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THE APOSTOLIC COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM: *TAING-YINN THARR* (တိုင်းရင်းသား)

APOSTLESHIP AS ANTI-COLONIAL EXISTENCE

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THE APOSTOLIC COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM: *TAING-YINN THARR* (တိုင်းရင်းသား)

APOSTLESHIP AS ANTI-COLONIAL EXISTENCE

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

Dedman College

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

with a

Major in New Testament

by

Lahpai Shawng Htoi

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August 6, 2018

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The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem:
Taing-Yinn Tharr (တိုင်းရင်းသား) Apostleship
As Anti-Colonial Existence

Advisor: Dr. Sze-kar Wan

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This study of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 pays special attention to the life of Lucan communities as they attempted to establish co-apostolic existence in the context of first-century Roman imperial expansionism. *Taing-Yinn Tharr* theory is introduced and deployed to explore the system of domination exercised through apostolic power in the New Testament church and evident in multiple instances of subordination in the Jerusalem deliberation. *Taing-Yinn Tharr*, developed in Myanmar to accommodate fellow subaltern groups, means “the fellow co-inhabitants of one country of origin” and entails a single united reality that privileges co-existence regardless of multiple, national distinctions present in the country. This thesis presents *Taing-Yinn Tharr* as a potentially fruitful postcolonial critical theory. Co-existence in equality is a key axiom for decolonizing both the text of Acts 15 and the internal-colonial context of Burma. This thesis argues that the convening of the Jerusalem council had as its true goal not the submission of Gentile to Jewish Christians but the institution of a universal apostleship despite differences on ethnic/cultural/religious grounds.

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INTRODUCTION

Much scholarship on Acts has attempted to interpret Luke-Acts in light of the reader's context as one strategy for imparting new life to Luke's vision of Christianity in our contemporary world. Readers are intrigued by Luke's narrative approach and deployment of the history of salvation. As Loveday Alexander argues, Acts needs to be read from "multiple literary and sociorhetorical locations in antiquity."¹ By doing so, we can determine "our perspectives on our sources, how we see is really what we get" in this reading process.² Current studies of Acts have focused on Acts' understanding of apostleship in the civic and public arena immediately before and after the Jerusalem council.

In most cases, Lucan communities exercise mere passive "togetherness" in the face of public confrontation and internal tensions (Acts 1:1-5, 6-11, 12-26; 2:2, 6, 44, 46; 3:11, 25; 4:24, 32; 5:12, etc.).³ At other times they exercise a clearly active togetherness in their trans-geographical move into the Roman world. Paul is told that he would be the Lord's "witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Reconstructing this hermeneutical concept, this *Taing-Yinn Tharr* study examines the life and struggle of Lucan

¹ Loveday Alexander, "Marathon or Jericho? Reading Acts in Dialogue with Biblical and Greek Historiography," in *Auguries: The Jubilee Volume of the Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies*, eds. D. J. A. Clines and S. D. Moore (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 16.

² Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1999), 7; Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987); and Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (NICNT: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988).

³ For further reference, see David L. Balch, *Contested Ethnicities and Images: Studies in Acts and Arts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

communities as one body to establish one universal apostleship in Acts 15. While much scholarship has seen the crucial role of the Jerusalem council in providing continuity between Judaism and Christianity, this TYT critical study presents the Jerusalem council as a collective effort by multiple Christian groups to establish a universal apostleship as anti-colonial existence in the context of Burma.

This study uses the lens of *Taing-Yinn Tharr* (တိုင်းရင်းသား) to explore the system of domination exercised through apostolic power in the New Testament church and evident in multiple instances of subordination in the Jerusalem deliberation (Acts 15:1-36). *Taing-Yinn Tharr* (TYT), a theory of co-existence developed in Myanmar to accommodate fellow subaltern groups, means “the fellow co-inhabitants of one country of origin.” It was first developed among the Bama and seven other ethnic groups to uphold unity and solidarity in their common resistance against British colonial rule. Soon after independence, however, the dominant Bama exploited the notion of unity for the sake of political gain, subjugating the other, non-Baman groups. Given its original anti-colonial and later neo-colonial usage, *Taing-Yinn Tharr* has considerable potentials as a postcolonial critical theory in that it can problematize and interrogate the concepts of unification and solidarity when they are deployed as a guise for domination. This study proposes the use of *Taing-Yinn Tharr* as a hermeneutic of resistance for an analysis of the supposed unity between Gentiles and Jews reached at the Jerusalem council of Acts 15.

TYT biblical criticism deploys an alternative exegetical method to analyze Acts 15, offering a de-colonial discourse against oppressive forces. Three dimensions are brought to attention in order to examine the power hierarchy of the church and to interrogate the office of apostleship and its oversight of universal salvation for both Jews and Gentiles: (1) the practice of alienation and of multiple binaries produced by the powerful over the powerless, as experienced

by the subaltern Antiochene representatives at the council; (2) “the ethos of ethnic negotiation-line” through an act of integration, or ethnic cleansing, to remap a dominant ideology of race in the context of the lurking Jewish Zealotism and the supremacy of Roman citizenship; (3) the misuse of “the system of legitimate order” for political control over subjugated peoples, as seen in the apostolic letter.

Moreover, as a hermeneutic of anti-imperial critique, this self-critical and self-liberating theory offers a better understanding of co-eschatological existence in which one co-representative universal apostleship shares and safeguards the one universal salvation of God for both Jews and Gentiles. The idea of multi-national existence in equality is a key axiom of TYT criticism which seeks to decolonize local anti-existential forces exercised by the ruling class in the context of Burma. A TYT reading summons readers to celebrate the rule of universal salvation through the collective universal apostleship of a pluralistic Christianity in the context of internal colonialism.

TAING-YINN THARR: A POSTCOLONIAL-SUBALTERN THEORY

2.1 *Taing-Yinn Tharr*: A Subaltern Discourse in Burma

Postcolonialism is primarily a critical response to colonialism, the domination of power and of knowledge, resulting in “regionalisms” and “post-colonial politic[s],” compelling subaltern groups to speak out regarding local autonomy and universal human rights and dignity.⁴ The term “postcolonialism” reflects a twofold disciplinary approach: critical studies of literature and of history in the aftermath of European colonialization. Postcolonialism provides a critical theory that allows once-colonized peoples to analyze neo-colonial realities operating according to Western norms long after the disappearance of Western powers. As a literary theory, it offers “an anti-essentialist” criticism for creative resistance, rewriting texts for the colonized people to combat marginalization and subjugation.⁵ Postcolonial resistance emerges from within a subaltern consciousness of and resistance to overshadowing forces that locate one group at the center of power and move all presumed differences to the margins. Within its theoretical framework, subaltern groups can engage subjugating powers as part of a collective and cooperative struggle, deploying the subaltern discourses born out of subaltern experiences of dispossession, transportation, dislocation, and subversion.⁶

⁴ “Introduction,” in *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, eds. Gaurav Desai and Suraya Nair (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 1.

⁵ Buchanan argues that a postcolonial approach “privileges difference over sameness,” is “pluralist and anti-hegemonic,” “problematizes all forms of subalternity and subjugation,” and “equates representation with power.” Ian Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 372-73.

⁶ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.

2.2 Co-subaltern Struggle: A Collective Resurgence for Self-Determination

The “subaltern” refers to a group of people living with “inferior rank,” implying “the collective” representation attributed to “subordination.”⁷ In Gramscian theory, the subaltern is “subject to the hegemony of another more powerful class,”⁸ which exercises domination and establishes “exploitative colonies.”⁹ Subaltern consciousness gives birth to anti-dominant resistance, which becomes a relational pattern for multiple co-subalterns who share the same subalternity under the same dominant dynamics. Such subaltern resistance seeks freedom of self-determination through the mobilization of political resistance by the use of signs, codes, and other discursive strategies.

