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Imaging the Divine: Idolatry and God's Body in the Book of Acts

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This article problematises the widespread assumption that the God of early Christianity is an invisible God. This assumption is found in both popular and academic discourse and often appeals to biblical critiques of divine images to make its case. Yet while Hebrew Bible scholars have recently questioned this axiomatic belief, New Testament scholars have yet to do the same. To address this oversight, this article first looks at divine images and idol polemic in the ancient world and then turns to Luke's depiction of divine images in the book of Acts as a test case. Here I demonstrate how Acts depicts God as a visible – and even embodied – being, while at the same time critiquing visual representations of the divine. With Acts, we find that not all Christians 'imaged' God as invisible.

Keywords: invisibility, divine embodiment, idol, image, sight, New Testament

Since the Middle Ages, it has become axiomatic among both Jews and Christians to describe God as invisible.[1] Even today, popular and scholarly discourse alike defines the God of Judaism and Christianity, as well as Islam, as an invisible, incorporeal, transcendent being, even though Christians specify that the imperceptible God can be seen in Jesus.[2] In discussions of God's invisibility, one of the most enduring biblically based rationales for maintaining divine invisibility is the Decalogue's prohibition against crafting 'graven images' (Exod 20.4;

1 This belief in God's invisibility is largely a result of classical theism, which arose during the Middle Ages and represented a shift from more embodied ways of envisioning God. See E. J. Hamori, *'When Gods Were Men': The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008) 35–64; C. Markschies, *Gottes Körper: Jüdische, christliche und pagane Gottesvorstellungen in der Antike* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2016).

2 While examples in the scholarly literature are too numerous to list, see the following two classics on Christian aniconism: P. C. Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); A. Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (trans. J. M. Todd; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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Deut 5.8).[3] Unlike the gods of foreign nations or the pagan pantheon, so the argument goes, the Judeo-Christian God cannot be represented in visual form, for God in fact lacks a visual form. Gentiles or so-called pagans may see their gods in the form of material images, or 'idols', but Jews and Christians do not see God in this manner since God is formless and beyond sensible perception. In other words, God cannot be represented as an image because God is in fact invisible, immaterial and incorporeal.

However, when we turn to the world of the Decalogue itself, as well as Jewish scripture more broadly, a strikingly different portrait of God emerges. Here we do not find an abstract, immaterial being who is ultimately unknowable and beyond human perception. Instead we find a concrete, visible – and even at times embodied – being who chooses to be made known to humans and does so in ways that engage their bodily senses (e.g. Gen 3.8; 18.1–15; 32.22–32; Exod 24.9–11; 33.17–23; Isa 6.1–5; Ezek 1.26–8; Dan 7.9–10). Hebrew Bible scholars such as Benjamin Sommer, Esther Hamori and Mark Smith all highlight God's embodied manifestations in scripture and problematise the commonly held assumption that God is both invisible and incorporeal, noting that these metaphysical musings concerning God's nature derive more from the Greek philosophical world of Platonism than the ancient Near Eastern world of scripture.[4]

When it comes to the New Testament, though, scholars have been mainly remiss in querying God's so-called invisibility.[5] One likely reason for this oversight, of course, is that a variety of New Testament texts describe God as being invisible, as in the letter to the Colossians, where Jesus is famously identified as 'the image of the invisible God' (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, Col 1.15).[6] By the time of the New Testament, we also find Jews and Christians interacting in a more sustained manner with Platonism, the philosophical 'school' that argued most adamantly for an incorporeal God, even though the New Testament as a whole typically reflects more familiarity with Stoicism, a school

3 See e.g. D. Boyarin, 'The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic', *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990) 532–50, esp. 532–3.

4 B. D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Hamori, *'When Gods Were Men'*; *idem*, 'Divine Embodiment in the Hebrew Bible and Some Implications for Jewish and Christian Incarnational Theologies', *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (ed. S. T. Kamionkowski and W. Kim; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2010) 161–83; M. S. Smith, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

5 Notable exceptions include R. Bultmann, 'Untersuchungen zum Johannesevangelium', *ZNW* 29 (1930) 169–92; A. Malone, 'The Invisibility of God: A Survey of a Misunderstood Phenomenon', *EvQ* 79 (2007) 311–29.

6 See also 1 Tim 1.17; Heb 11.27; cf. John 1.18; 5.37–8; 6.46; Rom 1.20; 1 Tim 6.16; 1 John 4.12, 20; 3 John 11; Bultmann, 'Untersuchungen', 182–90; Malone, 'Invisibility of God', 318–25.

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that understood God in material terms.[7] Regardless, the various references to God's invisibility in the New Testament may lead us to suppose that notions of God's formless nature, while in conflict with the Hebrew Bible, could ostensibly be grounded in the New Testament (and other early Jewish and Christian texts that describe God in this manner).

In this article, however, I will complicate the idea that the New Testament univocally depicts God as invisible by using the Book of Acts as a test case. I will argue that in Acts at least, we do not find an invisible, incorporeal God, but a God who is depicted in much more tangible terms. The narrator of Acts – henceforth referred to as Luke – never calls God 'invisible', and he even indicates that God becomes visibly manifest to humans (Acts 7.2, 55–6; cf. Luke 2.9). To focus the discussion even more, I will delimit the article to scenes where divine images play a role, largely because of the widespread assumption that such images support the idea of God's invisibility. As we shall see, however, Luke includes idolatry rhetoric – or polemic against divine images – at key places in Acts, but he never uses this rhetoric to promulgate a picture of an invisible God.[8] With these episodes, we might expect Luke to appeal to God's invisibility to explain why images are prohibited, especially since Luke is clearly conversant with wider philosophical discourse. Yet we find that this is not in fact what Luke does. If anything, a different picture of God emerges during Luke's accounts of idolatry, one in which God is depicted in embodied – not disembodied – terms. Thus, while the link between divine invisibility and divine images may be firmly linked in the popular (and even the scholarly) imagination, this link is not nearly so obvious in Acts.

