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The Jesus-Tradition in Acts

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The infrequent use of the Jesus-tradition in Acts is seldom noted, but it has implications for the use of the Jesus-tradition in early Christianity. It is widely assumed that the Jesus-tradition served to justify and to legitimate changing Christian belief and practice. However, the church in Acts does not normally seek justification for its practices or beliefs from the teaching or example of Jesus. The assumptions of gospel criticism about the function of the Jesus-tradition need to be tested against the observable phenomena of the one writer whose interest spanned the life of Jesus and the life of the church.

I

Paul seldom makes appeal to the Jesus-tradition. The amount of literature dedicated to interpreting and explaining this fact is large and continues to grow.[1] Less frequently noticed, and barely discussed at all, is the parallel feature in the book of Acts. The author of Acts is as reluctant as Paul to make use of traditions about Jesus.[2] In the case of Acts, some of the reasons adduced to explain Paul's sparing use of the Jesus-tradition do not apply. It would be possible to surmise in the case of Paul, for instance, that he was ignorant of the traditions concerning the historical Jesus, or to suppose that his gospel was exclusively concerned with the Christ of faith. It could be argued that the Jesus-tradition was so fluid that *allusion*

1 Significant recent studies on this subject include: G. N. Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1974); V. P. Furnish, *Jesus according to Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993); D. Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1995); M. and R. Zimmermann, 'Zitation, Kontradiktion oder Applikation? Die Jesuslogien in 1 Kor 7,10f. und 9,14: Traditionsgeschichtliche Verankerung und paulinische Interpretation', *ZNW* 87 (1996) 83–100; D. Horrell, 'The Lord Commanded ... but I Have Not Used. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Reflections on 1 Cor 9.14–15', *NTS* 43 (1997) 587–603.

2 One of the few references to the problem is C. K. Barrett, 'The Third Gospel as a Preface to Acts? Some Reflections', *The Four Gospels 1992: Festchrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. Van Segbroek *et al.*; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University, 1992) 1453–62. Barrett surveys 41 passages in Luke which seem to establish links with Acts, but notes (1461–2) how little *specific* material is drawn from the gospel into Acts.

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to the tradition was more appropriate for Paul than *citation* of it.[3] But if we may assume that the author of Acts was also responsible for the gospel of Luke,[4] then neither ignorance nor indifference can account for his infrequent use of the Jesus-tradition, and since he wrote a gospel it also seems unlikely that he thought the Jesus-tradition was too malleable to be cited in fixed form.

The unexamined problem of the Jesus-tradition in Acts is, of course, important for the light it may throw on Acts itself. But examining this problem may lead us further and shed some light on a wider circle of other problems. Luke's purpose in writing his gospel is one such problem. This is a widely discussed question,[5] but is seldom examined in the light of Luke's own use of the Jesus-tradition in Acts. Further, this examination may illuminate the use of the Jesus-tradition in early Christianity in general, though at that distance the light it affords may show us little more than general outlines.

In order to understand how Luke presents the Jesus-tradition in Acts, we need first to describe and then to analyse the passages in which he makes reference to the gospel material.

II

A descriptive survey of the passages in which Luke makes an unambiguous reference to the Jesus-tradition should distinguish between references to narrative and to sayings.

Narrative

No reference is made in Acts to any specific incidents in the life of Jesus, other than the baptism by John and the passion. But there are several instances in which the contents of Luke's former treatise are referred to in summary form.

1. *Acts 1.1–3.* Here Luke provides the link with the first volume by indicating the beginning and the end of the narrative dealt with in the gospel. The beginning

3 J. D. G. Dunn, 'Jesus Tradition in Paul', *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 155–78.

4 The attempts of Clark and Argyle to prove different authors for the two works are judged generally not to have carried conviction: A. C. Clark, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1933) 393–408; A. W. Argyle, 'The Greek of Luke and Acts', *NTS* 20 (1974) 441–5.

5 R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke–Acts* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1982), contains a thorough survey of opinions to the date of publication, together with the author's own contribution to the debate. Significant publications since that time include J. L. Houlden, 'The Purpose of Luke', *JSNT* 21 (1984) 53–65; R. I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); and A. Brent, 'Luke–Acts and the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor', *JTS* 48 (1997) 411–38.

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is left unspecified, the content of Jesus' ministry is summarised by reference to 'doing and teaching', and the end is marked by Jesus' being 'taken up'.