2.3 Contemporary Subaltern Discourse: A Postcolonial Ethnic Theory

Subaltern criticism plays a key role in anti-colonial discourse and internal independence movements for indigenous people.¹⁰ In particular, subaltern criticism employs anti-racism as a critical tool to enhance subaltern interpretation.¹¹ Race and nationality are inseparable in most cases of identity. As Gilroy argues, “The limits of the nation coincide with the limits of race,” causing the “politics of race fueled by conceptions of national belongingness and homogeneity

⁷ “Reading the Subaltern,” in Desai and Nair, 399.

⁸ Buchanan, 455.

⁹ Stephen Morton, “Poststructuralist Formulations,” in *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. John McLeod (Noida: Sirohi Brothers, 2007), 167. See, also, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Wishart, 1971), 12.

¹⁰ “Subaltern,” in *Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1998), 215-19.

¹¹ Rey Chow, “Where Have All the Natives Gone?,” in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arno, 1996), 122.

not only to blur the distinction between race and nation, but to rely on that very ambiguity for their effect.”¹²

In Asia, subaltern criticism is a postcolonial revisionist discourse, an “operational” principle developed during the colonial and de-colonial eras.¹³ Here, “fragmented and discontinuous” subaltern histories are displayed as “self-ascriptions” in contrast to dominant historiographies, such as Indian nationalism, that are characterized by colonialist/local elitism.¹⁴ Subaltern revisionist theory rewrites its own historiography by criticizing elitist historiographies for their disregard of the autonomy of subaltern peoples.¹⁵ Subaltern discourse is “a self-conscious political philosophy” that resists the “imbalances of official histories” tied to “the affairs of the state and the ruling class.”¹⁶ Ian Buchanan characterizes it as a self-subversive/critical principle to overturn both the native and alien forces of “servitude and subservience.”¹⁷ This study recommends co-subalternity as a way to de-polarize the dominant cultural system and ideology in the context of Burma.

2.4 *Taing-Yinn Tharr* Theory: A Critique for Co-Existence

The application of subaltern criticism is the major focus in my analysis of *Taing-Yinn Tharr* in Myanmar (Burma). I develop the word “co-subaltern” to capture the need for the variety of non-Baman ethnic groups to band together as a collective victimized group under Baman

¹² Ibid., 13, 250, and 260.

¹³ Sara Mills, *Discourse: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2004), 94.

¹⁴ Indian nationalist movements were designed by the elitist nationalists in collaboration with colonial forces. Ranajit Guha, “On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India,” in Desai and Nair, 403-409.

¹⁵ David Lloyd, “Outside History: Irish New Histories and the Subalternity Effect,” in Desai and Nair, 416.

¹⁶ For further references, see Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1995) and G. F. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (London: Faber, 1966).

¹⁷ Buchanan, 455.

dictatorship. *Taing-Yinn Tharr* conveys the meaning of “the fellow co-inhabitants” who share one country of origin, one independence from British colonialism, and one struggle for co-citizenship, all of which were secured during Burma’s initial fight for independence. The word *Taing-Yinn-Tarr* initially signified unification among all ethnic nationals regardless of religious identity, civil-political background, or cultural distinction. Regrettably, the idea of TYT has been exploited by the Bama as a neo-colonial tool to re-colonize all other ethnic nationals, particularly those who do not share the Buddhism of the Bama elite.¹⁸

On February 12, 1947, national leaders from the Bama, Kachin, Shan, and Chin tribes met together in Panglong to hold a joint conference for the first time, agreeing to pursue unity and solidarity, to advocate independence from the British, and to form a single Federal Union. The need for such united resistance became clear after repeated failed attempts at national defense and armed revolution against the British during the three Anglo-Burman wars of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the idea of reciprocal existential identification first developed in Panglong was never fully realized in the aftermath of independence. The legitimacy of national unity and co-operation in the struggle for the making of Burma have been co-opted for Baman political domination.²⁰ Independence from the British has merely brought about a shift from external colonialism to internal or local imperialism. Baman military rule has extended its control over the entire country in the name of three national causes: “(1) the non-

¹⁸ Guenter Lewy, “Militant Buddhist Nationalism: The Case of Burma,” *Journal of Church and State* 14, no. 1 (1972): 23-41.

¹⁹ See Maitrii V. Aung-Thwin, “British Counter-Insurgency Narratives and The Construction of a Twentieth Century Rebel” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2001. See also, Michael Fredholm, *Burma: Ethnicity and Insurgency* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993), 35 and Peter Carey, *Burma: The Challenge of Change in a Divided Society* (New York, NY: Macmillan Press, 1997), 5.

²⁰ For more details about Bama nationalist movements and nation building against British colonialism, see Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma* (London: Cresset Press, 1962) and Martin Smith, *Ethnic Groups in Burma: Development, Democracy and Human Rights* (London: Anti-Slavery International, 1994), 22, 17-36.

disintegration of the Union, (2) the non-disintegration of national solidarity, and (3) the perpetuation of sovereignty.”²¹ These represent the major shared duties of all residing within the Union and “should have top priority whatever government is in office.”²² These three ideals have been repeatedly deployed as justification for Baman military action against any perceived threat to their dominant position within the country.²³ Indeed, these national causes represent the foundational ideology upon which Baman nationalism has established itself. The cause of unity has been repeatedly used as a cloak for systematic practices of violent homogenization. This study attempts to recover the initial meaning of TYT and to put it in conversation with the biblical text to provide a lens through which we might accurately diagnose and address this present neo-colonial context.

First, TYT theory analyzes co-identification in the biblical texts and puts it into dialogue with our contemporary context of dominant ideologies like religious superiority/nobility, centralized nationalism, and polarized universalism. TYT theory offers a critique of ideological equilibrium based on a nostalgia for genuine origins in an “attempt to hark back to a true national past... represented in the reified/not completely good, honest and suitable forms of realism and stereotype.”²⁴

Second, TYT criticism re-examines “the historiography of politico-covenant,” re-reading historical documents and state constitutions in order to re-identify the fundamental values co-

²¹ Myanmar News Agency, “Our Three Main National Causes,” *New Light of Myanmar*, April 24, 2012. These national causes regularly appear on the front page of the government-owned newspaper.

²² Myanmar News Agency, “Our Three Main National Causes Should Have Top Priority Whatever Government is in Office: Prime Minister Makes Inspection Tour around Rakhine State,” *New Light of Myanmar*, November 26, 2010.

²³ See, for instance, Myanmar News Agency, “Always Uphold Our Three Main National Causes,” *New Light of Myanmar*, March 23, 2010.

²⁴ “Race,” in *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, ed. Stuart Sim (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 200.

established between the Bama and other ethnic groups for co-existence in the Union drawing on R. S. Sugirtharajah's notion of "memories of grievances."²⁵ By adapting both "logical revisionism" against European imperialism and Guha's subaltern theory, TYT helps readers revise the idea of truth as contained in various co-created texts like political covenants and historiographies by analysis of the multilateral agreements of Luke-Acts.²⁶

Third, TYT criticism offers resistance to multiple imperialisms.²⁷ In line with Sugirtharajah, the critique of revolution analyzes the system of imperialism operating as various neo-colonizing tendencies and the system of controls in the texts. TYT criticism offers an intellectual critique to destabilize the monolithic, legitimizing discourse of epistemological imperialism and to construct in its place a system of multinational existence, in which genuine unification, interdependency, and solidarity are cultivated without privileging any one particular group.²⁸ In the chapters to come, this thesis will offer a *Taing-Yinn Tharr* reading to shed light on the current local-imperialism of the Burman context by putting it in conversation with the apostolic council of Acts 15. Like the Burman context, the text of Acts 15 is complex. While the council was called in the name of unity, careful attention to its details exposes significant failures with respect to this high goal. A TYT analysis of the text, it is hoped, will help point the way forward for Christian communities in Burma.

²⁵ R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2, ed. Steven L. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 123-32.

