

PAUL'S APOLOGETIC AND THE PURPOSE OF ACTS¹

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The speeches in the Acts of the Apostles are generally held to have been included by Luke because of the contribution they make to the purpose and plan of his work. How far they represent the mind of the various speakers to whom they are attributed is a disputed question. The view taken here is that Luke followed the precedent of Thucydides, who says that he himself composed the speeches which form such a notable feature of his History but endeavoured at the same time to reproduce the general purport of what was actually said.²

The speeches to be considered in this paper are those delivered by Paul in his own defence in the last quarter of Acts (chapters 22-28).³

I

In Acts 19:21 Paul, towards the end of his ministry in Ephesus (A.D. 52-55), announces his intention of seeing Rome, after briefly returning to his former mission-field in Macedonia and Achaia and then visiting Jerusalem. To Paul himself we owe the further information that he planned, after seeing Rome, to go on to Spain and launch a campaign of evangelization there (Rom. 15:22-29), and also that the purpose of his visiting Jerusalem first was to deliver the proceeds of a collection which he had organized among his Gentile converts for the relief of poverty in the mother-

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² Thuc., *Hist.*, 1.22.1. See A. W. Gomme, "The Speeches in Thucydides" in *Essays in Greek History and Literature* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 156-189; T. F. Glasson, "The Speeches in Acts and Thucydides", *Expository Times*, lxxvi (1964-65), 165; P. A. Stadter (ed.), *The Speeches in Thucydides* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1973); M. I. Finley, *Ancient History: Evidence and Models* (London, 1985), pp. 13-15; G. H. R. Horsley, "Speeches and Dialogue in Acts", *New Testament Studies*, xxxii (1986), 609-614.

³ See also F. Veltman, "The Defense Speeches of Paul in Acts", in *Perspectives in Luke-Acts*, ed. C. H. Talbert (Edinburgh, 1978), pp. 243-256.

church. Luke's purpose in writing Acts, however, must be inferred mainly from what he himself tells us rather than from what someone else tells us—even when that someone else is such an eminent first-hand authority as Paul—but Luke's silences also constitute evidence in their own right, and Paul's letters provide the reader of Acts with some help in identifying and interpreting those silences.

The remainder of Luke's narrative tells how Paul's purpose of seeing Rome was realized, in spite of many unforeseen obstacles which might have prevented his ever getting there.⁴

After his visit to Macedonia and Achaia Paul takes ship for Judaea, along with a number of fellow-travellers.⁵ The voyage to Judaea is recorded in day-by-day detail in one of the "we" sections of Acts (20:5-21:18). As the voyage proceeds, ominous predictions of threats to Paul's liberty and to his life itself are made in one port after another. But Paul refuses to be turned aside from his determined course, and at last he and his friends arrive in Jerusalem.

There they have a meeting with James the Just and other leaders of the church. These are deeply worried men: for them to receive Paul will inevitably compromise them in the eyes not only of the general Jewish population of Jerusalem but also of many members of the church, described as "all zealots for the law" (Acts 21:10). In Jerusalem Paul is widely regarded as an apostate from Israel's true religion and as an agent of apostasy among other Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire. The leaders of the church of Jerusalem urge him to demonstrate his Jewish orthodoxy and loyalty by associating himself with four of their number who have to complete a purification ceremony in the temple in connexion with the discharge of a Nazirite vow. Paul consents to go along with this suggestion, which indeed chimes in well enough with his own stated policy of being "all things to all men" for the gospel's sake (1 Cor. 9:22 f.). But with his appearance in the temple precincts trouble breaks out: he is spotted there by some of his old opponents from the province of Asia, who have come to

⁴ See H. Chadwick, "The Circle and the Ellipse", in *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London, 1982), p. 16.

⁵ It is evident from a comparison with Paul's letters that these fellow-travellers were carrying their respective churches' contributions to the Jerusalem relief fund (see p. 384 with n. 10).

Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, and they raise a hue and cry against him, charging him with violating the sanctity of the temple by bringing Gentiles into it. The crowd of worshippers turns on Paul, drags him down the steps into the outer court and begins to beat him up. He is saved from death at the hands of his assailants by a detachment of Roman soldiers from the garrison in the Antonia fortress (north-west of the temple area); they rescue him and carry him on their shoulders up one of the two flights of steps connecting the outer court with the fortress. Paul is placed under formal arrest by the commanding officer of the garrison, and from then to the end of Acts he remains in Roman custody, no longer a free agent.

