

St. Luke's Portrait of St. Paul

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I. INTRODUCTION

More than one half of the second volume of Luke's history of Christian beginnings is devoted to an account of the career of Paul, from his activity as a leader in the campaign of persecution against Judaeans Christians, in the period before his conversion, to his protracted residence in Rome under house-arrest nearly thirty years later, while he waited for his case to come up for hearing before the imperial tribunal.

Since the later part of the second century this volume of Luke's history has been known as "Acts of Apostles" (It has been conjectured that his first volume was at one time entitled "Acts of Christ"). But in fact there are only two apostles whose acts are related in the second volume—Peter and Paul. Peter's acts are recorded in the first half of the volume. He disappears from the scene after chapter 15, with its account of the Council of Jerusalem. After that, Paul (who has first been introduced at the end of chapter 7, in the description of Stephen's martyrdom) dominates the scene. Peter is not depreciated in any way in Acts: in fact, Luke appears deliberately to draw a series of parallels between him and Paul, suggesting that the two had equal status in his eyes. It is Paul who carries the gospel throughout the Gentile world, but it is Peter who first preaches the gospel to Gentiles. Peter's ministry, however, is restricted to Judaea in Luke's narrative; if Luke's plan is to trace the advance of the gospel from Judaea to Rome, then Paul must inevitably be the major figure in his story.

If our knowledge of Paul were confined to what is said of him in Acts, we should have much cause to be grateful to Luke. The Paul whose portrait Luke draws is a very impressive character. Although he sets out on his wider apostolic ministry as the junior colleague of Barnabas, who called him to Antioch in Syria to help him in preaching the gospel and building up the church in that great Gentile city, before long he appears to take the lead in the partnership.

When the two men were released by the church of Antioch to carry the gospel farther afield, it is "Barnabas and Saul" who set out for Cyprus, but "Paul and his company" who set sail from Paphos for the south coast of Asia Minor. Probably the change in style is due in part to a change of source, but it fits in with Luke's general picture of the developing relation between the two. This might help to explain John Mark's return to Jerusalem after he had accompanied them as far as Perga in Pamphylia: he perhaps resented the way in which his cousin Barnabas was falling into second place.

When, at Pisidian Antioch, the synagogue authorities invited the two missionaries to address the congregation, it was Paul who responded to the invitation and preached a powerful sermon. A few weeks later, when the people of Lystra thought that the two men were divine beings visiting their city in human form, they called Barnabas "Zeus" (perhaps because of something majestic about his presence), but they called Paul "Hermes"—because, says Luke, "he was the chief speaker". At Athens, Paul holds the attention of the Council of the

Areopagus until he begins to talk nonsense (as his hearers think it to be); in Jerusalem he silences an angry and hostile mob by addressing them in their own vernacular.

Is this eloquent and compelling speaker the man whose "bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account", as his critics said (2 Corinthians 10:10)? That, indeed, is what his detractors had to say (but Paul does not deny their unflattering description of him); Luke, on the other hand, is one of his admirers. Luke reports or summarizes the matter of Paul's speeches, but says little or nothing about the manner of their delivery; from Luke's silence in this regard it might be inferred that the delivery was worthy of the contents, but this could be an unwarranted inference. Paul, we may be sure, lacked the godlike dignity which was thought proper for a great orator, but he was intensely in earnest about his message, and that very fact imparts a natural eloquence to a speaker.

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II. COMPARATIVE BIOGRAPHY

If we compare the biographical and other factual data about Paul provided by Luke with the information that can be drawn from Paul's own letters, we find a wide range of agreement and coincidence. Repeatedly we are told in Acts that Paul was a native of Tarsus; nothing is said about his birthplace in the epistles, but they certainly give us the impression that their author was not a Palestinian Jew. In the epistles we are told twice that Paul was born into the tribe of Benjamin. Nothing is said about this by Luke, whom we have to thank for the information that his Jewish name was Saul. Was it not natural that parents of the tribe of Benjamin should give their son the name borne by the most illustrious member of that tribe in Israel's history? And when Paul reminded his congregation in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch how God gave the Israelites as their first king "Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin" (Acts 13:21), was he not conscious as he spoke these words—or was Luke not conscious as he reported them—that the speaker himself was another Saul, a man of the tribe of Benjamin?

Paul is frequently described nowadays as a Hellenistic Jew, but he himself would probably not have accepted that description. If he calls himself a "Hebrew" (2 Corinthians 11:22) or, more emphatically, "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:6), he probably uses the word in contradistinction to "Hellenist" as Luke himself does in another connection in Acts 6:1. A "Hebrew", as distinct from a Hellenistic Jew, would attend a synagogue where the service was said in Hebrew, and at home he would habitually speak Hebrew, or more probably Aramaic (in the New Testament these two languages are indiscriminately called Hebrew). In Acts Paul is not called a Hebrew, but it is "in the Hebrew language" that the heavenly voice addresses him on the Damascus road (Acts 26:14)—is this because it was Paul's native tongue or Jesus' native tongue?—and, as we have seen, he is able to deliver an impromptu speech to the Jerusalem populace "in the Hebrew language" (Acts 22:2).

Both Luke and Paul himself testify that he was a Pharisee. It is only in Acts that Paul claims to have been a pupil of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), introduced elsewhere by Luke as "a Pharisee..., a teacher of the law, held in honour by all the people" (Acts 5: 34). As a pupil of Gamaliel, says Paul in Acts 22:3, he was "educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God." To exactly the same effect he says in Galatians 1:14, "I

advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers."

It was this zeal, according to both Acts and the epistles, that made Paul so energetic a persecutor of the church. "I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it", he writes in Galatians 1:13. When, in later life as a Christian, he looked back on that earlier phase, he was filled with amazement that God should nevertheless have pardoned him, giving him moreover the commission and the power to be so effective an apostle and propagator of the faith he had once tried to exterminate. "It is by God's grace that I am what I am," he acknowledged (1 Corinthians 15:10). Luke describes Paul in that earlier phase as "ravaging the church", recording how right up to the moment of his conversion he kept on "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 8:3; 9:1).

