methodology allows Christians to both confront and connect with surrounding cultures.<sup>131</sup> For Strange the

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<sup>125</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 71.

<sup>126</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 72. See also Strange, *Plugged In*, 29.

<sup>127</sup> His italics. Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 71.

<sup>128</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 73-75, 77. See also Strange, “Perilous Exchange,” 109-110.

<sup>129</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 79.

<sup>130</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 26-27, 31. See also D. Strange, “Perilous Exchange, Precious Good News: A Reformed ‘Subversive Fulfilment’ Interpretation of Other Religions,” in G. D’Costa et al., *Only One Way? Three Christian Responses to the Uniqueness of Christ in a Religiously Pluralist World* (London: SCM Press, London), 112-114; and Strange, *Plugged In*, 37-38.

<sup>131</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 96-103.

Christian gospel is the subversion “of all manifestations of the religious Other.”<sup>132</sup> The subversion occurs because the belief systems of other religions, being idolatrous, cannot bring the fulfilment they promise.<sup>133</sup> Therefore this subversion functions at the metaphysical and epistemological levels. Such subversion results in a call to turn from idols to the living God (Acts 14:15; 17:30).<sup>134</sup> The Christian gospel is also the fulfilment of the religious Other since the religious Other is rooted in the *imago Dei* and a recipient of God’s common grace. This Christian fulfilment has to be christological. Strange writes, using the language of Jeremiah, “the cracked cisterns of idolatry that bring only disillusionment, despair and unfulfilled desires are wonderfully fulfilled and surpassed in the fount of living water, Jesus Christ the Lord.”<sup>135</sup> For Strange such christological fulfilment is working at the metaphysical and epistemological levels revealing the knowledge of the true God and bringing a metaphysically new and distinct life through repentance and the forgiveness of sins. This repentance is reflected at the ethical level both in the life of the individual and/or Christian community as well as in the subversion and fulfilment of the ideals, hopes and beliefs of the surrounding cultures.<sup>136</sup> Strange writes,

As we [Christians] are those who are united to Christ, his story of relating to culture becomes ours. It’s a wonderful story because ultimately it’s about re-creation... That re-creation starts with us, on a personal level... But we’re part of something bigger too. Christians are those who are filled by the Spirit of Christ and take up the cultural mandate originally given to Adam. We can play our part in the task he was given.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 268. See also Bavinck, *Missions*, 136-137.

<sup>133</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 268.

<sup>134</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 268.

<sup>135</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 271.

<sup>136</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 268.

<sup>137</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 53-54.



In outlining subversive-fulfilment Strange makes two tantalising comments which he does not develop but which I believe might be significant for a deepened understanding and use of subversive-fulfilment as a framework for understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. First, Strange notes that subversive-fulfilment could be called “‘fulfilling subversion’.”<sup>138</sup> This implies that subversion and fulfilment are inherently related: wherever there is subversion there has to be fulfilment and vice versa. This suggests a flexibility in the ways in which this model could be utilised particularly where there is significant continuity between the Christian assembly and another religion, for example Judaism. Second, Strange notes that the Church embodies subversive-fulfilment in relation to the other religions.<sup>139</sup> Strange here is suggesting that subversive-fulfilment is an organic aspect of the Church’s being, that is, in engaging with the surrounding cultures its beliefs and actions will always seek to subvert and fulfil the surrounding cultures. Yet if Strange’s contention is correct, that subversive-fulfilment is an organic aspect of the Church’s being, then in the Church’s own internal engagements among its own members - who bring various aspects of their own prior identities and convictions into the Church - there will be manifested patterns of both subversion and fulfilment. I propose therefore that subversive-fulfilment has the potential as a model to illuminate and interpret not only extra-ecclesial engagements but also intra-ecclesial engagements and this has particular implications for the study of Acts 15 in this thesis.

As detailed in the next section of this chapter, Strange attempts to concretely

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<sup>138</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 273.

<sup>139</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 301-302.

demonstrate his thesis by interpreting Acts 17:16-34 through a subversive-fulfilment hermeneutic. Strange contends that Acts 17 is “a ‘touchstone’: a microcosm of the gospel of Jesus Christ encountering the religious ‘Other’ in public.”<sup>140</sup> Strange posits that this pericope reflects a biblical meta-narrative developed from Genesis 1-11 and which is part of “the theological DNA of a Reformed worldview not only in terms of a metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, but crucially in terms of an embryonic gospel narrative; that of creation-fall-redemption-consummation.”<sup>141</sup> For Strange, Acts 17 also provides links between the first and twenty-first century worlds since Paul is “describing the unique contours of a Christian worldview in contradistinction to other world views” and Paul’s primary revelatory source is Israel’s Scripture which is fulfilled in Christ.<sup>142</sup>

Strange connects the framework of subversive-fulfilment and its practical application to the engagement between the Church and other religions by using *possessio*. Directly dependent on Bavinck’s work regarding *possessio* - the framework which enables the Christian gospel to redemptively transform structures, customs and values of a culture, filling them with new, Christian, content, and in a new and Christ-

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<sup>140</sup> D. Strange, “Ministry in a Multi-Faith Society means Confrontation,” n.p. [cited October 31, 2016] [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/october-web-only/ministry-in-multi-faith-society-means-confrontation.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/october-web-only/ministry-in-multi-faith-society-means-confrontation.html).

<sup>141</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 52. Strange uses different terms for the Reformed perspective including “Protestant Reformed Orthodoxy” and “Reformed Evangelicalism.” He notes this as being faithful to biblical revelation, the ecumenical creeds of the Early Church, the five *solas* of the reformation, some creedal affirmations of Reformed orthodoxy, and several pan-evangelical statements.” Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 41-42. See Strange’s discussion and definition of Evangelicalism within a Reformed context in his work. Strange, *Salvation*, 3-14. See also Strange, “Perilous Exchange,” 92-94; Strange, *Plugged In*, 83-92; and D. Stevens, “God’s New Humanity in Diaspora: A Church of the Nations and for the Nations,” in *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World* (EMSS 23; eds. M. Pocock and E. Wan; Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2015), 110-117.

<sup>142</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 55, 56.

centred direction - Strange asserts that *possessio* provides the means to contextualise the Christian gospel as “the fulfilment (and therefore radical transfiguration) of an existing culture’s best hopes and intentions.”<sup>143</sup> Yet despite the significance of this concept to the subversive-fulfilment model I contend later in this chapter that Strange under-estimates the importance of *possessio* in applying the subversive-fulfilment model to the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures.

Strange then develops a practical application for a subversive-fulfilment engagement with other religions. He refers to these as the four Es.<sup>144</sup> They are: *enter*, in which the Christian steps into the other person’s worldview and discerns their story through “patient observing, watching and listening”;<sup>145</sup> *explore*, in which the Christian searches for the continuity, “elements of grace,” and the discontinuity, “the idols”;<sup>146</sup> *expose*, in which the Christian shows how the idols are destructive through “penetrating questions”;<sup>147</sup> and *evangelise*, in which the Christian subverts the idols and demonstrates how Jesus is the true fulfilment of what the idols promise to a person.<sup>148</sup> These four Es are not rigidly separated as if each must occur in turn

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<sup>143</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 284 n. 32.

<sup>144</sup> Originally cited in footnotes, in a later work Strange notes that former students are “test-driving them in their own different ministry contexts.” D. Strange, “Reflections on Gospel Contextualisation,” in T. Keller, *Loving the City: Doing Balanced Gospel-Centred Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2016), 94, 306 n. 8.

<sup>145</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 122.

<sup>146</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 120, 123-124.

<sup>147</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 125.

<sup>148</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 126.

before the other, but flexible.<sup>149</sup> Thus, depending on the knowledge and understanding of another culture, one might move directly to expose or evangelise.

Having examined the presuppositions, methodology and practical application of Strange's subversive-fulfilment it is now appropriate to consider how subversive-fulfilment has been used as a hermeneutical lens to read Scripture and also as a tool in a Christian-Muslim engagement.

### **3. Subversive-Fulfilment as a Hermeneutical Lens in Biblical Studies and in Mission**

#### **3.1. D. Strange: A Subversive-Fulfilment Reading of Acts 17:16-34**

Following Bavinck, Strange asserts that Acts 17:16-34 is "a, perhaps *the*, microcosm and instantiation not only of the theology of religions...but the missiological approach built upon such a theology of religions," "the example of subversive-fulfilment par excellence," and has as its purpose "to serve as an exemplar of the apostolic preaching to pagans."<sup>150</sup> Strange argues that by using subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens he will be able to provide "a more nuanced and faithful reading"

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<sup>149</sup> Strange writes, "So, we need to be flexible. These four steps give us a shape to our engagement, but there is also freedom to mix it up. We need to be both proactive and reactive - deliberately intentional and able to spontaneously improvise. This flexibility also means that while there is a kind of order to the steps, it's not always clear cut." Strange, *Plugged In*, 121.

<sup>150</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 286. Acts 17 is pivotal in Strange's thinking. He begins with Acts 17 to establish his doctrine of God and in another book he writes, "While I don't want to be guilty of having a 'canon within a canon,' I do think that Luke (under God's superintendence) intended this incident and the other apostolic encounters recorded in Acts to be exemplars in terms of the communication of the gospel in different cultural settings." See Strange, "Perilous Exchange," 102-103, Strange, "Reflections," 96-97, and Strange, *Plugged In*, 106.

of Acts 17.<sup>151</sup> For Strange this reading avoids the “diametrically opposed conclusions” of previous scholarship which cannot hold the continuity and discontinuity in tension because they over-emphasise one at the expense of the other.<sup>152</sup>

Drawing on the works of Pao and Pardigon and reading Acts through an Isaianic New Exodus perspective, Strange posits that Acts 17 has a strong “anti-idol polemic.”<sup>153</sup> This polemic emphasises “the transcendent uniqueness of Yahweh, the importance of his glory, the ability and power he has to save his people, the exposure and ‘trials’ of idols, and the summons to turn from idols, and their deleterious consequences, to the risen Christ.”<sup>154</sup> Strange argues that this polemic frames Paul’s negative response echoing Yahweh’s reaction in Deuteronomy 32. This polemic, says Strange, provides the continuity, “the appealing nature of the gospel,”<sup>155</sup> and the discontinuity, “the appeal for repentance in the face of universal judgement.”<sup>156</sup> Strange then addresses three “puzzling features” in the speech through a subversive-fulfilment perspective. He notes the previous and contradictory interpretations of δεισιδαιμονεστέρους (17:22) before presenting how subversive-fulfilment can hold in tension both the continuity, found in the Athenians’ innate

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<sup>151</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 287.

<sup>152</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 286, 287.

<sup>153</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 287.

<sup>154</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 287.

<sup>155</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 288.

<sup>156</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 288.

desire to worship, and the discontinuity, found in the Athenian forms of worship.<sup>157</sup> He then highlights Paul's proclamation as a contrast to the Athenians' idolatrous ignorance. This interprets the 'seeking' of the Athenians both negatively and pessimistically.<sup>158</sup> It is this, Strange asserts, that leads Paul to a clear proclamation of the Christian gospel.<sup>159</sup> Finally, Strange highlights the quotations from the poets Epimenides and Aratus.<sup>160</sup> He argues that Paul's use is neither an endorsement of a Stoic worldview nor a christianising of the poetry. Rather it provides a sophisticated demonstration of how there can be a simultaneous tension between ignorance and knowledge. Thus Paul's use of the poets reveals the "gropings of unbelief that show true knowledge of God, but [are] suppressed."<sup>161</sup> Strange's short work on Acts 17 enables a glimpse of how subversive-fulfilment can be used as a hermeneutical lens. His framework of idolatry as a hermeneutical key enables Strange to draw out Paul's strong response to the Athenians' worship but most especially enables Strange to provide a reading that accounts for both the continuity, in that the Athenians seek after something to worship, and the discontinuity, in that they seek after the wrong things. Such a reading can appropriately account for the tension.

Strange then introduces the four steps that allow for the "cultural engagement" between Paul and the Athenians.<sup>162</sup> Strange asserts that Paul 'enters' the Athenian

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<sup>157</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 288-289.

<sup>158</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 290. See BDAG, 1098 (a) 2.

<sup>159</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 108.

<sup>160</sup> Strange refers to the poets as 'pagans' but I think this is an unhelpful term in the Western context in which we are situated.

<sup>161</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 293.

<sup>162</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 119.

world in Acts 17:23 as he walks around looking at the different objects of worship.<sup>163</sup> Paul then ‘explores,’ finding the elements of grace (the Athenians are very religious) and the idols (the Athenians worship false gods).<sup>164</sup> He then exposes these idols “as destructive frauds” since they are made by humans.<sup>165</sup> This leads to the evangelism which is that Paul proclaims to the Athenians the God that they do not know.<sup>166</sup>

One element that is absent throughout Strange’s analysis of Acts 17 is the use of *possessio*. This is surprising since Strange understands *possessio* as both the framework and methodology for engaging with other worldviews. Such an inclusion might have provided a deeper demonstration of Strange’s argument for subversive-fulfilment as an effective hermenutical lens.

### 3.2. A. Harper: A Subversive-Fulfilment Reading of Mark’s Gospel

Building on Strange’s work I used subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens for reading Mark’s Gospel.<sup>167</sup> This work described subversive-fulfilment, gave a brief introduction to the Roman world and introduced the Priene Calendar Inscription as a framework by which to examine the continuity, discontinuity and tension between Christianity and the Roman world in the first century.<sup>168</sup> The continuity between

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<sup>163</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 119.

<sup>164</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 120.

<sup>165</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 120.

<sup>166</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 120.

<sup>167</sup> A. Harper, “The Christ and the Kingdom: A Subversive-Fulfilment Approach to the Gospel of Mark,” (M.A. diss.; King’s College, London, 2014), 5-10.

<sup>168</sup> The description of the emperor Augustus in the Priene Calendar Inscription includes the following: (i) one who was the agent of the gods and who manifested the presence of the gods on earth; (ii) the one who exceeds the anticipations of the peoples; (iii) the saviour of the peoples; (iv) the one who

Christian and Roman beliefs was revealed through the belief in the divine, the person of the saviour and the hopes of the people for a saviour. Yet there was also discontinuity since Roman belief was based on the emperor as saviour and as the means of blessing to the State and its peoples. Analysing four Markan pericopes the engagement between the Church and the Roman world was examined.<sup>169</sup> These pericopes included key narratives including the incipit and prologue, a miracle, an example of Jesus' teaching, and the crucifixion. They also included key Markan themes: christology, the kingdom of God and discipleship. Using subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens I drew out some fresh considerations for reading the gospel narrative. First, it provided a new means of understanding how Jesus, presented as the Son, is able simultaneously to subvert and fulfil the position and role of the emperor. Second, by using this lens, the theme of idolatry, a rare feature in Mark's Gospel, was discovered within a Jewish context, providing a helpful vindication for the use of a subversive-fulfilment reading. Third, the use of *possessio* provided a fresh approach to understanding the purpose of Mark's Gospel. Drawn together these point towards a potential purpose - to provide the means for the Church to navigate a complex engagement with Rome by speaking the language of Rome but investing those words with a christological meaning.

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ends all war; (v) the one who is greater than all those who came before him. Harper, "Subversive-Fulfilment," 13-14. See *OGIS* 458; Sherk, *Roman Documents*, 328-337; Danker, *Benefactor*, 215-222; Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 32-36; Evans, "Priene Calendar Inscription," 69; and Harrison, "Augustan Age of Grace," 79.

<sup>169</sup> The four pericopes are Mark 1:1-15; 5:1-20; 12:13-17; 15:16-39.



### 3.3. C. Flint: Christianity and Sunni Islam<sup>170</sup>

The scope of Christopher Flint's work, as one of Strange's students, was to examine the usefulness of subversive-fulfilment as a methodology for engaging with Sunni Islam.<sup>171</sup> This is a grouping whose written sources are "the Qu'ran and the strong hadiths" rather than folk-Islam.<sup>172</sup> Flint adopted the same presuppositions and methodology as Strange,<sup>173</sup> highlighting the Creator-creature distinction, the problem of idolatry,<sup>174</sup> and the gospel as subverting the non-Christian religion and promising fulfilment through Christ.<sup>175</sup> Flint's work involves a comparison of the "salvation-narrative" and "theological-propositional" contexts of Christianity and orthodox Sunni Islam.<sup>176</sup> He notes the continuity between Christianity and Sunni Islam by means of general revelation - that Islam recognises much about God and humanity that would be recognised by other religions.<sup>177</sup> He also notes a continuity that develops through remnantal and influential revelation, that is from Christianity's historical influence on Islam. Yet Flint also notes the discontinuity - Sunni Islam has distorted the Christian scriptures, most significantly Trinitarian theology, making "the two theological

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<sup>170</sup> C. Flint studied for an MTh at Oak Hill College under Daniel Strange. C. R. Flint, "How Does Christianity 'Subversively-Fulfil' Islam?" *SFM* 8 (2012): 776-822.

<sup>171</sup> Flint notes that Sunni Islam is "nominally representative of 80-90% of the worldwide Islamic community." Flint, "Subversively Fulfil," 790.

<sup>172</sup> Flint, "Subversively Fulfil," 791.

<sup>173</sup> Flint, "Subversively Fulfil," 779-783.

<sup>174</sup> Flint, "Subversively Fulfil," 778. Flint here notes, "This religious discontinuity extends even to the Jews who fail to rightly recognise Jesus: to reject Jesus is to reject YHWH." See also Wright, *Mission of God*, 131 and R. Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 26.

<sup>175</sup> Flint, "Subversively Fulfil," 790.

<sup>176</sup> Flint, "Subversively Fulfil," 792.

<sup>177</sup> Flint, "Subversively Fulfil," 797-803.

systems radically incompatible.”<sup>178</sup> This leads Flint to assert and develop the argument that Islam is a distortion of Christianity because it is an “idolatrous refashioning of divine revelation, formed through the dynamic dialectic of suppression and exchange.”<sup>179</sup> Flint then adapts the four Es as a means for the Church to engage with Sunni Islam formulating a three step engagement.<sup>180</sup> Step one is to affirm the deeper truth which the other person already accepts but which has been perverted. Step two is to expose the distortion; and step three to evangelise by demonstrating that the Christian gospel alone offers true satisfaction. This results in a call for repentance and true faith.<sup>181</sup> Flint’s application of subversive-fulfilment shows that this lens might be considered effective in missionary engagement. Using general revelation Flint recognised multiple continuities and points of contact. Through the framework of idolatry Flint could account for the discontinuities which could then be exposed as distorted elements of truth, that is the subversion. This provided the opportunity to point to Jesus as the fulfilment. Having applied the principles of subversive-fulfilment effectively within a missionary engagement Flint’s analysis demonstrates the potential for applying the same principles to the engagements in Acts and how it might help us perceive those engagements in a new and fresh way.

These three examples show how subversive-fulfilment as a methodology has been used in biblical interpretation and in contemporary missional theology and practice. These examples suggest that subversive-fulfilment can provide an appropriate

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<sup>178</sup> Flint, “Subversively Fulfil,” 792-797.

<sup>179</sup> Flint, “Subversively Fulfil,” 804.

<sup>180</sup> Flint gives a variety of examples in tabulated form. Flint, “Subversively Fulfil,” 806.

<sup>181</sup> Flint, “Subversively Fulfil,” 807-811.

hermeneutical lens for reading Scripture and a methodology for the Christian engagement with other religions. Whilst subversive-fulfilment has significant potential as a hermeneutical lens for understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and its surrounding cultures in Acts it is essential to acknowledge four potential weaknesses or limitations and to address them where possible.

#### **4. Potential Weaknesses and Limitations of Subversive-Fulfilment as a Hermeneutical Lens and Potential Answers**

4.1. A Systematic Theological Framework overlaid on a Biblical Narrative

Subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens and methodology is derived from a systematic theological framework and has a high dependency on two texts, Acts 17:16-34 and Romans 1:1-18, to establish its chief tenets. One potential criticism of this model concerns the degree to which a systematic framework is overlaid onto a specific biblical narrative, which could impose a particular meaning upon the text. The result of such an imposition might be the suppression or skewing of the original intention(s) of the narrative. Subversive-fulfilment is founded on a close engagement with Scripture, its overall meta-narrative and with specific texts, in particular Acts 17. From this reading the principles of Strange's presuppositions, methodology and practical application are developed and then placed within a systematic theological framework. It is at least arguable that a reading of Scripture generates the model, rather than the model being imposed on Scripture. Yet such a position continues to be open to critical questions. Beyond this, my contention is that subversive-fulfilment has the potential of enabling scholarship to appreciate and further develop Luke's positioning of the Christian assembly in relation to the surrounding cultures. This is significant because this is the issue that this thesis is addressing rather than whether

it is the best contemporary model of inter-religious encounter. Yet such a potential criticism of subversive-fulfilment highlights a potential danger, one that is shared with engaging with any biblical text, and that is the perennial danger of eisegesis rather than appropriate and careful exegesis. This thesis attempts to avoid this danger by engaging closely with an unbroken section of the narrative of Acts.

#### 4.2. An Over-dependence on Acts 17:16-34

Related to the potential criticism above a further issue is Strange's over-dependence on Acts 17:16-34. As noted in the outline of Strange's work he starts with Acts 17 because he sees this as an effective microcosm of the wider biblical meta-narrative. He then supports his thesis, beginning with Genesis 1-11 and moving through Scripture back to Acts 17.<sup>182</sup> Whilst it is commendable for Strange to draw upon the meta-narrative of Scripture, and to hold Acts 17 within that meta-narrative, it raises a central issue - that of interpreting and understanding a specific biblical text within its narrative and theological context. To demonstrate his perspective it would have been helpful for Strange to outline his narrative and theological understanding of Acts, to demonstrate his thesis using a wider section of Acts, or by using a series of 'model' pericopes from the Old and New Testament and therefore to engage with a range of different literature and passages. Whilst Strange does not undertake this, he does recognise the limitations in his work and that further work needs to be undertaken within the fields of missiology and Old and New Testament scholarship.<sup>183</sup> One of the goals of this thesis is to contribute to this further work.

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<sup>182</sup> This is a methodological approach used for understanding specific topics within Scripture. For example Beale highlights Isaiah 6 as a foundational model about idolatry before examining idolatry throughout Scripture. Beale, *Idolatry*, 36-70.

<sup>183</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 35, 337.

### 4.3. The Omission of Genesis 12 in Strange's Meta-Narrative

Strange's work adopts a meta-narrative predicated on Genesis 1:1-11:9, from creation through to the Tower of Babel. Strange's choice to finish at Genesis 11:9 is significant since through it Strange emphasises the essence and nature of rebellion and idolatry and the need for subversion prior to fulfilment.<sup>184</sup> My assertion is that Strange's perspective does not take into account the place of Genesis 12 in that structure which presents a different emphasis to Strange's.<sup>185</sup> Rhodes writes, "Scholars describe Genesis 12:1 as a kind of fulcrum text. Whereas Genesis 11:32 and the chapters that lead up to it are concerned with the history of all humankind and our disobedience and rebellion toward our Creator, Genesis 12:1 begins the story and history of Israel, as well as the creation of a covenantal relationship with God."<sup>186</sup>

Genesis is structured using the *tôlêdôt*, an account, or line, of descendants.<sup>187</sup> The

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<sup>184</sup> Widbin writes of Babel, "Placed here, the episode provides an unhappy ending to the story of God's up-and-down dealings with humanity before Israel. Babel deprives the reader of all optimism that the human race will eventually turn to the Creator on its own." R. B. Widbin, "Salvation for People Outside Israel's Covenant," in *Through No Fault of their Own: The Fate of Those who Have Never Heard* (eds. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991), 75. See also G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; eds. D. A. Hubbard and G. W. Barker; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), 209, 244-245; and Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 28.

<sup>185</sup> Strange does refer to Genesis 12 but does not address it in detail in relation to Genesis 1-11. See Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 185-188. This is reflected when examining scholarship of Genesis of which a number of works finish at the end of Genesis 11. For example, C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion, S.J.; London: SPCK, 1984); R. S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1-11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (Oxford: OUP, 1998); D. Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11* (BST; ed. J. A. Motyer; Leicester: IVP, 1990); and J. Calvin, *Sermons of Genesis: Chapters 1-11* (trans. R. R. McGregor; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

<sup>186</sup> Rhodes, *Where Nations Meet*, 36. See also S. Hauerwas and W. H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1989), 57.

<sup>187</sup> V. P. Hamilton, "Tôlêdôt," *NIDOTTE*, 2:459. This language occurs frequently in Genesis; cf. Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2. See also B. K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 17-21.

episode of Babel is found at the end of such an account (Gen. 11:9) and on its own would rightly account for Strange's conclusion.<sup>188</sup> Yet the two *tôlēdôt* following this section provide a careful qualification for interpreting Genesis 11.<sup>189</sup> The first is that of the descendants of Shem (11:10-26). This account occurs in the context of Noah's words of blessing (Gen. 9:26-10:1) and draws out the nature of promise and blessing and creates expectations; how and when will the words of Yahweh be fulfilled? The second account (11:27-25:11) introduces Abram who is given three promises by Yahweh (Gen. 12:1-3).<sup>190</sup> These promises draw on the previous *tôlēdôt* through similar language, blessing and cursing, but more significantly by drawing upon the promise of that blessing. This begins a new and creative divine work with a powerful trajectory for the scriptural narrative since it declares that through Abram there will be a universal blessing for all peoples; this is significant both for Israel and the nations in Luke-Acts.<sup>191</sup> It also creates further expectations; how and when will these words of Yahweh be fulfilled?<sup>192</sup> These promises for blessing the whole earth

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<sup>188</sup> Babel is found at the end of the *tôlēdôt* about the sons of Noah (Gen. 10:1).

<sup>189</sup> Currid writes that "Genesis 11:1-9 is subservient to the main theme of the section which begins at chapter 10 - the dispersion of people over the earth. Secondly, the structure of chapters 10-11 fits into a larger literary piece: here we see God making a multitude out of one people, but in the following chapters he chooses one...out of the multitude of nations." J. D. Currid, *Genesis* (vol. 1; Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003), 238. For other scholarship that sees 11:1-9 within a wider structure see W. Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta, Georg.: John Knox Press, 1982), 106; Waltke, *Genesis*, 20; K. N. Gruneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:1-3 in its Narrative Context* (BZAW 332; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 123, 136.

<sup>190</sup> Wenham, *Genesis*, 253; and Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 49.

<sup>191</sup> C. H. H. Scobie, "Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology," *TynB* 44 (1993): 285-286; J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 109; J. S. Derouche, "The Blessing-Commission, The Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," *JETS* 56 (2013): 225; Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 28; and J. D. Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (NSBT 14; ed. D. A. Carson; Leicester: Apollos, 2003), 61.

<sup>192</sup> In the Noachide words it is Japheth who is blessed by living within the tents of Shem (Gen. 9:27).

become the bedrock for reading the rest of Genesis,<sup>193</sup> the Old Testament, and Luke-Acts with its overt connections to Abraham (Luke 3:8; 13:16; 19:9-10; Acts 7:2-8).<sup>194</sup> Tannehill writes, “One of the richest ways of reading Luke and Acts is as the story of God’s promise to Israel - a promise given to Abraham and made more specific to David - concerning the salvation of Israel through a Messiah who will be the savior [sic] of all nations.”<sup>195</sup> These two *tôlêdôt* qualify Strange’s reading of Genesis 1-11 and create a lens in which promise and fulfilment, rather than idolatry and subversion, are dominant though as has been noted subversion is an inherent part of this fulfilment. Such a reading is significant for it suggests the potential for modifications to the subversive-fulfilment model as it engages with the narrative of Acts.

#### 4.4. Strange’s Portrayal of Idolatry and its Application

Strange’s assertion that idolatry is the “primary Old Testament category of the religious Other” and “*the* hermeneutical master key with which to unlock the nature of non-Christian religion and religions” demonstrates its fundamental significance to his overall thesis.<sup>196</sup> Within his work Strange interprets the term ‘idolatry’ broadly through the use of the term ‘false faith’ along with its identifiable markers already

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<sup>193</sup> Derouchie, “Toledot Structure,” 228-229.

<sup>194</sup> V. P. Hamilton, “Genesis: Theology of,” *NIDOTTE*, 4:663; D. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1-9:50* (BECNT; ed. M. Silva; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), 305-306; W. S. Kurz, “Promise and Fulfillment in Hellenistic Jewish Narratives and in Luke and Acts,” in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke’s Narrative Claim upon Israel’s Legacy* (ed. D. P. Moessner; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press, 1999), 151; and Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation*, 137.

<sup>195</sup> Tannehill, “Lukan Narrative,” 325, 327.

<sup>196</sup> His italics. Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 205; cf. 98, 156. Bavinck, “Prolegomena,” 175. Strange notes that his own understanding of other religions and subversive-fulfilment is “largely a description and re-articulation of their [Kraemer and Bavinck] articulations.” Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 238. Despite this Strange does not agree with them in everything. For example, see Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 39 n. 39, 239 n. 4.

mentioned.<sup>197</sup>

Although Strange argues that this interpretation of idolatry is an accurate depiction of the scriptural portrayal of idolatry I would argue that Strange's interpretation of idolatry needs to be carefully nuanced and modified. Whilst Strange provides examples of the sharp dichotomy between faithfulness and idolatry - for example Israel as faithful versus Israel as idolatrous or Israel as faithful and the nations as idolatrous - nowhere does he address the scriptural portrayal of idolatry *within* the covenant people of God in either the Old or New Testament. Such a perspective is essential to reading the scriptural narrative and is recognised by Wright who asks:

Why must we identify and condemn idolatry (as the prophets and apostles did), not only as it presents itself among those who do not yet acknowledge the living God *but also (and even more so) as it works its insidious poison among those who do claim to know and worship the God of the Bible and who name the name of Christ (recalling that the prophets condemn idolatry in Israel far more often than the nations)?*<sup>198</sup>

Such an interpretation of idolatry as being found within the people of God is significant because it substantially modifies Strange's understanding of idolatry and enables this thesis to provide a potential fresh reading of Acts 15.

To demonstrate this within the covenant people of God I will consider the Old Testament narrative regarding King Solomon which provides a clear example of this nuanced scriptural portrayal of idolatry. I will also assess whether Strange's identifiable markers, by which he defines idolatry, are readily recognised within this narrative about Solomon. These markers include a covenant unfaithfulness seen in

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<sup>197</sup> See in section 2.2.3. in this thesis.

<sup>198</sup> My italics. Wright, *Mission of God*, 136.



the acceptance of non-scriptural words; a self-determined autonomy which results in doubt, disobedience, and disbelief; the mimicking of true worship to something other than God, and the blurring of the Creator-creature distinction.<sup>199</sup>

In 2 Samuel 7 Solomon is located within a covenant framework in the narrative (cf. 2 Sam. 23:1-7).<sup>200</sup> He is the one who will build the temple, who will do wrong, but who will never lose the love of Yahweh.<sup>201</sup> Later Solomon is appointed by his father, David, to be King over Israel.<sup>202</sup> Despite the charge King David gives Solomon to be faithful to Yahweh by being obedient to Torah,<sup>203</sup> along with Solomon asking the LORD for wisdom and building the temple,<sup>204</sup> almost from the beginning Solomon exhibits covenant unfaithfulness. Despite scriptural commands regarding marriage to many wives and inter-marriage with the nations (Deut. 17:17), Solomon exhibits the marker of self-determined autonomy which results in disbelief of Yahweh's words and disobedience, for Solomon marries an Egyptian as part of an alliance. This action is so remarkable that Nehemiah uses it as an example for the people not to marry saying: "Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his

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<sup>199</sup> In this example Strange's identifiable marker of not recognising the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is not applicable.

<sup>200</sup> Firth notes that though the word does not occur in this section, "it is so full of covenantal language that one must conclude that it establishes a covenant with David." D. G. Firth, *1 and 2 Samuel* (AOTC 8; eds. D. W. Baker and G. J. Wenham; Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 387.

<sup>201</sup> 2 Samuel 7:1-16. Firth, *Samuel*, 385; W. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville, Kent.: John Knox Press, 1990), 255; W. Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary vol. 8; ed. S. E. Balentine; Macon, Georg.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000), 23.

<sup>202</sup> 1 Kings 1:28-31.

<sup>203</sup> 1 Kings 2:2-4.

<sup>204</sup> 1 Kings 3:10-15.

God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women” (Neh. 13:26). Whilst the narrative does acknowledge that “Solomon showed his love for the LORD” it also notes that “he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.”<sup>205</sup> In later life Solomon explicitly disobeys Yahweh, marrying wives from the surrounding nations. Through listening to them and highlighting the marker of the acceptance of non-scriptural words the narrative remarks that Solomon turns his heart from Yahweh by explicitly following other gods, which is the marker of covenant unfaithfulness. This results in Solomon building alternative sacrificial sites for other gods whereby true worship is mimicked.<sup>206</sup> Yet, despite this rejection of Yahweh Solomon is allowed a continued reign because of the covenant Yahweh establishes.<sup>207</sup> Thus the narrative portrays Solomon throughout his life as simultaneously idolatrous - self-autonomous, listening to words other than Yahweh’s, disbelieving and disobeying Yahweh, establishing false worship, and exhibiting covenant unfaithfulness - and yet also bound covenantally to Yahweh. Brueggemann writes, “According to editorial arrangements, we are meant to conclude that the change from Solomon’s first love [Yahweh] to his later, decadent love [his wives] is a matter of the aging process...We have, however, seen enough to know that Solomon, all along, kept these two loves alive.”<sup>208</sup>

Such a reading provides both coherence and difference with Strange’s definition of

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<sup>205</sup> 1 Kings 3:1-3. Schnabel notes that “Contact with these foreign nations is problematic as they may seduce Israel to apostasy.” E. J. Schnabel, “Israel, the People of God, and the Nations,” *JETS* 45 (2002): 38.

<sup>206</sup> 1 Kings 11:1-2, 4-8.

<sup>207</sup> 1 Kings 11:34-39.

<sup>208</sup> Brueggemann, *Kings*, 141.

idolatry. The coherence is provided by the presence of Strange's identifiable markers - covenant unfaithfulness seen in the acceptance of non-scriptural words and a self-determined autonomy which results in disobedience, and disbelief; and the mimicking of true worship to something other than Yahweh. Yet the Solomon narrative also suggests differences. First this narrative demonstrates that Scripture portrays a more nuanced understanding of idolatry than that which Strange posits. Rather than Israel as faithful versus Israel as idolatrous or Israel as faithful and the nations as idolatrous - Strange's position - Scripture portrays a covenant people of God who are believing and disbelieving or faithful and idolatrous simultaneously. The second distinction is that Strange's assertion that false faith excludes the presence of true faith cannot be supported. The Solomon narrative demonstrates that both false faith and true faith are simultaneously present and therefore Strange's identifiable markers should only be understood to detect idolatry or an idolatrous trajectory rather than false faith.

My contention is that Strange's definition of idolatry, in its current form, only works for the nations outside of Israel and of synagogue influence and needs substantial modification so that it can account for and incorporate those professing to be the people of God both in the Old and New Testament.<sup>209</sup> This modification is significant to this thesis since it relates directly to how Israel and those nations associated with

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<sup>209</sup> Strange, "Perilous Exchange," 122. Other scholars do not address this issue. Beale also omits Judaism when he considers the engagement between the Christian assembly and other religions in the New Testament and Parkes, assessing Christianity and Judaism historically, does not comment on the ideas of repentance or idolatry. See G. K. Beale, "Other Religions in New Testament Theology," in *Biblical Faith and Other Religions: An Evangelical Assessment* (ed. D. W. Baker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2004), 80; and J. Parkes, "Two Religions: Two Chosen People," in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths: A Reader* (eds. A. Race and P. M. Hedges; London: SCM Press, 2009), 116-121.

the synagogue are portrayed throughout Acts. Equally importantly, this affects how some of the Christian assembly might be being portrayed in the intra-ecclesial dispute in Acts 15.<sup>210</sup> This necessary modification is a reminder that as subversive-fulfilment engages with the narrative it may itself need to be further nuanced or modified

#### 4.5. *Possessio* as the Heart of Subversive-Fulfilment

For Bavinck and Strange the two key roles of *possessio* are to redemptively transform the structures, customs and values of a surrounding culture by filling them with new, Christian, content, and in a new and Christ-centred direction and to be a guide that steers the Christian gospel between the twin dangers of extractionism - the Christian community living apart from the culture - and syncretism - the Christian community merging with the surrounding culture including its beliefs and practices. The significance of this concept to both Bavinck's and Strange's theology and practical application of missiology should not be understated since it forms the core of the means by which the Church is to effectively engage with other culture. Yet despite the significance of *possessio* to Strange's methodology his engagement with it is limited and as noted earlier in this thesis it is absent from his subversive-fulfilment reading of Paul's engagement in Athens (Acts 17:16-34).<sup>211</sup>

My contention is that although *possessio* is not utilised sufficiently by Strange it

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<sup>210</sup> See Runesson's work who posits Acts 15 as an intra-ecclesial dispute. Runesson, "Jewish-Christian Relations," 131-132.

<sup>211</sup> It appears once in his article and only four times in his book taking 284 pages to first be mentioned. See D. Strange, "For their Rock is not as our Rock: The Gospel as the 'Subversive Fulfillment' of the Religious Other," *JETS* 56 (2013): 394; Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 284, 301, 322-324, 328-329.

should be considered as the fundamental idea of the subversive-fulfilment model. In this thesis I contend that it is through the use of *possessio* - and not, as Strange argues, idolatry - that the subversive-fulfilment model identifies the continuity between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures - that is the points of contact found in the beliefs, structures, customs and values of the surrounding cultures. It is then through the use of *possessio* that those points of contact are fulfilled christologically. As these points of contact within the culture are captured christologically, they are simultaneously subverted since they are filled with new, Christian, content, and in a new and Christ-centred direction. The result of *possessio* interacting with the metaphysical and epistemological beliefs of the surrounding cultures is a tension between the Christian assembly and the surrounding culture. This tension is manifested in the Christian call to ethical change and the response of the surrounding cultures to it. Thus by using *possessio* as a lens both the tension between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures and idolatry can be identified, clearly understood, and accounted for. Consequently in this thesis *possessio* will be placed at the forefront of the subversive-fulfilment reading of my chosen section of narrative - Acts 13:13-17:34. The use of *possessio* in this way may mean applying modifications to Strange's overall perception and application of the subversive-fulfilment model.

## **5. Chapter Summary**

In chapter one I demonstrated that for varying reasons previous scholarship had not adequately addressed the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts. My contention was that a fresh approach to understanding the engagement was needed. The main task of this second chapter

has been to demonstrate the appropriateness of using subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens. To accomplish this I have situated subversive-fulfilment within its historical and theological context and outlined the works of the two Dutch Reformed theologians and missiologists, Kraemer and Bavinck, who have strongly influenced Strange's work on subversive-fulfilment. Their work has much similarity. Both Kraemer and Bavinck's works assert that because of God's general revelation and common grace other religions reveal something of God. This is the continuity. Yet, both agree that other religions do not lead naturally to the revelation of Christ and neither can they be preparatory works for the gospel proclamation. Kraemer asserts this because of the anthropocentric, not divine, origin of non-Christian religions and Bavinck because of idolatry. This creates the discontinuity. Both discern a resulting tension but also points of contact by which the engagement may develop. Both also recognise that an effective engagement must occur at the level of the metaphysical, reflected in the beliefs and religiosity of the surrounding cultures about the divine, the epistemological level, the nature of knowledge and revelation about the metaphysical, and at the ethical level, the way in which the metaphysical and epistemological are made manifest affecting the structures, values and customs of the culture. This engagement must occur with a good awareness of the person's culture, and in a manner of love. Fundamental to Bavinck, and distinct from Kraemer, is Bavinck's application of idolatry as the means for the discontinuity and his use of *possessio*. Both of these Strange adopts.

Strange's work accentuates the role of idolatry as the hermeneutical key for interpreting other religions. His markers for interpreting idolatry include covenant unfaithfulness seen in the acceptance of non-scriptural words and a self-determined

autonomy which results in doubt, disobedience, and disbelief; the mimicking of true worship to something other than God; the blurring of the Creator-creature distinction, and in the New Testament not recognising the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is. For Strange idolatry identifies the continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and other religions. His subversive-fulfilment model provides points of contact by which the continuities and discontinuities can be effectively and sensitively engaged with, and it provides a way in which the Christian gospel can subvert and fulfil the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical convictions and practices of the surrounding cultures. It also accounts for and holds in continuous tension the continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and other religions. To do this Strange draws upon Bavinck's model of *possessio*. The practical application of subversive-fulfilment is expressed in the four Es. A person *enters* into a conversation and *explores* the other religion looking for points of contact. They affirm the continuities and *expose* the discontinuities caused by idolatry before *evangelising*, calling the person or group to repentance. This use of subversive-fulfilment as a methodology has been used to engage with Scripture and for missionary engagement. Therefore I provided examples of this. Strange's and my own work on the biblical narrative demonstrated that subversive-fulfilment has the potential to be an effective lens for engaging with Scripture across different genres and drawing out fresh ways in which to understand the texts. Flint's application of subversive-fulfilment within a missionary context demonstrated its simplicity and effectiveness most clearly demonstrated in three steps - affirm, expose, evangelise.

The final part of this chapter discussed potential limitations and weaknesses with subversive-fulfilment. Four key elements emerged from this that will be important for

this thesis. First, by finishing his foundational biblical meta-narrative at Genesis 11 Strange creates an emphasis on subversion. Had he finished at Genesis 12 then the emphasis would have been promise and fulfilment. This raises the question as to whether there is a flexibility to this hermeneutical lens to be applied to the text either way, as subversive-fulfilment, or fulfilling-subversion, dependent on the context of the engagement. Second, there is a danger in Strange's dependence on establishing subversive-fulfilment from a limited range of texts with the risk that he takes Acts 17 out of its narrative context. To establish subversive-fulfilment more fully as an effective hermeneutical lens a wider range of texts need to be read through this perspective. Third, whilst Strange's markers of idolatry are useful for discerning idolatry his overall approach is not sophisticated or nuanced enough to deal with idolatry within the covenant people of God both in the Old and the New Testament. Fourth, Strange appears to underestimate the role of *possessio*. My contention is that *possessio* is the central feature of this methodology through which the continuity is identified and by which the discontinuity is created in the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. These final two - idolatry and *possessio* - both suggest that there may also be further modifications to be made to the subversive-fulfilment model as it interacts with the narrative of Acts.

Having examined and analysed subversive-fulfilment as a potential hermeneutical lens the next chapter outlines some context which provides a useful and necessary foundation prior to reading a section of unbroken narrative in Acts using subversive-fulfilment. The first is the introduction of my dialogue partners in reading this section of narrative, Craig Keener and C. Kavin Rowe. The second is a theological orientation to Luke-Acts drawing out some key themes which are relevant to gaining



a deeper understanding of what is occurring in the narrative sections that are going to be examined through subversive-fulfilment. It is to this we now turn.

## CHAPTER THREE: SETTING THE CONTEXT

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of the previous two chapters has been to demonstrate that previous scholarship has been unable to adequately understand and explain the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures of Judaism, the nations and the Roman State. This inability to coherently address the engagements demonstrates the need for a fresh approach, one that complements the strengths of previous scholarship but which addresses their weaknesses and limitations. That fresh approach is subversive-fulfilment. This third chapter introduces two areas which are important for providing the appropriate contexts for understanding the application of subversive-fulfilment within the extended section of my chosen narrative in the latter half of Acts: Acts 13:13-17:34. This section of narrative is significant because it provides examples of varied and nuanced engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures which is the crux of my research question. Further, this section is regularly utilised by scholarship as has been demonstrated in chapters one and two.

The first area of importance introduces my two main dialogue partners, Craig Keener and C. Kavin Rowe. As in chapter one, where I surveyed ten different readings of previous scholarship, Keener and Rowe have been chosen because their work has been influential upon the study of Acts, it provides a significant analysis of the engagements, and both scholars apply their analysis to much, or all, of Acts 13:13-17:34. These two academics are distinct from previous scholarship since they each provide a richer and more integrated approach for understanding and explaining the

engagement than the previous scholarship outlined in chapter one. Keener and Rowe are contemporary scholars of Luke-Acts whose recent publications are significant landmarks and whose current works also provide contrasts: Keener's work is a highly detailed commentary using a nuanced version of Acts as apologia, and Rowe's work a monograph detailing the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world using a nuanced view of the collision that develops from two distinct and competing worldviews.

The second area of importance is a theological orientation to Luke-Acts with particular reference to three theological themes which provide a framework through which to read the narrative of Luke-Acts and which underlie the section of narrative under examination. These themes are: the theological character of Luke-Acts, the fulfilment of Scripture and covenant promises in Luke-Acts, and covenantal faithfulness and repentance in Luke-Acts.

## **2. An Introduction to C. Keener and C. Kavin Rowe**

### **2.1. C. Keener: Acts as an Intra-Ecclesial Apologia**

Keener's recent multi-volume work is rightly acknowledged as "a new standard" for research in Acts.<sup>212</sup> As well as a detailed commentary on Acts, Keener provides a number of excursuses which detail essential information for understanding both Acts and the first-century world.<sup>213</sup> Keener employs a social-historical approach to understand "how the text would have functioned as a communication between the

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<sup>212</sup> Mittelstadt, "Keener's Acts," 2.

<sup>213</sup> For example Volume 1 includes: "Ancient Physicians," "Background for Luke's View of the Spirit," "God's Kingdom in Early Jewish and Christian Teaching," "The Sabbath in Early Judaism," "Zealots," "Astrology," "Wine and Excessive Drinking."

first author(s) and the historically likeliest sort of audiences for which the author(s) published works.”<sup>214</sup> Keener positions Acts as a “historical monograph” but one which cannot be separated from the strong theological narrative found within it.<sup>215</sup> For Keener the nature of Acts is that of an apologetic but in contrast to some previous scholarship Keener positions Acts as an intra-ecclesial apologetic with two inter-twined purposes:<sup>216</sup> a prescriptive model of rhetoric and argumentation for later Christians to follow should they be brought before the authorities or need to engage in “public apologetics,”<sup>217</sup> particularly with the surrounding cultures;<sup>218</sup> and an apologetic for mission to the nations to allow for the inclusion of Gentile Christians.<sup>219</sup> Whilst emphasising these two purposes Keener does integrate other apologetic views provided by other scholars.<sup>220</sup> Such an apologetic perspective provides Keener a means of examining not only the authorial intention but also Luke’s “careful strategies” for engagement between the Church and other cultures. This he says,

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<sup>214</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 17. See also 4, 23, 496.

<sup>215</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 4, 435. Thus the primary character of Keener’s work contains a “heavy emphasis on social and historical context” whilst not disregarding the theological. Keener, *Introduction*, 3, 492. Keener is aware of the limitations of his work and highlights them. See Keener, *Introduction*, 5-16.

<sup>216</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 51, 435. For the audience see pages 426-428.

<sup>217</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 161. Keener repeats this in other places. For example, “Acts is heavily apologetic (and some of its strategies might help later Christians on trial).” Keener, *Introduction*, 436. See also pages 437, 440, 442.

<sup>218</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 442-443.

<sup>219</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 443, 465. Keener, *Introduction*, 441-458, 461. Keener writes, “Although we may view mission and apologetic as distinct purposes, for Luke they were closely intertwined. Luke’s apologetic was a concrete expression of mission in his own context, and it was often mission that generated the need for the apologetic.” Keener, *Introduction*, 438. See also C. S. Keener, “The Spirit and the Mission of the Church in Acts 1-2,” *JETS* 62 (2019): 25. Such a perspective is more nuanced than Alexander’s Type I apologetic. See Alexander, *Acts*, 184.

<sup>220</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 435-436. For example, defending Paul’s legacy due to his imprisonment and/or execution, presenting Christianity as a harmless sect to Rome, and even as a polemic.

“offers some fruitful directions we have rarely pursued.”<sup>221</sup> The engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures derives from the theological theme of mission and “the natural expression of the Spirit’s empowerment (1:8).”<sup>222</sup> Such engagements are included by Luke, says Keener, as prescriptive models of a variety of cross-cultural missions which provides the original audience a means of understanding contextualisation.<sup>223</sup> From this emphasis Keener posits two Lukan goals - the growth of the multicultural Church and that addressing cross-cultural conflicts leads to cross-cultural unity.<sup>224</sup>

Throughout Keener’s work there is a strong emphasis on the continuity through the fulfilment of God’s promises. This, he proposes, is achieved by Luke including direct biblical quotations, typology and allusions,<sup>225</sup> using Scripture to provide a theological context for events he narrates,<sup>226</sup> and historical retrospectives (7:2-53; 13:16-23).<sup>227</sup> Through these Luke develops the theme of continuity both of God’s activity in the world,<sup>228</sup> and “to establish that the Christian assembly is the promised fulfilment and

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<sup>221</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 458.

<sup>222</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 506-507, 509.

<sup>223</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 510. Keener also applies this to the modern day reader writing, “Acts addresses the conflicts of shifting cultures and provides models for contextualisation, and readers who so use it are rediscovering an approach to Acts that appears in keeping with the work’s own emphases.”

<sup>224</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 525.

<sup>225</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 483, 485.

<sup>226</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 489.

<sup>227</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 483.

<sup>228</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 485.

therefore a continuity of Israel and God's plan."<sup>229</sup> Such continuity provides the Lukan foundation for the mission to the Gentiles (Luke 24:47) and has a strong eschatological emphasis which is significant for Keener's understanding of the nature of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures.<sup>230</sup>

Yet, Keener recognises that Acts suggests a discontinuity between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures, though "only where necessary and where confirmed by clear divine sanction."<sup>231</sup> For example Keener writes, "Whatever the degree of, and purpose for, its differences, in any case, Luke uses the promise-fulfilment motif in competition with other visions of Israel's faith."<sup>232</sup> Keener applies this idea of fulfilment and challenge in a contemporary article to Jesus enabling people to "better understand how Jesus fulfilled or challenged his contemporaries' expectations for him."<sup>233</sup> Yet, for Keener, the discontinuity, with its resulting tension and conflict, does not have a politically subversive character in the present but one that is socially transformative.<sup>234</sup> Keener establishes this distinction through his

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<sup>229</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 483.

<sup>230</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 485, 507.

<sup>231</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 491.

<sup>232</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 485.

<sup>233</sup> C. S. Keener, "Jesus and Parallel Jewish and Greco-Roman Figures," in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (TENTS 9; eds. S. E. Porter and A. W. Pitts; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 85.

<sup>234</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 447-448. Earlier in his commentary Keener writes, "I believe that Luke intended Acts as a model, in some respects, for Christian missionaries after Paul, who might likewise use signs, debate, and even awkward legal situations as opportunities for public proclamation. To equip his audience for awkward legal situations, however... Luke also provides a model for public apologetics. Apologetics could include debating Jewish scribes or Athenian philosophers, but in the cities of the empire (and especially colonies) *it especially involved demonstrating that one's faith did not subvert the Roman order. Luke presents the church and its leaders as a public group, unafraid of*

application of the Lukan eschatological framework to the narrative:

The challenge belongs to the future (Acts 1:6-7; 3:19-21; Luke 21:25-28, 31), not so much the present. Even with reference to the future, Romans at the beginning of the empire looked for a future golden age. Christ supplants Caesar in that vision, and Christian monotheism could not brook Caesar worship in the present (Luke 20:20; Acts 12:22-23); but Luke suggests this fundamental disagreement in as conciliatory a manner as possible. Although it is certainly true, as some scholars have argued, that the eschatological vision of a just and caring community (cf., e.g., Luke 18:22-30; Acts 2:44-45) and a greater kingdom lend themselves readily to challenge societal injustice and the mores of Roman imperialism, this is not an application that Luke would dare offer explicitly...His alternative kingdom belongs to an eschatological dimension that transforms society instead of challenging Rome politically in the present.<sup>235</sup>

In holding such a position Keener acknowledges that there are situations in Acts which might appear to portray the Christian assembly as politically subversive, particularly those situations in which a tension develops with the surrounding cultures, but which are, in fact, socially transformative.<sup>236</sup> By holding this perspective where unrest does occur in the narrative between the Church and the surrounding nations Keener asserts that the narrative defends the Church by showing that the tension is created by the Church's accusers and not because the Church is politically subversive. Thus Keener argues, "a major emphasis in Acts is Luke's political apologetic, arguing that, contrary to accusations (Acts 17:7; 24:5), Christians were

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*debate and certainly not the sort of subversive and secretive sect that the Romans deplored.*" Keener, *Introduction*, 161. My italics. Keener's social transformation argument is very similar to that of Pickett and Marshall. See Pickett, "Luke," 15; and I. H. Marshall, "Luke's 'Social' Gospel: The Social Theology of Luke-Acts," in *Transforming the World? The Gospel and Social Responsibility* (eds. J. A. Grant and D. A. Hughes; Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 120-121. Holladay also holds to early Christianity being portrayed as politically harmless and socially transformative. He, like Keener, has a powerful sense of fulfilment of Old Testament promises and therefore an emphasis on continuity as well as holding to a nuanced apologia perspective. Holladay, *Acts*, 50-52, 55-58. See also V. Samuel, "Mission as Transformation," in *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (eds. V. Samuel and C. Sugden; Carlisle: Regnum Books, 1999), 227-235.

<sup>235</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 448.

<sup>236</sup> Yet despite this, Keener acknowledges that Luke "cannot suppress some tension" nor the "difficult job in exonerating Paul." Keener, *Introduction*, 446-447.

not a subversive movement out to undermine the State. Luke may undermine the larger society's values and gods, but any public disorder in his narrative is blamed on the Christians' enemies."<sup>237</sup>

There is much in Keener's work that is helpful for understanding the Lukan narrative and considering the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. The substantial issue is Keener's claim that the assembly is not politically subversive but socially transformative.<sup>238</sup> At one level Keener is correct; the assembly is not being portrayed as a replacement for the political structures in situ within the first-century world. Yet, I would contend that Keener unhelpfully nuances his argument. I agree with Keener that Luke is not politically subversive in that, when defined as Keener defines 'politically subversive', Luke does not conceive the Christian assembly nor the kingdom of God as an earthly or physical kingdom challenging Rome in the present.<sup>239</sup> I also agree that the Church, as the gospel, is depicted as socially transformative in the narrative. Yet whilst the Church is depicted as socially transformative this has to be recognised as having a strongly subversive element which impacts the political, social, and religious life of

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<sup>237</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 498. Such undermining is rightly recognised by Sordi. Referring to Catullus and Virgil she writes, "Their cry from the soul from some kind of divine salvation is one that can never be fully answered and, indeed, was not wholly quieted either when Augustus finally put an end to the civil wars or when the new era of the princeps brought peace to the empire. The yearning for a new relationship with the deity, the hopes fed by ancient rites and mysteries adopted from the East, the sacred concept of the history of the Etruscans and Romans, the deep-felt need for liberation from sin and death and from the fatigues and difficulties of human life, all these come together in the invocation of the living God. And the God who is invoked is He who visits human beings and makes them worthy of communion with him, in Catullus' image of the wedding feast, the God who renews mankind and mysteriously makes him a participant in His own life." Sordi, *Roman Empire*, 154.

<sup>238</sup> Others who have reviewed Keener's work identify the issues of Keener's work as being "too exhaustive," "difficult to navigate," and an over-emphasis on the social-history of Acts. Mittelstadt, "Keener's Acts," 16.

<sup>239</sup> Kim also maintains that a physical kingdom is not in view in Luke-Acts. Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 114.



the surrounding cultures. Keener, I propose, recognises this in the passage cited above. For example, “Christ *supplants* Caesar,” “Christian monotheism *could not brook* Caesar worship in the present,” and the values of the kingdom of God “lend themselves readily to *challenge* societal injustice and the *mores of Roman imperialism*.”<sup>240</sup> As clearly, Keener highlights that the Christian assembly is not out to “undermine the state” but “may undermine the larger society’s values and gods.”<sup>241</sup> Such a perspective creates a division that is not readily recognised in the first-century world where the political aims of the State were intimately inter-related with its values and religious beliefs.<sup>242</sup> Johnson writes, “Because religion was public, it was also necessarily political in character. Matters of religion were also matters of state.”<sup>243</sup> Such a perspective can be seen in the Roman world certainly since the time of Augustus, under whom the imperial cult was formalised and to whom the word ‘divus’ was regularly attached, gradually coming to mean “man made into god.”<sup>244</sup> By the mid 60s C.E. the emperor, as the embodiment of the divine, ruled through the intertwining of *both* political and religious power, fulfilling the desires of

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<sup>240</sup> My italics. See also J. Riegar, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 45.

<sup>241</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 498. For example, in respect to Paul, Keener writes, “Thus Jewish rabble-rousers...often started the trouble...or vested economic interests vied against Paul, as when some falsely denounced him as a non-Roman because he was forced to cast out a demon.” Keener, *Introduction*, 445, 446-447.

<sup>242</sup> This is something that Rowe correctly notes. Rowe, *World*, 4. See also A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (trans. L. Strachan; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 344; Blanchetière, “Christian Anti-Judaism,” 185-186; G. N. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 28; M. W. Pahl, “The ‘Gospel’ and the ‘Word’: Exploring Some Early Christian Patterns,” *JSNT* 29 (2006): 218; Riegar, *Christ and Empire*, 25; Horrell, “Introduction,” 252; B. W. Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians’ Responses* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015), 59; A. Brent, *A Political History of Early Christianity* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 79; Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 32-33; and Walton, “‘Mission’,” 547.

<sup>243</sup> Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 34, 95-99; and K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 288-289.

<sup>244</sup> Taylor, *Divinity*, 186, 241. Winter notes that this idea was not “a local or provisional idea” but “province-wide.” Winter, *Divine Honours*, 47.

the people.<sup>245</sup> These desires are expressed in the Priene Calendar Inscription.<sup>246</sup>

The people of Asia acclaimed Augustus as the agent of the gods who manifested the presence of the gods on earth, one who exceeded the anticipations of the people, was a saviour for all peoples, would end all war, and was greater than all those who came before him.<sup>247</sup> Therefore the emperor embodied the values of the empire: domination, power, superiority,<sup>248</sup> freedom, benevolence, justice, peace and salvation,<sup>249</sup> and it was through the emperor that all blessings flowed upon the empire.<sup>250</sup> Gilbert writes, "People prayed for and celebrated the salvation of the emperor, who in turn provided the people themselves with the same benefit.

Recognising the *princeps* as savior became a personal sign of loyalty to the emperor and the imperial system he represented."<sup>251</sup> Thus the reality in the first century is that

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<sup>245</sup> Hardin notes the variety of ways in which there was the intertwining of the political and religious power both generally and particularly in Pisidian Antioch. These include imperial coinage, civic space - architecture, altars, statues - and temporal space, such as the calendar. See Hardin, *Galatians*, 26-48.

<sup>246</sup> OGIS 458. See Sherk, *Roman Documents*, 328-337; Danker, *Benefactor*, 215-222; Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 32-36; Evans, "Priene Calendar Inscription," 69; and Harrison, "Augustan Age of Grace," 79.

<sup>247</sup> Strait, *Angry Tyrant*, 299-300; Hardin, *Galatians*, 27. See also Diehl, "Anti-Imperial Rhetoric," 49; Gilbert, "Roman Propaganda," 238; G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek East* (Oxford: OUP, 1965), 119; Riegar, *Christ and Empire*, 26-27; and D. Nystrom, "We Have No King but Caesar: Roman Imperial Ideology and the Imperial Cult," in *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (eds. S. McKnight and J. B. Modica; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2013), 35-36.

<sup>248</sup> W. Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2006), 8-10.

<sup>249</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), 63; and Gilbert, "Roman Propaganda," 240.

<sup>250</sup> J. Rupke, *Religion of the Romans* (ed. and trans. R. Gordon; Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 85; B. W. Winter, "Divine Imperial Cultic Activities and the Early Church," in *Into all the World: Emergent Christianity in its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (eds. M. Harding and A. Nobbs; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 247; S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 166-167, 171-174; Taylor, *Divinity*, 47; and Carter, *Empire*, 83.

<sup>251</sup> Gilbert, "Roman Propaganda," 239. Winter notes that people prayed to Augustus, offered sacrifices to the gods for Augustus, as divine, and his family, and perceived him as the Pontifex Maximus for the Empire. Winter, *Divine Honours*, 49-55. See also R. Syme, *Tacitus* (2 vols.; Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1958), 2:529; B. D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early*

to undermine the larger society's values and gods, which Keener asserts the Christian assembly does, is to undermine the State since the values and gods of the empire cannot be understood in isolation from the religious, social or political life of Rome since they are the result and the fulfilment of the blessings of the gods which comes through the medium of the emperor and empire.<sup>252</sup> To set oneself apart from the values of Rome was to set oneself apart from the blessings of the gods and the medium by which they came, the emperor and the State. To attribute any transformed values and practices to another "Son" or "Lord" would be considered a rejection of the political, social and religious life of Rome and a rejection of the blessings of the gods. Gilbert writes,

The imitation of terms and images often associated with Roman power, however, points to a different and more conflicted relationship between the Christianity represented by Luke-Acts and Rome. Unique among early Christian writings, the writer of Luke-Acts claims for Jesus and the church the same titles and achievements commonly associated with Rome: savior, bringer of peace, ascension into heaven, and ruler of the world. The language not only legitimates the community and its leaders but also deconstructs the Roman world in the process... Through the adaptation of Roman propaganda, Luke-Acts sets up an alternative vision of universal authority - indeed a rival to Rome's claim to be ruler of the world. Luke has co-opted and refitted the political language of his day and created an ideological confrontation between Rome and the church. True possession of universal dominion lies not with Caesar but with Christ, not with Rome but with Christians and their church.<sup>253</sup>

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*Christian Writings* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Oxford, OUP, 2008), 27; and J. E. Bowley, "Pax Romana," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 771-775.

<sup>252</sup> J. Punt, "Believers or Loyalists? Identity and Social Responsibility of Jesus Communities in the Empire," *In die Skriflig* 51 (2017): 2-3. See also Hardin, Galatians, 47; Wright, *Paul*, 63; Carter, *Empire*, 83; and Walton, "'Mission'," 547.

<sup>253</sup> Gilbert, "Roman Propaganda," 255. More succinctly Brent writes, "Theophilus' faith [i.e., and not imperium romanum] leads to the true peace, the peace of god, with salvation." A. Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian* (VCSup 45; eds. J. Den Boeft et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 121. See also N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (vol. 3 of Christian Origins and the Question of God; London: SPCK, 2003), 568-570; Winter, *Divine Honours*, 44; and Burrus, "Acts," 139.

Thus, whilst Keener may be right that there is a transformative element within Acts, it cannot be understood as a transformative approach which does not impact the empire nor can it be socially transformative in a purely positive sense. Rather this social transformation implicitly subverts; it is subversive in its allegiance, its values, and in the way in which this alternate way of life engages with the previous way of life.<sup>254</sup>

Keener's approach to the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures provides some useful insights. Yet Keener over-emphasises the transformational nature of the narrative whilst suppressing the subversive. This occurs by falsely dividing the State and the values of the larger society.<sup>255</sup> In doing this Keener cannot, as I shall seek to show in the following chapters, adequately address the tensions that occur within the narrative. Such a position indicates the potential value of an approach that can coherently integrate both the transformational and the subversive nature of the narrative. The detailed readings in chapters four to eight will seek to demonstrate the comparative value of this new approach.

## 2.2. C. K. Rowe: New Culture, 'Yes' - Coup, 'No'

According to Matthew Sleeman, Rowe's work, *World Upside Down*, is a "stimulating and substantive advance in Acts scholarship" which "deserves the hearty applause it

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<sup>254</sup> Riegar, *Christ and Empire*, 30-31.

<sup>255</sup> Sordi writes, "We are reminded that according to the religion of Rome, the prosperity and fortunes of the state depended not only on their industry, worth and wisdom of their citizens and their law-givers, but also upon the protection of particular deities, so that a public policy which did not take religion into consideration was as unthinkable as a national religion without political aims." Sordi, *Roman Empire*, 5.

has received in a wide variety of reviews.”<sup>256</sup> Similarly Kochenash writes, “Rowe’s impressive study does not foreclose further discussion regarding Luke’s negotiation of the kingdom of God and Rome, but it will surely cast a long shadow over future attempts...a credible account of Lukan attitudes toward Rome *must* reconcile the conciliatory with the seditious.”<sup>257</sup>

Critical of previous approaches for either assuming the dominant trend of an *apologia pro ecclesia* or for being inadequate critiques or counter-proposals, Rowe proposes a nuanced and sophisticated approach avoiding the polarities of previous scholarship and highlighting the continuity or discontinuity between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world along with the resulting tension.<sup>258</sup> Utilising a multidimensional hermeneutical lens and through a close exegesis of Acts, engaging with New Testament and classical scholarship, and interacting with political theory, narrative criticism, and constructive theology, Rowe analyses four pericopes: Acts 14, 16, 17 and 19.<sup>259</sup> These are used as examples which “articulate animating convictions of Lukan theology and, precisely in this way, serve well as focal instances of the larger perspective rendered through the entire narrative.”<sup>260</sup>

Rowe presupposes that Acts is a theological work, the audience are Christians and the purpose of Acts is to enable the Christian assembly, particularly pagan converts,

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<sup>256</sup> Sleeman, “Vision,” 327.

<sup>257</sup> His italics. M. Kochenash, “Luke-Acts,” 46.

<sup>258</sup> Rowe, *World*, 3-4.

<sup>259</sup> Rowe, *World*, 7, 15.

<sup>260</sup> Rowe, *World*, 11.

“to think Christianly in the late first-century Graeco-Roman world.”<sup>261</sup> His thesis is that the Christian mission in the Graeco-Roman world and the critical response the mission receives creates a tension. This tension develops further because the Roman authorities judge Christianity to be innocent. For Rowe, Luke conceptualises the engagement between Christians and the Graeco-Roman world as an antithesis. Divine revelation and an identity founded in the Lord Jesus Christ shape the patterns of life for the Church,<sup>262</sup> predominantly the confession of Jesus as Lord, the mission, and the assembly.<sup>263</sup> This results in a change of allegiance from one set of beliefs to another, “one that runs counter to the life-patterns of the Graeco-Roman world.”<sup>264</sup> The result, and central to Rowe’s thesis, is a cultural collision.<sup>265</sup> This collision creates a tension between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world because, Rowe asserts, the assembly threatens to dissolve the patterns of culture, especially the interrelatedness of religion, social customs, politics, and economics.<sup>266</sup> He writes, “Hence, to call into question pagan religion is to critique pagan culture: tear out the threads of pagan religiousness and the cultural fabric itself comes unraveled.”<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Rowe, *World*, 10, 11. This includes how Luke understands the identity of the Christian assembly as well as its relationship with the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture. Rowe, *World*, 4-5. See also C. K. Rowe, “History, Hermeneutics and the Unity of Luke-Acts,” *JSNT* 28 (2005): 138-139.

<sup>262</sup> Rowe, *World*, 4, 10.

<sup>263</sup> Rowe, *World*, 6.

<sup>264</sup> Rowe, *World*, 4.

<sup>265</sup> Rowe, *World*, 18. See also Diehl, “Anti-Imperial Rhetoric,” 49-50.

<sup>266</sup> By patterns of culture Rowe means the religious, social, political and economic areas of Graeco-Roman life. See J. M. G. Barclay, “Pushing Back: Some Questions for Discussion,” *JSNT* 33 (2011): 322-323.

<sup>267</sup> Rowe, *World*, 51. Rowe notes that to outsiders “the Christians are a strange and problematic social reality.” Rowe, *World*, 131.