2. *1.16*. This refers to the role of Judas in the death of Jesus. It represents a tidying-up of unfinished business from the passion narrative, as a successor is appointed to make up the Twelve.
3. *1.21–2*. A brief reference to the beginning and end of Jesus' ministry (from the baptism of John until Jesus' death). Discipleship through this period qualifies potential candidates to take Judas's place.
4. *2.22–40*. Here Peter gives a summary of Jesus' ministry and its meaning. The elements are:
   a. Jesus of Nazareth was attested to 'you' by God with 'mighty works and wonders and signs';
   b. Jesus was delivered up according to God's plan;
   c. 'you' crucified him, through the instrumentality of 'lawless men';
   d. God raised him up;
   e. the Scriptures prove that the Christ would be raised;
   f. the followers of Jesus (possibly the apostles in particular) are witnesses to the resurrection;
   g. Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God, and has thus poured out the Holy Spirit;
   h. the exaltation of the Christ is also foreseen in Scripture;
   i. the crucified Jesus has been exalted by God as both Lord and Christ;
   j. the appropriate response is repentance and baptism which will assure forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit and salvation.
5. *3.12–26*. This is a speech leading to an appeal for repentance which, like the previous example, includes an outline of the story of the passion, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. Here Luke works in a chiastic fashion back from present experience to past fact and then returns to present experience:
   a. a non-human power of healing is at work in the apostles;
   b. the God of the patriarchs glorified Jesus;
   c. 'you' delivered him up and denied him in the presence of Pilate, who wished to release Jesus (this is a characteristic Lucan emphasis);
   d. 'you' asked for a murderer, and killed the author of life;
   e. God raised Jesus from the dead;
   f. 'we' are witnesses of the resurrection;
   g. the risen Jesus is the source of the healing power at work in the apostles;
   h. 'you' acted in ignorance;
   i. God foretold through the prophets that the Christ should suffer;
   j. the hearers should repent, to receive 'times of refreshing from the Lord', and so that God might send the appointed Christ whom the prophets foretold.
6. *4.10–12*. Peter defends the healing of the lame man by claiming that the mira-

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cle has been performed 'by the name of Jesus of Nazareth', and he refers to the crucifixion and resurrection in order to identify the importance of Jesus:
   a. healing power is present 'by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth';
   b. 'you' crucified him;
   c. God raised him from the dead;
   d. the scriptures speak of him ('the stone rejected by the builders');
   e. salvation is available through no-one else.
7. *4.27*. The church's prayer refers to the passion, and especially to the alliance of Herod and Pilate, an incident unique to Luke in the gospels.
8. *5.29–32*. As in example 6, here Peter on behalf of the apostles makes a defence before the Council:
   a. the God of the patriarchs raised Jesus;
   b. 'you' killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree;
   c. God has exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour;
   d. the purpose of his exaltation is to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins;
   e. 'we' are witnesses to these things, as is also the Holy Spirit.
9. *7.52*. Stephen's long speech concludes with an accusation that the leaders of the people had betrayed and murdered the righteous one.
10. *10.36–43*. This, Peter's missionary speech in the house of Cornelius, is the fullest reference in Acts to the story of Jesus. Its features are:
   a. 'you' know the event which happened throughout all Judea;[6]
   b. Jesus' ministry began in Galilee with John's baptism;
   c. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power;
   d. his ministry consisted of going about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil;
   e. the apostles' function is to bear witness to the events of the earthly ministry of Jesus, particularly 'in the countryside of Judea and Jerusalem' (see example 3 above);[7]
   f. 'they' put Jesus to death on a tree;

6 The syntax of Acts 10.36–7 is difficult and has puzzled commentators and translators. Among the difficulties is that of knowing what Peter is referring to: the ministry of Jesus, or the apostolic proclamation about him. 10.36 seems most naturally to refer to a message about Jesus, and so to the apostles' proclamation 'to the sons of Israel', to whom, so far in Acts, the message about Jesus has largely been confined. 10.37a (ὑμεῖς ... Ἰουδαίας) may also refer to the apostolic proclamation: 'the thing (or word) which has happened throughout Judea' would seem an inappropriate description for Jesus' ministry, since Luke is notoriously vague about the location of Jesus' ministry in his 'travel narrative' but very specific about the central place of Judea in the spread of the message about Jesus (see Acts 1.8; 9.31).

7 This part of the speech should be compared with the reference to 'eyewitnesses' in Luke 1.2: Luke insists that this brief summary shares with the gospel itself an origin in the testimony of reliable witnesses.

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g. God raised him to life on the third day;
h. God allowed the apostles to see the risen Jesus, to eat and drink with him;
i. 'he' commanded the apostles to proclaim Jesus to the people, affirming his divine role as judge, and confirming the testimony of the prophets to his role as the one through whom forgiveness may be received.

