

## ***The Historical Value of the Book of Acts:<sup>1</sup>*** ***An Essay in the History of New Testament Criticism***

**W. Ward Gasque**

[p.68]

Mr. Ward Gasque, a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, who is at present engaged on research in the University of Manchester, has made a special study of the criticism and interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This paper, originally prepared for the Arnold Ehrhardt Seminar of Manchester University, is a by-product of his study. At a time when the historical value of Acts is widely underestimated on dogmatic, not historical, grounds, Mr. Gasque's judgments deserve careful attention.

One does not have to read very widely in the subject of New Testament criticism before he realizes that there is no such thing as a consensus of opinion among scholars regarding any but the most basic problems of New Testament research. Statements such as, "Most scholars agree that ...", followed by the opinion of the author, are simply more sophisticated gimmicks in the same general category as the public orator's raising of his voice when he knows that his argument is weak. Scholars do not usually agree: they have opinions.

Nowhere is this more true than in connection with the Acts of

[p.69]

the Apostles. As is well known, the Lucan writings are today one of the great storm centres in contemporary research (to allude to the title of a recent essay).<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the question of ultimate Christian origins, there is probably no other area of New Testament research in which scholarly opinion is so divided.

One of the important items on the agenda of the debate concerns the historical value of the Book of Acts, the subject of the present paper. To see the issues clearly we need only pause to consider a few of the most influential of the recent essays and monographs on the Lucan writings which have appeared in Germany and which are very much in the centre of the storm of controversy which is taking place at the present time in the world of New Testament scholarship.

---

<sup>1</sup> Secondary sources: A. J. Mattill, Jr., *Luke as a Historian in Criticism since 1840* (diss. Vanderbilt University, 1959) is the major study of the subject; W. Bieder, *Die Apostelgeschichte in der Historie*, Theologische Studien 61, EVZ-Verlag, Zürich (1960) surveys the whole history of *Actaforschung* in a brief (63 pp.) compass, as E. Haenchen (n. 5), 13-47 and E. Trocmé, *Le "livre des Actes" et l'histoire*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris (1957), 1-19, have done for the modern period; Bieder and Haenchen are dependent on A. C. McGiffert's essay in *BC* 2 (1922), 363-95, for the 19th century, for the most part; J. Dupont, *The Sources of Acts*, E. T. Darton, Longman & Todd, London (1964) is the definitive history of the source criticism of Acts; C. K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study*, Epworth, London (1961) and W. C. van Unnik (n. 2) trace some of the main lines of recent discussion, while D. Guthrie, "Recent Literature on the Acts of the Apostles", *Vox Evangelica* (1963), 33-49 [[http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol02/acts\\_guthrie.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol02/acts_guthrie.pdf)], fills in the bibliographical details; my forthcoming dissertation, *A History of the Criticism of the Book of Acts*, Manchester University (1969), is designed to give a comprehensive picture (omitting the areas of source and textual criticism).

<sup>2</sup> W. C. van Unnik, "Luke-Acts, A Storm Center in Contemporary Scholarship", in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, Festschrift for Paul Schubert, L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn (eds.), Abingdon Press, New York and Nashville (1966), 15-32.

Phillipp Vielhauer's famous essay on the "Paulinism" of Acts<sup>3</sup> is responsible for starting the discussion. However, the chief credit for bringing the Lucan writings to the centre of scholarly concern is due to the important monograph on the theology of Luke by Hans Conzelmann.<sup>4</sup> The massive commentary contributed to the Meyer series by Ernst Haenchen<sup>5</sup> is the definitive study of Acts from the point of view of the "new look" at the Lucan writings, to which one may compare the slender volume by Conzelmann in the *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*.<sup>6</sup> *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting* by J. C. O'Neill<sup>7</sup> is the only major work written originally in English which takes a similar point of view.

These writers, with their various differences, agree on certain basic assumptions.

(1) They agree in stressing the creative role of the anonymous author of Luke-Acts in his writing.<sup>8</sup> He is more of an artist and interesting story-teller than a historian in the normal understanding

[p.70]

of the word. His purpose is not so much to pass on historical information as it is to tell a story which will edify his readers.<sup>9</sup>

(2) In carrying out his aim of writing edifying history, the author betrays certain fundamental theological assumptions which strongly influence the way he tells his story.<sup>9a</sup> As he is an author in his own right (rather than a chronicler), so also he is a reflective theologian (rather than one who merely passes on tradition). This is the reason we can speak of the theology of 'Luke'<sup>10</sup> in comparison with and contrast to the theology of Paul or 'Mark' or 'Matthew' or the primitive Church.

(3) The theology of Luke-Acts represents the view of the post-or sub-apostolic Church, rather than that of the apostolic age.<sup>11</sup> Its position is that of 'early catholicism'<sup>12</sup> and so is closer to

---

<sup>3</sup> "Zum 'Paulinismus' der Apostelgeschichte", *Evangelische Theologie* 10 (1950/51), 1-15; E. T. in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 33-50.

<sup>4</sup> *Die Mite der Zeit*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen (1953; 1964<sup>5</sup>); E. T. *The Theology of St. Luke*, Faber and Faber, London (1960).

<sup>5</sup> *Die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen (1961<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>6</sup> *Die Apostelgeschichte*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen (1963).

