

The Trial of the Gospel

*An Apologetic Reading of
Luke's Trial Narratives*

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	page xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xii
1 Introduction	3
Trials and apologetics in Luke–Acts: setting the scene	3
Previous research on apologetics in Luke–Acts	4
Conclusion	21
The present approach: thesis, plan of work, and method	22
PART ONE JESUS ON TRIAL	
2 Narrative precedents of Jesus’ trial	27
Introduction	27
Previous studies on the trial of Jesus in the Third Gospel	28
The plot leading to Jesus’ trial	35
Jesus’ prediction and explanation of his trial	50
Conclusion	60
3 Luke’s account of Jesus’ trial	62
Introduction	62
The hearing before the Sanhedrin (22.66–71)	62
The initial trial before Pilate (23.1–5)	70
The trial before Herod (23.6–12)	76
Again before Pilate (23.13–25)	82
Conclusion	89
4 The trial of Jesus in narrative retrospection	91
Introduction	91
The post-trial section of Luke’s passion narrative (Luke 23.26–56)	92

Jesus' resurrection: the final vindication of the Messiah	106
The trial of Jesus in Acts	112
Conclusion	125
 PART TWO THE CHURCH ON TRIAL	
5 The trials of Peter	131
Introduction	131
Jesus' prediction of the disciples' trials (Luke 12.11–12; 21.12–15)	132
Peter's trials and existing paradigms for Lukan apologetics	137
Peter's trials in recent studies	139
The trial of Peter and John (Acts 4.1–31)	140
The trial of Peter and the apostolic group (Acts 5.17–42)	145
Conclusion	149
 6 The 'trial' of Stephen	 152
Introduction	152
The function of Luke's story of Stephen: previous research	154
Stephen's trial re-examined	158
Conclusion	172
 7 The trials of Paul	 175
Introduction	175
The function of Paul's trials in Acts: previous research	176
Paul's trials re-examined	187
Conclusion: the trial of the gospel	213
 8 Conclusions	 219
The apologetic function of Luke's trial narratives: a synopsis	219
Implications for other areas of Lukan study	222
Suggestions for further related research	225
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 228
<i>Index of biblical passages</i>	243
<i>Index of subjects</i>	251

1

INTRODUCTION

Trials and apologetics in Luke–Acts: setting the scene

Luke's¹ special interest in forensic trials has often been recognised in Lukan scholarship.² The textual evidence for such a concern on Luke's part abounds.³ While in the Gospels⁴ of Matthew and Mark Jesus predicts the disciples' trials only once (Matt. 10.17–20; Mark 13.9–11), in the Third Gospel he does so twice (12.11–12; 21.12–15). Similarly, whereas for the other two Synoptics Jesus' trial includes only two episodes (one before the Sanhedrin and one before Pilate), in Luke's Gospel four trial scenes are recorded: one before the Sanhedrin (22.66–71), a preliminary hearing before Pilate (23.1–5), a peculiarly Lukan episode before Herod (23.6–12), and a second session before Pilate (23.13–25). As one turns to Acts, the evidence is even more ample. After a brief presentation of the origins and lifestyle of the early Christian community in Jerusalem, the reader encounters two extensive trial scenes involving Peter (4.1–31;

¹ The author of both the Third Gospel and Acts will be referred to throughout as Luke. The common authorship (as well as narrative unity) of the two books is advocated or assumed by numerous recent Lukan studies: so, for example, W. S. Kurz, *Reading Luke–Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993; I. H. Marshall, 'Acts and the "Former Treatise"', in B. W. Winter and A. D. Clarke (eds.), *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting*, BAFCS, vol. I, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993, pp. 163–82; R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 5:1–2, Zürich and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benzinger, 1986, especially pp. 24–5; R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols., Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986, 1990. Even when the generic, narrative, and theological unity has been called into question (M. C. Parsons and R. I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), the authorial unity has remained largely unchallenged.

² See, for instance: J. H. Neyrey, *The Passion According to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke's Soteriology*, New York: Paulist Press, 1985, pp. 84–5; A. A. Trites, 'The Importance of Legal Scenes and Language in the Book of Acts', *NovT* 16 (1974), 278–84.

³ For more detail on the evidence listed here, see the relevant sections below.

⁴ To help distinguish between 'Gospel(s)' as New Testament literary documents and 'gospel' as the content of the Christian belief and proclamation, I shall write the former with an initial capital and the latter without.

5.17–42). These are soon followed by an even lengthier account of the trial and martyrdom of Stephen (6.9–7.60). Finally, Paul’s whole missionary activity is scattered with conflicts and challenges which are often cast in a trial form, culminating, undoubtedly, with Paul’s judicial history between his arrest in Jerusalem (21.27) and his two-year stay in Rome (28.30–1). It is not without justification, then, that Neyrey can write: ‘Forensic trials in Acts have an incredible scope: (a) *all of the major figures* of Acts (Peter, Stephen, and Paul) are tried, (b) in *all of the significant places* where the Gospel was preached (Judea, Jerusalem, Achaia, and Rome); (c) the trials take place *before Jewish courts as well as Roman tribunals*.’⁵

It is somewhat intriguing, in view of such a significant Lukan emphasis, that there is to date not a single monograph specifically exploring Luke’s use of the trial motif. The attention has tended to focus instead on individual trial scenes or, at most, on the trial(s) of a single Lukan character – mainly Jesus or Paul.⁶ To the extent to which the question of authorial intent has been raised with regard to the trial material in larger sections of Luke–Acts, this has been done only indirectly, mainly in connection with the representation of Luke–Acts as some form of apologia. It is important, therefore, to introduce this discussion of Luke’s trial motif with a more general survey of previous research on apologetics in Luke–Acts and thus acquire a better grasp of the angles from which Lukan trials have been interpreted in the past. This survey is at the same time necessary in view of the fact that the present study itself proposes an apologetic reading of Luke’s trial motif.

Previous research on apologetics in Luke–Acts

The present survey⁷ aims to include both works which have explicitly applied ‘apologetic’ terminology to aspects of Luke–Acts and works which have noted in Luke’s writing tendencies which would naturally belong

⁵ Neyrey, *Passion*, p. 85.

⁶ For bibliographical information relating to individual Lukan characters, see the relevant chapters below.

⁷ A partly similar survey of Lukan apologetics to the one presented here can be found in S. E. Pattison, ‘A Study of the Apologetic Function of the Summaries of Acts’, unpublished PhD dissertation, Emory University, 1990, pp. 10–35. Several observations justify my own review. First, the number and importance of the works which have been produced since Pattison’s thesis are indicative of the need for a more up-to-date survey. Second, Pattison’s survey is limited to Acts; this one includes Luke’s Gospel. Third, only very limited attention is given by Pattison to works which I shall list under the heading ‘An apologia for the gospel’ (see pp. 12–21) – his survey does not in fact include such a category.

to what we regard as ‘Christian apologetics’.⁸ Due to the fluidity of the term in its contemporary use, its meaning within the present work needs to be defined here. When used with reference to a first-century context, I take ‘Christian apologetic’ (which I use interchangeably with ‘Christian apologia’) to mean *the exercise of advocating the reliability of the Christian faith, or aspects of it*.⁹ The term ‘advocating’ is preferred to the more commonly used ‘defending’ because I take apologetics to include not only defence against specific objections but also the positive presentation of a case on behalf of the Christian faith.