11. *13.23–41.* Here Paul delivers a sermon, whose parallels with Peter's speech in 10.36–43 are clear. Its features are:
    a. Jesus is the saviour, who completes the narrative and fulfils the prophecies of the Scriptures;
    b. John's preaching of a baptism of repentance prepared Israel for the coming of Jesus: John's preaching is summarised in terms which differ from the text of Luke (and have similarities with John);[8]
    c. the Jerusalemites and their rulers did not understand the Scriptures, and fulfilled them (unwittingly) by condemning Jesus to death (cf. 1 Cor 15.3);
    d. they handed him over to Pilate for execution, without having found him guilty of a capital offence;
    e. after the scriptures had been fulfilled, 'they' took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb;
    f. God raised him from the dead;
    g. he appeared for many days to his disciples, who are now witnesses;
    h. the gospel is that God has fulfilled his promises to the fathers by raising Jesus from the dead, promises which are supported by an appeal to the scriptures;
    i. proclamation of the gospel requires a response of faith leading to forgiveness, and the possibility of perishing if the response is not made.
12. *17.30–1.* In Paul's speech at Athens, the reference to Jesus (who is not named) is introduced by the need to repent because of the coming judgment by the man whom God has appointed. The resurrection gives assurance to the prospect of this coming judgment.
13. *19.4.* In his address to the disciples of John at Ephesus, Paul refers to John's baptism of repentance and to his preparation of the people for the coming of Jesus (see 10b and 11b above).
14. *26.22–3.* At the close of Paul's defence before Agrippa, he summarises his message concerning Jesus:

8 F. L. Cribbs, 'The Similarities that Exist between John and Acts', *Perspectives in Luke–Acts* (ed. C. H. Talbert; Danville VA/Edinburgh: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion/T. & T. Clark, 1978) 44–6. Whatever conclusions may been drawn about Luke's sources from the similarities, it is clear that Luke was not concerned to create strict agreement between his treatment of John the Baptist in the gospel and in Acts, any more than he brought the various accounts of Paul's Damascus road experience into harmony with one another.

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a. the prophets and Moses foretold that the Christ would suffer (see 10i and 11h);
b. the Christ was to be the first to rise from the dead (see 10g and 11f);
c. the Christ would proclaim 'light' to the people of Israel and to the Gentiles.

Sayings

References to the sayings of Jesus are far less frequent and less elaborated than the references to narrative.

15. *6.14*. The 'false witnesses' may be making an elliptical reference to the sayings of Jesus when they claim that Stephen had said Jesus would destroy the Temple (Luke 21.6) and change the customs of Moses.
16. *9.5–6*. Jesus addressed Paul on the road to Damascus, and Paul refers back to this incident in 22.8 and 22.16. This is unambiguously a word of the risen Christ.
17. *11.16*. Peter remembered the 'word of the Lord' that 'John baptised with water, but you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. The reference, though, is to a saying of the risen Jesus in Acts 1.5, not to the words of Jesus in the gospel.
18. *20.35*. Paul expounds his policy, which the Ephesian elders should take as an example, of working in order to help the weak, 'remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" '. This reference has been the subject of considerable discussion, and Haenchen's suggestion that this logion is a Lucan creation, based on a Hellenistic proverb, has found wide acceptance.[9] However, Haenchen's explanation raises more questions than it answers. If Luke had a free hand to compose a saying of Jesus here, in order to affirm what he understood to be Paul's policy of self-support, then why did he create a saying which does not really address the matter in hand? Why did he borrow a phrase and attempt to pass it off as a saying of Jesus when his readers would have recognized it as a common proverb? Why did he not include the saying in the gospel (a problem for which Jackson and Lake had an answer but Haenchen did not)? Finally, why did Luke bother to create a saying to affirm Paul's self-supporting ministry, when other more central matters, such as the acceptance of Gentiles in the church, were resolved without appeal to a saying of Jesus? Haenchen leaped from noting the Hellenistic parallels to assuming that the origins of this

9 E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1971) 594 n.5. Haenchen drew the Greek and Roman parallels on which he relies from F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity: Part 1, The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 5 *English Translation and Commentary* (London: Macmillan, 1933) 264, although Jackson and Lake accepted the logion as coming to Luke from the source from which he drew Paul's speech (263). Haenchen has been followed by G. Lüdemann, *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1989) 228–9, and Horrell, 'The Lord Commanded', 598–9.

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logion were thereby explained. In fact, its origins are more obscure and its presence in Acts more puzzling than Haenchen allowed. Its very existence draws attention to the paucity of dominical sayings in Acts. It forces us to face an odd paradox in Luke's work: that the church which Luke depicts in Acts seems to have managed the ordering of its life very well without making use of the tradition which he so carefully recorded in his gospel.

III

For what purposes, then, does Luke use the Jesus-tradition in Acts, and what might such use tell us about the purpose of the gospel itself? The story of Jesus is far more prominent in Acts than the sayings of Jesus, and it would be appropriate to begin to answer these questions by way of an examination of the narrative references in Acts.

The story of Jesus appears in compressed form several times in Acts, typically in evangelistic or apologetic contexts. When the apostles and Paul are explaining their message and indicating the appropriate response from their hearers, they appeal to the story of Jesus, with an emphasis on his passion, death, and resurrection together with the exaltation of Jesus as the Christ. Some reference is made to what Jesus did (see Acts 1.1), and to what was done to him, especially in the most extensive example, 10 (sections b–d).

