

## THE SPEECHES OF ACTS<sup>1</sup>

### II. THE AREOPAGUS ADDRESS

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#### The Setting

In an earlier article I have argued for the Pauline authenticity of at least the setting of the Areopagus speech.<sup>2</sup> The discussion involves the old problem of the actual meeting-place of the court of Areopagus. The term, in Greek ὁ Ἄρειος πάγος, was applied both to the rocky spur west of the Acropolis ('Mars' Hill') and to the court which historically had met on the hill, and which was formally designated ἡ ἐξ Ἀρείου πάγου Βουλή.<sup>3</sup> Some sources point to a meeting-place of this council in a portico of the Athenian Agora, the Stoa Basileios. There has been a vigorous if intermittent debate whether the scene in Acts 17 should be located on the hill or in the Agora, a matter less pressing for those who are not disposed to be over-concerned with the question of authentic settings.

The evidence does not seem to permit a simple judgment that the meeting-place shifted from the hill to the Agora at an ascertainable date. It is probable that both locations were in use together, perhaps for centuries.<sup>4</sup> The locale on the hill had

<sup>1</sup> The Speeches of Acts: I. The Ephesian Elders at Miletus' appeared in *TynB* 40 (1989) 77-85. It was the author's unfulfilled intention to deal with Stephen's speech in part three. For a general discussion of the speeches see C.J. Hemer (ed. C.H. Gempf), *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen 1989) Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> C.J. Hemer, 'Paul at Athens: A Topographical Note', *NTS* 20 (1974) 341-50.

<sup>3</sup> Thus passim in the inscriptions of the Roman period; cf. earlier *Ath. Pol.* 60.2. The shorter term (6) Ἄρειος πάγος is freely used at all periods, and sometimes unambiguously of a body of persons rather than a location (e.g. τῶν ἐξ Ἀρείου πάγου φευφόντων, of those banished by the council, *Ath. Pol.* 47.2).

<sup>4</sup> For the meeting—place on the hill see Demosthenes 59.80-83; *Ath. Pol.* 57:3-4; 60:2-3, for the 4th cent. BC; Aristides (ed. Dindorf), *Panatheneicus* 1.170-2; Pausanias, 1.28.5; cf. 1.28.8; Lucian, *Bis Accusatus* 4.12. The force of the inscription SEG 12 (336 BC) 87 is ambivalent, and it may well refer to a bouleuthvriion of the Areopagus situated in the Agora, at a location not classified by the inscription, which was not found *in situ*. (Pseudo-) Demosthenes 25.3 is however explicit for the Stoa Basileios. Even though the

an ancient solemnity of religious association which would not be lightly abandoned, whereas routine business could be conducted more conveniently in the Agora, where the Archon Basileus, the chairman of the court, held his traditional seat in the Stoa Basileios.

We have argued then that Paul appeared before the court in session in the Agora, and that the whole scene may be located in the north-west corner of that expanse, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Stoa Basileios. The whole occasion assumes a strikingly economical dramatic unity of place, though this is not brought out explicitly in Luke's account. The main entrance to the Agora for a new arrival coming from the Piraeus was at this same north-west corner. This was close both to the Stoa Basileios and to the Stoa Poikila, or 'Painted Colonnade', which was famous as the resort of philosophers. It was the place where Zeno had argued and taught, and his followers had thus received their appellation 'Stoics', 'the men of the Stoa'.<sup>5</sup> Numerous literary references to the Poikile depict it as the place where the

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attribution to Demosthenes of this first speech against Aristogeton has been widely abandoned, it refers to a case of which we have independent contemporary record. There is further circumstantial confirmation in the evidence that the Archon Basileus presided over the court (at least in its function as a homicide court, *Ath. Pol.* 57.3-4), and that he had his seat in the Stoa. The most famous reference is tantalizingly parallel with Paul's case. Plato, in *Euthyphro* 2a, the opening words of the traditional arrangement of the whole Platonic corpus, represents Socrates as appearing before the Basileus in the Stoa Basileios to answer the indictment of Meletus. The apparent parallel is, however, largely fortuitous, and not to be pressed. For Socrates this appearance was a mere preliminary to trial by the regular dicastery courts, whereas Paul was probably not subjected to formal trial at all. The most that can be said is that Basileus and court exercised some supervision in matters of religion, and both cases were of some relevance to their function (cf. Plato, *Euthyphro* 3b with Acts 17:8). There was probably a long continuity of place and practice in an institution so deeply traditional, whatever changes or curtailments of actual jurisdiction might be imposed by external political forces. Cf. T.D. Barnes, 'An Apostle on Trial', *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969) 407-9, esp 409, 411. We differ from him in suggesting that this continuity embraced both locations, and that the Basileus was a convenient venue for routine matters in the heart of the city, whereas the religious associations of the hill were reserved for religious functions or homicide cases.

<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius 7.1.5.

philosophers continued to gather.<sup>6</sup> Athens was also noted for its Hermae, a characteristically Athenian form of dedicatory figure, square pillars with the head of the god Hermae.<sup>7</sup> Here, as elsewhere in Athens, excavation has confirmed the probable reading of ancient sources. The lexicographer Harpocration (1st or 2nd century AD)<sup>8</sup> refers to a grouping of these figures between the Basileios and the Poikile, and many such have actually been found in the Agora excavations in this area, notably before the building was discovered in 1969-70 and identified at least as the long-debated Basileios.<sup>9</sup> Most of these facts are mentioned in a note by R.E. Wycherly.<sup>10</sup> He comments on the strict usage of such κατά-compounds as κατάδενδρος and κατάμπελος, and applies the observation to κατείδωλος in Acts 17:16 to give the sense 'luxuriant with idols': 'When Paul arrived at Athens from Beroea, he found himself confronted by a veritable forest of idols', an apt if ironical description of the Herms.<sup>11</sup> This might well reinforce powerfully Paul's impression of the altar to an 'unknown God',<sup>12</sup> which he may have seen already on his way from the harbour to the city.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> So e.g. Cic. *Acad.* (Priora) 2.24.75; Hor. Sat. 2.3.44; Plut. Mor. 1058D. Less favourably it became proverbially the place of disreputable logic-chopping. Thus Lucian, *Dial Meretr.* 10.1; *Icaromen.* 34; *Iuppiter Trag.* 16; *Piscator* 13; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 3.104B.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the classic story of the mutilation of the Hermae in Athens on the eve of the Sicilian expedition in 415 BC (Thuc. 6.27).