The major sections in the survey below are based on the purported *object* of Luke’s apologetic (i.e. on whose behalf Luke is arguing), while the subsections describe the specific *nature* of Luke’s purported apologetic. It should also be noted that due to the broad scope of this survey I shall limit the discussion to works which view Luke’s apologetic agenda as having some relation to Luke’s entire work, or at least to the whole of Luke’s second volume (which, generally speaking, has been the more closely associated with apologetics). More in-depth discussion of previous research on individual trial accounts will be offered at the beginning of relevant sections – in fact even some of the works which are presented here in an overview will be analysed in more detail later. As for the authors whose works are surveyed here, although most of them would insist that Luke has more than one purpose in mind, I shall discuss their suggestions only in the areas in which their work has made a distinctive contribution.

⁸ One possibly surprising omission from the present survey is P. F. Esler’s *Community and Gospel in Luke–Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1987). For those who view ‘apologetics’ and ‘legitimation’ as two closely related notions, Esler’s repeated designation of Luke’s task as one of socio-political legitimation may of itself provide sufficient grounds for including his monograph in the category of works dealing with Lukan apologetics. The reason for which I have refrained from including it is the author’s specific dissociation of his thesis from interpretations which regard Luke’s goal as apologetic (Esler, *Community*, pp. 205–19).

⁹ In modern times, ‘Christian apologetics’ has also come to include the *study* (as well as the actual exercise) of advocating the Christian faith. For a definition of ‘apologetics’, as a modern theological discipline and as distinct from ‘apology’ (‘the defence of Christian truth’), see A. Richardson, *Christian Apologetics*, London: SCM Press, 1947, p. 19. Nevertheless, such a linguistic distinction is typically ignored in contemporary literature. Among the numerous works which use the term ‘apologetics’ to include not only the study but also the exercise of defending Christian truth, see D. K. Clark and N. L. Geisler, *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990; A. Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, London: Hutchinson, 1971; N. L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978; P. J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991; P. Kreeft and R. K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994.

An apologia for Paul

M. Schneckenburger, whose *Über den Zweck der Apostelgeschichte*¹⁰ was the first thorough examination of Luke's purpose,¹¹ has argued that Acts was designed as an apology for Paul, addressed to Jewish Christians, with the intention of defending Paul's position in the church against the attacks of the Judaizers.¹²

In a similar vein, E. Trocmé has maintained that towards the end of the first century there were two rival branches of the church: the Pauline churches of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia, and the Judaizing churches, rooted especially in Alexandria. In this context, Trocmé suggests, Acts was written as 'une apologie intrachrétienne' ('an inter-Christian apologia'),¹³ which through its commendation of Paul was meant to show that the Pauline churches were in no way inferior to the churches of Alexandria which were proud to trace their origins back to the Jerusalem church and the twelve apostles. In order to achieve this, Luke presented Paul as 'le seul continuateur de l'oeuvre entreprise par les Douze' ('the only continuator of the work performed by the Twelve').¹⁴

More recently, this general trend has been revitalised by the works of J. Jervell and R. L. Brawley. According to Jervell, Luke's extensive account of Paul's trial, and especially of his apologetic speeches in this context (22.1–21; 23.1; 24.10–21; 26.1–23), is a device which enables the author to put forward an apologia for Paul's Jewish orthodoxy, in the context of the apostle's controversial reputation in Luke's ecclesiastical milieu.¹⁵ Brawley's contribution,¹⁶ on the other hand, is to a large

¹⁰ Bern, 1841.

¹¹ See W. W. Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989, pp. 32–3.

¹² For a useful summary of Schneckenburger's position, see A. J. Mattill, 'The Purpose of Acts: Schneckenburger Reconsidered', in W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (eds.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce*, Exeter: Paternoster, 1970, pp. 108–12. See also Gasque, *History*, pp. 32–9.

¹³ E. Trocmé *Le 'Livre des Actes' et l'histoire*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957, pp. 54–5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁵ J. Jervell, 'Paul: The Teacher of Israel: The Apologetic Speeches of Paul in Acts', in J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972, pp. 153–83 (previously published in German as 'Paulus – Der Lehrer Israels. Zu den apologetischen Paulusreden in der Apostelgeschichte', *NovT* 10 (1968), 164–90). The Jewishness of the Lukan Paul, with its apologetic function, is also advocated in several other works of J. Jervell: 'James: The Defender of Paul', in Jervell, *Luke and the People of God*, pp. 185–207; 'Paul in the Acts of the Apostles: Tradition, History, Theology', in J. Kremer (ed.), *Les Actes des Apôtres*, BETL 48, Gembloux: J. Duculot; Leuven University Press, 1979, pp. 297–306; *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.

¹⁶ R. L. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987, esp. ch. 9.

extent a contemporary reading of Luke's writings through the spectacles of F. C. Baur,¹⁷ according to whom the early church was torn between the Judaizing tendencies of the Petrine Christianity and the universalistic orientations of the Pauline churches (in welcoming Gentiles without requiring them first to become Jewish proselytes).¹⁸ As the conflict from Jewish quarters was increasing, Brawley argues, Luke decided to compose his writings, which he aimed at the anti-Paulinist groups (Jews, Jewish Christians, converts from among God-fearers). Luke's purpose is partly apologetic, as he shows how even the Jewish opposition plays a legitimating role by establishing Jesus' identity (especially and programatically in the Nazareth incident) and by prompting Paul's Gentile mission. At the same time, Brawley argues, Luke's purpose is also conciliatory: Paul undergoes Jewish rituals; through the apostolic decree Gentiles are required to make concessions to Jewish Christians; the Pharisees are portrayed predominantly positively.¹⁹

Finally, a more solitary voice among the well-populated camp of those who view Paul's defence as central to the purpose of Acts is that of A. J. Mattill.²⁰ In his view, although Luke had already been gathering material for his story of the early church, the decisive factor in the final shaping of Acts was Luke's realisation of the indifference, or even hostility, of the Jewish Christians towards Paul, as he came under Jewish attack in Jerusalem (Acts 21). Luke's specific aim is, therefore, to deal with the objections of the Jewish Christians against Paul and thus to cause them to side with him, in the context of his still forthcoming trial in Rome.²¹

¹⁷ Brawley himself (*ibid.*, p. 3) acknowledges antecedents for his approach in the work of Baur.

¹⁸ See Gasque, *History*, pp. 27–30.

¹⁹ Brawley, *Luke–Acts*, pp. 157–8.

