

ACTS AND ROMAN AUTHORITIES

Both the lived experiences of scholars in various political systems and their political ideals influence how they approach biblical texts where political figures are depicted. Furthermore, the political perspectives of various biblical texts cannot be easily reduced to a common denominator. In the Hebrew Bible, monarchy-affirming passages are juxtaposed with monarchy-critical ones. In the New Testament, Luke coexists with John the Seer, whose differences in this regard are regularly acknowledged by scholars. A varying range of influence is also attributed to private individuals. While Isaiah is said to have confronted the king (Isa 7), Paul encounters Roman proconsuls only in the context of defending himself and does not comport himself as someone who might be able to influence forms of government or perspectives on governing. Political circumstances are thus variously constructed by different biblical authors, with the result that biblical propositions cannot be applied directly to the question of how religion and politics should relate in the modern world.

In this essay on the book of Acts, I will argue that Luke wanted to enable Christians, who represented an infinitesimal minority of the population in the Roman Empire, to claim persuasively that they were loyal. My argument involves several pieces, as a history of research will show.

1. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Scholars have taken a number of different positions regarding the political aims of the book of Acts.¹ Steve Walton has summarized these in terms of five main categories,² which have been modified slightly by Joshua Yoder. According to Yoder, scholars read Acts variously as “1) political apology for

1. For an exhaustive history of research, cf. J. YODER, *Representatives of Roman Rule: Roman Provincial Governors in Luke-Acts* (BZNW, 209), Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 5-38.

2. S. WALTON, *The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire*, in P. OAKES (ed.), *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, 2002, p. 2.

the church to Rome (*apologia pro ecclesia*); 2) apology for Rome to the church (*apologia pro imperio*); 3) equipping the church for witness; 4) legitimation for the church's identity; and 5) no definite political aim".³ While interpreters' viewpoints vary in detail, most broadly embrace one of the first three positions, and I will therefore structure this introductory overview according to those three classifications, with the addition of empire-critical readings.

1.1 Acts as *apologia pro ecclesia*

Elements of the first – the idea that Acts is an apology for the church – were circulating as early as the works of John Chrysostom. Chrysostom saw a parallel between the trials of Jesus and Paul: the innocence of these men is demonstrated by means of a *testimonium externum*, when it is acknowledged by Pilate and Claudius Lysias, respectively.⁴ This line of interpretation was common in the nineteenth century, and the work of Ernst Haenchen and Hans Conzelmann likewise made it the predominant interpretive tendency in the middle of the twentieth century. Haenchen argued that Luke wanted to encourage the Roman authorities to tolerate Christianity by presenting it as the true form of Judaism, which already had official legal standing.⁵ According to Conzelmann, this concern arose because of the delay of the Parousia.⁶ Martin Hengel and Bernd Wander suggest further that Luke was aware of potential affliction coming in the future and wanted to prove that accusations against Christians were unjust.⁷ According to Peter Pilhofer, Luke was interested in promoting harmony between Christians and the Roman Empire,⁸ and avoided the terms *παρουσία* and *εὐαγγέλιον* because they were used in imperial propaganda.⁹ The historian Jürgen Molthagen suggests that Luke may appeal to traditions of Roman

3. YODER, *Representatives* (n. 1), p. 5.

4. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act.* 49,2 (PG 60:340).

5. E. HAENCHEN, *Die Apostelgeschichte neu übersetzt und erklärt* (KEK, 3), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ¹³1977, pp. 663-664.

6. H. CONZELMANN, *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (BHT, 17), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, ⁶1977, p. 133.

7. M. HENGEL, *Zur urchristlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, Stuttgart, Calwer, 1979, p. 55; B. WANDER, Apologien und Unschuldsbeteuerungen als besonderes Mittel des Lukas, in A. VON DOBLER – K. ERLEMANN – R. HEILIGENTHAL (eds.), *Religionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (FS Klaus Berger), Tübingen, Francke, 2000, 465-476.

8. P. PILHOFER, *Das Neue Testament und seine Welt: Eine Einführung* (UTB 3363), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2010, pp. 366-367.

9. P. PILHOFER, *Der andere König und sein Reich* (*Apg 17,7*), in ID. (ed.), *Neues aus der Welt der frühen Christen* (BWANT, 195), Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2011, 127-136.

law and politics in which efforts were not usually made to restrict religious practices, but only criminal delinquency.¹⁰ The same line of interpretation is also evident in the works of more recent scholars. Ben Witherington concludes that Luke hopes for tolerance from Roman authorities based on the idea that Christianity “has the proper claims to antiquity, being the legitimate development of Judaism”.¹¹ According to Laurie Brink, Luke is aiming for imperial benevolence, something that would be ultimately achieved only later in the Edict of Milan.¹² The work of Friedrich Wilhelm Horn also builds on this line of research. He examines the relational triangle in Acts between Christians, Jews who did not believe in Jesus, and the Roman government, and characterizes the latter’s actions as resulting from pressure exerted by the religious leaders of Israel. Nevertheless, the family of Herod provides reliable witnesses who exemplify allegiance to Rome, knowledge of Judaism and interest in Christianity.¹³ According to Klaus Wengst, the Lukan perspective on this relational triangle should be critiqued: it is historically and theologically atrocious to burden the Jews with the death of Jesus, as Luke does.¹⁴ Hans Klein also draws attention to problems with the Lukan perspective on the trial conducted by Pilate: it implies an alignment with the Roman superpower, and a simultaneous distancing from a people who had recently been defeated in war.¹⁵

The exegetical fit of this line of interpretation for Acts has been criticized on two grounds: 1. Luke did not whitewash every element of his story to make it acceptable, but chose to retain material that could be politically offensive. For instance, he makes a “Zealot” an apostle of Jesus (Luke 6,15; Acts 1,13).

