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PAUL'S CONVERSION/CALL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE THREE REPORTS IN ACTS

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JOHANNES Munck has described the three accounts of Paul's "conversion" in Acts (9:1-19; 22:4-16 [with 22:17-21]; 26:12-18) as call/commissioning narratives modeled on the order of OT prophetic call/commissioning narratives.¹ He argues that, in spite of obvious differences that most modern scholars recognize among the reports,² when "we approach what is essential in the account [of Paul's conversion], namely its nature and meaning, the greater becomes the agreement."³ For Munck, the similarity in motif among all three allows one to argue that "the accounts in Acts go back to Paul, as they show a close connexion with Galatians."⁴ The similarity that Munck notes among the three passages in Acts, he also finds in Paul's own statement in Gal 1:15, namely that they understand Paul's experience in terms of the calls of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Yet, the *specific* motif in Gal 1:15 ("set me apart before I was born"), which Munck correctly associates with Isa 49:1-6 and Jer 1:4-5, does not appear in the narratives in Acts. Munck's thesis that all three accounts in Acts are modeled on OT call narratives is not convincing, although it is obvious that all three do share call/commissioning features. The general call/commissioning motifs, to which Munck points, seem an insufficient basis on which to argue that the Acts accounts "go back to Paul." A simpler and more reasonable explanation is that Luke was responsible for stylizing the narratives in Acts along the lines of OT call narratives. In short, Munck has not proven his thesis that "in all four accounts, Paul's call was related [i.e., narrated] in the same way as the call of the OT characters in the history of Salvation,"⁵ though he is quite right that all accounts do reflect call/commissioning motifs. Martin Dibelius, on the other

¹ J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1959) 24-35.

² *Ibid.*, 16-20.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵ J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; Garden City: Doubleday, 1967) 82.

hand, has attributed the differences in the accounts to the hand of Luke.⁶ Dibelius, however, did not work out in detail the literary solution to the problems of similarity/dissimilarity in the three accounts of Acts, as he did with the three accounts of the conversion of Cornelius and the two accounts of the vision of Peter (Acts 10:1–11:18).⁷ He was content with disproving the argument that the similarities and differences in the three accounts of Paul's "conversion" were to be attributed to different sources.⁸

There have been other attempts to define differently the form critical classification of the narratives of Paul's conversion/call. As early as 1932, Hans Windisch and others had noted the similarity in structure between Paul's conversion in Acts and the Heliodorus legend in 2 Maccabees 3 and other Hellenistic parallels.⁹ Recently Gerhard Lohfink has analyzed the Christophany in Acts 9:4–6, 22:7–10, 26:14–15 as an *Erscheinungsgespräch*, or a discourse in connection with a heavenly appearance, that Lohfink has found elsewhere only in the Elohistic tradition of the Pentateuch. On the basis of Luke's dependence upon the Septuagint in the book of Acts and the fact that the same form appears in the story of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts, Lohfink believes that Luke composed the narratives of Paul's conversion.¹⁰ Christoph Burchard has discussed the similarities in form and content between these parallels and the account of Paul's conversion/call in Acts 9, as well as pointing out its similarities to the Jewish-Hellenistic novel *Joseph and Aseneth*.¹¹

It does not appear, however, that a detailed comparative analysis of the structure of the three narratives in Acts has yet been made from the perspective of Luke's literary method.¹² Examined on this basis it

⁶M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1956) 158 n. 47. See also the brief discussion by E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 107–10 and H. J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: S. P. C. K. 1968) 213–38.

⁷Dibelius, *Studies in Acts*, 13–14, 94–95, 109–22.

⁸*Ibid.*, 177.

⁹H. Windisch, "Die Christusepiphanie vor Damascus (Act 9, 22 und 26) und ihre religionsgeschichtlichen Parallelen," *ZNW* 31 (1962) 1–23.

¹⁰G. Lohfink, "Eine alttestamentliche Darstellungsform für Gotteserscheinungen in den Damaskusberichten (Apg 9; 22; 26)," *BZ* 9 (1965) 246–57. Not all have been convinced by his evidence; see O. H. Steck, "Formgeschichtliche Bemerkungen zur Darstellung des Damaskusgeschehens in der Apostelgeschichte," *ZNW* 67 (1976) 20–28 and C. Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge: Traditions- und kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukas' Darstellung der Frühzeit des Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970) 54–55. See also Lohfink's *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1976) 61–85.

¹¹Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge*, 54–105.

¹²But compare Burchard's discussion, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge*, 105–36. See also the discussion by B. J. Hubbard, "The Role of Commissioning Accounts in Acts," *Perspectives on*

appears that Acts 9:1–19, Acts 22:4–16 and Acts 26:12–18 are in form three different narratives. While they share similar motifs and purport to describe the same incident, they utilize different literary modes. Acts 9:1–19 is basically a miracle story of the healing of Paul's blindness. Acts 22:4–16 appears to be a healing narrative that has been redacted into a commissioning narrative; Acts 26:12–18 is a commissioning narrative.

I. A Parallel Synopsis of the Structure of the Three Narratives

Acts 9 has arbitrarily been selected as the control narrative against which the structure of the other two narratives will be compared.

