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'Peace and Security' (1 Thessalonians 5.3): Is It Really a Roman Slogan?

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According to a growing number of scholars, when Paul makes use of the phrase 'peace and security' in 1 Thess 5.3, he is alluding to a well-known slogan in Roman propaganda that summed up the benefits of the Pax Romana. While there can be no doubt that 'peace' played an important role in Rome's imperial ideology, it is less clear that this was the case for 'security', and a review of the evidence presented by the proponents of this view calls into question their conclusion that 'peace and security' had the character of a slogan.

Keywords: Paul, Rome, slogan, peace, security, Thessalonians

In a recent issue of this journal Jeffrey Weima lent his support to an increasingly popular interpretation that Paul's use of the phrase 'peace and security' (εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια) in 1 Thess 5.3 is an allusion to a clearly identifiable Roman slogan—*pax et securitas*—that neatly expresses Rome's self-aggrandizing imperial ideology.[1] On this view Rome sought to portray herself throughout the empire as the guarantor of the common weal by means of this slogan and

1 Cf. J. A. D. Weima, 'Peace and Security' (1 Thess 5.3): Prophetic Warning or Political Propoganda?, *NTS* 58 (2012) 331-59, esp. 332, where he posits that the phrase 'stems from…a popular theme or slogan of the imperial Roman propaganda machine'. Weima offers by far the most detailed analysis of the literary, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence for the thesis to date. Yet despite its thoroughness, Weima's argument ultimately falls prey to one shortcoming common to most, if not all, other similar studies: the failure to define the term 'slogan'. His and others' arguments imply that they understand it to denote a widely recognizable political catchphrase, the provenance and general thrust of which would have been immediately apparent to its hearers, i.e. something along the lines of 'hope and change' in recent American political rhetoric. My purpose in this article is to question whether the evidence substantiates such a claim by proponents of the thesis. To the extent that they mean something less than that, namely, that Paul combines two terms among many that Rome independently made use of in propagating her imperial agenda (Weima's arguments, in particular, are somewhat equivocal on this point), both the argument for a clear allusion to that agenda and the case against it become weaker.

expected gratitude and submission from those who came under her aegis. Generally it is argued that Paul takes up this slogan in order to subvert the Roman imperial ideology to which the Thessalonians had consciously or unconsciously acquiesced. He warns them not to put their hope in Rome's assurances, for at the very time when 'peace and security' is proclaimed with such smug self-assuredness, eschatological judgment is sure to commence.

This understanding of 'peace and security' in 1 Thess 5.3 as an allusion to a Roman imperial slogan was first brought to the attention of biblical scholars by Ernst Bammel,[2] who postulated in 1960 that *pax et securitas* is 'das Programm der frühprinzipalen Zeit, in der Form wie es außerhalb von Rom seit den Tagen des Pompeius…verkündet wurde'.[3] In that first brief article Bammel merely put forward this thesis without arguing for it in any depth. Two and a half decades went by before he attempted to substantiate it.[4] Still, Bammel's earlier article left an indelible mark on later scholarship.[5] More recently, and particularly since the advent of so-called 'post-colonial' or 'anti-imperial' criticism,[6] this interpretation has gained scores of advocates.[7] In many cases, particularly in

2 Cf. E. Bammel, 'Ein Beitrag zur paulinischen Staatsanschauung', *TLZ* 85 (1960) 837-40. The thesis was promulgated a year before Bammel by A. A. T. Ehrhardt, *Politische Metaphysik von Solon bis Augustin*. Vol. 2, *Die christliche Revolution* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959) 21. If Bammel was aware of Ehrhardt's work, he does not mention it. Ehrhardt refers to Pliny the Younger *Ep.* 10.52, Tacitus *Agr.* 3, and Epictetus *Diatr.* 1.9.7, in support of his thesis, but none of these texts mentions *pax*/εἰρήνη, only *securitas*/ἀσφάλεια. Further, given the dates of the works cited (late first/early second century CE), they actually help to demonstrate that the emphasis on security in Roman political rhetoric was a later development. See below.

3 Bammel, 'Beitrag', 837.

4 Cf. E. Bammel, 'Romans 13', *Jesus and the Politics of his Day* (ed. E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984) 375-8.

5 This becomes apparent when one notes how frequently Bammel's characterization of *pax et securitas* as 'das Programm der frühprinzipalen Zeit' is echoed in later scholarship. Cf. W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 96: 'Pax et Securitas, the programme of the early Principate'; K. P. Donfried, 'The Cults of Thessalonica and the Thessalonian Correspondence', *NTS* 31 (1985) 350: 'the Pax et Securitas programme of the early Principate'; E. Faust, *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief* (NTOA 24; Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1991) 444: εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια reflects 'das gleichlautende *pax et securitas*-Programme des römischen Prinzipats'.

6 Cf. J. Diehl, 'Empire and Epistles: Anti-Roman Rhetoric in the New Testament Epistles', *CBR* 10 (2012) 217-63, esp. 226-8. For an example of this approach, cf. F. F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), esp. F. F. Segovia, 'Introduction: Configurations, Approaches, Findings, Stances', 1-68.

