

Acts and the Praxis of Early Christian Ecumenism

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Introduction

Since the time of F.C. Baur's study of Paul, New Testament scholarship has wrestled with the tension between the portrait of early Christianity that can be gleaned from Paul's letters and that presented in the Acts of the Apostles.¹ Baur's cardinal insight was the observation that, when compared with the gentile-inclusive Pauline gospel, on the one hand, and a more Jewish form of Christianity associated especially with James and the Pseudo-Clementine traditions, on the other, the Acts of the Apostles stands out as a strikingly irenic document. In Baur's view, Luke's Paulinizing of Peter and Petrinizing of Paul is so irenic as to strain historical credibility entirely, so that, while Acts may be sifted for whatever historical kernels it may contain, the narrative itself must be carefully distinguished from what really happened. Since Baur's time, arguments for or against the historicity of Acts have often detracted from its theological appraisal as a narrative concerned with unity through and amidst diversity. Although Baur himself dismissed what he identified as Luke's historically false conciliation, our perception of Acts' place within early Christianity—whether as a tendentious or trustworthy work of history—depends upon first perceiving it sympathetically and carefully as a theological narrative.

One characteristic of this narrative is the presentation of the early Christian movement as a phenomenon suffused with a pervasive unity. Or, to put the matter in Luke's terms, there was

¹ F.C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life, Works, His Epistles and Teaching*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., rev., ed., and trans. Eduard Zeller and A. Menzies (London: Williams and Norgate, 1876); cf. Philipp Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 33-50. for a recent reassessment, see Richard B. Hays, "The Paulinism of Acts, Intertextually Reconsidered," in *Paul and the Heritage of Israel: Paul's Claim upon Israel's Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters*, ed. David P. Moessner, Daniel Marguerat, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Michael Wolter, LNTS 452 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 35-48.

only one movement—one ὁδός—whose course was worth charting. There are, of course, many bumps along “the way,” and Luke does not shy away from letting readers know about a great many Christian controversies: the conspiracy of Ananias and Saphira, the inequality between the Hellenists and the Hebrews, the disputed status of John Mark, the presence in the early church of those still following John the Baptist, the disruptive nature of Paul’s gospel, and, especially, the debates among early Jewish Christians over gentile status.² But all of these differences are comprehended within a single, trans-geographic, multi-ethnic community—the one ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ (Acts 20:28). But as the above examples indicate, the facts of early Christian difference created obvious challenges to this unity. The present study seeks to uncover how Luke portrays the unity of the church subsisting within this diversity. Or, to put it another way, how, according to Luke, did early Christians develop not only local patterns of religious life but an integrated sense of community that connected gentiles in Antioch, Cyprus, and Macedonia to Jews in Jerusalem and the Diaspora?

The answer to this question, it turns out, is a practical one. A singular church uniting Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was “built up,” as Acts 9:31 summarizes, anticipating the eventual extension of the gospel to the wider Mediterranean world, not through intellectual abstraction but through particular habits of life, which we may fairly term ecumenical praxes. These include the formation of a trans-geographic ecclesial network, the sharing of resources within and through the facilitation of that network, and conciliar deference to this ecumenical network in matters relating to ecclesial life. Following an overview of these three ecumenical praxes, we will observe briefly how Acts’ attention to the connections between diverse congregations may help

² For a classic study of the diversity in early Christianity, see Walter Baur, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel, trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

to clarify the socio-rhetorical character of Acts as Luke's own contribution to the work of early Christian ecumenism.

The Formation of a Global Ecclesial Network

Acts narrates the geographical expansion of the gospel according to the formula expressed in 1:8, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." But although the story begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome, the movement is anything but linear. Readers must follow Philip to Samaria, Gaza, and Caesarea. Peter travels from Joppa to Caesarea to Jerusalem; and after his experience on the Damascus road Paul, sometimes with Barnabas and others, travels from Antioch in Asia throughout the Mediterranean and back to Jerusalem several times before he is finally sent to Rome. If the purpose of Acts, as some commentators have suggested, were to show Paul arriving in Rome in symbolic fulfillment of the gentile mission, then Luke's meandering narrative would appear burdened with a good deal of disorganized and unnecessary stops along the way.³ It is, of course, true that the geographical extension of the "word of God" is part of Luke's story (6:7), but the center from which it expands is as important as the periphery to which it reaches. Indeed, as with geometric circles, the expanse of the church in Acts has both a center and a diameter. And, as it turns out, these are closely related to one another.

Luke is more deliberate than he might have been to anchor the beginnings of the church in Jerusalem. The command to "stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" is uttered by the Lukan Jesus despite the evangelist's awareness of the strong tradition of

³ See, for example, Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble, Gerald Shinn, and R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 144.

resurrection appearances in Galilee (Lk 24:49).⁴ Luke's second volume opens with the same dominical command to "not separate from Jerusalem but to await the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). The purpose of this focus on Jerusalem is shrouded in Lukan subtlety, but it appears to reflect a symbolic commitment to biblical Israel, the people of God's enduring affection and care (see, e.g., Lk 1:54-55, 2:38, 13:34; Acts 3:26, 13:46, 28:20).⁵ A movement that would eventually gain a largely Gentile constituency and that could have been originally identified with "Galilee of the Gentiles" (cf. Mt 4:15; Is 9:1; 1Macc 5:15) is thus tied permanently through the event of Pentecost and its unfolding to the center of the Jewish world. Yet an awareness that the apostles have their geographical roots outside of Judea is expressed by angelic designation of the apostles as "men of Galilee" as they contemplate the resurrection of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, just east of Jerusalem (Acts 1:11; cf. Lk 22:59). As they return to the city in obedience to Jesus' double command, they embody in their voluntary geographic displacement the beginnings of a movement that will transcend and connect diverse places and peoples.