10. J. MOLTHAGEN, *Rom als Garant des Rechts und als apokalyptisches Ungeheuer*, in E. BRANDT – P.S. FIDDES – J. MOLTHAGEN, *Gemeinschaft am Evangelium* (FS Wiard Popkes), Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996, 127-142, p. 141.

11. B. WITHERINGTON III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1998, p. 555 n. 343. Cf. G.E. STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (SupplNT, 64), Leiden, Brill, 1992, pp. 378-379.

12. L. BRINK, *Soldiers in Luke-Acts: Engaging, Contradicting, and Transcending the Stereotypes* (WUNT 2, 362), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2014, p. 175: “Not until the Edict of Milan would the latter be realized (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 8.17)”.

13. F.W. HORN, *Die Haltung des Lukas zum römischen Staat im Evangelium und in der Apostelgeschichte*, in J. VERHEYDEN (ed.), *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (BETL, 142), Leuven, Peeters, 1999, 203-224, p. 221.

14. K. WENGST, *Pax Romana, Anspruch und Wirklichkeit: Erfahrungen und Wahrnehmungen des Friedens bei Jesus und im Urchristentum*, München, Kaiser, 1986, p. 121. English: K. WENGST, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Christ* (transl. by J. BOWDEN), Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1987, p. 97: “in historical and theological terms ... a monstrosity.”

15. H. KLEIN, *Das Lukasevangelium übersetzt und erklärt* (KEK, I/3), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006, p. 702.

Similarly, when Christian missionaries appear on stage in the story, there are always riots, which hardly makes Christianity look like a positive force that serves the interests of the Roman regime by promoting peace in the provinces.¹⁶

2. Some proponents of this sort of interpretation presuppose that Luke wrote for non-Christian readers, which cannot be proven.

1.2 Acts as *apologia pro imperio*

Paul Walaskay and Jürgen Roloff are representative of the second view mentioned above, that Acts is an *apologia pro imperio* addressed to Christians.¹⁷ According to Walaskay, Luke mitigates pre-Lukan traditions that had displayed anti-Roman sentiment. For instance, Luke 22,24-27 considerably softens material drawn from Mark 10,42-45.¹⁸ Classical philologist Albrecht Dihle ascribes a conviction to Luke that anticipates one of the main theses of subsequent Christian apologetics: that the unity of the world under the Roman emperor serves the plan of the Christian God to spread his message of salvation.¹⁹ According to Philip Esler, this also explains the inclusion of Roman military and administrative personnel in the narrative of Luke-Acts: Luke wanted to show that Christian faith and obligation to Rome were not necessarily mutually exclusive.²⁰ The positive portrayal of the Roman army that is used by Laurie Brink to support the idea of an *apologia pro ecclesia* is employed by Alexander Kyrychenko to argue that Acts is an *apologia pro imperio*. Kyrychenko describes the depiction of the Roman army in these narratives as far more favourable than in Greek and Roman literature; the army is an enforcer of the divine will both for non-Jews and for Jews who do not believe in Jesus.²¹

This line of interpretation is encumbered with a problem, however. It does not satisfactorily account for negative comments made about representatives of the Roman government in the texts. Some scholars feel that

16. R.J. CASSIDY, *Society and Politics in The Acts of the Apostles*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1987, pp. 148-157.

17. P.W. WALASKAY, "And So We Came to Rome": *The Political Perspective of St. Luke* (MSSNTS, 49), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983; J. ROLOFF, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament* (GNT, 10), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993, p. 211.

18. WALASKAY, *Rome* (n. 17), pp. 22-25.

19. A. DIHLE, *Die griechische und lateinische Literatur der Kaiserzeit: Von Augustus bis Justinian*, München, C.H. Beck, 1989, p. 223.

20. P. ESLER, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lukan Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 209-210.

21. A. KYRYCHENKO, *The Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel: The Role of the Centurion in Luke-Acts* (BZNTW, 203), Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 182-183.

one cannot simply read those comments as critique of individual misconduct without addressing the question of the legitimacy of the system.²²

1.3 Acts as Critique of Empire

Empire-critical approaches have also been tested out on Luke-Acts. Some texts from the gospel of Luke are cited especially often in this context: the *Magnificat*,²³ the nativity story²⁴ with its portrayal of Emperor Augustus,²⁵ the first appearance of Jesus in Nazareth and the pericope of the rich man and Lazarus,²⁶ as well as the narrative of Christ's ascension to heaven.²⁷ From Acts, the commitment to Jesus as "lord" has been noted (Acts 10,36),²⁸ and some have also seen a hidden critique of the ruler cult in Acts.²⁹ It has been observed, for instance, that Luke puts the only reference to εἰρήνη into the mouth of Tertullus, an opponent of Christianity (Acts 24,2). John Chrysostom noted this: ὄρα πῶς εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἐμβάλλει κολάσεως τὸν δικαστήν.³⁰ It is also an indication of Luke's distance from the upper class that he inserts the idea of εὐεργέτης in Luke 22,25.

Despite the comment by John Chrysostom on Acts 24,2, there is no evidence for such an empire-critical approach to Luke-Acts in the early church.³¹ Methodologically, empire-critical readings of Luke-Acts usually focus on the presence of terminology that appears in both Luke's writings

22. YODER, *Representatives* (n. 1), p. 17.

23. A.C. MILLER, *Rumors of Resistance: Status Research and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 2014; N.A. BECK, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms in the New Testament: Hidden Transcripts of Hope and Liberation* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 127), New York, NY, Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 104-105.

24. I. KUNDERT, *Jerusalem herrscht über Rom: Das Weihnachtsevangelium als Siegesbotschaft*, in *TZ* 69 (2013) 478-495.

25. C. BLUMENTHAL, *Augustus' Erlass und Gottes Macht: Überlegungen zur Charakterisierung der Augustusfigur und ihrer erzählstrategischen Funktion in der lukanischen Erzählung*, in *NTS* 57 (2011) 1-30.