Following from Rowe's thesis that the collision between Christianity and the Graeco-Roman world results in tension through the potential or perceived dissolution of Graeco-Roman culture,<sup>268</sup> Rowe develops this tension further by positing that the narrative declares the Christian assembly to be judicially innocent posing no threat to Roman authority.<sup>269</sup> Rowe rejects the idea of Acts as an apologia and highlights that the narrative of Acts does not provide the Roman view of the Christian mission but "Luke's *Christian* perspective of the church vis-à-vis the Roman state."<sup>270</sup> Therefore the Roman officials are used by Luke to testify on behalf of the Christians.<sup>271</sup> To defend this position Rowe cites the examples of Gallio,<sup>272</sup> Claudius Lysias,<sup>273</sup> Felix,<sup>274</sup> Festus and Herod Agrippa II.<sup>275</sup> Rowe also uses the narratives involving these officials to draw out four significant points. First, there is a distinction between the Christian theological hermeneutic and the State's interpretation of that hermeneutic. The Roman State is unable to arbitrate in the debate between Christians and their Jewish accusers because it does not understand the theological

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<sup>268</sup> Rowe, *World*, 5. Rowe writes, "Inasmuch as embracing Christian theological claims necessarily involves a different way of life, basic patterns of Graeco-Roman culture are dissolved." See also Rowe, *World*, 6, 91.

<sup>269</sup> Rowe, *World*, 53. Rowe later writes, "The Christian mission does not seek, that is, to become the new Rome by means of a direct assault upon the present polity. Rather, it claims to be a living witness to the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel and aims in Corinth simply to testify to Jews and Gentiles that the Christ was Jesus and to baptise those who believe in his resurrection." Rowe, *World*, 61-62.

<sup>270</sup> His italics. Rowe, *World*, 57. See also pages 53, 148.

<sup>271</sup> Rowe, *World*, 148. Rowe writes that the Christians are "not out to incite sedition, nor do they endeavour to usurp the imperial throne in the name of Jesus. Of such crimes, says the law, they are innocent."

<sup>272</sup> Rowe, *World*, 57-62.

<sup>273</sup> Rowe, *World*, 62-71.

<sup>274</sup> Rowe, *World*, 71-79.

<sup>275</sup> Rowe, *World*, 79-87.

framework. For Rowe this “embodies the political truth for Luke that the State is not sovereign over the formation of the people of God.”<sup>276</sup> Second, the State rejects claims of sedition because the charges of the Jews are inaccurate.<sup>277</sup> Thus, regardless of the confusion displayed by Gallio, Lysias, Felix, and Festus, the Lukan perspective on the legal and political reality is the same: “the Christian mission cannot be understood in any kind of way...as a takeover bid or call to sedition.”<sup>278</sup> Third, whilst the Roman State cannot declare Christians as guilty of sedition it has to respond to the effects of the beliefs and practices of the assembly where it interacts with the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>279</sup> Fourth, the depiction of the Christian assembly in Acts is not of a seditious group but of “the concrete manifestation of God’s fulfilment of the hope of all Israel” whose testimony is to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and who proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins.<sup>280</sup> Such proclamation has an impact in the religious, political and social spheres of the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>281</sup> Thus the Christian assembly has a subversive element within it. Rome is, according to Rowe, portrayed in the Lukan narrative as blind to the gospel, idolatrous and undergirded by satanic power.<sup>282</sup> Caesar usurps the identity of God and

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<sup>276</sup> Rowe, *World*, 62, 71. Rowe writes, “His (Festus) problem is not simply that he does not understand the intricacies of Jewish theology. It is rather a much deeper problem in that, as a pagan, he lacks the comprehensive hermeneutical framework in which to place the debate about the identity of Jesus. He is not missing bits and pieces of information, that is, but the entire context in which such information would make sense in the first place. He is literally unable to understand.” Rowe, *World*, 84.

<sup>277</sup> Rowe, *World*, 78.

<sup>278</sup> Rowe, *World*, 80.

<sup>279</sup> Rowe, *World*, 62.

<sup>280</sup> Rowe, *World*, 56.

<sup>281</sup> Rowe, *World*, 86.

<sup>282</sup> Rowe, *World*, 88, 100, 106.



positions himself as a rival to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>283</sup> The Church's proclamation results in multiple subversion - the lordship of Jesus over and against that of Caesar, a christological *pax* subverting the Roman notion of *pax* and the establishment of an alternative community.<sup>284</sup> The assembly is part of a kingdom which is not a human kingdom and yet a kingdom which exerts its influence upon every area of human life.<sup>285</sup>

Rowe's approach is indeed a nuanced and helpful approach. His serious treatment of the theological vision of Acts coupled with his close engagement of the Acts' narrative and understanding of the social, religious, and political customs of the first-century world provide a helpful perspective on the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman culture. Rowe also recognises various continuities, for example, identifying the religious nature and desire of the Graeco-Roman world to worship someone or something greater than themselves. Rowe also identifies discontinuities, for example his assertion that Luke's theological vision and his presentation of Jesus as Lord, the epistemological and metaphysical distinctives, provide an alternative ethical life. It is this which creates the tension and the collision between cultures. Despite this, there remain substantial concerns with this approach.

One of the chief concerns is whether the collision of the Christian and pagan cultures that Rowe finds in Acts results in the dissolution of the basic patterns of Graeco-

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<sup>283</sup> Rowe, *World*, 111-112. Rowe later writes, "Caesar is the challenger...in the sense that the self-exaltation necessary to sustain Caesar's political project is inevitably idolatrous." Rowe, *World*, 152.

<sup>284</sup> Rowe, *World*, 111, 114.

<sup>285</sup> Rowe, *World*, 101.

Roman culture as he asserts.<sup>286</sup> In the Lystran episode there is a clear collision between the Lystran interpretation of the healing and Paul and Barnabas' recognition of that interpretation (14:11-15). Yet there is no recognisable dissolution of Graeco-Roman culture. Prior to Paul's speech the crowd and priest act clearly within their culture and despite Paul's words the Lystrans still attempt to provide a sacrifice (14:18). In Philippi, the same occurs. The collision is recognisable between both Paul and the spirit and Paul and the owners and yet there appears to be no dissolution of the Graeco-Roman culture (16:19-21). The owners bring Paul and Silas within the recognised and appropriate legal system. It is the magistrates who order both the beating and the imprisonment as it is the magistrates who order their release. Paul then appeals to the Graeco-Roman culture because of his citizenship (16:22-23, 35-39). Again, in Athens a collision develops but the Graeco-Roman culture continues in place. Paul is, whether forcibly or not, taken to the Areopagus and given the opportunity to explain himself (17:19-21). The response, as in earlier pericopes, is mixed, but it is significant that some want to hear him again, demonstrating that Paul's message is not considered threatening and nor does it bring about a dissolution of the culture. The events in Ephesus are possibly the closest any dissolution of Graeco-Roman culture appears to come in the narrative. Demetrius' concerns relate to the threat to the inter-relationship of the religious and the economic and the city is in turmoil (19:26-29). Yet, note again in the maelstrom of the theatre it is the appropriate officer, the city clerk, who takes control and who encourages Demetrius to go through the appropriate legal process. He also warns

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<sup>286</sup> Rowe, *World*, 5, 6, 91.

the city that it may itself be charged due to its behaviour (19:35-41).<sup>287</sup> Throughout, no dissolution of the Graeco-Roman culture occurs.

A second concern is Rowe's over-emphasis upon the negative confrontation in the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world. Whilst Rowe is correct to recognise the negative collision and the potential for

destabilisation, he needs to frame this appropriately within the narrative context.

Luke-Acts is primarily framed positively through the theme of the covenant promises of God being fulfilled; that is Luke-Acts is inherently positive about what God is doing in the world now and which has an eschatological telos. This positive fulfilment flows through the songs of Mary and Zechariah (Luke 1:46-55, 67-79), through John's ministry (Luke 3:1-6), Jesus' programmatic statement, in which the Isaianic Scripture is fulfilled (Luke 4:17-21), the repentance and forgiveness of sins (Luke 19:10), the ethical change in those who have been forgiven (Luke 19:8; Acts 16:15, 31-34), the fulfilment of Scripture relating to the Messiah (Luke 24:25-27, 45-49), the giving of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4, 16-21), and the word continuing to increase and spread (Acts 12:24). This positive fulfilment of God's promises in Luke-Acts emphasises a re-creation or redeeming of the culture rather than a destabilisation or dissolution of culture. The narrative positions a re-creation or redemption of the world in its deepest metaphysical sense which is reflected in the nature and mission of the assembly and which results in the affecting of the religious, social, political, and

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<sup>287</sup> The clerk notes that neither the Temple of Artemis nor the sacred stone are threatened. He refers Demetrius and the craftsmen to go through the processes of law, and that the Ephesians themselves are in danger of breaking Roman law.

economic customs of the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>288</sup> Thus, the world is being changed through repentance and the forgiveness of sins but this should not be considered within a framework of individual salvation. Rather the impact is how such repentance affects the different socio-political levels and customs, challenging and redeeming them and at the same time fulfilling the hopes and desires of the Jewish and Graeco-Roman world. Such a perspective both nuances and develops Rowe's thesis. Thus, Rowe is correct, the assembly is politically innocent but this is because the narrative paints them as the fulfilment of the ideals and structures of Graeco-Roman life (cf. Acts 2:42-47).<sup>289</sup>

A further concern is that whilst Rowe's analysis of the Lukan perception of the Roman vision of the assembly is remarkably useful - in particular highlighting the narrative tension that is not resolved but which is held throughout the narrative - it appears that in the declaration of Christianity's innocence and the underlying subversion there is a weakness. Rowe is correct that the Christian assembly is not about a physical takeover or a call to sedition in a political, physical, sense - but that would come as no surprise to the reader of Luke-Acts. The assembly cannot be about a takeover because the Luke-Acts narrative demonstrates that both heaven and earth are already under the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus.<sup>290</sup> Luke-Acts asserts

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<sup>288</sup> C. K. Rowe, "Reading World Upside Down: A Response to Matthew Sleeman and John Barclay," *JSNT* 33.3 (2011): 345.

<sup>289</sup> Rowe, "Response," 338-339.

<sup>290</sup> Edsall critiques Rowe for not addressing the divine coercion that Edsall perceives in Acts and the associated human involvement in that coercion (Ananias and Sapphira: Acts 5:1-11; Herod: Acts 12:1-23; Elymas: Acts 13:1-11). Yet for myself there are two substantial weaknesses to Edsall's argument. First, he never defines this 'divine coercion' - particularly how it should be distinguished from human coercion found in Acts by opponents to the Christian assembly. Second, Edsall does not distinguish how this divine coercion is distinct from or related to divine sovereignty, a theme more

that the kingdom of God has broken into the world and is redeeming it in the fulfilment of Scripture. The kingdom of Rome and its ruler stand in opposition to the kingdom of God and its ruler. In opposing the kingdom of God Rome sides with the kingdom of Satan and demonstrates this in its idolatry.<sup>291</sup>

Beyond these, Rowe interprets the voices of Graeco-Roman characters with a neutrality that I would argue Luke does not intend. Luke's theological vision interprets the events and engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures theologically - this includes the words of both the assembly and those who oppose them. Therefore, contra Rowe, the voices of the owners of the slave girl (16:16-21), the Jews in Thessalonica (17:7), and Demetrius (19:24-28) are portrayed in the narrative as untrustworthy since they falsely accuse and seek to undermine the Christian assembly.<sup>292</sup> Likewise Rowe contrasts the reliability of Paul's testimony with the inability of the four Roman officials to understand "in any kind of way" the Christian mission;<sup>293</sup> for example in the Lukan narrative Felix is portrayed as untrustworthy through his hope of a bribe and in granting "a favour to the Jews" (24:26-27).<sup>294</sup> Considering Rowe's strong emphasis on the Lukan theological vision of Acts it is surprising that he does not apply this to the different voices found within the narrative. Thus the narrative holds a double subversion

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readily highlighted in Acts' scholarship. B. A. Edsall, "Persuasion and Force in Acts: A Response to C. Kavin Rowe," *CBQ* 78 (2016): 487.

<sup>291</sup> Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 116.

<sup>292</sup> There are also untrustworthy voices within the Jerusalem Jews (4:17-21), the Jewish political establishment (12:1-23), the Roman imperial authority (24:27), and from those claiming to be part of the Christian assembly (5:1-11).

<sup>293</sup> Rowe, *World*, 80.

<sup>294</sup> θέλων τε χάριτα καταθέσθαι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὁ Φῆλιξ κατέλιπε τὸν Παῦλον δεδεμένον.

presenting the untrustworthy voices as attempting to subvert the words of the assembly, and therefore the word of God, whilst subverting these voices through the vindication of the assembly's message. The narrative demonstrates that the Christian assembly are fulfilling the words of Jesus, turning people from worshipping idols to the living God through the proclamation of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:36-41; 14:15). This message is presented in the narrative as a redeeming of the whole world, including its social and cultural dimensions, and provides a more nuanced perspective of how the Christian assembly can be deemed innocent and yet the narrative can clearly subvert the position of its opponents whether Jewish, Graeco-Roman, or representatives of the Roman State. In short, the Lukan narrative subverts the voices of those accusing the assembly of turning the world upside down since in the redemption of the world, individuals and culture, the Christian assembly is (re)turning it the right way up.<sup>295</sup>

A final concern is whether Rowe's proposition works for the whole of Acts. Whilst Christianity is declared innocent by Roman officials there continues to be an unresolved conflict between the Christian assembly and the Jewish opponents. Rowe does not apply his thesis to this conflict, nor does he demonstrate how his thesis might be used to address it. As Schnabel writes, "unless Luke is thought to write for Greeks and Romans only, his [Rowe's] project of a 'political theology' would have to be deemed only partially successful as it arguably fails to address the concerns of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and of Jewish leaders in other cities

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<sup>295</sup> Sleeman also alludes to this perspective in the title of his review of Rowe's work, "The Vision of Acts: World Right Way Up." Sleeman, "Vision," 227.

of the eastern Mediterranean.”<sup>296</sup> At one level, Schnabel’s criticism is unfair since Rowe’s intention is to examine the Graeco-Roman world and the latter chapters of Acts lend themselves to that. Yet Schnabel’s point is also well made since there is a continued presence of Jews in the chapters Rowe addresses and they substantially influence the narrative (14:19-20; cf. 14:1-2, 5; 17:1; 19:8-9, 13-17). Such a perspective is reinforced by a similar criticism by Strait who argues that Rowe fails “to situate the [Areopagus] speech’s idol polemic within the contours of Hellenistic Judaism.”<sup>297</sup>

Further to this, Rowe’s proposal does not show how his thesis addresses the collisions that occur within an intra-ecclesial setting. Rowe does not address Acts 15:1-21, a pericope located in the heart of his chosen narrative and which would demonstrate how his thesis is wide-ranging across an unbroken section of narrative as well as how his thesis addresses the wider narrative. Two further things should be noted with respect to Acts 15. First, the omission of Acts 15 is significant because the collision that occurs there is particularly nuanced, since it is between Jewish believers and the way they relate to believers from the Graeco-Roman world. Second, the collision that occurs does not result in dissolution but resolution, something that I address more fully in chapter six.

### **2.3. Summary**

Rowe’s work, like Keener’s, provides some useful insights regarding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Yet

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<sup>296</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 33.

<sup>297</sup> Strait, *Angry Tyrant*, 316.

whilst Keener over-emphasises the transformational nature of the narrative and suppresses the subversive, Rowe's approach appears diametrically opposed - his emphasis being on the collision and subversion, whilst limiting the element of fulfilment found in Luke-Acts. Along with the critical analysis of chapter one, the analysis of these two scholars' work further demonstrates the potential for a fresh approach to the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Such an approach must coherently and consistently integrate the subversive and the transformational fulfilment in each engagement. I contend that subversive-fulfilment is just such an approach.

### 3. A Theological Orientation to Luke-Acts

Previous scholarship has often debated and discussed various difficult issues relating to Luke-Acts.<sup>298</sup> These have included the historicity of Acts,<sup>299</sup> its place in the

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<sup>298</sup> Luke-Acts is described by Unnik as "a storm center," and Talbert as "shifting sands." See W. C. van Unnik, "Luke-Acts: A Storm Center in Contemporary Scholarship," in *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert* (eds. L. E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1966): 15-32; and C. H. Talbert, "Shifting Sands: The Recent Study of the Gospel of Luke," *Interpretation* 30 (1976): 381-95. See also Gasque, "Book of Acts," 69.

<sup>299</sup> C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (WUNT 1/49; ed. C. H. Gempf; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 101-243. Gasque helpfully outlines and assesses the formative works such as Conzelmann, Haenchen, Wette, Baur, and Dibelius. Gasque, "Book of Acts," 68-88; W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (eds.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce* (London: Paternoster Press, 1970); M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1983); T. Callan, "The Preface of Luke-Acts and Historiography," *NTS* 31 (1985): 576-581; D. Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'* (SNTSMS 121; ed. R. Bauckham; trans. K. Mckinney et al.; Cambridge: CUP, 2002); W. W. Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989); W. W. Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975); and H. J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955).



canon,<sup>300</sup> its date of composition,<sup>301</sup> the genre,<sup>302</sup> Lukan unity,<sup>303</sup> the Alexandrian and

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<sup>300</sup> G. Goswell, "The Place of the Book of Acts in Reading the NT," *JSNT* 59 (2016): 67-82.

<sup>301</sup> J. T. Townsend, "The Date of Luke-Acts," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (ed. C. H. Talbert; New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1984), 47-62; and D. E. Orton (ed.), *The Composition of Luke's Gospel: Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

<sup>302</sup> D. L. Barr and J. L. Wentling, "The Conventions of Classical Biography and the Genre of Luke-Acts: A Preliminary Study," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (ed. C. H. Talbert; New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1984), 63-88; D. W. Palmer, "Acts and the Historical Monograph," *TynB* 44 (1993): 373-388; J. B. Green, "Acts of the Apostles," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (eds. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Leicester: IVP, 1997), 7-24; L. C. A. Alexander, "Formal Elements and Genre: Which Greco-Roman Prologues Most Closely Parallel the Lukan Prologues?" in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke's Narrative Claim upon Israel's Legacy* (ed. D. P. Moessner; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press, 1999): 9-26; D. L. Smith and Z. L. Kostopoulos, "Biography, History and the Genre of Luke-Acts," *NTS* 63 (2017): 390-410; C. H. Talbert, "The Acts of the Apostles: Monograph or Bios?," in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. B. Witherington III; Cambridge: CUP, 2006); L. C. A. Alexander, "The Preface to Acts and the Historians," in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. B. Witherington III; Cambridge: CUP, 1996); Dunn, *Jerusalem*, 64-86; S. Uytanlet, *Luke-Acts and Jewish Historiography: A Study on the Theology, Literature, and Ideology of Luke-Acts* (WUNT II/366; ed. J. Frey; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); C. K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History: An Investigation of Early Christian Historiography* (WUNT II/175; ed. J. Frey; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); and B. W. R. Pearson and S. E. Porter, "The Genres of the New Testament," in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 142-148.

<sup>303</sup> For a review of recent debate over the unity of Luke-Acts, see A. J. Bale, *Genre and Narrative Coherence in the Acts of the Apostles* (LNTS 514; ed. C. Keith; London: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2015), 15-20. See also Rowe, "Unity of Luke-Acts," 131-157; M. F. Bird, "The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion," *JSNT* 29 (2007): 425-448; C. K. Rowe, "Literary Unity and Reception History: Reading Luke-Acts as Luke and Acts," *JSNT* 29 (2007): 449-457; A. Gregory, "The Reception of Luke and Acts and the Unity of Luke-Acts," *JSNT* 29 (2007): 459-472; P. Walters, *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence* (SNTSMS 145; Cambridge: CUP, 2009); and J. B. Green, "Luke-Acts or Luke and Acts? A Reaffirmation of Narrative Unity," in *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C. A. Alexander* (LNTS 427; ed. S. Walton et al.; London: T. & T. Clark, 2011), 101-119.

Western texts,<sup>304</sup> the author's purpose,<sup>305</sup> Luke's sources,<sup>306</sup> the Paul of Acts,<sup>307</sup> and the 'We' passages.<sup>308</sup> However I contend that Luke's narrative project is fundamentally theological and thus requires a theological orientation in order to place the chosen section of narrative, Acts 13:13-17:34, within a wider Lukan framework, so as to orientate the reader to some key themes in Luke-Acts providing an appropriate context with which to better understand the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures both in the immediate and wider narrative.<sup>309</sup> It will also allow the thesis to flow more naturally by avoiding the

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<sup>304</sup> M. Wilcox, "Luke and the Bezan Text of Acts," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, Rédaction, Théologie* (ed. J. Kremer; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1978), 447-455; W. A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (SNTSMS 71; ed. G. N. Stanton; Cambridge: CUP, 1992); B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 2001), 222-236; and J. Read-Heimerdinger, *The Bezan Text of Acts: A Contribution of Discourse Analysis to Textual Criticism* (JSNTS 236; ed. S. E. Porter; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); and Holladay, *Acts*, 13-30.

<sup>305</sup> See Bock's useful historical and chronological outline of purposes. Bock, *Luke*, 14. See also C. R. Holladay, "Acts as Kerygma: λαλεῖν τὸν λόγον," *NTS* 63 (2017): 153-182.

<sup>306</sup> L. R. Donelson, "Cult Histories and the Sources of Acts," *Bib* 68 (1987): 1-21; J. Dupont, *The Sources of Acts: The Present Position* (trans. K. Pond; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964); B. Shellard, *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources and Literary Context* (JSNTS 215; ed. S. E. Porter; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

<sup>307</sup> F. F. Bruce, "Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?," *BJRL* 58 (1975): 282-305; and S. E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology* (WUNT 1/115; eds. M. Hengel and O. Hofius; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 187-206.

<sup>308</sup> See S. A. Adams, "The Relationships of Paul and Luke: Luke, Paul's Letters, and the 'We' Passages of Acts," in *Paul and His Social Relations* (eds. S. E. Porter and C. D. Land; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 125-142; and W. S. Campbell, "The Narrator as 'He,' 'Me,' and 'We': Grammatical Person in Ancient Histories and in the Acts of the Apostles," *JBL* 129 (2010): 385-407; Kurz, "Narrative Approaches," 210-211; W. S. Campbell, *The 'We' Passages in the Acts of the Apostles: The Narrator as Narrative Character* (SBLStBL 14; Atlanta, Georg.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

<sup>309</sup> Despite the importance of the subjects listed to the overall discussion of Luke-Acts such issues are not readily relevant to the consideration of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures and therefore yield to the focus of the thesis. For general overviews of these subjects see Conzelmann, *Acts*, xxxiii-xlv; K. A. Kuhn, *The Kingdom according to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2015), xvii-xxiii; Parsons, *Acts*, 6-22; Pelikan, *Acts*, 30-35; Schnabel, *Acts*, 21-43; C.S.C. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1957), 1-18; D. J. Williams, *Acts* (NIBC 5; ed. W. Ward Gasque; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990), 2-17; Witherington, *Acts*, 2-102; C. M. Tuckett, "The Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 483-490.

repetition of scene-setting for each pericope. Taking Keener's comment that one must consider the Lukan themes that "recur most frequently" rather than those that reflect "the interests of the era,"<sup>310</sup> there are three themes that I will focus upon. These themes are inherent to the narrative throughout Luke and Acts and will provide a foundation for understanding the narrational framework in which the pericopes are situated. Further, these themes are inter-related and inter-dependent and also incorporate other themes within Luke-Acts. Beyond this, and importantly, these themes naturally conjoin with the chief tenets of subversive-fulfilment.

### 3.1. The Theological Character of Luke-Acts

The first theme is the theological character of Luke-Acts. As has been established in chapter one previous modern scholarship has oscillated regarding the nature of Luke-Acts, some emphasising the historical and political dimensions of the text, whilst others have examined the narrative through various social-scientific lenses. Yet I would contend that the emphasis of Luke-Acts is fundamentally theological; it is founded upon and provides continuity with the scriptural and covenantal narrative of the Old Testament which emphasises God's activity in the world.<sup>311</sup> Examples of Luke-Acts being founded upon and continuing the Old Testament narrative include the prominent use of Scripture, whether explicit quotations or implicit allusions, along with their significant placing in the narrative. In Luke 1:6-7 the narrative portrays

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<sup>310</sup> Keener writes, "The themes that commentators emphasize most often reflects the interests of the era in which they write as well as those that dominate in the texts on which they comment. When I teach Luke-Acts, I focus on Lukan themes that recur most frequently, raising them as we first come to them in the text." Keener, *Introduction*, 492.

<sup>311</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 15-16; Keener, *Introduction*, 494-496; Pelikan, *Acts*, 25; Parsons, *Acts*, xiii-xiv; O'Toole, "Politics and Society," 2-3; S. Walton, "The Acts - of God? What is the 'Acts of the Apostles' all About?" *EQ* 80 (2008): 292; and Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 92.

faithful Israelites who keep the covenantal law,<sup>312</sup> along with echoes of Sarah and Rachel (Luke 1:7, 25; cf. Gen. 17:15-22; 30:23),<sup>313</sup> and the fulfilment of God's covenantal promises to Israel (Luke 1:16-17; cf. Num. 6:1-4).<sup>314</sup> This is further developed throughout Acts, the narrative describing how Yahweh continues to fulfil his redemptive covenantal promises cosmically, through the risen and ascended Lord Jesus and in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8-9,11; 2:32-33; 3:20-21; 5:30-31; 7:55-56; cf. Luke 24:49-50),<sup>315</sup> and economically, through the life of the Christian assembly,<sup>316</sup> that is in discipleship, witness, and suffering.<sup>317</sup> Such activity is concerned to demonstrate the fulfilment of Yahweh's covenantal promises to Israel and through Israel to the nations (Acts 2:17-21; 3:12-13, 18, 21; 8:31-33).<sup>318</sup> This fulfilment can only occur in Luke-Acts through a christological faith in Yahweh (2:38-39; 3:16; 8:16-17, 25, 35), in the person of the Christ, in the witness of the assembly to the Christ, and in the power of the Spirit.

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<sup>312</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; eds. I. H. Marshall and W. Ward Gasque; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 52.

<sup>313</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 49.

<sup>314</sup> See also Acts 1:1-3, 15-20; 2:14-36; 7:1-53; 28:23-28.

<sup>315</sup> See R. F. O'Toole, "Activity of the Risen Jesus," *Bib* 62 (1981): 475.

<sup>316</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 15.

<sup>317</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 72; Keener, *Introduction*, 505. See Keener, *Introduction*, 493 for other areas that Luke-Acts touches upon.

<sup>318</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 492. See also Schnabel, "People of God," 43; D. L. Bock, "Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Luke's Use of the Old Testament for Christology and Mission," in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (JSNTSup 104; eds. C. A. Evans and W. R. Stegner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 281-282; and S. S. Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts* (JSNTS 142; ed. S. E. Porter; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997). Though Pervo argues that suffering does not really exist in Acts, rather Luke applies it to create a sense of entertainment and a theology of glory. R. I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 18.

The result of this theologically driven narrative is that the events, places, space,<sup>319</sup> time, structures, characters,<sup>320</sup> and voices found in the narrative should be understood as theologically significant to the narrative.<sup>321</sup> This should not be seen as an undermining or negation of the historical, social, or cultural elements found in the Lukan narrative but that the author has so placed these to further the theological agenda of the narrative.<sup>322</sup> Marshall writes, “Luke is both historian and theologian . . . . As a theologian Luke was concerned that his message about Jesus and the early church should be based upon reliable history . . . . He used his history in the service of his theology.”<sup>323</sup> Therefore Luke’s theologically conceived and driven narrative is one that takes account of the varying and nuanced social dimensions of the first-century world (Luke 2:1-3; 7:6-8; 17:7; 20:20-26; 23:1-3), since this is where the theological manifests itself, indeed it establishes the rationale for the narrative (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2). I therefore agree with Pickett who writes, “we need a more integrated and

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<sup>319</sup> P-B. Smit, “Negotiating a New World View in Acts 1:8? A Note on the Expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς,” *NTS* 63 (2017): 5.

<sup>320</sup> Shauf writes, “It is not that political leaders are absent in Acts. They show up in many places. They do so, however, only when they have interaction with the Christian characters in Acts...We hear nothing of any of their political accomplishments or failures outside of these interactions.” S. Shauf, *The Divine in Acts and in Ancient Historiography* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2015), 255-256.

<sup>321</sup> Kuhn writes, “this account among many others reminds us that our post-Enlightenment tendency to segregate ‘religion’ from ‘politics’ is not an appropriate lens through which to view Luke’s world...In fact, one could justly argue that to merely use the terms ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ with reference to the ancient world was anachronistic.” Kuhn, *Kingdom*, xiv. See Jervell, “Salvation History,” 114-115.

<sup>322</sup> Nor should it be seen as undermining or negating the literary style and devices the narrator uses to persuade its readers/listeners. Kuhn, *Kingdom*, xv. See also Witherington, *Acts*, 70. Contrast this with Cassidy’s approach, “The very modifications that Luke introduces into Mark’s Gospel indicate that he was not concerned with providing a reliable historical account of Jesus’ teachings or activities.” Cassidy, *Luke’s Gospel*, 9.

<sup>323</sup> I. H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Leicester: IVP, 1970), 18-19. See also W. Ramsey, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), 80; J. H. Ropes, *The Synoptic Gospels* (Oxford: OUP, 1960), 84; R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (London: Blackwell, 1963), 366; Marshall, *Luke*, 35; L. Morris, *Luke* (rev. ed.; Leicester: IVP, 1988), 31; D. G. Peterson, “Acts,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (eds. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 286; W. H. Willimon, *Acts* (Interpretation; Atlan., Georg.: John Knox Press, 1988), 126; and Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 114.

nuanced approach that can discern the social, political, and economic implications of theological themes.”<sup>324</sup> Such a nuanced approach results in a number of significant conclusions for understanding the narrative of Acts. First, because the theological manifests itself in the social, political, and economic spheres, the Christian assembly is intrinsically involved in a public theology. This theological wrapping of the social, political, and economic spheres results in a variety of engagements with the surrounding cultures.<sup>325</sup> Within these engagements there are different voices: the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, those within the assembly and those outside of the assembly, both Jews and non-Jews. To understand the narrative correctly, and therefore the engagements, these different voices throughout Luke-Acts must be read and understood theologically. Some voices are to be considered trustworthy, for they represent or witness to the word, other voices are not because they challenge or oppose the word, but no voices are neutral. Luke-Acts demonstrates this throughout the narrative including in the engagements between the assembly and the surrounding cultures: Stephen, who is described as full of faith, the Holy Spirit, God’s grace and power (6:5, 8) is contrasted with the Synagogue of the Freedmen, who lie and produce false witnesses (6:11, 13). Saul, the chosen instrument (9:15),

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<sup>324</sup> Pickett, “Luke,” 12. Schnabel writes, “Acts presents part of the history of the early church, and thus must be interpreted with the full range of historical methods, taking into account Jewish and Greco-Roman social, cultural, and political history...Historical readings of Acts, if they are detached from the literary and narrative features of the text and from the theological aims of the author, are mere fads, as are literary readings if they are disconnected from the historical realities and the theological purposes of the text. In a similar vein, new theological readings of Acts will remain fads if and when they ignore the literary, rhetorical, and narrative dimensions of the text and disregard the historical realities of the missionary work of Peter and Paul.” Schnabel, “Fads,” 277-278. See also Schnabel, *Acts*, 1081; Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 3; Walaskay, *Rome*, 1; and Keener, *Introduction*, 157.

<sup>325</sup> Nasrallah writes, “Through Paul’s deeds and speeches in key sites like Lystra, Thessalonike, Philippi, and Athens, Acts articulates a theological vision of how Christianity and its notion of one, true God can fit within a ‘pluralistic’ empire and its notions of ethnic difference. To use the terminology of postcolonial criticism, it mimics the logic of empire without shading into mockery; it seeks to find a place for ‘the Way’ within a system of Roman domination.” L. Nasrallah, “The Acts of the Apostles, Greek Cities, and Hadrian’s Panhellenion,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 534.

is contrasted with Elymas the false prophet who is ζητῶν διαστρέψαι τὸν ἀνθύπατον ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως (13:6, 9-10). Paul and Silas in Philippi are contrasted with the owners of the slave girl who accuse them that καταγγέλλουσιν ἔθνη ἃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν ἡμῖν παραδέχεσθαι οὐδὲ ποιεῖν Ῥωμαίοις οὕσιν (16:20-21), and Felix is portrayed as wanting to speak with Paul so as to elicit a bribe (24:26). Yet not all untrustworthy voices are found in the extra-ecclesial engagements. Within the intra-ecclesial settings, the false words of Sapphira contrast with the true words of Peter (5:3-9), and the words of the Jewish brothers about circumcision are disputed and rejected by the words of Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James (15:1, 5, 7, 12, 19-21). Reading the narrative in this way - understanding that the events, places, and engagements have a theological significance - is beneficial because it can accommodate other themes which previous scholarship has posited, such as apologia, identity of the Church, coded communication, and legitimation. This is significant to this thesis as it demonstrates why subversive-fulfilment, as a fundamentally theological perspective, may be able to build upon the strengths of previous scholarship whilst limiting or correcting weaknesses and to do justice to the primarily theological narrative that Luke presents.

This way of reading Luke-Acts draws out some important aspects for this thesis. The first is that this theologically driven narrative purposely develops a depiction of engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures which is to be understood primarily as a theological engagement. This derives in Luke from the universality of God's promises. Beginning with two key references to the Abrahamic covenant Luke demonstrates a covenantal particularity which develops a universal theme (Luke 1:55; 2:72-73; cf. Gen. 12:1-3). This universality is glimpsed

throughout Luke's Gospel. For example, Simeon says, ὁ ἡτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν, φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ (2:32). This universality is further glimpsed in Jesus' reference to Naaman (4:26-27), the centurion (7:1-10), and the exorcism among the Gerasenes (8:26-39). It is emphasised in Jesus' final words to the disciples: καὶ κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν καὶ ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (24:47). The programmatic words of Acts 1:8 then reinforce this idea of universality. Witherington notes that "It is programmatic in the sense that it alludes to a world-wide mission, and probably also to a mission to both Jew and Gentile in the Diaspora."<sup>326</sup> This outward looking focus is further glimpsed in the table of nations (Acts 2:9-11).<sup>327</sup> Whilst the narrative refers to Jews from all the nations their conversion and the rest of the narrative imply the movement of the gospel outward to these places.

The second important point is that this theological reading of the narrative provides the original audience, as well as later audiences, with a paradigm to navigate the engagement with the different values, structures and customs of the first-century cultures. It provides the means for understanding the uniqueness of the Christian gospel and how to proclaim it as a distinct message but in a contextualised way. Connected to this the narrative reveals the different levels on which the engagement occurs, primarily the metaphysical level, concerning the different beliefs in the divine, raising issues of true and false faith and true and false worship; the epistemological level, concerning the way in which the divine is revealed, or appears, to people, thus

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<sup>326</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 111. See also Acts 8:26-40; 9:15; 10:1-11:18; Johnson, *Acts*, 16; Witherington, *Acts*, 69-72; and R. H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 207-208.

<sup>327</sup> Gilbert, "Roman Propaganda," 249.



raising issues of true and false knowledge; and the ethical level, concerning the way in which the characters in the narrative respond to the word of God and act within the social and cultural norms of the first-century. In Acts this occurs within the extra-ecclesial engagements, between the assembly and the surrounding cultures, and also within a significant intra-ecclesial engagement at Jerusalem. Finally, this theological reading of the narrative and engagement draws out the fulfilment of Scripture. Witherington rightly connects the two: "By referring to fulfilment Luke is suggesting that one can only understand and properly exegete these things in the larger historical and biblical framework he intends to provide."<sup>328</sup> It is to the fulfilment of Scripture and the covenant promises of Yahweh that we now turn.

### 3.2. The Fulfilment of Scripture and Covenant Promises in Luke-Acts

Linked to a theological reading of the narrative is the fulfilment of Scripture and the covenant promises of Yahweh through Jesus Christ to Israel and through Israel to the nations.<sup>329</sup> In the early chapters of the Gospel, Luke introduces characters who, through the utilisation of Old Testament imagery and language, highlight God's continued activity in the world fulfilling his covenant promises as found in the scriptures.<sup>330</sup> Thus the early chapters of Luke promise that this fulfilment will result in

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<sup>328</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 69.

<sup>329</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 1082. See also J. C. Miller, "The Jewish Context of Paul's Gentile Mission," *TynB* 58 (2007): 115; Walton, "The Acts - of God?" 296; C. H. Talbert, "Promise and Fulfilment in Lucan Theology," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (ed. C. H. Talbert; New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1984), 101; Witherington, *Acts*, 69; Bock, *Theology*, 414; Holladay, *Acts*, 48-49; and Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 58. Yamasaki-Ransom notes, "However, with a few exceptions, most studies see Luke's use of the Old Testament as some form of 'prophecy fulfilment' or 'proof from prophecy' schema." K. Yamasaki-Ransom, *The Roman Empire in Luke's Narrative* (LNTS 404; ed. M. Goodacre; London: T. & T. Clark, 2010), 9.

<sup>330</sup> Luke 1:45, 67. See Marshall, *Luke*, 35, 136. See also D. L. Bock, "Luke," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (eds. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 274; Peterson, "Acts," 286; and Kurz, "Promise and Fulfillment," 151-152; Jervell, "Salvation History," 106-107; Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 167.

the restoration of many Israelites to covenant faithfulness (Luke 1:16-17), the establishment of the kingdom of David (Luke 1:33; cf. 2 Sam. 7), the restoration of justice in Israel (Luke 1:52-55, 68-75), and the inclusion of the nations (Luke 2:29-32).<sup>331</sup> These themes continue through Luke into Acts and their fulfilment is depicted in the present pneumatologically and christologically as well as having a further eschatological fulfilment.<sup>332</sup>

Luke's emphasis upon the Spirit and his role in the fulfilment of Scripture and the covenant promises is seen within the early section of Luke's Gospel. Key characters are filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:15, 41, 67; cf. 2:25-27), and the Spirit is intimately involved in both birth narratives (1:15, 35, 41).<sup>333</sup> John the Baptist states that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16), Jesus' ministry is repeatedly connected with the Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; cf. Acts 2:1; 10:38),<sup>334</sup> and Jesus promises the Spirit to his disciples (Luke 11:13; 12:12; 24:48-49; cf. Acts 1:2; 2:33).<sup>335</sup> Such pneumatological fulfilment continues through Acts:<sup>336</sup> as the gift of the risen and ascended Jesus (Acts 1:4-5), in the fulfilment of Scripture (Acts 1:16; 2:17, 18; 4:25-26; 13:33-35, 41),<sup>337</sup> in the repentance of Jews and those from the nations

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<sup>331</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 17.

<sup>332</sup> Such fulfilment should not be seen as simplistic, for such fulfilment may be partial or develops further promises. L. T. Johnson, "The Social Dimensions of *Sōtēria* in Luke-Acts and Paul," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. H. Lovering; Atlanta, Georg.: Scholars Press, 1993), 530.

<sup>333</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 58.

<sup>334</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 113.

<sup>335</sup> Bock, "Luke," 276.

<sup>336</sup> See Witherington, *Acts*, 70-72.

<sup>337</sup> This includes in coming upon the Apostles. See Acts 1:5, 8; 2:4.

(Acts 2:38; 5:32; 8:15; 9:17; 10:44, 47; 11:15-16; 15:8; 19:2, 6),<sup>338</sup> in the discipleship, witness, and suffering of the Christian assembly (Acts 6:10; 7:55; 8:29; 9:31; 11:24, 28; 13:2, 9, 52; 20:23, 28),<sup>339</sup> and in the rejection of that witness (Acts 7:51; 28:25-27). Keener is right to note that “Luke presents the Spirit as necessary for the success of the church’s mission.”<sup>340</sup>

Such fulfilment can also be recognised christologically. Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises (Luke 2:11-15; 4:16-21) to the Patriarchs and to David (Luke 1:32-33; 18:38-39; Acts 2:25-31; 13:33-37). He is the fulfilment of promises about the Christ (Luke 2:11, 26; 4:41; 9:20; Acts 18:28) and Son of Man (Luke 5:24; 6:5; 9:22, 26, 44, 58; 11:29; 12:8, 10; 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8, 31; 19:10; 21:27, 36; 22:22, 69; Acts 7:56).<sup>341</sup> It is through him that the kingdom of God will break into the world (Luke 4:18-21) and that repentance and the forgiveness of sins will come to Israel (Luke 3:3; cf. 1:76-79; 2:11, 30, 38; Acts 3:26).<sup>342</sup> This restoration of covenant faithfulness within Israel results in a further fulfilment which is the covenant promises made to the nations (Luke 1:29-32; 2:30-32; 7:9). Jesus is said to fulfil Scripture in respect to his suffering and death (Luke 22:37; 24:6-8, 25-27) and provides words that will be fulfilled in Acts (Luke 24:44-48). Throughout Acts this christological fulfilment is

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<sup>338</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 521, 525. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 14; and C.M. Blumhofer, “Luke’s Alteration of Joel 3.1-5 in Acts 2.17-21,” *NTS* 62 (2016): 513.

<sup>339</sup> There is also a forbidding of witness by the Spirit. See Acts 16:6-7. Johnson, *Acts*, 15.

<sup>340</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 520. See also Keener, “Spirit and Mission,” 26-27; and Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 115.

<sup>341</sup> Jesus is also called “Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32; 8:28); “Saviour” (Luke 2:11); “The Lord” (Luke 2:11; 5:12); “My beloved Son” (2:23; 9:35); “Holy One of God” (4:34); and “Son of God” (Luke 4:41). Keener, 3:1-14:28, 1106.

<sup>342</sup> Wright, “Biblical Paradigms,” 87-89.

developed in two ways. The first is retrospectively, the Lukan audience being reminded that Jesus is the fulfilment of the covenant promises (Acts 2:22-24, 31, 36; 3:19, 22-26; 4:27-29; 8:32, 35; 10:43; 13:22-23, 33-34; 17:2-3). The second is the present work of Christ in the narrative, though admittedly with an eschatological telos.<sup>343</sup> This work includes the giving of the Spirit to his followers (Acts 2:33), providing salvation through the forgiveness of sins and repentance (Acts 4:12; 5:31-32; 9:4, 17; 10:43; cf. Luke 1:16-17, 76-79; 2:30), being ruler and judge (Acts 7:56; 10:42; 17:31; 23:11), and the acceptance of the nations (Acts 8:34-39; 9:15; 11:18; 13:47-48; 26:17-18, 20; 28:28-31).

This pneumatological and christological fulfilment of Scripture and the covenant-promises in Luke-Acts reveals within the narrative why Israel rightly and wrongly relates to and worships Yahweh. The narrative distinguishes between the Christian assembly, who have repented and experienced a christological forgiveness of sins and are filled with the Spirit, and those in Israel who are portrayed as believing that their genealogy, being related to Abraham (Luke 3:7-8), or their actions, being circumcised, bring them in to covenant relationship and faithfulness with Yahweh. The narrative also distinguishes between the Christian assembly and the nations with their polytheistic worldview and the worship of the gods made with precious metals (Acts 14:12-13; 17:24-25, 29). Finally, the narrative creates a careful nuance distinguishing between true believers and false believers and true and false teaching

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<sup>343</sup> Jervell, "Salvation History," 107. Jervell writes, "The time of the church is the time of fulfilments of past promises, but even in the fulfilling of promises new promises are given. Thus, the outpouring of the Spirit is a fulfilled promise, but at the same time the fulfilling points to the consummation with the apocalyptic signs (Acts 1:4; 2:1, 17, 33). The time after the coming of the Messiah is even a time with fulfilment and promises, partly but not yet completely fulfilled (Luke 9:31, 41; 22:16; 24:26-49; Acts 1:4-11; 3:24)."

within the Christian assembly (Acts 5:1-11; 15:1-2, 5). These themes draw out the nature of true and false worship and true and false faith and these elements then relate to the Lukan message of repentance, as well as bearing relevance to those who reject this message.

### 3.3. Covenantal Faithfulness and Repentance in Luke-Acts

#### 3.3.1. Terminology in Luke-Acts

Two words central to understanding repentance in Luke-Acts are ἐπιστρέφω, and μετάνοια. Both these terms are used in the LXX and whilst distinct are broadly synonymous signifying a change of belief whether a change of one's mind or conduct in a spiritual or moral sense (Isa. 46:8; Jer. 8:5-6; Joel 2:14; Jonah 3:9).<sup>344</sup>

Throughout Luke-Acts these terms are used holistically - of Christian disciples and non-disciples and of Israel and the nations. Of ἐπιστρέφω, Marshall comments, "ἐπιστρέφω can be used transitively, 'to convert' someone ([Luke] 1:17; Acts 26:18; Jas. 5:19f.; cf. Mal. 2:6; Sir. 48:10), or intransitively of someone turning, returning or being converted."<sup>345</sup> The term is used in Luke-Acts of Israel turning to God, restored relationships, and from disobedience (Luke 1:16-17), of Peter returning to Jesus (Luke 22:32), of Israel repenting and the removal of sins (Acts 3:19), the Lystrans turning from worthless things to the living God (Acts 14:15), the nations turning to God (Acts 15:19), and turning from the power of Satan (Acts 26:18), both Jews and those from the nations turning to God (Acts 26:20), and in Paul's speech to the

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<sup>344</sup> BDAG, 382 (a) 3 and 4; Walton, "Anthropology," 103; and A. Torrance, "Repentance in Christian Late Antiquity with Special Reference to Mark the Monk, Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, and John Climacus," (DPhil. diss., University of Oxford, 2010), 43.

<sup>345</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 58. Green notes that "Among the NT writings, none is more concerned with conversion than Luke-Acts." Green, *Conversion*, 161. See also Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 140.

Jewish leaders in Rome, his use of Isaiah, and the turning of hearts (Acts 28:27).<sup>346</sup> The word μετάνοια also bears the sense of turning, repentance, or conversion with a sense of remorse.<sup>347</sup> In the Lukan narrative the term is associated with the purpose or outcome εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (Luke 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31), it is connected with sinners repenting (Luke 5:32), human forgiveness (Luke 17:4), life-giving repentance (Acts 11:18), a christological repentance and faith (Acts 20:21), and turning to God (Acts 26:20). The phrase 'forgiveness of sins' is connected with the fulfilment of prophecy (Luke 1:77), occurring within a christological context (Acts 10:43; 26:18), being justified (13:38-39), and being released from the power of Satan (26:18).

Yet to understand these terms more holistically within Luke-Acts they must be situated within the covenantal framework established in the Old Testament and as a continuation of that covenant. This framework - the covenant between Yahweh and the people of Israel - is one of the central theological features of the Old Testament.

Speaking of Deuteronomy but with a wider outlook McConville writes:

The crucial theological category in Deuteronomy's programme was that of covenant, in which in turn Torah (law, instruction) is the regulating principle. Covenant, of course, is not unique to Deuteronomy; the whole Pentateuch may be said to be organised around the concept.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> It is also used physically of the turning of a body (Acts 9:40), Paul and Barnabas returning to the churches (Acts 15:36), and Paul turning to the spirit (Acts 16:18).

<sup>347</sup> BDAG, 640 (a) 2 and 640 (b). See S. E. Porter, "Penitence and Repentance in the Epistles," in *Repentance in Christian Theology* (eds. M. J. Boda and G. Smith; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 2007), 128; and M. J. Ovey, *The Feasts of Repentance: From Luke-Acts to Systematic and Pastoral Theology* (NSBT 49; ed. D. A. Carson; London: Apollos, 2019), 3 for the connection between these words in the New Testament.

<sup>348</sup> J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC 5; eds. D. W. Baker and G. J. Wenham. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2002), 20.

This covenantal relationship is established by Yahweh and founded on the exclusive loyalty and faithfulness of the community of Israel to Yahweh.<sup>349</sup> Wenham, writing about Leviticus, notes, “Under the covenant the people of God were expected to keep the law, not merely as a formal duty but as a loving response to God’s grace in redemption.”<sup>350</sup> The covenantal narrative in the Old Testament records both the faithfulness and unfaithfulness of Israel to this covenant.

Luke-Acts, then, must be appreciated as a continuation of this covenantal story of Yahweh and Israel. Luke-Acts is a narrative “deeply embedded in the ancient story of God’s dealings with Israel”<sup>351</sup> - demonstrated through its strongly Jewish covenantal framework seen in the repetition of the promises made to Abraham and the Patriarchs (Luke 1:55, 73; 3:34; 8:11; 13:16, 28; 19:10; 22:32; Acts 3:13, 25; 7:2, 8), to Moses and the Mosaic Law (Acts 3:22; 6:11, 14; 7:20-40; 13:39; 15:5), and to David (Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4; Acts 1:16; 2:25, 29, 34; 4:25; 7:45; 13:22, 34-36; 15:16) - and as importantly with the nations.<sup>352</sup> This is a covenantal story involving covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness which places ἐπιστρέφω and μετάνοια centrally within the narrational and theological structure.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> J. D. Currid, *Exodus* (vol. 2; Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2001), 62; and A. P. Ross, *Holiness to the LORD: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2002), 49-50; McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 44.

<sup>350</sup> G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT 3; ed. R. K. Harrison; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), 251.

<sup>351</sup> See also E. J. Schnabel, *Jesus and the Twelve* (vol. 1 of Early Christian Mission; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 219; Litwak, *Echoes*, 82; and Bock, “Luke,” 277.

<sup>352</sup> Ovey, *Feasts of Repentance*, 7-9.

<sup>353</sup> Talbert writes that “Conversion is a central focus of Acts, maybe *the* central focus.” His Italics. Talbert, *Milieu*, 135; Ovey, *Repentance*, 2, 11; and Green, *Conversion*, 3.

The early chapters of Luke's Gospel emphasise this continuation of the covenant narrative providing examples of both covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness.<sup>354</sup> Covenant faithfulness is witnessed in the portrayal of various individuals - Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6-7), Mary (1:28, 42-43, 46-55), Simeon and Anna (2:25-32, 36-38), along with the shepherds (2:20). Covenant unfaithfulness is also very much present. The primary work of John the Baptist will be that πολλοὺς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἐπιστρέψει ἐπὶ κύριον τὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν (Luke 1:16-17).<sup>355</sup> The use of ἐπιστρέφω indicates a turning back of the people to covenant faithfulness and this is fulfilled in Luke 3:3-20, for some of the nation - represented by the general population, officials, soldiers, and royalty - repent.

Yet with the Lukan narrative indicating that the terms ἐπιστρέφω and μετάνοια point toward a turning back to covenantal faithfulness in Yahweh this asks what the people in the narrative are repenting of and turning from. Scholarship varies in its response. Green defines those who convert as being "enabled by God, [who] have undergone a redirectional shift and now persist along the Way with the community of those faithfully serving God's eschatological purpose."<sup>356</sup> Marshall, explaining the meaning of ἐπιστρέφω, comments: "*Essentially* it conveys the idea of turning from idolatry and sin to love and serve God."<sup>357</sup> Talbert argues that these terms cover repentance and forgiveness of sins with "a change of behavior [sic] in an ethical direction" for

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<sup>354</sup> Green, *Conversion*, 2.

<sup>355</sup> Green notes six Old Testament references to be found within 1:16-17. These are Deut. 30:2; Mal. 2:6; 4:6; Sir. 48:10; Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3. Green, *Conversion*, 2.

<sup>356</sup> Green, *Conversion*, 163. Green notes that "Among the NT writings, none is more concerned with conversion than Luke-Acts." Green, *Conversion*, 161.

<sup>357</sup> My Italics. Marshall, *Luke*, 58. See also Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 140.



Judaism and “a movement from idolatry to the worship of the living God for the nations.”<sup>358</sup> To consider more carefully what people in Luke-Acts - both Jews and the nations - are turning from and repenting of I am going to briefly examine five passages which are important both structurally and theologically within the Lukan narrative.

### 3.3.2. Repentance in Luke-Acts

#### 3.3.2.1. Luke 1:16-17

Using Old Testament allusions and language the angelic announcement of John the Baptist’s ministry emphasises the need of Israel to turn [back] to God.<sup>359</sup> In this section ἐπιστρέφω is used explicitly twice - turning Israel to God and the hearts of the fathers to their children - and implied a third time - the disobedient turning to wisdom. The use of ἐπιστρέφω in this narrative and its being spoken by the angel - thus giving a divine perspective on Israel - “makes it clear that they [Israel] had gone away from him [Yahweh]”<sup>360</sup> with a need for covenant repentance.<sup>361</sup> Thus Israel is exhibiting covenantal unfaithfulness both in their relationship with Yahweh (v.16) and in the ethical demands of the Mosaic law (v.17). The word ‘disobedient’ (ἀπειθής) is a term used frequently in the LXX of rebellious Israel (cf. Lev. 26:1-46; Num. 11:20; Deut. 1:26; 32:51; Isa. 30:12).<sup>362</sup> Such Old Testament passages reflect the covenant

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<sup>358</sup> Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 136-137.

<sup>359</sup> D. Pao and E. J. Schnabel, “Luke” in *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007), 258.

<sup>360</sup> Morris, *Luke*, 69.

<sup>361</sup> Ovey, *Feasts of Repentance*, 11.

<sup>362</sup> See also Num. 33:51-56; Deut. 29:16-28; 32:5; Isa. 1:2-3; Jer. 7:24-26; 11:7-8; Ezek. 2:6-8; 12:2-3. See Bock, *Acts*, 469; Johnson, *Acts*, 246; and Williams, *Acts*, 245.

unfaithfulness of Israel and connect covenant unfaithfulness with idolatry - something that features in John's words (Luke 3:7).<sup>363</sup> This term is also used later in Acts of the Jews in Iconium who plan with the nations to mistreat Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:5).

### 3.3.2.2. Luke 3:7-14

This early Lukan passage indicates that Israel's salvation has become dependent on genealogy - that Abraham was a friend of God and therefore all his descendants are friends of God as well - rather than repentance and faith as revealed in Scripture (Luke 3:7-15; 13:15; 19:9).<sup>364</sup> Such a genealogical salvation is a marker of covenant unfaithfulness resulting in wrath (3:8). John's message of repentance for the

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<sup>363</sup> N. Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (AOTC 3; ed. D. W. Baker and G. J. Wenham; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 474; Wenham, *Leviticus*, 54; and Pao and Schnabel, "Luke," 258. There are a number of words which relate covenant unfaithfulness and idolatry. These include 1. "חקר" highlighting "the purpose of God's search to expose covenant (un)faithfulness, either idolatry or the moral character of the individual." G. H. Matties and R. D. Patterson, "חקר," *NIDOTTE*, 2:253; 2. "מרד," referring to covenant treachery including idolatry. "Israel's penchant for establishing alliances with pagan nations also represented rebellion against Yahweh (Isa. 36:5). Through such alliances with pagan nations Israel rejected Yahweh's promise of protection as their covenant lord." E. Carpenter and M. A. Grisanti, "מרד." *NIDOTTE*, 2:1098; 3. "בגד" which relates to idolatry through "Israel's flagrant treachery and betrayal that violate the integrity of the personal relation between God and his people... True religion demands complete loyalty, trust, sincerity, and steadfastness of purpose... Real faithfulness to God must be formed in the innermost depths of one's being, in complete, trusting, obedient, grateful dependence on God." R. Wakely, "בגד," *NIDOTTE*, 1:587. See also R. E. Averbek, "נסך," *NIDOTTE*, 3:114; M. VanPelt, W. Kaiser, Jr., A. R. P. Diamond, "שקה," *NIDOTTE*, 4:153; W. J. Dumbrell, "פלֶשׁ," *NIDOTTE*, 4:226; M. A. Grisanti, "שקץ," *NIDOTTE*, 4:244; and J. M. Hadley, "Idolatry: Theology," *NIDOTTE*, 4:715. See McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 109-111; Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 111-112; J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1993), 58; M. Halbertal and A. Margalit, *Idolatry* (trans. N. Goldblum; Cambridge: Mass.; HUP, 1992), 10; B. Rosner, "The Concept of Idolatry," *Themelios* 24 (1999): 21

<sup>364</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 137, 140. Yamasaki-Ransom writes, "being a 'Jew' does not automatically mean belonging to the people of God." Ransom, *Luke's Narrative*, 10. Litwak notes that "Luke so tightly couples the Abrahamic cycle with Luke 1 through discursive framing that the latter may be seen as a direct continuation of the story of Abraham and his descendants." Litwak, *Echoes*, 82. See also Morris, *Luke*, 105; Schnabel, *Jesus and the Twelve*, 219; and Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 112. Beyond John's ministry, one can also find allusions to idolatry in Jesus' ministry such as the programmatic statement of Luke 4:18-19. Here Jesus appeals to the fulfilment of Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-3. These passages in their context reflect Yahweh's salvation of his people from idolatry (Isa. 57:6-10) and their wicked deeds (Isa. 59:1-15). Marshall, *Luke*, 178, 182-184; Beale, *Idolatry*, 184; and Morris, *Luke*, 116

forgiveness of sins (μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) is intimately connected with Isaiah (Luke 3:3-4). The sense of the narrative suggests that both the narratorial audience and the Lukan audience would have known and understood this quotation and its wider context and my contention is that the Isaianic citation should not be considered an isolated quotation but understood within its wider context.<sup>365</sup> Whilst the early part of Isaiah 40 provides comfort to Israel (Isa. 40:1-5) the narrative develops by contrasting Yahweh with idols (Isa. 40:18-20; cf. 41:5-7, 21-24, 29; 42:8, 17; 44:6-20; 46:1-7) with the implication that this is what Israel needs to repent from.<sup>366</sup> Motyer writes, “This [Isa. 40:18-20] is the climax of the first set of four stanzas. The opening questions (18) admit only one answer and then proceed without comment to point up this implied answer by exposing the pathetic inadequacy of idolatry (a topic central to chapters 40-48).”<sup>367</sup> Pao concurs, arguing that this anti-idolatry polemic found in Isaiah 40 underlies the Lukan narrative,<sup>368</sup> and Wakely notes that this Isaianic message relates to idolatry - considered as a form of faithlessness or treachery within the Old Testament covenant relationship.<sup>369</sup> Litwak also agrees, noting that John’s words mirror the prophets and that his message has a focus on the “obduracy of Israel’s ‘fathers’ and their rejection of God and his

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<sup>365</sup> Pao and Schnabel, “Luke,” 275.

<sup>366</sup> Wright, *Mission*, 140.

<sup>367</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 304.

<sup>368</sup> D. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (WUNT II/130; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 101-110. See also T. A. Judge, *Other Gods and Idols: The Relationship between the Worship of Other Gods and the Worship of Idols within the Old Testament* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 674; London: T. & T. Clark, 2019), 120.

<sup>369</sup> Wakely notes that the use of faithlessness or treachery within a covenant relationship is also used in the Old Testament prophets and is directed at “the leaders of the community in Jerusalem...who were responsible for the socioeconomic, political, judicial, and religious welfare of the city, are arraigned for corruption and held culpable for rebellion, pollution, oppression, obstinacy, lack of trust, and irreligion.” Wakely, “בגד,” 1:588-589.

message.”<sup>370</sup> Therefore whilst the language of idolatry is absent from this narrative the underlying Isaianic narrative indicates that the concept is present in the Lukan account. Supporting this further are John’s words when he is κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. Such a phrase echoes the idea of cleansing and return of Israel to covenant faithfulness found in Ezekiel 36:25-27.<sup>371</sup> Therefore such repentance and the return to covenant faithfulness will, according to Luke, be demonstrated ethically, and the Lukan narrative continues to develop ethical distinctions between those in Israel and the nations who demonstrate covenant faithfulness and those who do not (Luke 16:14-15; 18:9-14; 19:1-10; 20:9-18). This continues throughout Acts, being found at significant and structural junctures of the narrative (Acts 7:51-53; 13:40, 45-51; 28:25-27).

### 3.3.2.3. Acts 3:11-26

Situated in Jerusalem and within the Temple environs, the context of this passage is the physical and spiritual heart of Israel. Having healed a lame man, and being surrounded by Israelites (v.12), Peter, connecting this people with the covenant promises of Yahweh to the patriarchs (v.13), proclaims Jerusalem’s culpability in the rejection and death of Yahweh’s servant, Jesus (vv.13-15; cf. 4:15). Such rejection and negative action reinforces the idea of covenant unfaithfulness through the people’s need to respond in repentance (cf. Luke 20:9-19; Acts 7:51-53). The use of ἐπιστρέφω and μετανοέω together creates an emphatic sense of repentance, as Witherington notes: “It is not just a matter of turning from sin (repentance-*metanoia*),

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<sup>370</sup> Litwak, *Echoes*, 185-186.

<sup>371</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant*, 298, 301 and Peterson, “Acts,” 287.

but of turning to God.”<sup>372</sup> The context also highlights that this repentance is defined covenantally through the scriptural salvation history of Israel (v.13) and christologically as the fulfilment of the promises of Yahweh (vv.14-16). Therefore since these people must turn from sin (v.19), such a turning must be understood covenantally and christologically.

Whilst the Old Testament has a range of images for sin - including ‘to miss or fail’, ‘to rebel or transgress’, or ‘iniquity and guilt’<sup>373</sup> - the overarching category of sin is that of covenant unfaithfulness. Wenham, writing of the Levitical purification offering but with relevance to the situating of Acts 3, notes,

Sin disrupts the relationship between God and man, and between man and man. It poses a threat to the covenant relationship by provoking divine anger...Sin not only angers God and deprives him of his due, it also makes his sanctuary unclean. A holy God cannot dwell amid uncleanness. The purification offering purifies the place of worship, so that God may be present among his people.<sup>374</sup>

This covenant unfaithfulness is recognised through the three categories above. The first is ‘to miss or fail’. Luc notes that there are three themes that relate to this sense: human responsibility, being alienated from God, and God’s mercy and grace.<sup>375</sup> This is seen within this pericope in Peter’s speech; the Jews in Jerusalem fail to recognise the true identity of Jesus and are responsible for the death of Jesus (vv.13-15), they will be cut off if they refuse to repent (v.23), and there is the

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<sup>372</sup> Peter says, μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε πρὸς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας. Witherington, *Acts*, 184. See also μετανοέω, BDAG 640 (a); μετάνοια, BDAG 640 (b); Schnabel, *Acts*, 213-214; Peterson, *Acts*, 179; C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 1:203.

<sup>373</sup> A. Luc, “χρη,” *NIDOTTE*, 2:87.

<sup>374</sup> Wenham, *Leviticus*, 89.

<sup>375</sup> Luc, “χρη,” *NIDOTTE*, 2:89.

opportunity in repentance to experience blessing (v.19).<sup>376</sup> The second sense that develops within the immediate context is 'to rebel', that is the "wilful violation[s] by an inferior against a superior."<sup>377</sup> For Israel this occurs within a covenant context (v.13).<sup>378</sup> Whilst Israel acts ignorantly (v.17), the narrative develops a clear sense that now the ignorance is dispelled, there is wilful disobedience that develops from an inward spirit (5:17; cf. 7:9; 13:45; 17:5). This is expressed in the actions of the religious leaders and such disobedience might be perceived as idolatry. Whilst Wakely notes that idolatry in the Old Testament is portrayed as indifference to Yahweh's commands and "An offense of faithlessness against a fellow member of the covenant family,"<sup>379</sup> Taylor highlights the negative connotations writing, "Idolatry is a root that sprouts poisonous and bitter growth (Deut. 29:18[17]). Justice or litigation can be turned into poison, as it were."<sup>380</sup> The proclamation of repentance here should be understood primarily as both an inward turn of the heart (Ezek. 14:7), and an external turn, relating to social and ethical practices (cf. Luke 3:3-14).<sup>381</sup> This repentance comes with positive implications - their sins "can be erased"<sup>382</sup> (vv.19-20) - and negative implications - rejecting such repentance will result in being cut off from God (v.23).

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<sup>376</sup> Peterson, "Acts," 289; and Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 138. Bock recognises this as a pattern in Luke's Gospel. Bock, "Luke," 278.

<sup>377</sup> Luc, "אחח," *NIDOTTE* 2:88.

<sup>378</sup> Ovey, *Feasts of Repentance*, 43.

<sup>379</sup> R. Wakely, "אוס," *NIDOTTE*, 3:230.

<sup>380</sup> R. A. Taylor, "אא," *NIDOTTE*, 3:1024.

<sup>381</sup> Duguid states that Israel is guilty of "internal idolatry." I. M. Duguid, *Ezekiel* (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999), 183. See also E. Carpenter and M. A. Grisanti, "אא," *NIDOTTE*, 1:313.

<sup>382</sup> Holladay, *Acts*, 120.

#### 3.3.2.4. Acts 7:1-53

Although this passage contains no references to ἐπιστρέφω or μετάνοια it is significant because of its explicit references to the covenant unfaithfulness and its connection with the idolatry of Israel. Whilst there is no call for repentance this is most likely because Stephen is stoned before he reaches the climax of his speech. It is possible that, as with Peter in Acts 3:19, Stephen would have exhorted his hearers to turn, ἐπιστρέφω, and repent, μετάνοια, from their idols. Such a situation is normative within Acts as a continuation of the Old Testament.<sup>383</sup> Stephen's speech is significant because of the striking similarities with Jesus' arrest and trial. It is further significant because it occurs in Jerusalem - the geographical and theological centre of Judaism - and is placed within a strongly covenantal framework which uses the salvation-history of Israel. Witherington notes that this speech emphasises the rejection of the prophets and therefore of God (7:38-39). He writes,

This speech is not an apologetic one in which Stephen is defending himself against false charges, nor is it in essence either Law or temple critical. Rather, it is critical of those Jews who down through the ages have rejected God's prophets and messengers and their messages, and critical of some of these Jews' assumptions, including assumptions about God dwelling in the temple.<sup>384</sup>

Against the backdrop of God's faithfulness and mercy, Stephen's speech demonstrates the faithlessness of some of Israel. Stephen highlights that though Moses received λόγια ζῶντα δοῦναι ἡμῖν, these were rejected for the people's own wisdom which resulted in a turning away in their hearts and dissociation from

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<sup>383</sup> Rydelnik's article is interesting at this juncture. Of Jewish descent his father disowned him, his mother, and two sisters when he followed Yeshua. On his father's death Rydelnik re-examines his perspective and his understanding of the state of the Jewish people from a particularist perspective. M. A. Rydelnik, "The Jewish People and Salvation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 (2008): 447-462.

<sup>384</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 258.

Yahweh in favour of Egypt.<sup>385</sup> Such covenantal unfaithfulness resulted in the creation of the golden calf (7:41), which Halbertal and Margalit call the “the epitome of idolatry in the Bible,”<sup>386</sup> the fulfilment of the desire for other gods (7:40) and an idol (7:41). Thus Israel’s specific sin is identified by Stephen as idolatry.<sup>387</sup> This idolatry demonstrates that Israel have turned away and been unfaithful to the covenant promises and disloyal to Yahweh.<sup>388</sup> The seriousness of idolatry in the hearts of Israel is seen in Ezekiel 14:1-8 with a resultant estrangement from Yahweh. Day states, “No portion of Scripture addresses this root issue of idolatry so repeatedly and pointedly as the hard-hitting Book of Ezekiel...Of all the sins God condemns and people commit, idolatry is the root sin, the sin that explains all the others. And this sin of idolatry is rooted in the heart.”<sup>389</sup> Yahweh’s response, says Stephen, was to give Israel over to the idolatry they desire (Acts 7:42-43; cf. Rom. 1:24-25) - that is the further creation of, and active dependence on, idols, false worship and false gods.<sup>390</sup> Keener draws this out in respect to salvation history in Acts and with reference to Stephen’s speech. He writes,

To reject God’s testimony is to put him to the test (15:10), as Israel of old had done; testing God or lying to him can have terrible consequences

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<sup>385</sup> Acts 7:39: ἀλλὰ ἀπώσαντο καὶ ἐστράφησαν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν εἰς Αἴγυπτον. BDAG, 948 (b) 4.

<sup>386</sup> Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry*, 195.

<sup>387</sup> I. H. Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007), 564.

<sup>388</sup> McConville states that “It is a first assertion in this chapter that obedience to law is at the same time a matter of loyalty to Yahweh.” McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 44. R. Averbeck agrees writing in regard to altar worship. He states the regulations in Deuteronomy 12 were “concerned primarily with ensuring the exclusivity of Yahweh worship against the idolatrous and syncretistic tendencies of the Israelites.” R. E. Averbeck, “עֲרֵב,” *NIDOTTE*, 2:892.

