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Jesus movement: part I**

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## THE JUDAEAN CULTURAL CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY OF GOODS IN THE EARLY JESUS MOVEMENT<sup>1</sup>

### PART I

#### Summary of the Argument of the Whole Study

*Luke's account of the community of goods of the earliest community in Jerusalem is clearly idealised with popular philosophical catchphrases. However, instances of formal community of property were a pronounced feature of Palestinian Jewish culture, and had persisted for approaching two centuries amongst the sect of the Essenes prior to the events which Luke purports to describe. By New Testament times communities of Essenes which practised complete sharing of property were to be found in most of the villages and towns of Judaea. There was also a significant community of fully property-sharing Essenes by the 'Gate of the Essenes' on Jerusalem's southwest hill, close to the traditional site of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, the Pentecost events of Acts 2, and the first recorded occasions of the sharing of property and daily corporate spiritual life amongst the early community of believers in Jesus in Jerusalem after his death and resurrection. Features of Luke's account of property-sharing in Acts 2–6 suggest the employment in the community of believers in Jesus of linguistic usages and organisational forms employed in the legislation for Essene community of goods revealed in the Rule of the Community discovered in Qumran cave 1. Other elements of Luke's account are illuminated by the practicalities of Essene property-sharing arrangements revealed in the accounts of the Essenes given by Philo and Josephus. These clues point to the probable Judaeian origins of the tradition and suggest that a group within the earliest Jerusalem Church practised formal property-sharing. Luke's portrayal of earliest Christian community of goods can be taken seriously as an historical account.*

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<sup>1</sup> This study combines new material with revised and expanded content from several of my earlier pieces, in particular the two originally published as 'Community of Goods in the Early Jerusalem Church,' in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, series II, volume 26, part 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), pp. 1730–1774, and 'The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods' in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), ed. Richard J. Bauckham (volume 4 of the series *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*), pp. 323–356. This study gives simple transliteration of Greek and Hebrew words, with translation, *in situ*, to make some of the content of my earlier pieces more accessible to readers without knowledge of these languages. Transliteration also replaces Greek and Hebrew characters in secondary literature titles.

## I. Introduction: Perspectives from the History of Interpretation

Luke, the author of the two-volume work which comprises the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, twice specifically states, at Acts 2:44 and 4:32, that the earliest church in Jerusalem had ‘all things common’. Taken as a whole, the various components of his account, contained within the first six chapters of Acts, of economic sharing in the earliest post-Easter Jerusalem community of Jesus’ followers, convey to his reader the sense that their ‘community of goods’ involved the sale of property and the surrender of the monies thus raised to the apostles (2:44–45; 4:32–5:11), daily meal-fellowship in homes (2:46), and a process of ‘daily distribution’ (6:1) by which the material needs of some widows (6:1–6) and apparently the needs of other underprivileged in the community, indeed the needs of all (2:45; 4:35), were provided for. The consensus of critical scholarship has for perhaps two centuries or more been almost universally against finding any historical phenomenon of actual, formally organised sharing of property which could be called a true, i.e. legally constituted, ‘community of goods’ behind Luke’s account.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Resistance to any historical reality of formally communalized property within the early community of Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem remains strong in recent scholarly literature, cf. Douglas A. Hume, *The Early Christian Community: A Narrative Analysis of Acts 2:41–47 and 4:32–35* (Tübingen: Mohr–Siebeck, 2011); Christopher R. Hutson, ‘All Things in Common: Mutual Aid in Acts 2.42–47 and Acts 4.32–37,’ *Leaven* 18.4 (2010), pp. 183–189; David Hamidović, ‘La remarque énigmatique d’Ac 5,4 dans la légende d’Ananias et Saphira’ *Biblica* 86 (2005), pp. 407–415; Markus Öhler, ‘Die Jerusalemer Urgemeinde im Spiegel des antiken Vereinswesens,’ *New Testament Studies* 51.3 (July 2005), pp. 393–415; Reta Haltemann Finger, ‘Cultural Attitudes in Western Christianity Toward the Community of Goods in Acts 2 and 4,’ *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78 (2004), pp. 235–270; Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches* (Downers Grove, IL/ Leicester, UK: Apollos/Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), pp. 160–169; Friedrich W. Horn, ‘Die Gütergemeinschaft der Urgemeinde,’ *Evangelische Theologie* 58 (1998), pp. 370–383; Gerd Theissen, ‘Urchristlicher Liebeskommunismus: zum ‘Sitz in Leben’ des Topos *hapanta koina* in Apg 2,44 und 4,32’, in Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm (eds.), *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts: Essays in Honor of Lars Hartman* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), pp. 706–710; Gregory E. Sterling, ‘“Athletes of Virtue”: An Analysis of the Summaries in Acts (2:41–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16)’ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113.4 (1994), pp. 679–696; S. Scott Bartchy, ‘Community of Goods in Acts: Idealization or Social Reality?’, in Birger A. Pearson (ed.) *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 309–318; Hans-Josef Klauck, ‘Gütergemeinschaft in der klassischen Antike, in Qumran und im neuen Testament’, *Revue de Qumran* 11 (1982–85), pp. 47–79; David P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: A. Fuchs, 1982), pp. 199–214; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1981), pp. 21–24, 129, and *The Literary Function of*

*Patristic and mediaeval interpretation: the community of property of the early Jerusalem community as the model for the monastic life.* Resistance to a literal historical interpretation (and application) of Luke's account was common in the Reformation period. Prior to the era of the Reformation, the interpretation of the Church Fathers was usually followed. While the Patristic period was not lacking in commentators recommending the account to Christians as an example of selfless charity,<sup>3</sup> as far as literal, practical imitation of the account was concerned, it provided the precedent and model for monasticism.<sup>4</sup>

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*Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 1–12, 162–163, 183–190; B. H. Mönning, *Die Darstellung des urchristlichen Kommunismus nach der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (ThD dissertation, Georg August Universität, Göttingen, 1978); L. Schottroff and W. Stegemann, 'Die konkrete Sozialutopie des Lukas', *Jesus von Nazareth: Hoffnung der Armen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978), pp. 149–153; David L. Mealand, 'Community of Goods and Utopian Allusions in Acts II–IV' *Journal of Theological Studies* 28 (1977), pp. 95–97; M. del Verme, *Communione e condivisione dei beni. Chiesa primitiva e giudaismo essen-qumranico a confronto* (Morcelliana: Brescia 1977); Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church* (London: SCM, 1974), pp. 31–34; Hans-Joachim Kraus, 'Aktualität des "urchristlichen Kommunismus?"', in Hans-Georg Geyer (ed.) *Freispruch und Freiheit: Theologische Aufsätze für Walter Kreck zum 65. Geburtstag* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1973), pp. 306–27; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'Jewish Christianity in Acts in Light of the Qumran Scrolls', in Leander E. Keck and James Louis Martyn (eds.), *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Nashville, 1966), pp. 230–257.