7 Cf., in addition to Weima, 'Peace', and the works mentioned in n. 5, K. Wengst, *Pax Romana, Anspruch und Wirklichkeit: Erfahrungen und Wahrnehmungen des Friedens bei Jesus und im*

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English-speaking scholarship, its veracity is simply assumed.[8] That is, at the very least, a premature development, for careful scrutiny of the data calls into question the proposition that *pax et securitas* was, in fact, an identifiable Roman slogan, particularly in the mid-first century CE when Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.

1. A Closer Look at the Evidence

In what follows I will review the epigraphic, literary, and numismatic evidence put forward by Weima and other proponents of the thesis that *pax et securitas*/εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια was a common Roman slogan.[9]

Urchristentum (Munich: Kaiser, 1986) 98-9; H. Koester, 'From Paul's Eschatology to the Apocalyptic Schemata of 2 Thessalonians', *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (ed. R. F. Collins; BETL 87; Leuven: Peeters, 1990) 449-50; N. Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994) 189; A. J. Malherbe, *The Letter to the Thessalonians* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 303; C. vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki, Stadt des Kassander und Gemeinde des Paulus: Eine frühe christliche Gemeinde in ihrer heidnischen Umwelt* (WUNT 2/125; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001) 170-8; J. R. Harrison, 'Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki', *JSNT* 25 (2002) 86-7; J. D. Crossan and J. L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 2004) 167; A. Smith, 'Unmasking the Powers: Toward a Postcolonial Analysis of 1 Thessalonians', *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (ed. R. A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity, 2004) 48; P. Oakes, 'Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians', *JSNT* 27 (2005) 317-18; N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 74; W. Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006) 54; B. Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 146; S. C. Keesmaat, 'In the Face of Empire: Paul's Use of Scripture in the Shorter Epistles', *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 204-5; J. Punt, 'Paul and Postcolonial Hermeneutics: Marginality and/in Early Biblical Interpretation', *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture* (ed. S. E. Porter and C. D. Stanley; SBLSymS 50; Atlanta: SBL, 2008) 270; J. R. Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome* (WUNT 273; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 327; E. Mackenzie, 'The Quest for the Political Paul: Assessing the Apostle's Approach to Empire', *EuroJTh* 20 (2011) 44; G. Zerbe, 'The Politics of Paul: His Supposed Social Conservatism and the Impact of Postcolonial Readings', *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes* (ed. C. D. Stanley; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011) 68.

8 This view has not gained widespread acceptance in German scholarship. M. Konradt, *Gericht und Gemeinde: Eine Studie zur Bedeutung und Funktion von Gerichtsaussagen im Rahmen der paulinischen Ekklesiologie und Ethik im 1 Thess und 1 Kor* (BZNW 117; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003) reflects the caution of many on the continent: One can, so Konradt, 'erwägen, daß in 1Thess 5,3 römische Friedenspropaganda…als Assoziationshorizont zu berücksichtigen ist' (145-6). Nonetheless '[a]ls bündige programmatische Propagandaformel Roms läßt sich die Wendung εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια…nicht erweisen' (145 n. 676).

9 I will not interact with the texts referred to by various authors that mention only *pax* but not *securitas* (cf. esp. Weima, 'Peace', 331-55; Witherington, *Commentary*, 146), since it is beyond

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1. The Pompey inscription at Ilium (*SEG* XLVI 1565; 62 BCE).[10] In this inscription on the base of a statue of Pompey discovered in 1987 the inhabitants of Alexandria Troas honor Pompey for liberating them 'from wars with the Barbarians and the dangers from pirates, having restored peace and security on the land and the sea'[11] (ἀπό τε τῶν βαρβαρικῶν πολέμων | [καὶ τῶν π]ιρατικῶν κινδύνων ἀποκαθεστάκοτα δὲ | [τὴν εἰρ]ήνην καὶ την ἀσφάλειαν καὶ κατὰ γὴν καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν).[12] Here we encounter the phrase 'peace and security' for the first time, but given the date—35 years before the establishment of the Principate—it is anachronistic to view this as an instance of Roman imperial propaganda. It seems to be an indigenous expression of gratitude, however politically motivated,[13] for the restoration of civil order after Pompey had banished the threat of piracy throughout the Mediterranean.[14] The inscription evokes familiar tropes which associated the absence of conflict on land with 'peace' and on the sea with 'security',[15] but it would go beyond the evidence to claim that the phrase has the character of a slogan here.
2. *Pss. Sol.* 8.18 (mid-first century BCE).[16] In a transparent allusion to Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE the author relates that 'he entered in peace (μετ᾽ εἰρήνης) as a father enters his son's house; he placed his feet with

all doubt that the *Pax Romana* ideology played an important role in the propaganda of the empire from its inception onward. What demands scrutiny are the claims that (1) *securitas* also played a significant role, and (2) there is evidence that *pax et securitas* had the character of a slogan. Both must be deemed to hold for the imperial period before the mid-first century CE when Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians if the thesis is to be considered viable.

