

Theology and Ecclesiology in the Miletus Speech: Reflections on Content and Context*

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Paul's address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 stands at the center of an extended treatment of the internal life of the church (20.1–21.17), and constitutes Luke's last portrait of the believing community. In this section, scenes of community life (20.7–12, 17–38; 21.8–14) alternate with travel episodes (20.1–6, 13–16; 21.1–7, 15–17) to show the relationship among groups of believers scattered around the Aegean and back to Caesarea. The resulting portrait of believing communities echoes some important features of the early descriptions of community life in Jerusalem. In this larger literary context, the speech to the Ephesian elders takes on a different appearance from its usual characterization as the farewell address of Luke's hero, Paul. The speech repeatedly connects the church to God, introducing Luke's larger themes of God's plan, the action of the Holy Spirit, and the instruction of Jesus himself. These features show that the church's future, in Luke's view, has less to do with its imitation of Paul than with its relationship to the God who calls it into being.

Paul's address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus is unique in Acts as the only speech Paul directs to an audience of disciples.¹ Perhaps for that reason, scholarly treatments of the speech attend primarily to questions of Paul and the church. The main questions in the secondary literature concern the literary analysis of the speech, its value for understanding the relationship between the Lukan Paul and that of the letters, and its possible contribution to reconstructing the

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¹ Acts 15.11 might be regarded as an exception, since Paul and Barnabas address the assembly in Jerusalem, but no account is given of the content of those remarks. Even when other speakers are included, the number of speeches addressed to believers throughout Acts remains quite small. Marion L. Soards's analysis of the speeches, which includes almost all instances of direct address, includes as speeches addressed to an audience of disciples only 1.4b–5, 7–8, 11, 16–22; 6.2b–4; 11.5–17; 15.7b–11, 13b–21; 20.18b–35; 21.11b–c, 13b–c, 20b–25 (*The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994]).

setting of Luke's own congregation.² This paper attempts to expand the discussion, by examining the larger literary context of the speech, a context that draws the scattered Christian communities around the Aegean into a fellowship that resembles Luke's portrait of the early community in Jerusalem. When read in that literary context, the Miletus speech has less to do with Paul and his legacy than it does with the church as God's own creation.³

Acts 20.1–21.17 as building up of the church

Following the riot at Ephesus, Paul undertakes his final journey to Jerusalem in a section of Acts that begins with 20.1 and ends with 21.17. This entire account deals with what we might refer to as the 'internal' or 'intramural' life of the church.⁴ In this lengthy section, there is no engagement of Paul or other Christian witnesses with non-believers; that is, there is no preaching of an

2 On these questions, see especially Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Henry Greeven; London: SCM, 1956) 155–8; Jacques Dupont, *Le Discours de Milet: Testament Pastoral de Saint Paul* (LD 32; Paris: Cerf, 1962); *idem*, 'La construction du discours de Milet', in *Nouvelles Études sur Les Actes de Apôtres* (Paris: Cerf, 1984) 424–45; Thomas L. Budesheim, 'Paul's *Abschiedsrede* in the Acts of the Apostles', *HTR* 69 (1976) 9–30; C. K. Barrett, 'Paul's Address to the Ephesian Elders', *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl* (ed. Jacob Jervell/Wayne A. Meeks; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 107–21; Lars Aejmelaesus, *Die Rezeption der Paulusbriefe in der Miletrede (Apg 20:18–35)* (AASF; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1987); Duane F. Watson, 'Paul's Speech to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20.18–38): Epideictic Rhetoric of Farewell', *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy* (ed. Duane F. Watson; JSNTSup 50; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991) 184–208; John J. Kilgallen, 'Paul's Speech to the Ephesian Elders: Its Structure', *ETL* 79 (1994) 112–21. For additional bibliography and review of research, see J. Lambrecht, 'Paul's Farewell-Address at Miletus (Acts 20, 17–38)', *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, Rédaction, Théologie* (ed. J. Kremer; BETL 48; Leuven: Leuven University, 1979) 297–306; Steve Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle: The Portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians* (SNTSMS 108; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000) esp. 17–32.

3 This approach operates from the methodological assumption that the attempt to identify Luke's theology must take seriously the narrative character of Acts; see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'Toward a Theology of Acts: Reading and Rereading', *Interpretation* 42 (1988) 146–57. As Walter Hansen observes, 'the speeches gain their meaning from their narrative framework; they also provide a theological foundation for the narrative' (G. Walter Hansen, 'The Preaching and Defense of Paul', *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* [ed. I. Howard Marshall/David Peterson; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998] 296).

4 This is admittedly a difficult distinction to make, since Luke's narrative depicts witnessing as integral to the church's very existence (Luke 24.46–9; Acts 1.8). The Pentecost account closely connects Peter's first witnessing speech (2.14–36) with the portrait of the community's fellowship (2.42–7). It is no less integral to Luke's story that the witnesses encounter resistance (e.g. 4.1–22; 5.17–42; 6.8–15). Nevertheless, this section of Acts is distinctive in its concern for the building up of those who are already believers.

initiatory sort. The previous pattern, beginning in chapter 13, has come to an end, the pattern, that is, according to which Paul preaches, his proclamation generates a divided response, and he flees under duress.⁵ The events of Paul's custody and extended trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea have not yet begun. To be sure, there are strong indications of various sorts that problems lie ahead and there are recollections of past difficulties, but in 20.1–21.17 the characters and the conversations concern those who are already 'disciples', to use the term Luke employs.