To explore Luke's account of God and images, this article unfolds in two main sections. I first look at discourse on divine images in the ancient world, focusing especially on the Jewish phenomenon of idol polemic. I start here, not only to complicate the connection between images and metaphysical discussions of God's invisibility, but because Luke himself is indebted to Jewish traditions involving 'idols'. I then turn to Acts itself by focusing on the narrative's three main episodes that involve divine images: Stephen's recounting of the golden

7 For a discussion of Stoicism in the New Testament and early Christianity, see T. Rasimus, T. Engberg-Pedersen and I. Dunderberg, eds., *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). For a discussion of God in Stoicism, see R. Salles, 'Introduction: God and Cosmos in Stoicism', *God and Cosmos in Stoicism* (ed. R. Salles; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 1–19.

8 Although the term 'idolatry' itself is a rather broad, flexible concept, I primarily contain my discussion of 'idolatry' in Acts to Luke's account of divine images. Note, though, that Luke incorporates 'idolatry' rhetoric in Acts 14.8–20 when Paul and Barnabas are mistaken for gods. Luke also mentions the topic of 'idol meat' on three separate occasions (Acts 15.20, 29; 21.25), and he critiques magicians and magical practices (Acts 8.9–24; 13.4–12; 19.18–19), which were often associated with idolatry in Jewish circles.

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calf incident in Acts 7, Paul's discussion of images in his Areopagus speech in Acts 17, and the silversmith Demetrius' accusation involving Paul and images in Acts 19. In the end, we shall see that notions of an invisible God as found in Platonic iterations of Greek philosophy (both ancient and modern) do not easily map onto Luke's own portrayal of God, even in his account of divine images. Instead we find that the Lukan God has much more affinity to the embodied God of Jewish tradition, as well as Greco-Roman traditions that depict the divine in more concrete terms. Among the variety of Jewish responses to the 'idol-ridden' world of the ancient Mediterranean, Luke is ultimately indebted to more tangible ways of imagining – or imaging – the divine.

1. Divine Images and Idol Polemic in the Ancient World

As noted earlier, the prohibition against crafting images in the Decalogue (Exod 20.4; Deut 5.8) remains one of the most persistent rationales Jews and Christians cite in their defence of an invisible God. When we look more closely at this famous prohibition, though, it becomes clear that the primary issue is not God's visibility or lack thereof, but God's superiority in relation to other gods. In Exodus and Deuteronomy, the prohibition of 'idols' – itself a pejorative term used to describe someone else's divine images – is closely connected with the prohibition of worshipping other gods beside the God of Israel.[9] The commandment, which immediately follows the commandment to have no other gods before 'the Lord your God' (Exod 20.2–3; cf. Deut 5.6–7), begins with: 'You shall not make for yourself an idol …' and then goes on to say: 'You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God …' (Exod 20.4–5; cf. Deut 5.8–9).[10] As W. Barnes Tatum argues, the second commandment is not anti-iconic, but anti-idolic; that is to say, the commandment is not against images per se, but against images that represent other deities.[11] Furthermore, in the explanation for this prohibition in Deut 4.15–18, the text does not prohibit the Israelites from making idols because God *lacks* a form, but because they did not *see* God's form: 'Since you saw no form when the

9 Note, however, that our English term 'idol' comes from the Greek εἴδωλον. In Hebrew, there are a number of different terms denoting 'idols', but the LXX tends to translate these words with εἴδωλον. See J. C. H. Laughlin, 'Idol', *NIDB* III.8–11, at iii.8–9; R. Hayward, 'Observations on Idols in Septuagint Pentateuch', *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. S. C. Barton; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 40–57, esp. 42. See also the discussion below.

10 On where the second commandment, or 'word', begins and ends, and the translation of these verses, see R. P. Bonfiglio, 'Idols and Idolatry', *OEBT* i.506–16, at I.509–10.

11 W. B. Tatum, 'The LXX Version of the Second Commandment (Ex. 20,3–6 = Deut. 5,7–10): A Polemic against Idols, Not Images', *JSJ* 17 (1986) 177–95, at 181. See also, though, Hayward's response ('Observations on Idols', 53–4).

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Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure …' (Deut 4.15–16). Just because God's form is not seen, however, does not mean that God lacks a form altogether.

Despite assumptions to the contrary, then, the modern understanding that visible images cannot represent an invisible God does not derive from the biblical prohibition against 'idols'. Such an understanding instead largely stems from a dualistic ontology that distinguishes between a visible, material image and an invisible, immaterial deity.[12] This dualistic bifurcation between the visible/invisible and material/immaterial finds its roots in Platonic philosophy and would become further entrenched in Western thought during the Enlightenment, when the philosopher René Descartes famously relegated 'the mind' to a distinct, ontologically separate realm from 'the body'.[13] Such Platonic and Cartesian dualisms, however, do not adequately account for the myriad aniconic – and iconic – practices found within scripture. These dualisms are even more problematic because the terms 'invisible' and 'immaterial' do not appear in Hebrew scripture. As Rudolf Bultmann rightly notes, there is no word for 'invisible' in Hebrew.[14] The same can also be said for the word 'immaterial', as well as 'incorporeal'.[15] In the Greek Septuagint (hereafter LXX), the translation of Jewish scripture on which Luke relies, the word 'invisible' (ἀόρατος) occurs only three times, but never in reference to God, and the words 'immaterial' (ἄϋλος) and 'incorporeal' (ἀσώματος) do not appear at all.[16] The sharp dichotomy between visible and invisible, material and immaterial, embodied and disembodied, though common today, is foreign to the world of Israel's sacred texts, in both its Hebrew and Greek versions.

12 See especially N. B. Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel* (BJSUCSD 11; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008) 5–12.

13 As D. B. Martin explains, the ancients themselves would not have bifurcated the mind from the body or the intellect from the senses to the degree that we often do today. Even the Platonic division between the body and the soul is not an ontological dualism in a Cartesian sense (*The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 3–36).

14 Bultmann, 'Untersuchungen', 177–8.

15 On the development of the Greek terms 'incorporeality' (ἀσώματος) and 'immateriality' (ἄϋλος) and their Platonic origins, see R. Renehan, 'On the Greek Origins of the Concepts Incorporeality and Immateriality', *GRBS* 21 (1980) 105–38.