10 Both vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki*, 179 n. 64, and Oakes, 'Re-mapping', 317-18, regard this as important evidence for their position. Weima, 'Peace', 341, also refers to it.

11 The translations of ancient texts in this section, except where otherwise indicated, are mine.

12 E. Winter, 'Stadt und Herrschaft in spätrepublikanischer Zeit: Eine neue Pompeius-Inschrift aus Ilion', *Die Troas: neue Forschungen zu Neandria und Alexandria Troas* (ed. E. Schwertheim; Asia Minor Studies 22; Bonn: Habelt, 1996) 175-94, reproduces the full text (176) and includes a photograph (Beilage 3, Tafel 19) of the inscription. It is slightly irritating that the first three letters of εἰρήνην are missing at the beginning of the line. This is due to the fact that the far left side of the inscription is damaged. Still, there are few other abstract nouns ending in -ηνην that could reasonably be combined with τὴν ἀσφάλειαν in this instance.

13 Cf. Winter, 'Stadt', 179.

14 Cf. Plutarch *Pomp.* 24-30. For a thorough discussion, cf. P. de Souza, *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999) 149-78.

15 Cf. the references in Winter, 'Stadt', 178.

16 The text consulted is that of Rahlfs. Cf. *Septuaginta: id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935) loc. cit. Bammel, 'Beitrag', 837, Faust, *Pax*, 444 n. 42, and Harrison, 'Paul', 86 n. 61, refer to this text as early attestation of the Roman political ideology of *pax et securitas*. *Terminus a quo* for the composition of *Pss. Sol.* is 48 BCE since Ps 2.26-27 alludes to the death of Pompey. It is likely that the Hebrew original was composed

great security (μετὰ ἀσφὰλειας)'. Despite the mention of 'peace' and 'security' in the parallel lines here, there are several reasons why this text should be deemed inconsequential for the thesis. First, the early date—roughly two decades before the dawn of the Principate—makes it unlikely that this should be viewed as an instance of Roman imperial propaganda. Second, 'peace' and 'security' do not describe the state of affairs that Pompey has brought about in Jerusalem, but rather his own sense of confidence and well-being during the conquest.[17] Third, there is no indication of a recognizable slogan behind the reference.

3. The altar inscriptions of Praeneste (ILS 3787-8; late Augustan period).[18] The town of Praeneste, roughly 20 miles east of Rome, was a favorite summer residence of Augustus and Tiberius and a major center of the cult of Fortuna.[19] A pair of altars—it is obvious that they belong together[20]—from the site of the temple of Fortuna Primagenia are dedicated, respectively, to *Pax Augusta* and *Securitas Augusta*. This is a good example of the sycophantic adulation of Augustus for which Praeneste was well known, but it does not prove the existence of a slogan. Indeed, the region is littered with statues and altars honoring Augustus and dedicated, not only to Pax and Securitas, but also Salus and Victoria, as well.[21]
4. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 3.2 (in its final form, 13 CE).[22] This monumental work makes many references to peace, but only one, in the Greek translation, to security. Augustus claims that 'the foreign nations which could with safety be pardoned I preferred to save rather than to destroy' (τὰ ἔθνη οἷς ἀσφάλες ἦν συνγνώμην ἔχειν ἔσωσα μᾶλλον ἢ ἐξέκοψα). There is, however, no hint of a slogan. First, it is the adjective ἀσφάλες, not the

shortly after that event. Cf. K. Atkinson, 'Solomon, Psalms of', *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. J. J. Collins and D. C. Harlow; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 1239.

17 So also vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki*, 174.

18 Harrison, 'Paul', 86, Crossan and Reed, *Paul*, 166-7, and Weima, 'Peace' 345-6, all refer to these inscriptions.

19 Cf. D. A. Arya, 'The Goddess Fortuna in Imperial Rome: Cult, Art, Text' (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2002) 351.

20 Crossan and Reed, *Paul*, 166, helpfully provide pictures of the altars but mistakenly describe them as the '[f]ront and back of an altar from Praeneste'.

21 Cf. G. Rowe, *Princes and Political Cultures: The New Tiberian Senatorial Decrees* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002) 117.

22 Cf. H. Gottschalk, 'Monumentum Ancyranum', *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike: Altertum* (13 vols.; Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2001) 8.388-9. The text and the English translation of Res Gestae here and of Velleius in the following paragraphs is that of F. W. Shipley. Cf. Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History. Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (LCL 152; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1924) loc. cit. Weima, 'Peace', 349-52, appeals to this inscription.

noun ἀσφάλεια, that we encounter here. Second, what is being conceptualized is not the security of the conquered peoples, but rather whether it was safe for Rome to allow them to continue to live. Finally, the original Latin text does not contain a reference to *securitas*.

