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IN CONTRAST: PAUL IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES  
PAUL RECLAIMED FOR THE MAINSTREAM

**‘...this man is my chosen instrument to bring my name before pagans and pagan kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he himself must suffer for my name.’ Acts 9, 15-16**

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To understand the figure of Paul in Acts, it is good to look first at Luke’s gospel, then at Acts itself, and finally at Paul in the story told in Acts. All this is an important part of the way the ongoing church has included Paul in its living memory. Historical? Not always. Significant? Forever.

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THE FIRST CENTURY

Before doing this, I want to locate it in a set of understandings of what went on in **the first Christian century**. Most people read Acts as a more or less accurate version of the early years of the Jesus movement. Many courses on Paul have used Acts as the basic grid. The author of Acts has a devotion to Peter and even more to Paul, and shows how everything prepared the way for Paul’s entrance on the scene and his resulting great ministry. At the end of his gospel, Luke sums up the point of Jesus: ‘that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’ (24,47). At the end of Acts Paul is in Rome doing just that. Acts could be subtitled: From Jerusalem to Rome, the story of Paul’s Triumph.

In this, Acts is seen by some scholars now to be probably the most misleading document in the New Testament canon! There are almost no surviving texts or other data for the period between 30 and 50 ce., that is, for the time prior to Paul’ activity. In contrast to the Acts’ outline of it, there is an **alternative ‘story’** that Luke seemingly knows but consciously over-writes, and that is now thought to be closer to the facts. In this underlying story, pre-70 we are dealing with a Messianic sect of Jews (sometimes called Nazarenes) led by James the brother of Jesus (with, in less prominence, Peter and John – Peter was less important than James). Many are linked with Jesus’ family. This group of Jesus-family people was not a minor fringe of ‘Christianity’: it was the only mainstream there was. Paul did not belong there. James, Peter and John, who did belong there, were among Paul’s most vociferous enemies – Paul sarcastically called them the ‘*so-called pillars*’ (Gal 2,9). They looked on Paul as a flash in the pan. Paul’s influence in his own time was probably quite weak in numbers: they increased significantly in the last decade of the first century and the early decades of the second.

Around the turn of the century, Messianisms in Palestine had been crushed (by Rome). Jesus-Messianism in Jerusalem was in strife as well. James and Peter were well dead. Sim(e)on (James’ brother who succeeded him) had been killed. The few family-group followers who remained, scattered to the east, and were known as Ebionites by their (Jewish) friends and foes. That form of ‘Christianity’ died out.

The **new mainstream** now was a group of communities that looked to the memory and image of Peter rather than James or the Jerusalem group. It was around this same time, that Paul’s letters were collected, and edited, and circulated. Mark had written-up Paul’s Christology (some

decades earlier) in the form of a gospel-story: it was now spread about. Luke - the protagonist of Paul - wrote in Acts his benign version of **how (a very modified) Paul fitted into such a Peter-connected church.** That is what Acts is all about.

A little later, towards the end of the third century, Eusebius of Caesarea – the father of Church history – wrote of an early clean break of an internally uniform Christianity with Judaism and its subsequent harmonious and unbroken advance into the second and third centuries. Most of us have been brought up on that kind of picture. I have come to think also that there never was such a clean break between the (many) early Christian movements and the various groups of Judaism.

I have then to locate Acts in this whole framework, as presenting someone very different from the ‘real or historical Paul’. Let us look more closely at Luke, Acts, and Paul in Acts.

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#### LUKE THE AUTHOR OF GOSPEL AND ACTS

**Luke's gospel** is usually considered to be written in the late 80's or 90's, and is perhaps the last of all the canonical gospels (Boismard). It is written in an Aegean city, possibly Philippi, or perhaps in Corinth, or Ephesus. It certainly comes from a Greek culture. It is written for Greek converts (and some Jewish ones), who live in a Hellenistic environment and culture. It is written for educated people, who are able to reflect on their culture and its foundations. It is written for ‘Theophilus’ types – they already believe in the one God of Israel, and they want to understand more about that God. It is written among and for second or better third generation Christians. They have a nostalgic interest in their past, and a lived experience of their development. They have lived through a transition from a predominantly Jewish to a predominantly Greek (Roman) culture. They need to make sense of the continuity of their faith in the discontinuity of these cultures.

