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From Persecutor to Persecuted

Paul the Apostle as a Victim as Portrayed in Acts 26

INTRODUCTION

The primary source for the comprehensive account of the life of Paul the Apostle is the Acts of the Apostles penned by Luke. Chapters 13 to 28 recount Paul's life and the events related to him. Making up a third of Acts, chapters 19 to 28 recount the apostle's arrest, his interrogations, and then his voyage to Rome and house arrest there. Such an extensive account of this period reveals that, including his arrest, captivities, and interrogations, the life of Paul attests to the *fulfilment of God's plan*. During his interrogation held before Agrippa, Paul stands before the king and the attendants as a *victim*, but for the readers of Luke's work Paul still appears as a *witness*, whose life is a proof of God's mighty acts. Focused on analysing the Apostle Paul as a victim, with particular emphasis on chapter 26 of the Acts of the Apostles, this paper first points out the role played by the speeches in Luke's work and the relationship between that role and the main goals of his narrative. Examining the apologia, we come to the conclusion that instead of defending himself, Paul testifies of the fact that he went from *persecutor* to *persecuted*. Therefore, albeit being a *victim*, he stands before his audience (and readers, even today) as a *witness*.

MAIN INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

The authorship and genre of the Acts of the Apostles

There is basically a consensus in the literature that the Acts of the Apostles had originally been penned as the second part of – sequel to – the Gospel of Luke, without a separate title given by the author. The two parts of Luke-Acts were separated during the formation of the canon. Part one was grouped with the other three Gospels, while part two, now separated, was given several titles at first. Tertullian refers to the second part as “The Memorandum of Luke”, while it is included in the Muratorian Canon as the “Acts of All the Apostles”. The title “Acts of the Apostles”, still used today, first appeared in the Anti-Marcionite prologues and in III.13.3

of Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses*.¹ Luke was generally considered the author in the early church tradition, with no other name ever linked to it.²

A specific genre in Hellenistic literature, "acts" (πράξεις) mostly described the deeds of a prominent person, or even a group. The works centred around the life of the protagonist – a divine or Godsent man –, recounting the miraculous events related to him.³ In the New Testament, the only work standing for this genre is the Acts of the Apostles.⁴ However, as emphasized in the literature, "acts" did not constitute a precisely defined single genre in antiquity. Summarising the works of Hengel, Sterling, and Witherington, Bock points out that the Acts of the Apostles is closer to the ancient historical monographs than to the genre indicated in the inscription of the work, that is, "acts" in the Greco-Roman sense.⁵

The goal and language of the Acts of the Apostles

As opposed to the three evangelists who recorded only the events of Jesus's earthly life, Luke, apart from the life of Christ, recorded also the history of the first Christians. The reason for that was aptly formulated by Van Unnik in the title of a related paper: "The 'Book of Acts' the Confirmation of the Gospel". Van Unnik also points out that Luke's Gospel describes Jesus's redemptive work and its reality, while the Acts of the Apostles shows the way the church proclaimed and confirmed this work and the message it conveyed. The first part of Luke-Acts presents God's plan of salvation and its fulfilment in Jesus as a series of events limited in time and space. The second part recounts the way the message spread from Jerusalem all the way to Rome, changing the lives of countless people over the course of a few decades.⁶ Carson and Moo emphasize that Luke's primary purpose was to edify and strengthen the community of believers by narrating how God's plan, fulfilled in Jesus, continued to unfold in the history of the early church.⁷

In his monograph, John Squires explores the fulfilment of God's plan in Luke-Acts. He points out that, running through the entire work, God's plan is a distinctively Lukan theme, emphasized specifically in the speeches of Acts. The several thematic strands underline the

¹ D. A. Carson – Douglas J. Moo: *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2005, 285.

² Balla Péter: *Az újszövetségi iratok története*, Budapest, Károli Egyetemi Kiadó, 2008, 166–167.

³ Darrell L. Bock: *Acts*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2007, 1–2.

⁴ Balla: *Az újszövetségi iratok története*, 163.

⁵ Bock: *Acts*, 3.

⁶ W. C. van Unnik: *Sparsa Collecta. The Collected Essays of W. C. van Unnik. - Part 1: Evangelia, Paulina, ACTA*, Leiden, Brill, 1973, 340–373.

⁷ Carson–Moo, *Introduction*, 321.

continuous realization of God's plan: through the life of Jesus in the Gospel, and through the early church in Acts. Squires points out that by focusing on the fulfilment of God's plan, Luke intends to explain, strengthen, and expand his readers' faith.⁸

The first verse of the prologue reveals Luke's thoughts on his own work: "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1)⁹. John Stott argues that Luke distinguished between two stages of Christ's ministry, as the Acts of the Apostles also recounts the work of Jesus, all that he *continued* to do and teach by the Holy Spirit, especially through his apostles. According to Stott, instead of "Acts of the Apostles", a more accurate – though cumbersome – title would be something like "The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through his Apostles".¹⁰

Haenchen highlights that Luke's language and style stand out among the works included in the New Testament. Similar to Luke-Acts in length, Xenophon's *Memorabilia* was written with a more reduced vocabulary, while the first four volumes of *Anabasis* hardly exceed the vocabulary used by Luke. In agreement with several other authors, Haenchen found that the most striking literary feature of Luke's oeuvre is the style resembling the Septuagint (LXX): nine tenths of the words used by Luke can be found in the text of the Septuagint.¹¹

Howard Marshall points out that Luke's prologues (Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1–3) underpin the finding that he had the ability to write in a different style, showing that the literary language of his works was a conscious choice. Rightly, Marshall concludes that Luke's intent was to write a *sacred story*. He believed that the events recorded in his works were the fulfilment of prophecies included in the Holy Scripture (Old Testament), and, thus, perceived the history of the early church as the continued work of God.¹² Therefore, the events recorded in Acts are in continuity with God's mighty acts included in the Old Testament, and also with Christ's ministry attested to by the Gospels.¹³

⁸ John T. Squires: *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (SNTS Monograph Series 76), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 1.

⁹ English Standard Version (ESV)

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott: *The Message of Acts. The Spirit, the Church & the World*, Revised Edition, Leicester, InterVarsity Press, 2020, 12–14.

¹¹ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ford. Basil Blackwell, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1971, 72.