5. Velleius Paterculus *Historia Romana* 2.98.2 (ca. 30 CE).[23] In his account of the quelling of a rebellion in Thrace during the reign of Tiberius, Velleius relates that Lucius Piso was finally able, after three years of war, to 'restore security to Asia and peace to Macedonia' (*Asiae securitatem, Macedoniae pacem reddidit*). The terms *pax* and *securitas* function here, as they often do, as synonyms. This seems less a piece of Roman imperial propaganda than a fairly neutral description of the end of conflict. It cannot be ruled out that the terms were taken from a ready-made slogan, but there is no positive indication that they were, and it cannot simply be assumed that this was, in fact, the case.
6. Velleius Paterculus *Hist.* 2.103.4-5.[24] In recounting the adoption of Tiberius by Augustus, Velleius can hardly contain his enthusiasm. He describes the hopes of the citizenry 'for the perpetual security and the eternal existence of the Roman empire' (*perpetuae securitatis aeternitatisque Romani imperii*) and recounts further that 'on that day there sprang up once more in parents the assurance of safety for their children, in husbands for the sanctity of marriage, in owners for the safety of their property, and in all men the assurance of safety, order, peace, and tranquility' (*spes…omnibus hominibus salutis, quietis, pacis, tranquillitatis*). Clearly Roman imperial ideology is writ large here, but it should be noted that the terms *securitas* and *pax* occur in two separate sentences, rather than together, and that they are part of a larger list of the felicitous effects that Velleius ascribes to Roman rule. There is no reason to think that a *pax et securitas* slogan played any role in this formulation.
7. Seneca *Clem.* 1.19.8 (ca. 55 CE).[25] In his characterization of the ideal ruler, Seneca describes him as one 'under whom justice, peace, modesty, security and dignity flourish' (*sub quo iustitia, pax, pudicitia, securitas, dignitas*

23 *Terminus a quo* for Velleius's History is 30 CE since it is dedicated to M. Vinicius on the occasion of the latter's attainment of consulship in that year, and, since such a commemorative work is 'time-sensitive', it was probably not written much later than that date. The date of Velleius's death is unknown. Cf. A. J. Woodman, 'Velleius Paterculus', *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University, 4th ed. 2012) 1539. Vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki*, 178-9, and Weima, 'Peace', 353-4, make reference to this text.

24 Witherington, *Commentary*, 146, and Weima, 'Peace', 354, appeal to this text.

25 Cf. L. D. Reynolds, M. T. Griffin, and E. Fantham, 'Annaeus Seneca (2), Lucius', *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 93. The text is that of J. Basore. Cf. Seneca, *Moral Essays, Volume I* (LCL 214; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1928) loc. cit. Vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki*, 175, makes reference to this text.

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florent). Here, too, we have a number of typical descriptors of Roman imperial political ideology, and while *pax* and *securitas* are elements in the mix, there is once again no hint that they alone function as a slogan. Rather, Seneca seems to be drawing from a mental canon of stock virtues that Rome tended to attribute to its benevolent rule.

8. Seneca *Ep.* 91.2 (62–64 CE).[26] In a letter to his friend Lucilius, Seneca describes the results of a fire in Lugdunum, the provincial capital of Gaul, as follows: 'So many beautiful buildings, any single one of which would make a single town famous, were wrecked in one night. In a time of such deep peace (*et in tanta pace*) an event has taken place worse than men can possibly fear even in time of war. Who can believe it? When weapons are everywhere at rest and when peace prevails throughout the world (*cum toto orbe terrarium diffusa securitas sit*), Lyons, the pride of Gaul, is missing.' Seneca's assessment of the state of the world seems to reflect Roman imperial ideology in broad terms, and *pax* and *securitas* are undoubtedly part of that ideology. Still, there is no indication in the text that Seneca is referring to a well-known slogan. Instead, as Gummere's translation suggests, he merely uses *securitas* as a synonym of *pax*.
9. Josephus, *Bell.* 4.94 (ca. 79 CE),[27] recounts the appeal that Titus made to the defenders of the town of Gishala to surrender. They had seen how cities that were better fortified had been handily defeated, whereas those who entrusted themselves to the Romans were 'enjoying their possessions in security' (ἐν ἀσφαλείᾳ δὲ τῶν ἰδίων κτημάτων ἀπολαύοντας). The heavy hand of Roman imperial ideology is certainly apparent here, but ἀσφάλεια occurs without any corresponding mention of εἰρήνη.
10. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.158-160 (ca. 94 CE),[28] relates the early success of Herod the Great as governor of Galilee. Among other things to his credit, Herod was able to curtail the constant threat of banditry to the inhabitants of the region, 'having procured peace for them and secure enjoyment of the villages' (εἰρήνην αὐτοῖς παρεσχηκότα καὶ ἀσφαλῆ τῶν κτημάτων ἀπόλαυσιν). There is no compelling reason to posit a Roman slogan behind this statement. The term εἰρήνη is, of course, present, but not the

26 Cf. J. Dingel, 'Seneca', *Neue Pauly* 11.413. The text and English translation is that of R. M. Gummere. Cf. Seneca, *Epistles 66–92* (LCL 76; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1920) loc. cit. Wengst, *Pax*, 33, and vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki*, 174-5, mention this text.