Who **Luke** actually was, we do not really know. Many legends have said that he was a companion of Paul, or an artist, or a medical doctor. It seems not. He may well be a Greek with an education into Jewish ways, or a Jew with a solid Greek education. His knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures is from the Greek translations called the Septuagint, so the former option could seem perhaps better. For a long time, the view that Luke, the author of the gospel and acts, was a companion of Paul, was unchallenged. The earliest witness to that is Irenaeus in the late second century. Appeal is made to ‘we’ passages in Acts, and to Paul's own mention, for example at the end of Philemon, of a Luke who was with him. But major differences have been noticed between Paul and Acts: concerning things as important as Kosher rules, the Torah itself, and Judaism. Luke in Acts never mentions any letters of Paul. He doesn't call Paul an apostle (a title Paul fiercely defended). The ‘we’ passages look like a rhetorical device. There was more than one ‘Luke’ around...

Luke's writing uses lumps of material from earlier gospels. It is a two-volume work (Lk/Ac). It is a total story of the beginnings and development of the Jesus movement. It is a heroic story. It is an epic story. It is an ‘orderly account’, which does not mean an accurate piece of research, but a vision of coherence. It is the early Christian parallel to Homer's Odyssey, or better still, to Virgil's Aeneid. Luke is something of a Dante or a Milton.

Acts is **the sequel** to this gospel. [The expression ‘Luke-Acts’ comes from H.D.Cadbury.]

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## ACTS AS A KIND OF 'HISTORICAL' 'NOVEL'

The term 'Acts' refers to writing about the deeds and dying of early martyrs. It does not mean an exact documentary record (like Hansard in parliament, or the Proceedings of a (legal) church meeting). It suggests, in fact, a certain point of view about the main character(s) that allows excessive veneration and consequently amplified 'memory'.

There is much discussion about the **literary genre** of Acts. In the past many readers have taken it as a historical record, with interesting and true stories. More recently, there has been a tendency to take it as a construct by an accomplished literateur (Luke) to make a theological and ideological point about the origins and spread of early Christianity, for specific political purposes. He seems to do so with a certain freedom in the use and creation of incidents. As the French would say, 'contes et legendes'. Luke surely did not have Paul's letters in front of him when he wrote Acts.

"Luke stands at the confluence of Greek-Roman historiography and the Jewish way of re-reading the past. From the former, he takes his concern for personal inquiry, the art of literary composition that unites what is useful with what is pleasing, the freedom of the writer to make up fiction when there is nothing in his sources, but always in accord with what he can grasp overall about the central personages he writes about. From the latter, he retains a freedom to choose his subjects, by reason of their importance, and an ideological position in function of which he re-reads and re-constitutes 'history'. The Acts of the Apostles is then a set of letters honoring the nobility of the early Christian communities and guaranteeing their identity. It shows their rootedness in the ancient plan of God carried to us in the Scriptures of Israel. This is at the very moment when they are more and more planted in the world of the nations and contested by the Jews.... Luke practices a 'synkrisis' or placing in parallel the continuity and yet the difference between Israel, Jesus, the apostles, Peter, Paul, etc... It is an **illustrative tapestry**... Luke has one eye on his own gospel and the other eye on the Septuagint." P. Bony, review of D. Marguerat, Les Actes des Apôtres (1-12), Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2007.

Many would date Acts early in the **second century** (Richard Pervo suggests the year 115 ce) and so a half-century later than the life and death of Paul. Nothing is certain here. Some date Acts between 100 and 150 ce. Ignatius doesn't seem to know Luke or Paul. Justin and Papias (per Eusebius) wrote as if Paul never existed. Irenaeus is the first clear witness to Lk-Ac.

There may have been a need at some point, in the early second century, to reclaim Paul for the 'tradition' by making him more orthodox than he really was: that is, by making him accredited by Peter and the twelve, acknowledging their authority, subservient to them, and working obediently under their direction, that is, making him 'one more among the apostles'. Acts surely wants to do that.

To achieve this, Luke has made Acts **more like a historical novel**, with good research and accuracy re geography, politics of various places, names, etc, and some events of history, but without an intention of a documented record of events.

It is important then to use Acts **only as a secondary source** for data re Paul. [Fitzmyer in his writing on Paul uses the present tense for material taken from Acts (for drama) and the past tense for material taken from Paul's letters (for factual history).] Whatever historical data can be taken from Acts, they could not contradict the assured data from Paul's own statements in his authentic letters.