¹² Howard I. Marshall: *The Acts of the Apostles. An Introduction and Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980, 18.

¹³ Marshall: *The Acts of the Apostles*, 23.

The structure of the Acts of the Apostles

The Acts can be divided into seven major units. Each part presents a new geographic and/or cultural venue, following a “road map” introduced in verse 8 of chapter 1:¹⁴ “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”¹⁵ This is fulfilled throughout the work: the gospel message spreads to Jerusalem in chapters 1–7, to Judea and Samaria in chapters 8–12, and all the way to Rome in chapters 13–28.

Paul’s arrest, interrogations, and his later voyage to Rome and his house arrest there is recounted in the last, seventh main part (Acts 19:21–28:31). This last, longest unit makes up a third of the work. Marshall found that described at such length, Paul’s captivity is instrumental in achieving a key objective of the work: Luke strove to show that the spread of the Christian faith is not hindered even by persecution. Moreover, Luke intended to highlight a cruel reality of life: no matter how innocent they are, Christians can still expect to *fall victim to injustice*.¹⁶

The first verse of the seventh part reveals that having accomplished his third mission, Paul goes to Jerusalem with the intention to see Rome thereafter (Acts 19:21)¹⁷. Here, for the first time, Luke mentions Rome as Paul’s planned mission destination. According to Carson and Moo’s introductory work, despite the length of the journey, Luke’s narrative in the following chapters is guided by the goal of reaching Rome as a destination.¹⁸ A significant milestone along the way is the apologia included in chapter 26.

Heading to Jerusalem, Paul advanced in a fast pace, eager to reach the city by the day of Pentecost (20:16). In Miletus, he sent for to the elders of Ephesus to say farewell to them. His speech reveals the key drive of his mission as a whole: *a life of obedience to God’s call*. Although foreseeing the imprisonment and misery awaiting in Jerusalem, Paul remains loyal to his ministry (20:23). As he puts it: “But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace” (20:24). Here, the apostle defines the purpose of his ministry as *to testify to the good news of God’s grace*. The meaning of the Greek term διαμαρτύρομαι is to testify,

¹⁴ Carson–Moo: *Introduction*, 286–290.

¹⁵ Bible quotes follow The New Oxford Annotated Bible (New Revised Standard Version).

¹⁶ Marshall: *The Acts of the Apostles*, 27–28.

¹⁷ In the following, when making reference to the Acts of the Apostles, only the numbers of the chapter and the verse will be indicated.

¹⁸ Carson–Moo, *Introduction*, 289.

that is, to make a solemn declaration about the truth of something.¹⁹ Paul's purpose in life is therefore consistent with *Jesus' command* that provides the key agenda of the Acts of the Apostles: to be the Lord's witness to the ends of the earth (1:8). The uniqueness of the interrogation described in chapter 26 is the steadfast determination to pursue that purpose.

After his arrival to Jerusalem, Paul visited the temple. Some Jews from Asia Minor stirred up the crowd, alleging that Paul took Greeks to the part of the temple where only Jews were allowed to enter. The riot got out of control and the crowd dragged Paul out of the temple to kill him. The tribune of the cohort intervened, arrested Paul, and the soldiers took him to the barracks (21,27–22,24). Thus, the process of interrogation began, first before the Jewish Council, then before governors Felix and Festus, and, eventually, before King Agrippa.

Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles and their historical reliability

Speeches formed a crucial part of Greco-Roman historiography. Thucydides divided his historical work into deeds and speeches.²⁰ In the literature, the role played by the speeches in the Acts of the Apostles and the historical reliability of the work itself are closely connected. Harboursing distrust of Luke's historiographic method, many scholars are also sceptical about the historical credibility of the speeches included in Acts. First developed by Martin Dibelius, the theory that the speeches attest to Luke's creativity has widely spread in the scholarly research.²¹ Dibelius applied form criticism to the second part of Luke-Acts, concluding that the material used by Luke can be separated from the rest of the Acts, which, thus, can be considered the result of the author's own creative writing. As pointed out by F. F. Bruce, the redaction criticism applied by Hans Conzelmann and Ernst Haenchen is based directly on Dibelius's view.²² Péter Balla's summary finds that the core arguments of critical scholars generally include the similarity of the style of each speech and other narrative parts, and the historiographic model of Thucydides (allegedly contradicting the model of Polybius) followed

¹⁹ W. Bauer – F. W. Danker – W. F. Arndt – F. W. Gingrich: *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th rev. ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2021, 206–207. (This work will be referred to as BDAG.)

²⁰ Derek K. Hogan: *Forensic Speeches in Acts 22-26 in their Literary Environment, A Rhetorical Study*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Baylor University, 2006, https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/2104/4848/derek_hogan_phd.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, 99. (Accessed: 23 April 2023)

²¹ Balla: *Az újszövetségi iratok története*, 177.

²² F. F. Bruce: *The Acts of the Apostles. Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990, 36.

by Luke.²³ Alongside several contemporary scholars, based on various aspects, we can reject these accusations.

According to Carson and Moo, the uniform style of the speeches only indicates that Luke did not pen a verbatim transcript of what had been said; in any way, that would not have been possible in the case of a speech delivered originally – for example – in Aramaic. Nonetheless, condensed speeches, summaries, and paraphrases can convey the message just as accurately.²⁴

As pointed out by Péter Balla, Thucydides, in fact, remarked that sometimes quoting the original speeches verbatim was not possible, so he had to rely on the account of others. Accordingly, this does not mean that Thucydides himself created the speeches he wrote, but that he always strove to reflect the line of arguments of the original speech in them.²⁵ Summarizing the historical value of the speeches, DeSilva found that according to the standard of ancient historiography, the speech had to be consistent with the setting, the person who delivered the speech, and the occasion. The content of the speech was to be conveyed accurately where possible, but the linguistic expression was to the author's singenuity. Therefore, Luke went to great lengths to follow the ancient historiographic tradition, even if he used the speeches to highlight certain events described in Acts.²⁶

“BROUGHT BEFORE KINGS AND GOVERNORS...”