<sup>8</sup> Harpocration, *Lexicon* sv Ἑρμαῖ.

<sup>9</sup> For the discovery see P.M. Fraser, 'Archaeology in Greece, 1969-70', *Archaeological Reports* 16 (1969-70) 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> R.E. Wycherly, 'St Paul at Athens', *JTS* n.s. 19 (1968) 619-620.

<sup>11</sup> Such was their prominence that the neighbourhood was called simply 'the Herms' (Wycherly 620).

<sup>12</sup> There is no justification for finding difficulty in the different forms of reference to 'unknown gods' (Paus. 1.1.4) or τῶ προσήκοντι θεῶ (Diog. Laert. 1.110) as being the occasion of erecting βωμμοὶ ἀνώνυμοι, or to the ἀγνώστων δαιμόνων βωμοί (Philostr. Vit. Ap. 6.3.5). The plurals are merely generalizing, and do not justify the literalistic and hypercritical objection that each altar must have been dedicated to a plurality of such gods. Nor is there substance in the comment of Lake (BC 5.242), developed into an objection by Haenchen (521n.) that Greek altar dedications using the dative are later and first begin in the 2nd cent. AD. A casual look at the inscriptions suffices to contradict it; thus e.g. IGRR 4.285-287, of Pergamum, all of 2nd cent. BC and dated by Attalid kings; *I Eph.* 3137, of Ephesus, Hellenistic are typical dedications to gods in the dative. At Athens itself both formulations are found at most periods. For the

This detailed illustration of the setting of the speech raises questions about the application of evidence. This series of connections cannot *prove* anything about the speech. But 'proof' is not really the issue at stake. It is the kind of correlation which could hardly be present accidentally in an invented setting. And if a writer had taken extraordinary pains to get his setting right it seems hardly conceivable that he would not have drawn attention to the fact. The special interest of this dramatic unity of place is that it is not stressed, nor even indicated, by Luke. It is most plausible to argue that he has reproduced it from the Pauline situation without ever making of it a conscious motif in the Lukan redaction.

This is something a little different from the argument from 'local colour', which may be continued, as in the work of a Philostratus. A.D. Nock in fact attempted to explain the present scene in that way,<sup>14</sup> where the religious and argumentative character of the Athenians, the philosophers, the 'unknown gods', the local slang σπερμολόγος, were just such stock themes as might have been gleaned from the literature about Athens. Such characteristically Athenian motifs are naturally present, and Nock's view must be mentioned as a possible explanation of them. They are equally consistent with the supposition that the setting is authentic rather than contrived. But here we are not relying primarily on this kind of item, but on the themes which Luke does not mention, but whose

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genitive see e.g. IG 22.3.4972 (late 4th cent. BC), 4993 (1st cent. BC); for the dative 4961 (early 4th cent. BC), 4990 (2nd - 1st cent. BC), 4996 (Ἄρτέμιδι, of Eleusis, 1st cent. AD). All the Athenian examples cited are brief dedications comparable in form, and dated only by lettering or the like. There is every indication, *pace* Lake, that the dative formulation is common throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. E. Haenchen refers to, SIG 725 *The Acts of the Apostles* (ET Oxford, Blackwell 1971) 521 n.2 but this relates neither to the second nor the third editions and appears to be incorrect. Nor does the supposition that the notion of unknown gods arose from the mere omission of the name as self-evident have anything to commend it. This is not the formulation. In the simplest examples the god alone is named, and the name of the dedicator omitted.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Paus. 1.1.4, where these altars are mentioned in connection with the harbour district of Phalerum, immediately prior to entering the city proper.

<sup>14</sup> A.D. Nock in a review article of Dibelius, *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte*, (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1951) in *Gnomon* 25 (1953) 506; ET *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London, SCM 1956) cited *Studies*.

implicitly dynamic gives point to the scene in a Pauline rather than a Lukan context. Luke himself may indeed have been imperfectly aware from Paul's description of the occasion of its topographical dimension. This may only be recovered in retrospect by the piecing together of literary and archaeological evidence.

### The Speech

If then, the setting belongs to the Pauline rather than the Lukan situation, what of the speech itself? Here the argument may be presented in terms similar to those applicable to the setting. Paul in the Agora encountered successively the philosophers and the popular religiosity enshrined in the religious court. The speech may be understood as apologetic dialogue directed successively to the classes of interlocutors represented among the hearers, the representatives of Stoicism, Epicureanism and Athenian religion. Yet the speech is not structured in any such way. It reads more like an abbreviation which has consolidated the three lines of argument in to a presentation of Christ within which the elements of the response to different misunderstandings are included together. The careful study of the Athenian background of motifs in the speech brings to light a richer tapestry of connecting thought which is no more than implicitly in Luke's account and cannot be explained as a Lukan theological emphasis.<sup>15</sup>

Paul's dialogue with Stoicism is signalled most obviously by the actual citation of the Stoic poet Aratus of Soli (*Phaenomena* 7, in Acts 17:28), Paul's own fellow-Cilician (cf.