²⁶ Fernando Coronil, "Can Postcoloniality be Deconlonized? Imperial Banality and Postcolonial Power," *Public Culture* 5, no. 1 (1992): 102 and introduction to *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Arno, 1996), 2-5.

²⁷ "The Other" in Sim, 366 and Jeremy Punt, "Empire and New Testaments Texts: Theorising the Imperial, in Subversion and Attraction," *Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012): 7-9.

²⁸ Jeremy Punt, *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation: Reframing Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 7.

A POSTCOLONIAL TYT BIBLICAL CRITICISM OF ACTS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter lays out a TYT biblical hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of Acts 15. In particular, it will examine how Lucan Christianity envisioned multiethnic existence within the context of Roman domination. This hermeneutical approach employs co-subaltern criticism to explore multiple systems of subordination that operated within Lucan communities consisting of a variety of distinct groups in the social context of the first-century Roman world. Co-existence is key to a TYT biblical hermeneutics that examines concepts of equality, unity, and solidarity and struggles against both internal and external colonial domination.

Theologically, co-existence is an idea employed in contemporary biblical studies to resist Eurocentrism in favor of perspectives relevant to the reader's own postcolonial context. Fundamentally, the theology of co-existence is established on basic universalizing/spiritualizing principles that address the need to hold on to the Lordship of Jesus and live peaceably with others. Here, such co-identification of multi-Christian existence is relevant to both Karl Rahner's theology of the "anonymous Christian" and Rudolf Bultmann's universal human experience. Noting that "the language of 'universals' and 'civilization' has often perpetuated a European and/or American version of civil religion infused with a few elements of Christian faith" to expand the notion of a common denominator among differences, Lee Camp suggests that Christian theologians take God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth as the point of "our particular faith practices more seriously."²⁹ Establishing a platform for genuine dialogue in our

²⁹ Lee C. Camp, "Theological Ground for Peaceful Co-Existence," *Restoration Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2007): 242.

particularity is much more important than establishing a superficial “universal” common ground between us.³⁰ Practicing the teachings of our faith creates opportunities for dialogue beyond “a narrow sense of cultural superiority and arrogance” on the part of any one religious heritage in particular.³¹ Indeed, the Apostle Paul’s faith in God enabled him to embrace “the way of Jesus” and to practice it in a way that transcended “the social, ethnic, and cultural forces of estrangement, alienation, and hostility.”³² To sum up, co-existence embraces the truth for all and practices hospitality and tolerance through dialogue in the midst of difference.

Recent biblical scholarship on the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles has rightly identified the two-volume work as a counter-imperial discourse against Roman domination. J. Massyngbaerde Ford describes the first-century Roman world as a “seething cauldron” due to diverse revolts among various social groups, especially the Jewish communities of Palestine.³³ Eventually, social unrest and disruption drove some victimized groups to adopt a stance of resistance to Roman political hegemony.

This section analyzes the creation of Christianity by Jesus and a group of his followers for the cause of the gospel as a religious sect within Judaism which ultimately spread into the Roman world under the apostleship of Paul and Barnabas. Loveday Alexander affirms this motif, describing early Christianity as “restless and urban.”³⁴ Ultimately, in “primitive Christianity,”³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., 242.

³¹ Ibid., 243.

³² Ibid., 245.

³³ J. Massyngbaerde Ford, *My Enemy is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 1.

³⁴ Loveday Alexander, “Mapping Early Christianity: Acts and the Shape of Early Church History—Biblical Faith and History,” *Interpretation* 57, no. 2 (2003): 163; Alexander, “‘In Journeyings Often’: Voyaging in the Acts of the Apostle and in Greek Romance,” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement: Collected Essays*, ed. C.M. Tuckett (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 17.

followers of the Way were driven from the “margins of empire and the centre of Judaism, Jerusalem, to the centre of the empire, Rome.”³⁶ The TYT lens sheds light on the earliest Christians’ relationship to cities that affected the way of life, thought, and theology of Christian communities as they sought to progress with a new, co-existent norm amidst multi-centers and ethnic diversities, especially between the Jewish and the Gentile parties in the church, in the context of the Roman Empire.³⁷

Conventionally, the Jerusalem council is understood by many scholars to be primarily concerned with the issue of uniform apostolic mandates and mission activities of the early Christian communities under Jerusalem. In contrast, I would argue that the apostolic council had as its primary aim the inauguration of a Christian assembly representing diverse groups in equality. For the Lucan Paul, the apostolic mission of the Church entails a multiethnic existence, including both Jews and Gentiles, that is certainly dependent on the tradition of the Jerusalem apostleship but is also independent from it. Both Jewish and Gentile believers share the charge to rebuild one messianic nation according to the salvific design of God (Acts 15:16-18). The early Christian communities in Acts were amalgamated diversities, including Jews, diasporic Jews/Hellenists, and Gentiles.

³⁵ The term “primitive Christianity” represents a technical, historical, and critical imperative to revisit the writings of earliest New Testament Christianity, especially in light of postcolonial lenses. I am conceptualizing “primitive Christianity” as the earliest Christian alternative praxis in the course of instituting its new faith in the context of the Roman imperial environment, with special reference to Adolf Deissmann in his ever-inspiring and compelling book, *Light from the Ancient East*. In particular, chapters 3 and 4 provide details about the practice of primitive Christians while embodying the gospel as individuals and an alternative community based on New Testament literary resources. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. L.R.M. Strachan (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 404.

³⁶ See Hans Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982).

³⁷ Introduction to *The Urban World and the First Christians*, eds. Steve Walton, Paul R Trebilco, and David W. J. Gill (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), xii-xv.

Further, TYT sheds light on the question of what co-existence means for the people of God and of the Church. While universality is commonly cited as a norm of Christianity, it is difficult for marginalized groups to appeal to the concept of multiethnic co-existence when the ruling/dominant class undermines and distorts it. This analysis will dwell on the institution of the Christian principle of equal sharing and co-habitation in dealing with issues arising from their new home—the world of the Roman Empire and Hellenized culture. Such Christian assembly ought to have provided and protected a new model of equal recognition, identification, representation, and apostleship for all.³⁸ TYT criticism seeks not only to explore such Christian ideals but to expose the problems and failures of the early Christian community to live up to this high calling.

3.2 Lucan Christian Movements Confronting Roman Imperial Order

A number of scholars have argued for the anti-imperial character of the Lucan writings.³⁹ This study makes the further claim that the Lucan writings depict a vision of primitive Christianity proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom in the midst of multiple hegemonies that go beyond Roman rule. The gospel encountered not only Roman imperialism but also local colonialism in the form of Jewish religious institutions. Richard Cassidy analyzes the Lucan writings from a socio-political perspective and notes that the Roman policy was to achieve stability within its provinces and then to secure its borders.⁴⁰ This policy of the Roman imperial system explains why the elitist Sanhedrin of Jerusalem was given provincial power to dominate

³⁸ See Robin Scroggs, “The Theocentrism of Paul,” in *The Text and The Times: New Testament Essays For Today*, ed. Robin Scroggs (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 185-87.

³⁹ Benny Tat-siong Liew, “Acts,” in *Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 419-28. See also Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ Richard J. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of Apostles* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 47.

the rest of the region (Acts 4:1; 4:5, 6, 21; 5:18). Most scholars agree that Luke had constructive and strategic relationships with Roman authorities. For Peter Oakes, the Lucan faith struggles to “maintain faithful witness” to Christ’s kingship and lordship until the final vindication of the Christian community against the Empire according to God’s plan.⁴¹ Luke sketches the establishment of Christianity during the time when the Romans had legitimated their power in the empire. Lucan writings capture the blueprint of the move of the Christian community as a civic assembly, and the exercise of its apostolic activities in key Roman cities like Antioch and Cilicia was clearly anti-imperial.