The value of Acts (about Paul) is that of a monument, not to the real Paul, but to the continuing constructed 'memory' of Paul in the early church. It is a 'representance' of Paul, as the French like to say. To compose such a thing was congruent with the vocation of a professional 'historian' in the ancient world. There was an intense need to include the phenomenon of Paul into the **received memory of the ongoing church**. [Cf. Odile Flichy, conference at Ecole Biblique, Jerusalem, May 5, 2007]

Perhaps there is a realm of realism that the ongoing deep convictions of a people create. It is not 'historical' in the technical, literal way we now use the word. But it is very 'real' for the people. To deny such a dimension to the picture of Paul that has emerged, would be, in Australian terms, a bit like denying the reality of the jolly swagman in *Waltzing Matilda*. As Winston Churchill once said of the legend of King Arthur, 'it's all true, or it ought to be'.

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#### THE CONTENT AND MESSAGE OF ACTS (notes dependent on Tom Wright)

Acts begins with the story of the **Ascension**. In the Ancient Near East, it was assumed that the one who dwells in the heavens, rules the earth and rules the (pagan) empires. Augustus thought he saw Julius Caesar – after his death – being taken up into the heavens, that is, having an ascension, and so being declared divine. Titus applied this idea to himself on his arch in the Roman forum. If the early Christians said Jesus had ascended into heaven, they were setting up a challenge to the Caesars. They were claiming Jesus as Lord. Ascension is not space travel or Deist distance from earth: it is a massive political claim – a contestation of the Imperial Power of Rome here on earth by an alternative Lord.

There are *two main parts to Acts*.

The first part, chapters 1-12, is about the **early proclamation of 'Jesus as Lord'**. It is about Jesus as an alternative to Caesar. It is about justice of a different kind from that of Caesar. It is about Jesus as the new meeting place with God – Jesus, not Rome. The word of this good news was spoken boldly by the first Christians. The reaction to this proclamation, on the part of Rome, is severe. The reaction on the part of Jewish leaders was similarly severe. Sadducees were worried about it, but for political, not religious reasons. Herod Agrippa, the would-be king of the Jews under tutelage of Rome, kills James ben Zebedee, and wants to kill Peter, whom he has imprisoned. Peter is rescued. Agrippa dies a horrible death (according to Josephus). The word goes on, proclaiming Jesus as true Lord.

The second part, chapters 13-28, is about the way **this proclamation of the true Lord goes to the whole world, principally via Paul**. Paul runs into more and more trouble for non-religious, and mainly political, reasons. Slave girls in Ephesus were cultic prostitutes, and they represented income for the Roman landlords of the temples. When Paul exorcises a slave-girl in Ephesus he takes away the source of income for these people. The idol-makers of Ephesus were worried (and furious) about it, and Caesar should have been making his will. When Paul spoke in Athens, the locals realized, correctly, that they were all in trouble if resurrection has actually happened. The general reaction to Paul is bad. In the end, Nero suicides (in the year of the four emperors) and there is chaos. Paul has gone to the end of the earth (Rome) to proclaim the challenge under Caesar's nose, and he proclaims Jesus as Lord without hindrance (*akolytos*) – this is the last word in the text of Acts.

Paul's life is a kind of 'Emmaus journey' to the place where evil is at its worst. He has had trouble everywhere. There was a riot in Ephesus. He was warned by prophets. He was beaten in the temple. He was tried before the Sanhedrin. There were plots against his life. He was tried before Felix. He was imprisoned for two years. He decided it was time to go to Rome. All hell broke loose. You might perhaps have expected a crucifixion of Paul, but what you get is a sea journey. The sea symbolizes untamable danger and evil. Remember the sea of chaos before creation, the red sea at exodus, Jonah, sea-monsters in Daniel, the storms on the lake of Galilee. On his sea journey, Paul is shipwrecked (instead of crucified). Will he be drowned at sea? Smashed on rock? Killed by soldiers? Poisoned by a Maltese snake? No, these are decided possibilities, but he and all with him are safe on shore... to go to Rome itself. Paul wanted to take the message to the place where the empire was strongest – to Rome itself. That was his real Emmaus journey. He went to Rome.

The message is: though it can look as though the cosmos is on Caesar's side, don't be afraid, don't lose your nerve, ride out the storm...to preach the Good News. Unhindered.

But the stories about Paul, the details of the narrative, do not have, in the mind of the author of Acts, the same importance and the same realist historical value as the main line of the strongly political message.

The reading public at this time in the Greek world liked **travel narratives with realistic, contemporary landscapes** (pulp novels). Examples would be Chariton's Chaereas and Callirhoe, and Xenophon of Ephesus' Habrokomas and Anthia. Paul in Acts moves in the same areas as these heroes and heroines of the legend. See L.Alexander, Acts in its ancient literary context: a classicist looks at the Acts of the Apostles, New York, Continuum, 2007.

