

ST. LUKE: JOURNALIST OF THE
FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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By

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For nearly 2,000 years, biblical scholars, exegetes and churchmen have been examining the Acts of the Apostles as either a theological or historical treatise. This study shows that Luke, the author of Acts, was not simply a recorder of historical events, nor just a theological interpreter of events. In every sense of the word he was a journalist influenced by the resurrected Jesus, impressed by the continued ministry of the gospel through the young church, but, like any journalist, alert to report this news that was happening among his associates as the gospel began to spread from a small nucleus of Jewish believers in Jerusalem until it encompassed most of the Roman world.

The study (1) investigated and normatively assessed the reportorial role of Luke the apostle, (2) analyzed the influences that shaped his thinking and writing, and (3) examined the interaction between the religious, linguistic, cultural, political, economic, geographical and social

factors, and the processes through which he collated material for the Acts of the Apostles.

Specifically, the study made a critical analysis of books, monographs, lectures, and theses written on the Acts and on Luke as an apostle. This was done by establishing the influential framework of Luke's world to see how he functioned as a reporter in the midst of the events he interpreted, and by researching the published and unpublished works pertaining to those events. By examining the Acts journalistically, many questions about the influence of culture, attitudes of different social groups, and religious opposition to the Christians were put into perspective.

Within the last decade there has come a new interest in the writing of Luke and an appreciation of his journalistic competency in reporting the development of the early church. As modern church renewal through the study of Acts begins to affect more and more people it will be largely due to the contemporary value of Luke's first century interpretive reporting.

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V.M. Mishon
Director of Thesis

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Andrea, and to my children Grant and Jane, in deepest appreciation for their patience, forbearance and support throughout the entire course of study at Michigan State University.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

Introduction

The Limitations of Other Studies in the Acts of the Apostles

For nearly 2,000 years biblical scholars, exegetes and churchmen have been examining the New Testament book known to us as the Acts of the Apostles (hereinafter referred to as the Acts). Their studies have led them to examine this work with a wide range of views--from straight historical narrative to romantic fantasy. Some have taken the Acts and analyzed it critically as if it contained material that had to be disproved. Others have so gilded it that it became in their hands a mystical book of super-human content totally unrelated to the flux and influences of daily living. Still others have made it their own apologia pro vita sua, reading into the Acts whatever justified their own particular thinking. Even in the twentieth century, many liberties have been taken with this book written by Luke the disciple. It has become all things to all men, whether they be great scholars or rude preachers.

Modern missionaries have seen in Luke's work an authorized manual for their church programs. As if Luke had ignored his own world and wrote only for the future, one missionary writer said: "The thoughtful and prayerful missionary of today will find here a divinely given sample or precedent for every type of experience and problem he is called upon to face."¹

Luke wrote about the efforts of the apostle Paul as a missionary. His travels and the establishment of churches have become guides for modern church missionary endeavors. But, Paul, like his biographer Luke, did not live or work in a vacuum. Paul responded to the world that Luke describes in his writing and the directions gained from Paul can only be activated by understanding the direction of his world:

Men have wandered over the world 'preaching the word' laying no solid foundations, establishing nothing permanent, leaving no really instructed society behind them, and have claimed Paul's authority for their absurdities.

Secondly, people have adopted fragments of St. Paul's method and have tried to incorporate them into alien systems and the failure which resulted has been used as an argument against the apostle's method.²

Many men have made the work of Paul a program to adopt without interpretation. They have copied his communication techniques with little or no attempt at understanding

¹Robert Hall Glover, Bible Basis of Missions (Los Angeles: The Bible Book House of Los Angeles, 1946), p. 26.

²Roland Allen, Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? (London: World Dominion Press, 1956), p. 8.

what guided and motivated him in the first century. Some enthusiastic pastors have tried to make the Acts a model for their own parish efforts and have misunderstood their own social scene as well as Luke's. "The life of the Jerusalem church as described in Acts . . . is often cited as a model of the perfect society . . . but we are Christians of the twentieth century, and many of the problems of the first century no longer concern us."³ And, more than one romantic sermonizer has ignored the influences of Luke's world and made him something other than real as he grew to become the author of the Acts.⁴

It is possible to find supportive material for a particular view of the Acts, while ignoring other references that do not support that view. But this kind of treatment can't be given to the Acts legitimately when time is taken to analyze the author and his world. It is neither honest scholastically nor justifiable exegetically to push aside the parts that go against a personal favorite assertion.

To take one view or another, no matter how popular or reasonable, is to over-simplify the mission, the people, and the influences that caused the writing of the Acts. Luke was a "victim" of his day, as all men are. To take

³George D. Younger, The Bible Calls for Action (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1959), p. 50.

⁴Graham Chambers Hunter, Luke First Century Christian (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), p. 9.

the writing of the Acts for any single thesis is, as the French put it, terribles simplificateurs, terrible to be sure in all areas.

The contemporary church cannot use the Acts to answer questions about twentieth century social problems, or directions for modern missions or guidelines for parish activities until it understands the answers to the historical questions asked by Luke and faced by the church of the first century. Until this is done, history is falsified and cannot then be used as a basis for answering modern church questions.

If people consciously or unconsciously ascribe to Luke their own ideas about his writing, then the true essence of his work is distorted. To discover the essence of the Acts is not to project from our day back to the Acts, but to investigate Luke's work in light of the background of thought of his time.

Attempts at Understanding the Acts Through Historical and Theological Research

Scholars who have attempted to correct false or confusing interpretations of the Acts have stressed the historical and theological method for properly understanding the factors influencing Luke's writing.

In the nineteenth century historical scholarship was applied to the actions and teachings in the Acts, with the assumption that this would help modern man fit the Acts into his own contemporary genre. Historians researched

Luke too, and did it all very objectively. Dates, places, names and Luke's background were critically studied in an attempt to check his accuracy.

How was one to know if Luke was a reliable author? Scholars could study Luke's Gospel along synoptic lines, looking at his sources, making literary comparisons and critically analyzing every aspect of his work. But they couldn't use the same approach with the Acts. There were no comparable sources for a synoptic approach (as the Gospel of Luke can be checked against that of Matthew and Mark and other non-canonical writings). Was Luke a reliable writer? Could the historical accuracy of his writing stand the tests applied to other books of the New Testament? The influence of biblical historical criticism made it difficult for people to rely on the Acts because to trust in the book's accuracy was to invite the ridicule of the critics. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries revealed a polarized biblical world with one side unable to trust the Scriptures and the other side trusting blindly with little or no scholastic support.

Unmick refers to two scholars, William Ramsay and Adolf von Harnack, whose critical historical view of Luke's writing revealed in great detail the accuracy of Luke's work in the Acts.⁵ But, their historical confirmation only

⁵W. C. Von Unmick, "Luke-Acts, a Storm Center in Contemporary Scholarship" in Studies in Luke-Acts. Edited by Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 19.

opened the door for non-historical questions about the Acts such as the interpretation of the book, Luke's intentions as he wrote, and the degree of influence that the Acts should have on the church. Therefore, leaving historical criticism behind them, modern scholars have looked toward theology for an explanation of Luke's writing.

Unmick explains that new studies, particularly those of Hans Conzelmann (Die Mitte der Zeit, 1954), the collected essays of Otto Dibelius and work by Philip Vrelhauer made scholars realize that Luke-Acts was a combined work written with a definite purpose.⁶

Luke had not simply written a life of Christ and then followed it with a history of the church. He had, in fact, written both books to show theologically the continuity of the redemptive life and ministry of Jesus while he was on earth and the extension of his work through the lives of the disciples after his resurrection and ascension. His was a theological treatise, with definite intent to show the unfolding ministry of Jesus, the brotherhood of the church in Christ and the mystery of Christ alive in the world.

In these studies Luke appeared no longer as a somewhat shadowy figure who assembled stray pieces of more or less reliable information, but as a theologian of no mean stature who very consciously and deliberately planned and executed his work Luke was not primarily a historian who wanted to give a record of the past for its own sake, but a

⁶Ibid., p. 21.

theologian who, by way of historical writing, wanted to serve the church of his own day amid the questions and perils that beset her.⁷

The historical research and the theological discoveries of the Acts, while opening many windows to Luke's work, has certainly not answered all of the questions about his writing. Unmick says that the Acts, through receiving its share of notice historically and theologically, is still not a thoroughly examined book. "Thus it cannot be said that the Lucan writings, Acts in particular, have suffered from neglect But it could not be said that . . . Luke's literary achievement was a storm center of literary studies."⁸

As studies move from history to theology, and scholars are content with their findings, another aspect of Luke's writing should come to light, one that encompasses his theological thinking, his ability as a historian with an eye for accuracy, but also brings into focus all of the influences of his world that made him see and select as he did the material for the Acts. It should be seen that Luke was not simply a recorder of historical events, nor just a theological interpreter of events, but in every sense of the word, a journalist influenced by the resurrected Jesus, impressed by the continued ministry of the gospel through the young church, but like any journalist, alert to report this news that

⁷Ibid., p. 20.

⁸Ibid., p. 23.

was happening among his associates as the gospel began to spread from a small nucleus of Jewish believers in Jerusalem until it encompassed most of the Roman world.

Luke, a First Century
Christian Journalist

It is evident from the foregoing then, that the journalism of Luke, applied with expertise to his writing of the Acts, cannot be divorced from his historical or theological motivations. He was, as scholars have taught, writing history and his accuracy as a historian seems to be well documented. He was also communicating theological concepts based on the continued ministry of Jesus through the lives of the disciples. But history and theology were influences upon his writing, not the purpose of his writing.

In the first of his two works, Luke explains to Theophilus his purpose for writing:

Many writers have undertaken to draw up an account of the events that have happened among us, following the traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and servants of the Gospel. And so I in my turn, your Excellency, as one who has gone over the whole course of these events in detail, have decided to write a connected narrative for you, so as to give you authentic knowledge about the matters of which you have been informed.⁹

This is Luke's own explanation for his writing, and he continues it in the Acts with an introduction to the same Theophilus, building a bridge between what Jesus

⁹Luke 1:1-4, The New English Bible.

did and taught, and the church with the implication that the Acts was the continuation of those things that Jesus did and taught.

He does not make the Acts a history, nor would the eschatological interests of the church have given a reason for writing a history. Neither does he make it a theological treatise because mystically for Luke the message was Jesus, and Jesus was the message, though this had to be interpreted to the various cultures Luke encountered. The Acts is a coherent and systematic account of a series of events; it is a news story. Robertson explains this style: "He does not say that it is a chronological order, though one naturally thinks of that . . . but he employs a different word which suggests military order."¹⁰ His was not just order for order's sake, but order with a purpose. He set out to accumulate his material, and organize purposely, which would not have been necessary if he were only doing a chronological history.

Luke was no mere chronicler of dry details. He was not a scrapbook historian who simply spliced together documents. He used literary sources as every real historian must. They influenced his style, in certain parts more than others, but he put his own stamp upon all the material that he incorporated.¹¹

Again, Robertson notes that the outstanding characteristic of Luke's writing is completeness, and this

¹⁰A. T. Robertson, Luke the Historian in the Light of Research (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), p. 53.

¹¹Ibid., p. 56.

requires careful writing. The journalist has to omit much of the material available to him, and it is obvious that Luke did, for much more happened in Jerusalem, and during the missionary journeys with Paul than is recorded in his book. Yet, his book has a completed quality about it.

Luke had to interpret the personalities in the narrative, both for the Jews and the Gentiles, explaining their behavior, their preaching and the reasons for their actions. He had to take each event and make it as one event, vivid and clear in its parts so that the reader knew more than just the facts of the events. The reader had to also feel and sense the attitudes and influences of the disciples and the people that the disciples met. Perspective and completeness characterize Luke's work, and this is what he intended, if we listen to his own introductory comments to Theophilus about his writing. Luke must be taken seriously about his purpose; we cannot dismiss his own explanation of his intent.

Luke, like any other writer, is entitled to be credited with his own conception of his task. He disclaims being a slipshod writer in the use of his material. He has the Greek love for clarity and for truth. He has the physician's skill in diagnosis that will stand him in good stead as he dissects the data before him He is already in possession of the evidence before he begins to write, as the perfect tense shows.¹²

¹²Ibid., p. 52.

Luke took pains to make himself understood. He researched his material, assembled it, condensed it and wrote it down, keeping order and accuracy before him as his guides. The narrative of the Acts is, Robertson concludes, simple, not forced, but it is accurate, no mere dumping out of materials. "Luke is a master artist in his grouping of the facts, but they are facts."¹³

To see Luke as a journalist, is not, however, to make him a mere stenographer or recorder of the events of the church. He had a message to preach but was more than an editorialist. He combined history, theology and preaching in his writing. But he did it in such a way that made him a storyteller (with the understanding here that story does not mean fiction). This historical-theological-homiletical storytelling is best understood through the investigation of the influences that shaped Luke's story.

Luke did not decide to incorporate a methodology into his narrative; he did decide to put down in an orderly connected way the events that occurred. He did this to help the church. But his ability to do so came out of his Greek background, a background not shared by the other principles in the Acts. It was the influence upon the man as a Greek and the continued influences of the world around him that brought forth the Acts in the form that we have. He neither thought of those influences nor developed them;

¹³Ibid., p. 46.

they were a part of him and those influences came out in his story.

