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# THE SUMMARIES OF ACTS 2, 4, AND 5 AND PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

Rubén R. Dupertuis

## INTRODUCTION

In earlier critical interpretation, the descriptions of the early Christian community of goods in the longer summaries of Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35, along with the related summary in Acts 5:12–16, often played a starring role in the quest for the sources underlying the narrative of Acts.<sup>1</sup> In more recent interpretation, especially since the work of Martin Dibelius and Henry Cadbury,<sup>2</sup> the summaries, or at least parts of them, are generally attributed to the author of Acts. Three other points also elicit general agreement. First, the summaries are commonly understood to be generalizations based on more specific traditions, such as the gifts of Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira (4:36–5:11). Second, the summaries are inseparable from the surrounding events on both narrative and linguistic grounds.<sup>3</sup> And third, some of the characterizations in the summaries are understood to indicate some degree of idealization in light of Hellenistic utopian ideals.<sup>4</sup> Most interesting in this regard is the

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1. See Jacques Dupont, *The Sources of Acts* (trans. Kathleen Pond; New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), 17–61, for a survey and analysis of earlier source theories.

2. Martin Dibelius, "Style Criticism of the Book of Acts," in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. H. Greeven; New York: Scribner's, 1956), 1–25; Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: MacMillan, 1927), 58–59, 324–25; idem, "The Summaries in Acts," in *The Acts of the Apostles: Additional Notes* (vol. 5 of *The Beginnings of Christianity*; ed. Henry J. Cadbury and Kirsopp Lake; London: Macmillan, 1933), 392–402.

3. See especially Maria Anicia Co, "The Major Summaries in Acts (Acts 2,42–47; 4,32–35; 5,12–16): Linguistic and Literary Relationship," *ETL* 68 (1992): 49–85.

4. The following are representative but not exhaustive: Lucien Cerfaux, "La composition de la première partie du Livre des Actes," *ETL* (1936): 667–91; idem, "La première communauté chrétienne à Jérusalem (Act., II, 41–V, 42)," *ETL* 16 (1939): 5–31; Heinrich Zimmermann, "Die Sammelberichte der Apostelgeschichte," *BZ* 5 (1961): 71–82; Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (trans. J. Limburg et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 24–25; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (trans. R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 191–96, 230–35; Eckhard Plümacher, *Lukas als*

description of the early Christian community in Jerusalem as having “all things in common [ἅπαντα κοινὰ]” (Acts 2:44, 4:32), and being of “one heart and soul [καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία]” (4:32).

#### THE SUMMARIES AND HELLENISTIC IDEALS

While many interpreters believe that idealization of some sort on Luke’s part may be involved, there has been much discussion regarding exactly what the literary relationship between Acts and the Hellenistic traditions might be and which particular group of ideas provides the most helpful comparison. Hans Conzelmann read the description of the early Christian community as an idealization based on the widespread literary *topos* of property sharing often associated with utopian dreams or stories of primeval times.<sup>5</sup> Ekhard Plümacher and, especially, David Mealand both saw a more direct literary connection between Acts and parallels in Plato’s *Republic*.<sup>6</sup> Others however suggest that the complex of images in these summaries is best seen in light of the Greek friendship ideals.<sup>7</sup> Still other interpreters do not see much of a connection between these passages and Greek utopian literature at all.<sup>8</sup>

A number of interpreters have objected to the notion that the author of Acts intentionally alluded to Plato’s *Republic* or Greek utopian ideals in order to portray the twelve apostles and the early Christian community

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*hellenistischer Schriftsteller* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 16–18; David L. Mealand, “Community of Goods and Utopian Allusions in Acts II–V,” *JTS* 28 (1977): 96–99; Jacques Dupont, “Community of Goods in the Early Church,” in *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 85–102; S. Scott Bartchy, “Community of Goods in Acts: Idealization or Social Reality?” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. Birger Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 309–18; Alan C. Mitchell, “The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44–47 and 4:32–37,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 255–72; Gregory E. Sterling, “‘Athletes of Virtue’: An Analysis of the Summaries in Acts (2:41–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16),” *JBL* 113 (1994): 679–96.

5. Conzelmann, *Acts*, 24.

6. Plümacher, *Lukas*, 16–18; Mealand, “Community of Goods,” 96–99.

7. Dupont, “Community of Goods;” and especially, Mitchell, “Social Function.” The *topos* of friends having all things in common can be found in the following: Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 9.8.2; 9.9.1–2; Plutarch, *Adul. am.* 65a and *Amic. mult.* 94c, 96d; Diogenes Laertius, 8.10; Cicero, *Off.* 1.51. Other instances are noted by Pieter W. van der Horst, “Hellenistic Parallels to the Acts of the Apostles (2,1–47),” *JSNT* 25 (1985): 49–60; and idem, “Hellenistic Parallels to Acts (Chapters 3 and 4),” *JSNT* 35 (1989): 37–46.

8. Brian Capper, “The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (ed. R. Baukham; vol. 4 of *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 323–57. See also Jean Danielou, “La communauté de Qumrân et l’organisation de l’Eglise ancienne,” *RHPR* 35 (1955): 104–15.

as belonging to an ideal or golden age of the church. David Seccombe doubts that “a Christian writer, as immersed in the Old Testament as Luke, would consciously have imitated pagan mythological conceptions in his presentation of the Christian movement.”<sup>9</sup> Seccombe goes on to make a distinction between being unconsciously influenced by Hellenistic culture and education into an appreciation of Hellenistic ideals—which he believes to be the case with the author of Acts—and “consciously striving toward a utopian goal.”<sup>10</sup> A similar distinction is made by Hans-Josef Klauck, who understands the author of Acts to have been conscious of using the language of Hellenistic social utopias in his description of the early Christian community, but is quick to point out that there is no direct dependence, just influence of patterns of speech.<sup>11</sup>

The discussion generally revolves around the question of Luke’s intentional portrayal of the early Christian community in light of Greek utopian ideals. The mechanism by which to explain the lexical and thematic similarities between the description of the Christians in Acts and utopian traditions has generally been some form of a literary *topos*.<sup>12</sup> I will suggest below that recent awareness of the widespread practice of literary imitation in the Greco-Roman world with its emphasis on the imitation of models has made difficult the task of making a distinction between the use of a widespread *topos* or motif and a direct allusion to a specific author or text. Furthermore, I will suggest that the portrayal of the early Christian community in Jerusalem is modeled in part on Plato’s guardians as described in the *Republic* and related dialogues.

