

**SUBVERSIVE SPEECH ACTS?
AN EVALUATION OF AN IMPERIAL-CRITICAL
READING OF EPHESIANS**

A Thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by
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Middlesex University
Supervised at London School of Theology
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Abstract

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While recent publications have examined how NT texts engage with early Roman imperial ideology, no full-scale exploration of Ephesians has been constructed to date. This project provides an original contribution in the field of study by utilizing an eclectic hermeneutic in order to evaluate the plausibility of an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. Current literature related to imperial-critical readings of Ephesians are surveyed, demonstrating that there are significant gaps in the scholarly literature. This study then employs an eclectic hermeneutic: drawing on speech-act theory, implied/empirical distinctions, and a narrative hermeneutic to construct and evaluate an anti-imperial reading of Ephesians. In doing so, the empirical life-setting of Ephesians is re-examined. Previously underexplored elements of the Roman context of Ephesians, with a focus on *maiestas* [treason] charges, imperial cults, and Roman imperial eschatology, are examined in light of the two major theories of the date of the epistle. New proposals for the epistle's implied elements are then explored in light of the possibilities offered for the Roman imperial empirical life-setting. A bi-focal exploration of the implied and empirical life-settings of Ephesians provides the foundations for constructing an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. Since no full-scale anti-imperial reading of Ephesians exists to date, this study first provisionally constructs one within the two major sections of Ephesians (1-3; 4-6) in order to evaluate its plausibility. An eclectic hermeneutic is then employed to evaluate whether speech acts within Ephesians were intended to carry anti-imperial overtones. This study concludes that, while there are prospects and limitations with an imperial-critical reading of the epistle, some of the epistle's speech acts can be understood to have subverted Roman imperial ideology on a narrative level.

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Abbreviations

BNT	<i>Die Botschaft des Neuen Testaments</i>
CNLD	<i>Cambridge New Latin Dictionary.</i>
DNTB	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds.</i> Craig A. Evans, and Stanley E. Porter, eds. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2000.
JHS	<i>Journal of the Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JPT	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
ODCW	<i>Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World.</i>
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary.</i> P.G.W. Glare, ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1982.
PTMS	<i>Princeton Theological Monograph Series</i>
RG	Res Gestae Augustus

All other abbreviations follow the SBL Handbook of Style

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PART 1

PROLEGOMENA

Chapter 1

1. Introduction: A Survey of Ephesians and Empire

1.1 PAUL AND EMPIRE STUDIES: SURVEYING THE APPROACH

Even though, in the early 20th century, Deissmann perceived “polemical parallelism”¹ in political terminology used throughout the Pauline corpus, there has been a growing concern among interpreters that political elements in Paul’s letters have been largely ignored. Alexander expressed this sentiment by suggesting that “there is a profound lack of interest in local or imperial politics in Paul.”² Horsley’s collections have attempted to correct this trend by challenging the depoliticization of Paul, and by reading Pauline texts in light of their Roman imperial context(s).³ These contributions have integrated Greco-Roman art,⁴ and patron/client relations into Pauline texts to attempt to reestablish their political contexts.⁵ Further attention has been given to the ways in the Pauline texts engaged with Roman imperial cults.⁶ Others

¹ Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (Rev. Ed., Trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), 342. Christian Strecker highlights key aspects of Deissmann’s contributions to the field: “Taktiken der Aneignung: Politische Implikationen der paulinischen Botschaft im Kontext der römischen imperialen Wirklichkeit,” in *Neues Testament und Politische Theorie: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Zukunft des Politischen*, ed. Eckart Reinmuth (Religionskulturen 9; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2011), 114-116.

² Loveday Alexander, “Rome, Early Christian Attitudes to,” in *ABD 5*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 837.

³ Richard A. Horsley, ed. *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, P.A.: Trinity Press International, 1997); *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation. Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000); *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Semeia 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

⁴ Paul Zanker, “The Power of Images,” in Horsley, ed. *Paul and Empire*, 72-86. See also Zanker’s more substantial work on this subject: *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988).

⁵ Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, “Patronal Power Relations,” in Horsley, ed. *Paul and Empire*, 96-103; John K. Chow, “Patronage in Roman Corinth,” in Horsley, ed. *Paul and Empire*, 104-125; R. Gordon, “The Veil of Power,” in Horsley, ed. *Paul and Empire*, 126-137.

⁶ Simon R.F. Price, “Rituals and Power,” in Horsley, ed. *Paul and Empire*, 47-71; Karl P. Donfried, “The Imperial Cults of Thessalonica and Political Conflict in 1 Thessalonians,” in Horsley, ed. *Paul and Empire*, 215-223. For extensive treatment on the imperial cult in Asia Minor, see Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). For Galatia: Justin K.

have begun to see connections between Paul's writings and Scott's anthropological work.⁷ At the same time, Blumenfeld has lamented the neglect of political aspects of Paul's thought, and states that overlooking this area "decontextualizes him and falsifies our reading of his works."⁸ While the reasons for this oversight are complex, Elliott's assessment that the privatization and domestication of Paul's letters in certain contexts has likely contributed to readers "perceiv[ing] them in only a narrow bandwidth of what we consider religious discourse" is perceptive.⁹ In reaction to this partitioning of political and religious categories in biblical interpretation, a field of study has emerged that has produced readings of Pauline letters in light of their Roman imperial contexts.¹⁰ Many of these contributions have focused attention not merely on general political elements of these texts, but on those elements deemed to be in subversion of Roman imperial ideology. This framework for interpreting Paul has begun to gain popularity, so much so that Barclay has referred to this movement, in jest, as the "Paul and empire coalition."¹¹ Having received renewed interest within the 'Paul and Politics' group at the Society of Biblical Literature's annual meetings, 'empire' has become, according to Maier, "a means of promoting a certain kind of political discourse in the Academy."¹² Some of this renewed interest has been attributed to the events surrounding the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.¹³ The result of this reinvigorated focus, according to Jewett, is that there is a "growing emerging consensus that the Roman imperial context needs to be considered" in NT

Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult: A Critical Analysis of the First-Century Social Context of Paul's Letter* (WUNT 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

⁷ See the collection of essays in Horsley, *Hidden Transcripts*.

⁸ Bruno Blumenfeld, *The Political Paul: Justice, Democracy and Kingship in a Hellenistic Framework* (JSNTSS vol. 210. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 11.

⁹ Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Paul in Critical Contexts Series. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 9. Elliott's suggestion that readers must acknowledge their own context when reading is warranted, although his proposal that interpreters develop a "contemporary Sachkritik" is counterproductive as a hermeneutical method. A large problem with previous readings of Romans throughout history, readings that Elliott himself opposes, was that they were read through a sort of hyper-contextualization which located meaning primarily within the modern empirical interpreter but failed to duly acknowledge the contextual situation of the implied author and implied audience of the text. Aspects of Elliott's approach seems to fall into this same error.

¹⁰ For general works on Paul and empire studies see annotated bibliography section I. For a more complete list of works organized by Pauline letters, see annotated bibliography sections II-X.

¹¹ John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (WUNT 275. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 365.

¹² Harry O. Maier, *Picturing Paul in Empire: Imperial Image, Text and Persuasion in Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 8.

¹³ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 8.

studies.¹⁴ The rise of postcolonial hermeneutics has also played a role in these developments. Segovia asserts that readers of the NT must consider “the reality of empire, of imperialism and colonialism, as an omnipresent, inescapable, and overwhelming reality in the world: the world of antiquity, the world of the Near East or of the Mediterranean Basin...[and] the world of today.”¹⁵ Each of these hermeneutical directives moves towards evaluating possible anti-imperial elements in Paul’s letters, and has played a significant role in recent interpretations of the NT. Yet, Maier notes that “not all scholars have agreed that attention to imperial imagery and language is important for interpreting NT texts.”¹⁶ Similarly, Gombis concludes that “more work needs to be done... [in] Paul’s letters before any sort of definitive word can be spoken as to whether or not Paul is an anti-imperial political theologian.”¹⁷ Imperial-critical interpretations of NT texts have been met with some hesitation.¹⁸

1.2 EPHESIANS AND EMPIRE STUDIES: SURVEYING THE APPROACH

The following chapter will demonstrate that while there has been a significant push towards imperial-critical readings of Paul’s letters, Ephesians remains under analyzed in these discussions.¹⁹ While certain developments have paved the way for readings of the letter in light of its Roman imperial context, providing thought-provoking approaches to the letter’s interpretive possibilities, weaknesses exist in these approaches. Furthermore, Gupta and Long

¹⁴ Robert Jewett, “Response to N. T. Wright, and J. M. G Barclay,” (paper presented at the annual Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, CA, 18 November 2007).

¹⁵ Fernando F. Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Towards a Postcolonial Optic,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 56. For a critical analysis of the connection between empire studies and postcolonial theory see Jeremy Punt, “Empire as Material Setting and Heuristic Grid for New Testament Interpretation: Comments on the Value of Postcolonial Criticism,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66.1 (2010), Art. #330, 7 pages.

¹⁶ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 4.

¹⁷ Timothy G. Gombis, *Paul: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 144.

¹⁸ See especially: John M.G Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Denny Burk, “Is Paul’s Gospel Counterimperial? Evaluating the Prospects of the ‘Fresh Perspective’ for Evangelical Theology,” *JETS* 51.2 (June 2008): 309-337. Balanced assessments are provided by: Christoph Heilig, *Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul* (WUNT 392: Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); Strecker, “Taktiken der Aneignung,” 153-161.

¹⁹ Since (at the very least) Paul is projected as the author, we can include Ephesians in an examination of the Pauline letters. We will discuss this more fully in the next chapter. It should be noted that some of the controversy over Pauline authorship of the epistle has been overstated. Harold Hoehner has shown that from over the past 400 years, only in the period from 1971-2001 had non-Pauline authorship become the majority opinion among publications, and narrowly (51%): *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 19. More importantly, this project’s focus on the implied author of the text points even more strongly for Ephesians’ inclusion in this discussion than does Hoehner’s statistical analysis.

note that “complete treatments of the politics of Ephesians are rather rare.”²⁰ Apart from the works of Faust, and Jayachitra no monograph-length assessment of Ephesians’ place in the discussion exists to date.²¹ This project aims to provide a more complete assessment of the anti-imperial status of Ephesians by using an eclectic hermeneutic that attends to implied/empirical distinctions, speech-act theory, and a narrative hermeneutic. As will be established below, no imperial-critical interpreter of Ephesians to date has used important developments in these hermeneutical areas. These tools, developed in subsequent chapters of this project, will help to provide fresh insights towards assessing anti-imperial interpretations of Ephesians.

Ephesians’ place in these conversations has remained enigmatic at best. Lincoln points out that Faust’s work exposed a greater need for Ephesians scholars to address the epistle’s Roman imperial context.²² While some recent contributions have partially examined this area,²³ there remains little consensus about how the epistle engages with imperial ideology. Lowe points out that “Ephesians has received little attention amid the recent explorations of Paul’s imperial contexts. It benefits from no direct treatment in studies such as Richard Horsley’s *Paul and Empire*, and warrants only a single reference out of all the essays in his subsequent volume, *Paul and Politics*.”²⁴ Recent articles have emerged that read Ephesians from an imperial-critical vantage point,²⁵ but much more needs to be done to assess these readings. The following

²⁰ Nijay K. Gupta and Fredrick J. Long, “The Politics of Ephesians and the Empire: Accommodation or Resistance?” *JGRChJ* 7 (2010): 113-114. Long later defines “political” as “a self-conscious articulation of a political theory.” “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology in Greco-Roman Context,” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 259. For our purposes, when we speak of “political” interpretations of Paul, we refer to interpretations that take seriously the Roman imperial context of the first century.

²¹ Eberhard Faust, *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); Jayachitra Lalitha, *Re-Reading the Household Relationships Christologically: Ephesians, Empire and Egalitarianism* (Biblical Hermeneutics Rediscovered 4; New Delhi, India, Christian World Imprints, 2017); Harry Maier has a substantial section on Ephesians in his work but its scope extends beyond Ephesians: *Picturing Paul*, 103-142.

²² Andrew T. Lincoln, “Review of *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief*. Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 24 by Eberhard Faust.” *JTS* 46.1 (1995): 292-293.

²³ Several sources engage the content of Ephesians in conversation with wider imperial ideology, but not necessarily from the vantage point of imperial criticism of the epistle: See annotated bibliography section V: A. E.g. Lee-Barnewall builds off of Hellerman’s work (see fn. 18 above), which concludes that the portrait of the humility of Jesus in Phil. 2 was anti-Roman. She notes some similarities between self-sacrifice in Phil. 2 and Eph 5, but more moderately concludes that in Eph., “Paul radically reorients [Mediterranean culture]...through his application of Christian values.” Michelle Lee-Barnewall, “Turning ΚΕΦΑΛΗ on its Head: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Ephesians 5:21-33,” in Porter and Pitts, eds., *Christian Origins*, 613.

²⁴ Matthew Forrest Lowe, “‘This was Not an Ordinary Death’: Empire and Atonement in the Minor Pauline Epistles,” in *Empire in the New Testament*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall (New Testament Studies; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 202.

²⁵ See annotated bibliography section V: B-C.

section will survey approaches taken in the scholarly literature on Ephesians relating to Roman imperial ideology. Two major trends can be discerned: 1) Dismissing/ignoring anti-imperial elements of Ephesians. 2) Affirming anti-imperial elements in the letter. With a recent push toward anti-imperial interpretations of Paul's letters, there is a need for more complete assessments of these developments in Ephesians.

1.2.1 DISMISSAL OF/IGNORING IMPERIAL-CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF EPHESIANS

Even though imperial-critical readings of Ephesians have recently emerged, the epistle has been significantly under-analyzed compared to some of the other Pauline epistles. Three volumes devoted exclusively to imperial-critical assessments of the NT have passed over Ephesians entirely.²⁶ Georgi's important work on theocracy in Paul does not mention Ephesians.²⁷ Alexander admits that anti-imperial elements are harder to trace in Paul, but she does not mention how Ephesians fits in.²⁸ Heilig's work is largely methodological, but he interacts with various imperial-critical readings of NT texts throughout his study. And yet his references to Ephesians are brief, and they ignore its anti-imperial status.²⁹ Even though Elliott connects public transcripts in Philo (e.g. 'boldness of speech') in relation to NT texts, he does not address the strikingly similar concept expressed in Eph. 6:19.³⁰ Similarly, despite a strong theme of enthronement in Ephesians, Keen's assessment of "cultural-critical inversions that flow from Jesus' enthronement" passes over the epistle entirely without explanation.³¹ Eisen's analysis of imperial-critical implications of a *parousia* theology in Paul also overlooks Ephesians.³² Wright, who is sympathetic to imperial-critical readings, acknowledges

²⁶ Horsley, *In the Shadow of Empire*; Horsley, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*; McKnight and Modica, *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not*.

²⁷ Deter Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

²⁸ Alexander, "Rome," 837.

²⁹ Heilig, *Hidden Criticism*, 120 fn. 52, 128 fns. 92 and 92, 152.

³⁰ Neil Elliott, "Strategies of Resistance and Hidden Transcripts in the Pauline Communities," in Horsley, ed. *Hidden Transcripts*, 117.

³¹ Eric M. Keen, "The Role of Symbolic Inversion in Utopian Discourse: Apocalyptic Reversal in Paul and in the Festival of the Saturnalia/Kronia," in Horsley, ed. *Hidden Transcripts*, 123-144.

³² Eckhart Reinmuth's recognition of the role of Christ's coming in Ephesians ["Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Politischen," in *Neues Testament und Politische Theorie: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Zukunft des Politischen*, ed. Eckart Reinmuth (Religionskulturen 9; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2011), 14] suggests that Ute Eisen's omission of the epistle within his imperial-critical examination of the *parousia* in Paul is unfortunate: "Die imperiumskritischen Implikationen der paulinischen Parusievorstellung." in *Bekennnis und Erinnerung: Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Hans-Friedrich Weiß*, eds. Klaus-Michael Bull and Eckart Reinmuth (Rostocker Theologische Studien 16; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004): 196-213.

developments made towards formulating an anti-imperial interpretation of Ephesians,³³ but he admits in his own work that he must “pass over Ephesians with the merest mention.”³⁴ Even though the scope of these works are naturally limited by their respective interests, their failure to address Ephesians’ place within the field marks an overwhelming trend in imperial-critical interpretations of the NT.

Some commentaries on Ephesians also ignore connections between the epistle’s content and its Roman imperial context. Considering the historical-grammatical approach that Hoehner uses in his colossal commentary on Ephesians, it is puzzling that he fails to consider the Roman imperial context of much of the terminology he discusses.³⁵ This oversight is especially accentuated given that he defends the Ephesian destination of the letter.³⁶ Hoehner claims that Ephesus’ “influence both as a secular and religious center emanated to the other parts of the Roman Empire” but he does not explore how its status as an epicenter of provincial imperial rule and ideology in Asia Minor may have contributed to what Paul said to the Ephesians.³⁷ He briefly assesses the work of Faust, who examines the Roman imperial context of Ephesians 2:14-18. Hoehner dismisses Faust’s claims on the basis that his argument is pinned on non-Pauline authorship of the letter, and that “there is nothing in the letter to indicate that the background of reconciliation of believing Jews and Gentiles was the reestablishment of peace between the Romans and the Jews.”³⁸ He also dismisses Hendrix’s claim that Ephesians takes the form of a Greco-Roman honorific decree. For Hoehner, Ephesians exhibits too much similarity to other Pauline epistles and wider Hellenistic letters.³⁹

³³ Wright acknowledged Long’s work on Ephesians in a presentation at SBL San Diego (paper presented at the annual Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, CA, 18 November 2007).

³⁴ N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 76.

³⁵ Hoehner surveys the historical context of the city of Ephesus but does not address the imperial context of the language utilized in the letter: *Ephesians*, 78-89. Furthermore, he concludes that “the purpose of Ephesians is to promote a love for one another that has the love of God and Christ as its basis,” but no connections are drawn between this theme and particular elements of the historical context of the recipients: 106. Helge Stadelmann takes a similar approach by briefly discussing the size of Ephesus, the Artemis cult and the city’s wider pagan context without mentioning anything about its Roman imperial context: *Der Epheserbrief* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1993), 19.

³⁶ Hoehner, 78-79, 144-148. Even those authors who have no interest in placing Ephesians in a specific location or date would have to admit that regardless of whether one adopts an early date or later date for the epistle, it is still situated securely in an environment under Roman imperial rule. Furthermore, regardless of one’s position on the authenticity of Ephesians 1.1, it is near consensus among Ephesians scholars that it is addressed to an audience(s) in some part of Asia Minor. That fact alone warrants exploring its Roman imperial setting.

³⁷ Hoehner, 89.

³⁸ Hoehner, 366.

³⁹ Hoehner, 76.

Other commentators who have employed historical-grammatical methods have also passed over the imperial context of Ephesians. For example, Best thoroughly examines linguistic and grammatical aspects of Ephesians, while also lucidly acknowledging the need to examine not only the text of Ephesians, but also its subtext. For Best, the subtext “can be a real help in putting what is said into its proper perspective.”⁴⁰ Yet shortly after making this claim, he concedes that he largely passes over much of the context of the city of Ephesus, including its imperial setting, because he does not see the letter authentically addressed there, even though he admits that a large part of what had taken place in the city would be reflected in larger Western Asia Minor.⁴¹ Best’s emphasis on discerning the subtext is commendable, although his dismissal of the letter’s imperial context as part of that subtext is puzzling.⁴²

Malina and Pilch attend carefully to socio-historical aspects of the first century context of the deuteropauline letters.⁴³ This includes identifying the political-religious environment of the early Christian communities.⁴⁴ They note early Christian concerns about kingship, which included expectations of the Messiah as “cosmic Lord, with a view to a forthcoming theocracy of Israel.”⁴⁵ They also observe that early Christian communities focused on “concord or harmony,” which was “a chief value among Romans,”⁴⁶ and they rightly maintain that distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in the Roman empire were far less visible than has

⁴⁰ Ernst Best, *Ephesians* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2004), xiii.

⁴¹ Best, xiii, 70, 72. Best also dismisses the idea that cultural, economic, political, or syncretistic issues are directly countered in the epistle.

⁴² Best acknowledges elements of the imperial context of Ephesians, but he dismisses much of it as having little relevance to the overall purpose of the letter. He goes as far to say that the author of Ephesians “pays no attention to what was happening outside the church and is apparently indifferent to its external flux,” Best, 70. On the other hand, Best’s appraisal does not consider that Ephesians displays a great deal of concern about reverting back to a way of life that the recipients had formerly lived in. The encouragement offered, in light of their new association with Christ, to refrain from participating in ‘old ways’ is evident throughout the paraenetic sections in the second half of the letter, especially Eph. 4.17-24. Therefore, the author must have been not only aware of what was happening outside the church, but also concerned about its impact upon the church community. While Bird’s characterization of the author of Ephesians as demonizing the ‘other’ by trying to instill fear into his audience through intimidation (resulting in setting the stage for violent military attacks later in history) misses the mark, her proposal at least acknowledges what Best ignores, that the author certainly paid attention to what was happening outside the church: Bird, “Ephesians,” 272. Whatever one concludes about the letter’s location, date, and recipients, its imperial context is at least one important contributing factor to what was happening inside and outside these Christian communities. Compare these with Schwindt, who considers the ‘unsaid’ in examining parallels with ancient worldviews in Ephesians: Rainer Schwindt, *Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* (WUNT 148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

⁴³ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social Scientific Commentary on the Deutero-Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1-10.

⁴⁴ Malina and Pilch, 1.

⁴⁵ Malina and Pilch, 2.

⁴⁶ Malina and Pilch, 2.

often been assumed,⁴⁷ including the fact that Israelites “often inscribed their funerary monuments with the polytheistic D M (*diis minibus*, i.e. to the divine shades or spirits) to Roman ancestral deities, or at other times to the spirit gods, the Junonian spirits.”⁴⁸ On top of engaging in Roman religious customs, Jews also participated in Greek athletic events, joined Greco-Roman guilds, and served in the Roman army.⁴⁹ Malina and Pilch contrast claims of the Roman Empire with Jesus’ vision for an Israelite theocracy.⁵⁰ Each of these observations has potential for understanding how the content of Ephesians engages with its wider Roman imperial context. Unfortunately, their perceptive framing of the deuteropauline letters within a wider Greco-Roman context is not drawn out in much detail in their commentary on Ephesians.⁵¹ This oversight leaves major questions about how these contexts inform what is said in the letter, and it ignores ways in which specific passages in Ephesians may have projected alternatives to these contexts.

Other scholars omit the significance of the Roman imperial context of Ephesians for different reasons. Gombis notes subversive elements of the text, but he does not connect it with a subversion of imperial ideology.⁵² Perkins suggests that preaching the gospel in Ephesians includes persuading others away from paganism, but she does not make any connections between its “pagan” setting, and its imperial context.⁵³ Critics have accused Perkins of having escaped “into the spiritual realm” by dismissing anti-imperial elements of the text.⁵⁴ Similar accusations have been made about Muddiman’s work.⁵⁵ He acknowledges political interpretations of the letter, but dismisses them because he finds no trace of persecution being addressed or discussions about relations with the state in the portion of the letter on Christian conduct.⁵⁶ Muddiman improperly confines ‘political’ elements of Ephesians to persecution and

⁴⁷ Malina and Pilch, 4.

⁴⁸ Malina and Pilch, 4.

⁴⁹ Malina and Pilch, 5-6.

⁵⁰ Malina and Pilch, 8.

⁵¹ Malina and Pilch, 13-30.

⁵² Timothy G. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2010), 133-154. His chapter is entitled “Empowering Subversive Performances.”

⁵³ Pheme Perkins, *Ephesians* (ANTC, Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 30.

⁵⁴ Bird, “Ephesians,” 265.

⁵⁵ Bird, 265, 273.

⁵⁶ John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC, London: Continuum, 2001), 15. Bird provides an illuminating critique of Muddiman: “Ephesians,” 273-4. In her work on identity formation, Minna Skhul acknowledges imperial concepts, but does not think that this implies that communal identity was perceived in dialogue with the empire: *Reading Ephesians: Exploring Social Entrepreneurship in the Text* (LNTS 408; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 37 fn. 106.

formal assessments regarding church/state relations, passing over any examination of its Roman imperial context.

Whereas the works above omit or ignore Ephesians' place within imperial-critical discussions, others have more explicitly denied that the letter subverts Roman imperial ideology. Elliott sees Ephesians as more conservative than other anti-imperial texts by telling slaves to remain slaves, and so rather than exploring its potentially subversive elements, he sees it as accommodating Paul's theology to a "dominant Roman imperial order."⁵⁷ Beyond these brief comments, Elliott does not give any further treatment to Ephesians. Horsley, perhaps the strongest proponent of anti-imperial interpretations of NT texts, sees Ephesians (and other 'deuteropauline' texts) as "obscuring the political anti-imperial thrust of Paul" because of its "spiritualization of Pauline language."⁵⁸ Arnold surveys aspects of the religio-historical context of the epistle but is skeptical about reading the letter as subversive of imperial rule.⁵⁹ He briefly discusses imperial cults within the city of Ephesus but incorrectly assumes that "the imperial cult was essentially political and thus differed from the cult of Artemis and the other religions of the city. It served more to enhance the status of cities and its more influential citizens."⁶⁰ He concludes (quoting Mellor) that "it was a cult based on political, rather than religious, experience."⁶¹ This reduction of what constitutes political elements in the epistle has contributed to imperial-critical assessments of Ephesians remaining in a state of infancy.⁶² Arnold acknowledges that "the Roman empire and its political regime proclaimed an ideology that in many respects collided headlong with the claim of Christ and his kingdom" but he dismisses the presence of this in Ephesians based on its characterization of battle that is "not against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12).⁶³ For Arnold, "Ephesians is thus not a document of political subversion, but a plan for spiritual subversion. Paul is stressing that the true enemies are not the consuls, senators, and the centurions, but the spiritual powers that hold these political rulers captive to the power of sin and keep them blind to the truth of the gospel of the

⁵⁷ Neil Elliott, "The Apostle Paul and Empire," in Horsley, *Shadow of Empire*, 100.

⁵⁸ Richard A. Horsley, "Introduction to Paul's Counter Imperial Gospel," in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 142-143.

⁵⁹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 31-41.

⁶⁰ Arnold, 40.

⁶¹ Arnold, 40.

⁶² A similar reductionist approach can be seen in his earlier work: Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 37-38. Candida Moss confronts a narrow conception of the imperial cults as political (or mere ritual) and not religious: *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 173-174.

⁶³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 40.

Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴ This sort of partitioning of spiritual and earthly powers continues to fuel one of the main objections against anti-imperial readings of the epistle.

Lau draws similar conclusions by dismissing Ephesians as a direct challenge to the Roman Empire based on its spiritual characterization of the powers and their location in the heavenly realms.⁶⁵ He objects to an anti-imperial reading of the letter due to the lack of explicit invocation of Roman imperial authorities in the text.⁶⁶ For Lau, since the presence of such authorities could only be discerned through inference, it weakens the likelihood of subverting them.⁶⁷ He further contends that the household code cannot have “physically subverted the prevailing Roman social order” since its structure is too similar to that of other Greco-Roman codes, concluding that the cosmic rule of Jesus “has implications for how believers are to relate to their respective governments” but by encouraging them to submit to the authorities.⁶⁸ Lau does not clarify what he means by “physical subversion” of imperial authority, but if his suggestion implies a social reordering on an institutional level, his comments are puzzling in light of the fact that he ultimately sees Ephesians constructing “an alternative social reality that indirectly challenges and relativizes the current political paradigm.”⁶⁹ One weakness of his conclusions is his assumption that explicit communication is preferable to implicit communication. He infers that since no explicit avowal of Roman imperial authorities can be found in the text, Ephesians must be silent on the issue. While his suggestion is plausible in certain communicative contexts, our work next chapter will challenge this assumption. Implicit communication, in certain circumstances, and for certain kinds of speech acts, is sometimes preferred over explicit communication. Furthermore, there are instances where explicit communication can disable an utterance’s communicative power.

In light of these wider dismissals, Long’s contention that Ephesians is “the crowning epistle arguably representing ‘the political Paul’” may seem peculiar.⁷⁰ He also suggests that Ephesians should be included in the “growing understanding, if not an emerging consensus, that a number of the Pauline letters...are written, if not intentionally to subvert Roman imperial

⁶⁴ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 41.

⁶⁵ Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books* (NovTSup 133; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 290.

⁶⁶ Lau, 289.

⁶⁷ Lau, 289.

⁶⁸ Lau, 290.

⁶⁹ Lau, 290.

⁷⁰ Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 258.

ideology, than to present a counter reigning Lord using terms and themes related to Mediterranean political thought and *realia*.”⁷¹ While a case could be made that Long’s statement reflects what is true of other NT texts, scholarship is far from reaching a consensus in terms of Ephesians as being subversive of imperial ideology. The suggestion (once made of Romans), that anti-imperial interpretations are “not yet prevalent in scholarship, or in North American Christianity” is closer to the mark in the case of Ephesians.⁷² There has been a lack of attention paid to, and even a denial of, the political implications of various aspects of the letter in scholarly publications.⁷³ Maier notes that “While much attention has been paid to the presence and use of imperial language and imagery in the earlier Pauline corpus, little attention has been given to the disputed letters.”⁷⁴ This observation confirms that there is room for further exploration of Ephesians’ place within imperial-critical discussions.

1.2.2 AFFIRMATION OF IMPERIAL-CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN EPHESIANS

Some scholars have challenged the dismissal of potential anti-imperial elements in Ephesians. According to Osiek, MacDonald, and Tullock, “commentators are beginning to view imperial ideology as an important interpretive grid for Ephesians.”⁷⁵ However, while shifts in the scholarly literature have begun to account for the Roman imperial context of the epistle, substantial questions remain as to how Ephesians relates to imperial ideology. To date, Long’s recent publications have provided the most vigorous attempts at mapping out anti-imperial elements throughout the letter.⁷⁶ Our survey of scholarly works that affirm anti-imperial elements in Ephesians will show that while these movements have paved the way for imperial-critical interpretations, a wide spectrum of perspectives exists. Some detect a direct and intentional critique of Roman imperial ideology in the letter’s language and themes, while

⁷¹ Long, 257.

⁷² Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations*, 5.

⁷³ Bird, “Ephesians,” 265.

⁷⁴ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 6.

⁷⁵ Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald with J. H. Tulloch, “Ephesians 5 and the Politics of Marriage,” in *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 119.

⁷⁶ For a full list of his works see annotated bibliography section V: B-C. Fred Long’s rhetorical commentary on Ephesians for the Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Series (eds. Vernon K. Robbins and Duane F. Watson) is still forthcoming: Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 258 fn. 17. Extant monographs on the subject are more limited in their focus: Jayachitra’s work focuses exclusively on the household code (*Re-Reading Household Relationships*), Ephesians only makes up one part of Maier’s work (*Picturing Paul in Empire*)—which also gives space to Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles. Faust draws out the political context of the concept of peace in the epistle, but he focuses mostly on Eph. 2:11-22 and on “Die ‘Politische Gestalt’ der Kirche im Epheserbrief.” *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris*, see especially 221-470.

others see a more complicated portrait that sees the epistle as both challenging and reaffirming aspects of imperial ideology.

While comparisons between NT Christology and Roman imperial ideology have been around for some time,⁷⁷ more extensive inquiries as to how Ephesians fits within this conversation have only come to the surface recently, due, in part, to Long's contributions.⁷⁸ As is the case with imperial-critical interpretations of other NT texts, the letter's christological titles have been read against the backdrop of Roman imperial ideology. Terms such as κυρίως,⁷⁹ σωτήρ,⁸⁰ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ,⁸¹ and κεφαλὴ⁸² have been understood in parallel with contemporary Roman imperial usage.⁸³ Greco-Roman inscriptions use each of these titles for Roman emperors.⁸⁴ These terms helped to shape a narrative of Roman imperial ideology and propaganda.⁸⁵ Consequently, Ephesians' christological use of similar terms has been understood to set Jesus' honorific possession of these titles in subversion of claims made in Roman imperial ideology. The portrayal of Jesus seated above πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ

⁷⁷ Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1987); see also articles in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*; Beck, *Anti-Roman*, 59-61; Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 342; H. A. A. Kennedy, "Apostolic Preaching and Emperor Worship" *The Expositor* 7 (1909): 289-307; Hints of these connections can be seen in Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith; London: SCM Press, 1955); esp. 139, 145, 147-191.

⁷⁸ A significant portion of Long's works are spent contrasting the Christology of Ephesians with Roman imperial ideology. See also, Keesmaat, "In the Face of Empire." For minor contributions see Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 83; Elna Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 100; P. Williamson, *Ephesians* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 52.

⁷⁹ Eph 1:2-3,15,17; 2:21; 3:11; 4:1,5,17; 5:8,10,17,19,20,22; 6:1,4-5,7-10,21,23,24. The term was used for the emperors: Werner Foerster, "κύριος," in *TDNT* 3, ed. G. Kittel, Trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1965), 1055-1058. Mouton appropriately acknowledges that there could be interconnectivity between Paul's use of this title for Jesus in light of its LXX appearances as well as its subversion of the Roman emperor. She notes that the LXX uses the title for Israel's God. Her conclusion that "this could perhaps be a reason why Paul ended up in prison" (Mouton, 100) seems unlikely. A similar point can be made about the temple imagery in Eph. 2:21. Hearing echoes of the temple in Jerusalem in this passage would not *de facto* dismiss the possibility that the audience of the letter also heard echoes of the Artemis temple in the passage as well. This is especially true in light of the possibility of a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish audience. Explicit references to the audience as τὰ ἔθνη in Eph. 2:11, 3:1 points to the likelihood of an implied non-Jewish audience, while heavy language of inclusion into Israel in Eph. 2 as well as multiple OT traces throughout the epistle points to an implied Jewish audience: Thorsten Moritz, *A Profound Mystery: The Use of the Old Testament in Ephesians* (SNT 85; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁸⁰ Eph. 5:23.

⁸¹ Eph. 4:13.

⁸² Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23.

⁸³ Long, "Ephesians: Paul's Political Theology," 271-277, 284 fn. 104, 291-293, 297-298; See also Long, "Discerning Empires," 7-17.

⁸⁴ Long, "Discerning Empires," 7-17.

⁸⁵ Long, "Discerning Empires," 5; John Dominic Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology," in Horsley, *In the Shadow of Empire*, 59-73.

δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος in Eph. 1.21,⁸⁶ has been read as carrying acoustic resonances that “subordinated [Rome] under Christ’s exalted position.”⁸⁷ These new inquiries have suggested that aspects of the letter’s Christology were subversive of imperial ideology in its first-century Roman imperial context.⁸⁸

Gupta and Long note that while the New Perspective on Paul asks questions about how Paul relates to Judaism and Torah, imperial-critical discussions explore Paul’s attitude towards the Roman Empire.⁸⁹ They claim that in Ephesians “one finds deliberate and pervasive ‘trumping’ of Roman imperial titles and claims.”⁹⁰ They challenge the idea that Ephesians is deuteropauline, and therefore not reflective of Paul’s thought.⁹¹ By placing the epistle within a Pauline framework, they provide an imperial-critical reading of the household code (Eph. 5:23-6:9), questioning those who read the passage as accommodating imperial ideology.⁹² They also explore anti-imperial elements to the letter’s portrait of rulers and authorities.⁹³ For Gupta and Long, Ephesians “shows many signs of counter-imperial resistance by affirming the establishment of an alternative political identity in the church assembly around Jesus Christ as

⁸⁶ See also similar parallels in Eph. 3:10; 6:12.

⁸⁷ Long, “Discerning Empires,” 13. This stands in close parallel to Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), Cf. Arnold who suggests that this power language should be heard in reference to Artemis, astrology, mystery religions, and magic: Arnold, *Power and Magic*. Long suggests that the problem with Arnold’s assessment is that he dismisses the Roman imperial context as “ineffectual in the lives of the average person,” (Long, “Discerning Empires,” 6).

⁸⁸ In response to Long’s “Discerning Empires” paper at the Disputed Paulines Session in the 2008 Annual SBL meeting in Boston, Max Turner raised objections to imperial-critical interpretations of the letter’s Christology on the grounds that Messianic ideas were firmly rooted within Judaism. Similar objections have been made regarding the Christology in other NT texts as well. E.g. Barclay critiques Wright for suggesting that christological titles ‘could not but be construed’ as anti-imperial: Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 377. Seyoon Kim also expresses caution towards elements of anti-imperial Christology throughout his *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

⁸⁹ Gupta and Long, “Politics of Ephesians,” 112.

⁹⁰ Gupta and Long, 136. See also Long, “Discerning Empires in Ephesians,” 17. In a different essay Long does not seem as pointed with his declaration regarding Ephesians as having engaged in “active and direct” critique. He echoes Deissmann’s words by addressing the notion that Ephesians employs a sort of “silent protest.” He continues by admitting that he is drawn towards N. T. Wright’s work that proposes Paul as having engaged in a “coded critique of imperial politics” (Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 306). It does not come as a surprise then that he evokes the work of Scott on hidden transcripts in order to make sense of what he sees as a less direct critique of empire in the household code portions of the letter (Gupta and Long, “The Politics of Ephesians,” 134). Some concerns have been raised against the use of Scott’s work for anti-imperial interpretations of NT texts, see Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 382-383; Briggs Kittredge, “Reconstructing,” 145-155). Long admits that some of his work is not completely exhaustive, but an “exploratory foray:” Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 258.

⁹¹ Gupta and Long, 114-115.

⁹² Gupta and Long, 115, 126-135.

⁹³ Gupta and Long, 115-126.

the one Lord (4.5).”⁹⁴ For them, the epistle’s cosmological perspective and its household code amounts to “a trumping critique of Roman imperial ideology and an ethical critique of the predominant social values.”⁹⁵

Long’s subsequent work has amassed further evidence for reading a variety of passages in Ephesians as a challenge to Roman imperial ideology.⁹⁶ Several overarching observations can be made here regarding Long’s approach. He traces rhetorical parallels between Ephesians and Greco-Roman epigraphic material and concludes that “the total political vision of Ephesians is only grasped as one understands how completely Paul relied on conventional topoi to present a political theology across the discourse...My identification of these political topoi has brought me to conclude that Paul was ‘trumping’ competing alternative political systems even while drawing upon major commonplaces with them.”⁹⁷ His rhetorical strategy draws parallels between the language and grammar of Ephesians and similarities found within Greco-Roman writings and inscriptions that cast Roman imperial ideology. Long’s grand political vision for Ephesians entails Paul subversively critiquing Roman imperial ideology through using imperial rhetoric throughout his epistle. The letter’s rhetorical context has not been fully examined in assessing potential imperial criticism in the letter.⁹⁸ Danker acknowledges the Roman imperial context of the letter. He concludes that “no document in the New Testament bears such close resemblance in its periodic style to the rhetoric of inscriptions associated with Asia Minor as does the letter to the Ephesians.”⁹⁹ Long follows Danker by providing illuminating work on the letter’s rhetorical context by drawing out connections with ancient political rhetoric.¹⁰⁰ More work needs to be done to examine whether the similarities between

⁹⁴ Gupta and Long, 115.

⁹⁵ Gupta and Long, 115.

⁹⁶ Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology;” Long, “Εκκλησία in Ephesians” Long, “Roman Imperial Rule;” Long, “Taught in Christ;” Long, “Learning in Christ.”

⁹⁷ Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 304-305.

⁹⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990), xli-xlii; B. Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 222-223; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 68-75, have all affirmed the need to acknowledge developments in rhetorical criticism when interpreting Ephesians, but none has explicitly shown how this impacts Ephesians imperial context. Although, one wonders whether Lincoln’s inclusion in the front-page endorsements of Keesmaat and Walsh’s *Colossians Remixed* signals that he sees some significance in the imperial context of Col/Eph of Ephesians, especially considering that he regards Ephesians as having depended on Colossians: Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lii.

⁹⁹ Fredrick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Greco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1982), 451. Holland Hendrix also notes similarities between Ephesians and honorific decrees: “On the Form and Ethos of Ephesians,” *USQ* 42.4 (1988): 3-15.

¹⁰⁰ Long, “Roman Imperial Rule,” 113-154, esp. 118ff.; Gupta and Long, “The Politics of Ephesians,” 112-36; Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 255-309; Long, “Discerning Empires in Ephesians.”

Ephesians and Greco-Roman epigraphic materials were merely stylistic, or whether some ideologically factors contributed to these similarities. Even if it can be demonstrated that there are ideological motivations, is the overlap intended to mimic or invoke, or to challenge, subvert, or reorient?

Long has also provided substantial evidence for viewing language in Ephesians as parallel to aspects of Roman imperial ideology. His examination of honorific decrees contextualizes some of the language of the epistle. On the other hand, Best has noted that tracing parallels with honorific decrees falls short of fully explaining aspects of the language used throughout the letter.¹⁰¹ While Long's assessment of political parallels with the language of Ephesians does well to situate key themes in the letter in its first century cognitive context, nothing in the language itself tells the reader whether these parallels constituted subversion of imperial ideology. Long's examination of epigraphic materials cannot, by itself, distinguish whether the epistle critiques the Roman Empire explicitly or implicitly, and it does not attend to the epistle's subtext and its larger storied components which provide context to its terminology. It is not enough to merely demonstrate parallels in language; it must be demonstrated that subversion was intended. Our use of an eclectic hermeneutic will help to examine these parallels in relation to wider cultural narratives conveyed through Roman imperial ideology.¹⁰² While Long's work has only appeared in the form of essays and articles on the subject to date, it is unfortunate that the rigor and depth of his work has gone almost completely unnoticed in recent Ephesians publications.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Best, *Ephesians*, 62.

¹⁰² Robert Foster suggests that terminology that is parallel with Roman imperial rhetoric in Ephesians may have functioned metaphorically, but not subversively: "No Book Beyond the Bound of Empire: Structuring Heavenly Realities through Imperial Metaphor in the Letter to the Ephesians," (paper presented at Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting: Boston 23 Nov 2008)

¹⁰³ Long has amassed over 150 pgs. of published materials on 'Ephesians and Empire' between his four articles, each of which has been published in significant academic journals or edited volumes. I found no references to Long's work in any of the following most recent substantial publications on Ephesians: Michael Immendörfer, *Ephesians and Artemis: The Cult of the Great Goddess of Ephesus as the Epistle's Context* (WUNT II. 436; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians* (Evangelical Exegetical Commentary; Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016); Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians* (Wisdom Commentary 50; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2017); Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse* (Osborne New Testament Commentaries; Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017); Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians* (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016); Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: Being a Christian, at Home and in the Cosmos* (T&T Clark Study Guides to the New Testament; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians* (TNTC 10; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019); Rabbi Barney Kasdan, *Rabbi Paul Enlightens the Ephesians on Walking with Messiah Yeshua: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer, 2015); Jayachitra, *Re-reading Household Relationships*; Norbert Baumert and Maria-Irma Seewann, *Israels Berufung für die Völker: Übersetzung und Auslegung der Briefe an Philemon, an die Kolosser und an die Epheser* (München: Echter, 2016). Three exceptions are: Elna Mouton, "Reimagining Ancient Household Ethos? On the Implied Rhetorical Effect of Ephesians 5:21-23," *NeoTest* 48.1 (2014): 172 fn. 12; Brian J. Oropeza, "Ephesians: Walking as an Elect Community in Christ," in *Jews, Gentiles*,

Recent readings of Ephesians have challenged the notion that its concept of εἰρήνη should be viewed primarily through the lenses of Hebrew שָׁלוֹם.¹⁰⁴ Instead, some have suggested that the peace proposed in Ephesians stands as a counter-ideology to that of the *Pax Romana*.¹⁰⁵ Interpreters have begun to acknowledge that first-century conceptions of imperial peace were intimately connected to visions of the *Pax Romana*, and projected a wide eschatological program within Roman imperial ideology.¹⁰⁶ Faust sees the peace in the epistle as a “christologischen Gegenentwurf zum flavischen Kaiser, der in seinem Staatsleib kürzlich Frieden gestiftet hatte” and that there are “weitere Elemente politischer Symbolik...die eine möglicherweise antithetische Parallele zwischen Kirche und römischem Staat transparent machen.”¹⁰⁷ The peace motif is drawn out in Ephesians by using “eine politische Analogie.”¹⁰⁸ He views the epistle’s portrait of the peace of Christ in Eph. 2:17 in connection with Is. 52:7 (LXX) and Rom. 10:12, 15 where there are thematic ties between God/Lord and the gospel of peace. This evocation of the biblical motif also functions as an analogy to the “politische Erfahrung im Imperium Romanum” that draws out parallels between Jesus and Caesar’s role as the “Garant der pax gentium.”¹⁰⁹ He locates the epistle within a particular historical context under the early Flavian rulers (AD 70s), noting that changes in policies towards the Jews under imperial rule help to inform the letter’s description of peace in Eph. 2.¹¹⁰ Faust’s work balances the epistle’s parallels with OT motifs, and with those present in Roman imperial ideology. He

and the Opponents of Paul: The Pauline Letters (Apostasy in the New Testament 2; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012): 225; Eric Covington, *Functional Teleology and the Coherence of Ephesians: A Comparative and Reception – Historical Approach* (WUNT 470; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 13. That scholars have remained largely unaware of Long’s work reinforces the idea that Ephesians has not yet gained much ground in many imperial-critical discussions.

¹⁰⁴ See Eph. 1:2; 2:14, 15, 17; 4:3; 6:15, 23. For the traditional interpretation of *peace* in Ephesians parallel with Jewish *shalom* see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 6, 435-436; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 164.

¹⁰⁵ Gosnell L. Yorke, “Hearing the Politics of Peace in Ephesians: A Proposal from an African Postcolonial Perspective,” *JSTNT* 30.1 (2007): 113-127; Keesmaat, 189-190; Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 293, 306; Long, “Discerning Empires,” 3, 7, 9; Jeffrey R. Asher, “An Unworthy Foe: Heroic Ἡρώη, Trickery, and an Insult in Ephesians 6:11,” *JBL* 130.4 (2011): 748.

¹⁰⁶ See especially Wengst, *Pax Romana*.

¹⁰⁷ Faust, *Pax Christi*, 431.

¹⁰⁸ Faust, 181.

¹⁰⁹ Faust, 181.

¹¹⁰ Faust, 325-403. Lincoln provides a nice survey of this aspect of Faust’s work, but ultimately seems unconvinced by his main thesis: “Review of *Pax Christi*,” 290-291. Gerhard Sellin also interacts with *Pax Christi* but he stresses that the author of the epistle’s negative experiences with *Pax Caesaris* only “probably” forms the context of the language of peace in the letter. “Konsolidierungs- und Differenzierungsprozesse im „Paulinismus“ (Kol und Eph),” in *Bekanntnis und Erinnerung: Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Hans-Friedrich Weiß*, eds. Klaus-Michael Bull and Eckart Reinmuth (Rostocker Theologische Studien 16; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 266.

depicts the epistle's negotiation of its imperial context as drawing from the OT while also carrying imperial-critical weight in its Roman imperial environment. He also focuses his attention more broadly, noting the social aspect of the peace language in Ephesians in bringing together Jews and Gentiles."¹¹¹ Similarly, Reinmuth attempts to locate the epistle's Jew/Gentile relationship within its Roman imperial environment, noting that the peace that Jesus brings to these groups in Ephesians functions as a "Gegengeschichte...zugleich aber unter diskursiven Bedingungen reflektiert, die zeitgenössischen Machtstrukturen und ihren Deutungen entsprechen (z.B. Sklaven—Freie, Frauen—Männer; 6,5-9; 5,21-33)."¹¹² Reinmuth's claim that the peace of Christ functions as a "Gegengeschichte" is notable, although whether it also reflects contemporary [imperial] power structures needs further consideration, and it raises some of the dilemma surrounding the epistle's relationship to the Roman Empire. Does the letter's theology of peace subvert, reinforce, or reflect contemporary Roman imperial ideology?

Yorke proposed that peace terminology in Ephesians drew strong "connotational overtones, conceptual implicatures, or acoustic resonances" with its hearer's Greco-Roman imperial context.¹¹³ For a first-century Greco-Roman hearer, the notion of peace may have evoked images of the role of Caesar Augustus as the bearer of peace. Yorke contends that the notion of Christ as the bearer of peace "c[ame] as music to the ears of the listening and marginalized congregants as they were being reminded and reassured that it is Christ, and *not* Emperor Augustus who was the genuine giver and guardian of true and lasting peace (*pax* or εἰρήνη)."¹¹⁴ He continues by observing that in a Greco-Roman context, *Eirene* was also considered the goddess of peace.¹¹⁵ Subsequently, he notes that, with the exception of Revelation, scholars have given "Syro-Palestinian politics and practices...the 'lions share' of their attention."¹¹⁶ Working to shift this direction of scholarship, he points to the Priene inscription, which praises Augustus Caesar as having ended war and brought peace to the empire.¹¹⁷ Yorke points to a key phrase in the inscription, "the birthday of the god (that is, the divine Augustus) is the beginning of the gospel of peace."¹¹⁸ He concludes that "it would be

¹¹¹ Faust, 180.

¹¹² Reinmuth, "Neue Testament," 16.

¹¹³ Yorke, 118.

¹¹⁴ Yorke, 115.

¹¹⁵ Yorke, 118.

¹¹⁶ Yorke, 119.

¹¹⁷ See *OGIS* 458.

¹¹⁸ Yorke, 119.

inconceivable that peace (εἰρήνη) would not have generated acoustic resonances with the *Pax Romana*.”¹¹⁹

Lau also maintains that there is a ‘political character’ to the concept of peace in Ephesians.¹²⁰ On the other hand, he defines the political elements of the letter much differently than Yorke. While he challenges modern notions of the separation of politics and religion, pointing to the reality that such partitioning of economics, sociology, education, religion, and ethics were unknown to the ancient world,¹²¹ he remains unconvinced that the author’s political language should be read as a polemic against the Roman Empire.¹²² Lau acknowledges that Ephesians’ “rhetorical appeals are similar to *topoi* used by ancient political writers urging unity among divided groups.”¹²³ Furthermore, he interprets the war imagery in Eph. 6.10-20 as political activity deeply connected to the letter’s theology of peace.¹²⁴ He suggests that the peace in Ephesians is built on a metanarrative that could be compared with similar narratives from other communities,¹²⁵ but he does not consider narratives driven by Roman imperial ideology to have played a significant role for the recipients of the letter.¹²⁶ Lau concludes that Christ’s rule in Ephesians has implications for interactions with earthly governments, and that the social reality constructed by the letter “indirectly challenges and relativizes the current political paradigm.”¹²⁷

These portraits reveal that, while developments have been made towards an anti-imperial interpretation of the notion of peace in Ephesians, there are still wide discrepancies over how the motif may have been heard. While Yorke’s analysis focuses largely on the Roman context of peace in the letter, he also maintains images of peace grounded in Israel’s prophetic tradition.¹²⁸ This approach is more holistic, and it provides a balanced interpretation of the concept of peace in the letter. He rightly notes that oral communication was the primary means

¹¹⁹ Yorke, 120.

¹²⁰ Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 76-156, see especially 153.

¹²¹ Lau, 77 fn. 4.

¹²² Lau, 12.

¹²³ Lau, 105.

¹²⁴ Lau, 146-153.

¹²⁵ Lau, 270-274.

¹²⁶ Lau, 12.

¹²⁷ Te-Li Lau, “Politics of Peace in Ephesians” (paper presented in the Disputed Pauline Session at the annual Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, Boston, MA, 23 November 2008), 12.

¹²⁸ Yorke, 121. See also Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 99.

by which the audience heard the letter,¹²⁹ but he does not spell out how this point impacts potentially subversive elements. More could be done to evaluate the epistle's theology of peace in light of its Roman imperial context.

Recent imperial-critical interpretations of the household code in Ephesians have emerged. Osiek, MacDonald, and Tullock state that their work on Eph. 5 is "indebted to recent scholarship of Ephesians using Roman imperial ideology as an interpretive grid" and that they hope to draw out "important points of contact among political elements, family values, and features of Christian identity reflected in this text."¹³⁰ They locate Eph. 5:22-33 in the context of early Christian households and of empire, concluding that "the marriage teaching of Ephesians [is] an important socio-political statement"¹³¹ and a "political strategy of resistance to the dominant social order."¹³² By dating the epistle around AD 90, during a time when Roman marriage ideals had spread further east, they appeal to a later empirical context in order to examine how this section of the letter would have been heard in light of that changing environment.¹³³ On the one hand, they see Eph. 5:22-33 as a "highly conventional text,"¹³⁴ but they also acknowledge that "when it comes to the lives of wives, much more may be going on than appears on the surface of the texts."¹³⁵ Hermeneutically speaking, they are willing to acknowledge differences between surface appearances of a seemingly straightforward conventional text by examining the ways in which the text transcended traditional Roman marriage conventions. Included in this tension are architectural images that "draw upon the ideological underpinnings of the empire, [but] ultimately these architectural images constitute a critique of conventional notions of sacred space, including temples and various politically approved arrangements for meetings."¹³⁶ These scholars have a similar approach to Eph. 6:10-20, claiming that this battle section in the letter is "an ironic jab at the imperial propaganda for

¹²⁹ Yorke, 116. Here he points to J. D. Harvey's work [*Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998)] in suggesting that a predominantly oral context requires speakers to learn to read internally so as to better construct the message before delivered out-loud. This means that the arrangement of the work is based more on what will be heard than what will be seen. Yorke continues by pointing out the high illiteracy rate in Greco-Roman populations (he suggests 80-90%), and that this suggests that one should view NT texts as "residually oral." See W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London: Routledge, 1982).

¹³⁰ Osiek, MacDonald, and Tulloch, "Ephesians 5," 118.

¹³¹ Osiek, et. al., 120.

¹³² Osiek, et. al., 142.

¹³³ Osiek, et. al., 120.

¹³⁴ Osiek, et. al., 120.

¹³⁵ Osiek, et. al., 121.

¹³⁶ Osiek, et. al., 130.

Roman rule, the *Pax Romana*...reversing the usual meaning of the term “gospel” to refer to the message of peace and security of Augustus and his successor.”¹³⁷ Ultimately, they portray Eph. 5 as subversive of conventional ideals, while maintaining some conventional notions of marriage upheld by Roman imperial ideology. One important question that emerges from their work is how a later deuteropauline date for the epistle may impact its speech acts, and whether subversion of imperial ideology becomes more likely or less likely within each date framework. We will assess this aspect in significant detail in chapter 4.

Talbert incorporates a strong awareness of the Roman imperial setting into his Ephesians commentary.¹³⁸ He takes great strides towards reading the letter’s content in its Roman imperial context by putting a strong emphasis on the *Zeitgeist* of Ephesians, which is essential for discerning how its original hearers would have heard the letter.¹³⁹ He also shows interest in larger ideological paradigms by reconstructing the letter’s context “over against the regnant imperial propaganda.”¹⁴⁰ Methodologically speaking, he identifies with the “dominan[t] historical paradigm in New Testament studies”¹⁴¹ and emphasizes ancient comparative sources.¹⁴² This method naturally leads to a strong focus on linguistic and grammatical aspects of the letter.¹⁴³ His interpretations use a more traditional comparative approach that sees the language as parallel to aspects of imperial ideology and themes. Unlike the works surveyed above, Talbert does not explicitly provide an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. On the other hand, unlike those who dismiss the Roman imperial context of the

¹³⁷ Osiek, et. al., 121.

¹³⁸ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 15-28.

¹³⁹ Talbert, 16.

¹⁴⁰ Talbert, 18.

¹⁴¹ Talbert, 18.

¹⁴² Talbert, 18.

¹⁴³ E.g. Talbert debates whether one should view ‘in Christ’ passages in Ephesians in an instrumental sense, locative sense, or otherwise, but he ignores the larger function of these passages for the construction of Christian identity: Talbert, 37-40, 45. Skhul does better at recognizing how these passages fit into communal identity formation: *Reading Ephesians*, 36. Talbert’s discussion on the origin of the term ἐκκλησία is also problematic. He rightly acknowledges that it was used of the city assembly that gathered for business purposes, as well as in a more technical sense for the people of God in the LXX, but he relies upon etymological studies that sees the term as a reference to “called-out people.” *Ephesians and Colossians*, 58. There is little evidence that the term is used in this manner throughout the NT where it carries a wider sense of ‘community.’ See Lindemann’s translation of the Greek term as “Gemeinde:” *Der Epheserbrief* (ZBK; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 19. Furthermore, the grammatical parallels that Talbert draws between Eph. 5.18-21 and 1 Cor. 14.16-17 in order to conclude that the ‘being subject’ in Eph. 5.21 refers more so to the context of worship than the household (because the 1 Cor. parallels are used in the context of worship) are weak at best (Talbert, 131). His emphasis here on grammatical connections misses that there is no clear break between the author’s train of thought in each of these sections, and so likely need not be classified as either-or. I briefly offered this sort of critique of Talbert in my review of his commentary in *ReISRev* 35.1 (Mar 2009): 60.

letter, he broadens the epistle's life-setting, which, in turn, raises questions about how Ephesians engages with that wider context. However, his methodology is limited in its ability to discern wider narrative elements invoked by the implied author and so he passes over potential conflicts between the theology of Ephesians and Roman imperial ideology.¹⁴⁴

In her imperial-critical examination of the 'shorter' Pauline letters (Eph., Col., Phil., and 1-2 Thess.), Keesmaat suggests that "Ephesians is the most overtly allusive text."¹⁴⁵ She envisions Paul using (and reorienting) passages from the OT in order to challenge the ideology of the Roman Empire.¹⁴⁶ She follows several 'story lines' that evoke OT images showing that the "Ephesian Christians are living out a different story, one that challenges the parameters and assumptions not only of the Roman Empire but also of Israel when Israel acts like Empire."¹⁴⁷ For Keesmaat, the way in which Ephesians appropriates and reshapes OT story lines presents a challenge to all imperial entities, including modern ones.¹⁴⁸ Her expansion of Ephesians' anti-imperial trajectory to include subversion of not only the Roman Empire, but Israel as an empire, is noteworthy.¹⁴⁹ One of her most significant contributions is that she discerns subversion of imperial ideology narratively, beyond the level of grammar and terminological parallels. Keesmaat's proposal shows promise for moving imperial-critical discussion beyond its current state, and yet it has not gained footing among Ephesians commentators.

Lowe suggests that "if there is imperial material here [in Ephesians], its influences are likely subtle—but not necessarily untraceable."¹⁵⁰ Whereas others have seen the power language of the epistle as reason to dismiss anti-imperial elements, Lowe notes that this language "could have been intended to include even 'the spirit of the empire, which perpetuates itself through a succession of rulers and which was so powerful, in the case of Rome, that it was able to sustain the madness of three emperors in one century. Previous scholarship thus presents ample precedent for considering earthly, political forces among the New Testament's

¹⁴⁴ Talbert does detect anti-imperial elements in Colossians: *Ephesians and Colossians*, 197.

¹⁴⁵ Keesmaat, "In the Face of Empire," 187.

¹⁴⁶ Keesmaat, 187.

¹⁴⁷ Keesmaat, 194.

¹⁴⁸ Keesmaat includes modern empires in this as well by framing her analysis with a brief examination of "The Imperial Context of North America:" 186-187.

¹⁴⁹ Keesmaat's claim has parallels with Jewett's work on Romans where he concludes that "since God's grace is available to all, no claim of superiority remains valid and therewith the basis for every kind of imperialism has been removed." Robert Jewett, "Response," 71.

¹⁵⁰ Lowe, "Not an Ordinary Death," 202.

pantheon of powers.”¹⁵¹ He also finds some promise in appropriating Gombis’ notion of kingship and triumph in the letter with imperial ideology as a “Christological recasting of the triumph,”¹⁵² and an “echo chamber” for its image of divine kingship.¹⁵³

According to Beck, references to ‘the devil’ in Ephesians functioned as an anti-Roman cryptogram, which challenged the Roman Empire but also subtly concealed some of its anti-imperial thrust.¹⁵⁴ In contrast to Arnold, he interprets the ‘rulers and authorities’ in Ephesians as earthly rulers, expressed in a hidden transcript, that is, “a protective coat for the cryptogram,” namely language of Satan/devil.¹⁵⁵ Beck detects a more cautious approach to anti-imperial elements in Ephesians than in other NT texts.¹⁵⁶ He suggests that the increase of frequency in anti-Roman ‘cryptograms’ in the letter compared to Colossians necessitated this caution in order to avoid detection by Roman imperial authorities.¹⁵⁷ Keesmaat, Lowe, and Beck draw similar conclusions about Ephesians, namely that Paul intentionally coded his anti-imperial language so as to avoid detection by imperial authorities.¹⁵⁸ Our project broadens the hermeneutical tools used for assessing implicit speech acts. An eclectic hermeneutic will help to evaluate whether the speech acts of Ephesians *counted as* either active or hidden critique of imperial ideology within its Roman imperial context. While Keesmaat, Lowe, and Beck assume that Ephesians is more coded in its critique of the Roman empire, their works do not fully evaluate aspects of the letter’s Roman imperial context in order to see if specific factors were in place that necessitated such language.¹⁵⁹

By emphasizing the roles that empires play in history, postcolonial readings also show some promise of addressing the Roman imperial context of Ephesians. Bird’s postcolonial interpretation of Ephesians acknowledges various political elements of the letter that have previously been overlooked, but like some of the approaches above, her proposal presents problems for assessing the imperial-critical status of Ephesians. She laments that biblical studies have become far too apolitical and proposes that a responsible reading of the text

¹⁵¹ Lowe, “Not an Ordinary Death,” 203.

¹⁵² Lowe, 206-207.

¹⁵³ Lowe, 207.

¹⁵⁴ Beck, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms*, 75-77.

¹⁵⁵ Beck, 76-77.

¹⁵⁶ Beck, 75.

¹⁵⁷ Beck, 75.

¹⁵⁸ Keesmaat, “In the Face of Empire,” 187; Lowe, 202; Beck, 75.

¹⁵⁹ We will assess this possibility in ch. 3 below.

demands that one take political elements into consideration.¹⁶⁰ Unlike the anti-imperial interpretations noted above, she discerns places in the epistle that both challenge Roman imperial ideology and reinforce it.¹⁶¹ She contends that the author of Ephesians constructed a counter-empire that was seen as conquering Rome,¹⁶² but also re-inscribed the same dominant ruling paradigm that existed within Roman imperial order.¹⁶³ According to Bird, the letter's anti-imperial elements are informed by, but also dependent on, imitating that empire. She concludes that the letter's theological trajectory led to escapism in the early Christian church.¹⁶⁴ Her assessment contrasts with Long's. Whereas Long envisions the author of Ephesians as a poetic painter of new ideological constructs, formulating a positive counter-identity for early Christians through subverting the empire, Bird sees the epistle as imitating imperial terminology—subverting it, but also (perhaps unintentionally) reinforcing its power structures.

While Bird's postcolonial approach rightly acknowledges that the context of the modern reader affects the interpretation of the NT,¹⁶⁵ it underplays elements of the implied author and recipients' context. Textual meaning then becomes centralized on modern empirical readers at the cost of the implied audience.¹⁶⁶ Ultimately, questions about whether Ephesians subverts modern empires is a secondary interpretive enterprise that can only be entertained after first exploring the meaning of the text from the vantage point of its implied author and audience. Her position rightly emphasizes the potential that contextual readings have for the 21st-century, but it de-emphasizes the implied author's intentions, which ultimately leads to what Moritz calls "re-authoring" the text.¹⁶⁷ This project mitigates that danger by locating textual meaning in the intentions of the implied author, rather than in empirical authors or audiences. In doing so, we will ask whether the implied author of Ephesians intended to subvert ideology *within its contemporary Roman imperial context*, and whether the letter's implied readers were expected to understand it in this way. Assessing this question requires the use of hermeneutical tools beyond those employed by Bird's study. She overlooks how subversion

¹⁶⁰ Bird, "Ephesians," 266.

¹⁶¹ Bird, 270, 276.

¹⁶² Bird, 277-278.

¹⁶³ Bird, 271.

¹⁶⁴ Bird, 278.

¹⁶⁵ See Segovia and Sugirtharajah, *A Postcolonial Commentary*.

¹⁶⁶ Briggs-Kittredge adapts Scott's work for similar purposes in "Reconstructing 'Resistance.'"

¹⁶⁷ Thorsten Moritz, "Scripture and Theological Exegesis," in *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scripture* (eds., Michael Bird and Michael Pahl; Gorgias Précis Portfolios 7; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2010), 133.

functioned in the text's contemporary environment(s), and therefore limits the possibilities for understanding the implied author's speech acts. Furthermore, her approach underestimates the larger theological vision of Ephesians. The speech acts intended in the epistle are far more complex and strategic than she suggests. Approaching imperial-critical issues in Ephesians in this manner will further help to reorient the traditional divide between *interpretation* and *application*.

Schüssler Fiorenza approaches Ephesians from a critical feminist perspective.¹⁶⁸ She detects a "symbolic political universe of Ephesians" that is "extensively spelled out in the first chapters of the letter."¹⁶⁹ She provides a political reading of the epistle by identifying οἰκονομία, πολιτεία, Χριστός, and ἐκκλησία as "political terms that define the imagination and symbolic universe of Ephesians."¹⁷⁰ She claims that ἐκκλησία is best translated as "political assembly of citizens"¹⁷¹ and that "democratic *ekklēsia* discourse continued to be juxtaposed with imperial discourse in the first-century context of imperial Rome, greatly impacting debates over authority, gender, and speech."¹⁷² This is primarily expressed in the household code, which paints the ἐκκλησία in a "subordinate feminine role," that "thoroughly genderizes and privatizes the political language of *ekklēsia*."¹⁷³ For Schüssler Fiorenza, 1 Cor. 12 reverses the honor status of Greco-Roman society, whereas Ephesians distinguishes between 'head' and 'body,' "correcting [Paul's] egalitarian communal understanding."¹⁷⁴ Consequently, she sees Ephesians as re-inscribing ideas of subordination that Paul had challenged earlier.¹⁷⁵ Her evaluation of the imperial-critical status of Ephesians is mixed; on the one hand, it promotes imperial ideology by "painting Jesus Messiah in imperial colors,"¹⁷⁶ while also "undermin[ing] this imperial imagery in and through an ethic of love."¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, the ethic of love

¹⁶⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians*, lviii-lxii.

¹⁶⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxiv.

¹⁷⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxiv.

¹⁷¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxvii.

¹⁷² Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxvii.

¹⁷³ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxix.

¹⁷⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxix.

¹⁷⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxx.

¹⁷⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxx.

¹⁷⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxxii.

in Ephesians is not “promoted among equals” and so it is “kyriarchal”—ultimately mimicking Roman imperial ideology more so than subverting it.¹⁷⁸ This creates a problem,

Jesus Messiah, who was executed by the Roman empire, becomes, in Christian imagination, the new emperor who demands subjection. True, the author sought to mitigate this imperial metaphorical-symbolic universe by making the love (*agapē*) of Jesus Messiah the paradigm for the husband to imitate. However, such love is no longer mutual but kyriarchal: top-down love. In short, by masculinizing the Divine and feminizing the *ekklēsia* the author constructs a kyriarchal relationship of domination.¹⁷⁹

Schüssler Fiorenza’s interpretation, which shares characteristics with Bird’s, reflects the divergence of opinions regarding the anti-imperial status of Ephesians. There is a disagreement among those who recognize imperial-critical statements in Ephesians: do those statements exist uniformly, without reinscribing imperial ideology (whether intentionally or not)? Or does Ephesians navigate its approach to imperial ideology in a heterogeneous manner by both subverting the Roman empire, and reinforcing its ideals?

Jayachitra also approaches an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians from the perspective of postcolonialism. She uses a postcolonial feminist hermeneutic to reexamine the ways that the household code in Ephesians subverted household ideologies projected by Roman imperial rule.¹⁸⁰ Like Keesmaat, she sees the anti-imperial strategies of Ephesians as “encounter[ed]...not in an explicit manner, but in a subtle way,” although for Jayachitra, this occurs “in the form of hybridity and colonial mimicry.”¹⁸¹ Thus, terms used in Ephesians, such as “household, ecclesia, powers, authorities and the imagery of army/soldier” point to its mimicry of Roman imperial concepts.¹⁸² She concludes that the household code was “radical and revolutionary,” and “by asking the husbands to love their wives, [it] is actually setting a resistant tone to the then prevailing Greco-Roman household codes. It was by no means conventional in the imperial Roman society to expect of husbands to love their wives.”¹⁸³ Jayachitra’s work opens up the possibility for reinterpreting the meaning of the epistle in light

¹⁷⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxxii. Similarly, Briggs-Kittredge sees the author of Ephesians as reinforcing kyriarchy, contradicting the beliefs of women leaders who received the epistle, that baptism had “abolished the privilege of husbands over wives in patriarchal marriage.” “Reconstructing,” 150-151. This suggests some tension between the ‘public transcript’ and the ‘hidden transcript.’

¹⁷⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxxii.

¹⁸⁰ Jayachitra, *Re-Reading Household Relationships*, 7-15.

¹⁸¹ Jayachitra, xiii.

¹⁸² Jayachitra, xiv.

¹⁸³ Jayachitra, xiv.

of wider Roman conventions that have not previously been given much consideration. Her reading challenges some of the conclusions drawn out by Lau, Bird, and Schüssler Fiorenza, and requires further investigation in order to determine whether this passage, which Horsley accused of obscuring the anti-imperial thrust of Paul,¹⁸⁴ may actually subvert aspects of Roman imperial ideology.

In his assessment of Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles, Maier states that “for the writers of these texts, imperial iconography and the claims it represented for the emperor’s rule were a rich resource for their own acclamations of the reign of Christ and the ethical codes that went along with it.”¹⁸⁵ Maier’s approach comes from a social constructivist perspective that also attends carefully to semiotics and visual art, placing these components next to (rather than underneath) textual analysis.¹⁸⁶ Along with Davina Lopez, he calls for “a visually literate form of academic study.”¹⁸⁷ Like Talbert, Maier focuses on parallels in language between Ephesians and extant contemporary resources since “reading these letters with the help of imperial imagery with a view to imperial language is indispensable for an understanding of the epistles’ social context, vocabulary, metaphor, strategies of persuasion and community ideals.”¹⁸⁸ Maier sees the use of imperial iconography as

encouraging listeners to inhabit a world in which it is not Caesar but Christ who delivers all the promises and ideals otherwise portrayed in imperial narratives. Since the Empire’s visual world was so critical in communicating these overarching narratives and ideals, it follows that Paul’s listeners were shaped by that visual world to imagine themselves as beneficiaries of a certain kind of order. It is precisely this order that the contested letters use as a means of persuasion. They arise out of a rhetorically charged imperial situation that has already invited urban dwellers to view themselves and the world around them in a certain way, and they draw on visual commonplace in that world to create another one that is at once part of and not part of the dominant order.¹⁸⁹

He concludes that tapping into this visual landscape “sometimes inscribes [Roman political virtues] in traditional ways, and at other times [reconfigures] them in paradoxical ones”¹⁹⁰ but

¹⁸⁴ See p. 9 above.

¹⁸⁵ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Maier, 17-19, 22-27.

¹⁸⁷ Maier, 20. Lopez’s method is spelled out in her *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

¹⁸⁸ Maier, 1.

¹⁸⁹ Maier, 15.

¹⁹⁰ Maier, 21.

ultimately “negotiates Roman imperial realities in complex and subtle, but not always oppositional, ways.”¹⁹¹ Similar to the work of Bird, Maier notes that “it is simplistic to consider Paul ‘for’ or ‘against’ the Roman Empire” since Paul was “neither for nor against ‘the Roman Empire’ but a skillful negotiator of his imperial context,”¹⁹² driven by an “entangled imagination” that “express[es] a complex negotiation with the Roman imperial mentality that defined their cultural horizon.”¹⁹³

The works surveyed above represent highly contrasting portraits of how Ephesians engages with its Roman imperial context. A great deal of room exists for further investigations of Ephesians’ place within current discussions of political readings of the NT. This project seeks to fill some of the gaps in these areas by carefully evaluating the imperial-critical status of the text beyond what current approaches offer.

1.3 MOVING FORWARD: THE NECESSITY OF AN ECLECTIC HERMENEUTIC

Rogers’ claim that Greco-Roman cultural matters in the first century were “so commonplace and well known that they did not need elaboration” does not represent the consensus among Ephesians scholarship.¹⁹⁴ Talbert has aptly observed that “normal historical questions do not yield the necessary answers” to major questions about the life-setting of the epistle.¹⁹⁵ Instead, he suggests that “what is needed is a different set of questions, a different perspective, a different approach that will render Ephesians less of an enigma.”¹⁹⁶ Similarly, MacDonald is right in noting limitations to the dominant historical-critical approach, as well as the need to both complement and challenge it.¹⁹⁷ Her observation that an obsession with historical problems and questions of the authenticity has resulted in “many interesting facets” of the letter “not receiv[ing] the attention it deserves”¹⁹⁸ is prudent. Interpreters of Ephesians can do better than simply comparing historical and textual referentialities. This project hopes to engage a

¹⁹¹ Maier, 21.

¹⁹² Maier, 33.

¹⁹³ Maier, 29.

¹⁹⁴ Cleon L. Rogers Jr., “The Dionysian Background of Eph. 5:18,” *BSac* 136 no 543 (Jl-S 1979): 250.

¹⁹⁵ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 15.

¹⁹⁶ Talbert, 15.

¹⁹⁷ Margaret Y. Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Rev. Ed; SP 17; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 1.

¹⁹⁸ MacDonald, 1.

different set of questions in order to provide some clarity to the relationship between Ephesians and the Roman Empire.

The interpretive challenges posed by recent developments in anti-imperial interpretations of Ephesians can be best addressed by utilizing an eclectic hermeneutic. Our next chapter will spell out three hermeneutical areas that will provide a more robust set of evaluation tools for assessing imperial-critical claims in Ephesians: implied/empirical distinctions, speech-act theory, and a narrative hermeneutic. This eclectic hermeneutic will be helpful in several ways. We will distinguish between implied and empirical authors, audiences and contexts in order to help to put empirical historical data in its proper place. It will also help to cast a vision for how the letter's Roman imperial context contributes to what is implied in the text. Debates about Pauline authorship will also be put in perspective by focusing on the implied author, which in turn helps to discern its implied context and the meaning of its speech acts. Since anti-imperial interpretations of Ephesians have focused on linguistic and grammatical parallels with imperial ideology, a well-informed understanding of communication theory is essential. Controversies over the plausibility that authors of NT texts were allusive, coy, or somehow camouflaged in their critique of the Roman Empire necessitate the use of speech-act theory since some of the core issues at hand are about communicative intent. Finally, fewer considerations have been given to the ways that the theological trajectories of Ephesians may have clashed with contemporary worldviews. A narrative hermeneutic will help locate potential underlying stories that form the basis of Roman imperial ideology. These underlying stories may have constituted an implicit subtext that is challenged or reoriented in the epistle. Each of these areas will help form our methodology employed throughout this study with the goal of assessing imperial-critical claims in Ephesians.

