

# Spring Meeting 2007

## Report from the Acts Seminar

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The Acts Seminar is in the midst of a new phase of its work. Our research has so far established that, as Joseph Tyson put it in his October 2006 paper, “the burden of proof lies on the scholar who intends to marshal an argument for the historicity of *any* item in Acts.” This is especially true because, as Tyson has persuasively argued, Acts is a “myth of Christian origins.” The story it tells about primitive Christianity is constructed in the form of myth, not history. Acts certainly contains historical data about the church in the early second century, the period when Acts was written. The question is whether we can extract historical data about the first century, the period referred to in the story Acts tells. In this new phase of our work, we want to see whether isolated sections within the story of Acts might contain historical data about primitive Christianity.

We began in Miami by taking another look at Acts 1-2, a section that we had previously judged to be a Lukan creation. There is a narrative in Acts 1:12-26 that tells about the death of Judas and the selection of a new apostle.

Could that story contain any historical data? That was the subject of Joseph Tyson’s paper.

The idea that there was a group known as “the twelve” is already found in 1 Corinthians (15:5, 7). But the way in which Luke paints the twelve as apostles is distinctive. This story in Acts makes the case for maintaining the number of disciples at twelve so that, with the death of Judas, another must be chosen. The overall story serves to reinforce the idea that there was “a clear line of authoritative successors to Jesus,” as Tyson argues. When seen in this light, it is clear that the various elements of the story function to promote a larger Lukan theme. These elements include the death of Judas, limiting of the early leaders to twelve, and the requirement that to be an “apostle” one had to have known the historical Jesus. Several of those elements were isolated on Tyson’s ballot and all received black votes.

The list of names of the apostles was also analyzed. It is not possible to derive one single list from which all of the variations derived. That fact, in and of itself, undermines the argument that all of the names refer to historical individuals. Nevertheless, based on gospel data already analyzed in the Jesus Seminar and on references in Paul, one can argue that Peter and John were historical individuals. The fellows voted pink on both propositions.

### Explanation of colors used in voting

- R** true
- P** probably true
- G** probably not true
- B** not true

<b>Ballot One Acts Seminar L. Michael White Paul, Gallio and the Bema</b>		<b>Vote</b>	<b>%R</b>	<b>%P</b>	<b>%G</b>	<b>%B</b>
Q1 The story of Paul’s hearing before Gallio is a Lukan creation.	<b>Fellows</b>	.90 Red	79	13	8	0
	<b>Associates</b>	.84 Red	58	36	6	0
Q2 The story of Paul’s hearing before Gallio is a source for historical data about Paul.	<b>Fellows</b>	.13 Black	0	8	21	71
	<b>Associates</b>	.15 Black	0	3	39	58
Q3 The story of Paul’s hearing before Gallio should be read in accordance with Lukan theology and themes.	<b>Fellows</b>	.94 Red	88	8	4	0
	<b>Associates</b>	.98 Red	94	6	0	0
Q4 Paul was in Corinth when Gallio was procounsel of Corinth.	<b>Fellows</b>	.32 Gray	0	13	70	17
	<b>Associates</b>	.39 Gray	9	18	55	18

**Ballot Six**  
**Acts Seminar**  
**Dennis E. Smith**  
**Religious Practices**

	<b>Vote</b>	<b>%R</b>	<b>%P</b>	<b>%G</b>	<b>%B</b>
Q1 Membership in the early 1st century Christian communities was signified by baptism.	<b>Fellows</b> .33 Gray	0	26	47	26
	<b>Associates</b> .40 Gray	5	35	35	26
Q2 The members of the early 1st century Christian communities were unified in their devotion to the teachings of the apostles.	<b>Fellows</b> .04 Black	0	0	11	89
	<b>Associates</b> .08 Black	2	0	19	79
Q3 The members of the early 1st century Christian communities practiced a communal life style.	<b>Fellows</b> .35 Gray	5	26	37	32
	<b>Associates</b> .23 Black	0	11	47	42
Q4 The members of the early 1st century Christian communities shared all their properties.	<b>Fellows</b> .25 Black	0	16	42	42
	<b>Associates</b> .11 Black	0	3	28	69
Q5 The early 1st century Christian communities emphasized caring for those in their midst who were in need.	<b>Fellows</b> .67 Pink	16	68	16	0
	<b>Associates</b> .52 Pink	5	48	44	3
Q6 The members of the early 1st century Christian communities practiced communal meals.	<b>Fellows</b> .89 Red	68	32	0	0
	<b>Associates</b> .84 Red	61	34	3	3
Q7 The members of the early 1st century Christian communities met for communal meals in homes.	<b>Fellows</b> .85 Red	56	44	0	0
	<b>Associates</b> .82 Red	55	37	5	3
Q8 The members of the early 1st century Christian communities practiced prescribed communal prayers.	<b>Fellows</b> .31 Gray	0	35	24	41
	<b>Associates</b> .29 Gray	3	13	53	32
Q9 In the early 1st century Christian communities, miracles took place in their midst as signs of apostolic authority.	<b>Fellows</b> .30 Gray	5	21	32	42
	<b>Associates</b> .13 Black	0	3	32	65
Q10 In the early 1st century Christian communities, stories about miracles arose and were circulated.	<b>Fellows</b> .74 Pink	21	79	0	0
	<b>Associates</b> .68 Pink	21	66	11	3
Q11 Some of the members of the early 1st century Christian communities attended ritual activities at the temple in Jerusalem.	<b>Fellows</b> .63 Pink	18	53	29	0
	<b>Associates</b> .62 Pink	11	68	19	3