<sup>15</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London, Tyndale Press 21952) 335, in referring to Eduard Norden's classic study *Agnostos Theos* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1956 [19131]), adds the little-noticed fact that the historian Eduard Meyer subsequently converted Norden to an admission of the possible genuineness of the speech. Bruce adds that Meyer's arguments against Norden would be valid also against Dibelius (335n.). For the speech generally see especially also N.B. Stonehouse, *The Areopagus Address* (London, Tyndale 1949); B. Gartner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala 1955); Dibelius, 'Paul on the Areopagus', *Studies* 26-77 and 'Paul in Athens', *ibid.* 78-83; Conzelmann, 'The Address of Paul on the Areopagus', in L.E. Keck, J.A. Martyn (edd.), *Studies in Luke Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert* (Nashville, Abingdon Press 1966; cited SL A) 217-30; Bruce, 'Paul and the Athenians', *ExpT* 88 (1976-7) 8-12.

also Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus* 4). 'By presenting God as Creator and Judge, Paul emphasizes his Personality in contrast to the motivating pantheism of the Stoics' (Bruce, *Acts* 338-9). Again, τὸ θεῖον, 'the Divine', 'the Godhead', is characteristically a language of the philosophical Absolute,<sup>16</sup> used specifically in a Stoic context in (Arr.) Epictetus 2.20.22. The nature of God is thus explained against the background of their own terminology, as Paul gently exposes the inconsistency between the transcendent reality to which their thinkers aspired and the man-made images of Athens.

Other points take up issues shared by both groups of philosophers or combines common ground which he may share with one or both. In verse 25 he refers successively to the Epicurean doctrine that God needs nothing from men and cannot be served by them, and the Stoic belief that he is the source of all life.<sup>17</sup>

Paul even plays off the one group against the other in this latter point, for the gods of Epicurus were unconcerned in human affairs, being themselves a part of the cosmos engendered by the fortuitous collision of atoms.<sup>18</sup> There are recurring themes which are aptly directed to the Epicurean, God as Creator and Lord of heaven and earth (v. 24), who gives life to all (v. 25), and who has appointed that man seek him, though he is not distant from any of us (v. 27). This God commands repentance (v. 30) and has appointed a day to judge the world. The final idea of 'resurrection', to which we return in a moment, was alien to all the forms of Greek thought, though they might debate the 'immortality of the soul'. There is, moreover, a fine irony running through the speech, that among these philosophers who prided themselves on their superior wisdom God was unknown, and it falls to Paul to build on their glimmerings of the truth and correct their ignorance.

<sup>16</sup> Thus e.g. Plato *Phaedus* 242c; also widespread in other classical writers: Hdt. 1.32, Aesch, *Choeph.* 958; also in the papyri (see MM). Cf also the neuter τοῦτο in v. 23, a usage consistent with a speaker's beginning where his audience are, and leading them towards the recognition of a personal God as Creator and Judge.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce, *Acts* 336.

<sup>18</sup> For the Epicurean view of the gods, see Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 2.165-183; 1090-1104; 5.146-234 and *passim*.

And there were incongruities present in that audience, the fear of neglecting even an unknown God's anger as against the distant and disinterested gods of Epicureanism. One kind of speculation corrected another, and Paul was able to set off positive teaching against the substance of their own debates.

When the motifs of response to philosophers are linked more closely to the ethos of Athenian life and religion, the latent dimensions of the speech become far more apparent. The Athenian reputation for religiosity is reflected in the designation δεισιδαιμονέστερος (v. 22), best taken as ambivalent, basically favourable, but with an ironical twist (of the comparative form).<sup>19</sup> God is universal, not limited to any man-made dwelling-place (v. 24; cf. Acts 7:48), words spoken in a scene dominated by temples and images which were among the artistic masterpieces of the world. All men are of one stock, whatever the Athenian claim to the racial superiority of an autochthonous people (v. 26). And man is the creature of God (v. 29); God is not like a representation made by the art and imagination of man. Paul's response however comes to a focus in matters less explicit, in the implied references to the traditions surrounding the Cretan seer Epimenides and the court of Areopagus itself. The words ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἔσμεν derive from a citation quoted fully in Syriac, whose second line is the hexameter quoted in Titus 1:12 and attributed to the semi-legendary Epimenides by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.14).<sup>20</sup> But Epimenides, whose testimony is here drawn into Paul's argument, was otherwise a figure significant in Athenian religious tradition. Diogenes Laertius

<sup>19</sup> Bruce, *Acts* 335 cites Lucian, *De Gymn.* (=Anacharsis) 19, as saying that complimentary *exordia* to secure the goodwill of the Areopagus were forbidden. The use of the noun *deisidaimoniva* in Acts 25:19 is not decisive for the present passage. It is there presumably favourable ('their own religion'), since the hearer Agrippa shared it, unless τῆς ἰδίας be taken as 'his (Paul's) own superstition' (as distinct from Judaism) (thus BC 4.311 *ad loc.*). There is no need to be unduly influenced by Haenchen's stricture (Acts 520) that 'superstition' is a modern concept. The factor of an excessive religious scrupulosity was familiar to the ancients, in such a personality as (the Athenian) Nicias, and is described in Theophrastus, *Characters* 16 (δεισιδαιμονία). For a satirical perspective on trials before the court of Areopagus, cf. Lucian's dialogue *Bis Accusatus*.

<sup>20</sup> See J. Rendel Harris, 'The Cretans Always Liars', *Expos.* 7.2 (1906) 305-17 and 'A Further Note on the Cretans', *Expos.* 7.3 (1907) 332-7.

