

"Discuss the speeches of Peter and Paul in Acts with reference to authorship, style, form, context and theological content."

The author of the Acts of the Apostles has chosen to include in his story of the progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome speeches, ostensibly from the protagonists, which enliven the often dry narrative. Apart from Stephen's long speech, all the major speeches are attributed to Paul or Peter. These speeches promote a uniform Lukan theology and although he must have sources, Luke's often skillful handling goes beyond that of just an editor, so the discourses are best thought of as Lukan compositions. The author makes some attempt to consider the context and the orator involved, he is more concerned with his theology and the needs of his readers than any conception of journalism or even historical fiction in our modern sense.

The speeches of Peter and Paul found in Acts can be divided by context into preaching or mission speeches, defence speeches, those dealing with internal church business, and those which do little but propel the narrative. The style, form and context of these speeches will be considered within these groupings, but as the study of their authorship and theology becomes an all encompassing one they will be discussed first. All biblical quotations come from the Jerusalem Bible.

The authorship of the speeches depends on who wrote Acts and to what extent the author is responsible for the speeches as they are found in the book. Because the work is anonymous we are left using the name attested by church tradition as the author; that is "Luke". Irenaeus identifies "Luke, the follower of Paul,"<sup>1</sup> author of a Gospel and "Luke, the physician,"<sup>2</sup> is described in the Muratorian canon as author of the third Gospel and Acts. Other early tradition in the anti-Marcionite prologue places Luke as author of the Acts and a Syrian from Antioch.<sup>3</sup> All this

identifies him with Paul's companion mentioned in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24, and 2 Timothy 4:11. 4 The books themselves suggest a man from a Hellenised Christian background comfortable with pagan and Jewish ideas. The Gospel's prologue suggests a looking back at events and probably belongs to a third generation Christian community.<sup>5</sup> The state of the speeches in Acts preclude any consideration that we may have here preserved the original words of Peter and Paul as in practical terms we have works too short to be real speeches revealing that there must be some editing involved. This is underlined by such concessions to his readers as ensuring Paul's speech at Pisidia omits much of the history covered in Stephen's speech, as Luke doesn't need his readers to see the proofs twice.<sup>6</sup> By the end of Acts, Paul is able to be presented as preaching in a similar way to the Jews in Rome with the scripture proofs described rather than quoted. Also the author illuminates obscurities in one speech in another. The speeches of Paul at Pisidia and Peter at Pentecost both expound on the death of David, but the full picture is not in either account and only is fully illuminated for Luke's readers, not Paul's nor Peter's hypothetical audience.<sup>7</sup> Further evidence of an editorial hand in the speeches is the presence of a footnote for Luke's readers in Peter's speech prior to the election of Matthias, informing his Greek readers of the Aramaic name for the site of Judas' death, not an obvious need for the putative audience of the brothers.(1:19)

That Luke did, however, exercise more than just editorial control of previously available material is clear, as it can be shown that neither Peter nor Paul could be responsible even for the basic material. Haenchen elegantly shows instances in which Peter is given speeches in which the import of the scriptural proof requires the sense found in the Septuagint.<sup>8</sup> Peter would hardly have used Joel 3:1-5 in which the Hebrew text has "Yahweh" rather than "Lord" in "all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved,"(2:21) since in this speech Jesus is called, "both Lord and Christ."(2:36) The heroic Paul of Acts does not gel with the humble figure of the letters 9, and such unlikely details as an education at the feet of Gamaliel, and being a Pharisee and a Roman citizen confirm the fictional nature of Luke's "Paul".<sup>10</sup> Luke's authorship accounts for the unity of style <sup>11</sup>, and recurring literary devices such as interruptions and refutations throughout the speeches.<sup>12</sup> It follows

then that Luke can make a speech outlining his overall structure for the book and give it to Jesus, "you will be my witness not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth."(1:8)

Greek tradition of oratory had provided for speeches to be written for someone else to deliver and Greek historians had projected this into their histories. Lysias is credited with the technique of *ethopoia* in his speech writing to convey, "something of the character of the speaker into the oration."<sup>13</sup> While this was used in speeches he wrote for others to deliver as their own, it became established practice for historians to use the device of inventing a speech for which there was no record or where the known speech didn't fit the bill. Thucydides said, "I have used language in accordance with what I thought the speakers in each would have been most likely to say."<sup>14</sup> Luke as a Christian of Greek background and some literary skill is an heir to this tradition and would have his own ideas of what Peter and Paul would be likely to have said based on his own theological views.