3.3 Luke-Acts and the Subaltern in Postcolonial Biblical Criticism

Subaltern critical discourse enables readers to put Luke-Acts in conversation with their postcolonial context. TYT biblical criticism seeks, in particular, to identify the presence of multiple layers of the “other” in Luke-Acts by applying a variety of approaches. Engaging biblical hermeneutics from the perspective of the “other” is itself an act of hermeneutical liberation, countering the effects of colonialism and its ongoing imperial domination through globalization and various forms of neo-colonialism today.⁴² Reading strategies in postcolonial hermeneutics focus on alternative and existential trajectories for the reader and their various effects on biblical studies.⁴³ The TYT strategy equips the subaltern reader to unmask and resist

⁴¹ Introduction to *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), xii-xvii.

⁴² Punt, *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation*, 6.

⁴³ For a helpful account of the various strategies and critical concepts that have been deployed in postcolonial biblical interpretation, see R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Vernacular Resurrections: An Introduction,” in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999): 12 and J. L. Berquist, “Postcolonialism and the Imperial Motives for Canonization,” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 33.

not only foreign- but local-colonial forces so as to accommodate and co-liberate one another in the context of multi-layered dominations.

3.4 TYT Biblical Criticism: A Hermeneutic of Multiethnic Co-existence

Postcolonial TYT biblical criticism of Acts concentrates on a hermeneutical principle of “multinational ideology.”⁴⁴ It offers a co-existential critique, helping readers problematize the construction of a shared system that generates unified norms and enforces unification and solidarity at the expense of diversity. Contemporary scholarship on Acts has already provided such alternative reading strategies by exploring Acts’ relationship to empire. TYT reading enters into this basic trend and enriches it by engaging the “multiple realities” of the reader’s context and putting them in dialogue with the multiple realities of the text.⁴⁵

First, TYT biblical criticism applies a hermeneutic of co-existence to the early church in the context of its multi-polar environment.⁴⁶ Luke narrates multiple Christian communities engaging multiple power centers including not only the Roman empire, but also Judaism and Hellenism.⁴⁷ Crucial to this practice is the critical notion of *catachresis*, according to which the dominated re-defines a notion employed by imperial culture by applying it “to a thing that it does not properly denote.”⁴⁸ A TYT catachretical critique examines dominant rhetorical concepts like

⁴⁴ Smith, Bordwell, and Thompson define multinational ideology as “a system of values, beliefs, or ideas” shared by varying ethnic groups which aids their co-inhabitation in a certain geographic space, whether in the heart of empire or one’s country of origin. Jeff Smith, David Bordwell, and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2016), 494.

⁴⁵ Liew, 419-23.

⁴⁶ Shehla Burney, “Edward Said and Postcolonial Theory: Disjunctured Identities and the Subaltern Voice,” *Counterpoints* 417 (2012): 49-53.

⁴⁷ Rubén Muñoz-Larrondo, *A Postcolonial Reading of the Acts of the Apostles* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012), 1.

⁴⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines the Greek term “catachresis” as “signs without a referent.” Burney, 41-60.

God's nation, brother/sisterhood, union, and even TYT as co-opted by a dominant group, whether Baman or Judaic.

Howard Clark Kee observes that, in its “structure and strategy,” the form of the Christian community reflects its Roman civil environment.⁴⁹ In describing the Christian community as the “assembly” (ἐκκλησία), Luke is clearly drawing on the Septuagint tradition. Yet, in addition to its Septuagint background, George H. Van Kooten notes the importance of the civic assemblies of the Greek cities in the Roman empire and observes that the use of “assembly” as self-designation in Acts and in Paul's letters carries deeply anti-imperial connotations, offering an “alternative political structure to contemporary municipalities and even to the Roman empire.”⁵⁰ Paul's Christian assembly offers an alternative constitution or form of government serving an alternative emperor and offering an alternative society.⁵¹ Yet, as we shall see, this anti-imperial impetus did not always rule out local-imperial movements within its own boundaries. Indeed, such local-imperialism shows itself precisely in the question of the boundaries of the community.

Second, TYT biblical criticism offers a hermeneutic for a multiethnic/unionist agenda. Co-subaltern resistance stands against a dominant universalism through the experience of subaltern hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry. TYT critique seeks to decolonize the biblical texts and to expose any particular national agendas that attempt to colonize differences on ethnic or other grounds. According to Jeremy Punt, early apostolic Christian communities practiced mission, making Jesus sympathizers and intersecting with the Roman Empire in the form of

⁴⁹ Howard Clark Kee, *Good News to the Ends of the Earth: The Theology of Acts* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity International, 1990), 1.

⁵⁰ George H. Van Kooten, “Ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ: The ‘Church of God’ and the Civic Assemblies (ἐκκλησίαι) of the Greek Cities in the Roman Empire: A Response to Paul Trebilco and Richard A. Horsley,” *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 4 (2012): 522-23.

⁵¹ 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 Press International), 211.

“countervailing missionary forces” over the Roman homogeneous identity.⁵² A multiethnic hermeneutical agenda sheds light on our neo-colonial context by way of Paul’s notion of God as king in relation to discipleship and the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.⁵³ Co-hybridity is a way of learning and living within “a complex web of cultural negotiation and interactions, forged by imaginatively redeploying the local.”⁵⁴ TYT analysis will also identify strategies for sensitizing readers to ways the broader scene of cultural production in and around Acts is detrimental to social formation. Interpretations have to be relativized, and readers have to be made aware of the philosophical, theoretical, and ideological agendas that inform them.⁵⁵ TYT biblical criticism offers a theory of resistance by constructing a new national identity through the deployment of hermeneutical strategies of “in-corruption,” intertextual consultation, and ethnic positionality while privileging intellectual honesty, ethical responsibility, and accountability.⁵⁶

Third, TYT hermeneutical revisionism analyzes texts and their legitimacy from the viewpoint of historiographical critique so as to allow the subaltern to reclaim the pre-colonial/postcolonial truth. As a contentious dialectic between Marxian-poststructuralism and Hegelian revisionism, TYT hermeneutics offers a critique of the system of dogmatization and

⁵² Horsley, “Patronage, Priesthoods, and Power: Introduction” in *Paul and Empire*, 95.

⁵³ Luke-Acts not only vocalizes the universal, salvific message, but also portrays it along with subaltern struggle. Lucan universalism comes primarily in the form of the salvific impetus to bring the Gospel to all, both Jews and Gentiles.

⁵⁴ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 16-17.

⁵⁵ Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 136-40; Segovia, “Reading Across: Intercultural Criticism and Textual Posture,” in *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando Segovia (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 68; and Pui-lan Kwok and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Women’s Sacred Scriptures* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 110.

⁵⁶ Punt, *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation*, 26-29.

totalizing history that equates the conqueror's civilization with truth.⁵⁷ Revisionist suspicion is a critical tool to dematerialize elitist politicization so as to foster consolidation and solidarity. Revisionist critique also dismantles the objectification of history and historical products and rejects "history as a heuristic category."⁵⁸ Luke presents the Pauline gospel as an affirmation of the history of salvation through Jesus as Lord in contrast to the civic gospel of the Roman Empire that propagated its "divine authority" and "lordship" through the constructs of peace, security, salvation, unity, stability, and silence "as a single and valid historical category."⁵⁹

Fourth, TYT biblical hermeneutics employs a co-contrapuntal exercise against the system of neo-colonialism that overrides freedom, justice, equality, and peace. In line with Edward Said's theory of contrapuntal articulation, a critique of contrapuntal praxis emphasizes individual self-accountability and freedom of action to substantiate a subaltern's counter-exercise on one's own social and political grounds.⁶⁰ A TYT contrapuntal exercise employs structural criticism to read the text "in view of structural dependency and read the forgotten other back into the text" so as to generate multi-interdependent and unified meanings.⁶¹ The right to exercise one's individual and institutional freedom is the pragmatic agenda behind contrapuntal criticism so as

⁵⁷ Revisionism is a contentious dialectic between Marxism, on the one hand, and postmodernism and poststructuralism, on the other, revisiting the Hegelian principle of "equating the historical value made through one's civilization and progress." Young, 20ff.

