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Whose Rhetoric? Whose Empire?:

The Subversion of Augustan Rhetoric of Empire in the Gospel of Luke

Presentation to the conference “Augustus”

L. Gregory Bloomquist

1. Introduction

In A New History of Classical Rhetoric, George Kennedy writes:

Although not a distinguished public speaker, [Augustus] had a profound understanding of the rhetoric of empire. A variety of republican titles and religious forms were used to mask the reality of his power; art, architecture, inscriptions, and urban planning conveyed the aura of a new golden age; and support was given to writers, who in turn were expected to celebrate the achievements of the emperor and the legitimacy of his rule.<sup>1</sup>

It is the contention of this paper that the author of the Gospel according to Luke and of the Acts to the Apostles, an author we will call “Luke”, also had a profound understanding of this rhetoric of empire.<sup>2</sup> It is my further contention that Luke was not only aware of the

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<sup>1</sup>George A. Kennedy, A New History of Classical Rhetoric (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 159.

<sup>2</sup>The author of the Gospel is unknown. The ascription to Luke is due to internal evidence found in the apparent second volume of the author, called the “Acts of the Apostles”, and in external evidence from the patristic period. For details on the question of authorship, see Joseph A.

Augustan rhetoric of empire, but sought to use it to convey his message. Furthermore, I will contend that Luke also sought to transform the vehicle of Augustan rhetoric by subverting its original intent.<sup>3</sup> Finally, I will contend that in this use and transformation of the Augustan rhetoric of empire, Luke not only provides us with an important example of one rhetorical practice within the social context of earliest Christian rhetoric but also that Luke provided Christian writers after him with a model for the transformation of their own, inherited rhetorics of empire.

It is my larger hope that this paper will contribute to and help to redress certain imbalances in classical studies. Averil Cameron has pointed out one of these, namely, the widespread “indifference among historians to the use of literature (as distinct from “literary sources”) as evidence”.<sup>4</sup> I shall be looking here not just at literature as monument but at literature as a complex embodied expression of voices of the period.

Another imbalance “stems from the well-established practice of leaving [specifically] Christian texts aside except where they seem to provide factual evidence.”<sup>5</sup> I would suggest

Fitzmyer, The Gospel according to Luke I - IX, Anchor Bible 28 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 35-62.

<sup>3</sup>On the general notion of the transformation of the rhetoric of empire by Christian writers, see Averil Cameron, Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup>Cameron, Rhetoric of Empire, 2, citing F. Moretti, Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms, trans. S. Fischer, D. Forgacs, and D. Miller (London: Verson, 1988), 18.

<sup>5</sup>As Averil Cameron has noted, we have not only become more aware of the widespread use of rhetoric, but we have also become more aware of the need to understand Christianity’s rhetorical

that this practice risks omitting important elements in the study of the development of competing classical rhetorics. Luke's work is an important reflection on the Augustan legacy and, in fact, an important moment in the very survival of that same Augustan rhetoric.

Finally, it is my hope that my study will contribute to an understanding of the social and cultural world in which this rhetoric was rooted. The task has been described by Fergus Millar: to "approach that crucial turning-point which is the reign of Augustus" by looking "at how the world was represented, or mirrored, in hundreds of communities round the Mediterranean."<sup>6</sup> The community formed by the "pedagogical action" of Luke's text is an important, early "rival to and then inheritor of the old elite culture."<sup>7</sup> It is entirely appropriate to examine the place of this rival in a conference devoted to Augustus and his legacy.

## 2. Method

Recent work by scholars in various fields has suggested to scholars of early Christian literature the poverty of many of their present methods. As is the case with classical studies, contemporary scholars of early Christian literature are finding their approaches to their texts "flat". Therefore, Prof. Vernon Robbins, among others, argues that future approaches to early Christian literature must do more justice to the richly textured nature of ancient texts "as social, strategies and "the role of communication, written and oral, in its spread" (Cameron, Rhetoric of Empire, 2-3).

<sup>6</sup>Fergus Millar, "State and Subject: The Impact of Monarchy," in Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects, ed. Fergus Millar and Erich Segal (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 38.

<sup>7</sup>Cameron, Rhetoric of Empire, 24, citing the work of Pierre Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture, trans. R. Nice (London: Sage, 1977), vi.

cultural, historical, theological and ideological discourse”, texts that are ““thickly textured” with simultaneously interacting networks of signification”.<sup>8</sup>

Robbins’ own suggestion is that we use what he has called “socio-rhetorical analysis” to get at these texts. Socio-rhetorical analysis is “an exegetically-oriented approach that gathers current practices of interpretation together in an interdisciplinary paradigm.” As the name implies, socio-rhetorical analysis seeks to reinvent rhetoric by reading and rereading, interpreting and reinterpreting texts “as forms of activity inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers, orators and audiences.”<sup>9</sup> At present, it attempts a “programmatic analysis of (1) inner texture, (2) intertexture, (3) social and cultural texture, and (4) ideological texture.”<sup>10</sup> I shall use this network of readings in my analysis of our subject.

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<sup>8</sup>Vernon K. Robbins, “Socio-rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case,” in The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 109 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 164-165.

<sup>9</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 165, quoting Terence Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 206.

<sup>10</sup>Most fully set forth in Vernon K. Robbins, Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Mark, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), prologue. In terms of rhetoric, socio-rhetorical analysis seeks to replace Kennedy’s five stages of rhetorical analysis (determination of unit, situation, disposition of arrangement, techniques or style, synchronic analysis). See George A. Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33-38.

### 3. The Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Luke-Acts and the Augustan Rhetoric of Empire

#### 3.1. Innertexture

At the initial stage of attending to inner or intratexture, one attains “initial insight into the argumentation in the text” prior to any analysis of meanings.<sup>11</sup> Here the critic attends to “words, word patterns, voices, structures, devices, and modes in the text” as “the context for meanings and meaning effects which are then analyzed with the other readings of the text.”<sup>12</sup>

Robbins suggests five groupings of these elements:<sup>13</sup> “repetitive texture and pattern” (repetition of words, phrases, and topics throughout the unit), “progressive texture and pattern” (sequences of words, phrases, and topics that form patterns throughout the unit), “narrational texture and pattern” (attention to the patterns formed by the voices of those in the text, including

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<sup>11</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 171, following Chaim Perelman and L.

Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

<sup>12</sup>Vernon K. Robbins, “Summary of Socio-Rhetorical Analysis and Interpretation,” unpublished paper, 1995, 4.

<sup>13</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 165. The basic rhetorical elements of language according to Kenneth Burke are “the repetitive, progressive, conventional and minor rhetorical forms of language” (Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931] 123-183).

narrator and actors), “opening-middle-closing texture and pattern”, and “argumentative texture and pattern” (support via argumentation for statements made in the text).<sup>14</sup>

Attention to the elements of these categories in the Lukan texts is illuminating.<sup>15</sup> We may not be surprised to find frequent repetitions of key words such as αὐτός and its derivatives, μη and ου, τις, τι, nor by names for the dramatis personae: θεός, χριστός, Ἰησους, κύριος, πατήρ, Ἰουδαῖος, etc., nor even by repetitions of place names: Ἱεροσόλυμα, Ἰσραηλ, etc. We may, however, be surprised by less obvious patterns formed by repetitions and progressive uses of these and other words.