C. H. Dodd thought that he could identify in these compressed statements the early kerygma out of which Mark first constructed his gospel.[10] This kerygmatic structure was altered somewhat by Matthew and Luke, and even Mark does not present bare facts. All the gospels are interpretations of Jesus, as Dodd was well aware. But he was convinced that the nearer we get to the original kerygma, the nearer we are to historical fact.

Dodd's view was clearly at odds with the prevailing form-critical understanding that the stories and sayings were free-floating, unconnected items, the pearls for which Mark had first created the string. Nor did Dodd anticipate and counter the argument which stood his assumption on its head: that the kerygmatic summaries in Acts inevitably reflect the structure of the synoptic gospels, not because they preserve early tradition, but precisely because they are summaries of Luke's own work. The rise of redaction criticism did little to alter the negative verdict which form criticism had made on Dodd's proposal: the presence of typically Lucan motifs in some of these summaries (see examples 5 and 7 above) lends redaction-critical weight to the case against Dodd's view.[11] Form criticism

10 C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936) 104.

11 U. Wilckens, *Die Missionreden der Apostelgeschichte: Form- und traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (WMANT 5; 3rd edn; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1974).

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was willing to allow Mark this one element of creativity: it was he, and not the earlier tradition, who brought into being the outline of the synoptic narrative. Dodd's proposal made little headway against the near-universal assumptions of contemporary scholarship.[12]

Luke's kerygmatic summaries may indeed reflect his own understanding of the importance of Jesus and the way in which the message about him was to be presented, but Dodd's work was not insignificant. He drew attention to the importance of the kerygmatic summaries, and to the possibility that they might help in understanding the meaning and purpose of Luke, and perhaps of other gospels, too. His mistake was to jump straight to a surmise about the pre-Marcan tradition, rather than asking what Luke himself wanted to convey about his own presentation of the story of Jesus. If Luke portrays both Peter and Paul using the story of Jesus in a particular way, it is a reasonable assumption that he is giving his readers the clues they need to grasp what he intended by his own more elaborate presentation of the Jesus-tradition in his former treatise (Acts 1.1).

In Acts, the story of Jesus is used in evangelism and in apologetic. The only examples Luke provides of the use of the story in other contexts relate to the choosing of a successor to Judas, and to the prayer of the church in Acts 4.27 (example 7). Overwhelmingly, the story of Jesus is told in order to lead people to the response of faith which Luke typically expresses as repentance.

It is common to conclude that Luke, like the other evangelists, had an inner-church audience in mind, and then to interpret the gospel as principally consisting of polemic and teaching directed to the church and its needs.[13] But in Acts, Luke has indicated as clearly as he could that telling the story of 'all that Jesus began to do' serves an evangelistic purpose.[14]

12 H. Koester, 'From the Kerygma-Gospel to Written Gospels', *NTS* 35 (1989) 361–81.

13 The view that Luke has a Christian readership in mind is shared by scholars who otherwise disagree profoundly about Luke's intentions: see J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God. A New Look at Luke–Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972); Maddox, *Purpose*, esp. 180–1; Barrett, 'Third Gospel', 1462–3.

14 Setting aside the theories which see Luke–Acts as defending Paul at his trial or making a case for Christianity as a *religio licita* (on which see Maddox, *Purpose*, 20–1), an evangelistic or apologetic purpose has been proposed by F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (2nd edn; London: Inter- Varsity, 1952) 29–34; W. C. van Unnik, 'The "Book of Acts" the Confirmation of the Gospel', *NT* 4 (1960) 26–59; and J. C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting* (2nd edn; London: SPCK, 1970). Dibelius proposed missionary preaching as the context for the handing-on of much Jesus-tradition, but he supposed that sayings were primary, and that important parts of the narrative (paradigms) served a merely illustrative and subordinate purpose. They were also isolated and unconnected: M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934) 24–7, 44.

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A possible evangelistic or apologetic purpose for Acts is sometimes discounted on the grounds that Luke's work would make no sense to a reader unfamiliar with the synagogue. He leaves too much of Jewish practice unexplained, so that he could not have been writing for an audience outside the church.[15] But we should note the way in which Luke himself incorporates references to the narrative of the gospel in Acts. Each of the kerygmatic summaries mentioned above was delivered to a Jewish audience, with the exception of Acts 17.30–1, where the narrative reference is almost absent, and the significance of Jesus is expounded by way of a thematic discourse on creation, providence, resurrection and judgment (and note Paul's brief address to the people of Lystra in Acts 14.15–17). Luke seems to be indicating that the audience he has in mind for his presentation of the story of Jesus consists of the kind of Jewish hearers depicted in Acts 2–4, or the devout Gentiles of Acts 10, or the Hellenistic synagogue worshippers of Acts 13.