²⁰ Mattill, 'Purpose'. The same proposal finds confirmation for Mattill as he later studies the concepts of *Naherwartung* and *Fernerwartung* in the book of Acts, and as he 'reconsiders' H. H. Evans' Jesus–Paul parallels in Luke–Acts and R. B. Rackham's early dating of Luke's writings (A. J. Mattill, '*Naherwartung, Fernerwartung* and the Purpose of Luke–Acts: Weymouth Reconsidered', *CBQ* 34 (1972), 276–93, especially p. 293; 'The Jesus–Paul Parallels and the Purpose of Luke–Acts: H. H. Evans Reconsidered', *NovT* 17 (1975), 15–46, especially p. 46; 'The Date and Purpose of Luke–Acts: Rackham Reconsidered', *CBQ* 40 (1978), 335–50, especially p. 348).

²¹ Somewhat similar to Mattill's position is that advocated by a number of scholars before him and according to which the book of Acts, or Luke–Acts as a whole, was written in order to provide material which could be used at Paul's trial before Nero: M. V. Aberle, 'Exegetische Studien. 2. Über den Zweck der Apostelgeschichte', *TQ* 37 (1855), 173–236; G. S. Duncan, *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry: A Reconstruction (With Special Reference to the Ephesian Origin of the Imprisonment Epistles)*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930, pp. 96–100; D. Plooiij, 'The Work of St Luke', *Exp* 8:8 (1914), 511–23; and 'Again: The Work of St Luke', *Exp* 8:13 (1917), 108–24; J. I. Still, *St Paul on Trial*, London: SCM Press, 1923.

A few observations regarding the contention that Luke aimed to present an apologia for Paul are in place. The works advocating this position have the undisputed merit of having made Lukan scholarship aware of the unique significance which Paul – and particularly the accusations and defences surrounding his character in the final chapters of Acts – has for any analysis of Luke’s aims. Equally valid is their special emphasis on Paul’s relationship to Judaism, as a major dimension of the Pauline conflicts in Acts. Notwithstanding such positive contributions, certain severe limitations of this position cannot be overlooked. Thus, in its earlier forms, at least, this suggestion has been too much dependent on the nineteenth-century Tübingen representation of early Christianity, a representation which has often been criticised for building on Hegelian dialectic more than on textual evidence.²² This criticism is further strengthened by the observation that Paul is not the only Lukan character whom Luke legitimates in relation to Judaism – one only needs to think of Jesus’ rootedness in Judaism by means of the infancy narratives, of his general conformity to Jewish practices during his ministry, and of the close association of the early Christian community in Jerusalem with the Jewish temple. This is not to deny, of course, that Paul has a unique place in Luke’s apologetic to Judaism, and the reasons for this will be discussed in chapter 7. For now, it suffices to say that Paul’s Jewishness is for Luke part and parcel of his concern with the continuity between the new Christian movement and Israel’s hopes, a concern within which Paul has an important, but not exclusive, place. Finally, and most significantly, whatever importance one is to attribute to Paul and his defence in Luke’s scheme, it remains notoriously difficult to stretch it so that it can account for the whole of Acts,²³ let alone for the Third Gospel.²⁴

Little else has been written after Mattill in support of his specific understanding of Luke’s purpose, except for a short article by V. E. Vine (‘The Purpose and Date of Acts’, *ExpT* 96 (1984), 45–8), which states that Acts ‘is to be seen as an appeal to the Judaizers for peace and reconciliation as Paul draws near to his trial. The hope is that they will close ranks behind Paul and not disown so faithful a witness to Christ’ (‘Purpose’, 48).

²² See, for example, Gasque, *History*, especially pp. 52–4; Pattison, ‘Study’, pp. 12–17. For a more sympathetic critique, cf. T. V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity: Attitudes towards Peter in Christian Writings of the First Two Centuries*, WUNT 2:15, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985, pp. 24–33, 211–12. A recent version of the Tübingen reconstruction of Early Christianity is M. D. Goulder’s *A Tale of Two Missions*, London: SCM Press, 1994.

²³ See, however, Brawley, *Luke–Acts*, pp. 28–50, who attempts to show that ‘the story of Paul not only dominates the literary structure of the second half of Acts but also rests on major preparation for Paul in the first half of Acts’ (p. 28).

²⁴ See also R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke–Acts*, ed. J. Riches, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982, p. 21.

A political apologia pro ecclesia

The suggestion that Luke–Acts was written as a political apologetic directed to the Roman authorities with the purpose of acquiring or maintaining religious freedom for Christians has a particularly long history. In an article published in 1720, C. A. Heumann argued that Luke dedicated his writing to the Roman magistrate Theophilus so that it would serve as an apologia against the false accusations which were being brought against Christianity.²⁵ A similar position was taken by E. Zeller in his commentary, published in 1854. He suggested that Luke intended both to refute the charges of pagans against Christianity and at the same time to give Christian readers material which they in turn could use in their own defences against such charges.²⁶ Again, in a short book published in 1897, J. Weiss insisted that Acts is an apology addressed to pagans with the purpose of refuting Jewish accusations against Christians.²⁷

(a) *A case for Christianity's religio licita status*

During the twentieth century the interpretation of Luke–Acts as a political *apologia pro ecclesia* has continued in several forms. One major variant started with the claim that at the time when Luke–Acts was written every religion in the Roman world had to be specially licensed by Rome in order to be allowed to function. Judaism, it was argued, enjoyed such a status of *religio licita*, and consequently the purpose of Luke–Acts was to present Christianity as a genuine branch of Judaism in order to enjoy its privileges.²⁸

²⁵ C. A. Heumann, 'Dissertatio de Theophilo cui Lucas Historiam Sacram Inscriptis', *BHPT*, classis IV, Bremen, 1720, pp. 483–505.

²⁶ E. Zeller, *The Contents and Origin of the Acts of the Apostles Critically Investigated by Dr Edward Zeller*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1876 (original German edition, 1854), p. 164.

²⁷ J. Weiss, *Über die Absicht und den literarischen Charakter der Apostelgeschichte*, Marburg and Göttingen, 1897.

²⁸ Among the most notable statements of this position are: F. J. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake (eds.), *The Beginnings of Christianity*, part 1, vol. II, London: Macmillan, 1922, pp. 177–87; H. J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke–Acts*, London: SPCK, 1968 (first published New York: Macmillan, 1927), esp. pp. 299–316; and B. S. Easton, *The Purpose of Acts*, London, 1936, reprinted as *Early Christianity: The Purpose of Acts and Other Papers*, ed. F. C. Grant, London: SPCK, 1955, pp. 33–57. More minor contributions from similar angles can be found in: F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, third revised and enlarged edition, Leicester: Apollos, 1990, p. 23; G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St Luke*, London: A. & C. Black, 1968, pp. 13–15; F. V. Filson, *Three Crucial Decades*, Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1963, pp. 17–18; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, New York: Doubleday, 1981, vol. I, p. 10. E. Haenchen also speaks repeatedly of Luke's concern to gain political toleration for Christianity by emphasising

Undoubtedly the single most significant contribution of the proponents of the *religio licita* interpretation is their search for a reading of Luke's purpose which is able to do justice both to the author's emphasis on the continuity between Christianity and Judaism and to the political dimension of the narrative. Yet several observations make their solution very difficult to accept. First, few Roman officials would have been able to appreciate the weight of Luke's (mainly theological) case for Christianity's continuity with Judaism, even were they interested in it. Second, recent research has thrown serious doubts on the premise that the category *religio licita* even existed at the time of Luke's writing.²⁹ Third, if, according to the great majority of contemporary scholarship,³⁰ Luke's work is to be dated after the Jewish revolt of 66–74 CE,³¹ it is difficult to imagine that Luke could have hoped to do Christianity a political favour by tying it to Judaism.