<sup>3</sup> Notable are Chrysostom's homilies on Acts with their drive for a comprehensive social programme for the Church; cf. also Homily 12 on 1 Timothy (4). See Martin Hengel, *Eigentum und Reichtum in der frühen Kirche: Aspekte einer frühkirchlichen Sozialgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Calwer Paperback, 1973), pp. 9–11; Otto Schilling, *Reichtum und Eigentum in der altkirchlichen Literatur* (Freiburg: Herdersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1908); Ignaz Seipel, *Die Wirtschaftsethischen Lehren der Kirchenväter* (Vienna: Mayer & Co., 1907).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Of Holy Virginitly*, 45; *Of the Work of Monks*, 25; *Enarrations on the Psalms*, 132:2–3; *Letters*, 211:5; Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 2; Jerome, *Letters*, 58:4 and 130:14. John Cassian's *Institutes* (2:5) and *Conferences* (18:5) gave the classic expression to the idea that the monks were the successors of the first community of believers in Jesus in Jerusalem. The Rules of Benedict, Pachomius (*Rule*, 82:20–21; 87:14–15) and Basil continue the 'monastic' interpretation of the Acts account of the early believers' community of property: Benedict, *Rule*, 33–34; Pachomius, *Rule*, 82:20–21 and 87:14–15; Basil, *Long Rule*, Questions 7, 19, 32, 34, 35, *Short Rule*, Questions 85, 93, 131, 135, 148, 187, 252. See also Bede's *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (c. 709) on Acts 2:44 and 4:32 and his *Reconsideration of the Acts of the Apostles* (725–731). Cf. Glenn Olsen, *The symbol of the primitive Church: reference to the ecclesia primitiva in the Age of the Fathers*, forthcoming; see already Glenn Olsen's 'Reference to the *Ecclesia Primitiva* in eighth-century Irish Gospel exegesis', *Thought* 54 (1979), pp. 303–312; 'Bede as Historian: The Evidence from his Observations on the Life of the First Christian Community at Jerusalem', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33 (1982), pp. 519–530, esp. 520–521 and 528–529; 'St. Boniface and the *Vita Apostolica*', *American Benedictine Review* 31 (1980), pp. 6–19, see esp. p. 11 and note 15 on pp. 11–12; cf. Pier Cesare Bori, *Chiesa Primitiva. L'immagine della comunità delle origini – Atti*, 2, 42–47: 4,

*Historical scepticism in the service of Protestant resistance to both 'extreme anabaptist' and 'monastic' interpretations.* As Protestantism followed and universally applied Martin Luther's rejection of monasticism,<sup>5</sup> it also cut loose, necessarily, from the longstanding interpretation that the 'apostolic life' of the early Acts community was realized in the property-sharing life of Christian monks and nuns. Enthusiasm for the literal application of community of goods in the life of the gathered community of believers emerged within limited parts of the Anabaptist movement and was opposed with considerable verve and hostility after the Münster debacle of the 1530s.<sup>6</sup> Menno Simons, the most influential Anabaptist, commented that the sharing of the Jerusalem church was neither universal nor permanent, and insisted that his movement had never taught nor practised community of goods.<sup>7</sup> After the Reformation, the Roman Catholic

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32–37 – *nella storia della Chiesa antica* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1974). and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 1 and note 3.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Christoph Bultmann, Volker Leppin and Andreas Lindner (eds.), *Luther und das monastische Erbe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Bernhard Lohse, 'Luthers Kritik am Mönchtum', *Evangelische Theologie* 20 (1960), pp. 413–432, and *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), pp. 154–161.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Horst Karasek, *Die Kommune der Wiedertäufer. Bericht aus der befreiten und belagerten Stadt Münster 1534* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1977); James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal & Kingston/ London / Buffalo, NY: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1991), on the events in Münster see chapter 6, 'The War Communism of the Notables', pp. 123–138; Hans-Dieter Plümper, *Die Gütergemeinschaft bei den Täufern des 16. Jh* (Göppingen: Verlag Alfred Kümmerle, 1972), principally on Hutterite community of goods. Luther tended to group all Anabaptist opponents together and could charge them all with belief in compulsory community of goods, comparing them with monks: 'The Anabaptists, too, think that those who have any possessions of their own are not Christians' (Luther, Genesis 13:2, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 2 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965], p. 325), see further Nathan A. Finn, 'Curb Your Enthusiasm: Martin Luther's Critique of Anabaptism', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 56.2 (Spring 2014), pp. 164–181, see pp. 176–177. Not all Anabaptists opposed private property, cf. Leonard Verduin, *Reformers and their Stepchildren*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 237; John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 90–91.

<sup>7</sup> Menno Simons replied in his book *A humble and Christian justification and replication* (*Works*, Vol. II, p. 309) to his opponents who 'imagine and say, we have our possessions in common.' 'This accusation is false and without all truth. We do not teach and practice community of goods but we teach and testify the Word of the Lord, that all true believers in Christ are of one body (1 Corinthians 12:13), partakers of one bread (1 Corinthians 10:17), have one God and one Lord (Ephesians 4). Seeing then that they are one, as said, it is Christian and reasonable that they also have divine love among them and that one member cares for another, for both the Scriptures and nature teach this... They show mercy and love, as much as

church continued in its view that the community of goods of the early chapters of Acts was an historical reality and gave precedent for the full property-sharing of monasteries and convents, the ‘apostolic’ and ‘religious’ life, while Protestant scholarship persisted in its rejection of both the practice of monasticism and generally of the historical reality of earliest Christian community of goods as recorded in Acts. A representative writer in this regard was the reputed scholar and French Benedictine Dom Antoine Augustin Calmet (1672–1757). An English version of his comment on the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–11 rendered his words, apparently with momentary inaccuracies, ‘Many of the ancients thought, that when the first Christians resolved to sell their estates, this resolution included a kind of [at least implicit] vow to reserve nothing [but to make all things common]; and that Ananias and Sapphira having violated this vow, were guilty of perjury and sacrilege...’ Calmet accepted an historical reality of a real community of goods in the early community of believers in Jesus in Jerusalem, based in a vow of poverty which was at least implicit.<sup>8</sup> By way of