II

From this point on Luke's record is punctuated by a succession of speeches in which Paul defends himself before varying audiences against the charges laid against him. These speeches are addressed:

- (1) to the Jewish crowd in the temple precincts (Acts 22:1-21);
- (2) to the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-6);
- (3) to Felix, procurator of Judaea (Acts 24:10-21);
- (4) to Festus, Felix's successor as procurator (Acts 25:8, 10 f.);
- (5) to Agrippa the younger (Acts 26:2-23);
- (6) to the leaders of the Jewish community in Rome (Acts 28:17-28).

1. *To the Jerusalem crowd*

The crowd in the outer court of the temple, to whom Paul spoke in the Aramaic vernacular from the top of the steps leading up to the Antonia fortress, was fiercely hostile to him and had to be conciliated. The first attempt at conciliation was his speaking in Aramaic, not Greek. "When they heard that he was addressing them in the Aramaic speech, they were the more quiet" (Acts 22:2).

Then he told them of his early life and upbringing as an orthodox Jew: although born in Tarsus, he was brought up in Jerusalem and educated in the academy of Gamaliel;⁶ he was, like

⁶ See W. C. van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul's Youth*, E.T. (London, 1962).

his hearers, a zealot for the God of Israel. It was this zeal that impelled him to lead the campaign of repression against the followers of Jesus. Nothing but a compulsion too great to be resisted could have turned him from his career as a persecutor. But this compulsion came when the risen Lord appeared to him on the Damascus road and called him to be his servant and messenger. In the interpretation of this call an influential part was played by "a devout man according to the law", highly respected by the Jewish community of Damascus, Ananias by name. So Paul had become a follower of Jesus in circumstances which left him with no choice to do anything else.

But later, in Jerusalem, he went on to tell them, he had a further vision of Christ in the temple, not unlike the vision which inaugurated Isaiah's prophetic ministry (Isa. 6:1-10), and was commissioned expressly as his messenger to the Gentiles. The mention of Gentiles reminded his hearers of their original grievance against him and, whereas they had thus far given him a quiet enough hearing, their fury now burst out afresh: Paul's attempt at conciliating them was frustrated.

2. *To the Sanhedrin*

Since Paul had been accused in the first instance of an offence against the temple, this made him liable to the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel.⁷ If a *prima facie* case could have been made out, the commanding officer would have handed him over to the Sanhedrin for trial; until then, he was responsible for this Roman citizen's safety. A preliminary appearance before the Sanhedrin was desirable in order that the officer might be satisfied that there was (or was not) a *prima facie* case. So Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin, over which the high priest presided *ex officio*, and introduced his case with a protestation that he had maintained a good conscience before God throughout his life up to the present moment. For this protestation the high priest—Ananias, an impetuous and thoroughly deplorable character, according to Jewish tradition—ordered him to be

⁷ Exceptionally, the Romans allowed the Jewish authorities in Judaea to retain the right of capital jurisdiction in this sphere, especially with regard to Gentile trespass into the inner courts of the temple (cf. Josephus, *BJ*, 5.194; 6.124f.).

struck in the face. This illegality on the part of the president of a court of justice drew forth an indignant retort from Paul.

Then he made a second beginning: he asserted that his whole case rested on the resurrection hope, a hope maintained especially by the Pharisaic party. The Sanhedrin comprised an influential minority of Pharisees alongside its Sadducean majority.⁸ Paul addressed the court as a Pharisee himself, and immediately divided his hearers—some of them supporting a man who, being so sound as he evidently was on the doctrine of resurrection, could not be far wrong in general, while others treated his commitment to that doctrine as another black mark against him. “What if he has really seen an angelic vision?” said some of the Pharisees. The result was that the court dissolved into disorderly wrangling, and the commanding officer had Paul taken back to the fortress. His attempt to get some kind of authoritative ruling from the Sanhedrin had evidently come to nothing.