Chapter 2

An Eclectic Hermeneutic: A Hermeneutical Grid for Assessing Imperial Criticism in Ephesians

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before assessing an imperial-critical interpretation of Ephesians, we should establish our methodology. We will use three hermeneutical components: Distinctions between implied and empirical (authors, audiences, and contexts), speech-act theory, and a narrative hermeneutic. While each of these methods has been used in NT studies, they have not often been used together.¹ Interpretive challenges addressed so far, which arise out of recent imperial criticism of the NT, necessitate this eclectic hermeneutic. An approach that only uses one methodological tool unnecessarily limits some of the conversation, whereas an eclectic hermeneutic will do more justice to the complexity of some of the issues involved in the discussion, especially the cross-disciplinary features explored in this project. Some of the current discussions surrounding imperial criticism of the NT have been too restricted by narrow methodologies which have led to standstills in the field of study.

¹ An exception to this is Thorsten Moritz, "Scripture and Theological Exegesis" in *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures*, eds. Michael Pahl and Michael Bird (Gorgias Précis Portfolios 7; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2010), 119-140. Others have utilized a combination of some of these tools: N. T. Wright combines speech-act theory and a narrative hermeneutic in his methodology section in *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 31-144; for the merging of speech-act theory and implied/empirical, see J. E. Botha, "The Potential of Speech-Act Theory for New Testament Exegesis: Some Basic Concepts." *HTS* 47.2 (1991): 277-293; J. E. Botha, "Speech-Act Theory and New Testament Exegesis." *HTS* 47.2 (1991): 294-303. Outside of biblical studies, Marsen has combined speech-act theory with narrative analysis: Sky Marsen, *Narrative Dimensions of Philosophy: A Semiotic Exploration of the Work of Merleau-Ponty, Kierkegaard and Austin* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

2.2 IMPLIED/EMPIRICAL: A CHALLENGE FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES

The first methodological tool that will be employed throughout this study is a distinction between implied and empirical authors, audiences, and contexts. While these differentiations are not commonplace, there are overwhelming arguments for recognizing the distinction.² The relevance of these categories for biblical and theological studies is particularly pronounced.³ At the same time, less interpretive attention has been given to their place in the so-called deuteropauline letters.⁴ The following section will spell out the distinction between implied and empirical, and its relevance for authors, audiences/readers, and contexts. We will conclude with an evaluation of its use for interpreting a work labeled commonly as ‘deuteropauline.’⁵

Empirical authors are historical flesh-and-blood people who write and whose identity can be described through biographical data.⁶ Any single work of art may have been created by multiple empirical authors. Two prominent examples are evident in biblical studies: the documentary hypothesis for the Pentateuch, and theories surrounding the authorship of Isaiah.⁷

² See annotated bibliography section XII: A. Not all literary critics adopt the same terminology (implied/empirical), e.g.: “actual audience” and “authorial audience” (Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 20-22); ‘real authors’/‘fictitious speakers,’ and ‘real readers’/‘mock readers’ (Gibson, “Authors,” 265); inferred author (Ganette and Moore, in Nelles, “Historical and Implied Authors,” 24); Kindt and Muller prefer “hypothetical” or “postulated author” (Kindt and Muller, *Implied Author*, 13). They also note the contributions of Eco (model author), Schmid (abstract author), Walton (apparent artist), Nehamas (postulated author), Currie (Fictional author), and Iser (implied reader) although they caution against conflating each individual contribution into the same singular concept (Kindt and Muller, *Implied Author*, 11-12, 64).

³ See annotated bibliography section XII: B. While Leland Ryken rejects recognizing implied authors and audiences because he sees it as an unnecessary “rhetorical approach to the Bible” that requires “specialized literary analysis,” he himself quickly points to the necessity of utilizing ‘literary tools’ for biblical interpretation without providing any criteria for what constitutes helpful literary tools and unhelpful ones: “And it Came to Pass: The Bible as God’s Storybook,” *BSac* 147 (1990): 137.

⁴ Exceptions this are: Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), lxi-lxii, lxxv-lxxvii; Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians Colossians After Supersessionism: Christ’s Mission through Israel to the Nations* (New Testament After Supersessionism 2; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 6, 26, 67-68, 73, 231; Harry O. Maier, *Picturing Paul in Empire: Imperial Image, Text and Persuasion in Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 15.

⁵ A more complete assessment of implied and empirical elements of Ephesians will be evaluated in the next two chapters.

⁶ Wayne Booth labels them FBP’s [flesh-and-blood persons]: “Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?,” in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, eds. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005): 76; see also Mark Allan Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Hearing the New Testament*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 240.

⁷ The most well-known articulation of the documentary hypothesis is Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885). For a discussion on the possibilities of multiple empirical authors of Isaiah see Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1-5; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 23-28.

In each case, the focus is on empirical authorship. A wide range of private interior motives, not reflected in the work or related to the purpose of its creation, may have influenced empirical authors' creation of it. Aspects of the empirical author's life-story, psychology, and circumstances that are not discoverable by examining the work itself, however interesting they may be, constitute data that may inform plausible reconstructions of the implied author, but they may not directly contribute towards interpreting the work. Similarly, empirical readers (also audiences or recipients) are historical flesh-and-blood people who read a text (or have it read to them). In the case of a letter, this can include the original recipients that the empirical author intended to write to, but it can also include any other non-intended recipient(s) of the work. Empirical readers, whether contemporary with the empirical author's lifetime or not, can be extremely diverse. Any empirical reader's ability to discern the meaning of the text is largely dependent upon that person's grasp of the implied reader/audience. This assumes, of course, that the empirical writer was reasonably successful in creating a sensible implied author.

Implied authors, on the other hand, are constructed by the empirical author(s) and are projected within the text.⁸ The implied author's perspectives are not private, they are revealed within the speech acts of the text and are perfectly discernible by the implied audience/readers. The relationship between empirical author(s) and the implied author can be complex. In a work of fiction, the implied author may not reflect many aspects of the empirical author's biography or perspectives.⁹ This can be seen in cases where the empirical author plays with various literary vantage points, thereby making it difficult to discern whether what is said within the work by the implied author corresponds at all with the perspectives and beliefs of the empirical creator(s) of the work.¹⁰ Ultimately, the empirical author of a work may not have much in

⁸ Wayne Booth is credited with coining the term in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2nd Ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Critics have noted problems with Booth's formulation of the implied author, not least in that he is unclear about whether it is a construct created by the writer, or an inference made by readers of the work: Dan Shen, "What is the Implied Author," *Style* 45.1 (Spring 2011): 80. On the other hand, these two aspects can co-exist harmoniously when the relationship between the implied author and implied reader is considered. Empirical readers can discern the implied author in the text to the extent that they successfully read from the vantage point of the implied reader. In this way, the writer(s) creates the implied author and reader, project them within the text, each of which is discernable by empirical readers, although with varying degrees of success. Shen concludes that "if we examine Booth's own words carefully, we'll find that Booth's own formulation is quite logical and coherent, basically free from the theoretical contradictions alleged by many commentators." "Implied Author," 80.

⁹ Powell notes that by invoking the implied author, interpreters agree that "biographical information concerning the author's agenda or personality should not be imposed on the story." "Narrative Criticism," 241.

¹⁰ An interesting example of this is the work of George Eliot. Carroll observes that "when her pseudonym was lifted shortly after her first novel many readers felt they had been badly deceived: the clerical gentleman who stressed so impressively the demands of duty in his vivid picture of a Christian society turned out to be a female atheist living with another woman's husband," quoted in William Nelles, "Historical and Implied Authors and Readers," in *Comparative Literature* 45.1 (Winter 1993): 27.

common with the implied author.¹¹ At the same time, distinctions between the implied and empirical authors are crucial, irrespective of the genre of the text. According to Powell, “regardless of the process through which a narrative comes into being, it will always evince particular values, beliefs, and perceptions that can be described as representative of its implied author.”¹² Powell’s point is also true of non-narrative genres: implied authors can be discerned in every genre of writing.

The implied reader is, likewise, created by an empirical writer(s) who acts as the perfect counterpart to the implied author. The implied reader, by definition, perfectly understands the implied author. Like the implied author, the implied reader will not correspond directly with any one empirical reader or group of readers. Powell sums up the concept well in saying, “The implied reader is one who actualizes the potential for meaning in a text, who responds to it in ways consistent with the expectations that we may ascribe to its implied author.”¹³ The implied reader acts as a “heuristic construct” that helps empirical readers understand the difference between the way they might respond to the text and what the implied author envisions.¹⁴

Interpretive problems are unavoidable when the empirical is prioritized over the implied. For example, Tony Kushner, the script writer of the 2012 Abraham Lincoln biopic (entitled *Lincoln*), denied that his own identification as gay influenced his portrait of Lincoln.¹⁵ He anticipated that some film critics may read the screenplay as a veiled support for gay marriage in light of the pointed focus within the film on the proposed thirteenth amendment to the U.S. constitution. This could have been interpreted as a less direct parallel to 21st century controversies in the United States over amending the constitution to redefine the legal definition of marriage. Such readings (or viewings) find their basis in an attempt to connect the empirical script writer’s homosexual self-identification with the meaning of the film. An undue

¹¹ Moritz, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis,” 125. See also Booth, “Implied Author.” This point is also evident in film criticism. There are many empirical authors of a film: Script writers, directors, cinematographers, actors/actresses, editors, and others all contribute towards ‘authoring’ the film. This makes it nearly impossible for the implied author to correspond with every one of its empirical creators (Booth, 125). Similarly, when the presence of an ‘unreliable narrator’ is discerned within genres of film usually not thought to contain them (e.g. documentaries), the difference between the implied and empirical authors become that much more obvious, see Fiona Otway, “The Unreliable Narrator in Documentary,” *Journal of Film and Video* 67.3-4 (Fall/Winter 2015): 3-23. The role of scribes in NT also point to the implied/empirical distinction: S.M. Baugh, *Ephesians* (EEC; Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 2-5; E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004).

¹² Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 241.

¹³ Powell, 241.

¹⁴ Powell, 241.

¹⁵ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/15/abraham-lincoln-gay-tony-kunsher-lincoln-biopic_n_2138062.html. Accessed 25 Feb. 2019.

focus on biographical aspects of the empirical author leads to these sorts of interpretive problems. Similar problems have arisen in biblical studies when biographical data is mined in order to interpret the text. This is the case when Luke 22:44 (Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane) is interpreted in medical terms (e.g. hematidrosis?)¹⁶ in light of identifying its empirical author as a medical doctor even though neither the empirical person named 'Luke,' nor his profession ('*doctor* Luke'), are identified within the text itself. A comment from Col. 4:14 ("Our dear friend Luke, the doctor..."), paired with post-biblical traditions of Lukan authorship of the third gospel, often influences interpreters to use the (possible) empirical author's biographical data in order to interpret the text.¹⁷ A similar line of reasoning has been applied to the gospel's focus on healing narratives.¹⁸ When this sort of speculative empirical data becomes the focus of interpretation, the wider theological perspective of the implied author can fall to the wayside by implying that these stories primarily exist within the narrative because of the empirical author's medical interests. In this case of Luke 22:44, a failure to make distinctions between the possible empirical author and the implied author of Luke leads to this interpretation.¹⁹

Distinguishing between the implied and empirical authors of texts becomes even more imperative in cases where the identity of the empirical author is either entirely unknown, or greatly disputed.²⁰ Despite the lack of explicit internal textual evidence, scholars have generally

¹⁶ William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255.11 (1986): 1456; Geoffrey L. Phelan, *Crucifixion and the Death Cry of Jesus Christ* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2009), 58. A. Plummer interprets the passage as a reference to actual blood: *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (ICC; 5th Ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 510-511. James R. Edwards also highlights the physical nature of Jesus' suffering in this passage, "Jesus' inner torment manifests itself in physical trauma." *The Gospel According to Luke* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 412. I. Howard Marshall affirms that the ancient sources support Plummer's view, but is hesitant to affirm that interpretation: *Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 832-833.

¹⁷ An different approach is taken when medical terminology is discerned within Luke, and then conclusions about the author as a doctor are drawn from it, see William Kirk Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke: A Proof from Internal Evidence that 'The Gospel according to St. Luke' and 'The Acts of the Apostles' were Written by the Same Person, and that the Writer was a Medical Man* (Dublin University Press Series. Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co., 1882).

¹⁸ A substantial amount of Hobart's work (*Medical Language*) analyzes healing stories in Luke in conjunction with contemporary Greco-Roman medical terminology. We are indebted to Dr. Thorsten Moritz for first introducing us, during a Gospels course at Bethel Seminary, to the implications implied/empirical authorship has on interpretations of Luke's healing narratives.

¹⁹ Metaphorical and theological interpretations have been offered of the passage without distinguishing between implied and empirical authors: e.g. the theological interpretation of Mikeal Parsons, *Luke* (Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 320-321, and the blood as metaphor or analogy: Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* (BECNT; Vol. 2; Grand Rapids, Baker, 1996), 1761; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 780 fn. 19; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (SP 3; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), 352.

²⁰ Powell, "Narrative Criticism," 241.

accepted Luke as the empirical author of the third gospel.²¹ In the case of Hebrews (despite early traditions surrounding Pauline authorship) very little, if anything, about the empirical author is explicitly identifiable. Aspects of the implied author, on the other hand, are in principle identifiable, at least to the extent that the text is designed to allow the reader to identify them. This person carefully navigates through the OT, especially Levitical/ceremonial rites, pointing to the work of Jesus the Messiah as the fulfillment that system. Regardless of whether the empirical author can be identified with any sort of precision, the implied author of Hebrews has as firm a grasp on the OT as any author within the NT. One does not need to identify the empirical individual who created the work in order to see this. Aspects of the implied author are much clearer in the text. Recent studies on Hebrews, for example, point to Priscilla, Luke, or Paul as the empirical author.²² Such an emphasis on reconstructing the empirical tends to come at the expense of the implied.

A focus on the implied author has special relevance for the so-called deuteropauline letters.²³ Objections to the Pauline authorship of these letters are not usually argued on the basis of the absence of an authorial identification within the text, but on attempts to reconcile known biographical details of Paul's life, the theology of the undisputed Pauline letters, and the contents of the disputed letters. While that exercise may be helpful for the purposes of various forms of historical criticism, less attention has been given to the fact that, by using Paul's name as the author, each of these letters were clearly meant to be read from the vantage point of Paul as its author. Therefore, one can confidently say that, at the very least, a projected version of Paul is the implied author.²⁴ Whether this amounts to 'playing Paul,' as Maier suggests, is

²¹ Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 33-34; Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, xviii-xxii; John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (WBC 35A; Dallas: Word, 1989), xxxiv-xxxvii.

²² See Ruth Hoppin, *Priscilla's Letter: Finding the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Fort Bragg, CA: Lost Coast Press, 2009). When adopting an implied approach to the authorship of Hebrews (or any other NT book), it becomes doubtful, apart from explicitly identifying the implied author as such, that distinctions between a male and female author would be easily discernable within the style or content of the writing. Problems such as these are not confined to the issue of male/female empirical authorship. Similar problems arise when attempting to identify other empirical authors of Hebrews based on the style, language, and theology of the work: See also, D. L. Allen, *Lucan Authorship of Hebrews* (NAC Studies in Bible and Theology; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010); David Alan Black, *The Authorship of Hebrews: The Case for Paul* (Topical Line Drives Vol. 1; Gonzalez, FL: Energion, 2013).

²³ Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. 2 Thessalonians is also sometimes included as deuteropauline.

²⁴ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 32. Whether that invitation to 'picture Paul' is a result of a non-Pauline empirical author is less consequential than Maier makes it out to be. Even if a non-Pauline empirical author wrote the epistle, its image of Paul helps shape the portrait of the implied author. Franz Mußner similarly concludes that the letter was written under a "Paulusbild." *Der Brief an die Epheser* (ÖTK 10; Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1982), 17.

questionable.²⁵ Although, he is right in noting that “the contested letters invite their audiences to picture Paul as a prisoner and furnish him with words to speak to the challenge or subject at hand.”²⁶ Readers are expected to make connections to their empirical sense of who Paul is in order to understand the text. Acknowledging this from the outset will allow us to explore what areas of Paul’s persona were expected to be grasped by the implied reader in order to understand the work. For the purposes of this study, it will be imperative to attempt to discern how Paul’s relationship to imperial authorities is projected within the implied author of Ephesians. We will say more on this subject in the next chapter.

A distinction between implied and empirical might raise questions about how meaning is to be discerned, and whether authorial intentions (of the implied or empirical author) contribute to the meaning of a text. By attending to the difference between the implied and empirical author, further distinctions can also be made between meaning, intentions, and motives in textual analysis. What is textual meaning? Skinner suggests three things: First, one could be referring to what the *words mean* in the work.²⁷ Defining meaning in this manner suggests that meaning is primarily discovered through grammatical and linguistic analysis. If so, this would make *locutionary* analysis the key interpretive task. *Locutionary acts* are Austin’s first level of a speech act, namely the act of *saying* something; roughly equivalent to using words in sentences with a certain sense and reference.²⁸ More will be said about this below. A second option is ‘what...this *work mean[s] to me.*’²⁹ Iser defines meaning as a ‘realisation’ of the text by the reader.³⁰ This second definition assumes that the actual perlocutionary effect upon empirical readers/hearers constitute the primary locus of meaning.³¹ Perlocutionary effects are the actual effects that an utterance has upon an audience.³² Thirdly, Skinner suggests that one could be referring to what the *writer means in the work.*³³ Much

²⁵ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 32.

²⁶ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 32.

²⁷ Quentin Skinner, “Motives, Intentions, and Interpretation of Texts,” *New Literary History* 3.2 (Winter 1972): 393-408; citing 396.

²⁸ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (2nd Ed.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 108, 122.

²⁹ Skinner, “Motives,” 396.

³⁰ Skinner, 397.

³¹ This theory of meaning is also sometimes referred to as ‘reader-response.’ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992), 515-555.

³² Lyn Nixon, “New Testament Quotation at the Reader-Author Intersection: Evoking Story for Transformation.” Unpublished PhD Thesis. Middlesex University/London School of Theology, 2014: 77.

³³ Skinner, 397.

depends on whether ‘the writer’ refers to the empirical or the implied author. If the latter, this definition is more plausible. However, critics have resisted locating meaning in the mind of the author because of the difficulty of recovering what a writer means in a work, but such an objection fails to distinguish between an empirical writer’s intentions *in* writing (reflected in the implied author), and the private motives that the empirical author may have *behind* the writing.³⁴ Textual meaning and empirical interpretation are not identical. Instead, the meaning of a work is equivalent to the intentions of the implied author, which are perfectly understood by the implied reader.³⁵ The speech-act approach defined below will identify these intentions as the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary actions that the successful text is designed to invoke. Uncovering these intentions is necessary because doing so helps empirical readers/hearers understand the empirical author’s plans or design in creating a certain type of work—whether they be joking, serious, or ironic. In other words, these intentions help empirical readers/hearers understand the type of speech act which is being performed.³⁶ For Skinner, a move towards seeing texts as linguistic actions

makes a certain sense of intentionality central to the business of interpretation. This follows from the suggestion that to understand the illocutionary force of an utterance is to recover what the agent saw himself [*sic*] as doing in issuing it, since this process is clearly equivalent to recovering the primary intentions with which the given utterance was issued.³⁷

It is important here to address the question of what data is necessary for the recovery of these intentions. Biographical data about the author’s interior psychological state of mind, the particulars of the author’s life which are not assumed by the text, as well as any other empirical data about the author which is not invoked within the text itself contributes little towards interpreting the text.³⁸ A misguided appeal to these elements as equivalent to an author’s intention has led some critics to reject the notion of authorial intent altogether.³⁹ A failure to distinguish between implied and empirical authors have likely contributed to this confusion.

³⁴ W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *The Sewanee Review* 54.3 (Jul-Sept 1946) 468-488.

³⁵ Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 242.

³⁶ Skinner, “Motives,” 400.

³⁷ Quentin Skinner, “Hermeneutics and the Role of History,” *New Literary History* 7.1: *Critical Challenges: The Bellagio Symposium* (Autumn, 1975): 209-232, citing p. 212.

³⁸ Moritz, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis,” 125-126.

³⁹ Booth calls proponents of the ‘author is dead movement’ [e.g. Derrida, Barthes, Foucault] “author-assassins:” “Implied Author,” 130 fn. 1.

Our study is designed to help with the recovery of authorial intention (of the implied author) by understanding 1) the various levels of speech acts at work within the text, as well as 2) the conventions necessary for unpacking the totality of the speech act, that is, necessary contextual information that will help to be able to distinguish the implied author's intentions as a certain speech act (illocutionarily/perlocutionarily) in its historical milieu. This requires that attention be given to both empirical and implied contexts.

We can also see the historical contexts of biblical texts as either empirical or implied.⁴⁰ Moritz concludes that “any vantage point (location, time, ideology, situation etc.) implied in the world constructed by the text is subject to this understanding, irrespective of the ‘geographical’ referentiality of the text.”⁴¹ Exploring empirical historical contexts of texts can then be thought of as contributing to the broadening of one's imaginative grid for, and in establishing plausible reconstructions of, what is implied: “Without empirical research, the interpreter's act of imagination into the vantage point of the implied audience remains essentially unaccountable to historical plausibilities.”⁴² Empirical historical contexts also provide insight into the cognitive context for understanding various speech acts. Skinner maintains that grasping the “nature and range of things that could recognizably have been done by using that particular concept, in the treatment of that particular theme, at that particular time...can be applied, that is, to test the plausibility of ascribing any particular intention to a writer in a particular work.”⁴³ In doing so, Skinner “shifts the emphasis of the discussion off the idea of the text as an autonomous object, and on to the idea of the text as an object linked to its creator, and thus on to the discussion of what its creator may have been doing in creating it.”⁴⁴ Importantly, what the creator of the text may have been doing in creating it is discernible through the implied author within the text, but requires a form of study outside of the text. This includes an understanding of the conventions of communication, and how different speech acts can be performed within varied contexts.⁴⁵ Skinner notes how the words of Hobbes and Bayle

⁴⁰ Moritz, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis,” 125.

⁴¹ Moritz, 126.

⁴² Moritz, 133. See also Thorsten Moritz, “Critical but Real: Reflecting on N. T. Wright's *Tools for the Task*,” in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Scripture and Hermeneutics Series Vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 185.

⁴³ Skinner, “Motives,” 406.

⁴⁴ Skinner, 408.

⁴⁵ Skinner, “Hermeneutics,” 216.

have been reinterpreted by some in light of a “concentration on the texts ‘for themselves.’”⁴⁶ A problem that has arisen out of concentrating exclusively on the text is that these new interpretations have emerged in contradiction to how these authors were understood by “all their contemporary opponents and sympathizers.”⁴⁷ Skinner notes that “the acceptance of these interpretations as textually correct entails the acceptance of some much less obviously correct assumptions about Hobbes, Bayle, and the age in which they both lived.”⁴⁸ For Skinner, a danger of a strictly text-centered approach to interpretation is that it may fail to consider the contemporary context of the text, and thereby miss the intended force of the given speech acts. His concern is noted. However, this study mitigates that danger by giving empirical data its *proper* place: It delimits plausible reconstructions of what is implied,⁴⁹ while also broadening one’s hermeneutical focus beyond empirical data alone.

Skinner’s distinctions in meaning are helpful in addressing imperial-critical concerns. In the previous chapter, we demonstrated that some imperial-critical interpretations of Ephesians focus on determining the meaning of words within its sentences and on examining their Roman imperial parallels. When textual meaning is equivalent to assessing whether words within the NT have parallels in Roman imperial ideology, the focus is often placed on only one component of a speech act, namely locutionary acts. Skinner has cautioned against this error by insisting that the focus cannot be on meanings of the words themselves, but on their use.⁵⁰ A failure to consider speech acts has resulted in a limited assessment of what counts as subversion of the Roman Empire in NT texts.

Another common approach among imperial-critical interpreters of the NT has been to survey politico-religious ideology in Roman imperial rule within the first century. These surveys often assume that, since the recipients of the NT writings lived within territories under Roman imperial rule, each of these areas must have had universal access to imperial ideology, and that this ideology was uniform across the empire. Very little attention has been given to regional and local expressions of imperial rule, and how communities outside of Italy engaged with the imperial ideology available to them. Our study hopes to attend carefully to local/regional

⁴⁶ Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 28-67, citing p. 52.

⁴⁷ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 52.

⁴⁸ Skinner, 52.

⁴⁹ Moritz, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis,” 133-134.

⁵⁰ Skinner, 55.

expressions of imperial ideology, while also recognizing areas of imperial ideology that were uniform across the empire in the first two centuries AD.

A distinction between implied and empirical authors, audiences, and contexts form the starting place of our three-dimensional, eclectic hermeneutic. The following two chapters will examine: 1) possible empirical contexts of Ephesians in light of its proposed date and location of the recipients; and 2) the relationship between those proposed empirical contexts and what is implied in the text. Ultimately, we will explore whether a symbiotic relationship exists between a Roman imperial context (and ideology) and the speech acts of Ephesians. Establishing this relationship will help to evaluate an imperial-critical reading of the letter. Before doing so, it will be necessary to first spell out an understanding of speech acts, and then to examine how a narrative hermeneutic contributes to this project. The following section will articulate our use of speech-act theory.

2.3 SPEECH-ACT THEORY: A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL VIEW OF LANGUAGE

Several areas of speech-act theory will help to assess imperial-critical claims in Ephesians.⁵¹ The following points will be established below:

1. Austin's nomenclature of *locution*, *illocution*, and *perlocution* provides a foundation for establishing a multi-level view of communication. These levels demonstrate that while word meaning contributes towards interpreting texts, it only constitutes one aspect of a speech act that an author performs in communication. This is relevant to our evaluation of parallel word meanings in imperial criticism of Ephesians, leading us to conclude that we must pay attention to all levels of the author's speech acts.
2. Speech-act theory can help to make sense of implicit layers of communication. Scholars have asked whether imperial-critical claims should be sought in terms of explicit references to the Roman emperor or imperial ideology on the locutionary level. This section will reveal that certain speech acts, some of which are closely related to the concept of subversion, are most effectively communicated implicitly rather than explicitly.

⁵¹ For an extensive list of resources that use speech-act theory in biblical studies, see annotated bibliography section XIII.

3. The presence of hoped-for perlocutionary acts reveals that implied authors not only intend to produce the illocutionary effect of understanding for the implied reader, but also a variety of associated perlocutionary effects. It is too soon to assess whether the author intended to subvert the empire on the perlocutionary level; however, it is a distinct possibility that will need to be explored. This will require examining whether perlocutions follow communicative conventions, as well as their contribution towards a text's 'meaning.'

2.3.1 PERFORMATIVE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

Austin pointed out that words *do* things rather than simply *tell* information.⁵² This principle complicates how meaning is discerned. A primary focus on locutionary word meanings and grammar is bound to fall short. For example, if a person were to say, sarcastically, 'I like your hat,' the meaning of the words, and its grammar alone could not determine whether the person intended to offend. One would need to consider what the person intends to *do* with their words. What a person *says* and *does* in communication are interconnected. To illustrate this point, Austin distinguishes between *constative* and *performative* language.⁵³ Constative utterances describe a state of affairs, state some sort of fact, and are open to verification in terms of truth or falsity.⁵⁴ He finds particular difficulty with those who see constatives as an all-encompassing category for language because some utterances can be nonsensical, or take the shape of an ethical proposition that does not fit within true/false verifications.⁵⁵ This raises the possibility that 'many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or only intended in part, to record or import straightforward information about the facts.'⁵⁶ Warnock notes what Austin is looking for in making this distinction:

The utterances to be first investigated exhibit three features in particular—first, their form is that of impeccably correct, quite ordinary indicative sentences, containing no 'curious words' and in no problematic construction—sentences which, in fact, look grammatically just like 'statements': but second, they do not actually state (Austin uses

⁵² Austin, *How to Do Things*.

⁵³ Austin, 1-11. G. J. Warnock states that Austin "began to think about the general phenomenon of utterances which look on their faces *misleadingly* autobiographical, in which it appears—merely on the basis of their verbal form—that the speaker is saying of himself that he does something, whereas in fact he is—essentially, primarily—*doing* it." *J. L. Austin* (London: Routledge, 1989), 106.

⁵⁴ Austin, 1-3.

⁵⁵ Austin, 1-3. See also Warnock, *Austin*, 107.

⁵⁶ Austin, 2.

the term ‘constate’) anything at all, and are not true or false: and third, the uttering of such sentences is, or is a part of, *doing* something—something, further, which would not normally or naturally be described as (just) *saying* something.⁵⁷

Austin suggests that some utterances which are not constative are performative. His classic example of a performative utterance is a wedding vow, which does not convey a straightforward statement, fact, or something that can be verified as true or false. Instead, it *does* something in the very act of saying the words. In many 21st-century wedding ceremonies it is assumed that everything stated within the vow is already known by the participants, so very little new information is exchanged in the process. This fact suggests that there is a whole category of utterances which do not fit the model of a constative. Austin identifies several other examples: the naming of a ship, the bequeathing of an oath, and a bet.⁵⁸

Austin shifts emphasis from the verification of truth or falsity in a statement to the performative nature of it. This shift in paradigm can help change the hermeneutical parameters of textual analysis. Rather than focusing merely on what the words mean, the veracity of the statement, what its referents are, or how its lexical and grammatical constructions can reveal meaning, Austin points to an element of communication that had largely been ignored—what language *does*. This aspect of speech-act theory helps provide direction for the current project by focusing on what the implied author of a text is doing through what is being said. Some assessments of imperial-critical readings of the NT have attempted to evaluate these readings based on whether criticism of the Roman Empire can be detected in the actual texts. While some beneficial contributions toward evaluating imperial-critical readings have emerged from this, the locutionary approach of such readings tend to be self-limiting.

2.3.2 ADOPTING A NOMENCLATURE—LOCUTION, ILLOCUTION, AND PERLOCUTION

Austin’s division of language still holds. In his eighth lecture in *How to Do Things with Words*, he proposes his three-fold division of communication.⁵⁹ His distinction between levels of speech acts draws on differentiating between constatives and performatives. If language does not merely convey statements that can be analyzed as either true or false, but performs some

⁵⁷ Warnock, 108.

⁵⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things*, 5.

⁵⁹ Austin, 94-120. While the publication of these lectures appeared nearly seven years after he formally delivered them at Harvard, his thoughts on the lecture topic were formed around 1939, see Warnock, *Austin*, 1105.

sort of action, this complicates how an utterance conveys meaning, and the effect it has upon its hearers.

Let us reiterate what was said earlier, that *locutionary acts* are the act of saying something;⁶⁰ roughly equivalent to using words in sentences with a certain sense and reference. Austin subdivides the locutionary act as follows: *phonetic* acts (uttering certain audible noises),⁶¹ *phatic* acts (using phonemes for the utterance of sentences),⁶² and *rhetic* acts (using sentences, with a certain reference and meaning).⁶³ For Austin, it is on the locutionary level that sounds, words, vocabulary, syntax, and grammar can all be analyzed in order to come to grips with how communication has meaning. His example of a locutionary act occurs in the sentence “He said to me ‘Shoot her!’” identifying that by ‘shoot’ he meant ‘shoot’ by ‘her’ he meant ‘her.’⁶⁴ The same could be said by also identifying who ‘he’ is and who the ‘I’ is that spoke the sentence. The grammatical relationships in the sentence that help one to determine subject, predicate, and so forth also apply. A locutionary act occurs when sounds are used *to convey a meaning with a certain sense and reference*.⁶⁵ This being the case, Austin suggests that locutions are conventional; they are governed by a set of linguistic and grammatical rules.⁶⁶ He argues that philosophers have spent the most time analyzing language on the level of the locution, and thus have deemed most problems in language as problems of ‘locutionary usage.’⁶⁷ A narrow focus on locutionary acts in imperial criticism of NT texts accounts for one

⁶⁰ Austin, *How to Do Things*, 108, 122. He contrasts the act of saying something with his two further categorizations described below. Searle disagreed with Austin’s formulation of locutionary acts, see John R. Searle, “Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts.” *The Philosophical Review* 77.4 (Oct 1968): 405.

⁶¹ Austin, 92. Phonetic acts involve the act of uttering certain noises. He calls these noises ‘phones.’ If Austin’s levels here were viewed, metaphorically, as steps on a ladder, the phonetic act would be at ground level, the lowest level that must be achieved if one wants to communicate verbally. For the purposes of this study it is important to point out that phonetic acts apply differently to written texts, since the phonetic emphasizes a verbal sound used.

⁶² Austin, 92. A phatic act occurs when audible noises (phones) are used to form words and sentences that conform to a vocabulary and certain grammatical constructions. These are called phemes. Phemes seem more easily identifiable within a written text in that they utilize words and sentences to form grammatical constructions.

⁶³ Austin, 93. Rhetic acts occur when words and sentences (phemes) are used with a definite sense and reference to convey meaning. He calls these rhemes. Like phemes, rhemes are also identifiable in written texts. Phonetic, phatic, and rhetic acts all make up the various things that can occur on the most basic level of speech acts—the locutionary level. I disagree with Black’s assessment that Austin’s phonetic, phatic, and rhetic acts are “somewhat crude and perversely idiosyncratic in its choice of labels” and that “it has little bearing upon Austin’s main problem,” Max Black, “Austin on Performatives,” in *Symposium on J.L. Austin*, ed. K.T. Fann, (London: Routledge, 1969), 409.

⁶⁴ Austin, 101.

⁶⁵ Austin, 148.

⁶⁶ Austin, 116.

⁶⁷ Austin, 100.

of the greatest limitations in some of the current hermeneutical approaches in the field.⁶⁸ For example, analyzing κύριος language in the NT by focusing on potential Roman imperial parallels at the lexical or grammatical levels cannot establish whether imperial-critical sentiments were expressed within the full communicative acts in Ephesians. The entire speech act must be considered, including illocutions, and perlocutions. Further aspects of the speech context must also be taken into consideration. Our assessment of the imperial-critical status of Ephesians will attend to all three aspects of Austin's speech acts in their implied speech context.

Ultimately, Austin sets up the category of locutionary acts in order to draw a comparison with another level of communication that is overlooked far too often.⁶⁹ *Illocutionary acts* convey more than just sense and reference,⁷⁰ performing various acts with a certain force.⁷¹ Austin develops *illocution* as the performance of an act *in* saying something.⁷² Illocutionary acts focus on the function of language, what language *does*, beyond merely telling information that can be assessed as true or false.⁷³ This can include promising, blessing, cursing, affirming, informing, and convicting (among many other things).⁷⁴ In each of these examples, the words actually constitute the performance of an act rather than a description of it. Here he invokes a formula for helping one perceive illocutionary acts: '*In saying x I was doing y [or I did y].*'⁷⁵ Austin draws a distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts by showing there are two ways to understand the sentence, "Shoot her!":

⁶⁸ Imperial-critical scholars do not usually utilize the language of locution, illocution, and perlocution. Our assessment here is that much of the methodology within the field has focused their energies on what Austin deems 'locutionary acts.'

⁶⁹ Austin, *How to Do Things*, 100. Austin mention that illocutions can be non-verbal while it seems implausible that locutions could be non-verbal. See *ibid*, 119. Austin also acknowledges that part of the reason he formulates his first two elements (locutionary acts and illocutionary acts) is to distinguish force with meaning: *How to Do Things*, 100.

⁷⁰ It will do for now to refer to locutionary acts as equivalent to having sense and reference, although Austin also asserts that "meaning is equivalent to sense and reference." Austin, 100.

⁷¹ Austin, 100.

⁷² Austin, 122.

⁷³ Austin, 122.

⁷⁴ For a precursory list of types of illocutions, see Austin, 153-163. Briggs identifies illocutions in the Bible: e.g. the creation account, blessings, naming, calling, *critiquing*, cursing, arguing, blaming, confusion of languages, promises, commandments, liturgical contexts, praise, lament, invocations, produces responses (e.g. weeping, rejoicing), telling truth, falsehood, prophetic speech, judgment, vindication, doom, and comfort: Richard S. Briggs, "Speech-Act Theory," in *Words & the Word: Explorations in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Theory*, eds. David G. Firth and Jamie A. Grant (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 75-110.

⁷⁵ Austin, 5. Italics mine.

Locution: He said to me “Shoot her!” meaning by ‘shoot’ shoot and referring by ‘her’ to *her*.

Illocution: He urged (advised, ordered, etc.) me to shoot her.⁷⁶

Attending to all levels of a speech act requires looking beyond merely what the individual words mean, how the sentence is constructed, and which grammatical rules it follows. An exclusive analysis of the elements contained on the level of the locution is too narrowly focused to perceive the total communicative act.

Moving beyond a locutionary analysis towards discerning illocutionary acts becomes crucial when one considers that a single locution can deliver a variety of illocutionary forces. Skinner aptly points out that the phrase ‘the ice is thin over there’ could perform a variety of illocutions: it could be a *warning* for a person to avoid going on the ice, or it could *direct* someone to the spot where the ice needs to be broken up.⁷⁷ Further, the phrase could also be an *observational* metaphor—perhaps a child is in trouble with a parent (i.e. ‘being on thin ice’),⁷⁸ or a husband is being *teased* about upsetting his wife, or worse, being *ridiculed* for allowing his wife to rule over him.⁷⁹ In each of these cases, the locutionary meaning of the individual words remains the same whereas the illocutionary act being performed differs greatly. This opens up the possibility that someone could perform an illocutionary act without explicitly indicating it on the level of the locution.⁸⁰ Austin’s distinction between locutionary acts and illocutionary acts suggests that discerning which act a speaker performs often requires an awareness of communicative factors beyond word meaning or locutionary content.

Key questions arise from Austin’s discussion of what an author/speaker may have been intending to do on an illocutionary level. For Austin, illocutionary acts are not dependent upon a speaker’s internal private intentions, rather, they are, like locutionary acts, conventional. Austin poses the problem by saying,

We may agree on the actual words that were uttered, and even also on the senses in which they were being used and on the realities of which they were being used to refer,

⁷⁶ Austin, 102.

⁷⁷ Quentin Skinner, “Conventions and the Understanding of Speech-Acts.” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20 no. 79 (Apr 1970): 129.

⁷⁸ I am grateful to Andrew Nelson, a student in my college course on Paul’s letter to the Romans, for making this observation.

⁷⁹ Skinner’s concept here shares similarities with Wittgenstein’s list of kinds of ‘language games’: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Rev. 4th Ed. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), §23.

⁸⁰ Austin, 116.

and yet still disagree as to whether, in the circumstances, they amounted to an order or a threat or merely to advice or a warning.⁸¹

This is particularly evident in cases where a single locution can perform a wide range of illocutions in differing contexts. Take, for example, an invitation for coffee. This invitation may be nothing more than a simple invitation. On the other hand, it is possible that the locution is actually performing a different sort of illocution, assuming the conventional circumstances around which the invitation was given carried with it a particular connotation: it is nighttime, the type of drink offered contains caffeine (usually an undesirable late evening drink), two people have just finished going on a date, both parties acknowledge having had a ‘good time,’ and the invitation occurs right as they are about to finish the date, following a kiss—all of the necessary conventions would be in place for a person to perceive the invitation as more than an invitation—as a sexual proposition.⁸² In order to perceive the meaning of this utterance, a person would have to look beyond the propositional components present within the locution, and instead, focus on what the person was *doing* in saying what was said. This can only be perceived by acknowledging the illocutionary force of the utterance within its larger contextual (conventional) environment.

Austin’s third level of communicative act is the *perlocutionary act*, which takes shape when an utterance produces effects upon its hearers:⁸³

Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the *design, intention, or purpose of producing them...*We shall call the performance of an act of this kind the performance of a ‘perlocutionary’ act (*italics mine*).⁸⁴

⁸¹ Austin, 115-116 fn. 1.

⁸² The scenario is humorously evident in an episode of the American sitcom *Seinfeld*. When one of the male characters refuses an invitation to go up to a woman’s apartment to ‘come up for coffee’ at the end of a date, on the basis of the fact that he cannot drink coffee late at night, he later comes to the realization that coffee does not really mean coffee. Once he realizes that her invitation illocutionarily constitutes a sexual proposition rather than a simple invitation, he bemoans his interpretive misstep as a lost opportunity: *Seinfeld* (Season 2 Episode 4. Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld, “The Phone Message,” Seinology website. <http://www.seinology.com/scripts/script-09.shtml>; accessed Mar 2014). In this case, the miscommunication was due to a mistaken focus on the locutionary content at the cost of the woman’s illocutionary intent. There is nothing explicit in the English language dictionary entries of any of the words she uses, nor in its grammatical construction, to indicate that a proposition might be intended. Unless one considers other factors outside of locutionary analysis, it is likely that her utterance will never be understood as a sexual proposition, even though this clearly seemed to be her intent.

⁸³ Austin, 109-120.

⁸⁴ Austin, 101.

Perlocutionary acts are done *by* saying something.⁸⁵ Examples of perlocutionary acts are: persuading, alarming, frightening, relieving, and assuring. Austin proposes the following formula for perlocutions: ‘*By* doing x I was doing y’⁸⁶ or also ‘*By* saying x I was doing y.’⁸⁷ While illocutions could be represented by the sentence, ‘In saying I would shoot him, I was threatening him,’ a perlocutionary act could be represented as follows: ‘By saying I would shoot him, I alarmed him.’⁸⁸ In the development of his three levels of speech acts, Austin acknowledges that there should be a distinction between attempt and achievement.⁸⁹ Someone may attempt to use utterances with a certain sense and reference (locution), or with a certain force (illocution), or also with a desire to effect hearers in certain ways (perlocution), but for various reasons these attempts are not always successfully carried out. An unsuccessful speech act can be said to have ‘misfired.’⁹⁰ It is on the level of perlocution that he deems the gap between attempt and achievement as most prominent, or as most potentially problematic.⁹¹ His observation regarding misfires is certainly true of empirical authors and empirical readers, but not true of the implied author and the implied reader since, by definition, the implied reader perfectly understands the communicative intentions of the implied author. Therefore, a misfire is an impossibility between the implied author and the implied reader, but a very real possibility between empirical authors and readers.

In adding perlocution to his levels of speech acts, Austin wishes to ‘draw the line between an action done (here an illocution), and its consequences.’⁹² Here, Austin sees a direct connection between illocution and perlocution. The happy performance of an illocutionary act is dependent upon a certain effect being achieved.⁹³ Once this effect has been successfully achieved, ‘uptake’ has occurred; that is, the successful reception of the author’s total speech

⁸⁵ Austin, 122.

⁸⁶ Austin, 107. Italics mine.

⁸⁷ Austin, 110.

⁸⁸ Austin, 122.

⁸⁹ Austin, 106 fn. 1.

⁹⁰ Austin calls these ‘misfires’ and ‘infelicities.’ He gives a multitude of examples of the kinds of things that can go wrong when the illocutionary act fails to achieve its effect: Austin, 16-18, 25, 27.

⁹¹ Austin, 117.

⁹² Austin, 111.

⁹³ Austin, 116. While Austin sees locution and illocution governed by conventions, he separates perlocution, deeming it ungoverned by conventions (Austin, 122). He acknowledges this by stating, ‘A judge should be able to decide, by hearing what was said, what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed, but not what perlocutionary acts were achieved.’ Austin, 122. While, in principle, this is true, it does not apply to situations of implied authors and recipients.

act has been appropriated by the recipient(s).⁹⁴ Achieving uptake for a given utterance, then, is directly related to the extent to which the totality of the entire speech act, on the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary levels, is successful.

Austin's articulation of locutionary and illocutionary acts has proved troublesome, leading speech-act theorists to dedicate significantly more energy in defining and distinguishing these two types of speech acts.⁹⁵ Perlocutionary acts have been given much less treatment.⁹⁶ The enigmatic status of perlocution has led to it being referred to as the "Achilles' heel" of speech-act theory.⁹⁷ The tangential treatment of perlocutionary acts among the literature warrants that further attention be given to it here, especially in light of its bearing upon imperial-critical issues in Ephesians. Does the act of subverting Roman imperial ideology constitute an illocutionary act or a perlocutionary one?

Austin's claim that perlocutionary acts are non-conventional may bear some of the responsibility for the lack of attention given to them.⁹⁸ His conclusions give the impression that an utterance's effect upon its hearers is largely unpredictable, at times even unrelated to the illocutionary act, and therefore unsuitable for systematic assessment. Austin's failure to distinguish between implied and empirical categories heightens this tension. In writing, an empirical author has very little control over the actual perlocutionary effects he/she has upon empirical readers. By definition, the implied author has perfect control over the hoped-for perlocutionary effect that is intended for the implied audience/readers. Nixon has challenged Austin's assumptions regarding the non-conventional nature of perlocutions.⁹⁹ She provides a helpful distinction between a perlocutionary *act* and its associated *effect*.¹⁰⁰ 'Perlocutionary *act*' describes the hoped-for effect that the implied author intends to achieve upon the implied audience through the illocutionary act. Such acts are a necessary component of the delivery of a total speech act because "all illocutionary acts have intentional perlocutionary acts associated

⁹⁴ Austin, 117.

⁹⁵ Ted Cohen, "Illocutions and Perlocutions," *Foundations of Language* 9 (1973): 492.

⁹⁶ In the first three decades after the publication of Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, only four major papers were published dealing with perlocution as its focus, Yueguo Gu, "The Impasse of Perlocution," *Journal of Pragmatics* 20 (1993): 405. While more articles have been published in the past twenty years on the topic, the literature still heavily favors distinctions between locutionary and illocutionary acts.

⁹⁷ Daniel Marcu, "Perlocutions: The Achilles' Heel of Speech-Act Theory." *Journal of Pragmatics* 32 (2000): 1719-1741.

⁹⁸ Austin, 122.

⁹⁹ Nixon, "New Testament Quotation," 94.

¹⁰⁰ Nixon, 96.

with them.”¹⁰¹ Perlocutionary *effects* differ in that they describe the actual effects that the illocution has upon an empirical audience. This includes all possible effects except for that of understanding the illocution, which she calls the ‘illocutionary effect’.¹⁰² Nixon’s distinctions between hoped-for perlocutionary *acts* of the implied author and actual perlocutionary *effects* of empirical authors help to avoid some of the confusion surrounding the non-conventionality of perlocution. Actual perlocutionary *effects* may well be non-conventional; how empirical readers respond to an illocution may be highly unpredictable and non-paradigmatic. On the other hand, the implied author necessarily aims to achieve certain effects through the illocutionary act. The perlocutionary act is an achievement of the intentions of the implied author. Meaning only occurs when illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts are taken together.¹⁰³ Whether the same perlocutionary effect (as the perlocutionary act) is actually achieved is dependent upon a number of factors, e.g.: has the empirical author eliminated (as much as possible) the nonconventionality of the perlocutionary effect, and has the empirical reader responded like the implied reader, in the manner that was intended by the implied author’s speech act?

Key questions arise regarding the process of uncovering illocutionary and perlocutionary intent. One may ask whether uncovering these intentions within literature is even possible, and if so, what information is necessary to uncover them. Skinner’s earlier discussion addresses these issues by spelling out two major issues within this conversation.¹⁰⁴ First, we need clarification about the meaning of the word *meaning*. Secondly, we must assess where that meaning is to be found. Is meaning to be found primarily in the mind of the historical author, or in biographical information about the historical author? Is meaning found within the social and linguistic conventions at the time of writing? Could meaning be primarily located within the social and linguistic conventions at the time of reading/hearing? Is meaning determined by empirical readers? Or, is meaning found primarily in the text alone, or in a combination of the possibilities above? How one answers these questions will likely be determined by one’s hermeneutical approach. Skinner’s articulation of speech-act theory addresses these questions, and for the purposes of our analysis, the following proposal will be considered and ultimately adopted: Meaning is equivalent to the communicative intentions of

¹⁰¹ Nixon, 96.

¹⁰² Nixon, “New Testament Quotation,” 96.

¹⁰³ Nixon, 95.

¹⁰⁴ Skinner utilizes speech-act theory for the purposes of analyzing political theory.

the implied author, which is expressed in the speech acts of the text. Empirical data helps to delimit plausible reconstructions of what is implied but cannot in itself determine meaning. A narrative understanding of reality further helps to discern the implied author's intentions by providing insight into the cognitive and communicative contexts of the utterances.

2.3.3 CONVENTIONALITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY

The previous section established the need for a multidimensional approach to language in order to understand total speech acts in communication. This way of viewing language helps to establish a hermeneutical approach that moves beyond locutionary analysis, towards discerning illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. In the process, we proposed that the successful uptake of a total speech act requires an awareness of communicative factors that go beyond word meaning or locutionary content. The following section will address some of what these necessary factors are.

In his work *The Construction of Social Reality*, Searle asserts that language is an institutional fact that stands in contrast to brute facts, which exist apart from any human institutions.¹⁰⁵ For example, a stone is a *brute fact* because a stone is a stone regardless of human institutions. If one were to say of the stone 'that object is a paper weight' this identification becomes an *institutional fact*, because it is only a paper weight because of something that is not intrinsic to its ontology, but is relative to human institutions.¹⁰⁶ Searle demonstrates the special significance of institutional facts in the following example:

I go into a café in Paris and sit in a chair at a table. The waiter comes and I utter a fragment of a French sentence. I say, "*un demi, Munich, à pression, s'il vous plaît.*" The waiter brings the beer and I drink it. I leave some money on the table and leave. An innocent scene, but its metaphysical complexity is truly staggering... Notice that we cannot capture the features of the description I have just given in the language of physics and chemistry. There is no physical-chemical description adequate to define "restaurant," "waiter," "sentence of French," "money," or even "chair" and "table," even

¹⁰⁵John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 27. Searle does not mean to suggest that these human institutions necessarily need to be officially recognized institutions. There may not be an officially recognized institution that has made a declaration that 'this stone' is therefore considered 'a paperweight.' Instead, it is the presence of human institutions of language, and culture (where paper serves specific functions), that has provided a conventional agreement (even if in no way 'official') that the stone counts as a paperweight in this certain context. It is plausible that within other human institutional contexts that the stone could just as easily be regarded as a pillow rather than a paperweight.

¹⁰⁶Searle, *Construction of Social Reality*, 12.

though all the restaurants, waiters, sentences of French, money, and chairs and tables are physical phenomena.¹⁰⁷

Searle's example illustrates that some components of reality take on special significance within its *social* construction.¹⁰⁸ Since institutional facts require *human* institutions for their existence, Searle suggests that it is these institutional contexts that dictate how one thing can *count as* another. He expresses this with the formula *X counts as Y in context C* (or *X=Y in C*).¹⁰⁹ For example, it is within this formula that an object (X) can *count as* money (Y) in a given context (C).¹¹⁰ The reason why *this* piece of paper (X) *counts as* £10 (Y) in 21st century London (C) is because of the existence of human institutions that have agreed that such is the case.¹¹¹ Searle's formula also has a significant application for language. Just as a piece of paper can *count as* money in a given context, based on its status as an institutional fact, so an utterance (locution) can *count as* the performance of a speech act (illocution/perlocution) in a given institutional context. In other contexts, that same utterance may *count as* a completely different speech

¹⁰⁷ Searle, 3.

¹⁰⁸ On social constructivism, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1966); George A. Kelly, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs: Volume 1 Theory and Personality* (London: Routledge, 1991); Stephen W. Jones, *Social Constructivism & Christianity* (Rev. Ed.; Watertown, MN: I AM Intercultural, 2018).

¹⁰⁹ Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 28.

¹¹⁰ Even this classification, i.e. 'object,' now has its own difficulties. In the case of money, the ease of electronic money transfers and the emergence of bitcoin complicates its classification as an 'object.' Money can now exist without the presence of any physical object. Regardless, electronic forms of money are also constructed socially based on the monetary conventions within society(s).

¹¹¹ Briggs, "Speech-Act Theory," 91. This does not imply any sort of official agreement as if a committee needed to gather to draw these conclusions. 'Institution' here is used in the broadest terms. The use of shell money within some tribal communities throughout Asian Pacific islands in the 20th century provides one example of the social construction of money. Even though this form of currency was often not officially recognized by their respective governments and was to an extent largely abandoned by many tribes at points throughout the 20th century, the use of these forms of money suggests that its institutional context within varied tribal communities attests to it being socially constructed. From an outsider's point of view, the notion of shells *counting as* money may seem absurd, while at the same time the notion of metal or paper *counting as* money likely raises no concerns. Money is only money because of its social reality. While someone from a tribe within the Asian Pacific islands may not be able to pay for an urban hotel with shell money, they nevertheless count as currency in inter- and intra-tribal exchanges to the extent that those within these contexts accept it as such. For the use of shell money throughout Asia Pacific islands, see Benjamin Danks, "On the Shell-Money of New Britain," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 17 (1888): 305-317; Paul Einzig, *Primitive Money: In It's Ethnological, Historical, and Economic Aspects* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1949), 56-60, 68-81; Kristina Fidali-Hickie and Cherie Whippy-Morris, "No Shells, No Langalanga: Hard Times in Malaita, Solomon Islands," in *Pacific Voices: Equity and Sustainability in Pacific Island Fisheries*, eds. Irene Novaczek, Jean Mitchell, and Joeli Veitayaki.Suva (Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 2005), 27-46; Alan Resture and Setapu Resture, "Seashells on the Seashore: Women's Participation in the Shell Trade on Funafuti and Nukufetau, Tuvalu," in Novaczek, et. al, *Pacific Voices*, 47-64. For a look at varied forms of money throughout history, see Glyn Davis, *A History of Money: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), 34-65.

act.¹¹² Horsley expresses a similar sentiment when he states that the approach that he took in his PhD dissertation intended to challenge the prevailing turn in biblical studies toward isolating word meanings for interpretation, especially those expressed in the publication of Kittel's *TWNT*. For Horsley, "particular words and symbols were integral components of broader patterns of meaning or whole worldviews and, more significantly, in a pluralistic cultural situation, could have very different meanings, connotations, and overtones in different worldviews."¹¹³

This *count as* formula has special significance for our assessment of potential imperial-critical speech acts in Ephesians. Social status is also an institutional fact. For example, if the Roman emperor was granted certain titles institutionally, and these titles afforded this person certain honorific privileges and roles within the context of the Roman Empire, what would *count as* the removal or undermining of that status? The granting of those honorific titles to another (in our case Jesus) likely constituted status removal, unless, of course, the privileged status of each could co-exist without conflict. The extent to which the reorientation of other institutional facts *counted as* subversion will also need to be considered. Might we see similar trajectories with who constituted the ideal Roman person, how the proper Roman household was structured, and how social relationships functioned? In each case, these *institutional facts* were generated from Roman imperial ideology. Therefore, some displacement, reconfiguration, or reversal of those institutional facts within NT texts likely *counted as* the subversion of that ideology. We will have to explore the extent to which it can be shown that undermining one would have *counted as* undermining the other. How one assesses the reorientation of these institutional facts has a direct impact on whether one might detect anti-imperial statements within Ephesians (and the NT at large). On top of this, Searle's "count as" formula opens the possibility that if subversion of the Roman Empire exists within the NT, it may not be explicitly visible on the level of the locution. Instead, seemingly straightforward locutions may have *counted as* subversive illocutions within its given context. The endowment of social power fits into Searle's notion of an institutional fact, and the X=Y in C formula can help to discern how some areas of social reality are constructed within varied Roman imperial contexts, not least those related to the Roman emperor.

¹¹² See Briggs, "Speech-Act Theory," 91-94

¹¹³ Richard A. Horsley, *Wisdom and Spiritual Transcendence at Corinth: Studies in First Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), ix.

Searle's formula is especially helpful in assessing utterances that are less than straightforward. Barclay and Kim have expressed concerns that coded and less than explicit imperial-critical elements are too often read into places where they are not actually present in the NT.¹¹⁴ Their arguments suggest that, if explicitly subversive language is not identifiable within the text, then imperial-critical elements are likely not present. In response to this, imperial-critical interpreters have often doubled-down on their claims that terminological similarities between imperial ideology and the NT constitute clear enough evidence to see subversion of Roman imperial ideology. In both cases, the discussion is usually kept at the locutionary level. This is, perhaps, one of the most significant limitations of the current state of discussions surrounding imperial criticism of the NT. Since Searle's formula asserts that locutions can *count as* something other than what they explicitly avow, a strictly locutionary assessment of potential imperial-critical utterances is far too limited. It does not address situations where subversion may be intended on illocutionary or perlocutionary levels. This project's use of Searle's formula seeks to extend the discussion beyond where it has currently settled.

Scholarship has not yet offered a detailed or systematic criterion for what might have constituted explicitly subversive language within the early Roman Empire. If certain kinds of explicit language were required for subverting Roman imperial ideology, what sorts of explicitly subversive language could we expect to be present? While some obvious assumptions may be made (e.g. it would be obviously subversive if one said that "Roman imperial rule should be overthrown by force"), less clarity exists in the case of utterances that would have *counted as* subversive of the Roman Empire, although they appear less obvious to modern empirical readers. Having an awareness of how seemingly straightforward locutionary statements could *count as* the performance of a subversive illocutionary act in given contexts will help us in our evaluation of the imperial-critical status of the speech acts in Ephesians. Searle's formula is a good starting point for this.

Few publications have addressed whether certain kinds of speech acts (especially for our purposes, subversive ones) lend themselves to implicit forms of communication rather than explicit ones. This issue will be addressed below by supplementing Searle's work with Skinner's. Does the very nature of subversive language suggest that an explicit expression of it on a locutionary level could, in fact, be less effective than an implicit one? Searle's X=Y in

¹¹⁴ John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 382-383, esp. fn. 69; Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 32.

C points to the reality that no explicitly subversive language needs be present within the locutions of a text for it to *count as* subversion, so long as it can be demonstrated that these locutionary acts were directed that way for the implied audience as intended by the implied author. This leads to further questions about the role of perlocutionary acts within this assessment.

Would some utterances within the NT have been intended to perform a transformative *perlocutionary act* in such a way that the implied author expected that the effect upon the implied readers be that they adopt his narrative in contradistinction to the one being offered by imperial ideology, thereby presenting an alternative way of living than what was projected by Roman imperial rule? If so, might the implied readers have been expected to understand the author's theology as a contrast with that of Roman imperial rule in such a way that it exhorted these followers of Jesus to live in a fashion that cut against the expectations of Roman imperial rule? Discernment of such perlocutionary acts by the implied author would not require that explicitly subversive language be present within the locutionary levels of the language in the text. Rather, it requires attunement to elements beyond the locutionary level of language. Ultimately, we will need to ask, using Searle's formula, whether a given utterance in Ephesians (X) could have *counted as* subversion of imperial ideology (Y) in its contemporary context (C). The plausibility of this kind of subversion occurring in specific speech acts throughout Ephesians will be the central focus of our later discussions.

We must pay attention to the implied author's locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in order to understand how locutionary content relates to the larger illocutionary and perlocutionary intentions of the work. Are the utterances intended as an insult, sarcasm, or irony? Determining the implied author's illocutionary and perlocutionary acts will clarify what the utterances were meant to *do*. Skinner affirms Austin's original correlation between illocution and conventionality, but also builds on it by pointing to the necessity of understanding linguistic and social conventions in the communication of speech acts. To illustrate this, let us return to Skinner's example used earlier, expressed in the statement: 'the ice is thin over there.' How can one tell whether this utterance is intended as a warning, as a directive, or as something else? The implied context of the statement becomes the linchpin that helps one determine what is meant by it. In the case that it is a skater who is approaching the thin ice, one might presume that the saying is meant as a warning. In the case that it was a

person hired to break up the ice, one might take the phrase as a directive.¹¹⁵ Either way, the implied context of the utterance in each situation governs which speech act is intended. Securing uptake of ‘the ice is thin over there’ requires uncovering the social and linguistic conventions of what counts as a warning or as a directive in each given situation. In order to understand what a speaker means (Y) in a given context (C) by the utterance (X), one must understand what people in general in that context (C), when giving an utterance like X, may be setting out to do. Skinner allows for an amount of social and linguistic innovation in speech acts, but also notes that the ability to be innovative depends on an awareness (perhaps even reshaping) of existing social or linguistic conventions.¹¹⁶ Ephesians poses particular challenges for this sort of assessment in light of major questions surrounding its provenance and life-setting. However, some of these challenges are overlaid by a narrow focus on the empirical over the implied. This project hopes to alleviate some of this tension through a multi-dimensional focus on the relationship between the implied and empirical as it relates to interpreting the speech acts of Ephesians. The next two chapters will address this in more detail.

2.3.4 SUBVERSION, PERLOCUTIONS, AND INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS

Austin’s understanding of the levels of a speech act raises questions about where subversion is to be located on his spectrum. What locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary elements can one expect to be present in a subversive speech act? Answering this question becomes more difficult the further one ventures into antiquity. Conventions of subversion differ in varied contexts.¹¹⁷ Modern readers of NT texts, when assessing potentially imperial-critical components, do well to acknowledge these historical, cultural, and linguistic differences. What counts as subversion in a modern context might not be so within ancient contexts. Since this is the case, a wider narrative understanding of these contexts is a necessity. Imperial-critical interpretations of NT texts have often focused on reconstructing the socio-political contexts of these texts without considering the narrative aspects of these contexts that would need to be in

¹¹⁵ A North American, midwestern context could hear the phrase ‘the ice is thin over there’ to be a directive in the sense that we want to find the place on the lake that only has three feet of ice, rather than five since it makes drilling into the ice, for the purposes of ice fishing, easier.

¹¹⁶ Skinner, “Conventions,” 118-138, citing p. 135.

¹¹⁷ Eating rice with a fork in front of the Japanese emperor could be subversive, while doing so with the American president likely would not be taken in the same manner. This is one of the arguments used against the appropriation of James C. Scott’s work into NT studies. While his work offers an erudite assessment of modern peasant cultures, its transferability into the Roman Empire cannot be done without some difficulties, not least that it runs the risk of anachronism, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

place for a given speech act to count as subversive within its contemporary environment. Austin, Searle, and Skinner argued that illocutions are conventional; Nixon has done the same with perlocutionary acts.¹¹⁸ These findings have yet to be incorporated into an assessment of imperial-critical components of NT texts. What illocutionary and perlocutionary conventions would need to be in place for these texts to have counted as subversion of the empire? For aspects of the text to function as subversive speech acts, the author(s) needed to have performed certain illocutionary acts, with specific associated intentional perlocutionary acts. There seems to be a wide range of potentially subversive speech acts. While discussions have sometimes centered around whether subversive ‘hidden transcripts’ are present within the NT, numerous potentially subversive speech acts have been overlooked. Some of these can be identified in the following list:

Illocutions—insult, critique, undermining, weakening, reversing, attacking, questioning, protesting, making fun of, disturbing, plotting against, challenging, disrespecting, thwarting, parodying, re-signifying,¹¹⁹ threatening, unsettling, sabotaging, destabilizing, overthrowing, overturning, toppling, ruining, weakening, damaging, ousting, displacing,¹²⁰ disrupting, or wreaking havoc on.

Perlocutions—offending, persuading, convincing.

These broad lists demonstrate that an abundance of speech acts closely related to the concept of ‘subversion’ could be performed. This raises questions about what sorts of speech acts were understood to have functioned as a challenge to Roman imperial ideology. This is true illocutionarily and perlocutionarily. If an implied author necessarily performs a hoped-for perlocutionary effect along with a subversive illocution, what aspects of the implied recipient’s context might the implied author have in view?

Under normal circumstances, Roman imperial authorities likely would not have read early Christian letters (or have gone through Paul’s [or a non-Pauline author’s] ‘mail’).¹²¹ Attempts to subvert the ideology of Roman authorities directly through NT epistles, to the

¹¹⁸ Nixon, “New Testament Quotation,” 93-102.

¹¹⁹ For resignification see Chris Brickell, “Masculinities, Performativity, and Subversion: A Sociological Reappraisal.” *Men and Masculinities* 8.1 (2005): 33.

¹²⁰ Brickell, “Masculinities, Performativity, and Subversion,” 33.

¹²¹ See Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 380-383. Whether this was also the case during periods of imprisonment is less likely, since there is evidence that some correspondences that a prisoner sent from incarceration would have likely been monitored, although the dangers of written correspondence seem lower than “direct speech.” Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting: Vol. 3—Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 390.

extent that the imperial authorities constituted the implied audience of their transformative speech acts, is highly unlikely. If the author of Ephesians set out to subvert the empire, his intended perlocutionary effects would likely not have been directed at imperial authorities. Instead, the perlocutionary acts of the author were made with an implied audience that consisted of already committed Christians. In that case, it seems less likely that a perlocutionary act of offending was one of the author's intentions. Unless it can be demonstrated that the author was hoping to offend in order to directly oppose his recipients' theoretical framework, another interpretation is more likely. Since the locus of our study is the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of the implied author of Ephesians, the actual perlocutionary effects that the epistle may have had on empirical audiences is beyond our scope. Instead, our focus is on potentially subversive elements intended by the implied author, and not on unintentional subversion. While it is possible that an empirical audience may take the speech acts in Ephesians to be subversive even when its implied author did not intend them to be so, our hermeneutical analysis is concerned primarily with the implied author and audience and not empirical ones. Similarly, empirical perlocutionary effects are largely outside of the control of the author. How an empirical audience responds to the work depends on many factors. Instead, the implied author's desired effects correspond perfectly with the given illocutions, and so the *associated perlocutionary acts* intended for the implied audience are in view here. Since perlocutionary acts are directly related to its correlating illocutionary act, the perlocutionary effect *of the implied audience* is recoverable to the extent that it is the result of conventional use.¹²²

Speech-act theory accounts for complex aspects of communication—utterances that hint, insinuate, veil, and imply. These instances are cases where the locutionary and illocutionary meaning come apart.¹²³ Searle refers to such instances as *indirect speech acts*.¹²⁴ For Searle, the illocutionary force of an indirect speech act is not visible in its locutionary propositional content. These utterances are then idiomatic.¹²⁵ Indirect speech acts “take some ingenuity to imagine a situation in which their utterances count as something other than the

¹²² Helen Ewald argues (with Gibson) that while literary analysis of persuasive writing usually emphasizes the need to recover actual (empirical) readers, the implied reader has been too often overlooked, and that “as an audience construct the implied reader serves a number of functions important to persuasive discourse.” “The Implied Reader in Persuasive Discourse,” *Journal of Advanced Composition* 8.1/2 (1988): 176, see also 168.

¹²³ Searle uses the terms “utterance meaning” and “speaker’s meaning.” *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 30.

¹²⁴ Searle, 30.

¹²⁵ Searle, 50.

sentence meaning.”¹²⁶ This ingenuity must also contain an “inferential strategy” whereby the hearer is able to infer that the illocutionary force drives the utterance beyond the locutionary meaning.¹²⁷ For Searle, the inferential strategy must “establish first, that the primary illocutionary point departs from the literal (we might say *propositional*), and second what the primary illocutionary point is.”¹²⁸ The process of identifying the proper illocutionary point requires moving beyond a surface analysis of the locutionary utterance. Doing so through a speech act lens entails consideration of conventions and context.

Skinner also addresses implicit speech acts by recognizing that some speech acts can function only by leaving out an explicit avowal of the communicative act.¹²⁹ In other words, some things are actually lost rather than gained in making explicit certain forms of communication.¹³⁰ He points to illocutionary acts of ordering, threats, warnings, and also sexual propositions as examples where the given speech act is never actually avowed in the statement.¹³¹ In fact, to *avow it* may be an indication that one likely failed at actually *doing it*.¹³² Skinner lists several verbs where there is “no possibility of avowal by means of an explicit performative:”¹³³

(A)	(i) patronize flatter propitiate conciliate coax cajole bully/browbeat	(ii) sneer scoff gloat flaunt abuse snub/rebuff taunt/tease mock/scorn	(iii) court flirt entice lure beguile
(B)	(i) allude indicate adumbrate	(ii) ignore gloss over cut dead	

¹²⁶ Searle, 31.

¹²⁷ Searle, 34.

¹²⁸ Searle, 34.

¹²⁹ Skinner, “Conventions,” 122.

¹³⁰ Skinner, 122.

¹³¹ Skinner, “Conventions,” 122.

¹³² Skinner, 128.

¹³³ Skinner, 123.

Particularly relevant for imperial criticism of NT texts is Skinner's inclusion of some of the items in category A (ii) above: snub, rebuff, taunt, tease, mock, and scorn.¹³⁴ All of these terms constitute subversive-like speech acts. Let us reiterate an important point made earlier—that the performance of a subversive illocutionary act may come without the avowal of an explicit performative verb that would otherwise clearly indicate subversive intent. In other words, subversion may not be easily detectable on the locutionary level and may also conventionally *require* implicit rather than explicit communication. It may only be through an author's triggering of certain social and linguistic conventions or narratives that one is even capable of discerning it as subversive. In the case of subverting Roman imperial rule, flouting conventions which affirmed imperial power might *count as* subversion. There may be nothing explicit in the language itself that indicates that subversion is intended, even though it may well be. Skinner also includes allusions in his discussion of implicit speech acts. Were an author to make explicit that an allusion was occurring, it would change the nature of the speech act altogether.¹³⁵ These sort of allusions require a reader to draw upon their imagination in order to detect how the surface level meaning of the utterance makes less sense of what is being said than an alternative interpretation. In these kinds of speech acts, implicit language is a more powerful means of communication rather than a burdensome alternative to straightforward language. Overlooking what occurs on an implicit level actually blunts the intended force of the language event.

The role of subversive language and allusion in imperial criticism of NT texts has not been explored in detail. Skinner's work on implicit speech acts is helpful in several ways: First, appeals to coded language or hidden transcripts as evidence for imperial-critical statements within the NT should not be dismissed outright simply based on the lack of explicitly subversive language. Skinner demonstrates that not only can speech acts function without explicit avowal of the illocutionary act they carry, but that some speech acts *demand* implicit communication conventionally. While Barclay is right in suggesting that Wright overstates his case that Paul's fear of persecution would give him reason for using coded language,¹³⁶ there could have been altogether different reasons for the use of coded language (also hidden transcripts)—namely that this sort of speech act demands implicit communication in order to

¹³⁴ Skinner, 123.

¹³⁵ Skinner, 122.

¹³⁶ Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 380-381.

secure uptake; otherwise the speech act would constitute a misfire. In addressing coded meanings in historical texts, Skinner suggests that, rather than assuming that the threat of persecution was a main motivator for using such language, a historian should ask if there were “strategies [that] have been voluntarily adapted to convey their meaning with deliberate obliqueness.”¹³⁷

Secondly, while the inherently implicit nature of subversive speech acts has largely been overlooked in imperial-critical discussions of NT texts, the burden of proof still rests on those who claim there are coded or hidden transcripts present. A major risk in acknowledging, with Searle, that locutionary and illocutionary meaning can come apart is that it could lead, fatalistically, to the notion that there are no connections whatsoever between locutions and illocutions. In this case, could not a text then mean whatever someone wants it to mean, and are there any factors that provide a control for the plausibility of various proposed meanings? Our next chapter will explore this question in more detail as it relates to the role that empirical elements can have on providing both limitations and possibilities for imaginative reconstructions of what is implied. This present chapter hopes to widen what might constitute as ‘proof’ of imperial-critical claims by suggesting that an eclectic hermeneutic, which distinguishes between implied and empirical, shows an awareness of speech-act theory, and utilizes a narrative hermeneutic, provides a more robust assessment of imperial-critical readings of Ephesians than would be the case without it.

How one prioritizes aspects of a hermeneutical geography, namely the extent to which what is *in the text* is seen as a reflection of what is *behind the text*, can greatly impact one’s posture towards imperial-critical readings of the NT. Does there need to be direct reference to the Roman Empire *in* the text for subversion to exist? How might one’s identification of Roman imperial components *behind* the NT writings help us evaluate whether they set out to challenge Roman imperial ideology? Desiring transparency regarding one’s own place of reading (socio-political location), imperial-critical interpreters draw parallels between Roman imperial ideology and 21st century political contexts.¹³⁸ This often portrays NT texts as addressing modern political concerns and finds the center of meaning within modern empirical readers. In speech-act terminology, this model of reading focuses exclusively on the text’s illocutionary and perlocutionary effects upon modern empirical readers without considering the speech acts

¹³⁷ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 51.

¹³⁸ E.g. Sylvia Keesmaat, “In the Face of the Empire: Paul’s Use of Scripture in the Shorter Epistles,” in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006): 186-187.

intended by the implied author for the implied audience. Thiselton suggests that doing so gives priority to “meaning-effects.”¹³⁹ This amounts to the empirical reader “re-authoring” the text from his/her vantage point.¹⁴⁰ A second hermeneutical error involves placing empirical historical reconstruction at the center of meaning. While historical reconstruction will play an important role in placing boundaries of plausibility upon the reconstruction of the implied author, audience, and occasions for writing, this sort of reconstruction itself cannot be the sole (or main) focus of study. A third error is to ignore empirical historical data that can help to reconstruct the implied.¹⁴¹ This project will navigate the implied and the empirical data by placing empirical data in its proper place, while attending carefully to the intentions of the implied author.

2.4 A NARRATIVE HERMENEUTIC: RETRACING THE HERMENEUTICAL HORIZONS

A final tool that we will use in our assessment of an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians is a narrative hermeneutic. This hermeneutic provides a third dimension to our methodology by attending to the narrative substructure of texts. In White’s definition, a narrative substructure is “a story that influences a discourse, regardless of whether it is explicitly referenced, to such an extent that the discourse is not completely intelligible without knowledge of the story.”¹⁴² A narrative hermeneutic¹⁴³ should not be conflated with ‘narrative theology.’¹⁴⁴ In discussing the concept, Moritz notes that, “the focus is not on such narrative aspects as genre and literary

¹³⁹ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 9-10. Hirsch also challenges the idea that a response to a work is equivalent to meaning: E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 7, 38-40. I owe thanks to Dr. Michial Farmer for pointing me in the direction of Hirsch.

¹⁴⁰ Moritz, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis,” 133, 138.

¹⁴¹ Moritz balances these concerns in his article, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis.”

¹⁴² Joel R. White, “N. T. Wright’s Narrative Approach,” in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul*, eds. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, Michael F. Bird (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 182 fn. 5.

¹⁴³ See Clarence Walhout, “Narrative Hermeneutics,” in Lundin, Walhout, Thiselton, eds., *The Promise of Hermeneutics*: 65-131. The study of narrative hermeneutics is sometimes associated with Ricoeur: Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, “Introduction: Why Narrative?” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 2. Thiselton cautions against drawing out a comprehensive theory of narrative hermeneutics from Ricoeur’s writings: *New Horizons*, 361.

