

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES TO-DAY¹

by F. F. BRUCE, M. A., D. D., F. B. A.

EMERITUS PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

The study of the Acts of the Apostles shows no signs of slackening. This *Bulletin* has in recent years carried a lecture on the "Paulinism" of Acts² and Dr. Colin Hemer's study of "Luke the Historian".³ A Manchester thesis, successfully submitted in 1970 by Dr. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles*, has been published in a distinguished monograph series.⁴ Volumes of essays on Acts or Luke-Acts have appeared, including the *Festschrift* for Paul Schubert in 1966⁵ and the proceedings of the twenty-eighth Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense in 1977.⁶ Monographs have been produced on specific themes in the study of Acts—on its sources, by Jacques Dupont,⁷ on its semitisms, by Max Wilcox,⁸ and on its theology, by J. C. O'Neill.⁹ News comes in of work still in progress, especially in the form of commentaries. We look forward to a new commentary on Acts in Das Neue Testament Deutsch from Jürgen Roloff^{9a} and to the first-ever commentary on Acts in the International Critical Commentary¹⁰ from C. K. Barrett, not to mention the forthcom-

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library on Wednesday, 9 December 1981.

² F. F. Bruce, "Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?" *Bulletin*, lviii (1975-76), 282-303.

³ C. J. Hemer, "Luke the Historian", *Bulletin*, lx (1977-78), 28-51.

⁴ Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese, 17 (Tübingen, 1975; published in U.S.A. by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan).

⁵ *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn (Nashville/New York, 1966). See also *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. C. H. Talbert (Edinburgh, 1978).

⁶ *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, rédaction, théologie*, ed. J. Kremer. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 48 (Gembloux, 1979).

⁷ J. Dupont, *The Sources of Acts: The Present Position*, E. T. (London, 1964). See also his *Études sur les Actes des Apôtres*. Lectio Divina, 45 (Paris, 1967).

⁸ M. Wilcox, *The Semitisms of Acts* (Oxford, 1965). See also H. F. D. Sparks, "The Semitisms of Acts", *JTS* (n.s.), 1 (1950), 16-28; D. F. Payne, "Semitisms in the Book of Acts", in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (Exeter, 1970), pp. 134-150.

⁹ J. C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting* (London, 1970).

^{9a} J. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*. NTD 5 (Göttingen, 1981). This did not come into my hands until after the lecture was delivered.

¹⁰ In earlier days the volume on Acts in ICC was twice assigned—first to

ing volume in the New International Greek Testament Commentary from two scholars already mentioned, Ward Gasque and Colin Hemer, and yet another in the Word Biblical Commentary series from Scott Bartchy.

I

The study of Acts at the beginning of the twentieth century was substantially promoted by the contributions of two scholars who, along quite different lines, countered the Tübingen assessment of F. C. Baur and his colleagues which had been influential from the middle years of the nineteenth century.

One of these was W. M. Ramsay, whose painstaking on-the-ground research into the historical geography of Asia Minor¹¹ provided conclusive evidence that those parts of the record of Acts which were set in that area of the ancient world reflected the situation of the mid-first century and not that of the second century, in which Luke-Acts had been placed by the Tübingen school. The other was Adolf Harnack who, in a series of essays or short monographs,¹² argued on more general historical, as well as internal literary, grounds for a first-century date for Luke-Acts—at first around AD 80 but later as early as AD 64. In addition, Harnack made acute contributions to the source analysis of Acts.

II

After World War I two further important contributions were made—one in Germany and one in the English-speaking world. They had this in common, that they made Acts the starting-point for studying the beginnings of Christianity.

F. H. Chase and then to C. H. Turner and H. N. Bate—but in neither case was the work completed.

¹¹ Cf. his *Historical Geography of Asia Minor* (London, 1890), and *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, I-II (Oxford, 1895, 1897). His findings were popularized in a succession of well-known works, notably *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London, 1895, 141920).

¹² These appeared in English translations as *Luke the Physician* (London, 1907), *The Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1909) and *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels* (London, 1911).

Between 1921 and 1923 the Berlin ancient historian Eduard Meyer published the three volumes of his *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums* (a work, unfortunately, never translated into English).¹³ If he made Luke-Acts his starting-point, that may be because, as the author of the great *Geschichte des Altertums*,¹⁴ he found its literary genre more familiar than that of other primary sources for Christian origins. From Luke-Acts he moved back to the Gospel of Mark and its sources, and thence to the other gospel material. The second volume traces the progress of Judaism from the early days of the Persian Empire to the ministry of Jesus, in order to provide readers with a background to Christian beginnings. The third volume opens with a study of the second half of Acts; from there it moves back to the more uncertain ground of the first half, and so back to the resurrection of Jesus. On the foundations thus laid Meyer sketches the development of the church to the early years of the second century, paying special attention to the careers of Peter and Paul. The order of presentation in the three volumes may seem odd, but it does underline the importance which he attaches to Luke's history in general and to Acts in particular. Luke's work, he finds, 'in spite of its more restricted content, bears the same character as those of the great historians, of a Polybius, a Livy, and many others.'¹⁵

In the eyes of many, such a verdict from an acknowledged master of ancient history might seem exceptionally impressive, but in the eyes of some, his expertise was a handicap to him in this particular field. According to Philipp Vielhauer, 'Ed. Meyer, who approaches Acts with the presuppositions of a historian of antiquity and treats it with the greatest confidence, misunderstands the nature of its accounts and the way in which they are connected.'¹⁶ Meyer, in fact, was not so naïf as that remark implies; the remark really conveys a more severe judgment on Vielhauer than it does on Meyer. Meyer knew a historical work when he saw one. Moreover, he prepared himself for his study of

¹³ Vol. 1: *Die Evangelien* (Stuttgart/Berlin, 1921, ²1924); Vol. 2: *Die Entwicklung des Judentums und Jesus von Nazaret* (1921); Vol. 3: *Die Apostelgeschichte und die Anfänge des Christentums* (1923).