Not that he is likely consciously to have said to himself, "I will preach Christ by writing a gospel and the history of the apostolic age." Even though Luke is of all New Testament writers the most self-conscious author, we must recognize that in writing he was moved in the main by motives of which he was himself (in all probability) imperfectly aware. Though he had in his make-up something of the storyteller, and that this gift had been fostered by some acquaintance with the romantic and historical literature of the Hellenistic age, need not be doubted.
...¹⁴

It is Luke's Hellenistic background, the nature of his roots that gives him the unique characteristics we find in him as a journalist. He collected his material, researching and interviewing for both the Gospel and the Acts before he wrote. The thinking that guided his collection as a Christian journalist was the thinking of a Greek.

A historian of the modern scientific kind he certainly was not, but a historian of the Hellenistic age. His fellows are Polybius and Plutarch, Josephus and Tacitus. It is important to recognize this, though important also not to give it the wrong kind of emphasis. It does not mean that Luke is not to be taken seriously as a writer of history; the distinction between fact and fiction was understood long before he wrote. Moreover, we shall not forget that, if Luke is something less than a scientific historian, he is also something more; he is one of the biblical writers who confronts us with a more than human testimony to Jesus Christ. Yet, true as this is, we shall understand Luke's testimony better if we recognize that as a man he shared, as it were by instinct, and brought to his task, the Hellenistic historians' conception of historiography.¹⁵

¹⁴Charles Kingsley Barrett, Luke the Historian in Recent Study (Edinburgh: Epworth Press, 1961), p. 53.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 9.

And what is that Hellenistic conception of historiography? Barrett draws on the writings of Lucian who produced his On Writing History shortly after the time Luke wrote. Lucian said, "The one aim and goal of history is to be useful; and this can result only from its truth. The one task of the historian is to describe things exactly as they happened. This is the one essential thing in history, to sacrifice to truth alone."¹⁶

Luke's accuracy, his historical interest, his theology, his own missionary interest--"Luke was not merely a witness, he took part in the action"¹⁷--were layers of the basic nature of the man that came from the influences upon him. Add to this, the continuing influences that came from the interaction between the various cultural, religious, political, economic, social, linguistic and geographical factors that were a part of the setting of the church in those early days of expansion, and it becomes clear that Luke had to be an interpretive reporter as he brought together his material.

Luke's style of writing, examined in the light of of the interpretive reporting needed in his cultural setting, shows an artistic quality. He is "a painter of short portraits,"¹⁸ who makes his personalities come through with

¹⁶Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁷Wm. M. Ramsay, Luke the Physician (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), p. 25.

¹⁸Robertson, op. cit., p. 59.

a minimum of descriptive material. He captures the essence of his people without going into character studies or physical descriptions. He makes his stories vivid by the power of personalities. The vast subject of the Christian faith, interpreted through preaching and its spread throughout the empire is woven into the lives of Peter and Paul and Barnabas and others without making the story theirs or anyone else's. It is the story of the growth of the church, but the reader, be he Jew or Greek, believer or not, feels the faith of the disciples as he reads.

Luke is able to move, with his sequence intact, from speech to event, from narrative to interpretation, without chopping up the story. It is fluid whether he is listing Stephen's defense or Paul's shipwreck, or the arguments over the care of Greek widows.

He is not only the most versatile writer in the New Testament but one of the most versatile of all historians . . . the unity of Luke's style is preserved throughout both Gospel and Acts is his characteristic freedom of expression and in the range of his vocabulary. Luke exhibits the science of the trained student and the skill of the artist is giving a harmonious picture by the use of varied material.¹⁹

Luke is given the title "literary artist" by Robertson. He uses language for more than a vehicle of facts; it has the sensitivity that goes beyond the communication of facts. He used the Koiné Greek, a vernacular tongue, with a finish that reveals his intent to communicate.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 57.

"He is fluent, but not prolix."²⁰ His artistry like his historiography were means not ends for his reportorial purposes.

A variety of religious factors shaped Luke's writing too. The flux of religious influences did not just begin in Luke's day. It was part of his world as he grew up and part of the world he was writing to. The Jews were being Hellenized before the Christians of Jerusalem carried the messianic message of Jesus to the synagogues and finally the temples of the Greek world. Luke not only had to report the spread of the gospel in his world so that it could be understood by both Jew and Greek, he had to understand the influences of Greek thought on the Jewish disciples even before they became Christians. Gilbert explains:

In the process of assimilation of Greek culture and philosophy by the Jews there were two external facts of primary importance. First, there was the invasion of Palestine by Greek settlers, and second, the dispersion of Jews throughout the Greek world.²¹

Luke was not only the recipient of all that this interaction of religious-philosophical thought added to his culture, he was, as every man is, a channel of it. The fact that as a Christian he reported the actions of the disciples as they interacted in the cultural milieu

²⁰Ibid., p. 58.

²¹George Holley Gilbert, Greek Thought in the New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 15.

of the first century did not reduce the influences that he too had on that culture and on the disciples.

It would be poor scholarship to ignore Luke's influence on the culture. He was part of the Christian missionary team, as well as a product of the mission. He was a reporter for what is called in his book "the way" as well as a believer in it. He was a product of his Greek-Hebrew world as well as an influence on it. And, it must be clearly understood that culture means more than a style of living.

Culture is the 'artificial secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, customs, social organizations, inherited artifacts, technical processes and values.²²

These cultural influences made Luke a writer of news not a recorder of events. He was not in a vacuum but a man pushed and pulled and shaped as he sought to clearly present what he saw happening in the church.

Another example of Luke's interpretive reporting is that he learned to work with subjects foreign to himself and present them in a way that made novice and expert alike trust his accuracy. For example, Luke was very careful in his presentation of seafaring matters, apparently schooling himself so that he could accurately report events at sea that occurred during the missionary journeys.

²²Richard Neibuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), p. 32.

Navigation and voyages play a large part in the 'we' passages Three-fifths of the words which are peculiar to the 'we' passages are technical terms relating to ships, parts of a ship, naval officers, sea-winds, management of a ship, and matters of navigation generally, and almost all of them are nouns, while the few verbs without exception denote actions required in seamanship. Such words are forced on the writer by his subject; and . . . it is a striking fact that in spite of the novelty of the subject in Chapter 27, describing the shipwreck, the ordinary style and vocabulary are traceable with perfect clearness²³

Luke was likewise careful in matters of geographical detail.

If Josephus crosses Luke's path in historical details, Strabo, in his geography travels much of the same ground that Luke traces in the Acts. But both Strabo and Xenophon tell much less than Luke does concerning certain parts of Asia minor through which Paul traveled.²⁴

Luke did not simply copy detail, he understood the details that he used because he wove them into his story, not as a historian concerned only to list the facts, but as a reporter writing for the people who were involved in the events and lived in the places he described. He seemed to make it his business to know what he was describing. For example, there is abundant evidence that Luke uses the popular rather than the official names of provinces. His purpose was clarity and he had to work to achieve it.

²³Ramsey, op. cit., p. 38.

²⁴Robertson, op. cit., p. 179.

All the more surprising . . . is the minute accuracy of Luke in the matter of the Roman provinces. In the Roman Empire there were provinces and vassal kingdoms. There were constant changes, as can be seen in Palestine, which was a vassal kingdom under Herod the Great.²⁵

How did Luke handle the divisions, changes in rulers, governors and provincial changes? "There was constant interchange of provinces between the emperor and the senate, but Luke ploughs his way safely through."²⁶

Whether the factors that Luke handled were linguistic, religious, political or the intricacies of Roman law as it differed from Greek law, the evidence comes through that Luke did the research and the backgrounding as well as the interpretation needed to relate to his readers with a reporter's skills.

The Acts is a news story, told by one who not only covered the story but was part of it. Always the influences, the research and the writing were under the influence of his own faith. The man is in the story and the man is a Christian. He gave himself to his task, and wrote with "wholehearted consecration of his great gifts and with high standards before his eyes."²⁷

Luke's life and writing show a broad journalistic perspective. It appears that during the years A. D. 45 to 64 he attempted to play the role of a perceptive and

²⁵Ibid., p. 181.

²⁶Ibid., p. 182.

²⁷Ibid., p. 241.

objective news reporter of the events surrounding the action of the young Church and accurately interpreted the essence of the gospel to a widely scattered heterogeneous audience.

In discharging these responsibilities, he seems to have fully appreciated the socio-economic and cultural factors which tend to influence religious beliefs. His theological expertise appears to have been especially useful in presenting a cogent eye-witness account of the church's historical events and the missionary journeys of Paul. Luke's linguistic skills and socio-anthropological insights helped him perform his role as a reporter of the Christian Church-related events. It must necessarily be assumed that the Apostle's role as a reporter was a function of his journalistic expertise and commitment to the Christian faith.

The Problem

Statement of the Problem

Therefore, the study proposes (1) to investigate and normatively assess the reportorial role of Luke the apostle, (2) to analyze the influences that shaped his thinking and writing, and (3) to examine the interaction between religious, linguistic, cultural, political, economic, geographical and social factors and the processes through which he collated material for the Acts of the Apostles.

It is hoped that this study will help to bridge the research gap in the field of religious journalism, particularly in biblical studies. Scholars who have studied the Acts, and sought to interpret this work either historically or theologically have sensed that there is more to Luke's writing than that of a historian and theologian. When the Acts is examined, however, on the premise that Luke was in fact an interpretive reporter, the gaps that have been left by the historical-theological studies are filled.

Method of Research

The methods of research employed here will include documentary and analytic techniques of historical research.

Specifically, the study will critically analyze books, monographs, lectures, and theses written on the Acts as a book of the Bible, and on Luke as an apostle. This will be done by establishing the influential framework of Luke's world to see how he functioned as a reporter in the midst of the events he interpreted, and by researching the published and unpublished works that pertain to these events. Thus it will be necessary to collect and research the biblical writings, commentaries, histories, theological works, geographical materials, and linguistic studies as well as exegetical works on the Acts and the teaching of the disciples. Then, it will be necessary to classify the material and analyze it for its influence on the life and ministry of Luke. Finally, these influences

will be used as the framework for explaining the writing of Luke.

Emphasis will be placed on the works of modern scholars who have had the benefit of the great discoveries of biblical materials from the Dead Sea area and the Qumran community over the last thirty years. Weight will be given to scholars who have tried to capture the design and content of Luke's writing rather than to those who have written primarily to support a theological bias. It will be necessary, however, to give variant views wherever scholars disagree on issues that are critical to this study.

The New English Bible will be used as the text for the Acts because it is a modern translation from manuscripts considered by most scholars to be among the earliest and best available.²⁸ Reference will be made to Greek texts whenever particular wording needs to be researched. The text will provide the examples of Luke's reporting skills with explanations coming from the writings of scholars with varied theological and denominational backgrounds.

²⁸In 1947 archaeological discoveries of ancient biblical manuscripts in the Wadi Qumran and the vicinity north-west of the Dead Sea gave many quality texts to the translators of the New English Bible.

Exception to the acclaim given the NEB by scholars is taken by E. C. Collwell "External Evidence and New Testament Criticism" in Studies and Documents, edited by Jacob Geerling (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1967), p. 3.

Since the ideas on what makes a good reporter vary, an attempt will be made to examine many authorities on journalism to achieve a measure for Luke's reporting skills that is universal rather than provincial. Realizing that Luke was a man of his age with Christian convictions of his own, this study will seek to determine the quality of his reportorial objectivity as he wrote for the public.

CHAPTER II

LUKE: THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE

Luke: The Greek Physician

Although the author of the Acts is not named in the Bible, Luke, the writer of the third gospel, is universally accepted as the author of the Acts.¹ Therefore a closer look at his life and message is needed.

Luke is mentioned only three times in the Bible, all in the letters of Paul. To the Colossian Christians Paul wrote, "Greetings to you from our dear friend, Luke, the doctor" (Col. 4:14); to his friend Timothy he wrote, while in his last imprisonment in Rome, "I have no one with me but Luke" (2 Timothy 4:11); and to Philemon he wrote, "Epaphras, Christ's captive like myself, sends you greetings. So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers" (Philemon 24). Paul lists Luke among the Greek workers in the church. In Colossians, he gives the names of all the Jewish Christians (Col. 4:10), then places Luke's name in the list of Greek Christians (Col. 4:14).

¹Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922), p. xi.

Little is known about Luke's life before he joined Paul on the missionary journeys. Studies on the derivation of his name by Robertson² and Plummer³ indicate Greek ancestry and extra-biblical writings such as Eusibius (Hist. Eccl. 111.4) put his birthplace at Antioch in Syria. This would make Luke an Asiatic Greek.

Since Luke's ancestry seems to be Greek, some scholars have surmised that he became a convert to Judaism before he became a Christian. Luke's heavy emphasis on the Old Testament has caused scholars to search for evidence of Jewish religious convictions. But Robertson, after researching Luke's writing, concludes that he was not a Jewish proselyte.⁴ His familiarity with the Jewish Scriptures seems to have come from his thorough research as a journalist rather than from Jewish convictions.

There is also much evidence supporting the belief that Luke was, by training and practice, a physician. Paul refers to him as a physician in Colossians 4:14. Ramsay⁴ and Hobart⁶ substantiate this by their research into the way Luke treated medical subjects, using medical terms that only a medical man would have used; and, the

²Robertson, op. cit., p. 16.

³Plummer, op. cit., p. xviii.

⁴Robertson, op. cit., p. 18.

⁵Ramsay, op. cit., p. 56.

⁶William K. Hobart, The Medical Language of St. Luke (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co., 1882), p. xxx.

fact that healings are given such a prominent place in Luke's writing with careful descriptions that show an unusual interest.

Luke probably practiced medicine as he traveled on the missionary journeys with Paul. His physician's eye for diagnosis enhanced his reporter's observations, and this combination of skills adds detail to his writing. The muscular healing of the beggar lame from birth tells as much about Luke the reporter as it does about Luke the physician.