There was no more that he could do along that line, and as Paul had so many enemies in Jerusalem, he decided to remit the problem to the procurator of Judaea, Felix. He therefore sent Paul under armed guard to the procurator’s headquarters in Caesarea, with a covering letter setting out the circumstances of his arrest and the subsequent enquiry.

3. *To Felix*

Paul’s defence before Felix (Acts 24:10-21) is the most directly forensic of his speeches. In its context it is his reply to the accusations voiced by one Tertullus, an orator who delivered the speech for the prosecution on behalf of the high priest and some other members of the Sanhedrin. There are three points in their indictment, two general and one particular: (1) Paul is a perfect pest, stirring up unrest in Jewish communities throughout the empire; (2) he is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; (3) in particular, he was caught in the act of trying to defile the temple.

Paul replies to this particular charge first and again last: he has committed no act against the temple, but on returning to Jerusalem on pilgrimage after several years’ absence he was going about his religious duties in the sacred precincts when he was accused of sacrilege by some Jews from Asia; let them be called as

⁸ Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.17.

witnesses. But in fact they made no appearance in court: they had no evidence to give. To the general charge of causing trouble throughout the Roman provinces Paul makes no specific reply: Felix in any case would be more concerned with what had been done in his own province. As for his being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, this is described by Paul in terms of his practising the ancestral worship of God according to "The Way", as he and his fellow-Christians called it—"sect" was their opponents' term for it. As to the crowd in the temple court and to the Sanhedrin, so to Felix he affirms that he is a loyal Jew; as before the Sanhedrin, so now he maintains that he shares and proclaims Israel's traditional resurrection hope. He credits his prosecutors with cherishing the same hope, although the chief-priestly members of the Sanhedrin delegation and in particular the high priest Ananias, being Sadducees, presumably did not accept it. It is a matter of interest that Paul is here represented as speaking of a resurrection "both of the just and of the unjust". He may well have been brought up to believe, with most other Pharisees, that the wicked as well as the good would be raised from death, but in his letters he refers only to the resurrection of "those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor. 15:23), treating it as their participation in the resurrection of Christ, related to it as the full harvest is related to the first fruits.

There is one point in Paul's defence before Felix that calls for special attention: this speech contains the only allusion in Acts to the Jerusalem relief fund which, as we know from Paul's letters, played such a large part in his policy at this time.⁹ "After several years", he said to Felix, "I came bringing alms and offerings to my nation, and it was while I was engaged in [presenting] these that they found me purified in the temple" (Acts 24:17 f.).

Here we have an instance of the kind of help which (as was said above) Paul's letters provide for the interpretation of Luke's silences. Why is Luke so reticent about the collection for Jerusalem to which Paul, at that very time, attached so much importance? And why, in Paul's one allusion to it in Acts, is it spoken of not as a contribution for the relief of the church of Jerusalem, and more especially for its poorer members, but as "alms and offerings" for the "nation" in general?¹⁰

⁹ See n. 5 above (on Acts 20:4).

¹⁰ See K. Berger, "Almosen für Israel: Zum historischen Kontext der paulinischen Kollekte", *New Testament Studies*, xxiii (1976-77), 180-204.

We do not know the answer to these questions: we can but speculate. Two possible answers, for either of which much can be said, seem to be mutually exclusive.

One is that the relief fund was misrepresented by Paul's accusers as an attempt to divert money that was due to the Jerusalem temple, and that this charge was pressed against him at his hearing before Caesar. But how could an offering made by Gentiles be treated as a diversion from funds which should have gone to swell the temple tax, the half-shekel levied annually, with the permission and indeed the protection of Rome, on all Jews throughout the world between the ages of twenty and fifty? It was argued, perhaps, that Paul's Gentile converts, especially those of them who had belonged to the fringe of Gentile adherents of the synagogue¹¹ in cities of the *diaspora*, were potential proselytes to Judaism, and that, but for Paul's intervention, they might have been expected to become in due course converts to the synagogue and hence contributors to the temple tax. If this was one of the planks in the indictment brought against Paul in the imperial court, it could have been regarded as a charge of temple profanation less easily rebutted than the charge that Paul had taken a Gentile with him on to forbidden territory. Luke, it might be further suggested, was aware that this more subtle charge was brought against Paul before Caesar; he may even have been aware that it was effective enough to lead to his conviction. At any rate, it was a sufficiently delicate issue for Luke to judge it best to say as little about it as possible.