This section of disciple-related activities consists of three scenes of community life (the gatherings in Troas, Miletus, and Caesarea respectively) alternating with four accounts of travel:⁶

20.1–6	Travel report
20.7–12	Gathering of believers in Troas
20.13–16	Travel report
20.17–38	Farewell speech in Miletus to Ephesian elders
21.1–7	Travel report
21.8–14	Gathering of believers in Caesarea
21.15–17	Travel report

Commentators agree that a new section of the narrative begins at 20.1, but identifying the conclusion of this section at 21.17 is more controversial. Judgements are roughly divided between those who connect vv. 15–17 with the Jerusalem scene that follows,⁷ and those who connect vv. 15–16 with the preceding narrative and

- 5 E.g. Acts 13.13–52; 14.1–7; 17.1–9. Acts 28.17–28 recalls this pattern, although at Rome it is no longer possible for Paul to flee.
- 6 Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ANTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003) 276. To my knowledge, the analysis closest to this one is that of Charles Talbert, who argues for 20.1–21.26 as the overall unit, which is comprised of four travel summaries (20.1–6, 13–16; 21.1–8a, 15–16 [17]) and four episodes (20.7–12, 17–38; 21.8b–14, 18–26). He does not perceive the theme of community building up for which I am arguing, however. In addition, the break he posits between vv. 26 and 27 is awkward, since it separates the temple riot and Paul's arrest from the passage that explains the hostility to Paul (Charles Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* [New York: Crossroad, 1997] 181–2).
- 7 Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (trans. Bernard Noble/Gerald Shinn; 14th edn; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 607; Jürgen Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (NTD 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985) 311; Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (HTKNT 5; 2 vols; Freiburg: Herder, 1982) 2.306–11; Alfons Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Kapitel 13–28* (ed. Erich Grässer/Karl Kertelge; ÖTK 5/2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1985) 592–9; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (tr. James Limburg/A. Thomas Kraabel/Donald H. Juel; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 179; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992) 373; F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 198; Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 522; C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles XV–XXVIII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) 999.

begin a new unit at v. 17.⁸ For the most part, no reasons are adduced for this decision, although interestingly both Fitzmyer and Witherington connect v. 17 with the scene that follows while acknowledging that the new episode actually begins only with v. 18.⁹

In some sense, 21.15–17 may be regarded as genuinely transitional, linked with the scenes that both precede and follow. Yet the connection between this passage and the events that precede it is strong. V. 15 continues the motif of going to Jerusalem, sounded already in 20.16, 22; 21.4, 11–14. The accompanying disciples from Caesarea also tie this travel report to the Caesarea event immediately prior to it. The warm welcome in Jerusalem (v. 17) signals the end of the journey, but the new scene only begins with v. 18.¹⁰

These three scenes at Troas, Miletus, and Caesarea comprise something of a triptych of community life. Within this structure, the Miletus speech stands as the centerpiece, flanked by the gathering in Troas on the one side and the visit to Caesarea on the other. The attention given to the community in the Troas incident has to do specifically with worship and upbuilding. This is expressed through the breaking of bread, reference to which occurs at both the beginning and end of the story (vv. 7 and 11). In addition, one element in the elusive story of Eutychus is his separation from and subsequent restoration to the community, an element reinforced by the comfort the gathered community derives from his restoration.¹¹

Leaving the Miletus speech for consideration below, the third scene, the one at Caesarea, also highlights the community of disciples (21.8–14). To be sure, Agabus's enacted prophecy in v. 11 draws attention to the individual Paul and points ahead to his future difficulties in Jerusalem, but the context for this prophecy is nevertheless the gathered community of believers. Philip's household

8 F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (3rd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990) 442–3; Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts. Volume 2: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 268; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Narrative Commentaries; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International, 1996) 269; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 692; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) 645; Robert W. Wall, 'The Acts of the Apostles', *The New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; 12 vols; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002) 12.290–1.

9 Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 692; Witherington, *Acts*, 645.

10 So also Philip E. Satterthwaite, 'Acts Against the Background of Classical Rhetoric', *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting. 2: Ancient Literary Setting* (ed. Bruce W. Winter/Andrew D. Clarke; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 349.

11 On the Eutychus story and its ambiguities, see Bernard Trémel, 'À propos d'Actes 20, 7–12: Puissance du thaumaturge ou du témoin?', *RTP* 112 (1980) 359–69; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 247–51; Alan D. Bulley, 'Hanging in the Balance: A Semiotic Study of Acts 20:7–12', *EgT* 25 (1997) 171–88.

provides a setting in which Luke can replay the theme of hospitality among believers.¹² Numerous details indicate that Caesarea is the location of a lively community of believers, including the fact that Philip is identified as ‘the evangelist’, recalling his earlier work in Samaria (8.4–9, 25–40). Luke specifies that Philip’s four daughters are prophets, which recalls the close connection between prophecy and the origins of the community in Jerusalem (2.17–18). The prophetic identification of both the daughters and Agabus demonstrates that prophecy does not arrive at Caesarea with the arrival of Paul.