One day at three in the afternoon, the hour of prayer, Peter and John were on their way up to the temple. Now a man who had been a cripple from birth used to be carried there and laid every day by the gate of the temple called 'Beautiful Gate,' to beg from people as they went in. When he saw Peter and John on their way into the temple he asked for charity. But Peter, fixed his eyes on him, as John did also, and said, 'Look at us.' Expecting a gift from them, the man was all attention. And Peter said, "I have no silver or gold; but what I have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Then he grasped him by the right hand and pulled him up; and at once his feet and ankles grew strong; he sprang up, stood on his feet and started to walk.⁷

Luke did not just relate an illustration of miraculous healing here. He noted the details; i.e., it was the right hand that Peter grasped; he "sprang up" not rising slowly; both Peter and John "fixed" their eyes on him. These are reportorial details that could have been missed in the simple recording that a lame man was healed. But there is more than a reporter's eye for detail in this

⁷Acts 3:1-8, The New English Bible.

story. Luke as a physician, noted that the man had been lame from birth and must have thought of the atrophied muscles and sinews and the unused bones which would start to work after forty years of sitting (Acts 4:22).

But Luke was also able to separate his physician's role from his role as a reporter. He wanted people to know about the healing power of God as it was demonstrated through the disciples, but he reported only the public cases, not the private ones. The lame beggar (Acts 3:1-8) and the cripple at Lystra (Acts 14:8-9) were public healings, and were proper subjects for the reporter to describe for his readers. But Luke was also the attending physician for Paul who was often ill (2 Cor. 12:7; Gal. 4:13; 2 Cor. 1:3-5, 8-10). The reporter who could describe in detail the public illnesses of other people was professionally silent about his own patient.

It is likely that Luke did give medical help to Paul. They seem to have met first at Troas (Acts 16:10 when the narration changes from saying what 'they' did to what 'we' did) and this was just after Paul had been in Galatia (where we have seen from Gal. 4:13 that he was ill); they were together again at Philippi (Acts 20:6 ff) immediately after Paul had been in Macedonia (and that was where he wrote his second letter to Corinth in which he spoke in 1:8-10 of such a serious illness). Luke was with Paul on the final journey to Rome. Paul's ill health is reflected in the courteous treatment which Julius the centurion extended to him giving him 'leave to go to his friends and be cared for' (Acts 27:3).⁸

⁸Gordon Robinson, New Testament Detection (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 178.

Luke, the physician and reporter, was also Luke the disciple and friend of the people who made up his story. Always these two parts of his life must be examined together in order to appreciate his journalistic work. How he handled his work as a writer and disciple can best be seen by first outlining the story of Acts, and then examining the way that he wrote it.

Luke: The Author of Early Christian
Church History

In the Acts, Luke recalls the commission given to the disciples (Acts 1:8), and records the progressive stages by which the commission is to be fulfilled. Chapters one through seven concern the early church in Jerusalem; chapters eight through twelve deal with the church in Judea and Samaria; and chapters thirteen through twenty-eight delineate the church universal as the gospel is carried beyond the Jewish regions.⁹

⁹McNeile does a rather elaborate description of what he calls literary "panels" that break the Acts into six periods. His Introduction to the New Testament (1953), p. 98, calls attention to C. J. Cadoux (in Journal of Theological Studies, xix, 1918, pp. 333 ff.) who suggests that "St. Luke splits the history into six periods of five years each, beginning with the Pentecosts of 29, 34, 39, 44, 49, 54, thus covering a total period of thirty years."

He elaborates further on the panel theory by referring to C. H. Turner's panels ("Chronology of the New Testament" in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, i. 421). These panels go by historical development, each concluding with some remark that summarizes the events recorded and the success attained. Turner's six periods are: 1) The Church in Jerusalem, summary in 6:7; 2) Extension of the Church through Palestine, summary in 11:31; 3) Extension of the Church to Antioch, summary in 12:24; 4) Extension of the Church to Asia Minor, summary in 16:5; 5) Extension of the Church to Europe, summary in 19:20; 6) Extension of the Church to Rome, summary in 28:31.

The Early Church in Jerusalem

Luke begins the Acts by letting the reader appreciate the anticipation of the church as it gathered after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and waited for the promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The disciples had a commission to "Bear witness for me in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and always to the ends of the earth," (Acts 1:8).

That power, Luke records, was given and the rest of his story is the working of that power in the disciples' lives as they carried the gospel into the world. An aggressive preaching ministry created opposition from the religious leaders. But, although imprisonment was used to hinder and frighten the disciples, the new movement spread.

The Church in Judea and Samaria

The story is woven around Philip a Greek, Peter an uneducated Jew who had experienced the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, and Saul of Tarsus a rabbi and possible student of Gamaliel, whose conversion brought Old Testament teaching and evangelical zeal to the wider mission of the church. It is the story of persecutions that strengthened rather than limited the faithfulness of the young church to its cause; and, it is the story of Herod, a king who was determined to keep his realm in order.

Luke does not dwell on the persecution because his story is larger than that, but he reports it as a strong factor in the scattering of the disciples as far north as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. At Troas, Luke joined the disciples.

The Church Universal

It is here that the narrative of the story incorporates the "we" passages. Luke began to write what he himself observed and participated in. It is the story of Paul's three missionary journeys and his final journey as a prisoner to Rome. This is the longest section of the three-part narrative.

The center of the faith had moved from Jerusalem to Antioch, from the Jews to the Gentiles, and Luke records the story of this movement with all of the intrigue and interwoven problems that is intrinsic to every great movement. He told Theophilus at the beginning what he intended to do, and with deliberate skill, he did it. His narrative has a steady and regular forward movement.

Luke's story is a news story. The people in the narrative are described as they acted, without bias or opinion. Luke does not hush up the dispute over the care of widows; the boldness of the disciples in the face of persecution is told without flourish; and the disciples' relationship with one another is described with both the strengths and weaknesses of men who have a common cause but do not always see eye to eye on the way to work

for that cause. The disciples are totally involved in the social scene and Luke does not separate them from it. The characters in Luke's story are not described as picturesque saints, but men of human frailty who try to remain obedient to their commission. In writing as he did, Luke gave the human interest angle that journalistically permits the reader to identify with the people in the story.

An Examination of Luke's Reportorial Skills

Reading the text of the Acts provides indices of Luke's skill as a reporter. Although the term "journalist" suggests formal training and the practice of certain professional roles, it must be understood that this title is given Luke on a post hoc or ad hoc basis. A look at Luke's work under the guidelines of accepted journalistic practices shows how remarkably close to prescribed journalistic standards he came.

Writing in Journalism Quarterly, Philip M. Burgess and Paul S. Underwood list three traditional areas important to the training of a journalist, particularly for international journalism, the kind of journalism undertaken by Luke. They list: "1) The development of writing skills; 2) the acquisition and internalization of the norms and ethical standards of the profession; and 3) the development and practice of skills of observation, reporting and

interpretation."¹⁰ Along with these, say Burgess and Underwood, must go social analysis skills. An analysis of Luke's reportorial skills will show that Luke possessed all of these parameters.

The Development of Writing Skills

It has already been shown that Luke had an orderly plan in mind as he wrote the Acts. His introductory remarks to Theophilus serve as a commitment to purpose and he was obligated by that commitment to write a clear narrative. It has also been shown that his diagnostic and reportorial skills gave him an eye for detail, but his commitment and eye for detail were valuable only to the extent that he exercised his skill as a writer.

Scholars have studied Luke's Gospel more extensively than the Acts. In the Gospel studies, Luke has been highly praised as a writer with original writing skills--skills that are liberated from the confinement of the style of his sources. Many scholars assume that Mark was Luke's prime source of information for the Gospel. But, because Luke rewrites the material freely, transposes the order of events for clarity, and has so freed himself from Mark, a few biblical scholars like P. Feine (Eine Vorkanonische Uberlieferung des Lukas in Evangelium und Apostelgeschichte), and G. Streeter (The

¹⁰ Philip M. Burgess and Paul S. Undersood, "New Approaches to Educating the International Student," in Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 47, No. 3, p. 520.

Four Gospels), have suggested that he had some other source called "proto-Luke." Creed, however, accepts Luke's Marcan sources and credits him with being a writer of such skill that it made possible his independent treatment of the gospel narrative.

An examination of Luke's treatment of the Marcan text shows him to have carried through a drastic revision of the language. The characteristic Marcan idioms are obliterated, and the whole narrative is made smoother and more consecutive.

He has no scruple in transposing (e.g. vi. 12f., viii. 19, xviii. 35), or fusing recorded events (e.g. xix. 45) if by so doing he will improve the literary connection or the dramatic setting.¹¹

The same creative writing skills that Luke put into his Gospel are also found in his second book, the Acts. Heretofore, many scholars had given weight to the assumption (as they did with the Gospel) that Luke was a borrower. They assumed that the Acts, since it had no counterparts, had to be made up of literary borrowings from Paul.

Plummer has compiled tables, comparing words and phrases in the Acts with like words and phrases in the letters of Paul.¹² These are intended to show that Luke did, in fact, borrow his literary technique from Paul. But this is to ignore a widely held assumption that

¹¹John Martin Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1957), p. lxi.

¹²Alfred Plummer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke," International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922), pp. liv-lix.

language is a socio-cultural phenomenon. Since Luke and Paul held the same religious convictions, traveled together on missionary journeys and used the same Koiné Greek that was common to the people of their day, it is, then, likely that they showed similarities in their use of language. Even today it is not unusual for people in a close relationship to use one another's vocabulary. It would be unusual if Luke and Paul did not use similar words and phrases as they explained the Christian message to their contemporaries. But this in no way detracts from Luke's literary abilities. Luke expressed his intention to Theophilus of wanting to communicate the church events and since he is writing to a Christian, it seems natural that he would use words and phrases that were common to the preaching of churchmen like Paul.

The disciples were communicating a message and the message was as much a part of Luke's story as the way that it was communicated. The message was bound to sound the same in Luke's writings and Paul's because of the close contact between Paul and the disciples who were proclaiming the message, and Luke who was reporting its proclamation. Luke's quotations from Paul's speeches would naturally contain words that Paul also used in his letters. And, theological terms that the disciples used to proclaim the Christian message would appear in Paul's letters and in Luke's explanation of the proclamation in the Acts.

The best test of Luke's writing skills is not how he compared with other New Testament writers, but how he used the language itself. An examination of Luke's work strictly on the basis of writing style shows clearly that his prime purpose was the purpose of every journalist--communication. Creed, in his explanation of Luke's treatment of the gospel, gives some insights that show the author of Acts to be a first rate reporter.¹³

Creed describes Luke's introduction to Theophilus as a sentence that is carefully balanced and done in irreproachable literary Greek. Luke could have composed a beautiful piece of literary prose in both the Gospel and the Acts. His education and facility with the language gave him the needed talent for that kind of writing. Were he simply a historian or a theologian or an essayist, his purpose would have been served by using this purer Greek prose that he used in his introduction. But Luke's purpose was reportorial with a larger goal than beauty and style. For, immediately after expressing his intent to Theophilus in literary Greek, he made an abrupt change to the Koiné or common Greek that characterizes the rest of his writing. Creed explains:

The transition proves the author to be a conscious artist. He could, if he wished, have written throughout as a professional man of letters; if he does not maintain his polished and polite style, it

¹³Creed, op. cit., pp. ixi ff.

is because he judges it unsuitable to transpose the traditional material into another idiom.¹⁴

The people in the church and the marketplace understood the common Greek and so, in the interest of good reportorial purpose, that's the idiom Luke chose to use. Furthermore, because of the Hellenizing of the Jews and the same influence of Hebraisms among the Greeks, the people had a mixture of words in their common market-place language that had roots in both Greek and Hebrew culture. Luke captured this so well that some scholars have supposed that he was using a form of Semitic-Greek dialect. But, Papyri discovered in Egypt has shown that the Greek used was not a dialect of Hebrew-Greek but the common Greek of the empire, mixed as it was because of the cross-currents of people and languages.

Luke, then, did not use the Semitic-Greek of Jews whose formal language was Hebrew (or in many cases Aramaic) nor the classical Greek of the sophisticated Greek writer, but the Koiné of the marketplace, the dialect that the people (even many Romans) used in their daily conversations. It was a dialect limited in vocabulary but a dialect that everyone understood throughout an empire traversed by the missionaries and inhabited by the converts to Christianity. Luke, as a journalist, used the language form that communicated most clearly to all of the people.

¹⁴Ibid., p. lxxvi.

The Acquisition and Internalization of
the Norms and Ethical Standards of
the Profession

The internalization of the norms of journalism causes a reporter to seek out the story that needs to be told. It is not a job, it is an attribute. Luke seems to have possessed this attribute.

The introduction to Theophilus has been examined both from the standpoint of the expression of Luke's self-imposed requirement for systematic organization and clarity and from the angle of his literary skill.

It can serve again here to show the burden Luke felt to present clearly the life of Jesus in his Gospel and the events that formed and shaped the infant church and its message about Jesus. Luke makes it plain that he wants to get the story and he wants it to be read. In his introduction to the Acts, when he again addressed Theophilus, he reemphasized his avowed purpose of having the same orderly account in the Acts as he attempted to render in the gospel. But in his comment to Theophilus he is doing more than just telling his plan. He is saying to his reading public "there is no fakery or falsehood in what I am writing." The Acts was to be no poetic piece dedicated to the Muses, but an accurate narrative with details that could be checked, and was dedicated to a real person.