After the perfect love match, in a fit of jealousy Chaereas of Syracuse hits his wife Callirhoe and leaves her for dead. Her body is found by tomb robbers. She revives and she is sold as a slave. After many adventures, Chaereas leads the Egyptian army to victory over the Persians, finds Callirhoe among the captives, and they sail home, and all live happily every after.

There are extended scenes – similar to those in the novels - that were not meant by Luke to have historical value – e.g. escapes from prison, humans being treated as gods, storm scenes, etc. A good example might be the burlesque episode in which the Lycaonians sacrifice bulls in honour of Paul and Barnabas, whom they think are the gods Hermes and Zeus. Even the author would want us to recognize a lot of bull there.

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#### THE PAUL OF ACTS

Even if the Paul of Acts is not the historical Paul, it is important that we take count of the Paul of Acts in this year of 'Paul'.

Paul is presented as a **Roman citizen** by birth. There can be real doubts about Paul's **Roman citizenship**. This status was usually granted either on emancipation from slavery or as rewards for significant services to the state. Neither seems to apply. Paul in Acts claims it by right of birth, but when and how did the Jewish family get citizenship? In Acts, on the basis of his citizenship, Paul appeals to Caesar for a direct hearing of his legal case. Would any and every

Roman citizen anywhere have a legal right to a trial by Caesar himself? Not much happened for some years. Did it ever go to court? Was there no appeal process when nothing happened? We don't know.

Paul is presented as having studied in Jerusalem under [Gamaliel the Elder](#), and as a member of the Pharisee party there. Gamaliel was a Hillelite, in a tradition of tolerance of opposite views: Paul did not behave like that. Some writers say that when Paul was around 12 or 13 years old, at the time of the Bar Mitzvah, he was sent to Jerusalem for further education. I would like to have more documentation that Bar Mitzvah was even practiced at that time in the diaspora.

Paul – in Acts - is presented as a young man who witnessed, and colluded with, in Jerusalem, the [stoning of Stephen](#) (in the mid 30's). There is seemingly no other documentation for that, outside of Acts. I would like some.

He is [mandated by the High Priest](#) to act against the new 'Christian' heresy among the Hellenistic-Jewish communities of Judea, and [sent also to cleanse the Jewish community in Damascus and get rid of those who adhered to the new heresy](#). [This last point, at least, is historically unlikely: Damascus was then under the control, not of Judea, but of the Nabatean King. The Jerusalem High Priest had no jurisdiction there. Moreover, it would have been normal to send a member of the Sanhedrin, and Paul at that time was hardly that.]

On the road to Damascus he has – in real history - a life-changing experience.

In Acts the Damascus road scene looks a fair copy from 2 Mac 3, 24-5, the story of the conversion of Heliodorus (he was felled by two angels at the treasury, was in darkness, and speechless, and carried off... then Onias (= Ananias?) offers sacrifice for him and he is converted...

The new convert then angered the Jews in Damascus by preaching his new insight about Jesus. As a result he fled to Jerusalem. There he was introduced to the apostles by Barnabas. He then angered the Jews of Jerusalem and fled, this time to Tarsus. He was [usually in some conflict wherever he was](#). He often preached in [Jewish synagogues](#), and was in conflict with synagogal authorities, and so imprisoned by them, given the 39 lashes by them (5 times), and even – unsuccessfully – stoned by them on one occasion. He was chastised and imprisoned by Greek magistrates in Philippi, and released with apology when they realized he was a Roman citizen.

The [Jerusalem conference](#) is significant in his development as is the consequent incident in Antioch involving Peter's Christian practice.

It is not easy to imagine the historical Paul circumcising Timothy, as Acts claims Paul did. It is not easy to believe that the historical Paul did not claim the title of 'apostle' for himself, either...Acts won't give it to him.

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#### PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN ACTS

There are some dates about which we can be sure in Paul's life, from evidence external to Paul's life. For example: Stephen had been executed in 36 (in the interregnum after Pilate was withdrawn from Judea and before his replacement arrived); Pollio (Seneca's brother) was governor of Achaia only for the short time of the spring/summer of 52.

Paul made [three missionary journeys](#), to Cyprus, to parts of Asia Minor, and to mainland Greece (where he established communities in Thessaloniki, Philippi, and Corinth, and preached without success in Athens.) The actual division into ‘three’ journeys is somewhat artificial, though it has become classical (especially for those – many - who read Paul principally via Acts). If someone met Paul in a street in Ephesus one day, and asked him, which missionary journey are you on at the moment, Paul would not have had the slightest idea what the question meant. [There are two markers that might be used to divide up the journeys. One is the Jerusalem Conference, and the other is the de facto liberty granted to Paul by Gallio. Authors disagree on the dating of the first, and some would prefer to place it even before the so-called ‘first’ journey. The Gallio decision is easier to date, and is usually invoked to distinguish the second and third journeys.]