The example of Cornelius and his friends is particularly instructive. The mission speech to these people includes the most elaborate statement about Jesus to be found in Acts, and thus the fullest summary of Luke's former treatise (example 10 above, Acts 10.36–43). Not only that, but Cornelius, like Theophilus, has heard something of the 'account' concerning Jesus (Acts 10.36; cf. Luke 1.4). Peter's instruction of Cornelius, like Luke's instruction of Theophilus, begins from that basis of partial knowledge and tells a narrative about Jesus (like the gospel), leading up to the apostolic confirmation of the message (like the book of Acts).

I. Levinskaya has drawn attention to the importance of the 'God-fearers' in Acts, and has proposed that Luke is narrating the beginning of a struggle between Christians and Jews for the loyalty of these people whose higher status offered the support and protection that was vital for Judaism and could be vital for Christianity.[16] Levinskaya's proposal is consonant with the case being advanced here. If Luke indeed envisaged his work as largely evangelistic or apologetic, as his own use of the gospel material in Acts suggests, and if Luke's treatment of his subject implies an audience at least on the margins of Judaism, then a battle for the loyalty of Gentile God-fearers would provide a credible context for the production of his work. People such as the centurion who was 'worthy' because 'he loves our nation and built us our synagogue' (a note supplied by Luke only: Luke 7.4–5) and Cornelius, the devout centurion who was generous to the people (Acts 10.2), emerge with special clarity in Luke's work. They are portrayed as important potential protectors of the followers of Jesus. Some of them already knew something about Jesus and the Jesus-movement. Cornelius is the central and crucial instance

15 J. Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996) 12–13.

16 I. Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in its Diaspora Setting* (The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting 5; Grand Rapids, MI/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996) 124–6.

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of such a person, but there are others. In Acts 13.6–12, Paul and Barnabas were locked in battle with Bar-Jesus the 'Jewish false prophet' for the loyalty and favour of a potential patron, Sergius Paulus, the proconsul in Cyprus. Lydia (Acts 16.14–15) was another helpful wealthy patron, a 'worshipper of God' but not, it would seem, Jewish. Felix had 'a rather accurate knowledge of the Way' (Acts 24.22), to which Paul appealed when telling his story in his own defence (Acts 24.10–21, 24). King Agrippa also heard Paul's story as one 'especially familiar with all customs and controversies of the Jews' (Acts 26.3), and apparently having also some prior knowledge of the story of Jesus and that of Paul (Acts 26.26).

In the preface to the gospel, Luke treats Theophilus very much as his characters in Acts treat potential protectors and patrons who stand in a close relationship to Judaism. The narrative concerning Jesus and his followers serves to replace hearsay with certainty (ἀσφάλεια, Luke 1.4), and second-hand stories[17] with the testimony of 'eyewitnesses and servants of the word' (Luke 1.2). Theophilus might well recognise people like himself in the portraits of high-status, devout sympathisers, partially informed about 'the things fulfilled among us' (Luke 1.1), and whose influence might be vital not only for Jews but also for the followers of Jesus. The narrative of the gospel and of Acts might do for Theophilus what it had done for Cornelius.

IV

So far, we have examined the use of the gospel narrative in Acts. We now turn to the other aspect of the Jesus-tradition, the sayings or teaching of Jesus.

The view that Luke, like the other evangelists, 'must have' had an inner-church readership in mind is one of the most enduring legacies of form criticism.[18] In treatments of the gospels at all levels, from introductory textbook to advanced monograph, it is very common to read interpretations of the gospels which discover layers of inner-church polemic and discussion within their text. It is assumed that the sayings and stories were told and written with this polemical and teaching concern because Jesus was the Lord and the authority of his teaching was supreme for the church.[19]

17 The leaders of the Jews in Rome, for example, knew about Paul's αἵρεσις, though all they had heard was critical of the movement (Acts 28.22).

18 A. Weiser, 'Jesus und die neutestamentliche Theologie: Zur Frage nach dem Einheitsgrund des Neuen Testaments', *ZNW* 87 (1996) 163–4, has argued that all NT writings have an 'inner-Christian' readership in view, and that paranesis is the principal focus of the NT, though he concedes that paranesis and kerygma are linked.

19 See, as an example pertinent to the present discussion, D. L. Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation* (JSNTSup 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996) 15.

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Form and redaction criticism share a common supposition that the gospel traditions had their origin in the need for Christians to relate their beliefs and practices to the teaching and example of Jesus. The gospels then arose out of a creative fermentation of the Jesus-tradition, in the course of which Christians reshaped or created it anew to meet novel situations. This common supposition is derived from the prior assumption that the first Christians 'must have' related their life and theology intimately to the example and teaching of Jesus.

Luke is the one writer in whom we can test this assumption: unlike the case of Paul, we can be sure of his knowledge of the Jesus-tradition, and, in distinction from the other evangelists, we are not reduced to speculating about how he thought it proper to use this tradition in the life of the church, because we can observe the process in the book of Acts. It is significant, therefore, that there is virtually no evidence *in Acts* that Luke wrote his gospel in order to enshrine the authoritative teaching of Jesus for the church.

