The Acts Seminar papers for March 2008 addressed a variety of issues related to the author’s use of stylistic and apologetic devices in his story of Christian origins. Rubén Dupertuis’s paper, “Parresía, Opposition and Philosophical Imagery in Acts,” analyzed the use of the term Parresía (“free speech” or “bold speech”) in Acts. Dupertuis proposed that the term was part of a larger apologetic theme in Acts to portray early Christian leaders as philosophers, modeled after the literary portrayal of Socrates and other.

Ballot 1 • Acts Seminar
Parresía, Opposition and Philosophical Imagery in Acts
Ruben Dupertuis

Q1 Parresía (“free speech”) is used in Acts in an intentional attempt to echo philosophical literary imagery.
Fellows 0.78 Red 57% R 30% P 03% G 10% B
Associates 0.87 Red 64% R 34% P 01% G 01% B

Q2 Parresía is consistently associated with stories of opposition in Acts.
Fellows 0.87 Red 71% R 18% P 11% G 00% B
Associates 0.78 Red 41% R 55% P 01% G 03% B

Q3 Parresía is used in Acts in contexts which evoke the claim of a divine commission authorizing the right to speak “with boldness.”
Fellows 0.90 Red 75% R 21% P 11% G 00% B
Associates 0.93 Red 80% R 19% P 01% G 00% B

Q4 Parresía is used in Acts to portray Christian leaders as Socratic figures.
Fellows 0.76 Red 52% R 28% P 17% G 03% B
Associates 0.82 Red 56% R 34% P 10% G 00% B

Q5 The use of philosophical imagery in Acts is an apologetic device to legitimate Christianity as a movement led by true philosophers.
Fellows 0.77 Red 48% R 41% P 03% G 07% B
Associates 0.82 Red 56% R 36% P 08% G 01% B

Q6 The characterization of the early Christian leaders as “bold speakers” is an historical datum.
Fellows 0.18 Black 00% R 12% P 31% G 58% B
Associates 0.12 Black 02% R 05% P 19% G 74% B

Ballot 2 • Acts Seminar
Historical Issues in Acts 28:11–31
Gerd Lüdemann

Q1 Since Luke places himself in the context of ancient historical writings, he deserves to be measured on the basis of the ancient standards of historiography.
Fellows 0.80 Red 61% R 21% P 14% G 04% B
Associates 0.79 Red 64% R 18% P 08% G 10% B

Q2 The simple, linear narrative structure of Acts is indicative of its artificial nature.
Fellows 0.82 Red 66% R 21% P 07% G 07% B
Associates 0.81 Red 59% R 25% P 14% G 02% B

Q3 Luke’s favorable portrayal of Romans is a noteworthy theme in Acts.
Fellows 0.90 Red 69% R 31% P 00% G 00% B
Associates 0.93 Red 79% R 20% P 01% G 00% B

Fellows 0.87 Red 62% R 38% P 00% G 00% B
Associates 0.81 Red 50% R 44% P 05% G 01% B

Fellows 0.87 Red 68% R 25% P 07% G 00% B
Associates 0.85 Red 64% R 30% P 04% G 02% B

Q6 Luke’s ultimate concern is to inculcate his view of salvation history.
Fellows 0.83 Red 59% R 30% P 11% G 00% B
Associates 0.87 Red 71% R 21% P 06% G 02% B

Q7 In Luke’s view, God has a plan for human salvation that involves the conversion of the Gentile world to Christianity.
Fellows 0.88 Red 70% R 22% P 07% G 00% B
Associates 0.90 Red 76% R 20% P 03% G 01% B

Q8 Although Acts occasionally offers accurate accounts of historical events, it includes a number of serious and fundamental distortions.
Fellows 0.95 Red 89% R 07% P 04% G 00% B
Associates 0.92 Red 79% R 17% P 04% G 00% B

Fellows 0.79 Red 61% R 18% P 18% G 04% B
Associates 0.82 Red 62% R 23% P 13% G 02% B
Q10 By its very nature objective history excludes theological presuppositions.
Fellows 0.64 Pink 39% R 32% P 11% G 18% B
Associates 0.71 Pink 52% R 21% P 15% G 12% B