Yet Christianity was not novel in this regard, for Israel had for centuries been a people dispersed across the Mediterranean yet united by a common identity tied to a geographic center in Jerusalem.⁶ Christianity, according to Luke, thus has its origins in the "ecumenical" disposition of the multitudes of "devout Jewish men from every nation under heaven" who were

⁴ To keep the disciples in Jerusalem, Luke has adjusted the angel's mention of Galilee to the women at the tomb. Whereas in Mark (and Matthew) the women are told that Jesus is going ahead of the disciples *to Galilee*, in Luke they are reminded of Jesus prediction of his resurrection "as he spoke to you while he was *in Galilee*" (Lk 24:6; cf. Mk 16:7; Mt 28:7, 16-20). An appearance to seven of the apostles in Galilee is narrated in Jn 21 as well. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

⁵ On Luke's ecclesiology as a continuation of the community of biblical Israel, see Gerhard Lohfink, *Sammlung Israels: Eine Untersuchung zur lukanischen Ekklesiologie*, SZANT 39 (München: Kösel Verlag, 1975); cf. Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972).

⁶ A similar trans-geographic consciousness is evident in the pre-Christian Saul's pursuit of Christians in Damascus with authorization from the high priest in Jerusalem (9:1-2) and the possibility, articulated by Luke's Roman Jews, that letters from Judea might have given warnings about Paul (28:21). On trans-geographical connections within the Diaspora, see John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117 CE)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 418-424.

present in Jerusalem (as Paul of Tarsus, another non-native to the region, would later hope to be) at the time of the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:5, cf. 20:16).⁷ Luke draws attention to this diverse gathering, which includes

Parthians, Medes, Elamites; and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and those visiting from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans, and Arabs. (Acts 2:9-11)

These, along with the “men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” (2:14) constitute the “whole house of Israel” to whom Peter’s first speech is directed (2:36).⁸ The Spirit-enabled understanding of the apostolic message in the multitude of ancestral languages simultaneously validates the diverse regions and peoples represented (including those of non-Jewish origin) while ensuring that all present have access to a common exposition of the “mighty deeds of God” (2:11). This preaching intends and produces a unifying effect, as those who receive Peter’s distinctive witness to the resurrected Christ are baptized and begin to devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles and the fellowship (κοινωνία) of a newly birthed communal life (2:42; cf. 2:32). Luke does not tell us what happens when these converts from the Jewish Diaspora return home to “every nation under heaven,” but the attentive reader is positioned to see in their

⁷ So StrB 2.604. Alternatively, these may be permanent residents of Judea with connections in the Diaspora; so Haenchen, *Acts*, 168; cf. Carl R. Holladay, *Acts; A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 93.

⁸ This gathered body of Diaspora Jews and proselytes is symbolic of the worldwide reach of the gospel “to all who are far off” (2:39). That is, even at this early point in the narrative, the “house of Israel” has doors that are open to the Gentile world.

reception of the gospel the beginning of a worldwide movement rooted in the apostolic church in Jerusalem.

As the narrative progresses, the Christian mission becomes explicitly directed toward gentiles as well as Jews, and this expansion prompts the development of an ecclesial network in which the Jerusalem church plays a central role. While Luke says nothing explicit about the founding of a church in the house of Cornelius, nevertheless his friends and relatives are all baptized after receiving the Holy Spirit (10:24, 44-48). But, interestingly, Peter's presence and proclamation appear to be a prerequisite to this outpouring of the Spirit in Caesarea, so that the pivotal moment of gentile inclusion into the church is not accomplished without the Jerusalem apostolate. To be sure, Peter is hardly in control of the narrative; he is slow to understand the rooftop vision in Joppa (10:14-17), and his sermon is literally interrupted by the Holy Spirit, who falls on the gentiles in Caesarea "while Peter was still speaking" (10:44). But though the whole complex of events in Acts 10 comes as a surprise to Peter, the apostle is hardly ancillary to the scene. Cornelius, though visited by an angel, has to wait four days for Peter to come before he can hear the gospel and receive the Spirit and baptism. The fact that, upon returning to Jerusalem, Peter is prompted to give not one but two reports of his experience (11:1-18, 15:7-11) demonstrates that, by virtue of his status as the most prominent apostle, Peter's intimate association with Cornelius carried implications for the community in Jerusalem, even if those implications are only slowly recognized.⁹ Those implications, as the Jerusalem council will eventually discern, include the reception of gentiles as equal members of the one church (ἀδελφοί ἐξ ἐθνῶν, 15:23). The result is twofold: the Jerusalem community recognizes the faith

⁹ The decrees of the Jerusalem church, written in the letter to Antioch, are circulated by Paul and Barnabas elsewhere in the Diaspora, indicating that they perceive in the Jerusalem council a judgment that is broadly normative (Acts 16:4). This judgment is particularly grounded in Peter's vision in Caesarea (so 15:7-11, 14).

of the Caesareans, which is recounted publicly to them and which affects theological developments in Jerusalem; likewise, the new gentile congregation in Caesarea is not independent from but in active fellowship with the church in Jerusalem, as indicated by the hospitality shown by the Caesarean church to both Peter (12:19) and Paul, who stayed in the home of Philip, one of the seven appointed by the Jerusalem apostles and whose later residence in Caesarea further solidified that church's connection with Jerusalem (21:8, 24:23; cf. 6:5).

An important feature of the forging of ecumenical relations between Caesarea and Jerusalem is the telling of the story of the conversion of Cornelius and his household. In both instances, this reporting in Jerusalem of these events includes an account of the Spirit's work among Cornelius and his companions with particular reference to the parity between the manifestations of God's work in Caesarea and Jerusalem:

The Holy Spirit fell upon them *just as it had upon us* (ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ὡσπερ καὶ ἐφ' ἡμᾶς) at the beginning...If therefore God gave them *the same gift that he gave us* (τὴν ἴσην δωρεάν...ὡς καὶ ἡμῖν) who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" ... And they praised God, saying, "Well then, God has given to the gentiles *as well* (καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) the repentance that leads to life." (Acts 11:15, 17-18)

God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, *just as he did to us* (αὐτοῖς...καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν); and he has made no *distinction between them and us* (οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν), cleansing their hearts by faith ...