When we consider Luke's references in Acts to 'all that Jesus began to teach', we meet the odd fact that Luke fails to make any use in Acts of the teaching of Jesus which he has provided in the gospel. Equally remarkable is the failure of Luke to provide in his gospel any substantial teaching from Jesus which would assist the church in solving the problems that he describes in Acts. The gospel scarcely seems designed to serve Acts, while Acts does not press the gospel into service. It may be granted that some of the themes of Lucan theology are evident both in the third gospel and in Acts. Numerous studies in the theology of Luke–Acts have made this clear, from the work of Conzelmann onwards.[20] But the *explicit* appeal to the teaching of Jesus as a guide for the church is missing. When the church in Acts faces some perplexity, it does not base its decisions on the teaching of Jesus. This aspect of Luke's method becomes clear if we examine the greatest perplexity faced by the church in Acts, i.e. the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God.

The Gentile mission in Acts is not based on the words or on the actions of Jesus as we find them in the gospel. The mandate for the Gentile mission lay in the action of God through Peter, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15.7–8, 12, 14) and in the testimony of the Scriptures (Acts 15.15–17).[21] The letter of the Jerusalem Council could quite rightly state that, 'It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose no further burden than these essentials', since it was the Holy Spirit and not the histori-

20 H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (London: Faber, 1960). Although Barrett identified an impressive 41 passages in Luke which seem to prepare in one way or another for the narrative of Acts, the connections have to be made by the reader: Luke himself makes no explicit link between Acts and the material in his former treatise (Barrett, 'Third Gospel', 1453–62).

21 The words of the risen Christ in Luke 24.46–7 are formally an exposition of the scriptures rather than a command ('Thus it is written . . . that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations').

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cal Jesus who provided the indications to guide the church in its attitude to the Gentiles.[22]

In his gospel, Luke omitted some of the sayings in the synoptic tradition most hospitable to the Gentile mission: for instance, both the teaching on the tradition of the elders (Mark 7.1–23) and the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7.24–30) fall within the section of Mark that is absent in Luke (Mark 6.45–8.26). Even those sayings in the third gospel which might have been made the basis of appeal are left undeveloped in Acts: for instance Luke 13.22–30, in which Jesus foresees his unresponsive hearers excluded from the kingdom of God, while 'people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God' (Luke 13.29).[23]

Further, if we examine the *method* of the Gentile mission, rather than its mandate, something similar could be said: the church did not appeal to the example or the teaching of Jesus to give authority to what it was doing. We may even discern a tension between the teaching of Jesus in Luke and the practice of the church in Acts.

D. L. Matson has pointed to the mission instructions to the seventy-two (or the seventy: Luke 10.5b–7) and to Luke's special material in Luke 19.1–10 (Jesus in the house of Zacchaeus) as establishing the pattern of mission which is then illustrated by the household conversions in Acts (Acts 10.1–11.18; 16.11–15; 16.25–34; 18.1–11). He argues for a consistent Lucan understanding of the method of mission, in which the mission of the church is based on the teaching and example of the Lucan Jesus. Matson recognises that some features of the mission in the third gospel are not replicated in Acts: for instance, Luke 10.6 foresees the division of households, which does not in fact happen in Acts.[24]

However, the lack of harmony between the mission instruction in the third gospel and the mission practice in Acts goes much further than this. The mission of the seventy-two was to be carried out in pairs (Luke 10.1), and, although Luke emphasises Paul's paired partnerships with Barnabas and Silas, it is clear that Peter and Paul both worked as part of larger groups (Acts 11.23; 13.13; 15.37; 16.3; 16.10 [we-passages]; 19.22; 20.4). Paul also worked alone on occasion at the start of his ministry (Acts 9.20, 28–9). The injunction of Luke 10.1 was not, in Luke's view, binding on Christian missionaries. The dominical command to move on from unresponsive places, symbolically shaking the dust from one's feet as one went

22 T. J. Lane has argued that the third gospel in fact functions as an introduction to the Gentile mission in Acts, with themes and details in each work linking with the other. However, these links are subtle and depend on the reader's construction of meaning. None of the 'intradiegetic' narrators make these connections. See T. J. Lane, *Luke and the Gentile Mission: Gospel Anticipates Acts* (EHS.T 571; Frankfurt/Berlin/Bern: Lang, 1996).

23 Luke 13.29 could in any case be understood as a reference to Jews in the Dispersion.

24 Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives*, 196, 200.

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(Luke 10.10–12), was honoured on one occasion in Acts (Acts 13.51) but was also contravened later in the narrative. When Paul met opposition in Corinth he duly shook his garments as a sign, but then received a revelation that he was to stay, which he did (Acts 18.5–11).[25] The command of Jesus recorded in the gospel did not dictate mission practice in Acts, or, to put it another way, the teaching of Jesus in the gospel was not a simple reflection of the mission practice of the church.