Q11 Luke purposely omits any mention of Paul’s death not only to finesse Rome’s undoubted responsibility, but also to avoid sully his picture of the Apostle’s triumphant life with the report of a gory end.
Fellows 0.81 Red 50% R 43% P 07% G 00% B
Associates 0.78 Red 45% R 46% P 09% G 01% B

Q12 Paul was imprisoned in Rome.
Fellows 0.64 Pink 15% R 63% P 22% G 00% B
Associates 0.73 Pink 30% R 61% P 07% G 02% B

Q13 Paul was executed by imperial authority in Rome.
Fellows 0.69 Pink 23% R 65% P 08% G 04% B
Associates 0.71 Pink 27% R 60% P 12% G 01% B

Q14 Paul engaged in unhindered preaching in Rome.
Fellows 0.11 Black 00% R 07% P 19% G 74% B
Associates 0.14 Black 00% R 02% P 37% G 61% B

Q15 Acts 28:1–16 is historically accurate in reporting that Paul was transported from Malta via Syracuse, Rhegium, and Puteoli to Rome.
Fellows 0.37 Gray 07% R 22% P 44% G 26% B
Associates 0.41 Gray 01% R 36% P 47% G 15% B

Q16 Paul was guarded by one soldier (Acts 28:16)
Fellows 0.27 Gray 00% R 15% P 52% G 33% B
Associates 0.35 Gray 02% R 16% P 67% G 15% B

Q17 Paul practiced his craft and underwrote the expense of his guard.
Fellows 0.27 Gray 00% R 12% P 58% G 31% B
Associates 0.34 Gray 02% R 07% P 82% G 09% B

Q18 Paul met Jewish leaders in Rome.
Fellows 0.14 Black 04% R 04% P 23% G 69% B
Associates 0.12 Black 01% R 04% P 24% G 70% B

philosophers in the Greco-Roman world. More specifically, according to Dupertuis, Acts utilized the term *Parrēsia* in stories of opposition and stories which evoke the claim of a divine commission, all of which served the larger apologetic purposes of Acts. Therefore, Dupertuis argued, Acts’ portrayal of early Christian leaders as “bold” speakers derives from Acts’ apologetic agenda and not from historical memories. Both Fellows and Associates concurred, and so voted black on the historical datum that early Christian leaders were bold speakers.

Gerd Lüdemann’s paper, “Historical Issues in Acts 28:11–31,” supported a long list of ballot items detailing characteristic literary and theological themes in Acts, many of which had been discussed in previous seminar papers. Fellows and Associates voted red on the entire list save for one. Item 10, “by its very nature objective history excludes theological presuppositions,” while it received a pink vote, nevertheless received quite a bit of discussion about how the terms of the statement were to be interpreted. The discussion revealed significant uneasiness in the seminar about how to assess this proposal, but the vote indicated a desire to affirm it in principle.

Lüdemann’s paper also proposed historical judgements about Acts 28:11–31. Based on supporting data
from 1 Clement, Lüdemann was able to affirm as historical the data that “Paul was imprisoned in Rome” and that “Paul was executed by imperial authority in Rome.” Both Fellows and Associates voted pink on those items, indicating a willingness to affirm but acknowledging that the evidence was not unimpeachable. The details that “Paul was imprisoned in Rome” and that “what unifies Marcion, the author of Acts, and Justin,” proposed as characteristic of Judaism of his day.

In her response to Tyson’s paper, Amy-Jill Levine agreed that Acts played a pivotal role in the development of a Christian self-definition in which anti-Judaism was an essential component. She then proposed several areas in which we as scholars need to sharpen our analysis. Does the author of Acts, she asked, really engage the Judaism of its day or merely a caricature of it? And is the author’s use (and misuse) of the Torah always to be equated with “Jews,” “Judaism,” and “Jewish practices” of his day? Levine’s comments reminded the seminar always to take seriously the complex reality of first- and second-century Judaism as we develop our theses about Christian origins.

Tyson’s paper helped to broaden the case for the placement of Acts within debates about Christian self-identity in the second century CE. He argued that “despite the diversity to be seen among Marcion, the author of Acts, and Justin, one unifying factor was their anti-Judaism.” These items were affirmed by both Fellows and Associates, though the predominance of pink votes indicates a continuing debate about the definition of anti-Judaism as an apologetic motif in a second-century context.