For example, the repetition of νόος and ἱερον, as well as οἰκία, οἶκος, and other related words, point us to a progression that has significant narrative consequences. For example, the Gospel opens in the Temple in Jerusalem (1.5, 1.1-4 is a dedicatory preface) and concludes there (24.53). The mid-point of the Gospel is also marked by Jesus’ initiation of a lengthy journey toward Jerusalem and the Temple (9.51 ff.). Jerusalem is still a focal point in the Acts of the Apostles; however, the Temple is relativised in Acts: the story resumes the Gospel story, which

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<sup>14</sup>While Robbins assigns the analysis of the indebtedness to rhetorical theory of these argumentative patterns, I would suggest that such analysis belongs more properly to the realm of intertextual analysis, since it compares one form with another arising from a different context. Robbins, “Summary,” 5, also includes under “innertextual” analysis “aesthetic texture and pattern”, but this seems more properly dealt with under the heading of socio-cultural analysis, since the points to which Robbins alludes, “range of senses” (including body zones, motions, purposeful actions) are highly culturally conditioned and cannot simply be attended to outside of such cultural considerations.

<sup>15</sup>On statistics of word and phrase repetition, one can rely on Robert Morgenthaler, Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes (Zurich and Frankfurt am Main: Gotthelf, 1958).

concluded with Jesus' ascension, but instead of the disciples returning to the Temple after the ascension (cf. Lk 24.53), they return to τὸ ὑπερῶον (Acts 1.13). And, as the Gospel ends where it began (viz., in the Temple), so Acts ends, as it began, in a private home, but now with Paul in captivity in Rome εἰς τὴν ξενίαν, Acts 28.23; cf. 28.16, 30). The middle of the Acts furthermore seems to picture a repetitive play between house (various words are used) as the meeting place for the new community and Temple as the key place of opposition to the new community (cf. Lk. 19.47; Acts 4.1 ff., 5.17 ff., 6.13 ff., etc.).

We may also be surprised by the appearance of named dramatis personae. We note particularly phrases and topics in Luke and Acts related to persons who exercise some kind of power. Of particular interest to us may be the frequency of particular persons or beings: θεός, χριστός, Ἰησοῦς, ἱερεύς, καισαρ, ἄγγελος, βασιλεία, βασιλεύς, πατήρ, as well as the frequent phrase βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. We note also the pattern of appearance of these persons, ones who do appear in the story and ones to whom reference is only made. Among the former, only the “angels” (or “messengers”), Jesus, the priests, and the Jewish and Roman political governors appear, while among the latter are to be counted not only the “Caesars” referred to but also, perhaps surprisingly, God understood as “king” or as “father”.

We turn, then, to what these patterns may suggest.

### 3.2. Intertexture

Recognition of frequency and patterns allows us to establish patterns for interpretation, especially through comparison with other known patterns. Analysis of this “intertexture”, then,

deals with the question: “with what texts does this text stand in dialogue?”<sup>16</sup> whether these texts are or are not part of a related corpus (e.g., the New Testament for Luke).<sup>17</sup>

Analysis of intertexture will involve analysis of (1) “reference” (“with what texts and textual traditions are these phrases in dialogue?”), (2) “recitation” (including the “rehearsal of attributed speech in exact, modified or different words from other accounts of the attributed speech, and rehearsal of an episode or series of episodes, with or without using some words from another account of the story”), (3) “recontextualisation” (“the placing of attributed narration or speech in a new context without announcing its previous attribution”), and (4) “reconfiguration” (modification of a word, phrase, topic or theme).<sup>18</sup>

Luke is an excellent test case for analysis of intertexture, since the author himself tells us (Lk 1.1-4) that he composed his works on the basis of other accounts that he had carefully

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<sup>16</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 179. In “Summary,” 7, Robbins notes that these “texts” are to be understood in the widest sense: “In other words, the interaction of the text being interpreted with other material and physical “objects”, with historical events, with other texts, and with customs, values, roles, institutions, and systems.” I believe that Robbins involves interpretive steps here that should again be understood to have their proper place in the “social-cultural texture” analysis.

<sup>17</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 181, citing Eagleton, Literary Theory, 1-53. For example, can we interpret Luke and Acts uniquely in the context of their canonical connection within the New Testament, or even with the Christian Scriptures, or does intertextuality demand that we transcend these boundaries that are the imposition of another age?

<sup>18</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 179. Robbins also speaks of a fifth component, “intertextual echo”; however, to me this is found in each of the already named four components (181).

considered and then either introduced into or excluded from his own account. Contemporary scholarship suggests that the sources Luke considered in writing his Gospel were (1) the canonical Gospel of Mark, (2) a written version of a Sayings Gospel -- given the name "Q" --, which, though lost, may have looked something like the extant Coptic Gospel of Thomas,<sup>19</sup> and finally (3) written material (designated L) that was unique to Luke or to his community and which is not found elsewhere in other Gospel traditions (e.g., the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Parable of the Good Samaritan).<sup>20</sup>

Scholars do not believe, however, that these works were incorporated into Luke's final works without modification but rather that Luke significantly altered and modified even the material that he took over and that he put his own seal on the final product. The situation is more complex with regard to Acts; accordingly, there is less consensus regarding the sources from which Luke worked in the composition of Acts.<sup>21</sup>

These sources, as well as redactional strata in the final product, also suggest the presence of prominent texts from Judaism (including but not limited to the Old Testament in Greek and current synagogue discussions). For example, it is widely believed that the extensive and largely poetic portions found in Luke's Infancy Narrative (Luke 1-2) are drawn from Jewish

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<sup>19</sup>See John S. Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>20</sup>See Fitzmyer, 1.65-106.

<sup>21</sup>On this question, see Mark Allan Powell, What Are They Saying about Acts? (Mahwah: Paulist, 1991), 27-30.

texts, either by Luke or by his sources.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the speeches of Acts, which incorporate vast portions of the Israelite history, are believed to be a mixture of pre-existing Jewish (and possibly also Samaritan) texts and Luke's own more or less significant redaction of them in light of his own reflection on the style and content of the Greek text of the Jewish Scriptures.

Finally, Luke's sources and redaction also reveal a Greco-Roman intertexture, analysis of which is now well underway thanks to the work of Richard Pervo,<sup>23</sup> Vernon Robbins,<sup>24</sup> David Gowler,<sup>25</sup> Willi Braun,<sup>26</sup> and the extensive work of David Gill and his team.<sup>27</sup> Given our subject matter, we need to look more closely at this intertexture.

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<sup>22</sup>See, for example, Stephen Farris, The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives: Their Origin, Meaning and Significance, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series vol. 9 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

<sup>23</sup>Richard I. Pervo, Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup>Among other texts, see Vernon K. Robbins, "Luke-Acts: A mixed population seeks a home in the Roman Empire," in Images of Empire, ed. Loveday Alexander, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 122 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 202-221.

<sup>25</sup>See for example David B. Gowler, Host, Guest, Enemy and Friends: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts, Emory Studies in Early Christianity (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

<sup>26</sup>Willi Braun, Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14, Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 85 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), on which see my L. Gregory Bloomquist, "Patristic reception of Lukan rhetoric: A response to Willi Braun's Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14," a paper presented at the Rhetoric of Scripture Group, Society of Biblical Literature, Philadelphia, November, 1995.