Luke seems to have consciously transposed the second missionary journey and placed it after the Jerusalem conference. He has done this to show that the Greek churches founded by Paul (Philippi, Thessaloniki, Corinth) were initially set up in full accord with Peter and the apostles.

A simple schema of Paul’s life according to Acts would be like this:

- c.36 ‘Conversion
- 46-49 First missionary journey (southern Turkey)
- c.52 Second missionary journey (Asia Minor and Greece)
- Third missionary journey (Greece and Asia Minor)
- 58. Arrest in Jerusalem
- 60 Journey to Rome
- 61 ‘Release’ (house arrest) at Rome (perhaps further journeys to the East and Spain??)
- 64 Death in Rome under Nero

Note that Luke likes to keep Paul on the move... We can look at the schema of these journeys.

**IT MAY BE HELPFUL TO KEEP ONE EYE ON THE MAPS THAT ACCOMPANY THIS MATERIAL.**

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#### THE FIRST JOURNEY

Acts 13-14: this takes place in Cyprus and South-Eastern Asia Minor, and Barnabas is with Paul. Paul himself in his letters never refers to it, or to Barnabas’ company.

In Acts, Paul first went to Tarsus at the invitation of Barnabas. The two went off on missionary work, first to Salamis in Cyprus (Barnabas came from there). It would not have taken long, by sea, with favorable winds, to get there: it was 135 miles from Seleucia to Salamis. Salamis had been the capital in the Greek Empire, and in Paul’s time it was a major commercial centre. It still lies in ruins after 7<sup>th</sup> century Arab invasions. It is now in the Turkish part of Cyprus.

Paul’s next stop was at Paphos. It had a good harbor on its west coast, and was a natural stopover. The Roman governor, Sergius Paulus, was converted by Paul (after Paul had shown up the magician, Bar-Jesus, as a fraud). Sergius Paulus came from Antioch in Pisidia in central Asia Minor. He may have suggested to Paul and Barnabas to go there. They went to Perga on what is today the southern Turkish coast. They then went across

the Taurus mountains to Antioch in Pisidia. Synagogue communities there were at least 50% Gentiles.

They then went southeast about 90 miles to Iconium. It is in ancient Phrygia. It became part of Galatia in 25 bce. It was connected to Antioch by the Via Sebaste. (Paul was there more than once.)

Paul and Barnabas then went on to Lystra and Derbe (there was an unpaved road between them). Today nothing remains of these cities.

They retraced their steps, and at Perga took ship for home base in Antioch in Syria.

Arrived there, they found trouble, from visiting Judean believers, who were demanding circumcision from all converts. Paul and Barnabas had not required this of converts. Nor had the church in Antioch. We know of the subsequent conference in Jerusalem, at which Paul seemed to carry the day and achieve the agreement of James and Peter. Antioch rejoiced.

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#### THE SECOND JOURNEY

Acts 15,40 – 18,22. This takes in mainly Greece, and Paul has no significant companion.

Paul then set off with Silas on a 'second journey', going to old and new places. They eventually came to Philippi in Macedonia. It had been founded in 360 bce by the father of Alexander the Great, Philip II. The Romans conquered it in 168, and built the Via Egnatia joining the Adriatic and Aegean seas. Philippi became a major trade center. Many veterans from the Roman army retired there. The population was then largely Roman. They spoke Latin rather than Greek, and made it a miniature Rome. The Jews there, as was not unusual, met on Sabbath up the river Gangites. There he converted a number of women, among whom was Lydia, a Gentile God-fearer of considerable social standing. Perhaps it is good to reflect that the 'church' that Paul left in Philippi amounted to some 15 or 20 people. There would have been Lydia and her household; the jailer and his household; the women at the river; the slave girl freed from the spirit of Python....Apart from Lydia, these are poor people, and like poor people anywhere, generous people. Most of them were not Jews. This 'model' is the basis for what Paul did in Corinth, a little later.

They then went to Thessaloniki, capital of the province of Macedonia, about 100 miles away. It had been made a free city by the Romans in 42 bce. It was never a colony. It had its own form of government. It worshipped the Emperor.

Paul and Silas had success there, but ran into trouble. They left for Berea about 50 miles to the southeast. It is in the foothills of the Olympic mountains, off the beaten track, but an important place. Paul found the Jews there open and fair minded, but trouble arrived from Thessaloniki, and he moved on to Athens.