According to Luke, it was when he was approaching Damascus that Paul had the vision of the risen Christ who called him into his service and it was in Damascus that he first enjoyed Christian fellowship. This is confirmed by Paul's own account: after his conversion, he says, without consulting any one, he took his departure for Arabia, from which he "returned to Damascus" (Galatians 1:17).

In Luke's narrative of Paul's conversion emphasis is laid on the blinding light and the voice from heaven, the speaker identifying himself with the words "I am Jesus" (Acts 9:5). Paul insists repeatedly that the risen Lord appeared to him, as he had appeared to Peter, James and others soon after leaving the tomb. "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? he asks indignantly in 1 Corinthians 9:1, when some were casting doubt on his apostolic credentials. It was God, he tells the Galatians, who "was pleased to reveal his Son in me", and it was through that "revelation of Jesus Christ" that the essence of his gospel was communicated to him (Galatians 1:12, 15). That the essence of his gospel was implicit in his conversion experience is similarly indicated in Acts 22:15 in the words addressed to him by Ananias of Damascus: "you will be a witness for him [for Christ] to all mankind of what you have seen and heard". As the Paul of Acts affirms that he was "not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19), so the Paul of Galatians tells how, as soon as he was commissioned to proclaim Christ among the Gentiles, he set about fulfilling this commission. Luke indeed makes him first bear witness to Christ in the synagogues of Damascus—very reasonably, if it was to those synagogues that he had been sent by the chief priests (for a very different purpose, to be sure). But Paul's witness to Christ in those synagogues is summed up in the sentence: "he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). Paul is the first person in Acts to frame his witness in these terms, and this may be seen as an incidental agreement with his claim in Galatians that he was charged to be a herald of the Son of God.

Luke's emphasis on the light, "brighter than the sun", which flashed around Paul on the Damascus road is probably reflected in Paul's description of the dawn of Christian faith as "seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image

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of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). And when he speaks of God "who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6), he speaks from his own vivid experience.

Before we leave Paul's sudden abandonment of his persecuting activity, there is one further question to be considered. Where did Paul's persecuting activity take place? Primarily in Jerusalem, according to Luke, although from there it was carried farther afield, "even to foreign cities" (Acts 26:11). Probably most readers of Paul's letters have assumed that there too, when mention is made of his former persecuting activity, Jerusalem was the place where it was carried on. But this has been contested more recently. It was, according to Ernst Haenchen, "in or near Damascus" that Paul persecuted the church, as an agent of the local synagogue, which exercised disciplinary authority over its errant members (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 298).

Paul's own account of the matter is: "I persecuted the church of God" (Galatians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:9). More briefly, he recalls in Philippians 3:6 his having been "a persecutor of the church". But if, with reference to that early stage of Christian history, one speaks of "the church of God" or simply of "the church", it is natural to think first and foremost of Jerusalem. The mother church had her headquarters there; if there were companies of believers outside Jerusalem, even as far away as Damascus, they were branches of the Jerusalem church. Luke speaks of "the church throughout all Judaea and Galilee, and Samaria" (Acts 9:31); Paul refers to the same entity (or to part of it) when he speaks of "the churches of Christ in Judaea" (Galatians 1:22). It was those churches, after Paul's departure for Syria and Cilicia, which received news from there to the effect that (as they said) "our former persecutor is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (Galatians 1:23). It was not the new Christians in Syria and Cilicia who described Paul as "our former persecutor"; he had not been active as a persecutor so far north as that, if indeed there were at the time any Christians there to be persecuted (which is more than doubtful). It was the Judaeian churches (including the mother church) that called him "our former persecutor" as they passed the astounding news around that Paul was now propagating the gospel.

Of Paul's journey to Arabia (presumably the territory of the Nabataean King) immediately after his conversion (Galatians 1:17) Luke has nothing to say. From Arabia, Paul says, he came back to Damascus. Luke tells how he had to leave Damascus by stealth, because the local Jews were keeping watch at the city gates, hoping to assassinate him as he left. Paul's own account of this incident says that it was the ethnarch of King Aretas (the Nabataean ruler) who guarded the gates with the aim of arresting him. One way or the other, he was helped to escape danger by his Damascene friends, who lowered him to the ground outside the city through a window in a house built on to the wall. Paul mentions this in 2 Corinthians 11:32f. because it was a recollection that kept him humble—he remembered the ridiculous figure he must have cut as he was let down through that window in a basket.

If it is argued that Luke's making the Jews Paul's enemies on this occasion is due to his anti-Jewish tendency, it should be borne in mind that Paul would be, for his part, unwilling to set them in an unfavourable light: according to Luke, who has reported the Jewish hierarchy's deadly hostility to Paul, Paul himself said, with reference to his appealing to Caesar, "I had no charge to bring against my nation" (Acts 28:19). So, if Luke would be naturally inclined to emphasize the Jews' part in the action against Paul at Damascus, Paul would be equally inclined to leave it unmentioned. But Paul's reference to the initiative taken by the ethnarch of Aretas suggests that he had done or said something in Arabia to arouse the suspicion of the Nabataean authorities.

In Acts and Galatians alike Paul is said to have set out from Damascus to pay his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem. Luke describes that visit in generalizing terms (Acts 9:26-29) not unlike those in which he has described Paul's activity in Damascus. He evidently had little independent information about the details of Paul's Jerusalem visit; he certainly cannot have known Paul's own account of it in Galatians 1:18 f. Paul knew that other accounts of what happened during that visit were in circulation; that is why he swears so solemnly that his account is true (Galatians 1:20). It has indeed been argued that Luke's account is based on one of those misrepresentations which Paul is at pains to refute; but Luke does not suggest that Paul derived any authorization from the apostles whom he met during this visit. Paul makes it plain, as Luke does not (probably because he did not know), that the only apostles whom he met during this brief visit to Jerusalem were Peter and James the Just, and it is this that he confirms with an oath.