Examining the Apostle Paul's apologia delivered before Agrippa from the above aspect, we find that – although standing as a *victim* before the king and the attendants – for the readers of Luke's work Paul still appears as a *witness*, whose life is a fulfilment of God's plan. It would be easy to see Paul as someone who fell victim to the unrighteousness of Jewish leaders, the partiality of the Roman governors, or simply to the calamitous circumstances. However, Paul's life, including his arrest, captivities, and interrogations, rather attests to the *fulfilment of God's plan*.

²³ Balla: *Az újszövetségi iratok története*, 177–178.

²⁴ Carson–Moo, *Introduction*, 320.

²⁵ Balla: *Az újszövetségi iratok története*, 177–178.

²⁶ David A. deSilva: *An Introduction to the New Testament. Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation*, 2nd ed., Westmont, InterVarsity Press, 2018, 308.

Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and the following apologias

Paul's defense speeches are included in chapters 22, 24 and 26. The climax of these chapters is the last apologia delivered before King Agrippa. In chapter 22, Paul addressed the people, who, however, refused to hear him out. The day after, Paul was brought before the council – the supreme tribunal of the Jews – by tribune Lysias to find out what Paul was charged with. Kilgallen points out a parallel with chapter 4 of the Acts of the Apostles, which recounts that Peter and John were captured and later arrested by the priests and Sadducees. Luke notes that the religious leaders were much annoyed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is resurrection from the dead (4:2).²⁷ In Paul's case, too, the *hostile attitude of the Sadducees on resurrection* led to the heated debate between the members of the council that cut Paul's speech short. Thereafter, the apostle was heard in Caesarea before Governor Felix, with the attendance of the high priest, members of the Sanhedrin, and an attorney called Tertullus (24:1–23). Kilgallen notes that this is the only actual hearing compliant with Roman law mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles in relation to Paul.²⁸ Reluctant to make a decision, Felix adjourned the hearing, leaving Paul in custody. Felix's successor, Festus, too, postponed the judgement to do the Jews a favour (25,9).

The Jews strove to persuade the governors to embrace an interpretation of Paul's teaching according to which the apostle agitated among the Jews and would stir riots all over the Empire (24:5). Being well aware of that the Romans would not be willing to convict someone for purely religious reasons, the Jews intended to add a *political twist to an accusation based solely on a religious matter*.²⁹ Nonetheless, the representatives of Roman law soon saw through the twisted arguments, and declared Paul innocent several times during the procedure (23:29; 25:18; 25:25). As Sherwin-White aptly argues, Paul's trial was complicated and prolonged because the charges against him were of *political nature*, thus the governors were reluctant to drop them. On the other hand, Paul's accusers offered theological evidence, which was difficult for the Romans to comprehend.³⁰

²⁷ John T. Kilgallen: *Paul before Agrippa (Acts 26,2-23): Some Considerations in Biblica*, Vol. 69, No. 2, Leuven, Peeters Publishers, 1988, 172.

²⁸ Kilgallen: *Paul before Agrippa*, 172.

²⁹ H. N. Sherwin-White: *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963, 50.

³⁰ Sherwin-White: *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 51.

Stott highlights that the procedure of Roman lawsuits consisted of three stages. First the charges were formulated, then underpinned by the prosecutor. This was followed by the formal accusation. In the third step, the case was heard by an official with *imperium* (the supreme executive power vested in the major Roman officials). The accuser and the accused were both present at the hearing.³¹ Nonetheless, the Jewish leaders who accused Paul had *no proof of their charges* (25:7), thus not even the first basic condition of the court procedure was fulfilled.

Provocatio ad Caesarem

The prolonged trial, the two years of captivity, and Festus's reluctance to render a judgement drove Paul to appeal to the emperor. Festus, too, was aware of the fact that no more hearings were necessary (25:25), yet – knowing that it would have led to Paul's release – he was disinclined to openly admit it. Having understood the situation, Paul appealed to the emperor relying on his Roman citizenship.

Witherington argues that there were probably not many Roman citizens living in Judea in the 50s AD, and even less who were also Jews. Therefore, probably only few precedents were available in relation to a complex case like Paul's who was apparently caught between Jewish and Roman law. Witherington also notes that administering justice must have been a puzzle for the governor in this case, as the accusers emphasized *political charges* but in fact intended to *judge Paul themselves*, while Paul pointed out the *theological issues* and insisted on the being tried in the *Roman justice system*.³²

Sherwin-White points out that Paul's appeal was not an *appellatio* – which spread later as an appeal filed to a higher-level court against the decision of a lower-level court – but the exercise of the *ius provocationis* of Roman citizens. This right provided protection against execution or torture without a fair trial, and against being tried by a court outside Italy.³³ As regards Paul's appeal to the emperor, we should discuss the aforesaid destination: Rome. The Lord assured Paul that he would bear witness to Him in Rome (23:11). Therefore, Paul made the next step with his destination in mind and most likely referred to that before Festus, expounding that he should (δεῖ) be tried before the emperor's tribunal (25:10).

³¹ Stott: *The Message of the Act*, 349.

³² Ben Witherington III: *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998, 724–725.

³³ Sherwin-White: *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 68.

Representatives of Roman law in Luke's narrative

Up to that point, Paul defended himself before Felix and Festus. Luke's portrayal of the two governors is not positive: Felix hoped that he would receive money from Paul (24:26), and both Felix and Festus wanted to grant the Jews a favour (24:27; 25:9). The time had come, however, for Paul to stand before King Herod Agrippa II, officially named Marcus Julius Agrippa. Alongside others, Kilgallen points out that in the Lukan narrative the king represents a connection between the Roman Empire and the Jews.³⁴ Both Paul and Festus welcomed the attendance of the king, hoping that he would comprehend Paul's defence related to the Jewish religion and be able to decide whether the apostle posed a threat to the ruler of the Roman Empire.³⁵ In Luke's narrative, the presence of Agrippa is an indication to the reader that the apologia that follows will be solidly grounded in Jewish theology.