Luke's speeches are a major way he advances his theological perspective. His role in composing the discourses ensures that, "there are no substantial theological differences between the speeches of Peter, Stephen and Paul."<sup>15</sup> They address issues important to Luke and probably a specific community using situations from the history of the Church as a springboard to the discourses.<sup>16</sup>

A "theology of divine promise(LXX) and divine fulfillment(Luke—Acts)"<sup>17</sup> is behind Luke's emphasis on scriptural proofs found in the speeches. These proofs frequently refer to the resurrection of Christ, which is the ultimate intervention of God in human affairs. The Lukan community in particular responds to the delay of the parousia with a concept of God working through the history of the Church. The recording of a history of the Church at all is inappropriate to a writer who expects the end of the world. The references to miracles in the speeches (e.g.3:12) allow the actions of God in the Church to be highlighted.

The other major theme addressed by the speeches is the question of the Jews and the Law, and the legitimacy of the mission to the Gentiles. Even though the Jewish Church is not a going concern by the time of Luke's writing he is fascinated by the chosen peoples rejection of Christ. For Luke, although the promises to the Jewish people cannot be erased, their rejection of Jesus' message, conveyed here by their lack of response to preaching by Peter and Paul, justifies the evangelisation of the Gentiles.

The speeches in which Peter and Paul preach to the Jews(Pentecost,Solomon's Porch,Pisidian Antioch,Rome), the God-fearers(Cornelius) and the Gentiles(Lystra, Aeropagus) have been noted to follow a pattern. Following Dibelius 18 and Schweizer 19, this can be summarised:

- 1 Introductory address and appeal for attention.
- 2 Christological Kerygma emphasising the witness of the disciples.
- 3 Scriptural proof.
- 4 Proclamation of salvation and call to repentance.

Dibelius finds that, "the harmony not only of outline but also of content is so striking as to require explanation,"<sup>20</sup> which he finds in hypothesizing that these are examples of the way Christians formed sermons in Luke's time. Sources for this form of address have been suggested from,"ethical pagan theism,"<sup>21</sup> and Jewish,"homilies, preached in synagogues."<sup>22</sup> That this scheme can be applied in general terms with allowances for the target audience would seem to counter Conzelmann's objection that since most of the speeches,"are designed specifically as sermons to the Jews (at the time of Luke the Jewish mission was no longer current"<sup>22</sup> they cannot be considered as giving us examples of how the Gospel was preached. I can see no reason for Luke to create speeches in any form other than a way reminiscent of how his Church preached.

The speech of Peter to explain the phenomenon of the Pentecost event(2:14—36) has been described as , "the finest creation of Luke among the early mission discourses."<sup>24</sup> Its context as an explanation of odd happenings serves Luke well, as the explanation to the crowd is a useful introduction to the start of progress of the Gospels for his readers. He commences after an appeal for attention using a favourite device with his refutation of a misunderstanding in the audience, then

proceeds with the features previously noted to be common to these speeches, the scriptural proofs in this case adapted from Joel and the Psalms, and the call to repentance and baptism. The language is "biblical" in the sense of imitation of the Septuagint 25, in the same way a modern preacher might talk in the style of the King James Bible to strike a chord with a congregation raised on that book. For Luke this solemn style is ideal for his readers for the Septuagint is holy writ. That this makes the story less likely as an address to an enormous crowd 26, who all somehow get baptised in the middle of the dry season 27, is not really an issue. What is important is expanding the significance of the coming of the Spirit to the Church into the impetus for commencing missionary activity.

Following Peter and John's miraculous cure of the man born lame, Luke inserts another speech to a Jewish audience.(3:12—26) The speech is only superficially related to the miracle pericope it purports to explain 28, but quickly gets to its main business of the explanation of the death of Jesus, this time with the use of Moses to confirm Jesus as "a prophet."(3:22)

Again a refutation is used in the introductory address an interruption, another recurring Lukan device, is employed, the priests and the Captain of the Temple Guard ending the discourse. The conciliatory tone to the Jewish people is not necessarily evidence of a very early tradition distinct from the rest of the addresses, as the arrest which follows parallels the speech/rejection pattern seen elsewhere with which Luke supports the approaching mission the the pagans.

At Pisidia(13:17—47), Paul follows the same schema as Peter's mission speeches and even Bruce notes a similarity between this address and that at Pentecost.<sup>29</sup> In the context of a synagogue the "biblical" style and appeal to scripture are most at home, and the audience don't even interrupt him until the following week.

