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THE BOOK OF ACTS: FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES¹

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on two issues that relate to the study of the book of Acts: the literary relationship between the third Gospel and the book of Acts and the purpose Acts. Often deemed as “introductory” or “foundational matters”, clear thinking on these areas is essential for a correct understanding and interpretation of Acts (and indeed the third Gospel). The article examines and evaluates various scholarly proposals about both issues before drawing certain conclusions. With respect to the issue of literary relationship, the discussion follows the four-fold schema set out by I.H. Marshall. It concludes that the Third Gospel and Acts are best viewed as a two-volume work. With respect to the issue of purpose, six distinct proposals are investigated and assessed before concluding that the main purpose of Acts (and the third Gospel) is pastoral in nature. Whilst recognizing that this is the strongest of the six proposals, it does not exclude the possibility of subsidiary purposes.

KEY WORDS: Luke, Acts, unity, purpose, pastoral.

1 This article is a revised extract from the author’s unpublished PhD Thesis entitled: “A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MIRACLE STORIES IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE LUKAN CONCEPT OF SALVATION.” which was submitted to The Queen’s University Belfast 2012.

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Within current New Testament studies, Acts continues to attract keen interest with new commentaries, articles, essays, and books being regularly published.³ For those seeking to explore this fascinating section of the New Testament, it is important to be clear about issues often labelled by scholars as “foundational”.⁴ Clarity of thought at this level will not merely help to facilitate correct thinking about the nature of Acts and how it is to be interpreted, it will also engender confidence when analysing and assessing the growing number of academic studies on it. This paper will examine two such issues: the literary relationship between the third Gospel and Acts, and the purpose of Acts. It argues that the third Gospel and Acts are to be viewed as a two-volume composition and that the general purpose of this work is pastoral in nature. The writer assumes Lukan authorship for both the third Gospel and Acts.⁵

The relationship between the third Gospel and Acts

Since the publication of Cadbury’s work, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, (1927),⁶ scholars have become increasingly accustomed to speaking of these books as a single literary work, written by a single author but divided for logistical reasons (i.e. the limits of what a single papyrus scroll could hold) into two volumes. Accordingly, Cadbury’s hyphenated designation “Luke-Acts” has since been adopted by a majority of scholars when referring to the two books together. However, as Parsons and Pervo⁷ point out, such unity must not simply be assumed; it needs to be argued.

3 Craig Keener’s four volume commentary *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids. Baker Academic, 2012-15) reflects the breadth and quantity of written material on Acts in recent years. See also Thomas. E. Phillips, *Contemporary Studies in Acts* (Georgia. Mercer University Press 2009).

4 Other such issues include authorship, date, recipients, genre etc.

5 For a helpful discussion on the topic of authorship, see Keener, *Acts*, Vol 1, 402-22.

6 Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: Macmillan, 1927).

7 Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). Both scholars regard the issue as an open question and point to various differences between the two works which

Various theories have been proposed about the literary relationship between Luke and Acts. These are set out by Marshall⁸ as follows:

(i). Separate works by two different authors

At the turn of the last century Hawkins⁹ produced a robust defence of the linguistic unity of Luke and Acts. In his research, he identified various linguistic differences between the two books. Two decades later, Clark¹⁰ picked up on these and developed a case against common authorship based on linguistic evidence. Although he found no immediate followers, the issue was later revived by Argyle,¹¹ who gave a full list of linguistic differences and concluded that Acts was written by a different author. Much of Argyle's case was later subjected to a devastating critique by

prevent a simple answer. In particular they highlight the problem of ascribing a single genre to both works, by identifying differences in the narrative and in the theology.