(1.110) recounts the legend that during a plague the Athenians consulted Epimenides, and he advised them to sacrifice sheep at various places to the appropriate god, and this served as an aetiological explanation of the βωμοὶ ἀνώνυμι characteristic of Athens.<sup>21</sup> Thus the figure of Epimenides locks the argument of the speech yet more closely into the traditional background of the 'unknown God'. But there is no hint that Luke was even aware of the intimate linkage of these motifs, which may be explained as belonging to Paul's situation in Athens, but are not apparent at all in the redaction. A further latent point concerns the resurrection, where Paul's word ἀνάστασις recalls a classic passage of Greek religious literature. In the climactic resolution of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* the matricide Orestes appears before the court of Areopagus in the classic trial for homicide which provided the aetiological occasion of the ancient function of that very court. At the climax of the final play, the *Eumenides*, Apollo, god of wisdom, makes a declaration which must have been familiar to every cultivated Athenian in that audience, as well as forming the crucial point of Paul's encounter with the beliefs of his hearers. It is a classic parallel for the Greek use of ἀνάστασις in the otherwise rare sense 'resurrection':

ἄνδρος δ' ἐπειδὴν αἴμ' ἀνασπάσῃ κόνις  
ἄπαξ θανόντος, οὔτις ἔστ' ἀνάστασις.<sup>22</sup> (Aesch. *Eumen.* 647-648).

<sup>21</sup> The whole passage in Diogenes 1.110-112 is interesting. The story is that black and white sheep were released from the Areopagus and the altars were erected where they rested, and thus served as a 'memorial of that atonement' (ὑπόμνημα τῆς τότε γενομένης ἐξιλάσεως). Epimenides was also credited (112) with founding the temple of the Eumenides at Athens, another link with the motifs of Aeschylus' play. We cannot now specify how far Paul's knowledge of the intricacies of Athenian tradition extended, but it suffices to show that he had struck some significant vein of the richer hidden complex.

<sup>22</sup> The rarity of the word in this sense is a natural reflection of the rarity of the need to express the notion of the 'resuscitation' of a dead body in pagan Greek, which is not quite the same thing as to categorize this a 'Christian' usage. If Aeschylus seems to have the only pre-Christian and non-Jewish instance, cf. Lucian, *Saltatio* 45 for the 'resurrection' of Tyndareus, a mythological reference. The interesting inscription *IGRR* 4.743 = *CB* 2 386-388, No 232, of Eumeneia in Phrygia (perhaps early 3rd cent. AD) lacks part of the crucial context, and its cultural setting debatable, possibly even incorporating a slighting allusion to Christianity by a Jew influenced by Epicureanism in a

In view of the pointedness of Paul's response and the precise appropriateness of the context it is difficult to suppose that the juxtaposition with classic Athenian religious thought was not deliberate and calculated. Yet again there is no hint that Luke was even conscious of the force of this juxtaposition. It belongs to Paul's situation and is not apparent at all in Luke's redaction.

These points are illustrative of features which seem to make this speech a test case. Several corollaries should be noted: (1) The structure of the speech's polemic is obscured by abbreviation. If this were Luke's polemic we should expect its thrust to be much more apparent in those respects which are here implicit. (2) The indications are that Paul, rather than Luke, had the first-hand knowledge of Athens of which this speech was the product. Luke may have known and reproduced the things which suited the familiar image of Athens, but the data of the speech point to an original interaction with the Athenians at a deeper level which Luke does not stress and of which he may even have been partly unaware. (3) In fact the most interesting themes of this speech are tacit. Even if Luke had the literary skill and motivation so to underplay his themes and ask so much of the reader, it is difficult to suppose he would have omitted the threads of connection which appear only out of background study. (4) The passage is a fascinating study in cross-cultural communication, in building bridges where possible without shirking the necessity of dialogue on points of basic disagreement, while seeking to meet those issues where the questioner is, on his own ground and terminology. But this whole dimension of the speech is difficult to detach from the assumption that it represents a real confrontation. (5) The question is raised how the explanation of the speech in terms of Lukan theology handles the evidence we have adduced. In general it seems that the attempt is not made, but that motifs are claimed other than those which seem to be involved in the expansion of the expressed content. For Haenchen this is 'an "ideal scene", which baffles every attempt to translate it into

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place where Christianity was already unusually strong. Other pagan instances are in Aelius Aristides, 32.25 (Keil) = vol 1.12, 142 (Dindorf): εἴ τις θεῶν ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἀνάστασιν ἔτι τούτου ζῶντος...; cf. vol. 2.46, 300 (Dindorf).

reality'. Again, he sees the doctrine of the resurrection as 'tagged on in a sudden transition in verse 31', whereas it is the logical climax to a deeper level of interaction in the original situation.<sup>23</sup>

### Dibelius Revisited

This last issue clearly needs closer consideration. Re-reading Dibelius in the light of the above discussion arouses renewed unease. A fundamental and recurring criticism is that his identification of motifs is permeated with assumptions of a History of Religions background which are highly questionable. His understanding of the speech's doctrine of God, for instance, sees features from Greek philosophy absorbed into Hellenistic Judaism and thus into the theology of the early church.<sup>24</sup> This is part of his larger argument that the speech as a whole is a Hellenistic monotheistic sermon which has no Christian content before the last two verses, and is alien both to the Old Testament and to the rest of the New. Haenchen recognizes that Dibelius has underemphasized the Old Testament components of the speech, though this is only one aspect of the issue<sup>25</sup>. A second fundamental criticism concerns Dibelius' absolutizing of differences apart from a sensitivity to context. The question whether Paul 'could have made' this speech<sup>26</sup> cannot be considered in isolation from the problem of communication, that a speaker with an urgent message to communicate to hearers of an alien mind must find a point of contact and will not hit them mechanically with a starkly unsympathetic

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<sup>23</sup> *Acts* 528, 532

<sup>24</sup> Dibelius, *Studies* 43. For a radical criticism of the notion of a Hellenized Christianity heavily influenced by philosophy, especially Neo-Platonism, see R.H. Nash, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan 1984) chapters 2-6. The concept of Hellenistic Judaism, as a mediating factor in this process, may itself be difficult to demarcate, and the dichotomy of Judaic and Hellenizing movements in Christianity again open to question. On the converse question of definition cf. S.K. Riegel, 'Jewish Christianity: Definitions and Terminology', *NTS* 24 (1977-8) 410-15.