¹⁴ E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 5 vols. (Stuttgart, 1884-1902, ²1907-58).

¹⁵ Vol. 1, p. 2.

¹⁶ "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts", E. T. in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Keck and Martyn, p. 50, n. 37.

Christian origins not only by reading everything relevant to the subject-matter in German theological publications of the preceding decade but also (and perhaps more importantly) by undertaking the study of the rise and progress of a more recent religious movement — Mormonism.¹⁷

How great his confidence in the historicity of Acts was may be seen in his confessed inability to comprehend how any one could ever have thought the account of Paul's visit to Athens in chapter 17 to be an invention.¹⁸ How great his confidence was in his own ability to convince others of the validity of his arguments may be seen in his claim to have persuaded Eduard Norden, who ten years previously had denied the Pauline authorship of the Areopagus speech,¹⁹ to revise his judgment on this point.²⁰

The other enterprise to be set alongside Meyer's work was the encyclopaedic study of *The Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake.²¹ They deliberately resolved to devote the first part of this study to a thorough examination of Acts. To this examination they devoted five volumes, which appeared between 1920 and 1933. In the event nothing further appeared: the enterprise never got beyond Acts.

Why did they choose to start with Acts? For one thing, the 'general solution of the synoptic problem' was by that time, they reckoned, a *fait accompli*: it was 'the great literary achievement of the last fifty years of New Testament scholarship'.²² The questions which followed on from that demanded a study of Acts as the 'necessary preliminary' to their investigation. 'Whatever be the historian's judgment as to its value as a record, without it he would be compelled to wander without a guide in the trackless forest of conjecture as to the way in which the church organized itself, and began its work. The investigator into Christian origins is fascinated by the problem presented in the early chapters, where it is the sole authority, and is forced to consider the actual character of the Christian faith at the outset'.²³

¹⁷ See W. K. Lowther Clarke, *New Testament Problems* (London, 1929), p. 120.

¹⁸ Vol. 3, p. 105.

¹⁹ E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig, 1913; reprinted Stuttgart, 1956), pp. 3-140 et passim.

²⁰ Vol. 3, p. 92, n. 4.

²¹ London: Macmillan.

²² Vol. 1, p. vii.

²³ *Ibid.*

Of the five volumes the first two were devoted to prolegomena, introductory essays on the historical and religious background and literary problems of Acts by several scholars who adopted different, and sometimes contradictory, approaches to the book. The third volume (1926) dealt with the text of Acts; it was a work of magnificent scholarship by James Hardy Ropes. The fourth (1933) was a commentary on Acts by Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury; the fifth was a sequel to the commentary, containing thirty-seven extended excursions on all sorts of interesting and important topics raised by the study of Acts. There was reason in Foakes Jackson's claim, in his preface to Volume 5, that 'no book of the Bible has been subjected to so exhaustive a treatment in a single work'²⁴ as Acts received in these two volumes. He could say so objectively, because he played no part in Volumes 4 and 5; others might go farther and say that 'no book of the Bible has been subjected to so exhaustive a treatment in a single work' as Acts received in all five volumes of *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Part I.

The editors probably intended their great enterprise to mark the start of a new era in the study of Christian origins; in fact, it marked the end of an era. It is probably a token of my antique cast of thought that I find myself more at home in *The Beginnings of Christianity* than I do in the bulk of more recent work on Acts.

III

While these works by Eduard Meyer and by Jackson and Lake were being produced, the foundations were being laid for a new approach to the subject which did mark a new epoch, and proved to be increasingly influential. This was the approach pioneered by Martin Dibelius. Dibelius had already made his name as a pioneer of New Testament form criticism with the first edition of *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (1919).²⁵ From 1923 until his death in 1947 he produced a series of essays and lectures on Acts which were posthumously collected and published in one volume under the editorship of Heinrich Greeven.²⁶ An English transla-

²⁴ Vol. 5, p. ix. Foakes-Jackson's own commentary on Acts in the Moffatt series (London, 1931) should not be overlooked.

²⁵ Third edition: Tübingen, 1959. The second edition (1933) was translated into English under the title *From Tradition to Gospel* (London, 1934).

²⁶ *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1951).

tion of the volume appeared in 1956 with the title *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*.

The main emphasis of these *Studies* lay on the importance of stylistic criticism. Dibelius was content to accept the tradition that Paul's companion Luke was the author of Acts (which he dated in the nineties of the first century). He was not concerned to question the historicity of Luke's account; he simply passed over the issue of historicity as of secondary importance. What was of primary importance was stylistic criticism, and this he applied to the narratives and the speeches alike. A good example of his application of it to the narratives is provided by his treatment of the voyage and shipwreck story of Acts 27. Here he notes that 'particular authenticity' has been ascribed to his story by 'the older school of criticism, which thinks only of the event and not of the account'.²⁷ Representatives of this 'older school of criticism' might include James Smith, whose work on *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, first published in 1848,²⁸ has never been superseded or rendered obsolete, or H. J. Holtzmann, who called the narrative 'one of the most instructive documents for the knowledge of ancient seamanship'.²⁹ It was not overlooked by the 'older school of criticism' that the narrative followed an established literary form, attested in the description of Mediterranean seafaring from Homer's *Odyssey* onwards:³⁰ a sample of this form has even found its way into the Hebrew Bible, in the account of the storm at sea which nearly wrecked the ship on which Jonah was planning to escape to Tartessus (or even in the picture in Psalm 107: 23-30 of those 'who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters').