Reflection of Greco-Roman texts can be found in Luke's sources. For example, prominent motifs derived from cynic sayings collections have been observed in the earliest stratum of one of Luke's sources, namely, Q<sup>28</sup> (e.g., 6.20; 11.2; 11.17, 20; 12.31 and 32).<sup>29</sup> These motifs reflect the cynic use of royal language to "undergird the appeal to utter dependence on God's providential care in the present."<sup>30</sup> Other texts from the same stratum of Q and from later developments of Q reflect the true rule preached by cynics as social reversal, an "anti-family ethos", and love of enemies (9.60, -- possibly 9.62 --, 10.9, 10.11).<sup>31</sup>

But, Greco-Roman texture is not limited to Luke's sources, something that might have suggested unawareness of the underlying texture. Rather, Luke evidences conscious attention to the Roman imperial setting as the context within which his itself story takes shape. Along with other early Christian writers, Luke alludes to the Roman imperial context as the context for the

<sup>27</sup>The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting, 6 vols., ed. by D. W. J. Gill, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994-).

<sup>28</sup>Burton L. Mack, The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

<sup>29</sup>John S. Kloppenborg, "Blessing and Marginality: The "Persecution Beatitude" in Q, Thomas, and Early Christianity," Forum 2/3 (1986) 36-37; idem, "The Function of Apocalyptic Language in Q," in Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1986, SBLSPS, 25 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986) 224-235.

<sup>30</sup>Kloppenborg, "Function of Apocalyptic Language in Q," 227.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Jirair S. Tashjian, "The Social Setting of the Q Mission: Three Dissertations," in Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers, ed. David J. Lull, Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers Series 27 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 638.

story of Jesus; however, Luke goes further than the others do in detailing the story. For example, Luke is the only writer in the whole of the New Testament to mention Augustus explicitly (Lk 2.1).<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in his second volume, Luke accurately depicts Roman customs, laws, and personnel of the first century CE in a way that has led scholars to conclude either that Luke was familiar with these customs and laws firsthand or that he was familiar with them from historically accurate literary sources.

Luke is also aware of cities and monuments of the imperial world, and gives pride of place to ones directly connected to the imperial cult. For example, a prominent city in Acts is Caesarea Maritima, which not only in name recalls its dedication to Augustus,<sup>33</sup> but which we now know from epigraphic evidence had important collegia of Augustales.<sup>34</sup> Or again, the main

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<sup>32</sup>Admittedly, there is some question about the reliability of that mention, since Augustus is mentioned in the context of a census that may never have taken place, a census that is the raison d'être for Joseph of Nazareth and his wife Mary to journey to Bethlehem to give birth there to Jesus. Nevertheless, for our purposes, it is not whether Luke got his historical facts “correct” that is of interest to us, but the fact of their inclusion and their rhetorical function. Is it not noteworthy, for example, that Luke introduces Augustus in his birth narrative of the Messiah, while Matthew, the other canonical birth narrative, contextualises the birth of the Messiah in the context of Herod’s reign and never mentions Augustus. Is it not noteworthy that Luke continues the story of what “Jesus began to do” by talking about the actions of Jesus’ apostolic followers in relation to the reigns of other emperors?

<sup>33</sup>See Lee I. Levine, Caesarea under Roman Rule (Leiden: E. Brill, 1975).

<sup>34</sup>See esp. B. Hudson McLean, “The Inscriptions of Caesarea and the Relation to the Physical Remains of the City,” unpublished paper presented to the Religious Rivalries Seminar, Canadian Society for Biblical Studies, 1995, 14.

square of Antioch in Asia Minor, a city that plays a prominent role in Acts (chaps 13 and 14), was called the Platea Augusta. It was dominated by the Temple to Augustus and engraved with the res gestae divi Augusti.<sup>35</sup> In other words, familiarity with cities should lead us to suspect also a familiarity with the rhetoric of empire emblazoned on the monuments of those cities.<sup>36</sup>

Monumental art, which no citizen in the second half of the first century CE could have avoided, gave visual expression to the Augustan rhetoric of empire.<sup>37</sup> For example, the altar of

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<sup>35</sup>W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 40.

<sup>36</sup>It is true that important sites associated with Augustus in the Holy Land are missing, such as Samaria (Sebaste). Most intriguing of all is that Luke, along with all of early Christianity, associates Jesus at some stage of his upbringing with Nazareth, a relatively insignificant town. Yet Nazareth was a mere four miles SE of the much more important city of Sepphoris, where “Actian Games” were held to mark Augustus’ victory over Antony. While we may argue, as some have done, that anonymity of Greco-Roman culture was characteristic of all Second Temple Jewish texts (cf. J. Andrew Overman, “Matthew’s Parables and Roman Politics: The Imperial Setting of Matthew’s Narrative with Special Reference to his Parables,” in Society of Biblical Literature 1995 Seminar Papers, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr., Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Paper Series 34 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995] 425), it seems more likely that Luke has a different agenda, namely, to ensure that the narrative has Jesus avoid contact with imperial sites while Jesus’ followers bring the gospel message to those same imperial sites, excepting those in Galilee. As we shall see, Luke’s understanding of Jesus as imperial rival to Augustus is always oblique.

<sup>37</sup>M. I. Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 44. Rostovtzeff equivocates when it comes to calling these realms “propaganda bureaus”.

the Gens Augusta from Carthage proclaimed Augustus as the one graced by Victory and before whom the world has poured forth her riches. The altar pictures the “majestic figure of Roma” resting; “war is over, Rome is victorious, there is no need of arms and weapons any more. ... Peace is restored. Rome looks proudly at the symbols of her world-Empire: the basis is piety, the foundation is religion.”<sup>38</sup>

Or, again, the Ara pacis in Rome depicts “idyllic scenes with the figure of Terra Mater surrounded by the elements and symbolizing the creative forces of nature as restored and protected by Augustus.”<sup>39</sup> Even the sacrificial procession of priests, with Augustus acting as high priest, and Aeneas -- in a front relief -- leading the procession of Julio-Claudians and sacrificing, again portend the age of bounty that is dawning for Rome.<sup>40</sup> Following Zanker’s lead, David Castriota even sees in the floral friezes of the Ara Pacis an ideology of “beneficial concord”.<sup>41</sup> The theme of concord is further underscored in Castriota’s mind if one sees the Ara Pacis figures of Dionysos -- preponderant on the Ara but “associated with Antony and not Augustus” -- and Apollo as a “numen mixtum”,<sup>42</sup> for, in fact, no greater example of concord

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<sup>38</sup>Rostovtzeff, History, 44-45.

<sup>39</sup>Rostovtzeff, History, 45.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Helmut Koester, Introduction to the New Testament, 1: History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age, second ed. (Philadelphia and Berlin: Fortress and De Gruyter, 1995), 293.

<sup>41</sup>David Castriota, The Ara Pacis Augustae and the Imagery of Abundance in Later Greek and Early Roman Imperial Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 86. See P. Zanker, The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988).

<sup>42</sup>Castriota, Ara Pacis, 106-23.

could be found than one that was seen to overcome the division between the followers of Antony and Octavian!

Most widespread of all monuments, perhaps, were coins. As a principal source of popular, rhetorical propaganda,<sup>43</sup> coins of the epoch would have suggested that Augustus, portrayed on some coins with Mercury (the god of merchants) and the horn of plenty, was truly divi filius and the great restorer of order. On other, later coins he is also portrayed by “a new idealized image of a great man and a great warrior” thus matching his desire to be remembered as pater patriae and princeps civium.<sup>44</sup> Subsequent emperors and subsequent coinage followed this pattern.