26. MILLER, *Rumors* (n. 23), p. 255: Luke suggests temporarily accepting Roman dominance while emphasizing "radically different values and practices of God's reign in the midst of the opposing Roman status quo".

27. G. GILBERT, *Roman Propaganda and Christian Identity in the Worldview of Luke-Acts*, in T. PENNER – C. VANDER STICHELE (eds.), *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (SBL.SS, 20) Atlanta, GA, SBL, 2003, 233-256, pp. 246-247.

28. L. ALEXANDER, *Luke's Political Vision*, in *Interpretation* 66 (2012), 283-293.

29. A. BRENT, *Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*, in *JTS* 48 (1997) 411-438; J. SWEET, *Latent Meanings. Luke-Acts and the Revelation of John*, in *Theology* 112 (2009) 403-409.

30. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act.* 50.1 (PG 60:344).

31. M. MEISER, *Lukas und die römische Staatsmacht*, in M. LARAHN – J. ZANGENBERG (eds.), *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft* (TANZ, 36), Tübingen, Francke, 2002, 175-193, pp. 188-189.

and Roman ruler ideology (e.g., “gospel”; “son of God”) or employ socio-historical models. The sociological theory of public vs. hidden transcripts has been invoked several times. In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*,³² American sociologist James C. Scott differentiates between public and hidden transcripts as follows: the former contain statements of the subordinate made towards the superior, while the latter contain what the subordinate actually thinks. The hidden transcript is not entirely inaccessible, but conceals by means of anonymity or ambiguous language.³³

1.4 Acts as Equipping the Church for Witness

Another line of interpretation primarily focuses on the behaviour Luke recommends for Christians. According to Martin Dibelius, Luke wanted to advise his fellow Christians about how to defend themselves. Specifically, they should stress that they did not want to revolt against the emperor, Temple, or law; the primary point of contention with the Jews was the question of resurrection.³⁴ The commentaries of Rudolf Pesch³⁵ and Craig Keener are committed to this line of interpretation.³⁶

1.5 Politics Unimportant in Luke-Acts

Finally, some scholars challenge the idea that politics is important in Luke-Acts. According to Michael Wolter, the episodes collected in Acts 21-26 do not address the relationship between the Christian community and the Roman government, but the divergent development of Judaism and Christianity.³⁷ The Jews, especially in the eastern part of the Roman

32. J.C. SCOTT, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1990.

33. S. SCHREIBER, *Caesar oder Gott*, in *BZ* 48 (2004) 64-85.

34. M. DIBELIUS, *Paulus in der Apostelgeschichte*, in ID. – H. GREEVEN (eds.), *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953, 175-180, p. 180.

35. R. PESCH, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 1-12)* (EKK, V/1), Zürich – Neukirchen, Benziger – Neukirchener, 1986, p. 29.

36. Cf. C.S. KEENER, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 3*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2014, p. 2774: “Pilate pronounced Jesus’s innocence ... as did the leader of the Roman execution squad. ... Luke’s marshaling of such precedents would provide Christians with a sense of security and perhaps evidence they could use to respond against slanders in the public arena. His approach comports well with the respect for Roman government often found in early Christian literature (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Tim 2:2; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-14).”

37. M. WOLTER, *Die Juden und die Obrigkeit bei Lukas*, in ID. (ed.), *Theologie und Ethos im frühen Christentum* (WUNT, 236), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2009, 388-401.

Empire,³⁸ tried to prevent the propagation of the gospel, and Roman authorities ended up protecting the Christian movement unawares.

1.6 Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn in light of this history of research. First, distinctions need to be made between various different representatives of the Roman government: emperors and Roman ideology vs. proconsuls vs. members of the Roman army. Second, the portrayal of such representatives in other Greco-Roman and Jewish literature needs to be considered. Third, as generally acknowledged, Luke wrote for Christians and not for eminent Roman officials. Fourth, one cannot solve the problem of reconciling the many positive statements about Roman authorities with the few critical ones simply by declaring the latter to be tradition³⁹ or by reinterpreting them as being somehow positive.⁴⁰ Clearly, Luke could make both positive and negative statements in the same work.

This raises multiple questions that will be addressed in the rest of this essay. I will ask about the portrayal of the governing *principes* and proconsuls mentioned by Luke in other ancient sources. I will inquire about the situation of Christians in the Roman Empire and about Luke's perception of this situation. I will also investigate the conditions under which Luke wrote, and interpretations of Luke's works by ancient theologians.

2. EMPERORS: DOMITIAN, NERVA, TRAJAN, HADRIAN

The dating of Acts is more debated today than ever. The historian Alexander Mittelstaedt dates it early, arguing that the actual historical details of the destruction of Jerusalem are incompatible with Luke 19,41-44 and 21,20-24⁴¹ – but ignoring the nature of apocalyptic language in the process.

38. WOLTER, *Juden* (n. 37), p. 391f., considers the events described up to Acts 26 as part of the past onto which Luke and his readers look back. The sea journey described in Acts 27,1-28,16 disrupts the continuity of the narrative and draws attention to a new stage in the expansion of Christianity, which is no longer hindered by non-believing Jews. The relational triangle between Jews, Christians, and Roman governance was thus a thing of the past.

39. WALASKAY, *Rome* (n. 17), p. 64.

40. WENGST, *Pax Romana* (n. 14), p. 122 (concerning Luke 22,25).

41. A. MITTELSTAEDT, *Lukas als Historiker: Zur Datierung des lukanischen Doppelwerkes* (TANZ, 43), Tübingen, Francke, 2005, 132.