That Theophilus is a real person, and not a symbolical personage representing devout Christians in general, is scarcely doubtful . . . the name was

a very common one Moreover, the epithet Κράτιος is far more likely to have been given to a real person than to a fictitious one.¹⁵

Luke, like every reporter, was concerned to get an accurate story, but he was also sensitive to the feelings of the reading public. Though he was free to write as he would, even to change and adjust the material from his sources to suit his journalistic style, and was careful to use the dialect of the people, he nevertheless maintained high standards in his writing.

Good writers in Luke's day were alert to Phrynichus' list of condemned vulgarisms.¹⁶ These words were not immoral words (as in cursing) so much as they were simply not used in better speech. Where there seems to have been only a preference for a particular word in Phrynichus' list because of custom, Luke freely made his own choice to suit his writing. Luke does not hesitate to use the word "orthros" to describe the period before daybreak, even though Phrynichus lists it as an unacceptable word. But, when there was a word or phrase that was offensive, Luke corrected these words and phrases from his sources and used the words and phrases that were considered more proper by Phrynichus. Luke was no mere copyist writing directly from his sources but a responsible

¹⁵Plummer, op. cit., p. xxxiii.

¹⁶For a longer list of Phrynichus' condemned words see J. M. Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke, pp. lxxxii ff.

reporter who was sensitive to the feelings of his reading public. A few examples will substantiate this sensitivity.

Phrynichus condemns the use of the word ptoma "corpse" or "carcass." Matthew uses it in his Gospel when quoting a parable of Jesus and Mark uses it in describing the burial of John the Baptist, and John the Elder uses it three times in The Revelation, but Luke does not use it, changing the word to the acceptable word soma.

Raphis "needle" is condemned by Phrynichus; Luke substitutes belonae, the word which Phrynichus endorses. Luke substitutes aepais "maiden" for the more common but proscribed word korasion "little girl."

But this respect for the feelings of the reader does not mean that Luke sacrificed journalistic accuracy or was a timid writer. There was no evidence that he shaped the news or shaded it for his readers. For example, even though as a physician he remained silent about Paul's illnesses, he was not protecting Paul. He reported without apparent qualms Paul's outburst, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall," (Acts 23:3) when Paul was furious at the high priest Ananias for having him struck in the mouth by attendants.

One other distinct point marks Luke as a reporter who had internalized the norms of the profession. He was ready to gather material for his story any time and any place. Luke had the advantage of being free while Paul was in prison and no doubt interviewed people and filled

in the gaps in his narrative during that time. No scholar has labeled him a reporter, yet all give evidence that he researched, questioned and investigated. Robertson's portrayal comes closer to characterizing Luke as a professional journalist than that of any other scholar.

Robertson suggests:

One would feel sure that Luke would make it his business while in Palestine to seek interviews with important persons who could add bits of color to his narrative about Christ. . . . A few questions would draw out much information which Luke would be quick to jot down.¹⁷

This, Robertson admits, is a feeling. But it seems that if he had put the same study into the Acts as he put into the Gospel, he would find the same kind of interviews and data gathering. Without realizing it, Robertson was describing a journalist.

The Development and Practice of
Skill of Observation, Reporting
and Interpretation

When scholars assume that Luke copied from other writers, or was influenced by other sources, and therefore any originality in his work has to be due to some form of corruption in his sources, they run into a problem. An example from Acts 7:16 will illustrate a problem that is easily handled when Luke is seen as a reporter of skill and his intent to write an orderly account is taken seriously.

¹⁷Robertson, op. cit., p. 48.

In his article, "Style and Text in the Greek New Testament,"¹⁸ G. D. Kilpatrick refers to Luke's account of one of Stephen's speeches: "There he ended his days, as also our forefathers did. Their remains were later removed to Shechem and buried in the tomb which Abraham had bought and paid for from the clan of Emmor at Shechem" (Acts 7:16). This is a passage quoted from Genesis 50:13 which translates in the Septuagint (the translation that Stephen would have used) mnemeion for the word "tomb." But Luke writes mnema which has the same meaning but is different from the LXX and different from the word for tomb he uses elsewhere. Kilpatrick, treating Luke as a mere copyist, gives three possible explanations for this change in Acts from the LXX: 1) that mnemeion was corrupted to mnema in all the manuscripts of Acts by scribes who sought to make all of the manuscripts consistent; 2) that Luke was using a particular text of the LXX that, unlike the others had mnema instead of mnemeion; or, 3) that all of the LXX texts had been corrupted by copiers before Luke did his research.

It is possible that Luke was using a text of the LXX that had the change in it, but to accept Kilpatrick's first and third suggestions is to deny what almost every scholar of ancient biblical texts admits--that the ancient

¹⁸G. D. Kilpatrick, "Style and Text in the Greek New Testament" in Studies and Documents, Vol. xxix, edited by Jacob Geerling (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1967), p. 157.

scribes feared to change even one iota of what they considered to be Holy Writ. Their reputation for care in transcribing the Bible is well attested by scholars.

Kilpatrick overlooks a fourth possibility for Luke's use of a different word, that being a reporter, Luke used the word mnema because it is the word that Stephen used in his speech. Since mnemeion and mnema have the same meaning, Stephen could have learned the Old Testament passage the way that he said it. Or, being a Greek he may not have had a good foundation in Old Testament scripture and misquoted the passage. Certainly, in the impromptu circumstances of preaching at his own trial just before he was taken out and stoned, he did not have time to research the passage. Also, Stephen may have used the word by choice. Certainly Luke is not confused about the two words because he uses mnemeion elsewhere in his writing. It seems logical to conclude, then, that Luke was quoting Stephen directly and was not the hapless victim of poor sources as Kilpatrick makes him out to be. This dilemma facing Kilpatrick would have been easily solved if he had taken Luke's intentions as a journalist seriously. The questions he raises are answered by Luke's stated intention to write a connective narrative and give authentic knowledge.

During the time that Luke was gathering his material for the Acts, he was with Paul and Paul's companions. It is probable that he was acquainted with most of

the twelve. His interviews and probing research give evidence of purpose as a reporter because he gives his readers more than the simple facts of a story. He surrounds his stories with details coming from his careful observation. "Some of the Lucan narratives give us a little story complete in itself, in which the differing characters and conflicting motives of the actors contribute to the whole."¹⁹

Such a complete story is given in Acts 21-22. Paul, in A.D. 57 was rescued by Roman soldiers from crowds threatening to lynch him in the Court of the Gentiles. He was permitted by the military tribune to address the crowd from the top of the steps leading from that court to the Antonia fortress. Luke does not content himself with the report of the near riots, the arrest, or Paul's speech. He adds the finishing touch that is so characteristic of his reportorial observations and interpretive reporting. Luke writes: "He addressed them in the Jewish language" (Acts 21:40). Paul had been speaking to the commander in Greek and it seems a minor point that Luke makes about his switching tongues. But when the reason for the switch is understood it becomes obvious that Luke was no mere recorder of events but a skillful interpretive reporter.

F. F. Bruce teaches that in that period Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek were used by the people with equal

¹⁹Creed, op. cit., p. lxviii.

facility depending on the circumstances. But there was a feeling among the Jews that to use Hebrew or Aramaic was more patriotic. For the stricter Palestinian Jews, Greek smacked of Hellenization, and although they used Greek they objected to the Greek influences in their lives. This feeling was compounded toward Paul who was preaching to the Gentiles.

The crowds would have expected Paul to speak Greek, and would have understood him well enough if he had. But, he chose Hebrew and quieted them emotionally as he attempted to show them what he was doing. Luke did not miss this crucial point. His skill and observation moved him past the simple recording of the speech and the events surrounding it. His readers were given the opportunity to be present and catch Paul's intent as he addressed the crowd. The story could only have been presented this way by one who was alert to all of the circumstances and wanted his readers to know the emotion as well as the facts of the event.

This same quality of observation and interpretation can be seen in the line, "It was in Antioch that the disciples first got the name of Christians" (Acts 11:26). The story was about the scattering of the disciples because of persecution and their preaching at Antioch. The line is of no consequence to the story but has much to say about the origin of the word "Christian." The believers did not name themselves and Luke realized that this distinguished

them from other self-named religious groups. They were called believers, Nazarenes, or followers of the way, but not "Christians" before Antioch. Luke was alert to this minute change in labels that took place in Antioch and related it to his readers. It changes nothing of the story but shows the careful reporting that enabled him to note the difference in epithets used by the people of that particular city. It is a Greek term, and as Bruce explains:

Jews would not have given them a name containing the element "Christ" (the Greek equivalent of Messiah), for that would have been tantamount to admitting that Jesus, whose followers these people were, was indeed the Messiah. To Gentiles, however, Christ was merely a name (if rather an odd one), with none of the religious associations which it had for Jews; and so, as they heard these people talk so much about their Lord and Savior as Christos, they called them Christianoi, "Christ's people."²⁰

Luke's observation, his ability to note and describe the details that fill out and accentuate a story, also reveals his attempts at conquering his own bias. He was a Greek, a Christian, a missionary and a journalist. These were all influential to his writing, but he seems to have attempted to be fair. The report of the choosing of the seven deacons illustrates his ability to separate his feelings and report with balance and fairness.

During this period, when disciples were growing in number, there was disagreement between those of them who spoke Greek and those who spoke the language

²⁰F. F. Bruce, "The Dawn of Christianity," Vol. I, The Spreading Flame (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 102.

of the Jews. The former party complained that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called the whole body of disciples together and said, 'It would be a grave mistake for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait at table. Therefore, friends, look out seven men of good reputations from your number, men full of the Spirit and of wisdom, and we will appoint them to deal with these matters, while we devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.' This proposal proved acceptable to the whole body. They elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch, a former convert to Judaism. These they presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.²¹

Luke did not comment on the way that this selection took place, but he did name the seven, an unnecessary part of the story since only Stephen and Philip were mentioned again and many other active people in the church were never mentioned. But it seems he was showing an attitude as well as documenting his work. All of the men chosen, judging from their names, were Greek. It was the Hellenists who were complaining, yet the church leaders in Jerusalem elected all Greeks to handle the distribution. Luke was showing that in Christ the believers had no bias nor fear that they would be used by groups within the church. Whatever his own feelings about the issue, Luke gives no cause for Hebrew or Greek Christians to complain about his reporting. At no point does Luke reveal anger at either party, and his listing of the names says more about their oneness than any interpretive comments could have done. Again, it

²¹Acts 6:1-6, The New English Bible.

is the full account, not merely the recording of facts and events, that makes Luke the true journalist.

One other vignette points to Luke's alert eye for detail and ability to report so that the interpretation is part of the story. It is the story of Philip meeting the Ethiopian eunuch.

Then the angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Start out and go south to the road that leads down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the desert road.) So he set out and was on his way when he caught sight of an Ethiopian. This man was a eunuch, a high official of the Kandake, or Queen, of Ethiopia, in charge of all her treasure.²²

The story goes on to tell how Philip explained the Messianic passages of Isaiah the Prophet to the Ethiopian, and how he responded by asking for baptism. The story of his conversion is complete in itself but Luke adds the fine details. He tells how Philip happened to be on the road and exactly what road he was on. Luke had researched the event before he wrote about it. He checked his geography, found the official's exact office and reason for being in Jerusalem (8:28) and the particular passage that he had been reading aloud, and from which Philip was able to explain to him the Messiah.

In a book that puts twenty or more years into twenty-eight chapters, Luke had to omit much detail. Yet, when he wrote this story he added every bit of detail that he could, giving a full and complete account as he promised

²²Acts 8:26 ff., The New English Bible.

Theophilus. By eliminating detail, he might have added more events to his story, but he was a practicing reporter and the story he told had to be complete because it was a story about people for people--and more than facts were involved.

Luke fits the description of a journalist as described by Burgess and Underwood. Luke's abilities as a journalist have been examined, but this examination so far has only shown what he did and how he did it. The influences upon Luke's life and work must also be examined in order to fully comprehend his work as a journalist.

Luke's life as Greek, physician, Christian and writer are only part of the making of this first century journalist. There were more influences that shaped him as he gathered material for the writing of the Acts. His world was an influence upon him and it contained stimuli that was religious, linguistic, cultural, political, economic, geographical and social. To understand the reporter requires an understanding of his world.

CHAPTER III

PERSPECTIVE ON THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF LUKE'S WORLD

As a practicing journalist in the first century, Luke reported the developmental stages of the Christian Church. To do so, he had to understand the context of the environment that affected his reporting. In this chapter the religious, linguistic, cultural, political, economic, geographical and social influences upon Luke's reporting will be analyzed.

The Religious Influences

The Christian message was tempered by the religious climate in which it was preached. Luke, therefore, interpreted the adaptation not by drawing attention to it but by accurately reporting the preaching and attitudes of the disciples as they moved within it. Luke described the church's mission as it interacted with both the Jewish and Graeco-Roman religious beliefs. Luke never described the Christian witness as an opposition to the established beliefs, but rather as the fulfillment of them. At no place in his reporting did he ridicule other religions,

but neither did he allow his readers to believe that Christianity was just one of many religions. Like a modern communicator, he described the witnessing church as part of the overall religious community, influenced by it and working within it.

When the disciples were witnessing to the Jews, Luke included the Old Testament Scriptures in his narrative. When the witness was carried to the Greek world, Luke reported the message of the fulfillment of their spiritual hunger in Jesus Christ. He reported how the disciples planted the Christian gospel in the religious tradition of the Jews and Greeks. He demonstrated his awareness that the message of the church was not a negative reaction to the religious environment of the people but rather a positive presentation about Jesus Christ within that environment.