27 The text quoted here is that of H. St. J. Thackeray, *The Jewish War, Books 3–4* (LCL 487; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1927) loc. cit. Wengst, *Pax*, 33, offers this text in support of his thesis.

28 The text quoted here and in the following is that of R. Marcus and A. Wikgren, *Jewish Antiquities, Books 14–15* (LCL 489; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1943) loc. cit. Wengst, *Pax*, 34, Witherington, *Commentary*, 146, and Weima, 'Peace', 353, mention this passage.

noun ἀσφάλεια. Instead, the adjectival form modifies the noun ἀπόλαυσις. Further, Josephus' account does not portray Herod as furthering Rome's program at this point but rather as initially coming to Rome's attention due to his promise as a ruler.

11. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.247-8,[29] quotes from a decree of the Jewish inhabitants of Pergamon after the Roman authorities reaffirmed their willingness to make allowance for Jewish religious customs. It begins by lauding the Romans for 'taking upon themselves dangers for the common security (ἀσφάλεια) of all humanity and desiring to settle their allies and friends in happiness (εὐδαιμονία) and firm peace (βεβαία εἰρήνη)'. The language of the decree is clearly designed to procure the empire's further goodwill by aping Roman imperial ideology, and the prominence of ἀσφάλεια and εἰρήνη (along with εὐδαιμονία) are undeniable. Still, even here there is no evidence of a Roman slogan.
12. Tacitus *Hist.* 2.12.1 (105–109 CE).[30] In this section of his *Histories* Tacitus describes the advance of Otho's generals through Italy. He notes in vivid language that the local population was unprepared for the rape and pillage of the land that the generals instigated: 'The fields were full of rural wealth, the houses stood with open doors; and the owners, as with their wives and children they came forth to meet the army, found themselves surrounded, in the midst of the security of peace (*securitas pacis*), with all the horrors of war'. Here we encounter a phrase in which *securitas* and *pax* are closely connected by means of a genitive construct, but the content lends no credence to the proposition that it evokes Roman imperial propaganda.
13. Tacitus *Hist.* 2.21.2.[31] This section recounts the attempt by Caecina, Vitellius's general, to conquer the town of Placentia. After he was repulsed, Tacitus speaks of the restoration of *securitas* among the townspeople. The term *pax* does not occur in this context, and the use of *securitas* betrays no attempt to further a Roman imperial agenda.
14. Tacitus *Hist.* 3.53.[32] In his description of the quarrels among Vespasian's generals during the campaign in Umbria, Tacitus quotes from Antonius's letter to the emperor in which Antonius sought greater recognition of his accomplishments. He is not seeking, claims Antonius, to demean the other generals, for 'they had at heart the peace of Moesia, I the safety and

29 Witherington, *Commentary*, 146, and Weima, 'Peace', 353, appeal to this text.

30 Cf. E. Flaig, 'Tacitus', *Neue Pauly* 11.1210. The text and English translation of Tacitus's *Histories* here and in the following references are those of A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb. Cf. Tacitus, *The Annals and the Histories* (Modern Library Classics; New York: Random House, 2003) loc. cit. Witherington, *Commentary*, 146, and Weima, 'Peace', 354, cite this text.

31 Wengst, *Pax*, 33, and Witherington, *Commentary*, 146, mention this passage.

32 Weima, 'Peace', 354, mentions this text.

security of Italy' (*illis Moesiae pacem, sibi salutem securitatemque Italiae cordi fuisse*). *Pax* and *securitas* are used synonymously here, but they are not paired with each other. Rather, *pax* stands alone while *securitas* is paired with *salus*.

15. Tacitus *Hist.* 4.73-74.[33] In his speech to the citizens of Trier, as recounted by Tacitus, Petilius Cerialis praises the benevolence of Roman rule and counsels his audience not to take its advantages for granted: 'Give therefore your love and respect to the cause of peace (*pax*)... Let the lessons of fortune in both its forms teach you not to prefer rebellion and ruin to submission and safety (*obsequium cum securitate*).' Here again, *pax* and *securitas* are mentioned in the same context, but it is noteworthy that, as in the previous example, *securitas* is paired not with *pax*, but with another term (here *obsequium*).
16. Plutarch *Ant.* 40.4 (110–120 CE).[34] In describing the difficulties facing Mark Antony during his campaign in Persia against the Parthian king Phraates, Plutarch relates that Phraates assured Antony of 'peace and security' (εἰρήνην καὶ ἀσφάλειαν) if he were to withdraw immediately. Here we encounter a second occurrence of the phrase that we have in 1 Thess 5.3, but it has no Roman imperial connotations. Rather, it represents Plutarch's later description of a Parthian offer of safe passage that took place outside the boundaries of the empire during the final years of the Republic.[35]
17. *Corp.herm.* 18.10 (third century CE).[36] The final tractate of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Encomium of Kings*, refers to rulers as those who 'preside over the common security and peace' (τοὺς τῆς κοινῆς

33 Wengst, *Pax*, 34, vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki*, 175-6, and Weima, 'Peace', 354, appeal to this text.