- 8 I. Howard Marshall, "Acts and 'The Former Treatise'" in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting* (ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke; vol. 1 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1993), 163-182.
- 9 John Caesar Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae; Contributions to the Study of the Synoptic Problem* (2nd ed.; Oxford, Clarendon Press 1909), 177-82. Hawkins outlines the linguistic differences under five headings: (i) Words and phrases characteristic of Luke's Gospel in contrast to the other Synoptics, but used in Acts at least three times as often in Luke; (ii) Words and phrases never occurring in Luke, but frequently in Acts; (iii) Words and phrases rarely occurring in Luke, but frequently in Acts; (iv) Words and phrases frequently occurring in Luke, but never in Acts and (v) Words and phrases frequently occurring in Luke, but much more rarely in Acts. Based on these observations Hawkins suggested that while they are insufficient to throw doubt on common authorship, they do seem to indicate that a considerable time must have elapsed between the writing of the two books.
- 10 Albert C. Clark, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes on Selected Passages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 393-408.
- 11 Aubrey W. Argyle, "The Greek of Luke and Acts," *NTS* 20 (1973-4), 441-5.

Beck.¹² However, as not all of the undeniable linguistic differences previously identified by Hawkins were addressed, some today still argue for separate authors of both books.¹³

(ii). Separate works by the same author

Almost every scholar today accepts that Luke and Acts display authorial unity. This advance has been due largely to the work of writers such as Harnack,¹⁴ Knox and Cadbury who pointed to such significant features as the common dedication of both books to Theophilus (Lk. 1:3; Acts 1:1), linguistic correspondence, common style, mode of composition as well as common themes. However, since Hawkins¹⁵ had earlier suggested a possible gap in time between the compositions of the two works, this provided a basis for the hypothesis that Luke and Acts are in fact separate works by the same author. Occasionally, it is suggested that Acts may have been written before Luke,¹⁶ or alternatively, that the Gospel was written first without any thought of a sequel, with Acts being composed

12 Brian E. Beck, "The Common Authorship of Luke and Acts," *NTS*, 23 (1976-7), 346-52.

13 Marshall, "Acts and 'The Former Treatise'" in *Acts* (ed. Winter and Clarke), 1:166. Marshall mentions the fact that David G. Weeks in his Fernley-Hartley lecture (1980) on "The Lukan School in Ephesus" (yet unpublished), puts forward the hypothesis that the Gospel of Luke and Acts were composed by different authors within the same school. He develops his argument in terms of differences in architecture, theology, style and historical usage. More recently, Patricia Walters *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence* – SNTS 145 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) has argued against the single authorship of Luke and Acts.

14 Adolf Von Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles* (transl. Rev. J. R. Wilkinson; London: Williams & Norgate, 1909); W.L. Knox, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1948).

15 Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae*, 177.

16 Marshall in "Acts and 'The Former Treatise'" cites G. Bouwmann, *Das dritte Evangelium*. Einübung in die formgeschichtliche Methode (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1968) 62-7, who finds it strange that Acts does not refer back to Luke and argues that the theology of Acts is more primitive.

much later.¹⁷ If so, it raises the question as to whether the Gospel underwent any revision in the light of the composition of Acts. This view of separate works by the same author offers a spectrum of possibilities from the two books being substantially independent of each other (what might be called view ii a), to the notion that despite an unspecified interval between their composition, they were assimilated to each other so as to become in effect a two-part work (what might be called view ii b).

(iii). A two-part work composed as a whole

This third proposal, advanced by Pesch¹⁸ *et al.*, affirms both books as a two-part work which was composed as a whole, divided into two parts from its inception, and carefully planned accordingly. This view will be returned to shortly.

(iv). One continuous work later separated into two parts

A fourth suggestion is that the two books, as they presently stand, were originally written as one continuous work which was then separated into two parts, with Luke 24:50-3 and Acts 1:1-5 added to conclude the first part and introduce the second part respectively. Several problems, however, are raised by this theory, two of which may be singled out. First, in the Greco-Roman world of the first century A.D., literary works were customarily published in the format of a scroll made of papyrus. As Metzger¹⁹ points out, the length of such a scroll was limited by considerations of convenience in handling the roll; the normal Greek literary roll seldom exceeded 35 feet in length. Ancient authors, therefore, would divide a long literary work into several “books” each one being accommodated by one roll. Luke and Acts would each have filled an ordinary papyrus roll of 31 or 32 feet in length, which explains why they were issued in two

17 Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte I* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 76-82.