At the end of this visit to Jerusalem, Paul was taken down to Caesarea and put on board a ship sailing in the direction of Tarsus. So Luke informs us (Acts 9:30); Paul himself says that he "went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia" (Galatians 1:21). Tarsus was the chief city of Cilicia; Antioch was the capital of Syria. At that time Syria and Cilicia formed one united province, with the seat of government at Antioch. In due course Paul made his way to Antioch; there he figures in association with Barnabas both in his own account and in Luke's (Galatians 2:11-13; Acts 11:25 f.; 13:1). According to Galatians 2:1, it was in company with Barnabas that Paul visited Jerusalem a second time after his conversion; Luke mentions two occasions on which the two men went there together (both times from Antioch)—the famine-relief visit of Acts 11:30 and the visit to attend the

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Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:2. It is a matter of debate with which of the two visits mentioned in Acts (if with either) the visit of Galatians 2:1 should be identified. Traditionally the conference which Paul and Barnabas had with the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church has been identified with the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. But these two meetings, so far as our record goes, dealt with different subjects: that of Galatians 2:1-10 dealt with the demarcation of mission-fields (it being agreed that Paul and Barnabas should evangelize Gentiles while Peter and his Jerusalem colleagues should concentrate on their fellow-Jews), while that of Acts 15 dealt with the terms on which Gentiles might be admitted to church membership and its social privileges. If, on the other hand, the visit of Galatians 2:1-10 be equated with the famine-relief visit of Acts 11:30, the only possible point of contact lies in the Jerusalem leaders' request that Paul and Barnabas should "remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10), which might be construed as a request that they should continue to remember them—that they should go on doing what they had already begun to do. How seriously Paul treated this request is shown by his careful organization of the Jerusalem relief fund (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15; Romans 15:25-31), a subject on which Luke is strangely silent.

The sequence in Galatians 1:11-2:14 is the only sustained autobiographical passage in Paul's writings. It comes to an end with Paul's rebuke of Peter at Antioch, another subject on which Luke is silent. There is a possible link between the "certain men from James" who came to Antioch and persuaded Peter to give up table fellowship with Gentiles (Galatians 2:12) and the "men from Judaea" who came to Antioch and pressed the obligation of circumcision on

the Gentile Christians there (Acts 15:1); but there is no necessity to identify the two sets of visitors. However, when Luke tells of the disagreement and separation of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-40, his narrative can be understood better when it is recalled that, in addition to their disagreement whether or not to take John Mark along with them again when they revisited the recently founded churches of Cyprus and South Galatia, Paul had already lost confidence in Barnabas when the latter joined Peter and others in ceasing to share meals with Gentile Christians.

Luke's silence about the controversy between Paul and Peter at Antioch is in line with his general policy of emphasizing the unity among the leaders of the primitive church and playing down their dissensions. By the time Luke wrote, those dissensions (important as they were when Paul was actively involved in them) were for the most part old, unhappy, far-off things; they were not likely to be of great interest to the people for whom he wrote and certainly would make no contribution to his purpose in writing. Paul and Barnabas's disagreement about John Mark was not a disagreement on a point of evangelical principle; it was a purely personal dispute, and might safely be recorded if only to remind readers that those pioneers in the Christian mission were men of like passions with ordinary mortals. Luke's silence over more fundamental disagreements does inevitably affect his portrait of Paul, but does not spring from a desire to portray Paul as other than he actually was.

There is no direct reference in Paul's letters to the apostolic decree of Acts 15:28 f.; he certainly makes no appeal to the decree when asked to give a ruling on one of the specific practices which it forbids—the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols. But in the very passages where Paul deals with this question (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-30) we may detect, indirectly, the influence of the decree. There may already have been an attempt to impose on the Corinthian church conditions laid down in the Jerusalem letter sent to the churches of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:23-29). If so, Paul would have thought it preferable to appeal to basic principles of Christian freedom and Christian charity, rather than to the authority of the church of Jerusalem, which some visitors to Corinth were invoking in order to subvert his own apostolic authority in a church which he had planted in accordance with the commission given him by the risen Lord. Moreover, by treating the question in the light of those basic principles he provided permanently valid guidelines for dealing not only with this particular issue but with others of the same general type.

Yet in Luke's account Paul is represented as acquiescing in the terms of the decree, and even as communicating them not only to the church of Antioch and the other churches in the province of which Antioch was the capital, but also to the churches recently planted by Barnabas and himself in South Galatia (Acts 16:4). In view of the reservations with regard to the decree which may be traced in his correspondence, it may be concluded that his close association with it in the narrative of Acts is due to the conflation of a Jerusalem meeting at which he was present with one from which he was absent.

Paul's colleagues after his parting with Barnabas are introduced by Luke in Acts 15:22, 40, and 16:1-3. They are Silas, a leading member of the Jerusalem church, and Timothy, a native of Lystra, who had been converted to Christianity during the visit paid by Paul and Barnabas to that city a year or two before. Paul enlisted him to be his personal aide-de-camp. With them Paul journeyed through Asia Minor to Macedonia and Achaia, until all three settled for a period in Corinth (Acts 18:5). Thereafter Silas disappears from the narrative, but Timothy

remains in Paul's company. This is exactly what could be inferred from the letters to the Thessalonians and the Corinthians. The man whom Luke calls Silas is referred to by Paul under his Roman name Silvanus. The two letters to the Thessalonians were sent from Corinth to the church of Thessalonica by "Paul, Silvanus and

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Timothy". In 2 Corinthians 1:19 Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth how, as he says, "Silvanus and Timothy and I" proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Son of God among them. Silvanus then disappears from Paul's correspondence, but Timothy remains to the end as one of Paul's closest associates.