Through the grace of the Lord Jesus we believe unto salvation *just as they do* (καθ' ὃν τρόπον κάκεινοι)." (Acts 15:8-9, 11)

Here, the reports of the reception of the Spirit in Caesarea have a focused purpose: the justification of gentile inclusion without full Torah observance. But here, as elsewhere in Acts, the recounting in one congregation the work of God elsewhere has the wider purpose of encouraging the faith of those who hear and of uniting the distant churches to one another.

Paul's first missionary journey begins and ends with the statement that the work of the journey has not arisen from the private initiative but has come about because the Holy Spirit has directed *the congregation* in Antioch to commission Paul and Barnabas to a work of establishing a network of churches in the eastern Mediterranean. The formal nature of the relation of these delegates to the Antiochene church is evident in the ceremonious commission they receive at the outset (νηστεύσαντες καὶ προσευξάμενοι καὶ ἐπιθέντες τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῖς ἀπέλυσαν, 13:3), the restatement of their commission by the church upon their return to Antioch (ὅθεν ἦσαν παραδεδομένοι τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὃ ἐπλήρωσαν, 14:26), their establishment of leadership in the congregations after the same manner as their commission in Antioch (14:23), and the designation of both Barnabas and Paul as ἀπόστολοι on account of their having received this formal commission (14:4, 14).¹⁰ In these actions the importance of the relationship of the church in Antioch to the newly established communities in Asia is evident.

It is therefore unsurprising, though no less significant, that when Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch after this journey, the opening of the “door of faith to the Gentiles” becomes the subject of sermonic announcement to the gathered Antiochene congregation (14:27).¹¹

¹⁰ Pace Holladay, who reads ἀπόστολοι in 14:4, 16, as “missionaries” in distinction from the twelve, and so misses the point that the designation ἀπόστολοι elevates not only the status of these emissaries but that of the church in Antioch who sent them (*Acts*, 283, 288). Luke is not worried that readers will confuse Paul and Barnabas with the twelve; the point is to associate them.

¹¹ The verb ἀναγγέλλω can, of course, imply a simple disclosing of events (e.g. Acts 19:18). However, Luke frequently uses the term, which is closely cognate with the potent εὐαγγελίζω, with a proclamatory meaning, particularly when the entire church is gathered (Acts 20:20, 27; cf. 15:4).

Although Luke gives only a brief account of this report, we should probably imagine this proclamation to include a recounting of the actual experiences of Paul and Barnabas among the newly founded churches and their faith, just as Peter recounts the events in Caesarea in Jerusalem and as Paul and Barnabas proclaim the conversion of the Gentiles among the churches of Phoenicia and Samaria, “bringing great joy to all the brethren” (15:3). The trans-geographic relations established through these missionary efforts and their subsequent recounting have an enduring character, for after the Jerusalem council Paul initiates a second visit: “Come, let us return and *visit* (ἐπισκευώμεθα) the brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how it is with them” (15:36). The verb ἐπισκέπτεσθαι is appropriate for a simple “visit,” but the term here carries overtones of care and provision, since we hear only a few verses later that Paul and Silas are going through Syria and Cilicia “strengthening the churches” (15:41).¹² This concern of the Christians in one region to know about the health of the churches in distant locales is likewise present in the account of Paul’s last arrival in Jerusalem, where to James and the elders he explains “one by one the things God had done through him among the gentiles” (21:19). A significant feature of the ecclesiology of Acts, then, is that the church is a trans-regional entity whose members have a stake in one another. To demonstrate this feature of early Christian social existence, Luke portrays the repeated travel of news-bearing representatives in an emerging network of Christian communities living in self-conscious relationship to one another.¹³

¹² This is one of Luke’s favorite ways of referring to the pastoral work of church leaders (see also Acts 14:22, 15:32, 16:5, 18:23). The calling to strengthen the church originates, in Luke’s narrative, with the special responsibility Peter seems to have toward the rest of the apostles (or perhaps the church generally) at Lk 22:32.

¹³ Jacob Jervell has argued, drawing primarily on Paul’s letters (e.g. Rom 1:8), that news about the faith of geographically distant churches was part of early Christian preaching: “Reports of the deeds of the apostles and the faith of the congregation had their place in the life of the church, precisely in the proclamation. And it is important to note that neither legend-making nor historical-biographical, but rather kerygmatic motives were decisive.” See Jacob Jervell, “The Problem of Traditions in Acts,” in *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 28. If Jervell is correct, Acts’ portrayal of traveling emissaries sharing news among

The Communion of Material Life

Lukan scholarship has devoted substantial attention to Luke’s vision of a radical communitarian social ethic.¹⁴ In Acts this ethic is intrinsically connected to a fundamental social cohesion in the early church. Even before Pentecost, Luke tells us that the community of disciples were “devoting themselves to unity in prayer” (προσκατεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν τῇ προσευχῇ, 1:14; cf. 4:24). After Pentecost we hear the same phrase again: “they were daily devoting themselves to unity in the temple (προσκατεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ), breaking bread in their houses and sharing meals in gladness and singleness of heart” (2:46).¹⁵ This unity, as is well known, has a strong material aspect: “All who believed were united and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had need” (2:44-45). A similar summary at 4:32-35 indicates the surprising social effect of this sharing and redistribution: “They held everything in common...and great grace was upon them all, for there was not a poor person among them” (4:32, 34). This unity of life in the Jerusalem community is a microcosm of the wider trans-geographic unity among the various regional churches, charted above.

the growing congregations—and Luke’s own narration of the expanding network of churches—may be part of a wider ecumenical consciousness in early Christianity. Compare the correspondence of Clement in Herm. *Vis.* 8:3.

¹⁴ See Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate of Symbol and Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1980); Kyoung-Jin Kim, *Stewardship and Almsgiving in Luke’s Theology*, LNTS 155 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Christopher M. Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics: A Study in their Coherence and Character*, WUNT II 275 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); David Andrew Smith, “‘No Poor Among Them’: Sabbath and Jubilee Years in Lukan Social Ethics,” *HBT* 40 (20): 142-165.