But Dibelius, while recognizing the nautical accuracy of Acts 27, did not ascribe this to the memory of an eyewitness (as might have been inferred from the use of the first person plural throughout the narrative) but to the author's dependence on literary models. The episodes in which Paul plays a personal part, however, are dovetailed into the voyage and shipwreck narrative

²⁷ *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, E. T. (London, 1956), p. 107.

²⁸ Fourth edition, London, 1880.

²⁹ H. J. Holtzmann, *Handcommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1889), p. 421.

³⁰ Cf. F. Blass, *Acta Apostolorum: editio philologica* (Göttingen, 1895), on Acts 27:41; *Philology of the Gospels* (London, 1898), p. 186.

'with some awkwardness and difficulty'.³¹ The story of Paul and the viper (Acts 28: 3-6) 'is told in a completely secular fashion';³² if it had been a piece of genuine Christian tradition about Paul, he would have reacted with fitting horror to the islanders' conclusion that he was a god, as he and Barnabas reacted to the similar misconception of the people of Lystra (Acts 14: 11-18).

As for the speeches in Acts, Dibelius argued that Luke composed them all in his distinctive style and was responsible for their structure. He conceded the possibility that Luke had some information of the general purport (ξύμπασα γνώμη) of Pauline speeches in individual instances and 'may even have been an eyewitness' on occasion;³³ but this possibility is irrelevant to the true study of the speeches. When we see Luke's 'hand fashioning the material'³⁴ we learn his purpose in introducing this or that speech, with its distinctive content, at crucial moments in the course of his narrative.

A critical examination of the style of any literary document is a necessary part of its study. But when the document claims to present a historical account, the question of the validity of that claim cannot be dismissed as of secondary importance. In such a document stylistic criticism is important, but historical criticism is most important.

In 1956 the commentary on Acts by H. H. Wendt in the 'Meyer' series³⁵ was replaced with a new and magisterial work by Ernst Haenchen.³⁶ This ran through six editions before the author's death in 1975. An English translation of the fifth of these editions (1965) was published in 1971.³⁷

Haenchen takes account of earlier work on Acts in other languages than German, but finds little real help in those published in England where, he says, 'scholarship is governed by the

³¹ *Studies in Acts*, p. 134.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 204, n. 27.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 164, n. 55. The phrase ξύμπασα γνώμη is quoted from Thucydides (*Hist.* 1.22.1), who claims to have preserved the 'general purport' of the speeches reported in his work.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165. I have discussed the speeches in "The Speeches in Acts—Thirty Years After", in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays... presented to L. L. Morris*, ed. R. J. Banks (Exeter, 1974), 53-68.

³⁵ *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1913).

³⁶ *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1956, 71977).

³⁷ *The Acts of the Apostles*, E. T. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).

spirit of conservatism'.³⁸ This goes even for *The Beginnings of Christianity*, radical as Kirsopp Lake and many of his collaborators were counted to be by the standards of their own day. He acknowledges that the 'rich abundance' of linguistic and historical information contained in *The Beginnings of Christianity* ensures its abiding value 'even on the Continent', but judges that in matters critical it makes little advance on Harnack.³⁹ So far as later British work on Acts is concerned, thinks Haenchen, Dibelius might as well not have written anything for all the notice that is taken of him.⁴⁰ An exception is made as regards C. S. C. Williams (whose untimely death was a sad loss to New Testament scholarship) did pay due attention to Dibelius's work but was not over-influenced by it: according to Haenchen, he 'assembles practically everything which can with any shadow of justification be brought against Dibelius'. Haenchen allows that while 'Dibelius is not of course refuted by these arguments' nevertheless 'the objections are well worth thinking over'.⁴¹

For his own part, Haenchen was deeply indebted to Dibelius, although he did not follow him slavishly. For example, he found it impossible to retain the tradition that the author of Acts was a companion of Paul. Whereas Dibelius, with many others, found in the 'we' narrative of Acts evidence for an independent literary itinerary on which the author drew, Haenchen, from 1959 onwards, rejected the itinerary hypothesis and regarded the 'we' narrative as a literary device by which the author made his account more vivid, giving his readers the impression that they themselves are present at the events so described.⁴²

Indeed, the author of Acts, in Haenchen's opinion, allowed himself the kind of freedom that is enjoyed nowadays by writers of superior historical fiction.⁴³ This appears, for example, in his technique of scene-depicting, his composition of speeches for leading characters, his simplification of the course of events so as

³⁸ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 41.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 85 ff., 490 f.; cf. E. Haenchen, "'We' in Acts and the Itinerary", *E. T., Journal for Theology and Church*, 1 (1965), 65-99.