Others point to a lack of evidence for early reception and posit a later dating around 120,⁴² 130⁴³ or even 150.⁴⁴ I cannot warm to a date as late as 150, since other texts that are more securely dated to that time period offer a rather different portrayal of Christianity. A date around 90 is probable, although any time before 120 is possible.⁴⁵ This compels us to include not only Domitian, but also Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian in our analysis. In the process, we must keep several issues in mind:

1. Our knowledge of these figures differs from Luke's knowledge of them. In all likelihood, Luke did not have access to information from the governing authorities or to the works of historians, but depended on what was commonly said about these emperors.
2. These figures may have been depicted differently in Rome and in the provinces, in the East and in the West.⁴⁶
3. The portrayal of the emperors by Roman authors was no doubt influenced by their own rank and position. Senators and others who supported the senatorial republic might have thought the principate violated republican ideals, while members of the knighthood and their minions may have seen other issues as more important.
4. We have to recognize that some authors, such as Pliny⁴⁷ and Tacitus,⁴⁸ only stylized themselves as steadfast opponents of Domitian retrospectively.
5. The ruler cult was more pronounced in the East than in the West. This might explain some of the differences between Luke and John the Seer.

42. R.I. PERVO, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists*, Santa Rosa, CA, Polebridge, 2006.

43. M. MÜLLER, *The Reception of the Old Testament in Matthew and Luke-Acts: From Interpretation to Proof from Scripture*, in *NT 43* (2001) 313-330.

44. A. GREGORY, *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus* (WUNT 2, 169), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

45. In M. MEISER, *Der theologieggeschichtliche Standort des lukanischen Doppelwerkes*, in W. KRAUS (ed.), *Beiträge zur Theologieggeschichte* (BZNW, 163), Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, 99-126, pp. 101-111, I had opted for the possibility of a late dating up to 120 CE. We should, however, ask whether Luke 19,41-44 would make sense fifty years after the destruction of the Temple (with Hans Klein, oral communication).

46. C. SCHUBERT, *Studien zum Nerobild in der lateinischen Dichtung der Antike* (BzA, 116), Stuttgart, Teubner, 1998, p. 245.

47. S. FEIN, *Die Beziehungen der Kaiser Trajan und Hadrian zu den Litterati* (BzA, 26), Stuttgart, Teubner, 1994, pp. 14-18.

48. W. ECK, *Traian*, in M. CLAUSS (ed.), *Die römischen Kaiser: 55 historische Portraits von Caesar bis Iustinian*, München, C.H. Beck, 1997, 110-124, p. 114.

2.1 Domitian

The depiction of Domitian in modern research is no longer lopsidedly influenced by Greco-Roman authors like Tacitus, Suetonius, and Philostratus, or by Christian authors like John the Seer or Tertullian. Domitian's dubious character notwithstanding,⁴⁹ Suetonius points to the positive quality of imperial administration under his rule, especially with regard to judicial processes,⁵⁰ an assessment that is supported by literary and epigraphic evidence.⁵¹ Domitian closely supervised provincial proconsuls.⁵² There is no evidence of an empire-wide persecution of Christians under Domitian.⁵³ Nor does the letter of Pliny provide a mirror for the time of this emperor.⁵⁴

The address *dominus ac deus noster*,⁵⁵ which is known from the works of Martial, was no doubt unacceptable to both Jews and Christians, but is not actually found in any documents that can be definitively traced to Domitian.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, it may have been a common address in the household of the *princeps*.⁵⁷

2.2 Nerva

Nerva's short reign⁵⁸ – he became emperor at 66 years of age and had no children – was characterized by antagonism between the senate and the so-called *praetoriani*, the emperor's bodyguards.⁵⁹ In contrast to the senate, which condemned the former emperor Domitian to *damnatio memoriae*, the *praetoriani* took vengeance on Domitian's murderers. Fearing for his reign, Nerva decided to adopt Marcus Ulpius Traianus.⁶⁰ This antagonism

49. Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 7,8, characterizes him as χαλεπός.

50. Suetonius, *Domitian*, 8,2.

51. K. CHRIST, *Geschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zu Konstantin*, München, C.H. Beck, 1988, p. 289.

52. P. SOUTHERN, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 55-58.

53. J. ULRICH, *Euseb, HistEccl III, 14-20 und die Frage nach der Christenverfolgung unter Domitian*, in *ZNW* 89 (1996) 269-289.

54. A. REICHERT, *Durchdachte Konfusion: Plinius, Trajan und das Christentum*, in *ZNW* 93 (2002) 227-250, esp. p. 228f.

55. Martial, *Epigr.* 5,8,1; 10,72,3.

56. U. SEIDEL, *Die Christenverfolgung zur Zeit Domitians*, Diss., Leipzig, 1983.

57. W. ECK, *Domitianus*, in *DNP* 3 (1997) 746-750.

58. M. Cocceius Nerva was consul in 71 CE and 90 CE, but had no military experience. Cf. CHRIST, *Geschichte* (n. 51), p. 285.

59. CHRIST, *Geschichte* (n. 51), p. 286.

60. O. SCHIPP, *Die Adoptivkaiser: Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antonius Pius, Mark Aurel, Lucius Verus und Commodus* (Geschichte kompakt), Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001, pp. 20-22. Pliny the Younger, *Paneg.* 89, praises Nerva for electing the best candidate.

between the elites of Rome was not important for daily life in the provinces, however, and authors who did not belong to the elite saw no need to depict Nerva in a particularly positive or negative manner. His social reforms focused primarily on Italy, and authors in the Eastern provinces may not have known much about the details.

An epigram of Martial says, *recta fides, hilaris clementia ... iam redeunt*.⁶¹ This could be mere homage, or gratitude for a better state of affairs than under Domitian.