18 Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte I* (Zürich: Benziger/ Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1986), 24f.

19 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, (3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5-6.

volumes rather than one. Secondly, Acts 1:6ff. does not seem to connect smoothly with Luke 24:49. According to Luke 24:33, the disciples are located in a house in Jerusalem which Jesus enters (v. 36), yet in Acts 1:12 when the Ascension occurs, they are suddenly in an open area on the Mount of Olives. These and other problems have resulted in the proposal not finding support among contemporary scholars.²⁰

Of the four proposals presented only two (i.e., ii.(a) and iii) command serious support within contemporary scholarship, with the latter one (i.e., Luke and Acts as a two-part work) being favoured more. Three principal arguments are advanced in support of it. First, attention is drawn to the prologues to the two books. Marshall²¹ states, “the prologue to Acts, reminiscent in language of the prologue to Luke, establishes that in their present form they are two parts of one work.” However, Alexander²² suggests that the use of a re-capitulatory preface does not demand that two treatises are necessarily closely linked together: the evidence from ancient prefaces indicates that one could have two works which “while complementing each other, are none the less very different in conception.” While this caution is fair, Marshall rightly considers it to be excessive, since more often the use of recapitulation does occur where the works are closely linked. Moreover, the similarity in theme between Luke and Acts as well as their close chronological relationship make it extremely likely that the author saw Acts as being closely tied to Luke.²³

20 For a more detailed treatment of the problems involved see Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1966), 109-11.

21 Marshall, “Acts and ‘The Former Treatise’” in *Acts* (ed. Winter and Clarke), 1:172.

22 Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke’s Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-14 and Acts 1.1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 146.

23 Marshall, “Acts and ‘The Former Treatise’” in *Acts* (ed. Winter and Clarke), 1:172-3.

The second argument relates to the evidence of certain material in Luke as a whole. This falls into four categories. As Pesch²⁴ notes, it appears that in a number of instances Luke has redacted material from sources in light of what was to follow in Acts. Thus, for example, the change from the dative plural *nefe,laij* (clouds) in Mark 13:26 to the singular *nefe,lh* in Luke 21:27, appears to have been made to suit the singular *nefe,lh* in Acts 1:9. Second, there are instances where Luke has not taken over material from his sources in the Gospel, but there is an equivalent in Acts. Luke, for example, has no parallel in his Gospel to Mark 13:32, but there is an equivalent in Acts 1:7. Third, there is some material in Luke which is prophetic of what is to happen in Acts. Barrett²⁵ offers a list of possible instances including Luke 3:6; 11:49; 14:15-24; 21:12-19; 22:31-34. Finally, there are alterations in Luke which reflect knowledge of traditions attested in Acts. One example is the setting of the Sanhedrin trial by day and not by night which, it is argued, shows the knowledge of procedure from traditions found in Acts 4-5.

The third principal argument centres on the ending of Luke. As Parsons²⁶ has shown the Ascension story provides both closure for the Gospel and the narrative beginning for Acts; the repetition serves to tie the two volumes together. Also significant are the prophetic elements in Luke which are especially noticeable in the concluding section (e.g. Lk. 24:49). However, since the other Gospels also have prophetic elements, and there are no grounds for suspecting a second volume to any of them, this point is at best one of many in a cumulative argument.

In addition to the above arguments, we might also add the large number of recurring patterns of parallelism between the two works.²⁷ These

24 Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* I, 24f.

25 C. Kingsley Barrett, "The Third Gospel as a Preface to Acts?" *The Four Gospels: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. van Segbroek et al.; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), Vol. 2: 1453-61.