But all this is quite uncertain. The other explanation is that the relief fund failed to achieve Paul's purpose in organizing it. It did not promote a spirit of unity between the church of Jerusalem and Paul's Gentile churches. It has been questioned, indeed, whether

¹¹ These so-called God-fearers have been the subject of much literary debate in recent years; see L. H. Feldman, "Jewish 'Sympathizers' in Classical Literature and Inscriptions", *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, lxxxi (1956), 200-208, and "The Omnipresence of the God-fearers", *Biblical Archaeology Review*, xii. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1986), 58-69; A. T. Kraabel, "The Diaspora Synagogue: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence since Sukenik", in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 2/19 (Berlin, 1979), pp. 477-510, and "The Disappearance of the 'God-fearers'", *Numen*, xxviii (1981), 113-126; M. Wilcox, "The 'God-fearers' in Acts—A Reconsideration", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, xiii (1981), 102-122; T. M. Finn, "The God-fearers Reconsidered", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, xlvi (1985), 75-84.

the money brought by Paul and his companions was accepted at all by the Jerusalem church.¹² Luke gives the impression that it was accepted; but it was hazardous for the elders of the Jerusalem church to accept anything from such a suspect source as Paul and his Gentile mission. Could their reputation in the eyes of their fellow-Jerusalemites (or indeed in the eyes of some of their own fellow-churchmen) survive any appearance of fellowship with Paul? Their suggestion that Paul should participate in the four Nazirites' purification ceremony was probably designed to make it easier for them to accept what he brought; if part of the gift was sanctified by being used to pay the Nazirites' expenses, they could more safely receive the rest of it.¹³ But their well-meant suggestion turned out disastrously. Any further association on their part with Paul was now out of the question. Since the relief fund, for all the high hopes which Paul placed in it, was in the event a fiasco, Luke preferred to forget it. In retrospect, it was an abortive enterprise and was best left unmentioned.¹⁴

4. *To Festus*

Felix might have discharged Paul for lack of positive evidence against him, but he kept on deferring a decision for two years, and then he was recalled to Rome. Not wishing to add to the abundant offence which he had already given to the Jewish authorities in the province, he left Paul in prison instead of releasing him; and when his successor Festus arrived, he found this item of unfinished business awaiting his attention. The Sanhedrin lost no time in bringing it up, and sent a deputation to Caesarea to restate the charges against Paul. Luke reports the hearing before Festus quite summarily: on the one hand, he says, Paul's accusers brought many grave charges against him which

¹² See J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London, 1977), pp. 256 f.

¹³ It has even been suggested that members of the Jerusalem church drew Paul into an ambush "by luring him into the Temple" and that Luke suspected as much; see A. J. Mattill, "The Purpose of Acts: Schneckenberger Reconsidered", in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (Exeter, 1970), pp. 115 f.

¹⁴ On the theory that the famine-relief visit to Jerusalem of Acts 11:28-30 is an antedating of Paul's present visit see F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions in the Acts of the Apostles", *Bulletin*, lxxviii (1985-86), 278, 292-294.

they could not substantiate, while on the other hand Paul replied to each of the three main charges with a direct negative: "I have committed no offence against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor yet against Caesar" (Acts 25:8). His denial of having committed any offence against Caesar must refer to the charge of being a disturber of the peace throughout the Roman world (cf. Acts 24:5a).¹⁵

But Festus was new to the office of procurator, and naturally wished to establish good relations with the Jewish authorities at the beginning of his governorship, so he spoke of taking Paul to Jerusalem and conducting his trial there. Paul, seeing that he was likely to be put in jeopardy all over again through Festus's inexperience, exercised his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar—appealed, that is to say, to have his case transferred from the jurisdiction of the provincial court to the supreme tribunal of the empire. Festus was relieved, because he no longer had to reach a decision in a matter where he felt himself to be out of his depth; his only problem now was the drafting of a report, the *litterae dimissoriae*, to be sent to Rome on the conduct of the case thus far. He no doubt had the court records of Felix's proceedings to help him in the task, but these were perhaps not sufficiently explicit with regard to this man "Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:19).