<sup>7</sup> S.P.C.K., London (1961).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. E. Haenchen, "Tradition und Komposition in der Apostelgeschichte", *ZTK* 52 (1955), 205-25.

<sup>9</sup> The author is not so much a historian in our sense of the word as he is a fascinating narrator. He writes not for a learned public which would keep track of all his references and critically compare them, but rather for a more or less non-literary congregation which he wants to captivate and edify" (Haenchen, "The Book of Acts as Source Material for the History of Early Christianity", in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 260; cf. his commentary. 93-99).

<sup>9a</sup> Cf. Haenchen, *Comm.*, 81-88; Conzelmann, *Comm.*, 9-10; O'Neill. *op. cit.*; and Vielhauer, *art. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted, however, that the theology of Luke is understood in a variety of ways. For Conzelmann, Luke is the theologian of *Heilsgeschichte*; for Haenchen, his main emphasis is "the word of God"; O'Neill sees him as an early Christian apologist who writes to convince unbelievers. Conzelmann, Haenchen, Vielhauer, and E. Käsemann see him as one who has led the Church astray by corrupting the theology of Paul and the early apostles, while U. Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn (1963<sup>2</sup>) with which cf. his essay "Interpreting Luke-Acts in a Period of Existentialist Theology", in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 60-83, and others take a more positive view.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Conzelmann, "Luke's Place in the Development of Early Christianity", *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 298-316; Haenchen, *Comm.*, 103: "In der Apostelgeschichte ein Mann der nachapostolischen Zeit spricht."

<sup>12</sup> E. Käsemann, "Ephesians and Acts", in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 288-97.

the theology of the Pastorals and the apostolic fathers<sup>13</sup> and, in some ways, the second-century apologists,<sup>14</sup> than to that of the other New Testament writings.

(4) The author's theological ideas and historical Church situation, so far removed from the events and doctrines of the apostolic age, have caused him to write an account which is quite unhistorical in its essential features.<sup>15</sup> Thus the Book of Acts is much

[p.71]

more reliable as a source for the theology and practice of the Church of A.D. 90 or later than it is for the Church of A.D. 30-60.<sup>16</sup>

(5) A major illustration of the unhistorical picture of apostolic Christianity resulting from the author's place in the development of early Christian history is the misrepresentation of Paul in Acts.<sup>17</sup> This is due not so much to the author's deliberate attempt to misrepresent Paul, as it is to his inability to understand him.<sup>18</sup> The issues of Paul's day were quite different from the issues of his own day. In his idealization of the early Church, the author unconsciously substitutes the theology of the Church of his own age for the theology of Paul, of which he either has no accurate knowledge or fails to make use of what knowledge he has. Thus there is an essential discontinuity between the theologies of 'Luke' and Paul.<sup>19</sup>

Needless to say, the author of Luke-Acts is not "Luke, the beloved physician" (Col. 4: 14) and companion of Paul!

In the closing paragraph of his recent essay on the historical value of Acts, Haenchen, after demonstrating (to his own satisfaction, at least) the worthlessness of the narrative of Acts as a source of apostolic history, delivers the *coup de grâce* to the idea of 'Luke the historian' in the following words:

The quest of the historical reliability of the book of Acts does not touch the central concern of the book. By telling the history of

---

<sup>13</sup> Conzelmann, *Comm.*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> O'Neill, *op. cit.*, and Vielhauer, *art. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Haenchen has provided the student with a detailed discussion of his point of view in his essay, "The Book of Acts as Source Material for the History of Early Christianity", *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 258-78.

<sup>16</sup> "Man hat Lukas gelegentlich gelobt, weil er die primitive Theologie der christlichen Anfangszeiten so treu darzustellen vermocht habe. Aber es ist seine eigene schlichte Theologie (die er mit seiner Gemeinde teilte), welche er überall voraussetzt und die man aus den Predigten, Gebeten, liturgischen Wendungen und gelegentlichen Bemerkungen in der Apostelgeschichte entnehmen muss" (Haenchen, *Comm.*, 81-82). On Acts 10: 35, Haenchen comments: "It is certainly not Pauline theology that appears here, nor is it anything ever thought by Peter. It is, rather, the theology of Gentile Christianity toward the end of the first century in which Luke lived not only outwardly but theologically..." (*Studies in Luke-Acts*, 266). Haenchen does not tell us his source for the theological thoughts of Peter!

<sup>17</sup> According to Haenchen, Luke has made three basic blunders: (1) He solves the problem of the Gentile mission and the controversy concerning the Law in a totally unpauline fashion. (2) The portrait of Paul in Acts contradicts the epistles, in that Paul is (a) a miracle worker, (b) a forceful speaker, and (c) not an apostle of equal standing with the Twelve. (3) He contradicts the Pauline epistles in his portrayal of Jewish and Christian relations (*Comm.*, 99-103).