¹⁵ The repetition of the phrase προσκατεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν in 1:14 and 2:46 is obscured by the NRSV’s rendering of the former with respect to the dative phrase τῇ προσευχῇ (“they were constantly devoting themselves to prayer”). While προσκατερέω often functions a dative phrase to describe the object of devotion or perseverance (as at 2:42, where prayer is one such object), the only object at 2:46 is ὁμοθυμαδόν. The parallel between the two summaries and Luke’s special preference for ὁμοθυμαδόν as a descriptor of community life (so also 5:12, 8:6, 15:25) suggest that, at 1:14, prayer is a feature of the church’s unified gathering, not its sole concern.

In fact, the community of life in the Jerusalem community already includes a trans-regional component, as it includes “devout Jews from every nation under heaven” who are baptized after Peter’s sermon (2:5, 41). This Diaspora component is symbolically present in the person of Barnabas the Levite, the only named individual who exemplifies the practice of communal redistribution. Though identified by Luke as “a Cyprian by race” (4:36), he is part of the Jerusalem congregation (see 9:27, 11:22) and sells property, possibly in Cyprus, in order to support the community (4:36-37).¹⁶ In this transfer of Diaspora wealth, Barnabas’ action anticipates the collection by the church in Antioch to send famine relief to the Judean Christians, a gift which he also mediates, together with Saul (11:27-30). By relieving the poverty of the church in Judea, the church in Antioch acts in a manner consistent with the communitarian ethic of the Jerusalem congregation, and through this material sharing the unity of life between of the two churches, with two very different constituencies, is made manifest (cf. Rom 15:25-27). Thus, on level of both inter- and intra-community relations, the sharing of material goods is a means of cementing the basic conviction that “all who believe are united” (Acts 2:44).

Various other instances of an ethic of communal sharing serve to illuminate Luke’s concern to portray a church united in a common life. The Lukan Paul, in his parting words to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, appears to be something of an evangelist for an ethic grounded in an otherwise unattested saying of Jesus that “it is better to give than to receive” (20:35). Paul’s own example of helping the poor through the work of a tradesman is offered as a way of life that will help to build up the fledgling church and which may forestall coming disunity in the community brought about by “savage wolves” (20:30). Tabitha’s devotion to “good works and acts of charity” serve to gather a community of widows and “saints,” who, at her death who recount her

¹⁶ See Haenchen, *Acts*, 232.

virtuous way of life and who, after her surprising resurrection, appear to become the agents of an additional ingathering of believers in the city of Joppa (9:36-42). In a similar way, individuals and churches in various cities show hospitality to itinerant apostles and teachers and so further the growth of the network of inter-connected churches (18:27, 21:17, 24:23, 27:3, 28:14). These essential benefactors are often mentioned without introduction or explanation; it simply appears to be assumed that belonging to a Christian community involves supporting those with a similar faith who come from elsewhere—sometimes for years (so 24:23, 27). In this way the practices that facilitate unity appears to sprout up spontaneously, as it were, among the communities where the word of God spreads.

If images of unity and the sharing of resources are central to in Luke’s portrayal of the growth of the church, it is remarkable that the author gives attention to deviation from that vision in the Jerusalem community. As with the story of Ananias and Saphira (5:1-11), the conflict between the Hellenists and the Hebrews in 6:1-6 appears to function negatively, setting up a problem to which Acts will chart the solution. Whereas the deception of Ananias and Saphira and the consequent divine judgement against them is individual, the problem facing the congregation at 6:1 is communal, and, accordingly, so is the solution.¹⁷ The complaint that the widows among the Hellenists are being neglected in preference to those of the Hebrews is met with a decision of the twelve apostles, with the agreement of the gathered community, to delegate the task of distribution to “seven trustworthy men, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (6:3). The task of selecting these seven, however, appears to have been entrusted not to the

¹⁷ On the historical character of this controversy and its consequences, see Todd C. Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004); Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Marcel Simon, *St. Stephen and the Hellenists in the Primitive Church* (London/New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1958).

community *simpliciter* but especially to the Hellenists who have been underrepresented.

Admittedly, this exegetical judgment is not required, for the twelve speak in the presence of the “multitude of disciples” in 6:2.¹⁸ But the directness of the apostles’ answer is easily intelligible as a focused answer to the “grumbling” of the Hellenists that first voiced the dispute (6:1):

“Choose, then, brothers, *from among yourselves* seven men who are trustworthy...”

(ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἑπτὰ, 6:3). The whole point of the apostolic arbitration, it would seem, is that that certain persons already in charge of the distribution have not been entirely trustworthy in the sight of the whole church. And it is from the Hellenists, or at least those with Hellenistic sympathies, it seems, that the seven are chosen, for they all have Greek names and one, Nicolas, is explicitly referred to as a proselyte from Antioch (6:5). The recognition of the giftings of these persons and their formal designation by the apostles is particularly noteworthy in view of the marginal status of Hellenistic Jews in the church at this point in Luke’s narrative. Even after the acceptance of Cornelius and the Copernican shift of perspective it brings about in Jerusalemite Christianity, those who go out from the Jerusalem church at 11:19 spread the gospel message only among “Jews”—that is, Hebrews.¹⁹ Eventually Diaspora Jews carry the message of Jesus to the Hellenists of Antioch

¹⁸ So C.K. Barrett, “You, the πλῆθος are to search out the right men,” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols, ICC [Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1994/1998] 1:313). If this is right, then the congregation itself has shown the deference to the Hellenists, since all hail from that group (so Holladay, *Acts*, 154-55).