⁵⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 171-74.

⁵⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995). See, also, Eugene W Seraphin, "The Edict of Caesar Augustus (Lk. 2:1-5)," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (1945): 91-96 and Sabine Frebe, "Augustus' Divine Authority and Vergil's *Aeneid*," *Vergilius* 50 (2004): 35-62.

⁶⁰ "Cultural Tourism," in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 54-56. See also Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1993).

⁶¹ Buchanan, 98. As Buchanan goes on to say, in narratives of the relationship between the center and the periphery, it is obvious that the "great powers depended for their wealth" upon their subjects/colonies but neglected their obligations to them.

to privilege “liberating interdependence” among nations, races, and religious groups regardless of diversity and distinctiveness in terms of origin.⁶² As we will see in the next chapter, “speaking freely” (παρρησία) in Acts offers a dynamic tool for promoting subaltern self-autonomous agendas and for resisting internal domination and neo-colonial forces at the same time.⁶³

⁶² M. W. Dube, “Reading for Decolonization (John 4:1042),” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 38.

⁶³ Luke uses verbal forms of παρρησία for seven of the twelve Pauline speech occurrences in Acts. W. C. van Unnik, “The Christian’s Freedom of Speech in the New Testament,” in *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W. C. van Unnik* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 283.

TYT INTERPRETATION OF ACTS 15: UNIVERSAL APOSTLESHIP AS ANTI-COLONIAL EXISTENCE

4.1 Introduction: The Jerusalem Council in a Postcolonial TYT Context

This section examines the emergence of the Christian community as a united assembly in the midst of multipolar domains as portrayed in Acts 15. The anti-imperial character of the book of Acts has already been noted by a number of scholars. Virginia Burrus argues that the narrative of Acts resists elitist hierarchy and emperor-patronage-client systems. Lucan “literariness,” she argues, functions as “textual indeterminacy and instability” amidst these realities to portray an anti-imperial alternative for Christian communities negotiating this imperialism.⁶⁴ Similarly, Amy L. Wordelman interprets the Lyconian episode in Acts 14 by decolonizing the politics and cultural biases present in it. Wordelman’s identification of the “other” unravels “negative cultural stereotypes within its rural and Eastern/oriental” settings.⁶⁵ While the anti-imperial character of the book of Acts has been well documented, a TYT hermeneutic adds a co-subaltern dimension, providing a united anti-local-colonial criticism to its reading of Acts 15.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Virginia Burrus, “The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles,” in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, eds. Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2007), 152-53.

⁶⁵ Amy L. Wordelman, “Cultural Divides and Dual Realities: A Greco-Roman Context for Acts 14,” in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan narrative and Greco-Roman discourse*, eds. Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichel (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 205.

⁶⁶ TYT criticism de-layers multiple dominations and systems of power present throughout the Jerusalem debate, including Jewish law, ethnic markers, and apostolic authority.

4.2 Christianness: A New Circumcision

The requirement of the Gentile converts to be circumcised represents a Jewish essentialist agenda: “Unless you are circumcised... you cannot be saved.... It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:1, 5). This insistence represents an attempt to force Gentile converts into a Christian homogeneity marked by the physical rite of circumcision. This requirement is oppressive, judgmental, and absolutizing, because it assumes that God’s salvation is the private possession of the Jews, and that non-Jewish Christians can access this salvation only through the Jewish Christian community and on its terms. As seen not only in Acts but also in various Pauline epistles, this insistence on uniformity and homogeneity resulted not in the unity but in the division of Christian communities.

While dominant uniformity results in division, the sharing of core theological truth frees all.⁶⁷ Authentic Christian faith recognizes its dependence on the heritage of Israel. However, Jewish insistence that Gentile Christians adopt the physical rite of circumcision is unfaithful not only to authentic Christian faith but to Jewish universal messianism.⁶⁸ A number of scholars have argued that circumcision is essential to Jewish identity, but this does not entail that it is essential to Christian identity.⁶⁹ Here, Christianness is presented as the new circumcision, a new

⁶⁷ Gentile freedom from the law was admitted in Jerusalem. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1971), 443.

⁶⁸ Ibid. See also C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (ICCHS: London: T & T Clark, 1994), 704.

⁶⁹ Elisabeth Punzi, “Freud’s Jewish Identity, Circumcision, and the Theory of Castration Anxiety: Problem or Pride?,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 17, no. 10 (2014): 967. For further reference, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995) and Julia Goldman, “Researchers to Study Unconventional Jewish Identity [Year 2000 National Jewish Population Survey],” *Canadian Jewish News*, May 13, 1999.

multiethnic agenda for both Jews and Gentiles, a new co-existential identity in light of “Isaianic universalism.”⁷⁰

4.3 Christianness and Representation: A Norm for Multiethnic/Unionist Identity

Peter-Ben Smit argues that physical ritual circumcision is not the real circumcision which marks true Christian identity.⁷¹ Real circumcision, he argues, actually opposes the false circumcision which was being forced on Gentile communities. Still, Paul’s purpose was not to reject the physical rite but to propose “a different understanding of real circumcision by means of a changed ritual praxis in the expression or establishment of individual and communal identity... carved into the flesh, albeit in a different way.”⁷² True circumcision is “of the heart” (Rom. 2:25-29) and in no way requires that Gentile converts adopt the physical ritual practices proper to the Jewish people alone. Rather, true circumcision entails a multiethnic agenda and a new identity which does not require racial/ethnic/ritual homogeneity. The gathering of the apostolic council at the initiation of Paul and Barnabas aimed precisely at establishing such ideals of Christian embrace and wholeness that would mutually co-identify individual members and communities.

David G. Horrel similarly argues that Paul contrasts certain forms of illegitimate Jewish exclusivism with proper Christian inclusivism.⁷³ Horrel argues that “Christianness,” as the new (or true) circumcision, entails that “the vision of all humanity one in Christ (will) only work if

⁷⁰ Sze-kar Wan, “Does God Really Love Diversity,” in *God Loves Diversity and Justice: Progressive Scholars Speak about Faith, Politics, and the World*, eds. Susanne Scholz et al. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 113-27. See, also, Eric D. Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations: The Function of Race and Ethnicity in Acts 16* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 27-60.

⁷¹ Peter-Ben Smit, “In Search of Real Circumcision: Ritual Failure and Circumcision in Paul,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40, no. 1 (2017): 73.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷³ David G. Horrell, “Paul, Inclusion and Whiteness: Particularizing Interpretation,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40, no. 2 (2017): 123-47.

being in Christ is somehow placed, literally, above all other forms of religious, ethnic or social identification.”⁷⁴ For him, “being in Christ is, in fact, a new and particular form of differentiation and identification, a new boundary-marker, just as exclusionary and particular as others – just differently so.”⁷⁵ The physical rite of circumcision does not remove one from the Christian community, but insistence on it does. It does so because such insistence violates Christianness. Christianness thus does not exclude the physical rite of circumcision but instead insists that genuine circumcision consists in the elimination of all racial and national exclusivism.

A multiethnic reading of Acts 15 views Jewish exceptionalism as no better than Roman imperialism in its attempt to control the accessibility of salvation. The insistence on circumcision and the attempt to control early Christian identity negotiation resulted in the annulling of genuine Gentile Christian agency. This insistence on the physical rite of circumcision as a dominant marker of unity represents a rejection of bipolar or multipolar unification among fellow-Christian groups in an illegitimate attempt to secure co-existence in church. Any such unipolar agenda of a particular racial/ethnic group in the church is oppressive and colonial. In contrast, true Christianness is modeled in the creation of the apostolic platform to co-resolve the issue of circumcision. The resulting discussion involving both Jewish and Gentile believers had the potential to represent a new unionist force not dominated by any particular ethnic group. True Christianness can only emerge if there is a shift from a singularizing dominant agenda to a hybridized agenda that privileges diversity. Christianness is characterized by a multiethnic reality that resists any single homogenized agenda of a particular group that ignores the interests of various other groups with whom co-existence is shared collectively. Thus, Christianness is the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 134.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

ongoing becomingness of a new circumcision for multiple Christian groups celebrating creoleness, diaspora, and hybridity as a multi-Christian marker regardless of differing and distinctive religious, racial, and cultural realities and origins.