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is in them. They do not suffer a beggar among them. They have pity on the wants of the saints. They receive the wretched. They take strangers into their houses. They comfort the sad. They lend to the needy. They clothe the naked. They share their bread with the hungry. They do not turn their face from the poor nor do they regard their decrepit limbs and flesh (Isaiah 58). This is the kind of brotherhood we teach, and not that some should take over and possess the land, soil, and properties of others, as we are falsely maligned, accused, and lied about by many... Furthermore, this love, mercy, and brotherhood they teach and practice, and have taught and practiced for seventeen years in such form and manner in perpetual thanks to the Lord that although we have been robbed of a great part of our possession and are still daily robbed and taken, and many a pious, God-fearing father and mother is killed with fire, water, and sword, and we may have no safe and free place of abode, as can be seen, and the times are hard; nevertheless none of the pious nor the children left behind by the pious, who are willing to adapt themselves among us, have had to beg...’ Cf. Donald F. Durnbaugh, ed., *Every Need Supplied: Mutual Aid and Christian Community in the Free Churches 1525-1675* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), cited by John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World. The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1990), p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> Dom Augustin Calmet, *Dictionnaire Historique, Critique, Chronologique, Geographique et Litteral de la Bible* (Geneva: Marc-Michel Bousquet & Compagnie, second edition 1730), p. 188: ‘...plusiers Anciens ont crû que les premiers Fidèles embrassant le Christianisme, & prenant la résolution de vendre leurs heritages, cette résolution enfermoit une espèce de voeu, au moins implicite, de ne s’en rien réserver, mais de mettre tout en commun; & qu’Ananie & Saphire ayant violé ce voeu, avoient commis une espèce de parjure & de sacrilege, en se réservant quelque chose de ce qu’ils avoient vendu.’ The above English rendering of Calmet’s view is found in the article ‘Ananias’ in *A Theological, Biblical and Ecclesiastical Dictionary*, ed. John Robinson D.D. (London: Longman, 1815), a volume without page numbers. The same English text is given in *Calmet’s Dictionary of the Holy Bible: With the Biblical Fragments by the late Charles Taylor, Augustine Calmet and Charles Taylor* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1830), Volume 1, p. 120 art. VII Ananias, which then adds Calmet’s patristic evidence in this form: ‘Hieronym. Ep. 8, Basil Serm. 1, de Inst Monach. Chrysost. et Oecumen. in Act v. Cyprian. lib. iii. Ad Quirin. Aug. serm. olim. 10, de diversis, nunc 148 n.

contrast, we may cite the opposing interpretation of Calmet's younger contemporary, the German Lutheran church historian Johann Lorenz (von) Mosheim (1693–1755). In 1733 Mosheim wrote an extensive and forceful dissertation against the 'common opinion' that understood the early Jerusalem church to have practised the full and compulsory sharing of property.<sup>9</sup> His essay demonstrated his familiarity with many of the relevant classical sources. He averred: 'It is an ancient opinion, though not older than the fourth century, that in the church of Jerusalem there was such a *community of goods*, as existed among the ancient Essenes and now among the monks; but this opinion is destitute of any solid foundation, resting solely on the declaration of Luke, that they had all things common. Mosheim stressed that Peter's emphasis on the voluntary nature of Ananias and Sapphira's donation of property at Acts 5:4 show that Luke's statements that the community had 'all things common' 'should not be understood, as it generally has been, of their *possessing* in common, but only of their *using* in common'.<sup>10</sup> In Mosheim's lengthy treatment we can detect his firm opposition to the Roman Catholic opinion, as represented by Calmet, that the communal life of the early Jerusalem believers in Jesus gave precedent for the religious life of monks and nuns in community of property, and to the

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2. Gregor. Magn. Lib. i. Registri Ep. olim. 31, nunc 34. Sanct. Tirin. Cornel. Grot. Et al.' Another edition of Calmet's dictionary (with the patristic references in footnotes, as in the second edition) is called *Taylor's Edition of Calmet's Great Dictionary of the Bible...* (Charlestown: Samuel Etheridge, 1812). It is in four volumes and gives a preface to the first edition noting that there had been editions of Calmet's Dictionary in French, Latin, Dutch, Italian, Spanish and other languages, but that there had not been an edition in England for sixty years. The dissemination of Calmet's view and work throughout Europe was typical of Catholic biblical interpretation of the Acts community of goods, which educated the clergy and congregations in the patristic way of reading the Acts text as about a real community of goods, giving precedent for Christian monastic vows and community of property based in a vow of poverty. The vow theory concerning the property-donation of Ananias and Sapphira is not merely about understanding the details of the Ananias and Sapphira story, but a way of understanding and literally applying the community of goods passages of Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–5:11, taking the wording of Acts at face value, basing the 'religious life' on Scripture, and reading the Acts account of the Jerusalem community of goods as an historically reliable account of Christian beginnings, devoid of exaggeration. Calmet produced his *Commentaires sur l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament en latin puis en français* in 1707–1717 (English translation 1716) and his two-volume *Dictionnaire historique et critique de la Bible* in 1722–1728.

<sup>9</sup> Johannes Mosheim, 'De vera natura communionis bonorum in ecclesia Hierosolymitana commentation', in his *Dissertationum ad historiam ecclesiasticam pertinentium*, 2 vols. (Altona and Flensburg: Fratres Korte, 1733–1743), Vol. 1, pp. 1–53; cf. L. William Countryman, *The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire: Contradictions and Accommodations* (New York: E. Mellen, c. 1980), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Mosheim's Institutes of Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern*, translated by James Murdock, revised by James Seaton Reid (London: William Tegg & Co., 1876), p. 20.



occasionally strong Anabaptist interpretation and desire to apply the Acts account of community of goods to the life of the whole Christian congregation, as persisted amongst the Hutterites, and the continued general reaction amongst both Roman Catholics and Protestants against the disastrous attempt by some early Anabaptists to create, in 1534–1535, a utopian commune in the city of Münster which abrogated the holding of private property.

However, notwithstanding the diversity of opinion about the legitimacy of Christian monasticism and earnest pleadings against what was often perceived to be a dangerous minority voice within Anabaptist opinion, these passages continued to be greeted with considerable interest in their practical imitation by some interpreters. One enthusiast for the detachment from personal possessions within the Christian congregation which the Acts account seemed to encourage was John Wesley. The theme of ‘community of goods’ is frequent in his writings.<sup>11</sup> In his *Notes on the New Testament* Wesley found that even Peter’s emphasis on the voluntary character of Ananias’ and Sapphira’s intended surrender of property to the nascent Jerusalem church did not contradict the communal holding of property implied at Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–35. Wesley took the view that Ananias and Sapphira had at the point of seeking to surrender their property not yet received baptism. Hence they were not yet fully a part of the community which was ‘of one heart and soul’ and held ‘all things common’. Had Ananias made the commitment and decision to be a believer, he would have withheld nothing of his property, for the community of good was universal in the community, an expression of the universal reign of the spirit of love in the community.<sup>12</sup> Wesley’s unusual interpretation may have originated with his Moravian associates.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. John Evans, ‘John Wesley and the Community of Goods’, in Keith G. Robbins, ed., *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America c. 1750–c. 1950: Essays in Honour of W. R. Ward* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1990), pp. 25–50.