16 On the term ἀόρατος in the LXX, see Gen 1.2 ('the earth was formless/invisible (ἀόρατος)'); Isa 45.3 ('I will open to you hidden invisible things (ἀοράτους)') (cf. its absence in A); 2 Macc 9.5 ('the all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, struck him with an incurable and invisible (ἀοράτῳ) blow'). Note, though, that the terms ἀόρατος and ἀσώματος become more frequent during the Second Temple period and beyond (e.g. T.Reu. 6.12; T.Levi 4.1; T.Ab. 3.6). Indeed, in true Platonic fashion, Philo himself uses the term ἀόρατος over a hundred times, and he also identifies God as 'invisible' (e.g. *Mos.* 2.65; *Opif.* 69–71; *Spec.* 1.18, 20, 46; 2.165). See W. Michaelis, 'ὁρατός, ἀόρατος', *TDNT* v.368–70.

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In Jewish scripture overall, God's lack of an ontologically visible form does not figure into discussions of divine images, but the specific rationale for the rejection of such images remains debated among scholars (with the majority arguing that divine images constitute errors of substitution and/or incorrect representations of God).[17] Regardless, scriptural critiques of 'idols' often serve a rhetorical purpose: they affirm the presence and power of Israel's God, while denying the presence and power of other gods.[18] In other words, idol polemic functioned as a means of self-identification; it drew boundary lines between the God of Israel and other gods and between God's people and other peoples. The LXX drew these boundary lines via its vocabulary for idolatry itself when the translators rendered the many Hebrew words that denote 'idol' with the Greek term εἴδωλον. In regular Greek usage, εἴδωλον means an 'insubstantial phenomenon', a 'phantom' or a 'likeness', yet the translators used this term to reference the images of gentile gods, suggesting that the gods of the nations have no more reality than the images used to represent them.[19] In other instances, idol polemic drew boundary lines between the God of Israel as creator and the created order. Idol parodies in particular draw this distinction, and in the LXX, the term 'made with human hands', or 'handmade' (χειροποίητος), appears in reference to divine images in order to highlight the difference between God the creator and humans who attempt to create gods, or at least images of the gods (e.g. Lev 26.1, 30; Wis 14.8; Isa 2.18; 10.11; 16.12; 19.1; 21.9; 31.7; 46.6; Dan 5.4, 23; 6.28 LXX).[20]

Although Luke himself reflects a deep familiarity with the Greek translation of Jewish scripture,[21] he was also living during a time when aniconic rhetoric took on an increasingly important role as a marker of Jewish identity. Indeed, idol polemic intensified during the Second Temple period and beyond, most likely as a result of increased exposure to Hellenistic culture. Texts such as the Letter of Jeremiah, Wisdom of Solomon 13–15 and Bel and the Dragon include biting invective against idols, amplifying themes from the idol parodies.[22] Philo and Josephus

17 Bonfiglio, 'Idols and Idolatry', I.510–11. See also M. K. Korada, *The Rationale for Aniconism in the Old Testament: A Study of Select Texts* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017).

18 See, for example, Levtow's discussion of 'icon parodies' (*Images of Others*, esp. 166).

19 Hayward, 'Observations on Idols', 40–57; F. Büchsel, 'εἴδωλον', *TDNT* II.375–8; T. Griffith, 'ΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ as "Idol" in Non-Jewish and Non-Christian Greek', *JTS* 53 (2002) 95–101; *idem*, *Keep Yourselves from Idols: A New Look at 1 John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002) 28–57.

20 E. Lohse, 'χειροποίητος', *TDNT* IX.436.

21 Note, for example, that Luke's lexicon includes both the terms εἴδωλον (and cognates) (Acts 7.41; 15.20, 29; 17.16; 21.25) and χειροποίητος (Acts 7.48; 17.24; cf. 7.41).

22 For a discussion of these texts and other instances of aniconic rhetoric during the Second Temple period, see C. D. Bergmann, 'Idol Worship in Bel and the Dragon and Other Jewish Literature from the Second Temple Period', *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures* (ed. K. Wolfgang and R. G. Wooden; Atlanta: SBL, 2006) 207–23.

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also criticise divine images, but do so by explicitly situating their critique in relation to Greek philosophy, with Philo in particular drawing on Platonic sentiments concerning art and representation in his opposition to images.[23] All of these authors, including Luke, would have lived in a world filled with material images, whether they were images from the Greek and Roman pantheon or from the imperial cult.[24]

Like a number of these authors, Luke likewise demonstrates familiarity with larger philosophical debates that swirled around divine images. Some philosophers and intellectuals of Luke's day, such as the first-century historian and philosopher Dio Chrysostom, thought that divine images could point to invisible realities beyond themselves, while others, such as the second-century satirist Lucian, disdained the unsophisticated materialism of popular piety.[25] Regardless, Luke's elite, philosophically minded contemporaries were fairly unanimous on the point that divine images were representations of the divine, not the divine itself. Yet as Dio Chrysostom demonstrates, there was also a belief that images could potentially facilitate communication with the divine.[26] A similar sentiment can be discerned among Jews during this time, for images figured in their own religious life, as research on Jewish material culture has shown.[27] Such images demonstrate that visual piety was a part of Judaism during the Greco-Roman period and that the second commandment itself was interpreted in a myriad of ways.

23 On Josephus and images, see J. M. G. Barclay, 'Snarling Sweetly: Josephus on Images and Idolatry', *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. S. C. Barton; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 73–87; J. von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome: (An)Iconic Rhetoric in the Writings of Flavius Josephus* (EJL 33; Atlanta: SBL, 2011). On Philo and images, see K.-G. Sandelin, 'The Danger of Idolatry according to Philo of Alexandria', *Temenos* 27 (1991) 109–50; S. Pearce, 'Philo of Alexandria on the Second Commandment', *The Image and its Prohibition in Jewish Antiquity* (ed. S. Pearce; Oxford: JJS, 2013) 49–76.

24 For a discussion of images and visuality in the Greco-Roman world, see J. Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); R. M. Jensen, 'Visuality', *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions* (ed. B. S. Spaeth; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 309–43.