#### EDUCATION AND MIMESIS

Literate education in the Greco-Roman world involved working through a series of steps that were designed, in the long run, to lay the groundwork of rhetorical training. The dominant feature of literate edu-

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9. David P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (SNTSU 6; Linz: Fuchs, 1982), 200.

10. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor*, 201.

11. Hans-Josef Klauck, “Gütergemeinschaft in der klassischen Antike, im Qumran und im Neuen Testament,” *RevQ* 11 (1982–83): 72.

12. The exceptions are Mealand, “Community of Goods,” 97–99, who suggested the possibility of a direct literary connection, and Cerfaux, “La première communauté,” who understood the summaries to have come from one of a series of sources the author of Acts used for his narrative of the early church. The similarities between the summaries and utopian traditions derived from Plato were to him so striking, that he posited a Hellenistic provenance for the source.

cation was the imitation of that which had been done with success.<sup>13</sup> Immediately after memorizing the alphabet and copying lists of words students began copying and memorizing maxims and lines of poetry, followed by copying, memorizing, expanding and paraphrasing longer passages (often taken from Homer). Finally, for a limited and usually elite few came grammatical and rhetorical exercises, which were, once again, based in the imitation of models.

At the primary and secondary educational levels the imitation of models was fairly straight-forward. At a more advanced compositional level, the ways in which one text served as a model for another was more complex. Authors were taught to imitate more than one model, culling the best from different writers like a bee collects pollen from various flowers, and arranging and assorting the raw materials into a new compound. Seneca states:

We should follow, men say, the example of the bees, who flit about and cull the flowers that are suitable for producing honey, and then arrange and assort in their cells all that they have brought it. . . . It is not certain whether the juice which they obtain from the flowers forms at once into honey, or whether they change that which they have gathered into this delicious object by blending something therewith and by a certain property of their breath. . . . We should so blend those several flavours into one delicious compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is a clearly different thing from that whence it came. (*Ep.* 84.3–5)<sup>14</sup>

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13. On literary *mimesis* in antiquity see George C. Fiske, *Lucilius and Horace: A Study in the Classical Theory of Imitation* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1920; repr., New York: Herder & Herder, 1964); Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry, Roman Literature and its Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–51; Richard McKeon, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," in *Critics and Criticism* (ed. Ronald S. Crane; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 147–75; D. A. Russell, "De Imitatione," in *Creative Imitation in Latin Literature* (ed. David A. West and Anthony J. Woodman; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1–16; Ellen Finkelpearl, "Pagan Traditions of Intertextuality in the Roman World," in *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity* (ed. Dennis R. MacDonald; SAC; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2001), 78–90. For recent discussions of education in the Greco-Roman world see Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); idem, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Ronald F. Hock, "Homer in Greco-Roman Education," in MacDonald, *Mimesis and Intertextuality*, 56–77.

14. Seneca, *Epistles* (trans. Richard M. Gummere; 3 vols; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917–25), 2:277, 279.

Sometimes reliance on a model was announced or advertised and sometimes it was disguised. Imitation of a model was not limited to word choice, but encompassed literary style, themes and was done across genres. With imitation as the dominant compositional ethos, creativity was measured by how writers handled traditional subjects and themes, not by an author's ability to spin new tales. Horace tells would-be writers that "it is hard to treat in your own way what is common: and you are doing better in spinning into acts a song of Troy than if, for the first time, you were giving the world a theme unknown and unsung" (*Ars* 128–130).<sup>15</sup>

An important aspect of learning to write was a competitive relationship with the model. Great models did not deter would-be writers, but acted as a challenge, inviting them to weigh in on a given theme. It may be partly as a result of this principle of composition that *topoi* develop. The long list of imitators of Homer's storms in the *Odyssey* is a good example.<sup>16</sup> Regarding this principle of improvement or rivalry, Seneca states, "he who writes last has the best of the bargain; he finds already at hand words which when marshaled in a different way, show a new face" (*Ep.* 79.6).<sup>17</sup> At the primary and secondary stages of education, Homer, and to a lesser degree Euripides and Menander, dominated the curriculum; at the level of rhetorical training and in the writings of the literary elite, however, there are a larger number of authors alluded to and used as models.<sup>18</sup> Plato's writings come to fore at this point.<sup>19</sup>

Of the many implications of the practice of literary mimesis for the study of early Christian literature, the following are of importance for this study.<sup>20</sup> First, if someone learned to write Greek, we can assume

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15. Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars poetica* (trans. H. Rushton Fairclough; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 461.

16. See the discussion in Dennis R. MacDonald, "The Shipwrecks of Odysseus and Paul," *NTS* 45 (1999): 93–94.

17. Seneca, *Epistles* (Gummere, 2:205).

18. Morgan, *Literate Education*, 67–89.

19. In Theon's late first-century C.E. manual of preliminary rhetorical exercises, for example, passages from Plato's *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Timaeus*, and the *Phaedrus* are proposed as models. For a translation of the extant *progymnasmata*, see George A. Kennedy, ed. and trans., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (SBLWGRW 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

20. The two scholars who have explored the implications in the greatest depth are Thomas L. Brodie and Dennis R. MacDonald. For the former, see "Greco-Roman Imitation of Texts as a Partial Guide to Luke's Use of Sources," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; New York: Crossroad, 1984), 17–46; "The Accusing and Stoning of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:8–13) as One Component of the Stephen Text," *CBQ* 45 (1984): 417–32; "Luke-Acts as an Imitation and Emulation of the Elijah-Elisha

familiarity with those authors and texts typically used as models in the educational system, including Homer, Euripides, and, by the early stages of rhetorical training, Plato. Second, it is possible to create a hierarchy, of sorts, when comparing numerous instances of a *topos* or theme given the preponderance of certain authors as targets for imitation. Third, the importance of mimesis in educational training and literary practice calls into question the use of religious boundaries to decide whether a Christian or Jewish author would have been familiar with certain classical texts.<sup>21</sup> It is more likely that a mimetic literary ethos, not piety, determines an author's literary models. That the author of Acts should use models as diverse as the Septuagint, Homer, and Plato should not be surprising;<sup>22</sup> diverse allusions to traditional literary themes are to be expected as part of standard compositional practices.

