

JUSTIN WINZENBURG

# Ephesians and Empire

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*  
573

---

**Mohr Siebeck**

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe

Herausgeber / Editor

Jörg Frey (Zürich)

Mitherausgeber/Associate Editors

Markus Bockmuehl (Oxford) · James A. Kelhoffer (Uppsala)

Tobias Nicklas (Regensburg) · Janet Spittler (Charlottesville, VA)

J. Ross Wagner (Durham, NC)

573





Justin Winzenburg

# Ephesians and Empire

An Evaluation of the Epistle's Subversion of  
Roman Imperial Ideology

Mohr Siebeck

*Justin Winzenburg*, born 1980; 2003 BA in Bible and Theology; 2007 MA in Theological Studies; 2020 PhD in New Testament from London School of Theology; currently Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek at Crown College (St. Bonifacius, MN).  
orcid.org/0000-0002-8609-1980

ISBN 978-3-16-161183-4 / eISBN 978-3-16-161184-1  
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-161184-1

ISSN 0340-9570 / eISSN 2568-7484  
(Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2022 Mohr Siebeck Tübingen, Germany. [www.mohrsiebeck.com](http://www.mohrsiebeck.com)

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form (beyond that permitted by copyright law) without the publisher's written permission. This applies particularly to reproductions, translations and storage and processing in electronic systems.

The book was printed on non-aging paper by Laupp & Göbel in Gomariningen and bound by Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren.

Printed in Germany.

## Acknowledgements

This book is a revised version of my PhD thesis conducted under the supervision of Thorsten Moritz at London School of Theology. The completion of this project would have been impossible without Thorsten's solid advice, direction, and constant support. His constructive comments on my work were tremendously helpful. Max Turner was also very gracious in his interactions with me as my director of research and S2.

Several colleagues who began with me at LST were very encouraging throughout the process: Holly Beers, Lyn Nixon, Nick Fox, and Cullen Tanner. I owe special gratitude to Tom Anderson for his constant encouragement and for engaging in long discussions about Ephesians and the Roman Empire, and also to my longtime friend Justin Velner who has helped fuel my interests in biblical studies over the years. I am also appreciative of the opportunity that Joel Lawrence provided for me by assigning me as his research assistant while at Bethel Seminary, which gave me perspective on the research process.

I have received unending support from my colleagues at Crown College (St. Bonifacius, MN), especially Stephen Jones, Glenn Myers, Dean Erickson, Don Bouchard, Jonathan Vinson, and Scott Moats. Michial Farmer was also extremely helpful in commenting on my work. Students who have participated in my courses have helped me to keep this project in perspective and to remember the "calling to which I have been called" (Eph 4:1). A group of wonderful librarians, across several institutions, have helped me track down research materials through interlibrary loan: Tim Senapatiratne, Dennis Ingolfsland, Mark Nygaard, Deanna Munson, and Mary Meehan.

My examiners provided immensely helpful feedback on my work. William Atkinson's careful attention to detail and his probing questions helped me to see areas that needed polishing and clarification. T. J. Lang has been a great source of encouragement. He has graciously led me to resources that I would have otherwise overlooked. It has been a pleasure to continue conversing after the viva. I am also deeply appreciative for his support and advice throughout the process of pursuing the publication of this work.

I especially want to extend my deepest gratitude to Professor Jörg Frey for accepting this manuscript for publication in the WUNT 2 series, as well as to Elena Müller at Mohr Siebeck. The rest of the team at Mohr Siebeck was immensely helpful in the process of preparing the manuscript for publication, including Markus Kirchner, Tobias Stäbler, Jana Trispel, and Kendra Mäschke.