Happily, Festus was able to draw on the superior knowledge of Agrippa the younger, ruler of a client kingdom on the north-eastern frontiers of his own province, who came to Caesarea at this time on an official visit to congratulate him on his arrival in Judaea as the emperor's representative. Agrippa, a member of the Herod family, was reputed to have expert knowledge of all matters related to the Jewish religion—among other things, he enjoyed the privilege of appointing (and, where he thought fit, deposing) the high priest of Israel. Festus therefore told him of his problem. Agrippa was interested in what Festus had to say about Paul, and expressed the wish to meet this man for himself. An early opportunity for this was arranged, and Paul was invited to give an account of himself to Agrippa.

This was no formal speech for the defence. By appealing to Caesar, Paul had effectively removed his case from any lower

¹⁵ Compare the serious charges brought against him and his friends at an earlier date, in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-7).

jurisdiction, and Agrippa could in any case have had no jurisdiction over him at all. But if Agrippa was to help Festus in drafting his report, he would be in a better position to advise him if he heard Paul's account of the matter, and he called on Paul to tell his story.

5. *To Agrippa the younger*

Paul's speech before Agrippa, as Luke reports it, is a carefully constructed *apologia pro vita sua*. Like the address to the crowd in the outer court of the temple, it is autobiographical in character, laying special weight on Paul's call and commission; but it is specially adapted to a very different audience and setting. Its language is studiously classical, as befitted the circumstances of its delivery. After a complimentary exordium (Acts 26:2 f.), Paul speaks of his early upbringing as a Pharisee and his devotion to the resurrection hope (vv. 4-8), his campaign of repression against the followers of Jesus (vv. 9-11), his confrontation with the risen Christ on the Damascus road (vv. 12-18), his life of obedience to the commission received then (vv. 19 f.) and his arrest in the temple (v. 21). A summary of his preaching forms the peroration to his speech (vv. 22 f.).

The main emphasis throughout the speech is laid on the loyalty of Paul and his message to Israel's ancestral religion. His preaching, he affirms, contains nothing but what Moses and the prophets said would happen—especially the death and resurrection of the Christ and the proclamation through him of "light both to the people [of Israel] and to the Gentiles" (verse 23).¹⁶ As in the speeches before the Sanhedrin and before Felix, special weight lies on the resurrection hope and its realization in Jesus. "Why should it be thought incredible by any of you", Paul asks, "that God should raise the dead?"—the dead in general, and Christ in particular, for his resurrection, having already taken place, is the guarantee that God will fulfil his promise by raising the rest of the dead.

6. *To the leading Jews in Rome*

The same emphasis appears in Paul's last apologetic speech in Acts: his address to the leaders of the Jewish community in Rome.

¹⁶ An echo of Isa. 42:6 (cf. Luke 2:33; Acts 13:47).

When, in consequence of his appeal to Caesar, Paul arrived in Rome to await his hearing in the supreme court, he was kept under house arrest. Some three days after he settled in his lodgings, he invited the leaders of the local Jewish community to pay him a visit and he acquainted them with his arrival in the city and the circumstances of his being there. He could not be sure if they had already had some communication from Jerusalem about him; the Roman community's links with the Judaeen authorities were close. But it was important that they should hear Paul's own account of events as soon as possible. He assures them that he has no complaint to make against the Jewish nation or its leaders, but insists that he has "done nothing against the people or the ancestral customs". It is his loyalty to Israel's true religion that has brought him to his present situation: "it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20)—a reminder that one of the conditions of his house arrest was his being chained by the wrist to the soldier who guarded him.

This first visit to Paul by the Jewish leaders in Rome was followed by a second, on an appointed day, when more members of the community came to his lodgings to hear him expound his message. As he spent a whole day "testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets" (Acts 28:23), some were persuaded by his arguments but others were not. The latter were evidently in the majority, for Luke treats their scepticism as the definitive instance of Jewish rejection of the gospel (of which earlier instances have been given throughout his record), quoting Paul's final word to them as one of the *Leitmotivs* of Acts: "Let it be known to you, then, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles: *they* will listen" (28:28). Henceforth, the gospel is expressly for the Gentile world.

Yet Luke is not anti-Jewish; least of all is he anti-Pharisaic. In his portrayal, Paul is the ideal Jew, "believing everything laid down by the law or written by the prophets" (Acts 24:14), and finding the fulfilment of all in Jesus. The gospel, for Luke, is the crown and climax of Israel's faith: that is the dominant emphasis of these apologetic speeches.