2.3 Trajan

Although Martial depicts Trajan positively, recent historical research has challenged this portrayal.⁶² While his principate was more conciliatory than that of Domitian,⁶³ he did not relinquish autocratic influence.⁶⁴ A famous line from Trajan's correspondence with Pliny, *nec nostri saeculi est*,⁶⁵ shows that he wanted to contrast himself with Domitian, as one also sees in Pliny's *Panegyricus*.⁶⁶ He was probably also rather skilled at flattering senators.⁶⁷ At least he did not have to experience a riot in the army or a conspiracy against him.⁶⁸ Coins minted in the city of Rome depict Trajan with a bundle of lightning bolts; this portrait does not suggest that Trajan was viewed as divine, however, but rather concords with the understanding of his role as a representative of Jupiter.⁶⁹ This contrasts the situation in Alexandria, where coins evidence divine veneration of Trajan; divine veneration of Domitian was rare in comparison.⁷⁰ Martin Fell notes positive characteristics

61. Martial, *Epigr.* 12,6,3-4.

62. Martial, *Epigr.* 10,72,1-4: "Flatteries, you come to me in vain, you poor creatures with your shameless lips! I am not about speak of 'Lord and God'. There is no place for you any more in this city" (D.R. SHACKELTON BAILEY, *Martial, Epigrams* [LCL, 95], Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 390).

63. At least, he was consul only four times (in 100, 101, 103, 112 CE), whereas Domitian was consul ten times (SCHIPP, *Adoptivkaiser* [n. 60], p. 24).

64. J. BENNETT, *Trajan optimus princeps: A Life and Times*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1997, pp. 208-213; CHRIST, *Geschichte* (n. 51), p. 289.

65. *Ep.* 10,97,2.

66. *Discernatur orationibus nostris diversitas temporum*. Cf. 53: *Omnia, Patres Conscripti, quae de aliis principibus a me aut dicuntur, aut dicta sunt, eo pertinent, ut ostendam, quam longa consuetudine corruptos depravatosque mores principatus parens noster reformet et corrigat*.

67. CHRIST, *Geschichte* (n. 51), p. 291.

68. Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 68,7,5.

69. St. PFEIFFER, *Der römische Kaiser und das Land am Nil: Kaiserverehrung und Kaiserkult in Alexandria und Ägypten von Augustus bis Caracalla (30 v. Chr.-217 n. Chr.)* (Historia.E, 212), Stuttgart, Steiner, 2010, p. 137.

70. PFEIFFER, *Kaiser* (n. 69), p. 140.

of Trajan: this emperor fulfilled his obligation to ensure justice, support the provinces, and promote the universal acceptance of his reign.⁷¹ Nevertheless, it could have been dangerous to write about contemporary issues during Trajan's reign.⁷² His attitude toward Christians and what he perceived as their illogical responses to questions from judicial figures is known from his correspondence with Pliny.⁷³

2.4 Hadrian

At the beginning of Hadrian's reign, four aristocrats were executed. Hadrian also took long journeys, not only to play tourist, but also to check on the welfare of the provinces, examine Roman troops, and reform the judicial system.⁷⁴ During his reign, temples were dedicated to him in Cyclicus, Smyrna and Ephesus – or at least he sponsored these temples financially. Private altars were also dedicated to him.⁷⁵ He also built temples for himself in Egypt, in places where the Egyptians did not take the initiative to do so themselves.⁷⁶

Regarding Hadrian's war against the Jews, Anthony Birley may be right that he was influenced by the example of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.⁷⁷ Depiction of Hadrian in rabbinic literature is ambivalent. Negative portrayal of Hadrian was influenced by his interest in the fate and culture of non-Romans, as well as the second Jewish revolt in 132-135 CE. The sorts of atrocities attributed to Titus are not ascribed to Hadrian,⁷⁸ but the period between 135 and Hadrian's death in 138 was considered to be a time of active persecution of Jews, because he prohibited circumcision.

While Christian authors were offended by Hadrian's relation to Antiochus, they acknowledged that he did not persecute Christians.⁷⁹ Although the so-called Hadrian rescript – mentioned by Justin Martyr and Eusebius of Caesarea⁸⁰ – suggests a greater level of tolerance with regard to Christians,

71. M. FELL, *Optimus Princeps? Anspruch und Wirklichkeit der imperialen Programmatik Kaiser Traians* (Quellen und Forschungen zur antiken Welt, 7), München, Tuduv, 1992, pp. 174-176.

72. FEIN, *Beziehungen* (n. 47), pp. 207-208.

73. Pliny, *Ep.* 10,97.

74. CHRIST, *Geschichte* (n. 51), pp. 319-321.

75. PFEIFFER, *Kaiser* (n. 69), p. 145.

76. PFEIFFER, *Kaiser* (n. 69), p. 167.

77. A.R. BIRLEY, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 228: Both Antiochus and Hadrian supported the cult of the Olympian Zeus; beginning in 129 CE, Hadrian used "Olympios" as an epithet.

78. ARN B 7; b.Gitt. 56b-57a.

79. SCHIPP, *Adoptivkaiser* (n. 60), p. 45, referring to Tertullian, *Apol.* 5,7.

80. Justin, *First Apol.* 68,3-10; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.* 4,8,6-9,3.

he likely continued along lines similar to those outlined in Pliny's correspondence with Trajan.⁸¹

3. THE SITUATION OF THE CHRISTIANS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

3.1 Non-Lukan Sources

To what extent did Christian individuals or groups have conflict with the Roman authorities? We need to make allowances for both chronological and regional variation. Paul mentions such conflict in 2 Cor 11,25, although it may have arisen because he was seen as a troublemaker, and not directly because of his commitment to Christ. One might associate the persecution of Christians mentioned by Tacitus with the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul in Rome, but these events are not always connected with one another in early Christian literature.⁸² Writing shortly thereafter, Mark 13,9 presupposes that followers of Jesus "shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake". Apparently, when disagreeable individuals were accused before the authorities, they were sometimes marked as members of a Christian group in order to prejudice the judge against them, but this does not reflect an official policy of persecuting Christians. Matthew incorporates the same sentence into his gospel (Matt 10,18), but he also complains about half-hearted discipleship (Matt 7,21-23), as if some Christians did not anticipate any real problems. In the Didache, the subject is addressed in Did 1,3 in the admonition to fast for those "who persecute you" – but we do not learn anything else. At that time, Syria might still have been safer than other regions such as Asia Minor, where there was some initial persecution at least when the book of Revelation was being composed (Rev 2,13). The author of Revelation seems to have anticipated an increase in conflict.