Now, it is true that not all contemporary scholars are “convinced by the current tendency among art historians to read Augustan art and propaganda so smoothly as an affirmation of a blissful “golden age”.”<sup>45</sup> This is a helpful corrective, for a rhetoric of empire need not have been characterised by the overarching theme of a “golden age” but only the function that such a theme played, whether instigated from above or widely occurring with no explicit imperial

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<sup>43</sup>According to Yavetz, “written propaganda addressed to the masses would have to be short, like slogans on coins; it was common knowledge that the average man was more interested in daily news, and piquant gossip, than in the vast array of facts from the past” (Zvi Yavetz, “The Res Gestae and Augustus’ Public Image,” in Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects, ed. Fergus Millar and Erich Segal [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984] 13).

<sup>44</sup>Yavetz, Res Gestae, 6-7.

<sup>45</sup>Jas Elsner, Courtauld Institute of Art, reviewing Castriota’s work in the Bryn Mawr Review 95.9.5, believes that “giving more room to a reading of the non-floral imagery of the Ara Pacis--its sacrificial themes, for example--would have discovered a less consistently “seamless and unequivocal” (p. 89) propagandist thematics.”

direction.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, there appear to be few doubts that Augustan rule was widely perceived as representing a significant change in the reality of those who lived under Roman rule. For the first time after centuries of civil and imperial wars, “the civilized world enjoyed a real peace.”<sup>47</sup> Not surprisingly, “inscriptions honored Augustus as a benefactor who had surpassed all hopes, and whose deeds had reached beyond the boasts of any future benefactors of mankind.”<sup>48</sup> Monumental art proclaimed empire.

Scholarly study of Luke has revealed that Luke is aware not only of monumental “texts” but also of other Greco-Roman texts, such as rhetorical argumentation,<sup>49</sup> historiography,<sup>50</sup> and narrative.<sup>51</sup> If so, we may also find it probable that Luke encountered facets of the Augustan rhetoric of empire in a variety of these texts, as well as in the monumental art.

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<sup>46</sup>So Roland Jeffreys’ review (Phoenix 49 (1995) 264) of Peter White, Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>47</sup>So, while it is fair to say that “the rule of Augustus was not a time of rest”, and that military considerations demanded “a policy of unflagging and strenuous military efforts” (Rostovtzeff, History, 52-53), a now-unified world knew peace precisely because the sea-lanes were protected by the Roman navy and the highways, which were built for military purposes, were now safe for commerce (History, 65).

<sup>48</sup>Koester, Introduction, 295.

<sup>49</sup>See Braun, Feasting.

<sup>50</sup>See Gregory E. Sterling, Historiography and Self-definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 64 (Leiden, New York and Cologne: Brill, 1992).

<sup>51</sup>See Pervo, Profit.

We know the prominent place of the Augustan rhetoric of empire in the writings of the Augustan poets, for whom Augustus' peace-making was associated with the peace-making of the gods, "Mercury or Apollo or Hercules, who appeared among men (ἐπιθωνής)" and for whom Augustus was "the Messiah and the Saviour of the mighty and holy Roman Empire."<sup>52</sup> For example, Horace's Carmen saeculare, composed directly or indirectly through Augustus' instigation, summarised Virgil's prophecies and showed that the new age was beginning in their age.<sup>53</sup> In Horace Augustus' reign was depicted as a novus ordo saeculorum, a new order of peace.<sup>54</sup>

Writings by others were, however, equally unequivocal in their vision of Augustus. In Nicolas of Damascus' Life of Augustus (dated 25-20 BCE),<sup>55</sup> Augustus is referred to in

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<sup>52</sup>Rostovtzeff, History, 44. See Roland Jeffreys' review of White, Promised Verse (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) in Phoenix 49 (1995) 263-265. Virgil, writing of Rome and her citizens living under Augustus, could write: "for these people I have set no limits, world or time, but make the gift of empire without end, Lords of the world, the toga bearing Romans" (Aen. 1). This is echoed in the anonymous Rhetorica ad Herennium, according to which Rome's mandate is "to rule the entire earth" (4.13).

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Koester, Introduction, 293.

<sup>54</sup> Yavetz, Res Gestae, 22-23: "he sincerely intended to restore the Republic, the authority of the Senate, and especially the old and traditional way of life". White's view in Promised Verse would suggest that this position remains valid.

<sup>55</sup>It is thought to be the "oldest historical source directly concerning Augustus" (Emilio Gabba, "The Historians and Augustus," in Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects, ed. Fergus Millar and Erich Segal [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984] 62). Gabba agrees that Nicolas' Life was "a free paraphrase of Augustus' work, adapted to the point of view of the eastern part of the Empire."

universalist terms as “a leader of outstanding wisdom, at the head of the greatest empire ever known,” whose two main achievements were peace and stability.<sup>56</sup> The edict of Paulus Fabius Maximus “invited the provincial koinon to consider the introduction of a new calendar for the province of Asia, based on the birthday of Augustus; the reasoning of the edict centres on the themes of general renewal and the good of humanity.”

In his De antiquis oratoribus (1.1-3), Dionysius of Halicarnassus applauded the “consolidation of Roman rule” that meant the end of popular, and debased Asianic culture and the restoration of classical Greek culture represented by the orators of the fourth century BCE.<sup>57</sup> In Aelius Aristides’ speech To Rome, Augustus’ empire is depicted as a new city-empire, with the Emperor as the head, over a population that lives at peace, though it comes from a variety of backgrounds. There is “a fundamental equality between all subjects, and overall liberty.” In the monarch’s eyes, “all are equal, safe in the enjoyment of their freedom under the Empire.” The bureaucracy of this new city-state is able “to bring the various elements of society into a harmonious relationship with each other, in freedom and under the rule of law.”<sup>58</sup> The preface “includes an encomium of the monarchic system, which has brought concord, order, security, and lasting peace to all the peoples of the Empire.”<sup>59</sup>

Even many Jewish writings of the period shared this rhetorical vision. For example, Philo of Alexandria depicts Augustus as

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<sup>56</sup>Gabba, “Historians,” 61, 63.

<sup>57</sup>Gabba, “Historians,” 65.

<sup>58</sup>Gabba, “Historians,” 68-69.

<sup>59</sup>Gabba, “Historians,” 69.

someone who with his virtues has vanquished human nature; who has deserved the name by reason of the extent of his power and the nobility of his behaviour. He has saved the world by bringing it peace; he has restored order throughout the world; he has brought freedom to the cities; he has civilized the barbarians; he has ensured the freedom of the seas for maritime trade. Above all, he has added new Greek lands to those already existing and has brought about the Hellenization of the barbarian world by the harmonious distribution of his favours and the distribution of all the good things of the world to everyone. (Legatio 149).

According to Frennd, Augustus fulfilled Philo's ideal of the earthly ruler as king, "the godly monarch ruling in imitation of his Creator, the Word."<sup>60</sup>

In sum, the overarching (or "repetitive") themes of the "texts" that proclaim an Augustan rhetoric of empire are of a procession of those involved in the restoration of right world-order, with Augustus at the pinnacle,<sup>61</sup> and the burgeoning prosperity that was proclaimed as the result

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<sup>60</sup>Frennd, Rise of Christianity, 35. Philo presents his view to show how the Jews present a stabilizing influence in the Roman empire. In fact, not only does Philo speak of a synagogue devoted to Augustus in Alexandria (Legatio, 22.151), but inscriptional evidence testifies to synagogue in Rome itself that was dedicated to Augustus and called "Augustesi" (Frennd, Rise of Christianity, 41, citing H. J. Leon, The Jews of Ancient Rome [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961], 142). Josephus does not present a "more realistic" picture of Roman rule than does Philo (pace Gabba, "Historians," 64) but a different one for a different function. Not surprisingly, Augustus' reception by learned Jews such as Philo and Josephus had significant implications for Christianity. Josephus seeks a similar goal to that of Philo, namely, to show the importance of the place of the Jews in the context of the Roman world. Early Christianity apparently had to contend with matters of self-definition on two fronts, in terms of its religious origins in Judaism and in terms of socio-cultural origins in the Greco-Roman world.