(b) *A case for Christianity's political harmlessness*

Not impressed by the arguments of those who saw Luke striving to acquire a *religio licita* status for Christianity, H. Conzelmann proposed a different understanding of Luke's defence of Christianity in relation to the Roman system.³² According to Conzelmann, Luke's apologetic is prompted by the realisation that the church was likely to continue in the world and that it therefore needed to define its position in relation to both Judaism and the Roman Empire.³³ Accordingly, he sees in Luke–Acts a twofold apologetic concern, one related to Judaism and the other to the state. Nevertheless, he

its kinship with Judaism (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971, pp. 102, 630–1, 691–4), but does not condition this interpretation on the existence of a formal *religio licita* category at the time of Luke's writing. He prefers, therefore, to speak in terms of a 'religio quasi licita', a more general form of tolerance which Judaism enjoyed within the empire (*Acts*, pp. 630–1). Cf. also Haenchen's 'Judentum und Christentum in der Apostelgeschichte', *ZNW* 54 (1963), 155–87.

²⁹ See, for example, Maddox, *Purpose*, pp. 91–3.

³⁰ For a useful classification of scholarly opinion on the matter, see G. E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke–Acts and Apologetic Historiography*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992, pp. 329–30.

³¹ On the dating of the Jewish revolt, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63BCE–66CE*, London: SCM Press, 1992, p. 33.

³² H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke*, London: Faber and Faber, 1960, pp. 137–49. See also H. Flender (*St Luke, Theologian of Redemptive History*, London: SPCK, 1967, pp. 56–62), who adopts Conzelmann's position and illustrates it in relation to the nativity story (Luke 2), the introduction to the parable of the pounds (Luke 19.11), and Jesus' examination before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22.66–23.1).

³³ Conzelmann, *Theology*, p. 137.

challenges the assumption of his predecessors, according to which Luke's apologetic to the state is to be understood in terms of Christianity's relation to Judaism.³⁴ For Conzelmann, Luke's political apologetic runs through Luke–Acts quite independently of his Jewish apologetic. In essence, it is said to consist of Luke's emphasis on the non-politicality of the Christian story, starting from John the Baptist and continuing into the ministry of Jesus and the early church.³⁵ Particular attention is paid, however, to the Lukan account of Jesus' passion³⁶ and to a number of incidents connected with Paul's trial.³⁷ Luke is allegedly at pains to show in these passages that 'to confess oneself to be a Christian implies no crime against Roman law'.³⁸

Conzelmann has succeeded in bypassing most of the criticism associated with the *religio licita* theories. Nonetheless, numerous subsequent studies have shown that a political apologetic such as that proposed by him can in no sense be indicative of Luke's governing concern.³⁹ One sentence from C. K. Barrett, in particular, has posed a daunting obstacle to any study which would attempt to argue for the dominance of a political apologetic: 'No Roman official would ever have filtered out so much of what to him would be theological and ecclesiastical rubbish in order to reach so tiny a grain of relevant apology.'⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the criticism levelled against the work of Conzelmann and his companions should not be used to exclude every form of political apologetic.⁴¹ Its significance is rather to indicate that such a Lukan concern, to the degree to which it is identifiable, is likely to be subject to a higher authorial agenda. The precise nature of this agenda remains the subject of our further exploration.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 138, 148. See also H. Conzelmann, 'Geschichte, Geschichtsbild und Geschichtsdarstellung bei Lukas', *TLZ* 85 (1960), 244.

³⁵ Conzelmann, *Theology*, pp. 138–44.

³⁶ Special reference is made to the non-political character of Jesus' royal title, Jesus' death as a prophet, the portrayal of the Jewish political accusations as lies, and Pilate's triple declaration of Jesus' innocence (ibid., pp. 139–41).

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 141–4. ³⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

³⁹ In addition to the critiques mentioned below, see Maddox, *Purpose*, pp. 96–7; P. W. Walaskay, 'And so we came to Rome': *The Political Perspective of St Luke*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 15–22.

⁴⁰ C. K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study*, London: Epworth, 1961, p. 63. See also the detailed criticism of Conzelmann's position in the works of R. J. Cassidy: *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987, pp. 148–55; *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978, pp. 7–9, 128–30.

⁴¹ Cassidy rather overstates his case at times (see also Sterling's evaluation of Cassidy's position in Sterling, *Historiography*, p. 382).

An apologia pro imperio

In 1983 P. W. Walaskay published what he calls an ‘upside-down’ representation of the traditional understanding of Luke’s political apologetic:⁴² ‘Far from supporting the view that Luke was defending the church to a Roman magistrate, the evidence points us in the other direction. Throughout his writings Luke has carefully, consistently, and consciously presented an *apologia pro imperio* to his church.’⁴³ According to this representation, Luke aims to persuade his readers that ‘the institutions of the church and empire are coeval and complementary’ and that ‘the Christian church and the Roman Empire need not fear nor suspect each other, for God stands behind both institutions giving to each the power and the authority to carry out his will’.⁴⁴ Luke’s account of the trials of Jesus and Paul, in particular, are said to bring the author’s pro-Roman stance to the fore.⁴⁵

The innovative character of Walaskay’s work and its effort to reconcile the political dimension of Luke–Acts with the fact that Luke was probably addressing a Christian audience can only be admired. It may also be conceded that Luke appears to be in favour of a degree of openness towards Rome. Nonetheless, this cannot be taken as more than a secondary and sporadic concern – such a view faces the same problems as those noted in relation to readings of Luke–Acts as *apologia pro ecclesia*. There is for too much material in Luke–Acts which would be made redundant on such a view – Rome features in only a relatively small part of Luke–Acts. In addition to this, Luke’s depiction of the Roman system and its representatives is not as uniformly favourable as Walaskay would have it; after all, Jesus dies with Pilate’s consent,⁴⁶ while Roman governors, one after another, fail to release Paul, even when the evidence compels them to recognise his innocence.

An apologia for the gospel

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a steady increase in the number of works which speak of Luke’s apologetic efforts as focusing specifically on the Christian message. I shall mention now some of the more notable contributions from this angle.⁴⁷

⁴² Walaskay, *Rome*. ⁴³Ibid., p. 64. ⁴⁴Ibid., pp. ix–x. ⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶ See J. A. Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Luke–Acts*, JSNTSup 106, Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, pp. 92–7.