4.4 Brotherliness/Sisterliness: A Collective Self-Authorized Existence

Luke formalized the idea of Christian brotherliness/sisterliness. While Luke, Peter, and James apply such brotherliness language to the Gentile Christians (Acts 15:7, 13), in point of fact, the Gentiles Christians are granted no significant role in the deliberations themselves. TYT criticism equips readers to critique a false ‘Christian equality’ through the lens of *catachresis*. It also brings out certain basic questions: Does a mere deployment of such fraternal language entail that Gentiles really enjoy the implications of such a description? Are agencies of internal domination fitting given such language of brotherliness/sisterliness? Christian brotherliness entails equality for all believers regardless of difference, yet such equality is not in fact granted to the Gentile communities in the deliberation. The language of “brothers” is thus deployed internal-colonially. While the extension of the language ought to have entailed the inclusion of Paul, Barnabas, and the Gentile Christians as equal participants in the discussion, the very opposite was in fact the case. While the language of brotherliness was deployed, it named the very opposite of its proper meaning. The use of the language of brotherliness signals “a relation of dominance” between the dominant one and the dominated others.⁷⁶ TYT catechetical critique attempts to re-inscribe “something that exist rationally” to reestablish self-determination for the subaltern subject.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “Binarism,” in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 23-28.

⁷⁷ “Dislocation,” in *Ibid.*, 65.

4.5 The Freedom of the Gospel

While Peter's relationship with Gentile converts is complex, he finally submits to the liberty of gospel in the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ Peter's speech in Acts 15 discloses freedom of faith as the center of Christian identity. When God accepts all nations without distinction, cleansing their "hearts by faith," that includes the Gentiles (Acts 15:9). All persons and nations have access to God by faith in the gospel through the impartation of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ Believing the gospel is the key to access to the wholeness and unity of God. This being the case, all who have faith in the gospel are brothers and sisters in Christ despite having different identities in terms of race, culture, and religion.

Although Peter begins his address with an appeal to the idea of brotherliness/sisterliness in faith through Christ, his speech reads less like an open discussion and more like a judicial ruling. Ernst Haenchen argues that the Jerusalem apostles and the elders make Peter and James their spokesmen in order to bring the agenda of the council deliberation under their control.⁸⁰ It is as if Peter delivers his own faith and resolution to all Gentile groups present just as Roman officials dictate their rulings to their passive audiences.

Luke also employs the idea of brotherliness/sisterliness to capture the universal availability of the gift of salvation (v. 11). Faith is appealed to as the primary identity marker to resolve an internal dispute among diverse Christian groups (v. 9). In God's cleansing of human hearts, there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. Whereas Peter did not forbid the Jewish-Christian practice of circumcision, he still holds that the Jews "need to obey the Law

⁷⁸ Bruce, 298. See, also, Kirsopp Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul: Their Motive and Origin* (London: Rivington, 1911), 116.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁸⁰ Haenchen, 444.

in order to be saved.”⁸¹ For Peter, access to God’s salvation depends on one’s racial/ethnic identity: salvation is through obedience to the law for Jewish Christians, while salvation is through the grace of Jesus Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit for Gentile Christians. I argue that all those who have the same faith in the Gospel share the same gift of salvation from God. The brotherhood/sisterhood of all entails sharing the same resources from God. In fact, Peter’s speech highlights precisely this liberty of the Gospel which all can access by faith, though Peter himself ultimately joins the rest of the Jewish Christian community to legitimate the practice of the Law and the requirement of the Noahide laws for Gentile Christians. The use of brotherliness/sisterliness language in Acts 15 is thus problematized by the council’s decision which ultimately undermines the genuine faith principle that grants access to the salvific resources of God to all who believe.

4.6 The Listening Assembly: A Collective Freedom of Voice

Collective equality in terms of brotherliness/sisterliness and freedom in faith requires that the assembly be self-driven and active. While the assembly addressed by Peter is portrayed passively, the same assembly becomes active when addressed by Paul and Barnabas. What Luke is trying to convey here is that true Christian unity requires more than mere Gentile submission to a dominant Jewish agenda. For Luke, the assembly has, as its ultimate goal, Gentile inclusion in God’s single new community, the sharing of a new humanity through the power of faith.⁸² According to Francis Martin, while Peter is presumed to determine “the mind of God,” Paul and Barnabas are content to take the role of “witnesses” of God’s works.⁸³

⁸¹ Barrett, 721.

⁸² Francis Martin and Thomas C. Oden, eds. *Acts* (ACCS: Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 182-83.

⁸³ Bruce, 291-92.

C. K. Barrett argues that the silence that follows Peter's speech represents the exercise of a dominant position over the council. Peter recounts the conversion of the Gentiles in Cornelius's house, but the silence of the congregation represents a failure of the right and freedom of the apostolic council. Arguably, Peter's role constraints the freedom of the gospel and limits the exercise of the freedom of faith for the other Christian groups present. The shift from silence to listening highlights the distinction between Peter's address and that of Paul and Barnabas. The silent assembly represents the dominance of the apostolic platform by one, while the listening assembly represents a sharing of the gift of salvation in oneness regardless of differing racial and religious backgrounds. Any act that privileges one group and silences all others is an act of distortion against the new assembly of God. Genuine Christian brotherliness/sisterliness requires an equal sharing of the gift of salvation in unity. A genuinely Christian assembly makes room for and cultivates a collective freedom of voice where all self-serving voices are kept in check.

4.7 A TYT Co-Revisionism of Salvific Legitimacy

TYT co-revisionism examines James' office over the Jerusalem church.⁸⁴ His speech makes it clear that James stood at the top of the authoritative pyramid: he voices his judgment upon all matters concerning which the council previously deliberated. Moreover, James' reply, "Brethren, listen to me," terminates the congregation's active listening to Barnabas and Paul (v. 13). Here, the equal accessibility to the apostolic platform is disrupted. In doing so, James embodies an elitist cultural system that hijacks the salvific universality of the Christian community.⁸⁵ Even in this first episode of apostolic deliberation, dominating discrimination is

⁸⁴ Martin and Oden, 186.

⁸⁵ God's salvation belongs to both Jews and Gentiles as featured throughout the apostolic deliberation.

present as represented by the silent, passive congregation.⁸⁶ The text portrays multiple monotonous voices from various leaders who try to homogenize the assembly into a false singularity.

According to Jacob Neusner, the determination of the council in Acts 15:19-21 is fully in line with Rabbinic teaching on Tannaitic authority. According to the Talmud, the children of Noah were commanded by God to set up courts regarding justice, idolatry, blasphemy, fornication, bloodshed, thievery, and cutting a limb from a living beast.⁸⁷ James judges that this decision applies to Gentile Christians and that they are to observe “the same restrictions” as did “aliens” in ancient days.⁸⁸

In support of Peter’s decision, James refers to the prophet Amos as historical proof that God “first visited the Gentiles to take from among them a people for his name” (v. 14). James continues quoting Amos to speak of the rebuilding of “the dwelling of David” that has fallen (v. 16), but the fallen tent of David refers not only to the historical fall of the Davidic royal house but also to the failure of ancient Israel to fulfill God’s intention to embrace both Jews and Gentiles. Still, James seems to be arguing that the prophetic witness traces out a pattern of Gentile rejection of Jewish law. One can argue here that the speeches of Peter and James are divided between a dominant rhetoric of Gentile inclusion and Gentile rejection of the law. In contrast, scholars like Haenchen have highlighted the striking divine agency of this prophecy. In verse 16 alone, God is referred to in the first person four times. It is God who will restore the

⁸⁶ The silent assembly signifies that the apostolic deliberation had become centralized, monotonous, and homogenous in terms of leadership, deliberation, and orientation under the design/construct of the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

⁸⁷ M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 323.