The exchange between Agabus and Paul contains further indication of the community setting of this event. In response to Agabus’s prophetic act, Luke reports that ‘both we and *the people of that place* exhorted him not to go up to Jerusalem’ (21.12; italics mine).¹³ In addition to underscoring the seriousness of the situation awaiting Paul in Jerusalem, this comment invokes the believing community in Caesarea and its concern for Paul. Perhaps most important, in response to the conflict generated by Agabus’s prophecy, conflict about whether Paul will in fact go to Jerusalem, the final word comes neither from the community nor from Paul. The entire group submits to God’s own will for what is to follow (v. 14).

All three of these scenes draw attention to the gathering of believers, whether for worship (20.7–12), instruction (20.18–35), or prophecy (21.7–14). And they stand out because there has been little counterpart to them since the flight of believers from Jerusalem in 8.2. The two primary exceptions, 11.1–18 and 15.1–35, are given over to questions generated by the inclusion of Gentiles among the ranks of believers. Additionally, 13.1–3 briefly recounts a gathering in Antioch. These exceptions underscore the distinctive character of the community gatherings in 20.1–21.17.

Yet the three events do not, in and of themselves, carry Paul to Jerusalem. There are also the four travel reports that surround them. The presence of such reports is in no way unusual in Acts, to be sure, but these particular accounts are distinctive. The very brief travel reports that appear at earlier junctures in Luke’s narrative simply facilitate transitions between scenes. For example,

8.25 Now when they [Peter and John] had witnessed and spoken the word of the Lord, they went back to Jerusalem, proclaiming the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

9.32 Now while Peter traveled all around, he went down also to the saints living in Lydda.

Even after Paul and Barnabas depart from Antioch by sea, marking what Loveday

¹² Note, for example, the hospitality extended to Peter and his companions at the home of Cornelius (10.48) as well as the actions of Lydia and the Philippian jailer (16.15, 34, 40).

¹³ All translations are my own.

Alexander has recently argued amounts to a bold invasion of Greek cultural space,¹⁴ the travel reports remain slender:

- 13.4 Now, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.
 14.1 Now the same thing happened in Iconium . . .
 15.41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches.

Sometimes the reports are so brief as to give the impression that Paul and his colleagues walk straight from the ship and into the local synagogue, as when they arrive at Pisidian Antioch in 13.14: ‘They left Perga and arrived in Pisidian Antioch, and they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.’¹⁵

Within the narrative of Paul’s journey to Jerusalem (20.1–21.17), by contrast, Luke provides far more detail. Here he frequently indicates how much time elapses either in specific journeys or between them (as at 20.3, 6, 15; 21.1, 4). He explains how the taking on of cargo required the longer stay in Tyre (21.3). He reports on Paul’s encouragement of disciples in various locations and the anguished concern of those disciples for Paul (20.2, 36–8; 21.12–13). Most important, Luke identifies seven men who join Paul, several of whom have not previously appeared in the story. These new companions come from locations spread across the territory of Paul’s witness.¹⁶ This account will seem slender when compared with Paul’s later journey to Rome, of course, but there Luke narrates a single sustained voyage, complete with storm and shipwreck. Here the detail often seems extraneous and prompts the question of why Luke draws attention to it.¹⁷

To be sure, these travel reports fall within the sections of Acts narrated in the first person plural, the infamous ‘we’ narrative, but in itself that fact cannot account for the presence of the additional detail. The previous ‘we’ passage in chapter 16 does not include so many particulars. The crossing into Macedonia involves a spare itinerary, with ‘we’ traveling from Troas to Samothrace to

14 Loveday Alexander, ‘“In Journeyings Often”: Voyaging in the Acts of the Apostles and in Greek Romance’, *Luke’s Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (ed. C. M. Tuckett; JSNTSup 116; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995) 17–40.

15 Haenchen, *Acts*, 407; Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 197.

16 Sometimes these new companions are understood to be Paul’s escorts for the delivery of the collection for Jerusalem (Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 167; Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 355; Barrett, *Acts*, 947). Despite the importance of the collection in Paul’s letters (e.g. Rom 15.25–8; 1 Cor 16.1–4; 2 Cor 8–9; Gal 2.10), however, Luke has virtually nothing to say about it, apart from the doubtful reference in 24.17, making it difficult to relate these companions to the collection (so also Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 498).

17 A comment by R. B. Rackham about the seven traveling companions applies equally well to many of the details in the travel reports: ‘From the historian’s point of view the detailed movements of the various delegates were not of any consequence: it is sufficient to know that the party was finally made up at Troas. What S. Luke wanted was to give us a picture of Paul and his company to form a companion picture to the Seven of ch. vi 5’ (R. B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* [London: Methuen & Co., 1901] 375).

Neapolis on the following day and then to Philippi (16.11–12). Even if Luke is employing a written source, he could well have pruned at least some of the minutiae.¹⁸ The detailed travel reports in this section of Acts appear to have a function beyond that of chronicling events.

The travel reports also fall within the parallels scholars have long posited between the journeys to Jerusalem undertaken by the Lukan Jesus and by the Lukan Paul.¹⁹ In both cases there is an announcement at the outset that Jesus or Paul will go to Jerusalem (Luke 9.51, 53; Acts 19.21), both repeatedly mention the destination of Jerusalem (Luke 13.22; 17.11; 18.31; 19.11, 28; Acts 20.16, 22; 21.15, 17), and both anticipate that suffering and even death will follow (Luke 13.33; 17.25; 18.31–3; Acts 20.22–4; 21.4, 11–14). One significant difference between the two accounts, however, is that, while the travel section of Luke's Gospel does refer to the destination of Jerusalem, there are few of the specifics such as appear in the travel sections of Acts 20.1–21.17. The comparison reinforces the question of why so much detail emerges at this juncture in the Lukan story.