Q12 The Greco-Roman Association Model is used by Acts as a literary model for the early Christian Jerusalem gatherings.	<b>Fellows</b> .93 Red	79	21	0	0
	<b>Associates</b> .82 Red	64	21	11	4
Q13 The Greco-Roman Association Model is the model of the communities to which Paul related.	<b>Fellows</b> .77 Red	58	21	16	5
	<b>Associates</b> .74 Pink	41	44	11	4

<b>Ballot Seven Acts Seminar Joseph B. Tyson How to Become an Apostle</b>		<b>Vote</b>	<b>%R</b>	<b>%P</b>	<b>%G</b>	<b>%B</b>
Q1 After the death of Jesus, apostles in Jerusalem became the sole leaders of the church.	<b>Fellows</b> .01 Black	0	0	4	96	
	<b>Associates</b> .05 Black	0	2	10	88	
Q2 After the death of Jesus, Peter and other leaders agreed that the number of apostles was to be limited to twelve.	<b>Fellows</b> .03 Black	0	0	9	91	
	<b>Associates</b> .07 Black	0	0	20	80	
Q3 After the death of Jesus, Peter and other leaders agreed that apostles must have known the historical Jesus.	<b>Fellows</b> .12 Black	9	0	9	83	
	<b>Associates</b> .14 Black	0	2	37	61	
Q4 After the defection and death of Judas, a replacement was chosen.	<b>Fellows</b> .07 Black	0	4	13	83	
	<b>Associates</b> .11 Black	0	0	32	68	
Q5 The story of the death of Judas in Acts 1:18-19 is historical.	<b>Fellows</b> .04 Black	0	0	13	87	
	<b>Associates</b> .02 Black	0	0	7	93	
Q6 The historical Peter was known as an apostle.	<b>Fellows</b> .74 Pink	39	43	17	0	
	<b>Associates</b> .80 Red	49	41	10	0	
Q7 The historical John was known as an apostle.	<b>Fellows</b> .68 Pink	14	77	9	0	
	<b>Associates</b> .69 Pink	12	83	5	0	
Q8 All the names on the “official list” of Acts 1:13 are those of historical persons.	<b>Fellows</b> .12 Black	0	4	26	70	
	<b>Associates</b> .23 Black	0	10	49	41	

In another paper, Dennis Smith argued that the summary statement in Acts 2:41–47, which describes the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem, was created by Luke, constructed out of literary utopian ideals, and formulated to address issues of his own day. However, that description also utilizes features of a Greco-Roman association. Luke probably described the early church in that way because his own community was a type of association. Associations, as Smith pointed out, were groups in the Greco-Roman world who were united by a variety of common features—occupation, ethnic heritage, devotion to common deity—and who regularly met for communal meals. Scholarship has also shown that the communities described in the letters of Paul fit the model of an association. Smith concluded, therefore, that the description contained in the summary statement of Acts, while not based on early historical sources, nevertheless contained data that matched what we know about early Pauline communities.

The fellows agreed with the primary thesis and voted red on the proposal that the Acts description of the early Jerusalem community was based on an association model. They also voted pink on the proposal that the Pauline communities were based on the association model. However, individual components of the description formed a mixed bag. Fellows agreed that the early communities met in homes and shared communal meals together (red) and that they emphasized caring for those in their number who were in need (pink). But they voted black on other features, including the use of prescribed prayers, sharing their property communally, and being unified in their devotion to the teachings of the apostles. The idea that early Christian communities across the board practiced baptism also received a gray vote.

The Gallio inscription has long been thought to provide confirmation of the historicity of the story, in Acts 18, of Paul's hearing before Gallio. The inscription provides independent evidence that Gallio was proconsul in Corinth and indicates that he was there in the early 50s. It is therefore considered to provide a benchmark for the chronology of Paul. Furthermore, when archeologists discovered a *bema* (a platform or dais that was used for public speeches or proclamations) in Corinth, it was interpreted to be the very *bema* before which Paul was judged by Gallio as detailed in Acts.

In his seminar paper, L. Michael White presented new evidence that disputes this longstanding conclusion. The centerpiece of his paper was a reassessment of the *bema*. White pointed out that the *bema* was dated to the time of Paul based on the story in Acts. His reassessment of the archeological data suggests that the *bema* was constructed after the time when Paul was there. If there was no *bema*, then, the Acts story cannot be historical. Instead it would seem that Luke observed the existence of a *bema* in Corinth in his own day, in the early second century, added data he had gathered about the governorship of Gallio, and out of this created the story we have in Acts.

The fellows were convinced by White's argument and voted red on the proposal that Luke created the story of Paul appearing before Gallio and constructed it to fit his own theology and themes. This conclusion left the chronology of Paul in limbo, and so the fellows could vote no higher than gray on the proposal that Paul was in Corinth during the proconsulship of Gallio.

At the fall 2007 meeting, we will continue to analyze Luke's story of the Jerusalem origins of the church to see whether any items of historical data can be extracted from it. **4R**