34 It is not possible to date Plutarch's *Lives* with any precision, but Plutarch probably died ca. 1920, and it is likely that the *Lives* of Romans during the late Republican period date to the latter part of his life. Cf. L. B. R. Pelling, 'Plutarchos. Biographien', *Neue Pauly*, 9.1160-1. The text is that of Bernadotte Perrin. Cf. Plutarch, *Lives IX: Demetrius and Antony. Pyrrhus and Gaius Marius* (LCL 101; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1920) loc. cit. Surprisingly, only Weima, 'Peace', 354-5, mentions this text.

35 Weima, 'Peace', 354-5, argues that Plutarch, by portraying the Parthians as offering 'the very benefits that Roman rule was supposed to provide', is employing irony here. There is, however, no hint of irony in the text, and Weima assumes what must first be proven: that 'peace and security' was a well-known Roman slogan. If that cannot be independently shown to be the case, the argument loses its force. Even if one were to allow it, it would merely offer insight into use of Roman imperial topoi in Plutarch's time, not the mid-first century CE.

36 Cf. K. Rudolf, 'Hermetik/Hermetika: I. Schriftum – II. Wirkungsgeschichte', *RGG* 3.1668-70. The Greek text is that of A. D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste. Corpus hermeticum. Tome 2: Traites XIII–XVIII Asclepius* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1946) loc. cit. Faust, *Pax*, 444, refers to this text.

ἀσφαλείας καὶ εἰρήνης πρυτάνεις). The phrase 'security and peace' is noteworthy here, but πρύτανις is a term associated with local rulers[37] and thus lacks demonstrable imperial connotations. Additionally, the text's late date makes it unlikely that it offers any insight into mid-first-century attitudes toward rulers, Roman or otherwise.

18. A Syrian inscription (OGIS 613, late fourth century CE)[38] reads as follows:

> Ὁ κύριος Μ(ᾶρκος) Φλ(άβλιος) Βόνος ὁ λαμπρ(ότατος) πρώτου
> τάγ(ματος) κόμ(ης) καὶ δού(ξ) ἄρξας ἡμ(ῶ)ν ἐν εἰρήνῃ
> καὶ τοὺς διοδεύοντας καὶ τὸ ἔθνος διὰ
> παντὸς εἰρηνεύεσθαι ἠσφαλίσατο.
>
> Lord Marcus Flavius Bonus, the illustrious *Comes* and *Dux* of the first regiment, ruled over us in peace and secured for both travelers and the inhabitants a peaceful existence in perpetuity.

Though a number of scholars see this as a clear indication of a far-reaching Roman claim to be the world's guarantor of peace and security,[39] it is weak evidence, at best. First of all, the inscription makes no use of the phrase εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια. The term εἰρήνη is, of course, present, but the noun ἀσφάλεια is not. Instead we have a complex verbal construction that literally reads: 'he made secure to live peacefully', hardly a catchy slogan. More importantly, the inscription dates from the fourth century CE and surely cannot be considered relevant to the discussion of Roman imperial ideology three centuries earlier.

2. Assessing the Evidence

While not claiming to be exhaustive, this survey interacts with the literary and epigraphic evidence put forward by a broad and representative sampling of those who advocate the thesis that the reference to 'peace and security' in 1Thess 5.3 was a well-worn first-century slogan summing up the benefits (from Rome's perspective) of Roman imperial rule.[40] Careful examination of the evidence, however, does not bear out that conclusion. There are only two verbatim occurrences of the phrase εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια in the textual evidence. The first is found in an inscription that dates to 64 BCE (cf. #1), long before the dawn of the Principate and somewhat longer still before Roman imperial propaganda began to glorify Augustus as the universal guardian of the peace of the empire. The second

37 Cf. LSJ, πρυτανάρχης κτλ., 1543.

38 Cf. C. Markschies, *Das antike Christentum: Frömmigkeit, Lebensformen, Institutionen* (Munich: Beck, 2006) 28.

39 Cf. Wengst, *Pax*, 32-3; Harrison, 'Paul', 86; Witherington, *Commentary*, 146; Weima, 'Peace', 352.

40 An independent search of the Greek and Latin collections of the *Perseus Digital Library* (cf. www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper) did not reveal any other examples worthy of consideration.

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stems from Plutarch in the early second century (#16) but seems to be nothing more than a casual combination of synonyms that betrays no imperial connotations. One other text contains the phrase in reverse order (#17: ἀσφάλεια καὶ εἰρήνη), but it dates from the third century CE. It should particularly be noted that the Latin phrase *pax et securitas* occurs nowhere in the evidence presented.[41]

Other texts speak of 'peace' and 'security' in the same context but either there is no hint of an imperial ideological agenda in their usage (cf. ##2, 4, 5, 8, 12) or they are part of a larger list of the assumed benefits of Roman rule (cf. ##6, 7, 11, 14, 15). The altar inscriptions in Praeneste to *pax* and *securitas* (#3) should probably be understood similarly, that is, as part of a larger catalog of Roman virtues that the Emperor was thought to embody. Finally, there are a number of texts that make use of non-substantival forms of either one or both of the terms (##10, 18) or mention only ἀσφάλεια/*securitas* but not εἰρήνη/*pax* (## 9, 13).[42]

In no single instance can it be conclusively demonstrated that the phrase 'peace and security' has the character of a slogan. It should also be noted that for the period from the establishment of the Principate (27 BCE) to the writing of 1 Thessalonians (ca. 50 CE)—the very period that is crucial for substantiating the thesis—only one author (Velleius Paterculus, #5) uses a phrase that has a slogan-like quality to it, though it is by no means certain that he is, in fact, alluding to a slogan nor what that slogan might be.