I am particularly grateful to all friends and family members who have supported me through this journey. There are too many to name here, some of whom have offered me housing, others have frequently encouraged me in my work, while still others have provided much needed respite. Ultimately, I owe the deepest gratitude to my wife Jill. She has endured much over the course of this project, and it would have been impossible to have completed it without her support. This book is dedicated to her, and to my sons Theo and Lukas.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	V
List of Abbreviations.....	XII

### Part 1: Prolegomena

#### Chapter 1: A Survey of Ephesians and Empire ..... 3

##### *1.1 Paul and Empire Studies: Surveying the Approach..... 3*

##### *1.2 Ephesians and Empire Studies: Surveying the Approach ..... 6*

###### *1.2.1 Dismissal of/Ignoring Imperial-Critical Elements of Ephesians..... 7*

###### *1.2.2 Affirmation of Imperial-Critical Elements in Ephesians .....14*

##### *1.3 Moving Forward: The Necessity of an Eclectic Hermeneutic.....30*

#### Chapter 2: An Eclectic Hermeneutic: A Hermeneutical Grid for Assessing an Imperial-Critical Reading of Ephesians .....33

##### *2.1 Introduction.....33*

##### *2.2 Implied/Empirical: A Challenge for Biblical Studies .....34*

##### *2.3 Speech-Act Theory: A Multi-Dimensional View of Language.....44*

###### *2.3.1 Performative Nature of Language.....44*

###### *2.3.2 Adopting a Nomenclature: Locution, Illocution, and Perlocution ...46*

###### *2.3.3 Conventionality and the Construction of Social Reality.....53*



2.3.4 Subversion, Perlocutions, and Indirect Speech Acts.....	58
2.4 A Narrative Hermeneutic: Retracing the Hermeneutical Horizons .....	64
2.5 Conclusion.....	72

## Part 2: From Method to Life Setting

Chapter 3: Empirical Life-Setting of Ephesians .....	77
--	----

3.1 Introduction.....	77
3.2 Empirical Life-Setting of Ephesians: Two Possibilities.....	77
3.2.1 Early Date .....	80
3.2.2 Later Date .....	85
3.3 Roman Imperial Context.....	90
3.3.1 Maiestas .....	93
3.3.2 Imperial Cults.....	112
3.3.3 Roman Imperial Eschatology.....	127
3.4 Conclusion.....	133

Chapter 4: Implied Life-Setting of Ephesians.....	137
---	-----

4.1 Introduction.....	137
4.2 Survey of The Implied Author .....	139
4.3 Implied Author: An Appraisal.....	145
4.3.1 Jewish Christian .....	145
4.3.2 Historical Circumstances: Imprisoned .....	151
4.3.3 Implied Author: Imperial Criticism .....	156
4.4 Survey of The Implied Audience.....	157
4.5 Implied Audience: An Appraisal .....	161

4.5.1 Gentile Godfearers .....	161
4.5.2 Historical Circumstances: Asia Minor .....	164
4.5.3 Implied Audience: Imperial Criticism .....	166
4.6 <i>From Method to Life-Setting</i> .....	167

## Part 3: Ephesians and Empire

### Chapter 5: An Imperial-Critical Reading of Ephesians..... 171

5.1 <i>Introduction</i> .....	171
5.2 <i>Imperial-Critical Reading of Ephesians 1–3</i> .....	172
5.2.1 Eph 1:1: New Prospects? .....	172
5.2.2 Eph 1:3–14: Berekah, New Exodus, and Roman Imperial Rule ....	175
5.2.3 Eph 2:1–10: Co-Enthronement with the Messiah in the Heavenlies.....	177
5.2.4 Eph 2:11–22: The εἰρήνη of the Messiah Jesus and the Pax Romana.....	180
5.2.5 Eph 3:1, 13: The Imprisonment of Paul, and Maiestas.....	185
5.3 <i>Imperial-Critical Reading of Ephesians 4–6</i> .....	187
5.3.1 Eph 4:4–6: One Lord, One Hope, One God and Father over All: A Challenge to the Emperor?.....	187
5.3.2 Eph 4:8–10: The Ascent/Descent of Christ and Apotheosis .....	193
5.3.3 Eph 5:21–32: Marriage, Haustafel, and Empire .....	199
5.3.4 Eph 6:12: Rulers, Authorities, Powers, Dominions, and the Roman Empire.....	202
5.4 <i>Conclusion</i> .....	206