25 E.g. Dio Chrysostom, *Dei cogn.* 12.59–62; Lucian, *Gall.* 24; *Jupp. trag.* 7–12.

26 On how the ancients both encouraged and discouraged epiphanic modes of viewing representational objects, see R. L. Gordon, 'The Real and the Imaginary: Production and Religion in the Graeco-Roman World', *Image and Value in the Graeco-Roman World: Studies in Mithraism and Religious Art* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1996) 5–34; V. Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 77–123.

27 E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (13 vols.; New York: Pantheon Books, 1953–68); S. Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

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Among Jewish and Christian authors who rejected divine images, however, the idea of God's inability to be perceived by the senses (popular especially in Platonic discourse) began to emerge as a rationale for this rejection around Luke's time. Philo and the Sibylline Oracles, for example, critique divine images in these terms, as do Origen and Clement of Alexandria.[28] Not all Jewish and Christian authors, however, make this move. In the New Testament, for instance, we never see the explicit connection between divine images and divine invisibility.[29] Aside from Paul's extended discussion of 'idol meat' in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, most of the references to 'idols' or 'idolatry' in the New Testament are briefly mentioned as practices or vices to avoid.[30] The closest juxtaposition between images and invisibility occurs in Romans 1. Here Paul describes God's 'eternal power and divinity' as 'his invisible aspects' (ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ) that can be seen in creation (1.20), and he then discusses how humans 'exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image (εἰκόνος) of a mortal human being and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles' (1.23).[31] Paul, however, attributes this 'exchange' to human disobedience (1.21–3); there is no suggestion that images mistakenly represent an invisible God. Indeed, when he discusses the 'exchange' itself, he incorporates immortal/mortal (ἄφθαρτος/φθαρτός) terminology, not invisible/visible terminology. Outside the New Testament, even Josephus, who is so eager to persuade his elite gentile audience of Judaism's merits, aligns himself with the Greek philosophers in their traditional critique of divine images, but does not deny that God has a form. Instead, he writes that humans simply cannot replicate God's form (*Ag. Ap.* 2.190–1).[32] Like Josephus, not all Jewish and Christian authors during the first and second centuries CE cite God's invisibility as a reason for resisting divine images; not all Jews and

28 See e.g. Philo, *Decal.* 66–76; *Ebr.* 108–10; *Spec.* 2.164–7; Sib. Or. 3.8–45; 4.4–23; Origen, *Cels.* 4.31; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 4.54–5; *Strom.* 5.5. See also R. M. Jensen, *Face to Face: Picturing the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 9–19, 69–130.

29 Instead, New Testament authors more frequently link idolatry with sexuality. See Rom 1.22–7; 1 Cor 6.9–11; 10.7–8; Gal 5.19; Eph 5.5; Col 3.5; 1 Pet 4.3; Rev 2.14, 20; 21.8; 22.15; S. C. Barton, 'Food Rules, Sex Rules and the Prohibition of Idolatry: What's the Connection?', *Idolatry*, 141–62.

30 See 1 Cor 10.14; 12.2; Gal 5.19–21; Col 3.5; 1 Peter 4.3; 1 John 5.21; Rev 2.20; 9.20. On Paul's discussion of 'idol meat', see P. J. Achtemeier, 'Gods Made with Hands: The New Testament and the Problem of Idolatry', *Ex auditu* 15 (1999) 43–61; J. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1* (WUNT II/151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

31 For a discussion of Romans 1 in relation to Paul's visual piety and visuality more broadly, see J. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 150–74.

32 Compare this, though, to Josephus, *J.W.* 5.219; 7.346. Even here, however, Josephus does not necessarily suggest that God is ontologically invisible; God is instead invisible to human eyes. See Malone, 'Invisibility of God', 316.

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Christians seem to have assumed the philosophically grounded notion of God's ontological invisibility and instead evince an understanding of God's visible, though hidden, form.

2. Divine Images and Idol Polemic in Acts (Acts 7.1–53; 17.22–31; 19.24–7)

When we turn to the Book of Acts, the volume in which Luke concentrates his anti-idolatry rhetoric, we find that Luke likewise does not depend upon the idea that God is by nature invisible in his critique of divine images.[33] Like Jewish idol polemic more broadly, Luke's depiction of divine images mainly functions as a means to differentiate God from foreign deities and God's people – Jews and now also Christians – from other nations. Like idol parodies, Luke's depiction of divine images also functions to differentiate the creator God from creation itself.[34] Luke's depiction of divine images, of course, also serves a variety of other rhetorical functions in their respective locations, especially since all three accounts occur in speeches; namely, Stephen's speech to the Jewish council (Acts 7.1–53), Paul's speech to the philosophically minded Athenians (Acts 17.22–31) and Demetrius' speech to his fellow artisans who make shrines for the goddess Artemis (Acts 19.24–7). But, overall, Luke's three principal stories involving idols – a polemical term that Luke himself adopts (Acts 7.41; 17.16; cf. 15.20, 29; 21.25) – mainly function to set apart Christians, like Jews, from their surrounding culture and to make claims about the nature of Israel's God. Luke does not indicate that divine images are prohibited because of God's invisibility or incorporeality. With these three stories, Luke instead reflects his larger reliance on traditions that image God in more embodied terms.

Luke's account of the golden calf in Acts 7 is the first point in the narrative where he uses idolatry as a boundary sign, here between Israelites and non-Israelites. Falling near the end of Stephen's speech, the account of the golden calf critiques the Israelites for wanting to make other 'gods' (θεοί) and for their manufacture of the calf 'idol' (εἴδωλον), an event that signifies their rejection of Moses and 'return to Egypt' (7.39–41). As the Israelites turned back to Egypt

33 Although Luke relegates his idol polemic to Acts, note that the word εἰκών appears in his gospel (as well as the Gospels of Matthew and Mark) in reference to an image of Caesar that appears on a coin (Luke 20.24; cf. Matt 22.20; Mark 12.16). In each respective account of this story, however, Caesar's image does not seem to be treated as an idol or improper image. See H. K. Bond, 'Standards, Shields and Coins: Jewish Reactions to Aspects of the Roman Cult in the Time of Pilate', *Idolatry*, 88–106, esp. 102–6.