The correspondence between Pliny and Trajan can probably be dated to 112 CE. The proconsul's uncertainty about appropriate penalties reveals that trials against Christians were not yet standard practice.⁸³ According to Angelika Reichert, Pliny wanted to repress Christianity by two means: offering

81. BIRLEY, *Hadrian* (n. 77), p. 127.

82. Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.* 2,25,5. Pseudo-Sophronius of Jerusalem, *De laboribus, certaminibus et peregrinationibus SS. Petri et Pauli* (PG 87/3:4014 A), presupposes the death of both apostles in the thirteenth year of Nero, 65 or 66 CE at the earliest, and does not mention a general persecution of Christians.

83. B.J.L. PEERBOLTE, *To Worship the Beast: The Revelation of John and the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*, in M. LABAHN – J. ZANGENBERG (eds.), *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft* (TANZ, 36), Tübingen, Francke, 2002, 239-266, p. 240.

forgiveness for apostates and penalizing Christianity itself.⁸⁴ Since the dating of the letters of Ignatius is a matter of debate,⁸⁵ they do not necessarily provide information about the time of Trajan.

No Christian martyrdoms can reliably be traced to the time of Hadrian. We have evidence for martyrdoms during the reign of Antonius Pius,⁸⁶ but Acts had most likely already been written before that.

3.2 Luke

Did Luke write at a time when Roman authorities were tolerant towards Christians?⁸⁷ Luke does not depict an outright persecution of Christians, although one can still speak of a perceived threat: non-Jews in Acts consider Christians to be Jews and accuse them of characteristically Jewish behaviour in the context of general anti-Jewish aggression, while Jews distance themselves from them in order to avoid reprisals.⁸⁸

Accusations against Christians in Acts can be categorized according to whether the denouncer is Jewish or Roman. In Jewish denunciations, Paul and his assistants are said to cause turmoil (Acts 17,6), contravene the commandment of the emperor by announcing “another king” (Acts 17,7), call for worship of God *παρὰ τὸν νόμον* (Acts 18,13),⁸⁹ cause *στάσεις* among Jews (Acts 24,5), and desecrate the Temple (Acts 24,6). Roman accusations concern un-Roman *ἔθνη* (Acts 16,21)⁹⁰, as well as *βλασφημία* and *ἱεροσυλία* towards traditional deities (Acts 19,37).

84. A. REICHERT, *Durchdachte Konfusion* (n. 54), p. 239. Taking this interpretation of the letter as a basis, Angelika Reichert considers a late dating of 1 Peter and Revelation possible. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.* 3,33,1-2, claims that persecutions of Christians declined after the edict of Trajan. This is apologetic and historically improbable.

85. R.M. HÜBNER, *Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochien*, in *ZAC* 1 (1997) 44-72; cf., however, A. LINDEMANN, *Antwort auf die Thesen von Reinhard M. Hübner*, in *ZAC* 1 (1997) 185-194.

86. Cf. Justin, *Second Apol.* 2 (Quintus Lollius Urbicus was prefect of Rome from ca. 150 until ca. 160); *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vis. 2,2,2; 3,2,1.

87. KLEIN, *Lukasevangelium* (n. 15), p. 702.

88. W. STEGEMANN, *Zwischen Synagoge und Obrigkeit: Zur historischen Situation der lukanischen Christen* (FRLANT, 152), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, *passim*.

89. Luke is intentionally vague regarding whether Roman or Jewish law is meant. Gallio considers the accusations of the Jews an internal Jewish matter.

90. As an example of the administration of Philippi, W.C. VAN UNNIK, *Die Anklage gegen die Apostel in Philippi*, in ID. (ed.), *Sparsa Collecta I* (SupplNT, 29/1), Leiden, Brill, 1973, 374-385, p. 383, recalls the expulsion of Jews from Rome in 139 BCE by the praetor Peregrinus Hispalus, which was justified with the accusation that they were undermining Roman customs.

Luke knows of at least one martyrdom under Roman rule: that of Paul. Had he also heard of others? The word order in Mark 13,9, “rulers and kings”, is changed to “kings and rulers” in Luke 21,12, which is consistent with Acts 12,21 and Acts 26. Luke wanted to show that Jesus’ words were reliable. In my opinion, when Luke uses the phrase *κατὰ πρόσωπον* in Acts 25,16, he is already thinking about anonymous denunciations.

4. RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Since Luke was not writing in a liberal democracy, he had to think carefully about whom he could characterize positively and whom he could criticize. Even in non-democratic systems, the conventional assessment of certain persons and epochs is subject to change, sometimes allowing for a fairly free description of former times, as long as one does not contradict official doctrine. Thus figures that are routinely criticized in official sources can be criticized by other authors, and past conflicts can be described in such a way that they become a means of commenting on present ones.

4.1 Critique of Figures from the Past

Luke criticizes persons from the time of Caligula, Claudius and Nero – including Herod Antipas, Gallio, and Antonius Felix – and it is important to recognize that this was acceptable at the time when he was writing. Christoph Schubert points out the anti-Nero rhetoric of the Flavians Vespasian and Titus.⁹¹ Herod Antipas had fallen into disgrace because he wanted to be called “king”.⁹² While Gallio is portrayed favourably by his brother Seneca and Statius,⁹³ Dio Cassius resents him for his mocking depiction of Claudius’ postmortem ascension to heaven on a meat hook.⁹⁴ Antonius Felix, whom Luke criticizes for greed, only escaped punishment thanks to the advocacy of his brother Pallas.⁹⁵ This makes Nero look bad, but it was unproblematic to criticise Nero in later times, except for the short interregnum of Otho, who wanted to stage himself as the new Nero.

91. C. SCHUBERT, *Studien zum Nerobild in der lateinischen Dichtung der Antike* (BzA, 116), Stuttgart, Teubner, 1998, p. 292.