¹⁹ At 6:1 the contrast is between Hellenists and Ἑβραῖοι, whereas at 11:19-20 it is between Hellenists and Ἰουδαῖοι. At 11:20, Haenchen prefers Ἕλληνας (P⁷⁴, κ² A D*) to Ἕλληνιστας (B D² E Ψ 1739), since the contrast with Jews requires a term that means “Gentiles” (*Acts*, 365). Yet it is difficult to understand why Ἕλληνας, if original, should have been modified to Ἕλληνιστας, whereas the opposite scribal tendency would be prompted by knowledge of the frequent duality (*Acts* 14:1, 18:4, 19:10, 17, 20:21; *Rom* 1:16, 10:12, et al). Holladay (*Acts*, 244) employs the same interpretive logic as Haenchen, though retaining Ἕλληνιστας and deciding it carries the meaning of Greek-speaking non-Jews, following Barrett (*Acts*, 1:550-552). These interpretations of 11:19 rely upon the faulty logic that Ἰουδαῖος has the same sense for Luke as the English term “Jew” has today. But, as Shemaryu Talmon has observed, Ἰουδαῖος could refer not simply to “Jews” but to those Second Temple Israelites who identified with a particular social class in Jerusalem, thus carrying a much narrower socio-cultural significance at the time Luke wrote. Accordingly, a term like Ἕλληνιστης, when contrasted with Ἰουδαῖος, may not mean “non-Jew.” We may have to do at 11:19-20 with cultural differences within Judaism (as within the Christian segment of Judaism

(11:20), but the Christian movement, as a whole, is hesitant to embrace this more liberal wing of Judaism in Acts. From this perspective, it is not surprising that Christian Hellenists in Jerusalem were viewed with suspicion by their Hebrew brethren, for the cultural divide over Hellenism within Judaism had deep roots.²⁰ In terms of Luke's presentation of the controversy, the acknowledgement that cultural difference could and did lead to division in the early church is coordinated with the conviction that such divisions must be overcome and that the resolution to such problems consisted in the recognition and empowerment of leadership from the ranks of the marginalized. In this way, the controversy between the Hellenists and Hebrews functions as a sort of converse to the situation facing the church of Antioch at the time of the Judean famine. Whereas the church at Antioch sent material support as a means of affirming and strengthening ecumenical relations with Jerusalem, the rupture of material communion in the Jerusalem community could only be mended by restorative actions that enabled better recognition of a vulnerable cultural minority. The point here as throughout Acts is that the church's true identity is lived out in a communion of life that cannot be limited by existing geographical, ethnic, or cultural divisions.

Negotiation of Difference through Conciliar Deference

A third practice which, through Luke's attention to it, marks Acts as distinctively concerned with ecumenical relations in the early church is the deliberative negotiation of

at 6:1) and, therefore, among those Jews to whom the scattered Jewish Christians took the gospel—perhaps an enduring legacy of the social difference that sparked the dispute at Acts 6:1. See Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Emergency of Jewish Sectarianism in the Early Second Temple Period," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 587-616; cf. Daniel Boyarin, "What Kind of a Jew is an Evangelist?" in *Those Outside: Non-Canonical Readings of the Canonical Gospels*, ed. George Aichele and Richard Walsh, (New York/London: T&T Clark, 2005), 109-153.

²⁰ See, e.g. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981), 255-309.

ecclesial difference. As we have observed, Luke is not afraid to describe realities of difference in the early Christian movement. At times, as in Acts 6:1-7, the narration of difference provides the opportunity to show how a conflict was resolved so that the church flourished even more (6:7). In this instance, an inequality between two bodies is mediated by the twelve apostles, who consult with the aggrieved group and the entire congregation (παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους, 6:5) before publicly affirming a minority constituency through a structural change that redistributes responsibility toward the pursuit of a harmonious congregational life. But not all differences among Christians are the same in Acts; there are various strategies by which Luke's main characters engage the diversity within the movement.

One strategy is the straightforward correction of some characters by others. For example, Luke's portrayal of the Christian community in Ephesus includes the presence of a body of disciples of John the Baptist, who are in some way deficient in their understanding of Jesus. Among these Apollos is most the notable, both because Luke singles him out by name and, particularly, because he is praised despite his theological shortcomings. He is "an eloquent man, learned in the scriptures...instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke fervently in the Spirit and taught accurately the things of Jesus" (ἐδίδασκεν ἀκριβῶς τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 18:25).²¹ But since he knows only the baptism of John he must be taken aside by Priscilla and Aquilla and have things explained to him even more accurately (προσελάβοντο αὐτὸν καὶ ἀκριβέστερον αὐτῷ ἐξέθεντο τὴν ὁδὸν, 18:26). A similar scene obtains when Paul returns to Ephesus in 19:1 and finds roughly a dozen followers of John who are ignorant of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit; a simple explanation results in their baptism and an outpouring of the Spirit (19:1-7). Here as well, difference is resolved through theological assimilation—or what Luke would probably call

²¹ The phrase ζέων τῷ πνεύματι ἐλάλει suggests that Apollos, unlike the disciples of John at 19:2, is not simply animated by "burning enthusiasm" (NRSV) but has received the Spirit. See Holladay, *Acts*, 361.

correction. A noteworthy feature of this picture of theological diversity is the lack of any reproach against the characters of those who, in Luke's view, hold inferior theological outlooks. But neither is there any notion of theological parity between the early Apollos and the disciples of John, on the one hand, and the most accurate teaching of Priscilla, Aquilla, and Paul on the other. There is, instead, a single way, regarding which one's understanding may be more or less accurate (cf. Lk 1:4). Accordingly, a right understanding of "the things of Jesus" is not equally shared among all members of the church. It is therefore necessary to consider how Acts portrays the adjudication of conflicting theological positions.