34 D. W. Pao argues that Luke's critique of idols reflects in particular the Isaianic idol parodies. According to Pao, Luke's emphasis on idols is one of four principal 'New Exodus' themes that Luke draws from Isaiah 40–55 and weaves throughout his second volume. D. W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

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(7.39), Stephen says, so God turned from them and handed them over to worship 'the host of heaven' (7.42; cf. Rom 1.22–8) and 'images' (τύποι) that they created: namely, the tent of Moloch and the star of Rephan (7.42–3). The Israelites' formation of foreign gods is a rejection not only of Moses, but of Israel's God, and is responsible for the Jewish exile, as the quotation from Amos makes clear (7.42–3; cf. Amos 5.25–7 LXX). Stephen's words function as an intra-Jewish critique, recalling Israel's history to remind his listeners of the past faults of 'our fathers' in adopting foreign gods (such as Moloch and Rephan) and of the present dangers still involved in such cultural accommodation.

After Acts 7, Luke's admonitions against idols are directed solely towards gentiles, suggesting that within Luke's narrative world divine images are primarily a Greek, or 'pagan', problem.[35] When the Jerusalem council decides to include gentiles, they stipulate that gentiles must abstain from idol meat, or food that is 'polluted by idols' (τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων) (15.20), a decision that is reiterated twice more in Acts (15.29; 21.25). When Paul arrives in Athens, the centre of the Greek world, he is vexed to find that the city is 'full of idols' (κατείδωλον) (17.16), telling the Athenians that God cannot be represented in material form (17.29). Finally, during Paul's stay in Ephesus, the silversmith Demetrius incites a riot by accusing Paul of saying that 'gods made with hands are not gods' (19.26). Demetrius warns that the artisans' trade may fall into disrepute and that the goddess Artemis will be scorned and deprived of her majesty (19.27). Demetrius' words whip the entire city of Ephesus into an uproar, a mob-scene that reflects the greatest clash in the entirety of Acts between what Luke calls 'the Way' and the larger religious ethos of the Greco-Roman world. In Acts overall, then, idol polemic primarily points to the boundaries between the God of Israel and other gods; between God's people and other peoples.

To be clear, Luke, in his effort to signal the difference between 'the Way' and other 'ways', does incorporate philosophical discourse against divine images from the wider Greco-Roman world. This is nowhere more evident than in Paul's Areopagus speech.[36] Paul, for example, is careful not to use the term 'idol' in his speech. The narrator uses this word when he says that Paul was distressed to see that the city was 'full of idols' (κατείδωλον, 7.16), but Paul himself calls these images 'your objects of worship (σεβάσματα)' (17.23). Paul is also careful not to equate divine images with the divine itself, merely saying that

35 On the association of idolatry with gentiles elsewhere in the New Testament, see 1 Cor 12.2; 1 Pet 4.3; cf. Rom 2.22.

36 For classic treatments of Paul's Areopagus speech in relation to Greek philosophy, see M. Dibelius, 'Paul on the Areopagus', *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. H. Greeven, trans. M. Ling; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1956) 26–77; D. L. Balch, 'The Areopagus Speech: An Appeal to the Stoic Historian Posidonius against Later Stoics and the Epicureans', *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. D. L. Balch *et al.*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 52–79.

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God is not 'like' (ὅμοιον) an image (17.29).[37] (And though Demetrius will later accuse Paul of saying that 'gods made with hands are not gods' (19.26), note that we never actually witness Paul saying this.) Yet while Paul's Areopagus speech demonstrates an awareness of the philosophical critique against images, it nowhere draws upon the rationale concerning God's invisibility as found in some philosophical circles.[38] Paul does provide a rationale, but he does so by citing a well-known Greek proverb that depicts the divine in anthropomorphic terms: namely as a parent.[39] In 17.28, Paul writes, 'For we too are his offspring (γένος)', a quotation that derives from the poet Aratus' *Phaenomena* (v. 5) but had gained proverbial status by Luke's time,[40] and he goes on to write that 'therefore (οὖν), being the offspring (γένος) of God, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold …' (17.29). With his 'therefore' (οὖν), Paul links the Aratus quotation to his rejection of images and argues that we ought not to liken God to gold, silver or stone because we are God's γένος, a word that means 'offspring', or 'family', or 'descendants'.[41] Luke interestingly refrains from saying that humans are the image of God,[42] but he fastens on to a familial term that points to the relationship between God and humanity. God's paternity – not God's invisibility – serves as the reason to reject images; Luke nowhere indicates that humans should avoid images due to God's lack of a visible form.

Although Luke never cites God's invisibility as a rationale for avoiding divine images, one might argue that Luke still takes issue with the idea of seeing God in his three 'idol accounts', as well as with the visual piety that divine images can elicit. With respect to seeing God, Stephen in Acts 7 prefaces his account of the golden calf with the story of the burning bush, wherein Luke evinces a certain reluctance to identify God with this vision of flame. (Unlike his Exodus intertext, for instance, Luke differentiates to a greater degree between God, who speaks, and the angel, who does the appearing (7.30–5; cf. Exod 3.1–4.17).) In Acts 17, Paul also describes humans as 'groping' (ψηλαφήσειαν) for God (17.27), a verb that

37 Since χαράγματι ('image') stands in apposition to the four dative nouns that precede it, which are complements of ὅμοιον ('like'), we should read 'like' (ὅμοιον) before 'image' (χαράγματι) as well. See M. C. Parsons and M. M. Culy, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003) 332, 340–1.

38 Given that Paul's Areopagus speech reflects mainly Stoic (rather than Platonic) ideas, this absence should perhaps not be surprising. H. Hommel tries to trace the speech's line 'in him we live and move and have our being' (17.28) to Platonic influences, but this connection is loose at best ('Platonisches bei Lukas: Zu Acts 17.28a (Leben-Bewegung-Sein)', *ZNW* 48 (1957) 193–200).