<sup>18</sup> "Das Paulusbild, aber auch das gesamte Bild der Missionslage in der Apostelgeschichte zeigt, dass hier kein Mitarbeiter des Paulus zu Wort kommt, sondern dass ein Mann der späteren Generation sich Dinge auf seine Weise zurechtzulegen sucht, deren wirkliche Perspektive nicht mehr gegeben ist" (Haenchen, *Comm.*, 103). But cf. the eccentric essay of E. R. Goodenough, "The Perspective of Acts", in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 51-59.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Vielhauer, *art. cit.*

[p.72]

apostolic times through many individual stories, the book primarily intends to edify the churches and thereby contribute its part in spreading the Word of God farther and farther, even to the ends of the earth.<sup>20</sup>

All this must come as rather a shock to those of us who have been nurtured on the writings of Lightfoot, Ramsay, and Bruce! When we read Conzelmann or Haenchen, we feel we are in another world. And, of course, we are.

How did this radical view of the historical value of Acts come about? It is not strongly argued in the recent writings; it is more or less assumed. We are introduced to the idea as one of the 'assured results' of criticism.

It is usual to trace the origins of this view of Acts back to the work of Martin Dibelius.<sup>21</sup> I would trace them much further back—about a century further, in fact.

The first scholar of note to question the essential trustworthiness of the Book of Acts as a historical document<sup>22</sup> was W. M. L. de

[p.73]

Wette. In his *Introduction to the New Testament*,<sup>23</sup> published first in 1826, de Wette rejected the traditional and natural interpretation of the so-called 'we' passages of Acts (16: 10-17; 20: 5-15; 21: 1-17; 27: 1-28: 19). In spite of the appearance of the pronoun ἡμεῖς in the narrative, de Wette suggests that it is improbable that the author was a companion of Paul and an eye-witness of part of the history. In favour of this view, he puts forward three reasons: (1) In his foreword (Luke 1: 1-4) the author makes the distinction between himself and the eye-

---

<sup>20</sup> *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 278.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., van Unnik *art. cit.*, 21; R. H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study*, SCM Press, London (1963), 104-7.

<sup>22</sup> Modern scholars often assume that pre-critical scholars were totally unaware of the problems which involve the attention of "critical" scholarship. For example, it is sometimes naively asserted that students of the Bible, prior to the rise of historical criticism in Germany during the nineteenth century, considered the Book of Acts to be a history of the early Church, pure and simple (e.g., McGiffert, *BC* 2, 363). No one, according to this view, paused to ask whether or not the writer had another purpose other than, or in addition to, his desire to narrate the events connected with the spread of early Christianity, and in what manner this aim may have influenced his selection and handling of his material. To the scholar living in the pre-critical period, Acts was simply a straightforward historical narrative; the speeches included in the narrative were verbatim reports of what was actually said on various occasions; and, in short, the author, simply a chronicler of early Christian history.

This particular understanding of pre-nineteenth-century study of Acts is not quite accurate. Earlier commentators were not quite so dense as some moderns might think. One need only look at the commentaries of such writers as Calvin (1552-54), Grotius (1646), John Lightfoot (1645), and Bengel (1742) to see that (1) the selective and partial nature of the history contained in Acts was recognized, (2) theological themes and motives were observed, and (3) the speeches were *not* regarded as verbatim reports of what was said on each particular occasion. These early commentators all agreed, however—as did all scholars before de Wette—that the narrative of Acts presented an historically reliable account, however limited in its scope or theological in its design, of the early Church.

<sup>23</sup> *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die Bibel Alten und Neuen Testaments. Zweyter Teil: Die Einleitung in das Neue Testament enthaltend*, Berlin (1826), 203-4; cf. his *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Neuen Testament: Kurze Erklärung der Apostelgeschichte*, Weidmann, Leipzig (1838), where essentially the same ideas are expressed.

witnesses of the events about which he is writing. (2) The information concerning Paul is partly miraculous, partly false,<sup>24</sup> and partly incomplete. The main cause of doubt, however, is found in the observation that (3) the author knows only the miraculous side of certain facts and includes uncertain sayings. A companion of Paul would have been in a position to write a better account of these things.<sup>25</sup>

De Wette is not extremely negative in his criticism. The author of Acts is not completely confused in his understanding of the facts of apostolic history; he has only made a few blunders here and there. However, some of the critics who were to follow de Wette were to be much more devastating in their criticism of Acts and, indeed, much more influential.

The most important German scholar of that era of New Testament criticism was F. C. Baur<sup>26</sup> (1792-1860), whose ghost still exerts an eerie influence in the field of *Actaforschung*. Baur was not primarily an exegete or a New Testament critic, but rather a theologian—specifically a student of the history of dogma. Yet he

[p.74]

published five books<sup>27</sup> and a similar number of significant essays<sup>28</sup> in the area of New Testament research. His basic thesis concerning the nature of early Christianity which forms the environment of the books of the New Testament and other non-canonical books, a view which remains essentially unchanged throughout his writings,<sup>29</sup> was first put forward in 1831 in an essay devoted to the problem of the 'Christ-party' of Paul's letters to the Corinthian church.<sup>30</sup>

His thesis is basically this. In spite of the impression which one gains from a superficial reading of the New Testament documents, *viz.* that the early Church was essentially uniform in its doctrine and practice, a closer examination of the literature demonstrates that this was not the real situation. Rather than being united in its confession of faith, early Christianity was marked by a severe conflict between two groups representing two very different conceptions of Christianity: a Jewish (Petrine) Christian party and a Gentile (Pauline) Christian party. A large part of the early Christian documents can be understood in the light of this basic division of thought and action.