Motif	Acts 9:	Acts 22:	Acts 26:
(1) Letters to the synagogues from the high priest.	1–2	4–5 (Letters to the brethren from high priest and elders.)	12b (Authority & commission of chief priests but omits recipients.)
(2) He approached Damascus.	3a	6a	12a
(3) A light from heaven flashed around him.	3b	6b (<i>About noon</i> a great light shone about me.)	13 (<i>At midday</i> , I saw a great light brighter than the sun shining around me and <i>those with me</i> .)
(4) He fell to the ground.	4a	7a	14a (<i>We</i> fell to the ground.)
(5) He heard a voice saying to him,	4b	7b	14b (I heard a voice speaking <i>in the Hebrew language</i> .)
(6) "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"	4c	7c	14c (Adds: <i>It hurts to kick against the goads</i> .)
(7) And he said "Who are you Lord?"	5a	8a	15a
(8) And he said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."	5b	8b (Adds: <i>Jesus of Nazareth</i> .)	15b

Up to this point the similarity among the three accounts is striking—they are virtually the same! The dissimilarity in the verses that follow,

on *Luke-Acts* (ed. C. H. Talbert; Danville, VA: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978) 187–98, and T. Y. Mullins, "New Testament Commission Forms, Especially in *Luke-Acts*," *JBL* 95 (1976) 605–14.

however, is as great as is the similarity in the verses compared above. It is the latter "half" of the narratives that gives each its own distinctive formal character.

<i>Motif</i>	<i>Acts 9:</i>	<i>Acts 22:</i>	<i>Acts 26:</i>
(9) [omits]	[omits]	10a <i>And I said what shall I do Lord?</i>	[omits]
(10) Rise and enter the city and you will be told what to do.	6	10b (The <i>Lord</i> said to me: Rise and go into Damascus and there you will be told <i>all that is appointed for you to do.</i>)	16a (Rise and <i>stand upon your feet.</i>)
(11) The men travelling with him were speechless hearing the voice but seeing on one.	7	9 (Now those with me <i>saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one speaking to me.</i>)	[omits]
(12) Saul arose from the ground and when his eyes were opened he could see nothing.	8a	11a [omits: Saul arose] (And when I could not see <i>because of the brightness of the light.</i>)	[omits]
(13) (Companions) led him to Damascus by the hand.	8b	11b	[omits]
(14) For three days he was without sight and neither ate nor drank.	9	[omits]	[omits]
(15) Ananias is commanded by the Lord to go to Saul and to lay hands on him so he can regain his sight.	10-14	[omits]	[omits]
(16) The Lord speaks the Pauline commission to Ananias.	5:16	14-15 (Ananias speaks the commission to Saul.)	16b-18 (The Lord speaks the commission to Saul during the Christophany.)
(17) Ananias lays his hands on Saul saying "The Lord Jesus sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."	17	12-13a (Ananias comes to Saul and says "Brother Saul receive your sight.")	[omits]

(18)	Something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight.	18a	13b (I received my sight and saw him [Ananias].)	[omits]
(19)	Then he rose and was baptized and took food and was strengthened.	18b-19	16 (Ananias charges Saul: "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.")	[omits]

II. *Analysis of 9:1-9*

Structurally, the narrative appears to relate a Christophany (9:1-6)¹³ followed by a narrative of healing (9:7-19). A statement of commissioning appears in verses 13-16 but it is not a primary feature of the narrative since it is not made to Paul but to Ananias and, according to the narrative, is never made to Paul. When examined in comparison with the other two narratives, it appears that the narrative in Acts 9 emphasizes the healing of Paul.

In 9:9 it is stated that, as a result of an encounter with the Lord, Paul could see nothing for three days. It is clear that the blindness is not a temporary natural phenomenon such as might be caused by staring too long at a bright light (9:3), because in 9:18 it is stated that Paul was "blind" as a result of "something like scales" being on his eyes.¹⁴ Ananias is told by the Lord that Paul is awaiting "healing" at his (Ananias's) hands (9:12). And when Ananias goes to Paul, he lays his hands on him and tells him that the Lord sent him (Ananias) to Paul for the purpose of healing his blindness and imparting to him the holy spirit (9:17). The conclusion to the narrative is met in verse 18a, when "the scales fall from his eyes and he regains his sight." The baptism (18b) (possibly) and the eating of food (19) are included to demonstrate the effectiveness of the healing, in the same way that Paul's failure to eat and to drink for three days is mentioned immediately after his becoming blind (9:9) in order to accentuate the effect of the blindness.

The commissioning statement contained in 9:13-16 plays no part in the narrative, except to secure the services of Ananias as the "handy man" of the Lord. It will be noted that there is no reluctant Ananias in 22:12-13 who needs convincing, hence there is no need for a statement

¹³ See Lohfink, "Eine alttestamentliche Darstellungsform," 246-57.

¹⁴ In this context Paul's blindness appears to be understood as the result of divine disfavor, such as it appears in Numbers 12:9-16 and Acts 13:9-11 or, perhaps, as an act of God designed to induce compliance with the divine will, such as Exodus 4:1-9.

by the Lord to convince him. In Acts 9 Ananias balks at going to Paul because of the reports concerning Paul's persecution of the church (9:13-14). At that point the Lord reveals to Ananias that Paul is a "chosen instrument" who will carry the Lord's name to Gentiles, kings and the sons of Israel (9:15). This "commission" is made only to Ananias and is never made to Paul in the narrative or immediately afterwards. In fact, 9:16 *implies* that the Lord himself will make a revelation to Paul at some future time! Ananias then proceeds to Paul and fulfills in 9:17b the task that the Lord had given him in 9:12; Paul's sight is restored at the laying on of Ananias's hands. (The additional feature in verse 9:17b, the receiving of the holy spirit, is discussed below.) The action takes place in 9:17b almost as though the revelation to Ananias in 9:13-16 had not happened. Ananias makes no reference to Paul's commission, as he does in Acts 22:14-15.