The importance of the role of mimesis in composition, both at the educational and literary levels, opens the door for another look at the relationship between the major summaries in Acts and the parallels in Plato's writings.

#### THE PERFECT POLIS

Primarily through the description of the ideal state in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, Plato was quite possibly the single most influential writer in the development of utopian traditions, including the extraordinary journey, the idyllic primeval age and the political utopia.<sup>23</sup> In the *Republic*, Socrates' pursuit of justice leads to the founding of a hypothetical state based on the separation of functions and the specialization of labors—

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Narrative," in *New Views on Luke-Acts* (ed. Earl Richards; Collegeville: Glazier, 1990), 78–85; and "Towards Unraveling the Rhetorical Imitation of Sources in Acts: 2 Kings 5 as One Component of Acts 8,9–40," *Bib* 67 (1986): 41–67. For the latter, see especially *Christianizing Homer: "The Odyssey," Plato, and "The Acts of Andrew"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

21. See, for example, J. R. C. Cousland, "Dionysus Theomachos? Echoes of the *Bacchae* in 3 Maccabees," *Bib* 82 (2001): 539–48; and Dennis R. MacDonald, "Tobit and the *Odyssey*," in MacDonald, *Mimesis and Intertextuality*, 11–40.

22. For Luke's imitation of the Septuagint, see Brodie's work referenced in n. 20 above. For Luke's imitation of Homer see Dennis R. MacDonald, "Luke's Eutyclus and Homer's Elpenor: Acts 20:7–12 and *Odyssey* 10–12," *Journal of Higher Criticism* 1 (1994): 5–24; and idem, "Shipwrecks," 88–107. For Luke's possible imitation of Plato, see John Kloppenborg, "*Exitus Clari Viri*: The Death of Jesus in Luke," *TJT* 8 (1992): 106–20; Gregory Sterling, "*Mors philosophi*: The Death of Jesus in Luke," *HTR* 94 (2001): 383–402.

23. On Greek utopianism, see John Ferguson, *Utopias of the Classical World* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975); and Doynce Dawson, *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

more importantly, each person is to work in an area to which his or her nature is suited. This state is to be ruled by a special class of guardians—part warriors, part philosophers—who, like farmers and builders specifically trained and skilled in their respective arts, are specifically bred, trained and sustained for the all important art of ruling and defending a state. Society is essentially divided into three groups: (1) a group of ruler guardians; (2) a larger group of warrior guardians whose job it is to defend the state; and (3) a producing class made up of everybody else.

In order to guarantee a just leadership and avoid corruption one of the more well known aspects of Plato's ideal state emerges: the guardians would not be permitted to own property or accumulate wealth in any way. The more extreme aspect of this communal arrangement is the common possession of wives and children.<sup>24</sup> The material sharing of possessions leads to a form of spiritual unity and complete ideological harmony that, in turn, leads to achieving a just state.

In two later and related dialogues, the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, Plato historicizes (and mythologizes) his hypothetical state suggesting it actually existed in a time that antedated the contemporary, and therefore incomplete, historical record. This long forgotten Athens, then, stood as the ideal primeval state from which the contemporary Athens had devolved and to which it could aspire. The fact that Plato takes his "hypothetical state" and places it in "history," however idealized and remote, will be extremely important in the subsequent development of utopian and golden age motifs. Also important is the fact that Plato's guardians stand at the point where images of ideal leaders, an ideal polity, golden ages and the corrupting potential of money converge.<sup>25</sup>

Plato's influence on subsequent utopian traditions is hard to overestimate. Moses Hadas has suggested that "there is a strong probability that [Plato] was the most important single intellectual factor in the process of Hellenization and that his is the major responsibility for shaping the east's eventual contribution to the west."<sup>26</sup> Images of far-off lands and philosophical utopias after Plato are largely dependent

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24. This was not an invitation to libertinism, but an extension of Plato's attempt to protect the guardians from anything that might lead them to place their own interests over the interests of the state.

25. Plato appears to be largely responsible for introducing a concern for the corrupting power of money and possessions into traditional pictures of the golden age; see H. C. Baldry, *Ancient Utopias* (University of Southampton Inaugural Lecture; Southampton, Eng.: University of Southampton, 1956); and David M. Schaps, "Socrates and the Socratics: When Wealth Became a Problem," *CW* 96 (2003): 131–59.

26. Moses Hadas, "Plato the Hellenizer," in idem, *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (Morningside Heights, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1959), 73.



on him.<sup>27</sup> Plato also appears to have influenced the portrayal of the Essenes by both Philo (*Prob.* 81–84) and Josephus (*Ant.* 18.18–22; *B.J.* 2.119–161). In particular, the structure of the latter's discussion in *B.J.* 2.119–161 appears to be shaped by Plato's treatment of the ideal state in the *Republic*.<sup>28</sup>

#### COMPARING THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN ACTS AND PLATO'S GUARDIANS

In his brief but important note on the community of goods in Acts and utopian ideals, Mealand showed that the wording in Acts 2:44 and 4:32 is closer to Plato's descriptions of the guardians than any instances of the friendship maxim in Aristotle's writings or elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the lexical similarities, there are a number of general similarities and correspondences between the descriptions of early Christian community life in the summaries of Acts 2 and 4 and the descriptions of the guardians in *Resp.* 2–5.

First, both occur in the context of the founding of a new city or nation and the establishment of a new constitution. Numerous echoes of the Sinai traditions in Exod 19 and later Jewish writers suggest that the Pentecost events in Acts 2 provide the charter for the newly inaugurated kingdom of God (Acts 1:3, 6).<sup>30</sup> Recently there has been increased attention

27. For a discussion of Plato's influence on Hellenistic utopias, especially those of Euhemerus and Iambulus, see Lawrence Giangrande, "Les Utopies Hellenistiques," *CEA* 5 (1976): 17–33. For Hellenistic philosophical utopias, see Dawson, *Cities of the Gods*.

28. Tessa Rajak, "C'ò che Flavio Giuseppe Vide: Josephus and the Essenes," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman World: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith* (ed. Fausto Parente and Joseph Sievers; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 149–51.