<sup>12</sup> Wesley finds a real sharing of property based in spiritual love commenting on Acts 2:45: ‘And sold their possessions - Their lands and houses; and goods - Their movables. And parted them to all as any one had need — To say the Christians did this only till the destruction of Jerusalem, is not true; for many did it long after. Not that there was any positive command for so doing: it needed not; for love constrained them. It was a natural fruit of that love wherewith each member of the community loved every other as his own soul. And if the whole Christian Church had continued in this spirit, this usage must have continued through all ages. To affirm therefore that Christ did not design it should continue, is neither more nor less than to affirm, that Christ did not design this measure of love should continue. I see no proof of this.’ His comment on 4:32 is in the same vein: ‘And the multitude of them that believed - Every individual person were of one heart and one soul - Their love, their hopes, their passions joined: and not so much as one - In so great a multitude: this was a necessary consequence of that union of heart; said that ought of the things which he had was his own - It is impossible any one should, while all were of one soul. So long as that truly Christian love continued, they

*The French revolution and the rise of socialism: The primitive community as a model for the modern state?* The events of the French revolution of 1789 and the rise of the socialist critique of both the rentier and industrial forms of capitalism gave a new political dimension to the interpretation of Jesus' sharper statements in the Gospels concerning property and the Acts account of community of goods of the early believers in Jesus in Jerusalem. Might not the Acts report of early property-sharing in Jerusalem offer scriptural precedent for the new theories advocating the communalization of property across the whole of the state, rather than simply amongst the believing Christian community or the smaller intentional communities of monks and nuns?

At the time of the French revolution, there were attempts to link Christianity with sympathy for 'the plight of the industrial working classes' and the critique of the vast landed estates and extraordinary wealth of the French aristocracy.<sup>13</sup> In the early nineteenth century the 'utopian socialist' Charles Fourier (1772-1837) proposed the organization of society in communities with 1600 individuals in each, in which property was held in common, and in which there were no private capitalists.<sup>14</sup> Robert Owen (1771-1858) made similar 'utopian' proposals and

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could not but have all things common.' On Acts 5:1 he comments: 'But a certain man named Ananias — It is certain, not a believer, for all that believed were of one heart and of one soul: probably not baptized; but intending now to offer himself for baptism.' Thus Wesley resolves the apparent contradiction between a universal community of goods in the church and its apparently voluntary nature by deducing that Ananias was not yet a believer, nor baptized. Had Ananias been a believer and baptized, he would have acted as all others in the community and withheld nothing. On Acts 5:3 Wesley comments: 'To lie to the Holy Ghost - Who is in us. And to keep back — Here was the first instance of it. This was the first attempt to bring propriety of goods into the Christian Church. On Acts 5:4 he comments: 'While it remained, did it not remain thine? - It is true, whosoever among the Christians (not one excepted) had houses or lands, sold them, and laid the price at the feet of the apostles. But it was in his own choice to be a Christian or not: and consequently either to sell his land, or keep it. And when it was sold, was it not in thy power? - For it does not appear that he professed himself a Christian when he sold it. Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart? - So profanely to dissemble on so solemn an occasion? Thou hast not lied to men only, but to God also. Hence the Godhead of the Holy Ghost evidently appears: since lying to him, ver. 3, is lying to God.' Here Wesley contrasts the universal character of Acts 4:34 (understanding Luke's 'as many as' to imply 'not one excepted') and makes Ananias' choice 'to be a Christian' (or not) equivalent to the choice open to Ananias 'either to sell his land, or keep it.'

<sup>13</sup> Cf. L. William Countryman, *The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire: Contradictions and Accommodations* (New York: E. Mellen, c. 1980), pp. 1-2 and 35; Countryman cites Alec R. Vidler, *A Century of Social Catholicism, 1820-1920*, paperback ed. (London: SPCK, 1969), pp. 45-49.

<sup>14</sup> (François Marie) Charles Fourier, *Le Nouveau monde industriel / The New Industrial World* (1835-1836); cf. Yaacov Oved, *Two Hundred Years of American Communes*, (New Brunswick [USA] and London [UK]: Transaction Publishers, 1988), pp. 129-165, with extensive bibliography.

experiments in England and in the USA, but his ideas had as little general effect as Fourier's in France.<sup>15</sup> However, after around 1830 the ideas of other socialist theorists and reformers began to have serious political effect. Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), who formulated the theory of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' used by Karl Marx, sought to stir working class insurrection and spent a total of 33 years in prison; Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-65) condemned all property as theft and sought the organization of mines and factories by workers themselves;<sup>16</sup> Louis Blanc (1811-1882) demanded the establishment by the state of workshops to be run cooperatively by the workers.<sup>17</sup> The profits of workers' labour were to be shared amongst them.

Socialist ideas and economic grievances motivated many of the revolutionaries of the 'year of revolutions', 1848. The radical political activist Wilhelm Christian Weitling (1808–1871) made, in the years leading up to the revolts, extensive use of the Biblical text. His book *The Gospel of the Poor Sinner* was political propaganda published as Christian literature and Bible exposition in order to avoid suppression. Weitling made much of the critique of property in the eighth century BC Israelite prophets, Jesus' critique of wealth, and the community of property of the early Jerusalem church.<sup>18</sup> The British politician Tristram Hunt has observed that Weitling's 'doctrine encompassed a highly emotional mix of Babouvist communism, chiliastic Christianity, and millenarian populism... Weitling revived the apocalyptic politics of the sixteenth-century Munster Anabaptists and their gory attempts to usher in the Second Coming.'<sup>19</sup>

Following the overthrow of Louis Philippe of France revolution spread to Germany, the Austrian Empire and Italy. None of these revolutions against monarchy and its aristocratic, estate-owning supporters enjoyed lasting success, and most were violently suppressed within a few months. Their relevance to study of the theme of property in the New Testament around the middle of the nineteenth century is seen in the offer by the *Académie Française*, in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, of a prize for the best essay on the theme of charity in the New Testament. The *Académie* sought to establish a flawless scholarly refutation of the apparently frequently advanced opinion that the

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Yaacov Oved, *Two Hundred Years of American Communes*, (New Brunswick [USA] and London [UK]: Transaction Publishers, 1988), pp. 108–109.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Joseph Proudhon, *Qu'est-ce que c'est la Propriété/What is Property?* (1840) and *Philosophie de la Misère/Philosophy of Poverty* (1846).

<sup>17</sup> Louis Jean Joseph Charles Blanc, *L'Organisation du Travail* (first published in the *Revue du progres*, which Blanc founded, in 1839).