Neither the first person plural narration nor the parallels with the Lukan account of Jesus explain the alternating pattern of detailed travel reports and scenes of community life. These scenes of community life do not stand as isolated vignettes about ἐκκλησίαι in particular and unrelated places, but are connected by Paul's journey. As Paul travels, narratively speaking, he brings these various communities together. Luke cannot display the entire church gathered in a single space as he does in Jerusalem, where all come together at Pentecost and again following the authorities' release of Peter and John in Acts 4. He does knit the disparate communities together, however, by means of narrating this journey, which

18 For critical surveys of the extensive literature on first person narration in Acts, see Susan Marie Praeder, 'The Problem of First Person Narration in Acts', *NovT* 29 (1987) 193–218; Stanley E. Porter, 'The "We" Passages', *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting. 2: Graeco-Roman Setting* (ed. David W. J. Gill/Conrad Gempf; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994) 545–74; *idem*, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology* (WUNT 115; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) 10–66; and William S. Campbell, 'Who Are We in Acts? The First-Person Plural Character in the Acts of the Apostles' (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000).

19 Parallels between Jesus and Paul have been posited at least since Bruno Bauer (*Die Apostelgeschichte: Eine Ausgleichung des Paulinismus und des Judenthums innerhalb der christlichen Kirche* [Berlin: G. Hempel, 1850]). In recent decades, the two most extensive proposals are those of Charles Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS 20; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1974), and Walter Radl, *Paulus und Jesus im lukanischen Doppelwerk: Untersuchungen zu Parallelmotiven im Lukasevangelium und in der Apostelgeschichte* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 33.49; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1975). Important cautions have been voiced as well: see esp. Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 79; and Susan Marie Praeder, 'Jesus–Paul, Peter–Paul, and Jesus–Peter Parallelisms in Luke–Acts', *SBLSP 1984* (ed. Kent Harold Richards; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1984) 23–39.

displays the connectedness of groups of believers scattered around the Aegean and back to Caesarea.

The combination of travel report and community gathering comprises a portrait of the life of believing communities that echoes some important features of the early descriptions of community life in Jerusalem. At 2.42, Luke characterizes the new community of believers as ‘holding on to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer’. In this extended portrait of community life, Luke shows Paul instructing the gathering at Troas (to the peril of drowsy Eutychus!), as well as speaking to the gathering at Miletus. The breaking of bread recurs, as previously mentioned, framing the story of the gathering at Troas. It may be implied in Philip’s hospitality at Caesarea as well, although it is not specifically mentioned. Prayer, to which Luke refers at several points in his description of the Jerusalem community (1.4; 2.42; 4.24–30; 6.4, 6), recurs in this section as well (20.36; 21.5). Likewise, the sharing of possessions that features prominently in Acts 2 and 4 returns here in Paul’s admonitions at the end of the Miletus speech about the responsible use of goods. A final feature that marks both sections (as well as many other passages in Acts) is the anticipation of resistance to the witness of the church.²⁰ As early as chapter 4, the gathered community responds to resistance, when it prays with one voice for God’s gift of boldness (4.23–31). Here also, the resistance that Paul has already encountered and now anticipates and accepts in Jerusalem becomes a feature of the community’s life. In this sense, the churches visited on this journey are also ‘in one accord’, even if Luke does not explicitly employ the term for them.

The Miletus speech reconsidered

How might these observations about the context of the Miletus speech influence our understanding of the speech itself? Treatments of the speech vary widely, to be sure, but they tend to focus on Paul as Luke’s central character (often termed Luke’s ‘hero’)²¹ and contemplate the church’s future in the absence of

²⁰ For the argument that affliction is characteristic of the church’s life, not only in Acts but throughout the NT, see W. C. van Unnik, ‘“With All Those Who Call on the Name of the Lord”’, *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke* (ed. William C. Weinrich; 2 vols; Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1984) 2.532–51 (esp. 548–9).

²¹ References to Paul as Luke’s ‘hero’, or one of Luke’s ‘heroes’, appear in the literature with distressing regularity. See, for example, John T. Carroll, ‘Literary and Social Dimensions of Luke’s Apology for Paul’, *SBLSP 1988* (ed. David Lull; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1988) 106; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 48; William S. Kurz, *Farewell Addresses in the New Testament* (Zacchaeus Studies; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990) 35; Eric Franklin, *Luke: Interpreter of Paul, Critic of Matthew* (JSNTSup 92; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994) 136; Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, *Paul the Accused: His Portrait in the Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995) 62; Alexander, ‘“In Journeyings Often”’, 39; Porter, *Paul of Acts*, 64. The term calls out for clari-

Paul. Issues of leadership and succession frequently come into the discussion.²² If, however, the larger context of 20.1–21.17 plays a role in our reading of the speech, then what stands out has less to do with an individual hero and his legacy than with the church as God's own creation. And the future health of the church rests with God rather than with faithfulness to a model established by Paul. Three features of the speech warrant further consideration, especially in light of the larger literary context of 20.1–21.17: Paul's self-presentation, the question of church leaders, and the roles of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Paul's self-presentation at Miletus