<sup>389</sup> J. N. Day, “Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 21.

<sup>390</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 271. See also Beale, *Idolatry*, 189; Marshall, “Acts,” 571; Johnson, *Acts*, 131; Wright, *Mission*, 141; M. Ovey, “Idolatry and Spiritual Parody: Counterfeit Faiths,” *Cambridge Papers* 11 (2002): 3; and B. Witherington III, *The New Testament Story* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 133.



(5:4-5, 9-10). God can hand transgressors over to their own madness (7:42) or send other judgements (8:20-21). He can punish terribly those who usurp his role (12:22-23) and is angry with hypocrites who speak falsely in his name (23:3).<sup>391</sup>

Stephen draws out the nature of the idolatry in detail citing Amos 5:25-27 (LXX).<sup>392</sup> In doing this Stephen connects the Israel of the past with the Israel of the present.<sup>393</sup>

This speech is very significant in the narrative of Acts since it provides a basis for the Lukan audience to understand later engagements between the Christian assembly and Jewish individuals or groups. It is also significant to the later narrative because of the parallels with Paul's paradigmatic speech in Acts 13:13-52. Whilst the specific language of idolatry is absent from Paul's speech for the Lukan audience, the echo of Acts 7 would, I contend, identify the concept of idolatry as the root problem of diaspora Judaism to the fore.<sup>394</sup>

### 3.3.2.5. Acts 28:17-31

This concluding section situates itself within a strongly Jewish setting (v.17, v.23). Engaging with a diaspora group who have not heard of Paul (v.21) the references to Moses and the Prophets should, for the Lukan audience, remind them of the paradigmatic engagement in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-52) as well as the further

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<sup>391</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 496.

<sup>392</sup> Marshall notes that "The connection between idolatry in the wilderness and the later worship of false gods and the consequent judgement is brought out in the lengthy citation from Amos 5:25-27." Marshall, "Acts," 565. See also J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Amos: The Day of the Lion* (BST; ed. J. A. Motyer; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 136-137.

<sup>393</sup> At the end of Stephen's speech he again identifies those Jews listening to him with their ancestors (ὡς οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν καὶ ὑμεῖς). This idolatry results in the "whole Jewish people throughout their history" being described as "stiff-necked" and having "uncircumcised hearts and ears" (7:51-52). See Marshall, "Acts," 570; Beale, *Idolatry*, 189; and B. Peterson, "Stephen's Speech as a Modified Prophetic Rib Formula," *JETS* 57 (2014): 369.

<sup>394</sup> This is further explored in chapter four of this thesis.

engagements with the Jewish diaspora communities. The response of this diaspora group is at the fore. Paul's method of engagement is scriptural and christological and the response of the Jews is, as in previous engagements, mixed (vv.24-25). Paul cites Isaiah 6 to explain the unbelief - itself a fulfilment of Scripture - and his appeal to the Spirit gives this passage a gnomic sense for Israel.<sup>395</sup> Litwak argues that this is because "Luke uses the scriptures to identify who the true people of God are."<sup>396</sup>

The Isaiah 6 citation provides a connection with the use of Isaiah 40 in Luke 3. Whilst the Luke 3 use of Isaiah 40 proclaimed a positive repentance this section is pessimistic with a sense of judgement because the people have a holistic inability to understand.<sup>397</sup> It also provides a connection with Amos 5 cited in Acts 7 making judgement more certain.<sup>398</sup> The use of Isaiah 6 at this point and its connection with Isaiah 40 and Amos 5 indicates "that they [some of the Roman Jews] are in a state of separation from God, caused by unfaithfulness or rebellion."<sup>399</sup> In Isaiah and Amos this state of unfaithfulness and rebellion comes from the people rejecting Yahweh and his law and embracing the pagan rituals, beliefs of other nations (Isa. 2:6-8, 17-18, 19-20). Most particularly it comes through idolatry. Motyer writes of Isaiah 2:

People's proudest achievement is to dispense with the living God and to become god-makers. Then indeed they have come of age! But the standard by which everything must be judged is how it will fare on the day of the Lord. On that day such 'gods' will be seen as good for nothing and thrown away. The idolater is no stronger than his idol

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<sup>395</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 802. See also Marshall, "Acts," 600; Litwak, *Echoes*, 183; and Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 153.

<sup>396</sup> Litwak, *Echoes*, 181.

<sup>397</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 78. See also Pao and Schnabel, "Luke," 278; and Marshall "Acts," 600-601.

<sup>398</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 58.

<sup>399</sup> Litwak, *Echoes*, 188. See also Marshall, "Acts," 601 and Johnson, *Acts*, 471.

and the idol no less helpless than he.<sup>400</sup>

Therefore whilst the vocabulary of idolatry is absent in Acts 28 Beale seems correct when he argues that the concept is present. He writes, “Though nothing is explicitly said about idolatry, as was also the case in the Gospels, because the Isaiah passage in its original context is about idolatry, that theme would appear also to carry over here.”<sup>401</sup> In the case of Acts 28, though, the idolatry is specifically bound to a disbelief in the christological fulfilment of the scriptures (vv.23-24).<sup>402</sup>

### 3.3.3. Covenant Faithfulness, Repentance and the Nations

Along with Israel ἐπιστρέφω in Acts is also used of the nations (11:21; 14:15; 15:19) and is connected once with μετάνοια (26:20). In the Old Testament the nations, with their polytheistic worldviews and worship, are outside of the particular covenant relationship with Yahweh that Israel has received. Yet Scripture indicates that the nations are included within a universal covenant (Gen. 1:28; 9:8-17) and will be recipients of the blessing that comes to and through Israel (Gen. 12:1-3). Wright, commenting on God’s promise to Abraham, writes, “And that promise has, as its bottom line, God’s intention of bringing blessing to all the nations of the earth.”<sup>403</sup> Therefore one of the ways in which Israel is depicted in the Old Testament - and the way the nation relates to the surrounding cultures - is as a light to the nations.<sup>404</sup> The nations are to be witnesses of Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh (Exod.

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<sup>400</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 58. See Amos 5:16-25 and Acts 7:42-43.

<sup>401</sup> Beale, *Idolatry*, 199.

<sup>402</sup> See Stenschke, *Gentiles*, 378-382.

<sup>403</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 35 and 155; and Hays, *Every People and Nation*, 161.

<sup>404</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 155.

15:14-16; Josh. 2:9-11).<sup>405</sup> Thus the eschatological trajectory of Scripture is the inclusion of the nations as the people of God who experience the same blessings as Israel (cf. Pss. 47:1-2; 67:1-7; 86:8-10; Zech. 8:12-13).<sup>406</sup> This testimony of Israel - which is both an example of covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness - along with Yahweh's general revelation, through the creation, and in the common grace of Yahweh, seen in the seasons (14:17), the nations, and their creative abilities (17:24, 26, 27, 29) - means that the nations are accountable to him (14:17; 17:24-26). It is for this reason that the nations are to turn from idolatry (14:15; 17:16) and ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα (14:15; cf. 17:30-31). Such repentance is to be understood christologically.

#### 3.3.4. A Christological Hermeneutic of Repentance

The nature of repentance in Luke-Acts occurs at the metaphysical and epistemological levels - sometimes simultaneously - and not purely at the ethical level. This christological repentance creates a new hermeneutical framework by which the world is re-interpreted christologically. One example of this new hermeneutic is Saul/Paul.<sup>407</sup> His religiosity in 8:1 and 9:1-2 echoes that of the religious leaders in the early narrative and results in the persecution of the Christian

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<sup>405</sup> Wright, *Mission*, 469-470. Wright comments "The same summons to the nations as witnesses of God's covenant with Israel (or its breach) is found in Jeremiah 6:18-19 and Amos 3:9...But the nations are not just summoned to witness the making or breaking of the covenant. Ideally, they should be able to observe Israel living by it. In fact, such testimony to the nations of the wisdom of God's ways embodied in the social life of God's people is presented as a major motivation for obedience to God's law...In other words, Israel's visibility to the nations was meant to be not merely historically remarkable but radically and ethically challenging."

<sup>406</sup> Wright, *Mission*, 478.

<sup>407</sup> Other examples include Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:23, 27-34).

assembly.<sup>408</sup> Confronted with the risen Jesus (9:5) Paul is utterly changed, to the astonishment of the assembly (9:21) and the bewilderment and anger of some of the Jews, as he interprets the scriptures in a new, christological, way (9:22-24). Kern writes,

His [Saul's] faith in Jesus is neither an outgrowth nor a natural result of prior commitments: rather than natural it is born of the supernatural. He must therefore reappraise his past, reject his present, and completely re-evaluate his view of God and what he is doing in the world. His assessment of Jesus involves a redefining of the nature of God himself, and demands a new hermeneutic which pulls down and then reconstructs his theology of Scripture, the Law and the way to live for God.<sup>409</sup>

This re-evaluation also provides the framework for engaging with the structures and customs of the culture. Therefore in Luke-Acts structures and customs are assessed and interpreted christologically. Where there is a similarity or continuity with the structures and customs of a culture, the Christian assembly will use them - for example they continue meeting in and using Jewish customs and structures (cf. 2:16-21, 25-28, 34-35; 46; 13:15). Yet where customs and structures do not reflect this new hermeneutical framework there are a variety of responses. These include stopping practices (cf. 14:13-15, 18; 15:19-21), critiquing beliefs, or using them to provide an explanation of the Christian gospel (17:23, 28). One significant implication of this is that where the Jews do not interpret the scriptures christologically this indicates that they are acting in a disbelieving way. Johnson, writing of the Jewish response in Acts 14, states,

From the side of God, the visitation of humans is for their salvation.  
From the side of humans, that visitation and salvation can only be

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<sup>408</sup> Schnabel, "Persecutions," 526-527.

<sup>409</sup> P. H. Kern, "Paul's Conversion and Luke's Portrayal of Character in Acts 8-10," *TynB* 54 (2003): 79.

realised by acceptance in faith. Those who accept in faith become part of the authentic Israel in the Spirit. Those who do not still remain Jews according to the previous understanding of that identity with the hearing and observance of Torah, but they refuse the invitation to share in this realisation of the people: they are 'disbelieving.'<sup>410</sup>

This new hermeneutic substantially contributes to understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures, enabling a greater understanding of the structures and the customs found in the narrative.

### 3.3.5. Repentance, Idolatry and its Identifiable Markers in Luke-Acts

The idolatry of the nations in Luke-Acts - specifically the Lystrans in Acts 14 and the Athenians in Acts 17 - is regularly commented on in scholarship. Yet the repentance and idolatry of Israel, particularly in the diaspora narratives, is rarely remarked on, most likely because there is an absence of explicit vocabulary. Holladay, concluding his study of the covenantal forms of 'return' in the Hebrew Bible, and alluding to Jer. 3:14, 22, states "there are no words in the OT for apostasy and repentance, and where there is no vocabulary there can be no concepts."<sup>411</sup> Focusing on the latter part of this sentence, my contention is that Holladay is incorrect and that whilst vocabulary might be absent, the concept can be present.

Throughout Luke-Acts there is the use of repentance and turning language (μετάνοια and ἐπιστρέφω) to the nations *and* Israel which indicates the need for *both* to turn from covenant unfaithfulness and to turn to God. For Israel this is most clearly

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<sup>410</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 250.

<sup>411</sup> Holladay, *Acts*, 10.

addressed in the geographically and narratively climactic episode of Acts 7.<sup>412</sup>

Stephen's words simultaneously identify Israel's fundamental problem, idolatry, and interpret Israel's historical rejection of Yahweh's words and christological rejection in Luke 1-Acts 6. Furthermore, this pericope acts as the lens through which the Lukan audience can interpret the later engagements between the Christian assembly and diaspora Judaism. This ability for the Lukan audience to interpret the later engagements with diaspora Judaism means that despite the lack of vocabulary in the later engagements this does not mean the absence of the concept, as Holladay maintains. This is found throughout Luke-Acts as shown in the previous section.

Further examples include Luke 19:1-10 where the vocabulary of turning and repentance is absent and yet Jesus proclaims salvation (εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι Σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ ἐγένετο, καθότι καὶ αὐτὸς υἱὸς Ἀβραάμ ἐστίν). More clearly in Acts 9:1-19 there is no vocabulary referring to turning or to salvation and yet clearly these concepts are to be understood as being present by both the narrational and Lukan audiences (cf. 9:15 and 9:17).

By looking at the concepts of ἐπιστρέφω and μετάνοια, along with the associated elements of covenant unfaithfulness and idolatry it is possible to provide some identifiable markers of idolatry in Luke-Acts even where the terminology is absent. First, idolatry is portrayed as being opposed to the epistemological revelation of the scriptures interpreted christologically and pneumatologically, through the words of Jesus, and the words of those followers whom the narrative depicts as trustworthy. Second, idolatry results in an alternative, false worship, that mimics true worship and

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<sup>412</sup> See 3.3.2.4. Acts 7:1-53 for comments on Acts 7.

blurs the Creator-creature distinction. For example, Stephen, in Acts 7:43-44, contrasts “the tent of Moloch” (τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μολόχ) with “the tent of witness” (ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου), and in Acts 17:29 Paul rejects the use of divine images and statues.<sup>413</sup> The third identifiable marker of idolatry in Luke-Acts is opposition to Yahweh positively identified in the person of Jesus.<sup>414</sup> The fourth marker is divine judgement for idolatry but also divine mercy since Yahweh provides the christological means for people to turn, or return, to covenantal faithfulness with himself.<sup>415</sup> These Lukan markers provide significant overlap with Strange’s identifiable markers of idolatry and also other New Testament writings where idolatry is positioned as humanity’s fundamental issue, not only for the nations and Israel, but also for those in the Christian assembly (Acts 14:8-20; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 8-10; 1 John 5:21).<sup>416</sup>

### 3.3.6. Summary

Luke-Acts, then, is a continuation of the Old Testament demonstrating the fulfilment of the covenant promises of Yahweh to Israel with a christological and

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<sup>413</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 147.

<sup>414</sup> Richard Bauckham, “Biblical Theology and the Problems of Monotheism,” in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. C. Bartholomew et al.; Carlisle: Paternoster: 2004), 196. Wright, *Mission of God*, 139, 163, 188.

<sup>415</sup> C. P. Baylis, “Repentance in Acts in Light of Deuteronomy 30,” *Michigan Theological Journal* 1 (1990): 19.

<sup>416</sup> Strange’s identifiable markers of idolatry include covenant unfaithfulness seen in the acceptance of non-scriptural words and a self-determined autonomy - both metaphysically and epistemologically - which results in doubt, disobedience, and disbelief; the mimicking of true worship to something other than God, the blurring of the Creator-creature distinction; and in the New Testament not recognising the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is. For New Testament portrayals of idolatry see: D. Secombe, *Dust to Destiny: Reading Romans Today* (Sydney: Aquila Press, 2000), 34-36; J. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Tyndale; Leicester: IVP, 1983), 196-197; A. Thisleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 616-620; D. E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; eds. R. W. Yarborough and R. H. Stein; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), 347-362.



pneumatological emphasis. As fundamentally theological - with the events, places, and voices being interpreted theologically although not at the expense of the historical, social, or cultural elements - Luke-Acts should be perceived as a paradigm of navigating the engagement with the surrounding cultures and the means of contextualising the Christian gospel. The continuation of the Old Testament context and the christological emphasis in Luke-Acts provides the foundation for the language of repentance - for both Israel and the nations. Repentance and turning to God are conceptually key to understanding Luke-Acts. Such repentance language also identifies that as people are to turn to God so they are to turn from idolatry - and that idolatry is the fundamental issue underlying the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Idolatry in Luke-Acts has clearly identifiable markers - with considerable overlap to Strange's - and although the vocabulary is not always explicitly present it can be seen that the concept of idolatry is established at a pivotal and structural junction, Acts 7, allowing it to underlie the following depictions of Judaism, the Graeco-Roman world, and the Roman State.

#### **4. Chapter Summary**

Keener and Rowe provide helpful insights to develop our understanding of the engagement that occurs between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Yet, as with the previous scholarship analysed in chapter one, they draw different conclusions regarding the engagements, Keener portraying the socially transformative element of the assembly positively whilst defending it from the charge of political subversion, and Rowe portraying the collision that occurs as ultimately subversive of the whole of Graeco-Roman life including the political. Neither perspective seems fully to capture both the positive and the negative dimensions of

this multi-faceted engagement.

The theological orientation of Acts focused upon three important areas: the theological character of Luke-Acts, the fulfilment of Scripture and covenant promises in Luke-Acts, and covenant faithfulness and repentance in Luke-Acts. These provide a framework by which to better understand the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. The theological character of the Lukan narrative emphasises God's activity in the world through the risen and ascended Lord Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the word, and by means of the life and proclamation of the Christian assembly. Such a framework means that the engagements within the pericopes are presented within a theological context and understanding. This theological emphasis does not negate the historical, political, or social aspects found in the narrative but does interpret such events theologically. Thus the continuities and discontinuities and the resulting tensions that occur should be considered as primarily theological, as should the ways in which the tensions manifest themselves. The fulfilment of Scripture and the covenant promises of Yahweh, as found in Scripture, also provide a means for understanding more clearly the engagements that occur in the pericopes. The christological and pneumatological fulfilment of the promises reflect the way in which the Lukan narrative takes the history, writings, and the stories of the Jews and those of the nations and provides a re-interpretation of them through a proclamation that not just fulfils but implicitly subverts to a different end, one that is found in the present but which also has an eschatological trajectory. Drawing upon these two previous themes, the framework of covenant faithfulness and repentance provides the means for understanding the theological tensions that develop in the pericopes.

The early narrative of Acts develops a contrast between a repentant Christian assembly and an unrepentant Israel. A lack of covenant faithfulness and repentance reflects both false faith and false worship, two elements of idolatry in the Old Testament. Beyond Israel, the polytheistic beliefs of the nations also highlight idolatrous beliefs and practices providing a clear contrast with the Christian assembly and a means for understanding the tension that develops in the engagements. I would also contend that the potentiality of idolatry can be identified within the Christian assembly (Acts 15). This will be further examined in chapter six and is significant as it has the potential to reinforce comments made in chapter two about the complexity of idolatry and its portrayal in Luke-Acts. This might challenge Daniel Strange's interpretation and application of idolatry which he contends is something found in the religious 'Other' and which needs to be exposed by the Christian message and be fulfilled in Christ.

With this framework in place we now turn to the selected sections of narrative to consider in which ways subversive-fulfilment might provide a fresh approach to understanding the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures and also how an engagement between subversive-fulfilment and the text might nuance subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens. To enable the reader to follow this application of subversive-fulfilment I have broken this part of the thesis into five chapters (focused in turn on 13:13-52; 14:1-22; 15:1-29; 16:1-40; 17:1-34) each following the same three-part structure. Such a methodology provides a controlled means of approaching the narrative whilst taking seriously the narrative's natural development. In each chapter I will follow the same procedure; engaging closely with the text and Acts' scholarship so as to: (i) provide a short

description of each pericope and place it in the appropriate narrative context; (ii) outline and critically analyse how the pericope has been interpreted by my two main dialogue partners, Craig Keener and C. K. Rowe; (iii) provide a subversive-fulfilment reading of the pericope. By placing *possessio* at the heart of this reading, the various continuities and points of contact between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures are identified and shown to be christologically captured, fulfilled, and interpreted. This results in the introduction to the engagement of discontinuities because this christological capturing and interpretation subverts the belief, understanding, or practice of the surrounding cultures. Because *possessio* is a flexible tool this fulfillment and subversion can occur at the levels of the metaphysical - reflected in the beliefs and religiosity of the surrounding cultures about the divine - the epistemological - in the nature of knowledge and revelation about the metaphysical - and the ethical - the way in which the metaphysical and epistemological are made manifest in the structures, values and customs of the culture. By establishing the elements of fulfillment and subversion it is possible to account for the tension enabling both an identification of and rationale for the tension that occurs between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. All of these combine to provide evidence of the identifiable markers which relate to idolatry or an idolatrous trajectory. The engagement can then be considered through Strange's four steps and their application to the narrative. This may also mean commenting on any adaptations or modifications that might occur to Strange's work as the subversive-fulfilment hermeneutic engages with the narrative. Finally this approach will allow me to consider how this hermeneutic using *possessio* might contribute a fresh and original approach to reading this portion of Acts and the wider narrative.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ACTS 13:13-52

### 1. Reading the Narrative

Chapter one identified the weaknesses and limitations of previous scholarship in approaching the engagements in Acts - one of which was the failure to apply their models across an unbroken section of narrative. A second weakness was the application of methodologies on selected, and often truncated passages. One passage regularly omitted by much of previous scholarship is Acts 13.

Acts 13:13-52 is significant for an understanding of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures because it provides a narrational paradigm for Paul's engagement with diaspora Judaism and with those from the nations who associate with the synagogue (14:1-2; 17:1-4, 10-12; 18:4, 19-20; 19:8-9).<sup>417</sup> Thus this passage helps to fill in the 'gaps' which the narrative leaves throughout the encounters within the synagogues depicted in Acts 14 to 17 because the narrative assumes that knowledge is gained from 13:13-52.<sup>418</sup> This passage is further significant because it provides a paradigm of response, both of diaspora Judaism and of those nations associated with the synagogue, as well as the

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<sup>417</sup> Luke summarises this in Acts 20:21 when Paul says, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." See also Witherington, *Acts*, 390 and 408, Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2001 and 2026; Peterson, *Acts*, 372 and 383; Parsons, *Acts*, 183 and 191; R. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2009), 11; M. L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* (JSNTS 110; ed. S. E. Porter; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 148-149; Longenecker, "Moral Character and Divine Generosity," 142-143; Tyson, "Jews and Judaism," 29; Thompson, *Church*, 168; Miller, "Paul's Gentile Mission," 101-102; Dunn, *Jerusalem*, 426, and Stott, *Acts*, 222.

<sup>418</sup> This is similar to Kauppi's approach in which he asserts that the author and audience have shared cultural and literary 'competencies' which allow the audience to understand the meaning in a text particularly when there are gaps. Kauppi, *Foreign*, 9-10.

interplay between these cultures.<sup>419</sup>

Set apart by the Antiochene church Barnabas and Paul travel through the Mediterranean.<sup>420</sup> Pisidian Antioch was a Roman colony and cultic centre established by Augustus and which was linked to other colonies such as Iconium and Lystra using the *via Sebaste*.<sup>421</sup> Within this colony there was likely a large Jewish presence and the focus of the pericope is the engagement at the synagogue (v.14).<sup>422</sup> Though the Lukan narrative often depicts the synagogue as a place of confrontation between Jesus and some Jews, and a place where his disciples will have to defend themselves, the initial use of the synagogue echoes Jesus' practice of teaching there.<sup>423</sup> Paul and Barnabas enter the synagogue and sit, a marker of

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<sup>419</sup> For a survey of scholarship on this speech see J. E. Morgan-Wynne, *Paul's Pisidian Antioch Speech (Acts 13)* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2014), 1-33. See Williams, *Acts*, 229; Johnson, *Acts*, 239; and Parsons, *Acts*, 197.

<sup>420</sup> For the possible options of the route that was taken from Perga to Pisidian Antioch see M. Wilson, "The Route of Paul's First Journey to Pisidian Antioch," *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009): 471-483; and Williams, *Acts*, 230-231. For a study on Barnabas see J. Read-Heimerdinger, "Barnabas in Acts: A Study of his Role in the Text of the Codex Bezae," *JSNT* 72 (1998): 23-66; and S. J. Murphy, "The Role of Barnabas in the Book of Acts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010): 319-341.

<sup>421</sup> Hardin, *Galatians*, 52-53, 54; Holladay, *Acts*, 264; C. Breytenbach, *Paulus und Barnabas in Der Provinz Galatien: Studien zu Apostelgeschichte 13f., 16,6; 18,23 und den Adressaten des Galaterbriefes* (AGJU 38; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1; and A. Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Kapitel 13-28* (ÖTNT 5/2; eds. E. Gräßer and K. Kertelge; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1985), 330. For a description of the Roman influence within Pisidian Antioch see Hardin, *Galatians*, 58-63.

<sup>422</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 450 and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2039-20142. Keener notes that Pisidian Antioch may have been chosen by Barnabas and Paul because of the connections with Sergius Paulus. Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2027, 2037. Agreeing with this, Breytenbach and Zimmerman also suggest Paul's Roman citizenship may have "played a role." C. Breytenbach and C. Zimmerman, *Early Christianity in Lycaonia and Adjacent Areas: From Paul to Amphilochius of Iconium* (AJEC 101/ECAM 2; eds. C. Breitenbach and C. Marksches; Leiden: Brill, 2018), 62. See also Witherington, *Acts*, 403; Rowe, "Imperial Cult," 282; and Peterson, *Acts*, 385. Gruen notes that "the synagogue, as far as our evidence allows, served as a prime signal of Jewish existence." Gruen, *Diaspora*, 105.

<sup>423</sup> Luke 4:28; 12:11; 13:14; 21:12; Acts 6:9; 9:12.

status or as teachers.<sup>424</sup> The familial language, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί,<sup>425</sup> indicates that Barnabas and Paul are considered Jewish rather than distinctly Christian.<sup>426</sup> Whilst the plural, οἱ ἀρχισυνάγωγοι, is unusual since there was normally one synagogue ruler, scholars note that this may have been an honorary title, that the synagogue community may have been unusually big, or a title that indicated a socio-economic patronage of the synagogue.<sup>427</sup> Alternatively it is possible that this was a gathering of multiple synagogues.<sup>428</sup> With the Lukan Paul at the fore of the narrative (13:8) he provides the requested λόγος παρακλήσεως, a phrase emphasising the exhortatory nature of the speech as opposed to an exposition of the scriptures read in the synagogue service.<sup>429</sup>

The speech occurs within a recognisable first-century structure. Witherington writes that the speech included the: “(1) *exordium* or proem - v. 16; (2) *narratio* - vv. 17-25; (3) *propositio* - v.26; (4) the setting forth of the *probatio*... - vv.27-37; (5) a *peroratio* or final exhortation - vv.38-41.”<sup>430</sup> Rather than a set scriptural text Paul uses the

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<sup>424</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2044. For Jesus’ practice of teaching in the synagogue see Luke 4:16, 31-33; 6:6; 13:10.

<sup>425</sup> The use of this phrase occurs eleven times in Acts. 1:16; 2:29; 2:37; 7:2; 7:26; 13:15; 13:26; 13:38; 15:7; 15:13; 22:1.

<sup>426</sup> Trebilco writes that ἀδελφοί “is used as a designation by Jews (who are sometimes Jewish Christians) of each other with the meaning of ‘fellow kinsman’ or ‘compatriot’.” Trebilco, “Self-designations in Acts,” 31-32. Acts 4:36 states that Barnabas is a Levite whilst Acts 8:59 and 22:3 gives Saul/Paul a high credibility within Judaism. Keener notes other suggestions such as that Jewish teachers wore special apparel that indicated their status. Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2045. See also Barrett, *Acts*, 1:629 and Pervo, *Acts*, 331-332.

<sup>427</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 406; Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2046-2047; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:629; Johnson, *Acts*, 230; Bock, *Acts*, 451; Peterson, *Acts*, 386 n. 55; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 103.

<sup>428</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2047.

<sup>429</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 271. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 231; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2047.

<sup>430</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 407. See also Schnabel, *Acts*, 570-571; and Bruce, *Acts*, 302-312.

sweep of salvation history to demonstrate God's pattern of working in history.<sup>431</sup> This is done not to establish "the continuity between Israel and the church," as Conzelmann proposes,<sup>432</sup> nor "to appeal to national pride," contra Williams,<sup>433</sup> but to demonstrate the authenticity of this new grouping as the fulfilment of the covenant promises in Scripture.<sup>434</sup> This speech reveals Paul's new hermeneutic placing the fulfilment of the promises christologically.<sup>435</sup> Whilst this speech has similarities with Stephen's,<sup>436</sup> Paul does not rehearse the failures of Israel, though he does allude to them (13:18, 21),<sup>437</sup> and he distinguishes these diaspora Jews from the Jews in Jerusalem (13:27).<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> See J. A. Meek, *The Gentile Mission in Old Testament Citations in Acts: Text, Hermeneutic, and Purpose* (LNTS 385; ed. M. Goodacre; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 14-20 for some considerations of how to listen to Luke's use of the Old Testament.

<sup>432</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 103.

<sup>433</sup> Williams, *Acts*, 232.

<sup>434</sup> For authenticity in antiquity see Keener, *Introduction*, 459 and C. A. Evans, "Why did the New Testament Writers Appeal to the Old Testament?" *JSNT* 38 (2015): 36. For covenant fulfilment see R. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 110. See also Marshall, "Acts," 519; C. K. Barrett, "Luke/Acts," in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (eds. D. Carson and H. Williamson; Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 231; S. Walton, "Acts as Biblical History," in *Le corpus lucanien (Luc-Actes) et l'historiographie ancienne: quels rapports?* (eds. S. Buttica et al.; Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2019), 62; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:636-637; Bock, *Acts*, 6-7; J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 49; Peterson, *Acts*, 385; Walton, "The Acts - of God?" 296.

<sup>435</sup> J. Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles* (vol. 1; eds. D. Torrance and T. Torrance; trans. J. Fraser & W. McDonald; Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1965), 377; M. Harris, *From Grave to Glory: Resurrection in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1990), 176; Bruce, *Acts*, 64; Bock, *Acts*, 448; G. Nave, Jr., *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* (SBL - Academia Biblica 4; Atlanta, Georg.: Brill, 2002), 25; and Schnabel, *Acts*, 592.

<sup>436</sup> Haenchen, *Acts*, 206; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 334; Johnson, *Acts*, 236; Holladay, *Acts*, 265; M. L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville, Kent.: John Knox Press, 1994), 81. Clark and Dunn also note the parallels between Paul's speech here and Peter's speech in Acts 2. A. C. Clark, *Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lucan Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 235; and Dunn, *Jerusalem*, 427.

<sup>437</sup> S. McKnight, "Gospelling the Gospel in Acts," *Scriptura* 103 (2010): 38.

<sup>438</sup> Willimon writes, "Unlike some of the earlier speeches in Acts, which harshly depict the guilt of the Jews, here the emphasis is upon the innocence of Jesus rather than the guilt of the people." Willimon, *Acts*, 124. See also Parsons, *Acts*, 192; and Bruce, *Acts*, 303.



Passing over the Patriarchs, Paul moves to God's work rescuing Israel from Egypt. The phrase ἐτροποφόρησεν is debated - did God care for Israel for forty years or bear with them (v.18)?<sup>439</sup> Parsons, Witherington, Johnson, Barrett, and Conzelmann suggest the former,<sup>440</sup> Peterson, Stott and Bock suggest the latter,<sup>441</sup> Keener leaves it to the decision of the reader,<sup>442</sup> and Bruce and Metzger suggest the word undertakes a double-duty.<sup>443</sup> For myself it is this latter position that is correct. Within the immediate narrative God's benevolent care is demonstrated through the covenant promises to the Patriarchs and reinforced in the rescue from Egypt and his care in the wilderness. It is further reinforced by God's continued benevolence to Israel in the land (vv.19-21).<sup>444</sup> Yet this context must be taken in the wider narrational setting of Acts and the connections between this speech and Stephen's. Stephen's speech with its emphasis on Moses and the disobedience of Israel would be significant (7:17-44). Here Israel lacked an understanding of God's rescue (7:25), rejected Moses as God's deliverer (7:35), refused to obey Moses (7:39), rejected him, and became idolatrous (7:39-41). This led God to give them over to further idolatry (7:42).<sup>445</sup> Therefore, within the immediate narrative the people in the synagogue may well be reminded positively of God's care for them but for the Lukan

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<sup>439</sup> For a discussion on the textual variants see Parsons, *Acts*, 194.

<sup>440</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 192; Fitzmyer, 507; Witherington, *Acts*, 409-410; Johnson, *Acts*, 231; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:632; and Conzelmann, *Acts*, 104.

<sup>441</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 387; Stott, *Acts*, 223; and Bock, *Acts*, 467.

<sup>442</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2058.

<sup>443</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 272 and Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 357.

<sup>444</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2059.

<sup>445</sup> For a literary and redactional analysis of Stephen's speech see J. J. Kilgallen, *The Stephen Speech: A Literary and Redactional Study of Acts 7, 2-53* (AnBib 67; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976).

audience the wider narrative creates a potential tension at this juncture - how will diaspora Judaism respond to the gospel; in obedient repentance or idolatrous rejection? Such a perspective is reinforced by 13:21, *κάκεῖθεν ἠτήσαντο βασιλέα, καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς τὸν Σαοῦλ υἱὸν Κίς*. Whilst a surface reading demonstrates the benevolence of God in giving Israel a king, a reading of 1 Samuel 8:7-8 produces a more negative assessment - the people have rejected God as king and are worshipping other gods.<sup>446</sup>

The use of Saul and David demonstrates God's sovereign purposes in salvation history. In spite of Saul (v.22) God's promises continue to be fulfilled through the line of David.<sup>447</sup> David's character is established by an amalgam of Septuagintal references (Ps. 88:21; 1 Sam. 13:14; Isa. 44:28) and he is directly linked to Jesus who is both the fulfilment of God's promises and saviour (v.23).<sup>448</sup> Rather than progressing the story of Jesus the narrative returns to John the Baptist, with a particular reference to Luke 3:3 and 16. Again the Lukan audience is reminded of Israel's unfaithfulness, their need for repentance and the emphasis on christological salvation (v.25). This is noted by Witherington who writes, "In short, he [John] made clear that Israel was estranged from God and in need of reconciliation with Yahweh."<sup>449</sup> It is also highlighted by Wallace when he writes, "Luke's portrayal of Paul's kerygma also includes the need for Jews to repent (Acts 13:44-47; 18:5-6;

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<sup>446</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 194 and Soards, *Speeches*, 82.

<sup>447</sup> See B. A. French, "The Completion of King Saul in Acts," *JSNT* 40 (2018): 429-430 and Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 170.

<sup>448</sup> See Williams, *Acts*, 233; Parsons, *Acts*, 195; Peterson, *Acts*, 388; Pahl, "Early Christian Patterns," 223; and P. C. W. Ho, "The Shape of Davidic Psalms as Messianic," *JETS* 62 (2019): 530-531.

<sup>449</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 410.

19:8-9; 26:20; 28:24-28).<sup>450</sup>

In developing the narrative Paul states that the message of salvation has been given to Israel and those nations associated with the synagogue (v.26). The familial and covenantal language, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, υἱοὶ γένους Ἀβραάμ, occurs at this point in the narrative because the diaspora Jews have not made a response to the gospel unlike their Jerusalem counterparts (vv.27-31).<sup>451</sup> The use of οἱ γὰρ κατοικοῦντες ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες αὐτῶν is threefold. It reinforces the sovereignty of God in fulfilling his promises (v.27, 30), it demonstrates the rejection of God's means for salvation by the Jerusalem Jews (vv.27-28), and it raises the narrative tension - again how will diaspora Judaism respond?<sup>452</sup> Paul then comes to the climax of his speech, the fulfilment of God's salvific promises through Christ. The speech begins by connecting the risen Jesus with Psalm 2, the coronation Psalm.<sup>453</sup> Wallace notes that "γέγραπται is used ethically and eschatologically; that is, it introduces both commands that are still binding...and fulfilled prophecy."<sup>454</sup> It would appear that Acts 13:33 functions as the latter with Jesus portrayed as the fulfilment of the Son of God. Moreover, Jesus is portrayed as one greater than David; the μέν/δέ construction creating the emphatic contrast between David's death and decay and Jesus' being

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<sup>450</sup> D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 289 n. 93. See also Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 513; and Barrett, *Acts*, 1:637.

<sup>451</sup> Notice the contrast with John's message in Luke 3:7-9. Soards, *Speeches*, 84-85.

<sup>452</sup> Thompson, *Church*, 246. See also T. M. Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts Within its Literary Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 168.

<sup>453</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 275-276; Witherington, *Acts*, 412; Bock, *Acts*, 456; and M. L. Strauss, "The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfilment in Lukan Christology," *TynB* 44 (1993): 388.

<sup>454</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 576 n. 14.

raised from the dead.<sup>455</sup>

The result of this fulfilment is the proclamation of the christological forgiveness of sins with verse 39 and the nature of justification as the cornerstone of this speech.

The idea of forgiveness of sins derives from the Old Testament and is developed christologically, pneumatologically, and ecclesiologically throughout Luke-Acts.<sup>456</sup>

Whilst the Old Testament speaks of forgiveness as both a human and divine act, the emphasis in Acts 13 is that of a divine act.<sup>457</sup> Yahweh's forgiveness is set within the context of the covenant relationship. This context is especially significant because Old Testament forgiveness terminology is more closely related to guilt and repentance than mercy or compassion (Jer. 15:1-9).<sup>458</sup> It also prevents justice being defined within a purely legal or social setting.<sup>459</sup> The forgiveness of sins usually presupposes a confession of guilt and repentance.<sup>460</sup> The term 'justification' should be read through a Lukan lens rather than accentuating a Pauline understanding.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> Wallace notes the correlative relationship created by μέν/δέ reading it as "on the one hand...on the other hand." Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 672. See P. Doble, "Luke 24.26, 44 - Songs of God's Servant: David and his Psalms in Luke-Acts," *JSNT* 28 (2006): 276.

<sup>456</sup> K. Anderson, *'But God Raised Him from the Dead': The Theology of Jesus's Resurrection in Luke-Acts* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2006), 26-27.

<sup>457</sup> J. N. Oswalt, "Forgiveness," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books* (eds. B. T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2005), 301.

<sup>458</sup> J. Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views* (VTSup. 78; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 445 and C. Blomberg, "The Law in Luke-Acts," *JSNT* 22 (1984): 57.

<sup>459</sup> Krašovec, *Reward*, 773 and 793. See also P. Ellingworth, "Forgiveness of Sins," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (eds. J. B. Green et al.; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1992), 241.

<sup>460</sup> Oswalt, "Forgiveness," 302.

<sup>461</sup> For example scholars including Bruce, Stott, Bock, and Piper invest their interpretation with a strong Pauline understanding. Bruce, *Acts*, 312; Stott, *Acts*, 225; Bock, *Acts*, 458; J. Piper, *The Future of Justification* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 20. Kilgallen writes, "A study of Pauline expression however, convinces one that, through the concept of dikaioumai is Pauline, the manner in which it is

Fitzmyer writes, “Luke...only secondarily introduces justification, making it almost a form of ‘forgiveness of sins.’ Justification never acquires in Lucan [sic] teaching the prominence that it has in Pauline theology.”<sup>462</sup> Witherington agrees, writing, “there is only the merest approach (explicitly) to this teaching in the words of Paul (13:38-39).”<sup>463</sup> This interpretation seems to be more appropriate to the Lukan context. First, the echoes of Luke-Acts are readily recognisable in the speeches of John the Baptist (Luke 3:3) and Jesus (Luke 4:18-21). Second, at this stage in the narrative Paul has not assumed the importance that has been attributed to him in the history of the Church.<sup>464</sup> One point this raises is whether this is a comparison or contrast between the christological justification and the Law of Moses. A comparison reflects the positive approach towards the law but recognises that it is not the fulfilment of God’s means to bring forgiveness and justification. A contrast creates a tension, for the law is inadequate to truly justify.<sup>465</sup> The Lukan narrative is uniformly positive towards the Mosaic Law (Luke 2:22-24, 27, 39; 24:44; Acts 7:38, 53) but recognises the christological fulfilment of the forgiveness of sins (Acts 15:1; 10).<sup>466</sup> The comparison

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expressed is not Pauline.” J. J. Kilgallen, “Acts 13,38-39: Culmination of Paul’s Speech in Pisidia,” *Bib* 69 (1988): 503.

<sup>462</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 518. See also Barret, *Acts*, 1:650; M. C. Parsons and M. Culy, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor, 2003), 264; and D. Peterson, “Atonement Theology in Luke-Acts,” in *The New Testament in its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B. W. Winter on His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (eds. P. Williams et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 69.

<sup>463</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 414.

<sup>464</sup> Note McGrath’s introductory comments to his section. A. McGrath, “Justification,” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (eds. G. F. Hawthorne et al.; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1993), 517. See also R. Lyon, “Justification,” in *The Marshall Pickering Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2; ed. W. A. Elwell; London: Marshall Pickering, 1988), 1252.

<sup>465</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 279; Stott, *Acts*, 225; Parsons, *Acts*, 196; and Barrett, *Acts*, 1:650.

<sup>466</sup> D. Moo, “Law,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (eds. J. B. Green and S. McKnight; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1992), 460; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:623; Blomberg, “Law,” 71; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 106; Morgan-Wynne, *Pisidian Antioch*, 128; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2075-2076. Although speaking

of the two is therefore the more likely reading resulting in a warning and a further development of the narrative tension - for the Jerusalem Jews fulfilled the words of the prophets and now the diaspora Jews have a choice to make (vv.40-41; cf. 7:51-52).<sup>467</sup> The significance of this choice is made in the emphatic negative subjunctive (ἔργον ὃ οὐ μὴ πιστεύσητε ἂν τις ἐκδιηγῆται ὑμῖν) found within the Habbakkuk citation (v.41; Hab. 1:5).<sup>468</sup> The implication is that if these diaspora Jews and those nations associated with the synagogue continue to look for justification and the forgiveness of sins through the Mosaic Law and if they now refuse, and continue to refuse,<sup>469</sup> the means of God's fulfilled promise, the present christological offer of salvation, then they will demonstrate, as some of the Jerusalem Jews have, that they are part of a genealogical Israel rather than a redeemed Israel (Luke 3:3; 8-9).<sup>470</sup>

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about repentance in Acts 20:21, Wallace's comment could also be applied to this section of narrative. Wallace comments "One major exegetical problem of the text relates to the Pauline kerygma and the use of μετάνοια here. Two of the most commonly-held views are at odds with each other. On the one hand, some scholars regard the construction as a chiasmus: Jews were to have faith and Greeks were to repent. Although it is true that turning toward God is a typical component in Paul's gospel presentation to the Gentiles...it is hardly atypical of Luke's theology...The evidence suggests that, in Luke's usage, saving faith includes repentance. In those texts which simply speak of faith, a 'theological shorthand' seems to be employed: Luke envisions repentance as the inceptive act of which the entirety may be called pistis." Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 289.

<sup>467</sup> Morgan-Wynne, *Pisidian Antioch*, 130; P. Borgman, *The Way According to Luke: Hearing the Whole Story of Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 318; and Bruce, *Acts*, 311-312.

<sup>468</sup> Wallace notes this is "the strongest way to negate something in Greek." Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 468. Metzger notes that "Cop<sup>G67</sup> makes the reference more explicit, 'what is said in Habakkuk the prophet.'" Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 366.

<sup>469</sup> Jervell makes the point that even in idolatry, God provides opportunities for his people to be rescued and therefore this indicates a consistent refusal of the people to accept the Christological fulfilment and salvation. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 93.

<sup>470</sup> Morgan-Wynne, *Pisidian Antioch*, 130; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:652; Johnson, *Acts*, 236; Parsons, *Acts*, 196; Pervo, *Acts*, 340-341; J. Squires, "The Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 32; G. W. E. Nickelsburg, "Revealed Wisdom as a Criterion for Inclusion and Exclusion: From Jewish Sectarianism to Early Christianity," in *'To See Ourselves as Others See Us': Christians, Jews, 'Others' in Late Antiquity* (eds. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 89; D. L. Bock, "Scripture and the Realisation of God's Promises," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 59.

Having finished this exhortatory call to repentance and the warning to listen Paul and Barnabas leave the synagogue and the narrative notes that the initial response of the narratorial hearers is uniformly positive (vv.42-43). Verse 43 at first sight appears contradictory to verses 38-41 for how can the Jews and converts προσμένειν τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ when they need to be justified?<sup>471</sup> With Keener, Johnson, Bruce, Bock, Peterson, and Stott I take this latter sentence to indicate that some within the synagogue accepted the christological salvation offered.<sup>472</sup>

πᾶσα ἡ πόλις (v.44) should be read as hyperbole common within Luke-Acts.<sup>473</sup> The use of ἀκοῦσαι does not state the mood of the crowd but it stands in contradistinction to that of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (v.45). Therefore it was likely that the crowd are depicted as positive in their approach to hearing the word. In light of Paul's synagogue speech, the diaspora Jewish response, and Paul and Barnabas' reply, the use of τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου (v.44) should be considered significant since it emphasises the christological centre of Paul and Barnabas' words,<sup>474</sup> reminds the reader of the sovereignty of the ascended Jesus, and emphasises that the Jewish rejection in

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<sup>471</sup> BDAG notes that προσμένω with the dative of thing has the sense of 'to continue'. Thus, they are encouraged to continue in the grace of God. BDAG, 883 (b) 2.

<sup>472</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2093; Johnson, *Acts*, 240, Bruce, *Acts*, 280; Bock, *Acts*, 462; Peterson, *Acts*, 397; Stott, *Acts*, 226. Witherington is more cautious. He writes, "It is not impossible that Luke means to suggest that God's prevenient grace is already working in Paul's audience, though they have not yet been fully converted." Witherington, *Acts*, 414.

<sup>473</sup> Luke 8:39; 9:6; Acts 21:28; 26:20; 28:22. Witherington, *Acts*, 414; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2093. Stott calls this statement an exaggeration. Stott, *Acts*, 227. Johnson takes it as literal. Johnson, *Acts*, 240.

<sup>474</sup> Compare this phrase with the surrounding phrases τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ (v.43) and τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (v.46). See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 369-370.

verse 45 is not of Paul and Barnabas *per se* but of Jesus.<sup>475</sup> Thus Paul's warning (v.40) has not been heeded, the prophetic words are fulfilled (v.41), and some of the diaspora Jews are shown to respond as their Jerusalem counterparts have, with jealousy and rejection.<sup>476</sup> Paul and Barnabas' approach makes clear Israel's privilege; they will hear the gospel first. Israel's rejection of that gospel, with the result of them also rejecting eternal life, means that they are "unworthy of salvation and its ongoing benefits."<sup>477</sup> Such a rejection also means a turning of the Christian assembly to the nations,<sup>478</sup> enabling them to become part of the restored people of God,<sup>479</sup> and a fulfilment of the Isaianic promises.<sup>480</sup> This turning to the nations should not be understood as a turning away from Judaism as a whole, but in a local sense.<sup>481</sup> Conzelmann, Bruce, and Kuhn all note that this mixed response of Israel towards the Christian assembly continues a pattern developed in the early chapters

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<sup>475</sup> With Keener I hold that the βλασφημοῦντες should be understood as a double-duty. To the diaspora Jews in the narrative it is Paul and Barnabas who are guilty of blasphemy but to the Lukan audience it is some of the diaspora Jews who are guilty of blasphemy. Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2096.

<sup>476</sup> Keener notes that the phrase ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου (v.45) has already been used of the Sanhedrin (5:17). Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2094.

<sup>477</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 415. See also Bock, *Acts*, 463; Peterson, *Acts*, 398, Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 323; and Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 363.

<sup>478</sup> Johnson notes that 'nations' is a more appropriate term at this juncture than Gentiles. Johnson, *Acts*, 241.

<sup>479</sup> R. Bauckham, *The Jewish World Around the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2008), 328; S. Walton, "Heavenly Citizenship and Earthly Authorities: Philippians 1:27 and 3:20 in Dialogue with Acts 16:11-40," in *The Urban World and the First Christians* (eds. S. Walton et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 236; and Walton, "Anthropology," 106.

<sup>480</sup> J. N. Oswalt, "The Mission of Israel to the Nations," in *Through No Fault of their Own: The Fate of Those who Have Never Heard* (eds. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991), 89-92.

<sup>481</sup> While Tyson notes the difficulty with interpreting the function of 13:46, this local turning from diaspora Judaism in Pisidian Antioch is the best way of understanding the wider narrative. Turning away from Judaism as a whole meets an immediate problem for in 14:1 Paul and Barnabas go to Iconium where they go to a Jewish synagogue κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ. See Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 271. See also Tyson, "Jews and Judaism," 31; Johnson, *Acts*, 241; Witherington, *Acts*, 415; Bock, *Acts*, 463; Peterson, *Acts*, 372; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2097-2098.



of Acts and which continues in the latter section of Acts (cf. 14:1; 16:13; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8).<sup>482</sup> I would agree with this assessment further noting that this mixed response challenges previous scholarship that has interpreted a turning away from Judaism to solely engage with and reach the nations.<sup>483</sup>

Throughout this speech the fulfilment of the covenant promises continues to be reinforced (cf. Luke 24:44-48; Acts 1:8; 9:15). The reference to Isaiah 49 is significant. This passage notes that Israel is Yahweh's servant (Isa. 49:3), that Israel will be gathered by God's servant (Isa. 49:5), and that this servant will bring salvation to the ends of the earth, including the nations (Isa. 49:6).<sup>484</sup> Yet scholarship is divided as to whom the Isaianic passage applies to within this pericope.

Conzelmann, Witherington, Williams, Fitzmyer, Barrett, Bock, and Keener posit that Paul and Barnabas assume "the role and tasks of the Servant,"<sup>485</sup> whilst Bruce, Stott, and Seccombe argue that the role and task of the servant is the risen and ascended Jesus and that Paul and Barnabas assume the role and task of Israel.<sup>486</sup> Whilst the latter fits the wider narrative of Acts - the ascended Jesus restoring Israel as the

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<sup>482</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 106; Bruce, *Acts*, 282; Kuhn, *Kingdom*, 273; J. B. Tyson, "The Jewish Public in Luke-Acts," *NTS* 30 (1984): 580.

<sup>483</sup> Pervo, *Acts*, 331. Hinkle writes, "The story that follows Paul's speech proves that not everyone who listens to him in the synagogue can be grouped with those who reject God's will and messengers." M. E. Hinkle, "Preaching for Mission: Ancient Speeches and Postmodern Sermons," in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (ASMS 34; eds. R. L. Gallagher and P. Hertig; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 95.

<sup>484</sup> For a helpful article on intertextuality see L. A. Huizenga, "The Old Testament in the New, Intertextuality and Allegory," *JSNT* 28 (2015): 17-35.

<sup>485</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 106; Witherington, *Acts*, 416; Williams, *Acts*, 238; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 521; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:658; Bock, *Acts*, 464; Bock, *Theology*, 298; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2099. See also Meek, *Gentile Mission*, 46-47; and H. Beers, *The Followers of Jesus as the 'Servant': Luke's Model from Isaiah for the Disciples in Luke-Acts* (LNTS 535; ed. C. Keith; London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 155 and 156.

<sup>486</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 282-283; Stott, *Acts*, 227; and D. Seccombe, "Luke and Isaiah," *NTS* 27 (1981): 259.

faithful servant to reach the nations - through the use of ἡμῖν the immediate context identifies Paul and Barnabas as the servant towards the nations (v.47). The use of ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς acts as a narrational reminder of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 but also as a fulfilment of the covenant promises. The joyous response of the nations associated with the synagogue to the word contrasts with the response of some of the diaspora Jews and is sharpened by means of ἐπλήσθησαν, they were completely filled with jealousy and their attempt to contradict Paul's words (v.45).<sup>487</sup> A second contrast between those from the nations and some of the diaspora Jews might also be noted in the phrase καὶ ἐπίστευσαν ὅσοι ἦσαν τεταγμένοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον - the emphasis on God's sovereignty and the fulfilment of his promises contrasts with the active rejection of God by some of the Jews (v.46).<sup>488</sup> A further contrast is also apparent in verses 49-50. Because the word spreads, some of the diaspora Jews now initiate an incitement of others, in this case τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας τὰς εὐσχήμονας καὶ τοὺς πρώτους τῆς πόλεως. Noting this point is a helpful corrective against scholarship that advocates an anti-Judaism/pro-Gentile reading of Acts, since some of those from the nations are complicit in the active persecution of Paul and Barnabas.<sup>489</sup> This action is also paradigmatic for the later episodes of Acts (14:2, 5, 13, 19; 17:5; 18:12-13; cf. 4:27).<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 242. See BDAG, 813 (a) 2. I take the jealousy of the Jews in verse 45 to be jealousy at the size of the crowds that gather to hear Paul and not a negative reaction to the message Paul proclaims.

<sup>488</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2102. See also Tannehill, "Lukan Narrative," 334.

<sup>489</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 465. See also Schnabel, "Persecutions," 534-535. Longenecker writes that "These holders of power and maintainers of social stability evidently came to perceive Christianity as a malignant societal cancer." Longenecker, "Moral Character and Divine Generosity," 156.

<sup>490</sup> Dehandschutter links the suffering to the fulfilment of Acts 9. He writes, "La prediction s'accomplit toute de suite après la première predication de Saul à Damas (9, 23-30), plus tard à Antioche (13,50), à Iconium (14) où Paul est lapidé." B. Dehandschutter, "La Persécution des Chrétiens dans les Actes des Apôtres," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, Rédaction, Théologie* (ed. J. Kremer; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1978), 544.

The response of Paul and Barnabas - shaking the dust from their feet - is a familiar Lukan response reflecting the rejection by some of their message. Conzelmann contends that this gesture is “weakened to a symbolic act.”<sup>491</sup> Whilst this is a possible interpretation I would contend that the act reminds the readers of Jesus’ words (Luke 9:5; 10:11; cf. Acts 18:6; 28:25-27) and therefore emphasises the rejection of the gospel by both some Jews in Jerusalem and some in Pisidian Antioch (13:27-29; 45, 50-51). Marshall writes:

The action of shaking off the dust of a gentile city from one’s feet was practised by Jews; they removed what was ceremonially unclean before returning to their own land, lest they should defile it. Thus the practice implied that the place in question was heathen and that the Jew had no fellowship with it...When the Christian missionaries did the same to Jews (Acts 13:51; cf. 18:6), it was a symbolic piece of evidence...against...them that were no part of the true Israel; they had refused the message of the kingdom of God.<sup>492</sup>

The final verse stands in contrast to the opposition faced by Paul and Barnabas. Unlike the Jews who are completely filled with jealousy (v.45), the disciples in Pisidian Antioch are completely filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (v.52).<sup>493</sup> This contrast works at three levels: it reminds the reader of the sovereignty of the risen and ascended Jesus - for despite this opposition his word continues to spread and be received; it marks out the Christian assembly as the fulfilment of the covenant promises of Yahweh and therefore as the restored Israel.<sup>494</sup> In doing this, it also provides a continuity with the earlier narrative - by rejecting this christological gospel

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<sup>491</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 107.

<sup>492</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 354. Morris notes that “it declared in symbol that Israelites who rejected the kingdom were no better than the Gentiles.” Morris, *Luke*, 180. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 244; Stott, *Acts*, 228; Bruce, *Acts*, 284 n. 74; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2106.

<sup>493</sup> J. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Das Neue Testament Deutsch 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1988), 210.

<sup>494</sup> Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 368.

many Jews, both in Jerusalem and in the diaspora, are revealed not to be part of God's people. This reminds the reader that it is through this restored Israel that God's promises will be fulfilled amongst the nations. This creates a dynamic in the narrative of how the message will be received now Paul and Barnabas have gone to Iconium (v.51; 14:1).

While the focus of the episode in Acts 13:13-52 is diaspora Judaism and the nations associated with the synagogue, there may also be an implicit engagement with the Roman State. Such a perspective is recognised by scholars but left undeveloped as a means for furthering an understanding of the engagement or the wider narrative. This pericope is situated in a colony city in which the imperial sanctuary and the worship of Augustus was central and "regulated much of public life."<sup>495</sup> This pericope also begins the wider narrative in which the Roman State takes on a more prominent and explicit role and in which accusations are made against the Christian assembly of undermining the customs and the decrees of the emperor and empire (16:20-21; 17:7; 18:13). Recognising the importance of Rome in his introduction and overviewing Acts, Willimon states,

Not only is a God depicted but a new world as well. The world rendered to us in Acts is not just a few images from the ancient Middle East or first-century Rome. What is portrayed is what is going on in creation as a whole. The world in Acts is not a sober description of what is but an evocative portrayal of what, by God's work, shall be, *a poetic presentation of an alternative world to the given world, where Caesar rules and there is enmity and selfishness between men and women and there is death. This is a world where God is busy making good his promises.*<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2042; For a description of the Roman influence within Pisidian Antioch see Hardin, Galatians, 58-63. Also D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (2 vols.; New York: Arno Press, 1975), 1:470.

<sup>496</sup> My italics. Willimon, *Acts*, 3.

Narrowing in more specifically and commenting on Acts 13:50, Bock writes, “The leading men would have included the duoviri, the local government’s highest representatives, who would have been tied to the cult of the moon god Men as well as the imperial cult. *A response to Jesus would imperil such worship.*”<sup>497</sup>

Such a reading develops the engagement beyond the Jewish diaspora to include an engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State. As noted in an earlier section this engagement would draw upon the nature and role of the emperor as the agent of the gods’ blessing, the emperor as the manifested presence of the gods and saviour, the values of the empire, the message of salvation being for the whole world, and the emperor as the object of worship.<sup>498</sup>

## **2. Engaging with Other Readings: C. Keener and C. K. Rowe**

### **2.1. C. Keener**

Acts 13:13-52 is situated by Keener within his framework of Acts as an apologia. This apologia has two elements, the extra-ecclesial - providing a model of rhetoric and argumentation for the Christians in the first-century to copy or follow both for legal situations and for public apologetics<sup>499</sup> - and intra-ecclesial - for Keener asserts that the narrative of Acts functions as an apologia within the Christian community for mission to the nations. Therefore, the Pisidian Antioch narrative is considered by

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<sup>497</sup> My italics. Bock, *Acts*, 465-466. Subversion is recognised by other scholars in their writings about New Testament writings. White writes about “peace and security” in 1 Thess. 5:3. He believes that this applies both to the Roman promise of a stable society and to the Hellenistic concept of the polis as the means for stability. He argues that Paul highlights that “lasting peace and security were to be found...only in the community of believers in Jesus.” J. R. White, “‘Peace’ and ‘Security’ (1 Thess. 5.3): Roman Ideology and Greek Aspiration,” *NTS* 60 (2014): 510.

<sup>498</sup> See in this thesis 3.2.1. C. Keener: Acts as an Intra-Ecclesial Apologia.

<sup>499</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 161. Keener repeats this in other places. For example, “Acts is heavily apologetic (and some of its strategies might help later Christians on trial).” Keener, *Introduction*, 436. See also 437 and 442.

Keener as part of the “missions strategy” of Acts, particularly the final verses which provide a rationale for a mission to the nations (13:44-48).<sup>500</sup>

Keener proposes that the purpose of Barnabas and Paul’s visit to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch is part of the Christian mission for it provides a natural link for the gospel through its use of Israel’s scriptures and with its salvation history.<sup>501</sup> He asserts that the way that Paul uses the scriptures and salvation history demonstrates the significance of promise-fulfilment in this passage. This promise-fulfilment, as was recognised in chapter three, is an obvious Lukan device and a key feature within Acts. This pericope rightly recognises how Yahweh works through history as depicted in Scripture and how this reflects Yahweh’s faithful promises to Israel and its fulfilment in Jesus.<sup>502</sup> Thus, Keener indirectly recognises that this speech functions at the epistemological and metaphysical level, the revelation through Scripture revealing Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel and his acts of mercy and faithfulness. The force of the epistemological and metaphysical in the development of the speech is then demonstrated through the ethical response - the need to repent, not acting as some of the Jews in Jerusalem.<sup>503</sup> Keener develops the promise-fulfilment motif to interpret the negative response and rejection of some of the Jews. Such an event occurs because this allows the narrative to argue for a

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<sup>500</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2093-2100.

<sup>501</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2002.

<sup>502</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2050 and 2051 and 2057-2062.

<sup>503</sup> This repentance, should it be followed through, could also be considered metaphysical and epistemological in character. At this point in the narrative though it should be considered as the ethical response to the epistemological revelation about Christ.

scriptural fulfilment of a mission to the gentiles.<sup>504</sup> Thus for Keener the focus of the passage is “providing salvation-historical justification for preaching also to the Gentiles and revealing the conflicts attending the mission.”<sup>505</sup> In this way Keener recognises the continuity and the tension which results from the promise-fulfilment but rejects the implicit subversion that this promise-fulfilment creates in the narrative.

Keener’s assessment of the chapter provides a number of helpful points. His emphasis on the intra-ecclesial nature of the passage not only clarifies the turning to the nations but also provides a further trajectory towards Acts 15 and the continued movement away from Jerusalem. He rightly notes the promise-fulfilment aspect of the chapter with its christological trajectory. Yet Keener’s work on this chapter could be developed further. One area would be to consider more carefully the engagement in its own right. Since this is a paradigmatic account it would be beneficial to see how the points he makes are traced through the engagements in the rest of the narrative. This is particularly significant for understanding the extra-ecclesial model that Keener puts forward. Following on from this it would allow Keener to demonstrate in greater detail how a first-century audience might have understood the extra- and intra-ecclesial models. This is significant since he does not provide a rationale for how this episode works to help the ideal audience engage with the surrounding cultures. Nor does Keener contextualise this account for how a modern reader might approach the narrative and apply the models he proposes.

Further to this, while Keener is correct to note the promise-fulfilment aspect of the

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<sup>504</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2090.

<sup>505</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2026.

chapter, I would suggest that his social transformation perspective does not function in this account. Keener argues that the Lukan eschatology provides a challenge to empires in the future, not the present. The gospel transforms life undermining the larger society's values and gods, but does not politically subvert the State. Yet two significant conclusions can be established as Keener's perspective interacts with the narrative of Acts 13. The first is that no social transformation occurs within this episode. The structures of synagogue, religious leadership, and scriptures are maintained and not transformed and the congregation are encouraged not towards transformation but προσμένειν τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ. This indicates that other than repentance, there is no ethical transformation required. The reason that this social transformation perspective does not function here is because the emphasis of the passage is on the promise-fulfilment that Keener rightly notes. For the fulfilment of the scriptures and salvation history to occur, diaspora Judaism and the nations associated with the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch need a christological repentance. Those that do are transformed at the metaphysical level, they become true children of Abraham (Luke 3:8), but they are not transformed at the ethical level, that is the structures and customs of Judaism. The promise-fulfilment concept is the cause of the second reason that Keener's social transformation perspective does not function adequately in this episode. Whilst Keener maintains that social transformation is not 'politically subversive', something this thesis has shown to be incorrect in chapter three, the nature of promise fulfilment is to be inherently subversive because fulfilment by its very nature predicts the achievement of a goal. Therefore those who reject the christological fulfilment are, in essence, shown to reject the scriptures and history that they claim as their own. This inherent subversion has already been depicted by Luke in the earlier chapters of Acts at the religious and the political



levels. For example, the narrative positions the Apostles as the new and proper leaders of Israel (1:8; 2:21-26; 2:42; 3:5-22) and as a contrast to the majority of religious leaders. These are depicted in the narrative as those in league with the Roman authorities, responsible for Jesus' death, and who reject the gospel (4:25-28). Later, the narrative portrays Herod, the religious and political head of Israel, as the anti-king, the reversal of the Deuteronomic king and the persecutor of the true people of God (12:1-24).<sup>506</sup>

Beyond this, it is surprising that Keener only applies his social transformation perspective in this episode to the Roman State. This is unexpected because whilst Pisidian Antioch, being a colony, is a strongly Roman city the Roman State is only implicit in this pericope. Pisidian Antioch is not described in the narrative as a colony, whereas Philippi in Acts 16 is, and there are no overt references in Acts 13 to Roman beliefs, customs, or practices. Instead the emphasis of Acts 13 is upon the Christian assembly's engagement with diaspora Judaism or those nations associated with the synagogue (13:16; 13:50) and Keener does not apply his social transformation perspective to these.<sup>507</sup> As argued above, I would suggest Keener applies this perspective in a limited fashion because it does not work within the dominant Jewish setting whilst it may within a Roman setting.

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<sup>506</sup> The emphasis on subversion and understanding the different components (social, economic, religious, political) Roman world as intimately inter-related is also exactly the point Rowe makes.

<sup>507</sup> Keener writes, "Pisidian Antioch was a Roman colony, proud of the Roman status that this honor conferred on its own citizens... This meant that most of its citizens would also be eager to demonstrate their loyalty in the city's imperial temple." Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2042. See also Keener, *Introduction*, 447-448.

## 2.2. C. K. Rowe

The paradigmatic nature of Acts 13:13-52 makes this a significant pericope for understanding the engagements that occur in Acts 13-17 since it underlies and influences the sections of narrative which Rowe addresses. Paul's speech engages diaspora Jews and those from the nations who relate to the synagogue. His words engage with the audience at three levels. The metaphysical level, recounting the activity of Yahweh in Israel's history, the christological fulfilment of Yahweh's promises, and the means of salvation and justification; the epistemological level; the ways in which Yahweh reveals himself, through his activity in Israel's history,<sup>508</sup> in the scriptures, and christologically. By addressing the metaphysical and epistemological levels this results in a response at the ethical level - Paul exhorts the listeners not to reject the message but αὐτοὺς προσμένειν τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ (v.41). Such an exhortation is rejected by some Jews who act unethically, responding with jealousy, abuse and the incitement of others.

Despite the narrational siting and the significance of this pericope to Rowe's thesis, Rowe does not address this portion of narrative. This omission is surprising considering that this is a significant example of a substantial engagement between the Christian assembly and surrounding cultures and is an engagement which encompasses and integrates Rowe's four categories: the theological vision of Luke

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<sup>508</sup> For example, note verses 16-20 where the narrative highlights the activity of God. He "chose" (v.17), "made" (v.17), "led" (v.17), "overthrew" (v.19), "gave" (v.19).

in Acts,<sup>509</sup> Jesus as Lord,<sup>510</sup> universal mission,<sup>511</sup> and the assembly.<sup>512</sup>

Rowe might argue that the omission of this pericope is due to the strongly Jewish setting rather than the Graeco-Roman world, which is the focus for his thesis. Yet, such an argument, if it were to be made, would reveal some underlying weaknesses to Rowe's methodology. First, Rowe's use of 'Graeco-Roman.' Whilst noting that his definition of this term emphasises the pagan world which is neither Jewish nor Christian, and which he notes is a definition used by many classical scholars,<sup>513</sup> it is questionable whether the narrative of Luke-Acts understands such a strong separation. The narrative of Luke-Acts portrays a close inter-relationship between Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world. The diaspora Judaism of Pisidian Antioch is geographically located in a colony city of the Roman State and has those from the nations within the synagogue (13:16, 26). This close engagement is portrayed in the wider narrative of Acts. Thus the Graeco-Roman world is intimately engaged in the synagogues (14:1-2, 5; 17:4, 12; 18:4), there are significant social and political relationships between the Graeco-Roman world and Jews (14:19; 25:13-15), and there are marriages between them (16:1; 24:24).<sup>514</sup> This close relationship between diaspora Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world is further recognised at this juncture of the narrative since the end of Acts 13 and the beginning of Acts 14 see a collaboration between diaspora Judaism and those from the nations (14:5), and such

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<sup>509</sup> Rowe, *World*, 4.

<sup>510</sup> Rowe, *World*, 103-116.

<sup>511</sup> Rowe, *World*, 116-126.

<sup>512</sup> Rowe, *World*, 126-135.

<sup>513</sup> Rowe, *World*, 14-15.

<sup>514</sup> In noting the close relationship between the Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world I also note it was not necessarily a stable relationship. See Acts 16:20-21 and 18:2.

a collaboration is heightened when Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuade the Lystrans, traditionally recognised by scholars as part of the nations who are outside of a synagogue influence, to reject Paul's message (14:19). Later in the narrative it is the Jews in Thessalonica who accuse the Christians of defying Caesar's decrees (17:5, 7; cf. 18:13).<sup>515</sup> Returning to the critical analysis of Rowe's work in chapter three we are reminded of Schnabel's criticism that "unless Luke is thought to write for Greeks and Romans only, his [Rowe's] project of a 'political theology' would have to be deemed only partially successful as it arguably fails to address the concerns of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and of Jewish leaders in other cities of the eastern Mediterranean."<sup>516</sup> Such a view is also found in Kirk's critique of Rowe. He writes, "Is the purpose of Acts to be found more close to home, in the tensions between the early church and non-Christian Judaism (or even all types of Judaism including the conservative Torah-keeping Judaism with which the non-Jewish church struggles so much)? That's a question worth pressing further."<sup>517</sup> It is, therefore, entirely possible that Rowe's "nuanced" approach suffers from the problem seen in chapter one, namely previous treatments of Luke-Acts underappreciating the complicated engagement between the cultures, creating a false division between the cultures, or emphasising one culture rather than addressing the multiple engagements as the narrative develops naturally.