### Chapter 6: Subversive Speech Acts: Ephesians and the Subversion of Imperial Ideology.....209

6.1 <i>Introduction</i> .....	209
6.2 <i>Ephesians 1–3: An Evaluation</i> .....	209

6.2.1 Eph 1:1: <i>Damnatio Memoriae</i> ?	209
6.2.2 Eph 1:3–14: The New Exodus: A Challenge to Claims of the Arrival of the Golden Age in Rome	215
6.2.3 Eph 2:1–10: Roman Institutional Facts: Undermined by Counter- Images of Enthronement	216
6.2.4 Eph 2:11–22: Jesus as the Alternative Agent of Peace	218
6.2.5 Eph 3:1, 13: Perlocutionary Acts and Imperial Authorities	220
6.3 <i>Ephesians 4–6: An Evaluation</i>	224
6.3.1 Eph 4:4–6: Jesus as an Alternative Agent of Unification	224
6.3.2 Eph 4:8–10: Imperial Ascent and Captivity: Undermined by Means of Locutionary Modification of Ps 68	226
6.3.3 Eph 5:21–32: A Toppling of Roman Ideals of κεφαλή	230
6.3.4 Eph 6:12: Perlocutionary Transformation in the Context of Imperial Cults	235
6.4 <i>Ephesians and the Subversion of Roman Imperial Ideology</i>	238
6.4.1 Subversive Eschatology in Ephesians	239
6.4.2 Subversive Christology in Ephesians	247
6.5 <i>Conclusion</i>	250
 Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion	 253
7.1 <i>Part 1: Prolegomena</i>	253
7.2 <i>Part 2: From Method to Life-Setting</i>	254
7.3 <i>Part 3: Ephesians and Empire</i>	255
7.4 <i>Subversive Speech Acts in Ephesians: Conclusion</i>	257
 Bibliography	 259
Index of References	305
Index of Modern Authors and Persons	311
Index of Subjects and Places	315

## List of Abbreviations

All abbreviations follow the SBL Handbook of Style, except for the following:

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



Part 1

## Prolegomena



## Chapter 1

# A Survey of Ephesians and Empire

### 1.1 Paul and Empire Studies: Surveying the Approach

Even though, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Deissmann perceived “polemical parallelism”<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup> These contributions have integrated Greco-Roman art,<sup>4</sup> and patron/client relations into Pauline texts to attempt to reestablish their political contexts.<sup>5</sup> Further attention has been given to the ways in the

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Paul Zanker, “The Power of Images,” in Horsley, *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).

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



Pauline texts engaged with Roman imperial cults.<sup>6</sup> Others have begun to see connections between Paul's writings and Scott's anthropological work.<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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."<sup>11</sup> 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

---

<sup>6</sup> Simon R. F. Price, "Rituals and Power," in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 47–71; Karl P. Donfried, "The Imperial Cults of Thessalonica and Political Conflict in 1 Thessalonians," in Horsley, *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. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult: A Critical Analysis of the First-Century Social Context of Paul's Letter* (WUNT II 237; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> See the collection of essays in Horsley, *Hidden Transcripts*.

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

<sup>9</sup> Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Paul in Critical Contexts; 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.

<sup>10</sup> For general works on Paul and empire studies see my bibliography section 4.1. For a more complete list of works organized by Pauline letters, see my bibliography sections 4.2–4.10.

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

political discourse in the Academy.”<sup>12</sup> Some of this renewed interest has been attributed to the events surrounding the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>13</sup> 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 studies.<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup> 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.”<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup> Imperial-critical interpretations of NT texts have been met with some hesitation.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Jewett, “Response to N. T. Wright, and J. M. G Barclay,” (paper presented at the annual SBL, San Diego, 18 November 2007).

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 4.