⁸⁸ John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). See, also, Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AYBC: New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 557.

ruined tabernacle of David, thus emphasizing God's ultimate authority and responsibility for His own agenda to form one people of both Jews and Gentiles. As the text suggests, God's agenda for Gentile inclusion failed for a period of time because Israel took it upon itself to restore David's kindship by establishing a tent for Israelites alone.

Both Peter and James envision the restoration of the Davidic house as the creation of Israel as a particularized nation in contrast to God's intention to include both Jews and Gentiles. In contrast, Luke's portrayal of the Davidic restoration centers on faith in "the Jesus event" culminating in the resurrection and fulfilling the Davidic promises. This is what "will cause the Gentiles to seek the Lord" according to Haenchen.⁸⁹ The speech of Paul and Barnabas also highlights God's own action to restore the divine agenda with respect to the election of the Gentiles through faith. TYT critique seeks to restore salvific legitimacy not by privileging one dominant historiographical norm, nor by rejecting Jewish law and ethnic origins, but by privileging the exercise of faith by Jews and Gentiles alike.

4.8 Jerusalem vs Phoenicia, Samaria, Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: A TYT Co-contrapuntal Critique of Relocation

Acts 15 pays considerable attention to geographies and cities. The whole book, in fact, traces the apostles' journeys from one place to another. According to Laura Nasrallah, the apostles bring with them a theological vision of the one true God who fully embraces a "pluralistic empire and its notions of ethnic difference."⁹⁰ A TYT contrapuntal approach offers a critique of space/land to examine the traveling of the gospel from Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish religious world, to the multiple centers of the Gentile Roman world. One can argue that

⁸⁹ Haenchen, 448.

⁹⁰ Laura Nasrallah, "The Acts of the Apostles, Greek Cities, and Hadrian's Panhellenion," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 3 (2008): 534.

this feature of the gospel traveling and operating from one border to the other in the face of the Roman imperial system represents an alternative resistance against anti-Christian forces and dynamics.

4.9 Jerusalem: Resisting the Dominant Apostolic Pulpit (The Pulpit of Justice, Freedom, and Equality in God's Election of the Nations)

Luke identifies the city of Jerusalem as the apostolic center of early Christianity as it spreads abroad. The convening of the apostolic council under the control of the Jerusalem church in response to the issue of circumcision might be taken to represent a monopolization of the power of the gospel and the universal apostolic office. The gospel of Gentile circumcision was brought to Antioch by certain Jerusalem leaders in order to rein in Gentile converts. This resulted in a significant division in the church and subsequent ethnic tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians. One might read the episode as a plot by Jewish Christians to arbitrate Gentile conversion and control access to God's salvation. In contrast, Luke narrates the convening of the apostolic council in Jerusalem not because Jerusalem was the apostolic center of early Christianity but, on the contrary, because Jerusalem was the center of the problem. Indeed, as Luke narrates it, the council was convened at the initiation of Antioch rather than Jerusalem.

The reception of Paul, Barnabas, and their party in Jerusalem was cold at best. They were welcomed by the leaders and the congregation as a whole, but they must first defend their apostleship to the Gentiles. This suggests that their Gentile mission was not recognized by all. Indeed, some of the Jewish Christians interrupted their report and charged them to observe circumcision and the law of Moses. This was followed by the first round of an exclusive deliberation among the Jerusalem apostles and the elders. The need to deliberate suggests, at least, that they had previously agreed that Gentile converts would need to keep the Mosaic law.

TYT contrapuntal criticism argues that the Jerusalem church's assumption of the role of a general headquarters threatened to take away equal membership of Gentile Christians and violate genuine Christian brotherliness/sisterliness. Moreover, the role of the Antioch assembly as a co-institutor of the apostolic council is neglected once the council begins. Luke is convinced that the church is a shared platform for all who believe, both Jews and Gentiles. In contrast, the Jewish leadership was convinced that, in order to have access to God's salvation, Gentiles needed to keep the Jewish law by way of the Noahide requirements if not circumcision. This act of determining an extra-faith salvific norm, particularly a specifically Jewish one, distorted the free gift of God's salvation and genuine Christian unity. While the gift of salvation is a collective gift to all of humanity, it is also a particular gift of salvation to each individual group of people; there is no need to gloss over differences for sake of superficial homogeneity.

The first apostolic council was held in Jerusalem to resolve two basic questions: the question of membership in the Christian community and the question of social fellowship. Regarding the first, the question was whether circumcision was necessary for Gentile inclusion in the Christian community. Regarding the second, the question was whether Gentiles were to be included as equal members in apostolic deliberation and the leadership of the Christian community. Paul and Barnabas clearly co-instituted the council, and Paul seemed to understand himself as bearer of a new office, Apostle to the Gentiles. They came to Jerusalem as official delegates appointed by the Antiochene church. Despite their prominent role in the spread of the Gospel in the Gentile world, F. F. Bruce points out that Paul and Barnabas "took no part in making the decision; that was the responsibility of the Jerusalem leaders."⁹¹ While Paul and

⁹¹ Bruce, 282.

Barnabas won a partial victory with respect to the first question, the council clearly failed with respect to the second.

TYT resistance questions any version of apostolic conciliarism in which the equal rights and representation among all delegates are inadequately upheld. The Jerusalem council was co-opted by the Jewish apostles and elders who were the only ones who played a dominant role in the deliberation. Luke seems to highlight the popular notion that Jerusalem was the legitimate apostolic center regardless of the spread of Christian assemblies throughout the Roman world. Jerusalem here represents the unipolar center that controls the entire platform of the apostolic council. In contrast, Phoenicia, Samaria, Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia represent self-authorizing forces of resistance among Gentile Christians, fighting for Christian identity against a Jewish attempt to demarcate the norms of access to God's salvation.⁹²

Luke notes that, on their way to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas passed through Phoenicia and Samaria (v. 3). This suggests that Paul and Barnabas rejected notions of Phoenician and Samaritan primitiveness in contrast to the Jewish rejection of these peoples as lacking Christian knowledge. This welcoming of Phoenicia and Samaria by the Antiochene group in one accord shows their different understanding of the universality of the Gospel from that of Jewish Christians. The Antiochene group understood the universality of the Gospel to entail that all people would be needed for the constitution and leadership of the new people of God. They viewed the council not as a place for all to submit to but as a platform of equality for all in one body of Christ to resolve the issue in a collective way before the one God. In this way, the cities of Phoenicia and Samaria represent an alternative space together with Antioch, in contradistinction from the singular apostolic space envisioned by the Jerusalem church.

⁹² Young, 45-68.

Apostolic space is in reality as extensive as the space where God is at work among all peoples, Jews and Gentiles.

The visitation of Phoenicia and Samaria also brought “great joy to all the believers” (v. 3). The travel of Paul and Barnabas with their coworkers is thus portrayed as a time of mutual rejoicing over “the success of the Gentile mission” despite their having just been criminalized as uncircumcised or contaminated by the Jerusalem sect.⁹³ This collective celebration represents the freedom, justice, and peace of salvation shared equally between Jews and Gentiles. The travelling party expressed no intimidation or anxiety that they had violated true Christianness as charged by the dominant Jerusalem group. Phoenicia and Samaria thus represent a collective celebration of God’s work among all peoples in stark contrast to the attempt by the Jerusalem church to co-opt that work for themselves alone.

TYT biblical criticism thus draws on significant scholarship that exposes the privileging of a dominant culture by a superior group or class of people through a system of control over the common space belonging to all. Duncan McDuie-Ra, Willem van Schendel, and Tina Harris examine such systems of control operating in Imphal, a multi-diversified city of Manipur in Northeast India. McDuie-Ra argues that a threefold ideological norm of belongingness, control, and exclusion fuels a dominant system of control.⁹⁴ The ruling regime deploys the armed forces in the name of “security” and civilian government in the name of “development and planning” to control and systematically suppress alternative ideologies and ethnicities.⁹⁵ Honorable goals

⁹³ Bruce, 288.