39 To be clear, the idea of God's paternity was also well known in philosophical circles, even among philosophers who advocated for God's invisibility.

40 On the origin and proverbial status of this saying, see R. I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009) 439.

41 BDAG s.v. 'γένος'.

42 Pervo identifies Luke's reticence here as an instance of enthymeme (*Acts*, 439). Cf. Gen 1.26–7; 1 Cor 11.7; 15.49; 2 Cor 3.18; 4.4; Col 1.15; 3.10.

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can connote the actions of a blind person or of one trying to find something in the dark,[43] suggesting perhaps that God cannot be seen.

With respect to seeing images, Stephen identifies the golden calf as an εἴδωλον (7.41), a sight-related term that does not appear in the Exodus account of the LXX,[44] and he says that the Israelites worshipped 'the host of heaven' (7.42), a phrase that can denote stars and other heavenly bodies (7.42).[45] Stephen also identifies the tent of Moloch and the 'star' (ἀστήρ) of Rephan as τύποι (7.43), a word that frequently means 'types', but can also mean images, statues or forms.[46] In Acts 19, the town clerk ostensibly makes an oblique reference to Artemis' statue that fell from heaven (19.35), a legend associated with the goddess Artemis, as well as Athena.[47] In Acts 17, the visuality of divine images plays an even more prominent role. Paul underscores this visuality, for he 'sees' (θεωροῦντος) that Athens is full of idols (17.16) and he begins his speech by saying, 'Athenians, I see (θεωρῶ) how extremely religious you are … for … I went through the city and looked carefully (ἀναθεωρῶν) at the objects of your worship' (17.22–3). Later in the speech, he also negates the notion that the deity itself is like an 'image' (χάραγμα) (17.29). As the etymology of the term 'idol' itself suggests (i.e., they are 'insubstantial' visual representations of the divine), each of Luke's idol accounts touches on the visibility of images.

Yet while such details may lead us to assume that Luke rejects visual piety altogether, a closer look complicates the assumption that Luke depicts God as invisible or that he entirely rejects images as a means of communicating with the divine. Indeed, Stephen may distance God from the burning bush in some ways, but he also frames his speech with theophanies: God appears to Abraham at the start of his speech (7.2), and Stephen himself has a vision of God at the conclusion of his speech (7.55–6). Likewise, Paul's description of the nations 'groping' for God does not necessarily convey that God remains beyond human sight. Within the context of Luke's two-volume work at least, the verb ψηλαφάω ('to grope') primarily connotes tangibility, not invisibility, for its one other usage in Luke's narrative occurs when the resurrected Jesus says 'touch (ψηλαφήσατε) me and see' to verify his embodied state (Luke 24.39; cf. 1 John 1.1).[48] Paul's comment about 'touching' God in Acts 17, therefore, more likely connotes God's tactility, not humanity's blindness and inability to see God.

43 See e.g. Homer, *Od.* 9.415–19; Plato, *Phaed.* 99b; Gen 27.12 (LXX); Isa 59.10 (LXX).

44 εἴδωλον is related to the word εἶδος ('visible form'; 'sight') and, as mentioned above, conveys a range of meanings including 'mental image' and 'likeness'. Büchsel, *TDNT* II.375–8; Griffith, *Keep Yourselves from Idols*, 28–32.

45 See e.g. Jer 8.2; cf. Jer 7.18 (LXX); 19.13; Zeph 1.5.

46 BDAG s.v. 'τύπος'.

47 E.g. Euripides, *Iph. taur.* 85–92; Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.26.6–7; cf. Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 16.213–16.

48 In Acts 13, Luke describes an incident when the blind Bar-Jesus is 'groping for someone to lead him by the hand' (NRSV), or more accurately, 'seeking for someone to lead [him] by the hand'

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Furthermore, while Luke certainly evokes the visuality of images at points, he does not indicate that the images are negative because they can be seen. In Acts 7 and 19, for example, the visible quality of the images is not even his central focus. Stephen calls the golden calf an 'idol', but Luke's usage of εἴδωλον terminology as a whole is consonant with the language of the LXX and appears to be more of a polemical point.[49] Stephen also mentions 'the host of heaven' and Rephan's 'star' (7.42–3), but he does not highlight their visibility. Instead, the phrase 'host of heaven', literally 'the army of heaven' (τῇ στρατιᾷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), most immediately recalls the heavenly host of angels – not stars – that sing God's praises in Luke 2.13, and Rephan's 'star' simply appears alongside Moloch's 'tent' in the Amos citation.[50] Moreover, the town clerk's reference to Artemis' so-called statue is unclear, for the substantive τὸ διοπετές – literally 'that which fell from Zeus' (τοῦ διοπετοῦς, 19.35) – may refer to an image of the goddess or, as commentators often note, to an aniconic meteorite.[51]

In Acts 17, Luke's failure to critique the visuality of divine images becomes especially apparent, for the images he sees in Athens are the medium through which Paul attempts to convert his listeners. In his Areopagus speech, Paul incorporates the visual religious culture of the Athenians to his advantage, for their divine images become a segue for him to discuss the God of Israel; their altar to 'an unknown god' becomes a means for him to identify this god as the one true God (17.22–4).[52] For Paul, the problem is not the visuality of the images, but the identity of the deity to whom the images point. By stating that 'what'

(ἐζήτει χειραγωγούς) (13.11). With this language, Luke connects Bar-Jesus' divinely inflicted blindness with Paul's (Saul's) divinely inflicted blindness on the Damascus road (see χειραγωγοῦντες in 9.8; cf. 22.11). Yet while Luke clearly links these two episodes, the parallels between Bar-Jesus' blinded state in 13.11 and Paul's statement in 17.27 are not nearly so apparent.

49 It is striking, for example, that Philo and Josephus refrain from using the term εἴδωλον in their apologetic on divine images, especially since Philo exploits the full range of visual connotations of the term elsewhere in his writings (see Tatum, 'LXX Version', 188–93; Pearce, 'Philo of Alexandria', 61).