I would further contend that the narratival development of this pericope does not

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<sup>515</sup> Rowe does note this relationship in his study of Acts 17:1-10 but emphasises the collision that occurs rather than the relationship. Rowe, *World*, 92-99.

<sup>516</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 33.

<sup>517</sup> J. R. D. Kirk, "World Upside Down: Part 1," n.p. [cited 7 September 2017] <http://www.jrdkirk.com/2010/01/26/world-upside-down-part-1/>.

support Rowe's thesis that collisions occur between the cultures due to the potential threat of dissolution of the culture. Whilst emphasising the Graeco-Roman world in his thesis Rowe claims that his thesis can be applied across the "entire narrative."<sup>518</sup> Therefore, with the emphasis of 13:13-52 being Jesus as the fulfilment of the promises of Yahweh the collision, such as there is (13:45, 50; cf. 14:19), is based on the rejection of the christological fulfilment of Israel's Scripture and history by some of the diaspora Jews of Pisidian Antioch. This results in jealousy and incitement.<sup>519</sup> Yet the narrative does not indicate that there is a dissolution, real, perceived, or threatened, of the Jewish culture nor the culture of the nations associated with the synagogue, nor the Roman culture, in which the pericope is implicitly set. This is seen in numerous ways. First, Paul and Barnabas engage with diaspora Judaism from within the culture: entering the synagogue, waiting to be asked to speak, and in using Israel's salvation history and Scripture.<sup>520</sup> Beyond this, they affirm Israel's salvation history and scriptures as being metaphysically and epistemologically true and authoritative and ethically binding. The Mosaic Law is spoken about positively even though its limits are described (v.39), and Paul and Barnabas encourage the congregation προσμένειν τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ. Such an exhortation gives no sense of a dissolution, that is, a negative perspective on, or breaking down of the Jewish

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<sup>518</sup> Rowe writes, "Thus is this work interested in the cumulative or total effect of the passages treated in the body of the book. Lest these scenes seem to leave portions of Acts untouched, we hasten to point out that the selected passages articulate animating convictions of Lukan theology and, precisely in this way, serve well as focal instances of the larger perspective rendered through the entire narrative." Rowe, *World*, 10-11.

<sup>519</sup> This jealousy and incitement continues through into Acts 14:19.

<sup>520</sup> Horrell recognises this as a marker of early Christianity in Acts. D. G. Horrell, "Early Jewish Christianity," in *The Early Christian World* (vol. 1; ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 2000), 136. See also Trocmé, "Jews," 146.

scriptures, history or synagogue etiquette and traditions, but rather the opposite.<sup>521</sup>

Those who believe Barnabas and Paul's message can exercise a christological faith which recasts the meaning and content of Israel's scriptures and history giving a greater depth to the benevolence and care of Yahweh demonstrated in the early portion of the speech. This benevolence should also be understood as something recast since the ending of the narrative reveals that Yahweh's benevolence through Christ is now for all peoples. Further, they can exercise this faith within a synagogue setting. Thus Rowe is correct that this is the "new cultural reality" that he posits but it comes without the dissolution that he predicates such a new reality on.<sup>522</sup>

In engaging with Rowe and Keener as dialogue partners, some significant points must be highlighted since neither reading adequately addresses this pericope.<sup>523</sup> First, since this portion of Lukan narrative is paradigmatic for future engagements with diaspora Judaism and those nations associated with the synagogue, it is unfortunate that Rowe does not engage with it and that Keener emphasises the engagement with Rome. Whilst Rowe establishes that the entire narrative of Acts can be read within the framework of his thesis, his contention of threatened dissolution is questioned by the initial and secondary positive responses and the limited collision which occurs because of jealousy at Paul's popularity rather than Jewish opposition at his theological agenda. Further, the threatened dissolution does not occur since the emphasis of the narrative is the christological fulfilment of the

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<sup>521</sup> See Longenecker, "Moral Character and Divine Generosity," 143-144.

<sup>522</sup> Rowe, *World*, 4. Rowe recognises this new cultural reality by stating: "That this process of revelation and formation inherently destabilizes essential assumptions and practices of Mediterranean culture."

<sup>523</sup> I recognise that Rowe does not comment on this pericope. My point here is that his overall thesis does not adequately address this pericope or the dynamics and issues represented in it.

salvation-historical storyline of Israel and its scriptures. Rowe's application of his overall thesis of collision and threatened dissolution of culture to this pericope places him in direct opposition to Keener with his emphasis on promise-fulfilment and social transformation. Keener's emphasis on promise-fulfilment cannot adequately address Paul's subversive engagement with Israel and the nations associated with the synagogue. Keener's approach limits the inherently subversive nature of the promise-fulfilment and this subversive approach not only addresses salvation-history and Scripture but all aspects of life. Thus, the tension of the narrative sits between these two positions amidst an unaddressed centre. This tension incorporates and holds together both fulfilment and subversion at multiple levels both narratively and for the Lukan audience. My contention is that this unaddressed centre can be coherently answered by using subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens both and in doing so provide a fresh approach to the reading of the narrative. It is to this we now turn.

### **3. A Subversive-Fulfilment Reading**

Following the structure outlined at the end of chapter three, I will examine Acts 13:13-52 using a modified subversive-fulfilment perspective by placing *possessio* at the heart of the reading. This will enable the points of contact and continuities between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures to be identified and an explanation given for how the continuities are christologically captured, fulfilled, and interpreted. This christological capturing and interpretation simultaneously introduces discontinuities which subvert the surrounding cultures. Both continuities and discontinuities occur at the metaphysical level - reflected in the beliefs and religiosity of the surrounding cultures about the divine, the epistemological level - in the nature

of knowledge and revelation about the metaphysical, and the ethical level - the way in which the metaphysical and epistemological are made manifest in the structures, values and customs of the culture. These discontinuities provide potential evidence of idolatry or an idolatrous trajectory and can be tested by the presence of the identifiable markers as highlighted in chapter two.<sup>524</sup> From these a rationale for the tension that occurs within the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures can be given. Having provided an analysis of the engagement through the perspective of a subversive-fulfilment reading I will then assess Strange's four steps and their application to the narrative. This may include identifying adaptations or modifications that might occur to Strange's work as the subversive-fulfilment hermeneutic engages with the narrative. The final part of this section will be to consider how this reading might contribute a fresh and original approach to reading this portion of Acts and the wider narrative.

The Pisidian Antioch engagement occurs within the shared religious and cultural heritage between Paul and the Jewish community. There are shared structural elements: the synagogue, the sabbath, and the speech, along with shared theological and historical commonalities found in the content of the speech. By using *possessio* as the heart of a subversive-fulfilment reading these points of contact are utilised to address distinct audiences - the narratorial and the Lukan audience - as well as across the cultures - diaspora Judaism and the Roman State - and to do this simultaneously.

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<sup>524</sup> See 2.4.4. Strange's Portrayal of Idolatry and its Application in this thesis.



Structurally the synagogue and sabbath function as echoes of Jesus' ministry. This is therefore a recognisable pattern of ministry for the Christian assembly and a point of contact since it is the primary means of engagement with diaspora Judaism. The structure of the speech also provides a point of contact and continuity for both the narratorial and Lukan audience since it is a common first-century pattern. Yet for the Lukan audience there is a deeper interpretation for through *possessio* the structure of the speech is christologically captured and fulfilled - it is to be used so that the *ultimate* purpose of a good or trustworthy speech is to provide a christological proclamation of repentance or a christological interpretation of Yahweh's activity in the world.

By using the concept of *possessio* at the heart of the analysis other points of contact are identified. These develop at three levels: the metaphysical, the epistemological, and the ethical. At the metaphysical level Paul's reference to ὁ θεός would be identified by both the narratorial and Lukan audience as Yahweh (v.17), the God of Israel who is covenantally bound to Israel (vv.17, 19, 22), and who frames the identity of the diaspora Jews through their covenant relationship with him. This covenantal relationship and identity - which enables diaspora Judaism to relate to their ancestors as well as their relationship with other Jews, both diaspora and in Israel, and the surrounding cultures - is re-framed christologically meaning that the identity of the diaspora Jews is now found in their response to the message of the Christian assembly.

At the epistemological level Yahweh reveals himself to Israel through their history and scriptures. Through the familial and covenantal language (vv.16, 17, 19) Paul

emphasises Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh (vv.17-20), Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel (vv.18, 20-22), and Paul alludes to Israel's covenant unfaithfulness (vv.18, 20-21). Paul references the Law and Prophets (v.15), Moses and David (vv.34-36, 39), and gives explicit citations from the Psalms, Isaiah, and Habakkuk (vv.34, 35, 41, 47). Read through the lens of *possessio* these aspects are captured and fulfilled through the christological trajectory and telos that Paul introduces (13:23, 32-33).<sup>525</sup> The Davidic reference moves the narrative directly to Jesus as the fulfilment of David and thus captures the messianic hope of diaspora Judaism which having been longed for by Israel is now real and present and has been fulfilled. This not only captures present hope but also points to a greater fulfilment since the christological framework has an eschatological trajectory. For the Lukan audience this also fulfils Jesus' words in Luke 24:44-49.

At the ethical level the response to the proclamation of a christological fulfilment of Israel's history and Scripture provides a narrational continuity with the earlier sections of Acts since there are both positive and negative responses to the proclamation. As with previous occurrences the initial response of the surrounding cultures to the Christian assembly is positive, despite Paul's allusion to the covenant unfaithfulness of Israel and its echo of Stephen's speech in Acts 7. There is also a later, negative, response leading to the rejection of the message by some Jews and the encouragement to persecute the Christian assembly.

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<sup>525</sup> Within Paul's speech there is a summary statement of John's baptism and message of repentance with its Isaianic reference (vv.24-25; cf. Luke 3:2-18; 20:3-6), a warning not to reject Jesus or the message (vv.27-28, v.41), nor to ignore the christological forgiveness of sins (vv.40-41).

By using *possessio* at the heart of this subversive-fulfilment reading these points of contact consecutively create an implicit engagement with Rome. The nature and role of the emperor as the agent of the gods' blessing is re-interpreted christologically, and this necessarily re-interprets how people receive blessing and salvation, since the christological capturing and fulfilment of the emperor's nature and role subverts Caesar and replaces the emperor with Jesus. Thus, the nature of salvation must be christologically interpreted, coming not through conquest or empire but through the fulfilment of the Isaianic prophecy and Jesus' words (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

Concurrently with the christological capturing and interpretation of the points of contact, using *possessio* to read the narrative can account for the subtle discontinuities which develop for the narratorial and Lukan audiences and which provide a subversive trajectory. By holding both the christological fulfilment and subversion simultaneously a subversive-fulfilment reading captures the dynamics of the engagement more effectively than other alternatives, which overplay or underplay different facets, such as promise-fulfilment or collision, as the Christian gospel interacts with the surrounding cultures.

The first discontinuity is the capturing of the structure of the speech. Whilst an implicit subversion, the Lukan audience are reminded that the speeches in Acts do not fulfil their true purpose, structurally or in content, unless they are christologically focused. This reframes how the Lukan audience understands the speeches and prepares them for rightly interpreting the later speeches in Acts.

The discontinuities develop substantially within the content of Paul's speech as Israel's history, scriptures, and the covenantal relationship are all christologically captured and re-interpreted. These discontinuities are significant because collectively they challenge the positions of previous scholarship, particularly Harnack and Sanders, since the Gospel is not moving away from Judaism to the Gentiles, as well as Klauck, who posits Judaism as an intermediary between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world. By using *possessio* to examine the metaphysical level a subversive-fulfilment reading provides a more coherent understanding of how Israel's identity is captured and subverted. Children of Abraham (Luke 3:8) are not to be identified ethnically or genealogically but in their metaphysical response to the christological message. This determines whether a person, regardless of their ethnicity, is identified as covenantally faithful or unfaithful and nuances the Lukan depiction of the identity of Israel.<sup>526</sup> The identity of Israel is formed in the heart response to Yahweh, which is now interpreted christologically and not by outward social and religious customs. Such a perspective enables future engagements in the narrative to be more readily understood and specifically provides a means for clarity in interpreting Acts 15:1, 5.

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<sup>526</sup> Gruca-Macaulay writes, "Not only does Luke-Acts emphasise that the Lord looks on the heart rather than the outward appearance; increasingly at issue in Acts is a growing tension between what were thought to be reliable external markers of the inner heart and a person's true inner essence...By looking from the Lukan perspective at what turns people into outcasts, it is possible to further refine Parson's thesis that, from its liberationist perspective, tends to overlook those who are cursed or ultimately barred from the new community, and who thereby form the de facto enemy." A. Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia as a Rhetorical Construct in Acts* (SBLESEC 18; Atlanta, Georg.: SBL Press, 2016), 237. See also M. C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 14-15.

By placing *possessio* at the heart of this analysis a further discontinuity and subversion is revealed relating to the Mosaic Law. Whilst the Lukan portrayal of the Mosaic Law is mainly positive, in this section Paul argues that a christological forgiveness of sins provides a deeper and more complete justification than the Law (v. 39). Without Israel entering into this christological forgiveness of sins they are no longer bound within the covenant promises - Yahweh's salvation history is no longer their history and his scriptures are no longer their means of revelation. The narrative emphasises this through Paul's argument that the rejection of this christological means of forgiveness will lead to the rejection of the object of worship, Yahweh (vv.40-41). By subverting the Law, *possessio* creates an epistemological subversion. Yahweh's covenantal promises revealed in the scriptures can now only be understood correctly if they are christologically captured and interpreted within that christological epistemology.

The speech also subverts the Jewish messianic hope and the way Israel relates to Yahweh. Whilst the scriptures pointed to the Christ, Paul's focus is that the Christ has now come, fulfilling the promises of Scripture. Thus, since the Christ is portrayed as both David's descendant and also greater than David (13:23, 36-37) the messianic hope is fulfilled christologically and Israel must now relate to Jesus as they relate to Yahweh and cannot relate to Yahweh outside of that christological context.

*Possessio* also creates an ethical discontinuity and subversion seen in the response of some of diaspora Judaism rejecting that the Christ is the promised fulfilment of Yahweh's salvation history and the scriptures. Whilst Paul and Barnabas' words do

not incite the diaspora Jews in Pisidian Antioch, those who reject this christological message become jealous, oppose Paul and Barnabas, and incite others against them and their message (v.50). Beyond the outward ethical response this negative response subverts the apparent religiousness of some of these diaspora Jews since the Mosaic Law prohibits such negative jealousy. This results in a further ironic subversion. Those diaspora Jews who reject the christological message aim to subvert it by persuading others to reject it. Yet this very rejection will become the stimulus for the fulfilment of Yahweh's plan which is that the gospel goes ultimately to the nations (1:8; 8:1; 9:15). Therefore, for the Lukan audience a greater subversion is disclosed as the emphasis of the narrative is that whilst people may try to, they cannot subvert Yahweh's sovereign plans, rather he subverts their plans (cf. 4:23-28).

Alongside this subversion of diaspora Judaism, utilising *possessio* also provides a reading with an implicit subversion of Roman belief. The christological capturing of salvation creates a discontinuity with a Roman perspective on blessings and salvation. By interpreting salvation through Israel's history this christological salvation situates itself as being older than the Roman perspective. It also promises a greater *pax* - which does not come through conquest or empire but through the fulfilment of the Isaianic prophecy and Jesus' words (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) - and another, greater, Lord who establishes a new community. Such fulfilment implicitly subverts Caesar's Lordship and his ability to act as mediator of such blessings and peace. Furthermore, whilst this christological belief might be interpreted as an act of disloyalty to the emperor and to Rome it subverts those in Luke's audience who might question suffering for Christ.

This reading of the narrative with the notion of *possessio* at the heart of the analytical framework demonstrates the range and flexibility of the subversive-fulfilment perspective. Unlike previous scholarship, including more recent scholarship such as Keener and Rowe, this perspective can account simultaneously for the christological fulfilment and subversion of diaspora Judaism and the Roman State. Furthermore, this perspective can account for the resulting tension that occurs by considering the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical rejection as idolatry.

Whilst explicit vocabulary relating to idolatry is absent this analysis uses the identifiable markers explored in chapter two to consider whether the concept of idolatry is present and may be illuminating for our reading of the narrative.<sup>527</sup> In rejecting the christological fulfilment of Israel's Scripture and history at the metaphysical and epistemological levels some of diaspora Judaism demonstrate the identifiable markers. By interpreting the scriptures outside of a christological perspective this reflects a self-determined autonomy and acceptance of non-scriptural words. Read in the light of Acts 7 this indicates that these Jews have identified with the disbelief of their ancestors. This disbelief results in ethical disobedience - a further identifiable marker of idolatry - since they are full of jealousy and incite others against the message (v.50; cf. Luke 11:47-51). The result is that the dust is shaken from Paul and Barnabas' feet against them (v.51; cf. Luke 10:11). Such a perspective indicates that some of diaspora Judaism have replaced true worship - christologically interpreted and understood - with their own worldview:

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<sup>527</sup> See 2.4.4. Strange's Portrayal of Idolatry and its Application in this thesis.

though they meet on the sabbath in the synagogue and listen to the scriptures they are only mimicking true worship since none of it is christologically focused. These responses and actions imply the presence of a covenant unfaithfulness and therefore the probability of idolatry within this pericope on the part of those who reject the message. This is significant because whilst some scholarship notes the connection between the speeches of Stephen and Paul, no other scholarship identifies idolatry as an underlying issue, and yet this concept of idolatry coherently explains the tension that develops in the narrative between the Christian assembly and some of the diaspora Jews.

In reading this episode through a subversive-fulfilment lens we must also consider the use of the four Es since Strange positions them as encapsulating the facets of Christian engagement with their surrounding culture(s). A cursory glance at this pericope would challenge the use of this model. The narrative portrays Paul as already inhabiting the worldview of his audience - their salvation history and scriptures are his and so he neither enters nor explores. More significantly Paul is speaking a *λόγος παρακλήσεως* with its emphasis on the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises and with the result that whilst there is a warning not to reject the message there is no direct exposure of idols in the speech. Rather any idolatry is revealed in the ethical response of those Jews who reject the message. Only then does Paul expose their rejection of the gospel (13:46, 51). Therefore, Strange's understanding of evangelisation as it applies to this passage must be nuanced. Whilst Jesus is clearly the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises, Israel's salvation history, and Scripture, these are all presented by Paul positively and not as idolatrous. Thus evangelisation as Strange defines it does not occur in this passage. Yet, in announcing a



christological fulfilment, particularly through the Habakkuk quotation, Paul is exhorting these diaspora Jews to accept the message, which could be defined as evangelistic. This suggests two significant conclusions. First, it is evident that Paul is already an 'insider' - a participant in the cultures with which he engages - making, in this instance, the four Es largely inappropriate or irrelevant for understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the diaspora Judaism culture as well as the nations associated with the synagogue. Second, since in this episode the four Es cannot be readily applied to this engagement this suggests that Strange's model may need to be nuanced to take account of cultures in which there is significant theological and cultural closeness to the Christian assembly. It may also indicate that Strange's model overstresses the distance and detachment of Christians to their surrounding cultures. This suggestion can further be tested in Acts 14 where there is an engagement both with Judaism and with the nations outside of the synagogue.

In drawing this chapter to a close, a subversive fulfilment reading with the concept of *possessio* at the heart of the analytical framework provides a fresh and original approach to reading this portion of Acts and the wider narrative. By christologically capturing and interpreting the culture a more coherent and consistent interpretation of the engagement can be demonstrated than is found in previous scholarship.

The first aspect of this fresh approach is that this episode demonstrates that *possessio* is an adaptable tool for analysing and interpreting engagements across an unbroken narrative section. Such an approach is distinct from other scholarship such as Rowe, Klauck, and Kauppi, for example, whose methodology is to focus their

models on limited pericopes removed from the narrative flow of the text or the wider context. A subversive-fulfilment approach also demonstrates its adaptability by being able to draw upon and incorporate multiple models simultaneously, such as Keener's promise-fulfilment reading and Rowe's collision of cultures reading. Yet in doing this it is able to challenge and modify such readings to provide a more coherent overall reading of the narrative.

It has also been shown that the concept of *possessio* is adaptable to provide a simultaneous multi-varied analysis of the passage. Thus within this narrative section the concept of *possessio* can interpret and address multiple audiences, the narratorial and the Lukan, and varied cultures, in this case diaspora Judaism, the nations associated with the synagogue, and the Roman State. Such an approach contrasts with the methods adopted by previous scholarship, for example as was shown in chapter one, assessing the engagement solely with the Roman State or the Graeco-Roman world or Judaism or approaching the surrounding cultures as monolithic entities. Such a perspective therefore provides a more coherent approach to that of Rowe's work, as critiqued by Schnabel, for example, since subversive-fulfilment can effectively interpret the narrative's depiction of an explicit engagement with Judaism as well as an implicit engagement with Rome even though subversive-fulfilment captures Jewish belief and practice differently to the way it captures the Roman State. The concept of *possessio* can also be applied simultaneously to the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical responses within the engagement. This offers an integrative and holistic approach which enables a coherent understanding of the engagement since it analyses and addresses the beliefs and actions that result from them as one integrated response. The significance of this reading when

contrasted with other scholarship is that a subversive-fulfilment reading can capture and account for the engagement with both cultures without altering the model.

Placing *possessio* at the heart of this subversive-fulfilment model also suggests a critical development to Strange's perspective. As noted in chapter two, Strange's over-dependence on Acts 17, his emphasis on engagements where there is a greater theological distance between the Christian assembly and surrounding culture, his view that idolatry is the hermeneutical master key to interpret non-Christian religion and religions, and his lack of analysis of Genesis 12 leads him to emphasise the subversive element prior to the fulfilment.<sup>528</sup> Placing the notion of *possessio* at the centre of the analysis reveals that the passage's priority is fulfilment and continuity. Such a conclusion suggests that this engagement with the text means modifications need to be made to Strange's overall model.

This subversive-fulfilment perspective can deliver a fresh approach to reading this section of narrative since it provides the ability to explain the christological fulfilment and subversion within the narrative as they function simultaneously. This is a more nuanced approach than that of most modern scholarship which often over-emphasises one aspect to the detriment of other features that may be found in the narrative - this was shown in the analysis of Keener and Rowe which promote either promise-fulfilment or collision.

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<sup>528</sup> See 2.4. Potential Weaknesses and Limitations of Subversive-Fulfilment as a Hermeneutical Lens and Potential Answers.

As already noted, the fulfilment or continuity is the primary emphasis in the narrative and accounts for and incorporates the wider biblical narrative, including Israel's salvation history and the covenant promises of Yahweh. This christological capturing is significant for it clarifies the nature of Christian identity and how Christians relate to Yahweh and his promises. It also subverts the covenant identity of diaspora Judaism since the relationship with Yahweh is found christologically and this subversion provides a coherent rationale for the tension that develops within the pericope since it occurs simultaneously with the christological capturing, interpretation and fulfilment.

This christological fulfilment and capturing of the content of the speech also draws to the fore the concept of idolatry through the subversion of the identity of diaspora Judaism and the Roman view of emperor deification and worship. Along with the echo of Stephen's speech (Acts 7), this narrative establishes that identifiable markers are visible and provide evidence of idolatry - most particularly the rejection of the christological fulfilment. This provides a coherent rationale for the rejection of some diaspora Jews at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels and the resulting tension. Such an approach provides a contrast with previous scholars who leave the concept of idolatry unaddressed within the Jewish framework and indicates how a subversive-fulfilment reading brings new light to reading the narrative.

By analysing how *possessio* engages with the narrative with its christological capturing, fulfilment, and interpretation at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels, three important areas can be extrapolated. The first aspect is that of identity and belonging. The christological capturing and fulfilment of Israel's history

and scriptures, as well as the Roman beliefs about the emperor and empire, create boundaries for what constitutes being an insider or outsider within the Christian assembly, that is how Christians identify themselves and how they relate to Yahweh within a covenantally faithful relationship. The fundamental parameter for identity is a christological emphasis and an inward heart-response. This is an integration of the metaphysical and the epistemological levels which reveals itself at the ethical level in a consistent and obedient response. Such a response contrasts with those who perform an external form of religious worship but whose response to the Christian message is inconsistent with that outward action and therefore they are portrayed in a way that is contrary to the worldview that they inhabit. The identity of those people who reject these parameters is depicted as being outside of the Christian assembly.

The Lukan depictions of the identity of the insider and outsider link to the second aspect, generating a Lukan theology of religions - something that Kauppi recognised needed to be developed.<sup>529</sup> This theology of religions provides a means of understanding how the outsider is to be perceived by the Lukan audience. Whilst some scholarship does consider the concept of idolatry as a means for positioning religious belief within Acts, this is predominantly within the Graeco-Roman cultures. There is a lacuna regarding the understanding and position of Judaism in Acts. By using a subversive-fulfilment reading a coherent and consistent solution to Judaism is established through the christological matrix. This subverts the belief and practices at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels and, through the concept of

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<sup>529</sup> See 1.3.2. L. A. Kauppi: A Graeco-Roman Reading of Religion in Acts in this thesis.

idolatry using the identifiable markers, is able to account for the Lukan depiction of the christological rejection that occurs by *some* elements of Judaism. Significant to this perspective is that this subversive-fulfilment reading is able to account coherently and simultaneously for the engagement between the Christian assembly and diametrically opposed religious beliefs, from the theological closeness of Judaism to the theological distance of the Graeco-Roman world.

The concepts of identity and theology of religions link to the third area, that this subversive-fulfilment reading provides a model engagement for the Lukan audience. The methodology of engagement provides a nuanced means for the Christian assembly to navigate the various cultures both individually and where they are inter-related, as in this pericope. The use of *possessio* provides a more careful means of engaging with the surrounding cultures beyond the ekklesia. Whilst *possessio* can accommodate, for example, Keener's argument that the speeches provide a model or Kauppi's christianising of language, it goes further since it is able to express the capture of the structures and content of each surrounding culture, allowing for an appropriate contextualisation of points of contact and continuity as well as accounting for the discontinuity through the christological fulfilment. This model of engagement also shows that there is not a uniform use of subversion. Compared with Stephen's explicitly subversive speech, which occurs as a climax against a repeated opposition by some of the Jerusalem Jews, Paul's speech has a more subtle or nuanced subversive edge. This might be because it is addressed to a group to whom the events in Jerusalem may be known but who have not previously engaged with the Christian assembly or its message. This nuanced accent on subversion may not be picked up by the narrational audience, since the jealousy stems not from theological opposition but from Paul and Barnabas' popularity, and

this provides an alternative and coherent account of how the Christian assembly could be subversive and yet politically innocent. Such a perspective re-formulates and validates subversive-fulfilment as a method of Christian engagement. Such a reading intersects with and provides a challenge to the readings of previous scholarship. It challenges the readings of Harnack and Sanders of a move away from Judaism to Gentiles and nuances more carefully how Israel should be perceived, rather than as a monolithic entity. It also challenges Klauck's position of Judaism as a mediating force since this christological rejection suggests that many cannot read their own scriptures correctly. This outlook also intersects with the work of Keener, which stresses promise-fulfilment or continuity, and Rowe, which stresses subversion or discontinuity, but rather than emphasising one to the detriment of the other, subversive-fulfilment holds that both elements are working simultaneously in the narrative. Thus subversive-fulfilment can coherently account for how the continuity and discontinuity function in the development of the narrative and coherently explain why the tensions develop.

One interesting area of this interaction with previous scholarship is how this modified subversive-fulfilment reading engages with the views of Barrett and Strange regarding the portrayal of Israel. Barrett identifies the continuity of salvation history here as a *praeparatio evangelica* but does not develop the implications of this either for understanding Israel's identity or how it enables one to read the narrative.<sup>530</sup>

Barrett's position is rejected by Strange who writes,

God's power is expressed as non-Christian religions are forced to provide a framework within which God's saving revelation might be expressed, while the saving work itself remains external

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<sup>530</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 1:639.

to the false religion.<sup>531</sup>

Both authors provide opposing and contradictory conclusions whilst both make the same mistake - that of assessing Israel as a monolithic entity rather than interpreting the variegated and nuanced Lukan depiction of Israel, which then enables the varied responses in Acts to be more clearly understood. More deeply, this subversive-fulfilment reading prevents an understanding of Israel as a *praeparatio evangelica*. The Lukan narrative depicts two main groupings within Israel. The first are those who live by faith and believe the covenantal promises of Yahweh. They are not a preparation for the gospel but are believers in the gospel even if they do not see its christological fulfilment (Luke 1:6, 42-45, 46-55; 2:25-40). The second group are those who reject the gospel message, either through a genealogical belief or through an outright rejection of the gospel message. Such a distinction also qualifies Strange's assessment, because Luke-Acts presents Israel metaphysically, as a nation and a covenantal entity. Israel is to be understood like this because it has been epistemologically revealed by Yahweh in salvation history and the scriptures. Such divine metaphysical and epistemological revelation of Israel challenges Strange to scripturally nuance his contention that Israel is forced to provide a framework for God's saving revelation for scripturally Israel *is* the framework within which God's saving revelation might be expressed. Thus, Judaism cannot be understood monolithically as a false religion since throughout Israel's salvation history and scriptures there is a varied response to the covenant promises of

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<sup>531</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 323-324.



Yahweh, both true and false faith and true and false worship. It is this point that was noted in chapter two critiquing Strange's view of idolatry.<sup>532</sup>

This subversive-fulfilment reading with *possessio* at its centre has provided a nuanced interpretation of the Lukan depiction of the Pisidian Antioch episode. Avoiding the mistakes of previous scholarship, this reading demonstrates that the emphasis on fulfilment and christological capturing of the culture is a framework for making sense of the engagements even when there are distinct differences between the Jewish and Roman cultures. This model has also highlighted that the difference of approach and different degrees of polemic are dependent on the context of the culture. Subversive-fulfilment has also provided a fresh approach enabling us to see new aspects within the narrative. This has occurred because we are framing the text within a new concept and therefore asking fresh questions. This has enabled us to consider what Luke is depicting in new ways and allows further reflections within the field of missiology and a theology of religions. The next step is to assess whether subversive-fulfilment can provide a fresh approach in an engagement where there is an explicit cultural and theological distance and in which there is a complicated interplay between the surrounding cultures themselves and as the Christian assembly interacts with them and so we turn to Acts 14.

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<sup>532</sup> See 2.4.4. Strange's Portrayal of Idolatry and its Application in this thesis.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ACTS 14:1-28

### 1. Reading the Narrative

In response to the negative attitude of some Jews and those from the nations within Pisidian Antioch Paul and Barnabas move on to Iconium (13:51). This city was significant: “located at the juncture of several important roads, Iconium was the most important assize centre where the governors regularly heard legal cases. Augustus established a Roman colony besides which the old Greek city continued to exist.”<sup>533</sup> The narrative remarks that Paul and Barnabas attend the synagogue as was their usual custom (κατὰ τὸ αὐτό),<sup>534</sup> and whilst the content of the speech is absent the phrase reminds the hearer of the paradigmatic speech at Pisidian Antioch.<sup>535</sup>

The narrational audience consists of both Jews and those from the nations. Whilst there are various interpretations for the use of Ἑλλήνων (v.1) and τῶν ἐθνῶν (v.2) I would highlight two significant points.<sup>536</sup> Related to the immediate narrative the inclusion of the nations “prevents the audience from reducing Paul’s ministry to the

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<sup>533</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 603. Dunn and Hardin note the significance of the city to the Imperial Cult. Dunn, *Jerusalem*, 430; Hardin, *Galatians*, 53. See also Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2107.

<sup>534</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 527; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:667; Williams, *Acts*, 246; and Bock, *Acts*, 469.

<sup>535</sup> This is supported by Witherington, *Acts*, 418; Bruce, *Acts*, 287; Johnson, *Acts*, 250; Willimon, *Acts*, 126; Morgan-Wynne, *Pisidian Antioch*, 39; Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 211, and Schnabel, *Acts*, 603.

<sup>536</sup> The narrative uses two distinct words for those from the nations. There are a range of views on Ἑλλήνων. First, BDAG notes that this usage is to distinguish the polytheistic believers from those who believe in Yahweh. BDAG, 318 (b) 2. Second, Ramsey notes that Greeks (Ἑλλήνων) is used because it reflects Luke’s knowledge that Iconium was a Graeco-Asiatic city and not a colony city. W. Ramsey, *The Cities of St. Paul: Their Influence on His Life and Thought* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 359. See also Peterson, *Acts*, 403. Though Witherington does note that under Claudius the city was enabled to call itself “Claudiconium.” Witherington, *Acts*, 417. Third, Keener notes that it is used in conjunction with τῶν Ἰουδαίων to “summarize an entire population.” Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2120. Fourth, Barrett notes that “the Greeks are more likely to be non-Jews having some association with the synagogue, whereas the ἔθνη will be untouched by Judaism.” Barrett, *Acts*, 1:668.

simple formula of rejection by the Jews and success among the Gentiles,”<sup>537</sup> thus challenging previous scholarship which posits such a position. Additionally, the inclusion of Jews and the nations continues the wider narrative and theological orientation of Luke-Acts - these are the nations to whom the promises of God are given through the restored Israel as represented by Paul and Barnabas.

As in Pisidian Antioch the response to the message is mixed. Whilst πολὺ πλῆθος believe (v.2), the narrative highlights that it is primarily the Iconium Jews who reject the message portraying them as disobedient (ἀπειθήσαντες), a term used frequently in the LXX of rebellious Israel (Lev. 26:15; Num. 11:20; Deut. 1:26; 32:51; Isa. 30:12).<sup>538</sup> This disobedience has three results: the poisoning of the souls, or lives, of the nations (καὶ ἐκάκωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐθνῶν) against those who have become part of the Christian assembly (v.2); the city divides between those supporting the Jews and those supporting the apostles (v.4) - such a division is significant because it is a theological division and not based on ethnicity;<sup>539</sup> and finally, the collaboration between the Jews and those from the nations against Paul and Barnabas (v.5). This collaboration is recognisably important to scholarship. Peterson writes, “This is a remarkable coalition, considering Jewish antipathy to idolatry and the Gentile way of life.”<sup>540</sup> Bock also writing on this co-operation comments, “this is an interesting move, since often Jews and Gentiles were corporately distinct. Gentiles viewed Jews with

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<sup>537</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 197. Barrett writes, “Paul, apostle of the Gentiles, never ceased to be concerned for the salvation of Israel.” Barrett, *Acts*, 1:625; Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:176. See also Trocmé, “Jews,” 161.

<sup>538</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 469. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 246; and Williams, *Acts*, 245.

<sup>539</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 198.

<sup>540</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 402.

suspicion, holding that the Jews ‘profane all we hold sacred.’ That opposing Jews would seek Gentile support shows how seriously they took the threat of the preaching of the gospel.”<sup>541</sup> Whilst both scholars are correct in part, the collaboration further demonstrates the close inter-relationship between the surrounding cultures that has been seen in Acts 13:13-52. The narrative does not reveal what the inter-relationship is based on, for example social, cultural, economic, or political factors, but against Peterson it shows diaspora Judaism was willing to engage with the nations despite their idolatry, and against Bock, that the nations were willing to engage and unite with diaspora Judaism. This inter-relationship between these cultures is further deepened in 14:19 where theologically and geographically separated communities unite against Paul and Barnabas. Therefore the importance of 14:5 is that it echoes the earlier narrative (cf. 4:25-30) and the treatment of Jesus and Stephen by the Jerusalem Jews creating a resonance between the rejection in Jerusalem and the rejection occurring amongst diaspora Judaism. This link reminds the Lukan audience that God’s people are those who repent for the forgiveness of sins within a christological context (cf. 2:38-41; 4:8-12).<sup>542</sup> It further reminds the Lukan audience of Jesus’ words about being witnesses (Luke 10:16; 21:12-19; Acts 1:8) and about Paul (9:15), and of the prophetic words of the Isaianic servant who is a light to the nations (13:47), a servant who will later suffer. In this case the tension of the narrative of suffering is suspended until verse 19 for Paul and Barnabas flee Iconium but continue to preach the gospel.

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<sup>541</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 470. Bock later, and rightly, says, “The cooperation of Jews and Gentiles shows that the threat is seen as socially serious.” Bock, *Acts*, 471. See also Peterson, *Acts*, 402.

<sup>542</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 250.

As in Pisidian Antioch the opposition causes Paul and Barnabas to speak with confidence (v.3; cf. 13:45-46). Unlike the encounter in Acts 13, their words are confirmed by σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα, reminding the Lukan audience of previous occasions when the gospel has been accompanied and authenticated by signs and wonders (Acts 2:19, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 15:12). Witherington writes, “Here as elsewhere in Acts, Luke is concerned about the evidential value of miracles - that they confirm and certify the truthfulness of the spoken word.”<sup>543</sup> Further to this is the sense within the narrative of a christological sovereignty. It is the message and grace of the risen and ascended Jesus and it is the ascended Jesus who confirms this message through the signs (v.3). This christological sovereignty is significant because it helps interpret τοῖς ἀποστόλοις in verses 4 and 14.<sup>544</sup> I contend that the phrase here refers to those who are sent by a local church for a certain work and is distinct from the Apostleship of the Twelve in Jerusalem.<sup>545</sup> Reading this phrase in Acts 14 within the wider narrative appears to affirm this.<sup>546</sup> For example, after his conversion, Paul is taken by Barnabas to the Apostles in Jerusalem (9:27) and in Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas are not commissioned by the Jerusalem Apostles but by the Antiochene church (13:9). In the subsequent narrative to Acts 14 Paul and Barnabas do not resolve the debate by virtue of an apostolic status but bring the

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<sup>543</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 419. See also Bruce, *Acts*, 287; Stott, *Acts*, 229; Johnson, *Acts*, 246; Parsons, *Acts*, 198; Peterson, *Acts*, 404; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2122-2124.

<sup>544</sup> This argument also applies to the use of ἀποστόλος in verse 14.

<sup>545</sup> Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 212.

<sup>546</sup> See Bock, *Acts*, 471.

dispute to Jerusalem to see τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους (15:2, 4; cf. 16:4).<sup>547</sup>

Moving to Lystra the healing of a lame man fulfils Jesus' words (Luke 4:18-21) and echoes previous healings (Acts 3:1-10; cf. Luke 5:18-26; 9:32-35),<sup>548</sup> demonstrating the restoration of humanity.<sup>549</sup> It also echoes Graeco-Roman stories, Schnabel noting "the stare and the loud voice are indicators of the action or presence of the gods (or God) who mingle with human beings."<sup>550</sup> The description of the person has strong similarities with Acts 3: both are lame from before birth, both leap and walk once healed, and the verbs, περιπάτω and ἄλλομαι, are found nowhere else in Acts.<sup>551</sup> Yet there are also two dissimilarities. The action is portrayed as occurring in

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<sup>547</sup> Witherington, Schnabel, Marshall and Bock agree that the apostle here is distinct from the Apostles in Jerusalem. Witherington, *Acts*, 419-420, Schnabel, *Acts*, 604; Marshall, *Acts*, 234; and Bock, *Acts*, 470, 471. Clark disagrees believing that the close verbal parallels between 3:1-10 and 14:8-10 suggest the possibility that Luke is portraying Paul and Barnabas as specially called and commissioned messengers. Clark, *Parallel Lives*, 330 and A. C. Clark, "The Role of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 181-185.

<sup>548</sup> Breytenbach remarks that this episode is in the style of a miracle storyteller. "Es ist eindeutig, daß die Verse 8-12 nach dem traditionellen *Schema einer Wundergeschichte* aufgebaut sind." His italics. Breytenbach, *Paulus und Barnabas*, 27.

<sup>549</sup> Walton, "Anthropology," 100-101. For two articles on connections between healing in Christianity and the Graeco-Roman world see C. D. Stanley, "Paul and Asklepios: The Greco-Roman Quest for Healing and the Mission of Paul," *JSNT* 41 (2019): 279-309; and R. J. Coffman, "Historical Jesus the Healer: Cultural Interpretations of the Healing Cults of the Graeco-Roman World as the Basis for Jesus Movements," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. H. Lovering; Atlanta, Georg.: Scholars Press, 1993), 412-443.

<sup>550</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 606.

<sup>551</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 422. Witherington writes, "In fact they are part of a larger sequence of parallels between the actions of Peter and Paul involving first the giving of a paradigmatic sermon followed by the healing of a lame man and then a strongly negative, even violent reaction to each man." Witherington, *Acts*, 423. See also Barrett, *Acts*, 1:664-665; Johnson, *Acts*, 247; Peterson, *Acts*, 407; B. R. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ANTC; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2003), 206; Williams, *Acts*, 246; Willimon, *Acts*, 126; Keener, 3:1-14:28, 2130; Williams, *Acts*, 170; and Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 101-102.

a purely non-Jewish environment and there is no explicit christological ascription to the healing (cf. 3:6).<sup>552</sup>

The significance of this healing is the engagement it creates with the Lystran population, a grouping which appears to be outside of the Jewish framework encountered so far in the wider narrative.<sup>553</sup> Despite being a Roman colony,<sup>554</sup> the use of Hellenic titles, Zeus and Hermes, and the repeated reference to Hellenic gods within the wider narrative (cf. 17:16-33; 19:23-41; 28:11),<sup>555</sup> along with the distinct lack of Roman titles or reference to the Imperial cult indicates a Lukan concern to demonstrate the engagement of the Christian assembly with “indigenous and popular religions.”<sup>556</sup> Beyond this, the wider significance is to prepare the audience for the dispute in Acts 15, understanding how the nations are to be included within the Christian assembly.<sup>557</sup> Therefore the narrative may use this healing to echo divine Graeco-Roman healings in which people are restored after a visitation from the gods.<sup>558</sup> It also reminds the reader of the relationship between Hellenic cities and

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<sup>552</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 529.

<sup>553</sup> Roloff suggests that an engagement outside of a Jewish framework is a completely new situation within the Lukan narrative (“Eine völlig neue situation wird eingeführt”), whilst Williams suggests that there was presumably no synagogue. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 212, and Williams, *Acts*, 247.

<sup>554</sup> Holladay, *Acts*, 286; and Breytenbach and Zimmerman, *Early Christianity*, 167-168.

<sup>555</sup> The use of Διοσκούριος in Acts 28:11 would allow for both the Hellenic and the Roman understanding of the names.

<sup>556</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 398; Gill and Winter, “Acts and Roman Religion,” 81 and 82; and D. J. Strait, “Proclaiming Another King Named Jesus? The Acts of the Apostles and the Roman Imperial Cult(s),” in *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (eds. S. McKnight and J. B. Modica; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2013), 133. This despite Lystra’s Roman connections and as a colony. See Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 1976 and 2128-2130.

<sup>557</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 235. Marshall writes, “The incident thus prepares for the events in chapter 15...and the emphasis lies on the response of pure heathens to the gospel.” See also M. Fournier, *The Episode at Lystra: A Rhetorical and Semiotic Analysis of Acts 14:7-20a* (AUS 197; New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 34.

<sup>558</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 606. See also Bock, *Acts*, 475; and Parsons, *Acts*, 198-199.

the gods - the identity of cities was founded in its relationship with the gods,<sup>559</sup> who as benefactors of the city would bring blessing.<sup>560</sup> Such a relationship should not be viewed as purely religious but binding on every part of life. Rowe writes, "Religion is not, however, just part of this fabric, ultimately passive and controlled by other more basic influences such as politics and economics, for example. Rather, religion is also constitutive of culture; it helps to construct the cultural fabric itself. Religion is, therefore, in the last resort 'indistinguishable from culture.'"<sup>561</sup> In this case the narrative emphasises Zeus as the main benefactor - "the god who presides over the dealings of the community, the saviour, the god of the universe."<sup>562</sup>

Recognising the healing the crowd ascribe divinity to the apostles;<sup>563</sup> they are gods appearing in human form (v.11).<sup>564</sup> This ascription may reflect the common worship

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<sup>559</sup> Watts also notes that "fundamental to the [pagan] city is that it was, first and foremost, a home for the temple of the local god, from whose glory the city's identity radiated." R.E. Watts, "Christianity and the Ancient World," *Crux* 53 (2017): 2.

<sup>560</sup> Neyrey notes the following terms are applied to Graeco-Roman deities: 'King', 'Father', 'Saviour', 'Benefactor', 'Creator', 'Sovereign'. He also notes that benefactions include safe journey, rain, food and drink, health, righteousness and justice. J. H. Neyrey, "God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Model for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *JSNT* 27 (2005): 471-477. See also J. R. Howell, "The Imperial Authority and Benefaction of Centurions and Acts 10.34-43: A Response to C. Kavin Rowe," *JSNT* 31 (2008): 29 and Stanley, "Paul and Asklepios," 286-287.

<sup>561</sup> Rowe, *World*, 51.

<sup>562</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 608. Breytenbach states: "In Ikonion wurde ein Altar gefunden, wo Zeus als Σωτήρ verehrt wurde." C. Breytenbach, "Zeus und der Lebendige Gott: Anmerkungen zu Apostelgeschichte 14.11-17," *NTS* 39 (1993), 401 and 408. See also C. H. Gempf, "Mission and Misunderstanding: Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14:8-20)," in *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell* (eds. A. Billington et al.; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 62-63; and W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (trans. J. Raffan; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1985), 125-127.

<sup>563</sup> Winter notes that the boundary between the divine and humanity was narrower in Graeco-Roman belief. Winter, *Divine Honours*, 51-52.

<sup>564</sup> BDAG defines this as "to make someone like a person or thing." BDAG, 707 (a) 1.



of Zeus and Hermes in the area,<sup>565</sup> and also echo the story of Baucis and Philemon which is set in Phrygian, or Lycaonian, hill country.<sup>566</sup> To ascertain the righteousness of humanity Zeus and Hermes visit in human form to test the hospitality of people. They are refused lodging until they come to the home of Baucis and Philemon. In providing hospitality the couple demonstrate righteousness and are given their wish to be priests of Zeus' temple. Along with the theme of righteousness this story also contains divine judgement since those who refused Zeus and Hermes are destroyed.<sup>567</sup> Therefore, it is probable that in the extravagant offering, ταύρους καὶ στέμματα, the narrative reflects the desire of the people to be considered hospitably righteous and not subject to judgement (v.13).<sup>568</sup> The narrative may also be presenting Paul and Barnabas as ambassadors. In Acts 9:15 Paul is described as σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι, he is authenticated by Barnabas and the Apostles (9:27-30), together they teach the Antiochene church (11:25-26), and they are set apart by the Spirit (13:3). In many ways they reflect the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles, being filled with the Spirit and opposing false teachers with recognisable divine

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<sup>565</sup> Gempf also notes the literary and archaeological data found in the region which link the two gods. Gempf, "Mission and Misunderstanding," 62-63. See also Schnabel, *Acts*, 608; Parsons, *Acts*, 199; Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 216; Breytenbach, "Zeus und der Lebendige Gott," 400-401; and Breytenbach, *Paulus und Barnabas*, 32-33.

<sup>566</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book VIII; trans. C. Martin; New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 288-291. Wordelman, whilst not rejecting the idea of Baucis and Philemon as a basis posits that the visitation of the gods was a common theme citing *The Odyssey*. Holladay suggests that it may be the legend of Zeus visiting King Lycaon of Arcadia and punishing him and his sons for their impiety. A. L. Wordelman, "Cultural Divides and Dual Realities: A Greco-Roman Context for Acts 14," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (JBLSym 20; eds. T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele; Atlanta, Georg.: SBL, 2003), 221, 223; and Holladay, *Acts*, 287-288.

<sup>567</sup> Keener writes, "Greeks regarded Zeus as special protector of strangers or guests and as patron deity of hospitality. Hospitality invited the favor of the gods...and injustice to strangers invited Zeus's anger." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2416; Johnson, *Acts*, 248; and Marshall, *Acts*, 421. See also Stott, *Acts*, 230-231; Bruce, *Acts*, 291-292; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 110; Witherington, *Acts*, 421-422; Peterson, *Acts*, 408; Gaventa, *Acts*, 207; Williams, *Acts*, 249; Gill and Winter, "Acts and Roman Religion," 82; Gempf, "Mission and Misunderstanding," 64, 66; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2146-2148.

<sup>568</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 422, 424.

authentication (13:8-12; cf. 14:3). For their message they suffer rejection (13:44-50; 14:2, 4-5; cf. 14:19; 14:22). Such a presentation made natural connections to the Graeco-Roman world since Zeus and Hermes were thought to protect ambassadors “so long as the ambassadors faithfully delivered the messages they were sent to pass on.”<sup>569</sup>

The initial response of Paul and Barnabas, slowed by their lack of knowledge of the Lycaonian dialect (v.11), is visual.<sup>570</sup> The tearing of clothes reflects the seriousness of what is occurring,<sup>571</sup> and the seriousness is built on through the word διαρρήξαντες, used in the LXX of an extreme outpouring of sorrow and mourning.<sup>572</sup> The source of this sorrow is that the apostles have become the “unwitting recipients” of idolatrous worship.<sup>573</sup> Their response is to reject the crowd’s assertions and sacrifice.<sup>574</sup> Within the wider context their words echo Peter (10:26) and contrast with Herod (12:21-23).<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Neyrey, “God, Benefactor and Patron,” 47; and Witherington, *Acts*, 424-425.

<sup>570</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 292; Stott, *Acts*, 231; Witherington, *Acts*, 425; Bock, *Acts*, 476, Marshall, *Acts*, 236; and Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 530. Keener suggests that they might have had an interpreter. Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2155-2156.

<sup>571</sup> Keener notes that the tearing of clothes is common amongst both Jews and the nations. Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2157.

<sup>572</sup> Gen. 37:29, 34; Num. 14:6; Josh. 7:6; Judg. 11:35; 2 Sam. 1:2. See Johnson, *Acts*, 248; and Schnabel, *Acts*, 609.

<sup>573</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 292. Pelikan, Bock, and Peterson also identify this as idolatry. Pelikan, *Acts*, 163; Bock, *Acts*, 477; and Peterson, *Acts*, 403, 406. Stott and Witherington call the act of the people “blasphemy.” Stott, *Acts*, 231; and Witherington, *Acts*, 425.

<sup>574</sup> καὶ ἡμεῖς ὁμοιοπαθεῖς ἐσμεν ὑμῖν ἄνθρωποι. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 213-214. Schnabel asserts that “they cannot ‘retranslate’ the healing and the reaction of the crowds into Christian terms.” This appears unlikely as the following speech demonstrates. See Schnabel, *Acts*, 609.

<sup>575</sup> Witherington notes the link with Peter but not the contrast with Herod. Witherington, *Acts*, 426.

This then leads to the main speech (vv.15-17) of which scholarship presents multiple interpretations.<sup>576</sup> Parsons and Gaventa assert that the narrative is not proposing a simple rejection of the Jews and turning to the nations,<sup>577</sup> Willimon suggests that the Lystran episode demonstrates the Church challenging the “cultural status quo” and refusing “to accept present political arrangements as eternally given,”<sup>578</sup> Kee that the speech would be compatible with Stoic thinking and therefore is used to enhance “the esteem with which these two messengers of Christ are greeted in a sophisticated Hellenistic urban setting,”<sup>579</sup> Bock asserts that this is a summary-speech preparing the reader for the more complete speech in Acts 17.<sup>580</sup> This accounts for the common grace of God in Paul’s presentation of the care of creation and in the Lystran recognition of the supernatural.<sup>581</sup> Marshall and Witherington both focus upon the theological drivenness of this pericope over the historical, biographical or novelistic elements.<sup>582</sup> Marshall also argues that this engagement is a Lukan depiction modelling how the Lukan audience might engage with “pagan

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<sup>576</sup> Breytenbach suggests that this speech has been overshadowed by the speech in Acts 17 and therefore neglected. Breytenbach, *Paulus und Barnabas*, 53.

<sup>577</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 198; and Gaventa, *Acts*, 209. Gaventa writes, “Yet the story does not generalize easily, since *both* Jews and Gentiles continue to respond with *both* faith and resistance.”

<sup>578</sup> Willimon, *Acts*, 127.

<sup>579</sup> H. C. Kee, *Good News to the Ends of the Earth: The Theology of Acts* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 57.

<sup>580</sup> Bock writes, “The Lystra-Derbe encounter in the next scene will be filled out by a very similar; detailed account of ministry in Athens in Acts 17. It may be that, planning to give one locale with detail, Luke simply makes his point briefly here, showing that the response at Iconium is the first of a pattern.” Bock, *Acts*, 468. See also Witherington, *Acts*, 425, 426; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 111; Parsons, *Acts*, 201; Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 214, and Bruce, *Acts*, 292.

<sup>581</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 476 and 478. Bock writes, “The grace of the care of creation in rain, seasons, and fruit is also a prevalent idea in the OT.”

<sup>582</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 232-233; and Witherington, *Acts*, 428. Witherington writes, “Throughout this account Luke’s interests are other than biographical or novelistic...God’s saving acts in history that produced the Christian movement and community are his theme.”

Gentiles,<sup>583</sup> hence Paul begins “a stage further back with the proclamation of the one true God.”<sup>584</sup> Pelikan notes the tension of paganism in the pericope “that was at one and the same time woefully misguided in its polytheism and idolatry (19:28) and yet in some curious and twisted sense ‘not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12:34)’.”<sup>585</sup> Klauck recognises the nature of inculturation and evangelisation as key points within the passage,<sup>586</sup> and Keener that this speech, at least to the Lukan audience, is evangelistic.<sup>587</sup>

The speech is placed within an Old Testament framework,<sup>588</sup> with Bock and Keener noting the polemical edge echoing the anti-idolatry polemic found in Isaiah 45.<sup>589</sup>

These are both argued for by Breytenbach who says:

Die Ausgestaltung von v.17, daß der lebendige Gott reiche Ernte durch den von oben geschenkten Regen garantiert, ist der Septuaginta entnommen. Die Verwendung des Motives

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<sup>583</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 238-239.

<sup>584</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 238; and Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:179. Schnabel concurs, “Luke summarises four assertions of Paul’s explanation of the gospel, which is adapted to this particular situation - face-to-face with a priest of Zeus, with people about to honour them as gods, and with a bull to be sacrificed on an altar in front of a temple erected in honour of Zeus. This situation explains why the speech is not christological or kerygmatic as earlier speeches in Acts, but theological, explaining the sovereignty of the one true God in whom they believe and whose reality is part of the message of Jesus the saviour, which they proclaim in Lystra.” Schnabel, *Acts*, 609. See also Peterson, *Acts*, 410; Bock, *Acts*, 478; Bruce, *Acts*, 293; and Williams, *Acts*, 250.

<sup>585</sup> Pelikan, *Acts*, 163.

<sup>586</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 60-61.

<sup>587</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2163-2164.

<sup>588</sup> Schnabel writes, “This is Old Testament language, where the LXX uses the same derogatory term to condemn the pagan worship of other gods (cf. Lev. 17:7; 1 Kings 16:13, 26; 2 Kings 17:15; Isa 2:20; 30:7, 15, 28; 31:2; 44:9; Jer. 2:5; 8:19; Ezek. 8:10).” Schnabel, *Acts*, 609. See also Soards, *Speeches*, 89, and Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 215.

<sup>589</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 479; and Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2165. See also Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 376-377. Wordelman writes that the Lystran episode is, “part of a general effort to show the power of the God of Israel over and against the dominant religious and philosophical beliefs of the Greco-Roman world.” Wordelman, “Cultural Divides,” 226.

an dieser Stelle muß jedoch dahingehend erläutert werden, daß hier gegen den Glauben der Landbevölkerung im südlichen Kleinasien polemisiert wird, die in Zeus die himmlische Gottheit über Wetter und Vegetation sieht. Diese Aufnahme eines traditionellen Motivs bei gleichzeitiger Umpärgung läßt sich demnach als Anpassung an den Schauplatz der jeweiligen Erzählung verstehen.<sup>590</sup>

Within the speech the use of εὐαγγελιζόμενοι with ἐπιστρέφειν (v.15) is significant. In Luke-Acts the term εὐαγγελιζόμαι is used six times, of which four are explicitly christological in emphasis.<sup>591</sup> The phrase ἐπιστρέφειν carries the idea of repentance as throughout Luke-Acts (Acts 9:35; 11:21; 15:19; 26:18; 28:27; cf. Luke 1:16-17; 22:32).<sup>592</sup> Placed together I would suggest these argue for an implicit christological framing and content within the speech. This christological framework then interprets other deities, and the associated worship, as being “empty, useless, or lacking truth” (τῶν ματαίων),<sup>593</sup> and θεὸν ζῶντα christologically. This indicates that the fundamental Lystran problem is idolatry,<sup>594</sup> and that the correct response is to turn

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<sup>590</sup> Breytenbach, “Zeus und der Lebendige Gott,” 409. My translation: “The elaboration of v.17, that the living god guarantees a rich harvest through the rain bestowed from above, is taken from the Septuagint. However, the use of the motif at this point must be explained in such a way that it is a polemic against the belief of the rural population in southern Asia Minor, who see Zeus as the heavenly deity over weather and vegetation. This inclusion of a traditional motif with simultaneous reshaping can therefore be understood as an adaptation to the scene of the respective narrative.” See also Breytenbach, *Paulus und Barnabas*, 65.

<sup>591</sup> Luke 9:6: Jesus sends out the disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God; Acts 5:42 and 11:20 the subject is [Lord] Jesus; Acts 8:4 and 15:35 it is the word [of the Lord], and in Acts 14:7 it is the good news, which in the context should be understood within the paradigmatic context of the Pisidian Antioch episode.

<sup>592</sup> See 3.3. Covenantal Faithfulness and Repentance in Luke-Acts in this thesis. Holladay, *Acts*, 289.

<sup>593</sup> BDAG, 621 (a).

<sup>594</sup> Williams writes, “His [Paul’s] theme was that to worship the creature...was inexcusable, for the creature was only evidence of the creator, who alone deserved to be honored [sic].” Williams, *Acts*, 250. See also Barrett, *Acts*, 1:680; Schnabel, *Acts*, 609-610; Peterson, *Acts*, 409; Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:179; Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 4-6; and Keener, 3:1-14:28, 2159.

from these deities to the θεὸν ζῶντα who is the true God, the Creator distinct from his creation, and the true benefactor - not only for the city but for all peoples (v.15).<sup>595</sup>

The result of this is the accountability of the nations outside of Israel toward Yahweh (v.16). In the past the nations were not under the revelation given to Israel but still had a knowledge of God through general revelation - οὐρανόθεν ὑμῖν ἕτουός διδοὺς καὶ καιροὺς καρποφόρους (v.17).<sup>596</sup> With the coming of the Christ and the fulfilment of Scripture so the nations now have a responsibility to repent and turn from their idolatry.<sup>597</sup>

Whilst Witherington contends that the speech is interrupted by the crowd and so does not reach its proper conclusion,<sup>598</sup> the narrative implies that some of the Lystrans either did not understand or refused to listen, continuing to worship other gods. Gempf suggests that the misunderstanding comes from a syncretic approach. He writes, “In a culture in which syncretism was a way of life, it should only be expected that the Lystrans initially misunderstand Christianity's exclusivity and attempt to incorporate new religious data (and persons) into their obviously flexible

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<sup>595</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 610; and Witherington, *Acts*, 426.

<sup>596</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 249; Bock, *Acts*, 478, and Witherington, *Acts*, 426-427. Bruce writes, “for the way in which God ordered the seasons, so as to give food to all flesh, ought to have made men mindful of Him and of His claims upon their worship.” Bruce, *Acts*, 293. This may be a naturally occurring point of contact since Breytenbach and Zimmerman note that Lystra “depended heavily on the yield of the fields.” Breytenbach and Zimmerman, *Early Christianity*, 168.

<sup>597</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 477-478; Schnabel, *Acts*, 610; and Peterson, *Acts*, 408

<sup>598</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 426.

system.”<sup>599</sup> Such a perspective would also account for why the Lystrans do not initially respond negatively to the speech.<sup>600</sup>

A further engagement then occurs between some diaspora Jews from Antioch and Iconium and the Lystran crowd. Although these diaspora Jews live a substantial distance away from Lystra - leading Barrett to ask the question, “Is it likely that disaffected Jews travelled over 100 miles from Antioch, as well as the shorter distance from Iconium, to attack Paul?”<sup>601</sup> - there were social and cultural relations between the cities, for these were Roman colonies connected by the *via Sebaste*, and Schnabel notes that Lystra “was the ‘sister’ city of Pisidian Antioch.”<sup>602</sup> The content of the discussion is not reported by Luke and scholarship offers differing interpretations. Schnabel notes that the content might mirror the later accusations in 17:6-7 and 18:13;<sup>603</sup> Bruce suggests that there must have been a synagogue in Lystra and Jews amongst the crowd;<sup>604</sup> Williams, that Paul and Barnabas were considered imposters;<sup>605</sup> and Keener that perhaps the diaspora Jews portrayed Paul

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<sup>599</sup> Gempf, “Mission and Misunderstanding,” 65. Schnabel writes, “Paul’s words do not convince these people to turn away from their traditional gods, they do not cause them to accept the reality of the one true and living God, and they just barely succeed in preventing the idolatrous sacrifice in front of the temple of Zeus.” Schnabel, *Acts*, 611. See also Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2172.

<sup>600</sup> With its Old Testament framework and christological language this speech should be understood by the Lukan audience of Acts. Conzelmann, *Acts*, 111; Bruce, *Acts*, 293; and Hinkle, “Preaching,” 96.

<sup>601</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 1:665.

<sup>602</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 605. See also Hardin, *Galatians*, 53-54; Witherington, *Acts*, 427 n. 295; Williams, *Acts*, 244; Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 217; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:683; and Breytenbach, *Paulus und Barnabas*, 2 and 46.

<sup>603</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 612.

<sup>604</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 295.

<sup>605</sup> Williams, *Acts*, 251.

and Barnabas as sorcerers who would dishonour any deity.<sup>606</sup> One further possibility that connects the speech at Pisidian Antioch and Lystra is that the diaspora Jews make clear to the Lystrans that they are being called idolaters and that Paul and Barnabas are stating that the Lystran worship, and therefore the life associated with that worship and the gods, is futile.<sup>607</sup> Bock writes, “In sum, an effort to share the gospel divides a community. In Gentile areas, idolatry will be a powerful force against embracing the gospel. The way of life ingrained by idolatry will be hard to reverse in some areas.”<sup>608</sup> This interpretation would make sense of the narrative, explaining the reason that some Jews would travel such a distance, the negative response of the Lystrans, and also the stoning of Paul - a punishment for blasphemy (v.19).<sup>609</sup>

Since Paul is not killed he first goes back into the city, more likely to recuperate than preach, and then moves on to Derbe (v.21).<sup>610</sup> The narrative briefly recounts the return journey. Whilst short, it is significant for it suggests that despite the apparent lack of success in Lystra some disciples were made (vv.21-22; cf. 16:1-2).<sup>611</sup> Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch (13:1, 4) where they report on both ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ

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<sup>606</sup> Keener, 3:1-14:28, 2172.

<sup>607</sup> Bock makes a similar point. He writes, “Perhaps the Jews emphasize the threat they represent to the Gentiles’ form of worship, since some Jews are not interested in bringing Gentiles to faith.” Bock, *Acts*, 479.

<sup>608</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 479. Note Keener, who does not make much of the issue of idolatry, writes, “The passage is pregnant with irony: rejected by some of their fellow Jews in Acts 14:2, the apostles are acclaimed as gods in the next town; they preach monotheism to idolaters, then are further assaulted by monotheistic enemies who join forces with the idolaters to attack them.” Keener, 3:1-14:28, 2149.

<sup>609</sup> Keener, 3:1-14:28, 2173.

<sup>610</sup> See B. Wagner and M. Wilson, “Why Derbe? An Unlikely Lycaonian City for Paul’s Ministry,” *TynB* 70 (2019): 55-84.

<sup>611</sup> This is reinforced by the narrative in Acts 16:1-2. Holladay, *Acts*, 290.



θεὸς μετ' αὐτῶν and ὅτι ἤνοιξεν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν θύραν πίστεως (14:27). Such a report sets the scene for Acts 15.

## 2. Engaging with Other Readings: C. Keener and C. K. Rowe

### 2.1. C. Keener

As with the Pisidian Antioch episode Keener positions Acts as an apologia with both an extra- and intra-ecclesial framework. The extra-ecclesial element of the apologia provides a model of rhetoric and argumentation for the Christians in the first-century to copy or follow both for legal situations and for public apologetics amongst the surrounding cultures.<sup>612</sup> Such a model would enable the first-century Christians to contextualise the gospel message which Keener also applies to the modern day reader: “Acts addresses the conflicts of shifting cultures and provides models for contextualisation, and readers who so use it are rediscovering an approach to Acts that appears in keeping with the work’s own emphases.”<sup>613</sup> The intra-ecclesial aspect functions as an apologia within the Christian community for mission to the nations and thus is significant to the events that occur in Acts 14 both in the synagogue and away from it. Keener argues that Acts should also be read as having a promise-fulfilment motif and that the Christian assembly and its message should be interpreted as being socially transformative and not politically subversive. Thus the Lukan narrative may undermine the larger society’s values and gods, but it does not

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<sup>612</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 161. Keener repeats this in other places. For example, “Acts is heavily apologetic (and some of its strategies might help later Christians on trial).” Keener, *Introduction*, 436. See also 437 and 440, 442-443.

<sup>613</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 510.

undermine the State.<sup>614</sup> Such a perspective is applied to Acts 14. Yet despite this assertion of reading Acts as a socially transformative account, Keener does acknowledge that Luke “cannot suppress some tension” nor the “difficult job in exonerating Paul,”<sup>615</sup> raising the issue as to whether Acts 14 does provide a legitimate socially transformative reading as Keener asserts.

The Iconium episode demonstrates Keener’s assertion that the Christian assembly may undermine the Iconium society’s values but this undermining must be qualified, as seen in Pisidian Antioch, since it is accomplished through the fulfilment of Israel’s scriptures and salvation-history. Thus the assembly’s message provides something greater. Yet, as with the Pisidian Antioch episode it should be recognised that there is no socially transformative element portrayed by the narrative since everything occurs within a recognisable Jewish framework and no social transformation is indicated or implied by the narrative,

This engagement in Iconium does develop a subversive edge, something which is tentatively recognised by Keener, as the tension develops in the contrast between the apostles and those who persecute them. Prior to Acts 14 the narrative has portrayed Paul and Barnabas as God’s agents. Keener notes that despite the external religiosity of the synagogue setting the narrative portrays those who oppose Paul and Barnabas as enemies of God’s true agents. Furthermore, Keener asserts

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<sup>614</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 498. For example, in respect to Paul, Keener writes, “Thus Jewish rabble-rousers...often started the trouble...or vested economic interests vied against Paul, as when some falsely denounced him as a non-Roman because he was forced to cast out a demon.” Keener, *Introduction*, 445. See also Sordi, *Roman Empire*, 3.

<sup>615</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 446, 447.

that the perception of the Lukan audience towards those who persecute Paul and Barnabas, would be to see them as “criminally impious.”<sup>616</sup> Such a portrayal is consistent with the wider narrative (cf. 4:23-28). Keener writes, “Luke consistently portrays the apostolic movement and its leaders as representing the *true* Jewish message.”<sup>617</sup> Although Keener does not develop this thread, this citation is significant since the contrast it creates between the Christian assembly and their opponents produces not a transformative angle but a subversive edge. Keener’s use of the word ‘true’ indicates that the metaphysical and epistemological beliefs of the Christian assembly as portrayed in the Lukan narrative are the only right, or correct, ones - that is, opponents to the Christian assembly hold to a false message and are not truly Jewish. It should also be noted that this subversion is not only religious but also social and cultural since the narrative depicts the plot in 14:5 being amongst those outside of the synagogue.