⁴³ Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, pp. 107-110; cf. his "Tradition und Komposition in der Apostelgeschichte", *ZTK*, lii (1955), 205-225.

to bring out his own theological perspective. In developing this part of his assessment of the author, Haenchen himself does not avoid over-simplification: he says, for example, that 'Luke had to suppress the fact that long before Paul reached Rome the Christian mission had got a foothold and created a community there'.⁴⁴ But if Luke indeed attempted to suppress this fact his attempt was inept. When at last he gets Paul on to the Appian Way he tells how brethren from Rome walked south to greet him and escort him back for the remainder of his journey (Acts 28:15). How did it come about that there were 'brethren' — by which term Christians are plainly meant — in Rome before Paul's arrival, if the Christian mission had not already secured a foothold there? Luke does not suppose, nor does he wish his readers to suppose, that Christianity first arrived in Rome with Paul. Indeed, his readers might reasonably (and rightly) infer from his first mention of Priscilla and Aquila that they were already Christians before they had to leave Rome at the instance of Claudius: he gives no ground for thinking that they were converted as a result of meeting Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:2 f.).

Haenchen's commentary, with all its great merits, fails to reckon seriously and critically enough with Luke's claim to relate what actually happened, on the basis of personal research and, where possible, of eyewitness testimony. He seems, moreover, to assume that if Dibelius has argued for a case, the case is thereby established.

Another important German series — the Lietzmann-Bornkamm *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* — was enriched in 1963 with a new commentary on Acts by Hans Conzelmann⁴⁵ (a replacement for the earlier work by Erwin Preuschen (1912)). This is a slim volume compared with Haenchen's — 160 pages to over 700 of Haenchen's — but it is packed full of compressed information. Conzelmann is content for the most part to present the evidence, along with other basic material, so that the reader may prosecute his own study and reach his own conclusions. An appendix provides the text of a number of relevant quotations from Hellenistic writings and a couple of imperial edicts. When he does express historical judgments, Conzelmann shows himself so sceptical that even 'Haenchen seems rather conservative by com-

⁴⁴ Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, p. 103.

⁴⁵ *Die Apostelgeschichte*. Erklärt von Hans Conzelmann (Tübingen, 1963).

parison'.⁴⁶ The whole idea of Barnabas and Paul's missionary journey through Cyprus and the cities of South Galatia (Acts 13:4-14:23) is taken to be the author's invention, and not simply the vivid narrative details.⁴⁷ The same creative inventiveness is discerned in the voyage and shipwreck of chapters 27 and 28.⁴⁸ Conzelmann's treatment of this part of Luke's story moved our own Professor Hanson — himself the author of a distinguished commentary on Acts^{48a} — to apply the same technique to Thucydides's account of Nikias's voyage from Piraeus to Catania in Sicily in 415 BC, by way of providing a *reductio ad absurdum* for this kind of argument.⁴⁹ It is no answer to Professor Hanson to say that he is comparing two different literary *genres*: that is the point at issue. Both Thucydides and Luke claim to give a factual account of historical events, and the claims of both should be evaluated by the same criteria.

Conzelmann's commentary presupposes the conclusions of his earlier work, *Die Mitte der Zeit*,⁵⁰ which has exercised considerable influence on the study of Luke-Acts for a quarter of a century and more. The thesis of this work is that the author of Luke-Acts introduced a new perspective into early Christian thinking by presenting the ministry of Jesus as marking not the end of time (to be consummated quickly by the parousia) but the mid-point of time, now seen to be followed by a third epoch, the time of the church. This new perspective was dictated largely by the delay of the parousia, which made it impossible any longer to view the ministry of Jesus as the end of history.⁵¹ It had now to be seen as part of the continuing course of history — more especially, of

⁴⁶ W. W. Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Tübingen, 1975), p. 248.

⁴⁷ Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 72-81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-147.

^{48a} R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts of the Apostles*. New Clarendon Bible (Oxford, 1967).

⁴⁹ R. P. C. Hanson, "The Journey of Paul and the Journey of Nikias: An Experiment in Comparative Historiography", *Studia Evangelica* 4 = *TU* 102 (Berlin, 1968), 315-318.

⁵⁰ Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, 17 (Tübingen, 1954); E. T. (with not entirely satisfactory title) *The Theology of Saint Luke* (London, 1960).

⁵¹ "History has reached its end, since Christ is the end of the law" (R. Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* [Edinburgh, 1957], p. 43); cf. the title of E. Fuchs's essay "Christus das Ende der Geschichte", *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ii (Tübingen, 1960), 79 ff.

salvation history⁵² — and this led further to the replacement of the primitive *theologia crucis* (characteristic of Paul and Mark) by a *theologia gloriae*.

These features belong to the development frequently called early (or emergent) catholicism (*Frühkatholizismus*). Those theologians for whom this development is *ipso facto* post-apostolic in time and sub-apostolic in character see a psychological as well as a chronological divide between the genuine apostolic writings and any Christian document which bears the marks of early catholicism. Thus Ernst Käsemann, who finds that of all the New Testament documents it is Ephesians 'that most clearly marks the transition from the Pauline tradition to the perspectives of the early Catholic era', recognizes an affinity between this epistle and Acts, in that both presuppose 'a church that has expanded across the world as well as a church that is consolidating itself internally, a church which separates itself from the environment sociologically as well as with respect to a certain ideological terminology' — a church, moreover, which 'itself more and more becomes the context of theology'.⁵³ For all the differences between the two documents, especially in their divergent appreciation of Paul's role as apostle to the Gentiles, both reflect a post-apostolic attitude which looks back to the history of gospel beginnings as indispensable for the understanding of contemporary trends.