<sup>25</sup> Haenchen, *Acts* 528.

<sup>26</sup> Dibelius, *Studies* 58.

barrage of alien thought in alien terminology.<sup>27</sup> In fact a number of valid observations in Dibelius seem to call for very different explanations. He finds, for instance, the style of a speech that was intended for delivery in its harmony of structure, embodying motifs capable of expansion, and makes them intelligible from an assumed matrix of Greek philosophical thought<sup>28</sup>. Both the possibility of expansion and the interaction with philosophy chimes with the discussion above, but we question the assumptions and simplistic relationships with which Dibelius approaches the issues. Again, the 'natural theology', the omission of revelation in favour of a 'rational' approach, such features are the natural reflection of the need to meet the questioner where he is. The arguments from the 'pagans' use an application of ζῆτεῖν,<sup>29</sup> πίστις.<sup>30</sup> or 'repentance'<sup>31</sup> are based on a recurring adduced polarization between Hellenistic and Old Testament concepts. None of these

<sup>27</sup> Cf. J.B. Skemp, *The Greeks and the Gospel* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964) 54, and his criticism of H.P. Owen, 'The Scope of Natural Revelation in Rom. I and Acts XVII', *NTS* 5 (1958-9) 133-43, for ignoring Paul's sense of place and time.

<sup>28</sup> Dibelius, *Studies* 57.

<sup>29</sup> The attempt by Dibelius, *Studies* 32-3, to draw a rigid distinction between Old Testament and Hellenistic conceptions of 'seeking' God is particularly problematic. It is evident that his concept of the former would in any case be inapplicable to communication with an audience to whom the Jewish God was 'unknown'. There is also a recurring problem in the theologizing of vocabulary in a manner open to the strictures of James Barr, a criticism applicable also to H. Greeven in *TDNT* 2.892-896 in his treatment of the word.

<sup>30</sup> Dibelius, *Studies* 57, 62-3. The use of πίστις to mean 'assurance', 'confirmation of truth' in Acts 17:31 is again apparently unparalleled in the New Testament. The treatment of this word by R. Bultmann in *TDNT* 6.174-228 is again a classic instance of the theological, existentially-influenced hermeneutic criticised in his work by J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (OUP 1961) 275-6. But the word is a regular Greek usage, and its use here to express in quite normal language an idea less often needed in the NT but appropriate to the Gentile context calls for no special comment or justification.

<sup>31</sup> Dibelius, *Studies* 58, says that 'repentance' is to be understood in a Christian sense here, but suggests that it 'consists ultimately of recalling that knowledge of God which, by virtue of his nature, belongs to man'. The thrust of his argument is less clear here. The *word* may be Luke's, a natural shorthand for a Christian response which Paul himself was at pains, no doubt, not only to enunciate but to explain. If Dibelius is here again offering a pagan to the admittedly Christian understanding of the word, we must again demur, suggesting rather that Paul began to come to the heart of his message, where his own theological concepts needed to be made intelligible to his hearers.

usages seem in any way unnatural for a speaker in a cross-cultural situation, rather the reverse, that this speech incorporates a running critique of the hearers' categories, and seeks to wean them away towards the initially unthinkable.

To say that is no more than to reaffirm the suitability of the speech to a real and original situation, not to establish that Paul spoke thus, but to counter the strong *a priori* feeling that he could not have done. The crucial question here, from a complementary perspective, is whether the Paul of this speech is at least consistent in his approach to the Gentile unbeliever with the Paul of the Epistles, a question which Dibelius and Haenchen answer with a decided negative. The classic passage for comparison is Romans 1, and on this relationship opinion is deeply divided. The view of Haenchen is that the Paul of Romans adopts the more vigorous of two possible Jewish approaches to Gentile mission, emphasizing the depravity of man apart from God, whereas Luke presents a Paul anxious to make common ground, to find in pagan religion a *praeparatio evangelica* capable of positive development and correction.<sup>32</sup>

The sharpness of this dichotomy is artificial. The passage in Romans is addressed to Christians, whereas Acts 17, with the shorter speech at Lystra in Acts 14:15-17, stands apart as a passage of direct address to pagans. This difference of audience is assuredly not irrelevant to Dibelius' repeated insistence that these same two passages stand uniquely apart as alien to the New Testament. A sensitive communicator will treat his hearers with respect and try to meet them at the point of their highest ideals, however wrong in the abstract he may believe them to be. This is not to say that he denounces the evil and corruption of the outsider to his 'in-group', and flatters and conciliates him to his face. Rather in his integrity he carries the fundamental tension into both settings, though he give rein to declare within his group the motivating realities which he must hold in restraint when he seeks to open every door to reason with the people at risk. It is certainly desirable not to condemn in detachment what we conciliate in personal encounter, but that is not the real issue, nor is the point to be

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<sup>32</sup> Haenchen, *Acts* 528-30

pressed beyond a realistic measure. The principle is fully in accord with Paul's own declaration in an acknowledged epistle of his flexibility, that he might 'by all means save some' (1 Cor. 9:19-23).<sup>33</sup>

The difficulty with Romans is, I think, only serious if the two versions of Paul may be shown to be incompatible, rather than just contextually different. It cannot of course be demonstrated that they proceed from the same mind. Their general compatibility is all that can, or need, be affirmed. The case for the specifically Pauline origin of the speech rests positively on arguments of the kind we have offered for its specifically Pauline setting, and the residual need is only to meet a radical objection to the feasibility of this ostensible explanation.