¹⁴⁴ White, “Wright’s Narrative Approach,” 183 fn. 11. Narrative criticism also differs, in some respects, in that it contains aspect of narrative analysis that focuses primarily on the gospels and Acts: Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 239, 244-248. On the other hand, the concept of implied author and reader, which forms a key part of our eclectic hermeneutic, is derived primarily from narrative criticism: Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 240-242.

theory, but instead on the recognition that all human knowledge depends on the unifying web of stories that afford us possibilities for creating internal working models and structures, and consequently the possibility to construe and recognize ‘meaning.’”¹⁴⁵ A narrative hermeneutic has the potential to recognize narrative substructures within genres of writing that have been traditionally considered non-narrative, and that do not contain traditional narrative features, including the NT epistles. This points to its relevance for interpreting Ephesians, in spite of the wide identification of its epistolary genre.

Narratology is also useful for the analysis of communication.¹⁴⁶ While having foundations in the study of fictional narratives, narratology is often “interested in the nature of narrative in general, trying to define regularities and recurrent features which are shared by all narratives.”¹⁴⁷ While an examination of non-fictional narratives within the field of narratology is not entirely possible without some recalibration, the subject has been applied to historical studies, literary studies, and other disciplines—often within the field of humanities and sometimes as a point of convergence within the disciplines.¹⁴⁸ In doing so, narratology has expanded the notion of ‘story’ to extend beyond standard features of narratives to include larger plotlines, stories, underlying narrative assumptions, and metanarrative components within wider genres of writing as well as non-written forms of media.¹⁴⁹ One must be cautious of a reductionistic approach that equates ‘narrative’ with ‘plot,’ since “there can be narratives without plot.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Moritz, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis,” 126. Here, Moritz also notes that “all communication is storied.”

¹⁴⁶ See annotated bibliography section XIV: A.

¹⁴⁷ Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer, “Introduction: Narratology and Interdisciplinarity,” in *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, eds. S. Heinen and R. Sommer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 2.

¹⁴⁸ Heinen and Sommer, “Introduction,” 2-3.

¹⁴⁹ See especially, Marie-Laure Ryan, ed., *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); D. Jean Clandinin, ed., *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007). Marsen’s work provides an interesting example of speaking about narrative within non-narrative texts. He takes Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*, clearly not a traditional narrative (as stated earlier, it is a collection of a series of Harvard lectures—Marsen identifies it as “manual-type style” [p. 173]), and discusses Austin’s “narrative quest” throughout his work, “The narrative quest [of *How to Do Things*] unfolds...by assigning rights of agency to the enunciator and to the circumstances in which enunciation takes place. To assist him in this, the narrator distinguishes a type of utterance that lacks a descriptive function and uses this to undermine the power of the statement and correct this mistake [thinking that all statements are straightforward statements of ‘fact’],” *Narrative Dimensions*, 167-168.

¹⁵⁰ Fludernik emphasizes narrative as ‘experientiality,’ which suggests that while there can be narrative without plot, narrative cannot exist “without a human experiencer,” Jan Alber and Greta Olson, “Monika Fludernik and the Invitation to Do Things with Narrative,” in *How to Do Things with Narrative: Cognitive and Diachronic Perspectives*, eds. Jan Alber and Greta Olson (Narratologia 60; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 2.

N. T. Wright’s narrative hermeneutic connects concepts of story with worldview.¹⁵¹ For Wright, worldview is “the basic stuff of human existence, the lens through which the world is seen, the blueprint for how one should live in it, and above all the sense of identity and place which enables human beings to be what they are.”¹⁵² Wright suggests that worldviews, “provide the *stories* through which human beings view reality. Narrative is the most characteristic expression of worldview, going deeper than the isolated observation or fragmented remark.”¹⁵³ Stories provide answers to basic questions like: “who are we, where are we, what is wrong, and what is the solution?”¹⁵⁴ How one answers these questions provides the basis for a person’s worldview, and can, in principle, be seen across cultures,¹⁵⁵ even when the answers to these questions differ greatly among different people groups. According to Moritz, Wright’s ‘story’ is an epistemological category that is “not the stuff of decoration and adornment, if anything they are at the very centre of the stuff of life itself.”¹⁵⁶ His narrative view of reality is rooted in a critical-realist epistemology that acknowledges realism (the external reality of the thing experienced) while also attending to the subjective experiences of the interpreter (thus, it is ‘critical’ of one’s own interpretations and perspectives of that reality).¹⁵⁷ Wright’s work in second temple Judaism spells out several over-arching narratives of the first-century Mediterranean world.¹⁵⁸ He then applies these narratives to his reading of the NT.¹⁵⁹ In the same vein as Hays’ earlier work, Wright’s project reflects a wider turn within biblical studies towards emphasizing the role of story (and narrative) in hermeneutics.¹⁶⁰ His magnum opus on Paul employs similar methods, although unlike his earlier work, it considers

¹⁵¹ For his sources and others that engage with a narrative hermeneutic in biblical studies, see annotated bibliography section XIV: B.

¹⁵² Wright, *New Testament*, 124.

¹⁵³ Wright, 123.

¹⁵⁴ Wright, 123.

¹⁵⁵ Wright, 123

¹⁵⁶ Moritz, “Critical but Real,” 184.

¹⁵⁷ Moritz, 184.

¹⁵⁸ Wright, *New Testament*, 147-338.

¹⁵⁹ Wright, 341-476.

¹⁶⁰ Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) [Originally published within the SBL Dissertation Series, Vol. 56 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983)]. In a similar vein, Ben Witherington III dedicates his book *Paul’s Narrative Thought World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) to both Hays and Wright who he says are “fellow followers of the Story, fellow diggers in the communal plot.”

‘story-worlds’ beyond that of Judaism, including those of the Greco-Roman world (also Roman imperial ideology).¹⁶¹

Moritz contends that Wright’s most significant hermeneutical contribution is that of ‘storied knowledge.’¹⁶² For Moritz,

We cannot interpret properly unless we understand that there is no such thing as propositional truth if by that we mean something other than storied knowledge. Unless, therefore, reading is located within an appreciation of the significance of stories behind the author (real or implied), *and* the text (including its history of effect), *and* the audience (again real or implied) *and* the one doing the reading/interpreting, the text read is likely to be misconstrued, to use Wright’s metaphors, as a mirror, a kaleidoscope, a telescope or microscope, rather than a complex instrument of subversion, confirmation, challenge, confrontation, intentionality—in short: ideology.”¹⁶³

In Moritz’s articulation, the text is an instrument for ideology, and those ideologies can only be understood through a storied/narrative lens. This does not suggest that only stories convey ideology, or that ideology can only be conveyed in a narrative genre. ‘Narrative’ here goes beyond the components that make up narratives; it is an epistemological horizon that makes up a person’s (or people’s) way of seeing the world and living in it. Witherington says that ‘story,’ “refer(s) to the whole of the drama Paul reflects on, both in and beyond the text of scripture.”¹⁶⁴ There are good reasons for sympathizing with Witherington’s definition. The narrative hermeneutic used here requires attending to the epistemological and ideological grids through which people see the world. The components of these ‘stories’ can be widely divergent across cultures (and even within sub-cultures). This ‘story’ that Paul reflected on likely was comprised of wider components than merely those contained within the Hebrew Bible. The OT scriptures undoubtedly shaped crucial aspects of that story, but elements from within the Roman imperial contexts of the first century world also deserve to be examined, even if they are not directly or explicitly invoked in NT texts. We sympathize with Maier’s narrative approach that considers the wider narrative elements to the Roman ‘imperial situations,’

By ‘imperial situations’ I aim to define this cultural situation more closely by taking note of key imperial narratives, idiosyncratic vocabulary, and formulations of ethics

¹⁶¹ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1271-1407.

¹⁶² Moritz, “Critical but Real,” 184.

¹⁶³ Moritz, 184.

¹⁶⁴ Witherington, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World*, 5 fn. 1.

and communal ideals that were part of the larger ideological world of the generation of Christ followers addressed by these letters. Through imagery, imperial iconographers sought to invite viewers into a narrative world, to render them participants in an order that guaranteed a certain set of social and ideological outcomes. For their part, the ‘Pauls’ of the contested corpus similarly invite their listeners into narrative worlds.¹⁶⁵

While some of our conclusions about the imperial-critical status of Ephesians will differ greatly from Maier’s, his underlying hermeneutical awareness of the narrative components of both Roman imperial ideology and NT epistles is noteworthy. This project will expand upon Maier’s notion and ask wider questions about the ways in which these two narrative worlds may have conflicted more than he acknowledges.

In a narrative hermeneutic, even passages that appear more ‘doctrinal’ in nature must be viewed through a narrative lens by having an awareness of the storied substructure that undergirds them. For example, Paul’s naming of certain OT figures in Romans clearly invokes their wider stories, as well as their place within Israel’s story.¹⁶⁶ Likewise, Ephesians 1:3-14 assumes the wider story of Israel and YHWH, a point sometimes missed by interpreters who read its predestination language (Eph 1:5—*προορίσας*; Eph. 1:11—*προορισθέντες*) mainly against the backdrop of Reformation era debates without recognizing that the implied author clearly invokes the OT story of God choosing Israel (Eph. 1:4—*ἐξελέξατο*).¹⁶⁷ Further, although Ephesians and Colossians have been seen as in an almost synoptic relationship,¹⁶⁸ Ephesians’ more substantial echoes of the OT suggest that these letters, which otherwise share strikingly similar features and language, may well have invoked, to some extent, a different set of stories for different audiences. In other words, they contain some differences in their narrative substructures.¹⁶⁹ Whereas Ephesians and Colossians have been mined for

¹⁶⁵ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 15.

¹⁶⁶ Moritz, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis,” 128. See also Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Paul and His Story: (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Tradition*. JSNTSS 181 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

¹⁶⁷ E.g. Barth’s point that the “epistle explicitly supports the Calvinistic *solī Deo Gloria*.” Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (AB 34; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 42.

¹⁶⁸ Thorsten Moritz, “Reasons for Ephesians,” *Evangel* 14.1 (1996): 12; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xlix; George H. Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School* (WUNT. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 240-289; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (SP 17; Rev. Ed.; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008), 4-6.

¹⁶⁹ We need not speculate here whether these differences are the result of separate empirical authors. Reasons for these differences may be attributable, not to separate empirical authors, but in difference in its implied audience. For Moritz, “Ephesians [was] a deliberate rewriting of Colossians for a similar but more Jewish-oriented audience.” “Reasons for Ephesians,” 12.

comparisons and contrasts in language,¹⁷⁰ less attention has been paid to potential differences in each letter's undergirding story lines. While there is value, in some discussions, of analyzing these letters together,¹⁷¹ potential difference in their narrative substructures warrant that each letter receives separate assessments of their imperial-critical status. Even if it can be demonstrated that one letter contained imperial-critical components that challenged Roman imperial ideology/narratives, it may not be the case with the other.¹⁷² Our treatment of Ephesians as separate from Colossians is, therefore, both pragmatically and theoretically grounded. This project will attend to the worldviews expressed in Ephesians, and their relationship to other views of the world that were in place at the time of writing.¹⁷³ Further, our eclectic hermeneutic seeks to reorient imperial-critical discussions that have largely focused on locutionary levels of communication. This reorientation warrants that special attention be paid to illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in the epistle, for which an awareness of narrational dimensions is essential.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This project applies an eclectic hermeneutic to an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. The methods employed help to reorient some of the current discussions in the field. Speech-act theory attends to a three-dimensional view of language as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. An awareness of these components helps to expand the conversation beyond mere locutionary analysis. We will use Searle's X=Y in C to show how certain locutions can *count as* various illocutions in different contexts. This fact will require us to explore whether speech acts in Ephesians, which otherwise do not exhibit explicit invocation of Roman imperial ideology, engage it on an illocutionary and/or perlocutionary level. Skinner's contributions to speech-act theory will help provide another paradigm for examining implicit speech acts. A narrative hermeneutic comprises a second component to our eclectic

¹⁷⁰ E.g. Van Kooten's extensive synopsis of the Greek texts of Eph/Col: *Cosmic Christology*, 240-289. See also Helge Stadelmann, *Der Epheserbrief* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1993), 13-14; Joachim Gnilka, *Der Epheserbrief* (HThKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 7-13.

¹⁷¹ See e.g. Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*; MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 4-6.

¹⁷² One wonders whether this contributed to Walsh and Keesmaat's isolation of Colossians in their *Colossians Remixed*, especially considering that Keesmaat acknowledges the varied storylines in each epistle in her "In the Face of Empire," compare 187, 198.

¹⁷³ Schwindt's project also highlights ancient worldviews, although by using a different methodology: Rainer Schwindt, *Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* (WUNT 148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002). See also Mußner, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, 21-22.

methodology by retracing the hermeneutical horizons through attending to the narrative substructures present in various ideologies, including both those expressed in Ephesians, as well as those held by Roman imperial rule. We will explore these narrative elements further in the next two chapters. The third component utilized in our methodology is a distinction between implied and empirical authors, recipients, and contexts. These distinctions will help to navigate some of the uncertainty surrounding the empirical authorship, recipients, and context of Ephesians. In the next chapter, we will turn our attention towards the two major proposals for the epistle's date framework. Each framework will lead to some significant difference in the plausible empirical life-setting of the Ephesians, especially as it relates to its Roman imperial context.

PART 2

FROM METHOD TO LIFE-SETTING

Chapter 3

Empirical Life-Setting of Ephesians

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Imperial-critical readings of NT texts have been largely dependent on reconstructing the empirical context(s) of the first century Roman Empire.¹ This project will attend bi-focally to both the empirical, and implied life-settings of Ephesians. Not much hinges on the empirical life-setting as such, unless it is leveraged for reconstructing what is implied in the text.² Examining empirical data provides a plausibility framework for delimiting the implied situation of the text by placing boundaries around the possibilities. In light of this, we first need to explore aspects of the empirical life-setting of Ephesians before reconstructing its implied life-setting.³

¹ See especially some of the major essays in the most recent edited volumes on empire in the NT studies: Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, P.A.: Trinity Press International, 1997); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2004); Richard A. Horsley, *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Adam Winn, ed., *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament* (Resources for Biblical Study 84; Atlanta: SBL, 2016); Stanley Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall, eds., *Empire in the New Testament* (New Testament Studies; Eugene, Pickwick, 2011); Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, eds., *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in the New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2013).

² See Thorsten Moritz, “Scripture and Theological Exegesis” in *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures*, eds. Michael Bird and Michael Pahl (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2010), 133. Bruce Winter’s work on 1 Corinthians is a good exegetical example of this. His detailed work in the historical/cultural situation of first century Roman Corinth provides helpful insights into several passages in 1 Corinthians, e.g. wisdom in 1 Cor. 1-3, secular discipleship in 1 Cor. 4, Roman law in 1 Cor. 6, the ‘present distress’ in 1 Cor. 7, Roman meals for 1 Cor 11, and Veiling in Roman culture in 1 Cor. 11: *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

³ Distinctions between what constitutes implied data and empirical data was spelled out earlier in chapter 3. Dahl’s discussion on the ‘fictional’ and ‘real’ setting of Ephesians has some parallels with my use of ‘implied’ and ‘empirical’ but also some significant differences: *Studies in Ephesians: Introductory Questions, Text- and Edition-Critical Issues, Interpretation of Texts and Themes*, eds. D. Hellholm, V. Blomkvist, and T. Fornberg (WUNT 131. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 451-456. While Dahl’s ‘real’ setting seems to correspond closely to what I refer to as the ‘empirical’ life-setting, his nomenclature assumes prima facie that what is projected in the text is merely a fabrication of the author and that it does not correspond whatsoever to anything ‘real’ for its recipients. Distinctions between the implied and empirical life-settings also distinguishes between what the text projects and external empirical data, but without predetermining how these realities correspond to one another, especially since what is implied can be as ‘real’ as the empirical and the two do not necessarily need to be in tension. These issues will be highlighted further in exploring the implied recipients, author, and life-setting next chapter.

Since we are proposing and testing an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians, this survey will determine the selection criterion for which empirical aspects of the epistle's life-setting are explored. This chapter will demonstrate that, while several empirical elements of the epistle's life-setting remain uncertain, the most plausible proposals imply different consequences for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. At this early point, a brief example can help to illustrate this situation. It is conceivable that, were we to adopt the view that Ephesians was a circular letter to Asia Minor, written by a late first-century or early second-century deuteropauline author, plausible reconstructions of the empirical rhetorical situation of the letter within its Roman imperial context might broaden compared to what would have been the case earlier. Consequently, the recipients may have been in a heightened situation in which tensions with Roman imperial authorities in Asia Minor had escalated.⁴ If so, the cosmic rule of Jesus conveyed throughout Ephesians may have *counted as* a critique of Roman imperial claims of cosmic rule, including those present within the imperial cults of the region—more so than if the letter had been intended for earlier recipients who were in a less explosive rhetorical environment. On the other hand, if Ephesians was written earlier, during a period of fewer tensions, its cosmic Christology may be better explained in light of a different rhetorical situation. This chapter will draw out implications like these. We will explore the changes in the rhetorical situation of Ephesians from two major frameworks: an earlier and a later date. The date of the epistle has consequences for its Roman imperial context as it relates to *maiestas* (treason) laws, imperial cult(s), and Roman imperial eschatology.

⁴ Everett Ferguson notes that while early Christian writers sometimes offered praise for some emperors in the second century AD, there were good reasons for some hesitations. Major Jewish disturbances occurred during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, including Hadrian's prohibition against circumcision, his rebuilding Jerusalem as *Aelia Capitolina* (a likely precursor to the *Bar Kokhba* revolt): *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (3rd Ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 39; see also Moshe David Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian's Days," *Studies in History* [Scripta Hierosolymitana] 23 (1972): 85-125. Hadrian's plan to construct a temple in Jerusalem to Jupiter Capitolinus might be best explained as a desire for the greater Hellenization of Judaism: A. R. Birley, "Hadrian to the Antonines," in Bowman et. al., *CAH XI*, 143. Two significant Jewish revolts emerged during Hadrian's reign, the first in 115-117 A. D., the second was the *Bar Kokhba* revolt in Judea, both of which led to significant losses in the Roman army: Birley, 144-145. This later revolt also led to the eradication of the provincial name "Judea," replaced instead with "Syria Palestina" (Birley, 146). "There were sporadic persecutions of the Christians under the second-century emperors, with more martyrs made under Marcus Aurelius than under any emperor before the Decian persecution of the third century (Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 424-425; cf. Birley, "Hadrian to the Antonines," 182; B.M. Levick, "Greece (Including Crete and Cyprus) and Asia Minor from 43 B.C. to A.D. 69," in Bowman, et. al., *CAH X*, 633. While the reign of Marcus Aurelius likely falls outside of the proposed date framework for Ephesians, the portrait offered here suggests that there were significant conflicts between Jews/Christians and Roman Imperial rule in the second century. Eusebius provides evidence that the bishop of Sardis in Asia Minor saw Marcus Aurelius' decrees as specifically targeted against Christians: *Hist. Eccl.* V.1.1-63, cited in Birley, "Hadrian to the Antonines," 143.

3.2 EMPIRICAL LIFE-SETTING OF EPHESIANS: TWO POSSIBILITIES

Uncertainties surrounding the date, author, and recipients of the letter make it difficult to determine the empirical life-setting of Ephesians. Decisions about any of these issues necessarily affect what one determines about the others, and very little consensus has emerged. The epistle's approximate date is often drawn from a chronology of Paul's life. This includes assumptions about the historicity of the Pauline narratives in Acts, the relationship between Ephesians and Colossians, assumptions about Pauline (or non-Pauline) authorship, and its theological characteristics.⁵ In the following sections, possibilities for the empirical identity of the epistle's recipients and author will be funneled through the two major date frameworks in order to explore variations in the letter's Roman imperial life-setting. After summing up each date framework for the epistle, we will pay special attention to *maiestas* (treason) laws, imperial cult(s), and Roman eschatology. We will note changes within these aspects of the Roman imperial setting for both an earlier and later date. This will assist in reconstructing the implied elements of the letter within the next chapter. We will then use that reconstruction to later test the plausibility of an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians.

3.2.1 EARLY DATE

Proposals for an earlier empirical date for Ephesians usually place the epistle either in the mid-50s, or at the beginning of the 60s, with a *terminus ad quem* of AD 68.⁶ This would help account

⁵ Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 11-2; George H. Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School* (WUNT. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 1-6; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (SP 17; Rev. Ed.; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008), 17-18; Andreas Lindemann, *Der Epheserbrief* (ZBK; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 10-12.

⁶ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians* (Wisdom Commentary 50; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), lxiii. Eusebius and Jerome both place the deaths of Peter and Paul four years after the fire of AD 64: G. W. Clarke, "The Origins and Spread of Christianity," in Bowman, et. al., *CAH X*, 871 fn. 65, see also David A. Black, "The Particularities of Ephesians and the Ephesian Address," *GTJ* 2.1 (1981): 70; L.H. Cohick, *Ephesians* (NCCS 10; Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 33; Rüdiger Fuchs, "I Kneel Before the Father and Pray for You (Ephesians 3:14): Date and Significance of Ephesians, Part 1. *EJT* 23.1 (2014): 17; These dates often follow a chronology of Paul's life from the book of Acts in conjunction with evidence from the Gallio inscription found in the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, which places Gallio in Achaia somewhere between AD 50-54, and Paul's trial before him (Acts 18) likely having took place in AD 51. According to Rainer Riesner, "If there is such a thing as an 'anchor' for Pauline Chronology, it is the Gallio inscription." "Pauline Chronology," in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, ed. S. Westerholm (1st Ed; West Sussex: Blackwell, 2011), 18, see also D. Slingerland, "Acts 18:1-18, the Gallio Inscription, and Absolute Pauline Chronology," *JBL* 110.3 (1991): 439-449; Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 219; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (3rd. Ed; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2002), 161-169, 219-221; Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 585-586; M.C. Parsons, *Acts* (Paideia Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 254; R. M. Novak Jr., *Christianity in the Roman Empire: Background Texts* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2001), 20-22; Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (trans. M. E. Boring; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 49. These dates also often assume a writing prior to the earthquake that destroyed Colossae and Laodicea in AD 60: Cohick,

for the similarity to Colossians, and it could be synthesized with narratives of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea or Rome.⁷ Much less support has been given to dates earlier than this.⁸ Most proposals within this date framework favor either Pauline authorship or cooperation between Paul and a co-worker.⁹ Possibilities for a date within Paul's lifetime are limited. There are four likely reconstructions:

1. Paul wrote Ephesians just prior to his appeal to the emperor [Nero] during his imprisonment in Caesarea, which possibly lasted over two years (Acts 24:27).¹⁰
2. Paul wrote the letter during his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:14-31), while he awaited his appeal before Nero in Rome, likely around AD 60.¹¹
3. The writing occurred during a second Roman imprisonment just prior to his death. 1 Clement 5:7 suggests that Paul reached "the farthest limits of the west." This likely means that Paul was released from the Roman imprisonment described at the end of Acts,¹² he traveled west (likely Spain),¹³ and eventually returned to Rome where he may have been killed under Nero.¹⁴ This would place the date of the epistle between AD 64-68.

Ephesians, 33. For more on the Colossian earthquake, see James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 23. Larry Kreitzer disagrees by suggesting that Eph. invokes imagery associated with the earthquake in AD 60, and so he dates the epistle after that: *Hierapolis in the Heavens: Studies in the Letter to the Ephesians* (LNTS 368. London: T&T Clark, 2007), 93-106. N. T. Wright provides one of the earlier dates for the prison epistles (including Ephesians) based on an Ephesian imprisonment hypothesis, possibly between AD 53-56: *Paul: A Biography* (New York: HarperOne, 2018), 266, 280.

⁷ Caesarea—Acts 23:31-26:32; Rome—Acts 28:14-31.

⁸ Earlier dates are often in conjunction with an Ephesian imprisonment, see e.g., Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, 266, 280.

⁹ Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 452.

¹⁰ Helge Stadelmann, *Der Epheserbrief* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1993), 14-16.

¹¹ Two churches claim to be the traditional spot of Paul's residence in Rome while under house arrest: St. Maria in Via Lata [on the Via del Corso], and San Paolo alla Regola [in the Campus Martius region]: A. Macadam, with A. Barber. *Blue Guide: Rome*. 11th Ed. (London: Somerset, 2006), 160, 222. I visited San Paolo alla Regola in the summer of 2019. The building exhibits a sign that says, "First Residence of St. Paul in Rome."

¹² Clarke, "Origins," 871.

¹³ See Romans 15:24.

¹⁴ If Paul had reached the furthest limits of the west (presumably Spain), his missionary activities might have consequently led to a second arrest. He may have appealed again to Caesar and been taken back to Rome in chains. The circumstances in Rome, a second time around, may have significantly shifted against some Christians who were under suspicion due to the allegations of their responsibility for the great fire of AD 64. While Tacitus portrays the Christians as Nero's scapegoat (*Annals* 15.44) Nero may have had more significant reasons for his suspicion in light of the fact that region of Rome where Christians/Jews were known to have been most densely congregated (modern Trastevere) was one of the only regions of the city unaffected by the

4. Paul wrote Ephesians much earlier, during an imprisonment in Ephesus. This imprisonment has much less attestation, but it makes sense of Paul's statement in Philemon 22: ἐτοιμάζέ μοι ξενίαν ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν. If Philemon was written during the same imprisonment as Ephesians, it is possible that the author implied that his visit (to Colossae) would be imminent—a more likely possibility from Ephesus than from Rome.¹⁵

The first three options place Paul's writing in the later years of his life, and during the reign of Nero. The fourth option is more difficult to pinpoint within the chronology of Paul's life, but it likely places the writing of the epistle in the early to mid-50s,¹⁶ during the later reign of the Emperor Claudius or the early reign of Nero. These narrow time frames allow for a more definite reconstruction of the empirical Roman imperial setting of Asia Minor. On the other hand, we must use caution here since it is difficult to be precise in dating the epistle empirically within a Pauline timeline.

Proposals for an earlier date often locate the recipients in Ephesus,¹⁷ in another city nearby,¹⁸ or scattered throughout several communities within Asia Minor.¹⁹ No serious consideration has been given to locations outside of Asia Minor.²⁰ Attempts to synthesize known locations of Paul's ministry within Asia Minor and possible destinations for Ephesians

fire: Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 47.

¹⁵ While no direct reference to an Ephesian imprisonment is present in the NT the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* suggest it: B. W. Robinson, "An Ephesian Imprisonment of Paul," *JBL* 29.2 (1910): 181. Robinson agrees with Deissmann, providing some support for the theory ("Ephesian Imprisonment," 181 fn. 1). Some who suggest an Ephesian destination for the greetings in Rom. 16 find evidence for an Ephesian imprisonment: Robinson., 182; Rom. 16:7: ἀσπάσασθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ Ἰουλίαν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου. Although, it is unclear whether Paul implies that they all are currently imprisoned at the time of writing. For the association between an Ephesian imprisonment and Philemon, see Robinson, 184-185. Recent support for an Ephesian imprisonment is offered by Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, 190, 239-241, 264-269, 280, 342.

¹⁶ Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, 266, 280.

¹⁷ See especially Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 78-89.

¹⁸ Possibly Laodicea: Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 192; Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*; or Hierapolis: Kreitzer, *Hierapolis in the Heavens*; and Larry J. Kreitzer, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1997). Andrew Lincoln suggests (w/Van Roon) that the letter originally contained two names: Laodicea and Hierapolis: *Ephesians* (WBC, Dallas: Word, 1990), 3.

¹⁹ MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 17; Alan Verhey and Joseph S. Harvard, *Ephesians* (Belief; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 25-26. C. Bowen challenges this: "The Place of Ephesians among the Letters of Paul," *ATR* 15 (1933): 283.

²⁰ While T. K. Abbott's notion that Eph. had wider circulation into the surrounding province of Phrygia has not been disproved, it has never been given much serious consideration: *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1946), viii.

also come with an earlier date, especially considering the epistle's synoptic-like relationship to Colossians.²¹ If Ephesians were written far earlier in Paul's ministry, it might make an Ephesian destination more likely since the seemingly generic tone of the letter may empirically reflect Paul's lack of relationship with the Ephesian community prior to his lengthy stays in Ephesus. On the other hand, this notion is hard to synthesize with accounts of Paul's imprisonments in Acts.²² Based on the portrait in Acts, one could presume, quite cautiously, that it would have been likely for Paul to have written to the Christians in Ephesus at some point during his missionary travels. Its portrayal of his close association with the Ephesians indicates that Paul may have spent as much time there as in any other city, and his farewell address to the Ephesian leaders further indicates the uniquely intimate relationship that he had with the Christians who lived there (Acts 20:17-36).

The most that can be said about the empirical location of the recipients is that a destination within Asia Minor is likely, if not certain.²³ The implications of this uncertainty for our assessment is that caution should be exhibited by not appealing exclusively to empirical elements of the life-setting of the city of Ephesus (or any other single city). Extensive surveys of the ancient city of Ephesus can contribute to framing the empirical life-setting, but only to the extent that the prominence of the city of Ephesus in Western Asia Minor likely held cultural weight in the wider region. The same applies to other cities throughout Asia Minor. Empirical data from these other locations can also contribute to framing the empirical life-setting of the epistle, but we should avoid too particular a focus. While some commentators doubt that anything about the empirical life-setting of the epistle can be detected in the letter,²⁴ a destination within Asia Minor is compelling. Considerations will be given to the wider Roman imperial context, with special attention given to regional aspects of the Roman context within Asia Minor.

One consequence of this earlier date is that Paul's theology, especially as it relates to potential subversion of imperial rule, may have developed over time. If it can be demonstrated

²¹ Some see Tychicus as a key to the dating of the epistle, since he may have been the letter carrier of both: Fuchs, "I Kneel before the Father," 21; Black, "Particularities of Ephesians," 66. See also Norbert Baumert and Maria-Irma Seewann, *Israels Berufung für die Völker: Übersetzung und Auslegung der Briefe an Philemon, an die Kolosser und an die Epheser* (München: Echter, 2016), 179.

²² Imprisonments of Paul recorded in Acts: Philippi (Acts 16: 16-34); Jerusalem (Acts 22:22-30); Caesarea (Acts 24) Rome (Acts 28:14-31). Although, 2 Cor. 11:23 implies that Paul experienced frequent imprisonments [φυλακαῖς περισσοτέρως] and his comments here were likely written prior to a Caesarean or Roman imprisonment: Robinson, "Ephesians Imprisonment," 183.

²³ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 12; MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 18.

²⁴ Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 12.

that Ephesians is critical of the Roman Empire, and if Paul wrote it at a time when he had not yet come to know the Ephesians, the letter might provide evidence that Paul's response to Roman imperial rule had changed from the writing of Ephesians (and other so-called prison epistles) to the time Romans 13 was written. However, this might imply a much earlier date than what has been associated with an Ephesian imprisonment.²⁵ Since an Ephesian imprisonment likely dates the epistle very closely to the book of Romans, it may be more difficult for imperial-critical interpreters of Ephesians, who accept Pauline authorship, to reconcile possible anti-imperial sentiments in the text with Romans 13.

If Paul was the empirical author of Ephesians, questions can be raised about the likelihood that he would have subverted Roman imperial ideology. Barclay has questioned whether the subtext of Paul's writings contained coded imperial-critical elements in light of his belief that Paul would have never shied away from confrontation to avoid persecution.²⁶ He reasons that had Paul wanted to subvert Rome, he would not have done so in a coded manner as many imperial-critical readings of Paul suggest.²⁷ Barclay further suggests that the Roman Empire plays an insignificant role in Paul's letters, and that the best Paul does is to lump the empire together with all of the other unnamed powers that Christ has defeated.²⁸ To suggest, then, that Paul was so concerned with Roman imperial ideology that he coded critique of it in his letters amounts to a misunderstanding of Paul's thoughts on the Roman Empire.²⁹

Some of the discussion surrounding the likelihood that Paul would have challenged Roman imperial ideology is based on a reconstruction of the empirical life of Paul, the theology of the undisputed letters, and assumptions about the role that subtext plays in Paul's writings.³⁰ The greater allowance that one gives for the presence of sub-textual echoes within NT texts, the greater the likelihood that Paul may have encoded imperial-critical statements on that level.

²⁵ If Romans can be dated to the winter or early spring of AD 56 (Frank J. Matera, *Romans* [PCNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], 4-6), Wright's date of AD 53-56 for the Ephesian imprisonment leaves very little room between the writing of Ephesians and Romans: *Paul: A Biography*, 266, 280.

²⁶ John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 370, 375, 378-380.

²⁷ See previous note. The *Muratorian Canon* 3-4 states that Paul had selected Luke as a travel companion because of Luke's awareness of Roman law, cited in T. B. Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter: Differentiating and Contextualizing Early Christian Suffering* (SuppNovTest 145; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 139 (see also 139, fn. 17). If true, this may indicate that Paul anticipated conflicts with Roman imperial authorities, and that he had hoped to avoid it through Luke's knowledge of Roman law.

²⁸ Barclay, 386.

²⁹ This is Barclay's main argument in *Pauline Churches*, 363-387.

³⁰ On the role of subtext in anti-Imperial interpretation of Paul, see Christoph Heilig, *Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul* (WUNT 392; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

In speech-act terms, the more narrowly one focuses on locutionary levels of communication, with less deference to illocutionary and perlocutionary authorial intensions, the greater the burden becomes for explicit, rather than implicit, communication. As a result, any anti-imperial sentiments in Paul's letter would have to be explicit, and the lack of any definite invocation of, or interaction with, Roman imperial ideology on the locutionary level suggests a lack of engagement with that ideology. The eclectic hermeneutic utilized in this project gives greater allowance for sub-textual echoes and implicit communication, and it acknowledges that attending to illocutionary and perlocutionary authorial intentions is indispensable for interpreting Ephesians. This hermeneutical approach focuses on how changes in contexts (*C* in Searle's 'X=Y in C' equation) can affect different illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Our approach therefore encourages an openness to the possibility of Paul's engagement with Roman imperial ideology in less explicit ways, especially when we make greater allowance for the Roman imperial context (*C*) of the letter.

3.2.2 LATER DATE

Proposed dates for the writing of Ephesians by a non-Pauline author vary more greatly than those for Pauline authorship. Most proposals range from the AD 70s to late 90s,³¹ although some suggest a second-century date, as late as AD 170.³² These dates are difficult to pinpoint with precision, since no single person has been identified as the later empirical author within this time frame. Post-Pauline dating places the writing of Ephesians in either the Flavian Roman imperial dynasty (AD 69-96) or the early to middle part of the Nerva-Antonine dynasty (AD 96-192). Significant events in Roman imperial history would have been in the past: The collapse of Julio-Claudian rule would have been a reality. The failed first revolt against Rome in Judea (AD 66-72) could be fresh in the minds of Jews and Christians. Flavian rule might have come to an end with the assassination of Domitian, and even the Bar Kokhba revolt could have been recently quelled (AD 132-136). Other aspects would have recently emerged: The

³¹ Rosemary Canavan prefers a date under Domitian: "Armor, Peace, and Gladiators: A Visual Exegesis of Ephesians 6:10-17," in *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, Images*, eds. Vernon K. Robbins, W. S. Melion, and Roy R. Jeal (Atlanta: SBL, 2017), 246. Lindemann supports a late first-century date: *Der Epheserbrief*, 15.

³² Markus Barth notes the latest date as 170 even though he prefers AD 62 as the date of writing: *Ephesians* (AB 34; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 50-51. Harry Maier thinks Ephesians could date as late as during the reign of Hadrian (AD 117-138): *Picturing Paul in Empire: Imperial Image, Text and Persuasion in Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 3. Similarly, AD 140 is Van Kooten's *terminus ad quem*, even though he prefers an earlier date: *Cosmic Christology*, 2.

heightened tension between Roman imperial authorities and Christianity may also have become a new reality for the empirical recipients in Asia Minor. All of these aspects contribute to an altered empirical life-setting for the epistle than what would have been the case at an earlier date. This change affects our understanding of the speech acts in Ephesians. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes that,

If Ephesians is best dated in the late 80s or early 90s of the first century rather than the early 60s, its historical context changes drastically. Not only has the apostolic generation passed but the war against the Roman occupation in the homeland Palestine has also been lost. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that the rhetorical situation in the 80s/90s is quite different from that in the 60s.³³

A later empirical life-setting has numerous consequences for detecting imperial-critical sentiments within the Roman imperial cognitive environment of the letter's recipients. Not all aspects of the debate surrounding the date of the epistle have relevance for testing an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. The possibility of a post-Pauline empirical author does have bearing on at least three areas:

1. Aspects of a Roman imperial life-setting of Ephesians differ over the course of the several decades that may separate Pauline from non-Pauline authorship. For reasons that will become more apparent later in this chapter, the differences in these contexts from the mid to late first-century (or possibly early second-century) do have a significant bearing on an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians, and on the context (Searle's 'C') of the implied author's speech acts.
2. As stated earlier, what is known about the personality and life experiences of the empirical author may impact the plausibility of whether that person would have subverted Roman imperial ideology. This raises further questions about reconstructing the implied author, as well as the usefulness of the undisputed Pauline letters for informing imperial-critical readings of Ephesians. For example, if it can be demonstrated that, in light of what Paul says elsewhere, he would likely not have subverted the Roman Empire in the way that some imperial-critical interpreters claim,³⁴ it seems less plausible that Paul would have been critical of the empire in Ephesians.

³³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians*, lxiv.

³⁴ Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 363-387.

Such a schema still leaves open some questions about the chronology of the Pauline letters: For example, did Paul develop anti-imperial sentiments later in his life?³⁵ The same conclusions do not apply to a non-Pauline empirical author. Therefore, asking ‘what would Paul do?’ gets complicated with non-Pauline authorship because the projected persona of Paul in the letter may have little to do with Paul, the empirical person. The question then becomes ‘which Paul?’ does that author project in the letter, and how does that image of Paul reflect (or not) what was known of the empirical apostle? Theoretically, it is possible that a non-Pauline author may have projected a version of Paul that was more critical of Roman imperial ideology than Paul himself.

3. Included in the life experiences of the empirical author is the issue of imprisonment, which has further impact on an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. Since Ephesians is one of the few letters that explicitly mentions that its author is imprisoned at the time of writing (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20), this experience has consequences for whether the sentiments expressed in the epistle were critical of the Roman Empire.³⁶ If the empirical author’s custody at the time of writing was subject to being watched over by Roman guards, we might expect imperial-critical sentiments to be absent, or subtle. On the

³⁵ This leaves open the possibility that Paul’s seemingly positive depiction of Roman imperial authorities in Rom. 13, likely written around AD 56 during the early part of Nero’s reign [often called the *quinquennium* (‘five good years’)], may not reflect his views of Roman imperial rule after Nero’s actions following AD 59 (e.g. allegations of Nero killing his own mother, and persecutions of Christians—possibly including the apostles Peter and Paul.). Anti-imperial readings of Romans 13 have emerged that challenge the traditional assumption that Paul’s depiction of the imperial authorities is largely positive, see T. L. Carter, “The Irony of Romans 13.” *NovTest* 46.3 (2004): 209-228; William R. Herzog II, “Dissembling, A Weapon of the Weak: The Case of Christ and Caesar in Mark 12:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7.” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 21 (1994): 339-360; more moderately, see N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Vol 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 1302-1304; Neil Elliott, “Paul and Empire: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians,” in *Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, 161-162; Neil Elliott, “Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Roman Imperial Propaganda,” in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997), 184-204. In contrast to these readings see: Ovidiu Hanc, “Paul and Empire A Reframing of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of the New Exodus,” *TynBull* 65.2 (2014): 313-316; Seyoon Kim, “Paul and the Roman Empire,” in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul*, eds. Christoph Heilig, J. T. Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 299-300. On Nero’s quinquennium see: T. E. J. Wiedemann, “Tiberius to Nero,” in *CAH X*, eds. A. K. Bowman, E. Champlin, and A. Lintott (2nd Ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 243-244.

³⁶ Four other NT epistles include its author’s imprisonment: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy. The imprisonments are characterized in the following ways in the Greek text: δεσμός—Phil 1:7, 13, 17; Col. 4:18; 2 Tim. 2:9; Philem 10, 13; δέσμιος—Eph. 3:1, 4:1; Philem. 1, 9; 2 Tim. 1:8; ἄλυσις—Eph. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:16. While connections between the prison epistles have been difficult to pinpoint, R. Fuchs suggests that all five prison letters “clearly demonstrate an increase in Christology along with simultaneous decrease of theology...[and] an increase in the use of the ‘in Christ’ formula.” “I Kneel Before the Father,” 16. Richard Cassidy notes that each word within the δέσμι- word group indicates some sort of binding: *Paul in Chains: Roman Imprisonment and the Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 96, and that the characterization of Paul’s imprisonment in Ephesians indicates the use of an actual metal chain: Cassidy, 102. In agreement with Cassidy’s point on the δέσμι- word group, see also, T. A. Robinson, *Mastering Greek Vocabulary* (2nd Ed.; Peabody, M.A.: Hendrickson, 1991), 86.

other hand, the imprisonment references could be a literary device used by a post-Pauline author to authorize the letter with apostolic authority (as opposed to being the lived experience of its empirical author).³⁷ If so, we must exhibit caution in highlighting the imprisonment for the purposes of an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. Furthermore, if the imprisonment in Ephesians invokes Paul's imprisonment in Rome³⁸ (as opposed to one in Caesarea,³⁹ Ephesus,⁴⁰ or elsewhere⁴¹) it affects an imperial-critical reading of the letter because of the author's proximity to the center of imperial rule. If the imprisonment reflects a non-Pauline author's empirical situation at the time of writing, very little could be said about the location of that imprisonment, or the circumstances which led to it. The empirical possibilities within what is known about Paul are significantly more limited.

While a later date for the epistle has found significant support,⁴² little work has been done to address the consequence of this viewpoint for how the contents of the letter stand in relation to its Roman imperial context. We discussed earlier that Ephesians has often been dismissed in imperial-critical discussions because of its perceived accommodation to the empire in the household code, and the possibility of its post-Pauline authorship. In using an eclectic hermeneutic, we hope to demonstrate that a later Roman imperial context, and a post-Pauline author expands some of the possibilities that the speech acts of Ephesians were more plausibly critical of Roman imperial ideology than if Paul wrote the letter. While the plausibility of an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians is impacted by Pauline or non-Pauline

³⁷ Cassidy suggests that the issue of Paul's imprisonment has not been given due consideration in the debates surrounding the authenticity of the authorship of the so-called Deutero-Pauline letters: *Paul in Chains*, 86-87. He also notes that "For individuals to write in Paul's name and bind themselves, figuratively, with Paul's chains, a considerable audacity would be required... What brazenness for anyone who would not merely adopt Paul's identity as an apostle, but also purport to assume Paul's identity as a Roman prisoner!" Cassidy, 87. Cohick agrees that the description of Paul's imprisonment suggests authentic Pauline authorship: *Ephesians*, 6.

³⁸ Verhey & Harvard, *Ephesians*, 24; Black, "Particularities of Ephesians," 70.

³⁹ Fuchs, "I Kneel Before the Father," 15-16.

⁴⁰ Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008), 220-233. See also C. R. Bowen's bibliography with sources listed for, and against an Ephesian imprisonment of the prison epistles: "Are Paul's Prison Letters from Ephesus? (Concluded)," *AJT* 24.2 (1920): 286-287. See also pp. 70-71 fn. 6; 72 fn. 15 above.

⁴¹ The first of these three possibilities (Rome, Caesarea, and Ephesus) are based on empirical data of Paul's life from the account in Acts. If the author of Eph. is not Paul, this leaves open the possibility that Paul's general experience of prison was meant to be invoked, with no particular location echoed, or it may suggest that the post-Pauline author invokes his own empirical imprisonment, in solidarity with what was known from Paul's life. If the latter, no definite place of imprisonment would be identifiable.

⁴² Kreitzer, *Ephesians*, 24.

empirical authorship, what matters most is the portrait of the implied author. More will be said about this in the next chapter.

The implications of a late date, as well as deuteropauline authorship for imperial criticism of Ephesians are twofold: First, it is unknown whether a non-Pauline author would have been critical of the empire. The only litmus test for making such a judgment would be the plausibility that anyone fitting the general characterization of the implied author might have been critical of the empire during these times. The contents of the text itself then deserve the greatest weight, although a lack of direct reference to the Roman Empire, its rulers, or its ideology on a locutionary level does not, in itself, provide strong enough reason to believe that the contents of the epistle contribute nothing by way of imperial criticism. Second, significant aspects of the imperial ideological climate (addressed below) change from Paul's lifetime to the dates proposed for non-Pauline authorship (AD 70-140). Whereas the consequences of a later date of Ephesians have been explored in relation to early Gnosticism,⁴³ and developments in church polity and ecclesiology,⁴⁴ more could be done to address the impact that this has on the Roman imperial life-setting of the epistle. Below, we discuss three areas of the Roman imperial context of Ephesians that can help us understand the different consequences of the proposed dates for the epistle for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. An examination of *maiestas* (treason) laws, imperial cults, and Roman imperial eschatology will reveal that the empirical Roman imperial life-setting of Ephesians would undergo several distinct changes

⁴³ Petr Pokorný, *Der Epheserbrief und die Gnosis: Die Bedeutung des Haupt-Glieder-Gedankens in der entstehenden Kirche* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1965). See also Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser: Ein Kommentar* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1957), 19 fn. 1; Lindemann, *Der Epheserbrief*, 14; Bird, "Ephesians," 271; contra Andrew T. Lincoln and A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 89; Fredrick J. Long, "Roman Imperial Rule under the Authority of Jupiter-Zeus: Political-Religious Contexts and the Interpretation of 'The Ruler of the Authority of the Air' in Ephesians 2:2," in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 129; John Paul Lotz, "The *Homonioia* Coins of Asia Minor and Ephesians 1:21," *TynBul* 50.2 (1999): 188; Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 117 fn. 43.

⁴⁴ Cohick challenges the notion that Ephesians' characterization of the church is post-Pauline by pointing out that a close reading of the text, especially the characterization of a unified Jewish/Gentile community in Eph. 2:11-21, reveals that "Paul is not describing the current state on the ground, as it were, in his congregation. Instead, he is declaring what the cross and resurrection have done to bring Gentiles...into fellowship with God." *Ephesians*, 18. Terminology relating to church polity used by the *Apostolic Fathers* reveals a more developed institutionalization within the church of the late first and early second centuries than is present within any NT text, including either Ephesians or any of the Pastoral Epistles. E.g. *ἐπίσκοπος* occurs 5x in the NT compared to 76x in the *Apostolic Fathers* collection. This fact suggests that Margaret MacDonald's claim that Ephesians reflects a later institutionalized church is less plausible: *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (SNTSMS 60; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 131.

from an earlier to a later date. These changes in context have further consequences for assessing the letter's imperial-critical status.

3.3 ROMAN IMPERIAL CONTEXT

The following sections examine selective elements of the empirical context of the Roman Empire that provides possibilities for informing the implied context of Ephesians. A comprehensive articulation of all aspects of Roman imperial ideology and practices during these eras is not possible here. We will discuss other aspects of Roman imperial ideology and context as necessary in chapters five and six, where a more complete imperial-critical reading of Ephesians will be proposed and analyzed.

Imperial-critical readings of the NT have argued that not only is a Roman imperial context hermeneutically relevant, it is the primary heuristic grid through which one must read the text.⁴⁵ This perspective rejects the notion that the Roman Empire functions as the 'background' to NT, and instead sees it as very much in the foreground—reshaping one's sense of hermeneutical geography.⁴⁶ Objections to this point of view have been offered, especially regarding the dangers of diminishing interpretive focus on the Jewish context of the NT.⁴⁷ These discussions, while helpful in raising caution against over-reading a Roman context at the cost of ignoring what has for long been deemed a foundational behind-the-text component for the NT,⁴⁸ fails to acknowledge the overlap between these contexts in the ancient world. First-century Jewish perspectives were not removed from a Roman imperial context, especially

⁴⁵ This notion is taken from Jeremy Punt, "Empire as Material Setting and Heuristic Grid for New Testament Interpretation: Comments on the Value of Postcolonial Criticism" *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66(1) Art. #330, 7 pages. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v66il.330. While other interpreters who prioritize the Roman imperial context of the NT do not always use the same language, it seems to accurately reflect the overarching sentiment.

⁴⁶ Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), x.

⁴⁷ Denny Burk commends N. T. Wright's emphasis on both Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds but also concludes that "Paul's explicit and implicit allusions to the Septuagint stand as *prima facie* evidence that Paul's theological lexicon was shaped primarily by Judaism...In light of Paul's explicit allusions to the OT, who could be blamed for concluding that Paul's theological lexicon finds its origin in the Judaism in which he was so deeply embedded?" "Is Paul's Gospel Counterimperial? Evaluating the Prospects of the 'Fresh Perspective' for Evangelical Theology," *JETS* 51.2 (June 2008): 319. Cf. Jeremy Punt, who "recogni[zes] the [important] impact of Paul's Jewish identity and its adversarial implications for an imperial worldview, whether incidentally or intentionally connected..." "Negotiating Creation in Imperial Times (Rm 8:18-30)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69.1. Art. #1276, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org.10.4102/hts.v69i1.1276>: 7.

⁴⁸ Even the author of Luke's gospel [often deemed to be a Gentile] frequently engages with the OT narrative, perspectives, and theological trajectories to the point that exposes his dependence upon and engagement with a Jewish context.

considering that Judea was a Roman province and had been Hellenized for some time.⁴⁹ Contemporaneous Jewish writers, like Josephus and Philo, demonstrate the complex negotiations between these two contexts, especially for the first century diaspora. While some tensions existed between aspects of Judaism and its Roman imperial context in the first century, it was also the case that some Jews assimilated into life in the empire without much tension.⁵⁰ A Jewish context is not more relevant than a Roman one, or vice versa.⁵¹ If we are to take the contexts of NT texts seriously, we must acknowledge that they were written from within and into complex socio-historical environments that often negotiated these contexts in varied ways. Our focus on the Roman imperial context of Ephesians is meant to counterbalance the vast number of publications that have placed emphasis on its Jewish context.⁵² An exploration of the Roman imperial context of Ephesians should not supplant an understanding of the epistle's engagement with Jewish motifs/themes; rather, it should supplement it, helping to provide a more robust picture of the life-setting of the epistle than what would be the case without it. Further, admitting that Ephesians exhibits Jewish characteristics, and that it evokes the OT, is not in itself reason to ignore its Roman imperial life-setting. This is especially the case considering that Jewish literature from the Second Temple period maintains obvious Jewish characteristics and theology, while also engaging deeply with its wider Hellenistic environment(s).

Examining the empirical Roman imperial context during the proposed eras of the date of Ephesians is not without significant hurdles. Reconstructing empirical data from the available literary, numismatic,⁵³ and epigraphic source materials is difficult.⁵⁴ Archaeological data may help to better detect what was empirically the case on 'ground-level.' However, major

⁴⁹ Paul B. Duff, *Jesus Followers in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 19.

⁵⁰ This is evident in Jews who served in the Roman armies: A. J. Schoenfeld, "Sons of Israel in Caesar's Service: Jewish Soldiers in the Roman Military," *Shofar* 24.3 (Spring 2006): 115-126.

⁵¹ E.g. Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 2-3. The postcolonial notion of hybridity also points to the reality of the complex formation of identities in colonial contexts: Jayachitra Lalitha, *Re-Reading Household Relationships Christologically: Ephesians, Empire and Egalitarianism* (Biblical Hermeneutics Rediscovered 4. New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2017), 9.

⁵² Ephesians scholars have generally acknowledged connections between the language in the epistle and the OT: Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Use of the OT in Ephesians," *JSNT* 14 (1982): 16-57; Thorsten Moritz, "The Psalms in Ephesians and Colossians," in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, eds. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 181-195; Thorsten Moritz, "The Use of Israel's Scriptures in Ephesians," *TynBul* 46.2 (1995): 393-396; Moritz, *A Profound Mystery*; Ira J. Jolivet Jr., "The Story Behind Ephesians," *Leaven* 14.2 (2006): 56-65.

⁵³ E.g. The intended audiences of propaganda on coins in the Roman Empire, at times, widely varied, as did its effect: see David C. Braund, *Augustus to Nero: A Sourcebook on Roman History 31 BC-AD 68* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1985), 10-11.

⁵⁴ On the value and problems of the varied forms of media, see Braund, 2-13.

lacunae still exist in our understanding of the lives of everyday people. On the other hand, many significant empirical elements of the Roman imperial context of Ephesians can be reconstructed—especially certain aspects of Roman imperial ideology. Whether this ideology reflected what ‘common’ people throughout the empire believed about imperial rule is difficult to fully assess.⁵⁵ There is much less doubt about the way Roman imperial rule hoped to be seen across the empire. This ideology certainly had a real impact upon people, although it is hard to quantify exactly how. Three empirical areas of the Roman imperial setting of Ephesians will be introduced below: *maiestas* laws, imperial cult(s), and Roman imperial eschatology. These areas provide brief, selective snapshots of some significant aspects of the Roman imperial context of Ephesians. After introducing these areas, we will turn our attention to how these aspects changed with the various eras proposed for Ephesians. Acknowledging these changes will assist in assessing the Roman imperial life-setting of Ephesians, and our subsequent constructions of the implied elements of the epistle.

3.3.1 MAIESTAS

Barclay has raised doubts about the dangers of subversion in the imperial climate of the early Roman Empire.⁵⁶ An examination of the presence of *maiestas* (treason) trials in the early empire reveals that the danger of subversive activities (including subversive writings) being prosecuted was higher than some have acknowledged.⁵⁷ Considering these dangers, if imperial-critical statements are to be found in Ephesians, their discovery might be primarily discernible through subtle cues in the subtext. It has already been established, on pragmatic grounds, that it is a necessity to analyze implicit speech acts on the level of the subtext within Ephesians. This was demonstrated in the philosophy of language spelled out in our eclectic hermeneutic.⁵⁸ This section seeks to establish contextual grounds for considering the role of implicit speech acts within Ephesians on the level of subtext. After introducing the concept of *maiestas* in the

⁵⁵ There is reason to believe that the arrival of imperial rule brought about a significant shift in attitude throughout the empire—projecting optimism for people to share in the imperial program: S. Treggiari, “Social Status and Social Legislation,” in Bowman, et. al, *CAH X*, 902-3. The emperor further impacted the lives of people through legislation, religious, and social reforms: Treggiari, 904.

⁵⁶ Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 381.

⁵⁷ Cf. Barclay, 381. Rose Mary Sheldon provides a balanced view by suggesting that while Rome did not have an active police force in the modern sense, Augustus utilized several groups (*speculators*, German bodyguards, praetorian guards, urban cohorts, *vigiles*, and *delatores*) to attend to the security of the emperor and empire at large, reaching far into the provinces. This continued into other imperial regimes: *Kill Caesar: Assassination in the Early Roman Empire* (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 28-41.

⁵⁸ See pp. 55-56 above.

early empire, a brief sketch of the role of *delatores* (informants) and *frumentarii* (secret service-like agents) will be offered. This sketch will demonstrate that changes in methods of subversion detection occurred within the Roman imperial context from the first to the second century. We will give further attention to how each of these might inform the necessity for implicit speech acts in Ephesians from the vantage point of an earlier and later date.

Maiestas is a Latin term that had often been thought to mean ‘greatness, grandeur, dignity, majesty.’⁵⁹ Ando challenges this definition by noting that Roman writers attributed the term nearly exclusively to the Roman people: “The reason for this is revealing: *maiestas* emphatically does not mean mere ‘dignity and grandeur.’ It is, rather, a rare, perhaps even unique abstraction formed from a comparative: it literally means ‘greatness.’”⁶⁰ Within the Roman Empire, it conveyed both a relationship and a quality that was possessed. This included the superiority that the gods had over humanity,⁶¹ as well as the superiority that the Romans had over other peoples.⁶² The “superiority of the Roman people [was] always...measured according to its position compared with the surrounding world.”⁶³ Rome built the concept into treaties made with foreign people groups—those subjected were required to honor the *maiestas* of the Roman people.⁶⁴ The term also appears as shorthand for *crimen laesae maiestatis populi*

⁵⁹ D. P. Simpson, *Cassell’s New Latin Dictionary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 358. See also I. J. Colunga, “Untangling a Historian’s Misinterpretation of Ancient Rome’s Treason Laws.” *The Journal Jurisprudence* 9 (2011), 11. *Maiestas* also had some connections with the idea of *perduellio*, which generally covered military high treason against the state: F. S. Lear, *Treason and Related Offenses in Roman and Germanic Law* (Rice Institute Pamphlet XLII, no. 2; Houston: Rice Institute, 1955), 8; D. Salvo, “*Maiestas*,” in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, eds. R. S. Bagnall, et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 4236. While Salvo suggests that *maiestas* was “an odd Roman concept,” and that there was no sufficient equivalent word in Greek (Salvo, 4236), there are strong reasons for seeing ἀσέβεια as the Greek equivalent to *maiestas* (as well as the related *impietas*): Richard A. Bauman, *Impietas in Principem: A Study of Treason Against the Roman Emperor with Special Reference to the First Century A.D* (Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte. München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1974), 3-7; M. Williams, *Jews in Graeco-Roman Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 107. That the NT and early Christian literature used ἀσέβεια primarily to express “vertically...a lack of reverence for deity and hallowed institutions” (BDAG, “ἀσέβεια”) is instructive. When used in the context of Roman imperial ideology, ἀσέβεια (as an equivalent for *maiestas*) might convey, not merely impiety towards the gods, but treason against the emperor: Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 4.

⁶⁰ Clifford Ando, *Law, Language, and Empire in the Roman Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 74.

⁶¹ H. Wagenvoort, *Roman Dynamism: Studies in Ancient Roman Thought, Language, and Custom*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1947), 123.

⁶² Salvo, “*Maiestas*,” 4236-4238; P. J. Burton, “Alliances,” in *Conflict in Ancient Greece and Rome: The Definitive Political, Social, and Military Encyclopedia*, eds. S. E. Phang, et.al (Vol. 2; Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2016), 694; D. J. Bederman, *International Law in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 190-191; Richard A. Bauman, *Human Rights in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 2000), 31; Horace states that “the *maiestas* of the *imperium* stretches from one end of the world to the other.” Cited in E. S. Gruen, “The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus,” in *CAH X*, 147.

⁶³ Wagenvoort, *Roman Dynamism*, 124.

⁶⁴ Wagenvoort, 124.

Romani,⁶⁵ which amounts to a crime against the “diminution of the reputation and authority of the majesty of the supreme status of Rome,”⁶⁶ what Cicero claims, equaled that of the gods.⁶⁷ While *maiestas* laws were applied as early as 103 BC, they had their roots as far back as the third century BC,⁶⁸ and new ways of applying them were developed under the Principate. The most notable changes were that *maiestas* charges, which were once primarily an offense against the Roman people as a whole, were subsequently seen as an offense against the emperor.⁶⁹ The concept came to represent treason,⁷⁰ i.e. diminishing the *maiestas* of the Roman people, the empire, and its emperor, although it was also much broader than that.⁷¹

All sorts of subversive conversation, speech, or actions could be classified as *maiestas*: the writing of defamatory poetic verses, selling a statue of the emperor, spreading slanderous stories in the army, breaking an oath sworn in the name of Augustus, carrying a coin bearing the image of Tiberius into the latrine,⁷² murdering a slave in front of a statue of Augustus, changing one’s clothes beside a statue of Augustus, allowing oneself to be elected into office on the anniversary of Augustus’ election,⁷³ criticizing the words or actions of the emperor, and slandering the imperial family.⁷⁴ *Maiestas* laws were also applied for refusing to swear an oath to the ‘divine’ emperor,⁷⁵ and for using oracles to predict the emperor’s fate (especially his

⁶⁵ Or sometimes *Maiestas minuta populi Romani*: ODCW, 446.

⁶⁶ Salvo, “*Maiestas*,” 4237; Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 56.

⁶⁷ Cicero *Ad Quirit.* 18, 25, as cited in Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 75 fn. 38.

⁶⁸ Lear, *Treason*, 14.

⁶⁹ Jill Harries, *Law and Crime in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77; Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 56; Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament: History, Culture and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Vol. 1; New York: De Gruyter, 1982), 326. “...Under Augustus the definition of treasonous activity was expanded [compared to Republican eras].” Sheldon, *Kill Caesar*, 40.

⁷⁰ Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 56; CNLD, 358; OLD, 1065.

⁷¹ Richard A. Bauman, *The Crimen Maiestatis in the Roman Republic and Augustan Principate* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1967), vii.

⁷² Suetonius, Tiberius, 58; Dio 58.2 as cited in Yanir Shohat, “Some Remarks on *Maiestas* Trials in the Annals of Tacitus,” *Studies in History* [Scripta Hierosolymitana] 23 (1972): 57, ftns. 23-24.

⁷³ J. W. Welch, “Miracles, *Maleficium*, and *Maiestas* in the Trial of Jesus” in *Jesus and Archeology*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 372.

⁷⁴ C. W. Chilton, “The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate,” *JRS* 45 (1955), 7; Ian Rock, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans and Roman Imperialism: An Ideological Analysis of the Exordium [Rom. 1:1-17]* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012), 73-76. See also Sheldon, *Kill Caesar*, 40; J. E. Lendon, *Empire of Honor: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118.

⁷⁵ D. G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 97. Koester suggests that *maiestas* laws also applied to those refusing participation in the imperial cult, and that it later led to “the juridical basis for the persecution of Christians.” Although, he does not cite his evidence for either of these having been the case: *New Testament*, 326. This stands in contrast to Millar’s claim that the Imperial cult “was not of any real significance” in persecution of Christians: “The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions,” in *Les Cultes Des Souverains dans l’Empire Romain*, ed. W. den Boer (Entretiens sur l’Antiquite Classique 19; Geneva:

death).⁷⁶ According to Sheldon, “People perceived as the ‘opposition’ were prosecuted for libel, magic practices, and astrological consultation...”⁷⁷ Tiberius was known for having revived *maiestas* trials and for applying them in a wide range of cruel ways.⁷⁸ While Caligula seems to have begun his reign by scaling back the previous laws under Tiberius, this reprieve did not last long. Dio Cassius reports an incident under Caligula whereby a man was convicted of *maiestas* for selling hot water.⁷⁹ Claudius also suspended the charges early in his reign, although he may have later revived it in the case of Lucius Vitellius.⁸⁰ There is no indication that the laws ceased entirely under Nero;⁸¹ instead they may have become even more elevated.⁸² After the reign of the Julio-Claudian emperors near the end of the first century AD, there is evidence that Domitian continued these trials,⁸³ and that “under later [post-Augustan] emperors the penalties grew harsher.”⁸⁴ The severity of *maiestas* charges varied in the post-Julio

Fondation Hardt, 1973): 163. Charges could also be brought against a person for rejecting the divinity of a deified family member, e.g. Nero’s deified wife Poppaea: Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 106, 154-155.

⁷⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.58 as cited in Shohat, “Some Remarks on Maiestas Trials,” 54. See also Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 39; Allen M. Ward, Fritz M. Heichelheim, and Cedric A. Yeo, *A History of the Roman People* (6th Ed. London/New York: Routledge, 2016), 300.

⁷⁷ Sheldon, *Kill Caesar*, 39.

⁷⁸ Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 57—referencing Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 57.19 and Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 3.58. *Maiestas* accusations were involved in over 100 trials during the reign of Tiberius: *Miracles*, 372; Rose Mary Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities in Ancient Rome: Trust in the Gods, but Verify* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 152; Shohat, “Some Remarks on Maiestas Trials,” 52. Wiedemann suggests that while Tiberius was present in Rome, *maiestas* trials were restrained, but that they flourished later in his reign as the result of his absence from the city of Rome, and his lack of control over them: “Tiberius to Nero,” 212, 250. Further evidence exists that, even though Tacitus gives the impression that *maiestas* trials may have been in abeyance during the years of AD 25-29, “they were used in far greater excess than is depicted in Tacitus’ historical narrative.” Shohat, “Some Remarks on Maiestas Trials,” 61.

⁷⁹ Cassidy, 59-60—in reference to Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.12.

⁸⁰ Cassidy, 60-61. See especially Dio 60.3.5ff, 4.1ff: cited in Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 6 fn. 27. In post Julio-Claudian eras, “the doctrine of manifest guilt...constituted such a vital substitute for the *crimen maiestatis* during periods of abolition...and Domitian’s use of his censorial potestas...[is] yet another substitute...” Bauman, 22.

⁸¹ There was a period of abeyance under Nero until AD 62, and possibly once more afterward until being revived again in 65: Bauman, 141, 150. During early eras of his reign, Nero was known to have “showed himself tolerant of abuse, and especially injurious words and pamphlets.” Bauman, 142.

⁸² Cassidy, 60-61. M. T. Griffin assumes the continuation of *maiestas* trials under Nero: While he promised initially that trivial *maiestas* trials, which were prevalent under his adoptive father Claudius, would cease, Nero’s promise did not hold throughout the duration of his reign: *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London: Routledge, 1984): 53. Nero’s reintroduction of *maiestas* laws in 62 A.D. may have been one means of eliminating his opposition: Wiedemann, “Tiberius to Nero,” 249, especially following several conspiracies against him: W. Eck, “Emperor, Senate and Magistrates,” in Bowmen, et. al. *CAH XI*, 217; see also Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 143-144, 210.

⁸³ Eck, “Emperor, Senate and Magistrates,” 217; Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 60-61; Bauman, 159. Vespasian and Titus abolished the charge: Bauman, 157.

⁸⁴ Sheldon, *Kill Caesar*, 40.

Claudian eras.⁸⁵ They went into abeyance during various periods,⁸⁶ especially from the time of Nerva to that of Marcus Aurelius, although suspects could be tried under other crimes for similar accusations.⁸⁷

Particularly relevant for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians is the notion that *maiestas* charges were extended to cover dangerously defamatory writings.⁸⁸ This notion was applied under Tiberius in the prosecution of Cremutius Cordus, who had previously published his works under Augustus without incurring censure.⁸⁹ Cordus had praised Brutus, and called Cassius ‘the last Roman.’⁹⁰ Dio adds that Cordus’ downfall was the result of failing to afford Julius Caesar and Augustus due respect.⁹¹ He was prosecuted for praise rather than blame, indicating that praise of a person deemed unworthy of it *counted as* subversive speech in some contexts during the early empire.⁹² According to Kapust, “For the law to be readily applicable,

⁸⁵ The reigns of Vespasian and his son Titus contrasts with those that implemented severe *maiestas* trials. Vespasian reversed some of the convictions under Nero and made himself more widely accessible without fear of accusations: M. Griffin, “The Flavians,” in *CAH XI*, eds. A. Bowman, P. Garnsey, and D. Rathbone (2nd Ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7, 24]. Titus punished certain *delatores* with slavery, deportation, or sending them to the colosseum, while also outlawing accusations of ἀσέβεια: Griffin, 50-51. Nerva [A.D. 96-98] released all those who had been on trial for *maiestas* under Domitian, showing greater clemency: M. Griffin, “Nerva to Hadrian,” in Bowman et. al, *CAH XI*, 87). Nerva’s heir, Trajan, seemed to have maintained a similar policy to that of his adoptive father: Griffin, “Nerva to Hadrian,” 106, 129.

⁸⁶ See especially Bauman, 191-223.

⁸⁷ Bauman, 105, see also 21. Literary freedoms were expanded during these eras as well: Speyer, *Büchervernichtung*, 73, although Torah scrolls were burned during the Bar Kokhba revolt: Speyer, 74.

⁸⁸ M. I. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern* (Rev. Ed.; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 151. See also Tac. *Ann.* 1.72.3-4; Dio 55.4.3. Tacitus’ own approach towards the ruling emperors seems to contrast that of Cordus, although perhaps because of the dangers of defamatory writing during his own lifetime: Daniel J. Kapust, “The Case of Cremutius Cordus: Tacitus on Censorship and Writing under Despotic Rulers.” in *Censorship Moments: Reading Texts in the History of Censorship and Freedom of Expression*, ed. G. Kemp (Textual Moments in the History of Political Thought; London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 18. Censorship was present during the Roman imperial period, especially through the Roman practice of book burning: Kapust, 18; Bauman, 146; Speyer, *Büchervernichtung*, 56-76. This fact challenges Barclay’s notion above.

⁸⁹ Harries, *Law and Crime*, 77; Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 157; Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 99-104. See Tac. *Ann.* 4.34-6; Sue. *Aug.* 35; Dio 57.24.2-4. The work viewed by Augustus may have been a different work than the one that Cordus was accused of *maiestas*, although another possibility is that the times had changed and so what was once previously not considered to fall under the crime had been applied differently under later emperors: Bauman, 103.

⁹⁰ W. W. Flint, “The Delatores in the Reign of Tiberius, as Described by Tacitus,” *CJ* 8.1 (1912): 41. Finley notes that during the early Roman Empire, many republican sentiments were still prevalent, and some wrote histories which clashed with “official and popular views.” *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, 145. Early emperors often deemed sympathy with certain Republican personalities as treason: Wolfgang Speyer, *Büchervernichtung und Zensur des Geistes Bei Heiden, Juden und Christen* (Stuttgart: Heirseemann, 1981), 62. It is also possible that Cordus was prosecuted, not just for his writings, but for “other grounds” as well: Finley, 147.

⁹¹ Dio 57.24.2-4, as referenced in R. S. Rogers, “The Case of Cremutius Cordus,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 96 (1965): 352. See also Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 102.

⁹² Kapust, 20.

Cordus' praise of Brutus and Cassius would need to be construed as [my note—*counted as*, in the sense of a speech act...] blame of Augustus or Tiberius."⁹³ Kapust also notes that "even praise might be read as blame and criticism."⁹⁴ Cordus' words counted as "the most radical of political claims, namely that the Republic *was* Rome and that with the fall of the Republic Rome is spiritually and politically dead."⁹⁵ In light of the *maiestas* accusations against him,⁹⁶ his writings were burned,⁹⁷ and he committing suicide by starving himself. The case of Cremutius Cordus may be an extreme example of the application of *maiestas* laws in the early empire.⁹⁸ It did not reflect the practices of all imperial regimes.⁹⁹ It does reveal that some potentially subversive writings *counted as* treason within the early Roman Empire, and therefore were subjected to *maiestas* laws. It also demonstrates that some written works, deemed acceptable under certain imperial regimes, could later be reread as having subversive intent and be subjected to *maiestas* allegations. To complicate things even further, the censorship of the treasonous works could also be overturned at a later date, as was the case with Cordus' *Annals*.¹⁰⁰ The charges brought against him may have even been the result of a

⁹³ Kapust, 20. There also seemed to be movement towards greater sensitivity to subversive speech during the reign of Tiberius, previous public criticism of Julius Caesar, and Augustus were never tried for *maiestas*: Kapust, 22. Cordus' defense was that his writings did not constitute blame of Augustus or Tiberius—even within the first century there were battles over what counted as a subversive speech act. E.g. titles of kingship mattered greatly in the ancient world, and it seemed ill advised to claim to be a king or serve a king if Rome had not given its stamp of approval. Bestowing lofty titles (e.g. King of Kings) on his and Cleopatra's children made Antony guilty of *maiestas*—in some ways parallel to Josephus' account of Archelaus: M. Reinhold, *Studies in Classical History and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56-8. Antony further insisted upon being worshipped as a divine king in the guise of Dionysus: Koester, *New Testament*, 367.

⁹⁴ Kapust, 23.

⁹⁵ Kapust, 22.

⁹⁶ Salvo, "*Maiestas*," 4238, F. H. Cramer, "Bookburning and Censorship in Ancient Rome: A Chapter from the History of Freedom of Speech," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6.2 (1945): 193.

⁹⁷ Rogers, "Cremutius Cordus," 352; Sheldon, *Intelligence*, 157; Speyer, *Büchervernichtung*, 65. Not all of Cremutius Cordus' writings were necessarily burned, it may have been the case that only the work in question, the *Annals*, was censored. This raises the possibility that only a part of an author's corpus could incur censorship, without demanding that other 'safe' works from the same author be given the same fate: Cramer, "Bookburning," 171 fn. 60; see also Speyer, 87.

⁹⁸ It has been suggested that other charges contributed more significantly to his arrest than did that of treasonous writings: Dirk Rohmann, "Book Burning as Conflict Management in the Roman Empire (213 BCE – 200 CE)," *Ancient Society* 43 (2013): 127.

⁹⁹ Rohmann, "Book Burning," 135 (in reference to Tac. Ann. 4.34.5): "Augustus was deliberately tolerant towards literature containing reproaches against himself," whereas Domitian maintained policies like that of Tiberius.

¹⁰⁰ Suetonius, *Caligula*, 16.1; Dio 57.24.4, cited in Cramer, "Bookburning," 194. Surviving editions of his work were later recommended by Quintilian but seemed to omit the passages that were originally accused of treason, see Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.104 (cited in Rohmann, "Book Burning," 129). On the other hand, Rohmann notes that the omission may not have been the result of state censorship: Rohmann, 129.

misinterpretation of his writings.¹⁰¹ He may not have intended subversion, but his writings were interpreted that way nonetheless.¹⁰² According to Sheldon, “censorship [among the intellectuals] became a crucial method in maintaining state security.”¹⁰³

A question emerges as to whether cases like these applied universally, regardless of one’s social status, or whether *maiestas* laws were only enacted against the social elite.¹⁰⁴ The literary data suggests that, while punishment differed according to a person’s social status,¹⁰⁵ accusations could be brought by anyone, including women, slaves, and freedman.¹⁰⁶ Torture was applied not only to slaves, but also to free men, including senators.¹⁰⁷ As early as the 5th century BC, defamatory songs, which constituted one of “the only procedure(s) available to plebeians at that time to express public criticism of their rulers,” was punished with the death penalty.¹⁰⁸ Even the dead were not exempt from being tried for *maiestas*.¹⁰⁹ Charges could

¹⁰¹ Bauman suggests that Cordus may have been tried due to his citation of Brutus, who had already been condemned, “...we might have here the origin of the rule that the citation of someone condemned for treason was a reflection on the condemning authority.’ *Impietas in Principem*, 102.

¹⁰² See note 35 above; Tacitus gives an account of Cordus’ defense of himself whereby he denies that he had been irreverent towards the emperors: *Annals* IV, 34.

¹⁰³ Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 157. Cf. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, 172, who cautions against overestimating censorship in the ancient world, “censorship in the narrow sense was merely an occasional off-stage diversion.”

¹⁰⁴ Finley makes a similar point regarding censorship in ancient Rome: *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, 149, 154.

¹⁰⁵ Sheldon, 156.

¹⁰⁶ See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.168, *War* 2.179, *Dio* 59.8.2 as cited in Shohat, “Some Remarks on *Maiestas* Trials,” 57 fn. 22. See also “Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 97-98; Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 171. Some *maiestas* charges were applied more exclusively to the social elite, whose resistance to autocracy was an attempt to reestablish senatorial and magisterial power: Herbert Musurillo, “Christian and Political Martyrs in the Early Roman Empire: A Reconsideration,” in *Assimilation et Résistance à la Culture Gréco-Romaine Dans le Monde Ancien: Travaux du VI Congrès International d’Etudes Classiques*, ed. D. M. Pippidi (Paris: Editura Academiei, 1976), 333.

¹⁰⁷ Harries, *Law and Crime*, 79; see also Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 98.

¹⁰⁸ Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, 157.