III

Luke's purpose in writing his history is not *primarily* apologetic. He writes in order to provide his readers with an orderly account

of the rise and progress of Christianity.¹⁷ But since this movement was “everywhere spoken against” (Acts 28:22), it seemed desirable to refute some of the current objections to it. The first Christian historian found himself accordingly obliged to be the first Christian apologist. Of three main types of Christian apologetic in the second century Luke provides first-century prototypes: apologetic in relation to pagan religion (Christianity is true; paganism is false); apologetic in relation to Judaism (Christianity represents the fulfilment of true Judaism); apologetic in relation to the political authorities (Christianity is innocent of any offence against Roman law).

As for apologetic in relation to pagan religions, that figures earlier in Acts—in Paul and Barnabas’s protest to the people of Lystra who were about to pay them divine honours (14:15-18) and in Paul’s address to the court of the Areopagus in Athens (17:22-31)—but it plays no part in Paul’s apologetic in the closing chapters of the book.

It is otherwise with apologetic in relation to Judaism. This is prominent in one of Paul’s defence speeches after another. One might put a marginal question-mark against some elements in Paul’s repeated claim to be an exemplary Jew, living according to the ancestral customs. He did live according to these when he was in Jewish company, but when he lived in a Gentile environment he was happy to live like a Gentile, eating Gentile food and conforming in general to the Gentile way of life (but not to Gentile morals). When he told the leading Jews of Rome that he was loyal to the customs, did some of them compare him with other Jews who were taken to Rome as prisoners around the same time and who showed their adherence to the “customs” by restricting their diet to figs and nuts, sooner than risk eating food which was forbidden to pious Jews?¹⁸ Luke relates earlier in Acts how Peter learned to call no food common or unclean (non-kosher), and certainly he knew that Paul had learned the same lesson and practised it even more thoroughly than Peter did: why then does he not indicate that Paul’s alleged devotion to the “customs” was subject to wholesale modification as expediency directed?

¹⁷ Cf. the prologue to Luke’s twofold work (Luke 1:1-4); see L. C. A. Alexander, “Luke’s Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing”, *Novum Testamentum*, xxviii (1986), 48-74.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Vita*, 14.

If, in representing Paul's claim in such terms, Luke has in view not Paul's defence before Caesar (which was past by the time he wrote) but the ongoing defence of Christians in the Roman Empire, his purpose seems to be to maintain that Christianity, far from being a novel and illicit cult, was in fact the full flowering of Judaism, which had for a long time now been a recognized and protected religion; he stresses the continuity of the old and the new. The recognition given by Roman law to Judaism ought *a fortiori* to be granted to Christianity. Christianity goes back beyond Moses and the law to Abraham and the patriarchs. Points in which it differs from traditional Judaism are due to the impact made by the Christ-event, and these, like the Christ-event itself, were divinely foreseen and designed.

In Paul's insistence that he is a loyal Jew he repeatedly lays special weight on his lifelong commitment to the crucial doctrine of resurrection. We know from Paul's own writings that in his eyes the general resurrection, which still lay in the future (and to which Pharisees looked forward), was all of a piece with the particular resurrection of Jesus, which had already taken place. Therefore to deny the one was to deny the other; to believe that Jesus had risen logically involved belief in the general resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 12 f.). This same conviction underlies Paul's insistence in these speeches that the doctrine of resurrection is the key issue in the case against him: "It is for the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I stand on trial", he said to the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:6); "it is for this hope that I am accused by Jews (of all people)", he said to King Agrippa (26:7). Why, he went on to ask, was it deemed incredible that God should already have done something (in the case of Jesus) which many of his accusers believed he would one day do (in the case of the rest of the dead)?

It has been questioned if Luke does justice to the true force of Paul's resurrection doctrine when he represents Paul as arguing thus. Probably he does; but his aim, as has been said, is to present Christianity as the fulfilment of Judaism and therefore as entitled to share in the liberty which the empire accorded to the practice of Judaism. Paul—whether the Paul of Acts or the Paul whom we know from his letters— could defend his case on biblical and theological grounds: the great prophets of Israel had looked forward to the day when Israel would be a light to the nations and he sees the gospel as the realization of this hope. But this meant in practice that Christianity became predominantly a Gentile faith,

and it was unrealistic to expect the state to recognize it as a variety of Judaism, let alone as the truest Judaism of all.