Acts 9:13-16 has all the earmarks of an attempt to harmonize 9:1-19 with the accounts in Acts 22 and 26. 9:13-14 reproduces the hostile pre-conversion character of Paul, essentially as it appears in Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2, 21, 26; 22:3-5, 20 and 26:9-12. The repeated emphasis of the motif in connection with Paul's conversion reflects an intention to emphasize the remarkable character of Paul's conversion by contrast with Paul's pre-conversion hostility to the church. In a sense, the verses serve to validate Paul's conversion. Hence, 9:13-14 probably reflects Luke's theology, or the tradition of the church. In any case, they are not a necessary part of the literary structure of the narrative in Acts 9:3-19, since Paul's hostility had already been described in Acts 9:1-2.

9:15-16 is also better understood in the light of Luke's literary and theological concerns, than in terms of Paul's life experience. It is not accidental that the commissioning statement in Acts 9:15-16 differs markedly from the commissioning statements in the parallel accounts (Acts 22:14-15; 26:16-18). Of all three statements Acts 9:15-16 best captures the spirit and style of Luke's worldwide missionary theme for the book in Acts 1:8 (compare similar statements at 9:31; 13:46-47; 26:19-20). Acts 9:15-16 is the only commissioning statement that specifically mentions both Gentile and Jewish missions and the commission has a structure and style similar to Acts 1:8:

Acts 1:8: "You shall be *my witnesses* in *Jerusalem* and in *all Judea, and Samaria* and to the *end of the earth*."

Acts 9:15: "He is a chosen instrument . . . to *carry my name* before the *Gentiles* and *kings* and the *sons of Israel*."

While the other two commissioning statements do retain the worldwide missionary emphasis, they are composed specifically in terms of the Christophany experienced by Paul. In these latter two instances,

Paul's missionary enterprise is not framed in generalities, as it is in Acts 1:8 (to be my witnesses) and Acts 9:15 (to carry my name). In Acts 22 and 26, Paul is directed to testify specifically about what he has seen and heard on the road to Damascus. The missionary charge to preach "before kings" in Acts 9:15 is Luke's anticipation of the way he closed Paul's public ministry by having Paul preach before King Agrippa (Acts 26:1-32), and it is suggestive of a Pauline appearance before Caesar (cf. Acts 23:11, 25:10-12 and 27:23-24.) The statement about suffering in 9:16 is Luke's anticipation of the rigors of Paul's missionary life as described by Luke in Acts 12:25-28:31. In short, Acts 9:15-16 functions as a literary device that helps the reader to anticipate the development of Luke's plot.

Luke has, further, strategically placed the narrative of Paul's conversion/call at the point of a dramatic thematic shift in the book. In Acts 1:8 Luke sets out both the theme and the structure for his book: "You shall receive power when the holy spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Luke's book is structured in precisely that way:

The Descent of the Spirit on the Church 2:1-42

The Witness in Jerusalem 3:1-5:41

The Witness in Judea and Samaria 6:1-9:31

The Witness to the End of the Earth 9:32-23:31¹⁵

Since Paul is the great missionary to the Gentiles, it is appropriate that his conversion/call immediately precede the worldwide spread of the gospel. Hence, Luke introduces it immediately before the movement of the gospel into the Gentile world, as the conclusion to the Palestinian mission (see the summary statement at 9:31).

As Perrin notes, Luke in 9:15-16 has deliberately redacted the narrative of Paul's conversion/call in the light of Acts 1:8.¹⁶ Therefore, it contains references to both the Gentile and Jewish missions although the emphasis is upon the Gentile mission which Luke now places first in the commissioning statement at 9:15-16 (cf. Acts 1:8 where the "Gentile" motif is only inferred ["the end of the earth"] in the last position). On the other hand, all reference to a Jewish mission has been omitted from the commissioning statements in Acts 22 and 26, simply because these narratives follow Paul's decisive rejection of the Jewish mission in Acts 13: 44-52. Hence, the specific inclusion of a Jewish mission in those narratives would be inconsistent with Luke's final phase of the spread of the gospel.

¹⁵ See N. Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 205-19. See also Hubbard, "The Role of Commissioning Accounts," 195-98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

Without Luke's redaction of 9:13–16, the rest of the narrative (Acts 9:7–12, 17–19) has the character of a simple miracle story coupled with a Christophany (9:4–6).¹⁷ The narrative reflects many of the characteristic features of miracle stories identified elsewhere. It contains: a description of the physical ailment (9:8–9, 18); a description of the length of the ailment (9:9); the approach of the miracle worker (9:17a). The miracle worker effects the healing of Paul by laying his hands on him (9:17b)¹⁸ and by making a verbal statement, corresponding to the use of a miracle working word (9:17c). The healing is described as taking place instantly (9:18). The demonstration of the healing comes in the form of Paul taking food (9:19). The amazed reaction of the crowd, a motif that usually follows the healing in miracle stories, is lacking in Acts 9, probably because Luke has included no crowd in his narrative. Yet the "amazement" motif may have influenced Luke's description of the reaction of synagogue audiences to the preaching of Paul in 9:21.¹⁹

The motif of receiving the holy spirit (9:17b) is probably a Lucan addition to a legendary miracle of Paul's healing. It conforms to Lucan theological concerns pertaining to conversion found elsewhere;²⁰ is lacking in the commission of the Lord to Ananias in 9:12, where one would have expected to find it; and is not part of the resolution of the narrative in 9:18–19, where Paul is baptized.