92. Josephus, *Ant.* 18, 252.

93. Seneca, *Nat. Quaest.* 4 praef. 10f.; Statius, *Silvae* 2,7,32.

94. Cassius Dio, 61,35,4.

95. Josephus, *Ant.* 20,182-183.

Furthermore, critical comments about past authority figures in Luke's works are not simply a dark background against which current representatives of government can shine. Given passages that are friendly to the Romans, another interpretation is preferable. Luke wanted Christians to know that both upright and corrupt representatives of the state often existed simultaneously. Christians therefore had no right to rebel against Roman authority, despite some misconduct by some representatives of the latter.

4.2 Accounts of Conflicts

While Acts 5 and 12 report conflict with Jewish authorities, they also shed light on conflict with non-Jewish authorities. During his trial before the Sanhedrin, Peter refuses to refrain from propagating his message and uses a phrase reminiscent of Socrates (Acts 5,29). This statement is applicable to the question of "confession or denial" in general and has repeatedly been used to explain Christian willingness to undergo martyrdom.⁹⁶ Furthermore, episodes in which apostles "suffer shame for his name" are not restricted to conflicts with Jewish authorities. Luke has Gamaliel counsel against blind opposition to the Christians, lest one become a θεομάχος (Acts 5,38f.).⁹⁷ Traditions about the fate of the θεομάχος were common in Greek tradition. Gamaliel's statement extends to pagan authorities who have forgotten the differences between God and humanity and have underestimated God's power. At the end of Acts 12, Gamaliel's warning is illustrated narratively when Agrippa I, persecutor of the community (Acts 12,1f.), is struck down and eaten by worms,⁹⁸ while the Word of God continues to spread. Since his death by worms was a result of accepting divine homage, Luke could have been thinking about literary accounts of quasi-divine homage of Domitian, or of the ruler cult.

96. Origen, *Comm. on Rom.* 9,27; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 13,10,13.

97. The term first occurs in Euripides, *Bacchae* 45.323.1255. Further pieces of evidence are named by D.H. LEE, *Luke-Acts and "Tragic History": Communicating Gospel with the World* (WUNT 2, 346), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013, p. 206 as well as p. 207 n. 20 with reference to H. WINDISCH, *Die Christusepiphanie vor Damaskus (Act 9, 22 und 26) und ihre religionsgeschichtlichen Parallelen*, in *ZNW* 31 (1932) 1-23, p. 23. Generally, cf. W. SPEYER, *Art. Gottesfeind*, in *RAC* 11 (1981) 996-1043. M. WOLTER, *Paulus, der bekehrte Gottesfeind (1. Tim 1,13)*, in WOLTER (ed.), *Theologie und Ethos im frühen Christentum* (WUNT, 236), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2009, 241-257, pp. 245-250, points out frequent connections with the word families of ὑβρις and βλασφημία.

98. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.* 2,10,1.

5. INDIVIDUAL OFFICIALS

Here I will include statements by ancient Christian exegetes and ask whether the watershed events of 325 CE influenced exegesis (and reception) of texts relating to this issue.

5.1 Cornelius

John Chrysostom praises Cornelius for his commitment to prayer and charity rather than carousing, and for restraining from making the most of his status as a Roman soldier.⁹⁹ In Chrysostom's era, this was meant as an admonition for Christian soldiers. According to Ps.-Oecumenius of Tricca, wealth did not hinder Cornelius from adopting a life of piety.¹⁰⁰

5.2 Gallio

The manuscript tradition of Acts 18,17 is split, as one observes in early Christian commentaries, some of which do not have the simple πάντες as a subject, but include the additional specification πάντες οἱ Ἕλληνες¹⁰¹ or πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι.¹⁰² John Chrysostom's citation of the text presupposes that Greeks are the subject, but his commentary mentions Jews as the subject: he praises the ἐπιείκεια of Gallio and recommends him as a role model, in contrast to Paul's opponents who act contrary to the law.¹⁰³ The textual differences do not really affect the interpretation of Ammonius of Alexandria and Pseudo-Oecumenius, who are more interested in why Sosthenes was seized than in how Gallio behaves. Pseudo-Oecumenius does not assess the behavior of Gallio. According to Ammonius of Alexandria, who presupposes the reading πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in Acts 18,17, Gallio would have intervened if they had not begun beating each other.¹⁰⁴

According to Hans Conzelmann, the Gallio scene depicts ideal behavior of governing authorities.¹⁰⁵ Richard Pervo follows Haenchen's view on

99. John Chrysostom, *Catech. Bapt.* 3/6.28-30.

100. Pseudo-Oecumenius, *Act.* (PG 118:477 CD).

101. D E L Ψ 33. 323. 614. 945 etc.; Pseudo-Oecumenius, *Act.* (PG 118:244 C); The Venerable Bede, *Retr.* (CCL 121:154).

102. Minuscles 453. 2818; Ammonius of Alexandria, *Frgm. Act.* (PG 85:1569 B).

103. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act.* 39,2-3 (PG 60:279). Eusebius of Caesarea does not mention Gallio.

104. Ammonius of Alexandria, *Frgm. Act.* (PG 85:1569 B).

105. H. CONZELMANN, *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (BHT, 17), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1977, p. 133.