Paul's movements during these years, chronicled in Acts 16:11-20:3, are confirmed by references in his letters to the Thessalonians, the Corinthians and the Romans. From those references it is easy to follow him as he travels from Philippi to Thessalonica to Athens to Corinth to Ephesus, and then back to Macedonia and Achaia. Detailed correlation of the two sources is difficult because Paul's references to his movements are not systematic but occasional and allusive (his readers did not need to be informed about them as though they had no previous knowledge). Even Luke's narrative is not so complete as we might suppose it to be if we could not compare it with Paul's own account. For example, Luke has nothing to say about the second, "painful" visit which Paul paid to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:1; 13:2), probably because it was bound up with one of those controversies which were things of the past by the time Luke wrote. But our two sources are consistent with each other for this phase of Paul's career, and permit us to construct a reasonably coherent outline.

A further check on the narrative of Acts is provided by Paul's personal note in Romans 15:25-33 where, writing from Corinth shortly before his departure for Judaea, he tells the Christians of Rome how, before he can pay them his promised visit, he must first go to Jerusalem and see to the delivery of the relief fund which he had been organizing in his Gentile mission field. Luke mentions that, towards the end of his ministry in Ephesus, Paul planned to visit Macedonia and Achaia and then go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21).

In Romans 15:31 Paul expresses misgivings about the reception awaiting him in Jerusalem. The narrative of Acts 21:17—26:32 shows how well founded these misgivings were. He had much need to ask the Roman Christians to pray that he might be delivered from the unbelievers in Judaea; he was not even sure if the Gentiles' offering would be acceptable to the Jerusalem church. Many students of Acts infer from Luke's narrative that, if the offering was indeed accepted by the Jerusalem church-leaders, it was accepted only under conditions which Paul agreed to fulfil but which had disastrous consequences.

When Paul sends the Christians of Rome greetings from "all the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16), we should remember that representatives of the various churches which he had planted were even then gathering to set sail with him for Judaea, to hand over in person their churches' respective contributions to the Jerusalem relief fund. These representatives certainly included the men who are named in Acts 20:4 as embarking on the voyage along with Paul and Luke himself. Luke evidently knew all about the relief fund and the importance which Paul attached to it. It is surprising, then, that his only allusion to it should be made when he

reports Paul as saying to Felix, "After some years I came to bring my nation alms and offerings" (Acts 24:17). What can be the reason for this reticence on Luke's part?

The reason, I suggest, was apologetic. When the time came for Paul's accusers to formulate their charges against him at the hearing of his appeal before the imperial tribunal, the Jerusalem relief fund could well have been misrepresented as an interference with the collection and delivery of the annual half-shekel tax to the temple authorities in Jerusalem. The organization and conveyance of this tax enjoyed the express protection of Roman law. But the half-shekel tax was exacted from Jews; Paul's relief fund was contributed by Gentiles. Even so, it could have been argued that the Gentile contributors were potential proselytes to Judaism, whom Paul had enticed away from the synagogue into an association of his own, and that the relief fund represented an improper diversion of money which, but for Paul's activity, would have gone ultimately to swell the temple revenue. The accusation that Paul had violated the sanctity of the temple by bringing Gentiles within prohibited bounds (Acts 21:28; 24:6) could not be sustained since no witnesses could be produced; but here was a more subtle attempt to convict Paul of infringing the temple privileges, and one which a skilled advocate could present in a persuasive way. In former times it was argued by more than one scholar that Luke's narrative was written to provide Paul's counsel for the defence with factual material to be used at his trial before Caesar; if this thesis can no longer be sustained in its earlier form, it may still be argued that a document prepared for this purpose served Luke as one of his sources for this part of his narrative. (Why could such a document not have been prepared by Luke himself?) The issue of the relief fund would in that case have been too delicate to be treated in detail; Luke, or the author of his source, judged that Paul's reference to "alms and offerings" in his defence before Felix was as much as it was politic to say on this subject. If the "alms and offerings" are said to have been designed for Paul's "nation", this should not be dismissed as a *suggestio falsi*: Paul himself hints here and there in his letters that he envisaged the relief fund not only as a gift to the church of Jerusalem but also as a witness to the whole Jewish nation at the centre of its life.

III. PAUL THE MAN

Thus far we have concentrated mainly on external features in our two bodies of source-material. What about their picture of Paul himself?

The Paul whom we know outside the pages of

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Acts is first and foremost a letter-writer. It is his letters that provide us with direct knowledge of the man himself—knowledge more direct than anything that can be learned from Acts. A man's companion and friend (as Luke, according to tradition, was to Paul) may give us a faithful portrait of him, but that portrait shows us the man through the eyes of another. From a man's letters, especially when they come with the unstudied spontaneity that marks Paul's "capital" letters, we can see into his heart. In Paul's letters, it may be said, we recognize his self-portrait. He did not compose his letters in order to serve as a self-portrait, and their evidence is the more valuable for that. No self-portrait, whether designed or undesigned, can in the nature of the case be objective, but a self-portrait provides testimony of a kind that nothing else can supply.

But Luke says nothing about Paul as a letter-writer. We cannot deny outright that he knew, or knew of, Paul's letters; what we can say with confidence is that he makes no use of them. If he knew them, and wished to make use of them, they could have given him authoritative and welcome information. It might be said that Paul's "dear physician" and fellow-traveller had no need of the evidence of the letters, since he had personal knowledge of Paul and his movements. But he was not with Paul during all the phases of his career chronicled in Acts. Moreover, it is evident from the structure of Acts that Luke did make use of other written sources, even for some aspects of Paul's ministry. If he had no objection to using other written sources, there seems to be no reason why he should not have used Paul's letters, if they were accessible to him. It seems simplest to conclude that they were not accessible.