Agrippa's presence is also crucial from another perspective. It fulfils Jesus's prophecy formulated in Luke 21:12–13: "But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify." Yamazaki-Ransom argues that Roman officials should be viewed in a broader context of the salvation history: in the framework of the relationship with God and God's people. He also points out an eschatological aspect, since the above prophecy is included in Jesus's speech on the signs of the end times in Luke's Gospel. Even though the Acts of the Apostles reveals no punishment either of the governors or of the Jewish leaders, the message of such punishment is implied in the overall eschatological frameworks of the narrative of the hearings, in the reference made to the coming judgement (24:25), and in the proclamation of the resurrected Jesus as Lord (26:15).³⁶

APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA

It follows from the above that the hearing before Agrippa aimed at *the sentencing of a man proclaimed innocent* by the Roman authorities in a religion-based case that did not violate the Roman law or jeopardized the emperor. Witherington notes that the series of court hearings in Luke's work reaches its climax at this point. Moreover, this is the climax of all Paul's speeches

³⁴ Kilgallen: *Paul before Agrippa*, 170.

³⁵ Kilgallen: *Paul before Agrippa*, 171.

³⁶ Kazuhiko Yamazaki-Ransom: *The Roman Empire in Luke's Narrative*, Library of New Testament Studies, London, T&T Clark International, 2010, 157–158.

recorded by Luke. The apologia before Agrippa is the longest of Paul's defense speeches.³⁷ As F. F. Bruce put it, in the quiet, dignified environment of the emperor's hearing chambers, Paul delivered the speech that is worthy to be called his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.³⁸ According to Bock, two main themes are featured in the apologia: a testimony to the cross and the insistence that the new faith represented by Paul is in continuity with the religion of the Jews.³⁹

The structure of the apologia

The apologia delivered before Agrippa is largely consistent with the structure of the speeches of antiquity: after a short introduction, Paul gives an account of the events, underpins his own arguments, refutes the charges against him, and finally summarizes his message in the conclusion. Nonetheless, Derek Hogan points out that due to the unusual nature of the interrogation, we should not strive to find all of the elements of ancient forensic speeches in this particular apologia.⁴⁰

Hogan summarizes the proposals for the division of the speech suggested so far in the literature: Kennedy: 26:2–3: *exordium*, 26:4–18: *narratio*, 26:19–23: *peroratio*; Neyrey: 26:2–5: *exordium*, 26:6–8, 16–20: *narratio*, 26:12–18, *probatio*; Long: 26:2–3: *exordium*, 26:4–11: *narratio*, 26:12–18: *probatio*, 26:19–23: *rebutatio*; Winter: 26:2–3: *exordium*, 26:4–18: *narratio*, 26:19–20: *probatio*, 26:21: *rebutatio*, 26:22: *peroratio*; Witherington: 26:2–3: *exordium*, 26:4–21: *narratio*, 26:22–23: *propositio*, 26:25–26: *rebutatio*, 26:27–29: *peroratio*.⁴¹ Each of the abovementioned scholar found that the speech begins with an *exordium*, where Paul expresses his joy over the fact that he had the opportunity to bring his case before Agrippa. All but Neyrey also agree on that the *narratio*, making up a significant part of the apologia, begins with verse 4. The key differences in the scholars' view concern the structure of the second part of the speech. Three scholars believe that the closing verses should be included in the *peroratio*, one would classify them in the category of *probatio* and one in the *rebutatio*. It follows that the special content of the apologia allows for various results in terms of determining its structure.

³⁷ Witherington: *The Acts of the Apostles*, 735.

³⁸ Bruce: *Acts of the Apostles*, 488.

³⁹ Bock: *Acts*, 705.

⁴⁰ Derek K. Hogan: *Forensic Speeches in Acts 22–26 in their Literary Environment, A Rhetorical Study*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Baylor University, 2006, https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/2104/4848/derek_hogan_phd.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, 173. Accessed: 23 April 2023)

⁴¹ Hogan: *Forensic Speeches*, 170–171.

Hogan argues that one of the reasons why the scene is difficult to analyse from the aspect of forensic rhetorical categories is that it does not depict a formal trial. Even though in verse 2 Paul says that he would make his defence against all the accusations of the Jews, Festus had already decided that the charges brought by the Jewish leaders are not eligible for Roman proceedings (25:19). Therefore, Paul's speech is not a standard apologia to refute the accusations brought against him, as those accusations are irrelevant, *negligible from the aspect of Roman law*. Moreover, at that moment, the governor was still uncertain about what charges to bring against Paul so that he could send the apostle before the emperor. Hogan notes that this fact has often been overlooked in the literature.⁴²

With a view to all that, we might as well say that Paul fell victim to the unrighteous intentions of the Jewish leaders, since the accusations that brought him before the Roman court were not only untrue but also irrelevant. Yet, the next part of the apologia reveals that Paul in fact uses his own hearing to testify to the good news of God's grace. In this way, even though he *is a victim*, he stands before his audience *as a witness*.

Agrippa's permission to deliver the speech (26:1)

Verse 1 of chapter 26 starts with a remarkable twist: not Festus but Agrippa gives Paul permission to speak: "Agrippa said to Paul, 'You have permission to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself" (26:1). As pointed out by Witherington, with this instance, Luke shows his readers that Paul addresses his apologia to Agrippa, and, thus, the speech will have a personal character.⁴³

According F.F. Bruce, Paul's outstretched hands represent a greeting of respect to the king,⁴⁴ while Keener sees it as a rhetorical gesture typical of the period.⁴⁵ Luke uses the verb ἀπολογέομαι to indicate the nature of the speech, which means an apologia delivered by the accused in his own defence against charges considered untrue.⁴⁶ Witherington, on the other hand, notes that Paul's apologia is special because it resembles a testimony given by a witness, not a speech delivered in defence against the accusations.⁴⁷ There is a tension between the *form* and the *content* of the speech. The court hearing that we see gives the speech a well-defined

⁴² Hogan: *Forensic Speeches*, 172.

⁴³ Witherington: *The Acts of the Apostles*, 738.

⁴⁴ Bruce: *Acts of the Apostles*, 496.

⁴⁵ Craig S. Keener: *Acts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, 581.

⁴⁶ BDAG, 102.

⁴⁷ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 736.

context. On the other hand, the content is aligned with the purpose indicated by Paul himself in the apologia: the main drive of his life, since the resurrected Jesus called out to him when travelling to Damascus: “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you” (26:16). Thus, God’s plan is fulfilled in Paul’s speech. On the other hand, the main agenda of Luke’s work is also fulfilled, summarized by the mission mandate given by Jesus’s ascension: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). Fulfilling this, even as *the accused*, Paul stands before the court as a *witness*.