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

<sup>18</sup> See especially: Barclay, *Pauline Churches*; 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; Laura Robinson, “Hidden Transcripts? The Supposedly Self-Censoring Paul and Rome as Surveillance State in Modern Pauline Scholarship,” *NTS* 67 (2021): 55–72. I appreciate the balanced assessments provided by: Christoph Heilig, *Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul* (WUNT II 392; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); Christoph Heilig, “Methodological Considerations for the Search of Counter-Imperial ‘Echoes’ in Pauline Literature,” in *Reactions to Empire: Sacred Texts in their Socio-Political Contexts*, eds. John A. Dunne and Dan Batovici (WUNT II 372; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 73–92; Strecker, “Taktiken der Aneignung,” 153–161.

## 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.<sup>19</sup> 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 note that "complete treatments of the politics of Ephesians are rather rare."<sup>20</sup> Apart from the works of Faust, and Lalitha no monograph-length assessment of Ephesians' place in the discussion exists to date.<sup>21</sup> 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

---

<sup>19</sup> Since (at the very least) Paul is projected as the author, we can include Eph in an examination of the Pauline letters. I 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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 I speak of "political" interpretations of Paul, I intend to refer to interpretations that take seriously the Roman imperial context of the first century.

<sup>21</sup> Eberhard Faust, *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditions-geschichtliche 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: Christian World Imprints, 2017); Harry Maier has a substantial section on Eph in his work but its scope extends beyond Ephesians: *Picturing Paul*, 103–142.

to address the epistle's Roman imperial context.<sup>22</sup> While some recent contributions have partially examined this area,<sup>23</sup> 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*."<sup>24</sup> Recent articles have emerged that read Ephesians from an imperial-critical vantage point,<sup>25</sup> but much more needs to be done to assess these readings. The following 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.<sup>26</sup> Georgi's important work on theocracy in Paul does not mention Ephesians.<sup>27</sup> Alexander admits that anti-imperial elements are harder to trace in Paul, but she does not mention how Ephesians fits in.<sup>28</sup> Heilig's work, while largely methodological, interacts

---

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> Several sources engage the content of Eph in conversation with wider imperial ideology, but not necessarily from the vantage point of imperial criticism of the epistle: See my bibliography section 4.5. E.g., Lee-Barnewall builds off 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, *Christian Origins*, 613.

<sup>24</sup> 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: Pickwick, 2011), 202.

<sup>25</sup> See my bibliography section 4.5.

<sup>26</sup> Horsley, *Shadow of Empire*; Horsley, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*; Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, eds., *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in the New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Dieter Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Alexander, "Rome," 837.

with various imperial-critical readings of NT texts throughout his study. His references to Ephesians are brief, and they do not discuss its imperial-critical status.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> Eisen’s analysis of imperial-critical implications of a *parousia* theology in Paul also overlooks Ephesians, although it is unclear whether his omission is based on attributing it deuterio-Pauline status.<sup>32</sup> Wright, who is sympathetic to imperial-critical readings, acknowledges developments made towards formulating an anti-imperial interpretation of Ephesians,<sup>33</sup> but he admits (in one of his first imperial-critical explorations of Paul) that he must “pass over Ephesians with the merest mention.”<sup>34</sup> 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

---

<sup>29</sup> Heilig, *Hidden Criticism*, 120 fn. 52; 128 fn. 92; 152.

<sup>30</sup> Neil Elliott, “Strategies of Resistance and Hidden Transcripts in the Pauline Communities,” in Horsley, *Hidden Transcripts*, 117.

<sup>31</sup> 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, *Hidden Transcripts*, 123–144.

<sup>32</sup> Eckhart Reinmuth’s recognition of the role of Christ’s coming in Eph (“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 *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): 196–213.

<sup>33</sup> Wright acknowledged Long’s work on Eph in a presentation at SBL San Diego (paper presented at the annual SBL, San Diego, 18 November 2007).