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm Weitling, *Das Evangelium des Armen Sünders*, 2nd ed. (1846, reprinted Leipzig: Reclam, 1967; in English translation, with introduction by David McClellan, London: Sheed & Ward, 1969). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were in their youth active in Weitling's procommunist organisation.

<sup>19</sup> Tristram Hunt, *Marx's General: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2009), pp. 131–132.

primitive church had recommended or practised communistic sharing of property. It was deemed desirable that a scholarly work of the highest quality demonstrate that the true social principle of Christianity was voluntary charity, not the equal sharing of property.<sup>20</sup> The Swiss Protestant scholar Étienne Chastel won the prize with an extensive and influential historical monograph, *Études Historiques sur l'influence de la Charité*, published in French in 1853 and in English, in the United States of America in 1857, as *The Charity of the Primitive Churches*.<sup>21</sup> Chastel was unwilling to find any sharing of property beyond generous charitable giving in the early Jerusalem church, and emphasised that Peter had insisted to Ananias and Sapphira that their donation of property was voluntary. He took this to mean, with all scholarly exegetes of the time, that there was no formal sharing of property nor abrogation of private property within the community the couple had sought to join.

It is unsurprising that, as the powers that reigned Europe in the nineteenth century forcefully resisted the restructuring of society according to socialist ambitions, the historically sceptical side of nineteenth century German Protestant biblical scholarship should furnish further skilled historical rejections of the supposed community of goods of the first congregation of believers in Jesus in Jerusalem. In 1884 Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, professor ordinarius and rector (1878–1879) of the University of Strasbourg, from 1871 a city of the German empire, furnished perhaps the classic case against Luke's account.<sup>22</sup> Holtzmann argued forcefully that no organized community of property had ever existed in the Jerusalem church. Holtzmann's case was largely a restatement of Mosheim's sceptical arguments, and was repeated by many scholars through much of the twentieth century. In the new century German form-criticism supplied a supplementary argument, namely that the general statements concerning 'all things common' and the frequent donation of property for the common good found in the 'summary' reports of Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35 should be demoted as secondary and later tradition, merely Luke's own generalizing and idealizing deductions from the older, individual reports of rare occasions of property donation such as those undertaken by Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira (4:32–5:11).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. L. William Countryman, *The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire: Contradictions and Accommodations* (New York: E. Mellen, c. 1980), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Étienne Chastel, *Études historiques sur l'influence de la charité durant les premiers siècles chrétiens, et considérations sur son rôle dans les sociétés modernes* (Paris: Capelle, 1853); *The Charity of the Primitive Churches: Historical Studies upon the Influence of Christian Charity During the First Centuries of Our Era, with some Considerations Touching its Bearing upon Modern Society* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lipincott & Co., 1857).

<sup>22</sup> Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, 'Die Gütergemeinschaft der Apostelgeschichte', *Strassburger Abhandlungen zur Philosophie. Festschrift für Eduard Gottlob Zeller* (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1884), pp. 27–60.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1956), pp. 7–11.

*Grounds for hermeneutical reassessment.* The negative historical judgment of the Acts account generally persists in New Testament scholarship<sup>24</sup> despite

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<sup>24</sup> The highly sceptical article ‘Gütergemeinschaft der Jerusalemer Urgemeinde’ in the German Wikipedia site (de.wikipedia.org) was included in the online encyclopedia’s list of ‘excellent articles’ on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2013. A weakness of the article is that it includes no discussion at all of the work of Bargil Pixner and Rainer Riesner concerning the possibility of an Essene Quarter in the immediate environs of the nascent early church of Jerusalem, suggestive of a kernel of historical truth of Essene-type community of goods in the Acts report of a phenomenon of communal sharing in the first post-Easter community of believers in Jesus in Jerusalem. The article also makes no attempt to study possible linguistic usages at Acts 2:44 and 4:47 reflective of the terminology of the *Rule of the Community* from the property-sharing Qumran community (see further below). The high classification of the article is not justified, and suggests an ossified culture of supposedly ‘assured results’ of historical study and interpretation in the dominant schools of German New Testament scholarship, which seems unwilling or unable to report matters of archaeology and semitic philology and unready to trouble itself with lines of argument which challenge its own inertia and limited vision. Similarly, while discussion of the possible historical relevance of the community of goods reflected in the Qumran *Rule of the Community* (1QS) was a staple of early discussion of the possible relevance of the Scrolls to the study of early Christianity, *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), contains no reference at all to the Acts report of community of goods amongst the early believers in Jesus in Jerusalem, nor to any of the key community-form related texts which have elsewhere been compared closely with the *yachadh* language and content in 1QS (Acts 1:15; 2:44–46; 4:32–5:11, cf. Richard J. Bauckham, ‘The Early Jerusalem Church, Qumran and the Essenes’, in James R. Davila [ed.], *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity* [Leiden, The Netherlands / Boston, MA: Brill, 2003], pp. 63–89, see esp. pp. 85–89). Jörg Frey’s essay ‘Critical Issues in the Investigation of the Scrolls and the New Testament’ in Lim and Collins (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2010), pp. 517–545, contains a rejection of the views of Riesner and Pixner on the existence of an Essene Quarter on the southwest hill of Jerusalem in the immediate vicinity of the ‘Upper Room’ of Acts 1:13 (cf. 2:1) but makes no mention of the community of goods claimed in Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–5:11, which is, of course, an important component of the argument for connections between Essenes and the early believers in Jerusalem. These treatments seem to represent an editorial approach within dominant schools of New Testament and Dead Sea Scrolls interpretation in Europe and the USA today which wish simply to exclude from debate avenues of research which diverge from and potentially threaten preferred conclusions. These preferred conclusions apparently seek, from ulterior motivations, to keep the Essenes, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the early Jesus movement well apart from each other. I would suggest that Protestant distaste for the precedent Roman Catholic scholars have found for later Christian monasticism within the intent of Jesus and the practice of the early Jesus movement according to Acts 2–5, modern liberal university theology’s distaste for what it finds to be unpalatable and unwanted sectarian social and religious forms in ancient Judaism and early Christianity, and modern theological distaste for the communitarian practice of current-day intentional Christian communities and occasional political appropriation of the Acts account by the politically left, have generated and encouraged an hermeneutical blindness in large sectors of the modern academy to the otherwise fairly obvious connections which this

awareness that, according to the ancient accounts of Judaism within its homeland, community of goods was widely practised in first century Judaea, in those communities of ‘Essenes’ which fully shared their property in a formal manner which may properly be termed ‘communitarian’, ‘communistic’ or ‘monastic’. Is the typical recent scholarly rejection of recent centuries, within Protestant biblical scholarship, however, any more than the echo within biblical interpretation of the three great ideological turns we have described — the Reformation rejection of both monasticism and extreme Anabaptist utopianism, and the hefty reaction of conservative Christian scholarship against the later rise of socialist/communist ideas on the organisation of the state, played out in the purportedly neutral-minded, ‘objective’ field of ‘historical biblical study’? Might it not be wise to stand aside, for the purposes of deeper discovery, from these perhaps externally motivated, historically sceptical studies to weigh again the possibility that the patristic interpretation that the Acts community of goods gives legitimate precedent for the communal lifestyle of voluntarist religious communities and points to the influence of an ancient form of monasticism, Essene Jewish monasticism, known to have existed in the same era in ancient Judaea, on the nascent Jerusalem church?