⁴⁷ In addition to the contributions discussed below, attention may be called to a recent article: L. Alexander, ‘The Acts of the Apostles as an Apologetic Text’, in M. Edwards,

(a) *Luke–Acts as a defence against Gnosticism*

The existence of anti-Gnostic overtones in parts of Luke–Acts has often been suggested by New Testament scholarship.⁴⁸ It was, however, only through the work of C. H. Talbert that a detailed case was put forward that ‘Luke–Acts was written for the express purpose of serving as a defence against Gnosticism.’⁴⁹

Predictably, Talbert’s thesis has been criticised for going a long way beyond what the evidence allows, when it argues that the whole Lukan narrative should be read as an anti-Gnostic defence; yet it is commonly granted that certain features of Luke–Acts could be understood along these lines.⁵⁰ For present purposes it suffices to say that, to the extent to which there is any value in Talbert’s thesis, its findings have revealed one dimension of Luke’s preoccupation with the apologia for the gospel.

(b) *Luke–Acts as the first fully fledged Christian apologia*

F. F. Bruce has argued that the author of Acts deserves to be called not only ‘the first Christian historian’,⁵¹ but also ‘the first Christian apologist’.⁵² Bruce substantiates his assertion by pointing out that for Luke the new Christian faith is ‘everywhere spoken against’ (Ac. 28.22) and that ‘of the three main types of defence represented among the second-century Christian apologists Luke provides first-century prototypes: defence against pagan religion (Christianity is true; paganism is false), defence against Judaism (Christianity is the fulfilment of true Judaism), defence against political accusations (Christianity is innocent of any offence against Roman law).’⁵³ The specific way in which Bruce explains each of

M. Goodman, and S. Price (eds.), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 15–43. In Alexander’s view, Acts is built around a number of apologetic scenarios (pp. 28–38), the role of which is not to provide a direct defence against specific charges (pp. 20, 25), but rather to address an implied audience (which may well have been different from Luke’s actual audience), defending the Christian world-view as a whole, which in Lukan terms is ‘the Word of the Lord’ (pp. 20–1, 38).

⁴⁸ Useful reviews of such contributions are available in Pattison, ‘Study’, pp. 17–21; C. H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics: An Examination of the Lukan Purpose*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1966, pp. 13–4.

⁴⁹ Talbert, *Gnostics*, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Maddox, *Purpose*, pp. 21–2; Pattison, ‘Study’, pp. 20–1.

⁵¹ As already claimed by M. Dibelius (*Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven, London: SCM Press, 1956, p. 123).

⁵² Bruce, *Acts*, p. 22. Caird speaks of Luke in similar terms, when he refers to Luke–Acts as ‘the first great apologia for the Christian faith’ (*Luke*, p. 14), but the nature of the apologia which Caird has in mind is exclusively political (*Luke*, pp. 13–5).

⁵³ Bruce, *Acts*, p. 22. In addition to these three types of defence, Bruce also speaks of a Lukan apologetic in relation to the church, by which he means an apologetic related to

these types of defence is not particularly innovative: the first type is exemplified by the two familiar Pauline incidents in Lystra and Athens;⁵⁴ the second by Stephen's speech and by Paul's defence addresses and loyalty to Judaism; the third by Luke's portrayal of Christianity as Israel's fulfilment and politically innocent.⁵⁵ Instead, Bruce's contribution to the study of Lukan apologetics consists precisely in his emphasis on the diversity of apologetic goals and strategies identifiable in Luke's writing and of his implicit assertion that these various apologetic dimensions must not be pursued at the expense of each other. It is not clear, however, that he has said enough to define the way in which they can be accommodated and correlated.

(c) *Luke–Acts as the confirmation of the gospel*

Fresh light was thrown on Luke's work by an article published in 1960 by W. C. van Unnik.⁵⁶ His suggestion is that Acts as a whole is to be understood as the confirmation of the Gospel, that is, Acts assures the readers (people who for various reasons were in need of certainty concerning the Christian message⁵⁷) that the central message of Luke's Gospel, and therefore of the Christian *kerygma*⁵⁸ – that 'Jesus' activity is saving'⁵⁹ – is and remains valid for them.

That van Unnik's understanding of Acts is of an apologetic nature (according to my definition of the term) needs little argument. His explanation of the motif of witness in Acts makes this particularly clear: the Old Testament prophets, the eye-witnesses, and, most importantly, God himself (through signs and wonders and through the gift of the Holy

Jewish Christians, focusing largely on the legitimacy of the Gentile mission (pp. 25–7). For convenience, this aspect of Luke's apologetic will be discussed in the present study under the wider rubric of Luke's apologetic in relation to Judaism.

A lengthier discussion of the early Christian defence of the gospel against Judaism, paganism, the Roman empire, and 'pseudo-Christianity' is offered by Bruce in his *The Apostolic Defence of the Gospel: Christian Apologetics in the New Testament*, London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1959. This, however, is not specifically related to Luke's work, although a significant part of Bruce's discussion focuses on material from Acts.

⁵⁴ The same incidents are used as evidence of Luke's apologetic to Gentile hearers by H. C. Kee, *Good News to the Ends of the Earth*, London: SCM Press, 1990, pp. 91–2.

⁵⁵ Bruce, *Acts*, pp. 22–5.

⁵⁶ W. C. van Unnik, 'The "Book of Acts": The Confirmation of the Gospel', *NovT* 4 (1960), 26–59.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁸ Van Unnik makes it clear that the message of the Gospels in general, and of Luke's Gospel in particular, is the Christian *kerygma* (*ibid.*, 27–8).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

Spirit, who is the real author of the Christian mission) all bear witness to the reliability of the Christian gospel.⁶⁰

The line taken by van Unnik's article found subsequent confirmation in the work of several other authors. Chronologically, the first among these was E. Franklin.⁶¹ To a large extent Franklin's study is a response to the Vielhauer, Conzelmann, and Haenchen consensus, according to which Luke's interest in salvation history is the sign that he had given up the eschatological hopes of the early church.⁶² Franklin's contention is that 'Luke stood . . . within the main eschatological stream of the early Christian expectations, and that salvation history in his two volumes, though present, is used in the service of his eschatology rather than as a replacement of it.'⁶³ If Luke did not abandon the hope of Christ's early return, Franklin adds, the implication is that he wanted his readers to be 'ready to meet their Lord when he appears'.⁶⁴ Apparently, however, the readers were far from being ready, so Luke set out to reconfirm their belief in Christ

by pointing out the necessity of the delay and by reasserting the belief in the immediacy of the return; . . . by describing the sheer rebellious nature of the disobedience which the Jewish rejection entailed; [and] by showing that the life of Jesus was of one piece with the whole saving work of God of which it was the climax.⁶⁵

A second advocate of the trend initiated by van Unnik was D. P. Fuller.⁶⁶ His overall concern was the relationship between the Christian faith and knowledge through the historical method, with special reference to the resurrection of Christ.⁶⁷ According to Fuller, the participants in the modern discussion on this topic would have a great deal to learn from the way Luke combined the two. He believes Acts was written to provide verification for the Christian claims related to the Christ event, to which Luke's readers had no personal access.⁶⁸

Finally, van Unnik's proposal has been further developed in the works of I. H. Marshall.⁶⁹ Both in his discussion of the purpose of Luke's Gospel

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 53–7.