C. L. Mitton, in his important work on Ephesians, suggested similarly that Ephesians and Acts 'breathed the same spiritual atmosphere and knew the same stage in the developing life of the church'⁵⁴. But while these affinities with Ephesians are evident, Acts has perhaps even closer affinities with the Pastoral Epistles, which may indeed presuppose the existence of Acts.⁵⁵ So close are their affinities with Acts that more scholars than one have argued for a common authorship.⁵⁶ It is difficult to go so far as this: the

⁵² Cf. E. Lohse, "Lukas als Theologe der Heilsgeschichte", *Evangelische Theologie*, xiv (1954-55), 254-275; H. Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, E. T. (London, 1967).

⁵³ E. Käsemann, "Ephesians and Acts", in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Keck and Martyn, pp. 289 f.

⁵⁴ C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford, 1951), p. 220.

⁵⁵ The sequence (Pisidian) Antioch, Iconium, Lystra (2 Timothy 3:11) follows the narrative of Acts 13-14; Gentile church leaders are called elders (πρεσβυτεροι) in Acts 14:23 and 20:17 and in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy 5:1, 17, 19; Titus 1:5) but not in the rest of the Pauline corpus.

⁵⁶ Cf. most recently S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles* (London,

Pastoral Epistles resemble Ephesians and are unlike Acts in stressing the uniqueness of Paul's Gentile apostleship.

On the other hand, C. K. Barrett finds in Acts scarcely any trace of early catholicism, as this is commonly understood;⁵⁷ he goes so far, indeed, as to find a *theologia crucis* in Acts.⁵⁸

IV

The year which saw the appearance of the English translation of Dibelius's *Studies* also saw the publication of the Lowell Lectures for 1953 by Henry J. Cadbury under the title *The Book of Acts in History*.⁵⁹ Cadbury's specialization in the study of Luke-Acts went back long before that: his *Style and Literary Method of Luke* (1920) and *The Making of Luke-Acts* (1927) had established his authority in this field, while his collaboration with Kirsopp Lake in the great commentary with appendices which formed Volumes IV and V of *The Beginnings of Christianity* confirmed his right (if any such confirmation was necessary) to be heard with great respect on anything relevant to the study of Acts.⁶⁰

Acts, he points out, is set in a number of overlapping cultural contexts: Greek, Roman, Jewish and Christian. These contexts are examined separately. In each of them Cadbury draws on a wide variety of sources — in literature, inscriptions, papyri, etc. — to illuminate Luke's narrative. Some of the illustrative material comes from unlikely quarters: few scholars, for example, would have observed that an Egyptian postage stamp, issued in 1926 to mark the International Congress of Navigation held in Cairo that year, reproduces an ancient drawing which aptly illustrates the 'undergirding' of the ship mentioned in Acts 27:17. (Even though it antedates Acts by a millennium and a half, being a detail from the portrayal of Hatshepsut's expedition to Punt, the operation it

1979); see also C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (London, 31981), pp. 281 f.

⁵⁷ "Luke... may present us with some of the raw material of 'primitive catholicism', but hardly with the thing itself" (C. K. Barrett, *The Signs of an Apostle* [London, 1970], pp. 53 f.).

⁵⁸ C. K. Barrett, "Theologia Crucis—in Acts", in *Theologia Crucis—Signum Crucis*. Festschrift für E. Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. C. Andresen and G. Klein (Tübingen, 1979), pp. 73-84.

⁵⁹ New York/London, 1955.

⁶⁰ Cf. his "'We' and 'I' Passages in Luke-Acts", *NTS*, iii (1956-57), 128-132.

depicts must have been much the same as the operation recorded by Luke.)⁶¹

Many readers of Acts have wondered what kind of evidence Paul could have produced to establish his claim on the occasions when he protested that he was a Roman citizen. We cannot be sure, but Cadbury gives us all the material that is available on this question.⁶²

'Even though the author interprets natural events supernaturally', says Cadbury, 'and recites speeches which were never exactly so delivered, he interpreted those events much as the actors and eyewitnesses did and perhaps he knew better than we moderns would what the actors were likely to feel and say under the circumstances.'⁶³

A few years later another series of lectures—the Sarum Lectures delivered in 1960-1961 by A.N. Sherwin-White—touched on the relation between Acts and contemporary history. These lectures were published as *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*. Whereas Cadbury was a theologian as well as a historian, Sherwin-White writes purely as an expert in Roman constitutional history. From this point of view he expresses the interesting judgment that 'for Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. Yet Acts is, in simple terms and judged externally, no less of a propaganda narrative than the Gospels, liable to similar distortions. But any attempt to reject its historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.'⁶⁴

This judgment is defended by an examination of several features of Paul's career as outlined in Acts—his relations with civic authorities in cities of varying status, his claim to Roman citizenship, his appearance before Roman judges, his appeal to Caesar. Such an examination, in the light of contemporary Roman procedure, leads to the conclusion that the general picture in Acts is true to its dramatic date: with regard to Roman citizenship

⁶¹ *The Book of Acts in History*, p. 10; cf. his essay 'Υποζώματα in *Beginnings of Christianity*, 5, pp. 345-354.

⁶² *Acts in History*, pp. 65-82; cf. F. Schulz, "Roman Registers of Births and Birth-Certificates", *JRS*, xxxii (1942), 78-94; 33 (1943), 55-64; A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (Oxford, 21973).