Because in Luke's scheme of things the Cornelius episode has now legitimised the Gentile mission, this Jewish rejection can now openly be seen as justifying the proselytizing of pagans.

We had to proclaim the Word of God to you first, but since you have rejected it, since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, we must turn to the pagans. (13:46)

The unlikely meeting of Paul with Roman Jews who surprisingly have no clear knowledge of Christians considering the expulsion under Claudius 30, provides a neat summary, from Luke, of

this form of address.

He put his case to them, testifying to the Kingdom of God and trying to persuade them about Jesus, arguing from the Law of Moses and the prophets. (28:23)

The rejection by the Jews seems to be their own decision in the text from Isaiah as presented here (28:26-27), while the sense is less severe in the original, with Yahweh making them unable to understand. Where he uses this text elsewhere (Luke 8:10), the author is referring to parables. Paul is not described as using parables, in fact he has a very clear approach to his audience, increasing the import of Jewish rejection and further justifying that, "this salvation of God has been sent to the pagans." (28:28) This mission is inaugurated in Peter's speech at the house of Cornelius to God-fearing pagans, an event so central to Luke's plan that Peter refers to it in three speeches. The kerygma is illuminated here less by scripture and more by Peter's witness. The expression, "Lord of all men," (10:36) is a term found in classical religions and appropriate to the universal nature of salvation now being proclaimed.<sup>31</sup> The feature of interruption appears, in this case by the Holy Spirit no less, who confirms Peter's vision that the Gentiles are to be saved. The whole episode with the involvement of angels, visions and the spirit emphasises for Luke's readers the involvement of God in a crucial point in the history of the Church.

The first speech noted which Paul delivers to a purely pagan audience occurs at Lystra. (14:15—17) The attempted deification finds a later echo at Malta. (28:6) This speech serves as a device to extricate Paul and Barnabas from the consequences of a miracle similar to Peter and John's. Although brief the speech still contains familiar features like the refutation of the audiences misunderstanding. Although the language remains reminiscent of the Septuagint <sup>32</sup>, the content is adapted to the pagan audience. The proof of God is not taken from scripture but from nature and the very motif of refusal of divine honours has classical parallels.<sup>33</sup> That such a speech would sway the religious mob seems doubtful, although Luke does imply that the locals were easily swayed by Jews as the people of Lystra are later convinced to stone Paul.

Similar concerns are found in the great speech Luke gives to Paul to deliver to Stoics and Epicurians at the council of the Aeropagus. (17:2Z—31) The basic structure of the mission speech is intact, but the scriptural evidence is replaced by quotations from the Greeks, Epimenicles and Aratus. The kerygma is not based on Jesus as Christ but on, "the Proclamation of God,"<sup>34</sup> who is, as at Lystra, expounded by his creation. The opening refutation and interruption are devices familiar to Lukan style, but there are also affinities to the traditions of Hellenistic rhetoric pointed out by Zweck, who finds in Dibelius' analysis on introduction/ exposition/ conclusion the exordium/ probatio/ peroratio of classical rhetoric.<sup>35</sup> In Athens, Paul's approach to the Jews is compressed and interrupted to bring the message to the philosophers. Their rejection of Paul's message may be meant as an explanation of similar failures in Luke's community.<sup>36</sup>

The defense speeches in Acts in general do little to inform the reader of the legal process or the verdict, but they are the backbone of a suspenseful trial drama, allow Luke to summarise the story of Paul and are used as preaching devices.<sup>37</sup> The trial speeches have a structure recognisable from the defence speech patterns in ancient literature.<sup>38</sup> At their most basic they consist of:

- 1 Opening framework
- 2 Apology including Captatio benevolentiae
- 3 Verdict

Paul speech to the Jewish mob (22:1—21), while nota trial is certainly a defence. The immediate charge of profaning the Temple is ignored in Paul's biographical speech which contains a novel siting of a call to evangelise the pagans in the Temple, sure to upset the audience, whose riot is a verdict of sorts. For Luke's readers this is justification of the pagan mission directly from Christ. As a defense it overturns convention by insulting the jury, hinting that Paul does not recognise their authority.

Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin (23:1—6) is again not a real trial, merely a meeting to sort out charges, but again in front of a Jewish "court" the convention is subverted. Paul offers an insult

instead of a *captitio benevolentiae*, then deliberately inflames the situation by claiming he is a Pharisee. Luke sees Jewish jurisdiction as invalid as by failing to uphold the law themselves they can't judge Paul.