The explanation for the motif of Paul's being baptized after the healing had taken place (9:18c) is less certain. It may simply be a Lucan redaction of the legend in order to balance off Luke's earlier reference to the holy spirit (9:17b) with its Lucan theological corollary, baptism.²¹ However, perhaps Luke simply reversed the order of 9:18c ("was baptized"), taking it from an original and more appropriate position following 9:19, where it served as part of the demonstration of the healing. In that sense, Paul was baptized as demonstration of his healing much in the fashion of the leper whom Jesus sent to the priest to make an offering for his cleansing "as Moses commanded, for a proof to the people"

¹⁷ I agree with Étienne Trocmé, who already in 1957 recognized the classical motifs of the miracle story in the Acts 9 account. Trocmé argued that it seemed to him completely improbable that Luke could have *created* these features since Luke's interest was focused on the conversion of Saul: *Le "Livre des Actes" et l'histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957) 174–79.

¹⁸ In Acts the "laying on of hands" is associated with receiving the holy spirit but elsewhere it is found as a standard feature in miracle stories. Compare Luke 4:40–41 with Mark 1:32–34. See also Mark 5:23; 6:5; 16:18 and Luke 13:13.

¹⁹ See R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963) 209–44, especially 209–15, 218–31 for the common *topoi* of the miracle stories, and Trocmé, *Le "Livre des Actes,"* 174–79.

²⁰ See Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 92, 142, 183–84, 187, 251, 304, 308, 358–59, 553–54, 556.

²¹ *Ibid.*

(Luke 5:14 = Mark 1:44; cf. Luke 17:11–19; 18:35–43). In short, the narrative in Acts 9:1–19 parallels those miracle stories that were circulating in the earliest Christian communities and is precisely the kind of story about the “conversion” of Saul that one might expect to develop in churches that collected miracle stories, and used them for homiletical purposes.

A striking parallel to the conversion/call of Paul, that to my knowledge has not been noted before, can be found in the Coptic *Act of Peter* (BG 8502, Coptic pages 135–38).²² The story describes the spiritual conversion of a wealthy man named Ptolemy in the form of a healing narrative very similar to that in Acts 9. Ptolemy apparently kidnapped the daughter of Peter and when he tried to force himself upon her, the Lord paralyzed the child on one side of her body in order to protect her virginity. Ptolemy was grief stricken over the incident and became blind because of the many tears he shed. He prepared to commit suicide and on the ninth hour of that day he “saw” a great light shining throughout his house and a voice, later identified as the Lord, spoke to him from the light. Ptolemy was told to go to the house of Peter where he will “see the Lord’s glory” and Peter will “explain the matter” to him. Since he is blind, Ptolemy has his servants lead him to Peter where he “saw with the eyes of his flesh and the eyes of his soul.” As a result he did many good things and gave many “the gift of God.” The narrative has the classic motifs of the healing narrative, as they appear in Acts 9, but without the commissioning features that Luke has added.

III. *Analysis of Acts 22:4–16 with 17–21*

By contrast the account in Acts 22 appears to relate a Christophany (22:4–10) followed by an account of a commissioning (22:11–16). While it retains some of the language and motifs of the healing narrative, these play no significant role in the narrative in Acts 22. In 22:9, the statement about the companions of Paul seeing the light but not hearing the voice interrupts the conversation between the Lord and Paul, i.e., it disrupts the continuity between verses 8 and 10. In Acts 9, the statement logically follows the Christophany and in that context serves to emphasize the miraculous character of the total incident. There the men are “speechless,” since they heard “a voice” but saw “no one” (9:7).

In 22:9, on the other hand, the companions of Paul do not react in astonishment. In fact, *no* action on the part of Paul’s companions is described in the narrative, except that they led Paul into Damascus (22:11). 22:9 is formally a “pause” in the dialog between Paul and the

²² See J. Brashler and D. M. Parrott, “The Act of Peter (BG 8502, 4),” *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (ed. J. M. Robinson; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977) 475–77.

Lord. As such, it interrupts the progress of the narrative. Both in terms of position and character, it stands out from its context. In terms of position, it clearly interrupts, for no evident reason, the dialog between Paul and the Lord. With respect to character, the verse is explanatory. It is a digression that plays no role in the action of the narrative.

The explanatory statement further lessens the miraculous character of the incident in that it eliminates in Chapter 22 the "bodiless voice" that astonished Paul's companions in 9:7. The voice is now identified as belonging to "the one" speaking to Paul (22:9). The only physical phenomenon observed by Paul's companions seems to be the bright light (22:6) that had blinded Paul (22:11). Paul's companions in Chapter 22 are completely excluded from the Christophany. The question in 22:10a, lacking in Acts 9, changes the character of the entire incident and in connection with verses 22:10b and 22:14 flips the latter half of this narrative into a commissioning narrative. In 22:10a Paul asks, "What shall I do, Lord?" Luke's use of *κύριος* here is not the respectful "sir" of 22:8, but it implies the recognition of Jesus as the Lord of the church, as is clearly shown by the next sentence: "And the *Lord* said to me. . . ." The thrust of Paul's question is not as one might expect, "What shall I do about my blindness?" but rather "What shall I do for you, Lord?" Put in other words, he is saying, "What is my commission?" This is shown by the response of the Lord in 22:10b, "In Damascus you will be told all that *is appointed* for you to do," and in 22:14, "The God of our fathers *appointed you* . . . you will be a witness for him to all men. . . ."