Exordium (26:2–3)

An important element of the speech, the *captatio benevolentiae* – capture of the benevolence of the king – introduces Paul’s speech in verses 2 and 3. Paul articulates his intention to make his defence against all the accusations the Jews brought against him. As Witherington points out, this intention is realized only partially, since Paul does not mention the charges brought against him but instead rephrases the actual reason of the lawsuit.⁴⁸ The verb ἐγκαλέω (to accuse someone, to bring charges against⁴⁹) is in the passive voice and present continuous tense (*praesens imperfectum passivum*), indicating that the accusation is an ongoing process. Paul then addresses Agrippa as someone who is especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews and begs him to listen patiently.

Paul as a young Pharisee (26:4–5)

Paul mentions his youth at the beginning of the *narratio*: his was a life spent from the beginning among his own people and in Jerusalem. Also, says Paul, the Jews had known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that he belonged to the strictest sect of their religion and lived as a Pharisee. The wording of these sentences reveals Paul’s literate Greek, whose quality would gain the approval even of an audience trained in rhetoric: for example, he uses the *praesens perfectum* form (ἴσασι) of the verb οἶδα (to have information about, know, be aware of, recognise⁵⁰). According to Culy and Parsons, this is the only passage in the New Testament where instead of οἶδασιν, the older literary form of the *praesens perfectum* is used.⁵¹ Keener

⁴⁸ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 739.

⁴⁹ BDAG, 242.

⁵⁰ BDAG, 615–616.

⁵¹ Martin M. Culy – Mikeal C. Parsons: *Acts. A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2003, 491.

points out that making references to witnesses, public knowledge, the information available to the audience, and youth were established rhetoric tools in antiquity. Paul refers to his widely known youth, well known also by the Jews *if they are willing* to testify.⁵²

The Resurrection Hope (26:6–8)

In verse 6, Paul clearly explains that he stands on trial on account of his hope in the promise made by God to his ancestors. This is completely different to the charge that had so far been brought against him. The first accusation is mentioned in chapter 21, shouted by the Jews from Asia Minor, stirring up the crowd: “This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place; more than that, he has actually brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place” (21:28). The next accusation was formulated by an attorney named Tertullus before Felix: “We have, in fact, found this man a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and so we seized him, and we would have judged him according to our law” (24:5–6). Thus, the content of the charges remains unchanged, but the wording differs. Kilgallen argues that Tertullus focused on showing the Roman officials that Paul was just as dangerous to the Roman peace as to the tenets of the Jewish religion –the accused is more likely to be convicted if presented as a *political revolutionary*.⁵³ The charges brought against Paul by his accusers overlap at certain points. In each case, the main motifs are the people (λαός), teaching against the law (νόμος) and the place (τόπος), and the profanation of the temple (ἱερόν). Nonetheless, behind all that lies a single central truth: Jesus and the faith in him. Jesus is the reason of the change in terms of the people, the law, and the sacred place.

Accordingly, the charges – the grounds for his arrest – had been formulated by Paul in various ways since the beginning of the trial. In the brief speech held before the council, he said the following: „Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (23:6). Later, in response to Tertullus’s words spoken before Felix, Paul explained that he worshipped the God of his ancestors, believing in “everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets” (24:14). Paul’s hope in God is the very hope accepted by his accusers: “that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous” (24:15). Thus, ironically, Paul was charged with something that was *identical* to

⁵² Keener: Acts, 582–583.

⁵³ Kilgallen: *Paul before Agrippa*, 13.

the belief of his accusers. After two years of custody, Paul said the following in his defence before Festus: “I have in no way committed an offense against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor” (25:8).

In his defense speech delivered before Agrippa, Paul explains that the content of the accusation against him – the faith in resurrection – is in continuity with the Jewish religion, which, in fact, was a *religio licita* in the Roman Empire, and did not violate Roman law in any way: “And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?” (26:6–8). Pesch notes that here Paul points out the inconsistency on the part of his accusers, who *betray their own faith*.⁵⁴

Verse 6 (καὶ νῦν ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι τῆς εἰς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν ἐπαγγελίας γενομένης ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔστηκα κρινόμενος) can be translated also as follows: And now for the hope of the promise made to our fathers by God, I stand here judged. As pointed out by Culy and Parsons, the *aoristos participium medio-passivum* form (γενομένης) of the verb γίνομαι (to come into existence, be created, become something⁵⁵), alongside the preposition ὑπό, emphasises the acting party from whom the action in question originates. This grammatical structure highlights the one who is responsible for the noun (here: ἐπαγγελίας) modified by the *participium*. Thus, by saying the above words, Paul confirms that the promise due to which he was accused originates from God.⁵⁶

The New Oxford Annotated Bible provides the following translation of the question included in verse 8: “Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”. Yet, based on the original text (τί ἄπιστον κρίνεται παρ’ ὑμῖν εἰ ὁ θεὸς νεκροὺς ἐγείρει;), this sentence can be translated also as follows: Why is it *judged* incredible with you if God does raise the dead? The same verb κρίνω (*passivum*: to judge, criticize, condemn⁵⁷) – which was in *participium imperfectum passivum* in verse 6 – is in *praesens imperfectum passivum* here. Thus, Paul’s rhetorical question also underpins that the charges brought against him concern his faith in resurrection. Keener notes that in certain cases, historians of the antiquity argued to support

⁵⁴ Rudolf Pesch: *Die Apostelgeschichte: 2. Teilband (Apg 13-28)*, Zürich, Benziger Verlag, 1986, 276–277.

⁵⁵ BDAG, 173–176.

⁵⁶ Culy–Parsons: *Handbook*, 491–492.

⁵⁷ BDAG, 502–504.

events that otherwise seemed unlikely. Paul has no doubt about that God raises the dead (26:8), since he himself met the one raised by God on his way to Damascus (26:15).⁵⁸

Therefore, we might say that Paul fell victim to the partiality of the Roman governors: it should have been obvious to them that no charges brought against the apostle constituted a violation of Roman law, but he was accused based on controversial religious issues (25:18–19). Yet, the following part of the apologia clearly shows that despite being a *victim*, Paul stands before his audience as a *witness*, whose life is a fulfilment of God’s plan.