It is perhaps natural that we should approach this question by seeking to determine where "authority" in the church is located according to Acts. But a survey of Luke's 23 uses of the term of ἐξουσία reveals that the term is notably absent from the contexts in which key ecclesial decisions are made. In fact, it would seem that, according to Luke, neither the church nor its leaders are in possession of ἐξουσία; this is the property of God/Jesus alone (Acts 1:7; cf. Lk 4:32, 36; 5:24).²² Humans in Acts who claim or seek ἐξουσία for themselves are working contrary to the purposes of God (Acts 8:19, 9:14, 26:10, 12) and may be under the influence of Satan (Acts 5:3-4; cf. Lk 4:6, Acts 26:18). The concept of "authority" (ἐξουσία) as the etymologies of the English and Greek words indicate, tends to involve an independence and assertion of the self over against rival, constraining powers. But in Luke's theological grammar, there is no human power that is not fundamentally dependent upon God, no human *ousia* that is

²² Three exceptions here prove this point: the twelve apostles are given authority to cast out demons and heal diseases (Lk 9:1) and to tread on snakes and scorpions (Lk 10:19), and faithful slaves in the parable of the pounds are promised the reward of "authority over cities" in the age to come (Lk 19:17). But disciples are not given authority over one another or over the church in the present life. Though they "will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes" (Lk 22:30), this responsibility is given to a *plurality* of persons, whose status is pointedly derivative: "I confer on you, as my Father has conferred on me," 22:29). The relation of the apostles to authority is therefore akin to that communicated in the language of the faithful centurion of Lk 7:1-10, who describes himself as a man not *with* but "*under* authority," despite the obvious fact that a charge is entrusted to him (Lk 7:8; cf. Acts 10:26).

the source of its own strength and wisdom (cf. Acts 17:28). It is true Luke recognizes that a special weight attaches to the leadership of the twelve apostles as a group, to the perspectives of particular leaders like Peter, Paul, and James, and to the corporate consensus of the churches, especially the Jerusalem church. But as the very plurality of these sources of guidance suggests, none of the human luminaries in Acts, whether individual or corporate, are sufficient or authoritative in themselves. And yet their wisdom is heeded in various ways as the church wrestles with its questions, as though moved by a conviction that God is at work in these various loci of human deliberation. What is interesting here is not so much that, in Acts, the characters think that God is operative among them—for that is a widespread and fundamental early Christian conviction—but that the adjudication of ecclesial discord depends upon *deference* to the various nodes of inspiration in the growing network of the ecumenical church.²³ As we consider several key scenes from Acts, the appropriateness of deference, rather than authority, as a term that designates the negotiation of ecclesial difference will become evident.²⁴

One of the most striking features of the story of Cornelius is how much of a surprise the whole affair is to Peter and the Jerusalem church. Although, as we have observed, Peter's presence in Caesarea is required for Cornelius' reception into the church, Peter himself is resistant to the heavenly instruction to "not regard as unclean what God has cleansed" (Acts 10:14). His threefold refusal to follow divine the divine command underscores for the reader that the mission to the gentiles originates not with any human vision (whether Petrine or Pauline) but with God's prerogative, to which Peter defers. This deference to God also involves a kind of

²³ Paul himself articulates a willingness to present his gospel to Jerusalem, "lest I should be running in vain" (Gal 2:2). Paul is, however, far more straightforward in naming his own authority; see 1Cor 9:12, 18; 2Cor 13:10.

²⁴ On the contribution of Acts to conceptions of authority in the history of the church, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 170-178.

deference to Cornelius, for Peter's perspective, upon arrival in Caesarea, is one that disavows any favoritism in God, declaring that "among every nation the one who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him" (10:35).²⁵ The propriety of this view is clear when the Spirit descends upon Cornelius and his house, an action which Peter will later describe as God's own recognition of these gentiles: "God, who knows the heart, by giving them the Spirit *bore witness to them*" (ἐμαρτύρησεν αὐτοῖς, 15:8). As the repeated recounting of Peter's discovery in Caesarea in Acts 11 and 15 indicates, this is the essential argument for the inclusion of gentiles: God has worked, and where God's work is evident, it requires recognition.

But it is not as though the word of God came only to Caesarea. The connection between Jerusalem and Caesarea implicit in the story of Peter's visit requires that God's work among the gentiles be acknowledged by the Jewish church in Jerusalem. This need for acknowledgment is evident when Peter, observing the manifestations of the Spirit in Caesarea, addresses the astounded "believers from the circumcision," asking "whether anyone can withhold the water of baptism from these who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (10:47).²⁶ Although the obvious answer is no, Peter's question indicates that admission into the church is not a private affair but, as it involves a common life, requires the assent of Jerusalem. When Peter returns to Jerusalem, therefore, he is nonplussed by the criticism of his fellow Jewish Christians and gives a patient, orderly account all that occurred in Caesarea (11:4), eventually gaining their recognition of the work of God in Caesarea: "They glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has given to the gentiles also the repentance unto life'" (11:18).

²⁵ The reader has been prepared for Peter's recognition of Cornelius by Luke's own recognition of the centurion's piety, which consists, in part, in Cornelius' own deference to Jewish religion: "he gave many alms to the people" (10:2; cf. the description of a similar figure at Lk 7:4-5). Such piety receives the recognition (μνημόσυνον) of heaven (10:4).

²⁶ The identification of Peter's associates as those ἐκ περιτομῆς πιστοί in 10:45 anticipates the circumcision controversy, perhaps identifying these Christian Jews, to whom Peter appeals at 10:47, as the sort that will call for full Torah submission in Antioch.

The responsibility felt by the Jerusalem church toward the missionary work in Caesarea (whether initially suspicious or finally doxological) anticipates Jerusalem's concern to appraise the rapid growth of a community of believers in Antioch.²⁷ When, scattered by persecution, Cyprians and Cyrenians from Jerusalem convert a large number of Hellenists in Antioch, "word of these [Hellenists] was heard in the ears of the church in Jerusalem," the church sends Barnabas the Cyprian to investigate the situation in Antioch (11:22).²⁸ Barnabas discovers nothing but "the grace of God" among the Antiochene Hellenistic Christians, and so he makes no remonstrations against these believers but rather rejoices and urges the congregation to "remain devoted in heart to the Lord" (11:23).²⁹ Here Barnabas follows the pattern of Peter and the Jerusalem congregation with regard to Cornelius and anticipates the discussion of gentile status in Acts 15, in which the surprising act of God in a distant locale becomes the cause for rejoicing and ecclesial deference. But beyond simply recognizing the work of God in Antioch, Jerusalem's emissary to the Antiochene church has the far-sighted wisdom to locate Paul in Tarsus, also experienced among Hellenists (cf. 9:29), and bring him to Antioch for an extended period of fruitful ministry (11:25-26). In this way the Jerusalem church, through Barnabas, actively furthers the "grace of God" in a congregation of a markedly different cultural and theological character.³⁰

²⁷ The same sense of ecclesial responsibility appears when, upon hearing of conversions in Samaria, the church sends Peter and John to that region (Acts 8:14-25).