It was primarily an intellectual and cultural center – with Acropolis, Parthenon, Athena Parthenos, etc. Paul met Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who despised him as a 'babbler' when he spoke of resurrection. They took him to the Areopagus but he

defended himself as a worshipper of ‘the unknown god’. Such gods had altars in Athens, so he could not be charged with introducing a new religion.

He moved 50 miles west, to the commercial center of the area, Corinth. It had been founded in 1000 bce, and almost totally destroyed by the Romans in 146 bce. A hundred years later Julius Caesar rebuilt it as a Roman colony. In the 50’s and 60’s ce it was the wealthiest city in southern Greece. The Acrocorinth rose 1900 feet above the Peloponnesian peninsula. It had a mobile and decadent population. A thousand female slave-prostitutes were active at the temple of Aphrodite, and were just as active in the city below.

Paul stayed there 18 months. When the Jews would no longer listen to him, he went to the Gentiles. Two prominent men, Justus who lived near the synagogue, and Crispus, a public benefactor of the synagogue, were converted. The Jews were angry because they had lost a good friend and good financial supporter. They brought Paul before the proconsul Gallio, accusing him of violating Torah. Gallio dismissed it as an internal Jewish matter. This effectively gave the Paul group the same recognition that the Empire gave to the Jews.

Cenchrea was the port of Corinth, and from there Paul sailed to Ephesus. It was the major port on the other side of the Aegean. It was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. It had the most beautiful building on earth at the time, the temple of Artemis (known to the Romans as Diana), the goddess of hunting and fertility.

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#### THE THIRD JOURNEY

Acts 18,23 -21,16. This is a sweep of Asia Minor and Macedonia, and then a quick transit to Jerusalem.

Paul did not stay, this time, very long in Ephesus – he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem. He returned overland, and then stayed two years. From there he went to Macedonia and Greece, including a stay at Philippi. When he left there on his way to Jerusalem by sea, he avoided Ephesus, and sailed further south into Miletus. He asked the elders from Ephesus to come and meet him.

This last journey is a sea journey. Ships at the time sometimes held a passenger list of 276 persons, plus cargo. They were a vital link between the ports on shore and the islands of the Mediterranean. Acts is recognized as a real history of navigation at this time.

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#### THE JOURNEY TO ROME

At the end of the third missionary journey, he went to Jerusalem. There he was accused by Diaspora Jews of preaching against Torah, and of introducing a non-Jew into precincts of the Temple reserved for Jews under pain of death. [There is no basis for that.] The Roman military intervened and arrested Paul, whom they mistook for a notorious rebel called ‘the Egyptian’. There was a discussion about flogging Paul, but this ceased after it was known that he was a Roman citizen.

After release, Paul got into trouble with the High Priest Ananias. Paul shrewdly presented himself as a Pharisee, and the Pharisees of the Sanhedrin took his side against the Sadducees there, including the High Priest. Paul then raised the issue of the resurrection, and divided the two groups. The Roman commander then took Paul into protective custody in the Jerusalem garrison. Paul's nephew then told the commander that a gang of Jewish fanatics were plotting to murder Paul on his way from the garrison to the tribunal. Claudius Lysias, the Roman tribune, then transferred Paul to Caesarea under strong military escort, to bring him before Felix, the prefect of Judea, 52-60 c.e.

There he was accused by the High Priestly party of being the ringleader of a heretical sect attempting to profane the Jerusalem Temple. The High Priest asked for extradition of Paul to the Jewish authority in Jerusalem, in view of imposing and executing the death sentence. The request was refused. Paul was kept under house arrest in Caesarea. During this time Felix and his wife Drusilla often listened to Paul – Felix was not religious, and probably was hoping for a bribe. There was an unresolved legal dilemma, who ought to try Paul, and for what.

Festus became procurator in 60 and inherited the Paul problem. There was quickly a second request by the High Priest for Paul's extradition, and, it would seem, a plan to murder Paul on his way from Caesarea to Jerusalem. This was refused by Festus. The High Priest and his party then came to Caesarea and charged Paul of crimes against Torah, Temple and Emperor. Festus suggested to Paul that he voluntarily go to Jerusalem and defend himself there before the Jews. Paul refused, and invoked the right of a Roman citizen to go to Rome and be tried before Caesar's court. This right was granted.

Before Paul was taken to Rome, the Jewish King Agrippa II and his sister Berenice came to visit Caesarea and to hear Paul. Festus thought Paul was mad, but Agrippa said ironically that if he heard much more of Paul he might himself be converted to Paul's Christianity!