Paul as a persecutor (26:9–11)

In verses 26:9–11, Paul recounts his former role as persecutor. According to Keener, the apostle thus confirms the credibility of his testimony to Christ, which is not the result of Paul’s own premises: “Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (26:9).⁵⁹ Standing before his audience as the one who is *persecuted*, Paul had once been a *persecutor* himself. As pointed out by Culy and Parsons, the personal pronoun in verse 9 is indicated alongside a reflexive pronoun (Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ἑδοξά ἐμαυτῷ), putting strong emphasis on the speaker, highlighting the personal character of the account.⁶⁰ F. F. Bruce argues that Paul uses the emphasized personal pronoun to point out that while he used to be a Pharisee, thus he had believed in resurrection, he himself considered Jesus’s resurrection to be impossible and felt obliged to fight against such heresy.⁶¹

A light from heaven (26:12–15)

The Acts of the Apostles recalls the story of Paul’s calling three times. The first is placed in the account of the events narrated by Luke (9:1–19), while in the other two cases, the calling is recounted by Paul’s own words (22:1–21; 26:1–29).

A paper authored by Charles Hedrick provides a summary analysis concerning the three recounts of the calling. Hedrick summarizes the history of the scholarly research and notes that a detailed comparative analysis is yet to be prepared from the aspect of Luke’s literary method.

⁵⁸ Keener: *Acts*, 584.

⁵⁹ Keener: *Acts*, 584.

⁶⁰ Culy–Parsons: *Handbook*, 493.

⁶¹ Bruce: *Acts of the Apostles*, 499.

He argues that while the three accounts share similar motifs and purport to describe the same incident, they utilize different literary modes.⁶²

According to Hedrick, the differences and “contradictions” among the three accounts are to be explained by Luke’s literary technique. He finds that facts necessary for understanding the event in one of the narratives are provided in the others. In fact, the complete story of Paul’s conversion can only be determined by bringing together features from all three narratives, as the entire story is not completely narrated in any of the three accounts.⁶³

We agree with Hedrick on that the tensions between the three accounts should not be considered corrections or modifications made by Luke, and the possible contradictions should not be seen as mistakes or inattention on Luke’s part. Nonetheless, the reasons underlying the differences between the three narratives should not necessarily be attributed only to Luke’s theologically and stylistically motivated goals set as a historian. Perhaps the differing narratives of the conversion story are simply the result of historical reality. Paul always adjusts his speeches to his audience – the same is true in the case of the apologia delivered before Agrippa.

Paul quotes Jesus’s words said in his vision as follows: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads” (26:14). Keener points out that this was a widely known Greek proverb in antiquity, referring to the “mad futility of opposing deity”.⁶⁴ According to Culy and Parson, this idiom expresses when someone hurt themselves while actively resisting authority, causing themselves damage or suffering as a result of their own reaction.⁶⁵ Agrippa had no problem understanding this expression, while the same proverb would have been useless in Paul’s speech delivered before his people (22:1–21), so he omitted it.

Paul as a servant and a witness (26:16–18)

In this narrative, Paul neither mentions the loss and regaining of his sight, nor the mediation of Ananias. Here, Paul receives the calling directly from Jesus in a heavenly vision, juxtaposing it, in a way, with the authorization and permission received from the high priests (26:12). Jesus said to Paul: “But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am

⁶² Charles W. Hedrick: Paul’s Conversion/Call. A Comparative Analysis of the Three Reports in Acts in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Sep. 1981, Vol. 100, No. 3, Atlanta, The Society of Biblical Literature, 1983, 417.

⁶³ Hedrick: *A Comparative Analysis*, 432.

⁶⁴ Keener: *Acts*, 585.

⁶⁵ Culy–Parsons: *Handbook*, 496.

sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (26:16–18).

Pesch points out that the calling formulated by Jesus echoes the Book of Ezekiel, where – symbolizing the resurrection to a new life – the one being called must stand up on his feet and listen to the words of the calling (Ezek 2:1). On the other hand, the sentence that includes the promise of protection in verse 17 is in connection with the stories of the calling of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Jesus sends Paul to his people (Isa 6:8) and the Gentiles (Jer 1:10) and promises to protect him from the awaiting dangers (Jer 1:8).⁶⁶ The motifs of the mission included in verse 18 – the opening of the eyes (Isa 42:7) and the turning from darkness to light (Isa 42:16) – echo the prophecies of Isaiah.⁶⁷ F. F. Bruce notes that the parallels with the prophets of the Old Testament refer to that Paul is called to a prophetic ministry.⁶⁸

The above statement that Paul adjusts his speeches to his audience is clearly shown here. In his apologia delivered before Agrippa, Paul testifies to that the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies continue in the lives of Jesus’s followers. Therefore, in his testimony, Paul says nothing other than what the prophets had proclaimed.

Paul’s obedience and its consequences (26:19–21)

Addressing Agrippa once more in verse 19, Paul tells him that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but obeyed it, as once did the prophets of his people. Bruce notes that this is a rhetorical figure called litotes: Paul emphasises his obedience by denying disobedience.⁶⁹ In verse 21, Paul explains that the reason why the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to kill him was precisely his obedience to the heavenly vision. Pesch notes that by such deeds, the Jewish leaders disobediently rejected their own universal mission.⁷⁰

According to the abovementioned finding of Squires, various themes intertwine in the Acts of the Apostles, showing the continuous fulfilment of God’s plan. Squires adds that the plan is usually not realized explicitly but with indirect instruments.⁷¹ Paul’s conversion is one of the

⁶⁶ Pesch: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 277–278.

⁶⁷ Pesch: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 278.

⁶⁸ Bruce: *Acts of the Apostles*, 501.

⁶⁹ Bruce: *Acts of the Apostles*, 502.

⁷⁰ Pesch: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 278.