---

<sup>24</sup> The only datum he includes in this connection is a note inviting comparison of Acts 9: 26 and 12: 17 (*sic*) with Gal. 1: 17-18, and Acts 11: 30 with Gal. 2: 1.

<sup>25</sup> Here de Wette puts forward a view which has become part of the common stock of German Criticism: the *real* Paul (i.e. the Paul of the epistles) worked no miracles—in spite of his claim in 2 Cor. 12: 12!

<sup>26</sup> Two thorough studies of Baur as a theologian have recently been published: P. C. Hodgson, *The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of F. C. Baur*, Harper & Row, New York (1966), and W. Geiger, *Spekulation and Kritik: Die Geschichtstheologie F. C. Baur's*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München (1964). Hodgson's study is the more complete of the two, but his work is somewhat marred by his urge to defend Baur almost *in toto*. See Hodgson, 291-94, for a select list of the numerous studies which have been devoted to Baur over the years.

<sup>27</sup> On the Pastoral Epistles (1835), Paul (1845), the four Gospels (1847), the Gospel of Mark (1851), and the theology of the New Testament (posthumous, 1864). Cf. Hodgson, *op. cit.*, 285-86 for complete bibliographical data.

<sup>28</sup> Notably on the Christ-party in the Corinthian church (1831), Apollonius of Tyana and Christ (1832), the purpose and 'occasion of the Epistle to the Romans (1836), the origin of episcopacy in the Christian church (1838), and the composition and character of the Gospel of John (1844), Cf. Hodgson, *op. cit.*, 248-49, for complete bibliographical details.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Hodgson, *op. cit.*, 22, 196.

<sup>30</sup> "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christenthums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom", *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 5 (1831), 4. Heft, 61-206.

In his essay Baur uses the method which later came to be known as *Tendenzkritik*—'tendency criticism' is the usual translation—the study of a New Testament writing in terms of its special theological point of view in the context of the history of primitive Christianity. His point of departure is 1 Cor. 1: 11, which mentions four factions in the Corinthian church, identifying them respectively with Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), and Christ.<sup>31</sup> These four represent actually only two parties: the basically Gentile part of the Church (represented by Paul and Apollos) and the Jewish Christians who

[p.75]

remained faithful to Judaism and the Law (represented by Peter and James). Concerning the Jewish-Christian party, Baur comments:

It called itself τὸς κηφᾶ, because Peter had the primacy among the Jewish apostles; τὸς χριστοῦ because it made direct connection with Christ the chief mark of genuine apostolic authority and, therefore, would not recognize Paul as a true apostle of equal rank with the others, since he made his debut as an apostle later and in an entirely different manner from the others: it believed that it was necessary to consider him far inferior to the least of the other apostles.<sup>32</sup>

These Jewish Christians, the Cephas-party, are the opponents of Paul in Corinth, before whom he defends himself, especially in 2 Corinthians.<sup>33</sup> The same group is to be identified with his opponents referred to in Galatians.

In addition to (I would say, *prior* to) the New Testament data which Baur adduces in support of his theory, he finds evidence for this basic division of thought in the primitive Church in an Ebionite tradition concerning Paul<sup>34</sup> and in the so-called Clementine Homilies.<sup>35</sup> In the former tradition Paul is said to have been a Gentile who became a proselyte because he wanted to marry the daughter of the Jewish High Priest; this being refused, he left Jerusalem in anger and began preaching against the Sabbath, circumcision, and the law. In the Clementine Homilies he found evidence for a polemic against Paul, veiled as an imaginary debate between Peter and Simon Magus.<sup>36</sup> Baur argues that both these imaginary and tendentious stories provide evidence for his view that a strong and significant part of the early Church, a Petrine party, rejected the work and the teaching of the apostle Paul.

In the final section of his essay,<sup>37</sup> Baur rejects the historicity

---

<sup>31</sup> It is questionable whether this is the *real* point of departure for Baur. My impression is that his view is derived primarily from his interpretation of the pseudo-Clementine literature and *then* applied to the study of the New Testament, although he treats them in reverse order in his essay.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>33</sup> In this connection it is interesting to note Baur's interpretation of the much-debated phrase "to know Christ κατὰ σάρκα" (2 Cor. 5: 16), which he interprets as meaning to recognize Jesus as the Jewish Messiah", a direct reference to the doctrine of the Petrine-party (cf. pp. 90-101 of his essay).

<sup>34</sup> "Die Christuspartei...", 115.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 116ff. On the pseudo-Clementine literature see B. Rehm, "Clemens Romanus III", *RAC* 3 (1957), 198-206, with bibliography; A. C. Headlam, "The Clementine Literature", *JTS* 3 (1902), 41-58, contains a good summary in English; translations of the important texts in E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, E.T., Lutterworth, London, 2 (1965), 111-27, 536-70.

<sup>36</sup> The suggestion had been made earlier by D. von Cölln, "Clementina", in *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, J. E. Ersch and J. G. Gruber (eds.), Leipzig (1828), 18, 36-44.

<sup>37</sup> "Die Christuspartei...", 136ff.