How can you sit there to judge me according to the law, and then break the law by ordering a man to strike me. (23:3)

Before Felix (24:10-21), the trial proper begins, and Luke recognises this court so Paul gives a proper account of himself, *captitio* and all, and directly defends himself against the accusations.

Luke portrays Paul as the one with reverence to the law and so reminds his readers of the Jewish origin of the religion and the past support of the Gentile church for the brethren in Jerusalem. The verdict is adjournment until Paul's appeal to Caesar under Festus two years later.

Before Agrippa (26:2-29), whom Paul regards differently to the Jews, again the convention of a defence speech is followed. Paul's "apology" consists of a biographical summary rather than a direct answer. Again interruption is employed in this case a device to show Agrippa in a conciliatory mood.

In contrast to these speeches, Peter's defense in front of the Sanhedrin (4:18-12), has more of the structure of the preaching form. In abbreviated form there is the demand for attention, a summary of the kerygma and scripture proof. The motif of sanction because of a kindness recalls the controversies of healing on the Sabbath.(eg.Luke6:6—11) There is at least here a more definite verdict given, the flouting of which again suggests denial of the authority of the Jews.

The speeches which deal with internal Church business lack the defined structures of the defence or mission speeches, but as these compositions address crucial moments in Church history, they do reveal much of Luke's thought.

While Peter's oration prior to the election of Matthias(1:15—22) contains common features and a style familiar from his mission speeches, its inward focus gives it a different emphasis. For Luke it is an opportunity to give his readers his version of the Judas story, which uses a different tradition

and scripture reference to that of Matthew.(Matt. 27:3-10) There is nothing in what Peter says in his speech on the psalm nor the story of Judas which justifies:

We must therefore choose someone who has been  
with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was  
travelling around with us. (1:21)

Luke uses this to introduce his concern with the witness of the apostles which forms such a recurring theme in the speeches which follow. The one hundred and twenty brethren represent a symbolic number making up a synagogue of believers.<sup>40</sup>

Peter speaks to the Jerusalem Christians after the Cornelius incident (10:34—43) and again to the Council of Jerusalem.(15:7—17) Both are challenges to the Gentile mission and Luke uses the action of the spirit upon Cornelius both times as defence. The success of his speech on both occasions gives for Luke's readers official sanction for the pagan ministry from the original Church. The homogeneous nature of the speeches is emphasised before the Council where Peter sounds like Paul, taking on the burden of the Gentile ministry and espousing justification by faith.

Paul's farewell speech to the Church at Ephesus is in the form of a testament to Paul and structurally closes off that portion of the Pauline mission. It is a defence of Paul to his peers, which allows Luke to give a portrait of his ideal apostle. The structure is unique in Acts opening with an appeal to remember his example, a foreboding of death, a warning on false teachers and a closing blessing and appeal to Jesus' example. For Luke this arrangement allows him to appeal to the example of Jesus and his greatest apostle Paul. The addressing of the problem of heresy in a farewell suggests a setting for these concerns in the Church after Paul's death, specifically the Lukan community.

Acts contains many small speeches which exist mainly to illuminate the narrative, but Luke uses even these to further his favourite viewpoints. Paul's speech on the ship soon to be wrecked (27:21-26) is one such speech. The context is a storm likely to halt Paul's inexorable progress towards Rome and is a wildly unlikely place to deliver a solemn piece about an angel granting them safety.

It does however allow Luke to show God as responsible for his apostle and to put Paul in the centre of the action. Paul endured at least three shipwrecks (2Cor.11:25) and a tradition of this seems to have found its way into a journey necessary to the structure of the book, which makes appeals to parallel shipwrecks in romances seem unnecessary. The speeches here, "give the section its literary character,"<sup>41</sup> and the angel and the prophesy it describes all delivered with due solemnity resonate to the divine hand in the happenings.

Luke uses the conventions of ancient historiography to his own theological purposes. Just as in other histories of the time, the speeches perform a literary function, but unlike other historians of the time Luke knows his God acts through history, and the discourses reflect this. He doesn't let the context get in the way of how speeches fit into the narrative if it advances his themes, but he does use forms which would have been familiar to his necessarily literate readers to create the testamentary, defence and preaching speeches delivered by Paul and Peter in the Acts of the Apostles.

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