⁷¹ Squires: *The Plan of God*, 26–27.

instrumental moments in the fulfilment of God's plan.⁷² Thus, it is no surprise that in his *apologia*, Paul speaks of the obedience to God's will and the consequences thereof. According to Pesch, when Paul understands that he went astray by acting as a persecutor, he simultaneously embarks on the road of his true mission as a new *convert*.⁷³ In this way, he undertakes turning into *persecuted* from *persecutor*, as, wittingly or unwittingly, he would definitely make enemies along the way: "For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me" (26:21). Later, near the end of his life, Luke formulates the thought in his letter to Timothy that those who follow the command of Christ will be *persecuted* (2Tim 3,12).⁷⁴

Paul's testimony (26:22–23)

Conzelmann notes that Paul's speech ends with a concluding summary of the essence of faith in verses 22 and 23. The message is essentially the same as that of the previous verses but expressed even more clearly.⁷⁵ Jesus's promise to protect Paul (Acts 26:17)⁷⁶ was fulfilled. This is evidenced by the fact that Paul stands there, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place (26:22). The term "small and great" (μικρῷ τε καὶ μεγάλῳ) is an example of merism. Luke's narrative indicates two contrasting phrases, thus referring also to those in between them.⁷⁷

Although the speech is delivered in a purely judicial environment, and Paul himself uses the term ἀπολογέομαι (to speak in one's own defence against charges presumed to be false, defend oneself⁷⁸) at the beginning of the speech (26:2), the testimony to Christ turns the *apologia* into a *sermon*. Inter alia, this is made clear by the fact that at the end of his speech Paul uses the word μαρτύρομαι (to affirm something with solemnity, testify, bear witness⁷⁹) instead of ἀπολογέομαι to describe his hearing (26:22). The situation was turned by Paul himself: instead of being a *victim*, he stands before his judges as a *witness*. He used his defense speech to make a testimony, rendering his interrogation an opportunity for evangelization.

⁷² Squires: *The Plan of God*, 32.

⁷³ Pesch: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 278.

⁷⁴ On the apostle Paul's last imprisonment and his second letter to Timothy, see the study by Péter Balla in this volume.

⁷⁵ Hans Conzelmann: *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, Donald H. Juel, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987, 211.

⁷⁶ In the following, when making reference to the Acts of the Apostles, only the numbers of the chapter and the verse will be indicated.

⁷⁷ Culy–Parsons: *Handbook*, 500.

⁷⁸ BDAG, 102.

⁷⁹ BDAG, 549.

In relation to the interrupted speeches in the Acts of the Apostles, Daniel Lynwood Smith notes that the intentional interruption of the speaker by the audience was a literary device in antiquity centred around key conflicts and narrative watersheds.⁸⁰ However, in addition to being a literary device, interruption was also a rhetorical device applied to highlight the impact of the speech on the audience.⁸¹ As pointed out by Smith, interruption is present in both volumes of Luke-Acts. In chapter 7 of the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen is not only the first martyr mentioned in Luke's narrative, but also the first follower of Jesus to be interrupted twice in a row.⁸²

Festus's exclamation and the reply (26:24–25)

Initiated by Festus's intervention, a dialogue is formed at the end of the interrogation. Marshall notes that while the governor's sentence may seem an interruption, Paul, in fact, got to the end of his speech and conveyed his message. Festus, on the other hand, remained unable to grasp the theological aspect of the speech.⁸³ He nonetheless sensed the apostle's purpose of delivering the good news of God's grace, and could not remain silent. He clearly saw the *content* of Paul's speech but was unwilling to embrace its *message*, thus he exclaimed: "You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!" (26,24).

Smith – quoting Richard I. Pervo – argues that the interruption is used by Luke in the speech as "the equivalent of a double underline", to reiterate the key theological themes: the reality of the resurrection and the proclamation of the good news to the Gentiles. The powerful speech of Jesus's followers provokes immediate emotional reaction: "their words can be resisted, but they cannot be ignored".⁸⁴ Festus, too, could only think that Paul went insane (μαίνομαι: to be mad, be out of one's mind⁸⁵). Speaking the sober truth, Paul could only reject the accusation of being out of his mind (26:25).

⁸⁰ Daniel Lynwood Smith: Interrupted Speech in Luke-Acts in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 134, No. 1, Atlanta, The Society of Biblical Literature, 183.

⁸¹ Smith: *Interrupted Speech*, 187.

⁸² Smith: *Interrupted Speech*, 187.

⁸³ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 398.

⁸⁴ Smith: *Interrupted Speech*, 189–190.

⁸⁵ BDAG, 541.

Paul's question to Agrippa and the reply (26:26–28)

Paul turns to Agrippa to confirm this statement. He refers to the events taking place in public and the fact that the king is well aware of them. As the witnesses of Jesus's resurrection did not remain silent, and their community is not an underground movement.

In verse 27, Paul addresses the king with a direct question: "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." This sentence is crucial because it carries a hidden message that the prophets of the Old Testament foretold the coming of the Messiah. Paul then claims that he knows Agrippa believes the prophets. Peterson points out that Paul said this for a reason, since Agrippa enjoyed certain rights regarding the temple and the appointment of the high priest. According to Paul, the fact that Agrippa believes the prophets is a sufficient basis for him to believe the good news about Jesus Christ as well.⁸⁶ Stott notes that throughout the entire speech, Paul sought the king's salvation, not his favour. That is why Paul did not content himself with telling the story of his own conversion but also called Agrippa to *convert*.⁸⁷ Yamazaki-Ransom argues that Paul's rhetorical question forced Agrippa to respond, not in relation to the apostle's claim of innocence, but in relation to his testimony about the resurrection of Jesus. Although Luke presents Agrippa as someone who listens (25:22; 26:3), as the primary addressee of Paul's apologia, he proves to be deaf to hearing the word of God.⁸⁸

According to Pesch, Agrippa's skilfully balanced response hides the sensation of being touched by Paul's words:⁸⁹ "Quickly you will persuade me to play the Christian"⁹⁰ (26:28). The interpretation of that remark is debated by scholars. Opinions are especially divided regarding the meaning of the phrase ἐν ὀλίγῳ (in a short time⁹¹, quickly⁹²), and the parallel with the term ἐν ὀλίγῳ καὶ ἐν μεγάλῳ (whether in a short or a long time⁹³) in verse 29. Yamazaki-Ransom summarizes the three most common conclusions of the various interpretations: 1: Agrippa's answer is positive, and he really became a Christian. 2: Agrippa's response is sarcastic. 3: Agrippa formulated his answer as a question. The first possibility cannot be substantiated based

⁸⁶ David G. Peterson: *The Acts of the Apostles*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 674.