<sup>61</sup>See Rostovtzeff, History, 45

of Augustus' rule. In the period after his death, he, "and not Julius Caesar, became the accepted model for subsequent Roman Emperors; his actions were recognized as binding precedents."<sup>62</sup>

I believe that Luke's works not only echo but build on this rhetoric of empire and transform it. For example, Luke regularly makes reference throughout Acts and strategically throughout the Gospel to the key players, present or absent, in the imperial hierarchy. Among the present, are the military leaders and the client governors; among the named but physically absent, are the provincial governors and, of course, Caesar. It is a pattern that is echoed for characters from another hierarchy, namely, the divine one. God's heavenly agents appear to fulfill their lordly mission and, though charged with imperial or kingly authority, are never confused with the king. In the case of Jesus, Luke, like the Augustan writers, walks a fine line between active intervention and ultimate responsibility: Jesus will be seen, as Augustus was, to be ultimately responsible for the restoration of divine order, but, as is clear from the Acts of the Apostles, though Jesus, like Augustus, has set things in motion, he does not need to do everything for it to happen. Nevertheless, God the Father is always absent.<sup>63</sup>

Again, in reference to events, be they important imperial events (such as the Census or events like it) or the ever-present, daily imperial presence throughout the land of Israel, use of elements of imperial rhetoric would have allowed Luke to draw boundaries. For Luke can be seen to have shown throughout his story how imperial structures have made a story that is much

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<sup>62</sup>Yavetz, Res gestae, 21.

<sup>63</sup>In Luke and Acts, God can be envisioned as either the one who is in ultimate control of history (see, for example, Robert F. O'Toole, The Unity of Luke's Theology: An Analysis of Luke-Acts, Good News Series 9 [Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984]) or the one who both makes and keeps promises (see Robert J. Karris, What Are They Saying about Luke and Acts? A Theology of the Faithful God [New York: Paulist, 1979]).

more important than the Augustan one possible and how that story will eventually transform the Augustan story itself. If, then, Luke, at the beginning of his Gospel, perceives a universal, imperial decree as setting the events of Jesus' life in motion, by the end of Acts, Luke also sees the imprisonment of Paul, an apparently insignificant though Roman citizen from the outlying reaches of the empire, being rescued by peripheral Roman troops in Jerusalem and being shepherded by those same troops to the very threshold of the Emperor himself (cf. Acts 25.12; 28.16). The innertextual dynamics of Luke's story suggest that Paul will in fact cross that threshold successfully, whether the door is physically open or shut (cf. the ending of Luke's Gospel, Lk 24.31 and 26)!

Luke recontextualises and reconfigures a variety of other themes in moving from Jesus' birth to Paul's Roman imprisonment. The imperial motif of a new age and order of peace is reconfigured in the angelic announcement at Jesus' birth (Lk 2.8-20), which, as noted, occurs in an imperial context. Ἐιρήνη, a characteristic description of Augustus' empire, is an overwhelmingly Lukan word among the canonical Gospels and is used in the context of the angelic announcement characteristically of the gift of God that Jesus will bring to all (cf. Lk 2.14).<sup>64</sup>

The imperial motif of deliverer of the whole earth is found in Luke's extensive use of the title Messiah (Christ). Furthermore, it is Luke who, uniquely in the Synoptic tradition, has Jesus called σωτήρ (Lk 2.11; Acts 5.31; 13.23) and it is the Lukan Jesus who, alone among the Synoptic Gospels, is said to accomplish σωτηρία for the world (Lk 19.9; Acts 4.12; 13.26; 16.17).

The imperial rhetoric identified the Romans as the recipients of the blessings of the gods by the hands of Augustus. As in the case of the rhetoric of empire, there are imperial blessings in Luke, blessings associated with "the kingdom of God" (cf. Lk 6.20-23). But

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<sup>64</sup> Ἐιρήνη is found only 1x in Mk, 4x in Mt, 6x in Jn, but 14x in Lk and 7x in Acts.

just as this empire is not an empire or kingdom that is identified with territory or ethnic origins, so, too, the blessings are not identified with “earthly” blessings. Rather, the kingdom is envisioned to be an empire comprised of citizens who have received good or bad from the hand of God and have recognised that reality.

The rhetorical affirmation that the land had been restored to an almost self-producing abundance under Augustus was further confirmation of Augustus’s world-saving activity;<sup>65</sup> the princeps had restored order, plenty and goodness. In Luke, this same restoration is consistently preached by Jesus as the work of the Father who is alone able to bring about an abundance and plenty that will characterise the “kingdom of God” (e.g., Lk 12.22-32; Acts 14.17). Workers in this Kingdom will be freed to engage in the new harvest (cf. Lk 10.2; Acts 6.2-4), much as, in the Augustan rhetoric of empire, landed-labourers were now free to engage in the harvest of empire through imperial military service.

The fact that the novus ordo saeculorum demanded a new form of yearly accounting is also echoed in Luke who, uniquely among earliest Christian authors, provided a new calendar appropriate to the salvation that had dawned in Jesus. For Luke uniquely arranged the events of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and giving of the Spirit around the Jewish feasts of Passover, followed, in a perfection of 50 days later, by Pentecost.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Rostovtzeff, History, 59, affirms that the Augustan period was one of serious concern that the peasants were abandoning the land in favour of emigration to the burgeoning cities.

<sup>66</sup>The number “50” represents the perfection of 7 weeks of 7 days. Cf. Aileen Guilding, The Fourth Gospel and Jewish worship: A Study of the Relation of St. John’s Gospel to the Ancient Jewish Lectionary System (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) and A. Jaubert, The Date of the Last Supper (Staten Island: Alba, 1965) for interpretations of the Gospel according to John in which that Gospel, too, is viewed as establishing a new, Christian calendar.

In sum, there is a sufficient indication of reconfiguration of themes from the Augustan imperial rhetoric in Luke and Acts to suggest that these texts are transforming the themes, motifs, and perhaps texts themselves of the imperial rhetoric. It still remains, though, to see the historical or socio-cultural context of this reconfiguration.

### 3.3. Analysis of the Socio-Cultural Texture

Richly textured texts have an existence in a complex web not just of literary relationships (intertexture) but also of social and cultural relationships. Analysis of this web of relationships “raises questions about the response to the world, the social and cultural systems and institutions, and the cultural alliances and conflicts evoked by the text.” Even classical rhetorical theory was aware that such phenomena were “primary topics”.<sup>67</sup>

At this level of analysis, one is interested in the common social and cultural topics “that everyone living in an area knows either consciously or instinctively”.<sup>68</sup> Such topics would include (1) overarching cultural and anthropological questions, such as honour, guilt, purity, rights, and legal arrangements,<sup>69</sup> (2) forms of social interaction (such as challenge-response

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<sup>67</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 185, citing Roger Fowler, Linguistic Criticism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 85-101 and Aristotle, Rhetoric 1.2.21-22; 2.22.1 - 23.30; 3.15.1-4).