<sup>34</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 76. Wright later corrects this by briefly offering an imperial-critical interpretation of parts of Eph in his *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2 Vols.; Christian Origins and the Question of God 4; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 728–733. Wright’s defense of including Eph in Pauline discussions suggests that his earlier oversight of the epistle in *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* was not a result of attributing deuterio-Pauline authorship to the letter, see Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 59–61, 1514–1515.

the terminology he discusses.<sup>35</sup> This oversight is especially accentuated given that he defends the Ephesian destination of the letter.<sup>36</sup> 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 is said to the Ephesians in the epistle.<sup>37</sup> 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."<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>

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."<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> Best's emphasis

---

<sup>35</sup> 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.

<sup>36</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 78–79, 144–148. Even those authors who have no interest in placing Eph 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 Eph 1:1, it is near consensus among Eph scholars that it is addressed to an audience(s) in some part of Asia Minor. That fact alone warrants exploring its Roman imperial setting.

<sup>37</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 89.

<sup>38</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 366.

<sup>39</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 76.

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

<sup>41</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, xiii, 70, 72. Best also dismisses the idea that cultural, economic, political, or syncretistic issues are directly countered in the epistle.

on discerning the subtext is commendable, although his dismissal of the letter's imperial context as part of that subtext is puzzling.<sup>42</sup>

Malina and Pilch attend carefully to socio-historical aspects of the first-century context of the deutero-Pauline letters.<sup>43</sup> This includes identifying the political-religious environment of the early Christian communities.<sup>44</sup> 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.”<sup>45</sup> They also observe that early Christian communities focused on “concord or harmony,” which was “a chief value among Romans,”<sup>46</sup> and they rightly maintain that distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in the Roman Empire were far less visible than has often been assumed,<sup>47</sup> 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.”<sup>48</sup> On top of engaging in Roman religious customs, some Jews also participated in Greek athletic events, joined Greco-Roman guilds, and served in the Roman army.<sup>49</sup> Malina and Pilch

---

<sup>42</sup> Best acknowledges elements of the imperial context of Eph, 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 Eph “pays no attention to what was happening outside the church and is apparently indifferent to its external flux,” Best, *Ephesians*, 70. On the other hand, Best’s appraisal does not consider that Eph displays a great deal of concern about reverting 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 I am less sympathetic of Bird’s characterization of the author of Eph 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), her proposal at least acknowledges what Best ignores, that the author certainly paid attention to what was happening outside the church: 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), 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 Eph: Rainer Schwindt, *Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* (WUNT 148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

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

<sup>44</sup> Malina and Pilch, *Deutero-Pauline Letters*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Malina and Pilch, *Deutero-Pauline Letters*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Malina and Pilch, *Deutero-Pauline Letters*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Malina and Pilch, *Deutero-Pauline Letters*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Malina and Pilch, *Deutero-Pauline Letters*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Malina and Pilch, *Deutero-Pauline Letters*, 5–6.



contrast claims of the Roman Empire with Jesus' vision for an Israelite theocracy.<sup>50</sup> 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 deutero-Pauline letters within a wider Greco-Roman context is not drawn out in much detail in their commentary on Ephesians.<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> Critics have accused Perkins of having escaped "into the spiritual realm" by dismissing political elements of the text.<sup>54</sup> Similar accusations have been made about Muddiman's work.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> Muddiman improperly confines 'political' elements of Ephesians to persecution and 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 those who were enslaved to remain enslaved, and so rather than exploring its potentially subversive elements, he sees it as accommodating Paul's theology to a "dominant Roman imperial order."<sup>57</sup> Beyond these brief comments, Elliott does not give any further treatment to

---

<sup>50</sup> Malina and Pilch, *Deutero-Pauline Letters*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Malina and Pilch, *Deutero-Pauline Letters*, 13–30.

<sup>52</sup> 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."

<sup>53</sup> Pheme Perkins, *Ephesians* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 30.

<sup>54</sup> Bird, "Ephesians," 265.

<sup>55</sup> Bird, "Ephesians," 265, 273.

<sup>56</sup> John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2001), 15. Bird provides an illuminating critique of Muddiman: "Ephesians," 273–274. 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.