No more binding was the injunction to accept hospitality from well-disposed sympathisers (Luke 10.7). Paul is shown in Acts as accepting such hospitality, as Matson notes. But he is also shown as maintaining his independence by supporting himself (Acts 18.3), and even making this independence a point of principle: it is the only point of Christian practice in Acts defended by reference to a saying of Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20.35). Horrell has argued that Luke created the dominical saying in Acts 20.35 because he was aware of criticism directed at Paul's self-supporting ministry by those who embraced an 'itinerant-charismatic' ministry and who relied on support from congregations. The creation of a saying of Jesus which upheld the propriety of self-supporting ministry would have sheltered Paul from criticism.[26] But if this was Luke's intention, he might have done Paul better service by planting a helpful saying in the gospel, instead of giving succour to Paul's opponents in his former treatise (for instance Luke 10.7), and then offering Paul the feeble protection of a common proverb, whose non-dominical origins would (on Haenchen's and Horrell's view) have been quite transparent to his readers.

The church in Acts faced its greatest challenge without recourse to the Jesus-tradition. The most that one can say is that there are parallels between the mission instructions to the seventy-two and some of the practice of the church in Acts. But there are equally clear differences. Some of the instruction, such as the command to work in pairs, is quietly ignored in Acts. Some, such as the command not to stay in an unresponsive locality, is set aside by new revelation which is not ascribed to the historical Jesus. Some of the mission instruction of Jesus is reversed by appeal to a logion which does not appear in the gospel itself. For Luke, it seems to have been unnecessary to refer to the historic Jesus in order to establish the practice of the church or to confer authority on its beliefs or actions, and his gospel is certainly not a manual of instruction on mission for his own church.

If by some chance the third gospel had perished while Acts survived, Bultmann

25 On this development of mission policy, see P. H. Towner, 'Mission Practice and Theology under Construction', *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. Howard Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998) 425–7.

26 Horrell, 'The Lord Commanded', 598–9.

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might well have concluded of Luke, as he did of Paul, that Jesus' teaching was to all intents and purposes irrelevant to him.[27]

V

If Luke intended the use of the gospel tradition in Acts to be paradigmatic, then he considered that the story of Jesus should be used to convince outsiders, whether in evangelism with sympathetic hearers (see examples 4, 5, 10, 11), or with an apologetic purpose in the case of neutral or hostile hearers (see examples 6, 8, 14). The story of the apostolic confirmation of the gospel was also part of his case (examples 4fg, 5a, 6a, 8e, 10hi, 11g),[28] and may explain why he thought it necessary to extend his treatment of his topic to a second volume.[29] It may well be that his ideal hearer was a relatively well-informed God-fearer, and the context of his work could have been a struggle for the loyalty of influential potential patrons, of whom Theophilus would have been an instance.

If Luke was in any way typical in his use of the Jesus-tradition – and the example of Paul and other early Christians writers suggests that he was[30] – it was not necessary for the first Christians to relate their doctrinal and practical decisions to the sayings and example of the historical Jesus. Most modern gospel criticism has assumed that the first Christians needed to clothe Christian doctrine and practice, which was rapidly changing, with the authority of a word of Jesus or an incident from his life, and that from this need there arose a constant modification of the tradition. But if neither Paul (who *may* not have had access to an extensive Jesus-tradition) nor Luke (who certainly *did* have such access) show much evidence that they were obliged to relate Christian theology and practice to the historical Jesus, then this essential form- and redaction-critical assumption must be highly doubtful.

If we did not have Acts, for instance, we would assume that Luke sided unquestionably with the charismatic enthusiasts whose missionary manifesto is apparently set out in Luke 10.[31] But his quiet reversal of Jesus' injunctions shows that his gospel does not enshrine the practice of the church he knew, and Acts 20.35 makes it clear that Luke considered different methods of missionary support not only to be legitimate, but to have dominical support. The over-confident attempt to delin-

27 R. Bultmann, 'The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Theology of Paul', *Faith and Understanding: Collected Essays* (London: SCM, 1969) 223.

28 See also Acts 22.3–21; 24.10–21; 26.2–23.

29 Van Unnik, 'Confirmation of the Gospel', 47.

30 W. Schmithals has drawn attention to the very sparse use of the gospel tradition in earliest Christianity: 'Die Bedeutung der Evangelien in der Theologiegeschichte bis zur Kanonbildung', *The Four Gospels: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. Van Segbroek *et al.*; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University, 1992) 129–33.

31 G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 27–67.

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eate the theology of individuals and communities from the contents of the gospels is seldom open to the kind of correction that Acts 20.35 offers.