[p.76]

of the tradition concerning Peter's ministry and martyrdom in Rome. The connection of Peter with Rome was, in his opinion, invented by the Judaizing party<sup>38</sup> in the church at Rome to correspond to the experiences of Paul and, therefore, to establish a connection between Peter, the apostle whose authority they recognized, and the early days of their own church. Further evidence for this Jewish-Christian opposition to the authority and teaching of Paul is found in the Epistle of James, which Baur interprets as having been written expressly to contradict Pauline doctrine, and the two Epistles of Peter, which were written in an attempt to parallel Peter's ministry and experience with Paul's and, in so doing, to establish his claim to authority over against the claims of the Pauline party, which gave Paul the place of prominence.<sup>39</sup>

Baur does not discuss the Book of Acts in this early essay, but his formulation of the nature of early Christianity is of supreme importance for an understanding of the Tübingen criticism of the book. It is important to recognize the fact that when Baur and his disciples turn to the study of Acts it is the Book of Acts *in the light of Baur's theory of the nature of primitive Christianity* that they study, not the text of Acts in its own terms.<sup>40</sup> In this way this basic

[p.77]

dichotomy between Petrine and Pauline Christianity, between Jewish and Gentile Christians, between the *Urapostel* and Paul, becomes the basic presupposition of the Tübingen conception of Acts, as it is for their consideration of the whole corpus of the early Christian writings.

Five years later in an article in which he applied the method of *Tendenzkritik* to the Epistle to the Romans,<sup>41</sup> Baur brought forward the hypothesis that Acts was written by a 'Paulinist' in order to defend the mission of Paul to the Gentiles against the criticisms of the Jewish Christian party. The author of Acts argues his point by portraying Paul as everywhere preaching to Jews and only turning to the Gentiles when the Jews had rejected his message.

---

<sup>38</sup> Baur uses the various terms of "Jewish Christians" (*Judenchristen*), "the Jewish-Christian party" (*die judenchristliche Partei*), and "Judaizing party" (*die judaisirende Partei*) as synonyms.

<sup>39</sup> He later argued that the Apocalypse was a narrow, Jewish-Christian work and that passages like Rev. 2: 9 and 3: 9 were directed toward the followers of Paul. The Gospel according to Matthew (the first written Gospel, which was used by Mark as his basic source!) was taken to represent the Jewish-Christian position also. Matt. 7: 23, for example, was written to protest against the Pauline doctrine of freedom from the Law. Luke and Acts belonged to the conciliatory period, as did the deuteron-Pauline epistles (*sc.* all besides 1 and 2 Cor., Rom., and Gal.). The Gospel of John was written even later, when the reconciliation of the opposing parties was an accomplished fact.

<sup>40</sup> Hodgson, *op. cit.*, 22, 196-201, argues that it is a misconception to think of Baur's interpretation of early Christianity as being dependent on the philosophical dialectic of Hegel (thesis-antithesis-synthesis)—a common accusation of the critics of Baur—since this essay was (in his view) written before Baur knew of Hegel. Although it is hard to imagine Baur's having studied and taught theology and philosophy in Germany for more than twenty years at a time when Hegel's books and ideas were the centre of widespread discussion and never having heard of Hegel, it must be conceded that it is an over-simplification to think of his conception of early Christianity as being *simply* the result of the application of the Hegelian dialectic. However, it remains true that his conception of primitive Christianity as consisting of two dialectically opposed parties—whether dependent on Hegel or exegetically derived—becomes the sieve through which Baur pours the New Testament data in his critical study.

<sup>41</sup> "Über Zweck und Veranlassung des Römerbriefs und die damit zusammenhängenden Verhältnisse der römischen Gemeinde", *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 9 (1836), 3. Heft, 59-178.

The idea is only mentioned in passing and is not developed. Two years later he developed the idea slightly in a few brief comments in an essay on the origin of the episcopacy.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever one may think of its historical trustworthiness, the Book of Acts, according to its basic conception and inmost character, is the apologetic attempt of a Paulinist to initiate and bring about the rapprochement and union of the two opposing parties. Thus Paul made to appear as Petrine as possible, and Peter, as Pauline as possible, thereby throwing a veil of reconciliation over the differences which we know, according to the clear statement of the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians, without any doubt really existed between the two apostles, and causing both parties to forget their mutual hostilities in their common enmity toward the unbelieving Jews, who had made the Apostle Paul the constant object of their intransigent hatred.<sup>43</sup>

An understanding of this important parallelism between Peter and Paul, insists Baur, is fundamental to any attempt to solve the other historical and critical problems related to the Book of Acts.

In the same year Karl Schrader, a former student of Baur, published the final volume of his five-volumed work on Paul,<sup>44</sup>

[p.78]

which he put forward the view that Acts is a second-century work written to defend the doctrines and 'practices of the Church as it existed in that day. Although Acts may contain bits and pieces of historical information concerning the actual situation of the Church of the middle decades of the first Christian century, the work is almost wholly unreliable. The situation reflected by the narrative and theology is that of the middle of the second century, rather than the first. Because of his various apologetic and polemical interests (among which Schrader includes (1) to attack Gnosticism and (2) to defend Judaistic-hierarchical views against the more loosely constituted Gentile Christian communities), the author has invented many allegedly historical details. The major discrepancy is, however, the way Acts makes Paul dependent on and inferior to the earliest Jerusalem apostles, a view which is explicitly denied by Paul himself in Galatians 1 and 2.