The numismatic evidence, though it is often evoked,[43] can actually be dealt with fairly quickly. This is due to the fact that although both the term *pax* and its personification are frequently found on Roman coins as far back as Augustus's reign, *securitas* first appears on coins only late in the reign of Nero.[44] Even then, the first coins commemorate the safety enjoyed by the

41 This fact should, at the very least, give pause to scholars who with alacrity translate the Greek phrase εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια into Latin. By doing so, they lend credence to the widely held but manifestly baseless assumption that the phrase *pax et securitas* enjoyed currency in the Roman Empire and thus prejudice the case in favor of their thesis. To his credit, Weima, 'Peace', avoids this pitfall.

42 I have pointed out what I believe to be the main difficulty of each text offered in evidence. Many of the texts could have been assigned to two or more of the categories above, but for simplicity's sake each text is listed only once.

43 Cf. Bammel, 'Romans 13', 377; vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki*, 177-8; Weima, 'Peace', 333-41.

44 Cf. H. U. Instinsky, *Sicherheit als politisches Problem des römischen Kaisertums* (Deutsche Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 3; Baden-Baden: Verlag für Wissenschaft & Kunst, 1952) 21. Both Bammel and vom Brocke (cf. n. 43) readily acknowledge this. Weima offers many examples of the use of *pax* (whether the word or the personification) on imperial coins, but none bearing *securitas* before the reign of Nero. He nonetheless makes appeal to one coin that was issued early in Caligula's reign (RIC I 33) that bears an image of the emperor on the front and a representation of his three sisters, Agrippina, Drusilla, and Julia, on the back (cf. Weima, 'Peace', 340). According to Weima (who relies on the judgment of Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy 31B.C.–A.D. 68* [London: Methuen, 1951] 113), the three personify the goddesses Securitas, Concordia, and Fortuna. This vague allusion

emperor—*Securitas Augusti*—after surviving the Piso conspiracy.[45] The *Securitas populi Romani* is first commemorated on coins in Galba's and Otho's short reigns.[46] To date, then, no numismatic evidence has been discovered for a Roman slogan evoking 'peace and security' for the time period during which Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians or earlier.

This is not as surprising as it initially seems, for a careful examination of political-ideological rhetoric in the early Principate would hardly lead one to expect a broad emphasis on *securitas*. Indeed, while the *pax*-ideology was standard fare under the Julio-Claudian emperors beginning with Augustus, the *securitas* component seems to have taken on importance only later.[47] In his landmark study of the political instrumentalization of fear in the Roman Empire, Alfred Kneppe argues convincingly that the concept of security played virtually no role in imperial propaganda under Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius.[48] Kneppe draws on Seneca's instructions to Nero in *De clementia* to demonstrate that imperial propaganda through the middle of the first century CE had, in fact, no interest in broadly promoting *securitas*. In Seneca's view, it was prudent for the emperor to maintain a certain level of fear among the masses since that alone guaranteed their obeisance.[49] Indeed, when Seneca highlights security as a goal worth striving for, he has only the Roman upper classes in mind.[50] Thus, it was only in Nero's later reign that the ideology of *securitas* was articulated,[51] precisely due to the fact

to *securitas* would seem to constitute the sum total of numismatic evidence for an emphasis on security in the decades before Nero's reign.

45 Cf. Instinsky, *Sicherheit*, 22.

46 Cf. Instinsky, *Sicherheit*, 25-6.

47 *Pace* Bammel, 'Romans 13', 376-7, who claims that the 'term' *pax et concordia* was used to describe the imperial agenda within the city of Rome, whereas the 'formula' *pax et securitas* was employed elsewhere in the empire. He provides evidence for neither claim. Indeed, with regard to *securitas*, he undermines his own case when he notes that the term was often juxtaposed with or replaced by *clementia*, *tranquillitas*, *stabilitas temporum*, or *quies*. (This is not to deny that the *concepts* may have been operative in later propaganda in the manner Bammel posits.)

48 Cf. A. Kneppe, *Metus temporum: Zur Bedeutung von Angst in Politik und Gesellschaft der römischen Kaiserzeit des 1. und 2. Jhdts. n. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994) 233. Interestingly, according to Kneppe, Velleius is the first Roman author to use the word *securitas* in the sense of a general state of freedom from cares and dangers on the part of a collective entity, rather than simply for an individual.