An example of Luke's awareness of the religious context in which the gospel was being communicated is found in his treatment of miracles. Luke was careful to avoid the impression that the gospel presentation was based on the working of miracles. He recorded the miracles as part of news reporting; he did not make them the main story. In Acts 8, Simon the magician wanted the miracle working power of the disciples so that he could have a following. Luke could have eliminated the chance of his reader's thinking that the Christian faith was just a miracle working religion by not reporting the

miracles. But the miracles were part of the mission work and the people responded to them. So Luke risked the reader's misunderstanding for journalistic accuracy.

The first religious opposition that Luke reported came from the Jews in Jerusalem. He reported that the general Jewish public responded to the message but that it was the Jewish leaders who were critical and annoyed because the disciples were teaching the people directly. It was jealousy (Acts 5:17) more than theology that brought the opposition.

Their faith in Christ led the Christians to give new interpretations to Old Testament teachings, interpretations that established Judaism could not accept. The Christian view of God working in history was Jewish and markedly different from the prevailing Greek view of God. Luke as a Greek understood this, and was able to interpret a movement that the Jewish common man could identify with and yet was the kind of movement that added the dimension of personal faith needed by the Greeks. Luke was able to interpret the appeal that the gospel held for both the Jews and the Greeks.

When the disciples were persecuted by the Jews, they began to preach to the Greeks. But it was not a direct move. Luke leads his readers from Palestine into the Greek world by way of Samaria where the people were despised by the orthodox Jews of Palestine. The Jews regarded them as racial and religious half-breeds because

of the Assyrian foreign settlers in Samaria and the sacred hill which was thought of as a rival to the sacred temple in Jerusalem.

So it was a bold step for these Jewish Christians to preach to the people of Samaria. In the overall picture of the growth of the Christian Church, this brief venture into Samaria could probably have been ignored. But to the journalist Luke, it was an answer to the question that many of his readers would have asked, "How could the Jewish disciples go directly from the Jews to the Greeks with the gospel?" Luke showed that they did not.

Having reported this intermediate step, the stage was set for Luke to explain the scattering of the disciples to preach to the dispersed Jews throughout the Gentile world and the resulting influences from the Greek religions.

Among the Greeks, religion was everywhere--but not personalized. Tenney explains:

The entire religious culture of the past was represented by the buildings and rites of pagan worship; its legends and ethics were ingrained into the people; and as Christianity slowly penetrated the fabric of society, it met the resistance of these antecedents.¹

The Greeks had no objection to the teaching about another god, but would not listen to the teachings of a faith that was personalized. Gnosticism tolerated new

¹Merril C. Tenney, New Testament Times (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 112.

thought, but not dogmatic theology. This opposition was compounded by a sense of history and patriotism that made the Greeks defensive of their gods because their gods were a part of their heritage. Luke reported this encounter between committed believers in one Saving God and the varied beliefs of people whose religious loyalties changed with the local, the degree of nostalgia that each held for his favorite god and the amount of loyalty each held for the integrity of the Greek state.

The simplicity of reporting the encounter between the Christians and the Jews was replaced by the complexity of the Greek beliefs. Luke had to be alert to every new encounter if he was going to make sense to his readers. Filson, in The New Testament Against Its Environment, gives an indication of what Luke encountered as a reporter:

Athens and the other cities had their gods. The guilds had theirs. The governments had theirs, and in many cases even claimed that their sensual rulers were divine. In government, religion, business, amusement, labor and social clubs the pagan world was built on the pattern of polytheism.²

Rome was losing control of the old Roman religions when the Acts was written. The educated were becoming more skeptical, an increase in foreign slaves and the shift in population from the rural areas to the cities reduced the number of worshipers of the local and village deities. Octavian had tried to bring back the old Roman religions.

²Floyd V. Filson, The New Testament Against Its Environment (London: S.C.M. Press, 1950), p. 29.

He thought that it would be a way of giving solidarity and integrity to the state. But it was artificial, all it did was create a nostalgic feeling for the past.

It was into this religious ferment that the Christians moved. Luke's reportorial eye had to pick out each distinct influence as it was brought to bear on the Christians. He had to understand and then put into his writing the shades of differences between the various religions encountered as the disciples moved about. Yet he had to keep his story moving smoothly, allowing his readers to see these influences and feel the pressures but at the same time not allow his story to become a discourse on non-Christian beliefs.

Whether it was Jewish temple politics, the popular Greek cult of Eleusis, the Egyptian cult of Serapis, Atargatis of Syria or the powerful cult of Mithra, Luke had to understand them and interpret them to his readers. He had to show how these various beliefs influenced the disciples' preaching without spending all of his time on religious discussions. And, he had to understand theologically how they conflicted with the faith he held. For as a reporter in this religious ferment, his loyalty was to the Christian church. In this sense, Luke was not a detached reporter, but he was an objective one. His reporting was interpretive and truthful. Through his reporting the reader was given the Christian message even as he was given the report of the preaching of the Christian

message. Luke seems to have been concerned to render objective truth at all times. A careful reading of the Acts shows this concern to have been an asset. It caused him to seek out even obscure facts and details to document his story.

As a reporter, Luke did not ignore the other religions influencing the disciples. His readers, living under similar influences, would have been able to identify the pressure and antagonism caused by the encounter of the various religions by the Christian missionaries.

The Linguistic Influences

The Acts was written by a Greek using the Greek language. But this is not simply a conclusion to be stated; it is rather a point of departure wherein Luke, the Greek, using his own language reported and interpreted the influences of several languages upon the preaching of the disciples.

The use of the Greek language in the Acts can be understood only when the linguistic influences upon the author using the language is understood. Luke's thinking and writing was shaped by four languages, and by the cultures in which those languages developed.

Greek, one of the languages, was the speech of the educated Hellenized classes, and was the medium of both cultural and commercial interaction between the Jews and the foreigner. Latin was the language of the Roman occupation army. Latin borrowings have been found in the

common tongue Aramaic. Aramaic was the language of the majority of the people in Palestine. Together with Hebrew, Aramaic provided the chief means of communication for the Palestinians. Hebrew was the sacred tongue of the Jewish scriptures. In Hebrew the lettered Jew had an important means of literary expression. It was the language of the learned, particularly the rabbis. So from the day of Pentecost, when the disciples first preached in Jerusalem, to the reporting of Paul's last imprisonment in Rome, Luke was continually researching and reporting events described and influenced by various tongues.

But all of these languages influenced each other, too. Just as the use of Latin in law and commerce influenced Aramaic, so Greek influenced Hebrew and Hebrew influenced Greek. Luke chose to use Koiné instead of the more classical Greek because all of the people used this tongue some of the time. It means, though, that the people would have brought into the Koiné many variations from their own principal tongue.

Strong suggests that this maze of languages was not without its effect on Luke's reporting. For, just as he sought to report events from the languages in which these events occurred, so he also adjusted to the community and whatever primary language influences were brought into the secondary language.³

³Augustus H. Strong, Popular Lectures on the Books of the New Testament (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1914), p. 144.

This kind of awareness could not come from the simple reporting of words and terms used by people in a particular locale. Luke was not a recorder. Luke's reporting had to come from an understanding of the roots and influences of words that formed the linguistic background of the various peoples.

For example, Luke was apparently so familiar with the formal Hebrew of the Old Testament that some scholars have wondered if he was a Jewish proselyte. His knowledge of Hebrew however appears to have come from his own study of the Hebrew Scriptures. Likewise there is evidence that Luke knew both the classical Greek, which he probably studied as a young man, and the variations of Koiné Greek which he learned at the various places visited by the disciples. Cadbury says:

His language shows in its adaptation of style to Greek idiom of his time that he was a man of some cultivation, at home in the speech of the current Greek and not to be reckoned a mere barbarian or one ill at ease in the speech and civilization of the far flung area in which the Greek influence had come to dominate.⁴

In his writing, Luke revealed his awareness of local color in language. He reported what he heard even when it was a little embarrassing. An example of this is found in Acts 17:18. Paul was preaching in Athens about the many Athenian gods. The people, according to Tenney, were quite blasé and sophisticated and did not

⁴Henry J. Cadbury, The Book of Acts in History (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955), p. 53.

mind hearing about Paul's new god. But, they were not about to be pushed by his preaching for a commitment to Jesus Christ.⁵ So they responded to Paul by calling him a "seed picker," a slang term which referred to a bird that picked up crumbs and seeds off of the streets. It was used in a derogatory way to refer to a man who posed as an expert, even though he only had seeds and crumbs of information and bits and pieces of knowledge. It was a term peculiar to Athens, but Luke was astute enough to catch it.

Again, in a demonstration of his accuracy in using languages, Luke referred to the city authorities in Thessalonica as politarchs, (Acts 17:8). Scholars for many years thought that Luke had taken a general term for civil authorities and mistakenly used it as a specific title. They based this assumption on the absence of this term in any Greek literature of that time. But modern archaeological finds from the ruins of Thessalonica have yielded an arch of the city gate with the word politarchs inscribed on it as a specific title. In his concern to be journalistically accurate, Luke had sought for and used the exact terminology of that particular city.

Another indication of Luke's concern for linguistic accuracy is found in his coverage of the disciples' speeches. While Luke's own style appears in his condensed

⁵Tenney, op. cit., p. 267.

news reports, the language of the speaker is accurately recorded in his coverage of original addresses.⁶

Luke's sources did not always give him the same account of an event. In one instance he reported exactly what he heard without rewrite. The example of this is found in his report of Paul's conversion as he researched it in Acts 9, and Paul's own description of it as he described it in Acts 22 and Acts 26. Luke reported in Acts 9:7 "Meanwhile the men who were traveling with him stood speechless; they heard the voice but could see no one." But later, when Paul referred to this Damascus road experience, he said "My companions saw the light, but did not hear the voice that spoke to me," (Acts 22:9). And, in Acts 26:14 Luke reported Paul as saying "We all fell to the ground, and then I heard a voice saying to me in the Jewish language. . . ."

Scholars have been bothered by this discrepancy and have questioned Luke's accuracy. But what at first appears to be a problem turns out to be an example of Luke's concern to write exactly what he heard without trying to put it together into some kind of harmony. In

⁶In his book *Speeches in the Acts*, F. F. Bruce examines the assumption of some scholars that Luke inherited the tradition of historical writers like Heroditus and Thucydides and composed the speeches he reported. His findings, however, show that the speeches reported by Luke are so awkward in comparison to the rest of his writing and phraseology and words so non-Lukan that he concludes: "Luke did not compose them, but he reproduced his source with considerable literalness."

Acts 22:9 and 26:14, Luke was reporting the conversion as Paul remembered and described it. Later on, perhaps during one of Paul's imprisonments when Luke had time, he researched the Damascus road experience (Acts 9:7) himself, perhaps even interviewing Paul's traveling companions. Unlike the modern journalist, this discrepancy did not seem to bother Luke. And, rather than make the story clearer journalistically, he wrote each account as it was given to him. This may have been acceptable to his early readers and has proven helpful to modern scholars who are interested in all variations, but it is one example where Luke differed from the interpretive concise reporting of the modern journalist.

Luke's facility with languages is also evident in these three accounts of Paul's conversion. Each reference to the conversion was made in a different language, yet Luke was able to report each one. In Acts 22:9 Paul was standing on the steps of the Fortress of Antonia, addressing a hostile Jewish crowd. He gave them the account of his conversion in Hebrew. In Acts 26:14, he spoke in polished Greek to a cultured and distinguished audience which included the chief citizens of Caesarea, members of the Imperial Service and King Agrippa I. And, when Luke checked out the same story with the people who accompanied Paul on the Damascus road, it was probably an interview in Aramaic.

Luke's ability, then, with the major languages and the colorations of those languages enabled him to be the kind of skilled reporter who could find the exact word (such as politarchs), research speeches in different languages, and catch the derogatory slang words of those who were opposed to the Christian message. These influences in his writing became part of the medium of explanation whereby his readers were given insight into the linguistic influences on Luke and his fellow disciples.

The Cultural Influences

The world of the first century was a welter of cultures that conflicted with one another. Every person encountered by the disciples had been shaped by different influences, making the reaction on one person to the preaching of the disciples different from the reaction of another. Tenney said:

Like the rivers which ran into the Mediterranean Sea from all sides, pouring into it their sediment and feeding its waters, so the many peoples comprised within the constantly expanding domain of Rome brought into it all their cultural contributions. Africans, Teutons, Greeks, Jews, Partheans, and Phrygians mingled in the provinces and cities and shared their national heritages.⁷

Since there are no definitive frontiers to the cultural influences upon Luke's writing, there are many features in the Acts that can be classified different ways. Some features are Greek, some Hebrew, some Roman and some

⁷Tenney, op. cit., p. 67.

Christian. Some are partially one and partially another, some are a mixture of many. It fell on Luke to give his readers a particular view as he saw it. This view of Luke's was conditioned by the influences on him and all of the contemporary color that formed his thinking.

The book of Acts is the view of one Christian who was raised a Greek within a culture that contained the tangled strands of many cultures. His observations were those of a Greek of mixed culture, writing about disciples of varied cultures moving in a world of conflicting cultures and all of it forming a contemporary color that went all the way back to the very ancient beginnings of the migrations to the west of the various indigenous cultures.

It is impossible to sort out the various cultural influences that affected Luke's writing. It can only be shown that Luke did report the contemporary color that was part of the particular event that he covered.

An example of the different conflicting cultural influences that Luke encountered is found in Acts 14:8-20. Here was a group of people untouched by Judaism, influenced by Rome, understanding Greek but speaking Lycaonian, confronting Christians who were Jews and Greeks, hearing about God coming to earth as the man Christ Jesus and trying to distinguish that in their minds from the coming of Zeus and Hermes. It was a difficult story for Luke to report because of all of the cultural strands woven together, but he did it. He even recognized that the persecution,

when it came, did not come from the people of Lystra but from Jews who came into the city from Antioch and Iconium.