⁶³ *Acts in History*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford, 1963), p. 189.

especially 'Acts breathes the climate of the earlier phase' of the empire—by contrast, for example, with the situation which obtained half a century later, in the time of the younger Pliny.⁶⁵

A similar over-all assessment of Acts from the classical scholar's point of view was made by Lord Hewart as President of the Classical Association in 1927: 'the best short general picture of the *Pax Romana* and all that it meant—good roads and posting, good police, freedom from brigandage and piracy, freedom of movement, toleration and justice—is to be found in the experience, written in Greek, of a Jew who happened to be a Roman citizen—that is, in the Acts of the Apostles.'⁶⁶

To revert to Cadbury: he paid closer attention than most of his predecessors had done to the prologue in Luke 1:1-4 which he took, rightly, to be the prologue to the complete Luke-Acts. He discerned in its language a claim by the author to have participated personally in events narrated for some time (ἄνωθεν) before the close of the story.⁶⁷

Quite recently the study of this prologue has been carried further forward by Dr. Loveday Alexander, who finds in it literary affinities to prefaces to scientific treatises of the period. In the matter of prefaces or prologues, 'there is much in common between Apollonius of Citium, a medical writer, Philo of Byzantium, an engineer, and Hipparchus, an astronomer—despite the fact that each is working in a different area of study.'⁶⁸

V

On St. Luke's Day, 1957, Arnold Ehrhardt read to the Lightfoot Society in the University of Durham a paper on 'The Construction and Purpose of the Acts of the Apostles' which was published a few months later in *Studia Theologica*.⁶⁹ In this paper

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁶⁶ "Presidential Address", *Proceedings of the Classical Association*, xxiv (1927), 21.

⁶⁷ "Commentary on the Preface of Luke", *Beginnings of Christianity*, 2, pp. 489-510; cf. A. J. B. Higgins, "The Preface of Luke and the Kerygma in Acts", in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. Gasque and Martin, pp. 78-91.

⁶⁸ L. C. A. Alexander, "Luke-Acts in its Contemporary Setting, with special reference to the prefaces (Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1)", unpublished D. Phil. thesis (Oxford, 1977), 56f.

⁶⁹ Vol. 12 (1958), 48-79; republished in *The Framework of the New Testament*

he discussed three subjects: Luke's literary art, his technique, and his purpose in writing Acts. He reacted quite vigorously against the emphases of Dibelius and Haenchen.

Luke's literary art, he argued, is the art of a historian; his technique is the technique of historical biography; his purpose is to provide a work which will serve as 'The Gospel of the Holy Spirit' as a sequel to 'The Gospel of Christ', recorded in the previous volume.⁷⁰ Luke was thus both historian and theologian — no worse a historian for being a theologian and no worse a theologian for being a historian. Ehrhardt underlined the judgment of Eduard Meyer, that Luke is 'the one great historian who joins the last of the genuinely Greek historians, Polybius, to the first great Christian historian, perhaps the greatest of them all, Eusebius of Caesarea'.⁷¹ As a historical biographer Luke is concerned with the outstanding figures of Peter and Paul and is at some pains to present 'parallel lives' of these two leaders, as principal characters in the divine tragedy which is the Gospel of the Spirit of God.⁷²

Luke omitted many things of which he was well aware, said Ehrhardt, because they did not serve his particular purpose. His explanation of Luke's reticence about the Jerusalem relief fund is that he 'wants us to see Jerusalem at the giving, not at the receiving, end'.⁷³ (But, it may be interposed, Luke has no objection to depicting Jerusalem at the receiving end of the famine relief sent earlier by the church of Antioch.)

Ehrhardt shared Meyer's impatience with those theologians who, faced with the 'we' narrative of Acts, fail to realize that 'Luke's readers no less than any other readers understood "we" as "we", i.e. a group of people including the writer'. Those who find it difficult to accept that the author of Acts was an eyewitness of the events described in the 'we' passages 'suffer frequently', he suggested, 'from an imperfect knowledge of what may be expected from an eyewitness after a lapse of anything up to twenty years'.⁷⁴

Stories (Manchester, 1964), pp. 64-102. Cf. C. K. Barrett's discussion of this lecture in *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (London, 1961), pp. 32-36.

⁷⁰ *Framework*, p. 89.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 95, n. 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101 with n. 4.

About the same time as he read that paper to the Lightfoot Society, Ehrhardt took a less academic body of students through the Acts of the Apostles when he delivered ten lectures on the book for the Extra-Mural Department of Manchester University. These were published posthumously by Manchester University Press several years later.⁷⁵

Ehrhardt was a versatile scholar: he had at one time been Professor of Roman Law in the University of Frankfurt (until he was evicted from his chair by the Nazis) and his last years were spent as Bishop Fraser Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History in the University of Manchester. From those fields of special interest he was able to illustrate the New Testament with material not so readily at the command of the ordinary theologian. In dealing with Cornelius of Caesarea, for example, he illustrated the spiritual hunger from which a serious-minded Roman soldier must have suffered by reference to a military calendar of feastdays found at Dura-Europos: 'We see from this calendar that the Roman army kept its Church parades with the same punctiliousness and drabness as any other army'.⁷⁶