50 Of course, 'the host of heaven' may still connote stars since Luke specifically mentions Rephan's star. The phrase itself, however, has more military connotations, and its one other occurrence in Luke's narrative specifically refers to angels (Luke 2.13). In the LXX, the phrase can refer to astral bodies (e.g. Jer 8.2) and to angels (e.g. 1 Kgs 22.19; 2 Esd 19.6). Note, however, that some references to 'the host of heaven' which are clearly astral use different Greek terminology (e.g. Deut 4.19; 17.3; 2 Kgs 23.5).

51 E.g. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 367; M. C. Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 276; C. R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016) 385; cf. Pervo, *Acts*, 498.

52 C. K. Rothschild makes a similar point (*Paul in Athens: The Popular Religious Context of Acts 17* (WUNT 341; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014) 73–5, 80). Note, though, that Paul selects an 'altar'

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(ὅ) the Athenians 'unknowingly' worship is 'the Lord of heaven and earth' (17.23–4), Paul signals that the images are indicative of a larger issue: namely, the Athenians' polytheistic frame (i.e., there is only the one God, not many).[53] Paul, of course, also claims that the deity does not resemble an 'image (χαράγματι) of human craft and thought' (17.29), thus indicating that images do not accurately represent God. But such a statement is standard philosophical fare and is also consonant with Jewish idol polemic; it does not deny that God has a form, but affirms that humans cannot replicate that form. Moreover, in making this statement, Paul primarily highlights the material substances of images, not their visibility, for he says that the deity is not like 'gold or silver or stone' (17.29).

Indeed, rather than critiquing the *visuality* of divine images, Luke more consistently critiques the *tactility* of idol-making. He does take issue with (at least some) divine images, but uses the sense of touch, not sight, to level his critique. In doing so, Luke does not therefore suggest that visual images incorrectly represent an invisible God, but that the act of creating images effaces the division between God and humanity, or creator and creation. In other words, Luke focuses less on the visibility of images and more on their human construction, the latter of which expresses his central concern with such images.

Luke lifts up the tactility of idols by incorporating 'hand' (χείρ) and 'to make' (ποιέω) language throughout all three of his idol passages. In Acts 7, Stephen repeatedly references the human manufacture of foreign gods: the Israelites commanded Aaron to 'make' (ποίησον) gods for them (7.40); they 'made a calf' (ἐμοσχοποίησαν, 7.41); 'revelled in the works of their hands (χειρῶν αὐτῶν)' (7.41); and worshipped images that they 'made' (ἐποιήσατε, 7.43). With the mention of revelling 'in the works of their hands', Stephen also links this idolatrous act to the building of the Jerusalem temple: he explains that though Solomon built a 'house' (οἶκος) for God, 'the most high does not dwell (κατοικεῖ) in things made by human hands (χειροποιήτοις)' (7.48), echoing a sentiment expressed in 1 Chron 17.4.[54] God is not contained by the temple or other things crafted by human hands; instead, God's 'hand' (χείρ) makes all, as Stephen makes clear in his citation from Isaiah 66 (Acts 7.50; cf. Isa 66.1–2).

(βωμός) with an inscription to make his segue; he does not choose an anthropomorphic image.

53 And note that Paul does not identify God as 'unknowable'; instead he reveals that 'an unknown god' whom the Athenians 'unknowingly' worship (or worship 'in ignorance') (ἀγνοοῦντες) is the God of Israel (cf. 17.30).

54 In Acts 7, Stephen uses the golden calf incident to transition to his discussion of the temple: his mention of the 'tent' (σκηνή) of Rephan and the 'images' (τύποι) the Israelites worship (7.43) leads to his discussion of the 'tent' (σκηνή) of testimony that Moses made according to a 'pattern' (τύπος) (7.44–5), which then leads to his discussion of God's 'house' (οἶκος) (7.46–50).

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In Acts 17, Paul makes a similar claim about humanity's manual attempts to manipulate the creator God. Here Paul declares that 'the God who made (ὁ ποιήσας) the cosmos and all the things in it; he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hand (χειροποιήτοις) nor by the hands (χειρῶν) of humans is God served' (17.24–5). Luke affirms once again that God does not live in things crafted by humans, whether they are the Jerusalem temple or pagan shrines. Instead, God is the one who 'made' all the nations from the first human; God is the one who gives to all mortals 'life and breath' (17.25–6) and who is not like an image of human 'craft' (τέχνης) (17.29). Finally, in Acts 19, Demetrius, who is identified as someone 'who made (ποιῶν) silver temples of Artemis' and brought 'no little business to the artisans (τεχνίταις)' (19.24), accuses Paul of saying that 'gods made by hands (χειρῶν) are not gods' (19.26). Demetrius then goes on to say that Paul's proclamation threatens the reputation of the artisans' trade and undermines the majesty of Artemis herself (19.27; cf. 19.37–8). As a maker of Artemis' shrines, Demetrius sets up a conflict between the goddess Artemis and the God of Israel, the latter of whom Paul, of course, proclaims as the ultimate 'Maker'. Here we find the sharpest conflict between human and divine 'hands', as well as the implication that while pagan gods may live in 'shrines' or 'temples' (ναοί, 19.24; cf. 17.24; 19.27), the God of Israel does not.

By emphasising the sense of touch in all three passages, Luke indicates that God's 'hand' is more powerful than human 'hands'. In other words, Luke is not so much critical of the visual piety that divine images can produce, but of how such images can distort an understanding of where power truly lies. God is the ultimate creator in Luke's view, and humans are a part of God's creation. Human attempts to 'create' gods are simultaneously attempts to usurp power that belongs to God alone. Even attempts to create localised spaces for the God of Israel fundamentally misunderstand God's nature. Humans do not create dwelling places for God or determine where God lives, for God is the one who made all the nations 'to dwell' (κατοικεῖν) upon the earth and who ordered the boundaries of their 'dwelling places' (κατοικίας) (17.26). God remains outside human control and cannot be confined to spaces of human making.