As a reporter, Luke was able to keep the narrative of the news events separate from the contemporary color, yet still show the interrelationship. He could give his readers the total picture of the Lystra experience because he made it his business to understand the cause and effect of the various cultural influences there.

The Political Influences

Throughout the Acts, the political influences of the Greek, Hebrew and Roman world show themselves separately and together in a kind of kaleidoscopic montage that influenced the thinking, preaching, and essentially every aspect of the disciples lives.

But, these political influences upon them were not purely Roman, Greek or Hebrew, for each of these was a composite of all of the centuries of political development that made the different systems. Roman justice could be found in the Greek political system, and Jewish nationalism could be traced among the Romans and the Greeks. Greek culture and language had permeated the Jewish and Aramaic world bringing a new familiarity and linkage with western life and thought. Tenney showed the overlapping political influences:

The Hasmonians, descendants of the valiant and patriotic Maccabees, had revived dreams of Jewish independence, had infused a warrior spirit into the nation that had been in subjection since the Exile,

and had promoted zeal for the law. The Idumean Herods, alien by blood but Jewish by religion, had re-established the Temple with its ritual and sacrifices and under Roman suzerainty had given Palestine comparative peace after the bitter strife under the Hasmoneans.⁸

One example from Acts 24 demonstrates Luke's ability as a reporter to find out the legal aspects of his story. It is the trial of Paul before Felix the Roman governor. Luke proved his ability to write in the area of Roman law.

Luke explained in Acts 24:5 that the charge brought against Paul was that of being a troublemaker and fomenter of discord. But, the Asian Jews who brought the charge then left the area. Paul, in his defense, objected to this on the grounds that they must be present to make their charges. In this, Paul was legally correct. Luke in reporting it caught the single legal loophole in the case. The Roman law was very strong against accusers who abandoned their charges.

There are several examples of this kind of legal case in Roman legal history. Pliny records one in the Tribunal of Trajan at about this same period in history. Sherwin-White comments:

Once again the author of Acts is well informed. But there is more to it than that. The disappearance of one set of accusers may mean the withdrawal of the charge with which they were particularly associated. The Asian Jews had accused Paul of two things: One, preaching everywhere, i.e. throughout the 'world,' and two of bringing Hellens into the

⁸Ibid., p. 66.

Temple. Charge one was taken over by the Jewish clergy, charge two, according to Acts could not be substantiated.⁹

Felix adjourned the case and waited for the arrival of the Tribune Lysias. Luke was able to succinctly present to his readers the legal aspects of this trial without getting bogged down in boring legal technicalities.

Likewise, Luke was alert to the political structure and boundaries of the region. He was able to present to his readers unusual situations such as the time that Felix told Paul he would hear his case, even though Paul was from a different province (Acts 23:35). Normally a leader of one province could not try cases from another province. But, because of a shakeup due to senatorial extortions, Cilicia did not have an imperial legate at the time of Paul's trial. Thus Felix was within his rights when he took Paul's case under his own jurisdiction. Luke had accurately unravelled the sometimes confusing legal system and interpreted it to his readers so that their questions about Cilicia and Felix's judging Paul's case would be understood. He could have ignored all of these political influences on the story. A theologian or historian might have; a journalist could not.

In another story reported by Luke, Paul and the other disciples were attacked by the people of Ephesus because their preaching was cutting into the profits of

⁹ A. N. Sherwin-White, Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 52.

the silversmiths who made idols of the goddess Diana. Luke said that the town clerk quieted the crowd (Acts 19:35). Sherwin-White credits Luke with a good grasp of the political ranking in that city. The town clerk was largely in control. He supervised the city council and the city council ruled the city. Thus it was that the town clerk was the proper official for the silversmiths to approach, and Luke in gathering his data reported it accurately. Sherwin-White adds: "The author of Acts is very well informed about the finer points of municipal institutions at Ephesus . . . he even used the correct technical terms ennomos ekklesia to distinguish the regularly appointed meetings from the present concourse."¹⁰

The council had three meetings each month, one that was considered to be the regular meeting and two that were extra meetings. But Luke reported that this was an assembly, making it neither the regular nor one of the extra meetings. However, it was not completely chaotic because, says Luke, the town clerk asked Demetrius, the leader of the angry silversmiths to bring his charges, later, presumably at one of the appointed meetings.

Even Luke's use of the term Asiarchs (Acts 19:31) was the proper term to describe the dignitaries who urged Paul not to meet before the assembly. Luke's use of the plural shows how accurately he reported his story, because

¹⁰Ibid., p. 87.

the term Asiarchs, referring to the ex-presidents of the provincial council of Asia, was a word peculiar to Ephesus. In some other eastern provinces, the corresponding title went only with the office of the President of the Council. For example, there was only one Lyciarch, and only one Pontarch or Bithyniarch. In Ephesus, the term was used a different way, and Luke found out that distinction before he wrote.

Luke's accuracy as a journalist can be checked. As scholars discover more and more about ancient Rome, the reportorial work of Luke is substantiated. Sherwin-White, in his concluding remarks about Luke's report of Paul's trial in Acts 24 says:

This interpretation of the charge against Paul is confirmed by the parallel evidence of the letter of Claudius to the Alexandrines. . . . Claudius there sums up his objection to certain political actions of the Jews as "stirring up a universal plague throughout world" . . . the similarity to the formulation of the charge against Paul is startling. . . . It is evident that the narrative of Acts is using contemporary language. The charge was precisely the one to bring against a Jew during the Principate of Claudius or the early years of Nero.¹¹

Luke was an interpreter of the political scene. The Stoics saw the world as simply the essence of what exists. The Romans concluded that the world was structured on political orders. But in a non-Greek, non-Roman way the early Christians understood the world to be neither a

¹¹Ibid., p. 51.

passive gift nor a system of government to be developed. They derived their meaning from the basis of their message of Christ.

Luke saw that this Christian message could not have nurtured itself on any political system or myth of the emperor. He reported the development of the Christian Church within the legal-political situation of each city in his narrative. This is the mark of a skilled journalist and Luke exercised his skills carefully.

The Economic Influences

In his article, "The Economic Background of the New Testament," F. C. Grant stated that Christianity was not an economic movement. But the early church activities were influenced by the economic conditions and Luke was aware of those influences. Grant said that Luke wrote to show that "Christianity was from the very beginning a purely religious movement, a cult, a body of beliefs and practices centred(sic) in something else than the economic welfare or well-being of any racial, national, or social group."¹²

To be aware of the economic conditions was to be aware of the great influences of Rome. It was Rome that built the trade routes, kept the roads open, supplied the ships and equipped the army to keep the Pax Romana. Luke

¹²F. C. Grant, "The Economic Background of the New Testament," in The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology, edited by W. D. Davis and D. Daube (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1956), p. 101.

wrote the Acts at a time when the number of citizens of the Roman Empire was growing rapidly and when the Roman economy was stable.¹³

Generally the economic background of the New Testament is one of a rising tide of well being. The only exception was Palestine with its poverty and over-population and declining food supply. This had an influence on the early church. Luke described the arguments over the care and feeding of widows (Acts 6:1-2). He also reported the trip made to Jerusalem by Paul and Barnabas to carry money from the churches outside of Palestine to the needy Christians in Palestine (Acts 11:30). So Luke was writing out of two worlds, the poor Palestinian world where Christianity was born and the Graeco-Roman world of stability and economic progress.

Luke says very little about the finances of the people in his story but this in no way indicates a lack of awareness of the economic influences on the people the disciples preached to or the disciples themselves. As in the rest of his writing, Luke drew attention only to

¹³Rome's approximate economic figures for this period are listed in An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, Vol. 5, pp. 4 ff.

Army and Navy under Augustus	240	(in millions of denarii)
Praetorium and urban cohorts	35	
The dole	60	
Public buildings and roads	5	
Games	2	
Civil Service	50	
	<u>400</u>	

Income approximately 450 million denarii

material that needed to be explained. He did not bother to explain situations or circumstances that were understood by the majority of his readers. This is well illustrated in three stories where the economics involved had to be explained and one story where the economics would have been understood by all.

When the disciples preached at Ephesus, Luke wrote that the resulting riots were started by Demetrius. He explained the economic reason:

There was a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Diana and provided a great deal of employment for the craftsmen. He called a meeting of these men and the workers in allied trades, and addressed them. "Men," he said, "you know that our high standard of living depends on this industry. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul with his propaganda has perverted crowds of people, not only at Ephesus but also in practically the whole of the province of Asia. He is telling them that gods made by human hands are not gods at all. There is danger for us here; it is not only that our line of business will be discredited but also that the sanctuary of the great goddess Diana will cease to command respect."¹⁴

At Philippi, the disciples healed a slave girl who was said to have been possessed of an oracular spirit. Her owners dragged Paul and Silas to the city square where they were flogged. Luke explained the economic reason for this to his readers: "Once, when we were on our way to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who was possessed by an oracular spirit and brought large profits to her owners by telling fortunes," (Acts 16:19).

¹⁴Acts 19:24-27, The New English Bible.

In Acts 19, Luke explained the economic significance in the conversion of some of the Ephesian magicians. He wrote: "And a good many of those who formerly practiced magic collected their books and burnt them publicly. The total value was reckoned up and it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver," (Acts 19:19-20).

Each of the above incidents was a local situation and the economics involved would not have been known by most of Luke's readers. This was interpretive reporting. Luke carefully explained the economics within the context of his reporting. An economic situation that required no explanation is found in Acts 27. This is the story of Paul's journey to Rome and shipwreck in the winter storms.

The dangerous season for sailing began about September 14 and lasted until the second week in November. After November 14 all navigation stopped on the open seas until winter was over. Luke reported that the fast was over when they set sail, so it was later than October 5. "It was risky to go on with the voyage," (Acts 27:9). But the captain insisted on sailing and as a result the ship was wrecked in a severe storm.

Luke gave his readers the details of the journey, the route taken and a description of the shipwreck, but said nothing about the economic factors that caused the captain to sail in precarious weather, probably because it was a Roman ship and everyone would have known the economic reason.

Cadbury says that the Emperor Claudius had recently undertaken to make good all losses due to storms at sea. In fact Suetonius reported that Claudius devised every possible inducement for securing the import of food to Rome even in winter. The ship's captain had everything to gain and very little to lose, with the exception of his own life, by pushing on and taking a chance at getting to Rome before winter. The passengers were non-paying soldiers and their prisoners. The cargo of corn, although valuable in Rome, was just as valuable to the captain if sunk because of Claudius' promise of reimbursement.¹⁵

Rome was the imperial power. Everyone was influenced by Rome and the policies of the emperor would have been well known. Luke did not describe what was already understood.

Luke understood and reported the economics influencing the development and growth of the Christian Church. The economics of the first century affected the disciples not as a system but as a basic part of human existence. The story of people carrying the Christian message to other people involved economics and Luke accurately described these economic influences.

The Geographical Influences

Geography also influenced Luke's writing of the Acts. But he wrote about it only as part of the larger

¹⁵Cadbury, op. cit., p. 60.

narrative. It was impossible for Luke to bring all of the geography into a story anyway; because if he described one area visited by the disciples, it meant that he had to ignore the others. This is an important consideration because if for a moment he turned his readers' attention to either the oriental or occidental neighborhoods of the cities visited by the disciples, he had to leave the other out. Then, if he turned back to the other part of the geographical picture there might appear to be some inconsistency. In the cities visited by the missionaries, one geographical section might be Anatolian another Hellenic, and still another Semitic. Each of these sections would influence Luke's writing, as the disciples moved around the cities.

An example of how Luke treated well known geographical details is found in Acts 23, where Luke reported how Paul was removed from Jerusalem to Caesarea under heavy armed guard. This was a distance of about sixty miles. Luke does not tell the reader the route that they traveled, but it is easily traced by his descriptions. Luke says "the infantry took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris," (Acts 23:31). This means that they traveled thirty-five miles in one night, a very difficult feat and one that would raise questions if the readers did not know the highly developed Roman road system. But everyone did.

Antipatris was accessible by two excellent Roman roads, on which some of the ancient milestones are still

standing. One road went west and then north, the other went north and then west. Either could have been swiftly traveled even on the darkest night.

Again geography enters into Luke's narration when he reports that the next morning the soldiers left them and only the cavalry escorted them the rest of the way to the castle. The readers would have understood this because the rest of the distance traveled was through open country where the population was Gentile, giving little opportunity for the pursuing Jews to ambush them.

Another evidence of Luke's ability to handle geography is found in Acts 20-21, the account of the hurried journey to Jerusalem for the Passover. Luke reported the overland and navigational routes so accurately that scholars have had no difficulty retracing the route and the stops.

Pfeiffer and Vos credit Luke's accuracy in never confusing the city of Antioch in the Galatian region with a city of the same name near Damascus. They write:

Antioch was not a city of Pisidia but lay on the north side of that district in Phrygia when Paul came through on his first missionary journey. Ramsay observes that the accurate and full geographical description of Antioch of that time would have been 'a Phrygian city on the side of Pisidia.' But the convenient way of alluding to it came to be 'Pisidian Antioch' to distinguish it from the Antioch on the Maeander River. Only as the term 'Pisidia' became widened in inclusiveness did 'Antioch of Pisidia' receive universal acceptance. This latter title for the town found its way into some of the

later, inferior biblical manuscripts. . . . But the better manuscripts read correctly 'Pisidian Antioch.' Thus Luke's language is seen again to correlate minutely with contemporary conditions.¹⁶

The same accuracy held true when Luke handled the colonial status of such cities as Philippi. In Acts 16, 17, 18 and 19, Paul is shown to have been indicted before the municipal magistrates of a Roman colony. There were communes within the Greek cities where the Roman soldiers and their families lived. Paul's travels took him through these settlements because, for military reasons, they were located at the central points of communication. Luke never confused the cities and the Roman citizen colonies or communes within those cities. His readers always knew which part he was talking about.