Why were they not accessible? If, as Adolf Harnack argued in the 'earlier years of the twentieth century, and as J.A.T. Robinson has argued in our own day, Acts was written in the 60s of the first century, the reason is clear: there had been no time for the collection of Paul's letters. But the perspective of Acts belongs (I think) to a period a decade or more later than the end of Paul's active career. Even so, there is not much evidence for the collection of Paul's letters and their wider circulation before the last decade of the first century. More important is the consideration that, if one of Luke's aims was the reconciliation of Pauline with non-Pauline (not anti-Pauline) versions of the gospel, Paul's letters would not have been too helpful for the achievement of this aim, even if they had been at Luke's disposal.

But on one level there is an impressive list of parallels between the Paul of Luke's narrative and the Paul of his own letters. The Paul of Acts, like the Paul of the letters, supports himself by his own labours rather than be financially burdensome to his friends and converts. That might be regarded as an incidental point in common between the two portraits, but it was integral to Paul's missionary policy. At a deeper level of missionary policy, the Paul who asserts in his letters that the order in which the gospel should be presented is "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16) is the Paul who in Acts visits the synagogue first in one city after another, apostle to the Gentiles though he is. "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you", he tells the unresponsive Jews of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:46); only when they have had an opportunity of accepting the message does he turn to the Gentiles and present it directly to them. It has indeed been argued that this going to the synagogue first is probably unhistorical, because the agreement reached with the leaders of the Jerusalem church was that they should be responsible for evangelizing Jews while Paul and Barnabas carried on their mission to the Gentiles. But the line of demarcation envisaged in this agreement cannot have been a clearcut one, and where would Paul go in the first instance to find a bridgehead for the gospel in the Gentile population of a new city to which he came if not to the group of Gentile "God-fearers" who attached themselves to the local synagogue?

It has been argued by some readers that Jewish hostility to the gospel is over-emphasized in Acts: riots are stirred up against Paul in most of the places which he visits, but only in two (Philippi and Ephesus) are they initiated by members of the local pagan population; elsewhere Jews are responsible. There is, however, one place in the Pauline writings where, apparently under great provocation, Jewish opponents of the gospel are denounced unsparingly as those who "displease God and oppose all human beings by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved" (1 Thessalonians 2:15 f.). These stern words could be

intelligible against the background of the Jewish action at Thessalonica described in Acts 17:5-9, 13; they come, moreover, in a letter of which Paul was not sole author. But the description of Jews as those who "oppose all human beings" is too disturbingly close to current pagan slanders about Jews for us to be totally happy about finding it in a letter proceeding from Jewish Christians. Textual criticism has nothing to say against the genuineness of the passage, but structural arguments have been put forward for regarding 1 Thessalonians 2: 13-16, or at least verses 15 and 16, as an interpolation. If verses 15 and 16 are a post-Pauline interpolation, then the statement about wrath coming on the Jews "for good and all" could be a reference to the disaster of A.D. 70.

Much more typical of Paul is his account in Romans 9:2 of the "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" which he endures at heart because so many of his Jewish kinsfolk are unwilling to accept the gospel in which alone, he is persuaded, their true well-being can be realized. It is the same Paul who in Acts, from Damascus to Rome, persists in going to the Jews first with the saving message in spite of repeated rebuffs.

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Paul, as portrayed by Luke, is the most adaptable of men. He makes himself at home in all sorts of company. It may be said that he has only one subject of conversation—the crucified and exalted Lord—but the presentation of that one subject is always suited to the audience. Whether he addresses Jews or Gentiles, learned or unlearned, Areopagus or Sanhedrin, synagogue congregation or city mob, Roman governor or King Agrippa, he chooses the right method of approach for each. This is the Paul who in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 speaks of his becoming as a Jew to Jews, in order to win Jews, or as one outside the law in order to win those who are outside the law—that is, Gentiles, who do not live under the Jewish law. "I have become all things to all", he says, "that I might by all means save some."

The importance of these words should not be minimized, even if it is unwarranted to use them as a blanket apology for inconsistencies of every kind. Paul's basic consistency lay in his faithfulness to his commission to preach the gospel; let that be maintained, and what might appear to be inconsistencies in secondary matters did not trouble him. His statement of his overriding policy may properly be related to incidents in Acts where he accommodates himself to Jewish customs more than the author of the letter to the Galatians might be expected to do. If such accommodation did not compromise the gospel, if, rather, it promoted the work to which he was called, no further justification was necessary. He was equally tolerant with others, increasingly so as time went on. Any compromise of the essential gospel of divine grace he could not admit, but if the true gospel was preached, he was prepared to overlook unworthy attitudes in its preachers. During his imprisonment in Rome, when he learned that some Christians who did not approve of him were preaching the gospel the more energetically because of his restrictions, hoping that this would make him feel frustrated and resentful, he welcomed the news of their activity. "What does the motive matter?" he asked. "Christ is being preached; that is the important thing, and that fills me with joy" (Philippians 1:17, 18).

Paul was prepared to go a long way to live like a Jew when he found himself in Jewish company. This, of course, came naturally to him: it was the way he had been brought up. Conformity to Jewish food laws in Jewish society was a matter of simple courtesy, not to

speak of Christian charity. Similarly he would not outrage Jewish sentiment by ignoring the sanctity of holy days. Those who thought that a man, once emancipated from these restrictions, ought not to recognize them in any circumstances failed to reckon with the fact that the truly emancipated person is not in bondage even to his emancipation. For himself, Paul had learned to "esteem all days alike" (Romans 14:5), but he continued to reckon the passage of time in terms of Jewish festivals: "I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost", he tells the Corinthian Christians towards the end of his Ephesian ministry (1 Corinthians 16:8). So also the Paul of Acts, a year or two later, decided, on his last voyage to Judaea, "to sail past Ephesus,... for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16).