¹⁰⁹ Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 98; Bauman, 141.

result in the confiscation of property,¹¹⁰ suicide, exile,¹¹¹ and *damnatio memoriae*—the blotting out of one’s name from public records, including forbidding images of the person to be shown at their funeral.¹¹² This practice offered “the final and most potent symbolic gesture of authority available.”¹¹³ On the other hand, the likelihood that subversive literary works possessed by less significant people in the Roman Empire would have been prosecuted under *maiestas* trials is less certain.¹¹⁴ *Maiestas* laws applied fairly broadly to peoples throughout the Roman Empire, and so it is not implausible to imagine these works being held to the same standard as those of the more socially elite. *Damnatio memoriae* may have primarily applied in cases where the person was of high status. Assassinated emperors who were considered enemies of the state were subject to having their names blotted out through *damnatio memoriae*. Nero and Domitian provide the clearest examples from the first century AD.¹¹⁵ The concept affirms “the power of

¹¹⁰ Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 98; Chilton, “The Roman Law of Treason,” 79. Hebrews 10:34 might allude to the fact that early Jewish Christians had their property confiscated in light of *maiestas* accusations: τὴν ἀπαγγὴν τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ὑμῶν μετὰ χαρᾶς προσεδέξασθε. On the other hand, it is uncertain whether the confiscation of property mentioned in Hebrews is due to legal acts against Christians, or the results of mob violence: Larry Hurtado, *Why on Earth did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 2016), 63. Some have read the passage against the backdrop of various historical circumstances present in the Roman empire during the first century: 1) the expulsion of Jews by Claudius: George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 359; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991), 300; F. F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Rev. Ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 268-270. 2) Parallels with Philo’s description of the treatment of Alexandrian Jews: James Moffat, *Hebrews* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 155. 3) Pre-AD 64 situation in Rome, or those who escaped the brunt of Nero’s persecution: Harold Attridge, *Hebrews* (SP; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 299.

¹¹¹ Exile was, perhaps, the most common punishment for treason: Wiedemann, “Tiberius to Nero,” 250.

¹¹² The case of M. Scribonius Libo Drusus stands out: “Vibius attacked the undefended Libo one charge at a time, and even produced letters in Libo’s own hand, evidence that would have been incriminating by any standard. Some were harmless enough, but one stood out as particularly damning, in which suspicious marks were appended to the names of certain members of the imperial house and to certain senators. Libo’s slaves were now interrogated, and Tacitus mistakenly makes this out to be not only a particularly vicious and clever ruse by Tiberius, but something entirely novel. Hope now deserted Libo, who committed suicide, though this did not stop the trial from proceeding. At trial’s end, Tiberius, probably in all sincerity given his intervention for leniency elsewhere, asserted that he would have spared Libo. After the trial, the senate took some extraordinary measures: it decreed that Libo’s image was not to be carried in his family’s funeral processions, forbade the cognomen Drusus in the Scribonian family, decreed a day of supplication, made offerings to Jupiter, Mars, and Concord, and decreed the day of Libo’s suicide a holiday (dies festus).” Stephen H. Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions: Prosecutors and Informants from Tiberius to Domitian* (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), 159.

¹¹³ P. Parshall, “The Art of Memory and the Passion,” *The Art Bulletin* 81.3 (1999): 458.

¹¹⁴ Rohmann, “Book Burning,” 128-129.

¹¹⁵ L. Hackworth Petersen, “The Presence of *Damnatio Memoriae* in Roman Art,” *Notes in the History of Art* 30.2 (2011): 1; E. R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Monumenta Graeca et Romana; Leiden: Brill, 2004); Griffin, “The Flavians,” 55. *Damnatio memoriae* was not always associated with *maiestas*. There were many other reasons for implementing *damnatio memoriae* within the Roman Empire: H. I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 42-43. Whether such ‘blotting out’ of a person’s name through *damnatio memoriae* was actually successful is unclear, the concept might have had the opposite effect of that it had intended—drawing to memory the very name which was being removed:

images on the collective memory and, by extension, the political imperative to overwrite it.”¹¹⁶ Crucifixion, on the other hand, was used to punish some who were convicted, indicating that cases of *maiestas* applied to non-citizens.¹¹⁷ While punishment for treasonous activity (often evident in *maiestas* trials) maintained some uniformity from the first until the third century AD,¹¹⁸ the dangers associated with treason in the early empire appear to escalate with the development of two groups responsible for the collection of intelligence throughout the empire: *delatores* and *frumentarii*. The growing roles that each of these groups played during the early empire can help to demonstrate some significant changes within the Roman imperial context between the first and second centuries AD.¹¹⁹

Hackworth Petersen, “*Damnatio Memoriae* in Roman Art,” 1; Parshall, “Art of Memory,” 458. A similar effect has been noted of book burning, Rohmann, “Book Burning,” 130.

¹¹⁶ Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 141.

¹¹⁷ H. W. Tajra, *The Trial of St. Paul: A Juridical Exegesis of the Second Half of the Acts of the Apostles*. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1989), 38. Gospel portrayals of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion have been viewed through the lens of *maiestas*, especially as it relates to Roman laws forbidding magic: Welch, “Miracles,” 374; see also Parshall, “Art of Memory,” 459; Sedition was also included in the original charges, Clarke, “Origins,” 866. Rogers’ comments provide some context for the seriousness with which magic and astrology were taken within the early Roman Empire, noting that the consultation of astrologers was viewed in the same light as treason: “Cremutius Cordus,” 354. *Maiestas* charges surround Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus in John 18:33-19:16. Pilate’s inquiry into Jesus as βασιλεὺς paired with the injunction given by the Ἰουδαῖοι in John 19:12, ἐὰν τοῦτον ἀπολύσῃς, οὐκ εἶ φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος. πᾶς ὁ βασιλεὺς ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν ἀντιλέγει τῷ Καίσαρι (‘if you release this [man], you are not a friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself king speaks against Caesar’) initially raises tensions between Pilate as a representative of Roman imperial rule and the βασιλεία of Jesus (Jn. 18:36). In the end, while Pilate seems concerned with *maiestas* charges, Jesus’ differentiation of the kind of kingdom of which he is a king leads Pilate to the conclusion that he is not guilty of *maiestas* (Jn. 18:38-19:5). Pilate eventually crucifies him under these charges anyways, as is reflected in the inscription placed on the cross of Jesus (Jn. 19:19-22), as well as in the fact that crucifixion itself “graphically illustrate[d] the inevitable end...that began with resistance to Roman rule.” Tom Thatcher, “I Have Conquered the World: The Death of Jesus and the End of Empire in the Gospel of John,” in *Empire in the New Testament*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 147. Welch notes two others who see *maiestas* charges present within the trials of Jesus: Gerhard Lohfink, *The Last Days of Jesus* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1984), 50; Simon Legasse, *The Trial of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1997); Welch, “Miracles,” 374 fn. 80. Chilton finds more complexity in assessing the trials of Jesus from the vantage point of *maiestas* in light of the fact that Jesus was not a Roman citizen: “The Roman Law of Treason”, 77, although while the punishments differed from citizen to non-citizen, both were subject to *maiestas* laws: Salvo, “*Maiestas*,” 4238. Ferguson is more vague in stating that “The charge against Jesus for which he was crucified was a political charge.” *Backgrounds*, 47. A context of *maiestas* has also been discerned in the life of Paul, especially in his trial before Felix in Acts 24, and assumptions behind his execution: Christopher Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76-78; Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 55. According to Rock, slave names listed in Rom. 16 is not unrelated to treason charges against Paul, since it may indicate that “the so-called ‘protective code’ of Romans may have been cracked [and subversion detected].” “Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” 77, see also 51 fn. 10, also 77-78, esp. 77 fn 149). Further, Tertullian’s comments (*Apol.* 10.1, 28.2) seem to indicate that professing Christianity would also have been treated as *maiestas*: Salvo, “*Maiestas*,” 4238. Although, Tertullian’s *Apologeticus* reflects a time later than Ephesians (c. AD 198?): R. D. Sider, *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire* (Selections from the Fathers of the Church 2; Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 2001), 6.

¹¹⁸ R. S. Rogers, “Treason in the Early Empire,” *JRS* 49 (1959): 90.

¹¹⁹ For an extensive bibliography of intelligence agencies during the Roman Empire, see Rose Mary Sheldon, *Espionage in the Ancient World: An Annotated Bibliography* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003), 94-147.

Delatores

Delatores likely have their origin at the beginning of the Roman imperial period, although their Republican precursors may have been the *quadruplator* and *index*.¹²⁰ While it is difficult to pinpoint a singular definition of what a *delator* did, they emerged within a wide array of contexts: a senator who brought about accusations, a freedman who denounced others to the emperor, a witness who embellished testimony, an informant who identified sought-after individuals, or an accuser who sought to take advantage of others.¹²¹ Most often, they were thought of as informants or accusers.¹²² They also often initiated *maiestas* accusations,¹²³ providing one means of exposing subversive activity.¹²⁴ *Delatores* came from every social stratum.¹²⁵ One reason for their interest in *maiestas* charges was the rule that, in these cases, slaves were allowed to testify against their masters.¹²⁶ This may have increased the likelihood of securing a conviction. Augustus and Tiberius were known to have sold “slaves to the imperial treasury in order to be able to inform without penalty.”¹²⁷ Furthermore, the “servile evidence rule” also assisted in the detection of other related crimes.¹²⁸

¹²⁰ Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 9. While Sinnigen suggests that “delation is a constant factor in the history of internal security not only during the Republic, but throughout both the Principate and Late Empire,” it is unclear whether he has significant evidence of *delatores* prior to the establishment of the Imperial period: “The Roman Secret Service,” *CJ* 57.2 (1961), 66. Rutledge, on the other hand, states that “the noun *delator* does not appear at any time under the Republic with the sense that it did during the empire.” *Imperial Inquisitions*, 9.

¹²¹ Rutledge, 9.

¹²² Sinnigen, “Roman Secret Service,” 66. Rutledge suggests that “one would be hard pressed to find a better or more significant example of an informant under the Roman Empire than Judas Iscariot.” *Imperial Inquisitions*, 3.

¹²³ See especially Stephen Rutledge’s monumental work on the role of *delatores* within the early Roman Empire. He provides a detailed catalogue of 109 *delatores* identified in contemporary Greco-Roman literature. His catalogue only lists *delatores* who are named in the ancient source material. This includes only a small fraction of the actual number of *delatores*, since there were certainly many others that were never named in the extant literature, although how many exactly is difficult to determine: *Imperial Inquisitions*, 185-290. See also: Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 97-98; Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 152-153; W. G. Sinnigen, “The Roman Secret Service,” and “The Origins of the ‘Frumentarii,’” *MAAR* 27 (1962): 211, 213-224.

¹²⁴ Sinnigen, “Roman Secret Service,” 66.

¹²⁵ Rutledge, 22-34. There seemed to have been a shift from the reign of Augustus, when slaves were punished for informing on their masters, to later emperors, where greater protection was in place for a slave who became a *delator*: Rutledge, 34.

¹²⁶ Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 21, 173-176. Although, when *maiestas* charges sometimes went into abeyance under new rulers, slaves often incurred severe punishment for having accused their masters of the charge: Bauman, 56.

¹²⁷ Rutledge, 34. Private owners also used slaves that “served as their ‘secret people’ (*delatores*).” A. Bodor, “The Control of Slaves during the Roman Empire,” in *Forms of Control and Subordination in Antiquity*, eds. T. Yuge and M. Doi (International Symposium for Studies on Ancient Worlds, Tokyo; Leiden: Brill, 1988), 405.

¹²⁸ Bauman, 21.

The presence of a *delator* was required at all trials brought before provincial governors.¹²⁹ While many of them may not have been officially commissioned by imperial authorities, they contributed, albeit moderately, toward perpetuating the oppressive nature of Roman imperial rule.¹³⁰ At times, *delatores* were given significant rewards for successful prosecution (especially in cases of *maiestas*) by obtaining up to one fourth of the defendant's property.¹³¹ This raised the possibility of abuse of power,¹³² which provided one of the reasons for the bad reputation that they received in some contemporary literature.¹³³ They faced some consequences for losing a prosecution,¹³⁴ although their prospects of winning must have been promising enough to make it worth their while: "their fortunes rested on it."¹³⁵ The presence of *delatores* in the early empire shows how Roman law increased incentives for prosecuting *maiestas* charges.

One important question to ask for our purposes is whether early Christians were susceptible to accusations brought by a *delator*. Barclay suggests that Christians were insignificant in the eyes of the Romans and that their affairs were not of any interest to Roman imperial authorities.¹³⁶ If so, it may be unlikely that Christians would have been targeted. On the other hand, in trying criminal cases, *delatores* were not necessarily motivated by the same factors as Roman imperial authorities, even when *maiestas* charges were in view. One need not have a reputation for sedition in order to be targeted by a *delator*, who often sought opportunity over actual offense. Early Christians may have been particularly vulnerable to accusations, considering the rumors already circulating about their gatherings and practices. Christians were

¹²⁹ Williams, *Persecution*, 170.

¹³⁰ Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 4.

¹³¹ Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *History of the Roman People*, 265; Sheldon, *Kill Caesar*, 195; Rutledge, 36. One case included an award of 5,000,000 sesterces, which may not have been uncommon if one successfully prosecuted a senator. To put this amount in perspective, a person was said to be required to have 1,000,000 sesterces in order to qualify for senatorial status: *Imperial Inquisitions* 36-37.

¹³² Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 97; Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 152; Rutledge, 12.

¹³³ Rutledge, 6-8, 35. Cf. Sheldon suggests that even though they have a bad reputation in contemporary sources, *delatores* may have had a wide range of motives for prosecution, not all of which were 'immoral:' *Kill Caesar*, 5, see also 37-40, 194-195.

¹³⁴ They would be labeled a *calumniator* [false accuser] (Rutledge, 12), and also faced the loss of financial, political, and social status: Rutledge, 36. Some were punished for perjury: Shohat, "Some Remarks on Maiestas Trials," 57, others may have been handed over to imperial authorities: Sheldon, *Kill Caesar*, 6.

¹³⁵ Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 152.

¹³⁶ Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 380-381. In the same vein, Sheldon notes that it was those of high political, family or social status that had to watch what they said and did: *Kill Caesar*, 48.

sometimes detested by the wider Roman populace,¹³⁷ and were accused of sinister activities and crimes. In general, Christians were under a greater suspicion than most.¹³⁸ They could have been targeted by a savvy *delator* who saw their ignominy as a unique opportunity. Furthermore, not all early Christians were of lower social status,¹³⁹ and some owned slaves.¹⁴⁰ Larger homes and tenement buildings (as well as shops within them), which provided meeting space for Christian ἐκκλησίαι, functioned as both public and private spaces.¹⁴¹ The public nature of these gatherings could have exposed the community to more serious accusations from a *delator*. Disrepute alone may not have provided enough motivation for a *delator* to bring accusations, but when financial incentives were in place, along with the ability to potentially secure the accused's slave(s) as potential witnesses, the combination of such factors may well have attracted the attention of a *delator*. Christians who possessed higher social standing might have been particularly vulnerable, although we must not dismiss the possibility that lower status Christians could also have been targeted. Croy claims that “the threat to Christians’ lives pervaded the first three centuries, with the exception, perhaps, of the latter part of the third century. Even when martyrdom was not being carried out, all that stood between Christians and the executioner was the lack of a *delator* (an accuser).”¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Some Jews and Christians were Roman citizens. For our purposes here, we simply intend to highlight the wider non-Christian, non-Jewish Roman population's attitude toward Christians.

¹³⁸ In contrast to Jews, Christians were denied exemptions from the prohibition of the gathering of formal associations: E. Kobel, *Dining with John: Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Forth Gospel in its Historical and Cultural Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 283; see also Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 144. Since associations were rarely approved for the provinces (Kobel, 284), Christian gatherings in Asia Minor ran an even greater risk of being under suspicion than in places where associations were deemed less threatening. The Romans may have made distinctions between Jews and Christians as early as the reign of Nero, although it is more likely that no such distinction existed during the mid-first century: Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented the Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 139. On the other hand, the situation for Jews in the empire changed after the destruction of the temple in AD 70, partly evident in the fact that the *fiscus Iudaicus*, a tax normally collected for the Jerusalem temple, was maintained by Domitian but transferred to support the temple on the Capitoline hill in Rome: Griffin, “The Flavians,” 27. *Delators* were used to prosecute Jews who refused payment: Griffin, 74. The mistreatment of some Jews under Domitian are well attested in the ancient sources: Griffin, 74-75. Nerva later reversed the *fiscus Iudaicus*: Griffin, “Nerva to Hadrian,” 92.

¹³⁹ David A. Fiensy, “What Would You Do for a Living?” in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social-Science Approaches*, eds. Anthony J. Blasi, Jean Duhaime, and Paul-Andre Turcotte (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 572.

¹⁴⁰ Slave ownership transcended social classes: J. A. Harrill, “Slavery,” in *DNTB*, 1126. Paul's letter to Philemon and the NT household codes also provide evidence that some early Christians owned slaves.

¹⁴¹ Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 140;

¹⁴² Clayton Croy, Review of Candida R. Moss, *The Myth of Persecution*, *RBL* 10 (Oct 2013). Some balance is necessary in discussing persecutions of Christians in the early empire. There is evidence that Christianity was afforded a great deal of protection by Roman authorities so long as they were not recognized as distinct from Judaism: T.G. Tucker, *Life in the Roman World of Nero and St. Paul* (New York: MacMillan, 1910), 383.

Frumentarii

In contrast to *delatores*, who may not have had any official ties with imperial authorities, the *frumentarii* were an organized group within the Roman military.¹⁴³ Originally in charge of grain distributions, they may have initially formed under Domitian, but their function expanded substantially after the reign of the Flavian rulers came to an end (AD 96).¹⁴⁴ While the work carried out by the *frumentarii* were likely done by other agents during Julio-Claudian eras,¹⁴⁵ their development in the later parts of the first century and the beginning of the second century AD marked a noted shift in organized Roman intelligence. Their work as grain distributors and letter couriers may have been a cover¹⁴⁶ for their most notable role as “spies in the service of the central government.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, Sinnigen aptly describes them as a “Roman secret service.”¹⁴⁸ Commissioned from within Roman legions abroad,¹⁴⁹ they were centralized within the *Castra Peregrina* near the Caelian Hill in Rome, although their work extended out to the provinces.¹⁵⁰ They were known to dress in civilian clothes¹⁵¹ and to instigate seditious conversation against the emperor in an effort to uncover treasonous sentiments.¹⁵² They flourished under Hadrian, contributing to a wider fear of spies.¹⁵³ One major conclusion that can be drawn from their work is that “emperors found it perfectly possible to operate an empire-wide intelligence service to ensure their own security, and that it

¹⁴³ Sinnigen, “Frumentarii;” Sinnigen, “Roman Secret Service,” 66-68; Sheldon, “Intelligence Activities,” 250-257; N. J. E. Austin, and N. B. Rankov, *Exploratio: Military and Political Intelligence in the Roman World from the Second Punic War to the Battle of Adrianople* (London: Routledge, 1995), 136-137.

¹⁴⁴ Sinnigen, “Frumentarii,” 223.

¹⁴⁵ “The conclusion seems unavoidable, that, before the Flavian dynasty, other organizations at the capital assumed what later were to become typical functions of the *frumentarii*, whose use was as yet unknown to the central administration.” Sinnigen, “Frumentarii,” 221.

¹⁴⁶ Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 252.

¹⁴⁷ Sinnigen, “Roman Secret Service,” 68.

¹⁴⁸ This concept is borrowed from the title of Sinnigen’s article: “Roman Secret Service”. Both Sinnigen (“Roman Secret Service,” 65; “Frumentarii,” 213) and Sheldon argue that while the term ‘secret service’ is not without difficulty and runs the risk of anachronism, the function of the *frumentarii* is most accurately paralleled in modern times with the notion of a ‘secret service,’ “While the *frumentarii* did not function exactly like modern intelligence services, ‘the sum total of their duties qualifies them for being labeled a domestic intelligence organization and thus secret service is not such a terribly inaccurate label as some would suggest.’” Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 251.

¹⁴⁹ Sinnigen, “Romans Secret Service, 67.

¹⁵⁰ Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 251; Sinnigen, “Frumentarii,” 218-220.

¹⁵¹ Sinnigen, “Frumentarii,” 221; Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 154.

¹⁵² Sheldon, 154. Sheldon quotes a passage from Epictetus, “A soldier, dressed like a civilian, sits down by your side, and begins to speak ill of Caesar, and then you too, just as though you had received from him some guarantee of good faith in the fact that he began the abuse, tell likewise everything you think and the next things is—you are led off to prison in chains:” Epictetus, *Discourses*, 4.13.5.

¹⁵³ Birley, “Hadrian to the Antonines,” 153.

was based on couriers who brought news—including military information—from the frontiers.”¹⁵⁴ The presence of the *frumentarii* increases in the centuries to follow.¹⁵⁵ This evidence demonstrates that increasingly organized efforts to gather intelligence were in place and it insured that subversive activities were exposed and prosecuted. It paints an important image of the dangers associated with subversive writings and activities, which increased as the *frumentarii* gained stronger footing after the first century AD.¹⁵⁶

This brief sketch of *delatores* and *frumentarii* in the early empire reveals a complex socio-historical environment surrounding Roman *maiestas* laws that encouraged detention and prosecution of individuals with subversive sentiments.¹⁵⁷ This included *delators* (from within the ranks of private citizens) motivated by a wide range of factors (including the accumulation of wealth). Delation was at times rampant during the rule of Julio-Claudian emperors.¹⁵⁸ As the first century came to a close, and Flavian rule along with it, organized military intelligence in the form of the *frumentarii* newly emerged as a government-initiated agency that actively pursued those suspected of anti-imperial sentiments, especially among low rank citizens and non-citizens, including Christians.¹⁵⁹ The presence of these two notable agencies highlights the dangers of anti-Roman sentiments being exposed and prosecuted. Sheldon notes that “This tendency towards surveillance worsened through the imperial period.”¹⁶⁰ The threat of revolts

¹⁵⁴ Austin and Rankov, *Exploratio*, 137.

¹⁵⁵ Sinnigen, “Romans Secret Service, 68.

¹⁵⁶ Contra Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 380-381.

¹⁵⁷ A third group, *diogmitae*, might have also functioned as armed police force of the irenarchs of Asia Minor: Levick, “Greece and Asia Minor,” 632; P. A. Brunt, “Did Imperial Rome Disarm Her Subjects?” *Phoenix* 29.3 (1975): 264; B. Baldwin, “Leopards, Roman Soldiers, and the ‘Historia Augusta,’” *Illinois Classical Studies* 10.2 (1985): 282. Although, Jones suggests they were likely closer to “light-armed local constables.” C.P. Jones, “A Note on ‘Diogmitae,’” *Illinois Classical Studies* 12.1 (1987): 180. Levick notes the *diogmitae* participated in the pursuit of Polycarp: “Greece and Asia Minor,” 633; cf. *Mart. Poly.*, 7:1, and they may have functioned like a “domestic security service,” that end up playing a central role in third century martyrdom accounts: N. Kennell, “Marcus Aurelius Alexys and the ‘homeland security’ of Roman Sparta,” *British School at Athens Studies* 16 [Sparta and Laconia: From Prehistory to Pre-Modern] (2009): 288. While it is beyond the scope of this project to provide a full assessment of martyrdom literature, some early Christian and non-Christian martyrdom accounts constituted important anti-Roman writings that expressed tensions between Roman imperialism and the wider population, even if they were largely propaganda rather than ‘history’: Musurillo, “Christian and Political Martyrs,” 333.

¹⁵⁸ See the examples throughout Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 85-121.

¹⁵⁹ Sinnigen, “Roman Secret Service,” 68.

¹⁶⁰ Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, 153. It is also important to note that, “the policing systems of the eastern provinces were considerably more developed than those in the West. In Asia Minor in particular we find a well-organized law enforcement structure” with the highest-ranking position of eirenarch, which likely developed in the first century: Williams, *Persecution*, 144.

abroad also heightened the need for productive measures to be taken against subversion of Roman imperial rule.¹⁶¹

From surveying the *Zeitgeist* of the Roman Empire, to establishing a speech-act philosophy of language, we have provided strong reasons, on two fronts, for attending to implicit speech acts on the level of the subtext of Ephesians. We demonstrated earlier that an understanding of speech-act theory, including the ways in which certain speech acts can *count as* subversion even when the locutionary content lacks any explicit avowal of it, suggests that a direct invocation of Roman imperial authority and ideology in the text is unnecessary. Even further, it would constitute ‘misfire’ of the intended speech act.

We can draw similar conclusions from our portrait of the Roman imperial context. It is not impossible to imagine a situation whereby an author who wished to challenge imperial sentiments carefully chose his words to avoid run-ins with *delatores* and [later] *frumentarii*. This is not to suggest, from the outset, that Ephesians intended this kind of subversion. We hope to establish here that, had an author wanted to challenge the empire while also avoiding detention, there are contextual grounds for believing that that author would likely have chosen to operate on a sub-textual level, rather than an explicit one. While it is unclear exactly what Paul might have done, or what a non-Pauline empirical author might have done, had someone wanted to challenge Roman imperial ideology during these eras, significant conditions necessitated caution. Therefore, Maier’s claim that “the Roman Empire did not have the army or military power large enough to create a state controlled by terror and surveillance,” is misleading since active army or military forces were not the only (or even primary) means by which imperial authorities conducted surveillance and prevented subversive activities.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ For a survey of threats abroad and reactions from the empire, see Stephen L. Dyson, “Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire,” in *ANRW* III: 138-175; Stephen L. Dyson, “Native Revolts in the Roman Empire,” *Historia* 20.2/3 (1971): 239-274; Nadav Sharon, *Judea Under Roman Domination: The First Generation of Statelessness and its Legacy* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 233-253; G.M. Bowersock, “The Mechanics of Subversion in the Roman Provinces,” in *Opposition et Résistances à L’Empire D’Auguste à Trajan*, eds. Adalbert Giovannini, and Denis van Berchem. Entretiens (Sur L’Antiquité Classique 32; Vandoeuvres-Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1986): 291-320; Barbara Levick, *The Government of the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook* (2nd Ed.; London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 214-226. For extensive discussions on first Jewish revolt against Rome, see essays in *The Jewish Revolt Against Rome: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Mladen Popvić (Leiden: Brill, 2011), and on the so-called ‘war of Kitos’: David Rokeah, “The War of Kitos: Towards Clarification of a Philological—Historical Problem,” *Studies in History* [Scripta Hierosolymitana] 23 (1972): 79-84. Deininger surveys Greek resistance to Rome in Italy and Sicily prior to the Empire: Jürgen Deininger, “Der politische Widerstand der Griechen gegen Rom in Unteritalien und Sizilien,” in *Assimilation et Résistance à la Culture Gréco-Romaine Dans le Monde Ancien: Travaux du VI Congrès International d’Etudes Classiques*, ed. D. M. Pippidi. (Paris: Editura Academiei, 1976), 139-150. It was taken for granted that revolts often began from the home region of the one leading it: Ramsay MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 201.

¹⁶² Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 11-12.

Whatever environments Ephesians was written in, whether the mid first-century AD or later, they contained ongoing efforts to prosecute subversive activities. But as the first century passed into the second, Roman rulers enacted more sustained, organized endeavors to uncover these sentiments. The later we envision the date of Ephesians, the more likely that its author would have been in danger of being prosecuted for treason had subversive sentiments been detected in the letter. These dangers warrant that we pay attention to sub-textual elements when examining the imperial-critical status of Ephesians. Appeals to boldness in the midst of persecution, whether on the part of Paul or a non-Pauline author, underestimate the threats incurred by subversive writings.¹⁶³ Therefore, the lack of any direct invocation of Roman imperial authority or ideology within the epistle does not necessarily suggest the absence of imperial-critical components. Instead, the presence of *maiestas* laws and the prosecution of these charges by *delatores* and *frumentarii* suggests that such a direct invocation was ill-advised.

Cassidy claims that “*maiestas* was almost certainly the principle charge that Paul faced in Nero’s Rome.”¹⁶⁴ While the lack of contemporary source material on Paul’s death makes this claim hard to verify, it raises questions about the relationship between Paul’s imprisonment, potential images of Paul cast by a later post-Pauline author, and the content of Ephesians. If Cassidy is correct, a later portrait of the apostle imprisoned also invokes images of *maiestas* in the imagination of post-Pauline recipients of Ephesians. If so, this might affect how one assesses potential imperial-critical aspects within the letter. While persecutions were largely local and sporadic at the end of the first century, threats against Christians escalated in the second century.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 381.

¹⁶⁴ Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 55. Hurtado provides an alternative reason for Paul’s imprisonment, namely public disturbance: *Why on Earth*, 50. Whatever the reason for his arrest, Paul’s eventual execution may say less about his guilt or innocence, and more about the fact that the emperor usually “placate[ed] members of the regional upper classes in their appeals, but tended to repress or discourage appeals from ordinary citizens.” B. D. Shaw, “Rebels and Outsiders, in Bowmen. et. al., *CAH XI*, 370.

¹⁶⁵ “Generally, Christians in the second century lived surrounded by hostile attitudes and were persecuted.” N. Matsumoto, “The Urban Mob and the Christians,” in *Forms of Control*, 546-547, see also, Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 606.

3.3.2 IMPERIAL CULTS

Recent research on the Roman imperial context of Asia Minor has focused on the presence of imperial cult(s) within the region. Extensive work from Price,¹⁶⁶ Fishwick,¹⁶⁷ Friesen,¹⁶⁸ Mitchell,¹⁶⁹ Ando,¹⁷⁰ Gradel,¹⁷¹ and Winter¹⁷² has suggested that there was a far-reaching presence of imperial cults scattered across both the western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire in the first century AD.¹⁷³ At the same time, there have been disputes over the pervasiveness of these cults and their impact on early Christianity.¹⁷⁴ Their prevalence in cities that Paul visited throughout Asia Minor and Greece, as well as the likelihood that Paul took notice of them, have also recently been brought into question.¹⁷⁵ These objections have left interpreters with major questions about the significance of such cults for the study of the NT. The extent to which imperial cults were intentionally engaged with in NT writings varies.¹⁷⁶ A diversity of responses to imperial cults likely existed within early Christian groups.¹⁷⁷ Revelation is often identified as the text that most widely (although perhaps subtly) engages

¹⁶⁶ Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹⁶⁷ Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (4 Vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1987-2005).

¹⁶⁸ Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

¹⁶⁹ Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor: The Celts and the Impact of Roman Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

¹⁷⁰ Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹⁷¹ Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford Classical Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁷² Bruce W. Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians' Responses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

¹⁷³ Price notes that "the extent of the imperial cult is very peculiar in comparison with the distribution of royal cults in other societies." *Rituals*, 78. Its popularity can also be seen in "the large number of private associations that took as their patron the emperor instead of one of the traditional deities." Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 212.

¹⁷⁴ 'Cult' here is not intended in a pejorative sense, rather it maintains the common nomenclature of the system of rituals surrounding altars dedicated to imperial rule, rulers, and their families.

¹⁷⁵ Colin Miller, "Imperial Cult in the Pauline Cities of Asia Minor and Greece," *CBQ* 72.2 (2010): 314-332.

¹⁷⁶ For a dialogue between historical and religious studies on the issue of imperial cult see, J. Brodd and J. L. Reed, eds, *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series 5; Atlanta: SBL, 2011). David G. Horrell surveys some of the varied approaches towards Imperial cult in NT studies in his introduction to a JSNT volume dedicated to the subject: "Introduction," *JSNT* 27.3 (2005): 251-255.

¹⁷⁷ See Winter, *Divine Honours*, 2; Bruce W. Winter, "Divine Imperial Cultic Activities and the Early Church," in *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context*, eds. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 250-264.

them, leading Turner to conclude that, “There has been an almost unanimous opinion among commentators that although the Seer nowhere mentions Rome by name, nevertheless his book is plainly aimed at Rome and in particular at its Imperial cult.”¹⁷⁸ Other NT texts have found less consensus regarding their invocation of, and theological response to, imperial cults.¹⁷⁹

Before addressing imperial cults in Asia Minor, we should offer a few points of clarification about terminology. While one may be tempted to employ the term ‘emperor worship’ synonymously with imperial cults, we purposely avoid it in this discussion. Emperor worship was certainly one strong component of ‘imperial cults,’ even though the rituals within the imperial cults were, at times, directed towards a wider network of Roman imperial rule rather than a single emperor.¹⁸⁰ This variability cautions us against limiting the imperial cult to ‘emperor worship,’ since the term could imply that imperial cults were always directed towards one ruler. We must also acknowledge the wide diversity of imperial cults across the Roman Empire at various eras.¹⁸¹ This requires that we avoid speaking solely of *the* imperial cult, as if it were a single unified entity, in favor of acknowledging diverse networks of ‘imperial cults.’¹⁸² One further distinction needs to be made between imperial cults that were officially sanctioned by Rome as provincial centers for worship of the emperor and his family and those that enjoyed a less official status.¹⁸³ For the sake of clarity, we will employ the term “provincial

¹⁷⁸ Nigel Turner, “The Church’s Attitude to the State in the New Testament,” *JTSA* 2 (Mar 1973): 47. A. S. Bandy similarly states that, “Conflict with the imperial cult in the Apocalypse can hardly be ignored.” “Persecution and the Purpose of Revelation with Reference to Roman Jurisprudence” *BBR* 23.3 (2013): 394. See also his helpful introductory bibliography on the Imperial cult in Revelation: Bandy, “Persecution and the Purpose of Revelation,” fn. 101, and on the Imperial cult in general: Bandy, 379-380, fn. 12. For other sources on imperial cult in Revelation, see also Steven J. Friesen, “Satan’s Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Setting of Revelation,” *JSNT* (2005): 351-373; Steven J. Friesen, “Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13,” *JBL* 123.2 (2004): 281-313; H. Jan de Jonge, “The Apocalypse of John and Imperial Cult” in *Kykeon: Studies in Honour of H. S. Versnel*, eds. H. F. J. Horstmanshoff, H. W. Singor, F. T. Van Straten, and J. H. M. Strubbe (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 127-141; vanThanh Nguyen, “The Final Testimony of Missio Dei: A Missiological Reading of Revelation,” in *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue*, eds. Dale T. Irvin and Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2018): 3-16.

¹⁷⁹ E.g. Romans—Lim, “Double-Voiced”; M. Wilson, “Hilastarion and Imperial Ideology: A New Reading of Romans 3:25” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73.3 (2017), a4067. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4067>; Rock, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans and Roman Imperialism*.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 130.

¹⁸¹ Price, *Rituals*, 78-100; Koester, *New Testament*, 366.

¹⁸² See Harry O. Maier, *New Testament Christianity in the Roman World* (Essentials of Biblical Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 84.

¹⁸³ A twofold distinction is similarly made by Price, although he distinguishes between two types of royal cults in societies: “those based on the capital and centrally controlled,” and those “that exist outside of the capital that consists of irregular and transient displays” He further notes that both kinds were extensive throughout the Roman Empire: *Rituals*, 78. Ferguson also notes the distinction between temples in Rome and those throughout the provinces, noting that “away from Rome [divine] honors advanced more rapidly.” *Backgrounds*, 211.

cult” to describe imperial cults that were provincial centers of these rituals, officially sanctioned by Roman imperial rule. Aside from these, we will discuss wider systems of imperial cults in the region, including temples, sanctuaries, priests/priestesses,¹⁸⁴ shrines, and altars.¹⁸⁵ These were not necessarily officially sanctioned by Roman authorities, as were the provincial centers of imperial cults.¹⁸⁶ Ultimately, all of these areas make significant contributions to our understanding the presence of imperial cults in the region. They help us to paint a picture of one expression of Roman rule displayed in varied provinces.

In the early stages of the Roman Empire, changes emerged in the religio-political landscape of Asia Minor, especially in the province’s relationship to imperial rule.¹⁸⁷ One such change was the establishment of imperial cults throughout the region. While imperial cults likely developed out of Hellenistic ruler cults,¹⁸⁸ they took on new aspects during the early Roman Empire.¹⁸⁹ Provincial imperial cults underwent “ceremonious deliberation by the

¹⁸⁴ At least 270 inscriptions from the imperial period mention women priestesses of Imperial cults: E. A. Hemelrijk, “Women and Sacrifice in the Roman Empire,” in Hekster, et. al., *Ritual Dynamics*, 265.

¹⁸⁵ Price employs these terms in relation to imperial cults frequently throughout his work, *Rituals*. Millar also acknowledges the connections between these various forms of media and Imperial cults: “The Imperial Cults,” 148.

¹⁸⁶ Friesen’s distinction between provincial and municipal cults is helpful here. Municipal cults did not need the approval of the emperor and were not necessarily situated within a temple complex. He notes the overlaps between the concepts but also highlights important distinctions: *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 25-103, esp. 56-76.

¹⁸⁷ The terms ‘religious’ and ‘political’ are fused together here purposely to recognize the ways in which they were so significantly interwoven in the early Roman Empire. It is anachronistic to separate the two as distinct entities. Furthermore, “The religious affairs of the state were in the hands of the same men who directed her politics.” Mary Beard, “Religion,” in *CAH XI*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 729; see also pp. 730-734, 751.

¹⁸⁸ Price, *Rituals*, 21; Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 199-207. On the other hand, Beard adds that “some aspects of [Julius] Caesar’s divine status are comprehensible as the development of existing trends within traditional Roman thought and practice. The boundary between the gods and men was never rigidly defined in Roman paganism as in the modern Judaeo-Christian tradition: Roman mythology could incorporate men, such as Romulus, who became gods; the Roman ritual of triumph involved the impersonation of a god by the successful general; in the Roman cult of the dead, past members of the community (or of the individual family) shared in some degree of divinity. There was no simple polarity, but a continuous spectrum, between the human and the divine.” “Religion,” 750. In Rome, worship had previously been offered to Scipio, Marius, and Julius Caesar: J. A. Crook, “Augustus, Power, Authority, Achievement,” in *CAH X*, eds. A. K. Bowman, E. Champlin, and A. Lintott (2nd Ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 134. Paul Rehak challenges scholars who are hesitant to draw parallels between Augustus’s own divine projection of himself and eastern ruler cults. He adapts Tondriau’s characteristics of Hellenistic ruler cults in order to contextualize Augustus’s building projects within the Campus Martius in a similar light: *Imperium and Cosmos: Augustus and the Northern Campus Martius*, ed. John G. Younger (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 145.

¹⁸⁹ A. Chaniotis, “The Dynamics of Rituals in the Roman Empire,” in *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire*, eds. O. Hekster, S. Schmidt-Hofner, and C. Witschel (Impact of Empire, Vol. 9; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 24. Despite these changes, the imperial cults in Asia Minor still maintained Greek characteristics: Crooke, “Augustus,” 79.

Roman Senate and careful consideration by the ultimate recipient, the emperor.”¹⁹⁰ Roman authorities rarely imposed temples upon the provinces in the early empire. Augustus ordered that Ephesus and Nicaea establish a temple to Rome and *Divus Julius*, likely in order to make political ties to a region that was previously allied with his rival Mark Antony.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, this temple never received the status of an official provincial cult. Gaius [Caligula] is said to have imposed a temple to himself on the city of Miletus, but its official functions likely halted after his assassination in AD 41 when practices of *damnatio memoriae* were carried out.¹⁹² For the most part, the first provincial imperial cults were inaugurated at the request of local authorities,¹⁹³ and they often exhibited traditional local motifs.¹⁹⁴ Requests for further temples were even denied by emperors, possibly to maintain the appearance of modesty to the senate, or to avoid supplanting the cults of their predecessors.¹⁹⁵

The provincial temples were initially dedicated to multiple members of the imperial family, or to the emperor and the city of Rome, or to other deities.¹⁹⁶ For 50 years, the temple to Rome and Augustus in Pergamum was the only official provincial cult in Asia.¹⁹⁷ When local authorities requested a second provincial temple in AD 22, this time to Tiberius and his family, fierce competition broke out among eleven cities vying for the honor.¹⁹⁸ Ephesus and Miletus were passed over because of the strong presence of Artemis and Apollo temples in those cities, it was deemed that an official cult to the emperor might diminish their prominence.¹⁹⁹ In AD 26, Smyrna was granted the second provincial temple in Asia.²⁰⁰ The

¹⁹⁰ Burrell, *Neokoroi*, 3; cf. E. Bickerman, “Consecratio,” in den Boer, *Le Culte dans Souverains*, 8-9.

¹⁹¹ This previous political allegiance with Antony became a liability for Asia Minor after Actium: Gruen, “Expansion,” 151. The rapid establishment of imperial cults in Asia Minor may have been motivated, at least in part, by a desire to establish secure ties with Augustus.

¹⁹² Burrell, 55; Friesen, 26. Caligula is the first known example of a Roman emperor who “was seriously convinced of his divinity already during his lifetime. Caligula soon began to appear in public in the dress and with the insignia of one god or the other, believing that he was an incarnation of Jupiter, and demanding that statues be put up everywhere in order to receive divine worship—even in the synagogues of Alexandria and in the temple in Jerusalem!” Koester, *New Testament*, 310, 369.

¹⁹³ Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 10.

¹⁹⁴ Friesen, 75.

¹⁹⁵ Friesen, 16.

¹⁹⁶ Burrell, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Friesen, 15.

¹⁹⁸ Burrell, 38; Friesen, 17-18.

¹⁹⁹ Friesen, 18. For further discussion of the requests for this temple, see M. P. Theophilos, “Ephesus and the Numismatic Background to νεοκόρος,” in *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus*, eds. James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplements 9. Atlanta: SBL, 2018), 309-11.

²⁰⁰ Friesen, 16-18.

provincial imperial cults provided significant benefits for the city in which it was housed. The cult presented a potent image of the benefits of being ruled by Rome, it exhibited gratitude to the rulers for their benefactions, and it helped order the cities of the provinces while highlighting the role of local elites.²⁰¹ It also produced “entertainment, travel, social intercourse, and extra economic activity.”²⁰²

During the reign of the Julio-Claudian emperors, we have record of only five sanctioned provincial imperial cult temples being granted across the empire: three during the reign of Augustus (Pergamum, Nikomedia, and Ancyra); one during the reign of Tiberius (Smyrna), and one during the reign of Gaius [Caligula] (Miletus).²⁰³ Three of these were in western Asia Minor, and all of them were in the eastern part of the empire, within the confines of what is now modern Turkey.²⁰⁴ A sixth cult may have been commissioned in Ephesus under Nero,²⁰⁵ although, if so, the building project was likely postponed until further approval was later granted under Domitian.²⁰⁶

Several points of caution emerge that can help bring clarity to the role that provincial imperial cults played in Asia Minor over the course of about 100 years from the rule of Augustus [27 BC to AD 14] to the end of Julio-Claudian rule in AD 69:

1. The first provincial imperial cults honored a wider structure of imperial rule rather than any one imperial figure: including the imperial family, Rome, and a combination of other deities. Any undermining of the provincial cult, or its ideologies, may have targeted Roman rule as much (or more so) than any one ruler.
2. Officially sanctioned provincial temples to the emperor and his family were only rarely granted, and often after a wide range of factors were taken into consideration as to which city would be given the honor. This suggests that, during the period(s) when Ephesians may have been written, Roman rulers were not rapidly imposing imperial cults upon the provinces.

²⁰¹ Friesen, 164.

²⁰² Friesen, 164.

²⁰³ The historical records of these include evidence from literary, numismatic, epigraphic, and archaeological data: Burrell, *Neokoroi*, 6-12.

²⁰⁴ Burrell, 15-269.

²⁰⁵ Theophilus, *Ephesus*, 323; Burrell, 6.

²⁰⁶ Burrell, 61.

3. The establishment of a provincial imperial cult in a city which already hosted a prominent temple to a god or goddess could have been taken as a threat to the existing cults. A great deal of caution was exhibited in the early stages of imperial rule to not pose a threat to the already established local temples. During the early to mid-parts of first century, imperial cults were not supplanting other cults in Asia Minor.
4. The benefits bestowed upon a city that hosted a provincial temple were vast and make it difficult to fully assess what ideological aspects motivated the requests for a temple. The ways in which inhabitants of the cities responded to the early provincial cults, and the extent of their participation in them, are also diverse, although their importance is unquestionable.
5. With the exception of the case of Gaius [Caligula], any imperial-critical portrait that assesses the Pauline era, and that wishes to unfairly characterize the imperial cults in Asia Minor as imposed upon from deranged emperors who threatened the masses with execution for failing to ‘bend the knee’ simply does not do justice to much of the data available to us.²⁰⁷ While the establishment of the imperial cults in Asia Minor certainly reveals some things about how Romans might have hoped to cast a particular view of imperial rule from this time, it equally reveals aspects of local ideologies that are not always directly connected to official imperial policy. This suggests that any disruption to the system of imperial cults in Asia Minor, whether that be material or ideological disruption (including potential literary works) may not have exclusively challenged imperial ideology per se but might have constituted the undermining of a network of wider ideologies present within the region. The extent to which these wider ideologies related to imperial ideology needs to be explored further.
6. Julio-Claudian era inhabitants of the Roman Empire who either lived in Asia Minor or passed through the region may or may not have had much direct contact with officially sanctioned provincial imperial cults. Much of their exposure to it depended upon the given era, as well as the city.

²⁰⁷ See Maier, *New Testament Christianity*, 84.

If the portrait above were to represent the whole picture of imperial cults, the assertion that they were an “all-pervasive, high-profile first-century reality” seems puzzling.²⁰⁸ On the other hand, two further aspects within the imperial cults in Asia Minor help paint a wider picture of the empirical Roman context of Asia Minor: non-provincial imperial cults, and the explosion of provincial cults near the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century.

An examination of officially sanctioned provincial imperial cults has cautioned against an overestimation of the role of imperial policy in the establishment of honoring the emperor (and his family) in Asia Minor. These cults were by no means the only sources dedicated to the emperors and their families. While provincial temples were somewhat scarce during the first one hundred years of imperial rule, non-provincial imperial cults in Asia Minor flourished during this period. This information suggests that Asia Minor’s imperial cults were a more widespread phenomenon than what can be seen by solely examining their provincial centers.²⁰⁹ Price cautions against thinking that the imperial cults of Asia Minor were ubiquitous.²¹⁰ On the other hand, he acknowledges that

Imperial temples and sanctuaries were extremely common. More than eighty happen to be attested in over sixty cities in Asia Minor, though it is not possible to give a precise figure even for the surviving evidence because of the problems of identification. The emperor also received statues in special rooms off the main square of half a dozen cities and buildings or other honours in various sanctuaries of the traditional gods.²¹¹

The imperial cults were widely distributed throughout Asia, including the cities of Asia Minor.²¹² Price’s maps of imperial temples, altars, priests, and cults in Asia Minor are visually

²⁰⁸ Winter, *Divine Honours*, 15; see also Justin Meggitt, “Taking the Emperor’s Clothes Seriously: The New Testament and the Roman Emperor,” in *The Quest for Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Philip Budd*, ed. Christine E. Jones (Cambridge: Orchard Academic, 2002): 144-151. Galinsky (along with Beard and North) cautions against thinking that there was one singular imperial cult (i.e. *the* imperial cult) and recognizes that it was only one mechanism of imperial propaganda: “The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?” in Brodd and Reed, eds., *Rome and Religion*, 3-8.

²⁰⁹ Levick suggests that at least 11 cities honored Tiberius with a cult, one of which deemed him “the greatest of the gods at Cyzicus.” “Greece and Asia Minor,” 667.

²¹⁰ Price, *Rituals*, 21.

²¹¹ Price, 135.

²¹² Price, 135. While Price questions the presence of imperial cults in less organized communities, he concedes that several remote cities had imperial sanctuaries: Price, 79. His argument that the imperial cult was “alien in the countryside,” is less convincing in light of the fact that much less historical data exists from non-urban areas and so it is difficult to fully assess whether the absence of data from non-urban areas can affirm his conclusion here. To be fair, Price himself notes the difficulty in assessing rural settlements and villages: Price, 81-2. His main point is that “communal organization is the crucial factor in accounting for the existence of the imperial cult, rather than the technical status of the community.” Price, 83. For our purposes, even if Price is right about the lack of imperial cults in the countryside, it likely has little bearing on a reading of Ephesians

striking.²¹³ While his documentation does not distinguish between the varied time periods in which they were established,²¹⁴ their pervasiveness and perceptibility throughout the eras surrounding the NT is unquestionable.²¹⁵ Augustus had granted permission for imperial sanctuaries in all cities of the province where imperial games were held.²¹⁶ Further, the rituals associated with imperial cults were employed by elites and non-elites alike, including in private Greco-Roman associations.²¹⁷

A major shift emerges in provincial temples after the reign of the Julio-Claudian emperors comes to an end. Whereas only five provincial temples are known to have existed throughout the empire from the Julio-Claudian period, six more emerge within Asia Minor alone during the Flavian and Nerva-Antonine emperors, and seven others are established throughout the rest of the empire during these times—bringing them to a total of 18, half of which were in Asia Minor.²¹⁸ What was once a slowly emerging honor granted only to a select group of cities during Julio-Claudian rule [27 BC to AD 69], becomes more widespread.²¹⁹ Cities which were granted provincial temples eventually adopted the title ‘*neokoros*,’ i.e. ‘temple care-takers.’²²⁰ While the term had earlier been applied to those holding offices in local temples, and to a city’s guardianship over other cults [e.g. Ephesian Artemis in Acts 19:35], its

since, in spite of the lack of clarity regarding the exact location of the recipients, an urban populated destination within Asia Minor is likely.

²¹³ Price, *Rituals*, xxii-xxvi.

²¹⁴ This was one of Miller’s major critiques of applying Price’s work to NT studies: “Imperial Cult in Pauline Cities,” see especially 315-319.

²¹⁵ Heilig aptly demonstrates this in his critique of Miller’s work: *Hidden Criticism?*, 93-104. See also G. W. Bowersock, “Greek Intellectuals and the Imperial Cult in the Second Century A.D.,” in den Boer, *Les Culte Des Souverains*, 181.

²¹⁶ Price, 79.

²¹⁷ Peter Oakes, “Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians,” *JSNT* 27.3 (2005): 311-312. For the appropriation of imperial cults into associations see Philip A. Harland, “Imperial Cults within Local Cultural Life: Associations in Roman Asia,” *AHB* 17.1-2 (2003): 85-107.

²¹⁸ These numbers are drawn from Burrell’s catalogue of neokorate cities: *Neokoroi*, 15-269. Burrell also notes that “our pools of evidence only represent a fraction of what once existed and may yet be increased: a previously unknown inscription or coin could add new names and historical circum-stances to our knowledge of the neokoroi at anytime.” Burrell, *Neokoroi*, 3. Theophilus makes a similar note about the study of ancient coins, “we possess only a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of the numismatic material that originally circulated in antiquity.” Theophilus, Ephesus, 313.

²¹⁹ While Herr’s initial claims that, “The apotheosis of dead emperors and the concomitant cult occupied no position of importance in Roman thought during the reign of the first twelve emperors” is mistaken, his claim that “After 96 C.E., however, a radical change set in” rightly points to the intensification of the imperial cults under the post-Julio-Claudian rulers: Herr, “Persecutions and Martyrdom,” 88-89. In contrast, we note that Augustus’s self-written *Res Gestae* was composed in order to justify his own apotheosis, demonstrating that the concept was very much on the mind of even the first emperor: Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 145.

²²⁰ Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 35. For a catalogue of the numismatic evidence for the term, see Theophilus, Ephesus, 314-18.

identification with cities housing provincial imperial cults eventually made it “one of the most coveted titles for elevating a city’s public standing.”²²¹ In contrast to its earlier use, the term became a corporate identification rather than an individual one: “the entire city, and not just its representative council, was included in the imagery of the Cult of the Sebastoi.”²²² *Neokorates* became associated with city ‘temple care-takers’ of the provincial imperial cults, whereas the term had earlier referred exclusively to a group of priestly individuals.²²³

Some cities over the course of AD 70-160 become *neokorate* twice, or three times over, with the establishment of new cults formed around emerging dynasties and single imperial rulers.²²⁴ This is on top of new cities having been granted the honor, in spite of having been previously refused. All of this points to significant changes in the religio-political landscape throughout the empire. The presence of imperial cult temples in Asia Minor not only grew exponentially, but cities in the region intensified their pursuit of solidifying formal ties with imperial rule by becoming ‘care-takers’ of provincial temples that honored emperors, even while they were still alive. Their roles as *neokorate* cities also included a system of official religio-political offices designed to ensure that these temples were cared for properly.²²⁵ One further development during this time is that whereas the presence of prominent temples in a city was once a strong reason to avoid granting a provincial imperial cult, this restriction was clearly bypassed by subsequent imperial dynasties,²²⁶ so much so that “the use of th[e] term [*neokorate*] for the Cult of the Sebastoi [in Ephesus] immediately raised the cult’s status to that of the most significant cult in the city and the region.”²²⁷ While it was not uncommon, in general, for some inhabitants of the region to have encountered temples dedicated to imperial

²²¹ Friesen, 41.

²²² Friesen, 57.

²²³ Theophilos, “Ephesus,” 306-309, 322.

²²⁴ Ephesus was identified as ‘twice neokoros’ (thus the title of Friesen’s work). Theophilos disputes the data utilized by Friesen and Dräger in their acceptance of coins that declare Ephesus ‘twice neokoros.’ He suggests that the coins have been altered and cannot be taken as defense of a second *neokorate* in Ephesus under Domitian: Theophilos, 320.

²²⁵ Friesen, 164.

²²⁶ Friesen, 19 fn. 54.

²²⁷ Friesen, 56. This fact is particularly remarkable considering the dominant place that the Artemisium played within the city. Her temple was the economic center, and she was its “sovereign and protectress.” Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 198-199. It is also remarkable that after the provincial Imperial cult became the most significant temple in the city, the role of the Artemisium did not likely diminish much, showing the ability of cities within Asia Minor to accommodate divine honors to the emperor with those of other established cults: Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 57. On the history of the imperial cults in Ephesus, see Rainer Schwindt, *Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* (WUNT 148; Tübingen. Mohr Siebeck. 2002), 68-69.

rule(rs) in the first one hundred years of the Roman Empire, it is much more definitive that the imperial cult(s) were an inescapable reality for those within Asia Minor near the end of the first century and beginning of the second century.

These imperial cults in Asia Minor projected cosmogonical [origins of the world], cosmological [ordering of time and space], and eschatological [arrival of the pinnacle of history] claims that supported wider Roman imperial ideology.²²⁸ This included claims of the eternality of Roman rule, the apotheosis of the emperors, and the (re)-ordering of civic time and space.²²⁹ The potential consequences of this ideology for the empirical life-setting of Ephesians may be numerous. The extent to which Christians within this region were pressured into participation in these cults is less certain.²³⁰ By the time that Pliny writes to Emperor Trajan (roughly AD 113), it becomes clear that Christians in parts of the empire (in Pliny's case—Pontus and Bithynia) were experiencing pressures to revoke allegiance to Christianity in favor of allegiance to the emperor and empire.²³¹ These pressures seemed to include, perhaps among other things, mandatory acts of reverence paid to the emperor,²³² including offering incense and wine to the emperor's image.²³³ This does not suggest that Christians were pressured into

²²⁸ Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 123-131.

²²⁹ Friesen, 123-131.

²³⁰ Koester notes that "No one was urged to accept the emperor cult as a replacement of his traditional religion," but also suggests that "Christians nevertheless got into serious conflict with the emperor cult." *New Testament*, 370-371. There are disputes as to whether any Imperial laws or edicts were in place prior Decius (AD 250). Millar's point that "there is no good evidence for any general law or edict against Christianity before the reign of Decius." "The Imperial Cult," 146. This has been seriously challenged by Williams, cf. *Persecution*, 179-236.

²³¹ Pliny was governor of Bithynia from AD 111-113. There is good reason to date Pliny's conflict with Christians to AD 112: Kobel, *Dining with John*, 285, fn. 60. Udo Scholz's cautions against using Pliny's works as the only source for understanding Roman imperial policies towards Christians in the second century is helpful, although this need not lead to a dismissal of Pliny's works altogether: "Römische Behörden und Christen im 2. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 24.2 (1972): 160.

²³² "Although his [Pliny's] reference to temples and rites need not refer only to the imperial cult, it is clear that this is included in the reference." Bowersock, "Greek Intellectuals," 184. Cf. Millar's claim that the imperial cult only played a minor part in the Pliny incident, "Imperial Cult," 153. Although, Bowersock's view that Pliny himself never deemed Trajan a god since he was 1) from Italy, and 2) "an intelligent person," seems to misunderstand the dynamics of the imperial cult at this time: Millar, "Imperial Cult," 153.

²³³ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96-97; Koester, *New Testament*, 370; Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom," 90. While there is some controversy over whether prayers were given only *on behalf of* the emperor within the imperial cults (Price, *Rituals*, 231-233; Bowersock, "Greek Intellectuals," 180), inscriptional evidence suggests that prayers were also *offered to* the emperor: Chaniotis, "Dynamics," 24 fn. 74; Winter, *Divine Honours*, 27. Friesen suggests there was little tension between sacrificing on behalf of the emperor and to the emperor, "They are only in conflict if we presume that imperial sacrifices functioned as a unified system whereby gods and emperors were placed on a single spectrum that defined who was human and who was divine in ontological terms." *Twice Neokoros*, 149. Pressures on early Christianity in the region (and in Ephesus in particular) were not exclusively related to responses to Imperial cults. Artemis worship also came into conflict with Christianity in the region: Richard Oster, "The Ephesian Artemis as an Opponent to Early Christianity," *JAC* 19 (1976): 27-

mandatory participation in officially sanctioned provincial imperial cults,²³⁴ but it does suggest that some Christians were pressured into showing loyalty to Rome through ritual acts, including rituals associated with imperial cults. A situation emerges whereby certain demonstrations of allegiance to the emperor/empire were increasingly at odds with early Christian devotion to Jesus. In discussing the eras after AD 96, Herr states that “since the emperor represents all that is good in the state and symbolizes its unity, worshipping him becomes the supreme test of the citizen’s loyalty to the state.”²³⁵ While Carter claims that not much evidence exists that Pliny’s account reflects other situations outside of Pontus/Bithynia, parts of Pliny’s own correspondence, as well as the account in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*²³⁶ suggests that his description of the treatment of Christians at least loosely applied beyond these two regions and most likely also within Asia Minor.²³⁷ Pliny’s account also indicates that pressures exerted on Christians in this region sometimes led to unavoidable conflicts between a Christian’s allegiance to Jesus and allegiance to the empire (and emperor). In particular, Christians were condemned for refusing to participate in rituals associated with the imperial cults.²³⁸ It is worth

44. Christians persecuted under Marcus Aurelius in Lyons were likely charged with cannibalism and incest: A. H. M. Jones, *Studies in Roman Government and Law* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 55.

²³⁴ Oakes builds off Fishwick’s point that there is no indication that the early imperial cults were obligatory: Oakes, “Re-mapping the Universe,” 312.

²³⁵ Herr, “Persecutions and Martyrdom,” 89. At the same time one must caution against seeing the imperial cults as the only, or even main source of conflicts for early Christians: Oakes, “Remapping the Universe,” 313.

²³⁶ An earlier date (AD 140-150) for Mart. Poly. is now widely accepted: Jakob Engberg, *Impulsore Chresto: Opposition to Christianity in the Roman Empire cc.50-250 AD* (Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 2; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 61-63. There are inherent problems with trying to reconstruct conflicts in the ancient world, especially as it relates to those that were less formal (and legally exempt). The epigraphic record is often considered, but the source material tends to ignore informal conflicts. Literary evidence provides more data, although questions have been raised about whether the NT and early Patristic material should be given weight when reconstructing persecution in the early empire. The scant epigraphic evidence though may not indicate lack of conflict as much as the nature of the source material makes it unlikely that informal conflict would be addressed there. This necessitates a closer examination of literary material, even in the presence of potential biases: Williams, *Persecution*, 131.

²³⁷ Pliny seems to be aware of prosecution of Christians in other places as well: Kobel, *Dining with John*, 287. There is evidence of persecution of Christians in Asia Minor prior to the time of Nero: Matsumoto, “Urban Mob,” 543. Further, it is possible to envision other provinces acting similarly since the roles that Pliny carried out as governor were not unique, even if his “his zeal and his diligence” were: Griffin, “Nerva to Hadrian,” 121. The fact that Pliny seemed to be carrying out the “standard procedure” (Griffin, “Nerva to Hadrian, 121), may indicate that there had been precedent for treating Christians in this manner. Pliny may allude to problems with Christians in the region that had occurred 20 years prior to his incidents: Levick, “Greece and Asia Minor,” 633. While it cannot be known, with certainty, which legal charges the early martyrdom accounts envisioned for Christians, *maiestas* is one possibility, and many kinds of charges may have applied: Musurillo, “Christian and Political Martyrs,” 341.

²³⁸ Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 603; Adam Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul’s Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians* (LNTS 585; London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 194; Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 142. Millar claims that the main charges against Christians were often “*flagitia*, cannibalism or incest, rather than non-observance of imperial cults. But imperial cults do appear in the tests applied by the provincial governor. It was natural that it should.” “Imperial Cult,” 154. On the other hand, in the case of Pliny, it appears that Christians were not being accused of participating in typical criminal activities, otherwise

noting that these pressures may not have been mandated by imperial decree, as least not in Asia Minor.²³⁹ The evidence suggests that local authorities were usually the ones carrying out these pressures,²⁴⁰ although Pliny's function as a Roman imperial magistrate, as well as his appeal for the emperor's approval in his judgements, suggests that the actions of local authorities were not always fully distinct from official imperial rule.²⁴¹ Pliny further indicates that members of the general public made accusations.²⁴² Since the well-being of a city was often connected with proper rituals associated with the most prominent deities that watched over the city,²⁴³ it is not inconceivable that, as the imperial cults grew in prominence in the cities of Asia Minor, trials and catastrophes that fell upon a city might have been attributed to a failure to properly attend to local cults, including the cult of the emperor.²⁴⁴ To the extent that they refused

recanting their faith would not have likely justified being acquitted: Griffin, "Nerva to Hadrian," 122. Instead, it is more likely that Christians were being prosecuted simply for identifying as a Christian: Musurillo, "Christian and Political Martyrs," 341. Levick notes the conflicts between Christians and regional/imperial religion in Asia Minor: "Greece and Asia Minor," 633. In discussing a Roman perspective on Judaism, Herr notes that "what angered Romans most – and, again, just in this period – was the refusal of Jews to participate in the imperial cult." "Persecutions and Martyrdom," 88. Although, Hadrian did not insist that Jews participate in imperial cults: Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom," 98-99.

²³⁹ Persecution of Christians by imperial decree seemed to develop in the third century: Matsumoto, "Urban Mob," 543, 547-548; T. D. Barnes, "Legislation against the Christians," *JRS* 58.1-2 (1968): 49. Pliny's awareness that some action must be taken against Christians seems to imply that there was a mandate of sorts in place, although what exactly that entailed is uncertain. The exact course of action here seemed to be up to the governor's discretion. Pliny's doubt about the specific course of action is probably more representative of his lack of knowledge of an official edict, rather than the total absence of one altogether: Engberg, 175-176. The fact that Pliny seeks the advice of the emperor seems to indicate that an obvious precedent had not been set for handling Christianity in the region, and it also affirms that Christianity was not viewed as the main threat of the state, otherwise Pliny would not have had to ask about how to treat them: Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 140. There is only evidence of one Roman official bringing about accusations against Christians prior to the Decian edict, but that the situation changes after Decius: Millar, "Imperial Cult," 150. For the most part, the emperors remained "distant ruler" of the provinces, where provincial administration was largely carried out by governors: Werner Eck, "Provincial Administration and Finance," in *Bowmen, et. al., CAH XI*, 272.

²⁴⁰ Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, 166. The same was the case in later Christian persecutions: MacMullen, *Changes*, 157. Private citizens and mobs also participated in the pressures against Christians: Matsumoto, "Urban Mob," 546-547.

²⁴¹ It became even more complicated in the provinces since some cases were tried without appeal to the emperor, whereas others were directly carried out on his orders: Jones, *Roman Government*, 57. The role of local magistrates became increasingly more important. The court systems in Asia Minor were often utilized for the purposes of conflict management: Williams, *Persecution*, 139.

²⁴² When the NT is regarded as an accurate source for determining the treatment of early Christians, the opposition experienced widens to broader authorities and imperial agents: Engberg, 89, 179.

²⁴³ Beard, "Religion," 729; Tucker, *Life in the Roman World*, 374.

²⁴⁴ Moss notes that Christians were often held accountable for weather, floods, disease, and natural disasters: Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 171.

participation,²⁴⁵ this placed some Christians and Jews under suspicion.²⁴⁶ Christian refusal to participate in these cults “threatened to disrupt the *pax deorum* (‘peace of the Gods’) and, in doing so, invited destruction on everyone.”²⁴⁷ Christians who rejected honors given to the emperor were perceived as atheists, disloyal to the empire, and subversive.²⁴⁸ Rumors had also circulated that Christians participated in cannibalism and incest.²⁴⁹ Until the time of Constantine, Christianity was generally viewed by Roman authorities as a *superstitio* that needed to be eradicated.²⁵⁰ According to Moss, the exemptions from imperial cults, which may have been previously granted to Christians who were essentially considered Jews by the Romans, became more problematic “as Christians became more visible and identifiable as a group distinct from the Jews.”²⁵¹ This has consequences for Ephesians if it is read as reflecting a later date. Further, if Ephesians was written to a largely Gentile audience, the conflict with imperial cults might be more intensified, since “All Gentile converts to Christianity would previously have taken part [in them].”²⁵² Taking all of this into consideration, any late first-century NT text with an empirical life-setting within Asia Minor must be interpreted with, at

²⁴⁵ Christians also refused participation in “civic meetings and religious ceremonies,” of which the imperial cults were included: Matsumoto, “Urban Mob,” 547. “Christians did not, in principle, honour any of the Graeco-Roman gods...The Christian failure to honour the gods would have included central Roman deities such as Jupiter, and also the deified Caesars.” Oakes, “Re-mapping the Universe,” 309. Jews may also have been prosecuted during the reign of Domitian for accusations of *asebeia* (combined with *maiestas* charges) by refusing to honor the traditional gods, including the imperial cults: Griffin, “The Flavians,” 76.

²⁴⁶ Oakes does not quite go quite this far, but affirms that denial of the gods, including the divinity of the emperor, potentially conflicted with imperial claims: “Re-mapping the Universe,” 309.

²⁴⁷ Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 175.

²⁴⁸ Kobel, *Dining with John*, 283; Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 178. Many of the negative characterizations attributed to Christians were likely colored by similar perceptions that Romans had of Jews in the empire: Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 513. Persecutions that were carried out against Christians were not likely motivated exclusively by religious views, per se, but also by political and social motives, “The early Christians were treated as they were, not because they held non-Roman views, but because they held anti-Roman views.” Tucker, *Life in the Roman World*, 384. This contrasts with Levick, who claims that Christianity was only known to be actively subversive within Judea: “Greece and Asia Minor,” 633.

²⁴⁹ Levick, 596; Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 181-185. As much as these were likely gross misperceptions about Christianity, the NT reveals that some of the early Christian gathering were not free from drunkenness (1 Cor. 11:21; possibly also, Eph. 5:18ff), social favoritism (James 2:1ff), and chaos (1 Cor. 12-14). See Tucker, *Life in the Roman World*, 385. Moss also notes that Christians were generally disliked, although she dismisses popular portraits of Christians being extensively persecuted in the early empire: *The Myth of Persecution*, 129.

²⁵⁰ Speyer, *Büchervernichtung*, 74. “Being designated as a *superstitio* meant that Christianity was akin to a disease.” Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 180. Allan Lund also highlights ways in which early Christians were marginalized by the Romans: “Zur Verbrennung der sogenannten Chrestiani (Tac. Ann. 15, 44),” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 60.3 (2008): 259-260. Although his timeframe is beyond the scope of what is relevant to this project, Peter Van Nuffelen provides a helpful survey of imperial cults in late antiquity: “Zur Rezeption des Kaiserkultes in der Spätantike,” *Ancient Society* 32 (2002): 263-282.

²⁵¹ Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 175.

²⁵² Oakes, “Re-mapping the Universe,” 314.

the very least, an awareness of potential conflicts between its Christian communities and the ideology of the imperial cults.

Considering that the works of both Price and Friesen have had momentous consequences for recognizing the presence of imperial cults in Asia Minor,²⁵³ it is surprising that little attention has been given to possible consequences of their works for understanding the empirical life-setting of the recipients of Ephesians.²⁵⁴ Asia Minor, in the first two centuries AD, was not simply one region where imperial cults were present; they thrived there in ways they did not in other regions of the Roman Empire during that time. The wider network of imperial cults reached beyond official provincial temples, so to say that imperial cults were an inescapable reality for some Christians in Asia Minor during the period of the early empire is no understatement.²⁵⁵ This inescapability alone warrants that consideration be given to this aspect of the empirical Roman imperial context of the recipients of Ephesians and to how these developments functioned during the various eras proposed for the writing of Ephesians—resulting in numerous consequences for constructing the implied elements of the letter.

3.3.3 ROMAN IMPERIAL ESCHATOLOGY

One final aspect of the empirical context of the Roman Empire for Ephesians will help in reconstructing the implied situation of the epistle: Roman eschatology. The growth of imperial power and the establishment of imperial cults are closely linked to Roman imperial eschatology.²⁵⁶ Roman imperial eschatology is evident in a vast array of coins, frescos, reliefs, portraitures, and literature from the early imperial era.²⁵⁷ These varied media projected bold

²⁵³ Price's work "altered the landscape of inquiry concerning the worship of rulers in the Roman East." Burrell, *Neokoroi*, 2.

²⁵⁴ Exceptions to this are: Long, "Ἐκκλησία in Ephesians," 198-202, 207, 215, 220-224; Long, "Ephesians: Paul's Political Theology," 263, 268 fn. 55, 271-272, 287-288, 306. Maier cautiously acknowledges that imperial cults were "penetrating deeply into the civic life of Asia Minor," but he does not want to overstate its importance: *Picturing Paul*, 37. In his introduction to the city of Ephesus, Darrell Bock recognizes imperial cults in the city as an expression of Roman power, but they do not appear to play a major role in his comments on specific passages in Ephesians: *Ephesians* (TNTC 10; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 4.

²⁵⁵ Oakes assumes "that there was some expression of the imperial cult in every town of any size in the eastern Roman Empire, with the possible exception of exclusively Jewish areas." "Re-mapping the Universe," 307. Imperial cults were not the only aspect of Roman imperial society that early Christians in Asia Minor had to navigate: Galinsky, "Cult," 1.

²⁵⁶ For links between imperial cults and eschatology see Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 129-131.

²⁵⁷ Barbara R. Rossing, "Prophecy, End-Times, and American Apocalypse: Reclaiming Hope for Our World," in *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend*, eds. Ted Grimsrud, and Michael Hardin (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 261; see also Richard Oster, "Numismatic Windows into the Social World of Early Christianity: A Methodological Inquiry," *JBL* 101.2 (1982): 210; Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton:

declarations of the arrival of an *aurem saeculum* (golden age) in Caesar Augustus.²⁵⁸ Virgil's *Aeneid* provides us with one potent expression of the arrival of the golden age.²⁵⁹

Turn hither now your two-eyed gaze, and behold this nation, the Romans that are yours. Here is Caesar and all the seed of Iulus destined to pass under heaven's spacious sphere. And this in truth is he whom you so often hear promised you, Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will again establish a *golden age* in Latium amid fields once ruled by Saturn; *he will advance his empire* beyond the Garamants and Indians to a land which lies *beyond our stars, beyond the path of year and sun, where sky-bearing Atlas wheels on his shoulders the blazing star-studded sphere*. Against his coming both Caspian realms and the Maeotic land even now shudder at the oracles of their gods, and the mouths of sevenfold Nile quiver in alarm. *Not even Hercules traversed so much of earth's extent*, though he pierced the stag of brazen foot, quieted the woods of Erymanthus, and made Lerna tremble at his bow; nor he either, who guides his car with vine-leaf reins, triumphant Bacchus, driving his tigers down from Nysa's lofty peak.²⁶⁰ (italics mine)

Subsequent Julio-Claudian emperors cast their own contributions in a similar light, either reaffirming Augustan imagery to contextualize their own accomplishments,²⁶¹ or brazenly

Princeton University Press, 199), 101; F. Norwood, "The Tripartite Eschatology of Aeneid 6," *Classical Philology* 49.1 (Jan. 1954): 15-26.

²⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 30, 114-115. E.g. the Augustan *ara pacis* (alter of peace) contains varied imagery that functions as: "a symbolic reference to the wealth of the golden age... The abundance of vegetation and the sprouting of cultivated plants... are characteristic of the conception of the *aurea aetas*, which was especially prevalent during the age of Augustus... the swans... were the sacred birds of Apollo whom the Sibyl had prophesized as future king of the golden age. Apollo was closely associated with the House of Augustus, under whose rule of peace the *aurea aetas* should come to be." Erika Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 13. The Tellus relief on the *ara pacis* also vividly portrays the arrival of the *aureum saeculum* across all of Italy: Simon, "Ara Pacis Augustae, 28. "Only under the scepter of the goddess of peace, who was even equated with the constellation of the golden age... would the wealth of the aureum saeculum become a reality. He who possessed that ascendancy over pax and caused that era of prosperity, however, was the emperor on his return to Italy." Simon, 29. Propaganda surrounding the arrival of the 'golden age' in Augustus was one aspect of "the great assault on the psychology of a generation." Crook, "Augustus," 139.

²⁵⁹ Maria Becker notes the eschatological nature of Virgil's writings: "Die Schwierigkeiten des Verständnisses rühren nicht zuletzt daher, daß der Dichter in der Form einer eschatologischen Verheißung besingt, was er schon in der Gegenwart erfüllt sieht: Die Geburt eines Kindes läutet die unerhörte Zeitenwende ein, die durch die Wiederkehr des goldenen Zeitalters markiert ist." "Iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto. Ein Beitrag zur Vergil-Erklärung (ECL. 4, 7)" *Hermes* 131.4 (2003): 456; see also Koester, *New Testament*, 340. For strong justification for studying Virgil's vision of Augustan Imperial ideology in conjunction with NT texts see, Rock, "Paul's Letter to the Romans," 52 fn. 13; David R. Wallace, *The Gospel of God: Romans as Paul's Aeneid* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

²⁶⁰ Virgil's *Aeneid* 6.789-804 [Virgil. *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*. Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough. Revised by G. P. Goold (LCL 63; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916)]. See also, Rock, "Paul's Letter to the Romans," 59-61. The arrival of the golden age is also evident in Virgil's fourth eclogue: Gregson Davis, "Introduction," in *Virgil's Eclogues*. Trans. Len Krisak (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), x.