Sherwin-White explains the difference between the military colonies in the Greek cities and the Roman cities of the western provinces. Luke understood that:

Provincial Romans in the eastern Empire lived in a different legal and social atmosphere from their fellow citizens in the western provinces. In the latter, Roman material and cultural civilization dominated the life of the communities, and technical Roman status was being steadily granted to whole communities in increasing numbers. The Mediterranean provinces in the west were becoming an extension of Italy, and the term provincia togata was coined to indicate this massive extension of Roman rights and Roman ways. . . . In the eastern provinces the pre-dominant civilization was Hellenistic and the pre-dominant language Greek. There were no romanized communes of provincial origin, no cities which had

¹⁶ Charles F. Pfeiffer and Howard F. Vos, The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), p. 347.

acquired Roman citizenship enbloc and so become what were called municipia civium Romanorum.¹⁷

As the disciples moved out from Jerusalem to the various cities of the Greek world, the author of Acts was careful to inform his readers about every detail of geography that influenced his story.

Curtis MacDougall in Interpretative Reporting commented that an account can be devoid of errors in fact, spelling and the like but still be inaccurate if the impression given to the reader is wrong. Luke's credibility is evident in his geographical accuracy. His is more than a well researched report; he was there. His readers travel with him, observing, feeling, and experiencing the events through his descriptive writing.

The Social Influences

An examination of the interaction between the Greek, Hebrew, Roman and Christian cultures shows the social groupings and resulting antagonism that influenced the proclamation of the Christian message and Luke's reporting of that proclamation.

The Jews saw the Christians as perverters of the Temple worship and the Mosaic law. The Greeks saw them as narrow and anti-social in their behavior, and the Romans found them to be a nuisance. Tenney writes:

¹⁷ Sherwin-White, op. cit., p. 175.

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Tacitus, writing of the times of Nero, calls Christians 'enemies of the human race.' It is hardly possible that Tacitus should have applied to them this epithet because of saddism or sourness on their part. It is more likely that he considered them to be anti-social because they did not conform to the social habits of the time.¹⁸

Luke encountered all of this, yet had to be an objective reporter about the social pressures that directly influenced him. The Acts shows no anger or violent outbursts nor even subtle innuendos of feeling by the author as he reported the encounters of the disciples with the various social problems of their day.

The Christians did not have a high social standing. They could not point to any kind of social heritage for prestige. Their founder had been condemned as a criminal or rebel and their own preachers were thrown into jail repeatedly for causing riots. Their numbers were small and they had no economic or political power to recommend them socially.

Luke knew this and had to report his story not only from the angle of the social response of the people to the disciples but also from within the church as the disciples argued with each other about how to reach the public without compromising their message. An example of the disciples' relationship with their social environment is found in Acts 21:21--22:29. An example of their relationship with each other is found in Acts 15.

¹⁸Tenney, op. cit., p. 125.

In Acts 21 and 22, Luke shows his readers the pressure that was on the disciples from both the Jews and the Greeks. They were trying to communicate the gospel message to both. Luke, in spite of his own Greek heritage, was able to report accurately the feelings of the Jews toward the Greeks and wrote without comment the directive to the Greeks to abstain from meats offered to idols for the sake of the Jews.

The Jews attacked Paul because they assumed that he had brought Gentiles into the temple. Luke reported what happened, not commenting on the Jewish mistake, even though it might have pleased him personally to do so. There seems to have been no need in Luke to assert his own social position, even though it was his people who were being attacked unjustly. He reported what he saw and let his readers form their own judgments.

The story brings in each of the social communities. The Greeks were becoming Christians through Paul the Christian Jew. The Jewish leaders got upset and Paul appealed to them as a strict Jew. But when they called in the Roman soldiers, he referred to his Roman citizenship. As a journalist, Luke kept these several social attitudes separate, and gave his readers the chance to see how they all were a part of the disciples' environment.

In his report of the meeting of the disciples at Jerusalem in Acts 15, Luke showed how the disciples related to each other. During this conference the disciples openly

argued with each other and discussed how much of the gospel was Jewish and how much of it could be given directly to the Gentiles without their coming through Judaism. It was a problem that could have split the church. Luke showed how the disciples handled their social and theological differences and came to an agreement that brought harmony to the church.

Luke summarized their social cohesion by reporting the words of James, "My judgment therefore is that we should impose no irksome restrictions on those of the Gentiles who are turning to God. . . ." (Acts 15:20). When it was decided to send a letter to the Gentile Christians, Luke entered this very loving letter into his story in its entirety.

Luke knew the Jews, the Greek Gentiles, and he knew the missionaries. He could describe how one set off the other and how their antagonisms influenced the actions of the others. Yet, he never took sides, or blew up a situation beyond its proportions. Luke had a story to tell. The story had emotions and social influences, but it was always the story that came first. An example of this is found in Acts 15:36-41.

Paul and Barnabas were good friends. It was Barnabas who first commended Paul to the Christians. But, when Paul suggested a return visit to Syria and Cilicia, they argued. Barnabas wanted to take his nephew John Mark along. Paul refused because Mark had deserted them on an

earlier journey into Pamphylia. Luke was alert to this fight not because it was a fight but because it explained why Paul and Barnabas parted company. Luke wrote, "The dispute was so sharp that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas," (Acts 15:39). This was a social conflict that influenced the mission of the church. Luke did not stumble at it, ignore it, or take sides. He reported it, and went on with his narrative.

The Acts is a story about a people who were unacceptable socially, struggling to present themselves and their message to their world, while at the same time trying to work out their own social differences. Luke as a reporter could not ignore this crucial aspect of the forming of a people out of many cultures and life styles into a family called Christians.

Social pressures are subtle. They are not described so much as they are felt. No reporter can say that something was done because of this or that social influence or pressure. But he feels it, and it is his job to relate this feeling to his readers so that they are part of the event, yet without drawing attention to this feeling or diverting the reader's attention from the event.

It is the journalist's skill that weaves in the social flavoring, the emotions--joys, anxieties, tensions, fears--or whatever is influential in a story. Luke handled the social influences that surrounded the disciples, was

apparently alert to his own feelings and kept them out of his story, and used the social influences like all of the other influences as descriptive stepping stones to move the story along.

It would have been a simple matter for Luke to write objectively about events in the church as he heard about them. He could have outlined a communication design that showed how the Christian message was carried by the disciples to the world around them. But this would have been a denial of the disciples' own humanity as it was shaped by the warp and woof of all of the influences that go into the forming of a people.

The church was forming in a world of myriad influences. Judaism provided the roots of the Christian faith. Hellenism, provided the intellectual soil in which the faith grew. Roman imperialism gave the protection that opened the field of its growth. Paradoxically, these three cultures became Christianity's bitterest enemies. Judaism regarded Christianity as a pernicious heresy, Hellenism saw it as philosophical nonsense and Roman imperialism regarded it as impractical weakness. Each of these three conflicted with the other two, differing both by ancestry and viewpoint. Still, together, they formed the matrix in which the Christian Church was formed. As a reporter, Luke presented that matrix to his readers.

An Overview

The Christian Church did not develop in a vacuum but was part of the world which surrounded it. The early church men and women had typical first century minds, influenced and conditioned by the world around them. Yet, they had experienced a new found faith and were committed to carry the message of that faith to their fellow man.

Curtis D. MacDougall has written: "It is inconceivable that there ever will come a time when there will not be those whose full-time function it is to find out what is going on and to transmit that information to others, together with a proper explanation of its significance."¹⁹ It is this finding out of what was going on that is descriptive of Luke the journalist as he reported the events of the Acts.

The Acts, although demonstrating historically the development of the early church, is better viewed as a news story about Christians in the first century. The religious, linguistic, cultural, economic, geographical and social influences that have been examined are to be seen not so much as historical views, although they are historically accurate, but rather colorings giving different insights to the news events of the Acts.

There have been two traditional ways to look at the early church. One way is to look at the church as an

¹⁹Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretative Reporting, 4th Edition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 5.

historical phenomenon subject to historical and sociological interpretations; the other way is to see the church as an eschatological group developed and guided by the Holy Spirit and understanding very little of its own development. Neither of these views is exclusive of the other nor accurately explains the development of a diverse group of people into a society which was part of, yet separate from, the society around it.

It is this distinction from the rest of the world, this creation of a new society, that Luke has reported. He has acknowledged history, understood the socio-cultural influences and cut a cross section through them to expose all that shaped the church as it grew. What Luke saw and reported is supported by secular evidence. But even more important than his reportorial accuracy is his ability to relate to his readers what he sensed and experienced around him.

The journalism that went into the making of the Acts came out of the shaping and molding of the journalist who wrote it. Luke, like his contemporaries, was a product as well as a reporter of the first century events. The fact that he was a Christian helped him put together the many and varied influences that shaped the people who preached the message of Jesus and the people who heard that message.

As a journalist, Luke goes down in history as a contributor to the whole first century social scene. Luke takes his readers on a conducted tour of the Graeco-Roman

world. The scene is observed through the eyes not of a citizen but as a resident foreigner. Sherwin-White said:

In Acts or in that part of Acts which is concerned with the adventures of Paul in Asia Minor and Greece, one is aware all the time of the Hellenistic and Roman setting. The historical framework is exact. In terms of time and place the details are precise and correct. One walks the streets and market-places, the theatres and assemblies of first-century Ephesus or Thessalonica, Corinth or Philippi, with the author of Acts. The great men of the cities, the magistrates, the mob, and the mob leaders, are all there. The feel and tone of city life is the same as in the description of Strabo and Dio of Prusa. The difference lies only in the Jewish shading.²⁰

The book then is a book of Acts, a history of striking deeds. It is the only history of the church's growth until Eusebius wrote almost 300 years later. It is a report, a record of events, an interpretive news story coming out of first century Graeco-Roman-Hebrew society. It was the beginning of a movement that would grow and influence the entire world. Luke was the reporter on the scene, guided by his determination to be accurate, his love of the gospel and the mission of the church, and his diagnostic eye for detail.

Luke and the growing church were part of a changing and developing world of mixed cultures. The developing church in the first century was a new enterprise, and it became one of the most far reaching in world history. Luke, the physician practicing the reportorial arts and

²⁰ Sherwin-White, op. cit., p. 120.

skills of what centuries later would be called "Journalism," showed plainly how this new enterprise began.

CHAPTER IV

CONTRIBUTION OF ACTS TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TODAY

How did the message of Jesus, which theologically is both what He said and what He did, get from the twelve disciples in Jerusalem to the Greek and Roman world? Jews and Greeks, men of varied backgrounds bound together spiritually as followers of Jesus, preached the message as they traveled to the major cities of Asia Minor. Luke, acting as a reporter, covered the travels of the disciples and reported their encounters with the various religions and cultures. His book, the Acts, is the story of the young Christian Church as it began and spread in the first century.

It has been shown that as a reporter, Luke had to know the gospel message as it came from Jesus, the message as the disciples understood and proclaimed it, and the reaction of the non-Christians to that message. This required an understanding of the disciples' backgrounds, the world and its influences upon them, and the experiences and knowledge of his readers. Luke brought the various

facets of his report together into a news story about the church. And today, perhaps more than at any other time in history, the Acts of the Apostles is becoming a guide for the renewal of the Christian Church.

Historically, Christians have tended to build the church in one of two ways. They have either based their beliefs and church organization on the teachings of their own leaders without regard to Apostolic tradition, or they have made the Bible a contemporary message without regard to the historical basis of that message. For example, much of the eighteenth and nineteenth century theological literature distorted the person and message of Jesus, and the faith and practice of the early church. Schleiermacher put his stress on introspection rather than on the Bible as the authoritative message of God the way the disciples did (Acts 2:15 ff).¹ Hegel portrayed God and man as not too disparate. The easy terms of relationship that he taught were very different from the fear of the Lord that Luke reported (Acts 5:1-10).² And Strauss contended that while each individual is impure, mankind as a whole is perfect. Luke reported that the disciples preached the sinful nature of every person and the need for individual conversion (Acts 3:19--4:12).³

¹For further elaboration see: Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 95.

²Ibid., p. 115.

³Ibid., p. 120.

Even the social movements of the twentieth century have largely ignored the meaning and message of Acts. Oscar Cullmann, writing from Basel, explains the conflict that has come from attempting to apply the gospel message to the present world without first understanding the message as it was proclaimed in the first century. He explains that modern man cannot work as a Christian without an historical endeavor. The asking of various contemporary questions presupposes the answers to the historical questions in the Acts. Questions about the present cannot be superimposed upon an historical work with legitimate answers. The historical work must first be understood, the questions and answers of that day realized, in order to propose proper questions based upon discoveries of former answers. Otherwise history is falsified and a poor foundation is laid for the Christian discussion of current problems. Cullmann continues:

Anyone, without the least historical endeavor, . . . can speak on everyday social and political questions and claim his support for this or that modern solution which one finds personally appealing. One promotes in this way the origin and spread of the unfortunate slogans which distort the historical truth from the start.⁴

The church and its satellite agencies has in former years branched out from the message of Jesus and the foundations laid by the early church to create for itself many organizational and theological problems. The great

⁴Oscar Cullmann, Jesus and the Revolutionaries, trans. by Gareth Putnam (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. ix.

recession, the darkness of the period between A.D. 500 and 950, the expansion through the Crusades, the squabbles of the reformers, the fragmentation of denominations and the confusion of social and political programs have all come from attempts by the church to operate without first studying the church as it began. Luke's work has not been misunderstood, it has been largely ignored.