29. Mealand, "Community of Goods," 98. Another reason for preferring the Platonic parallels is that both Acts and Plato discuss the complete absence of personal possessions, which is not the case in the friendship tradition. Furthermore, the line between friendship and utopian ideals cannot be too neatly drawn, since by his use of the maxim, *κοινὰ τὰ φίλων*, to justify the guardians' *κοινωνία*, Plato needs to be seen as part of the trajectory. Subsequent uses of the property-sharing ideal often mention Plato: Iamblichus, *Vita Pythagora* 30.167; Strabo, *Geographica* 7.3.7; and Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.2.10.

30. There are numerous parallels between Acts 2 and Philo's account of the giving of the law in *Decal.* 33.46–7. These include the gathering of all the people in one place, the appearance of sound and fire, and xenolalia. Charles Talbert concludes his analysis of the similarities by stating, "The echoes are unmistakable. Sound, fire, and speech understood by all people were characteristic of the Sinai theophany. The same ingredients are found in the Pentecostal events. The Sinai theophany and the establishment of the Mosaic covenant would be brought to mind as surely as would Elijah by the description of John the Baptist's dress in Mark 1:6. The typology of Acts 2:1–11, then, is that of making a covenant" (*Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of The Apostles* [New York: Crossroad, 1997], 43).

to the similarities between the beginning of Acts and the ways in which the founding of a city was typically described in Greek and Roman literature. Hubert Cancik has demonstrated that the beginning of Acts uses the tropes and language commonly used by historiographers to describe the beginning of an institution.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, David Balch has argued that Luke-Acts presents Jesus as the founder of a new πολιτεία preserved and perpetuated after his death by his followers.<sup>32</sup> And Todd Penner has suggested that Acts, with special mention of the events narrated in ch. 2, is part of a “discourse [that] is fundamentally civic in nature.”<sup>33</sup> However hypothetical and utopian, in the *Republic* Plato recounts the various stages of the establishment of a truly just πολιτεία—it is, in the most literal way possible, the founding of a new city.<sup>34</sup>

Second, both describe a way of life in which the κοινωνία among the citizens or members is marked by the absence of private possessions. In the *Republic* the term κοινωνία appears primarily in relation to the distinctive communal arrangements of the guardians.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, κοινός occurs in this section primarily in the context of sharing property, possessions and other goods.<sup>36</sup> In Luke-Acts, the term κοινωνία appears only in Acts

31. Hubert Cancik, “The History of Culture, Religion, and Institutions in Ancient Historiography: Philological Observations Concerning Luke’s History,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 673–95. Also, Walter T. Wilson’s analysis of the Greco-Roman tropes of the founding of a city can profitably be applied to the beginning of Acts (“Urban Legends: Acts 10:1–11:18 and the Strategies of Greco-Roman Foundation Narratives,” *JBL* 120 [2001]: 77–99).

32. “ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ ΤΟΛΙΤΕΙΩΝ—Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function,” in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco Roman Discourse* (ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, SBLSymS 20; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 139–88.

33. Todd Penner, “Civilizing Discourse: Acts, Declamation and the Rhetoric of the Polis,” in Penner and Vander Stichele, *Contextualizing Acts*, 65–104.

34. The interlocutors function as the city’s founders, having the power to construct as they see fit and to legislate accordingly. The language of establishing a city occurs throughout *Resp.* 3–5: οἰκίζομεν (4.420b); πρόσταγμα (4.423c); πόλιν κατ’οἰκίζομεν (4.433a); νομοθετήσωμεν (3.417b). It is the interlocutors who determine that a permanent overseer should be selected from among the older and wiser guardians (3.412a–414b) and provide the city’s first rulers with a myth of origins justifying laws and requirements (3.414b–417b).

35. *Resp.* 5.449c, 449d, 450b, 461e, 464a, 464b, 466d, 476a.

36. The guardians are to live together (κοινῇ ζῆν) (3.416e); Plato twice uses the proverb, κοινὰ τὰ φίλων, regarding sharing of all things, including wives and children (4.424a, 5.449c); both male and female guardians are to have all in common (κοινῇ . . . πάντα) and are to be given the same nurture and education (5.451e); females and males should share all tasks (ἅπαντα τὰ ἔργα) (453a); all women shall be common (κοινάς) to the men (5.457d); they are to have houses and meals in common (οἰκίας τε καὶ ξυσσίτια κοινὰ ἔχοντες) (5.458c–d); all are to spend their stipend in common (κοινῇ πάντας) (5.464b–c). Plato’s summaries of the ideal state’s constitution in the related dialogues also use the same phrase: πάντα κοινὰ (*Tim.* 18c, cf. 18b); ἅπαντα δὲ πάντων κοινὰ (*Crit.* 110d).

2:42, while the cognate κοινός appears in two clusters in Acts. It appears a number of times in Acts 10–11 in relation to Jewish purity laws likely meaning “unclean,”<sup>37</sup> and in the summaries in 2:44 and 4:32, where it is used in relation to the sharing of possessions and the absence of private property. The meaning of κοινωνία in its present context is best seen in relation to community of goods (v. 44).<sup>38</sup> As Mealand has shown, the construction Luke uses in Acts 4:32, οὐδὲ . . . ἴδιον, closely resembles the way in which Socrates repeatedly describes the absence of possessions among the guardians, which is first described as οὐσίαν κεκτημένου μηδεμίαν μηδένα ἴδιαν (*Resp.* 3.416d).<sup>39</sup>

Third, in both Acts and the *Republic* the communal holding of possessions is linked to the authority of the leaders. This is more readily apparent in the *Republic*, where attributes that determine good leadership, such as unity, are said to be dependent on the κοινωνία of the guardians (5.462c, 5.464a). The authority of the apostles in Acts 1–6 also appears to be tied to their relationship to possessions. This can be seen in the structure of the summaries: in both, statements about the power and authority of the apostles appear to interrupt descriptions of the community of goods (2:43; 4:33). The final summary in 5:12–16 drops the community of goods entirely, focusing on the apostles’ miracle-working powers. The emphasis on the apostles’ collective authority is justified by the nearly miraculous unity and unanimity among members crystallized in the community of goods. The power of the apostles and the community’s social organization go together.<sup>40</sup>

A fourth point of similarity is that both feature two separate principal discussions of the communal organization of group. In the context of the founding of the city, in *Resp.* 3.415d–417a Socrates describes for the first time how the guardians’ daily activities and household arrangements should be organized. In *Resp.* 5.461e–466d Socrates again addresses the communal holding of property and possessions, but focuses on the unity among the guardians made possible by their social

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37. This meaning of the term is consonant with the predominant use of the term in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew.