26 Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

27 For further parallels see Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological*

include the Spirit descending on Jesus as he prays (Lk. 3:21-23), and on the disciples as they pray (Acts 2:1-13); Jesus and the disciples both begin their ministries with sermons that focus on the fulfillment of prophecy (Lk. 4:16-30; Acts 2:14-40); similar accounts of lame men being healed (Lk. 5: 17-26; Acts 3:1-10), resulting in conflict with religious leaders (Lk. 5:29-6:11; Acts 4:1-8:3); both report missionary journeys to the Gentiles (Lk. 10:1-12; Acts 13-20) and conclude with a prolonged account of a journey to Jerusalem where the hero is arrested on false charges (Lk. 9:51-19:28; Acts 19:21-21:17). Although such parallels may serve a variety of purposes,²⁸ they only make sense if the writer intended both parts to be read together as a single work. The cumulative effect of these arguments points clearly in the direction of Luke and Acts being a two-volume composition, and therefore should be studied together. Regardless of the process which has led to their present form, it is reasonable to maintain that together they display authorial unity.

The purpose of Acts

A cursory reading of the literature on this issue reveals a wide range of suggestions, some of which carry more weight than others. These may be broadly grouped under the following headings - historical, irenic, apologetic, evangelistic, theological and pastoral.²⁹

(i). Historical – Luke wrote to provide the church with a historical record of its beginnings. Thus, the work is to be viewed as mere history.

Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974.

Also, Susan Marie Praeder, "Jesus-Paul, Peter-Paul, and Jesus-Peter Parallelisms in Luke-Acts: A History of Reader Response," in *SBLSP* (ed. K. Richards; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984) 23-39.

28 Suggested purposes include making the narrative more aesthetically pleasing; a mnemonic device; a means of highlighting the essential unity between the missions of Jesus and the church; or a combination of these factors.

29 For a more detailed survey of the various proposals regarding Luke's purpose see Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 29f.

While disagreement remains over whether Luke and Acts share a common genre, few today doubt that Acts is a piece of ancient historiography.³⁰ As to the reliability of the account, a much more positive assessment has prevailed since the second half of the nineteenth century, due largely to the works of such scholars as Lightfoot, Zahn, Ramsay and von Harnack.³¹ More recent studies, including those by Hemer,³² Sherwin-White³³ and Tajra,³⁴ have served to confirm this view.³⁵ However, although the provision of an accurate historical record is important to Luke, this proposal is unsatisfactory as a comprehensive solution to the purpose of writing for it fails, among other things, to account for many of subject areas of the book, including the complex relationship between Jews and Gentiles and the speeches in Acts. Moreover, it raises questions as to why Luke focuses mainly on Peter and Paul but does not give more details about other church leaders.

(ii). Irenic - In 1831, F.C. Baur advanced a theory that became one of the hallmarks of the famous “Tübingen school” of theology. He believed that Acts was written to repair a major breach in early Christianity which had arisen because of the different expressions that had been given to the

30 See David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 86-90, 116-57.

31 See the helpful survey in W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles*, BGBE 17 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1975).

32 Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*.

33 Adrian N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

34 Harry W. Tajra, *The Trial of St. Paul: A Judicial Exegesis of the Second Half of the Acts of the Apostles*, WUNT 35 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989).

35 Those who express confidence in Luke’s historical reliability often focus on the following: (i) the expectations of historians in antiquity; (ii) traditional authorship of Luke-Acts and Luke’s access to eyewitnesses and his participation in Paul’s journey (i.e. “we-sections” in Acts); (iii) confirmation of material from sources outside the New Testament; (iv) agreement of details with the Pauline letters and (v) Luke’s use of Mark’s Gospel.

faith by the apostles Peter and Paul. Baur argued that by the beginning of the second century the Petrine and Pauline parties in the church had become warring factions that threatened to split the new religion into two separate faiths. Acts was therefore written with a view to reconciling these factions and restoring unity to the church. Although somewhat dated, the theory has recently been revived by Goulder³⁶ who challenges the view that early Christianity was a strongly unified movement, with occasional off-shoots into heresy. He asserts instead that first and early second-century Christianity was set within a struggle between two competing, and at times antagonistic factions, Pauline and Petrine. This competition is seen as the context behind most, if not all, of the New Testament texts, including Acts.³⁷

The “irenica” view is however, not without its weaknesses. First, it rests on the idea that Acts is a second-century work, which many scholars now question. Secondly, the relationship between Peter and Paul only forms a small part of Acts, which leaves other sections of the book unaccounted for. Finally, the view appears to be contradicted by Paul’s own words in 1 Corinthians 9:5-6, in which he portrays Peter as a colleague. In addition to these criticisms is the fact that it ignores the first volume of Luke’s writing.