It is widely agreed that the Miletus speech has formal affinities with farewell addresses,²³ but it also needs to be acknowledged that establishing the genre of the speech in itself reveals little about this particular speech or its situation, since there is great variation among farewell addresses. To take only a few examples from the texts adduced in the discussion of the Miletus address, 1 Sam 12 opens with Samuel's adamant declaration of his own innocence (12.3–5), to which the audience is urged to assent, but little is said about successors for Samuel himself (12.2). In 1 Macc 2.49–70, by contrast, Mattathias makes no comment about his own conduct but urges loyalty to his successors, Simeon and Judas Maccabeus (vv. 65–6). Tobit's final address to Tobias and Tobias's sons says nothing of Tobit himself, but looks to Israel's future and admonishes his family to be faithful to God (Tob 14.3–11). Diogenes Laertius's account of the last will of Epicurus concerns the disposition of property and provision for the marriage of his daughter (*Epicurus* 10.16–22). These speeches have in common the expectation of the speaker's departure, the gathering of the speaker's closest circle, and concern for the future of those addressed, but they do not consistently address the

fiction. If a 'hero' is simply a central character, one who appears often in a narrative, then Paul would appear to qualify. In literary-critical terms, however, a hero is normally a protagonist, a figure whose judgements and actions shape the plot; Luke would scarcely identify Paul as a 'hero' in that sense. For an illuminating discussion of the popular as well as the classical uses of the term 'hero', see Dean A. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2000), esp. 1–69.

²² See esp. Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 96, 135. Barrett, however, notes that the speech makes no provision for the selection of future leaders ('Paul's Address to the Ephesian Elders', 117).

²³ Johannes Munck, 'Discours d'adieu dans le Nouveau Testament et dans le littérature biblique', *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne: Mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel* (ed. Oscar Cullmann/P. Ménoud; Neuchâtel: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1950) 155–70; Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1955) 344–7; Dupont, *Le Discours de Milet*, 11–26; H.-J. Michel, *Die Abschiedsrede des Paulus an die Kirche Apg. 20, 17–38: Motivgeschichte und theologische Bedeutung* (SANT 35; München: Kösel-Verlag, 1973); T. C. Alexander, 'Paul's Final Exhortation to the Elders from Ephesus: The Rhetoric of Acts 20:17–38' (PhD diss., Emory University, 1990); Kurz, *Farewell Addresses*, 35–51; Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 55–66.

speaker's own character or achievements. Given these striking differences in content, it becomes important not to permit assumptions about genre to dictate in advance the interpretation of the content of the speech.²⁴ Classifying the Miletus speech as a farewell address should not prompt excessive attention to the speech as a vehicle for rehearsing Paul's life and actions, without giving due consideration to other elements in the speech.

Paul's opening comments may signal how this particular farewell address is to be understood. His initial words characterize his labor in Asia as ἐγενόμην δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ ('I have been the Lord's slave', v. 19). He then explains what that enslavement means by reference to humility, tears, and resistance on the part of Jews, drawing attention to those events that would seem to undermine rather than reinforce his standing as a hero.²⁵ Furthermore, by labeling himself as one who 'slaves for the Lord', he recalls the declaration of Mary that she is God's slave (ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου, Luke 1.38), a figure seldom understood to be the initiator of events or one empowered to bring them about. Indeed, Mary's self-identification signals her consent to God's will.²⁶ Vv. 20–1 elaborate Paul's activity, which he describes in a way that would apply to all the witnesses to the gospel, from Peter at Pentecost forward. The series of pairs in vv. 20–1 (proclaiming and teaching, in public and in private, to Jews and Greeks, repentance to God and faith in Jesus) comprise the means, venue, audience, and content of the church's witness across the narrative of Acts. What Paul describes here, therefore, is not his work alone but that of the entire Christian witness. It is worth noticing that nowhere in this introduction does Paul use the emphatic ἐγὼ that would call attention to himself, although he does employ ὑμεῖς in address to the audience (v. 18).

The emphatic ἐγὼ does enter the speech, to be sure. Twice Paul announces καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ (vv. 22, 25). At v. 22, he does so to pronounce himself bound by the Spirit²⁷ as he travels to Jerusalem, and he then reports on the Spirit's constant

24 So also Colin Hemer, 'The Speeches of Acts: I. The Ephesian Elders at Miletus', *TynBul* 40 (1989) 78–9.

25 It is perhaps revealing that John Clayton Lentz, Jr, who argues that the Lukan Paul is a man of moral virtue and high social status, one who is 'always in control', makes no reference to the Miletus speech (*Luke's Portrait of Paul* [SNTSMS 77; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993], quotation on p. 2).

26 By taking Mary's words out of their larger context in Luke–Acts and understanding them to be paradigmatic for women, Mary's submission has sometimes been interpreted as encouraging or demanding female submissiveness in general. On the problems with such an argument, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1995) 72–4.

27 Grammatically, δεδεμένος ἐγὼ τῷ πνεύματι can refer either to Paul's own determination, that is, to his own spirit's conviction about going to Jerusalem, or to his being bound by the [Holy] Spirit. A similar ambiguity occurs at 19.21. Luke's usage elsewhere constitutes a strong argument in favor of understanding the agent here as the Holy Spirit instead of Paul's own

witness to what lies ahead. What must be known about Paul the speaker, then, is actually about the Spirit working through Paul rather than about Paul himself. And in v. 25 (as later in v. 29), the ἐγὼ introduces an emphatic statement about the future, first the future separation between Paul and the elders and later the dangers to the church. And what immediately follows in v. 28 locates the church as God's own creation.