But since the late 1960's there has sprung up among Christian people a desire to rediscover their heritage. Frustration and lack of spiritual fulfillment have turned the disenchanted, the young, and the concerned to search again for a message in the Bible about the real Jesus and the beginnings of the Christian Church. In this quest, there has come a rediscovery of the Acts. Luke's accuracy in research and reporting is giving twentieth-century Christians the look they crave at the early church.

In many parts of the world, the church, particularly the rigid liturgical church, has found a new movement starting both within and outside its structure. As in the experiences reported in the early chapters of Acts, people today are beginning to gather in small groups to pray, to study the Bible and to share with their neighbors the message of Jesus Christ as they have experienced it in their own lives. For many church leaders, this has been confusing. It is unlike anything they have programmed or organized. These people are discovering in Luke's report a clear explanation of the kind of church fellowship that

they long to have. And many are beginning to find in the twentieth century the exciting experiences of the Christians in the first century.

Slowly, some of this grass roots movement has begun to affect the organized church structure. Denominationalism has begun to break down, not through the organizational Consultation on Church Union, but through the common bond of Christian experience and love that has brought people together. Believers are beginning to reach out to each other across human barriers as their forefathers did in the first century across Jewish, Greek and Roman cultural barriers.

In returning to the Christian life style of Acts, church members are beginning to find a new direction. For them the Christian faith is becoming less of a spectator religion and more of a personal involvement. Folk masses, new forms of ministry such as coffee houses and theater, are involving people. Like Philip (Acts 8:26 ff) and James (Acts 15:13 ff), people today who were once sideline observers are getting into the movement of faith and witness. Lyman Coleman in his creative worship book Acts Alive says:

There comes a time in every man's life when he has to decide. Either he is going to be a slave to others' ideas and traditions, or he is going to think for himself, decide his own course of action, and pursue it whatever the cost might be. In a word, it is a choice between conformity and conscience.

Unfortunately, the traditional is oftentimes identified with the status quo in religion, morality, and politics, and anyone who questions the status quo

is accused of being against God, against good behavior, and against his country.

In the Book of Acts, we see how the early church was confronted with a decision between conformity and conscience. Up to that time, the Gospel was considered only for the Jewish people and the thought of associating with non-Jewish people to bring the Gospel to them was immediately suspect. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit led Peter to break with tradition.

Today there are similar issues that call for courageous and creative action. Whole worlds in our society have been cut off because of certain taboos among Christians. Many of these worlds cry out for the Gospel.⁵

Two examples of contemporary movements to re-identify with the first century church will explain the value of Luke's more-than-historical, more-than-theological news story about the early Christian church.

On March 4, 1970, in Frankfurt, Germany, a theological convention met to examine the mission of the church. It stemmed from a deep unrest in German churches and missionary societies due to the so-called departure from the genuine goals of mission of the Christian church. The group gathered out of a strong desire for a more biblical motivation for the practice of mission. Out of this consultation came the Frankfurt Declaration. The first of seven points agreed to and signed by leading German theologians read:

Christian mission discovers its foundation, goals, tasks, and the content of its proclamation solely in the commission of the resurrected Lord

⁵Lyman Coleman, Acts Alive (Newtown, Pa.: The Halfway House, 1966), p. 70.

Jesus Christ and his saving acts as they are reported by the witness of the apostles and early Christianity in the New Testament. Mission is grounded in the nature of the Gospel.

We therefore oppose the current tendency to determine the nature and task of mission by socio-political analysis of our time and from the demands of the non-Christian world. We deny that what the Gospel has to say to people today at the deepest level is not evident before their encounter with them. Rather, according to the apostolic witness, the Gospel is normative and given once for all. The situation of encounter contributes only new aspects in the application of the Gospel. The surrender of the Bible as our primary frame of reference leads to the shapelessness of mission and a confusion of the task of mission with a general idea of responsibility for the world.⁶

The declaration is moored in the message of the Apostles and the growth of the early Christian Church as Luke reported it. These Christians are aware that the early Christians were not ashamed to proclaim the teachings of Jesus and to live by them. Although the content of Jesus' teaching is in the gospels, and the result of these teachings is evident in the established churches that received the epistles, the book that shows how the teachings went from Jesus to the forming of the church is the Acts.

Like these early disciples, Christians once again are attempting to proclaim the gospel not as part of the world's political or social message but as definitive from Jesus and influenced by the world. Christians are learning how it was done in the first century as Luke reported.

⁶"The Frankfurt Declaration," Christianity Today (June 19, 1970), 5.

Luke's reporting in the first century provided the basis for the Frankfurt Declaration in the twentieth century.

The second movement indicative of a trend toward an application of the gospel as Luke saw it applied by the early church, is found in the youth movements known by various names such as "The Jesus People," "The Children of God," "The Jesus Movement," and "The Jesus Freaks." Recent magazines and newspapers have shown this movement to be a return to the basic gospel message as proclaimed by the disciples and reported by Luke in the Acts. Churchmen have labeled it a new form of fundamentalism. Many church people see it as vulgar because the young Christians in the movement have adopted the styles of the youth counter-culture.

Earl C. Gottschalk, Jr., staff reporter of the Wall Street Journal, wrote on March 2, 1971:

It's easy to see why conventional churchgoers are startled--and often offended--by the Jesus People. Their brand of Christianity is of a kind that has not been widespread since the turn of the century. They believe fervently that the Bible, line for line, is literal truth, every word inspired by God. They believe in the Ten Commandments--and in the hellfire of Divine punishment, and they are against promiscuity, greed, pride, drunkenness, drugs, debauchery and laziness.⁷

One of the main differences between this movement and the fundamentalist movement of fifty years ago is that this is not led by denominational leaders. It is springing

⁷Earl C. Gottschalk, Jr., "Hip Culture Discovers a New Trip," The Wall Street Journal (March 2, 1971), 1.

up spontaneously in many parts of the United States, and it is similar to movements of the same kind in South America and the Dominican Republic. Whereas the Protestant Reformation and the nineteenth century revivals were led by strong leaders, these new movements are springing up as people tell other people about Jesus Christ. In a Feb. 9, 1971, Look magazine article, Brian Vachon said:

The Jesus movement seems to be springing up simultaneously in a miscellany of places, and often in the last place you would think to look . . . hundreds of ministers are joining the non-denominational movement which has been swelled by tens of thousands of new converts.⁸

What happened in the early church, as Luke reported it, is happening again. And, there is a heavy reliance on the methods of the early church as they are learned from Luke's news accounts. Luke reported that the disciples preached and taught in the streets (Acts 2:1-47), gathered to pray on the beach (Acts 21:6), and taught in the synagogues (Acts 13:14 ff). Like the early disciples, the young Christians today are also going where the people are. They are preaching on the streets, in coffee-houses, on the beaches and, when they get the opportunity, in established churches. And, as the disciples were full of grace and power and worked miracles, according to Luke (Acts 6:8), the young Christians are claiming the same experiences. A blind girl said:

⁸Brian Vachon, "The Jesus Movement is Upon Us," Look (February 9, 1971), 16.

One student, having experienced faith healing himself, felt led to pray for my sight.

Three Christian students and I went to the chapel on campus to petition the Lord for my eyes. (For appearance sake I wore thick, heavy glasses.) When we started to pray, I personally thought these three were a little off their rockers, but I will try anything once.

Three things I remember distinctly. I felt waves of heat as though my body was consumed by a holy fire; I saw a great blinding light; and one of the students shattered my glasses on purpose. He felt the glasses had to be broken in order for anything to happen. The minute the glasses were broken the Holy Spirit took over. I blacked out for about 5 minutes, but when I came to I could see. I visited an eye specialist and he said I have 20-20 vision in both eyes. As you read this give all praise, honor and glory to Christ--for His Name is Wonderful.⁹

She expressed feelings very similar to Paul's conversion as recorded by Luke (Acts 9:1-9), and praised God as did the cripple healed in Acts 3:1-10.

Another modern incident is similar to Luke's record in Acts and indicates how closely the young Christians follow the example of the early church. In Acts 4:32-37, Luke reports that Christians who had land or houses sold it and laid the money at the apostles' feet. In San Francisco, David Abraham, editor and publisher of the Oracle, an underground paper accepted Christ on Haight Street. He turned over all rights to his paper to the Jesus People.¹⁰

Luke was not simply a historian. Had he been one, his message in the Acts would have been interesting and

⁹ This Week, unpublished newsletter from Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, Madison, Wis., April 12, 1971. (Mimeographed.)

¹⁰ Edward E. Plowman, "Jesus Presses are Rolling," Christianity Today (April 9, 1971), 38.

informative but not copy suitable for the twentieth-century church. He was, however, a reporter of the total first century church scene. People find it easy to identify with other people who live in genuine cultural situations with the pressures of life affecting them. This Luke has reported.

Whatever comes of the contemporary movements, the church will be affected by these developments that spring directly from a rediscovery of the events reported by Luke in the first century. As a practicing journalist, Luke provided the comprehensive background for understanding the church as it began. He has given the modern Christian a heritage, a point of reference for inspiration and renewal. For men and women who want a personal commitment and a vital relationship with the God they claim through Jesus Christ, Luke offers a journalistic on-the-spot report of how it was in the early church. Luke, the first century Christian journalist, faithfully delivered copy that was news then and still is.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The development and growth of the first century Christian Church took place within the milieu of Greek, Roman and Hebrew society. In that welter of cultures and religions, each influencing the other, the early disciples traveled and preached the gospel as they understood it. The story of their work and travels, and the resulting growth of the Christian Church, has been described in the Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke, a Greek physician and disciple.

Although many scholars have examined the Acts, most have analyzed it as either an historical or theological treatise. Their studies have failed to explain a fundamental characteristic of the book; that the author was personally involved in the events that he narrated objectively to his readers. Luke was on the scene, writing what he heard and saw and explaining to his readers how certain events occurred which led to the development of the church fellowship in the first century.

Luke did not content himself with simply copying down dates and recording the activities of the growing church. Neither did he preach or speculate on the essence of the church as the extension of the body of Christ. His book served as an interpretive bridge between the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the gospels and the established church as it is found in the epistles. Acts is the key to understanding how the message received from Jesus in Palestine was disseminated to the people who constituted the church in the cities of Asia Minor.

To write his narrative, Luke practiced the skills, and aimed at the objectives of the professional journalist. When the Acts is examined journalistically, many questions about the influence of culture, attitudes of different social groups, and religious opposition to the Christians are put into perspective. Luke's readers are told not just how and why the church grew but what influenced the church as it grew.

Luke researched events, interviewed people, and traveled with the disciples on their missionary journeys. He did not write as either a theologian or historian; he reported the development of the church as a news event.

The data that Luke gathered, the care he took to use proper titles and place names, and his facility with local terminology demonstrates his concern for accuracy in reporting. His interest in detail gives his news account an eyewitness impression that takes the reader on the scene

with him. Luke's skill made possible the readers' sharing the feelings of the disciples as they argued, struggled and preached. The result is a genuine human interest news story.

As a practicing journalist, Luke understood and interpreted to his readers the religious, linguistic, cultural, political, economic, geographical and social influences that affected the disciples and those to whom they preached. He also seemed to be aware of how they influenced his own thinking. Luke also demonstrated that he was able to work with the four major languages, Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Aramaic, and the variations of each as he encountered them in his travels. He showed how the disciples adapted their preaching to different cultural and religious beliefs and brought people of different backgrounds together to form the church. And, as a reporter, Luke seemed to consciously keep his own biases out of his story. He reported antagonism to the Christians and even persecutions without bringing into the story his prejudices about what was happening. Even though he was a Greek, he reported the Greek-Hebrew conflicts impartially.

International journalism, the kind of journalism practiced by Luke, is thought by modern journalists to require three basic areas of training: (1) the development of writing skills; (2) the acquisition and internalization of the norms and ethical standards of the profession; and (3) the development and practice of skills of observation,

reporting and interpretation. Analysis of the Acts shows that Luke did in fact have these aspects in his work as a reporter for the early church.

Within the last decade there has come a new interest in the writing of Luke and an appreciation of his journalistic competency in reporting the development of the early church. There seems to be a renewed interest in the style and message of the early church, and the source of study for this renewal is the Acts.

History reveals a basic lack of awareness of the early church's purpose and practice as they are recorded in the Acts. Doctrine has been taught as if Christians lived in a vacuum and church organizations run as if structure and prestige are all important. A corrective to this is the rediscovery of the disciples' message and work as they encountered their world. The study of Acts can offer the modern Christian a basis for understanding his world and the mission of the church today.

Increasingly, an appeal to the ways and message of the first century church is becoming important to the modern Christian. Personal faith and proclamation of the teachings and ways of Jesus are being studied and implemented, particularly among the young creative Christians. Acts is being studied by those who want to be proclaimers of the message and reformers of the church.

Continuing study of the Acts with attention paid to the sensitivity of the disciples and their attitudes

about people around them as they taught the message of Jesus, should add a dimension of warmth and enthusiasm that up to this time has not been too evident to the non-Christian. As modern church renewal through the study of Acts begins to affect more and more people, it will be largely due to the contemporary value of Luke's first century interpretive reporting.

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