⁶¹ *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke–Acts*, London: SPCK, 1965.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 3–6, 173. ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 6. He elaborates on this in ch. 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7; see also ch. 5. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶⁶ *Easter Faith and History*, London: Tyndale Press, 1968.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25; see also pp. 13–26. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁶⁹ Marshall's contribution comes in the form of several books and articles: *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC 3, Exeter: Paternoster, 1978, pp. 35–6; *Luke – Historian and Theologian*, third edition, Exeter: Paternoster, 1988, pp. 158–9; *The*

and in that of the purpose of Acts, Marshall notes Luke's preoccupation with the confirmation of the Christian message: 'Luke wished to present the events in such a way that they would seem to confirm the reliability of the catechesis.'⁷⁰ Marshall dissociates himself, however, from those who believe that such a confirmation was necessary because the faith of Luke's readers was becoming shaky.⁷¹ Rather, the need was simply for a fuller presentation of the story of the Christian *kerygma*, which Luke's readers had known only in general terms.⁷²

As a general evaluation of the contributions in this section, it may be said that, despite a certain degree of disagreement on issues such as the occasion of Luke's writing (e.g. whether it is the readers' wavering faith or their insufficient information) or the relative importance of the various Lukan themes in the author's construction, the principal contention that Luke's governing concern is the confirmation of the gospel is undoubtedly a pointer in the right direction, not least because of its coherence with Luke's declared goal in Luke 1.4. There is, however, strategic ground still to be conquered before this proposal can be established as a wholly legitimate understanding of Luke's dominant purpose. Part of this still unconquered ground, I suggest, is Luke's intriguing preoccupation with judicial trials.

(d) *Luke–Acts as an exponent of a literary apologetic tradition*

In his study entitled *The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting*,⁷³ J. C. O'Neill has argued that 'Luke–Acts was primarily an attempt to persuade an educated reading public to become Christians; it was an "apology" in outward form but, like all true apologies, it had the burning inner purpose of bringing men to the faith.'⁷⁴ O'Neill insists that his understanding of the apologetic character of Luke–Acts is not in the narrow political sense, nor in the sense of a defensive stance.⁷⁵ Rather, his contention is that Luke's approach is moulded by the apologetic writings of Hellenistic Judaism which 'had for at least three centuries been confronted with the sort of missionary problem which the Church faced in the first century of

Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary, TNTC, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, pp. 17–22; *The Acts of the Apostles*, NTG, Sheffield: JSOT, 1992, pp. 31–46; 'Luke and his "Gospel"', in P. Stuhlmacher (ed.), *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983, pp. 289–308. For his references to van Unnik's work see his *Historian*, pp. 93, 158 and *Acts* (1992), p. 44.

⁷⁰ Marshall, 'Luke', 305; see also Marshall, *Acts* (1992), p. 45.

⁷¹ Marshall, 'Luke', 303–4. ⁷² *Ibid.*, 307. see more generally, 304–7.

⁷³ London: SPCK, 1970. ⁷⁴ O'Neill, *Theology*, p. 176.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 176–7.

its life'⁷⁶ and which 'had produced a large body of missionary literature written in Greek which employed a developed apologetic to convince its Gentile readers of the truth of the Jewish faith'.⁷⁷ Accordingly, O'Neill says, Luke's writing as a whole is 'an argument for the faith'.⁷⁸ Luke's indebtedness to the apologetic methods of Hellenistic Judaism is said to be evident in the preface to his Gospel, in the historiographic form of his writing, and in a number of details of Acts, such as the commendation of the heroes of faith, the appeal to the state, the use of accepted philosophy, and the theology of conversion/repentance.⁷⁹

Similar to O'Neill's position is that advocated more recently by G. Sterling, in his study on the genre of Luke–Acts. According to Sterling, Luke's work is to be understood as a 'self-definition' of Christianity in relation to the world, after the model of 'apologetic historiography', which he defines as '*the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group's own traditions but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world*'.⁸⁰ As part of this tradition, Luke–Acts also offers a self-definition of Christianity by Hellenizing the *traditio apostolica* and in this way builds an effective apologetic for the beliefs which this *traditio apostolica* comprises. The function of this definition, Sterling suggests, can be best analysed from three different perspectives: Christianity, Israel, and Rome.⁸¹ In relation to the first, Luke saw the need for a definition of Christianity at a time when contact with the eye-witnesses of the Christian story was coming to an end; Luke's case therefore is said to be that Christian identity means belonging to the *traditio apostolica* which he reliably relates. In relation to Israel, Luke addresses the problem of Christianity's branching away from Judaism by showing that Christianity is no novelty, but the continuation of Israel. In relation to Rome, Sterling's explanation is very much along the lines of the *religio licita* theories, with the only notable difference that for him Luke offers his apologia for Christianity only indirectly: rather than addressing the Roman authorities, Luke is simply giving to Christian readers examples of how they could make their own apologia, should that be necessary. It is these three perspectives that define Luke's specific apologetic for the *traditio apostolica* and the beliefs associated with it.

Thus, from the angles of historical setting and literary genre alike, Luke's endeavour has been viewed as a historiographic apologia for Christianity and its beliefs, in a world context. O'Neill's evangelistic

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139. ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–40. ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 140. ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 140–59.

⁸⁰ Sterling, *Historiography*, p. 17. ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 378–86.

representation of this apologia suffers from dependence on the shaky premise of a non-Christian readership for Luke–Acts. Luke’s ‘argument for the faith’ can make equally good sense when viewed as a ‘confirmation of the gospel’, addressed predominantly to Christians, and perhaps through their mediation to non-Christians as well. Sterling’s explanation, on the other hand, is problematic in its representation of Luke’s political agenda. In claiming that Luke’s ‘defence is that Christianity is simply the extension of the Old Testament and *therefore politically innocent*’,⁸² Sterling repeats one of the major fallacies of the *religio licita* interpretations (despite his dissociation from them in the matter of Luke’s addressees). All in all, however, O’Neill and Sterling have successfully showed that when Luke–Acts is viewed against the background of Hellenism, and particularly Hellenistic Judaism, its apologetic presentation of the Christian faith comes to the fore. It remains for other studies on the Lukan narrative (the present one included) to demonstrate and detail this observation in relation to the contents of Luke’s work.

(e) *Luke–Acts as apologia by virtue of its use of ‘the plan of God’ motif*

In the same vein as O’Neill and Sterling, J. T. Squires has recently spoken of Luke–Acts as ‘a kind of cultural “translation”, an attempt to tell a story to people who are in a context somewhat different from the context in which the story originally took place’.⁸³ In this process of translation, Squires adds, apologetics is a very appropriate task. But what vehicle would Luke use for his apologetics? Squires’ answer is the theme of providence, or ‘the plan of God’, which, together with other related themes (such as portents, epiphanies, prophecy, and fate), is used ‘to assert and expound the central features of the story of Jesus and the early church’.⁸⁴ His motivation in doing this is said to be threefold: first, to confirm the faith of his Christian readers; second, to encourage and equip them to present the gospel to the Hellenistic world in an already ‘translated’ form; third, to enable them to defend their beliefs in the face of possible objections. Methodologically, Luke’s apologetic, far from being restricted to a political or defensive stance, includes, like Hellenistic historiography, elements of defence,

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 385; italics mine.