The following are the principal arguments raised against the claim of Acts that the earliest Christian community had ‘all things common’.

i) Acts 2:44 and 4:32 reflect the language of Greek philosophising about the ideal society. The usage ‘all things common’, πάντα (or ἅπαντα) κοινά [*panta koina*] (cf. 2:44, εἶχον πάντα κοινά, [*eichon panta koina*, ‘they had all things common’], cf. 4:32, ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά [*en autois hapanta koina*, ‘there were to them all things common’]) is found in Plato’s *Republic*, a Utopian scheme<sup>25</sup>, and in other literature which emphasises the philosophical ideal; it is found, for example, in praise of the tribal economy of the primitive Scythians or in connection with the renunciation of the ideal philosopher.<sup>26</sup> David L. Mealand noted that the phrase ‘no one called anything... his own’ at Acts 4:32, *oude heisti... elegen idion einai*, ‘no one said anything was his own/private to him’, recalls the usage ‘to call nothing one’s own’, frequently found in Plato’s *Republic* and

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piece will demonstrate between the social forms of Essenism in ancient Judaea and the early Jesus movement in Jerusalem and its environs.

<sup>25</sup> David L. Mealand, ‘Community of Goods and Utopian Allusions in Acts II–IV’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 28 (1977), pp. 96–97.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Plato, *Critias*, §110D; *Republic*, 3.22 §416D; 5.10 §462C (also §463B–C, E); *Laws*, 5 §737C, *Republic*, 5 §464D; Philo, *Counsels (Hypothetica)*, 11.4 on the property-sharing Essenes; Arrian, *Discourses of Epictetus*. 3.24 §68; Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 18 §30, 30 §167; Aristophanes, *The Assemblywomen*, §§590–595; Aelius Aristides, *Panegyric in Kyzikos*, 24; Lucian, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses* §§19–20.

other writings in conjunction with the ‘all things common’ *topos*.<sup>27</sup> A Greek proverb about friendship, ‘friends have all things in common’ (*koina ta [ton] philon*, literally ‘the things of friends [are] common’), is preserved from antiquity with extraordinary frequency.<sup>28</sup> It is found in conjunction with another proverb,

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<sup>27</sup> D. L. Mealand, ‘Community of Goods and Utopian Allusions in Acts II–IV’, p. 97. Mealand cites Plato *Critias*, §110D; *Republic*, 3.22 §416D, 5 §464D, 8 §543B; *Timaios*, §18B. See also Euripides, *Andromache*, 376; Euhemerus in Diodoros of Sicily, *Universal History*, 5.45.5; Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 30 §168.

<sup>28</sup> Euripides, *Andromache*, 377 (‘Neoptolemos must rule over my slaves, and my kin—and I myself as well—must rule over his. For friends have no private property but hold all things in common.’), *Phoenician Women*, 244 (‘But now I find the impetuous god of war has come to battle before the walls, and is kindling a murderous blaze—may he not succeed!—for this city. For friends share the pain of friends, and if this land with its seven towers suffers any mischance, Phoenicia’s realm will share it.’), *Orestes*, 735 (‘Pylades: ‘I have come through the city quickly, as I should, having heard and myself clearly seen the citizens assembling, against you and your sister, to kill you at once. What is happening? How is it with you? How are you doing, my best of comrades, friends and kin? For you are all these to me. Orestes: I am ruined, to make plain to you my troubles in brief. Pylades: You must destroy me also; for friends have all in common.’); Plato, *Phaidros*, 279C (‘Socrates: O beloved Pan and all ye other gods of this place, grant to me that I be made beautiful in my soul within, and that all external possessions be in harmony with my inner man. May I consider the wise man rich; and may I have such wealth as only the self-restrained man can bear or endure.—Do we need anything more, Phaedros? For me that prayer is enough. Phaedros: Let me also share in this prayer; for friends have all things in common. Socrates: Let us go.’), *Lysis*, (an early dialogue, on the nature of friendship) 207C (‘Then I, looking at Menexenos, asked him: Son of Demophon, which is the elder of you two? / It is a point in dispute between us, he replied. / Then you must also be at variance, I said, as to which is the nobler. / Yes, to be sure, he said. / And moreover, which is the more beautiful, likewise. / This made them both laugh. / But of course I shall not ask, I said, which of you is the wealthier; for you are friends, are you not? / Certainly we are, they replied. / And, you know, friends are said to have everything in common, so that here at least there will be no difference between you, if what you say of your friendship is true. / They agreed.’), *Republic*, 424A (‘“Their education and nurture,” I replied. “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.” “Yes, that would be the best way,” he said.’), 449C, *Laws*, 5.739C (‘This plan let us now adopt: let us state the polities which rank first, second, and third in excellence; and the choice let us hand over to Clinias and to whosoever else may at any time wish, ill proceeding to the selection of such things, to take over, according to his own disposition, what he values in his own country. That State and polity come first, and those laws are best, where there is observed as carefully as possible throughout the whole State the old saying<sup>1</sup> that “friends have all things really in common.” As to this condition,—whether it anywhere exists now, or ever will exist,—in which there is community of wives, children, and all chattels, and all that is called “private” is everywhere and by every means rooted out of our life, and so far as possible it is contrived that even things naturally “private” have become in a way “communized,” —eyes, for instance, and ears and hands seem to see, hear, and act in common,— and that all men are, so far as possible, unanimous in the praise and blame they