In the autumn of 60, Paul went by ship, under Roman guard, and the ship encountered a massive storm for two weeks near Crete, and finally ran aground in Malta. There Paul escaped death again when a viper wrapped itself round his arm.

In Rome, he was under house arrest in rented accommodation, guarded by one soldier. There he was able to preach the gospel unhindered and receive visitors. This went on for two years. No Roman trial was ever recorded (or took place). Eusebius (mid second century) says that Paul was decapitated in Rome under Nero, that is, before 68.

[In the later Acts of Paul, and more particularly the Martyrdom of Paul, we read that Nero's cupbearer, Patroclus was killed when he fell out from a window. Paul revived him. Nero heard he was alive. Nero then reacted to the tenet that Christ would overthrow Rome, and killed as many Christians as he could – including Paul?]

[It is interesting that in the Roman church of Santa Maria del Popolo, there is the 1601 painting of Paul on the Damascus Road, by Caravaggio. The original burial place of Nero was here!]

This is the broad story of 'Saint Paul', from Acts, but not necessarily the true history of Paul.

Once again, it is not necessarily 'what happened' to the historical Paul. It fits Paul into a vast conception of the origin of Christianity in Judea and its spread throughout the Roman Empire.

Luke has a vested interest in that. How we piece together the historical Paul and the Paul of Acts is the permanent problem of Paul for us.

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#### PAUL'S RELATIONS WITH PETER

In the spiritual traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, there is a strong devotion to the two apostles, **Peter and Paul**, together, in so far as they laid the foundations of the church of Rome. They are regarded as founders of a new city, somewhat similar to the two mythic brothers credited with the origins of Rome, Romulus and Remus. [This image comes from Benedict XVI]. Their alleged relationship is presented as a new and authentic way of brotherhood. They are hailed as pillars of the Roman Church. Peter is said to have founded that church. Paul came to it after his evangelization of the eastern Empire. They are honored in the same feast, that of 'Peter and Paul' (June 29). Legends are retold then about their last meeting in Rome, their last embrace and mutual blessing, as they went to martyrdom, Peter first, Paul soon after. Their feast is like a birthday of the Roman church.

In contrast, we could note the very different story as often presented by critical scholarship today. The bottom line is that Peter and Paul may never have been close, perhaps never even met in Rome. The point is that soon after Paul's lifetime, the mainstream was the larger community's 'memory' of Peter. They had a devotional connection in this way with Peter. The mainstream was then the group of Peter-connected churches. The Christian communities then felt a need to integrate Paul into the mainstream. They linked Paul with Peter to rehabilitate Paul!

This might lead us to think about **our connection with Rome**, with the diocese of Rome, with its bishop, our Pope. It might take us back to St.Peter, through the 'apostolic succession' of our church from him, there. In the third century, one of the earliest chroniclers of Christianity, called Julius Africanus, wrote in 220 that all churches went back to Peter. He provided a list of 'bishop-leaders' for churches in Antioch and Alexandria (as well as Rome itself) that purports to go back that far. He assumes these churches were all 'founded by' Peter and puts Peter at the head of all his lists. He thinks Peter left Palestine (Jerusalem) around the year 42 and that those churches were founded soon afterwards (possibly during the Olympiad of 41-44 – they had Olympiads then, and they lasted a few years at a time..) Peter would soon afterwards have gone to Rome and lived there for about the next 25 years. Eusebius who lived 275-339 is the founder of 'church history' as we know it, and he picked up this material from Julius Africanus and handed it on. There has always been a claim to a symbolic link between the later churches and Peter: we can document this claim in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it has never ceased. There are questions today about its character: was it a 'physical' kind of link, or a symbolic one in the deep-memory of the various communities?

Rome was, in the mid first century, the biggest city in the empire, with a population of about a million, packed with immigrants from every corner of the Mediterranean. The papacy, in the sense of a single leader for all the Christian communities of the city, only emerged in the third quarter of the second century, a full century after the death of Peter: that is the evidence of what texts we have, but not the persuasion of many (most) in the church today. There were in Rome various and rather diverse groups of those who believed in Jesus. They only came together under one head after 150 c.e. The earliest believers there were poor, working class people in Trastevere and Porta Capena. They spoke Greek as their vernacular until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. They were indistinguishable from Jews except for their belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Slowly some of the upper classes, especially women, joined the original different groups.

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In mid second century, there was real theological diversity in Rome. This is due to various teachers of Gnostic character, and those refuting them. Marcion taught there that Christianity had nothing to do with Judaism. Valentinus taught that the material world was the creation of an evil, lesser god, and that human beings were sparks of light trapped in material bodies. Praxeas taught that there were three modes of divine activity (= trinity). Theodotus the Tanner taught that Jesus was a man adopted by God the Father and filled with Spirit at his baptism. Rome was not the most orthodox centre of theology in those days!