Me most valuable work of the period of *Tendenzkritik*<sup>45</sup> is the study of the purpose of Acts by Matthias Schneckenburger,<sup>46</sup> who was also a former student of Baur. Schneckenburger took up the suggestions of Baur regarding the purpose of Acts (*viz.* that it is the work of a Paulinist who writes in defense of his hero) and the parallelism between Peter and Paul, working out the details very carefully and at great length. There is a decisive difference, however, between the work of Schneckenburger and the other members of the Tübingen School: Schneckenburger argues that, although apologetic and one-sided, the author's portrayal of

---

<sup>42</sup> "über den Ursprung des Episcopats in der Christlichen Kirche. Prüfung der neuesten von Hrn. Dr. Rothe hierüber aufgestellten Ansicht", *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 11 (1838), 3. Heft, 1-185.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>44</sup> *Der Apostel Paulus*, C. E. Kollmann, Leipzig (1830-36). Vol. 1 deals with the problems of Chronology; vol. 2, the life of Paul; vol. 3, the teaching of Paul; vol. 4 is a translation and interpretation of 1 and 2 Cor. and Rom.; vol. 5, of the rest of the Pauline epistles and Acts. It is a very uneven piece of work, a conglomerate of different, and often conflicting, opinions and would not be worthy of a place in the history of Acts criticism if it had not been referred to so often by some of the writers of the nineteenth century.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the judgment of Mattill, *Luke as a Historian*, 20-46.

<sup>46</sup> *Ueber den Zweck der Apostelgeschichte*, Ch. Fischer, Bern (1891).

Paul in Acts is an essentially accurate one.<sup>47</sup> Acts is indeed a *Tendenzschrift*, but not a *Tendenzroman*. In addition, he argues for the Lucan authorship of Acts and a relatively early date (c. A.D. 68) of publication.

Baur published a review hailing the significance of Schneckenburger's work almost as soon as it appeared.<sup>48</sup> He expressed enthusiasm and agreement concerning Schneckenburger's main these is with regard to the apologetic purpose of Acts, but he argued that this view was totally irreconcilable with an acceptance of the book as a historically trustworthy account of early Christianity. Much of the material of this review was incorporated into the introductory chapter to his famous work on Paul, which was published four years later.<sup>49</sup>

[p.79]

The Book of Acts, according to Baur, stands in the same basic relationship to the Pauline epistles (sc. the *genuine* ones: Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians) as the Gospel of John stands in relation to the Synoptics. As a comparison of the Synoptics with John leads to the conclusion that the differences are so great that historical truth can be found only on one side, so it is with the two sources available for a study of the life and teachings of Paul. In such a comparison Baur regards it to be an indisputable canon of historical criticism that "the presentation which has the greatest claim to historical truth is that which appears most unprejudiced and nowhere betrays a desire to subordinate its historical material to special subjective interests".<sup>50</sup> Since Acts is judged to be "a presentation according to subjective interests," it is of little value as a true, historical account. Baur dates Acts "deep in the second century."<sup>51</sup>

One of the factors which made Baur's work so significant was the presence of a number of gifted disciples who stood by his side from the beginning. Baur himself merely outlined what came to be known as the Tübingen view concerning the Book of Acts. He was the creative genius of a school of thought which came to be identified with him. In the course of his many writings he did little of what is properly regarded as exegesis; he merely dropped suggestive hints which pointed the way toward a brilliant conception of the early Christian writings as a whole. It was left to his disciples to develop these suggestions into a consistent whole by studying the documents in the light of the guiding principles which the great master had laid down. This work of systematizing was done primarily by Albert Schweigler<sup>52</sup> and Eduard Zeller.<sup>53</sup> Through their writings and through the influence of Baur's Paulus the Tübingen conception of early Christianity gained widespread acceptance.

---

<sup>47</sup> It is perhaps significant that the most careful and thoroughly exegetically founded of all the works on Acts produced under Baur's influence comes to this positive conclusion.

<sup>48</sup> *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* 15 (1841), 369-75.

<sup>49</sup> *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi*, Becher & Muller, Stuttgart (1845), 1-14.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Das nachapostolische Zeitalter in den Hauptmomenten seiner Entwicklung*, 2 vols., L. F. Fues, Tübingen (1846); this is a thorough and comprehensive application of Baur's hypothesis to the whole of the Christian literature corpus of the first three centuries.

<sup>53</sup> *Die Apostelgeschichte each ihrem Inhalt and Ursprung kritisch untersucht*, C. Mäcken, Stuttgart (1854), E.T. *The Content and Origin of the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., Williams & Norgate, London (1875-76). Zeller's work is a revision of articles which appeared in the *Theologische Jahrbücher* between 1848 and 1851 and is the closest the Tübingen critics ever came to writing a commentary on Acts.

The extreme views of Baur and his followers were not to go unchallenged. The arbitrary nature of their reconstruction of early

[p.80]

Christianity and the way it became a "critical" substitute for the older theological orthodoxy as a guide in reading the New Testament seems so obvious to us today.<sup>54</sup> But it was not always so. In critical circles in the mid-nineteenth century in Germany it was the key to the understanding of the problems of New Testament research. Many voices were raised in protest against the views of *Tendenzkritik*—the most notable being those of H. A. W. Meyer,<sup>55</sup> Schneckenburger,<sup>56</sup> J. A. W. Neander,<sup>57</sup> A. Ritschl,<sup>58</sup> G. V. Lechler,<sup>59</sup> M. Baumgarten,<sup>60</sup> and C. E. Lekebusch<sup>61</sup>—but they had little effect in staying the rise of the tide of critical opinion. The objections of Ritschl were taken perhaps the most seriously, since he was a former disciple of Baur and shared the same basic theological outlook with his former master; but even he was not entirely successful.