The blindness is mentioned almost incidentally. It is not caused by scales miraculously introduced by divine action, as it appeared in Acts 9, but it seems to be a normal sort of blindness that comes from staring too long into a bright light (22:11). This new "explanation" for the cause of Paul's blindness clearly contradicts Acts 9:18. Paul's companions, who now do not hear a "bodiless voice," have no reason to stare at the bright light and, hence, are not blinded. The failure of Paul's companions to be blinded was not a problem in Acts 9, since Paul's blindness there was the result of divine action and not a natural occurrence as in Acts 22:11. Further, rather than being blind for three days, as it appears in 9:9, Paul received his sight immediately upon entering the city. While Ananias still pronounces the word of healing (22:13), he is not commissioned *specifically* to heal Paul's blindness. Nor do we find the blindness being cured by the dramatic touch of the healer's hands (9:17), or other miracle story motifs.

The healing is further displaced as the climax of the narrative. In Acts 9 everything led up to the healing of Paul's blindness, but in Acts 22 the climax is the commission spoken in 22:14–15 by Ananias to Paul. In Acts 9, the concluding structure of the narrative is as follows:

Ananias is charged to heal Paul's blindness, 9:10-12; the Lord instructs Ananias why he is to go to Paul, 9:13-16; Ananias lays his hands on Paul and describes his own commission as one of healing and imparting the holy spirit, 9:17; Paul's blindness is cured, 9:18; and the reality of the cure is demonstrated through Paul's taking of food and the act of baptism (9:18c-19).

On the other hand, in Acts 22 the concluding structure of the narrative is as follows: Ananias comes to Paul and speaks the word of healing, 22:12-13a; Paul receives his sight, 22:13b; and receives his commission from Ananias, 22:14-15. The call to baptism (22:16) does not seem to be related to the healing in Acts 22 as it was in Acts 9, where it is associated with those motifs that demonstrated the effectiveness of the healing. Rather, in Acts 22 it appears as a natural result of Paul's being commissioned. That is to say, because you have been commissioned by the Lord, demonstrate what has happened to you by the public act of taking the name of Christ in baptism. In this context, Paul's baptism is his first witness to what he has seen and heard (22:15), rather than a demonstration of his healing.²³ That the commission is the important feature of the narrative is indicated by verses 22:17-21, where Paul's commission is again stressed by a second vision in which the Lord himself alludes to Paul's future commission.

The commissioning statement (Acts 22:14-15) appears to be an integral part of the larger narrative, Acts 22:6-21. The commission is made to Paul following his conversion (22:10a), as a direct result of the Lord's sending him to Damascus specifically to receive his "appointment" (22:10b). The commission says that Paul was the one appointed to "hear a voice" from the Lord's mouth; hence, the larger narrative excludes Paul's companions (22:9), although in so doing it contradicts the narrative in Acts 9. The commission says that Paul was to "see the Just One"; hence the larger narrative insists that Paul's companions saw only a bright light. Acts 9:7 had already indicated that they saw "no one." The commissioning statement understands the combination of "bright light" and "voice" (22:6-7) as the appearance of the Lord that Paul was appointed to see. Paul's blindness is not an unexpected corollary to seeing a divine figure. Compare the "dazzling apparel" of the two men at the tomb in Luke 24:4 (= Matt 28:2-3), the altered countenance of Jesus at the transfiguration (Luke 9:29), and the experience of Moses in Exodus 33:17-23.

Further, it appears that Luke has rewritten the commissioning statement in 22:14-15 in order to accommodate the larger context of the incident in that setting. In 9:15-16 when referring to the extent of the commission, Luke specifies that it includes the Gentiles as well as

²³ See also Acts 2:38 and 19:4-6.

the Jews. But in 22:15 he *generalizes* the commission by saying that it includes "all men." He then transposes the statement about the Gentiles to 22:21, where it becomes the (literary) reason for the anger of the crowds that leads to Paul's imprisonment and the further aggravation of the situation (22:22–30).

The account in Acts 22 assumes and builds upon the account in Acts 9. In Acts 22, it is not stated whence comes the commission that Ananias recites to Paul (22:14–15). It does not explain why Ananias sought out Paul (22:12–13). The lack of that information in Acts 22 constitutes a breakdown in the logic of the narrative. The reader of the book of Acts, however, has no difficulty, since he has *already* been given that information in Acts 9:10–16! Hence, for the account in Acts 22 to be logically consistent, it must be read in the light of Acts 9.

This is also true of Luke's failure to explain in Acts 22 that Paul arose from the ground at the command of the Lord (22:10). It was really unnecessary for Luke to repeat it, since he had *already* said in 9:8 that Paul had risen from the ground. While the lack of this statement in Acts 22 does introduce a logical inconsistency, the reader of the narrative would naturally "provide" that feature from his reading of Acts 9. Thus, one may reasonably argue that the account in Acts 22 has a *literary dependence* on the account in Acts 9; or put another way Acts 22 is composed with the assumption of facts given only in Acts 9.