Can we reconstruct the opinions and debates within specific Christian communities from the data supplied by the gospels? Much scholarship has assumed that we can, working from the twin assumptions that the early Christians formed self-contained and mutually critical communities, and that the history of their development is recorded in the redactional changes to the gospel tradition. The first of these assumptions has been called into question by evidence which suggests that the early Christians in fact formed a well-connected network of interdependent churches, and the second has been weakened by studies of the gospel genre which have distinguished gospel from letter as forms of communication.[32] Luke's use of the Jesus-tradition calls the second assumption further into question: in his case it suggests that he understood the function of the gospel material to be directed outwards, to serve the church's mission, rather than inwards, to give weight to partisan positions in Christian controversy.[33]

Luke was not alone in seeing the story of Jesus as serving the church's evangelistic or apologetic task. If we set aside conclusions drawn by inference from the contents of the gospels themselves, it is difficult to establish exactly what role was played in the first Christian generations either by oral traditions about Jesus or by written gospels. We can *assume* that the gospels had a function within the church before *c.*150, but it is a function which has to be read back from later evidence, or inferred from the internal evidence of the gospels themselves. Until we reach Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (66, 67), probably in the late 150s, we have no certain evidence for the use of the gospels in Christian worship. Arguments for the use of the gospels in worship are entirely arguments from silence.[34] Evidence for the reading of apostolic and other letters in the Christian assembly is, in contrast, clear and unambiguous.[35] This is what we

32 Both assumptions mentioned here are subjected to detailed and telling criticism in R. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998). See esp. Bauckham's comments (44–8) on the distinction between letters as 'closed' texts and gospels as 'open' texts.

33 The case for an evangelistic purpose behind the gospels has been maintained by a number of scholars, among them C. F. D. Moule, 'Jesus in New Testament Kerygma', *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982) 37–49 (first pub. 1970); W. Schmithals, 'Vom Ursprung der Synoptischen Tradition', *ZTK* 94 (1997) 288–316 (arguing for missionary purpose in the *origins* of synoptic tradition); H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven/London: Yale University, 1995) 103.

34 As in M. Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985) 75–7.

35 See 1 Thess 5.27; 2 Cor 2.3–4; 2 Thess 2.1–2; Col 4.16. The habit of reading and expounding letters continued into the second century: 2 Pet 3.15–16; *1 Clem* 47.1; Pol. *Phil.* 3.2. The process by which Paul was appropriated by a sometimes doubtful church has been explored in C. K. Barrett, 'Pauline Controversies in the Post-Pauline Period', *NTS* 20 (1974) 229–45.

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should expect if letters were 'closed' texts, addressed to specific readers and dealing with particular questions, whereas gospels were 'open' texts with a general audience in view. Letters became the subject of exegesis and discussion well before the gospels (indeed, immediately they were received, to judge from 2 Cor 10.10 or 2 Thess 2.1–2). Christians in the early second century did not cite sayings of Jesus in controversy with one another. Citations are generally allusive, typically touch on ethical questions, and cover uncontroversial matters such as the command to love one's neighbour.[36] It is only with Irenaeus that we find the first solid evidence of polemical use of the gospel tradition.

However, the gospel material was certainly used by the first Christian generations in order to present the claims of the Christian mesage. Stories of Jesus' miraculous healings were employed in Christian apologetic as early as the time of Quadratus (probably the 130s),[37] and from the same period we hear of Trypho, Justin's interlocutor, who had read 'the so-called gospel' in order to discover what the Christians believed.[38] It is immaterial for our purposes how much of the *Dialogue* represents historical reporting of an actual conversation, and how much is Justin's creative work. The essential point is that in the 130s an interested outsider might be expected to turn to a written 'gospel' in order to gain information about the beliefs of the Christians.[39]

The abbreviated telling of Jesus' story in Acts consistently leads to a summons to repentance and faith. There is every reason to suppose that Luke's full presentation of 'all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning' (Acts 1.1) was likewise meant to lead to the same point. Luke's gospel was intended to identify 'this Jesus' (Acts 2.32), and to explain why those who heard of him should respond in repentance and faith.

Was Luke unique? He is certainly the only gospel writer to provide in a second volume paradigmatic scenes to exemplify the ways in which the story of Jesus should be used in the church. But the testimony of our sources before the mid-second century suggests that Luke in Acts exhibits, not a peculiarity of his own, but the common attitude of the first Christian generations to the stories about Jesus: the Jesus-tradition served the evangelistic and apologetic purposes of the church before it was put to use in the church's liturgical, didactic and polemical activities.

36 Instances are: *1 Clem* 2.1; 13.2; 46.7–8; *2 Clem* 2.4; 3.2; 4.2; 4.5; 5.2–4 (these last two apparently from a non-canonical source); Pol. *Phil.* 2.3. The creation of Marcion's *Gospel* alongside his *Apostle* may have been crucially important in enlisting gospel material for polemical purposes.

37 Eusebius, *E.H.* 4.3. The apologetic reference to Jesus' miracles is present in Acts: see examples 4a and 10d above.

38 Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 10.

39 Gamble, *Books and Readers,* 103 n. 69, observes that Christian texts were read by non-Christians, but not all the references he provides point to texts produced by the church. Athenagoras, *Legatio* 9.3 and Justin, *1 Apology* 28 are inviting the reader to search the (OT) scriptures to verify Christian claims.

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