Although the critics of the Tübingen position were careful scholars who devoted themselves much more thoroughly to accurate exegesis and truly historical research than did Baur and his followers, they were markedly unsuccessful in their attempts to counteract the influence of Baur. They were living at the wrong time and defending the wrong point of view. This was nineteenth-century Germany, and Hegel was king. Baur and his disciples took note of their objections only to condemn them as the arguments of

[p.81]

'apologists' and 'traditionalists' who were too biased to be *wissenschaftlich* in their criticism.

The critics who were ultimately responsible for the overthrow of the Tübingen views were not the conservatives, but scholars who were in some ways more radical than their predecessors. Bruno Bauer,<sup>62</sup> Franz Overbeck,<sup>63</sup> and Paul Wilhelm Schmiedel<sup>64</sup> regarded themselves as the

---

<sup>54</sup> Whereas the traditionalist read the Book of Acts through the glasses of the older opinions concerning the problems of introduction, Baur read Acts through the glasses of his new "discoveries" concerning the true nature of early Christianity. Thus it is doubtful whether his study of Acts was any more "objective" or "historical" than that of the most tradition-bound conservative.

<sup>55</sup> *Kritisch-exegetisches Handbuch über die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1835; 1854<sup>2</sup>; 1861<sup>3</sup>; 1870<sup>4</sup>), E.T. of the 4th edition, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh (1877).

<sup>56</sup> *Op. cit.* Cf. also his "Beiträge zur Erklärung und Kritik der Apostelgeschichte", *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 28 (1855), 498-570.

<sup>57</sup> *Geschichte der Pflanzung und Leitung der christlichen Kirche durch die Apostel*, 2 vols., Friedrich Perthes, Hamburg (1847<sup>4</sup>), E.T. various editions.

<sup>58</sup> *Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche*, Adolph Marcus, Bonn (1857<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>59</sup> *Das apostolische und das nachapostolische Zeitalter*, E. F. Bohn, Haarlem (1851), E.T. 2 vols., T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh (1886).

<sup>60</sup> *Die Apostelgeschichte; oder der Entwicklungsgang der Kirche von Jerusalem bis Rom*, 2 vols., C. A. Schwetschke & Sohn, Halle (1852), E.T. 3 vols., T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh (1854).

<sup>61</sup> *Die Composition und Entstehung der Apostelgeschichte von Neuem untersucht*, Friedrich & Andreas Perthes, Gotha (1854).

<sup>62</sup> *Die Apostelgeschichte, eine Ausgleichung des Paulinismus und des Judenthums innerhalb der christlichen Kirche*, G. Hempel, Berlin (1850). This work is sometimes mistakenly referred to as a commentary, which it is not.

<sup>63</sup> The 4th edition of de Wette's *Kurze Erklärung der Apostelgeschichte*, S. Hirzel, Leipzig (1870), is a revision and expansion into an almost entirely new work which reflects Overbeck's extremely sceptical viewpoint.

true (but more consistent) heirs of the Tübingen critics. They attacked the view of *Tendenzkritik* neither by defending the historicity of Acts (they thought it was even more unhistorical—if that is possible—than had Baur) nor by denying Baur's dichotomy between Paul and the earliest disciples (a view which they also accepted). Rather, they rejected Baur's conception of Acts as a conciliatory writing. At the time when Acts was written, they argued, the reconciliation between the Jewish and Gentile elements in the Church had already been accomplished: Acts is an expression of the peace which was already a reality.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, Acts is to be regarded not as a compromise on the part of Paulinism toward reconciliation with Jewish Christianity, but rather as an expression of Catholicism, i.e. Gentile Christianity which has been strongly influenced by Judaistic influences which have been at work in the Church from the beginning.<sup>66</sup>

The aim of the author was rather more indefinite and less all-pervasive, according to this view; the errors of the author—and they are legion!—are due more to the writer's ignorance than to his deliberate distortion of the facts. Writing at a place and time so far removed from both the primitive Church and Paul, he was unable to understand the theologies of either or the reasons for the disagreement between the two. Indeed, he assumed that there must have been a basic unity in the early Church and that its theology must have been essentially the same as that of his own day.

The radicals laid great stress on the creative imagination of the author in his work.<sup>67</sup> He is an author in the fullest sense of the

[p.82]

word. His narrative is governed not only by theological tendencies, but also by his concern to tell a good story. Schmiedel expresses this by postulating an aesthetic "tendency" among the author's aims: he aims at being graphic in his narration.<sup>68</sup> This, for example, is the purpose of the presence of the "we" and the "otherwise purposeless" details appropriated from the document which he calls the 'Journey Record' in the latter part of the book, as well as most of the details of chapters 1-12, the speeches, and miracle narratives—all of which add vigour and colour to the narrative.