<sup>68</sup>Robbins, “Summary,” 12.

<sup>69</sup>This might involve, for example, an examination of individualist and dyadic personalities. “A dyadic personality is one who needs another person continually in order to know who he or she really is. ... The dyadic personality is an individual who perceives himself/herself and forms

and dialectic interaction), (3) economic wealth exchanges common to the means of production (agriculture, industry, information technology), (4) social relations arising from these exchanges, and (5) self-understanding, including understandings of the body.

One way of looking at these topics in religious texts will be in terms of religious responses to social situations. Here Robbins has been guided by Bryan Wilson's typology of religious sect into (1) the conversionist, (2) the revolutionist, (3) the introversionist, (4) the manipulationist or gnostic, (5) the thaumaturgic, (6) the reformist, and (7) the utopian.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, among the wider topics there are also some that are more crucial, what Aristotle called "final topics". These are the topics "that most decisively identify one's cultural location" and concern "the manner in which people present their propositions, reasons, and arguments both to themselves and to other people."<sup>71</sup> Robbins identifies four "final topics" of cultural rhetoric: (1) dominant culture rhetoric, (2) subculture rhetoric, (3) counterculture rhetoric, and (4) contraculture rhetoric.<sup>72</sup>

Analysis of the economic situation unleashed by Augustus reveals a situation of "a purely economic rivalry between business men ... unhampered by political considerations."

his/her self-image in terms of what others perceive and feed back to him/her" (Robbins, "Summary," 13).

<sup>70</sup>Bryan R. Wilson, "A Typology of Sects," in Sociology of Religion, ed R. Robertson (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), 361-383.

<sup>71</sup>Robbins, "Summary," 19.

<sup>72</sup>Robbins, "Summary," 20, citing K. A. Roberts, "Toward a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture," Sociological Focus 11 (1978) 111-126.

It was “a time of almost complete freedom of trade and of splendid opportunities for private initiative”, even in the strongly centralised province of Egypt.<sup>73</sup> In this, as noted above, Augustus appears to have successfully walked a very fine line between being seen as the one who was responsible for the general economic well-being of the empire and also as one who had freed others to produce the bounty.

Yet, in one area, Augustus did not succeed in distancing himself from the economic model of Hellenistic kings. For when he began to disburse his own wealth for the good of the people and began to be seen as the main source of largesse for the well-being of the state, Augustus and subsequent emperors became “in a sense patroni of the entire urban plebs”<sup>74</sup> and guarantors of the well-being of all those who came under their authority, including the defenceless. As a result, a significant theme of the Augustan rhetoric of empire was a combination of laissez-faire economic growth and the king as benefactor.

Not surprisingly, as a benefactor who alone was perceived to protect his subjects against the unscrupulous wiles of the aristocratic families, Augustus came into direct conflict with the aristocracy.<sup>75</sup> While the Senate willingly abdicated more and more of its

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<sup>73</sup>Rostovtzeff, History, 54.

<sup>74</sup>Zvi Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 152.

<sup>75</sup>In Tacitus’ work, for example, the honourable plebs is distinguished from the despised; the honourable, called by Tacitus pars populi integra were those who remained “within the structure of the clientela of large aristocratic homes which were not completely destroyed in the civil war” and who remained dependent on their aristocratic masters by observing fides towards their masters (magnis domibus adnexi), while the sordida plebs were those whose sole patron was the emperor. According to Yavetz, the economic position of the former may have actually improved as a result of their allegiance (Plebs, 97 and 152). “Although the emperor was not

financial responsibilities to Augustus, it was unwilling to abdicate its political will to Augustus -- and was resentful in being forced to do so.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, the rhetorical portrayal of this conflict reveals how even this conflict was woven into the rich texture of the Augustan imperial rhetoric. Pliny, for example, portrays Augustus winning “the affection of the humble without having lost the respect of their superiors.”<sup>77</sup> The element of concord reigns even here: Augustus, like a father, was able to lead all strata of society without differentiation (consensus universorum), and, like a healer, a good physician, was able to take into his hands a disease-ridden body and heal it.<sup>78</sup>

officially referred to as patronus of all the plebs, there was a clear conflict between his influence and the patronage exercised by individual senators.” In this way, according to Yavetz, Augustus was able to curb “the influence of all who attempted to obtain clients in one way or another from among the common people” (Yavetz, Plebs, 97, citing Tacitus, Historia, 2.92).

<sup>76</sup>Rostovtzeff, History, 57. Historically, of course, the proclamation by Augustus as patron of the urban plebs appears to have had to do less with magnanimity on the part of Augustus and more with the emperor’s wish “to restrict the private clientela of the senatorial aristocracy.” According to Yavetz, Augustus was able to curb “the influence of all who attempted to obtain clients in one way or another from among the common people” (Yavetz, Plebs, 97).

<sup>77</sup>Yavetz, Res Gestae, 13, citing Pliny, Epp. 9.5.

<sup>78</sup>Yavetz, Res Gestae, 13, citing Dio 66.39.2. In later years, Yavetz notes, “provincial writers would recall that August healed the sicknesses common to Greeks and barbarians alike” (Yavetz, Res Gestae, 21, citing Philo, Leg. ad Gaium, 144-145).

Luke, too, among the canonical Gospels, depicts Jesus as God's agent of healing (e.g., Lk 5.17-26; Acts 4.10). Unfortunately that healing has often been reduced to merely physical healing.<sup>79</sup> As scholars have recently shown, however, Jesus' healings would have been understood in first century CE as having clear political and economic import beyond the immediate physical effect.<sup>80</sup> So we need to ask: what healing does Luke understand Jesus to have brought, including to the land, that would allow a person or the land to abound?

Luke would have known a situation of disease, not abundance, in the eastern Mediterranean. The land-based agrarian economies of the early Roman period (in which the self-sufficient "household" was the main economic unit of a kinship-based economy) had yielded to a growing new urbanism brought with it by imperial Rome.<sup>81</sup> An analysis of patron-client dynamics<sup>82</sup> reveals that one of the key problems faced in the Palestine of Jesus' day was the breakdown in the patronage system caused by urbanism.

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<sup>79</sup>This perception is often accompanied by the traditional suggestion that the author must have been a doctor.

<sup>80</sup>See, for example, Paul W. Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A Socio-historical Study," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 49 (1981) 567-588, and Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994).

<sup>81</sup>Douglas E. Oakman, Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day, Studies in the Bible and early Christianity, 8 (Queenston, Ontario and Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 17-18.

<sup>82</sup>See, for example, S. N. Eisenstadt and Luis Roniger, "Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchange," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 22 (1980), 42-78;

Specifically, “Judea and Galilee were deeply insinuated into the imperial political system”, as evidenced by “the prominent building projects in this region during the first and early second centuries”. These projects announced “Judean and Galilean participation in a pattern involving the expectation of public building, royal benefaction, and civic appreciation at all political levels.” In fact, it may be that the Hellenistic East, including Herodian Palestine, “excelled at this aspect of the imperial system.”<sup>83</sup>

But, this shift led to a highly unstable economic situation. In it the key players were patrons, who controlled “access to key social resources”, and their clients, who were acquired.<sup>84</sup> It was an “inherently unstable” model for, while the kinship model, on which it was built, was very stable, the patron-client network of mutual relationships was

idem, Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); idem, “The Study of Patron-Client Relations and Recent Developments in Sociological Theory,” Political Clientelism, Patronage and Development, edited by S. N. Eisenstadt and Rene Lemarchand (Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1981), 271-296. In his MA thesis for the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, entitled “Patron-Client Dynamics in Flavius Josephus’ Vita: A Cross-Disciplinary Analysis” (available by anonymous ftp from [aix1.uottawa.ca](http://aix1.uottawa.ca)), Michael Strangelove helpfully overviews the history of patron-client studies. See now also Halvor Moxnes, “Patron-client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts,” in The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 241-268.