IV. *Analysis of Acts 26:12–18*

The third narrative is clearly a commissioning narrative. There is no mention in the narrative of blindness or healing, and all miracle story motifs are lacking. The bright light at noon is apparently seen by everyone, since all fall to the ground, although no one is blinded. In 26:14–15 Paul experiences the Christophany and in that *same* moment—not later as it appears in Acts 9 and 22—the Lord himself rather than Ananias (22:14–15) commissions Paul in 26:16–18. The statement about "kicking against the goads" in 26:14 should probably be understood in the context of the commissioning presently taking place; that is, "Paul you can't deny the charge that I am about to give you."²⁴ Further, the context clarifies that the content of Paul's vision had indeed been a commission. In Acts 26:19–23 "Paul" describes his initial response to the experience as obedience to the "heavenly vision" by declaring at Damascus, Jerusalem, throughout Judea and to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God. There is no such motif following the narrative in Acts 22 and 9. Luke's literary theme is clearly evident; compare Acts 1:8.

²⁴ The statement is a Greek proverb indicating the futility of continued opposition. See Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 685 for the relevant literature.

The narrative is again composed for its new literary setting in Acts 26 and the commission (Acts 22:14–15) is rewritten to suit Paul's address to Agrippa. The commission spoken to Paul in 26:16–18 exceeds its character as commission and becomes homily at 26:18b. It is actually part of the witness to Agrippa (26:19–23), rather than commission to Paul (26:16–18a).

Since Luke is apparently building on the narratives in Acts 9 and 22, he can in Acts 26 compose a highly schematic narrative. He omits the blindness, Paul rising and being led to Damascus and the account of Ananias. He does allude, however, to these features in an oblique way. The reference to Paul falling to the ground (26:14), the command to rise (26:16), and the brief allusion to Paul's companions imply those events on the road *as narrated in Acts 9 and 22*. The statement about "declaring first to those at Damascus" (26:20) implies the entire complex of events that occurred at Damascus, including Paul's healing at the hands of Ananias. At least it does to the reader already familiar with the narratives in Acts 9 and 22! The reader already knew that information and Luke apparently did not feel constrained to repeat it.²⁵ Indeed, to have done so would have made a boring narrative. In Acts 26, Luke reports the one element lacking in the accounts in Acts 9 and 22, and that is the *precise commission* that the Lord spoke to Paul on the Damascus road.

This precise commission Luke has carefully concealed from the reader in the accounts in Acts 9 and 22.²⁶ Yet he maintains the element of suspense by alluding to it in the commission to Ananias (9:15–16), and in the brief report of Barnabas to the apostles (9:27),²⁷ by referring to its contents secondhand through Ananias (22:14–15), and by having the Lord allude to it in 22:17–21. It is not until 26:16–18 that the suspense is broken and Luke finally tells his (impatient) reader exactly what the Lord said to Paul on the road to Damascus.²⁸

V. *The Contradictions*

I agree with Dibelius that a traditional legend of the "conversion" of Saul is to be found in Acts 9:1–19,²⁹ to which it appears that Luke

²⁵ See Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 692.

²⁶ For other appearances of the Lord to Paul see 22:17–21, and 23:11. The only vision that Paul has after the account in Acts 26 is an appearance of an angel in 27:23–24.

²⁷ On the element of suspense in Acts see Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 236–37.

²⁸ So G. Lohfink, "'Meinen Namen zu tragen . . .'" (Apg 9, 15)," *BZ* 10 (1966) 114–15.

²⁹ Dibelius, *Studies in Acts*, 110, 159–60. This is also Burchard's conclusion, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge*, 120–21. Munck (*Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 17), however, takes Acts 22 to be the source and Acts 9 to be a Hellenized adaptation by Luke, as does T. L. Budesheim, "Paul's Abschiedsrede in the Acts of the Apostles," *HTR* 69 (1976) 9–30.

added the statement about receiving the holy spirit (9:17b), the revelation to Ananias in 9:13–16 and possibly also the statement about baptism in 9:18c. Acts 26:12–18 and 22:4–21 are compositions by Luke and their differences from each other and the account in Acts 9 are due to Luke's literary style and method.³⁰ For the account in Acts 22:4–21, Luke has edited the traditional legend in a radical fashion, but has used certain elements of the traditional legend to compose a completely different narrative in Acts 26:12–18.

The apparent clash between 9:7 and 22:9 is perhaps the most obvious contradiction and the most difficult to explain. In Acts 9:7 it is stated that the companions of Paul heard the "voice" (*φωνή*) but saw no one. In Acts 22:9 it is stated that Paul's companions saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one speaking to Paul.