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



Ephesians. Horsley, perhaps the strongest proponent of anti-imperial interpretations of NT texts, sees Ephesians (and other ‘deutero-Pauline’ texts) as “obscuring the political anti-imperial thrust of Paul” because of its “spiritualization of Pauline language.”<sup>58</sup> Arnold surveys aspects of the religio-historical context of the epistle but is skeptical about reading the letter as subversive of imperial rule.<sup>59</sup> 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.”<sup>60</sup> He concludes (quoting Mellor) that “it was a cult based on political, rather than religious, experience.”<sup>61</sup> This reduction of what constitutes political elements in the epistle has contributed to imperial-critical assessments of Ephesians remaining in a state of infancy.<sup>62</sup> 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).<sup>63</sup> 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 Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup> He objects to an anti-imperial reading of the letter due to the lack of explicit invocation of Roman imperial authorities in the text.<sup>66</sup> For Lau, since the presence of such authorities could only be

---

<sup>58</sup> Richard A. Horsley, “Introduction to Paul’s Counter Imperial Gospel,” in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 142–143.

<sup>59</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 31–41.

<sup>60</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 40.

<sup>61</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> 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.

<sup>63</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 40.

<sup>64</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 41.

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

<sup>66</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 289.

discerned through inference, it weakens the likelihood of subverting them.<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup> 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.”<sup>69</sup> 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, the work provided in the 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.<sup>70</sup> 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 ideology, than to present a counter reigning Lord using terms and themes related to Mediterranean political thought and *realia*.”<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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.”<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 289.

<sup>68</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 290.

<sup>69</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 290.

<sup>70</sup> Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 258.

<sup>71</sup> Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 257.

<sup>72</sup> Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Bird, “Ephesians,” 265.

<sup>74</sup> Maier, *Picturing Paul*, 6.

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."<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> The following 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 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,<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> As is the case with imperial-critical

---

<sup>75</sup> Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald with J. H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 119.

<sup>76</sup> For a full list of his works see my bibliography section 4.5. Fred Long's rhetorical commentary on Eph 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: Lalitha's work focuses exclusively on the household code (*Re-Reading Household Relationships*), Eph 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*, see especially 221–470.

<sup>77</sup> 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*; 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), 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.

<sup>78</sup> A significant portion of Long's works are spent contrasting the Christology of Eph with Roman imperial ideology. See also, 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*,

interpretations of other NT texts, the letter's christological titles have been read against the backdrop of Roman imperial ideology. Terms such as *κύριος*,<sup>79</sup> *σωτήρ*,<sup>80</sup> *υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ*,<sup>81</sup> and *κεφαλὴ*<sup>82</sup> have been understood in parallel with contemporary Roman imperial usage.<sup>83</sup> Greco-Roman inscriptions use each of these titles for Roman emperors.<sup>84</sup> These terms helped to shape a narrative of Roman imperial ideology and propaganda.<sup>85</sup> 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 δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος* in Eph 1:21,<sup>86</sup> has been read as carrying acoustic resonances that "subordinated [Rome] under Christ's exalted position."<sup>87</sup> These new inquiries have suggested that aspects of the letter's

---

ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 185–194. 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: SBL, 2002), 100; P. Williamson, *Ephesians* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 52.

<sup>79</sup> 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, *Reading a New Testament Document*, 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 considering the possibility of a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish audience. Explicit references to the audience as *τὰ ἔθνη* in Eph 2:11, 3:1 point 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).

<sup>80</sup> Eph 5:23.

<sup>81</sup> Eph 4:13.

<sup>82</sup> Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23.

<sup>83</sup> Long, "Ephesians: Paul's Political Theology," 271–277, 284 fn. 104, 291–293, 297–298; See also Fredrick J. Long, "Discerning Empires in Ephesians: Trumping the Powers by the Triumphant One Lord Jesus Messiah," Unpublished paper presented in the Disputed Pauline Sessions at the annual SBL Meeting Boston, 23 November 2008: 7–17.

<sup>84</sup> Long, "Discerning Empires," 7–17.

<sup>85</sup> Long, "Discerning Empires," 5; John Dominic Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology," in Horsley, *Shadow of Empire*, 59–73.