Why, then, is he so dismayed that his Galatian converts have begun to "observe days, and months, and seasons, and years" (Galatians 4:10)? Because they were Gentiles by birth, and they had no reason to adopt the Jewish sacred calendar just because they had become Christians—least of all to adopt it as a legal obligation. Once Paul himself had inherited the observance of that sacred calendar as a legal obligation, but now he had learned to exercise complete freedom as regards its observance or non-observance; it was deplorable that Gentile believers who had no ancestral motivation for observing it should place themselves under the yoke of the commandments in this or any other way.

It is true that Paul, at a later date, manifested a more relaxed attitude when, writing to the Roman Christians about their diversity of practice in the observance of special days, he said, "Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). The Roman Christians were not his personal converts and he had not the same sense of responsibility for their spiritual development as he had for the Galatians. But more than that: the Roman church was a mixed community. Some of the groups which made it up consisted of Jewish Christians who had been brought up to observe the sacred calendar and had never ceased to do so. There was no reason for them to make an abrupt change in their practice, any more than there was for Gentiles who had never observed the calendar to begin to do so. Let each side go on without any sense of constraint, and let neither side criticize the other.

It was reported in Jerusalem, according to Luke, that Paul urged Jews in lands of the dispersion to give up circumcising their sons and maintaining the ancestral customs. It was probably Jewish Christians that the report had in view. The leaders of the Jerusalem church did not believe the report, but were disturbed because many did believe it, and recommended Paul to undertake a certain public action in order that every one might know, as they said, "that there is nothing in what they have been told about you but that you yourself live in observance of the law" (Acts 21:24).

Luke himself plainly believed that Paul had no objection to following Jewish customs when it was expedient to do so, and this is not at all inconsistent with Paul's own testimony. The following of the customs was an ethically neutral matter in his eyes, to be adopted or not in accordance with the interests of the gospel in any situation. As he saw it, there was a wide difference in principle between doing such

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things voluntarily and doing them from a sense of legal obligation.

This should be kept in mind when Luke describes Paul as undertaking a Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18) or as sponsoring others who were about to discharge such a vow (Acts 21:23-26). The latter occasion had a disastrous outcome, and Paul may not have been so sanguine as James and his colleagues were, when they advised him to take this course so as to persuade their stricter brethren that he was a perfectly observant Jew. Nevertheless, if they thought that Paul's taking this course would ease a difficult situation for them and enable them to accept the Gentile churches' gift without giving offence, then he would not refuse their request, whatever private doubts he entertained about its effectiveness. A Nazirite vow was a purely voluntary undertaking, with a long tradition of Jewish piety behind it; there was nothing in it that would compromise the gospel as Paul understood it.

It is certain that, in Jerusalem of all places, Paul would conduct himself as a practising Jew, if only out of consistency with his regular policy, which was to "give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God" and to "try to please all in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10: 32 f.). There were not many Greeks in Jerusalem, but both Jews and the church of God in that city would be scandalized if he failed to "observe the customs".

If this was Paul's own policy, we should not suppose that he expected other Jewish Christians to follow a different one. "Was any one circumcised when he was called?" he asks (1 Corinthians 7:18). "Let him not become uncircumcised". This probably means not merely that he should not have the marks of circumcision removed, but that he should not think it necessary to live as though he were not a Jew by birth and upbringing. If Paul had told such a person not to circumcise his sons, that would have been (for Paul) attaching undue importance to a rite which "in Christ" was neither here nor there (Galatians 5:6). Provided other Jewish Christians regarded the traditional practices as no longer divine requirements but as voluntary actions which might be undertaken or omitted as expediency directed, they might freely go on with them. What Paul was concerned about in this regard was that Jewish and Gentile Christians alike should respect each other's scruples, or lack of scruples.

But when Gentile Christians were being pressed to add circumcision and other Jewish observances to their faith in Christ as things which were necessary to complete their salvation and win the divine approval, then Paul remonstrated with them vigorously, because the basis of the gospel was being undermined. But even when remonstrating with his Galatian converts, he makes it plain that, in itself, circumcision is a matter of indifference: "neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Galatians 6:15). This is what we should expect from Paul: for him, external and ethically neutral acts or conditions are relatively unimportant; it is when they are given religious significance and viewed as means of establishing merit in the sight of God that they are to be deplored. If circumcision be accepted as a matter of law-keeping, then Paul declares solemnly "to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law" (Galatians 5:3); let it not be imagined that compliance with one small part of the law will be acceptable as a token performance of the whole law.

Surely, however, it may be argued, Luke stretches our credulity when he reports that Paul circumcised Timothy, whose home church of Lystra may indeed have been one of those churches to which the remonstrance of Galatians was addressed. Did Timothy, by receiving

circumcision at Paul's hands (if Luke is to be believed), become "bound to keep the whole law"? No, he did not, for his circumcision was neither performed nor accepted as a religious requirement. Paul circumcised him, says Luke, not to enhance Timothy's status in God's sight but "because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3). In Jewish law Timothy was a Jew, because he was the son of a Jewish mother; but he had not been circumcised, presumably because his Greek father would not allow the rite to be carried out. Paul was anxious to have Timothy as his junior colleague, but if Timothy had remained uncircumcised he would have ranked in Jewish eyes as an apostate and Paul would have ranked as a supporter of apostasy. If Paul was to continue to gain entrance to the synagogue in this or that place, Timothy's position had to be regularized.