49 Cf. Kneppe, *Metus*, 233.

50 Cf. Kneppe, *Metus*, 234.

51 Bammel, 'Romans 13', 377, admits that the propagation of *securitas* 'could not have happened earlier, because it was only under Nero that the doors of the temple of Janus were shut again [this symbolized the absence of armed conflict in the empire—JRW] for the first time since Augustus'.

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that the Roman upper classes were feeling increasingly insecure,[52] and very much later still that Roman authors began to lend credence to the self-aggrandizing claims of Nero and his sycophants[53] and wistfully long for the presumed Golden Age under Nero.[54]

Two methodological issues demand brief attention at this juncture. The first has to do with the use of lexical evidence. It must be stated clearly that the mere fact that *pax* and *securitas* or ἀσφάλεια and εἰρήνη appear in the same context does not, in and of itself, indicate the existence of a slogan or even constitute proof that a Roman imperial agenda is being propagated. It cannot simply be assumed that, since these words carry imperial connotations *in some contexts*, they do so in the texts cited.[55] Rather, each text must be examined within its particular context, and the burden of proof rests squarely on those who maintain that Roman imperial ideology has influenced the vocabulary.

The second issue concerns the dating of sources. Not all proponents of the thesis that Paul is alluding to a Roman slogan in 1 Thess 5.3 have shown sufficient sensitivity to the diachronic aspects of their analysis. Some range freely across centuries' worth of material and implicitly treat any instance in which the terms *pax* and *securitas* or εἰρήνη and ἀσφάλεια occur as *prima facie* evidence for their thesis. This is demonstrably not the case. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. First, as we noted above, there is no reason to believe that the appearance of the *securitas* motif on coins beginning with the reign of Nero has any relevance for the period before Nero's reign, that is, for the time during which Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians. Second, several authors make reference to the Syrian inscription (#18) without mentioning its date (fourth century CE) and reflecting on the implications this might have for its usefulness as evidence.

These methodological imperatives—careful attention to literary context and the dating of texts when making arguments from vocabulary—are by no means novel, and the scholars whose work is under review here no doubt wholeheartedly agree with them in principle. Still, the manifest danger of losing sight of them when one is caught up in the search for evidence in support of one's thesis recommends their repetition here. In any case, future research on this and related topics will benefit from greater attention to these parameters.

52 Cf. Kneppe, *Metus*, 244-5. Instinsky, *Sicherheit*, 17-20, concurs. He argues forcefully that when security is emphasized in Roman imperial literature, it is generally a sign that the political order had been significantly disturbed and that Rome's leaders were eager to restore it. In the first century CE this was the case after the humiliating defeat of Varus in Germania (9 CE) and during the later part of Nero's reign and the Year of the Four Emperors (65–69 CE).

53 Cf. e.g. Calpurnius Siculus *1. Ekloge* 46.

54 Cf. Kneppe, *Metus*, 245.

55 Cf. with regard to arguments from vocabulary in postcolonial interpretation of NT texts in general, J. White, 'Anti-Imperial Subtexts in Paul: An Attempt at Building a Firmer Foundation', *Biblica* 90 (2009) 309-11.

3. Conclusion

A review of the evidence offered by the many proponents of the thesis that the doublet 'peace and security' in 1 Thess 5.3 is a well-known first-century slogan summing up Rome's imperial agenda has yielded surprisingly little in the way of confirmation. None of the literary, epigraphic, or numismatic sources offered in support of this thesis unambiguously demonstrates the existence of such a slogan. The only *verbatim* use of the phrase in Greek before 1 Thess 5.3 predates the establishment of the Principate by a third of a century, and there is no evidence that it gained currency as an easily recognizable slogan, whether in Greek or Latin, even at a later date. It is, of course, undeniable that *pax* played an important role in the propaganda of the Roman Empire from the time of Augustus onward. It seems equally clear that this was one of many terms with positive connotations, among them (occasionally) *securitas*, that Rome pressed into the service of her self-serving agenda. A strong emphasis on *securitas*, however, was a later development in imperial political ideology, one that post-dated Paul's reference to 'peace and security' by at least 15 years. Thus, the conclusion that the 'believers in Thessalonica would have immediately recognized in Paul's brief phrase "Peace and security" a clear allusion…[to] the sloganeering of the Roman state'[56] is by no means a certain one.

It would lead beyond the scope of this article to investigate the tradition-historical roots of Paul's intriguing phrase, but the current interest in post-colonial interpretation should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that plausible cases have been made for a link either to the OT prophetic tradition[57] or even to Jesus himself.[58] Ultimately, though, all three theories labor under the same weakness: While they can adequately explain Paul's reference to εἰρήνη, none of them has yet been able convincingly to trace his singular use of the term ἀσφάλεια to a particular source. With regard to the origin and precise connotation of the phrase 'peace and security' in 1 Thess 5.3 the jury is still out.

56 Weima, 'Peace', 358.

57 Cf. T. Holtz, *Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher* (EKK XIII; Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986) 215; J. Plevnik, *Paul and the Parousia: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997) 103-4.

58 Cf. D. Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 314-16.

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