As for apologetic in relation to the state, some scholars have argued that Acts (or even Luke-Acts as a whole) was written to provide the counsel for Paul's defence before Nero with information which would be useful to him as he presented Paul's case in court.¹⁹ This view, as maintained by those scholars, cannot well be sustained and has not been generally accepted. There is much in Acts that would be irrelevant for forensic purposes. It is conceivable, however, that Luke had at his disposal some document which played a part at Paul's trial.

The charges brought against Paul before Felix (and Festus) would be repeated before Nero, and Paul's replies in the procurator's court would be relevant to his defence in the supreme court. The charge of stirring up unrest in the Jewish communities throughout the empire (Acts 24:5) would be even more relevant in the imperial court than it was before Felix: indeed, it was probably the main plank in the indictment when his prosecutors gave evidence against him in Rome and would certainly have attracted the death penalty if it could have been proved. Luke seems definitely to have had this charge in mind in his narrative of Paul's missionary activity. He does not deny that Paul's presence was the occasion of rioting in one place after another, but tries to show that Paul was not responsible for this: the responsibility, according to Luke's account, lay with others—sometimes with property interests which felt themselves threatened by the gospel²⁰ but frequently with the leaders of local Jewish communities.

If Paul's appeal to Caesar had been heard by the time Acts was written (as no doubt it was), this apologetic was still necessary: the charge of subversive activity pressed against him continued to be pressed against Christians in general, and Paul's defence was relevant to their situation.

One writer has argued that Luke wrote not only to commend

¹⁹ So M. V. Aberle, "Exegetische Studien: 2. Über den Zweck der Apostelgeschichte", *Theologische Quartalschrift*, xxxvii (1855), 173-236; D. Plooiij, "The Work of St. Luke: A Historical Apology for Pauline Preaching before the Roman Court", *Expositor*, series 8, viii (1914), 511-523, and "Again: The Work of St. Luke", *ibid.*, xiii (1917), 108-124; J. I. Still, *St. Paul on Trial* (London, 1923); G. S. Duncan, *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry* (London, 1929), pp. 97 f.

²⁰ Cf. Acts 16:19-21; 19:23-28.

Christianity to the favourable attention of the Roman state but also to commend the Roman state to Christian readers.²¹ This thesis can scarcely be upheld in an unqualified form. But Luke's attitude to the Roman state and to the imperial authorities throughout the provinces is quite positive. After the favourable judgments of Gallio and others earlier in the narrative, the reader is quite prepared for a favourable outcome to Paul's appeal. When Paul made his appeal, there was nothing in Nero's record that made an appeal to him exceptionally risky. If Luke wrote, as is probable, a decade or two later, he wrote for people who knew much more about Nero than was known in A.D. 59, the probable year of Paul's appeal, towards the end of the enlightened administration of the *quinquennium Neronis*. If, in the event, the outcome of the appeal was indeed favourable, then Luke's picture of Roman justice would be reinforced by what his readers knew. If, on the other hand, it led to Paul's conviction and execution, then the implication would be that this was an instance of Nero's deviation from Roman standards, which led in due course to the reprobation of his memory. What Tertullian was later to call an *institutum Neronianum*, a precedent set by Nero,²² was *ipso facto* an infringement of the tradition of Roman justice.

The note of cautious optimism on which Acts ends is not unlike that heard in Paul's letter to the church of Philippi—if that letter, or at least this part of it, is to be dated (as I think it is) towards the end of his two years of Roman imprisonment. There he does not know how his hearing will turn out, but thinks it more likely than not that he will be set at liberty and be able to continue his apostolic ministry (Phil. 1:19-26). It says something for Luke's quality as a historian that, writing as he probably does several years later, he is able at the end of Acts to recapture so accurately the atmosphere of this period of Paul's house-arrest.

²¹ P. W. Walaskay, "And so we came to Rome", SNTS Monograph 49 (Cambridge, 1983).

²² Tert., *Ad Nationes*, 1. 7.