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bestow, rejoicing and grieving at the same things, and that they honor with all their heart those laws which render the State as unified as possible,—no one will ever lay down another definition that is truer or better than these conditions in point of super-excellence. In such a State,—be it gods or sons of gods that dwell in it,—they dwell pleasantly, living such a life as this.’); Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.5.1263A (‘Property should be in a certain sense common, but, as a general rule, private; for, when everyone has a distinct interest, men will not complain of one another, and they will make more progress, because every one will be attending to his own business. And yet by reason of goodness, and in respect of use, ‘Friends,’ as the proverb says, ‘will have all things common.’ Even now there are traces of such a principle, showing that it is not impracticable, but, in well-ordered states, exists already to a certain extent and may be carried further. For, although every man has his own property, some things he will place at the disposal of his friends, while of others he shares the use with them.’), *Eudemian Ethics*, 1237B (‘At the same time it is manifest that this friendship does not occur between base people either; for the base and evil-natured man is distrustful towards everybody, because he measures other people by himself. Hence good men are more easily cheated, unless as a result of trial they are distrustful. But the base prefer the goods of nature to a friend, and none of them love people more than things; and so they are not friends, for the proverbial ‘common property as between friends’ is not realized in this way—the friend is made an appendage of the things, not the things of the friends.’), 1238A (‘And it is proverbial that time shows a friend, and also misfortunes more than good fortune. For then the truth of the saying ‘friends’ possessions are common property’ is clear for only friends, instead of the natural goods and natural evils on which good and bad fortune turn, choose a human being rather than the presence of the former and the absence of the latter; and misfortune shows those who are not friends really but only because of some casual utility.’), *Nikomachian Ethics*, 8.9.1159B (‘For in every partnership we find mutual rights of some sort, and also friendly feeling: one notes that shipmates and fellow-soldiers speak of each other as ‘my friend,’ and so in fact do the partners in any joint undertaking. But their friendship is limited to the extent of their association in their common business, for so also are their mutual rights as associates. Again, the proverb says ‘Friends’ goods are common property,’ and this is correct, since community is the essence of friendship. Brothers have all things in common, and so do members of a comradeship; other friends hold special possessions in common, more or fewer in different cases, inasmuch as friendships vary in degree.’), 9.8.1168B (‘For we admit that one should love one’s best friend most; but the best friend is he that, when he wishes a person’s good, wishes it for that person’s own sake, even though nobody will ever know of it. Now this condition is most fully realized in a man’s regard for himself, as indeed are all the other attributes that make up the definition of a friend; for it has been said already that all the feelings that constitute friendship for others are an extension of regard for self. Moreover, all the proverbs agree with this; for example, ‘Friends have one soul between them,’ ‘Friends’ goods are common property,’ ‘Amity is equality,’ ‘The knee is nearer than the shin.’ All of these sayings will apply most fully to oneself; for a man is his own best friend. Therefore he ought to love himself most.’); Diogenes Laertius 4.53, 6.37, 6.72, 8:10, 10:11; Libanius, *Letters*, 327.3.2, 1209.4.4, 1236.3.4, 1504.1.6, 1537.5.2; Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 6. §32, 19 §92; Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 33; Lucian, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, §§24-25; Aelius Aristides, *Panegyric in Kyzikos*, 24; Menander, *Sentences*, ed. Siegfried Jaekel (*Menandri Sententiae Comparatio Menandri et Philistionis*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1964), 534, in *Menandri quae supersunt*, ed. Alfredus Koerte and Andreas Thierfelder (Leipzig: Teubner, 1959), 10.1; Terence, *The Brothers*, 803–804; Plutarch, *Morals, On Brotherly Love*, 20.490E; Philo, *On Abraham*, 235; Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, 6.2–3; Martial, *Epigrams*, 2.43.1, 16; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 3.104–111, 37.7; Plutarch, *How*



‘friends are one soul’ (*mia psyche*, ‘one soul’) in a line of Aristotle’s *Nikomachian Ethics*.<sup>29</sup> The combination of the phrases ‘all things common’ and ‘one heart and soul’ at Acts 4:32 is remarkably similar. Luke seems intent to suggest that the life of the earliest community in Jerusalem realised the vaunted Greek ideal of friendship.<sup>30</sup>

It is therefore clear that Luke presents the early Christians in Jerusalem in the dress of Greek thinking about ideal political organisation, or a state of detachment from possessions realised by the ideally pious.<sup>31</sup> This is often taken as an indication that Luke is *idealising* events of lesser magnitude into a formal sharing

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to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend, 65A, *Convivial Questions*, 644C, 743E, *Morals. The Dialogue on Love*, 767D; *Precepts of Statecraft*, 807B, *It is Impossible to Live Pleasantly in the Manner of Epicurus*, 1102F; Appian, *The Civil Wars*, 5.3.19; Sextus, *Sentences*, edited by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge University Press, 1959), Nr. 228; Athenaeus, *The Dinner-table Philosophers*, 1.14.10 (=1.8A); Eustathius, *Commentaries on Homer*, II. 2.184.12, 2.817.13, 3.456.17, 3.465.29, 3.473.8, 3.566.14; Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 12.122.3; Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.16.51, *Laws* 1.12.34; Scholia to Plato’s *Phaedros*, 297C; Photius, *Lexicon, koinow*; Seneca, *On the Award and Reception of Favours*, 7.4.1; Philo, *Life of Moses*, 1.156–159, cf. *On Sobriety*, 56–57.

<sup>29</sup> 9.8.2 §1116B.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. A. C. Mitchell, ‘The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44–47 and 4:32–37’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992), pp. 255–272.

<sup>31</sup> On the ancient range of contexts of the theme of community of possessions in antiquity see especially Manfred Wacht, art. ‘Gütergemeinschaft’ in Theodor Klauser et al. (eds.) *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Vol. XIII (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann Verlag, 1982–1984), pp. 1–59 and Brian J. Capper, ‘Reciprocity and the Ethics of Acts,’ in I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 499–518. Several recent writers offer renewed survey and analysis of the various Greek and Greco-Roman contexts in which the motif of community of property may be found, including its relation to the themes of friendship, the Golden Age, and utopianism. One such study is given by Christopher M. Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics: A Study in Their Coherence and Character* (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2010), pp. 201–211. Hays finds that the ideal of friendship understood that what was privately owned should out of love be shared with friends. ‘The dominant ideology of friendship assumes private ownership alongside the generous shared use of possessions.’ (p. 208) Prior to this study Hays makes only brief reference (p. 199) to the linguistic similarity of phrases in Acts 2:44 and 47 to the *yachadh* terminology of the *Essene Rule of the Community*, curiously thereby making the acceptance of these semitisms in Luke’s Greek by Max Wilcox and Matthew Black (see below), to whom he does not refer, ‘speculative’ (p. 199) and merely attributing their view to the present author. Hays’ monograph also makes no reference to the studies of Bargil Pixner and Rainer Riesner on the possible physical proximity of the nascent Jerusalem church to the ‘Gate of the Essenes’ which may have taken its name from an Essene Quarter located within the walls of Jerusalem on the southwest hill. His seeming lack of study of these important themes means that his conclusions do not give sufficient weight to the evidence for Essene organisational, linguistic and geographic connections with the earliest community of goods of Jesus’ disciples in Jerusalem.

of property, and that the historical reality was only some occasional events of charitable generosity.