It is remarkable that opposite answers have been offered on this question of compatibility. The debate must be treated here with relative brevity, on a narrow field, though it is subsumed under the vastly larger question of the 'Paulinism' of Acts. The objection is raised that 'natural theology' here and in Romans perform an utterly different function, there to show that man without the law is 'without excuse' (Rom 1:20),<sup>34</sup> here as 'employed in missionary pedagogy as the forerunner of faith' (Vielhauer) against a background of ignorance rather than guilt. The Paul of Acts, according to these writers, is near Justin and the second century apologists and distant from the real Paul. He is made to equate justification with the forgiveness of sins, thus conceiving it only negatively and using a motif absent from the *Hauptbriefe*,<sup>35</sup> tying it to Jesus' Messiahship as based on his resurrection, with nothing about the particular significance of his death. Luke, it is said, knew that Paul

<sup>33</sup> Cf. F.F. Bruce, 'Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?', *BJRL* 58 (1975-6) 294, who rightly cautions that the passage 'should not be exploited as a blanket explanation to cover inconsistencies of every kind', but equally should not be underplayed, as by P. Vielhauer, 'On the "Paulinism" of Acts' *SLA* 40 and G. Bornkamm, 'The Missionary Stance of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 and in Acts' *SLA* 194-207.

<sup>34</sup> Vielhauer, "'Paulinism" of Acts' 36; Bornkamm, 'Address of Paul' 201-2; cf. Conzelmann, 'Missionary Stance of Paul' 226.

<sup>35</sup> Vielhauer "'Paulinism" of Acts' 41, cites parallels for this equation only from Col. 1:14 and Eph. 1:7 (which I should accept as Pauline), and with Acts 13:38, compares also the speeches of Peter (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43).

proclaimed justification by faith, but as a Gentile lacking the background of the law he did not know its central and absolute importance, so he presented only a 'partial justification', by faith *also*, not faith *alone*, where for Jewish Christians faith was made to complement law.<sup>36</sup> Thus there was a fundamental distinction between Luke and Paul in Christology.<sup>37</sup> Luke's Christology was pre-Pauline, his natural theology, concept of the law, and eschatology post-Pauline. 'He presents no specifically Pauline idea'.<sup>38</sup>

There is a first line of response to this on quite general grounds. The comparisons as offered depend on the assumption that the documents on either side are capable of a rigidly literalistic and exhaustive analysis irrespective of difference of context and audience. But Paul's thought, as represented unequivocally in his epistles, was characterised by a 'higher consistency' which comprehended a pragmatic flexibility where the fundamental truths of the Gospel were not at stake. He was emancipated from the law, but not therefore in bondage to his own emancipation. 'There are some converts from an old faith to a new faith', writes Bruce, 'who look upon the practices of the old faith, however ethically neutral they may be, as henceforth tabu. They have thus exchanged a positive form of legal obligation for a negative form'.<sup>39</sup> The Paul of the *Hauptbriefe* was actually criticised for vacillation and inconsistency (2 Cor. 1:17-9), and the same change may lie behind his reponse in 1 Corinthians 9:22. In the Jewish context he conformed to Jewish practices, studying in all places to give no offence unnecessarily in matters indifferent (1 Cor. 10: 32-3). This is just where we must take issue with Vielhauer, for whom 'circumcision is never a matter of indifference' citing Gal. 5:2-

<sup>36</sup> Bruce 'The Paul of Acts...' 301 n.1 points out that in Acts 13:38, 39 the passive of δικαιόω is (twice) translated 'be freed' by RSV and 'be acquitted'/'acquittal' by NEB, with the implication that something less than the full Pauline sense is meant. Of course these words do not permit the full doctrine of Pauline justification by faith to be deduced from them, but there is no need to minimise the connection by a reduced rendering of the word or to construe its content here in an un-Pauline way. This is quite in line with the teaching of Romans 3:20-6.

<sup>37</sup> Vielhauer, "'Paulinism" of Acts' 41-3.

<sup>38</sup> Vielhauer, "'Taulinism" of Acts' 48.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce, 'The Paul of Acts...' 295.

6),<sup>40</sup> for in the very passage that he cites, Paul says it is (Gal. 5:6; cf. Gal. 6:15; so Bruce).<sup>41</sup> Where a practice indifferent in itself is made an obligation to establish favour with God it is a denial of justification by faith alone, but where this abuse is not at issue Paul can be flexible. I have no intractable difficulty with the passages in Acts whose authenticity is constantly attacked because they represent a Paul who accommodates himself to Jewish practices (Acts 16:3; 18:18b; 21:23-6).<sup>42</sup>

Against this background it may be argued that the Paul of the Epistles would have been likely to make a first approach to an educated and even philosophic pagan audience in some such terms as we have in the present address. What then of the apparent differences from characteristically Pauline ideas? A crucial point here is to recognise the necessarily selective and unsystematic nature of the speech. This applies at two levels: (1) that the speech is a summary only, which merely mentions or leaves implicit what would have needed explanation; (2) that apologetic, which aims to

<sup>40</sup> Vielhauer, "Paulinism" of Acts' 40-1

<sup>41</sup> Bruce, 'The Paul of Acts' 297-8

<sup>42</sup> This is not to minimise the problems of these passages, but to suggest that in principle they are tractable, as difficulties of the kind which authenticate rather than otherwise. It seems unlikely that a writer who at the least knew of Paul's views of justification (cf. Acts 13:38-9), however imperfectly he be supposed to have understood them, would have invented the episode of the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:3). See the long discussion in Haenchen (Acts 479-82), who rejects older theories of redactional insertion and believes Luke was here the victim of an unreliable, but congenial, tradition. But Haenchen repeats in vigorous terms the assumption of the necessary religious significance of circumcision and absolutises Paul's rejection of it, depicting a Paul 'in bondage to his emancipation' and citing Overbeck to the effect that the historical Paul recognised 'only the Christian freedom *not* to fulfil' the law [his italics] (Acts 481). This passage remains difficult, but the difficulty is one of entering sensitively into the circumstances which prompted Paul's line of action in an exceptional case which raised different issues from those previously debated in the Jerusalem Conference. In the other two passages the problem is less acute, especially if we acknowledge Paul's many-sided flexibility. Among Jews he practised Jewish piety, which was proof against allegations that he preached a facile Antinomian licence. The incident of Acts 21:23-6 had disastrous results, but that is no argument against the intention of easing a delicate situation on ground where the gospel was not at stake. The implication of Acts 21:21 is that Paul was attacked by false reports to which his action was a natural response. Cf. Haenchen, *Acts* 609.