(iii). Apologetic - At one time it was popular to view Acts as a political apologetic, written on behalf of the church or the apostle Paul. Because the church was being attacked by the Roman authorities, and Paul in particular was viewed as something of a threat to civil peace and unity, it is argued that it was necessary to show that Christians were law-abiding people and not dangerous revolutionaries. This would explain the em-

36 Michael Goulder, *St. Paul versus St. Peter, A Tale Of Two Missions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

37 Goulder’s theory is not without its problems. The suggestion that it explains all the NT texts is, at the least, optimistic. While many texts have an underlying context of conflict, it is arguable whether the same group or groups are being engaged in each case. Thus, to funnel this diversity into two camps is an over-simplification of the true situation.

phasis on Paul not being guilty of any crimes against the Roman state (e.g. Acts 16:37; 18:14-15; cf. 19:37), a point that is repeated in successive trial scenes (Acts 24-26). However, the proposal fails to explain much of the other material in Acts. Moreover, it too fails to take into account Luke's first volume. At best therefore, the proposal provides something of a sub-purpose for Luke's writing; as a principal explanation it proves to be inadequate.

A related theory, by Walaskay,³⁸ takes a contrasting position by proposing that Luke's purpose is to present the Roman state in a favourable light to Christians so as to encourage them to work alongside it. Thus, the Roman recognition that there was no real case against Paul is used to commend the Romans and their system of justice to the Christians. However, this view is equally unconvincing for while it is correct that Luke believed that Christians should generally be submissive to the government, there is much in Acts that puts the Romans in a bad light (e.g. Acts 18:17; 24:26). Furthermore, the Roman material forms only a small of part of Luke –Acts.

(iv). Evangelistic - Both Bruce and O'Neill³⁹ argue that the author's purpose goes beyond apologetics. Luke's desire is not simply to dissuade pagans from persecuting Christians; he wants to convert them. This explains the inclusion of such stories as the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus (13:7-12) and the jailer at Philippi (16:25-34), both of whom become Christians. Seccombe⁴⁰ likewise favours this view but is more specific and sees as significant Luke's emphasis on the proper use of possessions. He maintains that Luke is writing evangelistically for people whose devotion

38 Paul W. Walaskay, *"And so we came to Rome": The Political Perspective of St. Luke*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

39 Frederick F. Bruce, *Book of Acts* NICNT. (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1988); John C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting* (London: SPCK, 1961).

40 David Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts*, SNTSU (Linz: A Fuchs, 1982).

to wealth might prevent them from accepting Christianity. However, all this presupposes that Luke's audience is outside the church and ignores much of the material which is only meaningful to believers. It therefore fails as a comprehensive explanation.

(v). Theological Polemics - This view argues that Luke has a definite theological axe to grind and that this explains his central purpose. Talbert⁴¹ proposes that Luke wrote to counter early Gnosticism which threatened to infiltrate and undermine the orthodoxy of Christianity in its early years. To combat this, Luke appeals to apostolic authority in three ways. First, he emphasizes the motif of authentic witness particularly to Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and ascension as a protection against a docetic tendency. Secondly, in the face of Gnostic misinterpretation of Scripture, Luke appeals to the apostles' legitimate exegesis of the Old Testament. Thirdly, the motif of the succession of a tradition of eyewitnesses assured "the guarantee of the truth of the church's proclamation in the midst of Gnostic distortions of the gospel."⁴² However, it seems unlikely that the purpose of Luke-Acts can be subsumed under the one category of defending against Gnosticism. Indeed, much of what is assumed as being directed against Gnosticism could just as easily have been directed against the orthodox Jews, who would have denied that Jesus was the Christ and that the Christ had to suffer. Moreover, how significant a threat Gnosticism was at the time when Acts was written remains uncertain.⁴³

Conzelmann,⁴⁴ in a seminal study, maintained that "Luke"⁴⁵ wrote to the church of his day chiefly to explain the delay of the Parousia. He argued that for some time after Jesus' death, the early Christians believed

41 Charles H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics: An Examination of the Lukan Purpose*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966).