⁸³ J. T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke–Acts*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 190. The new context into which Luke is translating his story is, as would be expected, the Hellenistic one.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53; see also p. 186.

assertion, polemic, and exposition, and is an important part of missionary preaching.⁸⁵

Thus, Squires' monograph has highlighted Luke's use of one specific theme as part of his apologia for the gospel within the Hellenistic milieu. As such, his contribution has provided a convenient precedent for the study of other Lukan themes which might serve a similar purpose.

(f) *Luke–Acts as a Christian apologia related to Judaism*

In the earlier discussion of the reading of Luke–Acts as a work aimed to acquire for Christianity the status of *religio licita*, I noted that one of the major arguments on which the advocates of this theory have built their case is Luke's emphasis on the continuity between Christianity and Judaism. While the theory has often met with justified criticism, the assertion that Luke is at pains to show the fundamental agreement between the new Christian movement and the hopes of Israel has continued to gain support among students of the Lukan narrative.

Among the various apologetic devices which Luke employs in order to establish the legitimacy of Christianity and its beliefs in relation to Judaism, one which has commonly been noted by Lukan scholarship is the use of the Jewish Scriptures in Luke–Acts.⁸⁶

A more indirect Lukan apologetic in relation to Judaism has been noted by L. T. Johnson.⁸⁷ According to his analysis, Luke's preoccupation is with God's dealings with the Jews and the implications of this for the validity of the Christian message. It is suggested that Luke's implied readers were mainly Gentile Christians, whose confidence in 'the things in which [they] have been instructed' (Luke 1.4) was being undermined by two historical events of which they had been a part: the Jewish rejection of the gospel and the Gentiles' acceptance of it. If those to whom God had

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 191, 193–4.

⁸⁶ J. Dupont, 'Apologetic Use of the Old Testament in the Speeches of Acts', in J. Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, pp. 129–59; C. A. Evans, 'Prophecy and Polemic: Jews in Luke's Scriptural Apologetic', in C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders (eds.), *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke–Acts*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993, pp. 171–211, esp. p. 210.

⁸⁷ L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991, pp. 3–10. See also his article, 'Luke–Acts', published one year later in the *ABD*, vol. IV, pp. 405–8. A more embryonic form of his explanation can also be found in his earlier work *The Writings of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1986. Johnson builds partly on the work of R. J. Karris ('Missionary Communities: A New Paradigm for the Study of Luke–Acts', *CBQ* 41 (1979), 80–97; *What Are They Saying about Luke and Acts: A Theology of the Faithful God*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

made his promises were now no longer sharing in them, while others were taking the benefits, what did that have to say about the faithfulness of the God in whom they had trusted? It is in response to this situation that Luke set out to give his readers ἀσφάλεια regarding the Christian teaching by addressing an issue of theodicy: ‘By telling how events happened “in order” (*kathexes*), Luke shows how God first fulfilled his promises to Israel, and only then extended these blessings to the Gentiles. Because God had shown himself faithful to the Jews, therefore, the Word that reached the Gentiles was also trustworthy.’⁸⁸

Finally, another major Lukan theme which has recently been portrayed as contributing to Luke’s apologetic for the gospel in relation to Judaism is that of the Davidic Messiah.⁸⁹ M. L. Strauss’ thesis does not aim to provide an analysis of Luke’s apologetics; yet the results of his investigation into the Christology of Luke–Acts are repeatedly said to indicate that Luke is engaged apologetically with Judaism.⁹⁰ What Luke ultimately aims to achieve through his apologetic, Strauss suggests, is to reassure his Christian readers (presumably Jews and Gentiles alike, whose faith is being threatened by the ongoing debate with unbelieving Jews) that they truly are the eschatological people of God, the heirs of God’s promises to Israel.⁹¹

Not everything that has been written on Luke’s apologetics for the gospel in relation to Judaism has done full justice to the Lukan text. Johnson’s suggestion, in particular, seems problematic in so far as it views Luke–Acts as revolving around a question of theodicy. Throughout Luke’s account of Jesus’ ministry and the church’s history, God is the one who legitimates (through miracles, inspired speeches, pneumatic experiences, etc.), not the one to be legitimated. This is particularly true with regard to the twin problems of Jewish rejection and Gentile acceptance of the gospel, to which Johnson points. The specific angle(s) from which they test the validity of the Christian message is not theodicy (‘Can God’s promises still be trusted?’) but Christology and ecclesiology. Christologically, the challenge is: can the church claim that God’s promises to Israel have been fulfilled in Jesus, since the Jews, who should be the most competent to judge, have largely rejected this interpretation and, instead, the church seems to find its adherents mainly in the Gentile world? Ecclesio-logically, the concern is: can the church have any part in God’s promises to Israel, since it has parted ways with the Jewish leadership and is now

⁸⁸ L. T. Johnson, *Gospel*, p. 10.

⁸⁹ M. L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke–Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfilment in Lukan Christology*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, especially pp. 345–6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 259–60. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

in the process of becoming an increasingly Gentile movement? A central argument in Luke's response is the reference to God's explicit verdict, which settles both the issue of Christology (by raising and exalting Jesus) and that of ecclesiology (the unbelieving Jews fulfil God's Isaianic pronouncement, while the Gentiles are brought in at God's own initiative). God's dealings with his people are thus not the object but the foundation of Luke's apologetic.

Such shortcomings aside, the trend of interpretations discussed in this section has shed light on what can confidently be regarded as a central area of Lukan apologetics, especially notable results being achieved in connection with Lukan topics such as the continuity between Israel and Christianity, the Jewish rejection of the gospel, the legitimacy of the Gentile mission, Jesus' Messianic identity (specifically established in relation to his passion-resurrection), and the witness of the Jewish Scriptures.

Conclusion

The present chapter commenced with a general statement of the significant place which Luke has allocated in his work to judicial trials. In view of the fact that the only context within which the function of Luke's trial material has been discussed in relation to Luke-Acts as a whole was that of apologetics, it was then necessary to carry out a survey of the major formulations of the apologetic character of Luke's work. The strategic place which Luke's trial accounts have played in most of these formulations has in this way become evident. It was the accusations and defences connected with Paul's trials in Acts that have provided, to a large extent, the basis for the contention that Luke's whole work, or at least his second volume, was written as a defence of Paul, most probably in relation to Judaism or Jewish-oriented Christians. It was the repeated exculpations of Jesus and Paul at the hands of Roman officials that gave rise to the understanding of Luke-Acts as a political apologetic for the church. It was the depiction of the Roman system and its representatives, mostly in connection with the trials of Jesus and Paul, that led Walaskay to find in Luke's work an *apologia pro imperio*. Notwithstanding the legitimacy of some of these interpretations with regard to specific parts or features of Luke's narrative, it has not been possible to take any of them as indicative of Luke's overall concern. Quite apart from any additional deficiencies which have been noted in their arguments, they display the common limitation of not being able to account for very much material in Luke-Acts.

