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Paul W. Walaskay

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49

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'And so we came to Rome'

THE POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ST LUKE

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON · NEW YORK · NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE · SYDNEY

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521251167

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First published 1983

This digitally printed first paperback version 2005

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 82-19835

ISBN-13 978-0-521-25116-7 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-25116-8 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02056-5 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02056-5 paperback

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TO MAXINE

*Πολλαὶ θυγατέρες ἐκτήσαντο πλοῦτον,
πολλὰ ἐποίησαν δυνατὰ,
σὺ δὲ ὑπέρκεισαι καὶ ὑπερήρας πάσας.*

Proverbs 31:29

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Paul W. Walaskay

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

Preface	<i>page</i> ix
Abbreviations	xi
1 Introduction	1
A. The Tübingen approach	2
B. The reaction against Tübingen	3
C. A classical presentation of Luke's <i>apologia pro ecclesia</i>	5
D. The redaction critical school	7
E. The current perspective	11
2 The politics of Luke: a reappraisal	15
A. Did Luke present a politically harmless picture of Christianity?	15
1. Simon, the so-called Zealot	16
2. Jesus' command to buy swords	16
3. Jesus as lord and king	17
4. The ending of Acts	18
5. Conclusion	22
B. Did Luke present an unfavorable picture of Roman authority?	22
C. Luke's positive view of imperial authority	25
1. The decree of Augustus and the birth of Jesus	25
2. The preaching of John the Baptist to the Jewish proletariat and the representatives of Rome	28
3. Jesus and the centurion: two authorities	32
4. The payment of tribute to Caesar	35
5. Kings and benefactors: Jesus' discourse on ranking	36
6. Conclusion	37

Cambridge University Press

0521020565 - 'And so we Came to Rome': The Political Perspective of St Luke

Paul W. Walaskay

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

<i>Contents</i>	<i>viii</i>
3 The trial of Jesus	38
A. The Sanhedrin hearing	38
B. The Roman trial	40
C. Jesus before Herod	42
D. The capital punishment and ultimate verdict	44
E. The fall of Jerusalem	45
F. Conclusion	48
4 The trial of Paul	50
A. Luke the Paulinist – the Pauline apology in Acts	50
B. Paul on trial	52
1. Paul before 'the men of Israel' and Lysias	53
2. Paul before Felix	54
3. Paul before Festus and his council	55
4. Paul before Festus and Agrippa	57
5. Conclusion	58
C. 'And so we came to Rome'	59
D. Conclusion	62
5 Concluding remarks on the political perspective of St Luke	64
Notes	68
Bibliography	104
Index	115

Cambridge University Press

0521020565 - 'And so we Came to Rome': The Political Perspective of St Luke

Paul W. Walaskay

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

The observation that Luke–Acts contains a political component is, of course, not new. More than 250 years ago C. A. Heumann argued that Luke's two volumes were written 'as an apology for the Christian religion' to be presented to a Roman magistrate named Theophilus.¹ Through the 'storm center' and 'shifting sands' of recent Lucan research this aspect of Luke's writing has remained a strong rampart.² Though the analysis and interpretation of the political material in Luke–Acts has varied from scholar to scholar, the premise that Luke has presented an *apologia pro ecclesia* is constantly in the background. Those who are uneasy about the content, context, and objective of Luke's political apologetic conclude either that Luke has made an inconsistent *apologia pro ecclesia* or that apologetic concerns did not motivate him at all.³

Like others, I struggled with the problems raised by the Lucan *apologia* until it occurred to me that perhaps the premise was 'upside-down'; I had been reflecting on Acts 17:6 at the time. Could Luke rather have presented an *apologia pro imperio* to the early church? Reading Luke–Acts with this perspective in mind does clear away many of the problems consistently encountered in the traditional understanding of Luke's political apologetic.

In this book I shall review the development of the traditional perspective (Chapter 1), then raise three questions (Chapter 2): If Luke presents an *apologia pro ecclesia*, why does he include so much material that is politically damaging to the Christian cause? How does Luke handle the anti-Roman sentiment expressed in his sources? Are there passages in Luke–Acts that not only indicate a pro-Roman bias, but suggest an *apologia pro imperio*? I answer the last question in the affirmative, a conclusion supported by an investigation of the text of Luke–Acts, particularly the trials of Jesus (Chapter 3) and Paul (Chapter 4).

Luke's pro-Roman perspective suggested to his readers that the institutions of church and empire are coeval and complementary. According to this perspective, the Christian church and the Roman empire need not

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

x

fear nor suspect each other, for God stands behind both institutions giving to each the power and the authority to carry out his will. That the Christian church survived that first crucial century may be due in large measure to the cautious wisdom of Luke in this regard (Chapter 5).

I wish to express my gratitude to my friends and colleagues at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Duke University, and the University of Rochester who assisted, supported, and encouraged me in this work. I am deeply indebted to Professor Franklin W. Young of Duke University, whose sage counsel and criticism have been as valuable to me as his personal warmth and understanding.

I am particularly grateful to Professor R. McLachlan Wilson and Professor Margaret E. Thrall who carefully guided this book through its final, but most critical stage. Whatever strengths one finds in this work reflect the wisdom of my mentors and editors; its weaknesses are my own.

My thanks also to President Robert Sproull, Provost Richard O'Brien, and Dr Clifford Reifler of the University of Rochester who granted me the time necessary to write my final draft, and to Mrs Rebecca Hurysz, my secretary, who calmly prepared that draft in spite of my mounting anxiety and deteriorating scrawl.

Finally, without the distracting playfulness of my daughter Rachel this work might have progressed faster, but it would have been far less enjoyable; and without the affection and encouragement of my wife Maxine the work might never have been done at all.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ABBREVIATIONS

- AB** Anchor Bible Commentary
ASNU Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis
BC *The Beginnings of Christianity*, 5 vols., ed. by F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake, London, 1920–33
BD *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, Chicago, 1961
BZ *Biblische Zeitschrift*
CAH *Cambridge Ancient History*, 12 vols., ed. by S. A. Cook, E. E. Adcock and M. P. Charlesworth, Cambridge, 1923–39
CBC Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CQR *Church Quarterly Review*
FIRA *Fontes iuris romani antejustiniani*, 3 vols., ed. by S. Riccobono, Florence, 1940–43
HTR *Harvard Theological Review*
HIhKNT Herder's Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HNT Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HNTC Harper's New Testament Commentary
ICC International Critical Commentary
JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*
JAOS *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JRS *Journal of Roman Studies*
JTS *Journal of Theological Studies*
KEK Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LCL Loeb Classical Library
MLA *The Making of Luke–Acts*, H. J. Cadbury, London, 1927
MNTC Moffatt New Testament Commentary
NCB New Century Bible
NovT *Novum Testamentum*
NTS *New Testament Studies*
PCB *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. by M. Black and H. H. Rowley, London, 1962

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Abbreviations*

xii

- PLA* *Perspectives on Luke–Acts*, ed. by C. Talbert, Dansville, VA, 1978
- SBT* *Studies in Biblical Theology*
- SLA* *Studies in Luke–Acts*, ed. by L. Keck and J. L. Martyn, Nashville, TN, 1966
- SNISMS* Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series
- TDNT* *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. of the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (ed. by G. Kittel and G. Freidrich), tr. by G. W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, MI, 1964–76
- THNT* *Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament*
- ThZ* *Theologische Zeitschrift*
- TLZ* *Theologische Literaturzeitung*
- TZT* *Tübingen Zeitschrift für Theology*
- ZNTW* *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*