In the Lystran episode Keener is able to recognise the similarities, or continuity, in the way in which the Christian assembly speaks of Yahweh and the Christ and the way in which the gods are spoken about by Roman poets.<sup>618</sup> Whilst Keener posits elements of social transformation - a rejection by Paul and Barnabas of the ethical practices such as the sacrifice - Keener’s argument is undermined because the rejection of the ethical practices by the apostles occurs because they have sought to subvert the metaphysical and epistemological beliefs of the Lystrans, whose gods

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<sup>616</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2126. Whilst Keener only comments on impious nature in respect to 14:5 the comments could also be made of the seeming piety of the Lystrans who at one moment are worshipping and going to offer a sacrifice but who are then easily persuaded to kill Paul.

<sup>617</sup> My italics. Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2175.

<sup>618</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2165.

are worthless and who need to turn to the living God. This is something Keener recognises for he emphasises that the living God of the Christian assembly is supremely distinct from the Graeco-Roman gods because he is the true God and the true benefactor of humanity.<sup>619</sup> This places Yahweh in stark contrast and undermines the Graeco-Roman beliefs about the worth, power, and benefaction of the Graeco-Roman gods.<sup>620</sup> This subversion occurs at the deepest level for it is the subversion of a whole worldview which in the first century was a symbiotic relationship between the religious, political, and social. This is something Keener acknowledges but does not develop.<sup>621</sup> Such subversion of the Lystran worldview occurs because the narrative portrays this worldview as idolatry, something Keener recognises since he regards Paul's message as evangelistic, drawing primarily upon the "turning" language to connect idolatry and repentance in the Lukan account.<sup>622</sup> Keener highlights the impact that any repentance would carry for new Christians within their society, not because of a dissolution of culture, contra Rowe, but in the perception of the surrounding polytheistic society towards the Christian faith. Keener writes, "A complete avoidance of idols would force Christians from public life in their communities, making them dishonourable outsiders; their strict monotheism was socially incompatible with polytheistic society."<sup>623</sup> Whilst such a perspective demonstrates perspicuity and similarities to both Rowe and subversive-fulfilment one

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<sup>619</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2169-2172.

<sup>620</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2165-2168.

<sup>621</sup> Keener highlights that a substantial problem for the Lystrans is that to reject the worship of their gods is the rejection of "an entire worldview." Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2163. See also 2149.

<sup>622</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2158-2159 and 2163-2164. Keener also notes the connection between idolatry and repentance in the Lukan account and the Pauline epistles, in this instance the close connection with 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

<sup>623</sup> Keener, *3:1-14:28*, 2168.

wonders why Keener does not develop this line of thought since developing the themes of idolatry, the rejection of an entire worldview, and the perception of polytheistic neighbours, might help to understand further the narrational and theological development of Acts. This would lead to considering how this tension is addressed in the narrative. Yet such an opportunity is missed and again indicates the potential value of a subversive-fulfilment reading.

Finally, commenting on 14:19 Keener draws upon a double subversion in the narrative: "His [Paul's] Jewish opponents are comfortably assimilated into their pagan surroundings; *they* are not preaching against idolatry. Luke consistently portrays the apostolic movement and its leaders as representing the true Jewish message, whereas many others who claim to be its bearers subvert it."<sup>624</sup> Here Keener correctly recognises that the apostles' Jewish opponents are attempting to subvert their message. This subversion of the Christian assembly also occurs amongst Jews (17:7) and Graeco-Romans (16:20-21), and both within a Roman context. Yet Keener's point needs nuancing. The subversive practice of these opponents is to undermine the Christian assembly. This occurs because of jealousy (13:45; 17:5-7) or to maintain their own power or influence (16:19-21). It is this that leads to the accusation that the world is being turned upside down (17:5). Yet in portraying the opponents of the Christian assembly in this way, the narrative is subverting them for it demonstrates why there is the need for the christological fulfilment which brings redemptive restoration and unity - the world being turned rightside up. Therefore, it should again be noted in respect to Judaism in Acts 14 that

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<sup>624</sup> Keener, 3:1-14:28, 2175.

the narrational focus is upon a metaphysical redemption rather than the social transformation of diaspora Judaism, that is the transformation of the cultures, customs, or behaviours of diaspora Judaism. Taking the Pisidian Antioch episode as paradigmatic the engagement in Acts 14 is one that emphasises the christological fulfilment of Yahweh's promises, Israel's salvation history, and Scripture. Inherently related to that fulfilment is a subversive element since it is only through Christ that the forgiveness of sins is given.

Keener's work draws out a variety of helpful points, most notably the contrasts between the Christian assembly and their opponents. Yet, I would contend that his argument for social transformation cannot be established from Acts 14. Within the Iconium episode, and using Pisidian Antioch as its model, there is no social transformation within that context. Whilst there are clear socially transformative elements to the Lystran episode, these must be nuanced and placed within the wider transformative metaphysical proclamations of repentance from idolatry. Such transformation at the metaphysical level is the rejection of an entire worldview and as such demonstrates one way in which the Christian assembly subverts the surrounding culture not only in their beliefs but in the associated religious, social, cultural, and political systems associated with those beliefs. Using Keener's model Acts 14 might be considered apologetically successful within a synagogue context but not within the Lystran pericope and therefore his model appears limited as a means of understanding the engagements.<sup>625</sup> My contention is that a subversive-fulfilment reading is able to address the varying tensions that occur as well as

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<sup>625</sup> Though 14:21 indicates disciples were made in Lystra.

provide a model for Christian engagement with other cultures.

## 2.2. C. K. Rowe

Rowe's work focuses on eleven verses of Acts 14 (verses 8-19) and centres upon the collision between the religious beliefs and responses of the Lystrans and the acts and words of Paul and Barnabas. Such a collision occurs because there are two distinct divine identities, the Graeco-Roman gods and Yahweh, and each demands a different ethical response.<sup>626</sup> The response of the Lystrans to the gods is sacrifice, but for Paul and Barnabas, the gods are false and such an action is futile or empty.<sup>627</sup> This results in the apostles' call to repentance and a redirection "from dead worship to the living God,"<sup>628</sup> which contributes to the collision. For Rowe this is the force of the narrative: "For Luke's call through the mouths of Paul and Barnabas is not simply an admonition to tweak or halt a ceremony. It contains, rather, the summons that simultaneously involves the destruction of an entire mode of being religious."<sup>629</sup> Such a "demolition" from Rowe's perspective not only impacts the religious - the identification of the gods, the ceremony, and sacrifice - but the whole of life.<sup>630</sup> Thus the narrative reinterprets the religiosity of the Lystrans perceiving it as

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<sup>626</sup> Rowe, *World*, 19. Watts agrees with this collision at the level of the metaphysical. Watts, "Christianity," 4.

<sup>627</sup> Rowe, *World*, 22.

<sup>628</sup> Rowe, *World*, 22 and 23. Rowe writes, "it involves both a demolition of the pagan model *in toto* (worshipping Zeus is futile) and the call for a new construction of divine identity."

<sup>629</sup> Rowe, *World*, 21. Earlier Rowe writes of it being an "extraction or removal from constitutive aspects of pagan culture (e.g., sacrifice to the gods)." Rowe, *World*, 18.

<sup>630</sup> Rowe, *World*, 7 and 23. Later Rowe writes, "Religion is not, however, just part of this fabric, ultimately passive and controlled by other more basic influences such as politics and economics, for example. Rather, religion is also constitutive of culture; it helps to construct the cultural fabric itself. Religion is, therefore, in the last resort 'indistinguishable from culture.'" Rowe, *World*, 51.

idolatry.<sup>631</sup> It is this “force for cultural destabilization” that enables the Lystrans to be persuaded to persecute the apostles.<sup>632</sup> Along with the idea of collision Rowe does note a positive direction within the episode since the Lystrans are “redirected towards the living God” who is the needed new “divine identity.”<sup>633</sup> Yet Rowe does not draw out these positive implications for reading the narrative or understanding the engagement more fully.

Rowe’s assertion about, and emphasis upon, the collision is clearly recognisable in this short episode. Yet by focusing on such a narrow section he appears to take events out of their wider context in which the narrative demonstrates the fulfilment of the covenant promises along with the elements of restoration and recreation through repentance. Such elements are found at the beginning and ending of Acts 14. Acts 14:1-5 reminds the audience of the paradigmatic speech in Pisidian Antioch in which Paul uses a salvation-history framework which emphasises the fulfilment of God’s promises through his activity amongst Israel. Though there is later opposition in 14:2, the immediate result of the speech is that both Jews and those from the nations believe (14:1) reminding the audience of the fulfilment of Jesus’ words to the apostles (1:8) and to Paul (9:15-16). The ending of Acts 14 also demonstrates a divine fulfilment. In verses 21-23 disciples are made and strengthened and leadership is appointed, in short the growth of the Christian assembly continues despite opposition, echoing the early chapters of Acts but in a diaspora situation.

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<sup>631</sup> Rowe, *World*, 24. See also Rowe, *World*, 50.

<sup>632</sup> Rowe, *World*, 24 and 51.

<sup>633</sup> Rowe, *World*, 23.



Yet Rowe's emphasis is upon the collision and my contention is that this emphasis distorts a proper reading of the Lystran episode. This can be seen, for example, in Rowe's argument that the apostles' words are a call for "the destruction of an entire mode of being religious."<sup>634</sup> Whilst in one sense Rowe is correct - there is a challenge to the beliefs of the Lystrans: at the metaphysical level, concerning the nature and identity of the divine; at the epistemological level, concerning the knowledge of the gods and their means of revelation; and at the ethical level, concerning the means for worshipping the gods through sacrifice. Yet Rowe's emphasis on collision without fulfilment creates a distorted conclusion. For underlying this episode is a redemptive and restorative theme. Paul does not call the Lystrans from empty ways to nothing but to the living God, that is someone better and greater than their gods. Paul is also calling the Lystrans to turn from false worship to true worship. This is not the demise or removal of Lystran worship, and by proxy, for Rowe, culture, and nor is Paul arguing for the negation of worship. Rather, it is the redemption of worship, from being empty or futile to becoming purposeful because it is the worship of the living God. Further, it is also the redemption of the means of worship. Since the sacrifice of the bulls is linked to the false worship it is to stop but the wider narrative has already demonstrated that the Christian assembly provides other, redeemed, means of worship that reflect the true worship of the living God (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37). It is this redemptively fulfilling aspect which Rowe does not account for in this narrative and is why, I would argue, the cultural dissolution and the accompanying cultural destabilisation that he posits does not occur within the narrative.

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<sup>634</sup> Rowe, *World*, 21.

Both Keener and Rowe present a helpful analysis of the text through their varied and nuanced approaches to the narrative. Yet both, I would contend, do not adequately account for the engagements that occur within this chapter and as with Acts 13:13-52 the tension of the narrative sits between these two positions amidst an unaddressed centre. Keener places Acts 14 within a social transformation perspective and sees it as a model for Christians to copy if called to speak publicly. Yet he does not account for those times in which social transformation does not occur but in which there is a clear subversion, both of Judaism and the nations, whether associated with the synagogue or not. Rowe rightly recognises the collision that occurs in the Lystran episode but by suppressing the fulfilment element of the narrative cannot account for the framework which qualifies the collision since the narrative provides a redemptive restoration of peoples and their cultures whether they have access to the scriptures and Israel's history or not.

### **3. A Subversive-Fulfilment Reading**

The review of Keener and Rowe's perspectives and their inability to address fully the engagement that occurs demonstrates the need for a fresh approach to reading Acts 14. To achieve this I will follow the structure outlined in the previous chapter. With *possessio* at the heart of this subversive-fulfilment reading the points of contact and continuities between the Christian Assembly and the surrounding cultures are identified and an explanation given for their christological capturing, fulfillment, and interpretation. This capturing and fulfilment simultaneously establishes discontinuities since by using *possessio* the beliefs and practices of the surrounding cultures are subverted at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels. These discontinuities provide potential evidence of idolatry, or an idolatrous

trajectory, and these elements combined provide a coherent account of the tensions that occur between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Strange's four steps can then be analysed as they interact with the narrative with the possibility of adaptations or modifications being suggested to his model. The final part is to consider how a subversive-fulfilment hermeneutic might contribute a fresh and original approach to reading this portion of Acts and the wider narrative. For clarity, I have treated the two engagements separately in this section but combine the findings relating to a fresh reading of Acts 14.

### 3.1. The Engagement in Iconium

Previous scholarship has overlooked the Iconium episode in favour of the Lystran episode. Yet, Acts 14:1-5 is a significant episode for it reinforces the paradigmatic episode at Pisidian Antioch - the absence of the speech's content suggesting the Lukan audience is expected to fill this lacuna by its knowledge of the Pisidian Antioch episode.<sup>635</sup> This episode also provides a narrational development in revealing a notable relationship between Judaism and those from the nations who are not associated with the synagogue, and prepares the Lukan audience for Acts 15.

Using *possessio* to read the engagement within an Acts 13 framework results in points of contacts and continuities which are christologically captured, fulfilled, and interpreted by Paul. These include Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh, familial and covenantal language, Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel, and possible

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<sup>635</sup> As noted previously there is a similarity here to Kauppi's approach about the shared cultural and literary 'competencies' of the author and audience which allow the audience to understand the meaning in a text particularly when there are gaps. Kauppi, *Foreign*, 9-10.

allusions to Israel's covenant unfaithfulness. These elements are addressed simultaneously at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels. Concurrently, as with Pisidian Antioch, this christological capturing results in discontinuities. These include forgiveness, the Jewish messianic hope, and Israel's identity. At the metaphysical level the term 'brothers' should be read subversively since it contrasts true believers with the disbelieving Jews (v.2). The Lukan narrative indicates a metaphysical separation between the true children of Abraham - those who have experienced a christological forgiveness and who relate to Yahweh christologically - and those who are not. This metaphysical separation is further expressed in the contrast epistemologically, between those who believe and those who refuse to believe, and ethically, since those who refuse the message are described as 'disobedient' (v.2) and agitate others against Paul and Barnabas.

As with the Pisidian Antioch episode specific vocabulary relating to idolatry is absent. Yet a close analysis of the engagement recognizes identifiable markers of idolatry. By refusing of the message the narrative depicts some of the Iconium Jews as 'disobedient' (v.2). This disobedience occurs epistemologically and metaphysically - a rejection of the christological fulfilment of Israel's history and the scriptures and a refusal to recognise Jesus' identity. This refusal results in a self-determined autonomy and promotes some of the Jews' own non-scriptural words to the nations. The disobedience is also confirmed through ethical disobedience, the poisoning of the minds, the plot to mistreat Paul and Barnabas, and the later persuasion of the Lystrans. This cohesive response from these Jews, made more emphatic by a lack of repentance, indicates a covenant unfaithfulness. In that sense their worldview mimics true worship for it is outwardly religious but stands against Yahweh's

covenant promises and his messengers.<sup>636</sup> These disobedient Jews share the traits of their unbelieving ancestors, echoing Acts 7, and reflect those Jews within Jerusalem and Pisidian Antioch who reject the message. Therefore, whilst specific vocabulary relating to idolatry is absent the presence of these identifiable markers indicates the concept of idolatry as the rationale for the rejection by some of the Iconium Jews. Such a reading coherently addresses the tensions that occur. The concept of idolatry accounts for the tensions originating at the metaphysical and epistemological levels - rejecting the christological fulfilment of the scriptures and the identity of the risen Jesus - which create the framework for the ethical disturbances. These tensions echo the responses of other diaspora Jews in Acts 13, but are distinct since Luke depicts these tensions as a direct result of disbelief. These tensions hold a greater importance in developing the overall engagements between the Christian assembly and Judaism since they are a core contributory factor to the climax of the Lystran episode.

In reading this episode through a subversive-fulfilment lens the role of the four Es must also be considered. Since Paul inhabits the worldview of his audience - that is, he is already an insider - he neither enters nor explores it. Assuming a similar content to the Pisidian Antioch speech then there is no direct exposure of idolatry by Paul. The use of 'believed' (v.1) implies that a form of evangelisation occurred and the narrative accentuates this in the confirmation of the message (v.3). This analysis, joined with Acts 13, strongly suggests that the four Es appear largely inappropriate or irrelevant for understanding the engagement when there is a cultural or

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<sup>636</sup> Such a position might remind the Lukan audience of Jesus' words about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in Luke 12:1-2.

theological closeness between cultures - in this case between the Christian assembly and diaspora Judaism as well as the nations associated with the synagogue. This suggests that Strange's model needs to be modified to enable it to take account of cultures in which there is significant theological or cultural closeness to the Christian assembly.

### 3.2. The Engagement in Lystra

This explicit encounter between the Christian assembly and the nations outside of the synagogue begins with a singular encounter - the healing of a lame man. This creates two parallel streams of continuity. For the narrational audience the healing echoes the Graeco-Roman beliefs and stories of divine action. For the Lukan audience this event fulfils Jesus' programmatic statement (Luke 4:18-19),<sup>637</sup> and echoes previous Lukan healings (Luke 5:18-26 and Acts 3:1-10), reminding them that such transformation is christologically orientated.

The first point of contact is the concept of the divine-human relationship. The Lystrans interpret the healing both metaphysically - interpreting the event as revealed in the presence of the divine - and epistemologically - the appearance of the 'gods' as a comprehensible means of revelation both within the Lystrans' worldview of the gods and relating to a local story. This perspective influences the ethical response of the Lystran people to the 'divine presence.' For the Lukan audience there are recognisable similarities regarding the divine presence but at this

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<sup>637</sup> J. T. Carroll, "Jesus as Healer in Luke-Acts," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. H. Lovering; Atlanta, Georg.: Scholars Press, 1994), 269-270, 284-285.

point in the narrative this audience should interpret the divine presence as having been fulfilled christologically through Jesus, the Son of God.

This idea of the divine-human relationship forms a second point of contact in which the Lystrans comprehend their own existence as both distinct from and yet subservient to the divine. This reflects their desire to respond at the ethical level through worship and a substantial sacrifice. Such actions indicate a desire to be considered righteous and to receive a blessing from the gods. If Baucis and Philemon are also part of the cultural and epistemological composition this reinforces the concept of righteousness but introduces the desire to avoid the judgement of the gods.

The final point of contact develops through the Lukan depiction of God as creator and sustainer, the agent of blessing for the creation, and whose creation provides testimony to the benevolence of God. For the Lystrans this is interpreted as Zeus, the main benefactor of the city through whom blessings come, yet for the Lukan audience verse 15 christologically captures and interprets this as Yahweh.

This christological capturing and fulfilment through the use of *possessio* simultaneously develops discontinuities within the narrative. Whilst the Lystrans might well recognise Paul's acclamation of the divine creator and sustainer they do not grasp how his fundamentally differing hermeneutic has altered the nature of the divine. Zeus, the benefactor of the city through whom blessings come, is portrayed as worthless - something reinforced in later episodes (cf. 16:16; 17:24; 19:13; 28:11) - and contrasted with the "living God" (v.15). The Lystrans are being instructed that

the living God is not part of the Graeco-Roman pantheon but is Yahweh, and that it is Yahweh who is the true benefactor. Life, and the blessings associated with an agricultural setting, come only from him. This, as Rowe rightly notes, substantially impacts how the whole way of life for the Lystrans is being delineated.

This move at the metaphysical level affects the epistemological. A knowledge of the divine can come from the world but a true knowledge can only come through divinely appointed and trustworthy ambassadors who provide an alternative epistemology, and whose words are verified by the healing. This subverts the medium of the Graeco-Roman pantheon of gods and also, by proxy, the voice of the priest and the crowds who are portrayed as representatives and followers of the gods. This contrast is further stressed in verse 17 since the rain, crops, and seasons are a more trustworthy account of God's kindness than all that the Lystrans contribute in their worship to Zeus. Consequently, the words of the crowd - "the gods have come down to us" - are revealed as false and this is emphatically reinforced through the actions and words of Paul and Barnabas. For the Lukan audience this narrative functions to remind them to interpret voices or revelations christologically, through the arrival of the only Son of God foretold by a divine messenger (Luke 1:32, 35; 2:11-12). It is also a reminder that not all words are trustworthy, drawing them back to the introductory claims (Luke 1:1-4) and enabling the Lukan audience to evaluate future speeches, which has important implications for their interpretation of the voices in Acts 15-17.

Progressing from the metaphysical and epistemological subversion is the re-imagining of the right ethical response. When the deity is "worthless," hospitality,



verbal ascriptions of the divine, sacrifices, and garlands are the wrong response. Rather the correct ethical response is a christological repentance with all that entails for the way to live and worship rightly, reminding the Lukan audience of the positive (Acts 2 and 4) and the negative (Acts 1 and 5). This ethical response is made more emphatic with the appearance of some Antiochene and Iconium Jews. These now act out the earlier plot (14:5) and stir up the nations outside of the synagogue to persecute the apostles. Whilst the union of some diaspora Jews and the nations is significant, the narrative may also be using this rejection by the Lystrans to reference the lack of hospitality provided to Hermes and Zeus in the story of Baucis and Philemon. If correct then this is a further example of *possessio* christologically capturing and re-interpreting both the framework of the cultural story and the content in the elements of righteousness and judgement. Thus the message, christologically interpreted and fulfilled, is good news, because the living God brings true righteousness, but in rejecting it the Lystrans will not be left to “go their own way” (v.16).

Such a framework additionally provides a further subversion regarding the Lukan audience. They are first reminded of the christological necessity for entrance into the covenant relationship. Rather than Baucis and Philemon as the example of blessing and judgement, the Lukan audience may reflect upon Judas (Acts 1:5-20) and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). They are also reminded in the echoes of Jesus’ programmatic words (Luke 4) - delivered in a Jewish context - that these words, appearing to be intended only for Israel are now to be employed for those outside of Israel. In fulfilling the earlier promises in the Lukan narrative (e.g. Luke 2:10, 29-32)

this may subvert those in the Lukan audience who might oppose the incoming of the nations and further prepares the audience for Acts 15.

Placing *possessio* at the heart of the analysis of this episode provides a fuller consideration of idolatry. As noted earlier in this chapter many scholars, for example, Bruce, Pelikan, Bock, Schnabel, and Peterson, consider idolatry a significant theme. Whilst these scholars draw upon verse 15 as evidence, through the identifiable markers a subversive-fulfilment reading provides a more specific and detailed perspective on the nature of this idolatry than previous scholarship. The self-identification of the Lystrans is derived metaphysically and epistemologically through non-scriptural words and stories about the divine. The Lystrans as polytheistic in their beliefs are portrayed as being outside of the christological covenant relationship and despite the christological proclamation the immediate narrative suggests that the Lystrans do not recognise the risen Jesus.<sup>638</sup> These beliefs impact the ethical response of the Lystrans who, at the appearance of the 'gods', respond by offering sacrifices and worship. Yet in this context these offerings are considered as a mimicking of true worship since the gods they worship are depicted by Luke as worthless. This is accentuated when, despite the christological proclamation, the Lystrans continue trying to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas.

Within this pericope the tension does not develop from the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Lystrans, though there is clearly a misunderstanding on both sides and clear opposition from Barnabas and Paul as they reject the ascription

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<sup>638</sup> It is noted that 14:21 indicates that some of these Lystrans did accept the Christological message.

of being divine, and announce the worthless nature of Hellenic deities.<sup>639</sup> The tension is depicted as being initiated through the introduction of some Antiochene and Iconium Jews and their joint efforts, with the Lystrans, to stone the apostles. This tension reflects a rejection of the christological message at the epistemological level, i.e., in relation to the words of the apostles, and the metaphysical level, i.e., in relation to repentance. This final section, taken in the wider context of 14:1-5 and verse 19, is significant for both the nations outside of the synagogue and the Jews who reject the assembly's words are situated together despite the different worldviews that they inhabit and despite their theological and cultural closeness or distance to the Christian assembly. Such a contention supports the earlier conclusions regarding the Lukan approach to Judaism in the Pisidian Antioch and Iconium episodes regarding idolatry.

This engagement between the Christian assembly and Lystrans allows for an analysis of the four Es: *enter*, *explore*, *expose*, and *evangelise*. Though Barnabas and Paul understand the wider Hellenic culture they enter the story of the Lystrans and explore their worldview. The apostles clearly expose the idolatry of Lystran worship and they evangelise, although the narrative is less clear than Strange might hope since the apostles call the Lystrans to turn to the living God without the narrative demonstrating how Jesus is the fulfilment of what the idols represent. Whilst it is clear that the four Es do not function in the pericope in the way that Strange presents them, and therefore some modification is still required, this methodology has a greater success in the Lystran episode than in those

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<sup>639</sup> This stands against Bock's point that "These 'rustic' people have a better intuition of what is going on than the elite, who simply want nothing to do with anything supernatural and tend to deny its presence in any kind of powerful or demonstrative way." Bock, *Acts*, 476-477.

engagements with diaspora Judaism. This is to be ascribed to the theological and cultural distance between the Christian assembly and the Lystran cultures.

### 3.3 A Fresh Approach

Acts 14 is a crucial chapter for a subversive-fulfilment reading of Acts since it addresses two significant and explicitly contrasting engagements. As importantly a subversive-fulfilment reading provides a coherent interpretation of these cultures when they are fused in their response to the Christian assembly.

In addressing these engagements a subversive-fulfilment reading demonstrates its adaptability as an interpretative tool. It is able to address differing theological and social cultures, whether those cultures with a theological and cultural closeness or a theological and cultural distance. A subversive-fulfilment reading provides a more coherent, nuanced, and unified reading of the engagements, providing fresh insights, and is sufficiently flexible that it can incorporate other scholarly perspectives such as Klauck's inculturation and evangelisation and Bock's common grace. Unlike previous scholarship a subversive-fulfilment reading can achieve this without adapting the model or repeating the errors of previous scholarship - isolating the engagements from within the narrative, only evaluating one of the encounters, or only focusing on a small section of text. Through the simultaneous application of a subversive-fulfilment model to the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical responses this integrative approach enables a coherent and holistic understanding of the varying responses within the engagements. This approach identifies commonalities between remarkably distinct cultures. These include the identity of the divine and humanity,

the relationship between the divine and humanity, the identity of humanity, and the worship of the divine. Yet in christologically capturing and interpreting these common features are inherently subverted - the identity of the divine and of humanity is now be christologically defined, the cultural stories and beliefs, whether explicit or implicit, are to be interpreted through a christological trajectory and telos. Thus, the outward action of worship is determined by and to be consistent with the metaphysical and epistemological beliefs - that is, the heart-response is the core as opposed to the outward religiousness, regardless of the grouping a person belongs to.

Placing *possessio* at the heart of the analysis this subversive-fulfilment reading allows a simultaneous multi-varied analysis of the engagements. Such a nuanced and rounded approach demonstrates the ability of a subversive-fulfilment reading to capture and account for the engagements. As with the Pisidian Antioch episode, a subversive-fulfilment reading simultaneously addresses multiple audiences, for example, the narratorial and the Lukan, and provides a coherent rationale for the tension that occurs with the Christian assembly. It also provides a clear rationale for the synergistic union at the end of the pericope drawing to the fore the concept of idolatry. Whilst previous scholarship has remarked on the presence of idolatry in the Lystran episode, through the use of *possessio*, the identifiable markers of idolatry are recognised as present in both worldviews. The fundamental commonality is the christological rejection and the rejection of scriptural words of both groups which results in a self-determined autonomy and which is realised independently in the separate episodes but also when the two groups join together. Such a rationale provides consistency with the subversive-fulfilment reading of Acts 13.

This subversive-fulfilment model also suggests modifications to Strange's own perspective. As with the Pisidian Antioch episode the theological closeness between the Christian assembly and Israel results in the four Es being largely inappropriate or irrelevant for understanding the engagement. In the Lystran episode appears at first that the theological distance between the Christian assembly and Lystrans supports Strange's emphasis on subversion and yet the content of Paul's speech is predominantly fulfilment rather than subversion. This emphasis challenges Strange's contention that idolatry is the hermeneutical master key to interpret non-Christian religion and religions, again reflecting his lack of analysis of Genesis 12, and reinforces the importance of *possessio* being at the heart of the model.

As with the previous chapter this analysis allows some important concepts to be extrapolated through a subversive-fulfilment reading that contributes to the immediate narrative and the wider reading of Acts. The first aspect is that of identity and belonging - the concept of who is to be considered an insider to the Christian assembly and who is an outsider. The fundamental parameter for identity is a christological emphasis and an inward heart-response epitomised in the repentance advocated in the Lystran episode. This response integrates both the metaphysical and epistemological levels, being revealed ethically in a consistent and obedient response. Such a response contrasts with that of those who respond negatively to this christological message which reveals their ethical actions to be an outward show of religious action rather than true worship. This is an identifiable marker of idolatry. A subversive-fulfilment perspective positions the Christian assembly as being exclusive in its perspective on the surrounding cultures only *if* they reject christological salvation. Previous scholarship frequently comments on this position with regard to the Lystran episode but not with respect to diaspora Judaism.

By means of establishing the insider/outsider divergence, the concept of identity fashions comments regarding a Lukan theology of religions. This theology of religions provides an understanding for how the outsider is depicted within the Lukan narrative. By establishing the depiction of the outsider in Acts 14, regardless of cultural or theological background, the author promotes the necessary requirements as to what constitutes an insider for the Lukan audience. Beginning with the Lystran episode the outsider within a Graeco-Roman worldview is depicted as polytheistic, idolatrous, and as worshipping a worthless pantheon. Whilst scholarship does consider the concept of polytheistic idolatry as a means for positioning religious belief within Acts, this is predominantly within the Graeco-Roman cultures. When applied to the relationship between the Christian assembly and Judaism a theology of religions is much less discussed. For example, Johnson considers the disobedient Jews in Iconium to be ethnically Jewish but not part of the Christian assembly, that is not “part of the authentic Israel in the Spirit.”<sup>640</sup> Yet, Johnson does not develop this thought narratively; for example, how this ethnic Israel is being depicted by the Lukan narrative, how the audience should conceive Israel’s identity or covenant relationship, or how it connects to the wider narrative, in particular Acts 13 and Acts 15. Neither does he develop this systematically, how such a perspective contributes to a Lukan theology of religions. The value of a subversive-fulfilment reading is that it provides a consistent and coherent interpretation of the engagement between the Christian assembly and surrounding cultures contributing to both the narrational

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<sup>640</sup> “From the side of humans, that visitation and salvation can only be realised by acceptance in faith. Those who accept in faith become part of the authentic Israel in the Spirit. Those who do not still remain Jews according to the previous understanding of that identity with the hearing and observance of Torah, but they refuse the invitation to share in this realisation of the people: they are ‘disbelieving.’” Johnson, *Acts*, 250.

reading and a systematic understanding of a theology of religions. Through the use of the identifiable markers of idolatry commonalities between the Iconium and Lystran episodes are identified and can be detected at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels. The Lukan depiction of the outsider identifies those who reject a christological epistemology in the interpretation and fulfilment of Israel's scripture. This rejection is a reflection of the deeper metaphysical rejection of the christological salvation that is essential within the Acts' narrative to be an insider. The result of this metaphysical and epistemological rejection is demonstrated in the ethical responses and is established in the collaboration of those Antiochene and Iconium Jews along with the Lystran peoples in their treatment of Paul and Barnabas. Such commonalities, despite distinct worldviews, provide a nuanced approach toward the narrative which leads to a rejection of the perspectives of some previous scholarship, such as that of Harnack and Sanders, but which can also accommodate other readings such as Klauck's perspective that Acts is an intra-Christian polemic against a remnant of pagan belief within the Christian community. As with Acts 13 a subversive-fulfilment reading provides an effective means of providing simultaneously a theology of religions of those with a theological closeness to the Christian assembly and those with an explicit theological distance. Such a theology of religions also accounts for the tension that arises within the engagement.

By using *possessio* at its heart a subversive-fulfilment reading provides a model engagement for the Lukan audience which is more coherent and nuanced than other readings, such as Keener's social transformation or Rowe's collision of cultures. Though metaphysically and epistemologically distinct a subversive-fulfilment reading highlights how the Lukan audience might discern similarities between the Jewish and



Graeco-Roman worldviews and in their responses to the Christian gospel. Seen through the lens of subversive-fulfilment the Lukan audience can perceive how they can engage with both Jewish Scripture and Graeco-Roman legends since all can be christologically captured, interpreted, and fulfilled through *possessio*. This provides a geographically and nationally nuanced approach to engagements and mission in the first century since this methodology can be applied wherever the Christian assembly is and to the stories of whichever people group the assembly encounters. Such an engagement also demonstrates a different approach between those with Scripture, starting with the covenant fulfilment of Yahweh's promises, and those without - in this case beginning with the gods being worthless and yet speaking in a way that is recognisable to the people.

This model engagement again highlights that there is not a uniform use of subversion, most particularly seen in the Lystran episode, for Paul's speech begins by renouncing the gods before portraying the "Living God" in terms that are understandable to the people. Such a reading demonstrates a flexibility to the engagements allowing the audience to reflect on how they might engage with others and also prepares the Lukan audience for the engagements in Acts 16 and 17 as well as the legal situations and public apologetics of the later chapters of Acts.

This fresh approach both challenges and affirms the varying contradictory positions and conclusions of previous scholarship. In terms of challenge this subversive-fulfilment reading undermines the interpretation of Harnack and Sanders regarding the movement of the gospel from Judaism to the Gentiles since the narrative of Acts 14, supported by the events in Acts 13, indicates both that many Jews believe and

also that Gentiles are involved in the persecution of Paul and Barnabas. This occurs in both the Iconium and Lystran episodes. Such a perspective also challenges Klauck's perspective that Judaism can act as a mediating force to prepare the Graeco-Roman world for the truth of Christianity. Further to this a subversive-fulfilment reading qualifies Keener's work agreeing with the promise-fulfilment framework and that the Christian message is socially transformative but positioning the gospel as subversive since it impacts the life of Judaism and the nations outside the synagogue at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels.

Beyond this a subversive-fulfilment reading can integrate or accommodate the views of previous scholarship. For example, a subversive-fulfilment reading can incorporate Bock's presentation of common grace in the care of creation, Willimon's subversive nature of the church, Klauck's inculturation and evangelisation, and Pelikan who considers the Lystrans as idolators and yet not far from the Kingdom of God. Thus this subversive-fulfilment reading avoids the inadequacies of previous scholarship since it does not emphasise one perspective to the detriment of the other, nor leave significant elements undeveloped. Rather this reading maintains that both fulfilment and subversion are working simultaneously within the narrative. This flexibility and nuanced approach to the engagements means that by integrating other scholarly positions - which often provide contradictory conclusions to each other - this reading can coherently describe the gaps in other scholarship and effectively explain how this previous scholarship can be more coherently understood as part of an overall holistic interpretation.

In applying a subversive-fulfilment reading first to Acts 13 and now Acts 14 it has been demonstrated that this methodology can be utilised effectively across a longer unbroken narrative of Acts and consistently provide a coherent interpretation of the engagements despite there being different theological and cultural differences, for example, within an explicit Jewish setting and an explicit Graeco-Roman polytheistic setting. Even more remarkably, this reading provides a coherent interpretation of the cultures when they collaborate. Such a reading sets it apart from previous scholarship. It does so by holding fulfilment and subversion simultaneously, so to speak, sitting amidst an unaddressed centre amongst a scholarship that over-emphasises one to the detriment of the other. This reading also enables us to take a nuanced approach as to how Luke is depicting the theological dissimilarities and similarities between disparate groupings and in contrast to the Christian assembly. This reading of Acts 14 therefore provides a developed reflection for further questions within the narrative that also resonate in the field of systematic theology and mission, such as identity, a theology of religions, and models of engagement. The next chapter, Acts 15, provides a new challenge by addressing an intra-ecclesial engagement within a strongly Christian setting. Acts 15 challenges scholarship to interpret this episode without adapting the model used to interpret other engagements. It therefore provides the potential for a subversive-fulfilment reading to demonstrate an even greater value as it illuminates the events found in this chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: ACTS 15:1-29

### 1. Reading the Narrative

For Acts' scholarship this chapter is structurally and theologically central to the narrative development of Acts. Witherington writes, "It is no exaggeration to say that Acts 15 is the most crucial chapter in the whole book."<sup>1</sup> Similarly Bock remarks, "Acts 15 is a central chapter in terms of both its location in Acts and the theological issue it presents,"<sup>2</sup> and Johnson regards the apostolic council "as a watershed in the narrative of Acts."<sup>3</sup> Yet this chapter has also caused controversy in scholarship and Marshall states, "Probably no section of Acts has aroused such controversy as this one or led to such varied historical reconstructions of the actual situation."<sup>4</sup> Much of this controversy concerns the attempt to reconcile the events in Acts 11, 15 and Galatians 2.<sup>5</sup> More significant to this thesis though is how this pivotal chapter in the

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<sup>1</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 439. Marshall, Peterson, Barrett, and Parsons also state that Acts 15 is the structural and theological centre of the book. Marshall, *Acts*, 242; Peterson, "Theological Enterprise," 527; Barrett, *Acts*, 2:709; and Parsons, *Acts*, 207.

<sup>2</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 486; Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 204-205; and Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 403.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 268. See also Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 538; and Blomberg, "Heresy," 65. Keener also refers to Acts 15 as "the theological watershed." C. Keener, *15:1-23:35* (vol. 3 of *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2014), 2194. Whilst Conzelmann sees this chapter as "the great turning point" I disagree with his reason for it being the turning point since he asserts that it emphasises "the transition from the primitive church to the 'contemporary' church." Conzelmann, *Acts*, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 244

<sup>5</sup> Whilst there is substantial discussion about the dating of this meeting in relation to the writing and dating of Galatians, this does not provide any substantial relevance to understanding the engagement that is occurring between the Jewish believers and the believers from the nations. For arguments on the relationship between Acts 15 and Galatians 2 see: P. Parker, "Once More, Acts and Galatians," *JBL* 86 (1967): 175-182; Marshall, *Acts*, 244-249; Witherington, *Acts*, 440-449; Bock, *Acts*, 486-493; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 539-541; Johnson, *Acts*, 269-271; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2194-2206; M. Slee, *The Church in Antioch in the First Century CE: Communion and Conflict* (JSNTS 244; ed. S. E. Porter; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 36-52; R. Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting* (vol. 4 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*; ed. B. W. Winter; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 468-470; Breytenbach, *Paulus und Barnabas in Der Provinz Galatien*, 127-128; R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 13-28)* (Evangelisch-

narrative addresses the tension that develops between believers from a Jewish background and believers from the nations. Parsons argues this tension is social. He writes, “The issue here is not about the Gentiles’ salvation but whether Gentiles and Jews can commingle without the Jews’ being defiled by association with Gentiles, who are by nature unclean...This is a social, not a soteriological, question.”<sup>6</sup> For myself, Parsons is wrong and I would contend that there are two fundamental and interlocking issues within this pericope. The first is the soteriological question: how is someone saved and what authority or source reveals this salvation (vv.1-2)? The second is the ethical question: how are the believers from the nations to be integrated within the strongly Jewish framework of the Christian assembly (vv.19-21)?<sup>7</sup> Witherington writes,

Here the matter must be resolved as to what constitutes the people of God, and how the major ethnic division in the church (Jew/Gentile) shall be dealt with so that both groups may be included in God's people on equal footing, fellowship may continue, and the church remain one.<sup>8</sup>

The structure of the pericope reflects these two fundamental and interlocking issues; the discussion of a theological solution (15:1-21) and then the practical guidance

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Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; Vol. 2; Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1986), 72; Dunn, *Jerusalem*, 446-450; Schnabel, *Acts*, 620-621; Barrett, *Acts*, 2:710-712; and Williams, *Acts*, 258-261.

<sup>6</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 210. See also Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 108; and I. H. Marshall, “Luke’s Portrait of the Pauline Mission,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission* (eds. P. Bolt and M. Thompson; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000), 99.

<sup>7</sup> See also Blomberg, “Heresy,” 65; Witherington, *Acts*, 450; Peterson, *Acts*, 417, 421 and 432; S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law* (SNTSMS 50; ed. R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge: CUP, 1983), 72; Wiarda, “The Jerusalem Council,” 245; Schnabel, *Acts*, 628-629; Bock, *Acts*, 487; D. Seccombe, “The New People of God,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 365; and C. Blomberg, “The Christian and the Law of Moses,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 407.

<sup>8</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 439 and 457. Bock writes, “This passage shows the church decisively addressing the question of Gentile involvement in the new community...This is a major point of concern in Acts.” Bock, *Acts*, 486.

expressed in a pastoral letter (15:22-35).<sup>9</sup>

The narrative uses 14:26-27 to set the scene for this pericope: ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ ὅτι ἤνοιξεν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν θύραν πίστεως. Arriving in Antioch from Judaea some Jewish believers assert that entry into the covenant relationship with God comes through circumcision: Ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως...(15:1).<sup>10</sup> For these men circumcision for all male believers according to the Law of Moses is the condition of salvation.<sup>11</sup> Without this physical expression of covenantal faithfulness these men assert that salvation is not possible (οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι).<sup>12</sup> Such a statement, when read within the overall development of the Acts narrative, is shocking for the emphasis since Acts 10 has been to stress the nature of salvation as a salvation for *both* Jews and the nations through a christological faith (10:1-48; 11:1-18, 19-21; 13:12, 38-39, 48; 14:1, 22-23, 27; cf. 16:31).<sup>13</sup> Such a perspective is supported by Rapske, Bolt, Bruce, Johnson, Hengel, Witherington,

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<sup>9</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 632; and Peterson, *Acts*, 423.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson notes that “Judea may be a circumspect way of referring to the Jerusalem community.” Johnson does not give reasons for this view and neither would such a view affect the narrative flow. Johnson, *Acts*, 259.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 259; and Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 598-599.

<sup>12</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 495. See also Schnabel, *Acts*, 628; Bruce, *Acts*, 330; Peterson, *Acts*, 421; Johnson, *Acts*, 259; Walton, “The Acts - of God?” 302; and Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 72. This is emphasised through the use of the dative (Ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως). With Wallace I take this as a dative of rule but would suggest that Wallace’s definition is insufficient to understand this verse. He states that this “specifies the rule or code a person follows or the standard of conduct to which he or she conforms.” This definition places the emphasis on the ethical whereas the flow of the immediate and wider narrative reflects on salvation through the christological fulfilment. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 157.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 259. Noting the immediate development of the narrative in Acts 13 and 14 Johnson writes that the statement in 15:1 relates to this context and is “all the more shocking...because of the way it controverts the theme so emphatically developed by the narrator in the previous section.”

and Keener.<sup>14</sup> This view of salvation draws Paul and Barnabas into a sharp dispute. Kraemer, commenting on Acts 15, argues that this dispute occurs because “Judaism is in actual fact a religion of self-deliverance and all the rest. It is because of this that Paul takes issue with it . . . His whole argument is centred on showing that the way of self-deliverance through self-justification is inherently beyond the bounds of possibility.”<sup>15</sup> Yet Kraemer mistakes the identity of the protagonists, for they are depicted in the narrative as Jewish believers, distinct from Judaism. He also appears to miss the emphasis of the passage for it is not about a phenomenological contrast between Judaism and Christianity but a dispute based on the nature of salvation.

The result of the dispute is that the scene moves to Jerusalem (15:3-4). This is because Paul and Barnabas do not have the authority to resolve the dispute since they are not Apostles but are those set apart and sent by the Antiochene church (13:1-3).<sup>16</sup> It also moves to Jerusalem because this dispute is significant to the metaphysical essence and identity of the Christian assembly. This dispute involves the epistemological authority for salvation, the inclusion of believers from the nations, and the ethical implications of that salvation. This requires the gathering of the assembly under the authority of the Apostles and elders (ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν

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<sup>14</sup> B. Rapske, “Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 242; P. Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 204; Bruce, *Acts*, 303; Johnson, *Acts*, 268; M. Hengel, “The Stance of the Apostle Paul Toward the Law in the Unknown Years Between Damascus and Antioch,” in *The Paradoxes of Paul* (vol. 2 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (eds. D. A. Carson et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 86-87; Witherington, *Acts*, 450; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 3:2213.

<sup>15</sup> Kraemer, *Christianity*, 106.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 5: Acts 14:1-28 and my comments on the use of the term ‘apostle’.

ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων).<sup>17</sup> Luke chooses to situate the Christian assembly as adopting a clearly recognisable first-century structure for this pivotal part of his narrative. Witherington notes that such gatherings were “The main way to resolve conflict...to overcome stasis and procure concord and unity.”<sup>18</sup>

The report of Paul and Barnabas (14:27) is repeated in 15:4 and begins the section in Jerusalem. It is significant that in 14:27 the word order emphasises the work done (ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς μετ’ αὐτῶν) whilst 15:4 emphasises that it is God who does the work (ὅσα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν μετ’ αὐτῶν).<sup>19</sup> Although the reporting in 15:3 is part of a transitional narrative its significance should not be overlooked because of the inclusion of τὴν ἐπιστροφήν. This phrase reminds listeners of the earlier Lystran episode (14:15) and so reinforces that the dispute is about salvation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> R. A. Campbell, “The Elders: Seniority in Earliest Christianity,” *TynB* 44 (1993): 186; and J. P. Tanner, “James’s Quotation of Amos 9 to Settle the Jerusalem Council Debate in Acts 15,” *JETS* 55 (2012): 65.

<sup>18</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 450. Witherington also writes, “Theophilus is being presented here with a picture of the church as a self-governing entity, a subculture in the Roman Empire, a people living in orderly fashion by their own rules, but nonetheless following procedures not unlike those recognised in the larger culture to be proper.” See also also McCready, “Ekklesia,” 62-63; W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Mass.: YUP, 1983), 78-80; Schnabel, “Fads,” 259-260; and Johnson, *Acts*, 271. Moles argues that Acts 15 is evidence that the Christian assembly is a *politeia* which contrasts with both Jewish and Roman *politeias*. J. Moles, “Luke’s Preface: The Greek Decree, Classical Historiography and Christian Redefinitions,” *NTS* 57 (2011): 470.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Acts*, 262; Witherington, *Acts*, 452; E. Richard, “The Divine Purpose: The Jews and the Gentile Mission (Acts 15),” in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (ed. C. H. Talbert; New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1984), 193; and Peterson, *Acts*, 422.

<sup>20</sup> Acts 14:15: εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν ματαίων ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα. See BDAG, 382 (a). Schnabel notes that “This is the only occurrence of the noun ‘conversion’ (epistrophē) in the New Testament, describing the turning of Gentiles from idols to the one true and living God, trusting in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and Savior, for forgiveness of sins, rescue from God’s wrath, and eternal life.” Schnabel, *Acts*, 630.



Views regarding the Pharisee believers are mixed.<sup>21</sup> Johnson asserts that Luke portrays the Pharisee believers negatively,<sup>22</sup> Darr that whilst believers they are portrayed negatively and that “being counted among the believers is not necessarily an indication of a character’s righteousness,”<sup>23</sup> and Sanders that the Pharisees are “obstructionist,”<sup>24</sup> and “not true members of the Christian community.”<sup>25</sup> My perspective is that these Pharisees are true believers, perhaps some of those who believe in the early narrative of Acts,<sup>26</sup> and that whilst their identification is non-pejorative, that part of the Christian assembly is advocating a non-christological salvation is a serious concern.<sup>27</sup> My contention is that Luke uses this disagreement to address the developing issues from Acts 13 and 14 to further his narrative and to teach his Lukan audience something more significant and nuanced, that is a christological unity.<sup>28</sup> The Pharisee believers restate the argument - the  $\delta\epsilon\iota$

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<sup>21</sup> This was discussed in chapter 1: 4.3. J. T. Sanders: Acts as Anti-Semitic.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson notes, “Everything in Luke’s shaping of the narrative from chapter 10 forces us to see the Pharisees personifying the same opposition to the ‘plan of God’ as they did in the Gospel.” Johnson, *Acts*, 272.

<sup>23</sup> Darr, *On Character Building*, 120-122.

<sup>24</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 95.

<sup>25</sup> Sanders, *Luke-Acts*, 114.

<sup>26</sup> Various scholars identify these Pharisees as true believers. For example, Schnabel, *Acts*, 631; Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:183; Witherington, *Acts*, 453; Marshall, *Pharisees*, 181-182; Ziesler, “Luke and the Pharisees,” 147-148; Holladay, *Acts*, 295; Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 390; Bock, *Acts*, 496; Barrett, *Acts*, 2:704-705; Peterson, *Acts*, 423.

<sup>27</sup> See Bock, *Acts*, 496 and Witherington, *Acts*, 453 n.381 who both argue that the term ‘party’ or ‘sect’ should not be read as a pejorative term.

<sup>28</sup> See the section on Subversive-Fulfilment in this chapter. Whilst I disagree with Ziesler’s assessment that in Luke-Acts “the Pharisees are the party who are friendly towards Christianity ‘politically’ and to some extent personally. This does not contradict their being at theological variance, especially in the realms of Law and Christology,” his perspective that these Pharisees are believers and within the Christian assembly is correct. Ziesler, “Luke and the Pharisees,” 151, 156.

highlighting the necessity of circumcision as a salvific, covenantal event (15:5)<sup>29</sup> - the believers from the nations must become proselytes following Jewish customs “if they want to be members of God’s people.”<sup>30</sup> The narrative identifies that answering this is the purpose of the meeting.<sup>31</sup> This question is addressed through three speeches; those of Peter, Barnabas and Paul, and finally, James.

Peter’s address recaptures his vision (10:1-11:18) emphasizing that in the providence and sovereignty of God the nations might believe (15:6-9). Such belief occurs “without prior circumcision and submission to the Mosaic Law.”<sup>32</sup> Such a statement from Peter is significant for through the vision his understanding of how the covenant promises of Yahweh through Jesus Christ to Israel would result in the nations hearing and believing the gospel now functions in line with the scriptural promises. As Witherington writes, “In other words, the eschatological restoration of God’s people was always intended to attract Gentiles to seek God.”<sup>33</sup> Echoing the words of Paul and Barnabas at Pisidian Antioch (13:38-39), Peter makes a distinction between the Law of Moses, “a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have

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<sup>29</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 496; Witherington, *Acts*, 453; Johnson, *Acts*, 260; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2227. Willimon is very positive towards the Judaeans noting that “They know that Israel’s covenant included blessing to all families of the earth (Gen. 12:3).” Willimon, *Acts*, 128. See also Scobie, “Israel and the Nations,” 295.

<sup>30</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 632; and Peterson, *Acts*, 423. Contra Witherington who says, “The issue to be decided is what will be required of Gentiles so they can be full participants in the fellowship, fully accepted by Jewish Christians.” Witherington, *Acts*, 457.

<sup>31</sup> Συνήχθησάν τε οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου.

<sup>32</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 633.

<sup>33</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 459. See also Scobie, “Israel and the Nations,” 290-291; Barrett, *Acts*, 2:714; and Bock, *Acts*, 500. The language used here is important. For example, compare it with Bock’s statement. “All of this suggests that Luke presents Christianity as a natural extension of Judaism because promises given originally to the Jews are now offered in the new community formed by Jesus the Messiah.” The danger of this is it could be made to suggest that Christianity is a separate religion to Judaism. It is better to talk in terms of restoration or re-creation. Bock, *Acts*, 496.

been able to bear,” and the “grace of our Lord Jesus” which saves (vv.10-11). This distinction strengthens Peter’s words about the heart and reminds the Lukan audience that it is a salvific issue that is at stake (vv.8-9) since it is God who has given them the Holy Spirit (v.8) and purified their hearts by faith (v.9).<sup>34</sup> Wahlen, connecting Peter’s vision in Acts 10 and this moment, writes,

Thus faith rather than circumcision is the decisive indicator because it is the means by which their hearts have been cleansed (v.9). Such should be evidence enough that their intent no longer inclines towards idolatry...Therefore circumcision is unnecessary, whether as a condition for table fellowship with Jewish Christians or for salvation.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, whilst Fitzmyer, Gaventa and Le Cornu and Shulam perceive the yoke positively it should be understood negatively since it is associated with testing God (νῦν οὖν τί πειράζετε τὸν θεόν).<sup>36</sup> Johnson notes that the verb ‘test’ “is to be understood explicitly in terms of resistance to God’s plan (see Exod. 17:2; Deut. 6:16, etc).” He cites Satan testing Jesus (Luke 4:2), Jesus’ opponents (Luke 11:16), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:9).<sup>37</sup> Yet it is important to nuance this Lukan perception of the law for, as Marshall writes, “The point here is not the burdensomeness or oppressiveness of the law, but rather the inability of the Jews to gain salvation through it, and hence its irrelevance as far as salvation is

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<sup>34</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 500; and Johnson, *Acts*, 262.

<sup>35</sup> C. Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision and Conflicting Definitions of Purity,” *NTS* 51 (2005): 517. See also B. Chilton, “Purity,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. C.A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 879; Witherington, *Acts*, 454; and J. H. Neyrey, “The Symbolic Universe of Luke-Acts: ‘They Turn the World Upside Down’,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J. H. Neyrey; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 295.

<sup>36</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 548; Gaventa, *Acts*, 216; and H. Le Cornu and J. Shulam, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Acts* (2 vols; Jerusalem: Academon, 2003), 823-826.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 262. See also Schnabel, *Acts*, 634; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 547; Peterson, *Acts*, 426-427; Bock, *Acts*, 501 and 503; Blomberg, “Law of Moses,” 407; R. F. O’Toole, “‘You did not Lie to Us (Human Beings) but to God’ (Acts 5,4c),” *Bib* 76 (1995): 182; Holladay, *Acts*, 298; and Keener, *Introduction*, 496; and 15:1-23:35, 2235.

concerned.”<sup>38</sup> Such a point is reflected in the Pisidian Antioch speech where Paul is positive about the law but demonstrates it holds a christological trajectory and telos (13:32-33, 38-39). Peter’s words are supported by Barnabas and Paul. Though short this speech is significant to the overall argument for they assert that the inclusion of the nations is a work of God. This is done through the use of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα to demonstrate that it is an authentic work of God.<sup>39</sup> It is also reinforced by the phrase, ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν δι’ αὐτῶν, echoing 14:27 and 15:4, with the force here emphasising what God is doing amongst the nations.<sup>40</sup>

The final speech is from James, who appears to have a significant leading role amongst the Jerusalem church (15:19).<sup>41</sup> Reinforcing Peter’s words, James describes the believers from the nations as God’s people (ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἔθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ) which is significant since λαός is often used in Acts to refer to the people of God, “as it does here” (Acts 7:34; 13:17).<sup>42</sup> What has formerly been a paradox, the nations separated from God’s people,<sup>43</sup> has now been

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<sup>38</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 250. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 259 and 263, Schnabel, *Acts*, 635, Bock, *Acts*, 501, and Witherington, *Acts*, 454; J. Nolland, “A Fresh Look at Acts 15.10,” *NTS* 27 (1980): 111.

<sup>39</sup> σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα: Acts 2:19; 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3. Johnson, *Acts*, 263; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2215 and 2226; Peterson, *Acts*, 428; and Witherington, *Acts*, 456. Whilst Paul appears to have taken the lead the name order at this juncture is reversed. This may be because still within the setting of the Christian assembly at Jerusalem and Antioch Barnabas is still the better known and therefore takes precedent (13:2).

<sup>40</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 2:704.

<sup>41</sup> Tanner, “Acts 15,” 65 and 74-75; Witherington, *Acts*, 457; Peterson, *Acts*, 429; and Richard, “Divine Purpose,” 194. Park argues there is not enough evidence to state that James is the leader of the Jerusalem council. H. D. Park, “Drawing Ethical Principles from the Process of the Jerusalem Council: A New Approach to Acts 15:4-29,” *TynB* 61 (2010): 277.

<sup>42</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 502. See also Tanner, “Acts 15,” 75.

<sup>43</sup> See Exod. 19:5; 23:22; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18. Dahl writes, “God has made provision to take a group of people out of the Gentile nations and make them his own. The point is not that this group is ‘a people’ in the sense of ‘a nation’ or ‘a cultural unit’, but that it now belongs to God in the same way

resolved through the christological fulfilment,<sup>44</sup> for the nations have been included within the people of God.<sup>45</sup> Using familial language James then connects Peter's speech with an LXX reading of Amos 9:11-12, which draws on other related texts.<sup>46</sup> Whilst James appears to adapt the Old Testament quotation, Schnabel writes, "The variations belong to a consistent interpretation of Amos 9:11-12 with the help of related texts that refer to the building of the eschatological temple (Jer. 12:15-16; Hos. 3:4-5) and the conversion of the Gentile nations (Isa. 45:20-23; Zech. 8:22) in the messianic age."<sup>47</sup> This prophetic quotation is a significant citation,<sup>48</sup> the "centerpiece of the speech,"<sup>49</sup> acting as a conclusive witness establishing that in the restoration of the Davidic covenant to Israel others from outside of Israel will be accepted into the covenant promises of Yahweh in their own right and without becoming proselytes to Judaism (15:13-18).<sup>50</sup>

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as Israel does, or, rather: as Israel should do." N. Dahl, "'A People for His Name' (Acts 15:14)," *NTS* 4 (1957-1958): 326.

<sup>44</sup> Tanner, "Acts 15," 84.

<sup>45</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 251; Bock, *Acts*, 503; Johnson, *Acts*, 264; Schnabel, "People of God," 52; R. Wall, "Israel and the Gentile Mission in Acts and Paul: A Canonical Approach," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 449; Blomberg, "Law of Moses," 407-408; and G. G. O'Collins, "Salvation," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (vol. 5; ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 911.

<sup>46</sup> Hosea 3:5; Jeremiah 12:15-16; Amos 9:11-12; Isaiah 45:21. Park, "Ethical Principles," 277. See also E. Richard, "The Creative Use of Amos by the Author of Acts," *NovT* 24 (1982): 37-53.

<sup>47</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 639. See also Bauckham, "Jerusalem Church," 453-456; Tanner, "Acts 15," 77; and Evans, "New Testament Writers," 46. Evans writes, "Jesus' use of scripture provided a foundation on which the New Testament writers built, but it did not establish rigid boundaries beyond which these writers could not go." Another helpful article, though not specifically about this chapter, is Blumhofer, "Acts 2.17-21," 499-516.

<sup>48</sup> Wall, "Gentile Mission," 441.

<sup>49</sup> Richard, "Divine Purpose," 195.

<sup>50</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 451 and 457. See also Schnabel, *Acts*, 621-622; Johnson, *Acts*, 271; Williams, *Acts*, 265; Parsons, *Acts*, 214; Peterson, *Acts*, 432; Evans, "New Testament Writers," 47; D.M. King, "The use of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:16-18," *Ashland Theological Journal* 21 (1989): 13; and Tanner, "Acts 15," 85.

The judgement is then made and I would contend that this judgement is not a compromise as Keener and Bock assert but an agreed judgement by the whole assembly.<sup>51</sup> This is recognised by Barrett who writes:

It is the best example of a pattern that occurs several times in Acts and represents the way in which Luke conceived the progress of Christianity. In this pattern a difficulty is encountered; steps are taken to deal with it; not only is the problem solved but a notable advance takes place as a result.<sup>52</sup>

Three requirements are established for those believers from the nations;<sup>53</sup> abstaining from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, and the meat of strangled animals and blood (15:20).<sup>54</sup> I contend that underlying this judgement is not a concern about just the activities themselves but the social context in which they are undertaken - that is the temples of the nations and their associated altars.<sup>55</sup> This judgement is subject to much discussion in modern scholarship and there are four

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<sup>51</sup> Bock who holds that the result was a compromise “led to an understanding that may not have completely satisfied anyone. Nevertheless, each side agreed that it could live with this agreement.” Bock, *Acts*, 507-508. Keener notes that this solution “pacifies the circumcision party (by treating Gentile converts as God-fearers) rather than ratifies Gentile converts’ full status as members of God’s people.” Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2194.

<sup>52</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 2:709, 2:721. See also Peterson, *Acts*, 428; Marshall, *Pharisees*, 160-161; Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:192-193; and Schnabel, *Acts*, 636, 647.

<sup>53</sup> Witherington notes the difficulty of using the word ‘decree’ at this juncture. Witherington, *Acts*, 460. Metzger notes the difficulties relating to the text and exegesis of this section. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 379-383.

<sup>54</sup> Instone-Brewer argues for “strangle” to be read as “smother” and refer to a child rather than an animal whilst Savelle, Jr., argues against this reading. See also Witherington for the textual variants. Witherington, *Acts*, 460; D. Instone-Brewer, “Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15,” *JETS* 52 (2009): 301-321; and C. H. Savelle, Jr., “Infanticide in the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 Revisited,” *JETS* 62 (2019): 533-542. Whilst not directly relevant to an analysis of the text, it is worth noting Park’s work. Park, “Ethical Principles,” 271-291.

<sup>55</sup> Witherington notes that “eidolothuton” in all first century occurrences of the word means “an animal sacrificed in the presence of an idol and eaten in the temple precincts. It does not refer to a sacrifice which has come from the temple and is eaten elsewhere.” His italics. B. Witherington III, “Not so Idle Thoughts about Eidolothuton,” *TynB* 44 (1993): 240 and 252. See also J. M. Wilkins and S. Hill, *Food in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 83; Witherington, *Acts*, 461-464; Bruce, *Acts*, 342; Peterson, *Acts*, 433; Schnabel, *Acts*, 643; and Johnson, *Acts*, 266.

main interpretations:<sup>56</sup> that the requirements correspond to the Noachide covenant which prohibits the eating of meat with blood still in it (Gen. 9:4-6) and is applicable to all humanity not just Israel;<sup>57</sup> that these rules outline the ethical code for Jews and those from the nations living amongst them within the context of Leviticus 17 and 18;<sup>58</sup> that the requirements are interpreted in the context of the Old Testament polemic against idolatry amongst diaspora Judaism;<sup>59</sup> finally, that these requirements provide the practical measures meant to facilitate communion and table-fellowship between Jewish believers and believers from the nations.<sup>60</sup> For myself it is the combination of these final two that present the best interpretation since they can also incorporate the first two suggestions. The Noachide covenant on its own is unlikely as neither the term εἰδώλον nor πορνεία occurs within Genesis 9.<sup>61</sup> Further whilst the blood of animals is prohibited in the Noachide covenant, the strangulation of animals is a later prohibition.<sup>62</sup> Keener also notes that a non-Jew that held to the Noachide

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<sup>56</sup> See Witherington, *Acts*, 459-466; Johnson, *Acts*, 271-273; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 118-120; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2258-2277. There is a minor argument that these guidelines correspond to the cardinal sins that Jews were not to commit under any circumstances and therefore correspond to the catalogue of vices and virtues that Jews used in teaching Gentiles when they became proselytes. Keener notes the similarity between this position and the Noachide covenant but also the problematic nature of these categories; primarily that these appear to be a twentieth-century imposition of a moral category. See Harnack, *Acts*, 259-61; Barrett, *Acts*, 2:735; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2260 and 2261.

<sup>57</sup> For a supporting view of this position see R. N. Longenecker, *Acts* (ExpBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), 245 and M. Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 150-173.

<sup>58</sup> For a supporting view of this position see Conzelmann, *Acts*, 253; Schnabel, *Acts*, 643-646; and P. McKechnie, "Jewish Christianity to AD 100," in *Into all the World: Emergent Christianity in its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (eds. M. Harding and A. Nobbs; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 145. See also E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 258-271.

<sup>59</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 462 and Witherington, "Eidolothuton," 240.

<sup>60</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 273.

<sup>61</sup> Barrett notes that "the parallel is not close, and there is nothing in the text of Acts to call Noah to mind." Barrett, *Acts*, 2:734.

<sup>62</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 464.

laws would be seen as a “God-fearer” but not a “proselyte.”<sup>63</sup> Such an explicit division between Jews and those from the nations undermines the essence of the pericope which establishes the unity of the people of God. The appeal to Leviticus as a stand-alone explanation is also unlikely. The commands here are connected to the possession of the land. Leviticus 18:25-27 states: “Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled...if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.” These laws clearly relate to the people of Israel whilst this section in Acts 15 is clearly about those from the nations. This is revealed both in the addressees of the letter (15:23) and in the direction of travel for the letter (15:30-36).<sup>64</sup> A combination of the final perspectives is a more likely rationale for the aspects of the judgement. As seen in chapters three and five of this thesis, turning from idols to the living God is a Lukan theme that reflects the wider meta-narrative of Scripture (13:38-41; 14:15; cf. 17:29-31). Such an instruction would be relevant to believers from the nations who had repented and for whom idolatry was a very real issue in the first-century.<sup>65</sup> Witherington contends that the problem of idolatry should not just be linked to food sacrificed to idols but also the social locations in which such feasts occurred - particularly the temple precincts. He writes that *eidolothuton* “was a polemical Jewish-Christian term...to warn against the danger of participating in feasts in pagan temple dining rooms and thus placing oneself in the presence of

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<sup>63</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2269.

<sup>64</sup> See Witherington, *Acts*, 464-465; Peterson, *Acts*, 435; Bauckham, “Jerusalem Church,” 459-560; and Blomberg, “Law of Moses,” 408.

<sup>65</sup> Witherington, “Eidolothuton,” 252; Collins, “Symbol of Otherness,” 169; and T. Rajak, “Jews and Christians as Groups in a Pagan World,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, ‘Others’ in Late Antiquity* (eds. J. Neusner and E. S. Fiech; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 253-254.



malevolent supernatural beings that were not by nature gods, but nonetheless were believed to be both very real and spiritually dangerous to the Christian converts.”<sup>66</sup> In rejecting such pagan worship those believers from the nations also rejected table fellowship in which food offered to idols was acceptable. Thus the conditions were created for table fellowship between a united people of God regardless of race or genealogy.<sup>67</sup> Such a position provides a consistency between the word of grace in Acts 13 and 14, the decision, and the positive response to the decision as communicated in the letter.<sup>68</sup>

The Lukan portrayal of James is that he continues his speech in verse 21 by providing a rationale for these requirements. Whilst Wilson calls 15:21 “one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament,”<sup>69</sup> such requirements, and their underlying connection to idolatry, are not new but have been an integral part of the Mosaic Law and thus should be understood particularly by Jewish Christians but also those believers from the nations.<sup>70</sup> Such a rationale integrates the rejection of

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<sup>66</sup> Witherington, “Eidolothuton,” 254.

<sup>67</sup> Johnson writes, “The point would seem to be to provide the basis for table-fellowship and full communion between Jew and Gentile Messianists...according to the protocol of table-fellowship in the ancient world, one would eat only with someone who shared the same values. Table-fellowship symbolised spiritual fellowship.” Johnson, *Acts*, 273. See also Willimon, *Acts*, 130; Parsons, *Acts*, 220; Schnabel, *Acts*, 621-622 and 642; Bruce, *Acts*, 342; Witherington, *Acts*, 465-467; J. M. G. Barclay, “Who was Considered an Apostate in the Jewish Diaspora?” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (eds. G. N. Stanton and G. G. Stroumsa; Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 91-92; and R. J. Bauckham, “James, Peter, and the Gentiles,” in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul* (NovTSup 115; eds. B. Chilton and C. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 93-97.

<sup>68</sup> Keener also notes the connection to the earlier passage of 11:3. Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2259. See also Witherington, *Acts*, 439; Peterson, *Acts*, 418.

<sup>69</sup> Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 283. See also D. R. Schwartz, “The Futility of Preaching Moses (Acts 15,21),” *Bib* 67 (1986): 276. He writes, “more contemporary commentators seem to find the enumeration of all the possibilities pointless.”

<sup>70</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 646; and Johnson, *Acts*, 267.

circumcision according to the Law of Moses (v.5) since these requirements are not salvific; demonstrates the ethical aspect of turning from idols (v.19; cf. 14:15); and provides the means for table fellowship for the whole united Christian assembly, addressing again the criticism of the circumcised believers in 11:1-3.<sup>71</sup> Beyond that, this section sets the scene for the forthcoming narrative and the engagements between the Christian assembly and the nations outside of the *syngagogue* in Lystra, Athens, and Ephesus. This decision is then communicated to the assemblies by means of a letter (15:23-29; cf. 16:4-5).