²⁸ However we understand the evangelism of the Hellenists at 11:20, the church in Antioch very soon included gentiles; see the discussion of John Meier in *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*, ed. Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 11-86. As a native of Cyprus, the same region from which some of those who evangelized Antioch came, Barnabas is a natural liaison between the two communities.

²⁹ The call to remain faithful (τῇ προθέσει τῆς καρδίας προσμένειν τῷ κυρίῳ) may reflect the worry of the Jerusalem congregation that these Hellenistic Jews (and perhaps gentiles) are prone, through inattention to Torah observance, to a lapsing religious life. If so, Barnabas' exhortation thus retains the Jerusalem viewpoint that the gentiles have hearts that need to be "cleansed by faith" (15:9).

³⁰ Douglas Campbell has recently argued that Paul's revelation regarding the Torah-free nature of the mission to the gentiles occurred in the midst of this work in Antioch (cf. Gal 1:12). If this is correct, it might help to make sense of the transition from a largely Hellenistic Jewish congregation (for this is all that is implied in the

Theological differences over Torah observance between Jerusalem and Antioch were not to be resolved, however, without a fight, and Paul and Barnabas have “no small dissention and debate” with the “certain people” who come unbidden from the Jerusalem church with a message requiring Torah observance (15:1-2). Despite the fact that these Jerusalem emissaries create a disruptive controversy in Antioch (cf. 15:24), the church there does not envision breaking relations with Jerusalem but instead, in deference to its now historic relationship to that church, appoints a formal delegation (ἔταξαν ἀναβαίνειν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβᾶν καὶ τινὰς ἄλλους ... [οἱ] προπεμφθέντες ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, 15:2-3) to deliberate with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. That is, although Antioch possessed spirited and powerful teachers united in their opposition to Gentile Torah-observance, the Antiochene Christians nonetheless desired the involvement of the Jerusalem congregation. That the request for consultation arises from Antioch and not from Jerusalem underscores the reality that independence from Jerusalem was a real possibility, and yet it is not the route that Antioch chose. The bond of unity with the Jerusalem Christians must have been too great to hazard a parting of the ways at Antioch.

If the church in Antioch acts in deference to its relation to Jerusalem, seeking counsel and agreement rather than independence, the Jerusalem church responds in kind. The Antiochene delegates, whose teaching regarding Torah observance was a matter of dispute in Jerusalem, is warmly received by the Jerusalem leaders, who give Paul and Barnabas a careful hearing, both after an initial greeting and in the presence of the multitude that gathers in silence to consider the matter in dispute (15:4, 12). The deference shown to Paul and Barnabas is, Luke emphasizes, not a recognition of authority attached to their persons but a careful consideration of how God has been at work in them:

preaching to Hellenists) to one that includes gentiles (so Acts 15:23). See Douglas Campbell, “Beyond the Torah at Antioch: The Probable Locus for Paul’s Radial Transition,” *JSPL* 4 No.2 (Fall 2014): 187-214.

When they came to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they related all that God had done with them.

παραγενόμενοι δὲ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ παρεδέχθησαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ἀνήγγειλάν τε ὅσα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν μετ’ αὐτῶν. (15:4)

And the whole multitude was silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul explaining all the signs and wonders that God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Εσίγησεν δὲ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ ἤκουον Βαρναβᾶ καὶ Παύλου ἐξηγουμένων ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν δι’ αὐτῶν. (15:12)

As we observed with regard to Peter’s initial reluctance to welcome gentiles (cf. 10:28), the source and authority of the gentile mission is consistently portrayed as originating in the work of God, even if this work is only slowly recognized among the churches and their leaders.

It would appear that, according to Luke, God is particularly patient with the deliberations of the churches. The testimony of the divine work in Antioch and abroad is insufficient in itself in light of the perspective voiced among the Pharisaic contingent of the Jerusalem church—a perspective for which there was a strong argument (cf. Gen 17:9-14). Accordingly, the question is not quickly solved (from the reader’s perspective it has been brewing since Acts 10), and there is “much debate” (15:7).³¹ It is highly significant that, in this debate, there is no opprobrium

³¹ Nils Dahl rightly observes the strangeness of this protraction: “the whole narrative moves toward salvation for the Gentiles as its goal; it is therefore all the more remarkable that so much space and attention is devoted to covering the rear against Jewish objections and accusations” (Nils Alstrup Dahl, “The Purpose of Luke-Acts,” in *Jesus and the Memory of the Early Church* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976], 95.) This “space and attention” is conceivable if, as Brawley has argued, Luke is seeking to persuade those with “Jewish objections and accusations.” See Robert L. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation*, SBLMS 33 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

against the character of the Christian Pharisees who advocate for full Torah observance among gentiles. They are not “false brethren” (cf. Gal 2:4) or “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (cf. Mt 7:15) but simply “believers from the sect of the Pharisees” (τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες, Acts 15:5). Thus, although their position will not win the day, the council hears them as it does the others, listening patiently in what we may therefore think of as a deference directed toward to the entire assembly. Although the eventual decision is articulated by Peter and James, it is the plurality of consensus—a confluence of mutual deferences—that is decisive. The authoritative decision comes from “the apostles and elders together with *all the church*” (ὅλη τῆ ἐκκλησία, 15:22), who have, after an extended deliberation “become of one accord” (γενομένοις ὁμοθυμαδὸν, 15:25). In this decision, the priority of God’s action in leading the church, which recognizes and defers ultimately to God, is clearly stated: “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν, 15:28).