42 Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics*, 56.

43 Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 23.

44 H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. G. Buswell; London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1960).

45 Conzelmann did not accept the traditional view of authorship.

that he would return in glory, in their own lifetime, to bring an end to this earth. At some point, however, as time went by and Jesus did not return, the church came to realize that he would not be coming back in the immediate future. Such a basic shift in eschatological expectation demanded a massive reinterpretation of Christian theology. It is this reinterpretation which the author provides. At the heart of his scheme is the replacement of the early Christian eschatological expectation with salvation history. In place of a church waiting for the Lord from heaven, the author offers a historical outline of the course of saving events, divided into three periods: the period of Israel, the period of Jesus' ministry, and the period of the church. It is this segmentation of salvation history into its separate stages that forms the structure of the two-volume work. The author, therefore, writes to encourage Christians in his day to endure the pressures of living as believers in an indefinitely continuing world order. He seeks to establish a role for the church and stresses its authority by locating its establishment in apostles accredited by Jesus himself. He provides for its effective working by organizing it with elders and bishops. This attention to the church, its authority and organization has come to be called "early Catholicism" because it is seen as leading on to the organized "universal" (catholic) church of the second century.

Reaction to Conzelmann's proposal has been vigorous and varied. Three points may be singled out. First, as Cullmann⁴⁶ shows, "salvation history" in the sense of a series of stages through which God has brought his salvation to the world, is integral to the New Testament and to the message of Jesus himself. It is not something invented by Luke. Secondly, it is questionable whether there was at any time in the early church a broadly held conviction that Jesus was certain to come back within a few short years. Those sayings of Jesus in which he is thought to have said that he would return in glory within the lifetime of the first apostles (e.g., Mt. 10:23; Mk. 9:1 par.; Mk. 13:30 par.) may be understood in other

46 Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950).

ways.⁴⁷ Moreover, several texts presuppose that the time of the Parousia may be delayed (e.g. Lk. 19:11-27; Jn. 21:20-23). Finally, many question Conzelmann's scenario of "early Catholicism" in Luke. Rather than having abandoned a doctrine of imminence, the church continues in "the last days" eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus from heaven. Moreover, Luke displays little interest in the church as an institution or in its sacraments.⁴⁸

Each of the above proposals make valid observations, and together highlight something of the character of Luke's literary endeavour which is "as complex and rich... varied and mysterious... as life itself."⁴⁹ Moreover they alert us to the danger of oversimplification when it comes to identifying Luke purpose. However, no one proposal provides a satisfactory explanation to Luke's general purpose.

(vi). Pastoral - A different approach and one that commends itself to numerous scholars begins by asking the question - What claim does the author himself make (if any) for his work? In this regard, we are not left to speculate, for Luke provides an important piece of information in the preface of his first volume (Lk.1:1-4). Within this section, we discover that the entire composition is addressed to one called "Theophilus" (v3), an otherwise unknown individual, who was probably a Gentile⁵⁰ and possibly Luke's patron who could thus have been responsible for funding

47 See for example Arthur L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

48 A.J. Mattill Jr., *Luke and the Last Things*, (Dillsboro: Western North Carolina Press, 1979).

49 William H. Willimon, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 11.

50 Ramsay notes that Luke's care to inform his readers about points on the geography of Palestine, even the simplest, is in sharp contrast to his assumption of geographical knowledge on their part for the Greco-Roman world. He also deliberately avoids items that would be puzzling to Gentile readers such as the word "rabbi" that occurs four times in Mark and the same in Matthew. See William Ramsay, *Was Christ born in Bethlehem?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 55-57.