<sup>83</sup>Overman, “Matthew’s Parables,” 428-429. See also J. A. Overman, “Recent Advances in the Archaeology of the Galilee in the Roman Period,” Currents in Biblical Research 1 (1993) 35-58.

<sup>84</sup>Oakman, Jesus, 208.

unbalanced and unequal:<sup>85</sup> the patron was overwhelmingly superior to the client, monopolizing access to production, its means, major markets, and the elite of the society.<sup>86</sup>

Not surprisingly, this process contributed to the disintegration of the peasant's world. That disintegration included the rise of "exploitative urbanism" and also of overly powerful landholding central institutions.<sup>87</sup> The problem for the village was that as the wealth of the land moved out of the sphere of reciprocal distribution characteristic of village life based on kinship to the ever-increasing centralisation of wealth into "urban areas, temple complexes, or state coffers", the cultivator became necessarily impoverished and village life degenerated into a "survivalist mentality".<sup>88</sup> In the end, urbanism not only fit Rome's attempts to support its empire but also encouraged the very kind of "acquisitive attitudes, insensitive exploitation of the agricultural produces, and the worship of

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<sup>85</sup>Oakman, Jesus, 208.

<sup>86</sup>Eisenstadt and Roniger, Patrons, 48-49. See my work "Rhetorical Analysis and Sociological Analysis in Historical Jesus Research," from the Sociology of Early Christianity Workshop, Toronto, 1994 [to be published in Method and Theory in the Study of Religion (estimated publication date: 1996)]. See also the work by Steven Grosby, "Kinship, Territory, and the Nation in the Historiography of Ancient Israel," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 105 (1993) 3-18.

<sup>87</sup>Oakman, Jesus, 211.

<sup>88</sup>Oakman, Jesus, 79-80. In order not to go into "a hopeless spiral of debt that would led to the loss of the family plot, the peasant would have to curtail consumption. The option of extending the production base was not available since more arable land was not available."

Mammon”<sup>89</sup> for which it was known in the imperial rhetoric but which are also condemned throughout the pages of Luke’s works.

Faced with this situation of economic decline brought about by a successful empire, the author of Luke-Acts finds a solution, namely, an alternative rhetoric of empire: Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom of God. In the context of the Lukan Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom of God it becomes most clear that the natural bounty of the earth will be restored not through Roman imperial rule and its client, the Temple-state of Israel. It is, in fact, clear that in Luke that it is this relationship that has led to the present chaos and worship of Mammon. In the Lukan account, however, it also becomes clear that restoration of the proper relationship will come through a restoration of village and peasant values, a life called “the Kingdom of God”. It was a goal for the powerless but, as in the case of imperial rhetoric, would have been addressed ultimately to the power-brokers.

What the Lukan Jesus was calling for was essentially subversive. It was “a reversal of the centralization of political power and economic goods ... a ‘general’ redistribution of all goods and evidently the destruction of central politico-economic institutions.”<sup>90</sup> But, this subversive messages was preached to the “brokers” of the traditional, patronage model,<sup>91</sup> the rising class of householders that were following and providing a physical meeting and welcome space for what Luke will later refer to as the Way.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Oakman, Jesus, 211.

<sup>90</sup>Oakman, Jesus, 213. Oakman suggests that Jesus’ preaching against the Temple here may have precipitated the “cause for his crucifixion”.

<sup>91</sup>Oakman, Jesus, 213-215.

<sup>92</sup>See Anthony J. Blasi, “Role Structures in the Early Hellenistic Church,” Sociological Analysis 47 (1986) 226-248.

The Lukan Jesus' subversive preaching, then, would have been reformist in that it would have sought to "create an environment of salvation in the world by using supernaturally-given insights to change the present social organization into a system that functions toward good ends."<sup>93</sup> But, there is a twist to the reformist nature of the Lukan Jesus' preaching. For, it is reformist of reform, in that it "piggy-backs" on the reformist Augustan rhetoric of empire. In this way, Luke shows how Jesus and Jesus' true followers, not the Romans, will be the ones who will bring about a new order. As Acts makes clear the new apostolic community, which we might call the bureaucracy of the new empire, called "the kingdom of God", will bring about a new harmonious community, capable of living in freedom under the rule of law,<sup>94</sup> precisely in so far as it restores an order that is more original and therefore more divine than Augustus' restoration produced.

What kind of culture does this reformist message evidence? Attention to the innertexture of Luke and Acts reveals that the power holders who appear, for example, the angel Gabriel in Luke (cf. 1.19, 26) and King Agrippa in Acts (chaps 25 and 26), represent the power and will of the one who sent them, in the first case, God; in the second, the Emperor. Both, the angels and Agrippa use dominant culture rhetoric, but there is a tension within Luke between these two dominant culture rhetorics and between these rhetorics and others.

For example, throughout Acts it appears that actors in the kingdom of God "accept a subordinate role to the emperor and his representatives".<sup>95</sup> From the very outset of the

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<sup>93</sup>Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Criticism," 186.

<sup>94</sup>The freedom is expressed by the new apostolic life-style (Acts 2.42-46) and the rule of law is shown vividly in the treatment of offenders, such as Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11).

<sup>95</sup>Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Criticism," 191.

Lukan narrative, the emperor had created a movement of people whereby Jesus of Nazareth is born in the city of David and at the end Paul is in imperial custody. The symbiosis of Christian preachers with imperial power appears to present Christianity in a subcultural mode.

But, it is that same subcultural mode that becomes contracultural in the relationship of these same preachers and personages vis-à-vis Judaism, for it is here that one sees explicit mention of reversal and inversion.<sup>96</sup> For from the very beginning of the Gospel -- namely, the annunciation narratives that precede the mention of the imperial census -- Lukan rhetoric “claims to represent Jewish tradition authentically” but to do so it must invert “certain behaviors in dominant Jewish culture”, leading to the Jewish perception that “Christian discourse is a “dishonorable” tradition.” In order to authorise this re-reading of Judaism, agents of God -- angels, the voice of God, the Messiah Jesus, and faithful followers of Jesus who reflect in their lives the same experiences of Jesus -- are all pictured as honoured precisely as a result of their dishonour in the eyes of the dominant Jewish culture.<sup>97</sup>

So, too, in the case of the tension with the imperial authorities. From the outset, namely, the prologue, it is not the “hierarchical structure of the social order” that seems to be in contention but rather the “benevolence of those who hold positions of power in that structure.” The rhetoric of the Luke, then, “seems not to reject “explicit and mutable characteristics” of Roman culture, which claims peace, salvation and benevolence as central

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<sup>96</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 192, citing Lk 2.1-5.