²⁶¹ L. Stirling, "Art, Architecture, and Archaeology in the Roman Empire," in *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, ed. D.S. Potter (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 79; see also Kelly D. Liebengood, "Confronting Roman Imperial Claims: Following in the Footsteps (and the Narrative) of 1 Peter's Eschatological Davidic Shepherd," in *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, ed. A. Winn (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 261. Barbara Levick notes that the rule of all of the Antonine emperors, with the

trumping the previous Augustan claims by announcing the arrival of an even better golden age in their reign, as was the case with Nero,²⁶² and the second century Nerva-Antonine rulers.²⁶³ While the provinces, especially Asia Minor, reached their peak of prosperity during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian,²⁶⁴ there can be no doubt that Augustus' brand of *pax* that emanated across the empire had still left its mark. Augustan peace was firmly encased in eschatological motifs.²⁶⁵ These Augustan claims (as well as that of its successors) were inescapable realities throughout the large part of the Roman Empire, present even in places where they might be least expected (e.g. Judea) by some modern interpreters.²⁶⁶

For our purposes, it will be especially important to consider the empirical realities of first-century Asia Minor related to Roman imperial eschatology. Understanding these realities can help our reconstruction of the implied situation of the recipients of Ephesians. Evidence

exception of Commodus, were represented as a golden age: *Vespasian* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2. Nero originally cast his imperial vision as a return to Augustan ideals: Wiedemann, "Tiberius to Nero," 242.

²⁶² Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith; London: SCM Press, 1955), 139. See also James R. Harrison, "Paul among the Romans," in *All Things to All Cultures: Paul among Jews, Greek, and Romans*, eds. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013): 143; V. Rudich, *Political Dissidence Under Nero: The Price of Dissimulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), 11; Eugenio La Rocca, "Staging Nero: Public Imagery and the Domus Aurea," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Nero*, eds. S. Bartsch, K. Freudenburg, and C. Littlewood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 195; E. Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2003), 144. Champlin suggests that Nero's action after the great fire of AD 64 were also meant to invoke a new Golden Age: *Nero*, 126; D. Shotton, *Nero*. Lancaster Pamphlets (London: Routledge, 1997), 15-25 (his chapter heading here is 'The New Augustus'); Rock, "Paul's Letter to the Romans," 96-103. Griffin traces the early reforms under Nero that were meant to counteract policies under previous rulers: *Nero*, 50-66, see also 138, 149, 187; and Shotton, *Nero*, 18.

²⁶³ Flavian [AD 69-96] ideology also stressed continuity with the favorable Julio-Claudian rulers: Griffin, "The Flavians," 11, partly evident in the fact that they adopted the Cesarean family name: Griffin, 14. Ideas for a public amphitheater (colosseum), vineyard, and extending the city's *pomerium* (sacred boundaries) were also taken from Julio-Claudian precedents: Griffin, 20. Roman rule in the second century is considered by some to have inaugurated an even more intensified golden age than that of the first century: M. Bunson, *Encyclopedia of the Roman Empire*. Rev. Ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2002), 475; M. Godman, *The Roman World: 44BC-AD180*. Routledge History of the Ancient World (London: Routledge, 1997), 68. The assassination of Domitian was justified as the necessary precursor to the arrival of a new golden age: B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (Routledge: London, 1992), 161. Nerva drew on Augustan imagery on his coins to demonstrate continuity with the first Principate: Griffin, "Nerva to Hadrian," 85. Gibbon claims that Trajan's rule "inaugurated the Golden Age of the Roman Empire:" quoted in J. Bennett, *Trajan Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times* (London: Routledge, 1997), xvii. During the reign of Antoninus Pius [AD 138-161], "the Pax Augusta for the whole empire appeared to be a lasting reality." Koester, *New Testament*, 321. The "golden age" of the empire came to an end when the last of the Nerva-Antonine rulers, Commodus, came to power [182-192]: Koester, 316, 322.

²⁶⁴ Barbara Levick, "Greece and Asia Minor," in Bowman, et. al., *CAH XI*, 612. Levick notes that "the cultural achievement of Asia Minor, and to a lesser extent, of mainland Greece, under the Principate of the late first and second centuries A.D. was not negotiable." Levick, 619. See also Schwindt, *Das Weltbild*, 71.

²⁶⁵ Rehak notes that the whole complex in the Campus Martius that Augustus established "serves as an eschatological 'museum' of Augustus's life and accomplishments." *Imperium and Cosmos*, 146. Augustan eschatology, *Pax*, and Imperial cults were all interconnected: A. Brent, "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor," *JTS* 48.2 (1997): 432. Vespasian was also concerned with projecting Rome's *aeternitas* (eternity) by imposing stricter laws against the demolition of public buildings: Griffin, "The Flavians," 22.

²⁶⁶ Joan E. Taylor, "Pontius Pilate and the Imperial Cult in Roman Judea," *NTS* 52 (2006): 555-582.

exists that the cosmic claims that were being conveyed throughout the empire at large were equally present in Asia Minor.²⁶⁷ For example, the *sebasteion* in Aphrodisias²⁶⁸ is a clear example of the Augustan claims of the establishment of a “worldwide renewal” which had “eschatological dimensions.”²⁶⁹ It projected a global reign with corresponding images of victory.²⁷⁰ These announcements of the arrival of the golden age was born out of Augustan politics and eschatology, especially relating to the celebration of the *ludi saeculares* (secular games):

The explicit context for proclamation that the Age of Bliss had been born was the famous *Ludi Saeculares* (Saecular Games). As a cultic event, it was influenced by the messianic ideals of the Augustan writers, thereby infusing these old Etruscan ceremonies with the new breath of Roman historical eschatology. The accomplishments of Augustus, or rather Roman gods through him, and the attendant shift in historical ethos reflected in Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*, a hymn composed especially this occasion. In regard to the new interpretation of this ceremony in Augustan era, Franz Altheim has observed, ‘It was the novelty of the Augustan Secular celebrations that the former age was not, as at previous celebrations, carried to the grave with its guilt and woe, but that the beginning of an epoch of happy promise was held in prospect. A conception like that of the coming age of Bliss, as Virgil had pictured it in his Fourth Eclogue, here found expression in cult.’²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Augustus “followed Caesar and Pompey in creating a new geography, with his regime at the center of the world.” Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 146. Rehak further notes that the Horologium-Solarium “put Augustus at the center of the cosmos.” *Imperium and Cosmos*, 146. On the cosmic scope of Roman imperial rule, see also Eberhard Faust, *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 281.

²⁶⁸ Aphrodisias was situated between Ephesus and Colossae, approximately 145 km west of ancient Ephesus, and 70 km east of Colossae (by modern calculations on Google maps).

²⁶⁹ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 51. Maier maintains a similar approach in “Paul, Imperial Situation, and Visualization in the Epistle to the Colossians,” in Robbins, Melion, and Jeal, *Visual Exegesis*, 171-194, and “A Sly Civility: Colossians and Empire” *JSNT* 27.3 (2005): 323-349. Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat detect more subversive elements present in Colossians: *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2004)].

²⁷⁰ Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 51.

²⁷¹ Oster, “Numismatic Windows,” 210-11.; see also Braund, *Augustus to Nero*, 6; S. Morton Braund, “Virgil and the Cosmos: Religious and Philosophical Ideas,” in *A Companion to Virgil's Aeneid and its Tradition*, eds. J. Farrell and M.C.J. Putnam (1st Ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 204-221. Virgil makes the strongest statement of the return of the golden age, Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 92. On the value of poetry for understanding imperial ideology, see Braund, *Augustus to Nero*, 7.

The *ludi saeculares* were meant to celebrate the arrival of a new *saeculum*.²⁷² Prior to the imperial era, the *ludi* had last been celebrated in 146 BC, but underwent a period of abeyance until Augustus recalculated the *saeculum* to reinstitute the celebration of the games in 17 BC. A subsequent attempt by Claudius to align the games with the foundation of the city of Rome²⁷³ led to the games' being celebrated just 64 years after the Augustan games.²⁷⁴ What was originally intended to be celebrated once in a person's lifetime, at best, had now been celebrated twice by some people living in the early empire. Emperors after Augustus began to take specific measures to cast their own eschatological vision as having surpassed that of their predecessors. Time itself began to be recalculated with the dawn of each new imperial ruler.²⁷⁵

This recasting of time can be seen during the first principate (Augustus) in an inscription from 9 BC found near Priene (just south of Ephesus).²⁷⁶ It provides further evidence of Roman eschatology in Asia Minor. A favorite of imperial-critical interpreters,²⁷⁷ the Priene inscription details a proposal from local authorities to recalibrate the calendar around Augustus' birthday. Whereas it is often utilized in imperial-critical discussions to highlight parallel terminology between Roman imperial ideology and language of the NT, its underlying narrative assumptions are most relevant for this project. The inscription casts a bold vision of eschatology, by "imagin[ing] Emperor Augustus to have inaugurated a new age of blessing on

²⁷² A *saeculum* was originally thought to be 100 years, but later changed to 110 years following the Sibylline oracle: Simon R. F. Price, "The Place of Religion: Rome in the Early Empire," in *CAH X*, eds. A. K. Bowman, E. Champlin, and A. Lintott (2nd Ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 836.

²⁷³ Wiedemann, "Tiberius to Nero," 239.

²⁷⁴ Price, "Place of Religion," 837.

²⁷⁵ Koester notes this in Virgil's *Aeneid*, "The epic repetition of the primordial time thus announces the presence of the eschatological time." *New Testament*, 341.

²⁷⁶ For the full Greek text and translation see OGIS 458II, also C.A. Evans, "Mark's Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel," *JGRChJ* 1 (2000): 69, also James R. Harrison, "Paul, Eschatology, and the Augustan Age of Grace," *TynBul* 50.1 (1999): 85-86. Harrison calls Augustus "the Lord of Time" in light of the fact that the *horologium* also organized time around Augustus: "Paul among the Romans," 145. See also Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 62-95, 146.

²⁷⁷ See, J. F. Dechow, "The Gospel and the Emperor Cult: From Bultmann to Crossan," *Forum* 3.2 (2014): 63-88; Deter Georgi, "Who is the True Prophet?" *HTR* 79.1-3 (1986): 103, fn. 10; Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 46; Fredrick J. Long, "'Εκκλησία in Ephesians as Godlike in the Heavens, in Temple, in γάμος, and in Armor: Ideology and Iconography in Ephesus and its Environs," in Harrison and Welborn, eds., *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus*, 223; Fredrick J. Long, "Ephesians: Paul's Political Theology in Greco-Roman Context," in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 276; Lim, "Double Voiced," 4; Bruce W. Longenecker, "Peace, Prosperity, and Propaganda: Advertisement and Reality in the Early Roman Empire," in Winn, ed., *Introduction to Empire*, 15, 17-18; Köstenberger and O'Brien acknowledge the presence of *euangelion* terminology in the inscription but denies that it provides context for the NT use of the term on the basis that the inscription only uses the plural, and "the New Testament itself gives no evidence of a political or polemical orientation." *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 11; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 272.

the human race and the whole of the created order.”²⁷⁸ Since the honor was proposed by leaders in the Roman province of Asia, it also demonstrates that provincial rulers subscribed to an ideology that saw the reign of Augustus as the dawning of a new golden age.

This Augustan eschatology can be further seen in the varied mediums that proclaimed its arrival:

Augustus's *Res Gestae* moved more and more into the limelight. The dramatic reappearance of this "Golden Age" thinking under the reign of Augustus was nourished by the literary proponents of Roman eschatology. Literature, however, was not the sole medium for the expression of this civilization's hopes. This belief in and anticipation of a "magical, almost unbelievable profusion of well-being, material and moral" came to expression on contemporary coinage. In Harold Mattingly's words, "This theme haunts the coinage: the old hope revives again and again, undaunted by constant disappointment."²⁷⁹

Frequent images of the globe appeared during the early Roman Empire, displaying the cosmic scope of Rome's imperial program.²⁸⁰ Emperors sought out "mastery of the world,"²⁸¹ and there were clear connections between images of the globe and the Augustan Principate:

E. A. Sydenham stated the situation quite accurately when he wrote that the globe type "implies that he (the emperor) occupies the supreme position as controller of the world. That is to say, it is equivalent to regarding the emperor himself as a being of the nature of divinity... Augustus... was careful to allow no worship of himself apart from that of Roma, while there is no doubt that he regarded the divine character of the Emperor as an essential factor of imperial theory."²⁸²

This global imagery can be seen again in Virgil's *Aeneid*, boldly proclaiming Augustus' dominion to have surpassed even that of Hercules, and extending to "where sky-bearing Atlas wheels on his shoulders the blazing star-studded sphere."²⁸³ The monumental horologium obelisk (for some time, thought to be a sun dial) that was erected near the *ara pacis*, contained

²⁷⁸ Longenecker, "Peace, Prosperity, and Propaganda," 18.

²⁷⁹ Oster, "Numismatics," 210. Note also Oster's footnoted comments on the quote provided above, "Virtually any survey of Augustan literature emphasizes this point." Oster further cites T. R. Glover, "The Literature of the Augustan Age" *CAH* 10, 512 in support of the pervasiveness of Roman eschatology under Augustus, see Oster, "Numismatics," 210 fn. 98. Braund notes that the *Res Gestae* was clearly "Augustus' version of events." Braund, *Augustus to Nero*, 8.

²⁸⁰ Oster, 206.

²⁸¹ Oster, 206, quoting Stephen Winestock. See also, M. Lavan, "The Empire in the Age of Nero," in *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, eds. E. Buckley and M. T. Dinter (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 71.

²⁸² Oster, 206.

²⁸³ Virgil, *Aeneid*, 796-797.

a globe at its peak, indicating Augustus' domination of the world.²⁸⁴ The global scope of the Augustus' reign finds its predecessor in his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, most explicitly evident in the erection of his statue on the Capitoline hill with the globe laying at his feet.²⁸⁵ Julius Caesar's ambitions for global rule can be traced throughout several instances in his life, especially in his encounter with a statue of Alexander the Great in the temple of Hercules in Gades (Spain). Even though the sight of the statue initially caused Caesar to fret over his own lack of accomplishments, the following night he had a dream of having raped his own mother, only to have soothsayers interpret the dream's reference: "that he was destined to rule the world, since the mother whom he had seen in his power was none other than the earth, which is regarded as the common parent of all mankind."²⁸⁶ Claims of Caesar's global rule were also connected to stories of his divine origins. Omens of Caesar's birth may have emerged as a counter-ideology to claims of worldwide rule being made by Caesar's rival Pompey the Great.²⁸⁷ This cosmic global imagery, associated with Julius Caesar, seems to have been adopted and further developed by his heirs, the Julio-Claudian successors—Rome's first five *imperators*. Cosmic imagery, a key aspect of imperial (and pre-imperial) Roman-ruler ideology, becomes even more intensified in the reign of Nero. The spread of cosmic global imagery, especially correlations between Nero and the Sun-god, explode in unprecedented ways after AD 59—during the mid to later part of Nero's rule.²⁸⁸ The adaptation this imagery can be traced back to Nero himself as its primary advocate—invoking aspects of the arrival of a new golden age.²⁸⁹ Included in this is the construction of Nero's colossus statue of himself in the atrium of his *Domus Aurea*. The cosmic myths reached far beyond Italy, into the most remote places of the empire. It is not at all inconceivable that these images impacted the eschatological ideas of those living in Asia Minor.

²⁸⁴ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 107. The monument is also known as the obelisk of Montecitorio (or Solare) and is currently located in the Campus Martius area in Piazza Montecitorio in Rome, where the globe at its peak can still be viewed.

²⁸⁵ Stephen Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 22.

²⁸⁶ See Sue., *Caesar*, 7 [Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I: Julius. Augustus. Tiberius. Gaius. Caligula*. Translated by J. C. Rolfe. Introduction by K. R. Bradley. (Loeb Classical Library 31. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).] Weinstock notes several other portents in Julius Caesar's life that were seen as a sign of his future rule over the world: *Divus Julius*, 22.

²⁸⁷ Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, 22.

²⁸⁸ S. Mratschek, "Nero the Imperial Misfit: Philhellenism in a Rich Man's World," in *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, eds. E. Buckley and M. T. Dinter (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 50.

²⁸⁹ Mratschek, "Nero the Imperial Misfit," 50; James R. Harrison, "Augustan Rome and the Body of Christ: A Comparison of the Social Vision of the *Res Gestae* and Paul's Letter to the Romans," *HTR* 106.1 (2013): 2.

3.4 CONCLUSION

The following conclusions can be made in light of the assessment above:

1. In certain regions of the Roman Empire during the first century and even more in the second century, there was some danger that writings thought to subvert imperial rule could be exposed by a *delator*, brought to trial and prosecuted under Roman *maiestas* laws.
2. While Paul may not have been motivated to be subtle in critiquing the empire in his writings out of fear of persecution, since he rarely seemed determined to alter his message to avoid it, the same cannot be said about a late first century interpreter (or student) of Paul writing under his name. An implied later date of Ephesians has different implications for assessing its imperial-critical status than does an early one.²⁹⁰ If Ephesians is deuteropauline it might increase the possibility that its speech acts could have been subversive of the Roman Empire—little attention has been paid to this fact, largely focusing the hermeneutical implications of non-Pauline authorship elsewhere.
3. While the exact circumstances of the empirical author are open to interpretation, the implied author's context of imprisonment (Eph. 3:1, 4:1, 6:20) suggests that this epistle, along with the others deemed 'prison epistles,' requires unique considerations for imperial-critical analysis. This is especially true in relation to the discerning of the letter's speech acts in relation to its Roman imperial context in ways not applicable to all other NT texts.²⁹¹
4. The context of *maiestas* laws, while providing nuance to the Roman imperial setting of the NT, does not itself fully explain the function of indirect or implicit subversive speech acts.
5. Understanding speech-act theory can help in two ways: First, it helps attend to the complicated nature of the implied author's speech acts occurring in both Jewish and Roman imperial contexts. Secondly, it explores the ways that speech acts function at

²⁹⁰ Lincoln argues that Ephesians exhibits an "apparent later perspective" of one "looking back" on the apostle's life, advocating for a post-apostolic date, although late first century (between 80-90): *Ephesians*, lxii-lxiii; lxxiii, see also MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 18.

²⁹¹ While Rom. 13:1-7 is taken to be the 'apex' of Paul's teaching on the Roman government, this usually occurs without consideration of the time that Paul spent imprisoned between the writing of Romans and Philippians: Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 1.

the level of the subtext, an important feature of speech acts in a Roman imperial context. This will lead to a more complete assessment of its imperial-critical status in chapter 6.

If the implied context of the letter to the Ephesians is post-Pauline (placed somewhere around the late first century-early second century), our analysis of the context of *maiestas* trials, the presence of *delatores*, and Roman imperial eschatology has further implications. The likelihood that terminological and theological trajectories within the text *counted as* subversion of Roman imperial ideology increases. In fact, the later the implied date, the more likely it is that its language would be understood as subversive of the empire within its cognitive environment in Asia Minor.

This chapter has explored various proposals for the empirical life-setting of Ephesians. Substantial questions remain that cast doubt on the possibility of identifying the empirical recipients, author, and date with precision. Despite this, the various proposals have revealed that what one determines about these questions, especially as it relates to an earlier or later date of the epistle, has bearing on how one understands the empirical Roman imperial context of Ephesians. The differences across decades within the first century, and into the second century, have implications for formulating and assessing an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. We explored three areas of the empirical Roman context of Ephesians that are relevant to imperial criticism of the letter: *maiestas* (treason) laws, imperial cult(s), and Roman eschatology. Specific aspects within these areas were addressed within the context of Asia Minor. These three aspects revealed that as the first century AD came to a close, the situation intensifies so that the possibilities for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians increase. With this broad framework in place, we will turn to an exploration of the implied context in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Implied Life-Setting of Ephesians

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter demonstrated that an earlier or later date framework for Ephesians leads to different nuances in its empirical Roman imperial context. This context, in turn, has further consequences for formulating and assessing an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. Since empirical data can help to reconstruct what is implied in the epistle, it will be necessary to explore the relationship between the empirical elements of its Roman imperial context and reconstructions of what is implied in Ephesians. This chapter will address this issue by surveying existing views of the implied author and audience of Ephesians. From there, various reconstructions of the implied author, audience, and context of Ephesians will be examined, leading to conclusions about how these reconstructions impact a formulation and assessment of an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. It will be concluded that the available empirical data helps to delimit both as well as provide imaginative depth to plausible reconstructions of what is implied, which in turn both opens some possibilities for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians while also placing limits on it.

Interpreters who use an exclusively historical-critical or a historical-grammatical interpretive method face significant problems when approaching anonymous texts.¹ Ephesians is not anonymous per se,² but some of the hermeneutical challenges encountered in the text are similar to those with anonymous authorship. Substantial unresolved questions of the empirical audience and life-setting of Ephesians only heighten this tension more. Neufeld's comments (originally regarding 1 John) are relevant for our discussion of Ephesians: "an almost complete lack of clues about its historical genesis suggests that the historical critical method can at best have a secondary claim only."³ Since imperial-critical interpretations have largely depended on

¹ Dietmar Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An Analysis of 1 John* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 2-3.

² 'Paul' is clearly named as the author in Eph. 1:1. Regardless of whether this refers to Paul empirically or someone writing under his name, the designation implies that 'anonymous' does not rightly describe the authorship of the work.

³ Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts*, 2. Our contention here is that a singular approach that exclusively utilizes a historical-grammatical method, often favoring the empirical over the implied, does not fare well in approaching texts with major questions of authorship, audience, and life-setting. "The danger is that

identification of the empirical political context of NT texts, difficulties in identifying a *Sitz im Leben* for Ephesians have contributed to less attention being given to assessing potential imperial-critical elements within the text.⁴ Scholars see its lack of a clear life-setting as reason to avoid speculation about *behind-the-text* components that could come into play in interpreting the letter.⁵ Our methodological distinction between implied and empirical constitutes a ‘different set of questions,’ an approach that can help to address some of the puzzling interpretive issues related to Ephesians, especially its imperial-critical status.

Skinner’s work pointed out the necessity of balancing a strictly text-centered approach to interpretation with an understanding of the text’s historical contexts.⁶ A danger, according to Skinner, is that strictly text-centered approaches can generate interpretations that do not coincide with the ways in which a text would have been understood in its contemporary environments. These interpretations betray their contemporary contexts when they convey a meaning that is incompatible with the conventions of a text’s own time periods. This leads us to a major question about imperial-critical interpretations: what assumptions about the author, audience, and context would have to be implied in the text in order for these interpretations to be plausible? In the last chapter, we explored aspects of the Roman imperial context of Ephesians from the vantage point of the two major proposed date frameworks. The following chapter will survey scholarly views of the implied author and audience of Ephesians in order to determine how these portraits impact imperial-critical readings of the letter. This

reconstruction of the history can be thought of as the whole work of interpretation.” Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts*, 37. Snodgrass cautions against placing too much emphasis on the historical location of the recipients, “specific knowledge of Ephesus—as amazing as this ancient city was—does not help us much in interpreting the letter.” *Ephesians* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 21. A balanced approach is advisable. Historical critical/grammatical methods are by no means completely invalid or without significant contributions. Instead, supplementary hermeneutical approaches provide more promise for addressing imperial-critical claims for texts with significant unanswered questions of provenance. We sympathize with MacDonald’s sentiment, who sees new hermeneutical approaches as “complementing and to a certain extent challenging the dominant historical-critical approach.” *Colossians and Ephesians* (Rev. Ed; SP 17; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 1.

⁴ An assumed late-first century date, its seemingly more developed ecclesiology, and its instructions within the *haustafel* also contribute to the lack of attention given to Ephesians by IC interpreters.

⁵ John Muddiman (in reference to Tertullian) states that “the destination of any epistle is a matter of indifference, since what Paul says to one church, he says to all.” *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC; New York: Hendrickson, 2001), 62. If by ‘the destination’ Muddiman is referring to identifying the exact empirical location and its empirical recipients, we agree. Otherwise, there are problems with dismissing what may be identified about the implied recipients of a text because it fails to take seriously the occasional nature of NT writings, especially NT epistles. Thorsten Moritz is right in saying that what is implied should be given greater consideration than empirical data: “Scripture and Theological Exegesis” in *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures*, eds. M.W. Pahl and M.F. Bird (Piscataway, N.J.: Georgias, 2010), 125-126, 133-134].

⁶ See pp. 35-38 above.

examination will help to demonstrate that what one determines about the implied aspects of Ephesians directly impacts an evaluation of the imperial-critical status of the epistle.

4.2 SURVEY OF THE IMPLIED AUTHOR

A great deal of energy has been spent assessing the plausibility of empirical Pauline authorship for Ephesians.⁷ Less explicit attention has been given to a thorough discussion of the implied author.⁸ While some of the objections raised against Paul as the empirical author have been overstated,⁹ one benefit of these objections is that they free up the interpreter to focus on what is implied in the text. Whereas determining the identity of the empirical author depends, among other things, on reconstructing biographical details by using data external to the text, the implied author can be reconstructed through what is evident in the text. Available empirical data can then help to contribute to plausible reconstructions of what is implied. For example, the argument that the implied author of Ephesians engages with a form of highly developed Gnosticism would be anachronistic and therefore implausible if it could be demonstrated that these forms of Gnosticism did not take shape until a later period in history.¹⁰ Reconstructing the implied author is restricted by what is known empirically. Empirical data can also help to provide imaginative depth to what is implied. For example, if it could be demonstrated that some Jewish authors in the Second Temple period used language of ‘redemption’ and being ‘chosen’ to invoke the coming of a new exodus, this provides imaginative depth to the portrait of the theology of the implied author of Ephesians, considering that these two concepts are closely tied together in Eph. 1:4-7. The primary hermeneutical contribution of empirical data then is to both delimit and provide imaginative depth to the reconstruction of what is implied.

⁷ See e.g. Harold Hoehner’s survey: *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 2-61.

⁸ For exceptions to this see, p. 30 fn. 4 above.

⁹ See especially Hoehner’s helpful critique of non-Pauline authorship of the epistle: *Ephesians*, 35-61.

¹⁰ This point contrasts with Petr Pokorný’s claim that if Ephesians was written by Paul, it confirms that the epistle’s reflection of a wider “gnostisch-synkretistische Welle” existed 15 years prior to what has been previously been thought. His premise assumes that Ephesians engages with Gnosticism, and so for him, an earlier date for Ephesians would push Gnosticism further back into the first century: *Der Epheserbrief und die Gnosis: Die Bedeutung des Haupt-Glieder-Gedankens in der entstehenden Kirche* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 11. While Pokorný actually dismisses this possibility as unlikely, his reading of the consequences of Pauline authorship for his thesis does not consider that if the empirical data challenges the idea that this form of Gnosticism existed in the first century, it delimits the possibilities for what is implied. For further support of the idea that the NT engages with Gnosticism (or incipient Gnosticism), see Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 312. Gerhard Sellin notes that prior to the 1980s, Ephesians scholarship was more inclined toward identifying Gnostic elements in the epistle, but that more recently these views have fallen out of favor: *Der Brief an die Epheser* (KEK 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 59.

While few scholars of Ephesians have adopted a distinction between implied and empirical, divergent opinions on the identity of the empirical author of Ephesians have led to various authorial portraits offered across publications. When collected, these portraits cast numerous images of the implied author. The following section will survey portraits of the implied author of Ephesians from some of the existing scholarly literature. We will then evaluate these portraits and cast our own vision of the implied author of the letter.

In assessing the author of Ephesians, Best “give[s] a brief sketch of the kind of person for who we should be looking”:¹¹ a male,¹² Hellenistic Jewish Christian, who is depicted as Paul, but probably comes from within a Pauline school, perhaps even in Ephesus.¹³ His Greek is wordy and complex, stringing together arguments that are likely over the head of his audience, and possibly signaling that he has a hard time expressing himself.¹⁴ His use of language indicates that the letter was meant to be read out loud,¹⁵ often with liturgical underpinnings which might also suggest a background in leading worship.¹⁶ He is Jewish, visible in many facets of the letter—the text’s language, idiom, type of exegesis, use of the OT, knowledge of ideas associated with Qumran texts, and emphasis on Israel.¹⁷ His apparent knowledge of Greek rhetoric and Stoicism seems to indicate Hellenistic influence, amounting to “joint Jewish and Greek inheritances.”¹⁸ The implied author must have been “a Jew by race if no longer Jewish in faith,” who nonetheless views the pagan background of the implied audience negatively, while placing a great value on the Hebrew scriptures.¹⁹ Best suggests it is difficult to place the implied author within a specific camp of Jewish thought since he has little in common with rabbinic thinking, and displays no apocalyptic influence, but he also seems to have been influenced by the Dead Sea Scrolls.²⁰ His ethics are “similar with Philo, the later

¹¹ Ernst Best, *Ephesians*. ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 7.

¹² Best’s argument for the maleness of the author is not based on the prevalence of male authors in antiquity, which provides a stronger case for his point, but rather it is based on the language of struggle used in Eph. 6:13, which he claims is stated in ‘male terms.’ *Ephesians*, 7. Best’s claim here is founded on unhelpful assumptions about ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness.’ Whereas males were the soldiers of the ancient world, one cannot assume inherently that a woman would be unfamiliar with such widespread imagery.

¹³ Best, 6.

¹⁴ Best, 4, 8-9.

¹⁵ Best, 9.

¹⁶ Best, 9.

¹⁷ Best, 8.

¹⁸ Best, 8.

¹⁹ Best, 91.

²⁰ Best, 91-92.

Wisdom, [and] Pseudo-Phocylides”, pointing again to his Hellenistic Judaism but largely providing “ethical teaching [that] is straightforward, dealing only with simple duties.”²¹ The author’s Christian tradition is clearly visible, in spite of the lack of direct quotations from Jesus,²² which (according to Best) leads to a gross mischaracterization of the secular world in the letter, and to inaccurate assumptions about his recipients’ households—that they were fully Christian.²³ Best detects an implied date between AD 60-90,²⁴ and an implied author who likely lived in the same area or shared the same background as his readers.²⁵

Even though Best is uncertain whether Paul wrote the letter, he views Paul as the implied author.²⁶ An important feature of the image of the implied author in Ephesians is how Paul is portrayed. Several aspects of Paul’s identity are depicted: he is an apostle,²⁷ a prisoner [for the sake of the Gentiles], a missionary (6:19), and διάκονος (3:7).²⁸ He is portrayed as a man of prayer and a recipient of revelation, but at the same time the least of all the believers (3:8).²⁹ He preaches and teaches salvation to the Gentiles [and to the ‘powers’] (3:10). Best detects an author who is meditative, reflective, and liturgical, but not necessarily as a role model for the recipients. Oddly, the Paul we see in Ephesians, according to Best, is out of touch with his audience because he assumes that they live in households made up exclusively of Christians.³⁰

Similar to Best’s view, Dahl also believes that the author was likely Jewish, but probably younger than Paul, “embrac[ing] a Pauline form of Christianity.”³¹ Schüssler Fiorenza also acknowledges the wide acceptance of Jewish authorship of the letter,³² and affirms the necessity of Ephesians being “read as a Jewish text,” but with a view towards “giv[ing] up the

²¹ Best, *Ephesians*, 9.

²² Best, 93.

²³ Best, 2-3.

²⁴ Best, 19.

²⁵ Best, 91.

²⁶ Best, 41.

²⁷ Best, 41.

²⁸ Best, 42.

²⁹ Best, 42-43.

³⁰ Best, 43.

³¹ Nils Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians: Introductory Questions, Text- and Edition-Critical Issues, Interpretation of Texts and Themes*, eds. D. Hellholm, V. Blomkvist, and T. Fornberg (WUNT 131. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 458.

³² Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. *Ephesians* (Wisdom Commentary 50; Colledgeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), lxiv.

understanding of religions as a fixed set of convictions with well-defined boundaries.”³³ She also notes that the “characteristic Jewish language of the letter points to a writer who is steeped in Jewish language and speech. The author does not write against Judaism in a polemical fashion. Instead, the author’s perspective is ‘wholly Jewish.’”³⁴ Similarly, MacDonald also believes that the frequent allusions to the OT, the connections with Qumran, and the concerns for unity between Jews and Gentiles points a Jewish Christian author.³⁵ Lincoln similarly concludes that the implied author was a Jewish Christian, but that he only had general knowledge of his audience.³⁶

Talbert sees the implied author as “God’s ambassador...to whom the divine benefactor has revealed his eternal plan for the cosmos.”³⁷ This system of benefaction, provides a connecting point between the implied author’s world and that of the recipients, who “lived in a world whose public space was knee deep in honorific inscriptions...designed to honor benefactors, both human and divine, for significant public or private service.”³⁸ For Talbert, the implied author exhibits shared aspects of the implied audience’s context.

Turner notes that the author exhibits “thankful, prayer-filled celebration and exhortation, written with the zeal, idealism, and burning enthusiasm of the visionary.”³⁹ The author seems to have had a powerful experience with the Holy Spirit, feeling a strong unity with Jesus and having begun to understand the depth of God’s love, which he prays that the churches would be able to comprehend.⁴⁰ As a Jewish Christian, the author presents a “fundamental ‘Israel’ bias and shape” to the writing.⁴¹ This is evident in the letter’s communally focused theology, its new exodus themes, and its cosmic Christology.⁴²

In searching for the author, Muddiman examines the kind of language used throughout the epistle. He suggests that the implied author sounds like Paul, but “uses slightly different words in the same sense as Paul and the same words in slightly different senses from Paul.

³³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians*, lxvi.

³⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, lxxvi.

³⁵ MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 16-17.

³⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxv.

³⁷ Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 23-24.

³⁸ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 20.

³⁹ Turner, “Ephesians,” 126.

⁴⁰ Turner, 126.

⁴¹ Turner, 131

⁴² Turner, 127-128.

Judged by his vocabulary, if the author of Ephesians were an imitator of Paul, he was good, but not that good! Not so much un-Pauline as ‘off-Pauline.’”⁴³ He does not rule out the possibility that the implied author’s language is the result of a more “reflective Paul” who uses different language than usual because of his pending death, or a “generalizing Paul” who intends the epistle for a wider audience.⁴⁴ He concludes that the portrait of the author differs from Paul in certain respects, but “displays too much independence to be a mere imitator, and yet there is such a high degree of similarity with Paul as to imply that, unless it is by Paul, he must be a subtle and observant imitator.”⁴⁵ Muddiman’s characterization brings an important issue to the surface: affirmations of Pauline authorship and similarities with Paul’s writing tendencies lead us to wonder what about Paul is implied in the letter, and what the implied audience would have been expected to understand about Paul in order to make sense of Ephesians.

Smillie’s work focuses less on identifying the author and more on analyzing the concluding words of the epistle (6:19-20) in order to discern the implied context behind the writing.⁴⁶ In the midst of his argument, an interesting portrait of the author emerges. He begins with a brief affirmation of Pauline authorship, but highlights Paul’s description of his imprisonment.⁴⁷ He then focuses on Paul’s use of μυστήριον, and his plea for intercessory prayer in order to be able to boldly proclaim the gospel in the midst of his chains: καὶ ὑπὲρ ἑμοῦ, ἵνα μοι δοθῆ λόγος ἐν ἀνοίξει τοῦ στόματός μου, ἐν παρρησίᾳ γνωρίσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ὑπὲρ οὗ πρεσβεύω ἐν ἀλύσει, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ παρρησιάσωμαι ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι (6:19-20). Smillie sees the description of the struggle (as not against flesh and blood) as providing some window into the letter’s *Sitz im Leben*: the first person plural ἡμῶν (6:12) sets up the description of Paul’s current circumstances in Eph. 6:19-20.⁴⁸ Regarding these circumstances, he claims that the impression given from the closing words of the epistle is that Paul is awaiting trial before Nero, and the reason for his arrest is the proclamation of the mystery on behalf of the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1; 6:20).⁴⁹ This interpretation does not necessarily

⁴³ Muddiman, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 4, citing Holden.

⁴⁴ Muddiman, 5.

⁴⁵ Muddiman, 6.

⁴⁶ Gene R. Smillie, “Ephesians 6:19-20 A Mystery for the Sake of Which the Apostle is an Ambassador in Chains,” *TRINJ* 18NS (1997): 199-222.

⁴⁷ Smillie, “Ephesians 6:19-20,” 199-202.

⁴⁸ Smillie, 204.

⁴⁹ Smillie, 213.

suggest that Roman imperial authorities persecuted Paul for his preaching. Instead, he sees the description as connected to the circumstances of Paul's arrest during his conflict with Judean leaders in Jerusalem, which eventually resulted in a transfer to the Roman imprisonment described in Acts 28 after his appeal to Caesar.⁵⁰ Paul's request for boldness then is particularly relevant in light of the fact that he anticipates an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the emperor.⁵¹

Beyond the possible textual allusions in Ephesians to the Roman imprisonment described in Acts, Smillie suggests that the extended decades of the Flavian dynasty, of which there is no official record of persecution against Christians, do not fit the circumstances described.⁵² He states that, "the three decades following Nero—the span favored by advocates of a post-Pauline pseudepigrapher for Ephesus—are remarkably inapt for the atmosphere the 'struggle' that we have observed in Ephesians 6."⁵³ Similarly, he dismisses the latter years of Nero's reign on the basis that Nero's persecution had roused sympathy for Christians in Rome,⁵⁴ favoring an implied authorial context of Paul's Roman imprisonment during AD 60-63.⁵⁵

Smillie assumes Pauline authorship, but we are including his work in a discussion on the implied author because of his careful work with the text and acute survey of Eph. 6:10-24 as a cohesive unit. He claims that the author's implied circumstances are more visible in the text than has often been thought. Rather than simply importing all possible Pauline biographical data wholesale to reconstruct the portrait of the author, Smillie makes a coherent case that the circumstances of the author are actually projected in the text. For our purposes, whether Paul himself penned these words or whether a post-Pauline author invoked these aspects of Paul's experience is not the most important thing. Instead, what is most significant here is whether the implied audience would have been expected to understand this portrait of the author in the manner described by Smillie. If so, three important points emerge about the implied author: 1) He was imprisoned in Rome 2) He awaited trial before Nero and hoped to proclaim the gospel to him. 3) He needed the recipients to pray for boldness for him to proclaim that gospel, implying that enough pressure had mounted against him that he envisioned having difficulty

⁵⁰ Smillie, "Ephesians 6:19-20," 208.

⁵¹ Smillie, 213-214.

⁵² Smillie, 218.

⁵³ Smillie, 219.

⁵⁴ Smillie, 218.

⁵⁵ Smillie, 220.

with the task. If Smillie's assertions are correct, this interpretation has monumental consequences for an imperial-critical reading of the letter, since an implied context at the epicenter of Roman imperial power and ideology, as well as an anticipated audience before Nero, leads to widely different conclusions about whether such a request strengthens or weakens an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians.

The following section will reconstruct key aspects of the implied author. This reconstruction will test how the characteristics of the implied author impact an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. We hope to map out certain characteristics of the implied author and to hold them up to an imperial-critical reading in order to see what assumptions about the author would have to be implied in Ephesians for an imperial-critical reading to be plausible. After providing this assessment, we will then turn our attention to the implied audience.

4.3 IMPLIED AUTHOR: AN APPRAISAL

How might these various scholarly portraits of the implied author of Ephesians contribute to the plausibility of an imperial-critical reading of the letter? In order to arrive at an answer to this question, we will first need to parse out some of the defining characteristics of the implied author. Doing so will help us to examine the ways in which those aspects of the implied author's identity and context shape an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians.

4.3.1 JEWISH CHRISTIAN

That the implied author is depicted as a Jewish Christian is widely acknowledged and constitutes one of the more uniform defining characteristics of the portrait of the implied author across publications, whether one accepts Pauline authorship or not.⁵⁶ Several aspects of the content of the letter point to a Jewish implied author:

1. The frequent use of language and motifs that align with Hebrew concepts, especially in contrast to Colossians, which exhibits less attunement to such language despite wider similarities with Ephesians. For example, Ephesians contains more frequent quotes and

⁵⁶ See pp. 124-125 above.

allusions to the OT than Colossians, it uses images that are similar to those found within the Dead Sea Scrolls and frames the blessings of ch. 1 in terms of Hebrew *berekah*.⁵⁷

2. We/You language that depicts the author as part of a group of Jewish Christians who experienced the privileges granted to Israel ('we') [1:3-14] which have subsequently been extended to Gentile Christians ('you all') by faith in Jesus [1:15ff].⁵⁸
3. An emphasis on Gentiles *as participants in the holiness that was once a prerogative for Israel* rather than *apart from Israel* or *in replacement of Israel* as God's people (2:1ff).⁵⁹
4. An authorial identification with Paul, who was firmly rooted in Jewish tradition and practices.
5. Ethical exhortations in Eph. 4-6 that align with traditional Jewish ethics.

It does not matter whether it can be proven that each of these characteristics is true of the empirical author of Ephesians. Instead, what is important is that these portraits within the letter clearly point to a Jewish implied author. The implied audience was expected to have understood this.

⁵⁷ Allen Verhey and Joseph S. Harvard, *Ephesians* (Belief Commentary; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 41-44; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 162-163; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC, Dallas: Word, 1990), 9-20; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (SP 17; Rev. Ed.; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008), 196-197; Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 41-43; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 93-95; Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (AB 34; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 1-3, 77-78; Baugh, *Ephesians*, 67 fn. 6; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians* (Wisdom Commentary 50; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), 6; Grant R. Osborn, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse* (Osborne New Testament Commentaries; Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 16; Larry J. Kreitzer, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1997), 54; Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 71; John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC, London: Continuum, 2001), 63-65; Ernst Best, *Ephesians* (ICC, London: T&T Clark, 2004), 112-113; Barney Kasdan, *Rabbi Paul Enlightens the Ephesians on Walking with Messiah Yeshua* (A Messianic Commentary; Clarksville, MD: Lederer, 2015), 6-7; T. J. Lang, *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness: From Paul to the Second Century* (BZNV 219; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 86. Baumert and Seewann call it a "jüdische(n) Form eines Lobpreises Gottes." *Israels Berufung für die Völker: Übersetzung und Auslegung der Briefe an Philemon, an die Kolosser und an die Epheser* (München: Echter, 2016), 181.

⁵⁸ D. W. B. Robinson, "Who Were 'The Saints?'" *RTR* 22.2 (1963): 45-53; Fredrick J. Long, "Roman Imperial Rule under the Authority of Jupiter-Zeus: Political-Religious Contexts and the Interpretation of 'The Ruler of the Authority of the Air' in Ephesians 2:2," in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 115. Jayne disputes this interpretation by offering that 'you' are simply the recipients and 'we' are the senders: "'We' and 'You' in Ephesians 1:3-14," *ExpTim* 85.5 (1974): 151-152. Andreas Lindemann suggests that "we" in Eph. 1 refers to "alle Christen." *Der Epheserbrief* (ZBK; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 25

⁵⁹ Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ's Mission through Israel to the Nations* (New Testament After Supersessionism 2; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 82. For a further challenge to supersessionist readings of Eph. 2 see Windsor, 112-158.

More recently, new exodus motifs have been detected in the narrative substructure of Ephesians.⁶⁰ New exodus imagery draws on Israel's exodus from Egypt and anticipates the arrival of a second exodus,⁶¹ often "used as a model to represent the salvation of Israel from their enslavement to foreign powers."⁶² Isaiah draws on Israel's liberation from Egyptian rule in order to project hope that YHWH would do the same for them under Babylonian rule, this time around bringing them through the dessert instead of the Red Sea.⁶³ The motif is also later connected to divine liberative acts of redemption brought about by the work of the Messiah.⁶⁴ According to Estelle, "Isaiah 40-55 is the linchpin in the relationship between the exodus motif and its development into the new exodus that blooms like spring in the New Testament."⁶⁵ One significant development of the motif in Isaiah is that the exodus theme becomes "eschatologized."⁶⁶ Scholars have extensively documented the widespread nature of the new exodus motif throughout both the OT and the NT.⁶⁷ Hanc claims that "there is an increasing tendency among scholars to identify the presence of the new exodus paradigm in *most* of the New Testament writings."⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Richard Cozart, *This Present Triumph: An Investigation into the Significance of the Promise of a New Exodus of Israel in the Letter to the Ephesians* (WEST Theological Monograph 5; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013); D. Starling, "Ephesians and the Hermeneutics of the New Exodus," in *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture*, ed. R. M. Fox (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 139-159; Max Turner, "Ephesians," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 127; R. Routledge, "The Exodus and Biblical Theology," in Fox, ed., *Reverberations of the Exodus*, 199; F. L. Fisher, "The New and Greater Exodus: The Exodus Pattern in the New Testament," *SwJT* 20.1 (1977), 72-73.

⁶¹ Routledge notes the paradigmatic nature of Israel's exodus from Egypt, and the long-standing impact that it had on God's people for subsequent generations, especially evident in the foundational festivals that were established to memorialize the events: "The Exodus and Biblical Theology," 187-192.

⁶² S. P. Sullivan, *The Isaianic New Exodus in Romans 9-11: A Biblical and Theological Study of Paul's Use of Isaiah in Romans* (SP Series; Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2017), 5-6.

⁶³ Sullivan, *The Isaianic New Exodus*, 153. See esp., Is. 40:1-11.

⁶⁴ Fisher, "The New and Greater Exodus," 69; Routledge, "Exodus," 188.

⁶⁵ Brian D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 149. He further suggests that, "No prophet gives more prominence to the theme of a second exodus [than Isaiah]" (Ibid.). Watts traces some new exodus imagery in Is. 1-39, while also highlighting its prominence in Is. 40-55 [Estelle, 154; citing Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 79-80]; see also Routledge, "Exodus," 201-202.

⁶⁶ Estelle, *Echoes*, 150, 161.

⁶⁷ For an extensive list of resources that discuss the new exodus, see annotated bibliography section XI.

⁶⁸ O. Hanc, "Paul and Empire: A Reframing of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of the New Exodus," *TynBul* 65.2 (2014): 314.

While connections between Isaiah and Ephesians are evident,⁶⁹ explorations of Ephesians' use of the Isaianic new exodus motif has only recently emerged.⁷⁰ At the same time, second exodus imagery in the OT is not solely confined to the book of Isaiah. Ezekiel 9-14 anticipates its arrival, as do the Psalms.⁷¹ If a strong presence of new exodus theology in Ephesians can be established, what implications might this have for an imperial-critical interpretation of the letter? On the surface, it may appear that the implied author's Jewish identity makes an imperial-critical reading of the letter less likely. The heavy concentration of Jewish themes could be taken to indicate that the implied author was either unaware of or disinterested in wider ideologies of the Roman Empire and exclusively dependent on and conversant with Judaism. While the pervasiveness of Jewish themes in Ephesians is unmistakable, these motifs' consequences for an imperial-critical reading of the letter are complicated by several factors.

Firstly, first-century Judaism was thoroughly Hellenized, even in Judea.⁷² Ideas which are traditionally identified in Judaism were already immersed within Greco-Roman culture. Thus, the mere presence of these ideas in Ephesians cannot be taken as evidence for disengagement with its wider Greco-Roman context. Jews were immersed in a wider Hellenistic and Roman imperial society, and first-century Jewish theology emerged from within it and continually interacted with it. Construing the origins of these themes exclusively from within Roman imperial ideology is unnecessary. While one should not dismiss the value of discovering parallels between words and themes found in Ephesians and those present in imperial ideology, the validity of imperial-critical interpretations does not rest on proving that the origins of the letter's imagery come from Roman imperial ideology. Identifying the etymology of these words and concepts is far less important than identifying their contemporary use.

⁶⁹ NA28 lists twelve passages from Isaiah in its cross-references for Ephesians: Is. 44:2 in Eph 1:6; Is. 11:2 in Eph 1:17; Is. 50:26 in Eph. 1:19; Is. 9:5 in Eph. 2:14; Is. 57:19 in Eph. 2:17; Is. 57:20 in Eph. 4:14; Is. 63:10 in Eph. 4:30; Is. 40:26 in Eph. 6:10; Is. 11:5 and 59:17 in Eph. 6:14; Is. 52:7 in Eph. 6:15; Is. 59:17 in Eph. 6:17.

⁷⁰ See p. 130 fn. 60 above.

⁷¹ Kelly D. Liebengood, "Confronting Roman Imperial Claims: Following in the Footsteps (and the Narrative) of 1 Peter's Eschatological Davidic Shepherd," in *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, ed. Adam Winn (Resources for Biblical Study 84; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 266-271; Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, 121-148.

⁷² M. David Litwa, *Jesus Deus: The Early Christian Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 7, 15. The distinction between diaspora Judaism and Palestinian Judaism is only geographical: Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 398.

Secondly, images commonly employed within Judaism were sometimes used to converse with Judaism's wider imperial contexts within the late Roman Republic and early Roman Empire. Those Jewish texts in the second temple period which most widely interacted with Greco-Roman society tend to use Jewish motifs in order to subtly critique aspects of society which conflicted with biblical theology.⁷³ Therefore, we actually ought to expect the absence of explicit references to Roman imperial ideology and the ubiquity of Jewish ideas in the Jewish texts that are most critical of the Empire; this structure was conventional.⁷⁴ The very nature of subversive speech acts suggests that implicit communication is preferable to explicit communication. Explicitly avowing the subversive speech act can actually cause it to misfire or to become ineffectual.⁷⁵

Thirdly, Searle's formula indicates that locutions which, on the surface, appear to have straightforward meaning can *count as* more subtle illocutions within given contexts (X=Y in C).⁷⁶ Thus, the presence of locutionary language that draws from Judaism does not inherently discount its engagement with Roman imperial ideology. Furthermore, the absence of explicit invocation of Roman imperial ideology, the Empire, or its emperor does not necessarily mean that these contributed nothing to the subtext of what is said in the epistle. The universality of Roman imperial ideology throughout the empire at this time makes discounting its impact on the subjects of Roman rule imprudent. Not every writing from the first century engaged with

⁷³ See, e.g. Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

⁷⁴ Revelation is an excellent example of this point: very little direct (quotational) references to either the OT, or Roman imperial ideology are discernable in the text. At the same time, its echoes and allusions to the OT are unmistakable, and some commentators have begun to see connections between its invocation of the OT and its challenge to Roman imperial ideology. G. K. Beale raises this option in his interpretation of the phrase "the wine of her fornication" [τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς] in Rev. 17:2. He suggests the possibility of both an OT background and its allusion to the Roman imperial cult: *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 849-850. Beale also notes similar overlap between OT and Roman imperial images in the "Babylon" language of Rev. 17: *Revelation*, 854. He also sees other aspects of the harlot's description in Rev. 17 as invoking Jewish images in order to (at least subtly) engage with the recipient's Roman imperial context in Asia Minor: Beale, *Revelation*, 856, 858. Beale's approach is helpfully nuanced. He challenges the interpretation of the seven hills and eight kings of Rev. 17:9 as a direct reference to Rome and specific Roman emperors: *Revelation*, 868-875. Although, he does acknowledge that "Nero serves as a good illustration of the text's ideas." *Revelation*, 870. In comparison with Beale's approach, Kraybill also acknowledges that Revelation's imagery comes from the OT, but he spends much more time spelling out the Roman imperial imagery that he sees as contributing to the background of the apocalypse than he does with its use of OT imagery: J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), esp. 50. For other connections between Roman imagery and the OT in Revelation, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (WBC 52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 936-937. In reference to Rome, Robert Mounce states that "Drawing heavily upon prophetic oracles and taunt songs of Jewish scripture, the Apocalyptist records an extended dirge over the accursed city." *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Rev. Ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 322.

⁷⁵ See pp. 58-59 above.

⁷⁶ See pp. 50-54 above.

that ideology. On the other hand, its omnipresence warrants a closer examination of how it contributed to the subtext of first-century writings.

Lastly, the implied author's Jewish identity places him within a context of a people group known to have had a history of resistance to Roman imperial rule. Not all Jews resisted Roman imperial rule, and there is no evidence that Paul was a Zealot, so this point raises questions about whether the portrait of Paul in Ephesians strikes a blow to imperial-critical readings. Would not the implied audience have understood that Paul was a Roman citizen? And would that audience have heard Ephesians in a way that went against Romans 13—which, if taken straightforwardly, appears to affirm that Paul offered little opposition to Roman rule?⁷⁷ The authorial identification with Paul is less plausible if it could be shown that the implied audience would not have read an epistle projecting Paul as its author as containing anti-imperial sentiments. On the other hand, the Jewish perspective of the implied author could increase the likelihood of anti-Roman sentiments being present since there is historical precedence of some Jews questioning aspects of Roman imperial ideology.

The heavy presence of Jewish themes in the letter also increases the plausibility of an imperial-critical reading. If new exodus imagery in Ephesians helped provide an alternative understanding of metanarrative for the letter's recipients, in contrast to what was being offered by imperial rule, invoking the arrival of the new exodus in Jesus might have implicitly challenged the empire without being easily detectable as subversion by imperial authorities who may have been monitoring the author's writings from prison. The necessity of subtler strategies of subversion increases in the later decades of the first century, and significantly increases the further one ventures into the second century. Even if some Christians did not shy away from explicit criticism of the Roman Empire, definite empirical conditions were in place that made explicit communication more dangerous. The new exodus motif was politically provocative. When the empirical realities of the implied audience's Roman imperial context are taken into consideration, employing the new exodus motif in Ephesians could have *counted*

⁷⁷ There are strong reasons for questioning whether Romans 13 reflects Paul's singular attitude towards the Roman Empire. Romans is not the only place within the undisputed Pauline corpus that offers insight into Paul's views of imperial authorities: E.g. In 1 Cor. 2:6, Paul depicts the rulers as τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τῶν καταργουμένων, and states that they had not understood God's mystery εἰ γὰρ ἔγνωσαν, οὐκ ἂν τὸν κύριον τῆς δόξης ἐσταύρωσαν [1 Cor. 2:8]. See also our comments on 1 Cor. 2 on p. 208-209 fn. 36 below. At the same time, Matera's claim that Romans 13 "has been seen as the biblical starting point for constructing a doctrine of church and state" suggests that, from the perspective of the history of interpretation, this passage has been regarded as paramount: Frank J. Matera, *Romans* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic: 2010), 301. However, even if Romans 13 reflects Paul's normative view of imperial authorities, imperial-critical readings of the passage have emerged that view its content as a challenge to Roman rule rather than an affirmation of it: see p. 77 fn. 35 above.

as subversion of imperial ideology so long as the readers understood that claims of its arrival implied divine victory over earthly rulers and that this victory envisioned, at least in theory, an obstruction to Roman imperial ideology. This victory need not be militaristic in order for the recipients to have understood that the motif undermined the ideology of the Roman Empire. Estelle's recognition that the new exodus motif was eschatological assumes that at the core of the motif lies claims about time, and the arrival of the pinnacle of history. Contemporary alternative Roman imperial eschatologies, spelled out earlier,⁷⁸ then function as the subtext for the arrival of the new exodus in Ephesians.

The implied author's articulation of household relationships in terms that align with traditional Greco-Roman structures also suggest that the author had wider knowledge of the cultural ethos of imperial rule. The implied author's awareness of this aspect of Greco-Roman society increases the likelihood that he would have been aware of other significant motifs present within Empire at this time. A significant problem for imperial-critical interpreters arises from the fact that the implied author seems to adopt and affirm these traditional structures rather than challenge them.

4.3.2 HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES: IMPRISONED

Even if Ephesians was not empirically written by Paul, it is still possible to deduce certain things about how Paul is projected in Ephesians. Some obvious aspects stand out: his knowledge of the OT scriptures/story; his belief in Jesus as Messiah and its implications for the overarching narrative of God's creation and his people; his knowledge and use of Greek; his experience with divine revelation; his beliefs about the spiritual benefits granted to those who have faith in Jesus; and aspects of his ecclesiology, cosmology, and eschatology. Several of the best-known aspects of Paul's life are not directly evident, e.g. details of his Damascus road experience, his missionary journeys, his background as a Pharisee, and his relationship to other prominent Christian leaders and communities (other than Τύχικος).⁷⁹ On the other hand, the most clearly identifiable aspect revealed about Paul's circumstances in Ephesians is his

⁷⁸ See pp. 111-117 above.

⁷⁹ The name Τύχικος is fairly well attested in Greco-Roman source material, including epigraphic data from 53 inscriptions, 13 of which are from Asia Minor. This data was pulled from searching the online tool of the Packard Humanities Institute (Cornell and Ohio State University) Searchable Greek Inscriptions, accessible at <https://bit.ly/2MtI6CK>, last accessed 07 Aug 2018. Further attestation of the name includes, Poly. *Hist.* 9.6.5, 28.7.1; Diodorus Siculus, *Lib.* 16.35.5, *Biblio. Hist.* 2.19.4; Pseud. Plutarch, *Plac. Phil.* 5.12 (obtained by search on Perseus digital library): <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>, last accessed 07 Aug 2018.

imprisonment.⁸⁰ The implied author's assumed context at the time of writing is clearly one of imprisonment. If one had no understanding of Paul prior to reading the epistle, this aspect would not go unnoticed.

Cassidy notes that Ephesians and Colossians “vividly and substantively image Paul as a prisoner in chains,”⁸¹ and like Philemon, they “portra[y] Paul in a situation of *sustained* Roman imprisonment.”⁸² This portrait raises questions about what purpose the author's imprisonment serves within the epistle. To the extent that the portrait of the implied author corresponded to some degree with the actual realities in the empirical life of Paul, there may be more behind the implied context of this imprisonment.⁸³ While, unlike 2 Tim., there are no explicit textual cues within Ephesians that project a specific location of the author's imprisonment, what the readers/hearers would have been expected to know about Paul's life does contribute to their perception of the implied author.⁸⁴

Smillie's claim that the circumstances of the author are more clearly implied in the text than has been previously thought deserves further consideration.⁸⁵ If the implied setting of the author's imprisonment in Ephesians is Rome, its “conceptual date”⁸⁶ likely projects to the mid to later part of Nero's reign—probably either the early years of the decade of AD 60s, during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (conveyed in Acts 28), or the mid-60s, during Paul's last

⁸⁰ Eph. 3:1, 4:1, 6:20.

⁸¹ Richard Cassidy, *Paul in Chains: Roman Imprisonment and the Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 85.

⁸² Cassidy, 86.

⁸³ This assumes that the empirical author, whether that person was Paul himself or someone else, would not have invoked a fictional image of Paul's imprisonment. It is possible that, in doing so, it created difficulties for the implied recipients that could result in a misfired speech act. Some scholars have seen the invocation of Paul's imprisonment as a strong case against pseudepigraphic authorship, see Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians* (NCC; Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 6; Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians* (TNTC 10; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 208.

⁸⁴ The context of a Roman imprisonment for 2 Tim. is very likely considering 2 Tim. 1:17; 4:6-22. In support of the view, see George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 10; Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Vol. 1: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 306; Walter L. Liefeld, *1&2 Timothy/Titus* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 237; George T. Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scriptures' Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 200-201; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), lxii-lxiv.

⁸⁵ See pp. 126-128 above. Similarly, Helge Stadelmann claims that the depiction of Jews/Gentile in the epistle reflects the circumstances in Caesarea during the author's imprisonment rather than the circumstances of the recipients. *Der Epheserbrief* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1993), 16.

⁸⁶ Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 86. Although, he concludes here that Ephesians, along with Colossians and Philemon, is “to be viewed as pertaining to Paul's journey after Romans.”

imprisonment prior to his execution under Nero.⁸⁷ Smillie favors the earlier date and suggests that, since sympathies for Christians had been aroused in Rome in light of Nero's treatment of them after the fire, a later Neronian implied date is less likely.⁸⁸ He also assumes that since there are no convincing empirical records of persecution of Christians during Flavian rule (in spite of the rumors against Domitian), a late first-century implied date is also unlikely.⁸⁹ His dismissal of each of these options as the *Sitz im Leben* of the epistle is based primarily on the assumption that the author's anxieties and request for prayer at the end of Ephesians (6:19-20) indicates an implied setting of active persecution against Christians by Roman authorities.

Such an assumption is not without problems. Smillie assumes that the imprisonment of the author was primarily the result of conflicts with Jewish leaders. It is not impossible that such conflicts escalated even further after the destruction of Jerusalem, when anxieties about who constituted true Jews had escalated within Judaism, and when there may have been a concerted effort to revive traditional aspects of Judaism. At that point, Christianity may have been deemed an illegitimate form of Judaism. Even if Flavian rulers did not hunt down Christians at this point, it is not inconceivable that a post-Pauline author found himself in a similar circumstance to that of Paul at the end of Acts. If so, the imprisonment in Ephesians implies a later date, possibly during Flavian rule. Further, more active persecution against Christians, especially in Asia Minor and the surrounding regions, escalate in the mid-second century.⁹⁰ Smillie does not address the possibility that a significantly later date may make sense if an active persecution of the author also implies a wider persecution of Christians on the part of Roman imperial authorities. While much later dates (mid to late 2nd century) are unusual among Ephesians scholars, some assert their possibility.⁹¹

On the other hand, if Smillie is right, the implied proximity to the epicenter of Roman imperial rule does have consequences for evaluating the subtext of Ephesians, especially if the recipients thought that Paul had been arrested and charged with *maiestas*.⁹² If the imprisonment

⁸⁷ "The concluding note in Codex Angelicus (L) represents the consensus of ancient opinions when it states: 'This epistle was written to the Ephesians from Rome [and sent] through Tychicus.'" S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians* (Evangelical Exegetical Commentary; Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 31 fn. 76.

⁸⁸ See p. 127 above.

⁸⁹ See p. 127 above.

⁹⁰ See pp. 107-111 above.

⁹¹ See p. 75 fn. 32 above.

⁹² If the traditions that place Paul's Roman imprisonment in, what is now known as the "Mamertine prison," are correct, it would have even further consequences for this point. If the implied readers were expected to envision Paul writing this epistle from the *carcer* (or *tullianum*) in the Roman forum, that could imply the following: 1) That the Roman authorities had taken a particular interest in the author, and that the author was deemed a special threat to Roman imperial rule (or guilty of treasonous activities) since only the most notorious

implicitly reflects another location, namely Caesarea or Ephesus, slightly different associations may have been more likely—although not without some similarities.

Whether Ephesians was one of the last letters penned by Paul is unclear, although if it were, it might explain some of the epistle's idiosyncrasies. Its distinctive theology and language may then be a result of Paul's theologizing in light of his own (as well as his recipients') unique circumstances, rather than being indicative of non-Pauline authorship. That the letter was empirically composed during this timeframe is less relevant than what is assumed, that is, what implied life-setting is projected for the recipients.

Even if the letter were composed at a later (even much later, post-Pauline) date, its implied life-setting provides the frame for the letter's content. What matters for interpreting the epistle, then, is not an exact determination of the empirical circumstances surrounding the composition of the letter, but rather what is implied, and which corresponding empirical realities can inform that implied context. This fact does not suggest that, if the letter was written after Paul's death, the post-Pauline author expected the empirical readers to ignore their current social and ecclesial circumstances in order to imagine themselves transported back in the mid-first century. Rather, it recognizes that even if a later empirical author wrote in order to address circumstances in the lives of Christians who lived after Paul's lifetime, his means of doing so was through projecting an implied setting in which Paul was alive. Had the empirical author wished to abstain from projecting any particular life-setting,⁹³ he could have done so easily by omitting an authorial name attached to the letter and by omitting any references to particular circumstances within Paul's life. By naming Paul, and by placing him in prison, the implied context of Ephesians becomes significantly more limited. Why would a pseudepigraphic author write under another person's name if that empirical author wanted the implied audience of the work to refrain from imagining the pseudonym's context when reading? While Smillie's argument against a Flavian date has problems, his assertion of an implied earlier date, from within the later part of Paul's lifetime, has merit. The fact that empirical circumstances might speak against an implied later date is not the best argument for thinking of the epistle as the work of Paul. Rather, the author's framing of the epistle by naming Paul and placing him in prison suggests Paul as the implied, even if not the empirical, author of Ephesians. The

criminals were housed in the *tullianum*. 2) Very limited accessibility of outsiders was granted to the author, and so the circumstances were far more taxing on the author than was the case with the Roman imprisonment described in Acts 28. 3) The likelihood that correspondences written under such an imprisonment would have been under surveillance of Roman imperial authority increases significantly, since the imprisonment in the *carcer* might have already associated the author with subversive activities.

⁹³ See Muddiman's argument, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 12-17.

imprisonment mentioned in Ephesians, then, might function as a crucial framing mechanism for the epistle's implied life-setting in the following ways:

1. The imprisonment may reflect the empirical circumstances of Paul at the time he wrote the letter. An implied Roman imprisonment, awaiting trial before Nero, and needing the intercessory prayer of the recipients (as Smillie argues) may prove to be the most plausible interpretation of those circumstances. This interpretation may suggest that anti-imperial sentiments are far less likely to be present in Ephesians. Why would Paul challenge Roman imperial ideology if he was imprisoned in Rome and anticipated an immanent audience before Nero? Paul's hope for boldness in proclaiming the gospel suggests that he anticipated aspects of its articulation would not sit well with the emperor. These anxieties may form the subtext behind Paul's concern that he might not have the courage to boldly proclaim the gospel to Nero. If so, perhaps he deems core aspects of the gospel and its story as necessarily in conflict with Roman imperial ideology. To the extent that Paul describes the gospel in Ephesians, those conflicting areas may provide the basis for the epistle's anti-imperial sentiments.
2. The imprisonment may have projected the actual lived experience of a post-Pauline empirical author.⁹⁴ In this case, Paul's imprisonment expressed in the epistle frames the later empirical author's own imprisonment. This projection of the implied author's circumstances serves several purposes. In the midst of the dangers of imprisonment, the empirical author found Paul's imprisonment to be a safer way to reference his own circumstances for a later first century or second century audience. This means that using Paul's name as the author did not primarily serve the purpose of authorizing the letter with Pauline authority as much as veiling the difficult circumstances of the later empirical author.⁹⁵ In this case, the implied readers would have been expected to understand it as a veil for the empirical circumstances of the post-Pauline author. This reconstruction raises the stakes for an imperial-critical interpretation of Ephesians since the implied author's circumstances would have inherently put him in a state of conflict with Roman imperial authorities.

⁹⁴ Joachim Gnllka, *Der Epheserbrief* (HThKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 21.

⁹⁵ See Franz Mußner, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (ÖTK 10; Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1982), 17.

3. If written by a post-Pauline author, the imprisonment might be entirely disconnected from the lived experience in that empirical person. The imprisonment may function as an invocation of Paul's experience of in order to either legitimize the authority of a post-Pauline author, or to encourage the readers to envision Paul in prison because by doing so they would be able to better discern the overarching purpose of the epistle. If the latter, the function of Paul's imprisonment in discerning the purpose of the epistle could be connected to larger imperial-critical strategies.
4. The imprisonment provides encouragement for post-Pauline believers in Asia Minor who were in danger (sooner or later) of imprisonment for the sake of the gospel themselves. If so, the implied author's circumstances function as a veiled reference to the empirical readers' circumstances. This does not necessarily demand an imperial-critical reading of the letter, but the implied readers would have been expected to understand that Christians were being threatened by imperial rule. If so, an imperial-critical reading becomes more plausible.

How one interprets the significance of the imprisonment in Ephesians affects the plausibility of an imperial-critical reading of the letter. Unfortunately, a strict focus on empirical data will not yield much certainty about the empirical author's circumstances. Instead, we must imaginatively reconstruct the portrait of the implied author by considering the textual data, as well as using empirical data to both delimit and provide imaginative depth to what is implied. The several functions of the implied author's imprisonment described above each carry different weight for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians.

4.3.3 IMPLIED AUTHOR: IMPERIAL CRITICISM

Reconstructing the implied author of Ephesians with a view toward the two date proposals for the epistle has varied consequences for an imperial-critical reading of the letter. Regardless of who may have been the empirical author, Ephesians projects Paul as its author or invokes Paul's persona.⁹⁶ The letter's projection of Pauline authorship is essential to assessing an imperial-critical reading of the epistle. Questions about Paul's empirical experiences and

⁹⁶ Paul has also been referred to as the "inscribed author." Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians*, lxiii. It is also plausible to describe Paul as the narrator, if by narrator we are using the term broadly to refer to the projected speaker within the work.

beliefs become relevant to the extent that they are either reflected in the text or were expected to be understood by the implied audience. Schnelle notes that pseudepigraphy need not be understood as an attempt to deceive.⁹⁷ The key, then, is to ask what aspects of Paul the empirical author was intended for the recipients to discern in relation to the contents of the letter. An imperial-critical reading of the letter is more plausible if the following is true of the implied author:

1. The Jewish heritage of the author made him more inclined to criticize Roman imperial ideology because of its conflict with traditional biblical theology. Having understood the ways in which second-temple Jewish writings engaged Jewish themes in order to critique the nations who had ruled them, the author taps into traditional themes in order to confront the idolatrous claims of the Roman Empire. His identity as a Jewish Christian meant that he believed the Messiah Jesus had brought about the arrival of the new exodus, which had significant consequences for Roman imperial rule. Rather than merely proclaiming its spiritual arrival in Jesus, the long-awaited new exodus had arrived in Jesus and so he now sits above all authority, rule, power, and dominion, including earthly Roman imperial rule. This also assumes that the implied author had significant knowledge of Greco-Roman culture in general and of Roman imperial ideology in particular. While Roman imperial ideology is not present in the locutionary content of Ephesians, its implied author's apparent understanding of wider Greco-Roman culture suggests a knowledge of Roman imperial ideology. The significance of this point for an imperial-critical reading of the epistle cannot be understated. If it can be shown that no evidence exists that the implied author of Ephesians was aware of wider Greco-Roman society and its values, this lack of evidence provides a major challenge to those who claim that the letter engages with Roman imperial ideology. Recent works have demonstrated that parallels with Roman imperial society and wider issues in Roman imperial Asia Minor in Ephesians are overwhelming.⁹⁸ Even if the letter is not seen to challenge Roman imperial ideology, its awareness of wider imperial

⁹⁷ Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament* (Trans. M. Eugene Boring; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 534-538, esp. 537-538. See also Jacob Adai, *Der Heilige Geist als Gegenwart Gottes in den einzelnen Christen, in der Kirche und in der Welt: Studien zur Pneumatologie des Epheserbriefes* (RST 31; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1985), 17-18. Cohick disagrees, she sees pseudepigraphy as an attempt to deceive: *Ephesians*, 27, as does Stadelmann, *Der Epheserbrief*, 20-22. Kreitzer is less skeptical: *Ephesians*, 28. Edgar Goodspeed suggests Eph. is the beginning of Christian pseudepigraphy: "The Place of Ephesians in the First Pauline Collection," *ATR* 12.3 (1930): 193.

⁹⁸ See our list of sources contained in the annotated bibliography, section V: A.

society and themes is generally confirmed by recent scholarship. Therefore, identifying the implied author as a Jewish Christian with significant knowledge of wider Greco-Roman culture and ideology at least allows for the possibility for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. If it can be shown that the author's use of Jewish motifs, when read christologically, *counted as* subversive of imperial ideology in the context of Roman imperial Asia Minor, such a reading would stand even more firmly.

2. The author's imprisonment was intended to implicitly characterize Roman imperial rule as unjust and opposed to gospel proclamation. Further, these circumstances might provide strong reasons for believing that the author was capable of anti-imperial sentiments. If a Roman imprisonment is assumed, it locates the author within the epicenter of imperial rule. Considering the sheer vastness of imperial imagery displayed across the city, the author would have been aware of Roman imperial ideology. If the author wants us to imagine that he is imprisoned in Rome, this choice also impacts an imperial-critical reading, since any correspondence from within the *carcer* would likely have been under heavy surveillance. Consequently, if any imperial-critical sentiments were to be discovered in the epistle, it would be reasonable to expect less explicit locutionary content related to the subversion of imperial ideology, and that any imperial-critical sentiments might occur on larger illocutionary and perlocutionary levels.

4.4 SURVEY OF THE IMPLIED AUDIENCE

It will be helpful to begin by stressing a distinction between the empirical and implied audience of Ephesians. While very few conclusions can be drawn about the empirical people to whom Ephesians was written, certain characteristics of the implied audience can be detected in the text. This holds true even if the letter functioned as a circular sent throughout Asia Minor. One objection that could discourage interpreters from focusing on an examination of the implied audience is the claim that the letter exclusively emphasizes the so-called 'universal church' rather than any local entities.⁹⁹ Although Ephesians' discussion of the church is different from the discussion in the undisputed letters, it still projects aspects of its implied audience. Furthermore, the 'universal church' theory is not without its problems, especially in light of

⁹⁹ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 10.

the author's use of paraenetic material that contains definite cultural characteristics rather than wider transcultural ones.

It has been suggested that there is little evidence of any particular polemical concerns among the implied audience that prompted the writing of Ephesians.¹⁰⁰ Some have explained this as reflection of the circular nature of the letter.¹⁰¹ This view raises questions about how it is possible that Galatians is clearly written with a polemical intent, while also functioning as a circular letter.¹⁰² A first century letter is clearly capable of addressing polemical issues in varied Christian communities within a wider Roman province without being directed toward any one city. A circular letter need not, then, by necessity, avoid polemical concerns. The general positive tone of the letter, especially in contrast to that of Galatians, is also evident.¹⁰³ Fuchs states that "Galatians knows nothing of imminent apocalyptic expectation...Ephesians is more concerned with the earthly battle with heretics generally, at present and in the future, which explains the absence of eschatology in this letter, as in Galatians, in which Paul is presently engaged in battle with opponents."¹⁰⁴

According to Cohick, "The Ephesian letter recipients line up with the social patterns of the larger Greco-Roman culture. They are members of families: slaves or masters, parents, spouses. They seem to be neither wealthy nor destitute; indeed, their financial status is not addressed directly. A sizeable number, perhaps the majority, are Gentile, for Paul speaks of himself and other Jews as 'we' and the letters recipients as 'you' Gentiles."¹⁰⁵ Cohick's claim that the audience likely consisted of Gentiles is also affirmed by Dahl, who assumes that the recipients were former Gentiles who did not know Paul personally but had heard of him.

¹⁰⁰ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 31; Gerhard Sellin, "Konsolidierungs- und Differenzierungsprozesse im „Paulinismus“ (Kol und Eph)," in *Bekenntnis und Erinnerung: Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Hans-Friedrich Weiß*, eds. Klaus-Michael Bull and Eckart Reinmuth (Rostocker Theologische Studien 16; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 263. Stadelmann is less convinced that there were no polemical concerns: *Der Epheserbrief* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1993), 19-20.

¹⁰¹ Baugh, 31.

¹⁰² This idea aligns most closely with a 'southern Galatian' theory of the recipients of Galatians, i.e. that the epistle was written to the central part of modern-day Turkey, which constituted an administrative center of the Roman imperial region of Galatia, rather than having been written to an area further north that contained largely ethnically Gallic tribes who had settled in that area: for further discussion see Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990), lxi-lxxii; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 3-18; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (ZECNT 9; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 22-29; David D. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 28-29; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 1-3.

¹⁰³ Baugh, 31.

¹⁰⁴ Rüdiger Fuchs. "I Kneel Before the Father and Pray for You (Ephesians 3:14): Date and Significance of Ephesians, Part 1. *EJT* 23.1 (2014): 16.

¹⁰⁵ Cohick, *Ephesians*, 35.