For a solution, many have appealed to the well-known difference in classical Greek between the meaning of *ἀκούειν* when used with the genitive and the accusative. The argument has been clearly stated by J. L. Lilly.³¹ In Acts 9:7 *ἀκούειν φωνῆς* (genitive) means simply that a sound has been heard without reference to intellectual perception of ideas. In Acts 22:9, on the other hand, *ἀκούειν φωνήν* (accusative) means that the sound heard has been intellectually perceived. Lilly recognizes that in the New Testament both constructions are used indiscriminately with the meaning of intellectual perception. Yet he feels that a difference in meaning is justified in this case because of the use of *τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι* ("of him speaking to me") in Acts 22:9. This addition implies intellectual comprehension of articulate sounds for Acts 22:9 and suggests that one is, therefore, justified in assuming the classical Greek distinction in meaning between the constructions. Hence, in 9:7 Luke means to say they heard the sound of a voice, and in 22:9 he means to say that, although they heard the sound of a voice, they did not understand it. What is negated in the sentence in 22:9 is

Budesheim argues that the speech of Paul in Acts 22:1–21 is traditional material used by Luke. Compare also Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 328–29.

³⁰ Dibelius has conclusively shown that the speeches in Acts are Lucan compositions. See, for example, Dibelius, *Studies in Acts*, 138–85, and in particular 158–61. Acts 22:4–21 appears in Paul's speech to the Jews in Jerusalem and Acts 26:12–18 appears in Paul's speech to King Agrippa at Caesarea. Compare the brief analysis of Luke's literary method by William Prentice, "St. Paul's Journey to Damascus," *ZNW* 46 (1955) 250–55. See also the discussions by Lohfink, *The Conversion of St. Paul*, 49–61; F. Veltmann, "The Defense Speeches of Paul in Acts," *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, 243–56, and Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 184–93.

³¹ See J. L. Lilly, "The Conversion of Saint Paul: The Validity of his Testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *CBQ* 6 (1944) 183–84 for the relevant bibliography. See also A. Girlanda, "De Conversione Pauli in Actibus Apostolorum tripliciter narrata," *VD* 39 (1961) 78–81. I note that Lohfink (*The Conversion of St. Paul*, 37–38) considers this solution possible.

not the hearing of what was spoken, but the understanding of what was heard.

If one admits the distinction in meaning between the two constructions, there is no contradiction between the two verses. If Luke understood *φωνῆς* in Acts 9:7 to mean unintelligible "sound" or "noise," then he may have conceived of an event such as we find in John 12:27–29 where God speaks to Jesus, who perceives articulate speech, while the crowd with him merely heard "sound" or "noise": "The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said 'an angel has spoken to him'" (John 12:29). In the same manner, Luke possibly understands Paul's companions to hear such (vocal) "sounds" without comprehending them as articulate speech.

At this point one will recall the unusual incident in Acts 2 where Peter and the other apostles spoke to the crowd during the festival of Pentecost. Everyone heard but understood in his own native tongue, rather than in the language in which Peter and the others were preaching. In a sense the incident in Acts 2 is a reversal of what may be true for Acts 9:7. In Acts 2, the crowd heard what should have been gibberish but instead each heard articulate sounds in his own language. What may have been intended by Luke for Acts 9:7 is that the companions of Paul hear as noise or gibberish what should have been articulate speech. Acts 22:9, then, is meant to clarify Acts 9:7. Luke here intends to say that Paul's companions did not *understand* the voice of the Lord that spoke to Paul—though they may indeed have heard audible "sounds" as in Acts 9:7.

What argues against this solution is that recent studies have shown that in the Hellenistic period there is no evidence that there was a distinction in meaning between *ἀκούειν* when used with the genitive and *ἀκούειν* when used with the accusative. In the Hellenistic period both constructions were used interchangeably with the meaning of intellectual perception and comprehension.³²

Munck (apparently) resolves the contradiction between the passages by tracing the contradiction to the sort of garbled reports that one might expect from eyewitnesses to an event: "These points of disagreement show that Paul alone got the message; the others were unable to understand what happened."³³

Haenchen, on the other hand, argues that the contradiction between Acts 9:7 and 22:9 was simply not a problem to Luke. In 9:7 when Luke

³² See H. R. Moehring, "The Verb AKOYEIN in Acts IX 7 and XXII 9," *NovT* 3 (1959) 80–99 and R. G. Bratcher, "ἀκούω in Acts ix. 7 and xxii. 9," *ExpTim* 71 (1960) 243–45. But see A. T. Robertson (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* [Nashville: Broadman, 1934] 506) who argues that the difference in case is significant.

³³ Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 81.

writes that Paul's companions "heard the voice but saw no one," he merely intended to confirm the objectivity of the event. He did not intend that Paul's companions be considered participants in the event. In 22:9, when he writes that Paul's companions saw the light but heard nothing he is again confirming the objectivity of the event and excluding Paul's companions as participants in the revelation. "It is only the means of expression that are changed, and not the sense of the statement." This contradiction between 9:7 and 22:9, as well as the contradiction between 9:7 (Paul's companions remain standing) and 26:14 (Paul's companions fall down) give Luke no trouble. "Both statements make sense in their context."³⁴

What Haenchen says is true. Both statements *do* make sense in their individual contexts when one reads the narratives *in isolation* from one another. When one reads them as supplementary accounts, however, there appears to be a clear contradiction. It is unclear why the contradictions would not trouble Luke, since he evidently intended each subsequent account to build on the preceding account(s). Further, if the contradiction is a problem to modern readers, why should one assume they would not trouble discerning earlier readers?