The final major section of the survey has indicated, however, a fast-growing trend of interpretations which, although diverse and not always entirely convincing in their specific outlook, seem to point unanimously towards a much more plausible apologetic understanding of Luke's overall purpose, namely, as an *apologia* for the gospel. Intriguingly, though, despite the impressive number of works which have pointed in this direction and the equally numerous aspects of Luke's writing which have been portrayed from this angle, it is this camp that appears to have drawn the least systematic support from Luke's trial narratives. The immediate question is then: is Luke's striking interest in trials in any sense coherent with what appears to preoccupy him in so many other aspects of his work, or do the lengthy trial narratives have to be viewed as political or pro-Pauline excursions which supplement the author's main agenda? Furthermore, are there sufficiently strong reasons to think of Paul's relationship to Judaism, Christianity's political harmlessness, or Rome's benevolence towards Christianity as the controlling emphases of the trial narratives themselves? These are questions to which answers can be attempted only after the actual analysis of Luke's trial narratives.

The present approach: thesis, plan of work, and method

The overall contention of the present study is that the trial narratives⁹² of Luke–Acts function as an important part of Luke's *apologia pro evangelio* – a purpose which is in keeping with the author's declared wish to give his readers 'assurance' about the 'matters' in which they had been instructed (Luke 1.4). Within this overall agenda, the specific role of the trial narratives is to provide the means whereby important tenets of the Christian faith are put 'on trial' before the reader, with the intended result of the gospel's confirmation.

The first trial narrative under consideration in what follows (part one) is Luke's account of Jesus' trial. Due to the fact that this narrative is not a self-contained literary unit, since it comes as part of a larger 'story' (the Third Gospel), its study cannot be undertaken in isolation from the foregoing narrative. Consequently, the examination of Jesus' trial begins with a discussion of two of its major 'narrative precedents' – the Gospel plot and the passion predictions – as a way of defining the hermeneutical framework from which the reader is expected to approach the trial

⁹² Unless specified otherwise, by the 'trial narratives' of Luke–Acts I shall mean parts of Luke's writing which depict 'trials' not in the general sense of 'testing', but in a forensic sense, allowing, however, for the fact that many of the 'trial' incidents are not *regular* forensic trials, that is, the litigants do not necessarily play a formal legal role.

narrative (chapter 2). Building on the results of this preliminary investigation, chapter 3 continues to discuss the role of Jesus' trial in Luke's Gospel by means of an analysis of the author's emphases in each of the four episodes of which the trial story is composed. Yet even the ending of the trial account is not the end of all that Luke has to say concerning Jesus' trial. Important indications exist that the issues which are at stake in Jesus' trial are only adequately settled beyond the account of the trial itself. Moreover, retrospective references to Jesus' trial continue to appear in the remaining part of Luke's Gospel and at various points in Acts. Under these considerations, chapter 4 focuses on the way Jesus' trial is represented by Luke retrospectively, specific attention being paid to the continuation of the trial conflict in the remaining part of Luke's passion narrative, to the outcome of this conflict in the resurrection narratives, and to the references to Jesus' trial in Acts. Thus, the examination of the function of Jesus' trial in Luke–Acts requires the analysis of much Lukan material outside the trial narrative itself and will inevitably lead to the account of Jesus' trial receiving a more extensive treatment in the present study than any other Lukan trial narrative.

In part two, under scrutiny is Luke's representation of the judicial or quasi-judicial encounters between Jesus' followers and their opponents. After a brief consideration of Jesus' predictions of the disciples' trials and of the significance of these predictions for one's subsequent understanding of the trial narratives, chapter 5 turns to the two trial episodes involving Peter (first accompanied by John and next by a larger apostolic group). The (apologetic) function of these accounts is explored by concentrating specifically on Luke's characterisation of the participants in the conflict, the specific object of his apologetic agenda, and the apologetic devices employed towards this goal. A similar investigation is then undertaken in chapter 6 in relation to the 'trial' of Stephen – this time by concentrating on the participants in the conflict, the nature of the conflict, the charges against Stephen, his defence speech, and the outcome of the trial. Finally, in chapter 7 attention is paid to the numerous trials of Paul in Acts, by focusing on three major groups of passages, dealing respectively with summary statements on Paul's trials (by the risen Christ and by Paul himself), Paul's mission trials (between Philippi and Ephesus), and Paul's custody trials (between Jerusalem and Rome). The specific search this time is for an interpretation of Paul's trials in Acts which does best justice to these stories in their entirety and diversity.

A concluding chapter (chapter 8) brings together the results of the investigation, indicates the implications of these results for a few other

areas of Lukan study, and points out some related areas in which further research would seem profitable.

Methodologically, the book follows a thematic approach, drawing on insights from both redaction criticism and narrative criticism (without, however, making loyalty to a specific method the governing aim of any part of the investigation). In connection with the narrative criticism, use will also be made, when necessary, of aspects of rhetorical criticism and reader-response criticism, due to the particular relevance of these approaches for the study of Luke's apologetics (an enterprise inseparably connected with the implied author's *persuasion* of his implied *readers*). As far as the use of redaction and narrative criticism is concerned, a change of approach seems appropriate between passages from Luke's Gospel and passages from Acts. As far as the Gospel is concerned, although there is no generally accepted solution to the Synoptic problem, the most widely held (and probably correct) explanation continues to be the 'two-document' hypothesis, according to which Luke used Mark (or a document very much like Mark as we know it) and another source, Q,⁹³ which he independently shared with Matthew.⁹⁴ The implication of this is that redaction criticism remains a feasible tool in the study of the Gospel material. The situation is, however, different when one turns to Acts. The high degree of uncertainty about Luke's sources here⁹⁵ makes redaction criticism rather more speculative,⁹⁶ and therefore the examination of passages from Acts will be limited to observations related to the text in its extant form.⁹⁷

⁹³ The precise nature of Q (written or oral; one or several documents) is of little consequence for the purposes of this study.

⁹⁴ The classic statement of this explanation is B. H. Streeter's *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins*, London: Macmillan, 1924. The main alternative explanation, known as the Griesbach hypothesis, has found only relatively limited support. The most influential recent advocate of a modified version of this hypothesis has been W. R. Farmer: 'Modern Developments of Griesbach's Hypothesis', *NTS* 23 (1976–7), 275–95; 'A "Skeleton in the Closet" of Gospel Research', *BR* 9 (1961), 18–42; and *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis*, Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1976. For critical evaluation, see C. M. Tuckett, *The Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis*, SNTSMS 44, Cambridge University Press, 1983; S. E. Johnson, *The Griesbach Hypothesis and Redaction Criticism*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

⁹⁵ See, for example, C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, vol. I, pp. 149–56; J. Dupont, *The Sources of the Book of Acts: The Present Position*, London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1964, pp. 88, 166–7.

⁹⁶ This is not to deny that significant results have been produced in the past through the redactional study of Acts (or of Mark's Gospel, for that matter).

⁹⁷ In support of such a change of methodology between Luke's Gospel and Acts, see J. T. Carroll, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke–Acts*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988, p. 32; Strauss, *Davidic*, pp. 31–3.