The final section of the speech, in which Paul disavows covetousness and recalls his own pattern of self-support, might be thought the strongest evidence that the speech presents Paul largely as a model to be emulated. The similarities between vv. 33–4 and statements in Paul's own letters are especially striking (see 1 Cor 4.12; 2 Cor 7.2; 1 Thess 2.9). At the same time, however, these statements also reflect a consistent Lukan concern about the importance of responsible use of possessions as well as a warning about the corrosive power of greed (see, for example, Acts 1.18; 5.1–11; 8.14–24; 16.16–24).²⁸ Paul's claim that he coveted no one's 'silver or gold' recalls both Peter's words in 3.6 and the negative example of Simon Magus's desire to profit from the Holy Spirit (8.18–19). That Paul supported himself Luke has already indicated in 18.3, and the closing lines of Luke–Acts reinforce his responsibility for his own maintenance. To be sure, Paul explicitly offers his behavior as an example, but it is an example he grounds in the teaching of Jesus, and it is an example for which there is ample precedent in Acts – both positive and negative.

Put succinctly, the Paul who takes leave of the Ephesian elders offers himself less as the church's hero, a model to be emulated for his own behavior, than as an instantiation of God's own will.

The question of church leaders

If Paul does not present himself as an independent leader to be emulated, neither does he address these elders as his successors as if he were handing auth-

spirit. Luke's emphasis on the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout Acts argues against the view that here Paul makes a decision on his own (see the rejection of such plans in 16.6–10). In addition, the noun πνεῦμα frequently appears without the qualifier ἅγιος in contexts that clearly refer to the Holy Spirit (e.g. 6.10; 8.18, 29; 10.19; 11.2). Perhaps most important, Luke does not often use πνεῦμα in reference to an individual's mind or conscience (Acts 17.16; and perhaps Luke 1.17, 47; on this see Campbell, 'Who Are We in Acts?', 172; Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 268).

²⁸ The distinctiveness of the Miletus speech, as Paul's only speech to a gathering of disciples, and the interest in comparing it with Paul's letters, should not inhibit interpreters from acknowledging that it is also profoundly Lukan in its content. In that sense, it resembles the Areopagus speech, which is both distinctive from and simultaneously continuous with the larger Lukan story (see Paul Schubert, 'The Place of the Areopagus Speech in the Composition of Acts', *Transitions in Biblical Scholarship* [ed. J. Coert Rylaarsdam; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968] 235–61).

ority over to them. Apart from the reference to ‘elders’ in v. 17 and the charge to the ‘overseers’ in v. 28, little in the speech seems directed to a defined group that exercises leadership.²⁹ And the presence of these words should not be overinterpreted.³⁰ To begin with, the word ‘elder’ appears only in the narrative introduction to the speech, when Paul summons the group from Ephesus (20.17). Luke’s usage of *πρεσβύτερος* elsewhere as a loose term for leaders among Jews as well as for leaders among disciples provides little or no content for the role (e.g. 4.5; 6.12; 14.23; 15.2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16.4; 23.14). Only at the Jerusalem council do the ‘elders’ take on a decision-making function, and even on that occasion their function remains somewhat vague.

More important, when Paul does address the gathered elders directly in vv. 28–31, he refers to the group as *ἐπίσκοποι*, employing a *hapax legomenon* in Luke–Acts. The context offers little by way of elucidating the term, and nothing in the speech elevates these ‘overseers’ or depicts them as occupying an established office. Instead, the context defines the origin of these ‘overseers’ with the declaration that they were appointed by the Spirit to serve the church of God. At the end of chapter 14, to be sure, it is Paul and Barnabas who designate ‘elders’ in each congregation, although even there Luke stipulates that prayer and fasting accompany these appointments (14.23). Here Paul says nothing of a human role in selecting the elders.³¹ Equally revealing, the passage does not suggest that these leaders constitute a group to be followed by other leaders or that they have some ruling authority. On the contrary, the speech moves immediately to dangers that face the church.

Employing the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep, Paul admonishes the overseers to keep watch over their flock. As he specifies the dangers that lie ahead, he also specifies that not all of those dangers come from outside the community. The ‘some of you’ (*ἐξ ὑμῶν . . . ἄνδρες*) in 20.30 at least contains the possibility that those who will lead believers astray come from among the ranks of the ‘overseers’ themselves. Far from lingering over the office of ‘elder’ or ‘bishop’, sketching its powers and responsibilities, Paul warns about its dangers.³²

29 This absence of direct address to a small circle is one of the features of the speech that fuels speculation that Luke here directly addresses the situation of the church in his own day.

30 See van Unnik’s warning about the narrow lens through which interpreters consider the NT’s treatment of the ‘church’ (‘“With All Those Who Call on the Name of the Lord”’, 533).

31 Pace Schuyler Brown, who contends that Paul appointed the Ephesian elders, even though Luke does not so stipulate. He explains this discrepancy as ‘functional identification of the leader of the Christian community with the holy spirit’ (*Apostasy and Perseverance in the Theology of Luke* [AB 36; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969] 129).

32 See also the comment of Bruce, who writes that ‘[f]rom the ranks of the leaders of the church itself some will arise to seduce their followers into heretical bypaths’ (*Commentary on the Book of Acts* [London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1954] 417). Barrett notes that the *ὑμεῖς* ‘should refer to the Ephesian elders’, but he concludes that ‘Luke is probably now thinking of the church at large’ (*Acts*, 979).