According to Dahl, their location is unknown.¹⁰⁶ While the community is not explicitly identified with any particular institution, Eph. 4:14 may imply that there were several factions within the community (or communities).¹⁰⁷ As we noted earlier in our discussion about the author, it is possible that the ‘we’ and ‘you’ language within Eph. 1 indicates that the recipients (‘you’) were composed largely of Gentile Christians who had now been afforded the honorific benefits first bestowed upon Jewish Christians (‘we’).¹⁰⁸ In the early 1980s, Lincoln also saw the implied audience as predominantly Gentiles, in danger of a syncretistic blending of Jesus with mystery cults, for which an appeal to their baptismal setting is evident throughout the text.¹⁰⁹ He later continued to affirm Gentile recipients of the epistle, but also argued that they knew both Paul and the Jewish scriptures.¹¹⁰ The paraenetic sections indicate that these Gentile Christians needed to grow in their faith and be reminded of the implications of their association with Jesus for Christian living.¹¹¹ Lincoln is not certain about the location of the recipients but he notes that they are clearly portrayed as Christians who belong to a much wider group of believers,¹¹² and that they face opposition from cosmic powers.¹¹³

Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledges that the household code implies that women and wives were a significant aspect of the implied audience.¹¹⁴ Commentators have typically not paid much attention to the gender dynamics of the implied audience. Furthermore, Schüssler-Fiorenza raises questions about calling them ‘Christians’ if by that we mean ‘not Jewish.’ She challenges anachronistic understandings of a separation of Judaism and Christianity and concludes that the implied audience consisted of Jews and former Gentiles who “understood

¹⁰⁶ Dahl, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” 452.

¹⁰⁷ Dahl, 454.

¹⁰⁸ See Robinson, “Who Were ‘The Saints,’” 45-53.

¹⁰⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul’s Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology* (SNTSMS 43; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 135-137.

¹¹⁰ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxvi.

¹¹¹ Lincoln, lxxvii.

¹¹² Lincoln, lxxvi.

¹¹³ Lincoln, lxxvii.

¹¹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza. *Ephesians*, lvi. Wilfried Eisele’s observation that, for Paul “spielt die von ihm selbst gewählte und anderen empfohlene eheliche Lebensform nicht die geringste Rolle mehr” in Eph. and Col. could be explained on the basis of the author’s rhetorical strategies or as a reflection of the implied audience’s circumstances rather than due to post-Pauline developments in a theology of singleness and marriage: *Die Sextussprüche und ihre Verwandten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 366-367.

themselves as Jewish Messianists” especially because we see the term Χριστός used in Eph. but not Χριστιανός.¹¹⁵

Stenschke finds explicitly and implicitly negative characterizations of the implied audience’s lives prior to their becoming Christ-followers.¹¹⁶ Some of the positive statements about the current status of the implied audience might indicate that they were lacking these characteristics before their conversion, or that apostasy may have been a danger.¹¹⁷ Further, the author’s imperatives imply that Jesus followers had been lacking in these areas.¹¹⁸ He also suggests that statements in the Ephesian household code implies that the non-Christian wives were not being subject to their husbands.¹¹⁹ However, we would also have to conclude that the implied audience included husbands who were not loving their wives up to the standard of their faith, and that parents, children, masters, and slaves were also not living according to the implied author’s instructions. The harsh portrait of the implied audience’s previous Gentile background is also interesting because, unlike 1 Thess. 1:9 and Rom. 1:21-23, no explicit mention of their previous idolatry is present.¹²⁰ On the other hand, some similarities are evident in the overlap between aspects of the rhetorical situation of the Roman churches and those addressed in Ephesians: “Ephesians is similar to the discussion in Romans 9-11 where Gentile Christians are called to respect the natural branches on the olive tree and are warned not to overestimate their own spiritual privileges and take them as granted and irrevocable.”¹²¹ However, unlike most other NT documents, no persecution of the implied audience is evident from the text.¹²² This point highlights the difficulty of handling the paraenetic statements in Eph. 4-6 as they relate to drawing inferences about the implied audience. It is not easy to tell if the context of the implied audience can be mirror-read from the content of Ephesians, although Stenschke rightly notes that “as we have seen in Ephesians 4-6, most of the statements in the letter regarding the Christian readers allow some indirect conclusions about their previous state.”¹²³

¹¹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza. lxvii.

¹¹⁶ Christoph Stenschke, “‘Once you were in Darkness’: The Past of the Readers of Ephesians,” *EJT* 23.2 (2014): 127-128.

¹¹⁷ Stenschke, “Once you were in Darkness,” 130.

¹¹⁸ Stenschke, 125-126.

¹¹⁹ Stenschke, 125-126.

¹²⁰ Stenschke, 127.

¹²¹ Stenschke, 131.

¹²² Stenschke, 131, referring to Best, *Ephesians*, 3.

¹²³ Stenschke, 127.

4.5 IMPLIED AUDIENCE: AN APPRAISAL

By exploring the implied audience, we hope to distinguish between those who may have actually read the letter (empirical readers/recipients), and the implied (or ideal) reader/hearer that is projected within the text. Our previous chapter demonstrated that, while very little can be said definitively about the empirical identity of the recipients, aspects of the implied readers' Roman imperial setting changes depending on whether one assumes an earlier or later date. Special attention then needs to be given to elements within the text that reveal aspects of the implied audience. We can draw several conclusions about the implied audience projected in the text, even though the recipients' empirical identity is uncertain.

4.5.1 GENTILE GODFEARERS

An implied audience that consisted largely of Gentile Christians appears most likely. Gentiles are explicitly addressed in Eph. 2:11 and 3:1, and so an exclusively Jewish Christian audience seems unlikely. The author seems to believe that they can still be fully Gentile without having to convert to Judaism (Eph. 2), but also that their association with Jesus should discourage them from living in the ways that Gentiles were living within the empire (Eph. 4), which may have included adopting wider Roman imperial eschatological narratives. The description of the implied recipients' pre-Christian lives fits with the idea that they were largely not Jewish,¹²⁴ although one cannot rule out that some Jews were susceptible to living in ways that did not align with Torah regulations. A largely Gentile implied audience might also make sense of the realized eschatology of Ephesians, especially if the letter is post-Pauline. Jewish Christians at the end of the first century may still have received an exemption from honoring the emperor, whereas Gentile Christians might not have.¹²⁵ The author might then have provided his late first- or early second-century Gentile recipients with an alternative eschatology to discourage

¹²⁴ Eberhard Faust sees some of the audience as "ehemaligen Heiden." *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 182.

¹²⁵ Bruce W. Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians' Responses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 5. Early emperors, with the exception of Caligula, allowed Jews to be exempt from participation in the imperial cults: Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Jerusalem against Rome* (Trans. Robyn Fréchet; Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 7; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), 52. Herr Moshe claims that only Jews were exempt from the imperial cult, but that "certain Gentiles, too, refused to engage in the cult, and this stamped them as traitors in the eyes of the Romans." Moshe David Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian's Days," *Studies in History* [Scripta Hierosolymitana] 23 (1972): 90.

them from crossing the line in honoring the emperor in the imperial cults of the region—noting that the ideological claims offered within the imperial cults are actually realized in Christ, and not the emperors. Since they are identified ‘in Christ,’ they are also afforded greater benefits than what Rome could offer. The author’s strategy is to encourage the formation of their newfound identity: not into forced conversion to Judaism, but to encourage them to see themselves as shaped by their Christian identity, rather than placing hope in Rome’s imperial programs, whether in terms of eschatology or in the benefits of imperial cults. An audience of Godfearers might be in greater need of encouragement to resist adopting Roman eschatology than would some Jews in Asia Minor. Furthermore, these Gentile recipients may have been in danger of viewing their role in God’s people as a replacement to Israel, thus explaining the author’s emphasis on formerly being excluded from citizenship in Israel to a new status of inclusion (2:12). Furthermore, the implied audience may have faced prejudices from some Jewish people who had labeled them “the uncircumcision” (2:11), a reason then for the author to also emphasize their newly included status.¹²⁶

While Gentiles are likely in view, the most plausible scenario is that they are Godfearers. Unlike in Colossians, the implied author of Ephesians expects his implied audience to understand a range of OT allusions, echoes, and quotes.¹²⁷ This expectation suggests that they understood the overarching OT story, and that they were capable of making connections between that story, the individual OT passages invoked in the letter, and the theology of the implied author.¹²⁸ Consequently, some have understood the presence of OT allusions in Ephesians as an indication of a largely Jewish audience.¹²⁹ On the other hand, an audience that consists mostly of Gentile Godfearers makes more sense of both the direct references to Gentiles in the letter, as well as the presence of OT echoes and quotes. One interesting possibility that may help to resolve some of the major questions about the author’s relationship to the recipients is that the epistle implies an audience of newly converted Godfearers in

¹²⁶ Stenschke, “Once you were in Darkness,” 131.

¹²⁷ E.g. NA28 includes 36 cross references to the OT in Eph., whereas it only includes 4 for Col. This observation leads Stadelmann to conclude that Jewish Christians are also included as the recipients: *Der Epheserbrief*, 18-19. Baumert and Seewann’s conclusion that these images reflect that a Jewish Christian audience was in view does not consider that Godfearers would have also understood the references: *Israels Berufung*, 179-181.

¹²⁸ Distinguishing between the implied and empirical here is helpful in dispelling the idea that the empirical author expected too much of his empirical audience. When the implied is given its due considerations, this possibility becomes irrelevant since the implied audience, by definition, is the persona of the sort of person who would perfectly understand the implied author.

¹²⁹ Moritz, “Reasons for Ephesians,” 8-12.

Ephesus.¹³⁰ This implication might explain why Paul is portrayed as having little direct knowledge of the recipients, while also explaining the unequivocal associations with Ephesus in the superscripts of all major Ephesians manuscripts. This could also reconcile Pauline authorship, an Ephesian destination, and the implied recipients. Ephesians' paraenetic components that point to the danger of the recipients reverting to Gentile customs make much more sense if the author has Godfearers in mind. The suggestion, then, that in contrast to Colossians, the recipients of Ephesians were predominantly Jewish (especially considering the letter's use of OT), needs to be reexamined.¹³¹ While that view accounts for the available empirical data for evidence of a Jewish communities in Asia Minor,¹³² it fails to consider wider textual cues that point to an implied audience of Godfearers. Such an audience better explains some of the language of Eph. 2—the Gentile incorporation into the people of God, and the breaking down of the dividing wall of hostility. The passages in Eph. 4 could be understood as reflecting the implied author's intentions to discourage Gentile Godfearers from becoming Torah-obedient (especially conversion to Judaism through circumcision) while also maintaining an ethic that challenges wider Gentile cultural trends. While it could be argued that the letter's Roman imperial context is relevant regardless of whether or not it was intended for an audience that was exclusively Gentile, since Jews were subjected under Roman imperial rule, an implied audience of Godfearers likely heightens aspects of its Roman imperial context. Such an implied audience might have been more inclined toward adopting the wider narrative cast by Roman imperial ideology.

4.5.2 HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES: ASIA MINOR

The substantial unresolved questions about the empirical identity of the recipients are related to the manuscript problems in Eph. 1:1. If ἐν Ἐφέσῳ is trustworthy, the Ephesian designation significantly narrows the implied context of the letter, even if the letter was not empirically written to Ephesus, since it would have been expected to be read as a letter addressed there.

¹³⁰ Bock, *Ephesians*, 21-22.

¹³¹ Moritz, "Reasons for Ephesians," 8-12.

¹³² On Jews in Asia Minor see especially Paul Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), See also the brief comments by Moritz, "Reasons for Ephesians," 8-9. Schwindt also highlights some of the prominence that Jews had in Ephesus: *Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* (WUNT 148; Tübingen. Mohr Siebeck. 2002), 67.

While there are good reasons to question the inclusion of Ephesus in 1:1, the fact that several major publications on Ephesians have generally arrived at a consensus regarding the recipients' setting within Asia Minor is remarkable. Those who question the authenticity of ἐν Ἐφέσῳ have offered up several other cities as the destination of the epistle without any consensus.¹³³ Very few places outside of Asia Minor have been given serious consideration.¹³⁴ Aspects of the language employed in Ephesians, as well as its similarities to Colossians, make a destination within Asia Minor highly probable, if not certain.¹³⁵ Furthermore, Arnold rightly notes that differences in language between the non-disputed Pauline letters and Ephesians are likely best explained by Paul's purpose in writing,¹³⁶ and in writing to this region (Asia Minor).¹³⁷ Considering all of the questions mounted up against an identification of both the empirical author and audience, the near-consensus surrounding the location of the implied audience within this region of the Roman Empire is noteworthy. In light of this consensus, Muddiman's claim that "it [Ephesians] has no setting and little obvious purpose" misses the mark.¹³⁸ An implied *Sitz im Leben* of Asia Minor is as safe an assumption as any.¹³⁹ On the other hand, without considering the epistle's relationship to Colossians, there is a definite lack of

¹³³ Ephesus: Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 140; Cohick, *Ephesians*, 33; W. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. BHGNT (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 2-3. Laodicea: Douglas A. Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 325; Shirley Jackson Case, "To Whom Was 'Ephesians' Written?", *BW* 38.5 (1911): 315-320; Hierapolis: Kreitzer, *Hierapolis in the Heavens: Studies in the Letter to the Ephesians* (LNTS 368; London: T&T Clark, 2008); Kreitzer, *Ephesians*; 31-48 Laodicea & Hierapolis: Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxxii.

¹³⁴ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 12; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 21.

¹³⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxxii; Arnold goes as far to say that "there is unanimous agreement among interpreters that the Epistle to the Ephesians was written to western Asia Minor." Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1989), 5. See also Best, *Ephesians*, 6.

¹³⁶ G. S. MaGee, *Portrait of an Apostle: A Case for Paul's Authorship of Colossians and Ephesians* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 169.

¹³⁷ While Best agrees with a likely destination within Asia Minor, his statement that "the letter itself, because of its very general nature, offers however no substantial clues to their location" is challenged by both Arnold and Kreitzer who find more sizable implied data within the epistle that helps reconstruct the location of the recipients. Arnold's *Power and Magic*, 14-38, largely explains the power language of Ephesians as reflecting a definite setting within Asia Minor as it relates to magic, Artemis worship, and astrology. Kreitzer sees distinct contextual clues contained within Ephesians that point to Hierapolis: see each of the articles in his *Hierapolis in the Heavens*. Best is less convinced that this sort of precision is possible, but still contends that "a stronger case can be made for this area [Asia Minor] than any other and it should probably be accepted as the area of the intended readers." *Ephesians*, 6.

¹³⁸ Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 12.

¹³⁹ Daniel K. Darko, *No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation and Shared Ethical Values in Ephesians 4.17-6.9* (LNTS 375; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 26; Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 12.

explicit information provided in the letter itself that may obstruct aspects of its regional context.¹⁴⁰

Arnold has provided the most convincing evidence for affirming a destination within Asia Minor by explaining linguistic idiosyncrasies, often attributed to non-Pauline authorship, as evidence of the author's interaction with religious practices within the province.¹⁴¹ While specific problems facing the implied audience are not easily discernible from the text of Ephesians, both Arnold and Kreitzer have discerned polemical overtones related to a context in Asia Minor in parts of the letter.¹⁴² Similarly, Johnson sees the letter's invocation of the devil, cosmic authorities, and deceitful teachers as an indication that "all is not well with these Christians and that some threat from outside demands the protection afforded by the apostolic letter."¹⁴³

Since the C (context) in Searle's formula X=Y in C will contribute to our assessment of imperial-critical claims in Ephesians, it will be useful to identify the implied context of the recipients within the Roman imperial setting of Asia Minor. In order to take seriously the implied cognitive environment within which the speech acts of Ephesians are to be discerned, we must attend to the social, political, and theological context(s) of Asia Minor. On the other hand, larger questions remain regarding the date that the epistle was written, and whether the work was penned by Paul, by a disciple of Paul, or someone later. Imperial-critical interpreters might be tempted to paint an unrealistic picture of social/cultural uniformity and consistency among the political realities of the Roman Empire, across its various regions within the first two centuries AD. Our assessment of the imperial-critical status of Ephesians hopes to attend carefully to the diversity of social, economic, ideological, and political realities across the empire during various eras, while also acknowledging some aspects of uniformity across the reigns of varied emperors.

¹⁴⁰ Although this does not necessarily suggest that "Nichts lässt er anklingen von den Umständen der Zeit oder von den Problemen vor Ort." Michael Gese, *Der Epheserbrief* (BNT; Göttingen: Neukirchener, 2013), 11.

¹⁴¹ Arnold, *Power and Magic*.

¹⁴² See p. 148 fn. 137 above.

¹⁴³ E. Elizabeth Johnson, "Ephesians," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jaqueline E. Lapsley (3rd Ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 577.

4.5.3 IMPLIED AUDIENCE: IMPERIAL CRITICISM

The portrait of the implied readers offered above has several consequences for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians:

1. An assumed Gentile audience would have been aware of Roman imperial ideology, including its wider eschatological claims and its depictions of the emperor in strikingly similar terms to NT Christology. Had the epistle's Jewish author used Jewish motifs in order to subvert this ideology, Godfearers would have understood it. It is important to note here that even if the empirical author mistakenly expected the letter's Gentile empirical recipients to understand Jewish themes, even though they may not have, this matters little for reconstructing the implied audience. This possibility is a moot point for the implied readers, since, by definition, the implied readers perfectly grasp the intentions of the implied author. This portrait of the cultural makeup of the implied readers, like that of the implied author, has monumental implications for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. A convincing demonstration that the implied readers of Ephesians would not have been aware of imperial ideology or of the Jewish author's use of Jewish themes to engage with that ideology would cast serious doubt on such a reading. Since an implied audience of Gentile Godfearers is likely, an imperial-critical reading is possible. Its implied audience could grasp these nuances.
2. The implied readers' assumed context within Asia Minor also has consequences for constructing and assessing an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. If the setting is during an earlier date, the readers would be in an environment that was starting to be flooded with images of Roman imperial eschatology and Christology. These readers would not likely have been in much danger of being pressured into participation in officially sanctioned provincial imperial cults, even though their rapid growth had been in motion for some time. If a later date is implied, the readers' context in Asia Minor changed compared to an earlier date. Roman imperial eschatology was even more rampant as new imperial regimes often sought cast their own rule in Augustan terms and built off of the previous century's wider eschatological claims. Further, the situation between Christians and Roman imperial authorities in Asia Minor would have escalated. During a later period, the presence of imperial cults in the region had increased exponentially, including officially sanctioned provincial cults. While there

were no legal mandates sent out by the Emperor that required Christians to participate in these cults, localized pressures from imperial magistrates led to conflicts for Christians in the region. The further one gets into the second century, the more tensions are raised between allegiance to Messiah Jesus in Asia Minor and allegiance to the emperor. While an implied audience within Asia Minor appears most likely, each date framework for the epistle has different consequences for how the contents of Ephesians would have been heard within Asia Minor during these periods.

4.6 FROM METHOD TO LIFE-SETTING

We began the methods section of our project by drawing on a distinction between empirical and implied data.¹⁴⁴ Empirical data needs to be put in its proper hermeneutical place by showing that it both delimits and provides imaginative depth to what is implied. Since questions about the *Sitz im Leben* of Ephesians are not inconsequential for an imperial-critical reading of the letter, we have drawn out characteristics of the implied author and audience above in order to get a better vision of what circumstances the epistle envisions. Several facets about the implied author and audience are discernible. The differing dates offered for the epistle lead to different historical circumstances within the region. Until now, interpreters have largely overlooked this point. We then turned our attention to surveying existing portraits of the implied author and audience of Ephesians. While there is little consensus about various aspects of the implied author and audience, some of the more unifying features across publications provide intriguing possibilities for constructing and assessing an imperial-critical reading of the letter. We explored two main characteristics for the implied author and audience and demonstrated that their cultural backgrounds and assumed historical circumstances paint various portraits that are relevant to this study. In exploring these characteristics, we drew several conclusions about the consequence of these depictions for imperial criticism of Ephesians. Having moved from our methodology to the life-setting of the epistle, we now turn our attention to providing a provisional imperial-critical reading of Ephesians with a view towards the available empirical and implied data. In doing so, we will also utilize speech-act theory and a narrative hermeneutic. After constructing this provisional imperial-critical reading of the letter, we will use our eclectic hermeneutic to provide a more complete assessment of various passages

¹⁴⁴ See pp. 30-39 above.

throughout Ephesians in order to come to a better understanding of the relationship between Ephesians and the Roman Empire.

PART 3

EPHESIANS AND EMPIRE

Chapter 5

An Imperial-Critical Reading of Ephesians

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide a test case for an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. The proposals offered here will be articulated from an imperial-critical reading so that these perspectives can be held up for further evaluation within the next chapter. The major question at hand is: What is the best case for reading these passages as subversive of the empire, and how would these points help to address interpretive questions of the letter? We will suspend the evaluation of these perspectives until the next chapter so that the reading can temporarily stand on its own. Once this reading is established, it will provide opportunity for further evaluation.

The sections below have been divided up according to the two major halves of the epistle. It is not possible here to address fully the controversies surrounding the connections, or lack thereof, between the two halves of Ephesians.¹ Such an organizational strategy has been employed here for pragmatic, rather than theological or literary, reasons. We will assume that Ephesians is one cohesive unit, and that it is imprudent to regard the first section as exclusively “theological” and the second as merely “practical” or “ethical.”² While the first half is, no doubt, theologically dense, it does not preclude practical or ethical intentions, even when the locutionary language does not explicitly avow them. Furthermore, the second half, while undoubtedly more paraenetic in nature, is framed by and builds on the materials from the first

¹ Many commentators have noted a shift from theological discourse in Eph. 1-3 to ethical or practical discourse in Eph. 4-6, although not all commentators hold these to be distinctly separate. Note especially the divisions of Barth’s two volume commentary (Eph. 1-3; 4-5):, *Ephesians* (AB 2 Vols 34, 34A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974). See also Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians* (TNTC 10; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 115; Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007)107; Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians* (NCC 10; Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 100; Alan Verhey and Joseph S. Harvard, *Ephesians* (Belief; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 132; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), 224; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (SP 17; Rev. Ed.; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008), 285-286. Muddiman notes a formal break in 4:1 but suggests there is less a break in content: *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC, London: Continuum, 2001), 177.

² For those stressing unity of the two halves, see Larry J. Kreitzer, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Epworth Commentary; Peterborough: Epworth, 1997), 118; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 272; Cohick, *Ephesians*, 100-101; Verhey and Harvard, *Ephesians*, 132; MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 285-286.

half. Even when its paraenetic materials more obviously emanate from its language, the second half of the epistle still serves an important theological purpose. While these divisions provide a pragmatic structure for our work, the imperial-critical readings offered here will often build off and depend on a unifying view of the letter that minimizes such distinct categorizations. It is not possible here to provide an imperial-critical reading of every passage in Ephesians. Instead, selective passages that have the most potential for such a reading will be brought into view.

5.2 IMPERIAL-CRITICAL READING OF EPHESIANS 1-3

5.2.1 EPH. 1:1—NEW PROSPECTS?

One of the most widely accepted theories regarding Eph. 1:1 is that the letter was originally written to churches throughout Asia Minor, and that the circular nature of the letter meant that the author could omit the audience's location.³ While this theory explains both the textual problem in Eph. 1:1, and the seemingly generic tone of the letter, it raises a whole set of other questions. Why would Ephesians omit the letter's recipients, when other circular letters in the NT list their recipients by city or region?⁴ There is no manuscript evidence for the existence of a sort of fill-in-the-blank letter wherein the recipients would be expected to add their unique location.⁵ It is uncertain whether any conventions were in place for circular letters at the time

³ Daniel K. Darko, *No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation and Shared Ethical Values in Ephesians 4.17-6.9* (LNTS 375; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 26; Rüdiger Fuchs, "I Kneel Before the Father and Pray for You (Ephesians 3:14): Date and Significance of Ephesians, Part 1," *EJT* 23.1 (2014): 14; Helge Stadelmann, *Der Epheserbrief* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1993), 18. Talbert challenges the idea that the omission of the recipients was the result of leaving a blank space for the purposes of it being a circular, but he eventually affirms that other evidence suggests Ephesians was a circular letter: *Ephesians and Colossians*, 34. Cf. Lindemann's rejection of the circular letter theory: *Der Epheserbrief* (ZBK; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 10. Michael Gese's claim that the omission is due to the letter's focus on "eine besondere Ekklesiologie" attends well to the ecclesiological developments in the letter but it still does not answer the grammatical problems that this omission of a location creates in the Greek text: *Der Epheserbrief* (BNT; Göttingen: Neukirchener, 2013), 17.

⁴ E.g. 1 Peter 1:1, Rev. 1:4, and to an extent, James 1:1 and possibly Galatians 1:1 [written to a network of Christian assemblies in the wider region of Galatia].

⁵ S.M. Baugh, *Ephesians. Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 32; Ernst Best, *Essays on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 10-11, 21. It has also been proposed that Tychicus was entrusted with the responsibility of filling in this blank: Hoehner, 147. Max Zerwick refers to it as "eine Lücke" without providing reasons for its presence in the text: *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Geistliche Schriftlesung 10; Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1962), 22.

that would have omitted the recipients, while also leaving a grammatical placeholder for them (τοῖς οὐσίῳ...καί).⁶ This has left room for alternative explanations.

If read from an imperial-critical vantage point, the omission of the recipients could be interpreted as a means of disassociating them with a letter that would risk putting them under suspicion of Roman authorities. If so, the contents of the letter were so subversive of the Roman Empire that, for protective purposes, the letter's recipients were omitted.⁷ Assessments of Paul's personality and theology may point against this reading, as would evidence of a loosened approach towards subversive writing from AD 40-60. Consequently, this theory is less plausible if the letter was written during the Pauline era. If the epistle was written in the late first or second century, the zeitgeist of Asia Minor ("C context" from Searle's X=Y in C) changed during those periods.⁸ The environment became far less hospitable to claims thought to be in competition with the Roman emperor and his rule. It is not inconceivable that, if Ephesians was deemed to contain elements subversive of Roman imperial rule, it placed the recipients of that letter under suspicion in the eyes of local imperial magistrates if brought to their attention by a *delator* or by *frumentarii*.⁹ If Ephesians is considered deuteropauline, and potentially one of the latest (if not last) of the NT writings, the cultural ethos of Asia Minor at the time of its production would have escalated against Christians to an unprecedented, albeit variegated, extent. The letter's original post-Pauline author (or a later scribe) might have performed protective measures against identifying the community as the recipients of the letter.¹⁰ If the omission was the result of a post-Pauline author's desire to disassociate the contents of the

⁶ Eph. 1:1, see Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 147.

⁷ The grammatical construction of Eph 1:1 seems to imply that something went missing, rather than it being the deliberate decision on the part of the author to expand its circulation throughout Asia Minor. The awkward construction in the extant manuscripts is essentially irreconcilable grammatically: Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 147. In a similar vein, Lindemann concludes that the original city designation was removed, but in order to match its general character: *Der Epheserbrief*, 19. Abbott dismisses the notion that the omission was accidental: *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1946), vi. Since there is no evidence of a fill-in-the-blank method for circular letters of the time, either the author did not fully understand Greek grammar, or the letter likely originally contained its recipient(s) (as is the case with every other similar grammatical construction within the greetings of NT epistles). Even if one is unconvinced by either of the theories offered in this section, it seems likely that the recipients were once included, and that some process of removal was employed at a later point, whether deliberately or accidental. In contrast to these views, Gerhard Sellin has no problems with the grammatical construction in Eph. 1:1: "Konsolidierungs- und Differenzierungsprozesse im „Paulinismus“ (Kol und Eph)," in *Bekenntnis und Erinnerung: Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Hans-Friedrich Weiß*, eds. Klaus-Michael Bull and Eckart Reinmuth (Rostocker Theologische Studien 16; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 264.

⁸ See pp. 80-117 above.

⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 384-407.

¹⁰ We will refer to this theory as the Protective Measure theory.

letter from a particular community in order to prevent them from being implicated in subversive content, its subversive content was easily detectable by imperial authorities and its images and message would have been deemed worthy of prosecution. This reasoning leaves several questions about why the recipients were removed and Paul's name was not. An identification of the author ('Paul') may have remained for several reasons:

1. Paul was already dead, and so association with him no longer presented a threat.
2. Stamping the letter with a sense of apostolic authority was deemed more important than shielding the empirical recipients from being associated with a man who might have been convicted of *maiestas* charges.¹¹ Ephesians then functions as a post-Pauline theological critique of Roman imperial rule, encouraging Ephesian Christians to act like Paul would have in the midst of trials and tribulations in Asia Minor, resisting accommodation to idolatrous aspects of their larger cultural context. This theory generally assumes a later date of the epistle.
3. The anti-Imperial script within Ephesians depended upon casting Paul as its author. This view assumes that the implied reader/hearer was expected to have understood the portrait of the apostle in chains, facing *maiestas* charges, in order to decode its subversive intent. Retaining Paul's name, as this line of thinking goes, contributed to its imperial-critical stance by purposely associating this epistle with a man who had been executed by Roman authorities, likely under the charge of treason.

These reconstructions may appear quite ambitious in light of the lack of explicit locutionary language that would make its subversive contents more easily detectable to outsiders. On the other hand, this reading deserves more consideration if the changing circumstances of Asia Minor, explored earlier, had escalated significantly against Christians in the region. Furthermore, if one were to apply Searle's X=Y in C to this reading, proof of explicitly subversive language on the locutionary level need not be present in order for such dangers to exist. Instead, one would need to be confident that Roman imperial authorities counted the speech acts in the letter as subversive of imperial rule. Explicitly naming Roman imperial authorities or ideologies in Ephesians is unnecessary so long as the letter's locutions (X)

¹¹ See pp. 82-97 above.

counted as subverting Rome (Y) in its context of being discovered by Roman imperial authorities (C).

5.2.2 EPH. 1:3-14—*BEREKAH*, NEW EXODUS, AND ROMAN IMPERIAL RULE

In spite of disputes about whether the words *we* and *you* represent Jewish and Gentile Christians respectively, greater consensus has emerged regarding the employment of Jewish themes throughout this section of the epistle.¹² This is most evident in the fact that commentators have widely acknowledged the imitation of the Hebrew *berekah* (blessing) in Eph. 1:3-14.¹³ Other Jewish motifs pervade this section, as is evident in several terms/phrases.¹⁴ The author depicts the recipients, who are later portrayed as former transgressors, and alienated from God's covenant promises (2:1-12), as having become recipients of the honorific blessings and status afforded to Israel. Much of the terminology used throughout this section has parallels in Israel's exodus experience.¹⁵ This might give the impression that Eph. 1 invokes Jewish themes and contexts rather than a Roman imperial one, casting doubt on imperial-critical readings of this section.

On the other hand, if this passage is read from an imperial-critical vantage point, two possibilities emerge: 1) The terminology in Eph. 1:3-14 invokes imperial propaganda rather than Jewish motifs in order to show that Jesus endows these benefits rather than Roman rule. 2) Jewish motifs are, in fact, employed in the passage but for a redirected purpose. One of its functions, then, is to invoke the Jewish context of these terms in order to implicitly critique Roman imperial ideology. Some Second Temple Jewish texts critique imperial rule by using OT passages and themes that envision God's defeat over enemies.¹⁶ Scholars have drawn further connections between the exodus motifs and the fulfillment of the new exodus in Ephesians.¹⁷ If the implied author envisioned the arrival of the long-awaited new exodus in

¹² See p. 129 above.

¹³ See p. 129 fn. 57 above.

¹⁴ E.g. *Εὐλογητὸς/εὐλογήσας* (1:3); *ἐξελέξατο* (1:4); *ἀγίους, ἀμώμους* (1:4); *ἔπαινον* (1:12, 14); *δόξης* (1:12, 14); *χάριτος* (1:6-7); *ἀπολύτρωσιν, αἵματος, ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων* (1:7); *ἐκληρώθημεν/ κληρονομίας* (1:11, 14, 18); *θελήματος* (1:11); *προηλπικότητας* (1:12); *σωτηρίας* (1:13).

¹⁵ Richard Cozart, *This Present Triumph: An Investigation into the Significance of the Promise of a New Exodus of Israel in the Letter to the Ephesians* (WEST Theological Monograph 5; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 95-124.

¹⁶ See Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

¹⁷ See p. 130 fn. 60 above.

these passages, its engagement with imperial ideology would be implicit. While new exodus motifs within the NT are often read with a focus on Jewish expectations from the Hebrew prophets, less attention has been given to how this aspect of Jewish eschatology functioned within a Roman imperial setting that had its own eschatological claims. Claims of the fulfillment of the new exodus are particularly discernible within the Gospel of Mark and Hebrews,¹⁸ but it becomes less clear how the use of the motif might have functioned for a different (or more diverse) group of recipients in this epistle within its implied context of Roman imperial Asia Minor. Further, even though the first exodus involved Israel's liberation from Egyptian rule, anti-imperial aspects of the new (second) exodus motif have been given less attention, in favor of seeing its arrival as spiritually fulfilled in Jesus, which might have fewer implications for a theology of earthly rulers and empires.

If the implied recipients of Ephesians were Gentile Godfearers living in Asia Minor, they would have been familiar with both the Jewish eschatological motifs within the new exodus themes employed in this section and the implications that these motifs had for the eschatological claims of Roman imperial rule. If so, the implied author's vision of the fulfillment of the new exodus in these passages functions not merely as a simple proclamation of its arrival in Jesus, but also as a proclamation of the defeat of the imperial powers. Jesus' enthronement over "all rule, authority, power, and dominion," when read from the implied audience's vantage point, implied his superiority to Roman rule. These claims, then, when read in light of the arrival of the new exodus, *counted as* a critique of Roman imperial eschatology, which made similarly majestic narrative claims.¹⁹ Such a critique is evident on the illocutionary and perlocutionary levels of the speech acts in this passage, functioning as an implicit challenge to the claims of Roman imperial eschatology in Asia Minor. These competing eschatological claims made throughout the empire were empty and false—even though the text does not explicitly say it on the locutionary level. In Searle's formula (X=Y in context C), locutionary

¹⁸ On Mark: Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997); Thorsten Moritz, "Mark," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 42-48; Brian D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 208-225. On Hebrews: Radu Gheorghita, "Περὶ τῆς ἐξόδου...ἐμνημόνευσεν, He Spoke about the Exodus:" Echoes of Exodus in Hebrews," in *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture*, ed. R. M. Fox (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 160-186.

¹⁹ "Poets and historians like Virgil, Horace, Livy, and others created, in their different ways, a grand narrative of Empire—a long eschatology that had reached its climax." Jeremy Punt, "Empire as Material Setting and Heuristic Grid for New Testament Interpretation: Comments on the Value of Postcolonial Criticism" *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66(1) Art. #330, 7 pages. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v66i1.330: 2; see also Jeremy Punt, "Empire and New Testament texts: Theorizing the Imperial, in Subversion and Attraction," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68.1 (2012) Art. #1182, 11 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102.hts.v68i1.1182>: 3.

acts can *count as* a given illocutionary act within a specific context (C). This suggests that the motif of Jesus' enthronement in this passage, which in another context might be heard as merely lofty theological language, carried a different illocutionary and perlocutionary weight in the context of first-century Asia Minor. In this passage, God's great day of liberation has arrived in Jesus the Messiah, and it was through God's Messiah that Israel (and the world) have experienced the fulfillment of the promised new exodus, therefore Rome's claims of inaugurating the golden age of salvation and peace to the world were implicitly false.

The author did not need to name the specific ideological claims of the Roman Empire in this passage for it to carry this weight. Roman imperial eschatology was so ubiquitous in Asia Minor that, according to this reading, the recipients of the epistle would have been expected to have understood the implications of the *berekah* for their context. The prevalence of Jewish imagery in this passage need not directly challenge this conclusion. The critique here is subtle, certainly not explicitly visible on the locutionary level of the text. But, when taking the implied context of the recipients seriously, the stock of Jewish symbolic images employed here functions as a challenge to first century sentiments that claimed the arrival of these benefits in the emperors and their empire. Had this *berekah* been written to an environment where these eschatological themes were less prevalent, or during a time where these themes had recessed, an Imperial-critical reading of this passage would be far more difficult to construct.

5.2.3 EPH. 2:1-10—CO-ENTHRONEMENT WITH THE MESSIAH IN THE HEAVENLIES

Ephesians presents a complex spatial cosmology that portrays the epistle's author and recipients in two co-existent conceptual spaces simultaneously: both seated in the heavenly realms, and yet also living earthly realities: whether imprisoned (implied author) or living in the *ekklesia* communities (implicitly in Asia Minor). In Ephesians 2:1-10, all of the benefits that have arrived in Messiah Jesus have been procured for the implied readers in spite of their past transgressions; Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσ μένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον (Eph. 2:8).²⁰ This has resulted in a cosmological transfer from: περιπατήσατε κατὰ

²⁰ It is not possible to fully explore here how the implied author's use of *χάρις* may have carried an anti-imperial sense. Harrison's works on the Augustan use of *χάρις* is instructive: "Paul, Eschatology, and the Augustan Age of Grace." *Tyndale Bulletin* 50.1 (1999): 79-91; *Paul's Language of Grace in its Greco-Roman Context* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003); "Paul among the Romans." In *All Things to All Cultures: Paul among Jews, Greek, and Romans*, eds. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 143-176; "Ephesian Cultic Officials, Their Benefactors, and the Quest for Civic Virtue: Paul's Alternative Quest for Status in the Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus*, eds. James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplements 9; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 280-282. In his

τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας (2:2), το: συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (2:6).

Read from an imperial-critical vantage point, these passages articulate a cosmology that both parallels and contrasts with the cosmology of Roman imperial rule. Fred Long detects anti-imperial cues in this passage when read from the vantage point of Augustan ideology, which he sees as having been conjoined with the authority that Jupiter (Zeus) was thought to have had over the ἀήρ (2:1).²¹ The author of Ephesians makes further connections between this cosmological realm and τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας (2:2). For Long, the cosmological transfer that followers of Jesus have undergone in this passage is not simply a shift from the realm of Satan to that of God, but from Roman imperial rule, which was associated with Satan in second temple literature, to the cosmological realm under the rule of Jesus.²² Similarly, Beck concludes that this passage amounts to an anti-Roman cryptogram that, if pressured by imperial authorities regarding its meaning, could be written off as referring to spiritual rather than earthly realities.²³ As this line of thinking goes, the locutionary content of this section may actually conceal the author's imperial-critical strategies from outsiders. During the first two

interactions with Harrison's work, T. J. Lang concludes that "the χάρις assigned to Paul to proclaim in Eph 3 should be viewed, at least in some sense, as an alternative form of redemptive capital that has been secured for the Gentiles by the God of Israel." *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness: From Paul to the Second Century* (BZNW 219; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 99. Some of Harrison's proposals point to a strong possibility that Roman imperial ideology constituted one of those "alternative forms(s) of redemptive capital," and although he emphasizes a contrast of ideologies rather than subversion in Ephesians ("Ephesian Cultic Officials," 280-282), he discusses Paul's strategies in 1 Thess. as a counter-narrative that was subversive of Augustan grace." *Paul and Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology* (WUNT 273; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 1-2, 66, 335. He argues for a similar meta-narrative perspective in "Paul among the Romans," 146. Faust draws similar conclusions about the χάρις in Ephesians in light of its context in Asia Minor: *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 431 fn. 1.

²¹ Fredrick J. Long, "Roman Imperial Rule under the Authority of Jupiter-Zeus: Political-Religious Contexts and the Interpretation of 'the Ruler of the Authority of the Air' in Ephesians 2:2" in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 113-154. Aspects of Long's argument can be supported by displays of Augustus portrayed as Jupiter: e.g. the Gemma Augustea, the sword of Tiberius, the Livia cameo in Vienna, and the colossal statue of Ceres Augusta from the theater of Leptis Magna, see Zanker, *Power of Images*, 360.

²² Long, "Roman Imperial Rule," 147-153. Other later writings also draw a connection between Satan and Roman imperial authorities. Early Christian martyrdom accounts contain "[an] undercurrent of [its] plot, in which the Roman officials are unwittingly in league with the great biblical Adversary, Satan, or the devil." Herbert Musurillo, "Christian and Political Martyrs in the Early Roman Empire: A Reconsideration," in *Assimilation et Résistance à la Culture Gréco-Romaine Dans le Monde Ancien: Travaux du VI Congrès International d'Etudes Classiques*, ed. D. M. Pippidi. (Paris: Editura Academiei, 1976), 337.

²³ Beck, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms*, 76.

centuries, the Roman emperor was given an honorific status that had acute cosmological implications. As the *pontifex maximus* of Roman religion, self-declared *divi filius* (son of God) of a deified adoptive father, and awaiting deification (not guaranteed, but granted honorifically with an acceptable Principate), the emperor was elevated within imperial cosmology to an authoritative position in two co-existent conceptual spaces simultaneously—in the heavens and on earth.²⁴ While Arnold reads these passages as expressing ideas related to Jewish demonology and “personal evil forces,”²⁵ more subtle sub-textual cues point to its critique of Roman imperial cosmology, which granted the emperor the institutional status as ruler of the earth and the cosmos.

This line of thinking goes beyond suggesting that the emperor should not be considered “heavenly” and that Christians (with Messiah Jesus) should. While failed emperors were denied deification for their transgressions, Ephesians portrays a heavenly cosmology that is not exclusively reserved for the moral or social elite, but is reserved for those who have found salvation in the Messiah in spite of their having been transgressors (2:1-5), uncircumcised, separated from the Messiah, aliens of the covenant, excluded from Israel, and once ‘far off’ (2:11-13). A subtle contrast is discernible within the cosmic Christology of this passage. Early Christians were marginalized in the Roman Empire.²⁶ Ephesians reverses that notion by seating once-transgressors, now Jesus followers, in the heavenly realms with the triumphant Messiah. This reverses their marginalization in the Roman Empire. The cosmological vision of Messiah Jesus brings past transgressors into a position of co-enthronement (συνεκάθισεν) the Messiah, whereas Roman imperial cosmology leaves no room for co-enthronement of the ruler of the empire and his transgressors. Instead, it reserves this honorific position for the gods/goddesses, emperors, and/or social elites that meet the criteria of exemplary imperial rule or special association with the emperor.²⁷ When read from an imperial-critical vantage point, this passage amounts to a reversal of the elitist imperial cosmology, familiar to those within Asia Minor, painting an alternative portrait of who is enthroned and who can be co-enthroned in the

²⁴ E.g. Augustus was called “heavenly” (ἐπουράνιος) both while he was alive and after his death: Nijay K. Gupta and Fredrick J. Long, “The Politics of Ephesians and the Empire: Accommodation or Resistance?” *JGRChJ* 7 (2010): 118-119. They also conclude that the emperors were “the new earthly gods on the block,” 119. Their points stress that Roman imperial ideology viewed the emperors as rulers of both the heavens and the earth simultaneously.

²⁵ Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 60.

²⁶ See p. 110 above.

²⁷ While Max Randin argues that the term ‘apotheosis’ was generally applied to all burials in Roman times, and so it included “the ceremonial interment of the lowliest citizen” descriptions of the apotheosis of the emperor and social elite seemed qualitatively different: “Apotheosis,” *CR* 30.2 (1916): 45.

heavenlies. The critique here, again, is subtle and implicit, in stark contrast to that of Seneca’s “pumpkinification (or gourdification)” of Claudius,²⁸ which was clearly written as subversive satire of the emperor’s deification. If this reading of Ephesians 2 holds weight, the imperial-critical implications are more subtle—not necessarily detectable in the epistle’s locutionary acts, but detectable on the level of its illocutionary and perlocutionary intent in light of its Roman imperial context (C in Searle’s X=Y in C).

5.2.4 EPH. 2:11-22—THE εἰρήνη OF THE MESSIAH JESUS AND THE *PAX ROMANA*

Ephesians 2:14 is a continuation of the author’s statement in 2:12-13. In spite of the fact that, in 2:13, the recipients are characterized as having once been separated from the Messiah (χωρὶς Χριστοῦ), alienated from citizenship in Israel (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ), foreigners to the covenant of promise (ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας), hopeless, and godless in the world (ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ), the author radically depicts their new status by saying: νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγενήθητε ἐγγὺς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ (2:13). The author’s statements in 2:14 and 2:17 clarify how such an event was possible; Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν (2:14), εὐηγγελίσαστο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς (2:17). This peace was ultimately accomplished ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ (2:13), ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ (2:14), and διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ (2:16).

These passages have been read through the lenses of the OT, christologically centering familiar Jewish concepts of peace.²⁹ The portrait of two groups at enmity with each other, Jews and Gentiles, being brought into unity through the work of Messiah Jesus is depicted in this passage. Concerns raised against a supersessionist reading of Eph. 2 have led to further questions about who constitutes the people of God, and what Israel’s privileged place in that people is.³⁰ The language of being called uncircumcision (οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία) by those

²⁸ Petronius, Seneca, *Satyricon. Apocolocyntosis* (Trans. Michael Heseltine, W. H. D. Rouse; Rev. by E. H. Warmington; LCL 15. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913).

²⁹ Macdonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 247; Muddiman, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 125-126, 137; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 140, 147-148; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 207; In contrast to this, Hoehner dismisses that the OT sacrificial peace offering is in view here (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 367 fn, 4) as well as the idea that Paul is adopting the primary meaning of Is. 57:19 in Eph. 2:17: Hoehner, 387. O’Brien and Best dismiss the idea that peace language here finds its origin in *Pax Romana*. O’Brien believes it derives from ‘the Prince of Peace’ in Is. 9:6 and Mic. 5:5: *Ephesians*, 194; Best believes it comes from the OT: *Ephesians*, 250. Verhey and Harvard read the peace language in Eph. biovocally—within both a Roman imperial and Jewish context: *Ephesians*, 89-105. Cohick also acknowledges the complexity of the concept of peace in the NT: *Ephesians*, 75.

³⁰ See most recently, L. J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ’s Mission through Israel to the Nations* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 112-158.

called circumcision (τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς) [2:11], inclusion into the citizenship of Israel (τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ) [2:12], and law of commandments (τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν) [2:15] draws its imagery from a Jewish theology of election, which might raise doubt about reading the passage in light of the epistle’s implied Roman imperial context.

Yorke, Lau, Faust, and Long have all suggested that the εἰρήνη presented in this passage should be read in light of similar themes found in Roman imperial ideology.³¹ They draw their conclusions from noting parallels between Roman peace and the peace described in Ephesians. Peace (εἰρήνη; *pax*) was a central theme of Roman imperial ideology,³² and its significance was displayed, in part, on various monuments and altars. While imperial-critical discussions have generally entertained the significance of the *ara pacis* (the Augustan altar to peace) for an imperial ideology of peace in the early Empire,³³ less attention has been paid to details of the altar’s imagery.³⁴ The senate commissioned the *ara pacis* in 13 BC after the emperor’s return from Spain and Gaul.³⁵ It was completed in 9 BC in the Campus Martius region in Rome, which was a centralized location of Augustan building projects. Rehak’s characterization of the Campus Martius as a “field of dreams,”³⁶ and an “Augustan ‘theme park’”³⁷ captures the significance of this area of Rome for studying Augustan imperial ideology.³⁸ That the *ara pacis*

³¹ Gosnell L. Yorke, “Hearing the Politics of Peace in Ephesians: A Proposal from an African Postcolonial Perspective,” *JSTNT* 30.1 (2007): 113-127; Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books* (SNT 133. Leiden: Brill, 2010); Faust, *Pax Christi*; Fredrick J. Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology in Greco-Roman Political Context” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Early Christianity in its Hellenistic Context 1; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 286.

³² Punt, “Empire and New Testament,” 5.

³³ E.g. van Thanh Nguyen, “Evangelizing Empire: The Gospel and Mission of St. Paul,” *Sedos Bulletin* 41.5/6 (2009): 104; Gary Gilbert, “The List of Nations in Acts 2: Roman Propaganda and the Lucan Response,” *JBL* 121.3 (2002): 515, 526; Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith; London: SCM Press, 1955), 97. Crossan mentions the significance of the imagery on the *ara pacis*, but passes over any detailed assessment of it: John Dominic Crossan, “Paul and Rome: The Challenge of a Just World Order,” *USQR* 59.3-4 (2005): 11. See also Punt, “Material Setting,” 3.

³⁴ Cf. Jeremy Punt, “The New Testament and Empire: On the Importance of Theory,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37 supplement (2011): 100; Jeffrey A. D. Weima, “‘Peace and Security’ (1 Thess 5.3): Prophetic Warning or Political Propaganda?,” *NTS* 58 (2012): 337, 343-345, 349. For a wider discussion of the *ara pacis*, see Paul Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos: Augustus and the Northern Campus Martius*, ed. John G. Younger (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 96-137.

³⁵ *RG* 12. See Alison E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 154-155; Amanda Claridge, *Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (2nd Ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 207; Filippo Coarelli, *Rome and Environs: An Archaeological Guide* (Updated Edition. Trans. J. J. Clauss, and D. P. Harmon. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 299; Erika Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 8.

³⁶ Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 9-30.

³⁷ Rehak, xiii.

³⁸ Rehak further concludes that while the Campus Martius region was a centralized area in Rome that functioned as a sort of “cognitive map of Augustus’s life,” *Imperium and Cosmos*, 142-143. He also concludes

was also accessible along the *via Flamina* meant it would have made an immediate impression upon travelers coming into the city from northern Italy.³⁹ The altar played an important role within a wider complex that contained the mausoleum of Augustus, his sun dial (*horologium*), and his funeral pyre (*ustrinum*).⁴⁰ Each of these monuments contributed to an Augustan ideology of *imperium* that was unprecedented, and cosmic in its scope.⁴¹ Imagery on the *ara pacis* potently projected the Augustan brand of *pax*: According to Simon, Augustus is portrayed as “he, who, as *dux pacificus*, can restore peace on earth.”⁴² It was deliberately commissioned to juxtapose the reality of the emperor’s return to Rome with symbolism of the return of peace to the world through Augustus.⁴³ The building’s rectangular construction with two doorways likely drew connections with the temple of Janus Geminus in the Roman Forum.⁴⁴ The ties with the temple of Janus were not inconsequential: its doors remained shut during times of peace, and were opened during times of war.⁴⁵

Earlier, it was demonstrated that Augustus, and subsequent Julio-Claudian emperors, claimed to have brought peace to the world—a key motif of Roman imperial eschatology.⁴⁶ Later imperial dynasties made similar claims.⁴⁷ The Roman vision of peace (*Pax Romana*) claimed that one of the primary means through which the emperors brought *pax* to the world

that the whole city of Rome itself could also be “understood as a similar cosmic center.” *Imperium and Cosmos*, 144.

³⁹ Cooley, *Res Gestae*, 3-4; Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae*, 8.

⁴⁰ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 140. For a map of the original layout of the whole complex, see Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, 297, fig. 77. Claridge provides a nice description of each monument: *Rome*, 204-216. Aicher provides a helpful summary of some of the ancient source materials on each: *Rome*, 240-251.

⁴¹ This is the larger thesis of Rehak’s work, see the individual chapters dedicated to these monuments in his *Imperium and Cosmos*.

⁴² Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae*, 8. Images of the imperial family on the exterior of the altar was a potent symbol that “the preservation of peace depended on this family.” Simon, 22.

⁴³ Peter J. Aicher, *Rome: A Source-Guide to the Ancient City* (Vol. 1. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2006), 245; Simon, 24. The altar’s images of garland—ripening fruit with intersecting wreaths, correlated with Augustus’ return to the city in the summer: Simon, 14. The larger procession on the altar depicts a specific event: the return of Augustus to Rome on 4 July 13 BC, and the subsequent celebration of a thanksgiving feast. These feasts, once used primarily during times of hardship, had been transformed into a demonstration of loyalty to the imperial family after the end of the Republic: Simon, 22.

⁴⁴ Simon, 9.

⁴⁵ *RG* 13; Cooley, *Res Gestae*, 157-158; Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae*, 9.

⁴⁶ See pp. 111-117 above. For connections between the *ara pacis* and the *saeculum aureum*, see Zanker, *Power of Images*, 182-183.

⁴⁷ See pp. 113 above.

was through subjugation of foreign peoples.⁴⁸ This vision of peace included military force,⁴⁹ plunder, murder, rape, and slavery.⁵⁰ At times, less violent means were employed, such as diplomatic agreements.⁵¹

The implied readers would have understood these trajectories of peace conveyed by imperial ideology, even if they had no specific knowledge of the *ara pacis* itself. These Roman imperial visions of peace would have provided a subtext for the claims of peace in Eph. 2. When one considers these Roman imperial narratives of peace, strikingly similar motifs are identifiable in Eph. 2:11-22. Talbert concludes that “any Gentile in western Asia Minor, hearing this message about Christ’s mission as peace-bringer, would have heard echoes of the widespread praise of Augustus and his successors for having brought peace to the world.”⁵² Consequently, Eph. 2:14ff parodies the empire’s images of violently procuring peace for the world. While Roman imperial eschatology is not directly invoked on the locutionary level, when read in light of its implied context in Asia Minor, this passage supplants the agent of peace most commonly presented to people in Asia Minor (the Roman emperor), with Jesus the Messiah. The conflicting narratives surrounding the agents of peace are both eschatological and christological in nature. The emperor is not mentioned in the locutionary content of Eph. 2. If this reading holds up, it will have to be assumed that the implied reader’s cognitive context provided familiarity with these competing narratives (opposing eschatologies and christologies) by recalling the imperial notions of peace and discerning the contrast with the peace offered in Messiah Jesus. Interestingly, in Ephesians, two groups who were previously at enmity with each other are pacified through bloodshed—a common motif in Roman imperial

⁴⁸ Peace through war was not an uncommon theme in the imperial eras. In describing the presence of Mars (god of war) on the *ara pacis* (altar of peace), Simon states, “But what has the god of war to do with an altar to the goddess of peace? The answer is that antique divinities cannot be defined merely by one formula. The preservation of peace also came within the powers of the god of war.” Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae*, 25, 30. See also Edward M. Keazirian, *Peace and Peacemaking in Paul and the Greco-Roman World* (Studies in Biblical Literature 145; New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 78-79. Plans were made to have the names of subjected people groups marched ahead of the body of Augustus during his state funeral in AD 14: Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 139.

⁴⁹ Barbara Levick, *The Government of the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook* (2nd Ed.; London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 34.

⁵⁰ See Tacitus *Agr.* 30.24.

⁵¹ The scenes depicted on the famous Augustus statue uncovered in his wife Livia’s villa in Prima Porta points to the complexities of Pax Romana. It displays the savviness of Augustus in reclaiming the Roman military standards from the Parthians through diplomatic means. The Parthian king is depicted as willingly handing over the standards that they had captured when defeating Crassus (53 BC) and Antony (40 BC). It also depicts people groups subjugated through military conquest. For further discussion of the imagery on this statue, see Louise Adams Holland, “Aeneas-Augustus of Prima Porta,” *TAPA* 8 (1947): 276-284.

⁵² Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 82-83.

eschatology.⁵³ This contrasts with the *Pax Romana* in Asia Minor. Consequently, for this reading to work, the recipients in Asia Minor would need to understand imperial claims that peace had been established through bloodshed (in which Roman crucifixion also played a role), but usually for the purpose of pacification of Rome's enemies. Ironically, the shedding of blood referred to in Ephesians, which is the means of peace being procured for the two groups, is not that of subjected people groups who have transgressed against the emperor/empire, but of God's Messianic agent, Messiah Jesus, on behalf of the transgressors. There emerges a portrait of the ruler who brings peace to the world through bloodshed, albeit self-sacrificially, rather than in the subjugation (or the death) of his enemies. This illuminates the speech-act strategy employed by the implied author of Ephesians for engaging with imperial ideology: his locutions do not explicitly *name* imperial authorities or ideologies, but, at times, *count as* competing narrative claims on the illocutionary and perlocutionary levels in its implied context. If so, the death and killing motifs that are present in Eph. 2:14-16 function ironically. The death present is that of the ruler, Jesus the Messiah, by means of crucifixion on a cross (2:15). The killing which takes place is of the hostility between the groups (ἀποκτείνοντας τὴν ἕχθραν) [2:16]. The reversal of the imagery usually employed in the *Pax Romana* would be striking to the implied audience. In Searle's formula, the letter's locutionary content (X) *counts as* subversion of imperial rule (Y) illocutionarily when understood within the claims of Roman imperial eschatology and cosmology in Asia Minor (C). When the σταυρός is invoked here, the Christology presented also functions as an ironic reversal of the expectations of the implied audience. In Eph. 2:16, the ἀποκαταλλάσσω of the two groups at enmity with each other has been afforded through the cross. Considering the Roman use of crucifixion, this projected a certain perlocutionary effect, *startling* the implied audience. The very thing which was most often used as a sign of intimidation, subjugation, and pacification, becomes here the means of reconciling warring groups. In this reading, the theological connection between reconciliation and the cross parodies Roman imperial ideology. Roman imperialism used the cross as a means of bringing peace because it helped to squash rebellions against imperial rule.⁵⁴ Connections between crucifixion and bringing peace to the world were likely obvious to people in Roman

⁵³ Davina Lopez draws on much of the violent images that the Romans used to depict their subjugation of the nations: *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

⁵⁴ J. Dennis, "Death of Jesus," in *The IVP Bible Dictionary Series: Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green (2nd Ed. InterVarsity Press, 2013): https://ezproxy.crown.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/ivpdjg/death_of_jesus/0?institutionId=4382. This was not the only use of crucifixion by the Romans, they also used it for public spectacle: see John Granger Cook, "Crucifixion as Spectacle in Roman Campania," *NovTest* 54.1 (2012): 68-100.

imperial Asia Minor, so the author's use of these concepts evoked those familiar images. In this environment, that the means of peace among warring groups be found in the crucifixion of the Χριστος is a shocking reversal that parodies Roman imperial crucifixion.

5.2.5 EPH. 3:1, 13—THE IMPRISONMENT OF PAUL, AND *MAIESTAS*

The image of Paul in chains in Ephesians presents the most straightforward locutionary evidence of the epistle's Roman imperial context. Regardless of whether Paul wrote the epistle, the implied author is portrayed as Paul under Roman imperial guard, even if not imprisoned in Rome. The author invokes imprisonment three times in the epistle: as a δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (3:1), ἐν κυρίῳ (4:1), and as a πρεσβεύω ἐν ἀλύσει (6:20). The author's request that the recipients pray for him to have boldness in proclamation of the gospel (6:19) also invokes aspects of the trials experienced while imprisoned. Smillie's claim that the epistle's closing words reveal Paul's implied context, namely awaiting trial in front of Nero, places the writing of the epistle in a heightened environment.⁵⁵

An imperial-critical reading of Paul's imprisonment in Ephesians could also be read in the following ways:

1. Imprisonment did not prevent the author from subverting imperial ideology in Ephesians, but it demanded a more subtle, sub-textual strategy in order to not be easily detected by imperial authorities. Ephesians seems to have employed anti-Roman cryptograms that are only detectable by insiders who would have understood the subtleties.⁵⁶
2. Imagery of Paul's imprisonment and persecution counted as subversion of imperial rule for the recipients of the letter. By casting his imprisonment as a framing device for the recipients, the implied readers would have been expected to judge the imperial authorities and their practices of imprisonment as unjust, unwarranted, and ungodly. The imprisonment of the Messiah's apostle, for the sake of proclaiming the gospel, implicitly places the Roman imperial program in the camp of the "rulers, authorities, powers, and dominions" that Jesus has defeated, and is seated 'over.' Furthermore,

⁵⁵ Gene R. Smillie, "Ephesians 6:19-20 A Mystery for the Sake of Which the Apostle is an Ambassador in Chains," *TRINJ* 18NS (1997): 199-222.

⁵⁶ Beck, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms*, 75-76.

along this line of thinking, Roman rule is implicitly placed in opposition to God's plan since it is 'for the sake of you Gentiles' that the author is imprisoned, and because the author intends, with the help of the recipients' prayers, to continue to proclaim the gospel boldly. As the author is divinely entrusted with God's 'mystery,' which reveals that the Gentiles have been included as full participants in God's people (3:1ff), any resistance to that message might implicitly characterize the resisters as contradicting God's plans for the world. The author did not need to state that the Roman imperial authorities are in opposition to the gospel on the locutionary level. In this reading, such a statement was not only ill-advised while under imprisonment, but unnecessary. The author's invocation of the imprisonment itself, when paired with his characterization as a prisoner because of his work in the Lord, counted as *subversion* of imperial rule. The author could accomplish this point without stating it on the locutionary level. If so, its meaning becomes clear when the illocutionary and perlocutionary intent of the imprisonment language is considered in light of the implied Roman imperial context.

In our earlier assessment of the presence of *maiestas* laws in the early Roman Empire, as well as the role of *delatores* and *frumentarii*, we concluded that significant first-century dangers necessitated caution be used when challenging Roman imperial rule.⁵⁷ Our work also demonstrated that these dangers increased in Asia Minor in the second century. This fact sheds further light on the author's depiction of his imprisonment. Knowing the dangers of subversive writings during the first two centuries of the empire, reasonable caution would need to have been exhibited when employing cosmological, eschatological, and christological themes that conflicted with Roman imperial ideology. By employing motifs that were loaded with meaning in its imperial context, rather than using explicit locutionary language, the author's critique of Roman imperial rule may have been coy and subtle in nature. A post-Pauline author could have invoked the imprisonment of the apostle in order to subtly critique Roman imperial rule in a post-Pauline era. This may have been fueled by confrontations with imperial authorities that the recipients would soon face (or had already been facing) within Asia Minor. Either way, if read from an imperial-critical vantage point, the function of the imprisonment has many of the same hermeneutical implications.

⁵⁷ See pp. 91-97 above.

5.3 IMPERIAL-CRITICAL READING OF EPHESIANS 4-6

5.3.1 EPH. 4:4-6—ONE LORD, ONE HOPE, ONE GOD AND FATHER OVER ALL: A CHALLENGE TO THE EMPEROR?

As far back as Deissmann, parallels between the NT's use of the word κύριος and its use elsewhere in the Roman Empire have been detected.⁵⁸ There is clear inscriptional and literary evidence for the use of the term for Roman emperors.⁵⁹ Imperial-critical interpreters suggest that κύριος, in the first century, should be read in light of its Roman imperial context as much as in the light of its Septuagintal use,⁶⁰ and that identification of Jesus as Lord (κύριος) in the NT directly challenges contemporary identifications of the Roman emperor as κύριος.⁶¹ Fantin's extensive lexical study on κύριος terminology has paved the way for understanding the concept in light of the roles of Roman rulers, the developments of imperial cults, and the increased use of the term for the emperors.⁶² According to Fantin, the likelihood that κύριος carried anti-imperial overtones within the NT increases the further that one gets toward the end of the first century.⁶³ Fantin argues that, at times, the Roman imperial use of the term carried

⁵⁸ Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 353-363. There is strong evidence of the general pervasiveness of κύριος language in Ephesus. Michael Immendörfer has identified κύριος in 71 inscriptions in Ephesus alone: *Ephesians and Artemis: The Cult of the Great Goddess of Ephesus as the Epistle's Context* (WUNT II 436; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 360-361.

⁵⁹ See p. 170 fn. 61 above.

⁶⁰ This argument is made in spite of the fact that κύριος occurs over 8000x in the LXX: J. G. Panjikaran, *Paul's Concept of Mission: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 10:8-17* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), 153.

⁶¹ See e.g. N. T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in Horsley, ed. *Paul and Politics*, 160-183; Fredrick J. Long, and Ryan Kristopher Giffin, "'Every Knee Bowed:' Jesus Christ as Reigning Lord over 'the Heavenly, the Earthly, and the Subterranean Gods' (Philippians 2:10)," in Harrison and Welborn, eds., *The First Urban Churches 4*, 240; Gupta and Long, "Politics of Ephesians," 115, 125; Sylvia C. Keesmaat, "Reading Romans in the Capital of the Empire," in *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. Jerry L. Sumney (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2012), 53; contra Peter Oakes, "The Imperial Authorities in Paul's Letter to Predominantly Greek Hearers in the Roman Colony of Philippi," in *The First Urban Churches 4: Roman Philippi*, eds. James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplements 13; Atlanta: SBL, 2018), 222; John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (WUNT 275. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 364-369, 371, 378-379; Ovidiu Hanc, "Paul and Empire: A Reframing of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of the New Exodus," *TynBull* 65.2 (2014): 316; Denny Burk, "Is Paul's Gospel Counterimperial? Evaluating the Prospects of the 'Fresh Perspective' for Evangelical Theology," *JETS* 51.2 (June 2008): 317. Joel White cautions against making too much of a contrast between Lord Jesus and Lord Caesar: "Anti-Imperial Subtexts in Paul: An Attempt at Building a Firmer Foundation," *Biblica* 90 (2009): 314.

⁶² Joseph D. Fantin, *The Lord of the Entire World: Lord Jesus, a Challenge to Lord Caesar?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011).

⁶³ Fantin, 53.

the weight of “supreme Lord.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Diehl suggests that Mark’s gospel avoids calling Jesus κύριος in light of its Roman imperial life-setting because of the “need to be cautious about referring to Jesus by the same titles that were used for the Roman leaders.”⁶⁵ Critics have claimed that an overemphasis on the parallels in ‘lordship’ terminology between the NT and a Roman imperial use amounts to “parallelomania,” and that similarities in terminology do not necessarily equate to subversion of imperial ideology.⁶⁶ Fantin’s work challenges these sentiments by showing that, to the extent that κύριος language claimed “supreme Lordship,” its appropriation in the NT offered a conflicting vision of who constituted the supreme Lord.

One might be tempted to focus on the frequency of κύριος terminology in Ephesians in order to stress the epistle’s parallels with Roman ideology—it identifies Jesus as κύριος 25 times; only the title Χριστός is used more frequently.⁶⁷ On the other hand, a stronger case for an imperial-critical reading of the term can be established on the grounds of how the concept is used in the letter, rather than merely on its frequency. The passage in Eph. 6:5 clearly uses the term for earthly masters when it tells slaves to ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐν ἀπλότητι τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ. This fact suggests that not every use of κύριος in Ephesians (or in the NT) carried the weight of “supreme Lord.” If there are places in Ephesians where such a meaning is present, contemporary aspects of Roman imperial ideology which emphasized the emperor’s role as exclusive, supreme κύριος might be undermined.⁶⁸ While most of the imperial-critical arguments that engage κύριος terminology have focused on the parallel locutionary content, the confrontation of Jesus and the emperor as Lord in Ephesians might actually occur on a larger metanarrative level and not merely in the use of parallel terms. Nevertheless, Fantin’s work, at the very least, provides evidence for some strong overlap in cognitive meaning between the Roman imperial use and that of the NT.

In Eph. 4:1-3, the author appeals to the community, in light of his imprisonment, to ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε, μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ πραύτητος, μετὰ μακροθυμίας, ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων ἐν ἀγάπῃ, σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης. There follows a poetic portrait of the oneness that the

⁶⁴ Fantin, 209-215.

⁶⁵ Judith A. Diehl, “Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament,” in McKnight and Modica, eds., *Jesus is Lord*, 49.

⁶⁶ See e.g., Denny Burk, “Is Paul’s Gospel Counterimperial,” 316-317.

⁶⁷ Eph 1:2, 3, 15, 17; 2:21; 3:11; 4:1, 5, 17; 5:8, 10, 17, 19, 20, 22; 6:1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 21, 23, 24.

⁶⁸ Fantin, 188-190; A. Winn, “Striking Back at the Empire: Empire Theory and Responses to Empire in the New Testament,” in Winn, ed., *Introduction to Empire*, 6-7.

community is called to: Ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν· εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἓν βάπτισμα, εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν (4:4-6).

When read from an imperial-critical vantage point, Eph. 4:4 challenges the supreme lordship of the Roman emperor. Fantin argues that “it is likely, then, that the emperor played an important role in the cognitive environment of the original readers of the letter [of Ephesians],” and that “it is probable that the default supreme lord in the general cognitive environment was Nero.”⁶⁹ While Ephesians allows for the co-existence of κύριος Jesus and earthly lords, its statement in 4:4 may function as an undermining of the emperor’s supreme lordship by exclusively claiming supreme lordship of Jesus for the letter’s recipients. Three distinct aspects of this passage may conflict with the ideology of the Roman emperor and empire: supreme lordship, cosmological hope, and deification. Under this line of thinking, the illocutionary act in this passage would have had different implications had the author said “we have a Lord too, and we also have hope, and we have a God and father,” or “our Lord is..., and our hope is...and our God and father is...” Doing so acknowledges other lords, other hopes, and other gods. The implied author leaves no room for this. The central motif throughout the passage is one-ness. The implied author emphasizes that the recipients have “*only* one body, one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and father of all.” These ‘ones’ make up the reasons for their unity in community. Lotz notes that “themes of unity and oneness occur throughout the epistle...but these themes do not occur against a neutral back-drop, they are expressed as a revolutionary part of God’s work of reuniting all things under the headship of Christ. The imagery here was intentionally provocative.”⁷⁰ For Lotz, one key aspect of the backdrop to the unity language in Ephesians is the contemporary Augustan portrait as world ruler and his program of Pax Romana.⁷¹ If so, the epistle’s oneness language *counted as* subversive of Roman rule.

The exclusivity of this passage stands, on the one hand, as a stark contrast to the pluralism of the implied audience’s Roman imperial context. On the other hand, when exclusive claims were being made within a Roman imperial context, they were often made about the emperors and Roman imperial rule. Considering the allowances given for a plurality of gods, lords, and faiths in the empire, any exclusive claims from Roman imperial authorities

⁶⁹ Fantin, *Lord of the Entire World*, 231.

⁷⁰ John Paul Lotz, “The *Homonoia* Coins of Asia Minor and Ephesians 1:21,” *TynBul* 50.2 (1999): 186.

⁷¹ Lotz, 186.

stands out. In Ephesians, there are no other lords, no other hopes, and no other gods or fathers. As the imperial-critical argument goes, unless the recipients lived with blinders on, they would have understood that the oneness language employed here—one lord, one hope, one god and father—conflicted with the narratives of Roman imperial ideology present within their context in Asia Minor. Messiah Jesus is the *supreme* Lord, who offers the *only* hope of the *one and only* God and Father. Any other claims of supreme lordship, cosmological hope, and deification would have conflicted with the author’s claims.⁷² Evidence that Roman imperial rule cast wide claims of the emperor’s supreme Lordship is vast. For example, the Priene calendar inscription, discussed earlier,⁷³ celebrates the lordship of the emperor, the hope that he had brought to the world, and his status as a god.⁷⁴ It cast wide eschatological and cosmological claims and was initially commissioned by public figures in Asia Minor. Similar images cast of the emperor within the region (e.g. the *sebastion* of Aphrodisas), would have been obvious to the implied audience.⁷⁵ Ephesians claims that its recipients’ only hope is the work of Messiah Jesus. Further, the only god and father worthy of acknowledgment is ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Eph. 1:3). These exclusive claims, when read from the vantage point of an imperial-critical viewpoint, constituted the subversion of Roman imperial claims.

Ideologies of the Roman emperor are not often discussed in christological terms. However, when a Roman imperial theology of the emperor is considered alongside the broader narrative framework surrounding the Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures, parallel motifs emerge, and some of the exclusive christological claims made about Jesus in the NT appear in tension with similar claims made of the emperor. In the same manner that an imperial eschatology is evident in the early Roman Empire, a Christology is discernible, even if Roman imperial ideology would not have used the same locutionary language for it.⁷⁶ For example,

⁷² Fantin claims that “as this passage is considered in its context, it seems clear that the polemical meaning is minimal (especially for the earlier dating); nevertheless, the structural clues make it likely that a claim to the exclusivity of the Christ is present. Thus, by implication, there is a challenge to Caesar.” *Lord of the Entire World*, 234.

⁷³ See pp. 115, 173 above.

⁷⁴ See, John Dominic Crossan, *God & Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 148.

⁷⁵ See p. 114 above.

⁷⁶ Justin Meggitt contends that an examination of the role of the Roman emperor in the ancient world “warrants giving it a position in christological discussion equal to that accorded to at least some of the material from the Jewish background in the analysis of the genesis and development of early Christian ideas about Jesus.” “Taking the Emperor’s Clothes Seriously: The New Testament and the Roman Emperor,” in *The Quest for Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Philip Budd*, ed. Christine E. Jones (Cambridge: Orchard Academic, 2002), 154. Similarly, Warren Carter puts conflicts between Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus and ideologies of the Roman emperor in christological terms: “Matthew and Empire” in Porter and Westfall, *Empire in the New Testament*, 109-112. In doing so, he implies that there are conflicts between christologies—a “previously unrecognized

the Roman senate honorifically granted Octavian the title ‘Augustus’ (‘revered one,’ ‘majestic’, or ‘venerable,’) in gratitude for the benefits that he brought the people after his defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium.⁷⁷ While the locutionary title in Greek associated with Augustus (σεβαστός) is not the exact same term used in the NT for Jesus the Χριστός, the honors associated with both are strikingly similar.⁷⁸ If it could be established that competing christological claims were rapidly emerging within Roman imperial ideology, parallel notions found in the NT might deserve reconsideration. What would these claims have *counted as* for Christian communities scattered throughout the Roman Empire?

If the implied context of Ephesians is post-Pauline, this passage is more loaded in terms of its subversion of Roman imperial ideology. The phrase ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου in John 20:28 has been placed within the context of Domitian’s reign, leading some scholars to the conclusion that the passage was subversive of the emperor’s claims of being “Lord and God (*dominus et deus*).”⁷⁹ Less attention has been given to the claim of “one Lord,” and “one God and father” in Ephesians, even though a later date for Ephesians could suggest that the cognitive context of the two books might have been similar.⁸⁰ If Ephesians was written around the time that the Gospel of John was written, and if the geographical location of its audience was similar, this has further consequences for understanding the claims in this section of Ephesians.⁸¹ In

intertextuality between imperial theology and Matthew’s Christology...the claims collide as the Gospel contests yet imitates imperial claims and offers its hearers an alternative worldview and societal experience.” Carter, “Matthew and Empire,” 112. Winter also acknowledges conflicts between a Christian vision of a messianic kingdom and “Caesar’s Messianic kingdom.” *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians’ Responses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 44. The thematic connections between Christian and Roman imperial christologies can also be seen in the ways in which some early Christians believed Vergil’s fourth eclogue prophesied the coming of Christ. The ‘messianic’ description in the eclogue fit what some early Christians thought of Jesus: Ella Bourne, “The Messianic Prophecy in Vergil’s Fourth Eclogue,” *CJ* 11.7 (1916): 390-400, see esp. 390; Michael Covington also notes the similarities that have been drawn between the eclogue and portraits of Jesus in his survey of the fourth verse of “It Came upon a Midnight Clear” and Vergil’s fourth eclogue: “A Vergilian Christmas Carol?” *The Classical Outlook* 54.4 (1976): 40.