In reaction to all this, Pope Victor (189-198) was the first leader to take a strong line. But his role had developed slowly. In the early times, the Roman Christians raised funds for relief of the poor (especially for the poor outside the city). One man was responsible for coordinating and managing this (a 'minister for external affairs'). As more money came in, his power and authority increased (a 'minister of the treasury'). By mid second century, he controlled appointments to other offices. Then treasury absorbed property that had previously been in private hands (e.g. catacombs), and developed a central administration, with one man responsible for all these functions. The result is the kind of leadership seen in Victor – and the first real instance of 'papacy' as later ages talk about it. Cf. Peter Lampe, From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the first two centuries (trans.M.Steinhauser), T.and T.Clark International, 2003. Lampe is a Tübingen scholar.

It was not until the 8<sup>th</sup> century that the term 'pope' was used of the bishop of Rome, and it was only in the 9<sup>th</sup> century that Gregory VII stated that it was a title reserved in a unique way for the bishop of Rome (on the grounds that he had the ministry of 'confirming his brother bishops' in faith and was pastor of the whole church.)

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When Peter was first in Rome, he didn't behave like the popes we know. In fact, there were initially no church buildings. The Christians gathered (for eucharist, etc) in 'house-churches'. Peter would have had 'presbyters' to assist him in the leadership of those groups. He would have had deacons to manage works of charity and catechesis. He would have had a secretary or two to handle correspondence, if any. It is not till the 4<sup>th</sup> century that his bishop successors there had 'notaries', as they called themselves, who were the beginnings of the 'bureaucracy' of later times, and of the diplomatic missions to other churches. [This is around the time the Lateran cathedral the cathedral of Rome - was built, and other churches too.] It is not until the 13<sup>th</sup> century that there is a 'Chancellor' in Rome, who effectively 'runs the church', and in the 14<sup>th</sup> century he works with groups around him, that have various names, and amount to the beginnings of what we would call a secretariate of state (present Vatican term) or ministry of foreign affairs (present secular term). Yes, there were cardinals, a good number of them, who were like the old Roman senate, and met sometimes thrice a week, and elected the next pope. History shows popes reducing the power of the cardinals continuously, and slowly claiming for themselves supreme legislative, executive, and judicial power, with few checks and balances. These popes then battled kings and monarchs for centuries as they tried to influence the church. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of course, kings and monarchs were either removed forever or reduced to symbolic and token significance, by various movements for change throughout Europe. One consequence was a centralization of all power in the catholic church in Rome, in the Vatican, and the Pope and his various organizations (called the 'curia'). It is this high-powered concept of papacy that we have grown up with, but we still in our minds see it as in unbroken succession from Peter.

We often read a text like Matthew 16, and think that Jesus on that occasion actually gave all this historically-later power to Peter and all his successors, and we think that we can trace an almost physical contact, via each succeeding pope, from that day to our own day. That is hard to do, for lack of actual documentary evidence, and because of the vast changes in the concept of ‘papacy’ that history has made necessary. But the symbolic value of a link to Peter, to Rome, and yes, to the Lateran cathedral, is very valid. John Paul 2 asked the world, other Christian churches included, to help him and his successors work out a concrete ‘job description’ for the Petrine ministry in the present world. He saw it above all as a ministry of promoting unity in a very diverse church situation. Popes will be working on that as long as they are popes, and Peter will symbolically be doing it through them all. The church has always slowly learnt to incorporate some models of leadership from secular life, and my guess is that it will continue to do so. It might, in the long future, then attribute such new models to the historical Peter!

But I think, if Peter came back to Rome today, he would need a tour guide to educate him into the intricacies of Vatican life, and he would not know what people were talking about when they mentioned ‘the Lateran’. Meantime, catholic pilgrims keep on coming to Rome, sensing the presence of Peter in the pope, and visiting churches like ‘the Lateran’. All roads lead to Rome, but there are a lot of roads, and a lot of them are symbolic.

I think Paul was ‘Romanized’ more after his death than before it. It is this Romanized Paul that is the ‘Saint’ Paul of liturgy and devotion.

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## READINGS

Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, Paul – a Critical Life, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 26-30; The Ministry of Women, *ibid.*, 289-290; The Collection, *ibid.*, pp.144-146.

See Martin Hengel, Der unterschätzer Petrus, 2007, and Brendan Byrne, a tale of two charisms, Tablet, 12 July 2008

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