He describes Luke as 'a glutton for documentary evidence' who 'knew how to use it to the best advantage in his history'.⁷⁷ Luke, he holds, was contemporary with at least the later events which he records and an eyewitness of some of them. By the time he wrote, Jerusalem had fallen, James the Just and his successor Simeon were both dead, and 'much animosity, so it seems, had also died with them'.⁷⁸ Luke could therefore ignore conflicts which, as Paul's letters show, seemed very serious while they lasted. Indeed, 'the apostle might have frowned at various things which he is supposed to have said in Acts'.⁷⁹

One of the fascinating passages in these lectures deals with the Simon Magus episode in Acts 8:9-24. Ehrhardt feels that Simon Magus 'comes out much better from his encounter with the apostles than the tempestuous St. Peter', who indeed 'trampled down the new plantation of St. Philip' and thus lost for the church a man who might have enriched it had he been retained within

⁷⁵ A. Ehrhardt, *The Acts of the Apostles: Ten Lectures* (Manchester, 1969).

⁷⁶ Ehrhardt, *Acts*, p. 54.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

it.⁸⁰ Well, maybe. But this is a sample of the original and provocative contribution which Ehrhardt made to the study of Acts.

VI

C. K. Barrett provided a slight foretaste of what we may expect when his commentary appears in an article on "Acts and the Pauline Corpus" published in honour of Dr. C. L. Mitton in 1976.⁸¹ In this article five points are made on the absence from Acts of any reference to Paul's letters or any evidence of dependence on them:

First: when Acts was written there may have been reasons for keeping Paul's letters away from public inspection (reasons which disappeared in a generation or two). Second: Acts was probably written before the *corpus Paulinum* circulated as such: it 'may well be the earliest of the Deutero-Pauline writings in the New Testament.' Third: Paul's friends and companions knew of his letters (they acted as letter-carriers for him), but the author of Luke-Acts was not one of these friends and companions. Fourth: the author of the 'we' narrative found no place in his itinerary for a reference to Paul's letters as the writers of a more extended narrative would have done. Fifth: Acts is a monument of the process by which various strands of Gentile Christianity came perforce to terms with one another when events of AD 70 made it necessary for Gentile Christianity thereafter to stand on its own feet. The author of Acts belonged to one of the non-Pauline strands of Gentile Christianity, but he could not ignore Paul's unrivalled career as missionary to the Gentiles. However, in reconstructing the story of the Gentile mission he credited Paul with the substance of his own 'gentile theology'—a non-Pauline, but no means anti-Pauline, gospel. In this reconstruction there was no room for Paul's letters.

On some of these theses of Professor Barrett I suspend judgment, pending the appearance of his commentary, in which no doubt they will be set forth and defended in greater detail. Plainly

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 46 f.; cf. his remarks on Simon in *Framework*, pp. 161-164. For a different point of view see C. K. Barrett, "Light on the Holy Spirit from Simon Magus (Acts 8, 4-25)", in *Les Actes des Apôtres*, ed. J. Kremer, pp. 281-295.

⁸¹ "Acts and the Pauline Corpus", *Expository Times*, lxxxviii (1976-77), 2-5.

he has much of very great importance to say on the interpretation of Acts.

The most recent commentary on Acts to have appeared (so far as I know) at the time of this lecture is that by I. H. Marshall in the Tyndale series (1980).⁸² This is not Professor Marshall's first contribution to Lukan studies. In 1970 he gave us a book entitled *Luke: Historian and Theologian*—a title which aptly sums up the two sides of Luke's expertise. This volume is mainly a study of Luke as a theologian, but no incompatibility is seen between being a theologian and being a historian. Luke was not concerned with historical research purely for its own sake, but in his prologue he undertakes to provide Theophilus with a reliable account of Christian beginnings, based on reliable sources of information, and an examination of his use of these sources confirms that he took his undertaking seriously and fulfilled it successfully.

If one word were chosen to describe Luke, says Marshall, it would be neither historian nor theologian but evangelist. Luke's subject is not so much salvation-history as salvation itself. Luke is not an exponent of 'early catholicism' as commonly understood; on the contrary, a study of his doctrine of the Spirit, of faith and repentance, shows that he 'is not the initiator of a decline from the early Christian message of Paul; he is his worthy follower.'⁸³

This introductory work was followed in 1978 by a magisterial commentary on the Greek text of Luke's Gospel.⁸⁴ The Tyndale commentary on Acts is based on the English text and is designed for a less specialist reading public, but it is undergirded by the same well-informed, up-to-date and accurate scholarship as is attested in the commentary on Luke. Acts (with the Gospel to which it is the sequel) was written as an account of the rise and early progress of Christianity 'to strengthen faith and give assurance that its foundations are firm'.⁸⁵

Throughout this commentary Marshall repeatedly interacts

⁸² *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, 1980). Other commentaries on Acts, not mentioned elsewhere in this lecture, are those by R. R. Williams (Torch Bible Commentaries, 1953), J. W. Packer (Cambridge Bible Commentaries, 1966), J. Munck (Anchor Bible, 1967) and W. Neil (New Century Bible, 1973).

⁸³ *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter, 1970), p. 222.

⁸⁴ *The Gospel of Luke*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter/Grand Rapids, 1978).

⁸⁵ Marshall, *Acts*, p. 21.

with Haenchen. He recognizes Haenchen's commentary to be 'an outstanding piece of scholarship'⁸⁶ but regrets the historical scepticism which pervades it—historical scepticism in which, he finds, Haenchen out-Bultmanns Bultmann. Only one who is a master of Lukan studies has the right to criticize Haenchen as Marshall does, but he is such a master. Of all the commentaries on Acts at present available to the student whose only language is English, Marshall's is the best; and even students of the Greek text will learn much from it.