The roles of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit

It would be difficult to overstate the roles of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as they emerge in this speech. In a narrative context that has to do with the intramural life of the church, Luke does, to be sure, draw attention to Paul's past labor and to his imminent departure. He does touch upon the responsibility of the elders to care for the church. Yet the real actors, the ones whose will has brought the church into being, summoned Paul to ministry, provided content for what Paul has preached and taught, offered teaching about the sharing of possessions, and who will build up and sustain the church in the future are the characters God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

The roles of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit come to expression throughout the speech, ranging from Paul's opening identification of himself as δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ to his closing quotation of words of Jesus in v. 35. The pivotal statement appears in v. 28, which also presents at least two important exegetical difficulties. The first is generated by the variant readings τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ³³ and τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου.³⁴ Each reading is attested in early and significant witnesses, and neither expression occurs elsewhere in Acts.³⁵ The remainder of the verse, however, suggests that scribes may have changed τοῦ θεοῦ into τοῦ κυρίου in order to avoid the apparent reference to the 'blood of God'.³⁶ The second exegetical problem appears with the phrase διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου, 'through his own blood'.³⁷ Again because of the difficulties of understanding this to be a reference to God's own blood, commentators often argue that ἴδιος refers to Jesus himself as God's own son.³⁸ Even while concurring with that judgement, it may be worth noting that Luke seems less concerned to assign precise roles to God and Jesus

33 \aleph B 614 1175 1505 \underline{al} vg sy bo^{ms} Cyr.

34 P⁷⁴ A C* D E Ψ 33 36 453 945 1739 1891 \underline{al} gig p sy^{hm}g co. The additional reading, τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου καὶ (τοῦ \underline{pm}) θεοῦ is clearly inferior. For a careful review of the evidence, especially that from the patristic period, see Charles F. DeVine, 'The "Blood of God" in Acts 20:28', *CBQ* 9 (1947) 381–408.

35 ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ does appear in Paul's letters (1Cor 1.2; 10.32; 11.16, 22; 15.9; 2 Cor 1.1; Gal 1.13; 1 Thess 2.14).

36 So also Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971) 480–1; Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 363; Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 679–80; Barrett, *Acts*, 976; Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 512; Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 95.

37 The variants to this phrase are not well supported and are readily understood as attempts to clarify matters.

38 Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 434; Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Kapitel 13–28*, 579; Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (EKK; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986) 2.204–5; Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 363; Barrett, *Acts*, 976–7; Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 512; Walton provides a helpful review of the several possibilities offered in the literature (*Leadership and Lifestyle*, 96–8). Even when translated 'the blood of his own [son]' instead of 'his own blood', the phrase stands out as unusual in a Lukan setting, for Luke does not elsewhere speak of the

than to locate the church's origin in their actions. In other words, however these questions are resolved, they do not obscure the thrust of the text: just as the 'overseers' did not appoint themselves, so the church did not bring itself into being.

The difficulty in distinguishing between the work of Jesus and that of God in v. 28 coheres with the speech as a whole, in which sorting out the work of God from that of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is almost impossible. Paul received his ministry from Jesus, but the elders were appointed to their task by the Spirit. It is God's plan that is at work, but the Spirit informs Paul about the dangers that lie ahead. The need for charity is learned from the teaching of Jesus, but it is also part of the divine $\delta\epsilon\iota$. Whatever the implications of these complexities may be for the church's trinitarian theology, the implications for this portrait of the intramural life of the church seem clear: the church is God's own.

A turning point

Many commentators note that the close of the Miletus speech and the arrival of Paul in Jerusalem mark a turning point in the story, but exactly what is it that 'turns'? Answers to that question tend to focus on the characterization of Paul. In a recent study, Steve Walton categorizes Paul's labor here as that of a pastor, by distinction from his earlier work as missionary and his later status as prisoner.³⁹ Others describe the Miletus event as the last occasion on which Paul is a 'free' man.⁴⁰

Such distinctions are difficult, and not only because they often employ anachronistic labels and artificial divisions, such as 'missionary' and 'pastor'. Paul still proclaims the gospel when he makes his final defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26, and Agrippa knows it (26.28). Paul is both prisoner and witness to the gospel in the closing scene in Acts 28.⁴¹ To complicate matters further, he seems to

cross in terms of blood (although see Luke 22.19b–20, noting the text-critical problems there as well). Neither does identifying this as a genuinely Pauline element in the speech dissolve the difficulties, since Paul seldom connects the cross with blood (Rom 3.25; 5.9; 1 Cor 10.16; 11.25, 27; Charles Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* [OBT; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990] 56–66). It may be that the reference to blood here echoes Paul's reference to blood in v. 26 (see Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 286).

39 Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle*, 202.

40 Lambrecht, 'Paul's Farewell-Address at Miletus', 332; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 271, see also 236.

41 Robert Maddox comments that 'no one is converted' in the last nine chapters of Acts (*The Purpose of Luke-Acts* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982] 76). Acts 28.24 suggests otherwise, but in any event the number of converts does not constitute an assessment of the validity of the witness, as should be clear from Luke 10.1–12. On Paul's continuing witness as a captive, see Matthew L. Skinner, *Locating Paul: Places of Custody as Narrative Settings in Acts 21–28* (SBLAB 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting. 3: The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994) 435–6.

exercise a pastoral function on the ship in chapter 27, when he encourages those on board and again when he urges them to eat. His healings on Malta may also be understood as falling within the pastoral role.