38. Dupont, “Community of Goods,” 86–87.

39. Mealand, “Community of Goods,” 97. Similar constructions occur elsewhere as well: in extending the communalism to wives and children: ἰδίᾳ δὲ οὐδενὸς οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον κεκτημένου (5.458c); and in repeating the requirements in order to show that the guardians’ achieve the greatest good as a result of their polity: μηδὲν ἴδιον ἐκτῆσθαι (5.464d). The same expression is used in *Resp.* 5.457d in reference to having only one wife and in the summaries of the guardians’ polity in *Tim.* 18b and *Crit.* 110c.

40. Daniel Marguerat, “La mort d’Ananias et Saphira (Ac 5:1–11) dans la stratégie narrative de Luc,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 216.

arrangements. In Acts also there are two descriptions of the communal life of the early Christians in Jerusalem featuring possessions in common. And, like the two corresponding sections in the *Republic*, the summary in Acts 2 focuses on the daily life of the community while that in Acts 4 focuses on the unity of the group.

*Acts 2:42–3:11 and Resp. 3.414–417*

The goal of Socrates' new city is to show that justice is not the rule of the stronger and that its practice is in everyone's best interest. For this reason it is important for Plato to provide mechanisms that will guarantee the success of the state by keeping its leaders from becoming corrupt. The two most significant features of the guardians' life are their education and, as mentioned above, communal living arrangements that require a special relationship to possessions. Together, they protect against the corruption of the rulers, ensuring complete unity and harmony within society and among the guardians.

In the *Republic* the subject of the proper education of the guardians comes up immediately after they are mentioned for the first time (2.374e–376e). Socrates spends considerable time outlining what education in the ideal state should look like, memorably banishing the poets in favor of literature that will not pollute the guardians with tales of promiscuous gods and other unwholesome themes.<sup>41</sup> Having created suitable guardians by virtue of a good education and established appropriate tests to make sure only the most capable become rulers (3.412b–414b), Socrates sets out to "arm these sons of earth and conduct them under the leadership of the rulers" (3.415d).<sup>42</sup> After selecting the proper place for their camp, Socrates introduces the requirements with the following two related statements:

[We may affirm] that they must have the right education [παιδείας], whatever it is, if they are to have what will do most to make them gentle to one another and their charges. . . . In addition, moreover, to such an education a thoughtful man would affirm that their houses [οἰκίσεις] and possessions [οὐσίαν] provided for them ought to be such as not to

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41. While the centrality of education for both establishing and maintaining the state is discussed elsewhere as well, *Resp.* 2.374e–403d systematically deals with different aspects of the education of the guardians: proper speech or stories regarding the gods, proper stories about men, acceptable forms of diction, music and the importance of gymnastics.

42. All text and translations of the *Republic* are from Paul Shorey's translation (2 vols.; LCL 237, 276; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935).

interfere with the best performance of their own work as guardians and not to incite them to wrong the other citizens.” (416c–d)

The quality of the guardians’ leadership is dependent on both their education and relationship to possessions.<sup>43</sup> Luke’s picture of the daily life of the early Christian community similarly begins with a general statement in which education (διδασχῆ) and fellowship (κοινωνία) are linked (Acts 2:42).<sup>44</sup> Although details of the apostles’ teaching are not given, it should probably be seen in light of the forty-day period of instruction (1:3) and the preaching of the apostles prominent not only in the early chapters of Acts but throughout the narrative. As in the *Republic*, in Acts 2:43 a related statement about the quality of the leaders follows. Unlike the description of the guardians, however, the focus in Acts is not on the potential for corruption, but on the apostles’ power and legitimacy signaled by their ability to perform miraculous deeds and the fear these abilities engendered in others. The nature of the authority is different, but in both true leaders and property sharing go together.

In both the *Republic* and in Acts specifics about the community follow. The guardians’ requirements are:

- [1] In the first place, none must possess any private property save the indispensable.
- [2] Secondly, none must have any habitation or treasure house which is not open for all to enter at will.
- [3] Their food, in such quantities as are needful for athletes of war sober and brave, they must receive as an agreed stipend from the other citizens as the wages of their guardianship, so measured that there shall be neither superfluity at the end of the year or any lack.
- [4] And resorting to a common mess like soldiers on a campaign they will live together.

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43. The link between the two suggested here is made more explicit later in the dialogue: “For if a right education makes of them reasonable men they will easily discover everything of this kind—and other principles that we now pass over, as that the possession of wives and marriage, and the procreation of children and all that sort of thing should be made as far as possible the proverbial goods of friends that are common” (*Resp.* 4.423e–424a).

44. Interpreters have long disagreed on where the summary begins. Some take v. 41 as the beginning (C. K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles* [2 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994–98], 1:161–2; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of The Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* [London: Tyndale, 1951; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 131). I follow those interpreters who take v. 41 as the end of the preceding section and v. 42 as the beginning of the paragraph (Conzelmann, *Acts*, 23; Haenchen, *Acts*, 190–91; and Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 156).

[5] Gold and silver, we will tell them, they have of the divine quality from the gods always in their souls, and they have no need of the metal of men nor does holiness suffer them to mingle and contaminate that heavenly possession with the acquisition of mortal gold. (416d–417a [Shorey; LCL])<sup>45</sup>

Implicit in the first prescription is the notion, made clearer in the third, that what goods the guardians have are to be supplied by the producing class. The first detail Luke gives about the community also concerns the absence of private property: all were “together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need” (Acts 2:44–45). The way in which Plato describes the absence of private possession among the guardians here—*κεκτημένον μηδεμίαν μηδένα ἰδίαν*—is strikingly similar to Acts’ reprisal of the community of goods in 4:32: οὐδὲ εἷς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ ἔλεγεν ἰδίον εἶναι. Like Plato, Luke’s first specific description of the Christians’ *κοινωνία* qualifies the absence of personal possessions with a statement about basic needs; Plato does so with the phrase *ἀν μὴ πάσα ἀνάγκη*, while Luke adds *ἀν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν*. Furthermore, the Christian community’s practice of selling possessions is analogous to the supply of goods the guardians are to receive from the producing class.