ii) Peter's challenge to Ananias and Sapphira, who have failed to hand in the full price obtained from the sale of their property, at Acts 5:4, includes the rhetorical questions 'While it remained (unsold) did it not remain yours, and after it was sold, did it not remain in your power?' This is taken to indicate that their donation of property was voluntarily undertaken. It is argued that since they were under no compulsion to make the sale, there can have been no formally organised community of property. That Acts remembers only one other example of major property-surrender, that of Barnabas (4:36–37) is thought to indicate that such events were rare. The rare occurrence of large-scale donations of property to the community is taken to weigh against the existence of formal property-sharing arrangements.

iii) In Acts 6:1–6 care for widows was at issue. This underprivileged group remained identifiable and permanently dependent upon the community, in need as it were of a perpetual 'dole'. Hence, it is argued, there was no common ownership of property, merely a structure which provided care for the indigent. The widows of the 'Hellenists' complain that they are being 'overlooked' (6:1). This is sometimes taken to imply that organisation of the community was rudimentary, suggesting that no well-organised community of property existed, but only badly-run charity.

iv) Property-sharing on a determined model such as Acts seeks to imply does not recur in the New Testament period, and does not reappear until the birth of monasticism (late 3rd century AD). Hence it is unlikely that it was ever a feature of earliest Christianity.

This piece will seek to demonstrate that convincing responses refuting these four major arguments against the historical veracity of Luke's report of a seemingly formal, Essene-like community of property within the first community of Jesus' post-Easter followers in Jerusalem may be found through a close examination and comparison of the reports of community of goods in Acts 2:42–47, 4:32–5:11 and 6:1–6 with the textual and archaeological materials concerning the Essenes of ancient Jerusalem and Judaea which have been preserved to the present day. Prior to this analysis, however, I will first note a very important argument already occasionally raised by careful critical scholars *in favour* of finding an important kernel of historical truth in Luke's claim that the early church in Jerusalem had 'all things common'. This argument arises from the testimony of the Fourth Gospel that Jesus' party of travelling disciples lived from

a common purse, administered by Judas.<sup>32</sup> It is entirely plausible that the post-Easter group of Jesus' disciples may simply have preserved the communal mode of life in which they had lived previously with their Lord. This communal purse and closely shared social life, involving common meal fellowship, prayer and worship had, after all, Jesus' own stamp of approval, and to continue as his loyal disciples and representatives would naturally involve the preservation of the common life they had shared before the tragic rejection of Jesus by the Jerusalem authorities. For the core of Jesus' travelling party to continue in the common life they had shared with Jesus would lend authority to their claim to be his authorized representatives, while to appear less united socially than the group had been prior to Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion by departing from their earlier common life would weaken their claim to be continuing the mission of Jesus as he intended. It appears from Acts 2:42–47 that they not only continued with the daily meal fellowship which Jesus had initiated amongst them (Acts 2:46) but also initiated procedures by which their common life was opened, to those who desired to join them in it, in Jerusalem. Thereafter, as we shall see, it is possible that property-sharing was from the day of their first Pentecost together in Jerusalem effectively limited to an 'inner group' within the community, comprising the former travelling party of disciples and those who joined them in their common purse, or that over time comprehensive property-sharing became limited to this inner group although early on there had been a serious attempt to include all believers in their message about Jesus. It is possible that the Galilean travelling party's habit of living from a common purse may have been opened to those converted on the day of Pentecost without carefully laid plans about what should follow, or that from the outset cultural conditions and expectations naturally suggested that the fully property-sharing group of believers in Jesus would always form an 'inner group' within the movement, just as within Essenism fully property-sharing groups comprised only one echelon of a broader, multiform social movement.

I conclude this section by pointing to a general argument in favour of Luke's account rarely given, in scholarly circles, the weight it deserves. This argument derives simply from the existence of community of goods as an established feature of first century Palestinian culture, amongst those Essene communities

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<sup>32</sup> Jn. 12:6; 13:29. Joachim Jeremias, who sought to stress that the community of goods of the early Jerusalem community of believers in Jesus was voluntary, nevertheless strongly resisted the common skepticism applied to the account of property-sharing in Acts 2–6, and gave as positive arguments in favour of a serious historical reality behind the account '(a) the repeated challenge of Jesus... to devote possessions to the good of the poor; (b) the example of Jesus and his disciples, who depended on a common fund and forsook all their possessions (John 13.29; 12.6; Matt. 19.29 and par.); (c) the example of the Essenes who, like the primitive community, had communal meals (*BJ* 2.129f.)', *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1969), p. 130, n. 19.

which shared their property communally. Scholarly comparisons of Essene practice and the Acts account of Christian community of goods have almost universally found the phenomena vastly different and quite unrelated. The net result of this supposedly valid conclusion is to grant one set of sources largely literal credence, but to throw the face value claims of another other set of sources, especially the statements of Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–35, largely to the wind. This outcome, because of its unevenness, betrays a certain historical implausibility. Since two sets of sources seem to attribute the same practice to components of two Jewish movements which existed at the same time, in the same very small region of Judaea, the balance of probability is, rather, in favour of some kind of connection between them. Otherwise, we must attribute to mere coincidence that Luke portrays the earliest Christians in Jerusalem operating a practice common in their geographical environment. It is well known that there is also a high degree of idealisation of the Essenes in Philo and Josephus. If Essene community of goods survives, in modern critical analysis, this stylizing aspect of the ancient sources, but Christian community of property does not, are the sources being treated even-handedly? Indeed, although we have no knowledge of the actual practice of community of goods in this period anywhere else in this ancient world, despite much philosophical lauding of the ideal, we have *two* claimed instances of it in our sources for early first century Judaea. Can the current scholarly consensus be correct to hold the ancient Essene and the early Jesus movement manifestations of community of property quite apart? In the opinion of the present author, there is a manifest unevenness in the treatment of the ancient sources in current scholarship, the Essene materials being awarded credibility and generous, plain-reading acceptance while the sources on the community of property of the early Jesus movement in Jerusalem preserved by the author of Acts are approached with hostility and undue skepticism. I would argue that this unevenness of approach arises from a conditioning of the current hermeneutical perspective by popular present-day resistance to 1) political enthusiasm for the relevance of any ideal of community of property to the organization of the state, 2) to the discovery of any precedent for the practice of the shared common life of monks and nuns with the historical Jesus and in the community of his first post-Easter followers in Jerusalem, and 3) to both the occasional current-day appearances of enthusiasm for the ideal of community of property as a model for the whole Christian congregation and the almost unbroken persistence from the Reformation to the present day of the practice of community of property amongst the Christian congregations of the Hutterites, whose property sharing arrangements represent an unwelcome testimony to the practicality of actual, full property-sharing within intentional communities formed by groups of like-minded believers.