## **2. Engaging with Other Readings: C. Keener and C. K. Rowe**

### 2.1. C. Keener

Within Keener's wider framework of reading Acts as an *apologia* with its extra- and intra-ecclesial emphasis, a means for public engagement with the surrounding cultures and for establishing a rationale within the Christian assembly for the mission to the nations, he stresses the significance of Acts 15 as the centre of Acts structurally and theologically, forming "the theological watershed" for this mission.<sup>72</sup> This chapter then forms the pinnacle of Keener's intra-ecclesial *apologia*.

Keener interprets the purpose of this chapter as providing evidence of a tension between Jewish believers and believers from the nations. This tension was so significant that it had the potential to create a "major schism" within the Christian

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<sup>71</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 273.

<sup>72</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2194 and 2207.

assembly.<sup>73</sup> To resolve the tension and avoid the schism an assembly is called which results in a “compromise solution.”<sup>74</sup> This solution, states Keener, “pacifies the circumcision party (by treating Gentile converts as God-fearers) rather than ratifies Gentile converts’ full status as members of God’s people.”<sup>75</sup> In pacifying the “circumcision party” Keener notes that “the theological difference between Paul and some of his detractors as to whether Gentile adherents now belong to God’s people” is not resolved but that table-fellowship is enabled between Jewish believers and believers from the nations.<sup>76</sup> Keener writes,

It is clearly wrong to cause needless difficulty for Gentiles turning to God (Acts 15:19), nor should there be any concern that the law will be neglected (15:21). But as a compromise solution, Gentiles can be asked to follow some basic, minimal expectations for table fellowship to maintain unity with the Jewish believers (15:20).<sup>77</sup>

Yet Keener’s work on this chapter leaves concerns that he has not fully addressed it. At the textual level I would contend that Keener’s reading provides an inadequate conclusion of the chapter - Acts 15 as a compromise in which the parties are both tolerant of the decision but not fully supportive. Such a reading is determined by the weight that Keener puts upon his reading of Galatians 2 to interpret Acts 15.<sup>78</sup> To make his argument for table fellowship being a central issue of concern in this chapter Keener applies four arguments which are all derived from Galatians. He argues that table-fellowship “represents a major issue in the church of Paul’s day

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<sup>73</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2194.

<sup>74</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2215.

<sup>75</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2194.

<sup>76</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2215.

<sup>77</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2258. See also 2194 and 2210.

<sup>78</sup> See also Willimon, *Acts*, 131; and Parsons, *Acts*, 207.

(Gal. 2:12-13);” he establishes that there was a potential schism because “a faction associated with James refused table fellowship with the uncircumcised (Gal. 2:12);” he asserts that “Peter affirmed the practice personally but did not wish to make an issue of it with other Jerusalem believers ([Gal.] 2:12);” and finally Keener notes that “Paul considered denial of such table fellowship a denial of the gospel ([Gal.] 2:14).”<sup>79</sup> Whilst inter-textuality is important within the narrative, as James’ use of Amos and other Old Testament texts in Acts 15 demonstrates, Keener goes beyond this in using Galatians 2 to make his argument for understanding and interpreting the events in Acts 15.

Second, Keener is correct to recognise two tensions that occur within the narrative. The first relates to the intra-ecclesial debate. He writes, “Luke displays an intra-Jewish theological debate in which Pharisees offer ‘dominant Jewish culture rhetoric’ while Luke counters with ‘Jewish contraculture rhetoric,’ which claims to uphold Jewish values while challenging the dominant culture.”<sup>80</sup> In summary the tension results from a contrast between two competing cultures. A further tension derives from the wider framework, for Keener addresses the contrast between the assembly and “the political rivalry, positioning, and mutual recriminations in the public assembly of classical Athens, or the courts of Rome (or even other assemblies in Acts).”<sup>81</sup> Yet Keener does not develop either of these points fully to help understand the engagement that occurs in Acts 15 or the wider narrative. Whilst Keener, citing Witherington, does argue as part of the apologia that the Christian assembly acts in

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<sup>79</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2259.

<sup>80</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2227.

<sup>81</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2226.

a way that is recognisable within the first-century world, following its own customs but also following procedures that are recognisable within the surrounding and prevailing culture,<sup>82</sup> he does not develop how this actually relates to the text or how it enables one to read the narrative from this perspective. Furthermore, I would argue that the contrasts Keener highlights and the tension that results should be identified as subversion - the Christian assembly subverting those advocating circumcision by means of the scriptures, and the subversion of the assemblies and decision making of the surrounding cultures. Thus such subversion occurs at the textual level and at the level of the Lukan audience.

## 2.2. C. K. Rowe

Acts 15 is a pivotal juncture in Luke-Acts both narratively and theologically. With its intra-ecclesial rather than extra-ecclesial emphasis, the focus being an engagement between Jewish believers about how believers from the Graeco-Roman world engage with them, the narrative develops a nuanced engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. This engagement occurs at the metaphysical level, as it concerns the nature of salvation; the epistemological level, dealing with the revelation of salvation particularly in respect to the nations; and the ethical level, concerned with both life for believers from the nations after salvation within their own culture and the relationship between Jewish believers and believers from the nations.

Such a nuanced engagement is important because it is a prime case to demonstrate

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<sup>82</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2230.

Rowe's contention that his work is "a richer and more compelling account of the historically situated rationality displayed in the text" than previous scholarship.<sup>83</sup> Yet, despite the siting and significance of this chapter to the overall Lukan narrative as well as its significant placement strategically placed within Rowe's choice of pericopes - Acts 14, 16, 17, 19 - this is one chapter which Rowe does not engage with and this omission is surprising. There are two potential reasons why this might have happened. First, Rowe may not consider this pericope to be a true engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world because of its intra-ecclesial nature - that is, the engagement is between believers regardless of their ethnicity rather than the Christian assembly and the 'pagan' Graeco-Roman world. Rowe might argue that due to the intra-ecclesial nature of Acts 15 the focus of his thesis, the collision between cultures and the threatened dissolution of Graeco-Roman culture, appears absent from this narrative. Yet, Rowe does claim that his selected pericopes demonstrate that his methodology can be applied to the wider narrative. He writes, "Lest these scenes seem to leave portions of Acts untouched, we hasten to point out that the selected passages articulate animating convictions of Lukan theology, and, precisely in this way, serve well as focal instances of the larger perspective rendered through the entire narrative."<sup>84</sup> Drawing on this statement I would contend that this pericope directly fits Rowe's analysis, since it occurs in the midst of the wider narrative section that Rowe has purposely chosen to address, and since underlying the dispute and debate of Acts 15 lie Rowe's four categories; the

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<sup>83</sup> Rowe, *World*, 9.

<sup>84</sup> Rowe, *World*, 11.

theological vision of Luke in Acts,<sup>85</sup> Jesus as Lord,<sup>86</sup> universal mission,<sup>87</sup> and the assembly.<sup>88</sup> Finally, this pericope is depicted as showing how the emerging Christian assembly at this pivotal moment negotiates the collision that results from the believers' differing religious and cultural backgrounds including common elements within the Graeco-Roman world. This lack of engagement with a pericope which is so structurally and theologically pivotal, both to Rowe's methodology and argument as well as the narrative of Acts, is a significant omission and leads us to consider a further reason why Rowe may have omitted this pericope. The second reason that this pericope may have been omitted by Rowe is that the application of his methodology to this passage appears to result in a contradictory conclusion to the one posited by Rowe. This pericope exemplifies Rowe's four interlocking categories for analysing the narrative of Acts. The theological vision of Acts recognises that Jesus is Lord. The fulfilment of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 leads to the proclamation of the Christian gospel to those inside and outside of Israel, in Rowe's terms, a universal mission. Thus, the nations are included in the people of God, the Christian assembly. Rowe is correct that these four themes do create a collision as 15:1 and 15:5-6 indicate but this episode challenges Rowe's thesis because precisely at the point of collision, and where Rowe would argue for a dissolving of culture, no dissolution or even threat of dissolution occurs.<sup>89</sup> Instead it is an opposite result - not

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<sup>85</sup> Rowe, *World*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> Rowe, *World*, 103-116.

<sup>87</sup> Rowe, *World*, 116-126.

<sup>88</sup> Rowe, *World*, 126-135.

<sup>89</sup> Rowe, *World*, 51 and 91.

dissolution but resolution as the earlier quote of Barrett showed.<sup>90</sup> This resolution is the emphasis of the narrative and Strong rightly notes that “Vastly more space is devoted to the resolution (15:6-29) than to the development of the conflict (15:1-5), and the solution is virtually repeated in the form of a letter.”<sup>91</sup> By means of a recognisably cultural norm - the ἐκκλησία - the Christian assembly is able to address the collision by means of resolution. This decision is recognised by the Christian assembly in Jerusalem as both the fulfilment of Scripture and in line with the Spirit (15:15-18; 15:28). The result is the Christian assembly unitedly agreeing with the decision and the action to be taken (15:22). This resolution should also be considered as comprehensive, addressing both the question of salvation and the question of social and cultural norms for believers from the nations so that they can have table fellowship with Jewish believers. I would argue that the narrational portrayal of the Christian assembly reaching a harmonious accord provides a contrast with other political and religious assemblies throughout the narrative which the Lukan audience would recognise.<sup>92</sup> In these other assemblies there is discord and indecision or an incitement to violence or the rejection of the assembly’s message (5:33-40; 14:2; 16:20-24; 17:5-9; 21:27-36; 23:6-10; 24:1-9, 26-27; 25:7-11) something Keener also recognises.<sup>93</sup> Such a perspective in Acts 15 stands contrary to the fundamental point that Rowe is trying to make - of collision and

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<sup>90</sup> I cited Barrett earlier in this chapter who writes of the assembly: “It is the best example of a pattern that occurs several times in Acts and represents the way in which Luke conceived the progress of Christianity. In this pattern a difficulty is encountered; steps are taken to deal with it; not only is the problem solved but a notable advance takes place as a result.” Barrett, *Acts*, 2:709.

<sup>91</sup> D. K. Strong, “The Jerusalem Council: Some Implications for Contextualization,” in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (ASMS 34; eds. R. L. Gallagher and P. Hertig; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 200.

<sup>92</sup> Horrell, “Early Jewish Christianity,” 140.

<sup>93</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2226.



threatened dissolution.<sup>94</sup>

This engagement with Keener and Rowe as dialogue partners enables some points to be raised which provide reasons why a fresh approach may be required. Whilst Keener addresses this pericope, his conclusion - Acts 15 as a compromise to enable table fellowship in which the parties are both tolerant of the decision but not fully supportive - cannot be defended from the passage. Keener also highlights some contrasts in the narrative but he does not recognise them as subversive and neither does he demonstrate how this episode is being read through the hermeneutical lens of his nuanced model of the apologia. Rowe's omission of this passage is important due to its significance and siting both for the narrative and in respect to Rowe's choice of pericopes. Most significantly I would contend that this passage undermines Rowe's thesis, a thesis he claims can be applied to any of the Acts narrative, because whilst there is a collision there is a clear and harmonious resolution which the narrative depicts as the means for strengthening and encouraging members of the Christian assembly outside of Jerusalem. Whilst neither Keener's nor Rowe's perspective adequately addresses the engagement nor the tensions that develop in this pericope, my contention is that subversive-fulfilment provides a model which is sufficiently flexible to address this intra-ecclesial debate and it is to this we now turn.

### **3. A Subversive-Fulfilment Reading**

Acts 15 is a significant passage for the application of a subversive-fulfilment reading within this thesis since this chapter introduces a distinct and nuanced intra-ecclesial

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<sup>94</sup> Rowe, *World*, 96-97; 102.

engagement rather than an extra-ecclesial engagement. Equally important, much of previous scholarship omits to apply their methodology to this chapter, as seen in chapters one and three of this thesis. To effectively read Acts 15 through the hermeneutical lens of subversive-fulfilment this section follows the structure outlined at the end of chapter three.

With *possessio* at the heart of this subversive-fulfilment reading various points of contact and continuities are identified and an explanation given for their christological capturing, fulfillment, and interpretation. As an intra-ecclesial engagement the structures and the content within this encounter are familiar both to the narratorial and the Lukan audiences. Within this pericope there are four main points of contact, or continuities: the use of the ἐκκλησία, the framework of Judaism, authority and leadership, and the use of the scriptures.

By placing *possessio* at the heart of this subversive-fulfilment reading, the first point of contact is the concept of the ἐκκλησία. Luke chooses to situate the Christian assembly as adopting this clearly recognisable structure at a pivotal moment. By using *possessio* the structure and its purpose of achieving a united decision is christologically captured and interpreted. The hope of a real resolution, understood in the narrative as the unity of, and peace between, the people of God, can only occur in the christologically saved, Spirit-filled people of God. Thus, the metaphysical beliefs of the Christian assembly are joined to the ethical actions. In this episode such a hope is fulfilled and reinforces earlier examples of the assembly's unity (cf.

2:42-47).<sup>95</sup> This christological fulfilment of the ἐκκλησία enables the development of a further fulfilment - that is a geographical one. In Acts 15 the intra-ecclesial discord leads the Christian assembly back to Jerusalem - the spiritual heart of Israel - where a harmonious resolution occurs.<sup>96</sup> In doing this, the meaning of Jerusalem - the city of peace and the place where God and his people dwell - is fulfilled and stands in stark contrast to Acts 7 and 8 where persecution against the Christian assembly breaks out.

The second point of contact is found between the Christian assembly and the framework of Judaism. Throughout Acts Luke situates Jewish believers within the structures of Judaism.<sup>97</sup> Jewish believers use the temple (2:46; 21:26) or a synagogue (13:14; 14:1). In this pericope Christian believers are portrayed as being within the religious parties of Judaism without compromising their new christological identity (15:5).<sup>98</sup>

The third point of contact is that of authority and leadership. Using *possessio* the concept of authority and leadership is christologically captured. Luke portrays the Apostles in Jerusalem as the fulfilment of scriptural promises about the leaders

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<sup>95</sup> Peterson recognises the fulfilment and comments on how Luke depicts the harmony of the decision: "At one level, Luke wrote to record the amazing way in which God brought unanimity and agreement to a potentially disastrous situation in the early church. God guided the debate and the decision-making process, protecting the church from error and division, and allowing the respective missions to Jews and Gentiles to flourish separately, but in harmony together." Peterson, *Acts*, 442.

<sup>96</sup> Smit argues that in Acts "Jerusalem is well established as the ideological and therefore also geographical centre of the Christ movement." Smit, "New World View," 3-4.

<sup>97</sup> Marshall, *Pharisees*, 149, 161.

<sup>98</sup> ἐξάνεστησαν δὲ τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες. Marshall writes, "The Lukan Paul has not relinquished Pharisaism in favour of his newfound faith in Jesus; rather, this new faith is the fulfilment of his Pharasaic hopes." Marshall, *Pharisees*, 158-159.

needed for Israel and which Israel often lacks in both the Old and New Testament. These leaders are filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4) and given over to prayer and the word (6:4). They have a divinely given understanding of Scripture (Luke 24; Acts 1; 2), seek resolution amongst the Christian assembly (6:1-2; 15:6), seek to worship God rightly (2:42-47), and lead the Christian assembly with mercy and justice (6:2-3). Despite persecution they remain in Jerusalem (8:1). This christological capturing of leadership enables the Lukan audience to perceive the distinction between a Spirit-filled leadership with its christological emphasis and a leadership without it.

The final point of contact is the use of the scriptures in Acts 15. Unlike the Pisidian Antioch scene this point of contact is between Christian believers, in this case addressing those believers who advocate circumcision for salvation. Through *possessio* the words of Scripture are captured and fulfilled within James's use of Scripture. This provides a significant epistemological moment for James does not simply repeat the scriptures but uses them to demonstrate that the words already spoken by Peter, Paul and Barnabas are true. Epistemologically the words of these men carry an authority equal to the Old Testament prophets, for *καὶ τοῦτω συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν* (v.15). This capturing of the words of the prophets shows they are to be understood in a deeper and more meaningful way since they are being fulfilled in the salvation of the nations. Yet this salvation is reframed within a christological context which recasts and reframes the understanding of Scripture (v.11). Thus, the 'Lord' in verse 17 re-interprets Amos - now understanding the prophet through a christological perspective. Therefore James is able to address the metaphysical level, since the salvation of the nations is

christological, and the epistemological level in that this salvation is attested to by those called by God and confirmed by Scripture.

This capturing and fulfilment of the structures and content simultaneously establishes discontinuities since by using *possessio* the beliefs and practices of the surrounding cultures are subverted at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels. This subversion occurs at the level of the narratorial and the Lukan audiences. Structurally, the christological capturing of the ekklesia creates a contrast with other structures portrayed in the narrative which do not result in a harmonious and united agreement. This is particularly significant for the wider narrative which includes the Lukan depiction of the Sanhedrin's compromise and disagreement (5:33-40),<sup>99</sup> or of structures that are open to abuse and misuse to the benefit of an individual or group. This includes Herod's arbitrary oppression of the assembly because it pleases the Jews (12:1-4), the portrayal of the Philippian magistrates who make a wrong judgement (16:22-24, 35-39), and the political rulers - Felix hoping for a bribe and to do the Jews a favour (24:26-27), and Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favour (25:9).<sup>100</sup> The final element of subversion that is identified through the use of *possessio* is that of Jerusalem's meaning. The harmonious unity of the Christian assembly subverts the actions of some of the Jews in Jerusalem who in the earlier narrative reject the gospel message. This results in Jerusalem as the centre not for peace or a place to dwell but for the persecution and scattering of the Christian assembly.

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<sup>99</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 272.

<sup>100</sup> I note that the clerk in Ephesus does speak rightly but also note that he encourages the craftsmen that they must take their accusation through a legal assembly (ἐν τῇ ἐννόμῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ) which does not occur (Acts 19:35-41).

The christological capturing and interpretation also creates a discontinuity and subversion of the leadership within Judaism. It reminds the Lukan audience of the earlier incidents in which the Apostles were mistreated by the religious establishment in Jerusalem, such as the High Priest and Sanhedrin (4:1-21), and of more contemporary events in Pisidian Antioch and Iconium. Within the immediate narrative this perspective may also remind the Lukan audience of the leadership amongst the nations, for example the priest in Acts 14 responding to the crowd rather than leading them (14:13). It also prepares the Lukan audience for further contrasts between the Apostles and other forms of leadership in the latter section of Acts, such as the magistrates in Acts 16 and the Aeropagus in Acts 17.

The understanding and interpretation of Scripture is also subverted since James' re-interpretation of various scriptures subverts the perspective of those who contend that salvation is by circumcision. This is strengthened by the narrative's depiction of those characters who are portrayed as christologically faithful whose interpretation is correct. As with the earlier narrative of 13:38-39 this pericope, whilst framing the Law of Moses positively, emphasises that it is not adequate for salvation and that its customs - in this case circumcision (vv.1, 5) - cannot bring a person into covenant faithfulness with Yahweh.

These discontinuities provide potential evidence of idolatry, or an idolatrous trajectory, through the identifiable markers and these elements combined enable a coherent account of the tensions that occur. Therefore, whilst this episode is intra-ecclesial - and therefore might appear to preclude a discussion about idolatry or the identifiable markers - the Solomonic narrative examined in chapter two is a reminder

that idolatry and covenant commitment can occur simultaneously (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6, 14; Gal. 5:19-24; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 1:9-10). The assertion of the Judaeen brothers (v.1) and Pharisee believers (v.5) is that entry into the covenant relationship comes through circumcision: and that this, according to the Law of Moses, is the condition of salvation for all male believers. Such words demonstrate that these believers, rather than accepting the message of the Apostles, have accepted non-scriptural words along with a disbelief in the christological means for salvation. Such a perspective is contrary to the immediate and wider narrative which has demonstrated that salvation cannot be found outside of the christological matrix and neither can anything be added to this christological salvation. This is clearly demonstrated at key points in the Acts' narrative including Peter's early speech (2:36, 38), the eunuch (8:35), and Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch (13:23-33, 38-39). Therefore to posit a different salvation fails to recognise Jesus for who he is - the means of salvation - and creates an alternative form of worship, the circumcision of the body rather than an inward turning to God through repentance.<sup>101</sup> Regarding this passage Beale writes, "It is Christ's Spirit, no longer rituals of Mosaic law, that now cleanses from idolatry and all uncleanness (Acts 15:8-9) and, indeed, protects from all idolatry."<sup>102</sup> This assertion that salvation comes through circumcision as one of the customs of the Mosaic Law reveals that identifiable markers of idolatry are present, since it places a salvific worth on something in addition to christological salvation. Yet this idolatrous trajectory must be carefully nuanced since I would posit that these

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<sup>101</sup> Beale, writing about Acts 7, notes, "For Jews to continue to believe that God's unique revelatory presence was in their physical temple and not in Christ was idolatry...it was putting their trust in something other than God." This could equally be applied to Acts 15 and the body. Beale, *Idolatry*, 195.

<sup>102</sup> Beale, *Idolatry*, 197 n. 31.

believers do not become idolators. The reason for this is that the response of these brothers and the Pharisee believers to the speeches is to accept them - that is, they change their views and accept the christological nature of salvation.

Such a reading accounts for the tensions that develop within this episode. At the metaphysical level, the tension is the dispute about the means of divine salvation as Mosaic or christological; at the epistemological level, the way in which Scripture is understood in light of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension and the authority of the Apostles in Jerusalem to interpret that Scripture; and at the ethical level, for the believers to understand the correct response and how they respond to the inclusion of believers from the nations and they must live in order to relate to the wider people of God.

Such a reading provides a modification to Strange's understanding and definition of idolatry and his four Es. First, this intra-ecclesial engagement undermines Strange's perspective since his thesis only addresses extra-ecclesial engagements in which there is a theological distance between the cultures. Second, this engagement challenges his underlying presupposition that idolatry is the hermeneutical key to understanding engagements. It does this by modifying Strange's understanding of idolatry by placing the concept of idolatry within the Christian assembly, and by indicating that whilst the identifiable markers may be present in an encounter the actual act of idolatry may not be. In engaging with wider perceptions and scholarship this is significant as this approach provides a balance to those who consider the Lukan account anti-semitic, since within Acts 13-15 a subversive-fulfilment reading



has identified the identifiable markers within a Jewish, Graeco-Roman, and Christian setting.

With respect to the four Es, the close theological and cultural relations within the assembly dispenses with the need for any entering or exploration of the worldview. There is an exposé of the false teaching that is presented and the potential idolatrous trajectory should the words of the Apostles be rejected. Thus, there is no evangelisation that occurs within the passage, unless that term is widened beyond Strange's definition to include the correction of false teaching.

This subversive-fulfilment reading, with the concept of *possessio* at the heart of the analytical framework, further demonstrates the value of this model for interpreting the engagements within Acts. First, reading Acts 13-15 through this lens exhibits that this model provides a coherent interpretation of diverse extra- and intra-ecclesial engagements without any alteration of the model. As shown in chapters one and three, previous scholarship was not able to do this or did not apply its methodology to Acts 15. For example, Keener applies neither his model of Acts as an apologia nor his social transformation perspective to this passage and Rowe omits this episode completely, despite its structural and theological importance in Acts and that it is situated in the midst of his choice of narrative. Furthermore, applying this model through Acts 13-15 demonstrates that this reading can be consistently applied to an unbroken section of narrative in contrast to much of previous scholarship which uses short pericopes or isolates texts from the wider narrative.

Beyond this, whilst some scholars recognise tensions in this episode they provide varying conclusions for it whilst other scholars recognise elements of subversion or fulfilment but do not develop these as a means for explaining the immediate or wider narrative.<sup>103</sup> A subversive-fulfilment model is unique since it occupies the unaddressed centre of previous scholarship resolving the tension of the simultaneous subversions and fulfilments that are occurring within the narrative. It is able to do that whilst also accommodating and incorporating other scholarship as part of providing a fresh and original approach to reading this portion of Acts.

The subversive-fulfilment model further allows other concepts to be identified and a developed understanding gained within the narrative. The first of these is the self-identity of the Christian assembly. A subversive-fulfilment reading provides an explanation of the Christian assembly's self-identity. Through *possessio* the epistemological understanding of Scripture is christologically captured and fulfilled demonstrating that identity is founded on a required christological repentance - the metaphysical level - and that this repentance qualifies and authenticates external responses. Such a depiction of identity enhances the audience's understanding of previous characterisation such as Judas (Acts 1) and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), reinforces the subversion of previous engagements, such as Simon (Acts 8) and

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<sup>103</sup> For example, Witherington writes, "The phrase 'all other peoples' (οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων) is important for Luke, for it is part of his main argument that there is one saviour for all of humanity, and that it is God's intent to make out of the many diverse ethnic groups one people by means of the spreading of the word throughout the Roman Empire...In other words, there is a considerable social program implied in this gospel, a program not dissimilar to Alexander's Hellenising agenda, or the emperor's Romanising one...The difference comes in the means of accomplishing this Christian program - through proclamation and signs and wonders and religious conversions, not through armies marching throughout the earth." Witherington, *Acts*, 459. See also van Kooten, "ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ," 547; A. J. Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in its Literary Setting* (LNTS 359; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 173-174; McCready, "Ekklesia," 69; Keener, *15:1-23:35, 2226. assemblies in Acts*"; and J. M. Ogereau, "The Jerusalem Collection as κοινωνία: Paul's Global Politics of Socio-Economic Equality and Solidarity," *NTS* 58 (2012): 378.

Bar-Jesus (Acts 13), and subverts the voices within the Christian assembly (Acts 15). Furthermore, this self-identity deepens the audience's understanding of the Christian assembly's relationship to Judaism - fulfilling it positively, in those who experience a christological repentance, and subverting it in those who do not. This subversive-fulfilment reading of identity also provides a rationale for how the nations outside of the synagogue can become part of the Christian assembly. Finally, this depiction of this intra-ecclesial self-identity and means of belonging further develops a Lukan theology of religions since it enables the audience to understand the internal perceptions of identity providing for a greater understanding of how the Christian assembly differs from other worldviews.

This subversive-fulfilment reading of Acts 15 also provides a nuanced perspective on a Lukan depiction of a model engagement since it demonstrates that subversive-fulfilment can be utilised to analyse and interpret intra-ecclesial debates without modifying the model. Such an approach provides a demonstration of Strange's undeveloped contention that subversive-fulfilment is an integral part of the Christian message.

Two further areas within this episode that a subversive-fulfilment reading draws out are the Lukan depictions of the nature of authority and leadership and the voices of characters found within narrative. A subversive-fulfilment lens illuminates the Lukan depiction of the nature of authority and leadership. Through the use of *possessio* the concepts of authority and leadership are christologically captured enabling the Lukan audience to perceive the distinction between a Spirit-filled leadership with its christological emphasis and a leadership without it. Within the immediate narrative,

the purpose of those leaders who subvert those advocating circumcision is not to exercise tyrannical authority but to ensure harmonious relations within the assembly which fulfils Christ's teachings. Within the wider narrative, this christologically captured leadership subverts the weak leadership that is depicted within the surrounding cultures, whether Jewish, like Herod (Acts 12), Graeco-Roman, like the priest of Zeus (Acts 14), or as part of the Roman State, such as the magistrates (Acts 16). This reading also allows the Lukan audience to assess the nature of leadership in the latter chapters whether explicit, for example the Sanhedrin (Acts 23), or implicit, as with the mention of the Emperor (Acts 28). At its widest level such a reading also provides a means for assessing authority and leadership in the Gospel of Luke, for example the role of the religious leaders and characters such as Pilate (Luke 23).

Placing *possessio* at the centre of the reading reveals how the Lukan narrative depicts the voices of the Apostles as christologically captured because they have had a christological and pneumatological experience. Their voices are considered trustworthy. Such a perspective fundamentally subverts the anonymous voices of the Judaeans which are therefore depicted as untrustworthy and incorrect. This subversive-fulfilment reading then contributes to a deeper understanding of the wider narrative. For example, Bar-Jesus, whom Klauck positions as a mediator - is now clearly depicted as untrustworthy. This perspective also prepares the narratorial and Lukan audience for the immediate future engagements of Acts 16 and Acts 17, as well as the later interactions with other significant figures such as Felix (Acts 24) and Festus (Acts 25).

Reading this portion of Acts through a subversive-fulfilment lens continues to demonstrate its ability to provide a coherent and consistent interpretation of the diverse engagements across an unbroken section of the narrative. Moving onto Acts 16 provides the opportunity for a subversive-fulfilment reading of engagements with individuals and with multiple characters, and as importantly, within an explicit Imperial setting. It is to this chapter we turn.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: ACTS 16:1-40

### 1. Reading the Narrative

The significance of Acts 16 is that it involves multiple engagements. Beginning with an encounter with Judaism within a Graeco-Roman context, it moves to an engagement with Graeco-Roman beliefs but within the clearly defined context of the Roman State, its officials and law.

Paul and Barnabas' pastoral concern for the ἀδελφούς in the Asiatic churches causes a return visit (15:36) and sets the context for Acts 16. Chapter 16:1-7 introduces four key elements: the parentage of Timothy; the positive result of the word at Iconium and Lystra; the circumcision of Timothy; and the delivering of the decision recorded in Acts 15:23-29.

The detailed description of Timothy and his parents is a significant narrational moment beyond the introduction of a new character. First, the married status of Timothy's parents - one Jewish and one from the nations - reflects the deep and complicated links between Judaism and the nations.<sup>104</sup> This is mirrored in the discussions of

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<sup>104</sup> See A. Kasher, *Jews and Hellenistic Cities in Eretz-Israel: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Hellenistic Cities During the Second Temple Period (332 BCE-70CE)* (TSAJ 21; eds. M. Hengel and P. Schäfer; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1990), 313-314; M. O. Wise, "Languages of Palestine," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (eds. J. B. Green and S. McKnight; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 434-444; C. D. Stanley, "'Neither Jew nor Greek': Ethnic Conflict in Graeco-Roman Society," *JSNT* 64 (1996): 123; P. Richardson, "Augustan-Era Synagogues in Rome," in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (eds. K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 19-23; L. I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), 18-20; W. T. Wilson, "Hellenistic Judaism," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 477-482; J. J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 1-25; R. M. Novak, *Christianity and the Roman Empire* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2001), 243-254; Achtemeier, *New Testament*, 21-26; R. M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine: The Thrust of the Christian Movement into*

scholarship. Conzelmann and Barrett note that such marriages were illegal according to Jewish law,<sup>105</sup> Bruce that the marriage reflects a more flexible social integration between Jews and the nations outside of Palestine,<sup>106</sup> and Johnson, that such mixed marriages presented difficulty for Jewish identity.<sup>107</sup> Second, scholars debate Timothy's ethnic status, as Jewish or one of the nations.<sup>108</sup> Yet the primary emphasis is the distinction in status between Timothy and his mother, designated as believers, and his father, who is not (v.1).<sup>109</sup> Timothy is described as a μαθητής (v.1), one who comes recommended by the other believers (v.2), and who will be useful to Paul (v.3). To take Timothy with him, Paul circumcises him διὰ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τοὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς τόποις ἐκείνοις. The structural positioning of this circumcision is important within the narrative. Coming so soon after the Jerusalem dispute and in the context of Timothy being described as a disciple (v.1) and believer (v.2) indicates that the Lukan narrative does not consider this act as salvific.<sup>110</sup> Rather, this

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*the Roman World* (London: Collins, 1971), 36; McKnight, "Proselytism," 839; P. F. Stuehnenberg, "Proselyte," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 5; ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 504-505; and Trocmé, "Jews," 159-160. See also Keener, 15:1-23:35, 2423-2424 where he notes the Jewish knowledge and inclusion of pagan beliefs and symbols.

<sup>105</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 125; and Barrett, *Acts*, 2:759.

<sup>106</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 351. See also Keener, 15:1-23:35, 2312-2317. The marriage between Felix and Drusilla (Acts 24:24) also shows that such marriages occurred between the higher echelons of the population. Bruce, *Acts*, 482-483.

<sup>107</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 283. See also E. Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations: The Function of Race and Ethnicity in Acts 16* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 65.

<sup>108</sup> Some scholars hold that he is Jewish, others that he is a Gentile (v.3) and others that he is a Gentile because his father will not allow him to be circumcised. See S. J. D. Cohen, "Was Timothy Jewish (Acts 16:1-3)? Patristic Exegesis, Rabbinic Law, and Matrilineal Descent," *JBL* 105 (1986): 251-268; Bruce, *Acts*, 352; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 574; Witherington, *Acts*, 474-477; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 125; Holladay, *Acts*, 314; Johnson, *Acts*, 283-284; Keener, 15:1-23:35, 2317-2318; and Williams, *Acts*, 275.

<sup>109</sup> Williams, *Acts*, 274. Barreto argues that his ethnicity must be perceived theologically as well demonstrating "the bold yet uneasy negotiations that would bring together Jews and Hellenes." Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations*, 118.

<sup>110</sup> Rather it upholds the Jerusalem decision. Keener writes, "Moreover, Luke's depiction of Timothy's

circumcision occurs because it will aid Paul in speaking in the synagogues. Parsons writes, “[Timothy] is not circumcised to enter the world to come. Rather, his circumcision is an attempt on Paul’s part to accommodate Jewish sensitivity and to ensure Timothy’s acceptability among the Jews with whom he will work.”<sup>111</sup> Such an act reinforces the wider narrative’s emphasis of Paul continuing to engage with Judaism and this, along with the narrative’s emphasis on Timothy’s status as a believer, challenges the anti-Judaic and pro-Gentilic readings proposed in previous Acts’ scholarship as well as the weakness of not integrating the various cultures but over-emphasising one to the detriment of the others. This section intentionally concludes with the strengthening and growth of the assemblies (vv.4-5) providing a continuity with the earlier narrative (2:47; 4:4; 6:7; 11:21; 14:22; 15:32) and an indication of the power of the word of grace (14:3).<sup>112</sup>

The structure of the next episode echoes the earlier narrative of the Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1-4:41) and the guidance given to Peter (10:10-20).<sup>113</sup> It also has similarities to Graeco-Roman “resistance myths.” These have “a pattern of epiphany, resistance, incarceration, and release.”<sup>114</sup> The epiphany is the divine intervention

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circumcision, coming on the heels of the Jerusalem Council, portrays Paul as continuing to approve Jewish practices so long as they are not imposed on Gentiles.” Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2322. See also Peterson, *Acts*, 451; and Bruce, *Acts*, 304.

<sup>111</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 222. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 284; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2322; Peterson, *Acts*, 449; Schnabel, *Acts*, 665-666; Witherington, *Acts*, 474; Pervo, *Acts*, 388; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 125; Bock, *Acts*, 522; Johnson, *Acts*, 284; Bruce, *Acts*, 352; and Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 575.

<sup>112</sup> See also Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 8:25, 40; 9:31; 11:24-25; 12:24; 14:21-23. Johnson, *Acts*, 285.

<sup>113</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 454.

<sup>114</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 227. Keener notes that seeking divine guidance was a common practice both among ancient Israel’s contemporaries and in the Graeco-Roman world. Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2333 and 2347-2349.



which prevents Paul's movements and the vision which leads him to Macedonia (vv.6-10).<sup>115</sup> The resistance is that of the slave girl's owners along with the crowd (vv.19-22), the incarceration in the jail (vv.23-24), and the release through the earthquake and the magistrates (vv.26, 35-36). The christological qualification of τὸ πνεῦμα (v.7), read as a genitive of possession, is significant for it reminds the reader that the risen and ascended Jesus continues to be active in the mission he has set his disciples (Acts 1:8).<sup>116</sup> In this episode he is active in the direction of travel for his people (vv.6-10),<sup>117</sup> the opening of Lydia's heart (v.14), the confrontation with the πνεῦμα πύθωνα (v.18), and the earthquake (v.26).<sup>118</sup>

Whilst the narrative notes the route, through Samothrace and Neapolis (v.11), it leaves any engagement unreported. Therefore the engagement in Philippi assumes a greater focus. Peterson notes, "Luke's account of the ministry of Philippi covers the rest of Acts 16. It is the longest record of Paul's activity in any European city or

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<sup>115</sup> Two discussions occur at this point amongst the secondary literature. First, there are discussions about the possible methods the Spirit's will was communicated but this is not key to this thesis. Second, there are substantial discussions about the 'we' passages. Whilst both are acknowledged and understood to be significant within understanding Acts neither directly bears upon the focus of this thesis. Spirit: Bruce, *Acts*, 325-327; Witherington, *Acts*, 478-479; Stott, *Acts*, 261; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2331; C. Breytenbach, "Probable Reasons for Paul's Unfruitful Missionary Attempts in Asia Minor (A Note on Acts 16:6-7)," in *Die Apostelgeschichte und die Hellenistische Geschichtsschreibung: Festschrift für Eckhard Plümacher zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (AGJU 57; eds. C. Breytenbach and J. Schröter; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 162-163. 'We' passages: Bruce, *Acts*, 327-328; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 127; Witherington, *Acts*, 479-486; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2350-2374. For a history of Macedonia from 650 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. see R. J. Lane-Fox (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Ancient Macedon: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Macedon, 650 BC-300 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>116</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 81-82. See Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:195; Johnson, *Acts*, 285; and Schnabel, *Acts*, 668.

<sup>117</sup> See Jewett's article for a study of the route. R. Jewett, "Mapping the Route of Paul's 'Second Missionary Journey' from Dorylaeum to Troas," *TynB* 48 (1997): 1-22; and G. L. Thompson and M. Wilson, "The Route of Paul's Second Journey in Asia Minor: In the Steps of Robert Jewett and Beyond," *TynB* 67 (2016): 217-246. See also D. French, "Acts and the Roman Roads of Asia Minor," in *Graeco-Roman Setting* (vol. 2 of *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*; eds. D. Gill and C. Gempf; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 53-54, 57.

<sup>118</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 455.

town.”<sup>119</sup> The narrative begins by emphasising the status of the city, the πρώτη, read as either the capital or having received a title of honour,<sup>120</sup> and a κολωνία (v.12), emphasising its relationship with Rome, rather than its Hellenic origins,<sup>121</sup> and its importance over other cities such as Thessalonica which was designated as a free city.<sup>122</sup> Witherington notes that Philippi was:

“a metropolis run on Roman principles and Roman law...Roman citizenship was highly prized in such a place...[Augustus] made Philippi a Roman colony and populated it with retiring Roman soldiers but he even gave the city the *ius italicum*, the legal character of a part of Italy, even though it was outside Italy. This was the highest honor that could be bestowed on a provincial city...It was, in short, Rome in microcosm.”<sup>123</sup>

This is not the first κολωνία city visited by Paul in Acts but it is the first noted as such by the text.<sup>124</sup> The forthcoming narrative clearly has the engagement between the Christian assembly and the Roman State at the fore.

The initial engagement occurs within a Jewish framework, being on the Sabbath. That Paul’s usual custom, as described by the earlier narrative, is to directly visit synagogues, and that they search for a προσευχήν (v.13) outside of the city may

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<sup>119</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 457.

<sup>120</sup> Some commentators take this word to mean Philippi should be understood as the first district. Conzelmann, *Acts*, 130; Williams, *Acts*, 280; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2380-2383. See also Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 393-395.

<sup>121</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 330. See C. Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, “Philippi,” in *Brill’s Companion to Ancient Macedon: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Macedon, 650 BC-300 AD* (ed. R. J. Lane-Fox; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 440-442; and C. Brélaz, “The Authority of Paul’s Memory and Early Christian Identity at Philippi,” in *Authority and Identity in Emerging Christianities in Asia Minor and Greece* (AJEC103; eds. C. Breytenbach and J. M. Ogereau; Leiden: Brill, 2018), 240.

<sup>122</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2381.

<sup>123</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 488; Peterson, *Acts*, 459; F. Millar, *The Roman Empire and its Neighbours* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: Duckworth, 1981), 81; and Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, “Philippi,” 447 and 450.

<sup>124</sup> Pisidian Antioch was also a colony city. Johnson, *Acts*, 292; Bruce, *Acts*, 330; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2382.

indicate that there was no synagogue in Philippi, though there is inscriptional evidence of the presence of Jews.<sup>125</sup> Noting the accusations of the owners, along with the response of the crowd, and the authorities (vv.20-22), it is also possible that there was an element of hostility towards Judaism within the city.<sup>126</sup> Much scholarship presents the Lukan depiction of Lydia as a business woman, possibly a wealthy one,<sup>127</sup> or at least of a higher status than other merchants.<sup>128</sup> Other scholars argue either for “caution...in drawing conclusions about Lydia’s wealth and social status based on her occupation,”<sup>129</sup> or that Lydia was “an immoral, deceptive, unfaithful ‘outsider’...an unsuitable fit with the community that constitutes the salvific space of a ‘place of prayer’.”<sup>130</sup>

Yet, as with Timothy, the narrative emphasises Lydia’s theological status - as a

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<sup>125</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2384. Such a position is contested. Pervo writes that no synagogue had been built; Conzelmann that it was possible but unlikely; Bruce, Bock, Fitzmyer, Stott and Williams suggest that there were insufficient men to form a synagogue; Barrett leaves it to the reader; Johnson, that the encounter occurred on the way to the synagogue, and Gaventa and Reimer, that a synagogue presence was possible. Pervo, *Acts*, 402-403; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 130; Bruce, *Acts*, 358; Bock, *Acts*, 533-534; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 585; Stott, *Acts*, 263 and Williams, *Acts*, 282. Barrett, *Acts*, 2:781-782; Johnson, *Acts*, 292; Gaventa, *Acts*, 236-237; I. R. Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Liberation Perspective* (trans. L. M. Maloney; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 78-86. For evidence of Hebrew names in Philippi see Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, “Philippi,” 451.

<sup>126</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2420 and 2472. Spencer notes, this assembly’s “physical location - twice removed from the city limits from architectural (gate) and natural (river) boundaries - and socioreligious composition - women devoted to the Jewish faith - betray its restricted, marginal status within the Roman colony.” F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 164.

<sup>127</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 492-493; Peterson, *Acts*, 458; and D. W. J. Gill, “Acts and the Urban Elites,” in *Graeco-Roman Setting* (vol. 2 of *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*; eds. D. Gill and C. Gempf; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 115.

<sup>128</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2398. See also Blue, “House Church,” 186.

<sup>129</sup> Holladay, *Acts*, 321.

<sup>130</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 269. Gruca-Macaulay traces the development of the popular scholarly view of Lydia as a successful businesswoman. Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 9-31.

σεβομένη τὸν θεόν (v.14).<sup>131</sup> The opening of her heart (ἦς ὁ κύριος διήνοιξεν τὴν καρδίαν) is a divine action reminding the Lukan audience of the activity of the risen Jesus and draws the Lukan audience back to the paradigmatic message in Acts 13:13-52. This divine action also functions to remind the Lukan audience that relationship to the divine can only be christological. This action results in repentance as indicated by the baptism and the spontaneity of hospitality (v.15; cf. 9:11; 21:4, 7-8, 16; 28:14),<sup>132</sup> echoing the actions of true believers in the earlier Acts narrative (2:37-39; 2:42-47; 4:32-37; cf. 16:29-34) and contrasting those false believers (Acts 5:1-11).<sup>133</sup> Importantly Gruca-Macaulay rightly notes that one function of Lydia's salvation is to emphasise the identity of the insider of the Christian assembly, the "we-group" and not the "enemy,"<sup>134</sup> and to "[dismantle] the social logic of ethnic, gender, or other physiognomic profiles as reliable guides to the inner spiritual character of newcomers to the Christ movement...As a result, 'Lydia the huckster' offers a radical challenge to gender-and ethnic-based criteria for assessing who can

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<sup>131</sup> See my earlier comments in the Introduction on this phrase.

<sup>132</sup> A. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels* (NTM 8; ed. S. E. Porter; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 147. See also B. M. Rapske, "Acts, Travel and Shipwreck," in *Graeco-Roman Setting* (vol. 2 of *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*; eds. D. Gill and C. Gempf; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 15; J. H. Neyrey, "Ceremonies in Luke-Acts: The Case of Meals and Table Fellowship," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J. H. Neyrey; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 362 and 386. Wallace notes this passage to be that of a first-class condition, thus signalling that she will be found to be a believer. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 451 and 694.

<sup>133</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 297; Schnabel, *Acts*, 681, G. Schneider, *Kommentar zu Kap. 9, 1 - 28, 31. Die Apostelgeschichte* (vol. 2; Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; eds. A. Wilkenhauser et al.; Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 214; and Witherington, *Acts*, 493. Lydia's hospitality appears to be a continued reflection of the sharing of money and possessions in Luke-Acts. See B. Capper, "Jesus, Virtuoso Religion, and the Community of Goods," in *Engaging Economics* (eds. B. W. Longenecker and K. Libengood; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 60, 73-74 and S. Barton, "Money Matters: Economic Relations and the Transformation of Value in Early Christianity," in *Engaging Economics* (eds. B. W. Longenecker and K. Libengood; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 49.

<sup>134</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 225 and 226.

and cannot form a salvific assembly of God.”<sup>135</sup>

The rest of the narrative relates to the engagement with the slave girl, the girl’s owners, and the magistrates. The engagement occurs between Paul and Silas and Graeco-Roman beliefs within an overtly Roman setting and has been the subject of scholarly attention. Klauck and Spencer assert that the pericope demonstrates the falsity of other religions and the superiority of the Christian faith,<sup>136</sup> Kauppi, the contrast between ambiguous Graeco-Roman oracles and the clarity of Christian prophecy,<sup>137</sup> Rowe, that the patterns of Graeco-Roman culture are threatened with dissolution by the Christian mission,<sup>138</sup> Harnack notes the syncretic use of θεός ὑψίστος: “Judaism also played some part in the blending of religions,”<sup>139</sup> whilst Williams, writing the same phrase asserts that “Luke is purposely using language which a pagan could understand but which meant more to a Christian.”<sup>140</sup>

The slave girl is identified as having a πνεῦμα πύθωνα, a spirit classically linked with the god Apollo, Zeus Hypsistus, and Dionysius.<sup>141</sup> In the power of this spirit she is

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<sup>135</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 269-270 and 272. See also 161-162.

<sup>136</sup> Klauck, *Magic*, 63-72. Spencer writes, “By overcoming such a force ‘in the name of Jesus’, Paul again demonstrates Christian superiority over magical-pagan religion (cf. 13.6-12).” Spencer, *Acts*, 166.

<sup>137</sup> Kauppi, *Foreign*, 39-41.

<sup>138</sup> Rowe, *World*, 51.

<sup>139</sup> Harnack, *Christianity*, 1:3.

<sup>140</sup> Williams, *Acts*, 194. See also Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2:215.

<sup>141</sup> Apollo: Conzelmann, *Acts*, 131; Bruce, *Acts*, 332; Stott, *Acts*, 264; Johnson, *Acts*, 293; Schnabel, *Acts*, 682; Witherington, *Acts*, 493; Keener, *15:1-23:35, 2422-2429*; Grant, *Gods*, 63; G. L. Green, “Finding the Will of God: Historical and Modern Perspectives,” in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (ASMS 34; eds. R. L. Gallagher and R. Hertig; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books,

able to tell the future and thereby earn money,<sup>142</sup> though Talbert notes “It was also a part of the Mediterranean mind-set that viewed history as the fulfilment of oracles/prophecies to hold that an oracle could be misunderstood as well as understood.”<sup>143</sup> Such divination echoes the earlier work of the Spirit of Jesus (v.7) and potentially Peter’s speech about daughters prophesying (Acts 2:18).<sup>144</sup>

The girl’s owners are designated as κούριοι (v.16).<sup>145</sup> This is significant for the same word is used four times within the immediate setting about Jesus (16:14, 15, 31, 32) and provides a contrast between the owners who enslave and Paul who is the means for a christological freedom, indicating the activity and, later, the greater lordship of the risen Jesus (cf. Luke 4:17-21).<sup>146</sup> Within the Philippian environs the

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2004), 213; Zeus Hypsistos: Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, “Philippi,” 451. Apollo and Dionysius: Parsons, *Acts*, 231. Dionysius: M. Kochenash, “The Scandal of Gentile Inclusion: Reading Acts 17 with Euripides’ *Bacchae*,” in *Classical Greek Models of the Gospels and Acts: Studies in Mimesis Criticism* (CSNTCO 3; eds. M. G. Bilby et al.; Claremont, Calif.: Claremont Press, 2018), 133-138. See also: J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley, L.A.: University of California Press, 1980), 1-24; and Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 143-149.

<sup>142</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 463 and R. Flacelière, *Greek Oracles* (trans. D. Garman; London: Elek Books, 1965), 1-4. For a wider perspective on the traditional cults and beliefs in Philippi see M. Mari, “Traditional Cults and Beliefs,” in *Brill’s Companion to Ancient Macedon: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Macedon, 650 BC-300 AD* (ed. R. J. Lane-Fox; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 453-465.

<sup>143</sup> Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 168. See also M. E. Boring, “Early Christian Prophecy,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 4; ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 496.

<sup>144</sup> This may also be connected with Philip’s four unmarried daughters in Acts 21:8-9. Speculatively, there may also be a reference to Nero who having received a statuette of a girl worshipped her “as though she were a powerful goddess, and sacrificed to her three times a day, expecting people to believe that she gave him knowledge of the future.” Suetonius, *Twelve Caesars*, 240-241.

<sup>145</sup> See also 16:19 where they are called οἱ κύριοι.

<sup>146</sup> The use of κύριος in 16:14 is disputed. For example, Dunn argues that it is used ambiguously, Cheng, that it is ambiguous but that it should be ascribed to God not Jesus, and Holladay, that “it is probably the risen Lord.” Whilst agreeing with Dunn that “the lordship of Jesus was a derivative lordship...in effect an expression of God’s lordship,” I would suggest that κύριος here refers to Jesus. This is for three reasons. 1. Whilst ‘θεός’ is used substantially through Acts 14:1-15:20 to refer to God, within the next sections the emphasis becomes explicitly christological. In 15:26 κύριος refers to Jesus, and in 16:7 the narrative emphasises Jesus’ explicit activity in the mission of his people. This is then reinforced in 16:15. Interestingly Cheng acknowledges that κύριος in this verse refers to Jesus. 2. Whilst there is reference to 2 Maccabees for the phrase ‘opening of the heart’, using Luke-Acts,

use of ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψίστος should be considered ambiguous since it might be as easily applied within Jewish, Hellenic, or Roman worldviews - as much to Zeus as to Yahweh - or within a syncretic worldview,<sup>147</sup> though Johnson is correct that the spirit recognised a divine being higher than itself.<sup>148</sup> Such a position is consistent with the Lukan narrative but it is not clear to the people in Philippi. Keener helpfully sums up the situation,

Given the diminutive size (Acts 16:13) and significance (16:20) of the Jewish community in Philippi, would the town's citizens necessarily understand her words in a monotheistic sense? Granted, a brief listening to Paul and Silas themselves would have confirmed the Jewish monotheistic sense, but it was the pythoness who had a large hearing there...By placing their preaching in a polytheistic context, the spirit could relativise the evangelistic value of any miracles they performed.<sup>149</sup>

Such a relativisation develops the tension within the narrative whilst at the same time reminding the Lukan audience of an earlier episode in which a spirit ascribes the

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διήνοιξεν - used of Lydia in 16:14 - has three other uses. In each the focus is the resurrected Jesus opening 'scripture' (Luke 24:32), 'the disciples' eyes (Luke 24:33), and 'the disciples' minds' (Luke 24:45). 3. Whilst the term ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψίστος is used (Acts 16:17) the activity centres around Jesus. It is through his name that the spirit leaves (Acts 16:18) and it is this christological qualification that is needed to interpret ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψίστος correctly. See J. D. G. Dunn, "Kurios in Acts," in *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays of James D. G. Dunn: vol. 1 Christology* (ed. J. D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 241-253; L. Cheng, *The Characterisation of God in Acts: The Indirect Portrayal of an Invisible Character* (PBM; Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2011), 237, 239; and Holladay, *Acts*, 322. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 293; Schnabel, *Acts*, 681-682; S. Walton, "Jesus, Present and/or Absent? The Presence and Presentation of Jesus as a Character in the Book of Acts," in *Characters and Characterization in Luke-Acts* (LNTS 548; eds. F. Dicken and J. Snyder; London: T. & T. Clark, 2018): 123-140.

<sup>147</sup> Trebilco notes that this ambiguity meant "It was thus not important to the dedicant that others understood exactly to which god he or she was referring. Hence the same title can be used for a number of different gods." P. R. Trebilco, "Paul and Silas - 'Servants of the Most High God' (Acts 16.16-18)," *JSNT* 36 (1989): 52, 59-60. Donaldson writes of Augustine's portrayal of Varro: "Varro says that Jews worship the 'highest god' (*summum deum*), a phrase that probably reflects the Jewish formulation 'the Most High God.' If this is so, the fact that Varro is apparently willing to take this formulation at face value and thus to align the Jewish God with no less a deity than Jupiter suggests a certain degree of respect for Judaism and generosity of spirit. Nevertheless, from a Roman perspective, to describe the God of the Jews as 'the highest god' is to speak the language of polytheism." T. L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (To 135 CE)* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor, 2007), 491.

<sup>148</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 294. See also Smith, *God in Translation*, 276.

<sup>149</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2463. See also Stott, *Acts*, 2643; Bruce, *Acts*, 333; Parsons, *Acts*, 231; Peterson, *Acts*, 464; Schnabel, *Acts*, 683; Kee, *Good News*, 61; and Witherington, *Acts*, 494-495.

same phrase to Jesus (Luke 8:28).

The narrative is unclear whether it is the ambiguity of the girl's message that greatly disturbs Paul (διαπονηθείς) or the length of time she does it for (πολλὰς ἡμέρας) (v.18); this point is debated by scholars.<sup>150</sup> Whichever, or perhaps both, the narrational result of the disturbance is Paul's christological eviction of the spirit. This eviction exercises multiple functions within the narrative. It echoes previous Lukan demoniac incidents, creates a contrast between true and false prophecy,<sup>151</sup> reminds the reader of the activity of Jesus, emphasises the superiority of his Spirit, and provides the audience with a challenge to consider who is an insider to the Christian assembly.<sup>152</sup> Further, it clarifies the ambiguity of ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψίστος for it places this term within a christological framework, meaning it cannot be one of the Graeco-Roman gods.<sup>153</sup>

As the spirit leaves (ἐξῆλθεν) so the owner's ability to make money leaves (ἐξῆλθεν) (vv.18-19).<sup>154</sup> Peterson asserts that this demonstrates "the profound economic and political implications" of christological preaching. He continues "There must be

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<sup>150</sup> See BDAG, 235 (a). For example, Conzelmann argues that the "extension of time seems artificial and tendentious." Conzelmann, *Acts*, 131. See also Stott, *Acts*, 265; Witherington, *Acts*, 495; Parsons, *Acts*, 231-232; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2465-2466; Trebilco, "Paul and Silas," 61-62; and Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 85 and 99. One position that I reject is Spencer's that the slave girl is ignored because of her gender, most particularly because of the immediate context where Paul has just engaged with a group of women. Spencer, *Acts*, 166-167. See Keener's rebuttal of Spencer in Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2458 and 2459.

<sup>151</sup> Seim writes that "She is thus under alien lordship" and provides a contrast between true and false prophecy. T. K. Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (Nashville, Tenn. Abingdon Press, 1994), 173-174; See Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 132.

<sup>152</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 242.

<sup>153</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2464; and Schnabel, *Acts*, 684.

<sup>154</sup> Williams, *Acts*, 286.



similar effects in any culture where the gospel begins to make its impact on individuals, transforming their relationships, ambitions, and values.”<sup>155</sup> The owners’ response is to forcefully bring the apostles into the public forum (τὴν ἀγοράν) with accusations of a public disturbance created by Jews,<sup>156</sup> with the possible implication of them being outsiders from the Philippian community.<sup>157</sup> Whilst the crowds and magistrates do not know that these accusations are untrue, the Lukan audience understands their falsity since they are not centred on the economic loss that the owners will experience (vv.19-21).<sup>158</sup> Witherington writes, “the complaint offered to the officials was couched in polemical forensic rhetoric and masked the real cause of the action.”<sup>159</sup> Johnson suggests that there is an accusation of “overturning the city,”<sup>160</sup> a similar accusation to Acts 17:6-7, but this appears to take the meaning of ἐκταράσσω too far. BDAG suggests the definition as “to cause to be in uproar, agitate, cause trouble, to throw into confusion.”<sup>161</sup> This appears to fit the context of the accusations much more clearly. These accusations incite the crowd.<sup>162</sup> The officials, without a careful examination of the situation (v.22; cf. vv.37-38),<sup>163</sup> order

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<sup>155</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 466.

<sup>156</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 685; and Schnabel, “Persecutions,” 537.

<sup>157</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 101.

<sup>158</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2468 and 2472-2477. Longenecker, “Moral Character and Divine Generosity,” 159. Pelikan suggests that this accusation should be taken as “ironic.” Pelikan, *Acts*, 188.

<sup>159</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 496. See also Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2468 and 2470; and Stott, *Acts*, 266. Johnson, *Acts*, 295 and BDAG, 309 (b). This is the first of four official accusations and these inflame the crowd. See Acts 16:20-21; 17:5-7; 18:12-13; 19:25-27.

<sup>160</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 295.

<sup>161</sup> BDAG, 309 (b).

<sup>162</sup> This is the first of four official accusations and these inflame the crowd. See Acts 16:20-21; 17:5-7; 18:12-13; 19:25-27.

<sup>163</sup> See Witherington, *Acts*, 497; Bruce, *Acts*, 336; Johnson, *Acts*, 298; and B. J. Tabb, “Salvation, Spreading, and Suffering: God’s Unfolding Plan in Luke-Acts,” *JETS* 58 (2015): 47.

them beaten (πληγῆ),<sup>164</sup> imprisoned, and carefully guarded (v.23). This treatment of Paul and Silas echoes that of Jesus - who was unjustly accused, had a crowd incited, and a weak Roman official deal with his case - and fulfils Jesus' words (Luke 12:12; 21:15; Acts 9:15-16).<sup>165</sup> Yet these accusations also reflect the very real impact of the Christian gospel upon the surrounding cultures with which the Christian assembly interacts - the divine identity of Jesus engaging with the Graeco-Roman beliefs through the eviction of the spirit and the potential impact upon the economic sphere of Philipian city life.<sup>166</sup>

As with Peter's imprisonment (12:5-8) there is prayer and divine rescue but the context of the vindication of the gospel is within a Roman situation (cf. 4:24-31) not a Jewish one (12:11).<sup>167</sup> Such an event provides clear overtones with Euripides' *The Bacchae*. Dionysius, the son of Zeus, is imprisoned, the Maidens exercise a form of prayer, and there is a divine rescue. Having been imprisoned by Pentheus it is an earthquake which sets Dionysius free.<sup>168</sup> Speculatively taking this further the Lukan narrative may use the wider setting as a form of commentary comparing Paul and Silas with Dionysius and the slave-girl's owners and magistrates with Pentheus. In

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<sup>164</sup> The NIV (1984) uses "severely flogged" but more helpfully BDAG suggests "a sudden hard stroke with some instrument." BDAG, 825 (a).

<sup>165</sup> Walton, "Anthropology," 113; and B. J. Malina and J. H. Neyrey, "Conflict in Luke-Acts: Labelling and Deviance Theory," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrikson Publishers, 1991), 97-98.

<sup>166</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 466; and Burrus, "Acts," 144.

<sup>167</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2490; Johnson, *Acts*, 300; and Walton, "'Mission'," 552.

<sup>168</sup> Euripides, *Bacchae*, 452 (Dionysius' capture), 495-519 (dialogue with Pentheus and Dionysius's imprisonment), 598-604 (earthquake and release from prison), 605-666 (the freedom of Dionysius). For an English translation, see Euripides, *Bacchae* (CTGD; eds. J. Harrison and J. Affleck; trans. D. Franklin; Cambridge: CUP, 2000). On the parallels with Acts, See J. B. Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany: Prison-Escape in the Acts of the Apostles* (Repr. 2012; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co; 2004), 270; Kochenash, "The Scandal of Gentile Inclusion," 136; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2495.

the Lukan narrative, the earthquake sets the prisoners free yet they do not leave, providing a means in the narrative to prevent the suicide of the jailer (cf. 12:19).<sup>169</sup> The whole event has made such an impact that the jailer asks, Κύριοι, τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ; (v.30).<sup>170</sup> Such a Lukan device again contrasts the girl's owners,<sup>171</sup> who enslave, and Paul, who sets free by pointing to a greater Κύριος, Jesus (vv.31-32).<sup>172</sup> The response of the jailer reflects a Lukan perspective on repentance - believing, baptism, and hospitality (vv.33-34).<sup>173</sup> Interestingly in analysing the jailer episode Parsons notes a subversive edge to the narrative. He writes, "Furthermore, by gaining ground via the household, the Christian movement poses a challenge not only to the temple cult...but also to the Roman Empire, which regarded itself as a household with the emperor as paterfamilias...and for which the household functioned as 'the seed-bed of the state' (Cicero)."<sup>174</sup> Gruca-Macaulay highlights this threat to the Empire as a challenge to Roman honour which "would infer harm to

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<sup>169</sup> Conzelmann treats this whole section as a legend, a narrative created by Luke but not necessarily true. Conzelmann, *Acts*, 132.

<sup>170</sup> Johnson notes that "If the jailer attributes the earthquake to the songs spoken by the apostles, the title 'Lords' might be better, since he would be greeting them as magicians or divine men. In that case, Paul's response would be a deflection of glory." Johnson, *Acts*, 301. Keener notes that this is a standard question of repentance in Luke-Acts. Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2507.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Luke 3:10, 12, 14; 10:25; 18:18; Acts 2:37; 22:10.

<sup>172</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2509 and 2510; Johnson, *Acts*, 301; and Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 250.

<sup>173</sup> Stott, *Acts*, 267; E. Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (LNTS 450; ed. M. Goodacre; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 59; and Wilkins and Hill, *Food*, 63. Regarding the debate on believing and baptism, there are a number of positions. Stott writes that the meal was "an external expression of the inward joy which *the whole family* experienced *because they had come to believe in God*." (34). Witherington notes that the emphasis on the household is that they celebrated "the jailer becoming a believer in the true God," not that the whole household became believers. Bruce, that the whole family were baptised by Paul and Silas. See Stott, *Acts*, 263 and 267-268; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 130; Peterson, *Acts*, 461; Witherington, *Acts*, 493 and 499; Walton, "Anthropology," 105-106; Williams, *Acts*, 290; Parsons, *Acts*, 231; and Bruce, *Acts*, 331 and 338.

<sup>174</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 234.

Roman social identity.”<sup>175</sup>

There is a clear contrast made in the narrative between the attitude of those who come to repentance, Lydia and the jailer,<sup>176</sup> and those who do not, the slave owners and magistrates.<sup>177</sup> Rather than lessening the narratival tension the release of Paul and Silas from jail increases it with the revelation that ἀνθρώπους Ῥωμαίους ὑπάρχοντας.<sup>178</sup> Such a revelation causes the magistrates to become frightened (ἐφοβήθησαν).<sup>179</sup> Witherington writes,

It was a very serious matter when a local magistrate in a Roman colony took action against a Roman citizen, especially when he did so without proper cause or reason. The magistrates could lose their posts or be recalled and disgraced for such actions...According to Julian law binding or beating a Roman citizen without trial was forbidden.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 180.

<sup>176</sup> Gruca-Macaulay notes the connection made in the Lukan narrative between Lydia and the jailer: both are baptized, as are their households; both listen to Paul's preaching; Lydia invites Paul into her home, and the jailer takes Paul into his. Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 107-108.

<sup>177</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 298 and Walton, “‘Mission’,” 552.

<sup>178</sup> Gill, “Urban Elites,” 107. The Western text adds that the magistrates recognised Paul and Silas were ἄνδρες δικαιοῖ, giving further justification for their innocence. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 399. See also Peterson, *Acts*, 474; Witherington, *Acts*, 499; and H. W. Tajra, *The Trial of St. Paul: A Juridical Exegesis of the Second Half of the Acts of the Apostles* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 28-29.

<sup>179</sup> BDAG, 1060 (2).

<sup>180</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 499. Geiger notes the significance of this chapter with Acts 22 commenting that these: “provide us with some valuable insights into the often complicated cases of civic, ethnic, cultural and religious identity in the Ancient Near East.” J. Geiger, *Language, Culture and Identity in Ancient Palestine*, in *Greek Romans and Roman Greeks: Studies in Cultural Interaction* (ASMA 3; ed. E. N. Ostenfeld; Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2002), 235. See also S. A. Adams, “Paul the Roman Citizen: Roman Citizenship in the Ancient World and its Importance for Understanding Acts 22:22-29,” in *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman* (ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 309-326; Johnson, *Acts*, 302; Stott, *Acts*, 268; Williams, *Acts*, 291; Bruce, *Acts*, 340; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 133; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2517 and 2528.

Whilst a number of commentators suggest that Luke uses this pericope as an *apologia pro ecclesia*,<sup>181</sup> it is more likely that the narrative portrays the magistrates negatively since they protect themselves (vv.38-39), not having taken the appropriate care to listen to the charges properly,<sup>182</sup> and having ordered the beatings.<sup>183</sup> Gruca-Macaulay goes further to argue that Paul and Silas are depicted in the narrative as Romans contrasted with the “self-purported Romans who represent Philippi’s social structure of power.”<sup>184</sup> Paul and Silas return to Lydia’s house where they first found hospitality and having encouraged the Christian assembly they leave (v.40).<sup>185</sup>

## 2. Engaging with Other Readings: C. Keener and C. K. Rowe

### 2.1. C. Keener

Keener’s approach to Acts 16 reflects his presuppositions of Acts as a prescriptive model of rhetoric and argumentation for later Christians to follow should they be brought before the authorities or need to engage in “public apologetics,”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> For example Stott argues that narrative demonstrates that Paul and Silas had to be “satisfied that they had been vindicated and that their mission had been cleared of illegality.” Stott, *Acts*, 268.

<sup>182</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 103.

<sup>183</sup> Johnson argues that they are pictured like Pilate “as having been swayed to their injustice by the anger of a mob.” Johnson, *Acts*, 302. See also Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2528 and Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 253.

<sup>184</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 257.

<sup>185</sup> Keener writes, “Given the presence of or rapid gathering of believers at Lydia’s home, we may assume that she was now hosting a house congregation.” Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2530.

<sup>186</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 161. Keener repeats this in other places. For example, “Acts is heavily apologetic (and some of its strategies might help later Christians on trial).” Keener, *Introduction*, 436. See also 437, 440, 442.

particularly with the surrounding cultures.<sup>187</sup> The chapter also functions for Keener as an apologetic for mission to the nations to allow for the inclusion of Gentile Christians.<sup>188</sup> As importantly, Keener notes that this narrative is keen to portray that Paul is no threat to either the “true Jewish message” or the Roman State.<sup>189</sup>

Thus in the early section of the pericope Keener highlights Timothy’s “interethnicity” as building on Acts 15 and symbolic of the work of the Spirit in creating a unified people.<sup>190</sup> He also notes that the waiting for divine guidance “fits a pattern evident at times in Acts, where fully succeeding in an assigned mission is dependent on divine blessing and empowerment.”<sup>191</sup> Keener recognises Lydia as a point of contact because she was already a God-fearer,<sup>192</sup> noting that her conversion and subsequent hospitality would not have been recognised as challenging to the status quo. Keener writes, “Although Lydia was not a citizen of Philippi, her resources were probably sufficient to minimize suspicions of subversion if friends met in her home.”<sup>193</sup> Of the slave girl Keener notes that the presenting issue is that she is relativising the Christian gospel to place it within a “polytheistic framework.”<sup>194</sup> By

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<sup>187</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 442, 443.

<sup>188</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 443, 465. Keener, *Introduction*, 441-458 and 461. Keener writes, “Although we may view mission and apologetic as distinct purposes, for Luke they were closely intertwined. Luke’s apologetic was a concrete expression of mission in his own context, and it was often mission that generated the need for the apologetic.” Keener, *Introduction*, 438.

<sup>189</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2321.

<sup>190</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2318.

<sup>191</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2331.

<sup>192</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2375.

<sup>193</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2407.