To distinguish between Paul as 'free' and 'captive' also seems to impose a distinction that begs for clarification. Admittedly, Paul does refer to his chains (26.29), but he has also spoken earlier – before his arrest – of his bondage to the Spirit (20.22). Indeed, it is possible to ask whether Luke has ever portrayed Paul as a free man, at least since his conversion in chapter 9, central to which is God's overtaking of Paul who is in the process of making his own judgements and acting on them.⁴²

If it is not Paul's own situation that 'turns' here, what does? The real divide that takes place with Paul's arrival in Jerusalem is that Paul is separated from the community of believers. Even as early as the elders' proposal that Paul avert criticism by going through a rite of purification, it is unclear whether the Jerusalem community supports Paul, even to the extent that some interpreters can suggest he was betrayed.⁴³ Once Paul is taken into captivity, all reference to believers drops out of the narrative until 28.14. Paul's nephew comes to his aid in Jerusalem, but nothing in the text connects the nephew to the rest of the believing community (23.16–22). At an early point in the voyage to Rome, the centurion Julius permits Paul access to his friends, and they may well be believers, but that fact is not stipulated (27.3). And, even though necessity dictates that someone on the outside must have supplied Paul with food for the journey during his captivity,⁴⁴ Luke gives scant indication of how Paul's needs were met. The church, then, as a fellowship of disciples, virtually disappears after Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. Commentators often note that Luke uses the expression 'church of God' only at 20.28, but it is also worth noticing that 20.28 is the last appearance in Luke–Acts of the term ἐκκλησία.

What should be made of the absence of the church following Paul's arrival in Jerusalem? Especially in light of the laudatory portrait of the gatherings in 20.1–21.17, the near disappearance of the community of believers after Paul's arrest

42 Particularly in Acts 26, Paul's speech appears to portray his conversion as a point at which he was turned from his own judgement about Jesus Christ and his disciples to a view that was imposed upon him by the outside (see Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 340–8). On this point, Paul's letters and Acts converge; see Gal 1.11–17 and Phil 3.2–11.

43 See A. J. Mattill, 'The Purpose of Acts: Schneckenburger Reconsidered', *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday* (ed. W. W. Gasque/R. P. Martin; Exeter: Paternoster, 1970) 115–16; Porter, *The Paul of Acts*, 179. For counter-argument, see Richard Bauckham, 'James and the Jerusalem Church', *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) 478.

44 Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974; repr. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1994) 153.

might suggest a critique of the Jerusalem disciples. Perhaps the portrait of the gatherings around the Aegean in terms that recall the early depiction of the church at Jerusalem implies that a faithful community no longer resides in Jerusalem.⁴⁵ An argument along those lines would be attractive to those who seek to discern the contours of Luke's own congregation behind the plot of Acts. To be sure, Luke's presentation of the witness to the gospel has a strong centrifugal force,⁴⁶ but that geographical movement does not necessarily correlate with concern to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of various communities. Just as Luke is capable of introducing human characters in service of the plot and then dropping them without explanation when they have served their purpose, he includes geographical locations without always explaining them. For example, Luke introduces Mattathias, Judas's replacement, with the scene in Acts 1.15–16, but never afterward mentions his name. Similarly, he refers to disciples in Lydda and Joppa (9.32–43), Tyre (21.14), and Rome itself (28.15) without accounting for the arrival of the gospel in those locations. His attribution of traits of the early Jerusalem community to gatherings in Troas, Miletus, and Caesarea indicates that this is what the church looks like – not that faithfulness has departed from Jerusalem.⁴⁷

In the penultimate section of Acts (21.28–26.32), resistance to Paul reaches its climax; only the intervention of Roman custody prevents his death. The defense speeches Paul gives in Jerusalem and Caesarea declare his innocence; more important, they vindicate the gospel proclaimed since Pentecost. Finally, Paul declares not his own faithful preaching of Jesus but Christ's proclamation of light to Jew and Gentile alike (26.23). The final chapters provide the denouement for this vindication, dramatically portraying Paul's rescue from death and his continuing witness in Rome. In these concluding sections, the isolation of Paul is a dramatic device that reinforces the danger posed by seemingly implacable resistance to his witness.

Before that isolation, however, comes 20.1–21.17, in which Luke provides sketches of vibrant Christian communities and lavishes attention on Paul's journeys between them. Paul's departure is imminent and that fact generates anguish in these accounts. Yet just as Paul's isolation will not prevent him from preaching, the church's separation from Paul also will not result in the church's demise. The Miletus speech and its literary context together confirm the church's identity, which has little to do with Paul. Its survival has never depended on Paul or any

45 I am grateful to Stephen E. Fowl for raising this question with me.

46 Alexander, '“In Journeyings Often”', 23; Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing on the 'Acts of the Apostles'* (SNTSMS 121; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002) 253.

47 In fact, it would be very odd to claim that Jerusalem is being criticized when Paul is no less isolated at Caesarea.

other 'hero'. The example offered in the Miletus speech, then, is not that of doing what Paul did but of adhering to the gospel and understanding its origin in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

48 C. Clifton Black, Stephen E. Fowl, J. Louis Martyn, John B. F. Miller and Patrick J. Willson read and commented on an earlier draft of this article, and I gratefully acknowledge their assistance. I also appreciate the research assistance of Craig B. Carpenter.