No doubt many people would have detected an inconsistency in Paul's procedure. But the distinction must be made between a higher and a lower consistency. If a man of emancipated mind wishes for certain proper purposes to perform a ritual act which in itself is ethically indifferent (as circumcision now was for Paul), he will perform it, not by compulsion but of his own free will. If expediency required that Timothy should be circumcised for his greater usefulness in the gospel ministry, Paul did not hesitate to circumcise him. In those days there were many (as there are in our own days) who could not grasp the difference in principle between doing such things voluntarily and doing them by way of religious obligation, and such people charged Paul with inconsistency. It appears from Galatians 5:11 that some said that Paul, for all his insistence on justification by faith, apart from legal works, nevertheless still preached circumcision in some situations. This could have been a reference to his circumcision of Timothy, but more probably it reflected the fact that Paul,

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before his conversion, had been active in winning proselytes to Judaism from paganism, and had insisted (unlike some proselytizers of that period) on their being circumcised. But, as he pointed out, if he were still following that policy, he would not be subjected to the persecution that he now experienced.

IV. PAUL THE THEOLOGIAN

When Luke portrays Paul as a theologian, he does so as one who was himself a theologian. Luke had not been brought up under the law of Moses and had no experience of the displacement of the law as the foundation for life which made such a difference to Paul. It is conceivable that Luke was a proselyte to Judaism before he became a Christian, but there is no evidence for this. It is frequently said that Luke's gospel was a theology of glory while Paul's was a theology of the cross. There is a measure of truth in this, although the antithesis between the two is not so sharp as is sometimes represented. Luke has rightly been called the theologian of salvation history, but salvation history is not a concept alien to Paul's thinking. Paul had his own scheme of salvation history, in which the age of the law, running from Moses to Christ, was a parenthesis, interrupting the age of promise, which was inaugurated with Abraham and consummated in the gospel.

It has become a commonplace in the study of Acts that the speeches which it contains, including those ascribed to Paul, give expression to Luke's theology. It will be helpful to look

briefly at three of the Pauline speeches in Acts: one delivered to Jews and God-fearers, one to pagans, and one to Christians.

(a) *In the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch*

Paul's synagogue address at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41) presents the gospel against the background, familiar to a synagogue congregation, of the history of Israel recorded in the Old Testament. As Paul, in Romans 1:3, says that Jesus was "descended from David according to the flesh" (perhaps quoting a primitive confession of faith), so in his synagogue address he is said to have begun by recounting the earlier phase of salvation history, the mighty acts of God from Moses to David (cf. Psalm 78:51-72), and then to have gone on: "Of David's posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised..." (Acts 13:23). In this retrospect, even if it begins with the Exodus of Moses' day, there is no word about the giving of the law; it is the fulfilment of promise that is emphasized—the promise made to David, to be sure, rather than that made to Abraham. Then Paul tells of the culminating phase of salvation history, the mighty acts of God in Christ, crowned by the resurrection, in fulfilment of psalmody and prophecy.

There are marked affinities between what Paul says here and what Peter says in Jerusalem at the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2: 22-36), but perhaps there was not much difference in substance between the Pauline and Petrine presentations of the gospel to Jewish audiences. If Paul, faced with a congregation in one of the synagogues of the dispersion, did not speak as Luke makes him speak here, then how did he speak? We may grant that there is less of the theology of the cross in this speech than we might expect from the Paul of the epistles, and when Paul here tells how the risen Christ "appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people" (Acts 13:31), we may be sure that the historical Paul added, "Last of all he appeared also to me" (1 Corinthians 15:8). But a Pauline touch is introduced at the end of the address. Where others proclaimed that through Jesus forgiveness of sins was offered to all believers (cf. Acts 2:38; 10:43), Paul at Pisidian Antioch not only says that "through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" but adds that "by him every one that believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by Moses' law" (Acts 13:38, 39). True, from these words as they stand the full Pauline doctrine of justification by faith could not be deduced; but the words can be construed quite consistently with the teaching of Romans 3:20-26, that God "justifies him who has faith in Jesus" whereas "no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law". The language of Acts 13:39 need not be taken to mean that Moses' law justifies from some offences, but that faith in Christ takes over where Moses' law fails and justifies from the remaining offences. This would indeed be a very un-Pauline thought, but it is probably as un-Lukan as it is un-Pauline.

b) *Before the Areopagus*

Paul's address before the court of the Areopagus at Athens has been dismissed with special confidence as un-Pauline. It is set in a context not merely of salvation history but of world history. To some modern theologians salvation history can be only doubtfully squared with Paul's outlook, but a world-historical perspective is out of the question. This address, moreover, instead of setting forth the Pauline gospel, anticipates the rationalism of the apologists of the second century in its attempt to establish the true knowledge of God by an

appeal to pagan poets and philosophers. The "word of the cross" is tactfully omitted, because it was known to be "folly to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1: 23). The Pauline emphasis on being "in Christ" by grace is replaced by a pagan emphasis on being "in God" by nature. All this, and more to the same effect, we are accustomed to hear from those who find it impossible to ascribe the Athenian speech of Acts 17: 22-31 to the real Paul.

Yet there are remarkable parallels between this speech and the first three chapters of the letter to the Romans, if it is remembered that the letter is address-

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sed to Christians who do not need to be persuaded of the folly of idolatry, whereas the speech is addressed to pagans who do require such persuasion. In the letter Paul insists that the Creator's 'eternal power and divinity' can be clearly discerned in his works, to the point where failure to discern them is inexcusable (Romans 1:18-23). In the letter, too, he indicates that the saving work of Christ has brought about a change in God's dealings with mankind! Hitherto "in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" but now he has provided his Son as an effective "expiation to be received by faith" (Romans 3:21-26).