In both what follows addresses the activities of daily life. Plato’s second requirement stipulates that there are to be no boundaries regarding houses. The emphasis is not on houses as personal possessions, although this is implied, but on the absence of personal or private boundaries creating an openness between the guardians. The third requirement addresses another basic need, food, the simplicity of which is suggested by the reference to the rations of soldiers at war. Socrates also requires that that the guardians live together [*κοινωνῆ ζῆν*] and take their meals in a common mess [*ξυσσίτια*]. Like the guardians, the Christians in Jerusalem share meals in each other’s homes. The awkward phrase *κλῶντές τε κατ’ οἶκον ἄρτον* may be a way of suggesting the absence of personal boundaries between homes as stipulated in Socrates’ second requirement. It also suggests that, like the guardians’ third requirement, the Christians share meals and live together. The simple quality of the guardians food may also be echoed in Acts 2:46. One of the two attributes describing the way in which they share their nourishment, *ἀφελότητι*, occurs only here in the New Testament and is probably best understood as simplicity.<sup>46</sup>

45. The numbering in brackets is mine.

46. Barrett sees the term as an alternative to *ἀπλότης*, which is used in the same sense in Eph 6:5; Col 3:22; 1 Chr 29:17; Wis 1:1. Further support for taking the term to mean “simple”

The parallels with the founding of the guardians city in the *Republic* do not end here. The fifth stipulation prohibits the guardians from handling or acquiring gold or silver in order to keep them from the corrupting power of money. To justify this, the guardians are to be told that they already have silver and gold (χρυσίου δὲ καὶ ἀργύριον) in their natures, making them the possessors of a more valuable treasure (3.416e). While Acts 3:1–10 begins a new episode, the central point of the prohibition of money is preserved. Peter responds to a begging paralytic's request for alms saying, "I have no silver and gold [ἀργύριον καὶ χρυσίον οὐχ ὑπάρχει μοι] but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (3:6). The man is helped to his feet and finds that he is healthy. The first part of Peter's response is very nearly the same phrase that the founders tell the guardians to justify their being kept from handling money. In both the *Republic* and Acts the denial of silver and gold is justified by the possession of something of much greater value that is of divine origin.<sup>47</sup>

The real irony of the guardians' polity is that what appears at first to be a sacrifice on their part in not being able to own possessions or accumulate wealth has a final reward that outweighs any inconvenience they might at first experience. By putting the interests of the state before their own the guardians gain, finally, more for themselves than they could have otherwise: "So living they would save [σώζουσιν] themselves and save [σώζοιεν] their city" (3.417a). The first major summary in Acts ends with a notice of the community's growth: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved [σφραζομένους]" (2:47). Luke, like Plato, concludes the first description of the community's daily life with an eye on the final reward at stake: the salvation available through the new manifestation of the kingdom of God inaugurated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

*Acts 4:32–5:16 and Resp. 5.462–466*

The function of the absence of private property in the ideal state is to prevent leaders from acting in their own self-interest, thus guaranteeing

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comes from the Vulgate, where it is translated as *simplicitas*. Barrett also notes that ἀφελῶς is used in for simple meals in Athenaeus, *Deip.* 10.419d (*Acts*, 1:171).

47. There is also a possible parallel between the location of the guardian's residences and the mysterious Beautiful (ὡραία) Gate at which the beggar sits (Acts 3:2, 10). The very first element in the description of the guardians' community life is the location of the camp: "And when they have arrived they must look out for the fairest (καλλίστου) site in the city for their encampment" (415e).

the all-important unity of the state. The goal for the guardians is to achieve “a kind of concord and harmony . . . a kind of beautiful order” (4.430e) in which all members of the city, both “the rulers and the ruled are of one mind” (4.431e). Plato’s second extended discussion of the guardians’ social organization is instigated by the interlocutors’ desire to hear more about the community of wives and children, which he briefly mentioned earlier in the dialogue (4.423e). In *Resp.* 5.462–466 Plato puts the newly constructed polity to the test to make sure it leads to the desired unity. Socrates asks, “Do we know of any greater evil for a state than the thing that distracts it and makes it many instead of one, or a greater good than that which binds it together and makes it one?” (5.462b). The ideal unity is depicted as the unity of body and soul in a single organism (5.462c). The primary cause of individualization and disunity, he continues, “is when the citizens do not utter [φθέγγωνται] in unison such words as ‘mine’ and ‘not mine’ [τό τε ἐμόν καὶ τὸ οὐκ ἐμόν] . . . . The city, then, is best ordered in which the greatest number use the expression ‘mine’ and ‘not mine’ [λέγουσι τὸ ἐμόν καὶ τὸ οὐκ ἐμόν] of the same things in the same way” (5.462c). A few passages later, we find this idea repeated: “these citizens, above all others, will have one and the same thing in common which they will name [ὀνομάσουσι] mine, and by virtue of this communion they will have their pleasures and pains in common” (5.464a). To assuage any doubt, Socrates further roots this unity precisely in the sharing of property, and in this case, its extreme manifestation in the community of wives and children: “And is not the cause of this [*referring to unity*], besides the general constitution of the state, the community [κοινωνία] of wives and children among the guardians?” (5.464a). The guardians’ community of goods guarantees that the language of unity is accompanied by actions (5.463e).

The unity of the early Christian community finds its clearest expression in the summary of Acts 4:32–35. The three points emphasized in *Resp.* 5.462–64—(1) the greatest good is acting as a single organism, (2) which can be realized in unanimous expression, (3) and can be achieved because of a polity in which there is no private property—are present in Acts 4:32 where the Christians are described as being of “one heart and soul,” and none among them says “any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.”