I am not sure Haenchen is correct when he says that Paul's companions are excluded from the revelation in Acts 9.³⁵ How does he know that? The text clearly says that they heard the voice although they saw no one. The statement does seem to imply the hearing and understanding of audible sounds and if this is so, they *would* be participants in the revelation. Does Haenchen mean they *did not understand* what they heard and were therefore excluded? Probably not, since he specifically excludes that interpretation of the passage.³⁶ He is probably basing his interpretation on the fact that Luke specifically rules out their participation in the revelation in Acts 22:9, where it is asserted that Paul's companions *did not hear* the voice of the one speaking to Paul. Hence, 9:7 is clarified by Acts 22:9: Paul's companions were not participants in the revelation.

The fact is, however, in Acts 9:7 the companions of Paul *are* participants in the Christophany, since they do *hear* and *understand* what the Lord says to Paul. It is this fact that Luke is *consciously correcting* in Acts 22:9.³⁷ He wishes to exclude Paul's companions because in Luke's

³⁴ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 322-23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 322.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 322 n. 1.

³⁷ Compare Luke's tendency to eliminate the more vivid or naïve elements from the miracle stories in Mark (Mark 1:25-26 = Luke 4:35, Mark 5:4-6 = Luke 8:29, Mark 9:17-27 = Luke 9:38-43). Luke also omits certain miracle stories having such features (Mark 6:45-52, 8:22-26, 11:12-14) and the miracle stories he adds from his special source are lacking such features (Luke 7:1-17, 13:10-17, 14:1-6). See P. J. Achtemeier, "The

theology the revelation and commission are unique to Paul (Acts 9:27, 22:14–15, 26:16). What is unclear, however, is how Luke assumed this contradiction/correction would be “understood” by his readers. Possibly, he assumed that they would accept his second edited version, since it was narrated “by Paul,” and in a sense was Paul’s own account of the incident, or at least the reader would be impressed that way.

There are other indications that Luke is correcting the earlier legend in his later edited version(s) and that he expects his readers to adjust their understanding of the event in the light of its subsequent narration. For example, the equally difficult contradiction between 9:18, where Paul’s blindness was caused by “something like scales” on his eyes and 22:11, where Paul’s blindness is attributed to the “brightness of the light.” These two explanations for the cause of Paul’s blindness are mutually exclusive. Because Luke has eliminated the miracle story motifs found in the account in Acts 9 from the later accounts, it is reasonable to assume that 22:11 is also a correction *by design* of 9:18. Again, what is unclear, is what Luke thought his reader would make of the tension.

This literary technique of clarifying and/or correcting one narrative by means of another receives further support from the fact that Luke clarifies in Acts 22 and 26 the confusion in Acts 9 as to whether or not Paul’s companions saw the light. In Acts 9, no specific reference is made to Paul’s companions seeing the light. Acts 9:7 says they heard a voice but saw no one. The text does not mention a light in connection with Paul’s companions, although one might assume from the text that they did see a light. They were apparently with Paul when the light flashed around him. Acts 22:9 and 26:14 clarify that obscurity on the part of Acts 9. In Acts 22 it is stated that they saw the light and in Acts 26 Paul’s companions fall to the ground when the light flashed from heaven, presumably because they had seen it. The seeing of the light by Paul’s companions is not precluded by the Acts 9 account; it is simply omitted.

In Acts 26:14 it is also clarified that Paul’s companions fell to the ground at the sudden appearance of the bright light. This feature had been omitted from both Acts 9 and 22, where Paul’s companions are not even introduced into the narrative until *after* the appearance of the

Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch,” *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, 161–64. See also Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 235. As discussed above, Luke is reporting, editing and interpreting the popular legend that he used in Acts 9:7. I do not mean to imply that Luke has copied material from a *written* “source.” The use of the feature of “double dreams” to confirm a vision is a Lucan literary trait found elsewhere in Acts (for example, 10:1–6, 19–20) and suggests that Luke composed Acts 9 (cf. Acts 9:10–12, 17). See S. Lundgren, “Ananias and the Calling of Paul in Acts,” *ST* 25 (1971) 121–22.

Lord to Paul. It was, however, already *implied* in Acts 9:7 that they had fallen to the ground and subsequently stood when they heard the voice. This is indicated by Luke's use of the Greek pluperfect *εἰστήκεισαν*: "The men . . . had stood." (The pluperfect tense stresses the continuation of a completed state in past time; hence, they *had* stood and were still standing.)³⁸ Luke, apparently, counted on his reader assuming in Acts 9 and 22 that Paul's companions had also reacted to the light and fallen to the ground, but does not bother to clarify that fact until 26:14.

VI. Summary

(1) Acts 9:1–19 is a traditional miracle story of Paul's conversion that has been adapted as a commissioning narrative by Luke. Acts 22:4–16 is Luke's edited version of the traditional legend and Acts 26:12–18 is Luke's own abbreviated composition.

(2) The differences and "contradictions" among the three accounts are to be explained by Luke's literary technique. The narratives are composed so as to supplement, complement and correct one another. Hence, facts necessary for understanding the event in one of the narratives are provided in the others. In fact, the complete story of Paul's conversion, as Luke understood it, can only be determined by bringing together features from *all three* narratives. The entire story is not completely narrated in *any one* of the three accounts.

(3) Therefore, it seems better to regard the tensions and non-agreements among the three accounts as Lucan corrections and improvements, both theologically and stylistically motivated, rather than "contradictions," if by contradiction one means error, mistake or oversight. Certain features are clearly contradictory in a *formal* sense but when viewed in the light of Luke's literary method they should be understood in an *essential* sense as improvements and corrections.

³⁸ See Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 903–6.