the entire literary project.⁵¹ Few scholars, however, doubt that Luke has a wider readership in view, given the extent of the material and the expense that such a venture would incur.⁵² Theophilus may, therefore, be seen as representative of this group. It appears from verse 4 that, like Theophilus, this wider audience had been “instructed” in the Christian faith. While the verb *kathce,w* (to instruct/teach) may refer to the knowledge an outsider may have of Christianity, in the present case, it seems more likely that it denotes the kind of instruction given to somebody who had joined the church, since so much of the material in Luke-Acts deals with issues beyond simple evangelism. Again in verse 4 Luke states that his reason for writing is *i[na evpignw/|j peri. w-n kathch,qhj lo,gwn th.n avsfa,leian*. Van Unnik⁵³ points out that the noun *avsfa,leia* conveys the idea of “giving assurance”, or reassurance. Moreover, Minear⁵⁴ maintains that by positioning the term at the end of the sentence, Luke deliberately gives it emphasis, thus making it a key term. This then raises the question- Why would such reassurance be necessary? Maddox⁵⁵ believes the answer lies in the circumstances of Luke’s readers, adding that their faith was most likely being undermined by severe criticisms. Marshall,⁵⁶ who concurs with this view, suggests that the source of the problem was most likely Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, refused to believe in his resurrection and disputed that the Christians were truly part of the people of

51 By calling him, *kra,tiste* (most excellent) Luke may be implying that Theophilus was a person of rank perhaps a Roman aristocrat (cf. Acts 24:3 and 26:25).

52 See Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 3-35.

53 Willem Cornelis van Unnik, “The ‘Book of Acts’ the Confirmation of the Gospel,” *Novum Testamentum* (1960) 26-59. In Acts 2:36; 21:34; 22:30; 25:26 Luke consistently uses the term in reference to assurance or determining the facts with certainty.

54 Paul S. Minear. “Dear Theo. The Kerygmatic Intention and Claim of the Book of Acts,” *Interpretation* 27/1973, 148f.

55 Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, 184f.

56 I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, NT Guides. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 39f.

God. In the face of such strong opposition and overwhelming numbers, it therefore seems that many of Luke's readers were beginning to doubt their spiritual position before God. Were they right to believe in Jesus as the Messiah when official Judaism rejected him? Could Gentiles become part of the church without being circumcised? Were Jewish Christians in fact apostates? Judging from the subject material that Luke records in his two volumes⁵⁷ it appears that these were key questions that Luke was seeking to address for his readers. If correct, we may conclude that Luke's general purpose was pastoral in nature, to provide reassurance to Christians. This proposal doesn't exclude other subsidiary purposes such as those previously mentioned, but it does help to explain much of the material found in both volumes, and ties in with what many scholars see as the central theological concern of Luke: to show that God's end-time salvation, predicted by the prophets, has now arrived through the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, and that this salvation is now going forth to the whole world.⁵⁸

Scholars may view Luke from one of three different perspectives: historian,⁵⁹ theologian,⁶⁰ and literary artist.⁶¹ Yet when it comes to Luke fulfilling his purpose it is unhelpful to highlight one at the expense of another. Rather, it seems Luke employs all three skills to fulfil his objective. His work is profoundly theological from start to finish, though not a systematic treatise. It is skilfully crafted; it grips the reader, captivates the mind and inspires the will with every twist and turn of the narrative. And it is historically based. Luke carefully grounds the entire literary en-

57 See especially, Luke 1, 2, 7:18-35 and Acts 7, 10-11 and 15.

58 Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 260.

59 Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 53-76.

60 Conzelmann was one of the first scholars to view Luke's writings from this perspective. See Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*.

61 Robert Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian. Luke's Passion Account as Literature*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

terprise in the bedrock of human history. To have done otherwise, observes Marshall⁶² would not only have been grossly reprehensible (given the gravity of issues involved), but it would reduce the work to a piece of “irrational fantasy”.

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62 Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 46.

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