<sup>97</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 192, citing Lk 2.1-5. The same rhetorical approach can be found in Paul’s letters. See my The Function of Suffering in Philippians, JSNT Supplement Series, 78 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

values.” Rather, it seems to claim, through the voices of Mary, Jesus, Jesus’ followers, and the narrator, “that God fulfils central values of Roman culture better than the kingdom of the emperor does.”<sup>98</sup>

Through the use, then, of the language of the Jesus of Q, a kind of contracultural language common to cynicism, as well as a version of the dominant culture language of the Augustan imperial rhetoric, Luke uses both Jewish and imperial rhetoric magisterially to provide a contracultural critique of both the Jewish sub-culture and the imperial dominate culture. In doing so, he produces a counterculture, whose rhetoric of “a “heretical” intra-cultural phenomenon ... articulates a constructive image of a better way of life in a context of “rejection of explicit and mutable characteristics” of the dominant or subculture rhetoric to which it is responding.”<sup>99</sup> In essence, Luke pictures for us a kingdom characterised by a restorationist return to the non-urban values of kinship common to eastern Mediterranean village life, a system in which God was clearly understood to be in control.

#### 3.4. Analysis of the Ideological Texture

The question of ideological texture is the one most directly posed by this essay, namely, “whose rhetoric?” and, in the case of the rhetoric of empire, “whose empire?” So I would like to conclude my discussion with some reflections on it.

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<sup>98</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 193.

<sup>99</sup>Robbins, “Socio-Cultural Rhetoric,” 190 (cf. 193), quoting Roberts, “Counter-Culture,” 114.

Analysis of the ideological texture of our set of texts has to do with the patterns of reading of these texts,<sup>100</sup> not in terms of “how” but in terms of “why”. Here we ask (1) why Luke used Augustan imperial rhetoric, as well as (2) why the Lukan use was picked up by Luke’s followers, both immediate and long-term. Ultimately, we may also want to consider (3) why it is picked up by us today and whether that would be correct.<sup>101</sup>

Luke’s work memorialises some important shifts in the early Christian approach to the world. Already by Luke’s time the earliest Christian contracultural language of cynicism, a language that appears to have represented the earliest appropriation of Jesus’ teaching, was proving itself inadequate. Structures of power and economy were taking shape in the earliest Christian community and there were no guidelines as to how to configure those structures. Luke’s works reflect a shift from a “response to the problems of social formation”: specifically, they reflect a shift from “an alternative community ethos and ethic among those willing to

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<sup>100</sup>According to Robbins, the analysis of the ideological texture of a text “focuses on self-interests. What and whose self-interests are being negotiated in this text? If the dominant voices in the text persuade people to act according to their premises, who will gain and who will lose? What will be gained and what will be lost?” (Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 194). I consider these elements, however, to be those that fall directly within the domain of socio-cultural analysis and conclude that at this stage in the development of the method analysis of ideological texture is the least developed element. For the purposes of our paper, however, it may also prove to be one of the most interesting.

<sup>101</sup>Here we enter the realm of the “responsible” use of ancient texts, as spoken of by Bernard Lonergan, Method in theology (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 9, 27-55.

consider an alternative social vision”<sup>102</sup> to a more complex social formation, characterised by membership, meetings, property holdings, etc.<sup>103</sup>

So, while the earliest strata of Jesus traditions were popular pronouncements, designed to influence those who had power to institute change in the distribution of wealth (the “haves”) as opposed to those who had no power (the “have-nots”), by Luke’s time the strictures are beginning to have meaning not just for the wider society but for Luke’s own community as well. While at the beginning the Jesus movement used a more scatter-shot contracultural approach to the transformation of the world, in good, Augustan style Luke sees the promised change coming in apocalyptic changes happening in the simple, daily, economic life around him, for it is there that ethnic divisions are overcome, gender divisions overcome, and class distinctions overcome

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<sup>102</sup>Mack, Lost Gospel, 127.

<sup>103</sup>So Willi Braun, ACTS-L discussion list, March 6, 1995, commenting on Mack, Lost Gospel, 121. I have suggested elsewhere that this was in fact the same process that other cynic movements experienced. See L. Gregory Bloomquist, “Methodological Considerations in the Determination of the Social Context of Cynic Rhetorical Practice: Implications for our Present Studies of the Jesus Traditions,” paper presented at the London Conference on the Rhetoric Analysis of Scripture, July 27-30, 1995; forthcoming in the collected papers of the conference to be published by Sheffield Academic Press. It may, in fact, help to show that the religious response of cynicism was itself not essentially utopian, that is, a response that “presupposes that people must take an active and constructive role in replacing the entire present social system with a new social organization in which evil is absent” (Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,” 186, citing Wilson, Magic and the Millennium, 22-26) but rather reformist.

in the context not of the world writ large but of the world writ small, namely, in the context of Christians' home-life.<sup>104</sup>

And all of this is possible in Luke's understanding through the son of the divine, Jesus, who is not pictured as a divine king after the model of the Hellenistic kings or of Antony's deified king but rather, like Augustus, as the inaugurator of a true, imperial rule of restoration. But, whereas the the Augustan rhetoric of empire is a restorationist movement that moves from the centre -- Rome -- to the limits of empire, Luke's "kingdom of God" is a subversion of that movement: the Lucan rhetoric of the kingdom of God rides the ebb or reflux of the imperial wave, beginning with the the periphery -- the client Temple-state of Jerusalem -- and moving from home to home back toward what had been central but is now become peripheral, namely, the ends of the world, which is Rome, the last stage of mission to the world (Acts 28) but already prophesied by Jesus at the beginning (Acts 1.8). It is a graphic and geographically accurate illustration of what Luke does in the realm of imperial rhetoric.

Strikingly, and perhaps sadly, the work of subsequent Western authors in subsequent generations reinverted Luke's own rhetorical reversal and rode the wave out in the direction it had originally come by returning to the Augustan imperial model. By the fourth century, Rome had clearly become in the eyes of Christian rhetors once more the seat of imperial power, though that power was by then Christianised, and the emperors were pictured more as Augustus had once been in his own rhetorical instruments. Ironically, the picture that emerges in the fourth century is one that looks a lot like the original Augustan one, even to the point of comparing the earthly king to the embodiment of the Logos, as Philo had done with Augustus.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>A particularly outstanding example of this analysis of an individual unit from this perspective is found in Braun, Feasting.

<sup>105</sup>Frend, Rise of Christianity, 36.

This was clearly not the intent of Luke, for whom there was but one embodiment and one head, Jesus, of the cosmic monarch who is God and the cosmic body that is the kingdom of God. And yet we must admit: it is Luke's own agenda that allowed for that later reversal. For the rhetorical reversal achieved by Luke blazes the way for later Christians to appropriate and transform rhetorical elements,<sup>106</sup> be they classical (as in Luke's case) or early Christian (as in the case of fourth and fifth century Christian writers).

In the end, we must agree with Cameron, who notes that the study of Christian discourse in the Roman world is a study not merely of "how Christian discourse made its impact on society at large, but [of how] it was itself transformed and shaped in the endeavor."<sup>107</sup> If "the Christian God is modelled on language",<sup>108</sup> then Christians have to thank Luke for redrawing and transcending the Augustan rhetoric of empire into what became the Christian kingdom of God. Scholars of the Augustan period also have Luke to thank for preserving an important witness to the shape of the original Augustan rhetoric of empire. But, as scholars of subsequent Christian centuries know, we also have Luke to thank for creating a dialectic of empire and its critique that, in its constant ebb and flow, has haunted Christians and the entire Western tradition ever since.

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<sup>106</sup>So Robert D. Sider, Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>107</sup>Cameron, Rhetoric of Empire, 4.

<sup>108</sup>G. G. Harpham, The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 17, quoted in Cameron, Rhetoric of Empire, 6 (my emphasis).