Yet it remains the case, despite this consensus-seeking deference toward God and one another, that Acts presents certain “pillars” among the church (cf. Gal 2:9), individuals whose voices carry special weight. Although all accounts of Peter’s experience with Cornelius emphasize the priority of God’s action (cf. 15:14, πρῶτον ὁ θεός), nevertheless Peter himself is recognized as a trustworthy witness to divine action: “Rising up, Peter said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God chose among you that through *my mouth* the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe” (15:7).³² Though Paul and Barnabas have the more extensive and recent experience in Antioch and have just spoken to the assembly in 15:12, neither Luke nor James pay as much direct attention to their words as to the earlier testimony of Peter: “After they [Paul and Barnabas] were silent, James answered, “Brethren, listen to me,

³² The introduction of this speech with ἀναστὰς Πέτρος in 15:7 echoes earlier speeches in Acts in which Peter’s voice has been the decisive witness to God’s action (Acts 1:15, 2:14).

Simeon has related...” (15:13-14). To the weighty account of Peter James adds his own interpretation of scripture and consequent judgement that the church should impose only a modest set of Torah requirements upon the gentiles in its ambit (15:15-21). This is hardly a “decree” by the brother of Jesus, for, as we have seen, the church reaches a functional unanimity, but it is James whose voice sways the church toward a position that, it would seem, conciliates the Christian Pharisees and, to some extent perhaps, their biblical argument.³³

The prominence of James in Acts and in early Christianity generally is striking given the absence of any warrant given for his place in the earliest sources.³⁴ His importance in the Jerusalem church seems to have been a historical *de facto*, enabled no doubt by his status as the “brother of the Lord” (Gal 1:19). The deference shown to him by the church in Acts, like that shown to Peter, first of the apostles, suggests an attitude of reverence toward those closest to Jesus. Here we may observe the growing influence of a principle of tradition, according to which what is most original carries a special authority (cf. 1Cor 15:3). The fact that the reverence for tradition is directed toward key individuals may support the argument of Alistair Stewart that the office of a single bishop is of greater antiquity than has been realized in much modern scholarship.³⁵ But, as we have seen, the authority of the Jerusalem council is found in the church’s mutual deference to one another in response to God’s prior action, which, as James’

³³ On the application of only those laws pertaining to gentiles as an alternative halakhic route to the Christian Pharisees’ imposition of the whole Torah, see Holladay, *Acts* 302-304.

³⁴ The only New Testament warrant for the special status of James is, perhaps, a resurrection appearance made to him, mentioned in passing at 1Cor 15:7. See John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

³⁵ Alistair C. Stewart, *The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 11-54.

reflections demonstrate, is itself understood in deference to the even more ancient voice of scripture (Acts 15:15-18; cf. Amos 9:11-12).³⁶

The Ecumenism of Acts in Theology and History

The prominence given to James may have a particular purpose in Luke's narrative.³⁷ As Acts suggests and as later Jewish Christian writings make clear, James was held in high regard among some Jewish followers of Jesus.³⁸ However, murky may be our understanding of the historical context in which Acts was written, the competing legacies of James and Paul are perhaps not irrelevant for assessing Luke's purpose in portraying the Jerusalem decision. Among the Christians who speak in support of the Torah-free inclusion of gentiles, it is James' position that is closest to that of the Christian Pharisees. Paul then becomes a champion of James' affirmation of an enduring value of the Torah among Gentiles (16:4), and he and his gospel are thereby given a place in the hierarchy of Christian tradition, as it might have been understood from a Jewish Christian perspective. This subsumption of Paulinism within a tradition emanating from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish Christianity, may be part of an "early Catholicism," but it may also be part of a rhetorical tactic aimed at persuading Christian Pharisees—or those who think like Christian Pharisees—in the church of Luke's day. Perhaps it was among such Christians that Luke sought to alleviate the worry that Paul may have instructed

³⁶ On the contemporary relevance of the combination of theological openness and ecumenical connection in the early church, see Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Eugene, OR; Wipf & Stock, 2008), 97-127.

³⁷ The same may be true of Peter, whom James refers to with the Hebrew name *Symeon* at 15:14, reminding readers that this dialogue is between two Palestinian Jews and perhaps evoking a symbolic connection to tribe of that name and, more fundamentally, to Israel. See Holladay, *Acts*, 301.

³⁸ See especially Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 1.27-71; cf. Graham Stanton, "Jewish Christian Elements in the Pseudo-Clementine Writings," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 317-323.

the Jews living among the gentiles to apostatize from Moses, circumcision, and Jewish custom (Acts 21:21). By advising Paul to demonstrate publicly his solidarity with temple worship in Jerusalem (21:20-24), the Lukan James seeks to moderate his negative image among the myriads of believers among the Jews, just as in Acts 15 he seeks to draw continuity between the liberties of Antioch and the more conservative piety of Jerusalem.³⁹ If Acts 15 was written with a view toward addressing issues that remained pertinent at the time of Luke's writing, the mediating figure of James, whose word seems to end all debate, would appear to stand in the spotlight precisely because of James' appeal among those who, as Baur rightly understood, traced their theological Christian heritage to Jerusalem. The deftness of Luke's appeal, however, consists not in a simple claim to authority but in the commendation of a way of being in relation to the wider church of God, a way of recognition in which tradition and divine innovation may be found, at length, to agree.

³⁹ This seems to be Luke's distinctive contribution to Paul's legacy, as indicated in his sustained apology for Paul's innocence of the charge of maligning or distorting Judaism throughout his speeches in Acts (22:1-4, 26:22, 28:17-20). On Luke's apology for Paul, see the essays in Moessner, Marguerat, Parsons, and Wolter, eds., *Paul and the Heritage of Israel*, 117-192.