If the author of these words is brought to Athens and invited to expound his teaching not to fellow—believers but to cultured pagans, what will he say? We must remember that he has now for several years been an effective preacher of the gospel in the pagan world. This fact, despite his modest disclaimer in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and elsewhere, implies considerable persuasiveness in speech and approach, including the ability to find and exploit an initial area of common ground with his hearers, apart from which any attempt at communication would be fruitless. This being so, I find it difficult to imagine him as saying something very different from what Luke represents him as saying. He will not alienate his hearers in the first words addressed to them, but he will tell them that idolatry is not only foolish but inexcusable, because the knowledge of the one true God is available in his works of creation and providence. He may even point out that some of their own thinkers have perceived that human beings are the offspring of the supreme God who is the source and support of their life. He will tell them, most probably, that God is willing to overlook their past ignorance of his nature, culpable though it is, since the Christ—event has introduced a new factor into the divine—human relationship, which demands a change of mind and practice. The apostle who, in Romans 2:16, speaks of "that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus", could very well emphasize before a pagan audience that God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given a pledge to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Paul had abundant precedent in the Old Testament scriptures for stressing the folly of idolatry and of the idea that the supreme God could be accommodated in a material building, and also for his insistence that the supreme God provides all his creatures with food to eat and space to dwell in, while he himself is not dependent on anything that they may offer him. While echoes of those scriptures are recognizable in his speech to those who are familiar with them, he naturally does not introduce quotations from them when speaking to hearers who are totally unacquainted with them. In addressing synagogue congregations or in dictating letters to Christians Paul might make liberal use of such quotations to illustrate his points or confirm his arguments. But here is a different situation; therefore, if poets whom his hearers do

acknowledge as authorities have expressed sentiments in general agreement with his arguments, he will quote them, giving their words a fresh nuance from the new context in which they are quoted. We underestimate Paul's versatility, his capacity to be "all things to all men", if we think that he could not have presented the teaching of the first three chapters of Romans to a pagan audience along the lines of Acts 17:22-31. True, Luke did not hear Paul's address to the court of the Areopagus, but he knew how Paul was accustomed to present his *praeparatio evangelica* to a pagan audience, and followed the Thucydidean example of giving the general purport of what was actually said. And if (as Luke assures us) some of Paul's hearers on this occasion believed his message, it could have been said of them, precisely as was said of converts in Thessalonica some weeks earlier, that they "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10).

c) To the Ephesian elders

The ship that was carrying Paul and his companions on his last journey to Judaea put in at Miletus for a few days, and Paul sent an urgent message to the elders of the church at Ephesus to come and meet him at Miletus. When they arrived, he talked with them, and the record of what he said is preserved in Acts 20: 18-35 as Paul's "last will and testament" to his Gentile converts, according to Luke.

Of all the speeches attributed to Paul in Acts this is the only one addressed to Christians; it is not surprising, then, that it presents more parallels to the thought and wording of Paul's letters than any of his other speeches in Acts, not least to the thought and wording of the letter to the Ephesians. (If both this speech and letter to the Ephesians are genuinely Pauline, the parallels are to be expected; if the genuineness of one or both documents be questioned, then some explanation in terms of literary dependence must be given.) This speech, moreover, comes in the context of one of the "we sections" of Acts, and a simple-minded reader (like the present writer) might infer from this that the narrator of the "we sections" is here reporting or summarizing an address which he himself heard.

The speech to the Ephesian elders contains the most explicit mention of the redemptive efficacy of the death of Christ to be found anywhere in Luke's history. According to the text and rendering preferred for Acts 20:28, Paul says to the elders either "Feed the church of the Lord, which he purchased by his own blood" or "Feed the church of God, which he purchased by the blood of his own (Son)." If the speech

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were composed by Luke, such language would be surprising; it is by no means out of place in a speech from the lips of Paul. It has indeed been argued that the author of Acts, in composing this speech, introduced a form of words current in the church in order to give the speech a Pauline stamp. But it is easier to believe that the form of words is one of several features of this speech which mark it as authentically Paul's. Here Paul is not engaging in primary evangelism; he is addressing people who have already been evangelized and reminding them of the gospel which they accepted and of its implications for the ministry to which they have been called. Their situation is similar to that of the communities to which the Pauline letters were addressed, and the language used is correspondingly similar.

It may be felt that the Paul of Acts lacks the passionate affection and concern so characteristic of the Paul whom we know from his letters. But if that note is missing elsewhere in Acts, it is markedly present in the account of the meeting between Paul and the Ephesian elders. After he had addressed them and warned them that this was the last time they would see him, "they all wept and embraced Paul and kissed him" (Acts 20:37).

V. CONCLUSION

The Paul whose portrait Luke paints is the real Paul. It is the real Paul viewed in retrospect by a friend and admirer, whose own religious experience was different from Paul's, who expresses a distinctive theological outlook, who writes for another constituency than that for which Paul wrote his letters. It must be remembered, too, that Luke did not set out to write a life of Paul. He is concerned to portray the Jerusalem church and its leaders as well as the Gentile mission engaged in by Paul. Even within the Gentile mission, he finds room for other preachers than Paul. He wants to give a balanced picture of the whole Christian movement of the first generation, at least along the road from Jerusalem to Rome. As Luke contemplated the mission and expansion of Christianity, he saw that both the progressive Paul and the conservative church of Jerusalem had their God-given parts to play, and he aimed at doing justice to both. Both Paul and the church of Jerusalem, not to mention others, contributed to the faith and life of the second Christian generation, and Luke was more interested in the deeper unity which they shared than in tensions and conflicts which, however distressing they were at the time, now appeared to him to be temporary and superficial and best forgotten. We are thankful for the preservation of Paul's letters, which ensures that they have not been forgotten; but Luke's interests were different from ours.

A man's own work is his greatest monument, but a juster appreciation of him can be formed if it is possible to see him as others saw him. Luke provides Paul's letters with a wider context than that which the letters themselves supply; thanks to him, we have a fuller understanding of Paul's place in the world of his day and of the impact which he made on it.

To Archbishop Methodios, church historian and theologian, himself the son of a great church founded by St. Paul, and a very distinguished alumnus of the Manchester Faculty of Theology, this paper is presented with warm congratulations and best wishes on this auspicious conjunction of anniversaries. *In multos annos!*