⁹⁴ Duncan McDuie-Ra, “Control,” in *Borderland Cities in New India: Frontier to Gateway* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 65-92.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

often hide sinister motivations and means, and TYT hermeneutics seeks to expose such subterfuges.

4.10 Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: A Relocation of Bilateral Apostolic Power

Some scholars have pointed out that James's exercise of judgement reflects the standard formula for decision in popular assemblies.⁹⁶ In such assemblies, the decision process was thought to belong to a deity either through a prophet or through a human judge.⁹⁷ A TYT reading of the text provokes readers to problematize such cultural practices of unilateral decision-making made by the leading class. Exploring ethical decision-making, Stacy L. Jackson asks the helpful question, "What kind of integration might assist us in our pursuit of Christian ethical decision-making in the midst of a culture of relativism and relentless ambiguity?"⁹⁸ To establish a common global citizenship for all, Jackson argue that we must "(1) move beyond learning without values, (2) integrate theory and practice, and (3) reflect across disciplines with prescriptive and descriptive insight."⁹⁹ In agreement with Jackson's proposal, I would argue that the Jerusalem council should have provided a common platform for first-century Christians from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds to integrate all beliefs, conversion experiences, and faith-based knowledge and to cultivate the exercise of Christian assembly and civic life by a variety of Christian groups.

By contrast, there are, arguably, two systems of decision-making inconsistently operating at the apostolic council under the leadership of the Jerusalem elders and apostles: (1)

⁹⁶ It reflects the Astypalaia Inscription from the third century C. E. *Inscriptiones Graecae* 12.3 cited in Boring, Berger, and Colpe, 324.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁹⁸ Stacy L. Jackson, "Integration in Christian Ethical Decision-making," *Business & Professional Ethics Journal* 23, no. 4 (2004): 115.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

Policymaking: Luke is clear that James assumes the authority to make the final judgement individually (v. 19).¹⁰⁰ Luke seems to justify James' exercise of decisive power in the council because he is a bishop of the Jerusalem church. (2) Non-policymaking: Immediately after the policymaking exercised solely by James, Luke describes the non-political making role of the rest of the congregation. Luke contrasts the third person "they" (vv. 22, 23) and the first person "we" (vv. 24, 25, 27) to highlight the collective response and agreement in support of James' individual decision. Luke portrays the congregation as active only in the choosing and sending of apostles to the Antiochene church (v. 22), writing the decree (v. 23), and consoling those troubled by the Jerusalem party (v. 24) by limiting Gentile legal obedience to the four abstentions (v. 29). For the Jerusalem party, these abstentions represent a minimal "moral standard" for the Gentile converts to be allowed into the fellowship of the Christian community.¹⁰¹ Such boundary-marking bears striking resemblance to the colonial decision-making process, according to which cultural norms like "nobility" and "loyalty" play the role of a polarizing gap overriding the principle of co-existence, freedom of political exercise, and equal sharing of power and resources between colonizing empire and colonized natives.¹⁰²

The fellowship of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, on the other hand, represent the equal and common exercise of the freedom of faith among the various Gentile Christian groups. The Gentile Christian assemblies flourishing in these regions occasion *παρρησία*, a speaking of the truth and of the word of the Lord freely without fear (v. 35). While the Jerusalem party deliberates over the minimal condition for Gentile inclusion, the *παρρησία* of Paul and Barnabas

¹⁰⁰ Haenchen, 440.

¹⁰¹ Bruce, 286.

¹⁰² Liesbeth Hesselink, *Healers on the Colonial Market: Native Doctors and Midwives in the Dutch East Indies* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 53.

is focused on proclaiming “what signs and wonders God had wrought through them among the Gentiles” (v. 12). The Lucan *παρρησία* of Paul and Barnabas thus plays a crucial role in Gentile resistance against the colonization of God’s salvation by one group. Here, speaking truthfully does not entail that the Gentiles reject Jewish ceremonial law; rather, it entails a celebration of the “freedom” of faith. The *παρρησία* of Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas strengthened the Gentile converts and established the assembly of Christ in Antioch. It is the act of *παρρησία* and not the co-opting of means of access which stands at the center of genuine Christian unity.

CONCLUSION

TYT biblical criticism offers a local-postcolonial strategy for reading Acts 15 against the backdrop of first-century Roman imperialism. Postmodern scholars have paid considerable attention to the salvific history presented in Luke-Acts as a new world order. In conversation with other postcolonial theories, this thesis offers a TYT critique of Burma and Acts 15. The idea of multiethnic existence in equality is a key axiom in TYT criticism, allowing the reader to decolonize local colonialism exercised by the present ruling group in the context of Burma. TYT biblical criticism de-colonizes the text of Acts 15 from the reader's own subaltern TYT context, equipping and empowering the reader to properly diagnose and resist the systems of internal colonial-victimization and to offer in its place the universal apostleship of a Lucan Christianity.

TYT biblical criticism employs its hermeneutical trajectory to reengage the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1-35), in order to examine the model of co-existence in multi-pluralistic domains in a way that is ideologically sound, historically authentic, and theoretically postcolonial. The previous section analyzed the Jerusalem council and presented it not merely as the first apostolic council for Jewish apostles and elders to address the question of circumcision but as the first Christian conference convened to officiate a collective apostleship among multiple groups irrespective of differences in terms of race/ethnicity and religion. Jewish and Gentile Christians together shared existence in three dimensions: (1) the Roman-inhabited world, geographically; (2) the Roman empire, politically; and (3) Hellenism, culturally. Despite being subordinate in terms of status, the move and expansion of Lucan communities in the exercise of

the office of apostolic egalitarianism within such dominating environments (both in rural contexts in general and urban arenas in particular) represents the exercise of multiethnic existence confronting the Roman universal system.

Having highlighted the multiple-trans-cultural agenda of the Lucan assemblies, this study argues that the convention of the Jerusalem council institutes a universal apostleship through an evangelizing body to all nations as an internal-anti-colonial alternative. The council thus represents an act of Christian apostleship to construct multiethnic existence in four dimensions: (1) a self-authorized initiation into the apostolic platform by the Antiochene community under the leadership of Paul and Barnabas; (2) independent power exercised by Paul, Barnabas, and the Gentile Christians (Acts 15:3, 12, 30-34); (3) a negotiated resolution by the elders and apostles (Acts 15:6-21, 22-29); and (4) a co-subaltern struggle to rebuild a new Davidic tabernacle by building up one apostleship in the system of multilateral unity among multiple Christian congregations.

Theologically, this TYT universal apostleship exists only when and where the salvific office is exercised in “equity” among all Christian attendees.¹⁰³ Universal apostleship secures a life of transcultural existence reinvented by Lucan Christianity. In Acts 15, all Christian groups engage their struggles and risks together in unity, solidarity, and mutual respect to redraw the co-existential boundaries of the Christian community as a multiethnic people of God. By its analyses of the text, TYT universal apostleship offers a way forward for the “third liberation” of all ethnic nationals, both Baman and non-Baman, who have been striving in various ways to revitalize the federal-democratic system constituted during the era of the anti-colonial struggle for independence. This theology of third liberation has much in common with Krister Stendahl’s

¹⁰³ Paul W. Khan, *Political Theology* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 35.

attention to Paul's salvific inclusivism and the theology of "primarily people and life."¹⁰⁴ In the context of co-subaltern struggle, the theology of universal apostleship legitimates all co-subaltern peoples and creates a liberated space to regulate the system of universal/collective salvation through the regeneration of TYT sovereign enterprises.

¹⁰⁴ Stated in Richard A. Horsley, *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 2-3.

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