⁷⁷ The title has no single equivalent in English, but it denoted being more than human, sacred, and most-honored: Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 315. It also pointed to connections with Jupiter, carrying religious connotations, and “was synonymous with being god present, *praesens deus*.” Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 316. In light of this, the Greek *epiphaneis* could be seen as parallel equivalent: Galinsky, 316. The title also drew connections with the verb *augere*—invoking the “increase” of territories, as well as the augur priests who interpreted omens: Zanker, *Power of Images*, 98. “Augustus” was favored over other titles, including the suggestion that he should be called ‘Romulus’ because he was a second-founder of the city of Rome: Suetonius, *Augustus*, 7.

⁷⁸ Cooley states that “Augustus was pregnant with potent polyvalent implications: sanctity, heroization, divine election, mediation between the gods and the Roman people.” *Res Gestae*, 262.

⁷⁹ Panjikaran, *Paul’s Concept of Mission*, 152.

⁸⁰ For a history of the phrase as used by Domitian see, Suetonius, *Domitian*, 13; M. Griffin, “The Flavians,” in *CAH XI*, 80-83.

⁸¹ For the Ephesian destination of the Gospel of John see Sief van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus* (SuppNovTest 83; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

other words, if John 20:28 functioned as an implicit critique of contemporary claims of Domitian, might the same be true of lordship language in Ephesians 4? If read from a later date, especially within the context of the reign of Domitian,⁸² the plausibility of an imperial-critical reading of this passage increases in light of the illocutionary force associated with “Lord and God” at that time. Therefore, even if the letter cannot be dated precisely to the reign of Domitian, the language of “Lord and God” carries an anti-imperial thrust if read from the vantage point of a later date.

5.3.2 EPH. 4:8-10—THE ASCENT/DESCENT OF CHRIST AND APOTHEOSIS

The ascent/descent passage of Eph. 4:8-10 has puzzled commentators since it “resembles” Ps. 68:18 [67:19 LXX] but does not quote it verbatim.⁸³ Some of the locutionary content between the two passages is clearly different, and this conundrum has led to a wide range of theories, with little consensus.⁸⁴ The notable shift in Ps. 68:18 from “you received gifts from a human” [ἔλαβες δόματα ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ] to “you gave gifts to humanity” [ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις] in Ephesians has been interpreted as either Jewish interpretation along the lines of the Targum of Ps. 68, or a Christian polemic against second-temple Jewish interpretive traditions of the psalm as it relates to the giving of the law.⁸⁵ In spite of the similarities between Ephesians and Colossians, this passage has no direct parallel in Colossians. Most scholars have focused on the locutionary differences between the LXX and the wording in Ephesians, whereas less attention has been given to the potential narrational components within each passage.

While the hermeneutical focus has largely been on the difference between the giving [ἔδωκεν] of gifts in Ephesians, as opposed to the receiving [ἔλαβες] of gifts in the Psalm, the

⁸² Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Politics of Identity in Ephesians.” *JSNT* 26 (2004): 435-437; Rosemary Canavan, “Armor, Peace, and Gladiators: A Visual Exegesis of Ephesians 6:10-17,” in *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, and Images*, eds. Vernon K. Robbins, Walter S. Melion, and Roy R. Jeal (Atlanta: SBL, 2017), 246.

⁸³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 524. See Hoehner’s bibliography for some of the attempts made at resolving the problem (Ephesians, 525, fn. 1). See also the helpful survey of views offered by Seth Ehorn, “The Use of Psalm 68(67).19 in Ephesians 4.8: A History of Research.” *CurBR* 12.1 (2012): 96-120.

⁸⁴ “The difficulties of interpreting Ps 68 are almost legendary. H.-J. Kraus’ sentiments are repeated by many commentators: ‘There is in the Psalter scarcely a song that, in its textual corruption and disconnectedness, presents the interpreter so great a task as Psalm 68.’” Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990), 170.

⁸⁵ Moritz, *Profound Mystery*, 56-86. Moritz affirms that the perspective of the author of Ephesians does not derive from a Jewish interpretation reflected in the TgPs 68, but rather that Eph. 4 plays off the Jewish Pentecost theme: *Profound Mystery*, 84-85.

language of ascent [ἀναβαίνω] provides interesting parallels with Roman imperial ideology. In both the Psalm and Ephesians, the subject is said to have “ascended on high leading captives [or captivity] captive” [Eph: ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν; LXX: ἀνέβης εἰς ὕψος, ἠχμαλώτευσας αἰχμαλωσίαν]. While what follows differs between the Psalm and Ephesians (giving/receiving gifts), this first part of the passage is remarkably similar. On the other hand, while the implied subject in Eph. is Jesus, the subject in the Psalm is more ambiguous. One thing is clearer: the preceding verse of the Psalm appears to invoke exodus imagery. The passages in Ps. 68:15-16 [67:16-17 LXX] reference Sinai, and other mountains, e.g. “mountain of God,” the “mountain of Bashan,” and “many-peaked mountain”⁸⁶ look on in envy. Further references, for example, language of having ascended on high, leading captive Israel, and receiving gifts from a human being, also point to exodus connections. This might explain the rabbinic tradition that associated this passage with a celebration of the giving of the Torah to Israel at Sinai after their exodus from Egypt.⁸⁷

While there is no doubt that the Ephesians passage has strikingly similar language to the OT psalm, its larger storyline has often been overlooked in discussion of it. Psalm 68 [Ps. 67 LXX] appears to be a Davidic victory psalm celebrating God’s defeat of foreign nations by invoking the exodus experience.⁸⁸ The motif of God’s defeat of enemies runs through the psalm (68:12, 14, 21, 23, 29-32). The psalm begins with YHWH rising up and *scattering* his enemies, a motif often associated with God’s judgement throughout the OT [68:1; 67:1 LXX].⁸⁹ The concentration of exodus imagery in what follows is significant: the LORD is a rider through the desert (68:4,7), protector of the vulnerable (68:5), and leader of prisoners (68:6). There is identification with Sinai (68:8, 15-18), inheritance (68:9), God’s provision for his ‘flock’ (68:10), kings fleeing (68:12) scattered (68:14) and stricken (68:21). The psalm mentions chariots (68:17), God’s salvation and deliverance (68:20), the sea (68:22), Egypt (28:31), and God’s power (68:28), namely in the skies (68:34). Smoke [καπνός] imagery in vs. 2 also

⁸⁶ Tate interprets these as references to different mountains: *Psalm 51-100*, 173, 180-18. Walter Liefeld affirms that the “other mountains [are depicted as] looking in envy at the ‘mountain where God chooses to reign.’” *Ephesians* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 101.

⁸⁷ Moritz, *Profound Mystery*, 72.

⁸⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 528. Tate, on the other hand, suggests that identifying the literary type of the Psalm is much more difficult, but also notes that the opening passages depict “a supplication in the form of a wish that Yahweh (Elohim, in the text) would rise up in a theophanic manifestation of judgment upon his enemies: *Psalms 51-100*, 175, see also 173-174.

⁸⁹ The Hebrew שׁוֹרֵף is used to describe the scattering of YHWH’s enemies, and the scattering of Israel in judgment: see the BDB entry, also Gen. 11:8, 49:7; Num. 10:35; Deut. 4:27, 28:64; Is. 11:12, 24:1; Jer. 9:16, 40:15; Ez. 22:15, 29:12, 30:23,26, 34:5, 36:19; Zech. 13:7.

invokes the similar description of Mount Sinai from Exodus 19:20 [LXX]. The implied storyline of Israel's exodus experience at Sinai may have been recontextualized here for the Psalmist's contemporary setting.⁹⁰ The latter part of the psalm describes God's defeat over enemies of Jerusalem rather than in the wilderness, or in Egypt.⁹¹

An imperial-critical reading of Eph. 4:8-10 might resolve some of the confusion surrounding this passage. A dominant storyline in Roman imperial ideology was the apotheosis/divinization of the emperor.⁹² This motif played an important role in imperial cults in Asia Minor. Emperors (and some of their family members) were first divinized after death,⁹³ assuming they did not undergo the damning of their memory (*damnatio memoriae*) because of insufficient rule.⁹⁴ At certain points, various emperors were proclaimed (or proclaimed themselves) to be gods prior to their deaths.⁹⁵ The idea of *ascending* from within Roman imperial cosmology highlighted the imperial family's divinization. Another overlap in themes between Eph. 4 and Roman imperial ideology can be seen in imagery of the Roman military triumph. For example, the arch of Titus in Rome, which commemorates the Emperor Titus' victory over Judea in AD 70-72 (along with his father, Vespasian), depicts the divinization of Titus. He rides on the four-horsed triumphal chariot, leading captives through the city of Rome and displaying spoils taken from Judea.⁹⁶ While imagery associated with royal victory existed

⁹⁰ For connections between the imagery in these passages and Israel's exodus experience, see Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 176

⁹¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 529.

⁹² Kreitzer concludes that "The practice of apotheosis of the Roman emperor was certainly widespread and influential enough to have touched the lives of some of the early Christians." "Apotheosis of the Roman Emperor." *BA* 53.4 (1990): 211. The work of Hannah and Magli has shown that the Roman imperial commitment to symbolically conveying imagery of apotheosis did not wane as the empire moved into the second century AD. This is evident the imagery and reconstruction of the Pantheon under Hadrian: "The Role of the Sun in the Pantheon's Design and Meaning," *Numen* 58.4 (2011): 486-513. Rollin Grams notes that there is strong evidence of the widespread awareness of the apotheosis tradition, including the fact that "Greco-Roman apotheosis traditions were sufficiently well known in Jewish circles in the first century AD." "Narrative Dynamics in Isaiah's and Matthew's Mission Theology," *Transformation* 21.4 (2004): 247.

⁹³ N. T. Elkins, "The Procession and Placement of Imperial Cult Images in the Colosseum." *Papers of the British School at Rome* 82 (2014): 76.

⁹⁴ While a wide array of images of emperors were restored during the reign of Titus, images of Caligula and Nero were absent in light of *damnatio memoriae*. N. T. Elkins, "The Flavian Colosseum Sestertii: Currency or Largess?" *The Numismatic Chronicle* 166 (2006): 214.

⁹⁵ The earliest example is Gaius (Caligula) but his stance seems to have been an exception to the perspective of other Julio-Claudian rulers.

⁹⁶ R. R. Holloway, "Some Remarks on the Arch of Titus." *L'Antiquité Classique* 56 (1987): 184; D. McFayden, "The Date of the Arch of Titus." *CJ* 11.3 (1915): 131; Kreitzer, "Apotheosis," 210; H. Price, "Titus, 'Amor Ac Deliciae Generis Humani.'" *The Classical Weekly* 39.8 (1945): 59; T. S. Luke, "A Healing Touch for Empire: Vespasian's Wonders in Domitianic Rome." *GR, Second Series* 57.1 (2010): 83; C. Densmore Curtis, "Roman Monumental Arches." *Supplementary Papers of the American School of Classical Studies in Rome* 2 (1908): 48. The Romans had a play on words that they often used in order to depict foreign leaders (*duces*)

prior to Roman rule,⁹⁷ the parallels between Roman imperial victory imagery and the imagery used in Ephesians (and the psalm) are striking: both invoke ascending, leading captives, and receiving (or giving) gifts.⁹⁸ The OT Psalm could not have described imagery of Roman imperial triumph. The exodus imagery is unmistakable, and while its historical context is uncertain, its composition prior to Roman imperial rule seems certain. When considering the Roman imperial context of the epistle, the implied author may have appropriated the Psalm for recipients within Roman imperial Asia Minor to recall images of Israel's exodus in a context rife with images of Roman military triumph. Following this line of argumentation, this subtlety might have undermined Roman imperial concepts by reversing its imagery, and by employing potent political images of Israel's exodus from Egypt and YHWH's defeat of Israel's enemies.

One must not ignore the Jewish storyline that is being invoked by the OT psalm in favor of a Romanization all of the images in Eph. 4. At the same time, if it can be shown that the recipients of the epistle understood the Roman military triumph within their cognitive context (C), the images *counted as* a subversion of imperial ideology *in that context*.⁹⁹ The reversal of some of the imagery of the Psalm in Eph. 4 points to the Christology that the author of Ephesians casts for his recipients. In contrast to depictions of the Roman emperor, whose ascension (to heaven, or to the Roman throne) included the taking of captives in military conquest, and the receiving of spoils of the ἔθνος he conquered, Jesus is portrayed as taking/leading captives (or taking captivity itself captive), and of giving, rather than receiving, gifts. Instead of being gifted spoils of war through conquest,¹⁰⁰ as Roman emperors were, the Messiah *gives* gifts for the edification and unification of the diverse community of Jesus followers. These gifts include τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας [4:11-12a]. The reversal of Roman imperial imagery in these passages is discernible by seeing that the Roman imperial motif, which celebrated conquering other nations, is used here to depict

being led (*ducti*) captive in the triumphal procession, Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 121.

⁹⁷ Timothy G. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2010), 27-29.

⁹⁸ According to Hoehner, αἰχμαλωσίαν “is consistently used of military captives who are captured. Certainly, this is the case in Ps. 68. God has had victory over the foe.” Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 529.

⁹⁹ Hoehner suggestion that the Paul deliberately modified Ps. 68 in order “to make it applicable to the present Ephesians context” is helpful, although, apart from his note on spiritual gifts, he is vague about the specific aspects of their context that apply here: *Ephesians*, 528. The Roman military triumph provides one promising contextual element that provides some of the framing of this passage for the recipients in Asia Minor.

¹⁰⁰ Images of conquest were rampant among imperial iconography, see S. M. Bond, “The Coinage of the Early Roman Empire.” *GR* 4.2 (1957): 157-158.

Messianic ascent and descent. Instead of receiving gifts by subjugating foreign peoples, the Messiah gives gifts to his people. While the descent might, instead, have invoked imagery of Jesus' descent into hell/hades,¹⁰¹ his incarnation,¹⁰² or functioned as an allusion to Pentecost and the giving of the Spirit,¹⁰³ the taking/leading captives could instead allude to the recipients' captivity under Roman rule. In the psalm, the recipients who are portrayed as receiving the gifts are also the ones who were [previously] taken captive (by Egypt?). This implies a subtle challenge to Roman imperial conquest through the invocation of exodus imagery, portraying Jesus as the ascending one, liberating captives *out of* captivity (similar to the exodus narrative), unifying the people, and giving them gifts. Since the psalm originally celebrated Davidic victory over Israel's enemies, similar triumphal aspects in its depiction of Jesus in Ephesians act as an ironic reversal of the practices of Roman imperial conquest, since Jesus is depicted as securing victory by being crucified. In contrast to the emperor's ascent in deification, which placed him over all of the cosmos,¹⁰⁴ this passage engages that idea since Jesus had already been seated ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου, οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι (Eph 1:21). That the victory of Jesus was procured through his crucifixion ironically casts his enthronement as a contrast to what was the case in Roman imperial rule. In this reading, the locutionary shift between the receiving of gifts [ἔλαβες] (LXX) as opposed to the giving of gifts [ἔδωκεν] (Eph.) might then be understood as a deliberate modification on the part of the author in order to provide an ironic reversal of Roman imperial ideology present within the recipients' context.

¹⁰¹ See Harris' survey of this view: *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7-11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery* (Biblical Studies Library; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 4-32; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 244-245; Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 192-193; Best, *Ephesians*, 383; Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 111; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 294. Kreitzer takes a modified view of this by suggesting the plutonium in Hierapolis was directly invoked here: *Hierapolis in the Heavens: Studies in the Letter to the Ephesians* (LNTS 368. London: T&T Clark, 2007), 42-67. Sellin notes the descent into hades interpretation but suggests that Ephesians' cosmology does not allow for it: *Der Brief an die Epheser* (KEK 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 334.

¹⁰² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 531, 533; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 245-246; Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 193-194; MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 290; Best, *Ephesians*, 386; Cohick, *Ephesians*, 109; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 295.

¹⁰³ Harris, *Descent of Christ*, 143-197; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 531-532; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 246-247; Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 194-195; Best, *Ephesians*, 385; Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 111-112; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 295-296. Lincoln notes that a good case has been made for all three of the interpretations listed above: *Ephesians*, 244. He also concludes that descent of the Spirit is most likely in view: *Ephesians*, 247. Muddiman attempts to combine aspects of the three major options: *Ephesians*, 195.

¹⁰⁴ For connections between Augustus' deification and its cosmic implications in Roman imperial ideology, see Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 144.

5.3.3 EPH. 5:21-6:9—HAUSTAFEL AND EMPIRE

Roman imperial rule in Asia Minor throughout the first and second centuries was not enforced exclusively through military actions and power.¹⁰⁵ A wide range of socio-cultural programs helped to solidify Roman imperialism. This included the promotion of social, cultural, and civic institutions,¹⁰⁶ as well as administration of a city's relationship with the gods.¹⁰⁷ Roman rule was further stabilized through the implementation of laws related to marriage, morality, and control of the family by the *paterfamilias*.¹⁰⁸ According to Lavan, "any destabilization of the institution of the *paterfamilias* would be linked to the destabilization of Rome itself."¹⁰⁹ Augustus brought about significant changes in legislation regarding marriage and morality,¹¹⁰ which were central to his reign.¹¹¹ These laws remained in place for more than two hundred years.¹¹² Roman jurists often objected to the laws, since they represented the state's intrusion upon the private lives of most Romans.¹¹³ The legislation was so wide-spread that unmarried men and women were prohibited from participating in public spectacles.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, these Augustan moral policies were connected to Roman eschatology, pointing to the fact that the Augustan Principate "viewed itself unreservedly in terms of Golden Age fulfillment."¹¹⁵ One key aspect of the legislation of morality was Augustan propaganda that cast the empire as a restoration of Republican values.¹¹⁶ For Augustus, "*mores* cannot flourish unless they are backed up by laws. Laws were the means to the end of producing good *mores*."¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁵ Liebengood, "Confronting Roman Imperial Claims," 258.

¹⁰⁶ Winn, "Striking Back," 9.

¹⁰⁷ Lavan, "Empire in the Age of Nero," 72.

¹⁰⁸ Lavan, 72.

¹⁰⁹ Lavan, 72. According to Oakes, "any movement that challenged the status quo of the social structure would, to some extent, be challenging Rome." "Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians," *JSNT* 27.3 (2005): 309. Aspects of early Christian practice "sometimes transgressed the norms of Graeco-Roman society," while also affirming some imperial ideals. Oakes, 310.

¹¹⁰ See Suetonius, *Augustus*, 34.

¹¹¹ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 128.

¹¹² Galinsky, 128.

¹¹³ Galinsky, 128.

¹¹⁴ Galinsky, 129. There were some exceptions to this rule: Horace and Virgil were given special privileges for their support of the legislation even though they were unmarried and did not have children (*Ibid.*).

¹¹⁵ Galinsky, 129.

¹¹⁶ Galinsky, 129.

¹¹⁷ Galinsky, 129.

Recognition of these realities by imperial-critical scholars of the NT have led to the identification of early Christian gatherings as alternative communities to those envisioned by Roman imperial rule.¹¹⁸ This has also led to the perception of tension between the Pauline and assumed deuteropauline letters. Whereas the undisputed Pauline letters have been portrayed as promoting communities that challenged Roman imperial socio-cultural norms, the deuteropauline letters (Ephesians in particular) have been characterized as accommodated and reinforcing imperial household structures.¹¹⁹ The household codes in Ephesians and Colossians are said to undeniably reflect accommodation to Roman imperial values regarding the household, in contrast to the perspective of the undisputed Pauline letters.¹²⁰ Disputes over the nature of the household code in 1 Peter find some parallels to those of Ephesians and Colossians, and the common interpretative camps offered there reflect well the polarizing sides on the issue.¹²¹ Long's recent work has demonstrated that a characterization of Ephesians household code as accommodating the empire might be largely misguided.¹²² Liebengood's application of James C. Scott's hidden transcripts is also useful to the present discussion.¹²³ He notes that modes of resistance are widely varied, and that it sometimes "requires a counter-ideology—a negation—that will effectively provide a general normative form to the host of resistant practices invented in self-defense by a subordinate group."¹²⁴ This can often include a "symbolic inversion, where the social ordering maintained in public transcript is turned upside down and in which an alternative social structure can be imagined."¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ Fredrick J. Long, "Ἐκκλησία in Ephesians as Godlike in the Heavens, in Temple, in γάμος, and in Armor: Ideology and Iconography in Ephesus and its Environs," in *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus*, eds. James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplements 9; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 193-234; Richard A. Horsley, "1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul's Assembly as an Alternative Society," in Horsley, ed. *Paul and Empire*, 242-252; Richard A. Horsley, "Building an Alternative Society: Introduction," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997), 206-214.

¹¹⁹ Winn, "Striking Back," 11.

¹²⁰ Winn, 11.

¹²¹ Liebengood, "Confronting Roman Imperial Claims," 256. He notes Horrell's pointed critique of Balch and Elliott as a way out of the polarization usually offered: David Horrell, "Between Conformity and Resistance: Beyond the Balch-Elliott Debate towards a Postcolonial Reading of 1 Peter," in *Reading 1 Peter with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of First Peter*, eds. R.L. Webb and B.J. Bauman-Martin (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 111-143.

¹²² Gupta and Long, "Paul's Political Theology," 126-135; see also Long, "Ἐκκλησία in Ephesians," 222-224.

¹²³ Liebengood, 257.

¹²⁴ Liebengood, 257.

¹²⁵ Liebengood, 257.

Subsequently, two interpretive conclusions could be drawn from the Ephesian household code:

1. The epistle adopts traditional Greco-Roman household codes for apologetic reasons—to avoid providing any evidence of some of the rumors about the Christian communities in the Roman Empire.¹²⁶ Therefore, it does not challenge the traditional structures of the household—husband over wives, parents over children, masters over slaves. The author encourages the community within Asia Minor to acquiesce to traditional household values and hierarchies. Ephesians’ version of the household code might then be interpreted as conflicting with Paul’s theology in Galatians 3:28: οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληγν, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἔστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
2. From an imperial-critical vantage point, the passage reads differently. While it appears to affirm traditional Greco/Roman household structures, some aspects of it may have reinforced those structures, while other aspects might have subverted them.¹²⁷ Gibson’s recent work draws out distinctions in marriage customs between Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures.¹²⁸ He sees the passage as promoting marital unity in a fashion that was unprecedented within the Roman Empire.¹²⁹ Further, the instructions given to husbands differ greatly from typical expectations of men in Roman imperial Asia Minor. The call for husbands to live self-sacrificially for their wives, as Christ did for the church, goes far beyond anything present in household codes from the first century and subvert notions of Roman marriages from this time. Furthermore, Ephesians’ expectations that the wife submit to her husband also went beyond what was expected within contemporary marriages.¹³⁰ When read in this light, the household code in Ephesians is nuanced in its relationship to the prevalent household culture of its time. If one were to

¹²⁶ See the articles by David L. Balch: “Two Apologetic Encomia: Dionysius on Rome and Josephus on the Jews,” *JSJ* 13.1/2 (Dec. 1982): 102-122; “Household Codes,” in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (SBL Sources for Biblical Study 21; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 28-35, esp. 29; Contra Darko, *No Longer Living*, 106-108.

¹²⁷ Osiek, MacDonald, and Tullock, 123-126.

¹²⁸ Jack J. Gibson, “Ephesians 5:21-33 and the Lack of Marital Unity in the Roman Empire.” *BSac* 168 (2011): 162-77.

¹²⁹ According to Gibson, “No admonition to husbands could have been more countercultural to the Roman, Greek, or Jewish man.” “Lack of Marital Unity,” 176.

¹³⁰ Gibson, “Lack of Marital Unity,” 163.

consider the prevalence of Augustan marriage legislation in the early empire, it becomes more evident that Ephesians envisions marital unity that transcends what was offered in the Augustan vision. Consequently, this passage provides a contrast between the relationships envisioned by the epistle and those envisioned by the imperial program, projecting a counter-narrative for first century people in Asia Minor.

5.3.4 EPH. 6:12—RULERS, AUTHORITIES, POWERS, DOMINIONS, AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles to an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians is its statement in 6:12: ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰς ἀρχάς, πρὸς τὰς ἐξουσίας, πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τούτου, πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις. Power language is also present earlier in the epistle in Eph. 1:21, 2:2, and 3:10. While the statement in Eph. 6:12 is significant, aspects of the earlier power passages also deserve consideration here. Smillie aptly notes that “the powers referred to by so many different terms throughout Ephesians are most often treated as primarily spiritual entities in popular interpretations of the Bible.”¹³¹ This common interpretation might be understood as a challenge to imperial-critical readings of Ephesians. Similarly, if the powers over which Jesus is seated in Ephesians are strictly spiritual and not earthly, then his enthronement may have little consequence for earthly rule and promotes a cosmology and eschatology that is so qualitatively different from their Roman imperial counterparts that any comparisons or contrasts could be seen as minimal at best. This raises questions about whether the powers in Ephesians are to be viewed dichotomously, either spiritual or earthly.

Wink’s now famous articulation of the powers raises suspicions against readings that overlook wider connections between earthly powers, systems, and their spiritual “inner dimension.”¹³² Similarly, Forbes challenges the Jewish apocalyptic background to Pauline pneumatology and instead suggests that the powers in Paul are generally “deliberately abstract and impersonal.”¹³³ In contrast, Adewuya reads the powers from an African vantage point and affirms an interpretation of the powers as “the personal character of the powers of evil in the

¹³¹ Smillie, “Ephesians 6:19-20,” 206.

¹³² Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 107, see also 104-112. Smillie also suggests that the powers “include human beings and social structures.” “Ephesians 6:19-20,” 205.

¹³³ Chris Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities and Powers: Demythologizing Apocalyptic?” *JSNT* 82 (2001): 62.

universe.”¹³⁴ Arnold challenges Carr’s demythologization of the powers and concludes that there is significant historical precedent for ancient belief in personal demonic forces.¹³⁵ Carr claims that the idea of personal evil forces did not exist in the ancient mindset, and so Paul’s language of power “conforms to basic Jewish usage” but “are not applied to the demons, and what language there is of demons in Paul is very scarce and conforms to the traditional Jewish association of them with idols.”¹³⁶ Even though they all have widely divergent articulations, these readings, apart from that of Wink and Carr, all stress that the power language in Ephesians is directed toward spiritual entities that are distinctly not human authorities.

Imperial-critical readings of the power language in Ephesians have drawn significantly different conclusions about the referents behind the powers and their function in the epistle.¹³⁷ These recent interpretations will be utilized here in order to present a provisional reading of the power language in Ephesians as directed against Roman imperial ideology. Such a reading will help us to evaluate aspects of an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians that are not present within other passages in the epistle.

An imperial-critical vantage point claims that the wrestling is “not against flesh and blood,” but could function as a hidden transcript.¹³⁸ According to Beck, “This protective cover enabled the oppressed to say, if accosted by the oppressors, that the oppressed were not talking about people on earth, but about spiritual beings in a transcendent realm. Nevertheless, the oppressed people would understand.”¹³⁹ Consequently, the phrase ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις might

¹³⁴ J. Ayodeji Adewuya, “The Spiritual Powers of Ephesians 6:10-18 in the Light of African Pentecostal Spirituality,” *BBR* 22.2 (2012): 256.

¹³⁵ Clinton E. Arnold, “The ‘Exorcism’ of Ephesians 6.12 in Recent Research: A Critique of Wesley Carr’s View of the Role of Evil Powers in First-Century AD Belief,” *JSNT* 30 (1987): 71-87. See also his *Power and Magic* where he reads the power language of Ephesians against the backdrop of first century magic, mystery cults, and the wider religious context of western Asia Minor.

¹³⁶ Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase hai archai kai hai exousiai* (SNTSMS 42; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 122; see also Arnold, “‘Exorcism’ of Ephesians 6.12,” 72.

¹³⁷ Norman A. Beck, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms in the New Testament: Hidden Transcripts of Hope and Liberation* (Rev. Ed.; Studies in Biblical Literature 127; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 75-76; Gupta and Long, “Paul’s Political Theology,” 120-125; Long, “Roman Imperial Rule,” 113-154; Lotz, “*Homonoia* Coins,” 187-188; Sylvia Keesmaat, “In the Face of the Empire: Paul’s Use of Scripture in the Shorter Epistles,” in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed., Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 185; Jennifer G. Bird, “Ephesians,” in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Documents*, eds., Fernando F. Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 267.

¹³⁸ This concept is derived from the work of James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹³⁹ Beck, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms*, 76. Gupta and Long suggest a more forthright authorial strategy in arguing that, had an imperial informant read of the enthronement of Jesus above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, it “could not but be taken as a diminution of the emperor, if not implicitly a critique.” “The Politics of Ephesians,” 120.

then be included because the audience felt like the oppressor's power was actually coming from above.¹⁴⁰ Ultimately, this passage amounts to a cautious cryptogram intended to protect the recipients from "the advocates of Roman Civil Religion."¹⁴¹ Similar cryptic messages would presumably be present in the power language of 1:16 and 2:15.¹⁴² Beck's view assumes an environment that monitored Christian writings, a view that Barclay has strongly challenged.¹⁴³ The dangers associated with subversive writings were greater than Barclay has acknowledged, and these dangers increased with the development of the *frumentarii* in the second century and beyond.¹⁴⁴ This empirical data cautions one against immediately dismissing Beck's claim, especially if Ephesians is considered post-Pauline.

If one were less inclined toward Beck's line of thinking, the power language functions as a reversal mechanism. By seating the ἐκκλησία with Messiah Jesus, who is above all rule, authority, power, and dominion in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6), this indicates that the community now rules over the powers so that the powers are now subject to them, according to Bird "divine deliverance has turned the oppressors into the oppressed and vice versa."¹⁴⁵ Imperial rule is subverted, but it is also reinforced it implicitly projecting new (namely Christian) imperial rulers.

Keesmaat sees the language of rulers, authorities, powers, and thrones as a "clear reference to the throne of Caesar and his dominion, rule, and authority over the whole world."¹⁴⁶ Although she also claims that Ephesians is the most allusive in its subversion of the empire.¹⁴⁷ Keesmaat views the author's portrait here as providing a wider challenge to the "story of Empire" that was dominant during the first two centuries AD.¹⁴⁸ The power language then functions as an allusion to that imperial story. For Keesmaat, Paul challenged the Roman imperial story by using OT themes.¹⁴⁹ This fact discourages interpretations that seek to locate

¹⁴⁰ Beck, 76.

¹⁴¹ Beck, 75.

¹⁴² Beck, 74.

¹⁴³ Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 380-381.

¹⁴⁴ See pp. 94-97 above.

¹⁴⁵ Bird, *Ephesians*, 267.

¹⁴⁶ Keesmaat, "In the Face of Empire," 185. Similarly, Frank Thielman concludes that in Eph's portrait of Christ's victory over the powers "it is likely that he includes in his thinking the close alliance between local deities and deified members of the imperial family, whether living or dead." *Ephesians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 22.

¹⁴⁷ Keesmaat, "In the Face of Empire," 185.

¹⁴⁸ Keesmaat, 187.

¹⁴⁹ Keesmaat, 187.

the referents of the power language within either Judaism or a Roman context. They need not be mutually exclusive. The author of Ephesians could have used apocalyptic Jewish language as a veiled critique of the imperial storylines present in Asia Minor. One significant contribution of her work is that she tries to locate the subversion of the empire in Ephesians on both a narrative level and a locutionary one. She acknowledges that the power language may have referenced Roman imperial ideology, but that the conflict also emerged on a larger metanarrative level.

Lotz argues along similar lines in suggesting that the power language functioned within the wider religious and political milieu of Asia Minor. In discussing the power language of Ephesians, he states that

In the context of the religious milieu of the first century, these are lofty assertions, but in the context of the political world, these were provocative and seditious words. In Plutarch's warning to the young political aspirant he conscientiously recommended that the supremacy of Rome in all affairs be acknowledged and not infringed upon, but here the writer of the epistle refuses to consign God's power merely to the realm of religion and the great hereafter, but situates Christ's supremacy fundamentally in the present age.¹⁵⁰

Lotz's argument stands in contrast to those interpretations which consign both the enthronement of Jesus and the wrestling match solely to the spiritual realm. In contrast to Beck's claim, the fact that the struggle is "not against flesh and blood," may not mean that the power language of the epistle purposefully conceals its contemporary Roman imperial subtext in order to avoid conflict with imperial authorities.

Gupta and Long provide an imperial-critical reading of the power language of Ephesians by initially focusing on the use of ἄρχων in Eph. 2:2.¹⁵¹ They conclude (citing Wink) that the term was exclusively used "for an incumbent-in-office and, with sole exception of Daniel 10 and 12, for human agents."¹⁵² This leads them to challenge the interpretation of Eph. 2:2 that sees τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος as Satan.¹⁵³ Instead, they interpret the reference as a critique of the emperor, who was associated with Zeus, the referent of ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος [2:2]. Ephesians depicts the emperor as a negative example, encouraging believers

¹⁵⁰ Lotz, "Homonoia Coins," 187.

¹⁵¹ Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 120-121.

¹⁵² Gupta and Long, 121 fn. 32.

¹⁵³ Gupta and Long, 120-121.

to imitate Jesus instead.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, they see ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις in Eph. 3:10 as a reference to two entities 1) earthly rulers 2) authorities in the heavenly places.¹⁵⁵ Gupta and Long conclude that both earthly and spiritual entities are in view. In their treatment on Eph. 6:12, they build off of 3:10 but challenge the assumption that Eph. 6 intends to say that “the contest is *not at all* against flesh and blood.”¹⁵⁶ They read the ἀλλὰ as indicating “two mutually opposite options” amounting to a contrast of significance where “the negation is more in terms of the relative value of the options—the enemies are not *merely* flesh and blood, but *more importantly* are the rulers and powers of the heavenly realms.”¹⁵⁷ They conclude that the power language in Ephesians describes an “ideological-spiritual conflict with evil human rulers and evil authorities in the heavenly realms.”¹⁵⁸

One commonly overlooked area in imperial-critical readings of Eph. 6 is the armor of God imagery. Guelich suggests that the portrait of the armor in Eph. 6:10-20, which Jesus followers are to equip themselves with against the schemes of the devil, is depicted in primarily a defensive rather than offensive posture.¹⁵⁹ Read from an imperial-critical vantage point, such a defensive posture, if set within a post-Pauline (especially later second century environment) served as an instruction to the Christians of Asia Minor to resist pressures related to the growing imperial cults in the region. In this sense, the battle was primarily ‘spiritual’ but not without consequence for its imperial ideological context. In some ways, this perspective aligns with MacDonald’s claim that “what is experienced on the earthly plane has a cosmic referent.”¹⁶⁰ In an imperial-critical reading, the referent of the powers in Ephesians does not need to be reduced exclusively to earthly imperial powers and rulers in order for the passage to have functioned as a challenge to imperial ideology. Another possibility, in this context, is that its defensive posture may have been understood as a directive to resist violent reactions against local imperial authorities who were persecuting Christians in the region. If our analysis of the empirical evidence of localized pressures/persecutions of early Christians in Asia Minor during

¹⁵⁴ Gupta and Long, 121. See also Long’s more complete treatment of the subject: Fredrick J. Long, “Roman Imperial Rule under the Authority of Jupiter-Zeus: Political-Religious Contexts and the Interpretation of ‘the Ruler of the Authority of the Air’ in Ephesians 2:2” in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 113-154.

¹⁵⁵ Gupta and Long, 124.

¹⁵⁶ Gupta and Long, 124. Italic are theirs.

¹⁵⁷ Gupta and Long, 124.

¹⁵⁸ Gupta and Long, 125.

¹⁵⁹ Robert A. Guelich, “Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul, and Peretti,” *Pneuma* 13.1 (1991): 46.

¹⁶⁰ MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 226.

the relevant eras holds true, it significantly increases the plausibility of this interpretation. If it can be demonstrated that Ephesians was written to an implied environment where no such pressures were present, this reading may be far less likely.

5.4 CONCLUSION

We focused our attention on those passages in Ephesians which have either already been read as subversive of Roman imperial rule, or which yield the greatest potential for such a reading.¹⁶¹ Our goal throughout this chapter has been to provide a provisional reading of these passages from an imperial-critical vantage point with a view towards our methodology. Key areas of our imperial-critical readings utilized previously overlooked methodological aspects: distinctions between implied and empirical, an awareness of speech-act theory, and a narrative hermeneutic. In our next chapter, we turn our attention to analyzing these readings through the lens of our methodology in order to assess its strengths and weaknesses. Two major theological motifs emerge in these readings: Christology, and eschatology. We will turn our attention toward framing these readings in terms of these two categories in order to assess whether Ephesians contains speech acts that were subversive of Roman imperial rule and ideology.

¹⁶¹ We eagerly await Fred Long's forthcoming commentary in the Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity series, which will, as far as we are aware, provide the first full commentary length imperial-critical reading of Ephesians.

Chapter 6

Subversive Speech Acts?

Ephesians and the Subversion of Imperial Ideology

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will test the provisional imperial-critical reading of Ephesians offered in the previous chapter with our eclectic hermeneutic. In order to demonstrate the complexities of the questions at hand, as well as the fact that any substantial assessment of the imperial-critical status of Ephesians leads to as many provisional and exploratory conclusions as definite ones, we will begin with the most tentative of our proposals.

6.2 EPHESIANS 1-3: AN EVALUATION

6.2.1 EPH. 1:1—DAMNATIO MEMORIAE?

Our provisional imperial-critical reading of Eph. 1:1 explained the omission of the recipients based on the author's desire to disassociate them from a subversive letter that would have put them in danger with imperial authorities. This was labeled the "Protective Measure theory." One problem that emerges from this interpretation is that if both a later date and a destination within Asia Minor are assumed, the letter's high Christology has significant implications for an imperial context that was growing increasingly sensitive to affirming excessive and exclusive loyalty to its emperor. If a post-Pauline author wanted to express a high Christology over and against the contemporary claims of the emperor in Asia Minor, while also avoiding confrontation with local magistrates, would he not have done so with implicit rather than explicit critiques of Roman imperial ideology? The Protective Measure theory, on the other hand, assumes that anti-imperial sentiments in Ephesians would have been easily detectable by

outsiders, so much so that protective measures were used to disassociate the recipients from them. Even if one is sympathetic to an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians, an assumed later date raises suspicions with this theory in light of the empirical realities in Asia Minor during that time.

An alternative interpretation provides some promise to solving the textual dilemma of Eph. 1:1, while also posing a challenge to the Protective Measure theory. It is tempting to speculate that the omission of the recipients may be better explained as a deliberate implementation of *damnatio memoriae*, performed by an early Christian scribe. Our purpose here is not to arrive at a definitive conclusion on this issue per se. The articulation offered below intends to show that the Protective Measure theory is problematic, and that other theories could better explain the omission.

Despite numerous well-documented theories about the textual problems of Eph. 1:1,¹ little attention has been given to Best's comments that the book of Revelation may contain insight into why an identification of the recipients was omitted from the text of Ephesians:

Ephesus as the destination of such an important letter may have been felt inappropriate in view of a subsequent failure on the part of the Ephesians to live up to the terms of the letter; such a failure might be deduced from Rev. 2.4f and the scribe believed he was fulfilling Rev. 2.5.²

Best's argument is not without its own problems. Revelation 2:4 describes Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus as follows: ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες. But it is unclear whether this statement is in reference to a failure of living up to previously agreed-upon 'terms' in the letter to the Ephesians. Furthermore, Lincoln points out that Best assumes that the textual problem of Eph. 1:1 was the result of a deliberate scribal decision,³ while it is

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 144-147; Larry J. Kreitzer, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Epworth; Peterborough: Epworth, 1997), 31-48, 51-52; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), 1-4; John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2001), 24-32, 59-62; Ernst Best, *Ephesians* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 1-6, 98-102; Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (AB 34; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 67; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Sacra Pagina 17; Rev. Ed. Collegeville: Liturgical, 2008), 191-196; Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians*, 33-35, 39-40; Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 32-34; W. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (BHGNT; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 2-3; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 85-87.

² Ernst Best, *Essays on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 5. Lincoln notes Harnack's similar argument, that the omission of the recipients of the letter may be informed by what is said of the churches in Revelation, but Harnack suggested that the omission was of Laodicea and that the negative references to in Rev. 3:14-17 might have been the reason for the omission: *Ephesians*, 3.

³ Lincoln, 4.

possible that the exclusion of the recipients was the result of an accidental omission on the part of a scribe.⁴ Establishing the validity of his theory might also require an examination into scribal tendencies from this period, including whether there is evidence of any scribes having taken the sort of liberties that led to such a deliberate omission.⁵ Another objection to this view arises in light of Ignatius' early second century letter to the Ephesians, which suggests a much different portrait of the Ephesian community from that offered in Revelation—one that affirms the community's positive development, rather than being in danger of apostasy.⁶ On the other hand, if considered in light of a wider Roman practice of *damnatio memoriae*, the omission of the recipients in Eph. 1:1 was the result of a different set of motives than that offered in the Protective Measure theory. Consequently, this discussion will also demonstrate some of the limitations of certain imperial-critical readings of Ephesians.

Best's connection between Revelation 2:4-5 and Ephesians 1:1 requires further consideration, especially when viewed in light of contemporary practices of *damnatio memoriae*. Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians might reveal that the empirical realities of the Ephesian church in the late first or early second century make it less plausible that *damnatio memoriae* would be applied to the same community that his letter is addressed to. If Ephesians was originally penned by Paul (or otherwise written in the mid-first century), it is likely that what is revealed in Revelation 2:4-5 is a grim portrait of the Ephesian church subsequent to the production of Ephesians. Our methodological appeal toward using empirical data to both delimit and provide imaginative depth to what is implied applies here. It is not impossible to conceive of a situation in which, after receiving the letter we know as Ephesians, the churches in Ephesus experienced a spiritual downfall and that an early scribe performed *damnatio memoriae* by omitting the recipients' location from Ephesians 1:1—creating what would later become the dominant existing manuscript tradition. Later scribes, then, reiterated the omission

⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 147.

⁵ A few questions emerge from this point that we are not able to address within this project. E.g. What were the different qualifications for Jewish or Roman scribes, and what can be drawn from each of these about early Christian scribes? Were the scribes of NT texts assumed to be Christian? The comments from Tertius (Paul's scribe) in Rom. 16:22 seem to indicate his status as a Christian [ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐν κυρίῳ]. Would such a scribe then have deemed it theologically inappropriate to make such a correction, even in the case of *damnatio memoriae*? Can a 'renegade' scribe be ruled out, who might have dismissed the conventions in light of being appalled at the latter state of affairs in the Ephesian community?

⁶ See esp. *Ign. Eph* 1:1 where the Ephesians are commended for having a “πολυαγάπητόν ὄνομα.” Michael W. Holmes, ed. *Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (3rd Ed; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 182. The characteristics that describe the Ephesian community here may suggest that by the late first or early second century, whatever warnings were present in Revelation may have been well received in Ephesus, possibly leading to some reform in the community.

by either maintaining it from their predecessor, or by further implementing *damnatio memoriae* themselves as they saw fit.⁷ Later, after Revelation was written and before Ignatius' letter to them, the churches of Ephesus seemingly reformed.⁸ From then on, associations of this letter with the Ephesians may have been deemed more appropriate in light of their transformation. This may also explain why the superscription in even the earliest manuscripts continued to identify the letter as ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ, while also maintaining the omission in Eph. 1:1 from the dominant manuscript traditions.⁹ Consequently, this theory generally supports an earlier date of the letter.

Unless *damnatio memoriae* was performed by the scribe who made the first copy of the letter, this theory assumes that some manuscript copies, that identified the original recipients and were produced prior to the implementation of *damnatio memoriae*, may have been in circulation. If this was the case, where these manuscripts went and why they did not become the dominant manuscript family is a mystery. It also does not explain the seemingly general tone of the letter, although as we have already noted earlier, such a tone has been overstated and is easily resolved if Paul did not write the letter, or if Paul primarily wrote it to a group of new Gentile converts within Ephesus (or Asia Minor at large) whom he had not previously met.¹⁰ In the case of the former, we cannot assume that a later post-Pauline author had as much familiarity with the Ephesian churches as Paul is said to have had in the book of Acts. Further, in order to more fully establish this theory, substantial work would need to be done to

⁷ The way in which this downfall is described in Revelation 2:4 “ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες” may indicate that the once spiritually vibrant Ephesian churches, who are largely commended in the letter of Ephesians, likely struggled in interim years between the writing of the epistle and Revelation. The provisional reconstruction offered here helps to explain the why author of Ephesians maintains a parenetic emphasis throughout Eph. 4-6. The recipients of Ephesians may have been in danger of adopting unhealthy practices in their Greco-Roman cultural milieu. On the other hand, this reconstruction does not fully explain the absence of a manuscript tradition which included the original recipients. If *damnatio memoriae* was conducted subsequent to the writing of Ephesians in light of their moral communal failures, theoretically, there would have been time to develop a standardized manuscript family that included the recipients prior to the blotting out of their location. No empirical evidence for such manuscript tradition currently exists.

⁸ Rainer Schwindt's use of Rathke's synopsis of Ephesians and IgnEph, appears to affirm that Ephesians was written prior to IgnEph: *Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* (WUNT 148; Tübingen. Mohr Siebeck. 2002), 58.

⁹ E.g. \mathfrak{B}^{46} & B. While it is generally accepted that the superscripts were not original to the autograph editions of NT documents, upon close examination, the handwriting of the superscript in \mathfrak{B}^{46} is strikingly similar to the rest of the document. If it could be demonstrated that the superscript was written by the same scribe who omits the identification of the recipients in Eph. 1:1, this suggests that the scribe was aware, at an early date, of both the association of the letter with Ephesus, and its omission from the main part of the text. Unfortunately, in discussing the issue with text-critics, I have been unable to arrive at a definitive answer as to whether the handwriting of the superscript is exactly the same as that in the main text.

¹⁰ See pp. 146-147 above.

investigate whether any empirical evidence exists of early Christians practicing *damnatio memoriae*, including an exploration of a variety of early Christian artifacts. Such a comprehensive examination is outside of the scope of this project.

This discussion serves to illustrate some of the complexities involved in assessing the imperial-critical status of Ephesians. If Ephesians was so subversive of imperial rule that safety measures were employed by the author (or a later scribe) to avoid potential persecution for the recipients, the implications for imperial criticism of the letter seem clear—Ephesians may afford us an example of significant anti-imperial critique which would have been easily discernible by imperial authorities had they read it. On the other hand, this interpretation is not without problems. If imperial-critical sentiments are explicitly present in Ephesians, why then do they seem to be absent in its locutionary content? Further, while the Protective Measure theory provides a very imaginative reading, it also seems to mischaracterize the purpose and theology of Ephesians. No scholar to date, with the exception of Long, has discerned such explicit subversion of imperial ideology as the primary purpose of the letter.¹¹ This suggests that alternative strategies need to be taken to explain the omission in Eph. 1:1, and to characterize the imperial-critical status of Ephesians.

If the omission of the recipients was deliberate but motivated by an altogether different reason, namely the conventions of *damnatio memoriae*, its contribution towards assessing its imperial-critical status is more complicated. On the one hand, understanding the Roman imperial context of the letter would matter. And yet, the omission of the recipients could be much less related to imperial-critical content within the letter, and more likely a result of a scribe responding to the empirical historical circumstances of the Ephesian churches. Without finding it necessary to firmly commit to any one theory of the textual problem of Eph. 1:1, this discussion reveals that the imperial-critical status of Ephesians is far more complicated than the Protective Measure theory offers. Therefore, any imperial-critical interpretation of Ephesians which paints a singular portrait of subversion of the empire is far too simplistic.

While it is not entirely impossible that a post-Pauline author or scribe purposefully omitted the identification of the recipients in order to protect them from suspicion from local imperial authorities, why does the letter include an authorial name? Was this author writing in

¹¹ Long argues that, in Ephesians, Paul has a “self-conscious articulation of a political theory” that “subverts and supplants errant socio-political orders.” “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology in Greco Roman Political Context,” in *Christian Origins and Greco Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 259, and 307.

Paul's name in order to invoke Pauline authority and theology, knowing that Paul had already been dead for nearly half a century? If so, the empirical author could have used Paul's name in order to avoid being implicated by the epistle's anti-imperial content. On the other hand, once Pauline authorship is bypassed, we lose controlling factors associated with his personality and biography—for example, his boldness so as to refrain from avoiding persecution, his use or non-use of coded language, his theology of governing authorities from other letters [especially Romans 13], and/or the influence that his Roman citizenship had upon his writings.¹² What may be assumed about Paul cannot be assumed about an author writing in Paul's name. We might then dismiss the question of whether Paul would have subverted imperial ideology in this fashion. Placing undue emphasis on empirical authorship places interpreters at a distinct disadvantage here, since the possibility of reconstructing biographical details of a post-Pauline empirical author is highly suspect. Instead, one must discern the implied author, which places limits on the authorial portrait, since this portrait is dependent upon an awareness of Paul. Suddenly, our question as to whether Paul would have subverted Rome in such a fashion becomes relevant again.

Admittedly, the Protective Measure theory is highly speculative and likely dependent upon a later date of Ephesians. It is built on the premise that Ephesians would have been clearly deemed subversive of imperial rule by Roman magistrates in the region. While some of our work below will sympathize with aspects of imperial-critical readings of Ephesians, such an ambitious portrait of the anti-imperial nature of Ephesians in the reconstruction offered by the Protective Measure theory seems exaggerated and unsubstantiated. This theory fails to explain why other NT letters, especially Colossians (in its similarity to Ephesians), identified their recipients even though wider anti-imperial elements may have been present to an equal (or greater) extent than that of Ephesians.¹³ It also raises the question as to how it would have been possible that the epistle was so subversive of Roman imperial rule that it required this protective measure in spite of the fact that its contents have been interpreted as accommodating its Roman imperial context.¹⁴ The obviousness of its subversive content would need to be demonstrated

¹² J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xii.

¹³ According to Keesmaat, "these [imperial-critical] themes [in Ephesians] are strengthened and intensified in Colossians." "In the Face of the Empire: Paul's Use of Scripture in the Shorter Epistles," in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 198. See also Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downer Grove: Intervarsity, 2004).

¹⁴ See p. 9 above.

more clearly in order to give the Protective Measure theory further consideration. Another weakness of this theory is that it does not fully explain why Paul's name was included, especially in light of the fact that whether he had actually been put to death due to *maiestas* charges or not, any association with a man executed under Roman imperial rule may well have raised suspicions. If the letter was originally written by someone other than Paul, would it not have been easier to simply have omitted his name as well in order to avoid these associations? Arguments that the inclusion of Paul's name was necessary in order to give it apostolic authority are problematic, especially in light of the fact that several other NT texts allow the implied author to carry the weight of apostolic authority without identifying the name of the empirical author within the text.¹⁵

6.2.2 EPH. 1:3-14—THE NEW EXODUS: A CHALLENGE TO CLAIMS OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOLDEN AGE IN ROME

Our provisional imperial-critical interpretation of Eph. 1:3-14 raised the possibility of situating its imagery within a Roman imperial context rather than a Jewish one.¹⁶ In order to evaluate this possibility we turn toward speech-act theory, which places more weight on the use of language than its etymology. Any attempt then, at relocating the imagery of Eph. 1:3-14 as a reference to Roman imperial ideology is both unnecessary and misguided. While speech-act theory does not forego identifying the sense and reference of locutionary content in communication, its ability to attend to illocutionary and perlocutionary levels of communication proves to be the most promising for assessing an imperial-critical reading of Eph. 1:3-14. Many of the problems associated with imperial-critical readings of the NT are related to disputes over the extent to which the Roman Empire and its ideology are present within the locutionary content of the text. Such disputes leave the conversation on the locutionary level and often ignore potential wider illocutionary and perlocutionary implications. Roman imperial ideology is not explicitly present in the locutionary content of this passage. On the other hand, if we apply the works of Cozart, Sterling, and to a lesser extent Turner, on the new exodus in Eph., this raises the stakes for an imperial-critical reading of Eph. 1. The implied arrival of the new exodus in Jesus in Eph. 1:3-14 and its depiction of the

¹⁵ E.g. the Gospels, Acts, and Hebrews.

¹⁶ See pp. 158-160 above.

enthronement of the Messiah, along with the benefits found ἐν Χριστῷ, carried imperial-critical overtones.¹⁷

As our work with the implied readers of the epistle has shown, there are good reasons to view them as Gentile Godfearers located in Asia Minor. If so, such an audience was aware of the eschatological claims of the arrival of the golden age of *pax* widely projected in Roman imperial ideology. In that context (Searle's "C"), proclaiming the arrival of the new exodus in Jesus *counted as* undermining the arrival of the golden age in Rome. Its illocutionary function, then, is not only to *declare* that the great day of liberation has arrived in Jesus,¹⁸ but, by implication, to *convince* the implied readers that it had not arrived by any other means. Rome's identification of the arrival of the golden age with the emperors provides the most obvious and pressing context to Ephesians' claims for implied readers who are depicted as Gentile Godfearers in Asia Minor. In light of this, we are inclined to see the arrival of the new exodus in Eph. 1 as carrying imperial-critical weight, but primarily on the illocutionary and perlocutionary levels. Ultimately what emerges is a conflicting narrative; in other words, its challenge to the empire does not occur primarily in its explicit engagement with Roman imperial terminology, that is, in straightforward locutionary claims. Instead, its theological trajectories *counted as* subversion of imperial ideology in Asia Minor.

Unlike other aspects of imperial-critical readings in Ephesians, which become more plausible the later one dates the epistle, this reading of Eph. 1 is less dependent on a later date. The Roman imperial eschatological claims that provide the context (C) for the locutions (X) to *count as* subversive (Y) are as prevalent in the mid-first century AD Asia Minor as is the case with a later date. At the same time, a great deal of caution must be displayed to not overstate the case. Our interpretation here does not necessitate that the author employ a hidden transcript in order to avoid detection by imperial authorities. While, empirically speaking, implicit communication becomes more of a necessity the further one gets into the second century, the imperial-critical strategy here does not require that the author be coy or allusive in order to avoid persecution. Instead, it suggests that the author's proclamation of the εὐαγγέλιον through claims of the arrival of the new exodus in Jesus *counted as* a challenge to ideologies that claimed otherwise, which in this context included Roman imperial claims of the arrival of the golden age in the empire. Whether this was the author's exclusive illocutionary intent is less

¹⁷ See pp. 130-131 above.

¹⁸ Thus, Franz Mußner concludes that Jesus is depicted as "messianischen Weltherrschers." *Der Brief an die Epheser* (ÖTK 10; Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1982), 23.

certain. On the other hand, if our reasoning holds, in such a context this speech act also carried associated perlocutionary weight. In other words, the implied author intended this illocution to have an associated perlocutionary effect on the implied audience, namely, that either their misinformed beliefs about the arrival of the pinnacle of history needed transformation, or to reinforce and encourage their correct perspective.

6.2.3 EPH. 2:1-10—ROMAN INSTITUTIONAL FACTS: UNDERMINED BY COUNTER-IMAGES OF ENTHRONEMENT

Our provisional reading of Eph. 2:1-10 focused on the cosmological transfer from “περιεπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας” [2:2], to “συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” [2:6]. An imperial-critical reading interprets these passages as a contrast to the emperor’s heavenly and earthly status. Having located Christians as co-enthroned with the Messiah in the heavenlies, this characterization functioned as a reversal of the elitist cosmology which reserved honorific status in the heavenlies and on earth for the emperor, his family, and social elites.

This reading assumes that the implied audience primarily understood the granting of honorific status in the heavenlies as an institutional fact projected from within the Roman imperial system. In other words, in Searle’s formula, the C (context) that is needed in order for the locutions of the passage to *count as* subversive of imperial rule is an environment where heavenly status was attributed primarily through imperial ideology. While an implied environment within Asia Minor yields to such a reading, imperial ideology did not constitute the only context from which the implied recipients could have drawn. Other religious cults, especially Artemis, were also making cosmological claims.¹⁹ Considering that the temple of Artemis held a preeminent status within the region, it is more difficult to assert conclusively that the implied readers were expected to understand this passage exclusively as an imperial-critical critique. On the other hand, since other areas of the letter function as a critique of imperial ideology, such a reading here is plausible.

¹⁹ See Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1989), Michael Immendörfer, *Ephesians and Artemis: The Cult of the Great Goddess of Ephesus as the Epistle’s Context* (WUNT II. 436; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

Whereas empirical readers situated within Asia Minor could have heard this passage through a multitude of cosmological claims present within the region, the implied readers' vantage point is more limited since that reader is constructed to perfectly understand the intentions of the implied author. The available empirical data from Asia Minor cannot rule out that the implied author may have had wider cosmological claims in view than merely those available through imperial claims. If we allow the empirical data to inform our reconstruction of the implied, an interesting development emerges if the epistle was written at a later date. While the Artemis cult enjoyed a preeminent position in the political and religious environment of first century Asia Minor—so much so that an officially sanctioned provincial imperial cult was denied to Ephesus because of the status of Artemis within the city—the temple's exclusive preeminence within Ephesus changes in the early second century. The exponential increase of imperial cults in the region during this time led to Ephesus being granted a provincial cult more than once; in fact, as we discussed earlier, the city became a *neokorate* twice. This resulted in the cult of the *Sebastoi* being given preeminent status in the city, even beyond that of Artemis.²⁰ The available empirical data can then inform our reconstruction of the implied by placing limits on an imperial-critical interpretation of Ephesians; if an earlier date is assumed, such a reading is possible, although not without plausible alternatives. On the other hand, as the empirical situation changes in Asia Minor in the second century, the possibility that the implied recipients would have been expected to hear the cosmological claims of Messiah Jesus and his people as in conflict with Roman imperial cosmological claims becomes more plausible, especially with the rapidly increasing development of provincial imperial cults in the region. This fact does not suggest that an imperial-critical reading becomes a necessity with a later date, but it increases its plausibility.

One further component that deserves attention here is the notion of first-century institutional facts. Irrespective of whether imperial ideology or other local cults formed the context for the expected vantage point of the implied readers, the established institutional fact is strikingly similar. If enthronement was exclusively attributed to the patron deity, whether the emperor or the gods, this thought constituted an elitist institutional fact that is undermined in Eph. 2:1-10. By seating Jesus-followers in the heavenlies with the enthroned Messiah, Ephesians projects an alternative narrative vision of the heavenly realms than what was expected in Asia Minor. This passage then subverts contemporary ideologies by undermining

²⁰ See p. 106 fn. 227 above.

an established institutional fact with its portrayal of the enthronement of Jesus and his people together. An examination of potential changes in the established institutional facts surrounding enthronement imagery in Asia Minor (from the first century into the second) would help to illuminate whether the passage carried greater imperial-critical weight had the epistle been written later. Unfortunately, space constraints limit such an examination for this project.

6.2.4 EPH. 2:11-22—JESUS AS THE ALTERNATIVE AGENT OF PEACE

An imperial-critical reading of Ephesians 2:11-22 interpreted the εἰρήνη of the Messiah Jesus as a distinct challenge to the *Pax Romana*. We surveyed widespread images of peace, expressed in Roman imperial ideology, in order to assess available empirical data to help inform a reconstruction of what is implied in Ephesians. What emerged was a potent portrait of Augustan peace, prevalent throughout the empire in the early first century. Similar images of peace were then cast by later emperors who sought to coordinate their visions with those offered by Augustus. An imperial-critical reading asked how the message of peace, expressed in Eph. 2:11-22, would have been heard by the implied reader. If the implied reader was expected to have understood these widespread ideologies of peace conveyed in imperial ideology, the passage functioned as ironic reversal of those images. As was noted, Roman imperial eschatology is not directly evoked on the locutionary level of this passage. Instead, if understood within the context of these wider imperial portraits of peace, the peace of Messiah Jesus in Eph. 2 is strikingly ironic. A contrast was made between the function of death and the shedding of blood within Roman imperial visions of peace and the vision of Eph. 2. What emerged was a competing Christology, that is, an alternative vision of the agent of peace for the world and his means of accomplishing that peace. While the warring groups in Ephesians were not competing militaristically and did not involve the conquest of territories, as was the case in the *Pax Romana*, the thematic parallels are prominent.

This reading does not require identifying εἰρήνη as a locutionary reference to imperial claims of peace.²¹ The language of peace in this passage appears to have its origins in Jewish conceptions of שלום. At the same time, it also contains a Messianic centered Hebraic portrait

²¹ Lau objects to reading language of peace in the epistle as anti-imperial on the basis of its lack of explicit reference to imperial authorities or ideology: *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books* (NovTSup 133; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 289.

that conveys a conflicting narrative that undermined the most prominent visions of peace offered by imperial ideology. If imperial claims of peace were less widespread, this reading of Eph. 2 would be less plausible. On the other hand, since imperial images of death and bloodshed were so prominent in various forms of media throughout the first two centuries, no less so in Asia Minor, the intersection of these themes in Ephesians carries imperial-critical weight. This passage counted as an ironic reversal of imperial ideology by depicting the death of the Messiah Jesus as procuring peace for his transgressors—an unprecedented turn when compared with the *pax* of Imperial Rome. The epistle’s depiction of the cross also furthers this parody. Inhabitants of the Roman Empire would have understood that crucifixion was used as a means of securing Roman *pax*, indicating the triumph over Rome’s transgressors. Very few people would have thought that the triumphant agent of peace would be the crucified one, and that transgressors could be afforded this peace through the self-sacrifice of the ruler. What emerges from this interpretation is a speech act that is both parodic and subversive through its undermining the Roman imperial narratives of peace. Therefore, Reinmuth’s claim that the peace of Christ in Ephesians reflects contemporary imperial claims by framing it in the context of traditional household relationships needs reconsideration.²² He does not recognize the ways in which the epistle’s vision of peace counteracted Roman imperial narratives of peace.

If the claims of peace from within Ephesians 2 were qualitatively different than the peace claims being made by imperial ideology—namely that the peace of Christ is primarily a ‘spiritual’ peace—then the tension between the two are less significant. But such a reading is not without problems. The passage does not focus exclusively on the spiritual peace between the Messiah and his transgressors, but also on peace between two other warring groups: Jews and Gentiles. This sociological portrait of peace undoubtedly has ‘spiritual’ implications but is also deeply imbedded in claims about how actual dissenting groups within the Roman Empire are unified. As far as Ephesians is concerned, peace between these two warring groups comes only through the death of the Messiah, not through subjugating τὰ ἔθνη under Roman rule.

The imperial visions of peace, which provide empirical data that helped in reconstructing the implied setting, were as widespread in the mid-first century as they were in later periods. Claims of the arrival of the golden age of peace, prominent during the Julio-Claudian eras, were adopted and reframed by subsequent emperors, portraying their work as a

²² Eckhart Reinmuth, “Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Politischen,” in *Neues Testament und Politische Theorie: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Zukunft des Politischen*, ed. Eckart Reinmuth (Religionskulturen 9; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2011), 16.

continuation of the Augustan program. Consequently, the plausibility of an imperial-critical reading of this passage does not appear to be affected much by the different date frameworks for the epistle. On the other hand, if Ephesians was written at a later date, especially if during the mid-second century AD, not only had the Augustan era passed, but so had Julio-Claudian rule. Two whole imperial dynasties would have come to an end. While later emperors often conformed their ideologies of peace to early Augustan (and wider Julio-Claudian) portraits, some differences may have developed in their ideology of *Pax Romana* and the imperial program of peace. Consequently, placing the Augustan program of peace as the exclusive cognitive backdrop to the notions of peace in Eph. 2 is not without some problems. More work would need to be done in order to nuance later second century imperial notions of peace to be able to discern whether a late date for Ephesians points to a different illocutionary and perlocutionary speech act. Even if the epistle was written from a second-century post-Pauline empirical author, that author strategically encoded his speech acts by depicting the implied author in the persona of Paul. Therefore, the necessity for understanding Julio-Claudian conceptions of peace for Eph. 2 should not be entirely ignored.

6.2.5 EPH. 3:1, 13—PERLOCUTIONARY ACTS AND IMPERIAL AUTHORITIES

Our provisional imperial-critical reading of the imprisonment in Ephesians led to two possible interpretations: 1) Ephesians challenges Roman imperial ideology, but the challenges are subtle, primarily evident in careful sub-textual cues to avoid detection by imperial authorities while the author was imprisoned. 2) The images of imprisonment in the epistle are themselves anti-imperial, encouraging the implied readers to judge the imperial authorities as unjust, thereby framing other imperial-critical components throughout the letter.

With a view towards evaluating these interpretations, we explored whether conditions existed that necessitated that caution be used when challenging Roman imperial ideology. The presence of *maiestas* laws, the development of *delatores*, and the emergence of *frumentarii* brought clarity to the circumstances surrounding the risks and detectability of subversion in the early Empire. In discussing *maiestas* laws in the early empire, it was demonstrated that the likelihood of these charges being brought against a person suspected of treasonous sentiments increased with the rampant appearance of *delatores* (informants) and *frumentarii* (a sort-of ‘secret service’), especially after the end of the first century. Furthermore, Roman suspicion of

Christians could have made wealthier Jesus-followers easy targets for *delatores* who saw an opportunity to secure a profitable conviction. These empirical realities do not provide any conclusive evidence of the effect that the author's imprisonment had on the composition of Ephesians. It does suggest that, during certain eras of the early Empire, conditions existed that necessitated caution in writing sentiments that were subversive of imperial rule. Had the author wanted to express imperial-critical sentiments under imprisonment, while also avoiding the possibility of being accused of *maiestas* charges, subtle strategies would need to be employed. This, at the very least, suggests that hermeneutical strategies that only prioritize straightforward locutionary levels of communication are insufficient for assessing subversion of imperial ideology within Ephesians, especially if one favors a later date when the dangers had increased. Equally, the implied author's context of imprisonment necessitates using a narrative hermeneutic, since it is probable that any imperial-critical sentiments expressed in the epistle were subtle and not necessarily detectable on a straightforwardly locutionary level, but rather on a larger narrative level.

Another significant empirical development is that treason charges were applied to subversive writings, even long after the composition had been received without incurring censure.²³ This development shows that what *counted as* subversive in one era of the early Empire may not have *counted as* subversion in another and vice versa. This led us to draw distinctions between the implied and empirical life-setting of Ephesians. If Paul's imprisonment in Ephesians primarily functions as a projection for a later post-Pauline audience, it has different imperial-critical consequences during those later eras than if it was written during Paul's lifetime.

This empirical data provides further imaginative depth and limitations to reconstructing the implied situation of the imprisonment of the author in Ephesians. On the one hand, these conditions suggest that, if anti-imperial sentiments are expressed in Ephesians, they are more likely to be subtle rather than overt. On the other hand, this point assumes that the author acquiesced to these pressures. As Barclay has noted, there are reasons to believe that Paul would not have shied away from such a confrontation had he deemed the cause a worthy one.²⁴ If Paul wrote Ephesians, this puts some limitations on an imperial-critical interpretation of the author's imprisonment. However, it is advisable to not make too much of the empirical data.

²³ See pp. 86-88 above.

²⁴ See p. 58 fn. 136 above.

Even if Paul is not the empirical author, the available empirical data may limit such a reading in light of the implied author's identification with Paul. What would have been true during Paul's lifetime provides the framing for the implied context by projecting Paul as the author. Where Barclay finds no evidence for empirical conditions that would have necessitated more careful strategies for expressing imperial-critical sentiments, the available empirical data challenges his view by showing that subversive writings were subject to far greater dangers than he has acknowledged.²⁵

The necessity for implicit communication under circumstances of imprisonment gives imperial-critical interpreters of Ephesians one reason for maintaining that the epistle challenged imperial ideology without explicitly avowing it on locutionary levels. The expectation then, that one should be able to find explicit references to the emperor or imperial ideology in order to affirm imperial-critical readings are misguided. This reality helps alleviate potential criticism of this project's hermeneutical preference toward analyzing illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. In response to those who might prefer that subversive sentiments be communicated locutionarily, the imprisonment of the author provides one reason for suspending such expectations. This is even more true if one is inclined to see Ephesians as composed at a later date. We used an eclectic hermeneutic that distinguished between implied and empirical data in order to put the empirical data in its proper place: it both delimits and provides imaginative depth to what is implied. In this case, the available empirical data provides imaginative depth to the conventions of subversion during various eras of the early Empire by spelling out the dangers of undermining imperial rule. While distinctions between implied and empirical data have not become common among imperial-critical interpreters, this distinction provides one example of the need to use the available empirical data to help inform what is implied.

The imprisonment may also function as a subversive perlocutionary act by implicitly encouraging the implied readers to *judge* imperial authorities as unjust. Considering that the implied readers are Jesus-followers, and that Paul is depicted as imprisoned because of the gospel (6:19-20), if the imprisonment was primarily initiated by imperial authorities, by implication they would be in opposition to both the gospel and the apostle. One complication to this view is that Acts depicts Paul as often facing opposition from fellow Jewish leaders in

²⁵ See pp. 82-97 above.

cities across the Roman Empire,²⁶ and that even his imprisonment in Rome was due to his appeal to Caesar after facing initial conflicts with Judeans in Jerusalem.²⁷ While Jewish leaders were not always necessarily distinct from Roman imperial rule, the possibility that Roman imperial authorities are not in view could decrease the likelihood that the perlocutionary act included judging Roman imperial authorities as unjust. While the identity of the incarcerators is not clear in Ephesians, it is important to ask what would have been the likely interpretation expected of the implied readers. Earlier, we identified the implied readers as Gentile Godfearers who are new participants in the Christian communities in Asia Minor. If our identification of the intended audience is correct, it is plausible that they were expected to assume that the incarcerators were Roman imperial authorities. If written at a later date, framing the imprisonment in Ephesians in Pauline terms functioned as a subversive strategy for a post-Pauline author. This empirical author intended that the implied audience contextualize the message of Paul's imprisonment within their contemporary context in Asia Minor. If written during the mid-second century, the situation of the imperial cults in Asia Minor had escalated against Christians, and so by drawing the implied audience into sympathy with Paul's imprisonment under unjust rule, the perlocutionary effect was that the author had wanted them to judge their contemporary imperial rulers in a similar light.

The letter's characterization of Paul's imprisonment also places limitations on an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. It is possible to assume that imperial-critical statements would be omitted in Ephesians due to censorship under such circumstances. The perceived accommodation to traditional Greco-Roman household codes in Eph. 5-6 might then be explained as the results of the author's acquiescing to imperial ideology while imprisoned in order to avoid incurring more significant hardships. This suggests that the imprisonment led the author to intentionally accommodate imperial ideology, purposely avoiding anti-imperial sentiments. We must briefly postpone an evaluation of this point until the section below that addresses the household code. At this juncture, we note that if the interpretation above holds, it challenges an imperial-critical interpretation of the author's imprisonment and raises questions about imperial-critical interpretations of other passages in the epistle.

²⁶ Acts 13:50-51; 14:2,5,19; 15:1; 16:3; 17:5-9,13; 18:6,12-17; 19:9,13-16; 20:3; 21:11-14; 21:27-22:22; 23:1-21; 25:13-32; 28:19-20,25-28.

²⁷ There are exceptions to this; Paul faces opposition from Gentiles as well: Acts 13:8-11; 14:5,11-18; 16:16-39; 18:14-17; 19:24-40; 22:23-29; 23:22-35; 24:1-25:12.

6.3 EPHESIANS 4-6: AN EVALUATION

6.3.1 EPH. 4:4-6—JESUS AS AN ALTERNATIVE AGENT OF UNIFICATION

An imperial-critical reading of Eph. 4 interpreted the ‘oneness’ language [ένότητα (4:3); εἷς/ἐν/μιᾶ (4:4)] in the passage as a challenge to the ideology of the Roman emperor. This perspective was framed around the phrase εἷς κύριος as understood in the context of contemporary claims of the emperor’s supreme lordship. Other meanings of κύριος were acknowledged, namely that Ephesians allows for earthly “lords” [Eph. 6:5] that do not appear to conflict with the lordship of Messiah Jesus. Ephesians claims that there is “Ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν· εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἐν βάπτισμα, εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν” [4:4-6]. While κύριος terminology was widely used throughout the Roman Empire, Fantin provides support for the claim that during certain eras, when used of the Roman emperor, it carried the sense of “supreme Lord.”²⁸ Κύριος would have been understood in this way within Roman imperial cognitive environments.²⁹ Like other speech acts in Ephesians, Searle’s *count as* formula is relevant for assessing an imperial-critical reading of this passage. The prospect that κύριος language, when applied to the emperor, intensified in the later first century is significant for understanding its use in Ephesians. This becomes even more true in the second century AD, where, at least in Asia Minor, early Christians counted a declaration of Caesar as κύριος as a blasphemous speech act.³⁰ If one adopts a date within this framework, it becomes more likely that Ephesians’ claim that there is εἷς κύριος subverted the emperor’s supreme lordship within the Roman imperial context of Asia Minor. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, if it is at least moderately reflective of the historical situation in Asia Minor in the mid-second century, reveals that some of the christological titles employed within Ephesians, usually deemed to be ‘safe’ within the mid-first century, certainly become less so the further one gets into the second century.³¹ According to Holmes, *Mart. Poly* clearly perceives a tension between “Lord Christ

²⁸ Joseph D. Fantin, *The Lord of the Entire World* (New Testament Monographs, 31. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011).

²⁹ Fantin, 231-234.

³⁰ *Mart. Poly*. 9:3.

³¹ *Mart. Poly*. 8:2. Michael Holmes suggests dating *Mart. Poly* between ad 155-160, but that a date as late as 177 is unlikely: “Polycarp of Smyrna,” in *DLNTD*, 937.

and Lord Caesar.”³² It seems curious that scholarly consensus surrounding the recipients being located within Asia Minor, if paired with a later date and non-Pauline authorship, has generated little discussion around the 25 occurrences of κύριος within Ephesians. In an earlier implied context, when κύριος carried less of the sense of ‘supreme’ lord, its anti-imperial thrust would have been less potent. Since the context changes in the second century, in this case, its illocutionary force would also change. In other words, while κύριος was significantly less loaded in a mid-first century context, an assumed later date intensifies the possibility that it *counted as* subversive of Roman imperial claims of the emperor’s supreme lordship.

This distinction between Roman imperial uses of κύριος across various eras has gone largely unnoticed by imperial-critical interpreters who have read the term as subversive of imperial ideology. This demonstrates the necessity of an eclectic hermeneutic that attends to the empirical as a means for reconstructing the implied. Κύριος carried a much less explosive sense during earlier eras of imperial Rome than it did in later times, and so early NT texts may not have intended to undermine the Roman emperor’s use of the concept when they identify Jesus as κύριος. This complicates Gupta and Long’s detection of anti-imperial sentiments in the use of κύριος in Ephesians, considering that they reject Ephesians as deuteropauline.³³ In order to affirm their claim, one would have to either uncover empirical data that points to the exclusive sense of the use of κύριος in early imperial ideology, or to demonstrate that the means of undermining imperial ideology occurred on a different level, namely a narrative one rather than a locutionary one. While much of Gupta and Long’s work is commendable, this area of their work deserves reconsideration.