⁸⁷ Stott: *The Message of the Acts*, 361–362.

⁸⁸ Yamazaki-Ransom: *The Roman Empire*, 190.

⁸⁹ Pesch: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 280.

⁹⁰ Another possible translation mentioned in the New Revised Standard Version: "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?"

⁹¹ Henry George Liddell – Robert Scott: *A Greek-English Lexicon with a revised supplement*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, 1215.

⁹² BDAG, 623–624.

⁹³ BDAG, 623–624.

on Luke's narrative. The second and third statements are possible, but in both cases the answer is negative.⁹⁴

The purpose of Paul's apologia (26:29)

According to Soards, Paul's reply to King Agrippa's answer in the following sentence reveals the purpose of his speech:⁹⁵ "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am—except for these chains" (26:29). Paul knows that only God can give his listeners the grace of conversion, since he alone could lead him out of darkness into light. Such a controversy: albeit standing in *chains* before his audience, Paul who is the one who is truly *free*. According to John Calvin: „This answer doth testify with what zeal, to spread abroad the glory of Christ, this holy man's breast was inflamed, when as he doth patiently suffer those bonds wherewith the governor had bound him, and doth desire that he might escape the deadly snares of Satan.”⁹⁶

Pesch argues that Luke's recount of the apologia is not for the attending audience only. The Lukan purpose is to convey the message to everyone who would ever *read* these lines.⁹⁷ The good news of God's grace echoes from the pages to this very day. In addition to attesting to his innocence, albeit being *a victim*, Paul stands before us as a *witness*.

Confirmation of the innocence of the accused (26:30–32)

The following verses reveal the judgement rendered by the king and the governor after the hearing. "Then the king got up, and with him the governor and Bernice and those who had been seated with them; and as they were leaving, they said to one another, 'This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.' Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor'" (26:30–32). Thus, *innocent*, Paul should be released. Him being a *victim* can be traced back to the same root: despite the fact that, in a legal sense, the superior authority was inclined to acquit him, the case based on untrue charges was not closed. The contradiction in the trial is aptly formulated by Pesch as follows: „Called like the

⁹⁴ Yamazaki-Ransom: *The Roman Empire*, 192.

⁹⁵ Soards, Marion L., *The Speeches in Acts*, Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994, 123.

⁹⁶ John Calvin: *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. II, translated by Henry Beveridge, Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999, 307.

⁹⁷ Pesch: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 280.

prophets, to be a witness by the Messiah, Paul, the converted persecutor was persecuted by the Jews, while they themselves were the ones who did not follow the prophets and Moses.”⁹⁸

Jürgen Roloff points out the parallel between Paul’s hearing before King Herod Agrippa II and the interrogation of Jesus before King Herod Agrippa I mentioned in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 23:6–12). Here, too, although convinced of the defendant’s innocence, the governor – still unsettled by the Jewish leaders – asks the king’s help for resolving the case. In the Gospel of Luke too, the king shows apparent curiosity about the accused (Luke 23:8), whose innocence, though strongly symbolically expressed, is clearly declared (Luke 23:11).⁹⁹

Hogan points out that in many ancient novels and historical works, trials and legal proceedings – despite the narrative emphasis – fail to resolve the case. In most litigations described in one or more speeches, events outside the legal process determine the outcome. Usually, some intervention by gods or other people makes further litigation unnecessary. Hogan, however, notes that most strikingly, the Acts of the Apostles does not reveal – not even at the end of the book – the outcome of the case.¹⁰⁰

But is the problem really not solved? In a study, Roland Kany raises the question as to why the Acts of the Apostles was not continued in antiquity.¹⁰¹ Historical works, such as those of Thucydides and Polybius, were often continued by several historians of the posterity, picking up the threads where the great predecessor left them. Kany, on that basis, asks: Why wasn’t the Acts of the Apostles continued in the 2nd or 3rd century by someone who knew what eventually happened to Paul in Roman captivity, or what happened to Peter and the rest of the twelve? Someone who knew how the first Christians reacted to the destruction of the temple, how the followers of Jesus lived in Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt or North Africa. Who knew how Christianity was strengthened in Europe, how new structures were formed, how the mission progressed – and the list of questions could go on and on. As Kany has no certain answer, he formulates eleven theses to take stock of the possibilities. His fourth thesis reads as follows: “The Acts of the Apostles achieved its goal with its conclusion. Nothing more can and needs to follow.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Pesch: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 279.

⁹⁹ Jürgen Roloff: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981, 349.

¹⁰⁰ Hogan: *Forensic Speeches*, 175.

¹⁰¹ Roland Kany: Warum fand die Apostelgeschichte keine Fortsetzung in der Antike? Elf Thesen zu einem ungelösten Problem in Jörg Frey, Clare K. Rothschild, Jens Schröter (ed.): *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft. und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, 327–348.

¹⁰² “Die Apostelgeschichte hat mit ihrem Schluss ihr Ziel erreicht. Es kann und muss eigentlich nichts mehr folgen.”

CONCLUSION

We have no certain answers as regards the final outcome of the case as Luke-Acts ends with Paul remaining in custody for two years in Rome, “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31).

Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that ultimately the Apostle Paul’s life is no tragedy. It is not a story of the triumph of evil over justice. It does not show the derailment but much rather the fulfilment of God’s plan. According to the words of Jesus recorded by Luke in his Gospel, those who follow him will be arrested, and brought before kings and governors, but all that will be an opportunity to *testify* (Luke 21:12–13). In addition, as clearly shown in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul was aware of that his journey to Rome and his proclamation of the good news of God’s grace there renders his life a fulfilment of God’s plan (Acts 19:21; 23:11; 27:24).

The main agenda of the Acts of the Apostles is formulated by the words of the resurrected Jesus directed to the disciples in verse 1 of chapter 8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” This is fulfilled throughout the work: the gospel message spreads to Jerusalem in chapters 1–7, to Judea and Samaria in chapters 8–12, and all the way to Rome, the capital of *imperium sine fine* in chapters 13–28. The fulfilment of this prophecy shines through the life of Paul the Apostle, too, as he becomes *persecuted from persecutor*, testifying – even as a *victim* – to the power of God. The same shows in the apologia of chapter 26, where Paul summarises his message in verses 22 and 23: “To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

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