VII

The last work to be considered here is Martin Hengel's *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (1979). The literal translation of its German title is *On primitive Christian historiography*⁸⁷ (if this title reminds classical readers of Lucian's treatise *How history ought to be written*, the resemblance is probably not accidental). The period of 'earliest Christianity' on which Hengel's work concentrates is that which stretches from the activity of Stephen to the apostolic council of Acts 15.

Martin Hengel is a distinguished theologian who has, at the same time, a firm foundation in the study and writing of history (one needs only to mention his monograph on the Zealots⁸⁸ and his *Judaism and Hellenism*).⁸⁹ He is far from being obscurantist or traditionalist in his approach to Acts. He treats it seriously as a historical document—not as a product of modern historical criticism but as a work in the main stream of Greek historiography. Where Luke's sources were inadequate, their inadequacy is reflected in his work. Where he found their information unedifying, as in the record of controversies within the primitive Christian community, he smoothed it over. Among the more informative sources which he used two in particular are discerned: (a) an Antiochene or Hellenistic source, which recorded the careers of Stephen and Philip and the early missionary activity of Paul and Barnabas, and (b) a collection of stories about Peter.

Much of the scepticism voiced in recent German theological

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸⁷ *Zur urchristlichen Geschichtsschreibung* (Stuttgart, 1979).

⁸⁸ M. Hengel, *Die Zeloten*. AGSU, 1 (Leiden/Köln, 1961).

⁸⁹ M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, E. T. (London, 1974).

writing on Acts is dismissed by Hengel. 'Why should Luke, the Christian doctor (Col. 4.13), not have written about Paul's missionary expedition from Jerusalem to Rome in honour of Christ' if (as Lucian tells us) Callimorphus, surgeon in the Sixth Lancers, through fit to write in honour of Asclepius about a Parthian expedition?⁹⁰ As the letters of the younger Pliny provide a primary source for the time of Domitian, Nerva and Trajan, so the letters of Paul provide a primary source for much of the period covered by Acts, though the author of Acts had no knowledge of them. Yet, while they enable us to attempt a historical-critical assessment of Acts, it is the record of Acts that enables us to read Paul's letters in their historical and chronological context. Far from attempting to write 'chapters in a life of Paul'⁹¹ on the basis of the letters only, with a deliberate ignoring of the evidence of Acts, Hengel considers that 'without the account written by Luke, incomplete, fragmentary and misleading though it may be, we would not only find it impossible to put Paul and his work in a chronological and geographical setting; we would still be largely in the dark about the development of Paul's great mission around the Aegean and the events that led up to it, and about his concern to go to Rome and to Spain.'⁹²

As for Luke's alleged 'tendency', the idea that historical-critical knowledge is value-free is 'a modern "achievement"'.⁹³ Classical historians accepted history as the record of the interplay of superhuman forces which influenced human actions. There is no history-writing or historical research, even today, 'without "pre-understanding" or heuristic interests'. A proper objectivity need not imply 'the neutrality of the uncommitted'.⁹⁴

In a chapter entitled 'Unfashionable Reflections on Luke as a Theological Historian'⁹⁵ Hengel takes issue by name with Haenchen and Conzelmann. Among those for whom he writes Luke has a special eye on 'the educated upper classes with sympathy for Christianity'.⁹⁶ He is 'no less trustworthy than other

⁹⁰ M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, E. T. (London, 1979), p. 21 (reference to Lucian, *How history ought to be written*, 16).

⁹¹ Cf. J. Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (New York, 1950).

⁹² Hengel, *Acts and History*, p. 38. His plan to go to Spain (Rom. 15: 24, 28) is, of course, unmentioned in Acts; but Acts provides its historical background.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-68.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

historians of antiquity'.^{96a} His account 'always remains within the limits of what was considered reliable by the standards of antiquity'.⁹⁷ He is not mistaken in representing the synagogue, with its fringe of 'Godfearers', as an important locus for early missionary teaching and discussion: 'it was an area which will have been abandoned reluctantly and only under external compulsion'.⁹⁸ Paul's circumcision of Timothy 'is not a Lukan falsification': if he had refused to circumcise him, 'Paul would have supported apostasy and would no longer have been allowed to appear in any synagogue'.⁹⁹ The label 'early catholicism', however well it lends itself to our contemporary penchant for 'handy clichés', does not help us to understand Luke's milieu or outlook.¹⁰⁰

The currently popular redaction-critical approach which sees Luke as a freely inventive theologian misses his real purpose, which was to record what actually happened. This purpose is furthered by the 'we' itinerary, introduced by Luke at certain points in his narrative because he 'simply wanted to indicate that he was there';¹⁰¹ no more recondite explanation need be sought. A much more fruitful approach than that of the redaction critics is to take Luke's claim seriously and examine his work critically, 'reconstructing the story which he tells by adding and comparing other sources'.¹⁰² Such a reconstruction Hengel himself undertakes in the second part of his book.¹⁰³

As one who, many years ago, made the transition from classical to biblical learning by writing a commentary on Acts, I welcome these indications that the study of this important book is emerging from a generation of unnecessary scepticism and entering a new phase in which its value is better appreciated as a trustworthy source for our knowledge of the history as well as the theology of primitive Christianity.

^{96a} Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 69-126.