<sup>86</sup> See also similar parallels in Eph 3:10; 6:12.

<sup>87</sup> 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).

Christology were subversive of imperial ideology in its first-century Roman imperial context.<sup>88</sup>

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.<sup>89</sup> They claim that in Ephesians "one finds deliberate and pervasive 'trumping' of Roman imperial titles and claims."<sup>90</sup> They challenge the idea that Ephesians is deutero-Pauline, and therefore not reflective of Paul's thought.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup> They also explore anti-imperial elements to the letter's portrait of rulers and authorities.<sup>93</sup> 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 the one Lord (4.5)."<sup>94</sup> For them, the epistle's cosmological perspective and its

---

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).

<sup>88</sup> 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. Cf. also Kim, *Christ and Caesar*.

<sup>89</sup> Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 112.

<sup>90</sup> Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 136. See also Long, "Discerning Empires," 17. In a different essay Long does not seem as pointed with his declaration regarding Eph as having engaged in "active and direct" critique. He echoes Deissmann's words by addressing the notion that Eph 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 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; Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, "Reconstructing 'Resistance' or Reading to Resist: James C. Scott and the Politics of Interpretation," in Horsley, *Hidden Transcripts*, 145–155. Long admits that some of his work is not completely exhaustive, but an "exploratory foray:" Long, "Ephesians: Paul's Political Theology," 258.

<sup>91</sup> Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 114–115.

<sup>92</sup> Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 115, 126–135.

<sup>93</sup> Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 115–126.

<sup>94</sup> Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 115. Wright draws a similar conclusion about the epistle's ecclesiology, "the creation of the single family, the new humanity and

household code amounts to “a trumping critique of Roman imperial ideology and an ethical critique of the predominant social values.”<sup>95</sup>

Long’s subsequent work has amassed further evidence for reading a variety of passages in Ephesians as a challenge to Roman imperial ideology.<sup>96</sup> 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.”<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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.”<sup>99</sup> Long follows Danker by providing illuminating work on the letter’s rhetorical context by drawing out

---

new Temple, is thus a major political act, with resonances out into the world of power.” Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 731. Wright also notes that the creation of the new community in the Messiah “was bound to come into confrontation, and sooner or later conflict, with the principalities and powers that claimed to run the world.” Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 730.

<sup>95</sup> Gupta and Long, “The Politics of Ephesians,” 115.

<sup>96</sup> Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology;” Long, “Ἐκκλησία in Ephesians;” Long, “Roman Imperial Rule;” Long, “Taught in Christ;” Long, “Learning in Christ.”

<sup>97</sup> Long, “Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology,” 304–305.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; 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, have affirmed the need to acknowledge developments in rhetorical criticism when interpreting Eph, but none has explicitly shown how this impacts Eph imperial context. Although, one wonders whether Lincoln’s inclusion in the front-page endorsements of Keesmaat and Walsh’s *Colossians Remixed* (Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* [Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2004]) signals that he sees some significance in the imperial context of Eph, especially considering that he regards Eph as having depended on Colossians: Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lii.

<sup>99</sup> 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 Eph and honorific decrees: “On the Form and Ethos of Ephesians,” *USQ* 42.4 (1988): 3–15.

connections with ancient political rhetoric.<sup>100</sup> More work needs to be done to examine whether the similarities between 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.<sup>101</sup> 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. My use of an eclectic hermeneutic will help to examine these parallels in relation to wider cultural narratives conveyed through Roman imperial ideology.<sup>102</sup> 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.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> 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, esp. 118ff.; Gupta and Long, "The Politics of Ephesians," 112–136; Long, "Ephesians: Paul's Political Theology," 255–309; Long, "Discerning Empires."

<sup>101</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 62.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Foster suggests that terminology that is parallel with Roman imperial rhetoric in Eph 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 SBL Annual Meeting: Boston 23 Nov 2008).