<sup>194</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2457. See also 2463.

doing this she also relativises the nature of salvation, which according to Keener becomes a salvation of deliverance, health, or safety.<sup>195</sup> The spirit is exorcised and the girl liberated as a fulfilment of Luke 4.<sup>196</sup> For Keener the accusations of the owners stem largely from economic motives tied to the girl's religious activity.<sup>197</sup> These accusations create a level of irony since Paul and Silas are rejected by the surrounding cultures for being truly Jewish and yet in other narratives are rejected by some Jews "as if they were apostates."<sup>198</sup> The narrative furthers this irony, according to Keener, by contrasting their treatment, as if having committed a serious crime, with their later refusal to escape. For Keener this is part of Luke's apologetic: "Paul and Silas, far from being subversive rabble-rousers, are law-abiding Roman citizens."<sup>199</sup> Such an argument is also made by Kee and Skinner. Kee writes, "The point is made in Acts thereby that there is no basic conflict between the Roman system - both its citizenship structure and its legal processes - and the faith of the new community. Stated negatively, Christians are not political subversives but deserve the protection of Roman civil law."<sup>200</sup> Skinner writes, "Paul and friends do not come to Philippi to overthrow Rome or spit in the face of Roman culture. But the gospel does have implications for Roman values and assumptions about imperial

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<sup>195</sup> These Keener notes are "common goals of pagan religion." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2458.

<sup>196</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2459 and 2461.

<sup>197</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2469.

<sup>198</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2465.

<sup>199</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2487. Keener later writes, "in contrast to charges against Christians (e.g., 17:7; 24:5), Paul is so law-abiding and respectful toward the Roman colony's authority that he does not try to escape even when he has the opportunity." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2508.

<sup>200</sup> Kee, *Good News*, 63.

power.”<sup>201</sup> Keener notes other contrasts in the narrative. There is a contrast with the spirit in the slave girl and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, in which the latter is shown to be superior.<sup>202</sup> He also notes a contrast based on the geographical route of Paul - whereas Alexander invaded Asia from Europe, now the gospel is invading Europe from Asia but such invasion comes through suffering and not imperial conquest.<sup>203</sup>

One further contrast that Keener highlights is the contrasting depiction of the “the true prophetic women, daughters, and youth” in Acts 2,<sup>204</sup> and Lydia<sup>205</sup> - all part of the Christian assembly - and the slave girl.<sup>206</sup> Despite these contrasts Keener minimises any subversive element from the actions or words of the Christian assembly within this chapter. Rather, Keener’s contention is that the Christian assembly are depicted as model citizens of the State.<sup>207</sup> Such a perspective is a continuation of Keener’s argument that Christians in Acts are not politically subversive toward the State and yet are able to “undermine the larger society’s

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<sup>201</sup> Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 122.

<sup>202</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2332.

<sup>203</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2341.

<sup>204</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2421.

<sup>205</sup> “This slave girl also contrasts with the women of 16:13, especially Lydia, whose heart God opened (16:14). Lydia not only was probably free...but had some means, God opened Lydia’s heart to hear Paul; a python spirit forced the slave to announce Paul’s role. In the end, however, Jesus also liberates the slave girl spiritually (16:18).” Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2459.

<sup>206</sup> Similar to Keener, Gruca-Macaulay notes this contrast positioning this within “a syncretic movement of ‘rubbing away’ false exteriors, or affirming external interiors, as a horizontal back-and-forth, as two characters rub against each other in the narrative for comparative effect.” Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 210.

<sup>207</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2420-2421.



values and gods.”<sup>208</sup> This occurs whilst transforming society in such a way that Rome is not challenged in the present.<sup>209</sup> Yet, Keener’s position has some important weaknesses to it.

The emphatic force of the narrative is that Acts 16 is an engagement with the Roman State at every level. The narrative highlights the status of Philippi, the nature of divine belief, the economic relations with the divine, the authorities as representatives of Rome, and Paul as a Roman citizen. These elements should not be considered in isolation from one another but as intimately inter-related within their first-century context. Beyond this, the narrative situates these events as divinely guided and sanctioned (16:7-10). Therefore, it should be noted that Keener is correct to highlight the undermining of society’s values along with the ideas of the divine and a transformation of society. The possession of slaves as a means of economic prosperity and the possession of the girl by the spirit are both undermined as the Christian assembly brings freedom. The accusations of the owners are known by the Lukan audience to be untrue and the narrative vindicates Paul and Silas as they are escorted from the city. The weak magistrates and the abuse of the legal system is contrasted with Paul and Silas’ obedience to the system when they do not escape. Such obedience results in the transforming of society leading not to death for the jailer but life, that is repentant life, for him and his household.

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<sup>208</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 498. For example, in respect to Paul, Keener writes, “Thus Jewish rabble-rousers...often started the trouble...or vested economic interests vied against Paul, as when some falsely denounced him as a non-Roman because he was forced to cast out a demon.” Keener, *Introduction*, 445, 446 and 447. See also Sordi, *Roman Empire*, 3.

<sup>209</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 448.

Yet Keener's argument for undermining society's values and gods and for social transformation without subverting the State develops two substantial weaknesses in the events of Acts 16. The first is that if societal transformation is such a significant theme in Acts then why does Luke not focus on the transformation of the slave girl who, once the spirit is exorcised, quickly disappears from the narrative? Of all the characters in this chapter she is one through whom the narrative could have demonstrated social transformation and yet it does not. The second weakness is that because of the inter-relationship of the various elements of the Roman world and State that are so central to this chapter, Keener's argument that one can undermine society's values and gods without subverting the State is recognisably wrong. Rather one emphasis of Acts 16, and using Keener's own words from his introduction, is that "Christ does supplant Caesar."<sup>210</sup> The events in Philippi demonstrate that the true Lord is not Caesar but Christ. The events that occur in Philippi are not accidental but a result of the divine guidance of the ascended Jesus. Thus the false spirit succumbs to the true Spirit; the false owners, or lords, are contrasted with the true Lord; the weak magistrates who imprison wrongly are contrasted with the true judge who sets free; the legal system which is open to abuse, oppresses the innocent, and falsely imprisons is contrasted with the kingdom of God which vindicates, sets free, and brings life. Thus the narrative recognisably subverts the Roman State at the cultural, legal, ethical, and political levels. Caesar's kingdom is one of oppression, falsehood, and abuse. Those who represent him and those who live under his rule reflect this. Christ's kingdom is one of freedom, truth, and life and likewise those who live under his rule bring such things. Such a perspective

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<sup>210</sup> Keener, *Introduction*, 448.

challenges Keener's presuppositions for how to read Acts as a model for engagement. It also challenges his position of societal transformation in the present because whilst Keener is right to note that the Christian message has a significant eschatological trajectory, particularly in societal transformation, the narrative is clear that this is a very real activity in the present. Such societal transformation cannot be read purely positively but must be understood - at the least - to be implicitly subversive.

## 2.2. C. K. Rowe

The focus of Rowe's work on Acts 16 is the engagement with the slave girl, her owners and the resultant trial. Drawing on ancient and modern writings Rowe highlights the ambiguity of the phrase θεός ὑψίστος with the resultant christological clarification.<sup>211</sup> This move for Rowe reveals that Paul's proclamation is "an attack upon pagan religiousness" and "involves a simultaneous confrontation" with the spirit and the related economic practices.<sup>212</sup> This attack, says Rowe, is recognised by the Philippians who interpret this christological force as one of "subversion for the religious-economic habits of the polis,"<sup>213</sup> and see the "inherently destabilizing power of Jesus Christ for the pagan way of life."<sup>214</sup> For Rowe it is unsurprising that Paul and Silas are asked to leave the city.<sup>215</sup> Rowe's perspective rightly recognises the collision and the tension found within this section of Acts 16 and is correct to recognise the subversive nature of the Christian message.

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<sup>211</sup> Rowe, *World*, 25.

<sup>212</sup> Rowe, *World*, 25.

<sup>213</sup> Rowe, *World*, 25.

<sup>214</sup> Rowe, *World*, 26.

<sup>215</sup> Rowe, *World*, 27.

Yet I believe that Rowe overstates his case through his narrow focus on one small section of the narrative and that this engagement between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman culture and between the Christian assembly and the Roman State, requires a more nuanced account. First, the collision must be understood within the wider Lukan narrative. Therefore I would argue that the collision with the mantic occurs within the Lukan framework of fulfilment. The engagement occurs only because of the divine sanction of the Spirit of Jesus who enables Paul and Silas to go to Philippi and the removal of the spirit echoes the fulfilment of the covenant promises of God as expressed in Jesus' mission and in the coming of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:18-21; 12:14-22). Thus the collision with the mantic along with the collisions that result from the engagement with the mantic, with the owners and magistrates, fulfil the covenant promises and Scripture for the assembly (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8) and Paul himself (9:15-16). The idea of the fulfilment of the covenant promises of God is then exonerated in the repentance of the jailer.<sup>216</sup> Interpreting the mantic section in this way nuances and adapts Rowe's interpretation which emphasises the collision, clearly demonstrated in his language: "confrontation," "threatening," "subversion," "inherently destabilizing power,"<sup>217</sup> and which does not take into account the theme of fulfilment that prompts, and occurs within, this episode.

Focusing upon the wider narrative of Acts 16 also challenges Rowe's conclusions. Whilst Rowe's argument appears easily proved from his chosen, but narrow, section of text, applying his thesis to the pericopes either side of the mantic - that is the

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<sup>216</sup> See also Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2324.

<sup>217</sup> Rowe, *World*, 25-26.

engagement with Lydia and the jailer - provide a very different conclusion to that of Rowe. Both characters are important to the pericope because their inclusion, as with the maniac, is a result of divine guidance and human obedience (vv.9-10). Lydia and the jailer are also important because the story of each contains subversive elements - subverting Israel's salvation-history as per the paradigmatic speech in Acts 13:13-52, and Graeco-Roman myths which should, according to Rowe's thesis, lead to collision. Yet, the results are the polar opposite to that posited by Rowe. Neither Lydia nor the jailer perceive Paul's message as an attack or as confrontational or destabilising to their own situations. Rather they positively accept the message for themselves as well as for their households, offering hospitality and refreshment to Paul and Silas. In that context they act as positive contrasts within the narrative to the owners of the girl at the metaphysical and ethical levels, for where there is repentance the correct ethical actions follow. This contrasts with the owners - who do not repent - and whose ethical response to the loss of economic gain leads to false accusations.<sup>218</sup> By omitting an analysis of the interconnecting episodes of Lydia and the jailer along with the wider Lukan idea of fulfilment and the kingdom of God Rowe seems to skew his interpretation of this episode.

Keener and Rowe's readings of the text provide multiple insights for understanding the engagements that occur in Acts 16 yet I would contend that their different and distinct emphases do not adequately address the engagements that occur in this chapter. Keener's analysis within his wider framework cannot account for the political overtones and subversive critique found within the Philippian setting. Whilst he

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<sup>218</sup> Rowe notes that in repentance both Lydia and the jailer are accepting and embodying a set of convictions that run counter to the life of Philippi. Yet even here he does not acknowledge the positive framing this provides within the narrative. Rowe, *World*, 26.

rightly posits the undermining of the values and gods along with a social transformation, the segregation from emperor and empire is false and not a perspective understood in the first-century world. Further, his socially transformative argument does not address why the slave girl is lost to the narrative when she is the perfect example to demonstrate a Lukan social transformation. Rowe rightly recognises the subversive element of the engagement both in respect to the religio-economic and as a destabilising force. Yet, as in earlier pericopes he does not acknowledge the wider framework of fulfilment in which the pericope is set and neither does he apply his thesis more widely, for example to Lydia and the jailer, which would, I contend, challenge or nuance his work since while subversion occurs the collision does not. As in previous chapters it should be noted that in outlining Keener and Rowe's perspectives the tension in this narrative sits amidst an unaddressed centre - Keener's over-emphasis on fulfilment without subversion and Rowe's emphasis on subversion without fulfilment. Therefore the engagement of Keener and Rowe with Acts 16 demonstrates that their approaches do not adequately address the issues being raised within the engagements that occur and so further demonstrate the need to develop a fresh approach and so we turn to a subversive-fulfilment reading of Acts 16.

### **3. A Subversive-Fulfilment Reading**

To read this multi-level engagement through the hermeneutical lens of subversive-fulfilment I will follow the structure established in chapter three and followed in chapters four to six of this thesis. By placing *possessio* at the heart of this subversive-fulfilment reading the points of contact and continuities are both identified and christologically captured. This capturing introduces discontinuities since it

subverts the belief, understanding, or practice of the surrounding cultures. By establishing the elements of fulfilment and subversion it is possible to account for the tension that occurs between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. All of these combine to provide evidence of the identifiable markers which relate to idolatry or an idolatrous trajectory. This will allow me to consider how this hermeneutic using *possessio* might contribute a fresh and original approach to reading this portion of Acts and the wider narrative.

A subversive-fulfilment reading recognises various continuities. First, there are textual continuities. The introduction of believers in Lystra demonstrates the fulfilment of Jesus' words: that the word continues to spread even in unfavourable circumstances (cf. 1:8; 6:7; 9:15; 12:24); the unity and growth of the Christian assembly (cf. 2:42-47; 4:32-36; 8:4; 9:31; 11:21); and the sovereignty of Jesus through the guidance of his Spirit in the activity of the Church (1:11; 1:24-26; 2:33; 3:6; 4:10; 5:9; 8:26; 8:39; 9:15; 9:34; 11:1-18; 12:7; 12: 22; 13:9-12).

In 16:1-15 there is an emphasis on fulfilment - the references in Acts 16 to Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium remind Luke's audience of the varied responses to Paul and Barnabas's message in those places but emphasise the success of the engagements and the fulfilment of Jesus' words. In doing this the narrative subverts the opponents of the gospel message for despite their significant opposition, poisoning minds, and stoning Paul, they have not prevented the growth of the Christian assembly. Thus, this subversion of the assembly's opponents does not occur for the benefit of the characters in the narrative but for the Lukan audience. This is significant because this subversion through fulfilment prepares the audience to understand the nature and futility of the opposition that will occur in Acts 16:16-40

and continue through to Ephesus with little exception (17:1-19:41). Beyond this, in the episode with Lydia there is a continuity with the work of God in the heart of people (2:37; 11:17; 14:27; 15:8-9; 15:12), along with hospitality and the sharing of goods as a mark of repentance (2:44-45; 4:34-47).

A subversive-fulfilment reading also identifies continuities between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world. The first notes the continuities at the metaphysical level, that is, concerning the beliefs and religiosity of the surrounding cultures about the divine. The reference in the narrative to the guidance provided by the Spirit of Jesus and the πνεῦμα πύθωνα highlights the Graeco-Roman belief in the divine and the practice of consulting oracles. In the first century such consultations occurred for people to learn of future events or find answers to specific questions. Grant writes, “many gods provided oracles and sent dreams through which the future could be known and right decisions taken...This is why miracle stories and predictions of the future play a prominent part in religious traditions.”<sup>219</sup> This aspect of continuity also affects the epistemological level, the means by which knowledge and revelation of the divine is found. Thus in this episode both the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures have a similar means of revelation. There is also a continuity created in the narrative through the use of the designation ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψίστος. As noted in the first section of this chapter the phrase itself is ambiguous and Jewish, Hellenic, and Roman worldviews could accommodate the term. There are also continuities between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world at the ethical level, the way in which the metaphysical and

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<sup>219</sup> Grant, *Gods*, 54.



epistemological levels are seen in the concrete realities of the rule of law, as well as social, political, religious, and economic practices. All of these continuities develop, from a subversive-fulfilment perspective, because people are made in the *imago Dei* and experience God's general revelation and common grace. For example, the *imago Dei* recognises a religiosity in people who desire to understand their place in the world through divine guidance or knowledge of the future. It also recognises that people desire to relate to someone/thing greater than themselves and reflects people's desire for the miraculous and for divine action to happen on earth. These continuities provide points of contact between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman belief system. Yet, interestingly in this episode the points of contact are not used to initiate the engagement with the slave girl or her owners. Therefore, I would contend that the continuities provide a model for the Lukan audience enabling them to identify such continuities in their own engagements with the surrounding cultures.

By means of *possessio* these continuities and points of contact are captured and christologically re-interpreted and this results in subversions within the narrative. In the engagement between Paul and the slave girl the narrative provides a continuity since both are instructed by divine spirits. Yet the pericope creates a contrast between the spirits and those they guide. The first contrast relates to power for the Spirit of Jesus is portrayed as having greater power and authority since the πνεῦμα πύθωνα is driven out with a christological force. The roles of the spirits are also contrasted. The πνεῦμα πύθωνα enslaves the girl providing the spirit with a voice and she is further enslaved since this spirit's voice has been recognised and she has become a slave to her owners. By contrast the Spirit of Jesus has sent Paul to

Macedonia to set captives free and to fulfil God's promises to the nations (Luke 4:18-21; Acts 9:15-16). Thus in the narrative the Spirit of Jesus is portrayed as both more powerful and ultimately trustworthy and to the Lukan audience, capable of fulfilling his promises.

Through *possessio* the title ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψίστος is also christologically captured and re-interpreted. Rather than dispensing with this title or adopting an alternative phrase the author places this name within a christological framework and therefore undermines the ambiguity of the girl's words. In doing this the narrative reveals that the only means of knowing the divine is christologically and any divine reference outside of a christological framework is untrue. This is reinforced by the subsequent eviction of the πνεῦμα πύθωνα.

The engagement between Paul and the slave girl is also significant for the epistemological discontinuities that it introduces into the narrative. Whilst Paul proclaims a christological repentance the girl, in telling the future or fortune, proclaims an earthly salvation. Her words about God and salvation, whilst being able to be perceived by the Lukan audience as both true, christologically read, and false, since the girl is not recognising Christ as God or saviour, are presented as untrustworthy in the narrational context because they are ambiguous in their meaning and open to interpretation depending on the beliefs of the surrounding cultures. Even more clearly, and with a strong sense of irony, the slave-girl does not tell her owners their fortune - they are about to lose a fortune! Thus the narrative emphasises that revelation of true divinity and salvation must be christological and that any other form of revelation is untrustworthy. The result of such an inability to trust a revelation in

the Graeco-Roman world is one of hopelessness. Piennisch writing more widely notes, “Jedoch ist der Mensch ohne Offenbarung in einer ausweglosen Situation gefangen, da er nicht das Instrumentarium besitzt, um eine zuverlässige Erkenntnis über Gott zu erlangen.”<sup>220</sup>

Through *possessio* the ethical level is also impacted and a central aspect in this narrative is found in the economic. The golden age of Greek thought developed political theories regarding the organisation of the State. One inherent factor was the community of goods within the ideal of friendship.<sup>221</sup> Likewise, the Essenes and Qumran community rigorously pursued the ideal of Torah in its attitude to money and possessions with the greater desire of achieving an ideal community.<sup>222</sup> This idea of the community of goods is captured in the narrative through the portrayal of Lydia. In becoming a believer a marker of her repentance is a spontaneous hospitality, with the implicit sharing of money and possessions. Such repentant hospitality echoes the attitude of the early Acts narrative where the Christian assembly provide for

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<sup>220</sup> M. Piennisch, “Mission als Theologische Kommunikation: Hermeneutische Erwangungen zur Verkündigung des Evangeliums,” *Stuttgarter Theologische Themen* 9 (2014): 76. Translated as: “However, man without revelation is caught in a hopeless situation because he does not have the tools to gain a reliable knowledge of God.”

<sup>221</sup> B. Capper, “Reciprocity and the Ethic of Acts,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 504 and B. Capper, “The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods,” in *Palestinian Setting* (vol. 4 of *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*; ed. R. Bauckham; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 325. See also S. Walton, “Primitive Communism in Acts? Does Acts present the Community of Goods (2:44-45; 4:32-35) as mistaken?” *EQ* 80 (2008): 99; and D. L. Balch, “Rich and Poor, Proud and Humble in Luke-Acts,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (eds. L. M. White and O. L. Yarborough; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 216.

<sup>222</sup> C. Murphy, *Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 103. See also D. Watson, “Paul’s collections in Light of Motivations and Mechanisms for Aid to the Poor in the First-Century World,” (PhD. diss., University of Durham, 2006), 56-122; Bock, *Acts*, 215; Capper, “Palestinian Cultural Context,” 331; Stott, *Acts*, 108; and Walton, “Primitive Communism,” 109.

those who have need (Acts 2:45; 4:32; 4:36-37). It also echoes the ideals hoped for in Graeco-Roman and Jewish society.<sup>223</sup> Yet, through *possessio* this spontaneity of Lydia's hospitality provides a means for Luke to demonstrate that the Graeco-Roman and Jewish ideals are fulfilled not through civic instructions, or the State, or by distinct sects but they are fulfilled by those who come to a christological repentance and who are moved by the Spirit to fulfil the Law.<sup>224</sup> This portrayal of fulfilment has an inherent subversion with the narrational implication that it is only the Christian assembly which can in reality demonstrate this spontaneity and provision of money. This *possessio* of the economic is furthered in two additional ways in this narrative - through the portrayal of the jailer and the slave owners. The actions of the jailer reinforce the portrayal of repentant and spontaneous hospitality amongst the believing community. Having believed, the jailer attends to the wounds of Paul and Silas before opening his home to them and preparing a meal. Such actions are contrasted with the portrayal of the owners of the slave-girl. For their own economic benefit they are willing to enslave a girl and when that economy is lost use false accusations to ensure Paul and Silas are wrongly treated. This becomes more significant when one considers the positioning of these episodes in the narrative, Lydia and the jailer acting like book-ends to the actions of the slave owners.

Whilst the Philippian narrative does not explicitly mention idolatry the identifiable markers provide evidence of idolatry. The πνεῦμα πύθωνα, despite its ability to

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<sup>223</sup> A. Mitchell, "The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37," *JBL* 111 (1992): 257.

<sup>224</sup> A. Kuecker, "The Spirit and the 'Other,' Satan and the 'Self': Economic Ethics as a Consequence of Identity Transformation in Luke-Acts," in *Engaging Economics* (eds. B. W. Longenecker and K. Libengood; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 103; F. F. Bruce, "The Church of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles," *BJRL* 67 (1985): 643; and Anderson, 'But God raised him from the Dead', 26-27.

predict the future, is depicted in its eviction as a false spirit. With the removal of the spirit, the slave girl's words are then no longer ambiguous but shown to be non-scriptural and therefore as a counterfeit of true worship. This spirit is therefore shown to be inadequate and untrustworthy when compared with the divine beliefs of the Christian assembly. The slave owners are depicted as using the slave girl for their own prosperity and therefore with a self-determined autonomy. Their hope is not christological but economic and is reflected in their ethical responses. To fulfil their hopes of prosperity they are prepared to keep the girl doubly enslaved, within the spirit's and their own power. In seeking redress for their grievance, losing the thing they truly desire, the owners' interest is not the girl nor justice but themselves and they resort to false accusations to gain vengeance upon Paul and Silas. Such a response is, and is contrasted with, the spontaneous repentant hospitality of Lydia and the jailer. Significantly, this provides evidence that whilst the vocabulary of idolatry may be absent, the concept may be present within the narrative. This shows that the concept of idolatry occurs not only within a Jewish context but within a context of those nations outside of the synagogue - this latter context of idolatry in the nations outside of the synagogue is more readily noted by scholars. Such a perspective demonstrates a consistency through Acts 13-16 and across different cultures, from an explicitly Jewish episode to an explicitly Roman episode.

Unlike previous engagements, there is a wholly transformational and positive impact in respect to Paul meeting with Lydia and the jailer. The substantial tension develops between Paul and the slave girl at the metaphysical level over the identity of the divine. Yet unlike previous episodes it is not the Christian assembly that is the cause of the tension but the slave girl. There is also a tension at the epistemological level

for whilst the girl appears to speak truth, her words are false and this is proved through Paul's words which lead to the eviction of the spirit. This eviction leads to numerous tensions at the ethical level. The first develops between the owners and Paul and Silas resulting in the owners' false accusations whilst hiding their own motives and which results in the beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas. Such a tension is amplified by the portrayal of the response of Paul and Silas to the accusations and imprisonment, not complaining, though the later narrative will provide a strong reason that they could, and praising God from jail. It is further developed by the contrast between the owners and those who come to repentance. In their repentance both Lydia and the jailer provide hospitality. The metaphysical change, repentance, is demonstrated ethically in their actions.

One significant area of a subversive-fulfilment reading that appears mostly absent within this pericope is Strange's four steps: enter, explore, expose, and evangelise. The worlds in which Paul finds himself, Jewish, Graeco-Roman, and the Roman State, are not worlds he needs to enter or explore for he simultaneously inhabits all three.<sup>225</sup> Whilst Paul's message to Lydia must have had a strong christological content - if it is to be consistent with the rest of Acts - the narrative does not record it and Paul's response to the jailer is a simple statement of belief. Most surprising is that the narrative records no aspect of evangelism between Paul and the slave-girl. In prior engagements with a theological distance Strange's steps have been mainly applicable. This episode is significant because despite the theological distance the steps are not readily identifiable nor applicable.

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<sup>225</sup> See J. C. Lentz, *Luke's Portrait of Paul* (SNTSMS 77; Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 23-61.

Building upon the subversive-fulfilment reading from Acts 13 onwards a subversive-fulfilment reading of Acts 16 continues to provide a fresh approach to reading the narrative. Methodologically, subversive-fulfilment proves itself to be an adaptable model which can be utilised to account for the integrated and simultaneous engagement between the Christian assembly and the Jewish culture, Graeco-Roman culture, and Roman State as they intersect and inter-relate within Acts 16. As has been shown in chapters four to six of this thesis, this approach can be consistently applied across the wider unbroken narrative of Acts 13-16. This reading contrasts with the approach of some previous scholarship since that scholarship often treats the surrounding cultures in isolation, for example the Christian assembly and the Roman State, as monolithic entities, or by treating texts in isolation of their context. For example in Acts 16, Kauppi applies his model to just three verses (16:16-18) and Rowe to nine verses (16:16-24). Furthermore, whilst previous scholarship provide helpful insights in their analysis, predominantly of the python and magistrates' engagements, many do not subsequently apply their methodologies to the engagements with Lydia or the jailer and nor do they develop the significance of the engagement to enable an understanding of how this affects a reading of the wider narrative.

Through a subversive-fulfilment reading, the identity of the Christian assembly in Acts 16 becomes a wholly significant issue. The importance of this identity is marked by other scholarship. For example Gruca-Macaulay notes that one of the functions of Lydia is in establishing the identity of the Christian assembly and that those 'outsiders' are perceived as the "enemy,"<sup>226</sup> but she does not develop this thinking by

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<sup>226</sup> Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 225, 226, and 242.

applying these implications to the immediate or wider narrative,<sup>227</sup> nor does she expand upon the significance of the 'insider/outsider' identification for a Lukan theology of religions. Using *possessio*, a subversive-fulfilment reading captures and interprets identity through an inward christological repentance and this is accentuated in the characterisation of Timothy, Lydia, and the jailer. Such a depiction of Christian identity subverts any emphasis on ethnicity, citizenship, or gender as being a means of inclusion into the assembly - incorporating Gruca-Macaulay's language - a subversive-fulfilment reading identifies the other characters as outsiders or the "enemy." Through this, the interpretation of previous scholarship of the slave-girl's message as ambiguous is clearly erroneous since her theological identity is not established in the narrative as Christian. Through *possessio* this christological repentance as the foundation of identity is also christologically captured and authenticated through the external responses of Timothy, Lydia, and the jailer, as well as Paul and Silas, by which they demonstrate their repentance ethically and in contrast to the ethical actions of the slave-owners and the magistrates, thus subverting them.

In establishing this christological identity and distinguishing how the assembly differs from the surrounding cultures this subversive-fulfilment reading continues to develop a Lukan theology of religions. With a clear insider/outsider dichotomy the Lukan audience are challenged as to who is an insider or outsider to the Christian assembly or in Gruca-Macaulay's language, who the "enemy" is. From a subversive-fulfilment perspective, the outsider is defined in opposition to the christological repentance and

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<sup>227</sup> She does refer to in understanding the profile of the first audiences of Luke-Acts but not the narrative. Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 98. See also 269-270, 272 and 279.



therefore in relation to the identifiable markers of idolatry such as the acceptance of non-scriptural words,<sup>228</sup> a self-determined autonomy, the mimicking of true worship, and not recognising or acknowledging the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is.<sup>229</sup> Such markers are seen in the ethical responses of the slave-girl owners and the magistrates.

Resulting from this, a further extrapolation is the engagement with the Roman State drawing out the elements of the Kingdoms of God and Satan, leadership, and the nature of authority, power, and justice. Examining the episode using *possessio* the Christian assembly is depicted fulfilling the nature of an ekklesia and fulfilling the blessing that should derive from the *pax Romana*. This fulfilment is seen in the actions and words of Paul and Silas who are portrayed as fulfilling Jesus' words and the role of the suffering servant (Acts 9:15). Though falsely accused they are silent in suffering. They endure hardship and worship God rightly. After the earthquake they prevent a suicide and point to a greater Lord as they proclaim the word which results in repentance, hospitality, and baptism. Such a result occurs because they have a greater Lord who has purposely sent them to Philippi as part of his divine plan to bring blessing to people. The final vignette demonstrates the vindication of Paul and Silas. Such a depiction challenges Walaskay's perspective since it subverts the *pax Romana*, the lordship of Caesar, the freedom, benevolence, justice, peace and salvation of the Roman State, through the Lukan depiction of the magistrates.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 74, 240.

<sup>229</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 220. Strange writes, "In considering this 'false faith' in the Son the conclusion to which we are drawn is that not to recognize the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is, is an act of idolatry and again provokes divine wrath." See Wright, *Mission of God*, 164-176.

<sup>230</sup> Rupke, *Religion*, 85; Taylor, *Divinity*, 47; Carter, *Empire*, 83; and Wright, *Paul*, 63.

Their inactions, not investigating the charges properly or who Paul and Silas are, and their actions, ordering a beating and imprisonment, pictures the Roman State, the bastion of order, law, and justice, as chaotic, disordered and oppressive, aligning it with the kingdom of Satan.

This subversion and fulfilment also relates to leadership. Through *possessio* it is the portrayal of Paul and Silas who fulfil the desired values of the empire but because they follow a different Lord and belong to a different kingdom, the kingdom of God, this subverts the way in which the magistrates act and the Roman concept of leadership. In this way, the narrative is able to account for the tension between the Christian assembly and the Roman State for it enables the Christian assembly to be perceived as politically innocent, since they are the embodiment of what the State desires of its citizens, and yet at the same time subversive, since Paul and Silas are like this because they follow a different Lord.

One final area a subversive-fulfilment reading draws out relates to the concepts of authority, power, and justice. As with elements within the Lukan narrative other scholarship alludes to a subversive-fulfilment approach but without developing it either as a model or for reading the narrative. For example, Edwards writes, “The ultimate purpose of Luke’s apologetic is not simply to defend the gospel from false conceptions, however, but to produce a meta-narrative that redefines all powers and authorities in relation to the gospel.”<sup>231</sup> Thus in Acts 16 the magistrates are representative of the power, justice and order of the Roman State. Yet these civic

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<sup>231</sup> Edwards, “Public Theology,” 250.

figures abuse their position and oppress Paul and Silas. This portrayal creates an ironic, subversive, tension since those who are to uphold justice lack justice. The magistrates are further subverted in the depiction of Paul and Silas who, in christologically capturing the ethical standards that the Roman State expects of its citizens, become the model Romans.<sup>232</sup> A subversive-fulfilment reading provides a clear narrative: only christologically redeemed and pneumatologically filled people act with high ethical standards. Such a depiction also subverts Jewish writings which presented “the Jewish community as an ideal polity that surpassed all Greek and Roman polities in their virtues.”<sup>233</sup>

Having examined the various engagements across Acts 13-16 through a subversive-fulfilment lens I turn to the final chapter that this thesis will address. The focus of previous scholarship in Acts 17 is often solely upon the Athenian episode but through a subversive-fulfilment lens this is just one of a variety of engagements found within this chapter. It is to Acts 17 I now turn.

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<sup>232</sup> Grant writes that the gods “often encouraged moral behavior and rewarded it with a blessed life for the soul after the death of the body.” Grant, *Gods*, 54.

<sup>233</sup> Edsall, “Persuasion and Force,” 486-487.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: ACTS 17:1-34

### 1. Reading the Narrative

Acts 17 is a singularly important chapter to this thesis since it draws upon engagements with the varying frameworks of the Jewish, Graeco-Roman, and Roman cultures. Most particularly the episode in Athens is critical since it is such a major focus of other scholarship and paramount to Strange's whole model of subversive-fulfilment. Thus, this chapter provides the opportunity for me to validate a reading that has been shown to be distinct from other scholarship and which has modified Strange's own approach.

Moving from an explicitly Roman context in Acts 16 the narrative places Paul within a Jewish context in the pluralistic Hellenic city of Thessalonica.<sup>234</sup> Paul observes his usual custom (κατὰ δὲ τὸ εἰωθός; cf. 13:14, 44; 14:1; 16:13, 16) when entering a new place and spends time in the synagogue (vv.1-2).<sup>235</sup> The brevity of the narrative reminds the audience of the paradigmatic speech in Acts 13:13-52 along with echoes of Jesus' words (v.3; cf. Luke 24:46-48).<sup>236</sup> The response also reflects the

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<sup>234</sup> Witherington notes that Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia but was made a free city in 42 B.C.E. This allowed it to have some autonomy from Rome even though it cultivated strong links with Rome. Witherington, *Acts*, 503. See also P. Adam-Veleni, "Thessalonike," in *Brill's Companion to Ancient Macedon: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Macedon, 650 BC-300 AD* (ed. R. J. Lane-Fox; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 552-554; Johnson, *Acts*, 305; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2536-2539; Bruce, *Acts*, 369; and Conzelmann, *Acts*, 134. Keener also notes that there were an assortment of Hellenic deities, the Egyptian cult of Sarapis as well as the cult of Dionysius. Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2542 and 2543.

<sup>235</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 502 and 503. See also Stott, *Acts*, 271; Bruce, *Acts*, 34; Pervo, *Acts*, 418; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2538. Keener notes that it is likely that Paul spent more time in Thessalonica but that Luke highlights the time spent in the synagogue.

<sup>236</sup> Witherington makes a wider point that "the reader is supposed to fill out this summary of Paul's message and method by remembering what he (and Peter) have been said to preach or teach earlier in Acts." Witherington, *Acts*, 505.

Pisidian Antioch episode: encouragement, particularly in light of the responses in Acts 14:18-19 and 16:19-24, with both Jews and those from the nations associated with the synagogue being persuaded (v.4; cf. 13:43 and 48);<sup>237</sup> and negativity based on jealousy (v.5; cf. 13:45. See also 5:17; 7:9). The incitement (v.5; cf. 13:50; 14:2) and ensuing disorder (θορυβέω) is reminiscent of the Philippian pericope (16:19-24).<sup>238</sup> Unable to find their culprits, the crowd drag other believers before the πολιάρχας (v.6). Whilst able to administer their own law such officials remind the audience of the officials in Philippi and place Roman governance again at the fore of this episode.<sup>239</sup> There are two accusations: First, that Paul and Silas are troublemakers who are τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες (v.6). Holladay interprets this as the gospel being able to subvert Roman ideals. He writes, “Luke’s intent may have been to show that the gospel could not only get attention in major urban centres but also challenge, even subvert, well-entrenched Roman values, social structures, and institutions.”<sup>240</sup> Johnson also views this as subverting the Roman State with clear political connotations. He writes, “any other translation would miss the point of the charge.”<sup>241</sup> Such subversion is recognised in a second accusation,

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<sup>237</sup> Stott argues that the God-fearers and Greeks may have been two groups. He argues this based on tautology - all God-fearers being Gentiles. Stott, *Acts*, 272. See also Conzelmann, *Acts*, 135.

<sup>238</sup> BDAG, 458 (a). Wills believes that “a fear of the stigma of stasis” lies behind this passage. Wills, “Jews in Acts,” 637. Gruca-Macaulay, *Lydia*, 79-80.

<sup>239</sup> Whilst these officials reflect the freedoms of Thessalonica, they would have been responsible to the Roman proconsul who governed all of Macedonia. Keener writes that the officials “held considerable authority, overseeing administration and police matters; it was they whom Rome would hold responsible for keeping peace and stability in the city.” Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2551. See also E. A. Judge, “The Decrees of Caesar at Thessalonica,” *RTR* 30 (1971): 2; and Johnson, *Acts*, 306.

<sup>240</sup> Holladay, *Acts*, 334. This is an interesting statement from Holladay since - like Keener - he holds that the Christian assembly is not portrayed by Luke as subversive but as politically innocent and socially beneficial. Holladay, *Acts*, 50-52, 55-58.

<sup>241</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 307, 310. Witherington’s assessment of this is that it “is probably on target.” Witherington, *Acts*, 507 n. 164. See also Stott, *Acts*, 273; Bruce, *Acts*, 344; Williams, *Acts*, 141;

that Paul and Silas defy Caesar's decrees (δογμάτα) by proclaiming another king (βασιλεύς) (v.7).<sup>242</sup> The decrees that are defied are not explicitly stated. Following Judge, Witherington suggests it was predictions about the coming of a new king or kingdom, or the death of the emperor.<sup>243</sup> Alternatively Hardin suggests that the accusation is against the group for having a political orientation and thus breaking imperial laws.<sup>244</sup> Either may account for why Jason is accused of demonstrating hospitality to Paul and Silas (v.7). The resulting turmoil (τάρασσω) most likely occurs because there were links between Thessalonica and the imperial cult and also because the blessings of empire were derived from the faithfulness of cities to the emperor.<sup>245</sup> Thus, a negative judgment made against those believers who hosted Paul and Silas (v.9) indicates that the Roman authorities believe there was substance to the accusations.<sup>246</sup> Four ironies develop within this setting: the portrayal of the Jews and officials acting improperly in contradistinction to the believers;<sup>247</sup> the unrest caused by those making the accusations;<sup>248</sup> the accusations

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Neyrey, "Symbolic Universe," 271; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2556; and Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 3-7; 75-76.

<sup>242</sup> Winter, *Divine Honours*, 252; and Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, 270-276.

<sup>243</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 508; Donfried, "The Cults of Thessalonica," 343-344; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2556. See Judge, "Caesar," 1-7; Winter, "Imperial Cultic Activities," 251; Winter, *Divine Honours*, 253-255;

<sup>244</sup> J. K. Hardin, "Decrees and Drachmas at Thessalonica: An Illegal Assembly in Jason's House (Acts 17.1-10a)," *NTS* 52 (2006): 48.

<sup>245</sup> BDAG, 990 (b). BDAG indicates that the emphasis is of an inward turmoil but "which can manifest themselves in outward tumult." See also Acts 19:23; Witherington, *Acts*, 503-504; and Gill and Winter, "Acts and Roman Religion," 98-99.

<sup>246</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 502.

<sup>247</sup> A. J. Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in its Literary Setting* (LNTS 359; ed. M. Goodacre; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 146. Thompson takes this point further writing, "Those in turmoil and disorder, however, are explicitly said to be in the realm of Caesar's reign." Thompson, *One Lord, One People*, 149.

<sup>248</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2546; Holladay, *Acts*, 334; Thompson, *One Lord, One People*, 147.

being evidently untrue within the narrative and yet simultaneously understood as true by the Lukan audience;<sup>249</sup> and the hope of the opponents, to stop Paul and Silas, leads to the word spreading (v.10).<sup>250</sup> Being sent by the brothers (v.10) should be read positively - sent for their safety not because of the brothers being put on bail (v.9) - and the movement to Berea should be read as naturally flowing from the Thessalonian episode. Keener writes that “Paul’s experiences in Thessalonica and Berea are meant to be read together...the two paragraphs in Acts are parallel in how they begin and in the groups summarised as responding (17:4, 12). These paragraphs go on to juxtapose contrasting responses to Paul’s ministry, a contrast Luke makes explicit in 17:11.”<sup>251</sup> As with previous episodes Paul speaks in the synagogue and the character of the Bereans is considered εὐγενέστεροι τῶν ἐν Θεσσαλονίκη.<sup>252</sup> This element of the pericope should not be overlooked since it engages with previous scholarship demonstrating, as Tannehill notes, that “the author has not completely stereotyped Diaspora Jews. Despite repeated emphasis on Jewish opposition, the narrator here inserts a contrasting picture, preserving a

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<sup>249</sup> Keener also makes this point. He writes, “At the same time, the misunderstanding or distortion by the missionaries’ accusers may serve Luke’s literary purposes on a higher level. Luke may intend some irony here that would be lost on the accusers in the story world...though Paul’s message is no threat to the Roman order, he does announce a king whom God has enthroned (Acts 2:33-35); who will reign forever (Luke 1:33; Acts 1:6); and whose birth is set in deliberate contrast to the majesty of the emperor Augustus in Luke 2:1-14, a passage that also mentions Caesar’s ‘decree’ and ‘all the world.’ (2:1).” Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2555.

<sup>250</sup> Pervo, *Acts*, 421. Pesch indicates that whilst the Christian assembly is accused of being dangerous to the State and abandoning the Mosaic traditions, the Lukan depiction is of the Old Testament promises being fulfilled through the Christian assembly. R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 1-12)* (Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; vol. 1; Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1986), 34.

<sup>251</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2532.

<sup>252</sup> BDAG defines εὐγενής as pertaining “to having the type of attitude ordinarily associated with well-bred persons, *noble-minded, open-minded*.” BDAG, 404 (a). See also Witherington, *Acts*, 509 and Johnson, *Acts*, 307-308.

sense of local variety of response.”<sup>253</sup> This is further emphasised in the positive response from many of the Jews and those nations associated with the synagogue who believe (πίστευω; v.12) and the absence of any negative response. The narrative uses a μέν/δέ construction to contrast the response of those from Bereoa and Thessalonica (vv.12-13). Whilst the Bereoans believe, the Thessalonians again appear σαλεύοντες καὶ παράσσοντες τοὺς ὄχλους (v.13; cf. 14:19; 17:5). As with Thessalonica the response of the believers is to send Paul away, again with the implied sense for his safety.<sup>254</sup> He is sent on his own and much further away (vv.14-15).<sup>255</sup>

The narrative then gives a detailed account of Paul’s time in Athens (17:16-34) which Schneider calls “einen Höhepunkt” of Acts.<sup>256</sup> With Schneider, many scholars this is a fundamental and significant speech in Acts. Stonehouse writes, “The passage is so replete with exceptional and arresting features that the commentators and historians of early Christianity have been stimulated to treat it at considerable length. Moreover, a remarkable number of learned monographs have been devoted to its interpretation.”<sup>257</sup> Seventy years after Stonehouse’s words this continues to be true

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<sup>253</sup> Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:207. For example, see Acts 13:45, 49-50; 14:2, 5; 14:19. See also Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2544-2466.

<sup>254</sup> Stott, *Acts*, 274.

<sup>255</sup> Metzger notes that the Codex Bezae, with occasional support from other Western witnesses, recasts verses 14 and 15 to include others who conduct people as far as Athens. Though significant it does not affect the flow of the narrative in respect to the purpose of this thesis and the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 403.

<sup>256</sup> Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2:231.

<sup>257</sup> N. B. Stonehouse, *The Areopagus Address* (London: Tyndale Press, 1949), 5. See also Conzelmann, *Acts*, 138; P. Gray, “Implied Audiences in the Areopagus Narrative,” *TynB* 55 (2004): 205; and Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 613-617.



of scholarship's fascination with this passage. Witherington writes, "This passage is in many regards one of the most important in all of Acts,"<sup>258</sup> and Bruce notes, "Probably no ten verses [vv.22-31] in the Acts of the Apostles have formed the text for such an abundance of commentary as has gathered round Paul's Areopagitica."<sup>259</sup>

A sample of scholarship shows though that such fascination has resulted in various and differing conclusions. Conzelmann and Haenchen assert the scene is a Lukan invention to carry forward his own theological aims,<sup>260</sup> whilst Barrett and Johnson contend it is an idealised reconstruction of what Paul might have said.<sup>261</sup> Keener, Rost, Fleming, and Losie interpret the speech as a model of contextualisation.<sup>262</sup> Losie writes it is "a model of how the gospel may be proclaimed in a cross-cultural situation where the traditions of Judaism (and in our day, Christianity) are foreign."<sup>263</sup> Bock suggests that this is the "most complete example of how Paul addresses a

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<sup>258</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 511.

<sup>259</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 353.

<sup>260</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 138-139; and Haenchen, *Acts*, 529.

<sup>261</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 2:825; and Johnson, *Acts*, 318. Johnson writes, "He [Luke] made what historically could only have been the meagerest and most casual of contacts into a moment frozen in time, the exemplary meeting between Jerusalem and Athens."

<sup>262</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2565. He writes, "Contemporary readings often use Paul's ministry in Athens as a model for contextualisation - that is, cultural sensitivity without syncretism. Luke himself may have also intended his portrayal of Paul's example as a model. Certainly, historically Paul's background facilitated his communicating a Jewish message cross-culturally among Gentiles." S. Rost, "Paul's Areopagus Speech in Acts 17: A Paradigm for Applying Apologetics and Missions to Non-Christian Religious Movements," in *Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach* (eds. I. Hexham et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2004), 113-136; and D. E. Fleming, *Contextualisation in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2005), 75-79.

<sup>263</sup> L. A. Losie, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus: A Model of Cross-Cultural Evangelism," in *Mission in Acts: Ancient narratives in Contemporary Context* (ASMS 34; eds. R. L. Gallagher and R. Hertig; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 233. See also Sordi, *Roman Empire*, 158.

purely Gentile audience,<sup>264</sup> and Schnabel that it is a civic speech intended to demonstrate the common ground regarding belief in a divine being.<sup>265</sup> Winter, Peterson, and Losie interpret the speech as an apologetic and evangelistic model,<sup>266</sup> whilst Smith claims it is “barely Christian but appeals instead to a rather universal God.”<sup>267</sup> Pelikan calls this passage “The most profound point both of the affinity and of the difference between Christian theology...and its Gentile context,”<sup>268</sup> Walton suggests that Paul undermines the worldview of his narrational listeners “offering them a replacement world view drawn from Jewish monotheism re-understood in light of Jesus’ resurrection.”<sup>269</sup> Tannehill argues that it is a model of engaging and transforming the presuppositions and concerns of the hearer without which if “The fundamental structures of the old life remain standing...the gospel loses its culture-transforming power.”<sup>270</sup> Many of these conclusions allude to or explicitly focus upon the elements of subversion or fulfilment but as with previous episodes in this thesis the previous scholarship does not develop these themes to interpret the engagement or to interpret the wider narrative.

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<sup>264</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 558.

<sup>265</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 748.

<sup>266</sup> B. W. Winter, “Introducing the Athenians to God: Paul’s Failed Apologetic in Acts 17?” in *A Graced Horizon: Essays in Gospel, Culture and Church in Honour of the Reverend Dr. Choong Chee Pang* (eds. R. Chia and M. Chian; Singapore: Genesis, 2005), 83; Peterson, *Acts*, 504; and Losie, “Paul’s Speech,” 232.

<sup>267</sup> Smith, *God in Translation*, 309.

<sup>268</sup> Pelikan, *Acts*, 190.

<sup>269</sup> Walton, “‘Mission’,” 553.

<sup>270</sup> Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:215.

Narratively this pericope functions as a waiting point - Paul is waiting for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him (vv.15-16) - and in developing the nature of engagements since it is the longest speech recorded in Acts to those nations outside of the synagogue.<sup>271</sup> Paul's time in Athens results in significant distress (παροξύνω) as he sees κατείδωλον οὔσαν τὴν πόλιν. The term for this distress over the idols echoes the use of the term in the LXX where God is angry over Israel's idolatry (Deut. 9:18; Ps. 105:28).<sup>272</sup> These idols would have represented both Hellenic and Roman divinities for Athens, like Thessalonica, was a free city.<sup>273</sup> Following his usual custom Paul speaks within the synagogue (v.17). Unlike earlier episodes the narrative does not comment on either the success of the message or the opposition to it.<sup>274</sup> Rather Paul departs from his usual custom, going to the ἀγορά (v.17) and engaging solely with the nations echoing his speech in 14:8-18.<sup>275</sup> Presumably it is in the agora that he meets the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Epicurean philosophy was critical of popular religion with its localising of gods in many temples and its concern to supply their needs.<sup>276</sup> Epicurean belief centred on the nature of matter being "eternal,

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<sup>271</sup> Stott notes the significance of this cultural engagement asking, "What should be the reaction of a Christian who visits or lives in a city which is dominated by a non-Christian ideology or religion?" Stott, *Acts*, 276. See also Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:213.

<sup>272</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2574.

<sup>273</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 512 and 513; and Bruce, *Acts*, 348; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2572-2574; and Schnabel, *Acts*, 722. Stott notes that "The whole Greek pantheon was there, all the gods of Olympus." Stott, *Acts*, 277. Keener notes that the route to the Acropolis included walking up stairs "that the emperor Claudius contributed to less than a decade earlier." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2576.

<sup>274</sup> Gray writes, "There is no clash with the Jews in Athens to precipitate the turn to the Gentiles as there is in other cities." Gray, "Implied Audiences," 208.

<sup>275</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 312. Witherington notes that "Luke has presented us here with the fullest example of Paul's missionary preaching to a certain kind of Gentile audience (namely, an educated and rather philosophical pagan one without contacts with the synagogue), which should be compared to the shorter but similar speech in Acts 14:15-17." Witherington, *Acts*, 511.

<sup>276</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 2:829; and Peterson, *Acts*, 490.

uncreated and without a divinely imputed purpose.”<sup>277</sup> Therefore Epicureans believed that the pleasure of the mind was the highest pleasure enabling them to be “free from both passions and superstitious fears.”<sup>278</sup> Such pleasure was not hedonistic but to be perceived as freedom from suffering.<sup>279</sup> In rejecting the local Hellenic gods Epicureans also rejected the afterlife since they believed that the soul was material and disintegrated at the point of death.<sup>280</sup> The philosophy of the Stoics was pantheistic, emphasising the immanence of the divine “in which God permeates all of nature.”<sup>281</sup> All matter, whether divine or not, had a bodily existence and no spiritual world was believed in.<sup>282</sup> Stoic philosophy stated that the human race was one, proceeding from a single point of origin.<sup>283</sup> Humanity’s duty, or the goal of life, was to live in a virtuous manner making the right decisions to attain happiness.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> N. C. Croy, “Epicureanism,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000), 325.

<sup>278</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 514. See also Bruce, *Acts*, 351; Stott, *Acts*, 280; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2584-2593.

<sup>279</sup> Croy, “Epicureanism,” 326. See also L. H. Martin, “Graeco-Roman Philosophy and Religion,” in *The Early Christian World* (vol. 1; ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 2000), 63; and W. A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (London: SPCK, 1987), 56-60.

<sup>280</sup> Croy, “Epicureanism,” 326.

<sup>281</sup> J. C. Thom, “Stoicism,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000), 1140. Balch, following Malherbe, argues that an engagement with the Stoic philosopher Posidonius enables new exegetical insights to the text. Whilst this is outside of the remit of this thesis, the larger point, that the speech to the Areopagus has a strong Stoic flavour, is, I contend, correct. D. L. Balch, “The Areopagus Speech: An Appeal to the Stoic Historian Posidonius against Later Stoics and the Epicureans,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds. D. L. Balch et al.; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 52-53.

<sup>282</sup> Thom, “Stoicism,” 1140.

<sup>283</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 2:829.

<sup>284</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 514. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 313; Bruce, *Acts*, 350; Stott, *Acts*, 281; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2593-2595; Thom, “Stoicism,” 1141; Meeks, *First Christians*, 46-52; and W. S. Vorster, “Stoics and Early Christians on Blessedness,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds. D. L. Balch et al.; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 40.

A dispute occurs because Paul proclaims τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν (v.18). The dispute results in some calling Paul ὁ σπερμολόγος, one “whose communication lacks sophistication and seems to pick up scraps of information here and there.”<sup>285</sup> Others accuse him of introducing strange or foreign divinities (δαίμονιον).<sup>286</sup> Both accusations have parallels with the events in Philippi (16:20-21) and Thessalonica (17:7) and both are derogatory. The accusation of introducing divinities creates an echo for the Lukan audience to the trial and fate of Socrates.<sup>287</sup> Because of these accusations Paul is taken before the Areopagus. There is some debate on this term for it can refer to a geographical location or council. It appears likely that the council is in view here.<sup>288</sup> First, verse 22 notes that Paul was ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου. Taken with verse 33, ὁ Παῦλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν, these are both terms more readily understandable if not geographically locative. Second, verse 34 indicates a member of the council, Dionysius, became part of the Christian assembly.<sup>289</sup> Whilst

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<sup>285</sup> BDAG, 937 (b). BDAG also notes that the English synonyms, ‘gossip’, ‘babbling’, and ‘chatterer’ miss that sense of one who picks up the scraps of information in an unsystematic way. This accusation might come because these philosophical schools assume that Paul is part of another philosophical school. See S. Mason, “PHILOSOPHAI: Graeco-Roman, Judean and Christian,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (eds. J. S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996), 48-51; E. M. Blaiklock, *The Areopagus Address* (Bristol: ECL, 1964), 6; and Rowe, *World*, 28-29.

<sup>286</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 515. See also Johnson, *Acts*, 314; Stott, *Acts*, 282; Bruce, *Acts*, 351; Rowe, *World*, 28; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2598-2599; and B. W. Winter, “On Introducing Gods to Athens: An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20,” *TynB* 47 (1996): 80.

<sup>287</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 313; Stott, *Acts*, 280; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 139; Rowe, *World*, 31-32; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2598. Sandnes argues that the market place and the discussion with philosophers also provides echoes with Socrates. K. O. Sandnes, “Paul and Socrates: The Aim of Paul’s Areopagus Speech,” *JSNT* 50 (1993): 21. See also R. A. Bauman, *Political Trials in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1990), 106-115. The use of the Socratic trial is not a uniquely Lukan technique for Isocrates (436-338 C.E.) also used Socrates as a basis for his own trials. J. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 260-261.

<sup>288</sup> See Stott, *Acts*, 282; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2600. Conzelmann notes that “the discussion about whether the narrow place on the Hill of Ares was adequate for a speech is pointless.” Conzelmann, *Acts*, 140. See also Stonehouse, *Areopagus Address*, 13.

<sup>289</sup> See Witherington, *Acts*, 515.

some commentators portray this as a gentle and scholarly action, as the philosophers are interested in Paul's ideas (vv.19-20),<sup>290</sup> the earlier judgement of ὁ σπερμολόγος (v.18) and the verbs ἐπιλαβόμενοι and ἤγαγον (v.19) might indicate a seizing, or even arrest, of Paul and suggest Paul is being put on trial.<sup>291</sup> Thus the questions posed in verse 20 might be considered accusatory or at least interrogatory. Stott disagrees with this stating, "There seem to have been no legal charge, no prosecutor, no presiding judge, no verdict and no sentence."<sup>292</sup> Yet, Stott's statement ignores four important elements: the Areopagus's civil role in judging whether new gods can be worshipped or introduced in Athens,<sup>293</sup> the wider narrational emphasis in Luke-Acts in which Jesus and prominent members of the Christian assembly are brought before the authorities unfairly (Luke 22:47-23:25; Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-41; 6:8-15; 12:1-4; 16:19-24, 35-39; 17:5-8; cf. Luke 10:8-12; 22:12-19),<sup>294</sup> Jesus' prophetic words about Paul (Acts 9:15-16), and the similarities that scholars recognise between this pericope and the trial of Socrates who was also accused of introducing new divinities.

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<sup>290</sup> Johnson holds that "The tone of the proceedings makes us think rather of a discussion than a formal hearing or trial." Johnson, *Acts*, 314. See also Bruce, *Acts*, 352; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 139; Blaiklock, *Areopagus Address*, 6; and Stott, *Acts*, 283.

<sup>291</sup> T. D. Barnes, "An Apostle on Trial," *JTS* 20 (1969): 419; Witherington, *Acts*, 515; and Rowe, *World*, 31. See also Winter, *Divine Honours*, 127 and 143-144.

<sup>292</sup> Stott, *Acts*, 283. See also Borgman, *Luke-Acts*, 327; and Losie, "Paul's Speech," 225.

<sup>293</sup> Winter argues that "this is not a prosecution; instead, it is an initial meeting of Council members with Paul, after it had been reported that he was possibly the herald of new divinities." Winter, "On Introducing Gods," 79 and 83. Keener writes, "The Socratic allusions are Luke's and the court's agenda was more likely evaluating Paul than deliberately providing an opportunity for an example of missionary preaching." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2568.

<sup>294</sup> Witherington writes, "Paul's anger establishes a basically judicial situation when it comes to his speech." Witherington, *Acts*, 517.

Whilst Witherington and Schnabel perceive the structure of Paul's speech as the *exordium*, including the *captatio benevolentiae*, *propositio*, *probatio*, and *peroratio*,<sup>295</sup> and Bock suggests an alternate structure, the *captatio benevolentiae*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *reprehensio*,<sup>296</sup> the central point is that the structure of the speech is one recognised and utilised in the first-century. Paul's speech demonstrates a remarkable similarity to the one in Lystra (14:15-18).<sup>297</sup> Paul begins by connecting with his listeners in two ways. First, he calls them religious (v.22). A number of scholars, including Conzelmann, Stott, Johnson, Keener, and Losie, consider *δαιμονία* to be used positively.<sup>298</sup> Bruce takes a middle position arguing that "Paul is stating a fact, not paying a compliment," and Witherington that it should be taken negatively.<sup>299</sup> For myself, this word appears to perform a double-duty.<sup>300</sup> To the Athenians it appears positive, enabling them to listen further to Paul, but for the Lukan audience - who remember the Lystran episode and who have heard of Paul's distress at the idolatry of Athens (v.16) along with the later charge of ignorance (*ἀγνοοῦντες*) (v. 23; cf. 17:30; 25:19) - this phrase would appear negative.<sup>301</sup> This

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<sup>295</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 719; and Witherington, *Acts*, 518.

<sup>296</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 558.

<sup>297</sup> Whilst some debate whether Paul ever gave this speech in Athens, this does not affect the nature of this thesis. See Bruce, *Acts*, 353-354; and Stonehouse, *Areopagus Address*, 15-18.

<sup>298</sup> See Conzelmann, *Acts*, 140; Stott, *Acts*, 284; Johnson, *Acts*, 314; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2626; and Losie, "Paul's Speech," 230.

<sup>299</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 355; and Witherington, *Acts*, 520.

<sup>300</sup> See also Keener and Bock who perceive the word positively for the hearers in the narrative world but negatively, or at least ambiguously, to Luke's ideal audience. Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2626-2629; and Bock, "Athenians," 119.

<sup>301</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 520; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2629; and Stonehouse, *Areopagus Address*, 20. This is against Weiss who maintains that Paul does not denounce them because of their superstitions but "is based upon the efforts being put forth by his hearers to control the element of mystery in nature." Weiss, "Pagani," 43.

dual use reflects Luke's intention to apply the narrative at different levels, something recognised by Gray who writes, "Rather than aiming the speech at a monolithic Gentile audience, the author engages multiple implied readers while recapitulating many of the leading Lukan motifs in the mission to the Jews."<sup>302</sup> Paul also refers to the altar inscription (v.23) which was common in influential cities within the empire.<sup>303</sup> The significance of the inscription within the narrative is that it becomes a point of contact for Paul with the Athenians; ὁ οὖν ἄγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.<sup>304</sup>

Moving away from scholarship that supports Paul's use of general revelation to engage with the nations,<sup>305</sup> I contend that Paul is explicitly using a scriptural framework with a distinct christological hermeneutic,<sup>306</sup> which is contextualised appropriately.<sup>307</sup> Such a framework is not made explicit to the narrational audience but would be recognisable to the Lukan audience.<sup>308</sup> Drawing from Isaiah 42:5 - and

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<sup>302</sup> Gray, "Implied Audiences," 206.

<sup>303</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 141. See also Witherington, *Acts*, 521-523; Stott, *Acts*, 284; Johnson, *Acts*, 315; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2572, 2575, 2630.

<sup>304</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 356; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 140; and Stott, *Acts*, 284.

<sup>305</sup> Losie writes of this account: "to see if it indeed provides an example of the use of general revelation in the proclamation of the gospel in a cross-cultural situation." Losie, "Paul's Speech," 223, 233. See also Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:214; Bock, *Acts*, 559; and Neyrey, "Acts 17," 120, 121.

<sup>306</sup> Walton, "The Acts - of God?" 297. See also Kern, "Paul's Conversion," 79; Peterson, *Acts*, 490; McKnight, "Gospelling the Gospel," 38; and K. D. Litwak, "Israel's Prophets Meet Athens' Philosophers: Scriptural Echoes in Acts 17,22-31," *Bib* 85 (2004): 200-203.

<sup>307</sup> Shauf writes, "There are commonalities in the portrayal of the divine between Acts and Greco-Roman historiography, but these commonalities are only substantial on points that are in fact shared with Jewish historiography." Shauf, *Divine in Acts*, 262-263.

<sup>308</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 356. Bruce writes, "And this God who is Creator of all and universal Lord is introduced in language strongly reminiscent of the OT scriptures. Equally reminiscent of those scriptures is the language with which he goes on to describe Him." See also Borgman, *Luke-Acts*, 327; and Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2665.



echoing Acts 7:48 - Paul's initial point is that of God as Creator (v.24).<sup>309</sup> This Creator is transcendent and distinct from humanity, οὐτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος, needing no temple or human help (v.24; cf. 7:48-50).<sup>310</sup> Rather it is God who gives life to people (v.25), who made the nations from one man (ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων), and who determines people's lives both spatially and temporally (v.26).<sup>311</sup> Yet despite this divine transcendence Paul develops an argument of immanence. The telos of such divine action is ζητεῖν τὸν θεὸν εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὐροιεν (v.27). The reason that people might do this is because they are made in the *imago Dei*; γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ (vv.28-29).<sup>312</sup> The dual approach of the Lukan narrative in verses 24-29 demonstrates a positivity between Paul and the Areopagites and provides multiple points of contact.<sup>313</sup>

Yet for the Lukan audience the speech contains four underlying criticisms: first, a criticism of the Athenian worldview of being autochthonous. The Athenians believed that they belonged to the earliest population in Greece and this contributes to their charge against Paul of introducing new divinities (v.19). By proclaiming the covenant God of Israel as creator of all humanity Paul undermines this charge.<sup>314</sup> Next, by proclaiming God as transcendent Paul critiques both the worldview that Athens is the

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<sup>309</sup> Stott, *Acts*, 285; Soards, *Speeches*, 97; and Witherington, *Acts*, 525.

<sup>310</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 357.

<sup>311</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 525.

<sup>312</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 360; and Sordi, *Roman Empire*, 158.

<sup>313</sup> Stonehouse, *Areopagus Address*, 8.

<sup>314</sup> Keener writes, "Respectable people esteemed and appealed to antiquity, the ultimate form of precedent." Keener, *Introduction*, 454 and 459.

land most dear to the gods as well as a critique of the culture of temples and statues of the gods (vv.24-25, 29).<sup>315</sup> Further, by proclaiming the immanence of God Paul critiques the view that the gods are difficult to know and that they are distant (v.27).<sup>316</sup> Finally, Paul critiques the worldviews of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.<sup>317</sup> This criticism develops in verse 27 with the implication that people cannot find God because they are in some form of darkness.<sup>318</sup>

Paul then approaches his conclusion stating that such ignorance will no longer be overlooked (v.30) because judgement will occur through God's appointed one, Jesus (v.31).<sup>319</sup> Such a statement is significant for it ensures that any potential ambiguity in language is interpreted correctly by both the characters in the narrative and the Lukan audience. For example, Paul's use of Hellenic poets (v.28) might leave one thinking of Zeus, but as in Philippi, Paul's christological emphasis re-contextualises the meaning of the sentence (cf. 16:17-18).<sup>320</sup> The christological framework reminds the Lukan audience that Paul's engagement is not a form of philosophical oratory (v.21) but has an exhortatory and redemptive emphasis. Consistent with the narrative of Acts the Athenians are commanded to repent from their ignorance (v.30; cf. 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 14:15; 19:14). As with previous episodes there are

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<sup>315</sup> Winter, "On Introducing Gods," 73; Bruce, *Acts*, 357-358; and Witherington, *Acts*, 526.

<sup>316</sup> E. Schnabel, "Knowing the Divine and Divine Knowledge in Greco-Roman Religion," *TynB* 68 (2017): 288 and 296. Schnabel writes, "When interacting with Greeks and Romans who worshipped one or several of the traditional gods, the missionaries of the early churches would have wanted to emphasise that the one true God who created the world is all-powerful but not distant, omniscient but not domineering, actively involved in the affairs of the world but not arbitrary, personal but not vengeful." Schnabel, "Divine and Divine Knowledge," 312.

<sup>317</sup> Stott, *Acts*, 285; Blaiklock, *Areopagus Address*, 6-11; and Bruce, *Acts*, 357.

<sup>318</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 529.

<sup>319</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 523.

<sup>320</sup> Stott, *Acts*, 286 and 288; and Bruce, *Acts*, 360.

a mixture of responses. Whilst some mock (cf. Acts 2:13),<sup>321</sup> there are positive responses (vv.32-34). The first group - those who want to hear more - are distinguished from the mockers by the μὲν/δέ construction. The second group are those who believe (πίστευω) which, within the strongly 'other nations' context, reminds the reader of the continued fulfilment of the words of Jesus (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 1:8; 9:15).<sup>322</sup>

## 2. Engaging with Other Readings: C. Keener and C. K. Rowe

### 2.1. C. Keener

Keener's work on this chapter is particularly detailed with a significant focus on the latter section in Athens.<sup>323</sup> Reading through Acts 17:1-15 Keener draws attention to the literary function of the narrative which he asserts should be read as one entity since narrational parallels are created between Thessalonica and Berea along with an explicit juxtaposition found in verse 11.<sup>324</sup> One of these parallels is between the Christian assembly and their opponents. Keener writes, "Luke may employ the Christians' opponents as a literary foil, emphasizing their denseness to highlight the rational superiority of the Christian message."<sup>325</sup> He also recognises patterns which have developed since Acts 13 - that of Paul visiting the synagogue and opposition to

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<sup>321</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 317.

<sup>322</sup> Neyrey argues that those who mock Paul are the Epicureans and those who want to hear more are the Stoics but the narrative is silent about specific identities. Neyrey, "Acts 17," 128.

<sup>323</sup> Keener spends thirty-one pages on Acts 17:1-15 and one hundred and sixteen pages on Acts 17:16-34.

<sup>324</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2532.

<sup>325</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2554-2555.

the message.<sup>326</sup> Furthermore Keener notes that the Lukan portrayal of Paul's persuasive speaking as well as the conversion of the wealthy might have been to "especially encourage higher status members of Luke's ideal audience."<sup>327</sup>

Keener also addresses how Luke's apologetic functions in the early narrative of Acts 17. Keener asserts that this pericope provides a portrayal of the Christian assembly as posing no threat to Rome. He notes that the narrative repeatedly depicts all opponents as the cause of unrest and not Paul.<sup>328</sup> He writes, "It is not Paul who stirs sedition here, any more than Jesus really stirred unrest (Luke 23:5). Rather, it is consistently Paul's opponents...who stir up unrest."<sup>329</sup> This is reinforced, says Keener, by the response of the authorities who handle the matter in such a way that "does not suggest that they envision any real threat of social subversion."<sup>330</sup> Keener further claims that the accusations of Paul's opponents introduce an irony into the narrative - to be missed by the narratorial opponents but perceived by the Lukan audience.<sup>331</sup> For whilst Paul, and his message, offers no political threat to Roman order, "he [Luke] does announce a king whom God has enthroned (Acts 2:33-35); who will reign forever (Luke 1:33; Acts 1:6); and whose birth is a deliberate contrast

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<sup>326</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2538, 2539, and 2541.

<sup>327</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2543. Keener later notes that it was the 'lowlifes' who reject Paul's message and the nobles who accept it. Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2546. See 2456 and 2457 for a discussion on this.