meet the hearer where he stands, necessarily partakes of this selective character. It does not raise issues which mean nothing to him, merely for the sake of staking out a completeness of theological stance. Examples of this reticence are found in the speech, and in matters which lend themselves to the criticism of those who desire completeness. God will judge the world in righteousness by a 'man' whom he has appointed (Acts 17:31). Here the speaker could not indulge Christological refinements which would be meaningless to a pagan audience, if they did not actually suggest a false picture. But the central teaching, of a day when God will judge the world by Christ, is closely paralleled in Romans 2:16. When Albert Schweitzer contrasts a 'God-mysticism' in the speech with a 'Christ-mysticism' as exclusively Pauline, he is quick to explain it by denying the Paulinism of the speech,<sup>43</sup> but the difference may again be explained from the difference of audience and the horizons of their understanding. And where Luke uses the terminology of Hellenistic philosophy, he is not putting in Paul's mouth words impossible for Paul; rather, the apologist is meeting his audience on their own ground to respond to them there, endorsing what he can in their terms, but effectually also submitting their ideas to a profound critique.

Gärtner's conclusions are very interesting here in the strong stress he lays upon the similarities of thought in this speech with the Paul of Romans, and also with Old Testament and Jewish texts. He sees the revelation of God in creation and history as having the same function here as in Romans. There is the same polemic against idolatry in both. The speech's depiction of God has no traits that can be called non-Pauline. The terms of Acts 17:28, often taken to reflect a pantheistic conception, are akin to Paul's diction. The criticism of idolatry also follows a pattern often found in Old Testament and Jewish texts. There is another striking likeness with Romans 1 in the function given to natural revelation and in the genuinely Jewish

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<sup>43</sup> A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (London, A. & C. Black 1953) 6.

doctrine that the creature may not be worshipped as if it were God.<sup>44</sup>

Much more could be said. It may be claimed that the critics here assume the situational unreality of the speech, and interpret it through a presuppositional mould. Thus when Vielhauer insists that in its place in Acts it has a function which Luke intends it to fulfil *as a self-contained* whole [my italics]<sup>45</sup>, this excludes *a priori* the possibility that it represents an apologetic selectively adapted to an original audience.<sup>46</sup> Nor am I satisfied that this apologetic thrust can be credibly explained in Lukan terms through a special kinship with the second century apologists. It is indeed a model of apologetic, but its force as apologetic is rooted in its situation, and partly lost in the necessity of summarising a recollection. It presupposes a real encounter, not a Lukan set-piece, which must have focused more pointedly on the latent arguments. This is Pauline apologetic in substance. It is neither Luke nor a proto-Justin. And why not? How did Paul ever act as pioneer missionary to the Gentiles without mastering the cultural problems of communication with them? We hear much today of 'contextualisation': was he not faced with the same challenge? Does not his very achievement entail his success in meeting that challenge? The paradigmatic character of the speech, as a classic of intercultural communication applicable to our own increasingly pluralistic world, is indeed inseparable from the appreciation of the 'reality' of its original context.

<sup>44</sup> B Gartner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala, Almqvist and Wicksells 1955) 250.

<sup>45</sup> Vielhauer, "'Paulinism' of Acts' *SLA* 37.

<sup>46</sup> The argument as a whole must be seen (regrettably) against this strongly presuppositional factor. Within the limits of *SLA* alone, the Lukan creation of speeches is asserted, simplistically and unexamined, by Vielhauer, "'Paulinism' of Acts' 33, E. Schweizer, *Mysticism of Paul* 208 and Conzelmann, 'Address of Paul' 218, in notable contrast with Moule, 'The Christology of Acts', *SLA* 167, who treats this as a real question, and concludes cautiously that Luke may have reliable sources for the passages he discusses, *SLA* 172.

### Conclusions

I conclude this discussion with the consideration of some smaller tributaries and corollaries of the central debate on authenticity.

(1) How, in the light of this study, should we evaluate the structure and style of the speech, with its assonance, alliteration and paronomasia?<sup>47</sup> Are these after all pointers to a rhetorical piece of Luke's self-conscious making? Perhaps the style may be called rhetorical in one sense and not in another: not in the sense that it could be, or could purport to be, a reasonably full transcript of a speech suitable for oral delivery, but in the sense that it uses devices of structure and emphasis appropriate to the elevated and literary rendering of a formal speech. There is no reason to insist that we have other than Lukan style or to doubt that Luke would summarise the content of a speech with a flavour of style suitable to its occasion. If in fact he drew his account direct from Paul's reminiscences, there is equally no reason why he should not in the process have repeated Pauline phrases, as I believe he repeated poetic quotations actually cited by Paul. The present shape of this speech may indeed owe much to the form of Paul's own retelling of it, and in the result the Lukan and Pauline contributions to its presentation may be inseparable. It may be a case of shaping by 'anecdotal transmission', in a way not so clearly applicable to any other speech in Acts.

(2) Is Horsley's argument for Luke's use of interruption as a literary device helpful in understanding the form of the speech, and its ending in particular? The thrust of his case is not altogether clear, and he treats this speech as a less striking manifestation of the phenomenon.<sup>48</sup> If he implies that Luke used this device to abbreviate a speech which in its original

<sup>47</sup> Note e.g. the assonance ζωὴν καὶ πνοήν (17:25); alliteration ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου (v. 26); paronomasia πάντας πανταχοῦ; (v. 30); the use of optatives (v. 27); of particle-groupings μόνον δέ, τε καὶ, ἀλλὰ καί (v. 27).