The first characteristic of the community’s life listed—being of one heart and soul—corresponds to Plato’s ideal of the group functioning as a single organism.<sup>48</sup> The guardians’ unity of expression regarding

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48. The phrase may be, as some have suggested, an intentional combination of Semitic and Greek idiom. See, for example, Deut 6:5 (Dupont, “Community of Goods,” 92).



possessions is emphasized in the requirement that all say “mine” and “not mine” of the same things, which is stated repeatedly throughout the section.<sup>49</sup> Luke similarly portrays the Christians as not saying (ἐλεγεῖν) any had personal possessions. This verse is often understood as contradicting the absolute community of goods implied in 2:45 and 4:34–35. Given the other similarities to the *Republic*, rather than understanding the use of λέγω as evidence of a different source, of Luke’s depiction of multiple property-sharing systems simultaneously,<sup>50</sup> or of a subjective community of goods,<sup>51</sup> the formulation allows the early Christians to fulfill the greatest good of a state in their unity of verbal expression regarding possessions. Furthermore, as in the *Republic*, Luke preserves the link between unanimous verbal expression and communal holding of possessions in v. 32 by following the statement that no one claimed personal possessions with the adversative particle ἀλλ’ introducing the community’s practice, ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά. Luke describes the early Christian community in v. 32 in essentially the same terms and in the same order that Plato assesses the guardians’ polity in *Resp.* 5.462a–464b.

In *Resp.* 5.464c Plato provides a brief summary of the requirements first established in *Resp.* 3.416c–417a emphasizing the absence of private possessions and the support of the guardians by the producing class. After highlighting the power of the apostles’ witness in v. 33, Luke describes the early Christian community in similar terms. Luke, who is not creating a state *de novo*, lists the goods of which the Christians divested themselves. Just as *Resp.* 5.464c repeats the earlier stipulations in 3.416c–d, Acts 4:34 repeats the absence of possessions first mentioned in 2:42–47. The differences from the first to the second discussions are analogous. In *Resp.* 3.416c–d, Plato specifically lists only possessions as something the guardians must not have, while houses are used to emphasize the communal living of the guardians and lands are not mentioned at all. Similarly, in Acts 2:44–45 only possessions and goods (κτῆματα and ὑπάρξεις) are specifically identified as the things the Christians sell. The second discussion in *Resp.* 5.464c has houses (οἰκίας), lands (γῆν) and other property (κτῆμα). Similarly, in Acts 4:34–35 Luke lists houses

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49. φθέγγονται and λέγουσι in 5.462c; ξυμφωνήσουσιν in 5.463e; ἐλέγομεν in 5.463e; ἐμὸν ὀνομάζοντας in 5.464c.

50 Justin Taylor, “The Community of Goods among the First Christians and among the Essenes,” in *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium of the Orion Centre for the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 27–31 January 1999* (ed. David Goodblatt et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 153.

51. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 469–76.

(οἰκιῶν) and, using a different term, adds lands (χωρίων). Luke does not list a third item, but his use of κτήτωρ is interesting as it appears only here in the New Testament.<sup>52</sup> The use of the term is not surprising, however, given that the related noun κτήμα and verbs κτάομαι and κτάσθαι appear in nearly every description of the community of goods among the guardians in *Resp.* 2–5 and occur in *Resp.* 5.464c–d three times.<sup>53</sup> Finally, it is worth noting the similarity between the producing classes' support of the guardians—repeated in *Resp.* 5.464c—and the practice of laying the proceeds of the goods sold at the apostles' feet, which accomplishes the same thing. This act also emphasizes the authority of the apostles within the group and shows that, like the guardians, the words of unity are realized in deeds (cf. *Resp.* 5.463e).

Two other similarities are worth noting. First, another important aspect of Plato's ideal state is the separation between the guardian class (comprised of both the warrior and ruler guardians) and the rest of society. There is also an important distinction between the ruler guardians (who are generally the eldest) and the rest of the guardian class. Regarding their relationship, Plato states:

“As for an older man, he will always have the charge of ruling and chastising the younger.” “Obviously.” “Again, it is plain that the young man, except by the command of the rulers, will probably not do violence to an elder or strike him, or, I take it, dishonour him in any other way. There being two competent guardians to prevent that, fear [δέος] and awe [αἰδώς], awe restraining him from laying hands on one who may be his parent, and fear in that others will rush to the aid of the sufferer, some as sons, some as brothers, some as fathers.” (5.465b [Shorey, LCL])

In Acts also there is some distance between the leaders (the apostles) and the rest of the Christian community. This is first singled out in the qualifications necessary to become an apostle when Judas is replaced (1:21–22). In the summaries and surrounding episodes the relationship between the apostles and the rest of the community is characterized as one of fear and awe. Immediately following the reference to the κοινωμία of the apostles in Acts 2:42 and immediately preceding the description of the community of goods in the first summary is a description of the reaction to the apostles' miraculous powers: “And fear [φόβος] came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the

52. The term κτήμα occurs four times in the New Testament: Mark 10:22 and its parallel in Matt 10:22 and in this section of Acts at 2:45 and 5:1. Of seven instances of κτάσθαι in the New Testament, five are in Luke-Acts.

53. See, for example, *Resp.* 3.416d, 416e, 417a; 4.423e; 5.458d, 464c, 464d, 464e.

apostles" (2:43). A similar reaction is reported of the Christian community in response to the miraculous deaths of Ananias and Sapphira: "And great fear came upon the whole church, upon all who heard of these things" (5:11). The theme appears again in the third and related major summary: "Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor" (5:12–13). There has been some debate regarding the referent of "the rest" (λοιπῶν). Some interpreters take the term to refer to non-Christians or outsiders.<sup>54</sup> Another possible interpretation, which I prefer, takes λοιπῶν as referring to a distinction between the apostles and the rest of the Christian community based on other Christians' fear of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, fear or anger of Jewish authorities, and the narrator's presentation of the apostles in the previous two summaries as qualitatively different beings.<sup>55</sup> This distance between the apostles and other Christians whom they lead parallels the distance and somewhat fearful relationship between the different groups of guardians in Plato's ideal state. Admittedly, there is a major difference between the two: while the guardians are feared for possible familial ties, the apostles are feared and respected for their miracle-working power.