<sup>328</sup> Nations: Acts 16:19-22; Jewish: 14:2, 5, 19; 17:13; 21:27-36. Keener writes, "Even in Thessalonica itself, the informed reader sees that it is those who accuse Paul of stirring unrest (17:6) who themselves prove guilty of this behaviour (17:5)." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2545 and 2546.

<sup>329</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2545.

<sup>330</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2551. Holding to a similar position is Pinter who argues that there is no "direct antithesis between Jesus and Caesar in Luke's Gospel." D. Pinter, "The Gospel of Luke and the Roman Empire," in *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (eds. S. McKnight and J. B. Modica; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2013), 110.

<sup>331</sup> Keener calls this the "storyworld" and the "ideal audience." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2555.

to the majesty of the emperor Augustus in Luke 2:1-14, a passage that also mentions Caesar's 'decree' and 'all the world' (2:1).<sup>332</sup> This, Keener says, is reinforced by the Imperial worship and propaganda found in Thessalonica which "mythologically emphasized the emperor's, hence Rome's, cosmic authority."<sup>333</sup>

It is Keener's forays into the political realm in 17:1-15 which raise questions of Keener's thesis - that Acts posits a socially transformative perspective whilst not being politically subversive. Whilst the Christian assembly is not creating a like for like replacement of the Jewish synagogue or the Roman State it is clearly creating a series of ironic contrasts within this multiple engagement. These include the contrast between the Lordship of Christ and of Caesar and between the behaviour of those who inhabit the kingdom of God and those who inhabit the kingdom of Caesar - whether Jews or those of the nations. I would contend that these contrasts do not substantiate a social transformation perspective but subvert the Roman State within the action of the narrative and to the Lukan audience. Such subversion is rightly recognised by other scholars such as Johnson, Witherington, Rieger, Hardin, and Rowe. Rowe writes, "Jesus is completely inseparable from his identity as the universal Lord. Caesar's rivalry thus takes the form of wrongful (self-) exaltation to the sphere whose existence is exactly concomitant with the identity of God in Jesus Christ. Politics, that is, inevitably involves the question of idolatry. From the perspective of the Graeco-Roman world, therefore, things are indeed upside down:

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<sup>332</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2555.

<sup>333</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2555.

Jesus' lordship is primary - ontologically and hence, politically, not Caesar's." <sup>334</sup>

As with other scholarship it is to the latter part of Acts 17 that Keener directs most of his attention. For Keener the purpose of this speech in its literary setting is to provide a model for the Lukan audience to consider how they might engage within the "intellectual milieu" and to do this whilst "communicating the gospel in culturally intelligible terms and emphasizing common ground" but without removing or reducing the gospel.<sup>335</sup> Thus for Keener the narrative, drawing upon ideas from the speech at Lystra in Acts 14, portrays Paul's contextualisation, "that is, cultural sensitivity without syncretism,"<sup>336</sup> as a demonstration of this model for engagement with the result that the speech provides "a natural apologetic approach, probably even a model for Luke's audience, whom he encourages in the church's mission."<sup>337</sup> The contextualisation provides points of contact with both Jewish and Hellenic worldviews. Keener asserts that the outline of Paul's speech mimics that of the Stoics,<sup>338</sup> and argues that Luke has an interest in presenting Paul as a sage.<sup>339</sup> Yet

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<sup>334</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 307 and 310; Witherington, *Acts*, 507 n. 164; Riegar, *Christ and Empire*, 23; Hardin, "Decrees," 48; and Rowe, *World*, 112-113.

<sup>335</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2670. Earlier Keener writes, "He [Paul] is respectful toward the Athenians' practice (17:22-23) and employs culturally intelligible and (at this point) even respectable language, but as in contemporary missiology, ideal contextualization entails communicating in terms another culture understands while one endeavors not to distort one's message in the process." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2640.

<sup>336</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2565. See also Dahle who argues that the Lukan purpose of this episode is to provide an apologetic model. L. Dahle, "Acts 17:16-34: An Apologetic Model Then and Now?" *TynB* 53 (2002): 314-315.

<sup>337</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2569.

<sup>338</sup> Keener writes, "This basic outline of argument was well enough known that it may serve as a model for the outline of Paul's Areopagus speech, naturally again commending the speech more to the Stoics than to the Epicureans." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2595.

<sup>339</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2569 and 2570. Keener writes, "With Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, as well as the distinguished Areopagus, as his foil, Paul advances the intellectual respectability of the

Keener maintains that this speech should be understood within a Jewish framework since it is full of biblical references and allusions. This reveals Paul's clear understanding of the Hellenic world,<sup>340</sup> and his ability to contextualise the biblical message within a Greek worldview in a way that would be recognisable to Luke's audience.<sup>341</sup> It is through this contextualised Jewish framework that Paul critiques pagan thought and practice as a whole whilst maintaining the historic Jewish faith.<sup>342</sup> The critique might be summarised thus: "Paul contends that God is both transcendent beyond creation and immanent in humanity, and hence that idols reveal nothing relevant to him and offer no benefit to humans. God's ultimate revelation is not in human artistic representation but in the gospel (Acts 17:29-31)."<sup>343</sup>

For Keener the critique centres upon the nature of idolatry. Such idolatry would have been "traumatic" to Paul both because of his worldview, that Yahweh is the true Creator, and because of Paul's suffering in Lystra after he had rejected such idolatry.<sup>344</sup> Paul begins the speech with a positive statement, concerning the

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Christian message for members of Luke's audience for whom this would prove a matter of serious interest." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2570.

<sup>340</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2616-2617.

<sup>341</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2614. He also notes the wider issue of contextualisation writing, "Paul preaches in different ways to synagogue audiences (13:16-47), rural pagans (14:15-17), and cultured urban philosophers (17:22-31)...the Areopagus speech thus offers not only to the Areopagus (in the narrative world) but also to Luke's own audience a summary of Paul's message for Athens."

<sup>342</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2619. Keener argues that Luke was not with Paul in Athens and therefore this should not be considered a verbatim account. Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2624.

<sup>343</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2564.

<sup>344</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2572-2574. Keener notes that the statues and places of worship would have been prevalent whichever approach Paul made to the city. See also 2575-2578 for other examples of idols that Keener posits Paul may have seen during his visit.

religiosity of the Athenians, which is intended to secure the favour and consequent interest of the hearers in the narrative world.<sup>345</sup> Yet this statement, taken with the altar's inscription, reveals a critique for, according to Keener, the ignorance of the Athenians is not being portrayed in the narrative as complimentary and should be understood by the audience as that "typically attributed to idolaters."<sup>346</sup> Therefore, according to Keener, within Paul's Jewish framework Yahweh becomes a point of contact for he is the complete unknown God with no image and a secret name. Yahweh can then be used as a point of contact which neither compromises belief in Yahweh nor creates a syncretic system.<sup>347</sup> Developing the speech, Keener notes how Luke portrays Paul as refuting the charge of introducing new divinities which is recognised as negative within an Athenian context.<sup>348</sup> By Luke's placement of Paul's speech within a Jewish framework the narrative refutes the argument of newness since the message becomes "the natural culmination of Israel's indisputably ancient faith."<sup>349</sup> Paul is also portrayed as reversing the charges against the accusers, for since Yahweh is the Creator, then the Athenians are the ones introducing new gods.<sup>350</sup> From this, Keener remarks that this speech supports the Lukan apologia since it reflects the difficulty of the early Church as it "sought to communicate across significant cultural divides,"<sup>351</sup> enables the Lukan audience to perceive the falsehood

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<sup>345</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2628.

<sup>346</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2636. Keener writes, "In Paul's Jewish tradition, which affirmed covenant knowledge of God on the basis of the one God's self-revelation, ignorance of God was very negative."

<sup>347</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2632 and 2633.

<sup>348</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2613.

<sup>349</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2605.

<sup>350</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2605.

<sup>351</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2599.



of the situation, and reminds the audience that “Paul is a faithful Jew (18:18; 21:24, 26), conversant in Greek wisdom (17:22-31), and a Roman citizen (16:37).”<sup>352</sup> Thus the Lukan Paul finds common ground in understanding the nature of the deity and the means of revelation and yet such beliefs are used to undermine the Hellenic view since Paul’s language is framed within an “anti-idol apologetic.”<sup>353</sup> Therefore Paul’s words should be interpreted as directly challenging the Athenian culture.<sup>354</sup> Yet, Keener challenges previous scholarship that interprets Paul’s speech as a failure, presenting this speech instead as a Lukan apologetic model.<sup>355</sup>

Keener develops this model further by asserting that the Lukan narrative strongly emphasises the Socratic image and portrays Paul in this way. Keener deems that this occurs because in the Graeco-Roman world comparing a person to Socrates “attributed incalculable wisdom to that figure.”<sup>356</sup> Also, by portraying Paul like Socrates Keener asserts that Luke is providing a comparison between them, both voices of protest seeking to instruct the Athenians about true religion, both having to account for their beliefs and yet whose belief, “ethical monotheistic thought,” was often respected by educated pagans in the first century.<sup>357</sup> Such a comparison, Keener notes, was a pattern followed by other Christians into the second century

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<sup>352</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2605.

<sup>353</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2636, 2637 and 2638.

<sup>354</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2640.

<sup>355</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2677.

<sup>356</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2606.

<sup>357</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2607 and 2625. Keener writes, “As Socrates reportedly used his trial to instruct Athenians about true religion, so Paul can do here. Luke presents Paul’s teaching in a manner that makes it as similar as possible (possibly with cues from genuine Pauline apologetic) to the ethical monotheistic thought often respected by educated pagans.”

and although such a view became less popular such comparisons have not completely died out.<sup>358</sup> Yet Keener also emphasises a substantial distinction in the Pauline speech from other Hellenic comparisons for whilst the speech is intellectually respectable its objective “is not mere intellectual sophistry but moral conversion.”<sup>359</sup> For Keener this engagement is a clear example of contextualisation. Paul, with his distinctly Jewish worldview, engages in a way in which Hellenic listeners will understand his message, both that of direct speech and allusions. Keener writes,

He is respectful toward the Athenians’ practice (17:22-23) and employs culturally intelligible and (at this point) even respectable language, but as in contemporary missiology, ideal contextualization entails communicating in terms another culture understands while one endeavors not to distort one’s message in the process.<sup>360</sup>

Yet despite Keener’s considerable work on this substantial episode he omits some of his central perspectives in reading this narrative. The most significant omission is Keener’s lack of comment on his social transformation perspective; that is, the emphasis on promise-fulfilment in the assembly’s message means that the gospel has a socially transformative effect on the surrounding cultures but which is not politically subversive. I would argue that Keener’s social transformation perspective does not readily work in this episode - something that Keener himself appears to recognise in his discussion of the anti-idol polemic. Such a polemic may argue for a social transformation but it does so in a way that undermines the entire religious worldview of the Areopagites, a worldview that is intimately and undeniably interconnected to the social, cultural, political, and economic components of first century life. Such a perspective is recognised by other scholars. Bruce, for example, writes,

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<sup>358</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2611.

<sup>359</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2626.

<sup>360</sup> Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2640 and 2666.

“The apostles proclaimed the kingdom of God, a very different kingdom from any secular empire, and no doubt they gave Jesus the Greek title *basileus* (‘king’), by which the Roman Emperor was described by his Greek-speaking subjects.”<sup>361</sup> Strait writes,

I argue that Paul’s polemic against idols in Athens is not a politically innocuous speech act. In the Areopagus speech, Luke confronts the iconic spectacle of gods and kings with the Gospel of the Lord of all - a worldview that is incompatible with the religions of Rome, including emperor worship...Luke’s call to repentance includes changing one’s mind about the machinery of imperial Rome, including its system of divine honors [sic] underlying imperial power and conquest.<sup>362</sup>

Thus at the metaphysical level Paul’s message subverts the nature of the Athenian divinities; their reality and their earthly homes - the temples, by contrasting them with Yahweh as Creator. At the epistemological level Paul’s message subverts the beliefs of the Stoics and Epicureans along with the Hellenic myths and poets. Finally, at the ethical level there is subversion in respect to the Hellenic worship since temples, altars and statues are deemed not necessary for worship. Along with these is the subversion of the idea that Athenian worship is ancient, for Paul presents Yahweh as the Creator and as the true God and thus the newness of which Paul is accused is reversed to imply that it is the Athenian worship that is a ‘new’ distortion and is to be seen within a framework of idolatry.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 325. Drews argues that the term ‘*basileus*’ was not used to denote the king in early Grecian thought. R. Drews, *Basileus: The Evidence for Kingship in Geometric Greece* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983), 129-131.

<sup>362</sup> Strait, *Angry Tyrant*, 11. See also Stott who writes, “The ambiguity of Christian teaching in this area remains. On the one hand, as Christian people, we are called to be conscientious and law-abiding citizens, not revolutionaries. On the other hand, the kingship of Jesus has unavoidable political implications since, as his loyal subjects, we must refuse to give to any ruler or ideology the supreme homage and total obedience which are due to him alone.” Stott, *Acts*, 273.

<sup>363</sup> Keener writes, “The speech to Athenians reflects the same tension one finds elsewhere in Luke’s apologetic approach to salvation history: the message is both old and new...Elsewhere it is old because grounded in the history and prophecies of Israel, yet new because the climatic event has occurred; here it is old because it refers to the benevolent Creator, who is not far from humanity (*Acts*

## 2.2. C. K. Rowe

For Rowe the scene at the Areopagus provides the most significant engagement between Paul and the Graeco-Roman world. The length and attention to detail that Rowe gives this pericope demonstrates that this episode reveals his thesis most clearly.<sup>364</sup> Rowe's focus is 17:22-31 but he places it in its narrative context noting key narrative markers in 17:16-21 which "shape the reader's perception of Paul's speech."<sup>365</sup> These include the distortion of Paul's message by the Athenians because they listen with a polytheistic mindset,<sup>366</sup> the derogatory comment about Paul (ὁ σπερμολόγος), the distrust the audience should sense towards such judgements,<sup>367</sup> and that the speech occurs within a framework of Paul being seized to appear before the authorities.<sup>368</sup> For Rowe the seizing of Paul, his presence in the midst of the Areopagus, and the comparisons between Paul and Socrates place Paul's speech "within an overtly political context."<sup>369</sup> For Rowe this pericope is not a "university-like debate" since the city's idolatry distorts how those listening to Paul's preaching respond, resulting in a life-threatening situation.<sup>370</sup>

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17:24-28), yet it is new (cf. 17:19, 21) because this new stage in salvation history calls Gentiles also to account." Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2670.

<sup>364</sup> Rowe spends the following time on each pericope: Acts 14: Five and half pages; Acts 16: Three pages; Acts 17: Fourteen pages; Acts 19: Eight and a half pages.

<sup>365</sup> Rowe, *World*, 28.

<sup>366</sup> Rowe, *World*, 28.

<sup>367</sup> Rowe, *World*, 28-29.

<sup>368</sup> Rowe, *World*, 29.

<sup>369</sup> Rowe, *World*, 31.

<sup>370</sup> Rowe, *World*, 33.

Rejecting traditional scholarly work suggesting that Paul's speech seeks to establish "common ground,"<sup>371</sup> Rowe develops a more nuanced argument that Luke changes the framework of the engagement placing "pagan traditions within a different hermeneutical context and thereby transforms their meaning."<sup>372</sup> This interpretative move enables Paul to take pagan poetry and to embed it within a Yahwistic salvation-historical framework from the creation (17:24, 26) to the consummation (17:30-31).<sup>373</sup> Rowe writes that by doing this Luke drafts "pagan testimony into the service of the gospel allow[ing] pagan philosophy to speak truth not on its terms but on Luke's."<sup>374</sup> The result of this hermeneutical move is that the pagan framework must be interpreted within that of a christological understanding.<sup>375</sup> Therefore, Rowe argues that Paul's speech undermines the Athenian religiosity, the points of commonality being used as points of attack rather than points of contact. This includes the use of δεισιδαιμονεστέπους being heard by the Athenians as complimentary and the Lukan audience as a well-placed criticism,<sup>376</sup> that God is the Creator God so that it is the Athenians who are introducing new gods not Paul,<sup>377</sup> and that there is a "Creator/creature distinction."<sup>378</sup> Such a distinction means that

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<sup>371</sup> Rowe, *World*, 27.

<sup>372</sup> Rowe, *World*, 27.

<sup>373</sup> Rowe, *World*, 40.

<sup>374</sup> Rowe, *World*, 40.

<sup>375</sup> Rowe, *World*, 40-41.

<sup>376</sup> Rowe, *World*, 32 and 34. There is similarity to Klauck here. Using Acts 17 Klauck notes that in the narrated communication Paul appears to be flattering the Athenians but to his readers he is highlighting the problematic aspect of "Gentile religiosity." Klauck, *Magic*, 81.

<sup>377</sup> Rowe, *World*, 32-34. Rowe writes, "Bluntly put, it can scarcely get older than this: the God about whom Paul speaks created the world in which Athens exists."

<sup>378</sup> Rowe, *World*, 34.

God is not dependent on humans and there is no need for temples or statues.<sup>379</sup> Thus Rowe notes that the result of this critique is the charge of idolatry. The fundamental error of idolatry, says Rowe, is a rejection of the idea that humanity is prone to ignorance and superstition. This rejection leads to divine images being created which in the Athenian context results in gods conceived in precious metals.<sup>380</sup> Therefore it is not that Paul proclaims a new religion, for his message encompasses salvation-history from the creation of the world, rather the Athenians have distorted God and made him in their image.<sup>381</sup> Thus, for Rowe the use of pagan philosophy and poetry at one level becomes a point of contact,<sup>382</sup> and yet is subverted to become “subservient to the Christian gospel and serves its ends.”<sup>383</sup> For Rowe, the idolatry leads the Lukan narrative to conclude the speech with the necessity for repentance and it is this message that would lead to the “destruction” of the alternative philosophical schools found in the narrative.<sup>384</sup> For Rowe this creates a collision with the Graeco-Roman culture.<sup>385</sup> This collision has three substantial conclusions: that Greek philosophy is not a “legitimate conversation partner;”<sup>386</sup> that

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<sup>379</sup> Rowe, *World*, 34. Rowe notes that neither of these points were particularly novel and could be found within Hellenic philosophical thought. This position though was not reflective of the larger populace and Rowe gives examples where common superstition collapses the Creator/creature distinction. Rowe, *World*, 34-36.

<sup>380</sup> Rowe, *World*, 38.

<sup>381</sup> Rowe, *World*, 37.

<sup>382</sup> Rowe, *World*, 37.

<sup>383</sup> Rowe, *World*, 40. Diehl also suggests that Imperial language is subverted yet in such a way as to enable the Christian assembly to be free from treason. Diehl, “Anti-Imperial Rhetoric,” 69.

<sup>384</sup> Rowe, *World*, 39 and 41.

<sup>385</sup> Rowe, *World*, 39.

<sup>386</sup> Rowe stands against Johnson’s proposal that Greek philosophy is a legitimate conversation partner. Rowe, *World*, 39. See Johnson, *Acts*, 319.

the gospel is a “critical transformation of pagan philosophy wrought by its incorporation into a different comprehensive story;”<sup>387</sup> and that this speech has political connotations since it is “a call to embrace a new way of life and abandon pagan worship.”<sup>388</sup>

Rowe’s thesis rightly challenges previous scholarly readings of this engagement. He provides a helpful analysis of the episode correctly noting how the Athenian religiosity is presented as positive to the Athenians but negative to the Lukan audience. He is also correct to note the Creator/creature distinction, the nature of the Athenian idolatry, and to highlight the hermeneutical move with the resultant subversive re-positioning of pagan language being used in the service of the gospel. These elements result in a politically charged collision since the Athenians are being called to repent from their pagan worship. As such Rowe’s analysis looks substantially like that of a subversive-fulfilment reading of this episode. Yet there are some subtle differences.

First, Rowe omits any sense of fulfilment. As established in chapter three of this thesis one of Luke’s fundamental themes is that of the fulfilment of Scripture and the covenant promises. The engagement in Acts 17 must be read within that wider framework and thus Paul’s engagement is one of the fulfilment of God’s promises for the inclusion of the nations. Thus when Rowe writes that the Athenians are called to embrace a new way of life and abandon pagan worship, he perceives only collision whereas the Lukan narrative perceives this as restoration or reorientation, for this

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<sup>387</sup> Rowe, *World*, 40.

<sup>388</sup> Rowe, *World*, 41.

new way of life is founded in an alternative metaphysics (repentance and the forgiveness of sins bringing a new life), an alternative epistemology (the scriptures and salvation history), and an alternative ethic (worshipping the true God not idols). Rowe's emphasis on the collision leads him to conclude his work on Acts 17: "That the call to conversion inherent in the Christian critique was - at the very least - socially and politically dangerous."<sup>389</sup>

This leads to a second criticism of Rowe's argument which is that his perspective that the Christian critique is considered by the Athenians as socially and politically dangerous does not occur in this episode. I agree with Rowe that Paul is forcefully seized and the initial situation is dangerous for Paul but the force of the narrative is that it is because Paul appears to be proclaiming a new idea and not because the Christian critique is recognised as socially or politically dangerous. Neither is Paul's speech recognised by the Athenians as socially or politically dangerous at the end of the speech. At worst some sneer at Paul whilst most responses are favourable - others want to hear him again and some believe. Most notably Paul is free to leave of his own accord (v. 33). It should also be noted at this juncture that the officials of the Areopagus are portrayed as the most properly functioning group, particularly when compared with Jewish and Roman officials in the earlier narratives of Acts. Yet the Acts 17 narrative gives no indication that this group finds Paul's message socially or politically dangerous. Similarly in Berea, Paul's message is not found to be socially or politically dangerous with the result that some Jews and some from the nations believe the message. In short, there is no collision in Berea and the

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<sup>389</sup> Rowe, *World*, 41.



collision in Athens occurs because Paul's message is new, not because it is considered socially or politically dangerous.

Both Keener and Rowe provide helpful and nuanced accounts of Acts 17, most clearly on the episode in Athens. Significantly both recognise the distinct hermeneutical framework through which Paul works to engage with the Areopagus. Both Keener and Rowe recognise Paul's ability to contextualise the biblical message, that Paul uses points of contact, and that the fundamental presenting issue is that of idolatry. They also present similar views on Paul's speech, reversing the accusation of newness from Paul to the Athenians. The fundamental difference is that Keener emphasises this speech as an apologetic model whilst Rowe focuses upon the collision between Christian and Graeco-Roman worldviews because the Christian message is socially and politically dangerous. Keener's emphasis suppresses the subversive nature of the gospel message, despite him alluding to it, whilst Rowe's emphasis suppresses the fulfilment aspect of the gospel message within the Lukan narrative. Both of these perspectives result in an unresolved tension within the narrative. My assertion is that the hermeneutical lens of subversive-fulfilment is able to address this unresolved tension in a way that provides a fresh reading of the narrative. It is to this we now turn.

### **3. A Subversive-Fulfilment Reading**

To provide a subversive-fulfilment reading of the Acts 17 narrative I will follow the structure outlined in chapter three. With *possessio* at the heart of this subversive-fulfilment reading the points of contact and continuities between the Christian Assembly and the surrounding cultures are identified and an explanation given for

their christological capturing, fulfillment, and interpretation. This capturing and fulfillment simultaneously establishes discontinuities since by using *possessio* the beliefs and practices of the surrounding cultures are subverted at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels. These discontinuities provide potential evidence of idolatry, or an idolatrous trajectory, and these elements combined enable a coherent account of the tensions that occur between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures to be provided. Strange's four steps can then be analysed as they interact with the narrative with the possibility of adaptations or modifications being suggested to his model. The final part is to consider how a subversive-fulfilment hermeneutic might contribute a fresh and original approach to reading this portion of Acts and the wider narrative. As with Acts 14, to ensure clarity for the reader I have treated the Thessalonican and Berean engagements separately to that of Athens, but combine the findings relating to a fresh reading of the whole of Acts 17.

### 3.1. The Engagements in Thessalonica and Berea

Acts 17 begins within a Jewish context and prompts reminders of the paradigmatic episode in Pisidian Antioch and the previous engagements with Judaism. As with other episodes the lack of explicit content regarding "the scriptures" (17:2) enables the Lukan audience to fill the cultural gap with their knowledge of previous speeches. Using Pisidian Antioch as the standard speech Paul's content would have included points of contact and continuities through the familial and covenantal language and the rehearsing of Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh to demonstrate the fulfillment of Yahweh's promises. Through this Paul uses these points of contact to capture Israel's salvation history and its scriptures christologically in a way which

points to Christ as Messiah, the hope of Israel and the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises. The christological capturing of the scriptures simultaneously creates a discontinuity since it subverts the Jewish perceptions of the Messiah and the way in which the people are expecting Yahweh to act. As with previous episodes through *possessio* this capturing occurs at the metaphysical and epistemological levels and this accounts for the tension that develops and that is evidenced at the ethical level.

Distinctive from Acts 13, but reflecting the charges in Acts 16, the accusations against the believers reflect a double subversion. In the narrative, and with Acts 13 in mind, the accusations are clearly false - the world has not been turned upside down, nor by the message in the synagogue are they acting against Caesar's decrees. And yet, for the Lukan audience these things are true. The world being turned upside down is in reality being turned rightside up and the christological fulfilment is presented as the climatic and final message for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Within the wider Lukan narrative this is presented in various forms: the oppressed and the prisoners being set free (Luke 4:16-21), the strong man having his possessions taken (Luke 11:20-22), and the word of grace continuing to have its effect (Acts 2:40-41, 47; 6:7; 12:24; 13:49). It is also portrayed at the ethical level - the christological fulfilment is transmitted both through the message of the Christian assembly and also in the life of the assembly, for the narrative portrays Paul and Silas as peaceable and Jason as hospitable. This is presented in contradistinction to the accusers - those who are jealous and incite violence. If taken as a repeat of previous engagements between the Christian assembly and diaspora Judaism then the negative ethical response stands in contrast to those who believe and has suggestions of idolatry towards those who reject Paul's message.

When the action moves on to Bereoa, I would argue that this section acts as a literary foil and a continuation of the narrative subverting the negative response of those in Thessalonica who reject the Christian assembly. First, there is a strong contrast between the character of the Bereoans and Thessalonians. Whilst some of the Thessalonians are depicted in the narrative as jealous and creating trouble, the Bereoans are considered εὐγενέστερος (v.11). Second, there is the contrast in response. Whilst the Bereoans are eager to receive Paul's message and examine the scriptures, leading many of them to believe it, some of the Thessalonian Jews follow Paul to Bereoa and cause further trouble.<sup>390</sup> The subversion of the Thessalonians in this latter piece of narrative appears primarily aimed at Luke's audience. The contrast between the Bereoans and the Thessalonians depicts for the Lukan audience the relationship between the epistemological and metaphysical acceptance of a message which is then identified in the ethical response. In this case, the positive portrayal of the Bereoans subverts the negative response of the Thessalonian Jews. As with the Thessalonian episode, this negative ethical response - the result of the Christian gospel at the metaphysical and epistemological levels - stands in stark contrast to those who believe and has suggestions of idolatry towards those who reject Paul's message and act in this way.

Within Acts 17:1-15 Strange's four steps are absent since Paul's understanding of the Jewish world removes any need for them. Paul inhabits this world, even if that framework is now interpreted christologically, and his previous experiences with diaspora Judaism provide a deeper understanding for him. Thus Paul has no need to

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<sup>390</sup> Thompson, *Church*, 27-28.

enter or explore the world of the synagogue. If we continue to use Acts 13:13-52 as paradigmatic for Paul's engagement with the Jewish culture then his emphasis is the fulfilment of Scripture and Yahweh's covenant promises. Therefore, as in Acts 13 there is no exposing of idols by Paul, rather any exposure of idolatry is undertaken by the narrative in the ethical response of diaspora Judaism to Paul's message. Finally, whilst evangelism may occur, what we see is that Paul proclaims the christological fulfilment of the scriptures; this modifies Strange's description and understanding of evangelism in which Christ is put forward as the fulfilment of the idols.

### 3.2. The Engagement in Athens

As seen in section one of this chapter there is widely varying scholarly opinion relating to this speech and its content, audience, and purpose. As with the speech to the Lystrans in Acts 14 these scholarly conclusions are often varied and contradictory. Whilst some scholars attempt to demonstrate the continuity, beginning with the altar inscription, the narrative starts with a discontinuity and an emphasis on idolatry (v.16).<sup>391</sup> This discontinuity frames the whole episode including Paul's interaction with the philosophers and the Areopagus and thus sets a narrational tension - what will the result of this engagement be particularly in light of previous engagements?

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<sup>391</sup> Strange rightly notes this. Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 288. Schnabel notes both "points of connection (agreement, contextualization) and points of contradiction (disagreement, decontextualization)." Schnabel, *Acts*, 730.

Yet within this frame of discontinuity, Paul is depicted as communicating to the Areopagites by appealing to easily recognised Hellenic beliefs and the known religious and cultural structures. At the narrational level Paul uses recognisable points of contact and continuities in his speech. The initial point of contact is the altar and its inscription. Paul then introduces the metaphysical nature of the divine, the temple, worship and sacrifice. After this Paul refers to Hellenic poetry, and the sculptures found in the temples. Therefore by using *possessio* a subversive-fulfilment reading shows Paul taking the content of the first-century Athenian worldview, beliefs, and practices and capturing it by re-interpreting it through a christological lens. By capturing these elements Paul simultaneously subverts the Athenians' understanding - the unknown God can be known; he is the Creator not the created, and he places humanity in the world and is not placed by them. For Paul this God that can be known and the restoration of humanity's purpose, to find God, can occur through a christological repentance. This proclamation provides a fulfilment of the Athenian religious desires evidenced in the narrative.

A further element which is recognised but left undeveloped is the engagement with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophy. Much scholarship contents itself to describe these philosophical belief systems but does not demonstrate how the engagement applies to their hermeneutical models nor how it develops the narrative.<sup>392</sup> The

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<sup>392</sup> Schnabel does trace the Epicurean and Stoic belief through the whole of Paul's speech. Schnabel, *Acts*, 728-740. Barrett notes that "their views are alluded to, and indeed used, in the Areopagus speech" but does not draw out the implications. Tannehill writes, "It is not so clear that he [Paul] is critical of the philosophers who have asked for an explanation." Johnson adopts a position similar to a subversive-fulfilment perspective. He writes, "If he [Luke] does not creatively reshape Greek philosophy, he does something more important: he recognizes it as a legitimate conversation partner in the approach to God... Luke does not construct or canonize a 'natural theology'; he simply shows Paul picking up the inchoate longings of this 'exceptionally religious' people and directing them to their proper object." Yet as with Barrett, he does not develop the significance of his observations. As significantly Strange only briefly refers to Stoic thought in his treatment of Acts 17 and not at all to the

Lukan portrayal of Paul is that he contextualises his speech not only to the Areopagites but also to the Epicureans and Stoics. He establishes points of contact with the Epicureans through his criticism of popular religion with its localising of gods in many temples and its concern to supply their needs. He establishes points of contact with the Stoics by asserting a single point of origin for humanity, their desire to seek for the divine and their duty to live according to the divine should they find it. Through *possessio* Paul addresses three distinct belief systems simultaneously and captures and christologically reframes them. By doing this Paul introduces a discontinuity which is both subtle and nuanced, engaging with his narrational audience using a scriptural framework with its christological emphasis and yet not appearing to the narrational audience as being openly critical of these philosophical positions.

With the Epicureans Paul's speech subverts their philosophy at the metaphysical level. Unlike the Graeco-Roman gods, which Epicureans reject, and against a random atomistic existence, which Epicureans support, Paul reveals a God intimately involved with space, time and humanity's purpose (v.26; προστάσσω). He also subverts their view of death - the soul is material and so disintegrates at death - with his emphasis on the human, and therefore material, nature of the resurrection (v.31). Paul's speech also subverts Epicurean philosophy at the epistemological level. Rather than being self-referential, the pleasure of the mind and random atomistic life, the resurrection is the definitive proof for judgement and justice beyond death. Finally Paul subverts the Epicureans at the ethical level. The self-referential

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Epicureans. Tannehill, *Acts*, 2:216; Johnson, *Acts*, 319; Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 291, 292, and 293. Barrett, *Acts*, 2:829. Witherington also notes this writing: "In short, he [Luke] does not believe that a Jewish or Christian knowledge can simply be added to what pagans already know about god, with salvific results. Conversion to a new worldview, not merely additional knowledge is required." Witherington, *Acts*, 531.

pursuit of pleasure within an atomistic universe stands against the framework that Paul introduces. The correct ethical response is repentance.

For the engagement with Stoic philosophy, at the epistemological level the Stoics' search for the divine through their own dialogue (v.21), is fulfilled through Paul's revelation of the Creator and Lord that he is proclaiming and who validates this revelation through the resurrection (v.24; v.31). Their duty to this divine revelation is not further discussion (v.21) but repentance (v.30) understood not just at the ethical level, as a change of lifestyle, but at the metaphysical level, as a turning from the unknown divine to worship the "Lord of heaven and earth" (v.24). Such a perspective does not fundamentally modify Strange's depiction of the Areopagus speech though it presents an argument that Strange's own reading of Acts 17:16-34 could have been more nuanced showing that the subversive-fulfilment model can illuminate various levels of engagement that occur simultaneously.

Along with the *possessio* of the beliefs and religious structures of Athenian culture there is the potential of a *possessio* in terms of the structure of the speech - similar to that found in the Pisidian Antioch episode. The continuity is found in the recognisable first-century style of the speech, something which both the listeners in the narrative and the Lukan audience would be attuned to. Yet in capturing this structure a discontinuity is created, for the structure of the speech must have a christological content if it is to fulfil its ultimate purpose, that is a christological proclamation. If this is correct, then the purpose of the structure is fulfilled through Paul's content, his christological trajectory and telos with a proclamation of repentance. Beyond this, the implied subversion is that other speeches in Acts which



are not christologically focused do not fulfil their purpose either in content or structure. This is significant for the majority of other speeches in Acts are performed by those who oppose the Christian assembly or its message.

Since the Athenian episode is Strange's touchstone for his subversive-fulfilment reading of the religious Other I will assess some wider elements of Strange's perspective as well as his four steps.<sup>393</sup> Although Strange argues that a subversive-fulfilment reading provides a "more nuanced and faithful reading" of Acts 17:16-34, in analysing this episode it is significant that Strange omits the concept of *possessio* from his analysis. This is unexpected since it performs such a pivotal role in Strange's subversive-fulfilment model as the framework which enables the Christian gospel to redemptively transform structures, customs and values of a culture, filling them with new, Christian, content, and in a new and Christ-centred direction.<sup>394</sup> Perhaps as surprising is that Strange outlines the concept of *possessio* in his work immediately prior to addressing Acts 17:16-34 and yet still omits it.<sup>395</sup>

I would also suggest that Strange's assertion that this episode is "an anti-idol polemic"<sup>396</sup> ignores that Acts 17:16-34 should be understood within the wider framework of the fulfilment of Scripture and divine covenantal promises. As has been shown previously Genesis 12 provides a promise of fulfilment for the salvation of the

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<sup>393</sup> Strange, "Ministry in a Multi-Faith Society," n.p. He notes that Romans 1:18-32 vies for "equal attention" in respect to a theology of religions. Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 155, 215 and 287.

<sup>394</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 283-284.

<sup>395</sup> See Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 283-285.

<sup>396</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 287.

nations (Gen. 12:3), in Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:18-21; 24:44-48) and throughout Acts (1:8; 9:15-16). Within the closer narrative the rejection of the gospel message by some of the Jews in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:46-48) leads to the fulfilment of Scripture for the nations; in Acts 15, James, citing Amos, demonstrates that the promises of Scripture have pointed to the nations becoming the people of God; and in Acts 16 the Spirit of Jesus sovereignly directs Paul and Silas to the nations as part of the fulfilment of Jesus' words (Acts 9:15-16). It is this fulfilment of Scripture and the covenantal promises that provides the wider framework for which the continuity and discontinuity between the Christian message and the Athenians and the nature of idolatry should be interpreted.<sup>397</sup>

A final area of Strange's work that I would consider requires modification is Strange's application of the four Es. Strange contends that these are clearly demonstrable from the text. Strange asserts that Paul enters the Athenian world looking at the different objects of worship,<sup>398</sup> exploring the continuities (the Athenians are very religious) and the discontinuities (the Athenians are idolaters). Paul exposes these idols and evangelises by proclaiming to the Athenians the God that they do not know.<sup>399</sup> Yet, by considering Paul's citation of the poetry and its application within the speech it would suggest that Paul does not need to enter the world of the Athenians. He has a sound enough understanding of it both to quote recognised Hellenic poetry and to

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<sup>397</sup> This is the same premise as has been demonstrated in in chapter four of this thesis (Acts 13:13-52).

<sup>398</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 119.

<sup>399</sup> Strange, *Plugged In*, 120.

apply it to his hearers in the speech.<sup>400</sup> I would also suggest he does not explore the world of the Athenians, for the narrative portrays Paul's interpretation of the Athenian religious world as one of idolatry (v.16). Paul does expose this idolatry and does proclaim the need for repentance though the narrative does not portray a strong christological emphasis in Paul's speech, and certainly not as Strange would contend, of Christ as the fulfilment of the idols.

### 3.3. A Fresh Approach

By using subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens a number of fresh insights are created. First, subversive-fulfilment provides a coherent and integrated approach to the *whole* of Acts 17 which is able to cogently address each of the engagements using the same model whether there are theological and cultural similarities or differences to the Christian assembly. Whilst a subversive-fulfilment reading intersects with the work of many other scholars, particularly with respect to the Athenian episode, subversive-fulfilment provides a more nuanced and thorough account of the engagements that are occurring and can more adequately address the resulting tensions since it holds both the fulfilment and subversion simultaneously rather than emphasising one concept to the detriment of the other. For example, a subversive-fulfilment reading intersects with Keener's socially transformational apologia and Rowe's collision of cultures with the threatened

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<sup>400</sup> Malherbe writing of Paul's understanding of the Graeco-Roman world and particularly the Hellenic world states, "The Hellenization of Palestine was more thorough than has been thought, even to the extent that disciples of the rabbis were educated in Greek philosophy and rhetoric. It is of biographical interest to know where Paul received his education, but it is not of decisive importance in order to determine what his educational level was in the period of his greatest missionary activity, some twenty years after his conversion. By then he had spent two decades in a Greek environment - ample time for him to have assimilated the Greek culture that is reflected in his letters." A. J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 35.

dissolution of the non-Christian culture. For example, if, as Keener asserts, Acts is a means of equipping Christians with models of apologia, then a subversive-fulfilment reading with *possessio* at the heart provides an apologia which is richer than previous models since it can be applied simultaneously to distinct groups, theologically and culturally, at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels and provides such nuance that the Christian assembly can be depicted as the promise fulfilment of Yahweh. Yet, through the concept of fulfilment this model can also incorporate Rowe's account of the collision between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures interpreting the Lukan depiction of the Christian assembly as a threat not because of a threatened dissolution of culture but because as part of God's covenant promise, the assembly threatens to fulfil and transform different cultures by redeeming them. This coherently addresses why the Christian assembly might be perceived as both socially and politically dangerous and yet innocent by the political authorities. This is the unique richness of a subversive-fulfilment model for it sits within the unaddressed centre of coherently and consistently answering both the fulfilment and subversion that occurs within each of the narratives of Acts 17 *and* the engagements found throughout Acts 13-16.

Beyond this a subversive-fulfilment reading of Acts 17 also demonstrates that it can accommodate and incorporate other readings. For example, in respect to Athens previous scholars identify concepts including inculturation, idolatry, contextualisation, and evangelism yet these are fragmented ideas that remain undeveloped for understanding the immediate or wider narrative so as to create a greater sense perceiving the nature of the engagements. For example, Witherington provides a remarkably similar reading to that of a subversive-fulfilment perspective alluding to

*possessio*, points of contact, idolatry, and placing the engagement within a Jewish-Christian hermeneutical framework.<sup>401</sup> Yet, despite this perspicuity Witherington does not apply this thought to the engagement or the narrative development. Thus a subversive-fulfilment approach can accommodate and, in that sense, both subvert and fulfil the perspectives of previous scholarship by integrating them into this subversive-fulfilment account.<sup>402</sup>

A further area where subversive-fulfilment provides a fresh approach is in relation to idolatry. Recognising with other scholarship the idolatry in Athens, a subversive-fulfilment reading also identifies further accounts of idolatry in Acts 17. The first is in the rejection of Paul's message by some Jews and the second in the kingship of Caesar. This is a significant insight since idolatry is then identified as an issue underlying the engagement between the Christian assembly and all the surrounding cultures: Judaism, the Roman State, and the Graeco-Roman world. Such a reading further demonstrates the adaptability of subversive-fulfilment to account for multiple engagements within the natural development of the text without modifying the model, in contrast to previous scholars who have focused on one single engagement, such as the Christian assembly and Judaism alone, or have conducted an exegesis using

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<sup>401</sup> Witherington writes, "What has happened is that Greek notions have been taken up and given new meaning by placing them in a Jewish-Christian monotheistic context. Apologetics by means of defense and attack is being done, using Greek thought to make monotheistic points. The call for repentance at the end shows where the argument has been going all along - it is not an exercise in diplomacy or compromise but ultimately a call for conversion, after a demonstration of what the Athenians obviously do not truly know about God. Familiar ideas for evangelistic purposes to bolster arguments that are essentially Jewish and Christian in character." Witherington, *Acts*, 524.

<sup>402</sup> Thus it can account for the apologetic and evangelistic model which demonstrates contextualisation. See Winter, "Acts 17," 83; Peterson, *Acts*, 504; Keener, *15:1-23:35*, 2565; Rost, "Areopagus," 113-136; and Fleming, *Contextualisation*, 75-79. It can also account for the concepts of points of contact and general revelation. See also Stonehouse, *Areopagus Address*, 8-9; and Losie, "Paul's Speech," 232.

a limited number of texts, often removing them from their context and the wider narrative.

Such insights also nuance Strange's account of Acts 17 which is significant since he perceives this as his starting point for his methodology. Fundamentally it modifies Strange's approach by indicating the role played by *possessio* in the reading of the narrative. It also nuances Strange's work by placing the Athenian account within a framework of fulfilment, both within the wider scriptural narrative and the narrative of Acts. This fresh approach further challenges Strange's use of the four steps. Whilst Paul does expose the idols, it is questionable whether he is portrayed as either entering or exploring the world of the Athenians. It also nuances Strange's account of evangelism for whilst Jesus is significant in the speech in Athens, he is not directly presented as the fulfilment of the idols.

From this coherent and integrated approach to the narrative a subversive-fulfilment reading provides some fresh insights to understanding the engagements. One significant theme found across Acts 17 is that of salvation and blessing. Read through a subversive-fulfilment lens and with *possessio* at the centre, these concepts are christologically captured and interpreted within the nuances of each engagement, whether Jewish, with reference to Caesar, or the Greek beliefs and philosophies - for example, with reference to Thessalonica, the Roman beliefs of Caesar as the universal saviour whose blessings are good news to the area. Yet, through a subversive-fulfilment reading *possessio* christologically captures both

Caesar as saviour and the blessings he brings.<sup>403</sup> Therefore through a subversive-fulfilment perspective the Lukan depiction of Jesus is the fulfilment of the Roman beliefs of the emperor and empire. Jesus is presented as the better saviour and as providing a greater salvation. At the metaphysical level it is the Christ, as the risen, ascended, and ruling Lord, who is the true universal saviour and whose message brings both present and future blessings to his people. This is depicted throughout the wider narrative and in the immediate context to Lydia, the jailer and their households. At the epistemological level it is the Christian message that is *the* only true good news, not that of Caesar, and this news extends beyond Thessalonica to the ends of the earth (1:8). At the ethical level the Christian message brings true freedom beyond the freedom of the status of Thessalonica. By fulfilling the concepts of saviour and salvation the Lukan depiction also subverts the Roman concepts of emperor and empire but does this in such a way that shows the Christian assembly to be politically innocent.

Such a portrayal re-addresses the identity of the Christian assembly. Through *possessio* inclusion in the assembly is founded on a christological acceptance at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels. This is most clearly depicted at the epistemological and the ethical levels in the contrast between those Jews in Thessalonica who reject the message, and persecute the assembly (vv. 5-9 and 13),

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<sup>403</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 503. See also Winter, *Divine Honours*, 255. Witherington writes: "One may point especially to the coins with the head of Julius Caesar, minted even before the time of Christ, which involved the recognition of Julius as a god, and the fact that Augustus replaces Zeus on the coins of the city. These coins reflect the ongoing benefactions that Rome bestowed on Thessalonica, which the city had apparently come to depend upon, and the growing imperial theology and eschatology that was part of the rhetoric of response in such a city. *The essence of this theology was that the emperor was the universal savior whose benefactions and aid should be proclaimed as good news throughout the region.*" My italics. See also Winter, *Divine Honours*, 255.

and the Berean Jews who accept the message with eagerness. Such a depiction subverts the concept of inclusion into the assembly based on religious heritage, ethnicity, or citizenship and this characterisation polarises the identity of the groups.

This polarisation of identity, drawing again on the idea of the insider/outsider, raises to the fore a Lukan theology of religions. The Lukan audience are again challenged as to their perceptions and understanding of who an outsider to the Christian assembly is. With a range of engagements in Acts 17 those who oppose the Christian message are depicted as those who reject the Christ at the epistemological and metaphysical levels. Read through a subversive-fulfilment lens, those who reject this christological epistemology accept non-scriptural words,<sup>404</sup> have a self-determined autonomy, mimic true worship, and do not acknowledge the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is.<sup>405</sup> Such a rejection is seen at the ethical level in the disruption they cause and all of these can be considered within the framework of the identifiable markers of idolatry as found in a subversive-fulfilment reading.

A subversive-fulfilment reading of Acts 17 also provides a model engagement for the Lukan audience. This demonstrates the ability of the Christian assembly to engage with multiple cultures simultaneously through the use of the cultures' own structures, beliefs, and worldviews. Yet, as with Acts 14 this chapter demonstrates that whilst

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<sup>404</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 74, 240.

<sup>405</sup> Strange, *Theology of Religions*, 220. Strange writes, "In considering this 'false faith' in the Son the conclusion to which we are drawn is that not to recognize the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is, is an act of idolatry and again provokes divine wrath." See Wright, *Mission of God*, 164-176.



using the same christological framework, different levels of engagement are applied dependent on the theological closeness or distance between the cultures. Through *possessio* each of the distinct features can be christologically captured, interpreted, and fulfilled but in such a way that is subtle and nuanced depicting the Christian assembly as politically innocent, which is of particular importance in the Thessalonican and Athenian episodes. In capturing these features, subversion is introduced but, as with Acts 14, this is dependent on the theological closeness or distance of the cultures. These engagements also demonstrate that the Christian assembly need to understand and connect with the surrounding cultures at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels

Having completed this reading of Acts 13:13-17:34 through a subversive-fulfilment perspective, with *possessio* at the heart of that reading, it is now time to turn to the conclusion of this thesis.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

### 1. Summary

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine whether subversive-fulfilment can provide a fresh approach to understanding the engagements between the Christian assembly and its surrounding cultures within the natural flow and development of the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. These engagements in Acts have garnered considerable scholarly interest yet the results of such scholarship have often been contradictory - even when scholars have used the same narrative sections - and is the reason that a fresh approach is needed.

Chapter one provided a critical survey of a representative sample of accounts by previous scholarship of the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts. The survey showed that previous scholarship had failed to reach a consensus or to integrate the diverse features of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts. The survey further revealed areas of weakness within the accounts of previous scholarship including focusing upon a single culture, for example the engagement with Judaism or the Roman State alone, exegeting texts in isolation away from their immediate and wider narrational context, ignoring the dynamic and integrated relationship between the different cultures as they engage with each other as well as the Christian assembly, examining the cultures as monolithic entities, or inadequately integrating and explaining the continuities and discontinuities that occur within the engagements. These weaknesses accounted for the plethora of often contradictory conclusions occurring amongst previous scholarship even when examining the same

textual evidence and demonstrate the need for a fresh approach towards the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts.

Chapter two introduced subversive-fulfilment - a perspective developed by Daniel Strange. For Strange subversive-fulfilment acts as a model by which to engage with other religions in the twenty-first century and my proposal was that this model could coherently integrate and account for the Lukan depiction of the engagements within the theological vision of Luke and also account for the social, political, and cultural aspects found in the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Placing subversive-fulfilment in its historical and theological context, this chapter identified key features of subversive-fulfilment including: continuity and discontinuity at the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical levels, the resulting tension, idolatry, *possessio*, and the four Es - *enter*, *explore*, *expose*, and *evangelise*. These features formed the basis for providing a subversive-fulfilment reading of the narrative of Acts found in chapters four to eight of this thesis. Chapter two then provided examples of how subversive-fulfilment had been applied in the context of Biblical Studies and missionary endeavour before outlining some potential weaknesses of subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical model. The major weaknesses in Strange's model I highlighted included his referring to but not applying *possessio* within his model, an over-emphasis on Genesis chapters 1-11 and the corresponding over-emphasis on subversion over fulfilment when reading the biblical narrative, and not taking into account the nature and role of idolatry within the covenant people of God. Such weaknesses indicated the potential for modifying Strange's subversive-model as it engaged with the flow of the narrative.

Chapter three provided a setting to facilitate the close reading of the chosen text for this thesis - Acts 13:13-17:34. Whilst chapter one set out the contours of previous scholarship, this chapter provided an engagement with two specific dialogue partners, Craig Keener and C. Kavin Rowe, enabling me to demonstrate not only that subversive-fulfilment can address the limitations of a wider field of scholarship but also engage closely with those scholars who have produced recent, nuanced, and ground-breaking accounts of the engagement between the Christian assembly and its surrounding cultures. Despite the obvious strengths of these respective works this initial encounter demonstrated that Keener and Rowe's models could not adequately account for the multiple engagements that occur within the narrative of Acts. Keener's fundamental weakness was his narrow definition of 'political subversion' - the Christian assembly physically replacing the Imperial structures - and his over-emphasis on a theological promise-fulfilment and social transformation. This was further reinforced by Keener's false dichotomy separating the political nature of the State from the values and the gods of the larger society. Rowe's weakness was his over-emphasis on the negative collision between the Christian assembly and the Graeco-Roman world with its destabilising potential. Whilst collisions inevitably occurred within the narrative Rowe's perspective did not properly account for the narrative context which is overwhelmingly positive - the activity of Yahweh in the world fulfilling his covenant promises through Jesus. Beyond this, the perceived dissolution that Rowe posits simply does not occur within the narrative and Rowe's emphasis on the Graeco-Roman engagement is challenged both by the narrational events of Acts 13 and 15 as well as the surrounding events of Acts 16 in which neither Lydia or the jailer perceive a threatened dissolution of their culture. Following this, chapter three then introduced a theological orientation to Luke-Acts

with particular reference to three theological themes: the theological character of Luke-Acts, the fulfilment of Scripture and covenant promises, and covenantal faithfulness and repentance. These themes both provided a framework by which to read the narrative of Luke-Acts - including the section of narrative under examination - and most importantly provided a means for identifying and understanding the concept of idolatry within the Lukan narrative.

The aim of chapters four to eight was to demonstrate the fruitfulness of applying subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens across an unbroken and naturally developing section of narrative (Acts 13:13-17:34) with the varied, nuanced, and often simultaneous, engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. This included demonstrating the adaptability of a subversive-fulfilment reading of both extra- and intra-ecclesial engagements, identifying fresh insights that a subversive-fulfilment reading developed from the narrative, and how a subversive-fulfilment perspective challenged and adapted the readings of previous scholarship.

## **2. Conclusions**

A subversive-fulfilment reading is a theological perspective which prioritises and illuminates Luke's theological purposes as well as enabling a theologically fruitful account of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. Whilst previous scholarship has failed to reach a consensus or to integrate the diverse features of the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures in Acts, this thesis has demonstrated that a modified

subversive-fulfilment perspective can provide a fresh approach which offers a coherent, consistent and integrated reading of the differing, and sometimes simultaneous, engagements in a more substantial way than previous scholarship.

As noted in chapters 1 and 3 of this thesis there are substantial weaknesses with the approaches of previous scholarship to the engagements in the Lukan narrative.

Because of these weaknesses previous scholarship recognises the issues but does not resolve the tensions nor apply their models to the wider narrative. In essence they leave an unaddressed centre. It is into this lacuna that a subversive-fulfilment model provides fresh insights into reading and understanding the Lukan depiction of the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures.

In applying a subversive-fulfilment perspective this model has been shown to be adaptable, able to address the limitations of previous scholarship and also to accommodate them within the subversive-fulfilment reading to provide a more thorough, nuanced, and holistic reading of the engagements. This model has been shown to be useful across an unbroken narrative in which it can engage the cultures simultaneously, coherently interpret both extra- and intra-ecclesial engagements and does not need modifying across the different cultural engagements. This fresh reading is achieved by placing *possessio* at the heart of the subversive-fulfilment analysis and it became clear, as this thesis progressed, that *possessio* was the most significant feature of the subversive-fulfilment reading. As a tool *possessio* demonstrated a remarkable flexibility. It can be utilised to interpret the engagements - both extra- and intra-ecclesial - within an unbroken and developing narrative and to do this whilst multiple engagements occurred simultaneously.

*Possessio* enabled the identification of the continuities in the engagements between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures and yet in christologically capturing those continuities *possessio* itself created the discontinuity by re-interpreting them christologically.<sup>1</sup> In doing this *possessio* could correctly account for the resulting tension occurring within the narrative in three ways:<sup>2</sup> identifying the level at which the tension occurred - the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical; by preventing the over-emphasis that occurs in previous scholarship on either the continuity or the discontinuity, and by positioning itself amidst the unaddressed centre.<sup>3</sup>

The flexibility of *possessio* also enabled it to interpret the engagements in a more holistic way with its emphasis on interpreting the engagements at the metaphysical level, the epistemological level, and the ethical level. This allowed a subversive-fulfilment reading to address a variety of elements within the narrative including the beliefs of the surrounding cultures about the divine (the metaphysical level), the idea and means of revelation (the epistemological level), the structures, such as the customs, social and political structures, the rhetorical framework of speeches, literary references, and the art and architecture of the surrounding cultures, as well as the ethical behaviours of the characters found in the narrative. Most importantly *possessio* enabled a subversive-fulfilment reading not only of the extra-ecclesial

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<sup>1</sup> The narrative recognises within these engagements a variety of continuities such as people's relationship with the universe; the sense of the religious in people's inmost being; the desire to understand the riddle or purpose of existence; and people's craving for salvation and a saviour.

<sup>2</sup> *Possessio* creates the tension is because in providing the christological fulfilment of a structure, custom, or Scripture it inherently subverts that thing with a resultant tension.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Keener gives prominence in his work to the continuity - the theological promise - fulfilment and social transformation - whilst Rowe emphasises the discontinuity - the negative collision and the potential for destabilisation.

engagements - the major focus of previous scholarship - but also of the intra-ecclesial engagement of Acts 15.

The ability to use this tool simultaneously provides the means for a fresh approach to the narrative and addresses the weaknesses of previous scholarship. *Possessio* accounts for the dynamic and integrated engagements found in the narrative: between the Christian assembly and surrounding cultures, between the surrounding cultures as they interact *with each other* as well as the Christian assembly, and as the Christian assembly engages with itself. As a tool, *possessio* can be applied within an unbroken section of the Acts' narrative without isolating and exegeting texts away from their immediate and wider narrational context, and addresses the nuanced distinctives of the surrounding cultures rather than treating them as monolithic entities. Further, *possessio* holds the continuity and discontinuity in tension preventing an over-emphasis on either. This shows how using subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens can not only illuminate Luke's theological strategy in Acts but also generate fresh and critical perspectives on subversive-fulfilment as a model for cultural and religious engagement.

As noted in chapter two, the role of *possessio* in a subversive-fulfilment reading has been given insufficient consideration by Strange in his work on Acts 17 and needs to take a more significant role in his analysis. This has resulted in the need to modify Strange's original model. The first modification occurs by using *possessio* at the heart of the subversive-fulfilment reading instead of Strange's contention of idolatry being the hermeneutical key for unlocking the engagements. *Possessio* has as its primary emphasis the christological capturing and fulfilment of the points of contact



between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. In essence, with *possessio* at the fore instead of idolatry, a subversive-fulfilment reading is fundamentally a fulfillingly-subversive model - the scriptures, stories, institutions, and values are demonstrated in the Lukan narrative to find their fulfilment in Christ. It is then this fulfilment that creates the subversion. This contrasts with Strange's emphasis on idolatry which initiates the engagement within the framework of subversion. This thesis has shown this to be incorrect within the Lukan narrative. Furthermore, as shown in chapter two, Strange's model does not account for idolatry within a covenant relationship, such as exhibited by Solomon. Such an omission indicates that Strange's subversive-fulfilment model needs to be modified since it cannot be applied adequately to the intra-ecclesial engagement of Acts 15.

A further, significant, modification to Strange's work that has been revealed to be needed is to his four Es - *enter*, *explore*, *expose*, and *evangelise*. The application of these within the narrative met with only a very limited success - more applicable where there was a greater cultural and theological distance between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures or where the discontinuity was the dominant means of engaging with the surrounding culture. A further limitation was the application of the first two Es - 'enter' and 'explore' - since the Christian assembly already inhabited and understood the surrounding cultures.

By interpreting the engagements through this modified subversive-fulfilment reading with *possessio* at the heart, the identification of idolatry, or trajectory towards idolatry, contributed a fresh insight and understanding of idolatry in Acts. Whilst previous scholarship has commonly acknowledged idolatry within those nations

outside of the synagogue, noticeably in Lystra and Athens, a subversive-fulfilment reading showed a more integrated, holistic, and nuanced approach to idolatry in each of the engagements within 13:13-17:34. Through the identifiable markers the concept of idolatry was shown to be present in all of the engagements despite the word being absent. Idolatry in the narrative is the result of the rejection of the christological fulfilment and interpretation of the scriptures or events. Thus, idolatry not only underlies the engagements in Lystra and Athens, where there is explicit idolatry, but also the engagements where idolatry is not explicitly mentioned such as the Jewish engagements or the engagement in Phillippi. As significantly a subversive-fulfilment reading provides a fresh portrayal of idolatry in the intra-ecclesial engagement of Acts 15. The importance of this is that despite the recognition of previous scholarship of the structural and theological importance of Acts 15 the identification of idolatry, or an idolatrous trajectory, within the Christian assembly goes unrecognised by other scholarship. This reading also integrates Lukan theology more closely with other New Testament writings (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6, 14; Gal. 5:19-24; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 1:9-10).

This subversive-fulfilment reading then provides the means for understanding the Lukan depiction of identity, first of the Christian assembly - 'insiders' - and of those outside of the Christian assembly - 'outsiders'. The identity of the Lukan audience is framed within a christological framework which is the capturing and fulfilment of the divine, the legends of the heroes, and the concepts of blessing and salvation in the surrounding cultures. Being outside of this christological matrix is framed by the narrative with the surrounding cultures acting out the identifiable markers of idolatry, particularly in their rejection of the Christ. This enables the audience to understand

the importance of the epistemological and metaphysical response of the surrounding cultures and it also explains the tensions that occur in the engagements and the ethical responses, both positive and negative. This is significant for this subversive-fulfilment reading, unlike previous scholarship, holds a nuanced perspective addressing Judaism and the nations but without an anti-semitic/pro-gentilic reading. Furthermore, such an approach provides a means for the Lukan audience to correctly interpret the characterisation and voices of individuals within the immediate and wider narrative. This includes the more discernible characterisation - Judas (Acts 1), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and Felix (Acts 24) or the more debated, such as Gamaliel (Acts 5), Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8), Bar-Jesus (Acts 13), the Pharisees (Acts 15), or the slave-girl (Acts 16). In addressing this characterisation, The intention and content of the various speeches can also be correctly identified and interpreted. Finally, establishing the identity of the Christian assembly provides a means for the creation of a Lukan theology of religions and correctly interpreting the missional nature of the Christian assembly within Acts. The focus of both of these is not to cast those who reject the euangelion - whether extra-ecclesial or intra-ecclesial - as the "enemy" but to provide an opportunity for a christological repentance and salvation.

Therefore, using a subversive-fulfilment reading to understand the concepts of idolatry and identity within the narrative illuminates a coherent Lukan depiction of a theology of religions across the unbroken narrative, that is inclusive and extensive

and nuanced - including Judaism, Christianity, and the varieties of Graeco-Roman religion. Such an approach addresses a need identified by Kauppi.<sup>4</sup>

This interpretation of a Lukan theology of religions provides an integrated and holistic means to demonstrate that the Lukan concern regarding the positioning of individuals or groups in the narrative is christologically focused and not bound to considerations of their ethnic, religious, or gender identities. Rather than the false dichotomy of previous scholarship, for example anti-Judaic and pro-Gentile readings, a subversive-fulfilment reading enables the audience to correctly identify the individuals and groups within the surrounding cultures and those within the Christian assembly.

Through *possessio*, with its christological fulfilment and capturing of the culture, a subversive-fulfilment reading interprets the Christian assembly as being portrayed as representative of true faith whilst the religious impulses of the surrounding cultures, which are outside of the christological matrix, are portrayed by the narrative as having false faith. Both types of faith are enacted in the narrative through worship. True faith is enacted in true worship found in the spontaneity of hospitality (16:15, 34), patient suffering (13:50; 14:5, 19, 22; 16:22-24), faithful witness (Acts 13-17) and faithful worship (Acts 16:25). False worship, or idolatry, is identified as anything outside of the christological matrix, whether Judaic practices, the practices of the nations outside of the synagogue, or within the Christian assembly itself. This is seen in the identifiable markers outlined throughout this thesis. A subversive-fulfilment

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<sup>4</sup> Kauppi writes of the need to “outline and develop a synthetic Lukan theology of religion including both Judaism, early Christianity, and “the pluriform varieties of Greco-Roman religion.” Kauppi, *Foreign*, 127.

reading also portrays true and false faith through the ethics of the characters. True faith is identified through a christological faithfulness, right leadership and power, truthful words, and accepting mistreatment. False faith is recognised by a christological rejection seen in diaspora Judaism's jealousy, incitement, and opposition, and the nation's false accusations, exercise of weak leadership and abuse of power. Such a perspective challenges those readings of other religions as a *preparatio evangelica*, or of Judaism being able to act as a mediating force between the Christian message and the Graeco-Roman world. Furthermore, it provides clarity as to why the surrounding cultures can function together and offers a consistent and coherent rationale for why the tensions occur both in extra- and intra-ecclesial settings.

These elements of idolatry, identity, and the theology of religions provide a means for reading Acts as a Lukan depiction of model engagement. This model engagement can coherently and consistently interpret the tensions that previous scholarship has identified but has never satisfactorily addressed because it has over-emphasised one aspect of the engagement, for example the subversion or fulfilment, to the detriment of the other or only focused on one of the engagements. Moreover, this Lukan depiction of engagement is more wide-ranging than that of previous scholarship because it understood within both the extra- and intra-ecclesial settings.

Through subversive-fulfilment the engagements christologically capture and fulfil the structures, content, and beliefs of the surrounding cultures and the culture of the Christian assembly. This occurs simultaneously at the metaphysical and epistemological levels. This capturing should be interpreted as turning the world

rightside up - it is the re-creation of the individual, structures, and society and as such is seen in the ethical behaviour of the Christian assembly. This provides the rationale for the political innocence of the Christian assembly. As such this mirrors Keener's social transformation but a subversive-fulfilment reading goes further for before fulfilling the cultures it subverts them at every level, including the political. Thus, the Christian assembly need to be prepared for collisions, tensions, and suffering. In that sense, this mirrors Rowe but nuances his work since the threatened dissolution of culture never occurs since the culture is either christologically re-interpreted, where there is repentance, or continues in its form, where there is no repentance. Thus, a subversive-fulfilment reading of the Lukan depiction of the engagements and the tensions sits upon a previously unaddressed centre.

A subversive-fulfilment reading therefore provides fresh insights to the concepts of power and ethics as they are depicted within the Lukan narrative. The use of *possessio* draws out a fresh approach to the concept of power, both divine and human. For in both the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures divine and human power act in synthesis. The narrative portrays the covenant promises of Yahweh being fulfilled through the Christian assembly under the rule of the ascended and risen Jesus and in the power of the Spirit. Within the surrounding cultures the similarity with the Christian assembly is most clearly demonstrated in the slave girl but the beliefs in the divine ultimately underlie the societal customs and way of life for the surrounding cultures. Whilst there is a continuity at this level, the narrative makes a clear distinction between the two. Power, christologically captured and interpreted in Acts, sets people free both physically and metaphysically. This is enacted by the Christian assembly. The use of power outside of the assembly

enslaves people, uses falsehood and is oppressive - for example, the use of power by the diaspora Jewish leadership and their influence upon others, the slave girl, and the magistrates in Acts 16.

This subversive-fulfilment reading of power also provides a fresh means of understanding the ethical portrayal of the characters in Acts. Through *possessio* the narrative portrays the Christian assembly as the ethical ideal both individually and corporately since they have responded positively to a christological belief. Individual characters of the Christian assembly are portrayed as trustworthy in fulfilling Yahweh's promises - for example, the healing of the man and in the rejection of divinity (14:9-10, 15), contrasting with Herod. Individual characters are also portrayed as obedient - for example, Paul's obedience to the Spirit (16:7), the christological eviction of the spirit (16:16), praising God despite the wrongful conviction and treatment (16:25), the prevention of Jailer's death (16:28), the proclamation of gospel (16:31), and speaking truth to power (16:37). This ethical ideal is also portrayed corporately in the restoration of fellowship in Acts 15 and a corporate decision not to burden believers from the nations. Such an ideal is placed in juxtaposition to the opponents of the Christian assembly who are portrayed as untrustworthy and disobedient. For example, some of the Jews in Pisidian Antioch and Iconium reject the message and incite trouble and persecution (13:50; 14:2, 5), even travelling some distance to do so; the words of the slave girl are portrayed as untrustworthy because of their ambiguity (16:16-18), the slave owners seize Paul and Silas and falsely accuse them (16:20-21), and the crowd and magistrates do not assess the claims justly but wrongly credit the owners as speaking the truth.

This focus upon power and ethics draws out some other elements for understanding the engagement between the Christian assembly and the surrounding cultures. The first is that this subversive-fulfilment reading provides a fresh approach to understanding the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. In the Lukan narrative the characters act in a similar manner to these two respective kingdoms. The Christian assembly functions like the kingdom of God, setting people free. Those who reject the message act in a similar way to the kingdom of Satan - oppressive, creating disorder, along with the abuse of people. The second is that it addresses the idea of the Christian assembly being considered politically innocent and yet subversive. By portraying the Christian assembly as the ethical ideal - trustworthy and using power correctly - the Lukan narrative contends for the political innocence of the assembly. Yet this portrayal implicitly subverts the surrounding cultures because the divine origin of this ethical ideal and the blessings bestowed undermine both the Jewish and Roman notion of kingship as well as the ideals of individual and community ethics. Such an understanding of the Christian assembly being politically innocent and subversive provides a nuanced reading of the situation enabling these two elements to be held in a continuous tension. Such a reading addresses the weaknesses of both Keener and Rowe along with those who contend for an *apologia pro ecclesia* or *pro imperio* reading of Acts.

The use of subversive-fulfilment as a hermeneutical lens for reading the Acts of the Apostles also suggests some possible new directions for further research. First, the application of *possessio* to other literary genres throughout the Old and New Testament to see to what extent it provides fresh insights within different genres. Second, to consider whether *possessio* might provide a theological model for



understanding the engagements between the people of God with the surrounding cultures in the broader sweep of Scripture. Finally, and more broadly, there is the potential to apply the subversive-fulfilment perspective to other New Testament texts, to assess how far it offers a theologically-grounded model for grasping the dynamics of the theologically-construed engagement between the emerging Christian assemblies and their wider cultural and religious environments. At the same time, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate, such investigations might also suggest ways in which the subversive-fulfilment framework itself might be developed through close and critical engagement with biblical texts.

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