<sup>48</sup> G.H.R. Horsley, *NTS* 32 (1986) 610, conceding that this is 'not so unequivocal an interruption in *medias res* as the others'.

form ran smoothly to an intended conclusion, I think not. Paul at Athens, like Stephen before the Sanhedrin, built up a case which embodied a telling critique of his hearers. It seems entirely plausible to suppose that they simmered, until the climax, involving here an intolerably alien concept, provoked an outburst, here the underlying anger breaking into mockery. Faithful preaching in such a context was liable to provoke, and if reaction were to come, it was important that it should not be roused prematurely, and by nothing less than the heart and focus of the message. It may readily be supposed that reaction and division among the hearers was a constant result of the early Christian preaching, and there seems no need to invoke literary abbreviation on this ground. I agree however about the need and fact of abbreviation, and the literary skill to offer *multum in parvo*, but I suggest that is achieved by a précis of the highlights of the substance, not by a dramatic device of interruption.<sup>49</sup> We should probably not try to draw any conclusions about omissions in the speech. The lack of the cross and justification in the report is not significant for this may have been included in the approach to the resurrection but omitted in the retelling as assumed common ground to Paul, Luke and their immediate audiences. The point is, I think, that the resurrection was the focus of the address, and the point which divided the hearers. Further explanation was certainly needed afterwards in any case for those whose interest was seriously aroused.

(3) There is an old suggestion, not much in vogue in current academic circles, that Paul blamed his excursion into philosophy for his lack of success in Athens, and then

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<sup>49</sup> It is in part Horsley's point that the interruption is usually hostile, and Acts 10:44 (cf. 11:15) therefore a notable exception. But this tendency is equally susceptible of the alternative explanation, and the two (or ? three) interrupted speeches favour the alternative, for 2:40 asserts that Peter had much more to say which is not reported (hardly an 'interruption'), 13:42 and 20:36 run their course, and the latter is among known friends. It might indeed be claimed that Peter's speech ends uninterrupted at 2:36 and that 2:40 alludes to further unreported exhortation, while indicating plainly that Luke makes no profession to report the spoken work exhaustively. This accords with what we have said about the prevalence of the speech-material throughout the narrative, and speeches shorter, but hardly different in kind, do not display the same characteristics, even though they too bear the marks of abbreviation.

determined to 'know nothing' among the Corinthians 'save Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:2).<sup>50</sup> This view is misconceived, and not now important in itself, but worth mentioning as a useful catalyst. Paul would surely have said that his determination at Corinth applied no less here. This speech is indeed presenting 'Christ crucified' (a prerequisite inseparable from the stress on the resurrection). Paul's words are not a pronouncement about the *manner* of his preaching at Corinth, but about the heart of the Gospel presented, and in that I make bold to think the Lukan Paul at Athens and Paul at Corinth are of one piece. Nor are we to think in terms of failure at Athens. (It is in fact odd that those who see the speech as a Lukan creation are content to see it also as attached to a Pauline failure. If Luke were presenting a model pericope, why should he scruple to make his idealisation conspicuously successful?) The speech is a model in a slightly different sense, an authentic report of a classic confrontation. The response was indeed limited, and that is frankly reported. But the speaker's responsibility was to present his case, whatever the response, and this is a masterpiece of cross-cultural communication.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> In the form often offered, this theory exemplifies a fallacy of reasoning, *post hoc* (or *cum hoc*) *propter hoc*, quite apart from the fact I believe it misunderstands the speech (cf. D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids, Baker 1984] 134). The force of such a connection must depend on the much more rigorous establishing of a real causal link. The idea that I Cor. 1-2 depicts a Paul who advocated a 'foolish' simplicity of the Gospel against the use of the intellect is a dangerously false and simplistic dichotomy. His polemic is directed rather against those who set up a misuse of the intellect in defiance of God. This issue apparently arose within the Corinthian situation.

<sup>51</sup> If any connection is to be seen between the Athens incident and 1 Cor. 2:2, a better case might be made on rather different ground, though this can be no more than a speculation which I forbear to press. On the possible ground that the function of the Areopagus in this case was to audit prospective lecturers, Paul's speech might be seen as nearer akin (in modern transposition) to a probationary lecture or the oral defence of a thesis of *Habilitationschrift* than to a formal trial. Originality of presentation was at a premium, then as now (*mutandis mutatis*; cf. Acts 17:21). This appears in an entertaining story in Philostratus (*Vit Soph* 2.8/578-579), where another Cilician, the sophist Philagus (2nd cent. AD) delivered at Athens a declamation (ἐπίδειξις) which he had previously published elsewhere, and critics in his audience read the written text aloud in unison with the speaker. The incident is located, not in the court of Areopagus, but in the theatre of Agrippa, and the incident has no more force for our discussion than as another illustration of Athenian life (cf also *Vit Soph* 1.2/485; 1.21 /521; etc. *passim*). Cf. also E.A. Judge, 'Paul's Boasting in relation

I conclude with the observation that there may be a real task to be done in exploring the corollaries of the substantial acceptance of this speech, even if that be thought by some to be a fruitless and presuppositionally-conditioned exercise. I submit, however that there is evidence which entails a more positive evaluation of the speech, and the danger from presupposition lies rather in inadequately based denial. This pericope has focused our attention on the evidence for the original context. Our other test-cases highlight different critical factors.

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to Contemporary Professional Practice', *ABR* 16 (1968) 37-50; C. Forbes, 'Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric', *NTS* 32 (1986) 1-30. I make no apology for the attempt to explore possible relationships between a Pauline understanding of the speech and the Paul of the letters. Such may in principle, I believe, be integrated, but caution is needed against insufficiently rigorous attempts to do it.