With this rhetoric, Luke, on one level, reinforces the distinction between God and humans. God is the creator and humans the creature, and this distinction marks God as 'other' from humans.[55] Yet on another level, Luke's emphasis that God cannot be limited to singular spaces uses the language of embodiment – including human embodiment – to depict why God cannot be limited in this

55 In this respect, the God of Acts looks very different from the God of Stoicism. For a more comprehensive articulation of the different ways in which Christians and Stoics depict God, see C. K. Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), esp. 27–30, 44–9, 71–4, 87–91, 124–9.

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way. First, in Acts 17, Paul's claim that God can be sought after and possibly touched heightens the sense of God's material tangibility, a tangibility that is close to every human being and not found in temples (17.26–7). As noted above, ψηλαφάω ('to touch') occurs one other time in Luke-Acts in a manner that substantiates the physicality of Jesus' resurrected state. In order to verify this physicality, Jesus tells his disciples to 'touch (ψηλαφήσατε) me and see' (Luke 24.39) and thus proves that he is not a 'spirit' (πνεῦμα). Paul similarly uses this sensuous verb in Acts 17 (here in the optative) as a means to substantiate God's presence, and in doing so, conveys not only the nearness, but the palpability of God: '[God] made every nation of people to dwell upon the face of the whole earth … and to seek God. If only, then, they might grasp (ψηλαφήσειαν) him and find [him], the one who is in fact not far from each one of us' (Acts 17.26–7).[56] For Paul, touching God is within the realm of possibility;[57] God is not an intangible being who remains beyond the sensible realm, but is 'not far from each one of us' (17.27).

Secondly, and most striking of all, there is Stephen's depiction of God in anthropomorphic terms in Acts 7. Here Stephen quotes from the prophet Isaiah to substantiate his point that God, or 'the most high', does not dwell in houses made with human hands, saying, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is a footstool for my feet. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?' (Acts 7.49–50; cf. Isa 66.1–2). Not only is God's 'hand' a standard anthropomorphic metaphor that denotes God's power (e.g. Acts 4.28, 30; 7.25),[58] but God's 'place' (τόπος) is clearly in heaven, with the earth serving as a footstool for the divine feet (an explicit identification of a divine body part that most English translations obscure). In his work on divine embodiment in Hebrew scripture, Mark Smith identifies Isa 66.1 as an example of God's 'cosmic body', the third of God's three bodies that he identifies in Hebrew scripture and the one that is evident in the later prophets and carried forward into post-biblical Judaism and early Christianity.[59] According to Smith, God's cosmic body is located in

56 Other texts – including Jewish texts – contain this theme of seeking God, but they do not use this sensuous verb (e.g. Deut 4.29; Wis 13.6–7; Philo, *Spec.* 1.36). Ironically, Paul's statement about potentially touching God finds affinities with Dio Chrysostom's observation that people have a longing to touch (ἁπτομένους) images of the gods (*Or.* 12.60–1) (Pervo, *Acts*, 437).

57 Parsons and Culy observe that the use of εἰ with two optative verbs forms a fourth class condition, which is normally used to express something that has only a remote possibility of happening in the future (*Acts*, 339). The use of ἄρα and γε further emphasises the sense of uncertainty (cf. 8.22) (*Acts*, 339). My point, however, is that Paul identifies 'grasping' God as a possibility, remote though it might be.

58 On the anthropomorphic metaphor of God's 'hand', see A. K. Knafl, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), esp. 257–8.

59 Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 21–4. Isa 66.1, for example, is echoed in 1 En. 84.2; Aristob. 4.5; Matt 5.34; Sib. Or. 1.139.

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heaven (or 'above' heaven) and partakes of a bodily form, although the nature of its physicality remains unclear. Regardless, this divine body is a heavenly or super-heavenly reality, and it is striking that, in Luke's context, a scriptural reference to God's body appears in a larger discourse on idolatry. Indeed, it is God's body – not God's invisibility – that becomes a rationale for why humans should not place too much worth in the work of their hands.

In sum, Luke may critique visual representations of the divine, but he nowhere claims that God is invisible or beyond human perception. Luke's critique is consonant with other Jewish accounts of idol polemic and functions to differentiate God's people from non-believing gentiles and God (the creator) from other gods and from humans (the creation) more broadly. At the same time, Luke also represents God in ways reminiscent of humans. Luke uses language that points to God's tangibility, and he uses divine anthropomorphisms from Jewish scripture to explain why God cannot live in human-made houses. Indeed, God's paternity and God's body provide the rationales as to why images and temples should be rejected. Notions of an invisible God – both ancient and modern – do not map onto Luke's representation of God, for Luke is more indebted to traditions that depict God in embodied terms.

3. Conclusion

In this article, we have seen how Luke's critique of divine images still 'images' the divine in embodied ways. Given his attention to images as idols and his familiarity with the philosophical critique of such images, we might expect Luke to appeal to God's invisibility as a reason to reject visual representations of the divine. Such a rationale, however, is not in fact what we find. Luke instead betrays a reliance on traditions that represent God, at least verbally, in more tangible terms. In some ways, Luke's depiction of an embodied God finds affinity with Stoic thinkers who describe God as material (a perhaps not surprising occurrence since Platonism did not supersede Stoicism as the more popular philosophical framework for Christians until the late second century).[60] But Luke more frequently draws upon imagery from Jewish texts in both his description of 'idols' and his description of God, and he even cites Isa 66.1–2 – a text that depicts God's body – as a reason why God cannot be contained in human houses.

Overall, Luke's picture of God points to the variety of ways that Christians conceived of the divine in early Christianity. Our standard view of an invisible, immaterial God largely relies on Platonic thinking – helped along by Cartesian dualism – and does not always reflect the more visible and material ways that Jews and Christians described God in their sacred texts. With Acts, at least, we have seen

60 See T. Engberg-Pedersen, 'Setting the Scene: Stoicism and Platonism in the Transitional Period in Ancient Philosophy', *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, 1–14.

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that not all New Testament texts envision God as a being who remains beyond human sight. Luke may reject visual representations of the divine, but he does not indicate that God is invisible. Luke may also help pave the way for later, more Platonically oriented Christians, but he does not depict God as a disembodied being. With the Book of Acts, we find that not all early Christians conceived of the divine in intangible terms; indeed, we discover that our own blinders have prevented us from grappling with the nature of God's body.[61]

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