<sup>103</sup> Long has amassed over 150 pages 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 Eph: 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: Lexham, 2016); Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians* (Wisdom Commentary 50; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2017); Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse* (Osborne New



Recent readings of Ephesians have challenged the notion that its concept of εἰρήνη should be viewed primarily through the lenses of Hebrew שָׁלוֹם.<sup>104</sup> Instead, some have suggested that the peace proposed in Ephesians stands as a counter-ideology to that of the *Pax Romana*.<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup> 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.”<sup>107</sup> The peace motif is drawn out in Ephesians by using “eine politische Analogie.”<sup>108</sup> He views the epistle’s portrait of the peace of Christ in Eph 2:17 in connection with Isa 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

---

Testament Commentaries; Bellingham: 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); Barney Kasdan, *Rabbi Paul Enlightens the Ephesians on Walking with Messiah Yeshua: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville: Lederer, 2015); Lalitha, *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, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Opponents of Paul: The Pauline Letters* (Apostasy in the New Testament 2; Eugene: Cascade, 2012): 225; Eric Covington, *Functional Teleology and the Coherence of Ephesians: A Comparative and Reception – Historical Approach* (WUNT II 470; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 13. That scholars have remained largely unaware of Long’s work reinforces the idea that Eph has not yet gained much ground in many imperial-critical discussions.

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

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

<sup>106</sup> See especially Wengst, *Pax Romana*.

<sup>107</sup> Faust, *Pax Christi*, 431.

<sup>108</sup> Faust, *Pax Christi*, 181.



parallels between Jesus and Caesar's role as the "Garant der pax gentium."<sup>109</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup> Faust's work balances the epistle's parallels with OT motifs, and with those present in Roman imperial ideology. He 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.<sup>111</sup> 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)."<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> 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)."<sup>114</sup> He continues by observing that in a Greco-Roman context, *Eirene* was also considered the goddess of peace.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Faust, *Pax Christi*, 181.

<sup>110</sup> Faust, *Pax Christi*, 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 *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), 266.

<sup>111</sup> Faust, *Pax Christi*, 180.

<sup>112</sup> Reinmuth, "Neue Testament," 16.

<sup>113</sup> Yorke, "Politics of Peace," 118.

<sup>114</sup> Yorke, "Politics of Peace," 115.

<sup>115</sup> Yorke, "Politics of Peace," 118.

Subsequently, he notes that, with the exception of Revelation, scholars have given “Syro-Palestinian politics and practices...the ‘lions share’ of their attention.”<sup>116</sup> 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.<sup>117</sup> 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.”<sup>118</sup> He concludes that “it would be inconceivable that peace (εἰρήνη) would not have generated acoustic resonances with the *Pax Romana*.”<sup>119</sup>

Lau also maintains that there is a ‘political character’ to the concept of peace in Ephesians.<sup>120</sup> 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,<sup>121</sup> he remains unconvinced that the author’s political language should be read as a polemic against the Roman Empire.<sup>122</sup> Lau acknowledges that Ephesians’ “rhetorical appeals are similar to *topoi* used by ancient political writers urging unity among divided groups.”<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, he interprets the war imagery in Eph 6:10–20 as political activity deeply connected to the letter’s theology of peace.<sup>124</sup> He suggests that the peace in Ephesians is built on a metanarrative that could be compared with similar narratives from other communities,<sup>125</sup> but he does not consider narratives driven by Roman imperial ideology to have played a significant role for the recipients of the letter.<sup>126</sup> 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.”<sup>127</sup>

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.<sup>128</sup> This

---

<sup>116</sup> Yorke, “Politics of Peace,” 119.

<sup>117</sup> See *OGIS* 458.

<sup>118</sup> Yorke, “Politics of Peace,” 119.

<sup>119</sup> Yorke, “Politics of Peace,” 120.

<sup>120</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 76–156, see especially 153.

<sup>121</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 77 fn. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 12.

<sup>123</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 105.

<sup>124</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 146–153.

<sup>125</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 270–274.

<sup>126</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 12.

<sup>127</sup> Lau, *Politics of Peace*, 290.

<sup>128</sup> Yorke, “Politics of Peace,” 121. See also Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 99.