If an earlier date of the epistle is assumed, when κύριος is paired with the other ‘oneness’ items in Eph. 4:4-6, a larger storyline emerges; one that does conflict with the widespread narratives of Roman imperial ideology. In Eph. 4, the oneness language is used to encourage the implied audience to maintain unity in Christian community. In other words, the fact that there is “one body and one Spirit, just as even you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all” should motivate them to σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης [4:3]. If this passage was written during the Pauline era, its portrait of

³² Holmes, *DLNTD*, 936.

³³ Nijay K. Gupta and Frederick J. Long, “The Politics of Ephesians and the Empire: Accommodation or Resistance?,” *JGRChJ* 7 (2010): 115. While they state that “Ephesians encodes the author as Paul” (“Politics of Ephesians,” 125), they reject deuteropauline authorship of the epistle: “Politics of Ephesians,” 114-115, but also affirm that Eph. depicts a conflicting Lord Jesus with lord Caesar: *Ibid.*, 115.

unity, not its use of κύριος provided the most provocative undermining of imperial ideology. Lotz's work on Ephesians, discussed earlier, affirmed this point.³⁴ What emerges from Eph. 4 is a narrative Christology that competes with Rome's visions of the emperor, even if they are not directly competing κύριοι. Widespread claims of the unification of people across the Roman Empire through imperial programs prove a relevant context for the portrait of unity offered in Eph. 4. Regardless of whether 'lordship' terminology in this passage (and elsewhere throughout Eph.) undermined the 'lordship' of Caesar, its picture of unity casts an alternative narrative about who has the capacity to unify. A similar narrative sentiment was detected in Eph. 2:11-22.

6.3.2 EPH. 4:8-10—IMPERIAL ASCENT & CAPTIVITY: UNDERMINED BY MEANS OF LOCUTIONARY MODIFICATION OF PS. 68

An imperial-critical reading of this passage explained the blatant locutionary incongruity between Ps. 68 (67; LXX) and Eph. 4:8-10 as a deliberate modification on the part of the author. This was interpreted as the result of the author's intention of conveying a counter-narrative that undermined imperial ideology for the implied readers. This portrait drew on empirical data of imperial claims of the emperor's apotheosis/divinization, which were widely accessible. It also noted that the psalm originally functioned as a victory song by evoking exodus imagery to convey YHWH's victory over Israel's enemies, a point which has too often gone unnoticed among interpreters of Ephesians.³⁵ One cannot help but wonder whether this oversight is the result of a narrow focus on locutionary content in the passage without paying much attention to the wider illocutionary and perlocutionary strategies of the author.

Narratively, the author depicts the ascension of Jesus as a moment of liberation for captives by invoking images of YHWH's liberation of Israel from her enemies in the victory psalm. When the psalm draws on the past exodus experience of liberation in order to reinforce YHWH's presence with Israel in her contemporary circumstances, it establishes a hermeneutical precedent to contextualize the past actions of YHWH for a new generation facing similar problems. The implied author of Ephesians appears to make a similar

³⁴ John Paul Lotz, "The *Homonoia* Coins of Asia Minor and Ephesians 1:21," *TynBul* 50.2 (1999): 186, see also p. 172 fn. 70 above.

³⁵ Baumert and Seewann also note that the imagery of God/God's messengers descending from heaven to reveal themselves is evident in an array of OT passages: *Israels Berufung für die Völker: Übersetzung und Auslegung der Briefe an Philemon, an die Kolosser und an die Epheser* (München: Echter, 2016), 295.

hermeneutical move by seeing the ascension and captivity depicted in the psalm as a relevant image for the implied audience.

One aspect of the author's interpretive strategy that has not been previously explored by scholars of Ephesians is that his locutionary modification of the psalm may have been motivated by necessity in order to ensure that the intended illocutionary and perlocutionary acts did not misfire. Had the author maintained the exact locution of the psalm, the meaning of the speech act would change. If the author had borrowed the psalm's exact locution, it would have depicted Jesus as taking captives and receiving gifts from them, maintaining continuity with either of his OT contexts, whether that of the exodus or the contemporary setting of the psalm. On the other hand, doing so would have undermined the author's own purpose of drawing a contrast with the implied audience's Roman imperial context. If one takes this context seriously, depicting Jesus in such a fashion would cause a misfire in the speech act since it eliminates the narrative contrast between the imperial method of taking captives and receiving plunder and Jesus's treatment of his people. Instead, the author deliberately depicts Jesus as taking captives and lavishing gifts on them rather than receiving gifts in plunder. Such a modification of the locutions of the psalm might disturb some interpreters who insist that the NT authors maintain the precise locutions of OT passages when invoking them. While such a sentiment avoids a portrait of the NT authors as "proof-texters" who see no necessity in maintaining the language or meaning of the original OT texts, it fails to discern the wider narrative purposes of the use of the OT in the NT.

The author of Ephesians does not reinforce the exact locutions of Ps. 68 in Eph. 4, but the narrative compatibility of each text should not go unnoticed. Both Eph. 4 and Ps. 68 perform similar illocutionary acts even when the locutions differ. Admittedly, the psalm focuses more intently on the defeat of YHWH's enemies (68:12, 14, 21, 23, 29-32) than does Ephesians. One interesting point of connection between the two is that both the LXX (Ps. 67:15) and Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) use the adjective ἐπουράνιος, although a difference is that in the former YHWH is characterized as ἐπουράνιος whereas the use of the term in Ephesians is much more broad: God blesses ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (Eph. 1:3), Jesus rules from τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (1:20), the family of God is co-seated with Jesus ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (2:6), the mystery has been revealed in order that God's wisdom would be made known to rulers and authorities ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (3:10),³⁶ and Jesus-followers struggle against the spiritual forces of evil ἐν

³⁶ Unfortunately, limitations in space prevent us from fully exploring how the μυστήριον in Ephesians fits within an imperial-critical reading of the epistle. A few brief comments are worth mentioning here. T. J. Lang observes important differences between the mystery language in the undisputed Pauline epistles and

τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (6:12). Eph. 4 does not use the exact same locutionary term, although it does describe the ascension of Jesus as having occurred “ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα” (4:10). In both the psalm and Eph., the agent of liberation is depicted as taking captives in triumphal procession, and ascending on high, which affirms the ἐπουράνιος rule of the liberator. In the psalm, the ascension of YHWH to his throne is couched in temple imagery: he rules from his sanctuary (Ps. 68:17, 24, 29, 35). In Ephesians, Jesus leads captives (or captivity) to freedom and lavishes gifts upon his people rather than, as the psalm depicts, receiving the spoils of war (in 68:18, “even the rebellious” bring gifts; so do “kings” in 68:29) or the temple gifts (implied in 68:17-18?). In this portrait, the descent imagery likely refers to the humility of the Messiah, also contributing to the reversal of imperial notions of victory.

The general illocutionary point of each passage is similar: the authors perform a declarative speech act that announces that the liberator has taken captives, ascended on high, and become ruler over all things. On the other hand, in the case of Ephesians, the Messiah’s giving gifts is central to the epistle’s characterization of captivity (Eph. 4:7, 8, 11): this is not a typical depiction of the ruler’s treatment of his captives. By performing this speech act for his implied readers, who are assumed to reside within a Roman imperial context, the author’s illocution is nuanced compared to its counterpart in the psalm: the declarative illocution in

deuteropauline letters: *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness: From Paul to the Second Century* (BZNTW 219; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 107-109, see also 53-67, 90-103. He notes that in 1 Cor. 2, the mystery is depicted as having been concealed from some people, hidden from τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (1 Cor. 2:7), while in Eph. 3:10, the proclamation of the mystery is “thoroughly democratized” by becoming available to even ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις. *Mystery*, 108. For Lang, these differences do not constitute “outright contradictions” but are evidence of the unique “deuteropauline codification of a Pauline mystery discourse.” *Mystery*, 109. He further contends that the deuteropauline schema separates history into two eras, before and after the mystery has been revealed, each of which hinges on the arrival of Jesus. *Mystery*, 109. A few potential applications of Lang’s work for this project are worth noting here. If read from an imperial-critical vantage point, such a modification of the mystery in Ephesians might be able to be explained as a perlocutionary strategy on the part of the author (whether Paul or a post-Pauline author) in order to convince the audience in Asia Minor to adopt a Christian cosmological vision of unification in the Messiah instead of that offered by Roman imperial ideology. One major difference between the mystery language in 1 Cor. 2:7 compared to that in Eph. 3 is the content of the mystery—Christ crucified in 1 Cor. 2:1-2, and that Gentiles are co-heirs, co-bodies, and co-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel in Eph. 3:6. While the mystery of the crucifixion of the Messiah was hidden from rulers of this world in 1 Cor. 2, the mystery of the cosmic unification of Jew/Gentile in the Messiah is made evident to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places in Eph. 3. The modification of the content of the mystery (although by no means unrelated to one other), its democratization, as well as its more pronounced two-eras schema could reflect the author’s attempt to contextualize the μυστήριον against Roman imperial cosmic claims of the unification of the nations (ἔθνος) for his recipients in Asia Minor. Such strategy constitutes an ironic reversal since, in Ephesians, the crucified Messiah is the agent of the unification of Jews and Gentiles. Lang notes the cosmic scope of the mystery in Ephesians 1:9 by showing that it “is therefore every bit as much about the destiny of the cosmos as it is about the destiny of humans” and that Ephesians depicts “humanity and Christ...at the center of God’s eternally planned but recently disclosed mystery to unify the cosmos in Christ.” *Mystery*, 90. In some ways, this uniquely cosmic vision of the mystery language in Ephesians yields to potential imperial-critical readings of Ephesians since similar cosmic claims of unification were being made by Roman imperial rule within the cognitive environments of the implied readers.

Ephesians involves a reversal of expectations. This liberator ascends to rule over all things but gives gifts to his captives rather than demanding spoils of war. The reversal of the typical imagery within the Roman imperial narrative of the emperor taking captives, receiving spoils, and ascending in apotheosis is poignant. While the emperor's taking captives and receiving spoils were used as a means of unifying all people under Roman imperial rule, Jesus's gracious gift giving forms the basis for the unification of God's people πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως..." (Eph. 4:12-13a). An associated perlocutionary act also emerges from this: the author hopes for transformational unity in the communit(ies) of Jesus-followers, under one head of the new πολιτεία, Jesus, whose "captivity" is very unlike that imposed by Roman imperial rule.

Prior to our project, Hoehner appears to have been one of the only scholars who attempted to explain the locutionary differences between Ps. 68 and Eph. 4 on the basis of the audience's context.³⁷ He discerned something significant in the context of the community's spiritual gifts as the reason for the difference, although he does not offer much clarification about what those circumstances were. In sympathy with Hoehner's resolution to the dilemma, we have found that discerning the audience's implied context provides a promising explanation for the author's modification of the psalm. What emerges from this modification is the illocutionary declaration that Jesus the Messiah's taking captives is actually liberating them without taking spoils of war; in fact, he takes captives (or captivity itself) captive and then lavishes gifts upon his people for the edification of their communities. In its implied context, this narrative trajectory *counted as* a reversal of the Roman imperial vision of captivity. Therefore, the implied readers would have been expected to hear this passage as an undermining of the emperor's habits of taking people captive, receiving spoils from them, and subsequently being deified for his actions.

6.3.3 EPH. 5:21-6:9—A TOPPLING OF ROMAN IDEALS OF κεφαλή

The two interpretations of the *Haustafel* offered above provided distinctly separate proposals related to the imperial-critical status of Eph. 5:21-6:9. The first interpretation suggested that the author purposely accommodated imperial household values for apologetic reasons, namely,

³⁷ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 528.

to either encourage the implied readers to avoid perpetuating the widespread rumors about Christians or to avoid the possibility of further punishment while imprisoned. A second interpretation read the passage in light of Augustus's marriage (and household) legislation, which was connected to a wider eschatological program that claimed that the restoration of republican family values indicated the arrival of the golden age. These laws were also one means of enforcing imperial ideology across the provinces. Ephesians 5:21-6:9 was read as a challenge to that ideology, projecting an alternative household structure for Christian communities in its vision of loving, self-sacrificial husbands and submissive wives, both of whom were somewhat unprecedented in imperial conceptions of marriage.

The perceived accommodation to imperial family structures should not go unnoticed. Significant work has been done in Ephesians scholarship to spell out parallels between the household code in Eph. 5-6 and Roman family structures expressed in contemporary Greco-Roman literature.³⁸ On the other hand, much of the existing analysis has largely focused on locutionary and structural parallels at the expense of examining the passage's illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. This focus has led to an overestimation of the accommodation to imperial values in the passage. Elliott's dismissal of Ephesians in his imperial-critical discussions are reflective of such an overestimation.³⁹ Briggs-Kittredge's explanation of the historical circumstances surrounding the passage better attends to contextual factors beyond general comparisons with Greco-Roman household codes but also overlooks some of the author's illocutionary strategies.⁴⁰ She concludes that there were women in the Ephesians communities who had understood their baptismal status as having granted them "oneness in Christ," fueling egalitarian sentiments, and that the author's strategy in this passage is to squash those sentiments by "reassert[ing] a key aspect of the domination system with the use of the metaphor of marriage."⁴¹

Some scholars who have come to vastly different conclusions regarding the desirability of the portrait of marriage in Ephesians have equally overestimated its hierarchical assumptions by reading Eph. 5:21-6:4 as supporting a stark subordination where the husband is portrayed

³⁸ See Darko's helpful survey of the scholarship on the subject: *No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation and Shared Ethical Values in Ephesians 4.17-6.9* (LNTS 375; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 72 fn. 9.

³⁹ Neil Elliott, "The Apostle Paul and Empire," in Horsley, *Shadow of Empire*, 100.

⁴⁰ Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, "Reconstructing 'Resistance' or Reading to Resist: James C. Scott and the Politics of Interpretation," in Horsley, ed. *Hidden Transcripts*, 145-155.

⁴¹ Briggs Kittredge, "Reconstructing," 151.

as superior to the wife.⁴² Lee-Barnewall challenges these assumptions by tracing views of κεφαλή throughout contemporary Greco-Roman literature.⁴³ She acknowledges that the term often depicts a person as a superior over others, including the emperor's superiority as 'head' over his 'body,' the empire.⁴⁴ In this way, she does not dispute that the usual locutionary sense of κεφαλή includes an "asymmetrical relationship between the head and the body for the good of the whole."⁴⁵ For Lee-Barnewall, it is that fact that contributes to the portrait of headship in Ephesians functioning as a reversal of conventional notions of κεφαλή. While one could expect then that wives would be called to sacrifice for the sake of their husbands, the head, the opposite is the case in Eph. 5.⁴⁶ The call for husbands to love and sacrifice was not only countercultural, but it constituted a "reversal of status conventions."⁴⁷ The husband's 'headship' in the passage is grounded in its image of Jesus as head of the church. Since the Messiah ἐαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς (5:25), husbands are to act as a self-sacrificial 'head' that loves his wife and ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει her (5:29).⁴⁸ Lee-Barnewall concludes that this picture functions as a reversal of "expectations of his status, that is, sacrificing himself and loving the body, rather than saving his own life and receiving love. As Christ did not use his status, but instead sacrificed on behalf of the church, so too are husbands to sacrifice for, rather than dominate, their wives."⁴⁹ This fact challenges Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation that the household code's call to Christ-like love is "kyriarchal, top-down love."⁵⁰

⁴² See e.g. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. *Ephesians* (Wisdom Commentary 50; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), lvii-lxxx, 89-115; Bird, "Ephesians," 275-276; William Loader, *The Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament: Case Studies on the Impact of the LXX in Philo and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 108; Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 199, 201-211; John MacArthur Jr., *Different by Design* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), 55; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 183. Elizabeth Johnson is a bit more nuanced in recognizing the self-sacrifice required of husbands, but still concludes that the author reinforces "conventional patriarchal household structure." "Ephesians," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jaqueline E. Lapsley (3rd Ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 580.

⁴³ Michelle Lee-Barnewall, "Turning ΚΕΦΑΛΗ on its Head: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Ephesians 5:21-33," in Porter and Pitts, eds., *Christian Origins*, 599-614.

⁴⁴ Lee-Barnewall, "ΚΕΦΑΛΗ," 599-608.

⁴⁵ Lee-Barnewall, 608.

⁴⁶ Lee-Barnewall, 608.

⁴⁷ Lee-Barnewall, 610.

⁴⁸ Helge Stadelmann concludes that the counterpart to the wife's subordination is not domination but love: *Der Epheserbrief* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1993), 235. Similarly, Norbert and Seewann note that the husband is depicted as a traditional 'lord' over the wife, but that this also includes the call to self-sacrifice: *Israels Berufung*, 337-339.

⁴⁹ Lee-Barnewall, "ΚΕΦΑΛΗ," 612. Joachim Gnllka captures this by stating that the passage depicts not "Selbstbehauptung, sondern Selbsthingabe." *Der Epheserbrief* (HThKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 279.

⁵⁰ See pp. 25 above.

Lee-Barnewall's work provides some prospects for understanding how Eph. 5:21-6:4 also undermined imperial ideology. While she does not fully explore these implications in her article, her notes on Roman imperial conceptions of κεφαλή are relevant to this project. By tracing imperial conceptions of Nero as 'head,' we can see that the subjects of the Roman Empire were expected to sacrifice themselves for the emperor since the destruction of the head would lead to "the destruction of the Roman peace."⁵¹ In a context where that conception of headship was normal, the husband's call to self-sacrificial, Messiah-like love for his wife in Eph. 5 undermined traditional Roman imperial marriage ideals, especially since family units were supposed to reflect the imperial order of society.⁵² This was heightened even more in the Augustan marriage legislation. Ephesians reverses those concepts.

This interpretation also calls into question some of the ways that the empirical context of the Roman Empire is understood in this passage. While it is helpful to mine the cultural data regarding the subordination of wives in Roman marriages, the use of common locutionary terms (κεφαλή) in such an environment does not necessarily signal that the author was reinforcing those values in Ephesians. Understanding the empirical data is helpful but only to the extent that it helps to reconstruct what is implied. In this case, the empirical data helps to understand the conventions of Roman marriages so that the reader can more easily detect its christological reversal. By attending to the christological reordering of the concept of κεφαλή in Eph. 5, Lee-Barnewall's work provides a warranted assault against common interpretations of the passage that focus too narrowly on locutionary content and ignore the reorientation of headship in the passage. Therefore, Faust's claims that "Das Verhältnis Christus-Ekklesia parallelisiert also durch die politisch geläufigen Metaphern σωτήρ / κεφαλή-σῶμα genau das Verhältnis Kaiser-Staat und könnte hier somit die Stelle von "Herrscher" (= Christus) und zugehöriger "Polis/Politeia" (= Ekklesia) vertreten"⁵³ and that the depictions of Jesus exist to

⁵¹ Lee-Barnewall, 603-607. Faust points out that similar imagery was used of Vespasian: *Pax Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 439. He also acknowledges that Rome claimed to be the head of the world: Faust, 283.

⁵² Faust notes that the three-fold structure of the household code (husband/wives, parents/children, master/slave) reflected the structure of the Roman politeia and that it represented a wider desire for the empire's social control over domestic structures: *Pax Christi*, 432-433. This concept may have been derived from Aristotelian ethics that saw the household as having a "stabilisierenden bzw. destabilisierenden Wirkung auf das Staatswohl." *Pax Christi*, 436. He also concludes that the Christian politeia in Ephesians "eine Art von Alternativentwurf zum römischen Staat abgibt." *Pax Christi*, 434. Lee-Barnewall's point need not be understood to necessarily conflict with Gese's claim that the 'headship' imagery draws from Jewish conceptions of God as the 'head.' Gese, *Der Epheserbrief*, 149.

⁵³ Faust, *Pax Christi*, 439.

show the “Wunsch nach christologischer Begründung der Herrschaft des Mannes in der Ehe”⁵⁴ do not do justice to the portrait of the self-sacrificial head in Eph. 5. Interpretations such as these have contributed to softening the epistle’s anti-imperial trajectories by overestimating its accommodation to imperial social values.

6.3.4 EPH. 6:12—PERLOCUTIONARY TRANSFORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF IMPERIAL CULTS

The characterization of the power language in Eph. 6:12 presents the most straightforward challenge to an imperial-critical interpretation of the letter. By saying οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰς ἀρχάς, πρὸς τὰς ἐξουσίας, πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τούτου, πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, Eph. 6:12 appears to minimize struggles with earthly human authorities by depicting the most significant struggle as against spiritual entities. This might imply that imperial-critical statements would be unlikely in Ephesians since the author appears far more concerned with spiritual struggles than with earthly ones. In contrast to this, we constructed several variations of imperial-critical readings of this passage by using existing Ephesians scholarship. We turn our attention now to evaluating those readings in light of our eclectic hermeneutic.

Keesmaat detected allusive anti-imperial sentiments in the power language of the epistle, concluding that it presents one of the most veiled challenges to the “story of Empire” in the NT.⁵⁵ Lotz similarly noted that the power language in Ephesians challenged wider Roman sentiments, but saw this process as occurring through the use of “provocative and seditious words” in its first century religious milieu.⁵⁶ Both interpretations offer several prospects that align well with the methods used in our eclectic hermeneutic. Keesmaat’s narrative approach to the power language in Ephesians parallels our use of narrative categories in this project. Unlike Keesmaat, Lotz does not use narrative categories, but his conclusions coordinate well with Keesmaat’s points by reading the content of the epistle in its first century Roman imperial environment. Each author attempts to identify conflicts with Roman imperial ideology beyond a locutionary level. One prospect of their hermeneutical approach is that it does not require

⁵⁴ Faust, 440.

⁵⁵ Sylvia Keesmaat, “In the Face of the Empire: Paul’s Use of Scripture in the Shorter Epistles,” in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 185. See pp. 184-185 above.

⁵⁶ John Paul Lotz, “The *Homonoia* Coins of Asia Minor and Ephesians 1:21,” *TynBul* 50.2 (1999): 187. See p. 186 above.

identifying the origins of the power language from exclusively within a Roman imperial context, or, as Beck claimed, as hidden referents to earthly rulers.⁵⁷ In Beck's interpretation, the power language of the epistle functioned as a hidden transcript that purposefully veiled the language so that if accosted by oppressors, the Christians could claim that the text they possessed did not refer to Roman earthly rulers, but to spiritual rulers. Beck's view could explain a post-Pauline author's strategy in light of the empirical circumstances in Asia Minor. Since conflicts between Christians and imperial authorities in the region had significantly increased over the span of several decades,⁵⁸ this reality could, in theory, necessitate the use of hidden transcripts.

On the other hand, since an implied context within Paul's lifetime is projected in the text, more work would need to be done in order to explore how a post-Pauline empirical author might have used that implied context in order to confront later empirical circumstances. Further, Beck assumes that struggles with imperial authorities constituted the primary motivation for subtle subversion. We used Skinner's work on implicit speech acts to show that the nature of some subversive speech acts necessitates the use of less explicit language, but because it helps perform the speech act more effectively, not because of a fear of persecution. Subversive speech acts likely misfire if the language is made more explicit. Beck's suggestion that veiled language is present in Eph. 6 deserves further consideration, but his explanation as to why the language is less explicit fails to consider how the nature of the author's illocutionary act may have constituted the primary motivation for using more subtle rhetorical strategies. His claims are more plausible if Ephesians was composed later. However, by not attending to implied/empirical distinctions, Beck overlooks an assessment of the empirical historical context of the epistle. If Ephesians was composed by a post-Pauline author, its depiction of the implied author in the persona of Paul codifies the epistle with an implied context during Paul's lifetime, and that portrait places limitations on Beck's scenario.

Imperial-critical sentiments can be present in the epistle's power language without having to interpret its locutions as a reference to imperial power. Keesmaat avoids locating the origins of the power language exclusively from within Roman imperial ideology.⁵⁹ She sees

⁵⁷ Norman A. Beck, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms in the New Testament: Hidden Transcripts of Hope and Liberation* (Rev. Ed.; Studies in Biblical Literature 127; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 75-76. See pp. 184-185 above.

⁵⁸ See pp. 107-111 above.

⁵⁹ Keesmaat, "In the Face of Empire," 187.

the author of Ephesians as drawing on OT images to construct anti-imperial sentiments. Such a perspective is noteworthy because it takes the Jewish cosmological perspective of the implied author seriously. The power language in the epistle appears use locutions that are embedded within Jewish imagery.⁶⁰ By using Searle's X=Y in C formula, we acknowledge that those locutions can *count as* a subversive illocution in the context of Roman imperial Asia Minor. While Keesmaat, like Beck, detects allusive strategies behind the locutions used in the epistle's power language, Searle's formula helps to demonstrate that such conclusion is unnecessary. By using empirical data to reconstruct the implied Roman imperial context of Ephesians, this project sympathizes with Beck and Keesmaat's conclusions that the author performs a speech act that undermines Roman imperial ideology. On the other hand, applying Searle's formula here helps the interpreter understand that the locution does not need to contain an allusion to imperial authorities. If such an allusion were present, it suggests that the author was *talking about* Roman imperial rule without explicitly mentioning it.⁶¹ While speech-act theory helps to show that this kind of rhetorical strategy is entirely possible, our use of Searle shows that subversive speech acts do not need to allusively refer to their subject on the locutionary level in order to undermine established institutional facts. In the case of Eph. 6:12, neither of the locutionary phrases used, i.e. τὰς ἀρχάς, πρὸς τὰς ἐξουσίας, or τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις need be interpreted as veiled allusions to imperial rulers, so long as its illocutionary and perlocutionary acts undermined imperial ideology. Therefore, while Gupta and Long's attempt at identifying locutionary allusions to the emperor and Zeus in Eph. 2:2 takes the empirical data from the epistle's cognitive environment seriously, their conclusions are unnecessary for detecting subversion of imperial ideology in the power language in Ephesians.⁶²

⁶⁰ This is one strength of Wesley Carr's argument, even though he unnecessarily reduces Jewish perspectives on demonic powers to associations with idol worship: *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase hai archai kai hai exousiai* (SNTSMS 42; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 122. See p. 184 fn. 135 above.

⁶¹ Christian Strecker's approach is helpful here. He notes that Paul's terminology is grounded in OT images, but that they also are met in Roman imperial discourse, resulting in language that resides "gewissermaßen in einer Art dritten Raum zwischen dem jüdischen und dem römischen Diskursuniversum." "Taktiken der Aneignung: Politische Implikationen der paulinischen Botschaft im Kontext der römischen imperialen Wirklichkeit," in *Neues Testament und Politische Theorie: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Zukunft des Politischen*, ed. Eckart Reinmuth (Religionskulturen 9; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2011), 154.

⁶² Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 120-125; See also Fredrick J. Long, "Roman Imperial Rule under the Authority of Jupiter-Zeus: Political-Religious Contexts and the Interpretation of 'the Ruler of the Authority of the Air' in Ephesians 2:2" in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 113-154. See pp. 186-187 above.

If Ephesians was written at a later date, applying Guelich's work to an imperial-critical reading of this passage provides some imaginative depth to how it constituted a subversive illocutionary speech act without referring to Roman imperial authorities.⁶³ Guelich emphasizes the defensive posture of the armor in Eph. 6:10-20.⁶⁴ This posture, in the context of mid/late second century Asia Minor, *counted as* an instruction for Christians to withstand pressures to participate in the imperial cults of the region. Even if one were inclined, with Adewuya, to see the referents of the power language as either Satan or personal demonic entities,⁶⁵ the implied author's Jewish perspective yields to associations between Satan, demons, and idolatry.⁶⁶ In other words, the locutionary referents can point to Satan or demonic entities, while also performing an associated perlocutionary act that hoped to transform or reinforce the ways that Christians in Asia Minor were approaching pressures towards the imperial cults in the region. In many ways this point addresses one of Lincoln's critiques of Faust's work. He suggests that Faust does not properly explain how one would "decide whether the symbolic world of Jewish Scripture or the symbolic world of Roman ideology is determinative for interpretation of the language in Ephesians... Or can both be involved so that the language has multiple referents?"⁶⁷ We have concluded that one need not locate the epistle's locutionary referents within imperial ideology, or identify them as "multiple referents" in order to view the speech acts in Ephesians as a challenge to those ideas on a narrative level.

Unfortunately, this interpretation cannot fully explain how the speech acts in Eph. 6 functioned in an implied earlier date framework. A few brief comments will suffice here. Even if the letter implies a context within Paul's lifetime, when pressures for Christians to participate in the provincial imperial cults were not as intense in Asia Minor, it is not impossible that some pressures existed to participate in imperial cults that were not officially sanctioned as provincial

⁶³ Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul, and Peretti," *Pneuma* 13.1 (1991): 46. See also p. 187 above.

⁶⁴ Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare," 46. The defensive posture in this passage also seems to challenge Bird's conclusion that the power language in Ephesians challenged the community's oppressors but replaced Roman rule with new (Christian) imperial rulers: Jennifer G. Bird, "Ephesians," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Documents*, eds., Fernando F. Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 267. While Eph. 2:6 depicts Jesus-followers as seated in the heavenly places, the same location where the Messiah is depicted as ruling over the powers in Eph. 1:20-21, the defensive posture expressed in the instructions in Eph. 6 is far from depicting Christians as new imperial rulers.

⁶⁵ J. Ayodeji Adewuya, "The Spiritual Powers of Ephesians 6:10-18 in the Light of African Pentecostal Spirituality," *BBR* 22.2 (2012): 256.

⁶⁶ Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 122.

⁶⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, "Review of *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief*. Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 24 by Eberhard Faust." *JTS* 46.1 (1995): 292.

centers, but which had been more widely accepted by local elites. In this context, the speech acts carried similar illocutionary and perlocutionary weight for wealthier Christians in the region who may have encountered conflicts (whether from local people or from their own conscience) with these cults in their public engagements, necessitating the subversive speech act.

6.4 EPHESIANS AND THE SUBVERSION OF ROMAN IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY

Two theological themes within Ephesians have frequently been prominent in our assessment of imperial-critical readings of Ephesians: eschatology and Christology. We conclude our assessment below by turning our attention to these two theological themes with a view towards exploring how the implied author's wider eschatological and christological speech acts in Ephesians functioned as a counter-narrative to Roman imperial ideology.⁶⁸

6.4.1 SUBVERSIVE ESCHATOLOGY IN EPHESIANS

While the quest for the historical Jesus reinvigorated an awareness of Jewish motifs and imagery present in NT eschatology,⁶⁹ less attention has been given to the ways in which they may have related to contemporary Roman eschatological themes.⁷⁰ Talbert aptly points out that “the eschatology of Ephesians has been a difficult script to decipher.”⁷¹ A wide range of questions can help clarify what has been so enigmatic about it: Should the eschatology of Ephesians be considered ‘realized’ or ‘inaugurated?’ How does its eschatology compare with

⁶⁸ A similar assessment of the letter's ecclesiology and pneumatology might have also yielded significant contributions to an imperial-critical assessment of the letter. Unfortunately, space constraints limited our analysis to these two interrelated theological themes (Christology and eschatology) in Ephesians. Mußner (citing Dahl) connects the role of Jesus in Ephesians and its eschatology: “das Christusgeschehen als ‘eschatologisches Geschehen’ verstanden.” *Der Brief an die Epheser*, 23.

⁶⁹ R. Hiers, “Eschatology and Methodology,” *JBL* 85.2 (1966): 170-171.

⁷⁰ Exceptions to this are: Fredrick J. Long, “Ephesians: Paul's Political Theology in Greco-Roman Political Context” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Early Christianity in its Hellenistic Context 1; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 271, 276; Harry O. Maier, “Colossians, Ephesians, and Empire,” in *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, ed. A. Winn (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 187; Rosemary Canavan, “Armor, Peace, and Gladiators: A Visual Exegesis of Ephesians 6:10-17,” in *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, and Images*, eds. V. K. Robbins, W. S. Melion, and R. R. Jeal (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 242-246.

⁷¹ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 73.

that of the undisputed Pauline letters? Are eschatological concerns, present in the undisputed Pauline letters, replaced by ecclesiological concerns in Ephesians,⁷² or can post-Pauline historical circumstances (e.g. living with the reality of a delayed *parousia*) best explain the different perspective that Ephesians has to offer compared to other NT texts?⁷³ Attempts have been made at resolving some of these questions by pointing to parallels between Ephesians and various contemporary contexts, e.g., Jewish eschatological motifs (including the Dead Sea Scrolls),⁷⁴ early Gnostic themes,⁷⁵ Platonism,⁷⁶ and Greco-Roman (and Hellenistic) religious language.⁷⁷ While these contributions have rightly stressed the necessity of reading the eschatology in Ephesians within its historical milieu, very little work has been done to try to understand it in light of widespread contemporary Roman imperial eschatology.⁷⁸ This oversight may be the result of overly narrow (and unhelpful) definitions of what counts as eschatology.⁷⁹ Furthermore, an underestimation of the pervasive presence of Roman imperial

⁷² G. F. Wessels, “The Eschatology of Colossians and Ephesians,” *NeoTest* 21 (1987): 184.

⁷³ Lemmer rightly notes that a scholar’s decision regarding the eschatology in Ephesians is often a strong indicator and determinant of rejecting or accepting Pauline authorship: “A Multifarious Understanding of Eschatology in Ephesians: A Possible Solution to a Vexing Issue.” *HTS* 46.1-2 (1990): 112.

⁷⁴ Helmut Merkel, “Der Epheserbrief in der neueren exegetischen Diskussion” *ANRW* II 25.4, 3200-3201; Best, *Ephesians*, 91.

⁷⁵ Petr Pokorný, *Der Epheserbrief und die Gnosis: Die Bedeutung des Haupt-Glieder-Gedankens in der entstehenden Kirche* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1965); Merkel, “Der Epheserbrief,” 3176-3195; Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 454; Schwindt, *Das Weltbild*, 476-508. In rejection of the concept, see George H. Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School* (WUNT. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 5. Best acknowledges the ties that have been made between Eph. and Gnosticism but is skeptical that its second century articulation can be read back into the first century: *Ephesians*, 88, see also 66-67. Arnold rejects a Gnostic background to Ephesians’ eschatology: *Power and Magic*, 145; see also Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 364 (see also his fn. 1 on pg. 364). Faust claims that the ‘in Christ’ language reflects “gnoseologische Eschatologie.” *Pax Christi*, 431.

⁷⁶ Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 3.

⁷⁷ See especially Arnold, *Power and Magic*.

⁷⁸ The same is true of other scholarly works on NT eschatology. For example, David Aune’s survey of early Christian eschatology in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* devotes only one brief paragraph to the theme’s engagement with its larger Roman imperial context. His focus in this regard is limited to a few sentences on the return of a Saturnian age, a brief mention of the *aureum saeculum* under Augustus, as well as the presence of the Roman cult of *Aion*: “Early Christian Eschatology,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Vol. 2. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 599. For wider NT eschatology in light of its Roman imperial context see, Adam Winn, “Striking Back at the Empire: Empire Theory and Responses to Empire in the New Testament,” in *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament.*, ed. Adam Winn (Resources for Biblical Studies 84; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 4; in 1 Peter see Kelly D. Liebengood, “Confronting Roman Imperial Claims: Following the Footsteps (and the Narrative) of 1 Peter’s Eschatological Davidic Shepherd,” in *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, ed. A. Winn (Resources for Biblical Studies 84; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 255-272.

⁷⁹ Millard Erickson notes that eschatology “has traditionally meant the study of last things.” *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, ed. L. Arnold Hustad (3rd Ed; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 428. While this definition of eschatology makes sense of ἔσχατος, it could imply that eschatology is exclusively concerned with the end of the world. Consequently, wider themes of the consummation of history and the final work of God (or the gods) in the world are sometimes overlooked: Erickson, 428. Similarly, Harrison challenges his own earlier claims

eschatology and the spread of its imagery throughout Asia Minor in the first and second centuries may also contribute to the oversight.⁸⁰ Our hope here is to evaluate the letter's eschatology in light of its contemporary context by examining how it engaged with its wider Roman imperial environment. Doing so will help shed light on some of the enigmatic questions posed above and provide some initial examples of how an eclectic hermeneutic can better assess the imperial-critical status of Ephesians.

Some scholars of Ephesians have concluded that the eschatology expressed in the letter is best explained in light of the circumstances of the recipients.⁸¹ At the same time, there has been very little agreement as to what those circumstances were. While Arnold emphasizes that the realized aspects of Ephesians' eschatology is likely the result of the author "tailoring his eschatology to the situation of Western Asia Minor,"⁸² his overly narrow articulation of what counts as the religious environment of Asia Minor does not go far enough in its treatment of eschatological motifs in the region, and it fails to take into consideration other important aspects of the life-setting of Asia Minor. In the midst of what is otherwise an admirable survey of the religious contexts of Asia Minor, he dedicates only one page of his work to spelling out potentially relevant Roman imperial aspects.⁸³ Within those brief comments, Arnold narrowly conceives of imperial realities in relation to "the Ruler cult," which he dismisses as having no bearing on explaining imagery in Ephesians.⁸⁴ His reasons for such a dismissal are largely based on an anachronistic understanding of imperial cults as being political *rather than*

("Paul, Eschatology and the Augustan Age of Grace," *TynBul* 50.1 (1999): 79-91) that the new age of Augustus and Nero constituted a Roman 'eschatology,' preferring instead to categorize it according to a Roman view of time: *Paul and Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology* (WUNT 273; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 9. Harrison's distinction is too reductionistic. Roman views of time inherently contained certain eschatological claims. Later, in his same work, he discusses Paul's "alternate eschatology," which was a "radical subversion of the Augustan age of grace and its terminology." *Imperial Authorities*, 66.

⁸⁰ While questions surrounding the letter's *Sitz im Leben* have likely also contributed towards hesitations with examining a larger Roman imperial context, the fact that a wide range of other contextual elements have been expounded upon in extravagant details makes the oversight of the letter's larger Roman imperial context that much more puzzling—especially considering that the recipients Roman imperial context likely impacted the lives of people in Asia no less than many of these other elements (e.g. Gnosticism, Demeter/Cybele cult, Spiritual Powers, Magic, etc.).

⁸¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to its Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 183; Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 146; Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 74; Wessels, "The Eschatology of Colossians and Ephesians," 183-202; Lemmer, "A Multifarious Understanding of Eschatology in Ephesians," 102-119.

⁸² Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 146.

⁸³ Arnold, 37-38.

⁸⁴ Arnold, 37-38.

religious, and as being bankrupt of genuine religious experiences and sentiments.⁸⁵ Price's work challenges both of these notions and reveals that intricately woven political-religious agendas were present in the cults, whose claims of the arrival of the *aureum saeculum* suggest that they are much more valuable for understanding the eschatology of Ephesians than Arnold has acknowledged.⁸⁶ Echoing Price's sentiment, Lotz concludes that "the imperial cult is perhaps the most obvious contemporary example for understanding the inter-connectedness of the political and religious worlds."⁸⁷ While studies of the imperial cults of Asia Minor shed some light on Roman imperial eschatological motifs in the region, these cults were only one expression of Roman imperial eschatology. A singular focus on imperial cults in Asia Minor does not do full justice to the epistle's imperial context, but it does play one role among many in helping to discern the context of the letter's eschatological speech acts.⁸⁸

Lemmer also claims that the circumstances of the recipients best explain the letter's eschatology, although it is puzzling that he never clearly states what these circumstances were, leaving one to wonder whether the context of the recipients played as crucial a role as he initially suggests.⁸⁹ While Lemmer's basic premise seems plausible, his major oversight in this regard points to the enigma in front of us—what was it about the recipient's circumstances that might have contributed to the cognitive context of the eschatology of Ephesians? In response to this question, we will summarize several of the conclusions drawn above regarding the eschatology conveyed throughout Ephesians in light of Roman imperial ideology. We also include a few additional conclusions regarding the theme of eschatology in the epistle:

1. While Ephesians nowhere explicitly references Roman imperial eschatology, the epistle's own eschatology is illuminated when we consider the empirical Roman imperial realities in Asia Minor as contributing to its subtext.
2. Ephesians employs potent OT motifs, especially that of the arrival of a new exodus, to shape a counter-narrative to the claims of Roman imperial eschatology. In other words,

⁸⁵ Arnold, 37-38. Friesen provides a strong argument for the religious elements of imperial cults: *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 122-131.

⁸⁶ See Price, *Rituals and Power*, 7-19 (see especially 17-19).

⁸⁷ John Paul Lotz, "The *Homonoia* Coins of Asia Minor and Ephesians 1:21," *Tyndale Bulletin* 50.2 (1999): 185.

⁸⁸ See pp. 98-111 above.

⁸⁹ Lemmer, "Multifarious Understanding," 112.

while much of the imagery of Ephesians has deep roots within Judaism, the employment of those Jewish images engaged the wider eschatologies present within its contemporary environment and *counted as* subversive of imperial rule. These motifs are even more intense if Ephesians was written in the second century AD. For example, Jewish conflicts with Emperor Hadrian led to a crisis worse than that of the first revolt against Rome. These conflicts were often portrayed, in later Jewish literature, as eschatological defeat; as Herr states, “the divine emperor has risen against the Jewish God and had prevailed.”⁹⁰

3. When certain illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in Ephesians are understood in light of this wider reconstruction, the letter’s eschatological claims appear to confront Roman imperial eschatology primarily on a *narrative* level. When further considerations are given to Searle’s X=Y in C formula, it becomes evident that the seemingly straightforward locutions in this passage can *count as* subversive illocutions (and perlocutions) in the context of Roman imperial Asia Minor.
4. Ephesians’ eschatology is best characterized as an ‘intensified inaugurated,’ rather than ‘realized’ eschatology. Differences between its eschatology and that among other Pauline epistles are likely the result of its projecting counter-eschatologies to those that were present within the Roman imperial environment of Asia Minor, as opposed to a post-Pauline author’s having to come to terms with the reality of a delayed *parousia*. A combination of non-Pauline authorship and a later date of the epistle place it in an environment that escalates the ideological tension because Roman imperial eschatologies are intensified across the empire during these eras.

The eschatology of Ephesians is not fully realized.⁹¹ Instead, it presents a brand of inaugurated eschatology that envisions unrealized future cosmic benefits to be actively present

⁹⁰ Moshe David Herr, “Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian’s Days,” *Studies in History* [Scripta Hierosolymitana] 23 (1972): 116, see also 120.

⁹¹ Contra Jacob Adai, *Der Heilige Geist als Gegenwart Gottes in den einzelnen Christen, in der Kirche und in der Welt: Studien zur Pneumatologie des Epheserbriefes* (RST 31; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1985), 315-316. Similarly, Gerhard Sellin claims that the deuteropauline letters reflect “einer spiritualisierenden heilspfektionistischen Tendenz in der Eschatologie.” “Konsolidierungs- und Differenzierungsprozesse im „Paulinismus“ (Kol und Eph),” in *Bekenntnis und Erinnerung: Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Hans-Friedrich Weiß*, eds. Klaus-Michael Bull and Eckart Reinmuth (Rostocker Theologische Studien 16; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 259.

to a greater extent than we see other places in the NT.⁹² As Lemmer puts it, “the future reaches back into the present...that which is elsewhere indicated as intended future is portrayed as now real.”⁹³ Its inauguration is more intensified and cosmic in scope, although by no means fully realized. Followers of Jesus still await the fullness of times, by which unity will come to all things in heaven and earth (1:10). Unity in the church will also bring about maturity to the fullness of Christ (4:13). The ‘current age’ is described as ‘evil’ (5:15), and evil days are still to come (6:13) while cosmic powers rule over ‘this present darkness’ (6:12). Ultimately, Ephesians suggests that communities of Jesus-followers in Asia Minor were still waiting for the new age to come (1:21, 2:7). This is also evident in the implied author’s prayers for the recipients.⁹⁴ They still need to have their hearts enlightened to the hope given to them, to their inheritance, and of the power offered to them (1:18-19). Prayer is offered that they would be strengthened with power in their inner being (3:16). Further, Eph. 3:18-19 implies that the recipients had not yet fully comprehended God’s love or been completely filled to the fullness of God. These passages make little sense if Ephesians is understood to express a fully realized eschatology. Consequently, the eschatology of Ephesians is best described as an ‘intensified inaugurated eschatology.’

The intensified elements of the inaugurated eschatology in Ephesians are not likely the product of post-Pauline musings on an unexpected delay of the *parousia*. These speech acts do not appear to primarily function illocutionarily as predictions, per se. Instead, they most often appear to be declaratives, even when a futurist eschatology is in view. They are only predictive in a secondary sense, that is, they do not appear to exist primarily for the purpose of *foretelling* the future. Instead, these speech acts strategically functioned as a subversive narrative, one that cast a potent counter-ideology to the eschatological visions offered by Roman imperial images. Attending to the eschatological speech acts of Ephesians requires considering the letter’s speech context. Discerning its illocutionary and perlocutionary intentions demands an awareness of the ways in which its author borrowed and reshaped Jewish eschatology, while also reconstructing the kinds of eschatologies offered in the wider cultural environment within which the author’s use of these images became sensible to the implied readers. Accomplishing these things helps to assess the imperial-critical status of Ephesians more carefully by moving

⁹² Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 63. Wessels claim that Ephesians’ eschatology is not an intensification of what is Pauline eschatology, but a supplementary emphasis using differing metaphors: “Eschatology in Colossian and Ephesians,” 183-202.

⁹³ Lemmer, “Multifarious Understanding,” 116.

⁹⁴ Cozart, *Present Triumph*, 162.

beyond assessments of the letter's locutionary language, with a view to the illocutionary and perlocutionary levels of communication, where wider cultural narratives become the loaded context of the utterances.

It is not merely the presence of parallel words (locutions) that made the eschatology of Ephesians conflict with Roman imperial eschatologies. Wider motifs and symbolic referents carry more illocutionary and perlocutionary weight than does the presence of parallel locutionary terms. Liebengood aptly states that "expressions of resistance are not discerned *primarily* in terminology that can be interpreted as having an antithetical relationship to Rome (such as *lord, savior, gospel, or kingdom*) but rather that a more profound confrontation can be ascertained at the level of the implied narrative."⁹⁵ He reveals that a 'symbolic inversion' is present within the eschatology of deferred hope in 1 Peter, especially when it is contrasted with the realized perspective of Roman imperial eschatology.⁹⁶ Similarly, the eschatology of Ephesians also confronts Roman eschatology in its implied narrative. Whereas 1 Peter employs images of *deferred hope* in order to symbolically invert the realized eschatology of Imperial Rome, Ephesians leans more heavily upon an *intensified inaugurated eschatology* to confront the larger metanarrative of Rome's realized eschatology, which was expressed most potently in images of the arrival of the golden age. This project's primary concern is with examining Ephesians in relation to its imperial context, and so we cannot give space here to some of the ways in which Ephesians may have challenged wider eschatological sentiments within some of the varied forms of Judaism during the first century.⁹⁷ It seems likely that the eschatology in Ephesians spoke multi-vocally within its varied Hellenistic contexts, including the Judaism(s) of the first century, while also speaking within its wider imperial context in Asia Minor.

While the works of Maier⁹⁸ and Bird⁹⁹ have helped break ground in terms of better understanding the presence of Roman imperial motifs in Ephesians, their conclusions about the meaning of the use of these motifs by the author fall short of explaining its larger theological vision. Maier portrays these thematic overlaps as image-borrowing, "entangled in the political

⁹⁵ Liebengood, "Confronting Roman Imperial Claims," 258.

⁹⁶ Liebengood, 258.

⁹⁷ E.g. the description of the eschatological war in 1QM, 4Q491-496: *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (Trans. and Comm. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook; New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 146-170.

⁹⁸ See his *Picturing Paul in Empire*.

⁹⁹ Bird "Ephesians," 265-280.

worldview around them,”¹⁰⁰ whereas Bird detects imperial metaphor in Ephesians, but sees its author as imitating Roman imperial rule by depicting Christ as the imperial replacement of the emperor. Both interpretations affirm the need to attend to the letter’s Roman imperial context. Neither interpretation pays careful attention to the ways that these motifs counteracted the wider narratives present within Asia Minor. For Bird, in particular, Jesus in Ephesians is merely a new imperial ruler.¹⁰¹ These two approaches pass over some of the larger narrative assumptions of the implied author of Ephesians that point to his employing these motifs for very different means.

The portrait of eschatology offered in Ephesians decentralizes contemporary emperor-centered eschatological motifs in favor of a newfound center, namely Jesus. Ephesians goes beyond image-borrowing which simply reaffirms imperial values. If our assessment is correct, several of the eschatological speech acts in Ephesians subverted and undermined Roman imperial eschatology. Calling it anything less than subversive seems to diminish the function of its eschatology within Asia Minor, and it fails to take seriously the empirical realities that can inform the letter’s implied context. While not every Roman imperial motif that finds parallels in Ephesians is subverted in the text, several larger meta-narratives are. When viewed in light of Roman imperial claims, eschatological motifs in Ephesians reshape contemporary themes with its cosmic, exclusively Christ-centered eschatology. The cosmic nature of these motifs in both Ephesians and in contemporary Roman imperial eschatology left little room for competing narratives.¹⁰² Each claim is too meta-narrative in its scope to co-exist peacefully with alternative counterclaims. While the book of Revelation has often been acknowledged as

¹⁰⁰ Maier, “Colossians, Ephesians, and Empire,” 186. Maier provides a more balanced view than that of Bird by suggesting that Ephesians did not endorse Roman imperial ideology, “Colossians and Ephesians nowhere expressly endorse the imperial order and organization of the world, but the benefits of Christ’s present, this-worldly reign were no doubt rendered more comprehensible because of them, even if unconsciously.” Maier, “Colossians, Ephesians, and Empire,” 187. In the same essay, he also suggests that Ephesians can be said to have been “inhabiting and being shaped by an overarching imperial world.” 189. He does not seem to go far enough in his own articulation of the relationship between Ephesians and its Roman imperial context since Ephesians does not seem to either embrace, nor merely be shaped by (or within) a Roman imperial context, it seems to challenge aspects of it.

¹⁰¹ Bird, 266-268, 278.

¹⁰² Lavan notes that the idea of Rome’s cosmic ideology went back as far as Pompey the Great and found its predecessor in Alexander the Great: “Empire in the Age of Nero,” 71. Eckhart Reinmuth claims that Ephesians depicts the coming of Christ as a “universalen Anspruch” but his conclusion that it “der Metaphorisierung schöpfungstheologischer und reichsrömischer Kategorien legitimiert” does not do much to draw out potentially subversive aspects of the epistle’s depiction of Jesus. “Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Politischen,” in *Neues Testament und Politische Theorie: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Zukunft des Politischen*, ed. Eckart Reinmuth (Religionskulturen 9; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2011), 14.

presenting the most pointed biblical critique of the Roman Empire,¹⁰³ similar theological and narrative sentiments exist in places in Ephesians, even though its method of delivery is quite different (genre), as are its locutions. In either case, the implied readers of each text are being compelled to adopt either their implied author's Christocentric cosmic vision of history (i.e. eschatology), or not. While the purposes of each work may widely differ, in some respects, the similarities in its wider narrative, in contrast to those offered in contemporary Roman imperial eschatologies, are noteworthy.

The cosmic breadth of the eschatology of Ephesians suggests that attempting to adopt both its portrait, and a Roman imperial one, is meta-narratively contradictory. This does not negate the notion that some syncretism between the two would have been historically possible at the time, but it does suggest that the *theological vision* of each demanded that such a syncretization was incongruous. Had either vision of eschatology refrained from the cosmic scope of their claims, one would be less inclined to see them as necessarily antithetical.

6.4.2 SUBVERSIVE CHRISTOLOGY IN EPHESIANS

As is evident through our assessment of imperial-critical readings of Ephesians, some of the christological speech acts in the letter subverted imperial ideology. One key aspect of assessing the letter's Christology in light of its Roman imperial context relates to its potential interaction with Roman imperial cults. While Galinsky cautions against imperial-critical readings that overstate the significance of imperial cults, his conclusion applies less in first-century Asia Minor, where it seems that pressures from local individuals and magistrates increasingly made it culturally unacceptable to be a follower of Jesus in light of Christianity's seemingly anti-social and anti-imperial perceptions. Further, while no NT author, including the implied author of Ephesians, ever comes out and explicitly says 'do not participate in the imperial cults' or that 'claims within the imperial cult, that the emperor is σωτήρ, κύριος, etc., are invalid or empty,' some of the honorific language attributed to Jesus in the letter may well have been *taken to mean that* as competing claims about the emperor would have constituted institutional facts within the context of first-century Asia minor.

¹⁰³ Jeremy Punt, "Empire and New Testament texts: Theorizing the Imperial, in Subversion and Attraction," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68.1 (2012) Art. #1182, 11 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102.hts.v68i1.1182>: 6.

The imperial cult was one factor present within first century Asia Minor that can inform the speech context (and cognitive environment) of Ephesians. While it may not have been the only relevant aspect, it has enough overlap in language, ideology, and speech context that ignoring it leaves out one important dimension of the social context of the recipients. The empirical recipients of Ephesians likely had to negotiate this context, theologically and pragmatically, in complex ways.

While references to the imperial cult are absent from Ephesians on the locutionary level, the implied context in Asia minor situates the theological trajectories of the text in such a way that put the early Christian recipients at odds with imperial cultic activities.¹⁰⁴ If Jesus was the ‘προσφορὰν καὶ θυσίαν τῷ θεῷ εἰς ὁσμὴν εὐωδίας’ [Eph. 5:2b], no other sacrifice, to the imperial cult or otherwise, was acceptable for Christian participation.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, some of the christological speech acts in Ephesians functioned as transformative perlocutionary acts that challenged Christians in Asia Minor to either quit participating in Roman imperial cults or to continue to refuse to do so. This does not require a coded critique of these cults within the text on the locutionary level of the epistle’s speech acts, nor does it suggest that the empirical author saw it as the only possible actual perlocutionary effect for the empirical recipients. But when read within this environment, the christological statements within Ephesians *counted as* both an illocutionary challenge to the ideology of imperial cults present within the region, and a perlocutionary act that discouraged participation in them for the implied audience. This interpretation also suggests that since unofficially sanctioned (non-provincial) imperial cults contributed to the implied context of the epistle, any speech act that carried consequences for these cults challenged Roman imperial rule as much as it challenged any one particular emperor.¹⁰⁶ It is also likely that any disruption of these cults carried subversive weight aimed at local and regional policies as much as a Roman imperial rule as a whole.¹⁰⁷ This point balances our interpretation of the author’s speech acts by acknowledging that undermining

¹⁰⁴ Winter, *Divine Honours*, 16.

¹⁰⁵ Galinsky’s claim that imperial cults were primarily focused on this-worldly salvation and that Christianity’s focus on other-worldly salvation indicates that the two were not comparable is way off the mark: “The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?” in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*, eds. J. Brodd and J.L. Reed (SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series 5; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 6. While Christianity may deserve such characterization throughout aspects of its history, it is a gross misunderstanding theologically to speak of early Christianity in this light. Christianity during its earliest eras were as this-worldly focused in its soteriology as it was other-worldly—in our opinion, the eschatological trajectory of the book of Revelation points decidedly in this direction.

¹⁰⁶ See pp. 102-103 above.

¹⁰⁷ See pp. 102 above.

these cults was accomplished through various illocutionary and perlocutionary strategies. At the same time, the letter leaves little room for its christological portrait to co-exist, on a storied level, with similar competing claims made of the Roman emperor from within imperial cults.

An important conclusion emerges from the previous point: aspects of the imperial-critical status of Ephesians can be projected on a sort of scale based on how the empirical date of composition impacts what is implied. This imagined scale does not have precise defining points, but the later one dates the epistle, the more explosive the narrative trajectory of Ephesians becomes in an environment that had become increasingly hostile toward Christians in Asia Minor, and which afforded much wider christological claims of the Roman emperor. While our assessment of the imperial-critical status of passages throughout Ephesians concluded that some of the anti-imperial thrust of these pericopes were not impacted by the date framework for the epistle, some were. This reality suggests that dismissing Ephesians from imperial-critical discussions on the basis of its deuteropauline status,¹⁰⁸ or its perceived accommodation to later imperial values in the household code¹⁰⁹ needs to be reexamined. If Ephesians is deuteropauline, its anti-imperial sentiments are more pronounced.

One last point can help to encapsulate the subversive Christology of Ephesians, while also serving as a caution for imperial-critical interpreters. In our imperial-critical reading of Eph. 2, we focused on the vision of peace that was cast by Augustus, most potently expressed on the *ara pacis* in the Campus Martius region of Rome. According to Rehak, this region of the city functioned as a sort of “eschatological museum” for Augustan ideology.¹¹⁰ While it might seem more obvious to include his work within our conversation above on subversive eschatology, Rehak’s conclusions also have significant implications for understanding Roman ideologies of the ruler (christology). His main thesis is that these Augustan monuments were unprecedented, and that they potently conveyed the cosmic scope of Augustus’s ideology of *imperium* (empire).¹¹¹ Some of his conclusions are not particularly novel: the general significance of the Campus Martius region in Rome, as well as the cosmic scope of Augustan

¹⁰⁸ See p. 9 above.

¹⁰⁹ E.g. A. Winn, “Striking Back at the Empire: Empire Theory and Responses to Empire in the New Testament,” in Winn, ed., *Introduction to Empire*, 11.

¹¹⁰ See pp. 113 fn. 265; and 164-165 above.

¹¹¹ Paul Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos: Augustus and the Northern Campus Martius*, ed. John G. Younger (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

imperium have been noted by other scholars.¹¹² One of his major contributions is his claim that an exploration of the Augustan monuments in the Campus Martius is a vital starting place for understanding early imperial ideologies of the ruler. Without stating it in such terms, Rehak centralizes the study of Roman christology in these monuments, even though such ideologies were undoubtedly conveyed in various media throughout the Roman Empire. While one could object to examining the Campus Martius monuments for the study of Ephesians on basis of the assumption that inhabitants of Asia Minor would likely not have had much, if any, exposure to the complex, if Rehak is right, the centralization of Augustan ideology in this area of the city of Rome suggests that the images of imperial ideology that radiated to the provinces were deeply interconnected with the ideology conveyed in these monuments. Rehak's work has largely gone unnoticed in the most recent publications in the field of 'Paul and Empire' studies, even though one of the most lively public discussions on 'Paul and Empire' occurred a full year after his publication of *Imperium and Cosmos*.¹¹³ This oversight can function as a word of caution to imperial-critical interpreters by pointing to one of the main methodological obstacles in the field: the interdisciplinary nature of its subject requires a broad knowledge of developments in the areas of Roman history, archaeology, numismatics, and literature, as well as in wider biblical and NT studies. Keeping up with the most recent developments in all of these fields is a formidable task, as is ensuring a careful examination of diverse source materials in order to avoid misinterpreting the data. Interdisciplinary research has a profound way of humbling those who participate in it; this has certainly been the case with this project. At the same time, that which can be an obstacle has the potential to lead to major contributions in NT studies. Interpreters can greatly profit from imperial-critical assessments that have integrated studies of the Roman Empire with NT interpretation. Even when there are disputes about the nature of the NT's engagement with its Roman imperial context, the interdisciplinary efforts of the field of imperial criticism can help to provide a more robust portrait of the Roman imperial context of the first century and draw interpreters into deeper research and hermeneutical self-reflection.

¹¹² Working from Strabo's identification, Jacobs and Atnally Conlin refer to the Campus Martius as the "holiest of all" places: *Campus Martius: The Field of Mars in the Life of Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-6, see esp. 4. On the cosmic scope of Imperium: see p. 165 fn. 41 above.

¹¹³ The public debate between N. T. Wright and John Barclay at the annual Society of Biblical Literature meeting in San Diego, CA on 18 November 2007 has become almost legendary. Robert Jewett also provided follow-up comments.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter evaluated provisional imperial-critical readings of Ephesians using an eclectic hermeneutic. What emerged from this analysis is that the implied author of Ephesians performed various speech acts that counted as a challenge to several narrative threads that existed within contemporary Roman imperial ideology. Some objections might be raised about our conclusion as it relates to the overall purpose of the epistle. Is the author's primary purpose in Ephesians to subvert Roman imperial ideology? In order to address this question, we must point back to the speech-act strategies employed by the author. There are multiple speech-act strategies in place without concluding that the author intended multiple meanings. While we are not inclined to deny, in principle, that multiple authorial meanings are possible, our preference for using speech-act theory to articulate authorial meaning helps us arrive at a more nuanced perspective. By discerning the implied author's illocutionary and perlocutionary acts within its implied Roman imperial context, we affirm wider purposes for the epistle while also maintaining its imperial-critical character. This hermeneutical approach helps to navigate the author's declarative and paraenetic strategies, sympathizing with some traditional interpretations of the author's intent, while also understanding how those intentions functioned as subversive speech acts in the implied context of Roman imperial Asia Minor. One need not imagine a scenario where, in reaction to unjust treatment by imperial authorities, the author could not help but take rhetorical stabs at Rome. Neither does one need to imagine that, out of fear of persecution, the author encoded his speech acts in hidden transcripts in order to avoid detection from imperial authorities. Our interpretations of the eschatological and christological speech acts in Ephesians recognize that the author made declarative statements that instructed early Christians while also undermining aspects of imperial ideology. The author also made paraenetic statements that directed Jesus-followers to appropriate actions in light of the great "calling to which they were called" (4:1) while also undermining elements of Roman imperial ideology.

Our interpretation of Ephesians does not require redefining the locutionary references in the letter, nor its basic rhetorical goals. However, by attending to the whole speech acts of the author, we are able to discern how certain illocutionary and perlocutionary acts counted as challenging, undermining, and subverting Roman imperial ideology in the context of Asia Minor. To be clear, this conclusion does not suggest that, as Barclay has noted, the lack of locutionary references to Roman imperial ideology or its authorities relegates the Roman Empire to the general powers that Paul believes Jesus has conquered, subverting them by

paying no attention to them.¹¹⁴ Such a portrait minimizes the author's awareness of the recipients' context, and reduces an understanding of the author's meaning to locutionary content by implying that the only way for the author to have "paid attention" to the empire was for him to avow it on the level of the epistle's locutions.¹¹⁵ Our work hopes to reconstitute what counts as "paying attention" to Roman imperial ideology by demonstrating that the available empirical data help us to reconstruct the implied circumstances, of which the implied author was very much aware, even when not explicitly mentioning it locutionarily. This approach helps to expose some weakness in the current state of affairs in imperial criticism of the NT. These conversations have often been relegated to locutionary analysis, disputes over interpretations of the empirical data without deference to what is implied, and little awareness of how the authors of these texts employed wider narrative strategies. Our hope in attending to these areas in this project is that imperial-critical discussions would advance beyond such limited conversations.

¹¹⁴ John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 386-387.

¹¹⁵ This objection is also very similar to Lau's: *Politics of Peace*, 289.

Chapter 7

Summary and Conclusion

7.1 PART 1: PROLEGOMENA

In part one of this study we reviewed existing literature on Ephesians and Empire, and then we formed our methodology. In chapter 1, we established that, while there have been substantial developments in imperial-critical readings of Pauline literature, Ephesians has been under analyzed in these discussions. We surveyed scholarly literature on the epistle in order to trace the ways that scholars have dismissed imperial-critical readings of Ephesians. Our survey of existing imperial-critical readings of the letter revealed several trends, including disputes over whether the epistle replaced Roman imperial rule with a new imperial rule in Jesus, whether the author employed allusive or coy strategies, and whether the letter's terminology evoked parallel terminology in imperial ideology. We demonstrated that, while brief contributions have been made towards reading Ephesians as a challenge to Roman imperial ideology, there was substantial room for further evaluation. This led us to highlight the necessity of using an eclectic hermeneutic that attends to speech-act theory, distinctions between implied and empirical, and a narrative hermeneutic.

In chapter two, three hermeneutical areas were developed in order to better assess the imperial-critical status of Ephesians. Our use of speech-act theory accounted for the fact that various locutions can constitute the performance of different illocutionary and perlocutionary acts across different speech situations, and that taking stock of word meanings on the level of a locution is not enough to determine whether a given speech act was intended to be subversive of Roman imperial ideology. We also highlighted varied communicative levels upon which subversion can take place. This approach necessitated considering the epistle's wider context and subtext in order to discern the epistle's speech acts in its context. Special attention was also given to Searle's discussion of speech acts in the context of institutional facts. We used Searle's formula $X=Y$ in C in order to express how certain locutions can *count as* various illocutions in specific contexts. Skinner's discussion of implicit speech acts established that certain kinds of

illocutions demand implicit invocation in order to avoid misfires in communication. Some subversive speech acts fit that model. Another methodological component that we drew on was a narrative hermeneutic. This aspect helped attend to narrative elements of the author's strategies, moving beyond locutionary analysis towards discerning how the epistle's theological trajectories interacted with wider cultural narratives. We also drew out distinctions between the empirical and implied author, audience and setting. This tool helped to reorient disputes about the epistle's life-setting, and it led into the two wider discussions on these subjects within the next section of the project.

7.2 PART 2: FROM METHOD TO LIFE-SETTING

In part two, we moved from our methodology into exploring the empirical and implied life-settings of Ephesians. In chapter four, the empirical life-setting of Ephesians was examined from the vantage point of the letter's two major date frameworks. Three key aspects of the empirical life-setting were explored: *maiestas* laws, imperial cults, and Roman imperial eschatology. It was demonstrated that these three empirical aspects underwent changes during the two proposed date frameworks for the epistle. While there was a certain amount of danger associated with subversive writings during the early Empire, the increase of *delatores* and *frumentarii* heightened that danger in later eras. This fact provided contextual reasons for examining less explicit language in the epistle for detecting subversion of imperial ideology. Our survey of imperial cults provided context to the situation in Roman imperial Asia Minor. Even though provincial imperial cults were somewhat scarce in the early first century, and even though participation in these cults were not mandatory, a more widespread network of imperial altars and images existed in the region during Pauline eras. In later eras, provincial imperial cults exploded in the region, often supplanting local cults in their prominence. As these cults increased, greater tensions arose between local imperial authorities, local community members, and Christians in the region. This portrait provided empirical data that illuminated our reconstruction of what the epistle implied. Our examination of Roman imperial eschatology revealed that wide-cast claims of the arrival of the golden age in Augustus were developed by later emperors who wanted to depict their imperial program in a similar light to that of Augustus. Cosmic claims of imperial rule projected a grand eschatology that projected the Roman Empire's role in the world and the arrival of peace in Roman rule.

After exploring empirical aspects of the epistle's life-setting, we turned our attention to the implied life-setting of Ephesians. Differing portraits of the implied author and audience

emerged, which had different consequences for an imperial-critical reading of the letter. These articulations led us to consider two aspects for each the implied author and audience. We explored the Jewish Christian perspective of the implied author, as well as the epistle's portrait of the author's imprisonment. The implied author's Jewish vantage point was identified, among other things, through the presence of new exodus motifs in Ephesians, which impacted imperial-critical readings of Ephesians. This exploration revealed that the implied author's Jewish perspective need not lead to a dismissal of imperial-critical readings of the letter. Instead, that aspect of the author's perspective yields to such a reading. The epistle's portrait of the author's imprisonment placed some limitations on earlier conversations about the empirical date of the letter, and it raised the possibility of the presence of imperial-critical sentiments in the letter because of its implied critique of imperial authorities. We then turned our attention to the depiction of the implied audience as Gentiles and their assumed location in Asia Minor. This exploration led us to conclude that the implied readers would have been expected to understand aspects of the Roman imperial context in Asia Minor, and that their previous experiences with paganism could have necessitated that corrective measures be taken to present a counter narrative to their previous ways of life and thought. Their assumed context in Asia Minor also helped to centralize some of our discussions around experiences with the imperial cults and wider Roman imperial ideology in the region. Our explorations of the empirical and implied life-settings helped to form the basis of constructing a provisional imperial-critical reading of Ephesians.

7.3 PART 3: EPHESIANS AND EMPIRE

We began part three by constructing a provisional imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. These readings traced several passages throughout the epistle's two major sections (chs. 1-3; 4-6), with a view towards how they functioned as illocutionary and perlocution speech acts that subverted Roman imperial ideology. The omission of the recipients in Eph 1:1 was explained as an intentional act that disassociated the recipients from a letter that contained elements subversive of imperial rule. The epistle's implicit portrayal of the arrival of the new exodus in Jesus in Eph. 1:3-14 was read as an eschatological challenge to similar eschatological claims made by Rome. Eph. 2:1-10 constituted an undermining of elitist imperial views of enthronement by claiming that the Messiah's transgressors could be co-enthroned with him in the heavenlies. This passage functioned as a counter-cosmology to that projected within imperial ideology. Eph. 2:11-22 was read as a parody to widespread claims of the arrival of

peace in Rome (*Pax Romana*) by declaring that the peace of the Messiah arrived through his self-sacrificial death. The imprisonment of the author in Eph. 3:1, 13 cast some doubts about the likelihood that a person in those circumstances would have explicitly subverted Rome. On the other hand, the characterization of the imprisonment encouraged the implied readers to judge the imperial authorities as unjust.

The exclusive claims of the existence of “one Lord” in Eph. 4:4-6 undermined claims of the emperor’s supreme lordship cast by Roman rule. The puzzling passage of the ascent and descent of Jesus in Eph. 4:8-10 was understood as a parody of the emperor’s conquest of the nations and ascent to the heavens in apotheosis. Jesus also led captives, but in his ascent, he gave them gifts instead of receiving spoils of war. The epistle’s depiction of household relationships also posed problems for an imperial-critical reading of the letter, but its christological centering of the household relationships provided subtle challenges to aspects of Augustan marriage legislation that attempted to cast imperial rule as a restoration of republican values. Lastly, the epistle’s characterization of power language, especially in Eph. 6:12, constituted the most significant challenge to imperial-critical readings of Ephesians. While it depicts a battle that is “not against flesh and blood,” the passage might have functioned as either a hidden transcript, a subtle challenge to imperial narratives of power, or a connection between spiritual powers with earthly powers. The defensive posture of the armor of God imagery also could have functioned as an encouragement to resist pressures of participation in imperial cults.

In chapter six, we utilized the three aspects of our eclectic hermeneutic to assess an imperial-critical reading of Ephesians. A narrative hermeneutic helped to move beyond some of the standstills in assessments of the imperial-critical status of NT texts. It was revealed that while terminology throughout Ephesians finds parallels in both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, determining whether these terms counted as subversive of Roman imperial ideology in the epistle requires an awareness of narrative components. When storied elements were taken into consideration, confrontations between the story implied in the epistle and that present in Roman imperial ideology became much more apparent. The presence of parallel locutionary terms themselves were not what convincingly demonstrated the author’s imperial-critical perspective. When the totality of the portrait of Jesus in the letter (its Christology) was held up to similar claims being made of the emperor in the Roman imperial context of Asia Minor, tensions between the two emerged. The same conclusions were drawn when considering the

letter's eschatology against contemporary claims made of Roman imperial rule.¹ What emerged was not merely the presence of parallel terminology being applied to Jesus (or infused with Christian content), but conflicting narratives of who brought peace to the world, who brought salvation, who ascended to heaven, who led captives and by what means, and who was seated above all "rule, authority, power, and dominion." Conflicts emerged in the eschatological storylines of the arrival of the great new age, including how peace was afforded, and by what means. The interpretations offered of these passages in Ephesians, as well as in its christological and eschatological trajectories, demonstrated that some of the epistle's speech acts counted as undermining Roman imperial ideology.

7.4 SUBVERSIVE SPEECH ACTS IN EPHESIANS: CONCLUSION

Prior to this project, there was no monograph-length assessment of the imperial-critical status of Ephesians. We have sought to fill some of that gap in the scholarly literature. One of the conclusions that emerged from this study is that what one determines about the date framework for the epistle greatly affects the plausibility that certain aspects of the letter's speech acts and its wider theological narrative functioned as a critique of Roman Imperial ideology. The later one imagines the implied context of Ephesians, the higher the probability that some of its speech acts throughout the epistle undermined Roman Imperial ideology in its implied setting in Asia Minor. It was also concluded that while both prospects and limitations exist in an imperial-critical reading of the letter, there are promising areas within the letter's speech acts that, on a narrative level, subverted Roman imperial ideology. These conclusions were supported by using an eclectic hermeneutic that attended to speech-act theory, distinctions between implied and empirical authors, audiences, and contexts, and a narrative hermeneutic. The use of this hermeneutic helped to better assess the imperial-critical status of Ephesians.

In his substantial critique of Wright's claim that Paul's writings contain coded critiques of the Roman Empire, Barclay concludes that:

In the current wave of enthusiasm for reading Paul's gospel as directly targeted at Caesar, I feel like the little boy in the fable. When the boy saw the emperor parading in what were supposedly 'new clothes' he was bold enough to say, 'but the emperor is

¹ Oakes draws a similar conclusion in his discussion on 1 Thess. and Phil., "Christology and eschatology, in particular, conflict with Roman ideology." Peter Oakes, "Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians," *JSNT* 27.3 (2005): 321.

naked.’ In this case, when I am bidden to watch the emperor walking around Paul’s letters, I am rude enough to object, ‘but I see no emperor!’²

One contribution that arises from this project is that “seeing the emperor” in the NT, especially on the locutionary level, is not necessary in order to affirm imperial-critical readings of these texts. A hermeneutical approach that attends to speech-act theory, to the relationship between what is implied and empirical, and to a narrative hermeneutic significantly impacts an interpreter’s ability to detect subversive speech acts in the NT. While an eclectic hermeneutic does not necessitate finding subversive speech in all NT texts, its methodological tools open the interpreter to understand how seemingly straightforward locutions can *count as* subversive illocutions and perlocutions in certain contexts. Further, attending to the nature of implicit speech acts necessitated a hermeneutic that is aware of the subtext of communication as much as the explicit textual information. Our use of speech-act theory helped to convey these ideas. On the other hand, speech-act theory, on its own, could not point to the necessity of distinctions between implied and empirical data. If deference is given only to empirical data without considering a reconstruction of what is implied, significant limitations emerge in evaluating imperial-critical readings. Lastly, a narrative hermeneutic helped to reorient the conversation by attending to potential wider storied conflicts that existed between the trajectories provided in Ephesians and those envisioned by contemporary Roman imperial ideology. If interpreters ignore speech-act theory, implied/empirical distinctions, and a narrative hermeneutic, one could expect, with Barclay, to note an absence of imperial-critical sentiments in the NT. When a wider eclectic hermeneutic is utilized, it becomes evident that certain locutions *counted as* a challenge to wide claims cast by Roman imperial ideology within its implied context in Asia Minor. In Ephesians, these speech acts projected an alternative metanarrative to those offered in Roman imperial ideology, ultimately ‘re-mapping the universe’ for its implied readers.³

² John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (WUNT 275; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 383 fn. 69.

³ This concept is borrowed from the title of Peter Oakes’s article, “Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians,” *JSNT* 27.3 (2005): 301-322.

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