Gallio: his behavior was correct, and Rome should take this standpoint “as her own”. “Christianity is an inner-Jewish affair in which Rome does not meddle.”¹⁰⁶ Rudolf Pesch is more careful: although Gallio may behave impeccably as a statesman, his refusal to accept the case against Paul is not the same as a statement in the latter’s favor.¹⁰⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson concludes similarly: “If Gallio has dismissed the suit as a Jewish matter and then allowed an anti-semitic riot to break out without interfering, his ‘judicial restraint’ does nothing to positively protect the Christians.”¹⁰⁸

5.3 Antonius Felix and Tertullus

The depiction of Antonius Felix¹⁰⁹ in Roman and Jewish literature is unfavourable. Tacitus and Josephus say that he was partly to blame for riots in Judaea.¹¹⁰ According to Tacitus, he executed the office with the cruelty of a slavish soul.¹¹¹ Josephus reports that Felix had eliminated the inconvenient high priest Jonathan by means of bribed assassins; after his dismissal, a Jewish delegation supposedly complained to Nero about him.¹¹²

With regard to Acts 24,1-13, John Chrysostom considers the words of Tertullus¹¹³ rather than the words of Paul to be *κολακεία*.¹¹⁴ He characterizes Antonius Felix as *μιαρός* because he accepts money,¹¹⁵ while Paul does not try to flatter the judge. Luke truthfully describes the mindset of the judge.¹¹⁶

Felix’s relationship with the Jewish woman Drusilla¹¹⁷ is also known to Pseudo-Oecumenius, who is interested in why Drusilla married Felix. He concludes that she hoped he would convert from idolatry, and that she told him

106. R.I. PERVO, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, MN, Fortress, 2009, pp. 454-455.

107. R. PESCH, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 13-28)* (EKK, V/2), Zürich – Neukirchen, Benziger – Neukirchener, 1986, p. 151.

108. L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina Series, 5), Collegeville, PA, Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 334.

109. Luke refers to him as *ἡγεμών*, Josephus, *Bell.* 2,247 as *ἐπίτροπος*.

110. Tacitus, *Ann.* 12,54,1; Josephus, *Ant.* 20,162.

111. Tacitus, *Hist.* 5,9: *Antonius Felix per omnem saevitiam ac libidinem ius regium servili ingenio exercuit*; cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 12,54,1.

112. Josephus, *Ant.* 20,162-165.182

113. Ammonius of Alexandria, *Frgm. Act.* (PG 85:1592 B). According to Ammonius of Alexandria, Tertullus seems to be a non-Jew.

114. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act.* 50,1 (PG 60:345). Eusebius of Caesarea mentions Felix as *ἐπίτροπος* (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.* 2,19,2), but does not comment on his behavior.

115. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act.* 51,2 (PG 60:354).

116. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act.* 51,1 (PG 60:351-52).

117. According to Josephus, *Ant.* 20,141-143, she had been married to Azizus and this marriage was annulled so that she could marry Felix.

a lot about Christianity based on the Old Testament.¹¹⁸ Pseudo-Oecumenius does not discuss Tertullus.

5.4 Porcius Festus

According to Josephus, Porcius Festus planned to destroy a newly erected wall which would have prevented Agrippa from watching events in the temple. Nevertheless, Festus allowed the Jews to send an embassy to Nero, who decided in their favour.¹¹⁹

John Chrysostom contrasts Porcius Festus and the apostle Paul. Porcius' behaviour is called ἀπάτη,¹²⁰ while Paul's actions in Acts 25,9-12 are praised as παρρησία.¹²¹

While Ammonius of Alexandria is not really interested in Porcius Festus, he concludes from Acts 25,16 that Pilate had violated both divine and Roman law by leaving Jesus to the Jews for the purpose of homicide.¹²²

5.5 Christian Figures

How do Christian characters behave in Acts? Despite difficult conditions, they keep spreading the message, moving on to new locations if necessary, following the lead of Jesus (Luke 4,31-44; cf. Luke 4,28-30), Peter (Acts 4,20), the apostles (Acts 5,42) and Paul (e.g., Acts 14,19f.). They justify their mission as obedience to God (Acts 4,19; 5,29). When confronted by state authorities, they avail themselves of all possible legal means to protect themselves. They affirm their good conscience (Acts 23,1; 24,16) and their innocence (Acts 28,8.10), reject generic charges raised against them as false (Acts 24,13) and insist on their rights (Acts 16,35-40; 22,25; 25,10f.). This stands in tension to the willingness to suffer expressed by the community, and the willingness to be martyred (Acts 14,22; 21,13).

118. Pseudo-Oecumenius, *Act.* (PG 118:284 AB).

119. Josephus, *Ant.* 20,191-195.

120. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act.* 51.3 (PG 60:355).

121. *Ibid.*

122. Ammonius of Alexandria, *Frgm. Act.* (PG 85:1593 D – 1596 A). Pseudo-Oecumenius, *Act.* (PG 118:285 A) offers only the hint that “Caesar” was a Roman title, not a name.

6. CONCLUSION

Putting this all together, I want to discuss the consequences of the foregoing for dating Acts, as well as some theological repercussions. Regarding the question of “religion and politics” in Luke-Acts, key features include protection of the in-group, active promulgation of one’s own standpoint, and a willingness to be martyred.

While the depiction of centurions and chiliarchs is consistently positive in Acts, the portrayal of proconsuls is ambivalent. Is it a coincidence that the latter function as judges in trials of Christians?¹²³

Acts contains an implicit demand for tolerance – as Tertullian would observe – and for protection of the in-group. This makes a dating of 90 CE still seem likely, although a dating as late as 110 CE is possible. I would hesitate to date Acts to the time of Hadrian, since his claims to divinity do not seem to be reflected in Luke’s work.

This point about demanding tolerance for the in-group has theological consequences. Such a demand fits the situation of an infinitesimal minority in the Roman Empire. While the protection of people outside the group would not be much of a concern for an author writing under those circumstances, we have to think beyond this today. We are aided by the fact that the issue of good government is discussed from a minority’s perspective in the (Jewish) *Letter of Aristeas*, which calls for rulers to imitate God with regard to his kindness towards humans and his philanthropy¹²⁴ – a topos that appears in the New Testament only in connection with individual ethics. As is commonly acknowledged, this topos originated in Greek ruler ethics, and one could profitably appropriate it and apply it to politics today.

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123. Pliny, *Ep.* 10,96; Justin, *Second Apol.* 2; *Mart. Polyc.* 9,2.

124. *EpArist.* 188.210.281.