Second, the distance between the guardian classes and the rest of the population is related to the division of labor: everybody in the ideal state is to do only what is suited to his or her nature. The guardians are not to do any activity that is beneath them in order to allow them to focus on their specialized duties (*Resp.* 395c, 416c). An interesting parallel in Acts is the appointment of the Seven to cover serving tables in order to free the disciples to do the more important task of preaching the gospel (6:1–11). Somewhat surprisingly, despite the text's emphasis on their different role, the narrative goes on to describe the activity of Stephen, one of the

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54. Haenchen states, "Round this group of Christians holy awe draws its protective circle: none of the 'rest,' the non-Christians, dare mix with the listening believers" (*Acts*, 245). Conzelmann attributes the "apparent contradiction between verses 12 and 14 [to] mere clumsiness on the part of the narrator" and suggests that λοιπῶν clearly refers to non-Christians (*Acts*, 39).

55. Witherington reads λοιπῶν as referring to "the rest of the Christians who were afraid to join the apostles in the temple in view of what happened the first time—namely, the arousal of the anger of the Jewish authorities and the trial of the Christian leaders" (*Acts*, 225). Similarly, Luke Timothy Johnson reads the verse as referring to the other Christians' fear of approaching the apostles in the wake of the fate that had just befallen Ananias and Sapphira (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville, Minn.: Glazier, 1992], 95).

Seven, as having much the same function and role in the preaching of the gospel that the members of the Twelve did.<sup>56</sup>

### CONCLUSION

As the table below illustrates, the parallels between Plato's description of the guardians in his ideal state and the description of the earliest Christian community in the summaries of Acts are dense and extend beyond the important lexical agreements of a few key phrases into significant thematic parallels.

#### Support of the Guardians/Apostles

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Guardians concentrate on philosophy, training and affairs of the state                                     | Apostles lead the community in teaching, fellowship breaking of bread, and prayers<br><br>they perform signs and wonders |
| Guardians are supported by the producing class   | Apostles are supported by other Christians (who lay the proceeds of goods sold at their feet)                            |
| in order to concentrate on being guardians (because all classes should do what is suited to their natures) | The Seven are elected so the apostles do not spend their time serving tables instead of preaching                        |

#### Lifestyle

|   |  |
|---|--|
| They live in simple houses in an area set apart             | Eat in each other's homes  |
| They eat and train and are educated together                | Worship, break bread and learn the apostle's teaching together           |
| Possessions are held in common, no one has private property | Possessions are held in common, no one has private property              |
| They have neither excess nor need, food as needed           | Proceeds of goods sold are distributed to all as needed, no one is needy |

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56. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (SBLDS 39; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 212–13.

## Importance of Unity

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Success of the community depends on unity and being in agreement | Christian community is of "one heart and soul" |
|--|--|

## Importance of Education

|  |  |
|--|--|
| The right education will ensure guardians will be able to handle rigors of communal living | They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship |
|--|--|

## Silver and Gold

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Guardians do not need silver or gold because what they have is greater: silver and gold is built into their natures | Apostles do not need silver or gold because what they have is greater: the power to heal in the name of Jesus |
|---|---|

## Division of Society

|                                     |                                 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ruler guardians                     | Apostles (the Twelve)           |
| The more numerous warrior guardians | Growing Christian community     |
| The rest of the working classes     | Everybody else (non-Christians) |

I suggest that the Luke's portrait of the early Christian community in the summaries is specifically modeled on Plato's description of the guardians in the *Republic*. Reading the summaries in light of his literary model may help explain at least a few the inconsistencies often noted in the section. At face value, there is an apparent inconsistency regarding whether the community of goods depicted by Luke is mandatory or voluntary. Acts 2:44–45, 4:34–45 suggest that all Christians sold all their possessions, while elsewhere in Acts Christians are depicted as owning property (12:12, 21:9, 21:16), keeping their wealth after conversion (8:27–40) and being in need of outside financial help (11:27–30).<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, that the Christians say they do not have personal possessions in

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57. In addition, Paul's decidedly noncommunal lifestyle in the second half of Acts is in stark contrast with the description of the early Christian community: Paul presents his self-supporting lifestyle as a model for others in his speech to the Ephesian elders (20:34–35); Paul is depicted by the author of Acts as having the means to pay for an expensive Nazirite vow (21:26); and Paul's living arrangements in Rome may suggest some wealth (28:30–31).

Acts (4:32) and Peter's response to Ananias (5:4) can suggest that participation was voluntary. The use of λέγω in 4:32, as I have suggested above, can more properly be explained as Luke's attempt to have the Jerusalem community achieve the ideal of unity of expression required of the guardians by Plato. The apparent interruption of both the summaries in Acts 2 and 4 by a notice about the authority of the apostles (2:43, 4:33) need not be seen as evidence that Luke switched to a different source. In the *Republic* the guardians' authority and superior leadership is dependant precisely on adhering to the stipulations regarding communal life and the absence of personal possessions. Although he may not do it as smoothly, Luke likewise pairs the two. That Peter and John have no money in Acts 3:1–11 can be understood to be at odds with the idea that they were in charge of the community's purse.<sup>58</sup> This too can be understood in light of Luke's imitation of *Resp.* 3.416–417 in the preceding summary. There is one more intriguing inconsistency in the narrative that might be explained in light of Luke's use of the *Republic* as a model. In Acts 2:46–47 the Jerusalem Christians break bread in each other's homes, but in 4:32 they are depicted as selling their homes along with other possessions. This can be explained by Luke's modeling of the two summaries on the two different descriptions of the guardians' polity in *Resp.* 3.415–417 and 5.462–464. In both first discussions houses are mentioned to underscore the communal living arrangements, while in both second discussions houses are listed among the possessions.

Luke Timothy Johnson has noted that many of these minor inconsistencies "probably demand of the author a concern he did not have."<sup>59</sup> In light of Luke's apparent use of the *Republic* as literary model, these difficulties might be understood as narrative inconsistencies the author sacrificed in order to score more important allusive, theological, and apologetic points. Immediately following the symbolic founding of God's kingdom on earth, Luke presents the credentials of the leaders of this new polity using the narrative language of Plato's philosopher-kings.

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58. See the discussion in Thomas E. Phillips, *Reading Issues of Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (SBEC 48; Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 2001), 200–202. Phillips argues that the summary in Acts 2:42–47 does not indicate that the apostles had personal access to the community's resources, and that the statement in 3:6 need not be seen as a contradiction of the preceding summary.

59. *Literary Function of Possessions*, 10 n. 1.