German criticism in the nineteenth-century gradually became less radical in its views. *Tendenzkritik* was assigned to the junk-pile reserved for the other temporary fads of biblical criticism, and scholars went on about their work. Conservative scholars such as Bernhard Weiss<sup>69</sup> continued to regard Acts as essentially reliable as a source for the history of early Christianity, while others like his son Johannes Weiss<sup>70</sup> argued that the historical value of Acts varies considerably according to its parts.

---

<sup>64</sup> "Acts of the Apostles", *Enc. Bib.* 1 (1899), 37-57.

<sup>65</sup> Bauer, *op. cit.*, 121; Overbeck, *op. cit.*, xxxi.

<sup>66</sup> Bauer, *op. cit.*, 122-25; Overbeck, *op. cit.*, xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>67</sup> Bauer, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>68</sup> *Art. cit.*, 42.

<sup>69</sup> *Lehrbuch der Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (1886), E.T. Hodder & Stoughton, London (1887), vol. 2, 314-55.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. his article, "Acts of the Apostles", in *HDCG* 1 (1906), 25-29: while Acts belongs to the last decade of the first century and is the work of an author who has had no personal contact with the first three decades of an Church's history which he narrates, the latter part of Acts, which is based on an eye-witness account, and the speeches of the early part, representing not the actual preaching of Peter but rather the theology of the primitive Church, are of great historical value.

However, most scholars were no longer discussing the issues raised by Baur. The majority who were concerned with Acts at all were lost in the Stygian, darkness of source criticism, proving by the very diversity of their conclusions the futility of their task, while a few others were gathering evidence in support of an alleged political-apologetic aim in Acts.<sup>71</sup>

It is important to notice that, although critical orthodoxy at the end of the nineteenth-century had ostensibly rejected *Tendenzkritik*, it had, perhaps unconsciously, assimilated two important items of the Tübingen critical theory: (1) Baur's assumed dichotomy between Paul and the *Urapostel* and (2) his negative judgment concerning the historical value of Acts. The writings of O. Pfleiderer,<sup>72</sup>

[p.83]

H. J. Holtzmann,<sup>73</sup> A. Jülicher,<sup>74</sup> and C. Weizsäcker<sup>75</sup> may be taken as representative, while Hans Windisch's essay in the second volume of *The Beginnings of Christianity*<sup>76</sup> illustrates the manner in which these views continued to be numbered among the basic assumptions of one school of German critical thought well into the twentieth century. Although these assumptions remained unproved and, in fact, were seriously challenged by many German scholars and uniformly rejected by British and American scholars, the issues were never re-opened for general discussion. In this way critical research continued with scholars divided on the basic issues of Acts criticism with little mutual understanding.

In the early part of the twentieth century a number of voices were again raised in protest against the cavalier treatment accorded to Luke's (professedly) historical work on the part of some critics. This time the weight of the objectors' scholarship was even more notable than before: Theodor Zahn,<sup>77</sup> Adolf Harnack,<sup>78</sup> Alfred Wikenhauser,<sup>79</sup> Eduard Meyer<sup>80</sup>—a mixed group of bedfellows if ever there was one! But once more the critics of critical assumptions were drowned out by the shouts from the mainstream. Zahn was, of course, a conservative and therefore regarded as 'uncritical'. Harnack's increasingly conservative conclusions regarding Acts were written off as merely one of his eccentric opinions. Wikenhauser was a Catholic scholar, and in those days Protestants had no dealings with the Catholics. Eduard Meyer had the unfortunate disadvantage of coming to the study of Acts "with the presupposi-

---

<sup>71</sup> The major work from this point of view is J. Weiss, *Ueber die Absicht und den literarischen Charakter der Apostelgeschichte*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1897).

<sup>72</sup> *Das Urchristentum*, 2 vols., G. Reiner, Berlin (19022); E.T. 4 vols., Williams & Norgate, London (1906-11).

<sup>73</sup> *Die Apostelgeschichte, in his Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Freiburg i. B., vol. 1 (1889), 307-431.

<sup>74</sup> *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen (1901 E.T. Smith, Elder & Co., London (1904), 430-56.

<sup>75</sup> *Das apostolische Zeitalter der christlichen Kirche*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen (1902<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>76</sup> "The Case Against the Tradition", *BC* 2 (1922), 298-348.

<sup>77</sup> *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, vol. 2, Leipzig (1907<sup>3</sup>), E.T. T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh (1909), vol. 3, 1-173.

<sup>78</sup> *Lukas der Arzt*, J. C. Hinrichs, Leipzig (1906), E.T. Williams & Norgate, London (1907); *Die Apostelgeschichte*, J. C. Hinrichs, Leipzig (1908), E.T. Williams & Norgate, London (1909); *Neue Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte und zur Abfassungszeit der synoptischen Evangelien*, J. C. Hinrichs, Leipzig (1911), E.T. *The Date of Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels*, Williams & Norgate, London (1911).

<sup>79</sup> *Die Apostelgeschichte und ihr Geschichtswert*, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen VIII. 3-5, Münster i. W. (1921). Wikenhauser's work is the only systematic treatment of the problem and is an outstanding piece of research.

<sup>80</sup> *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, vol. 3, J. G. Cotta, Stuttgart and Berlin (1923).

[p.84]

tions of a historian of antiquity," thus misunderstanding "the nature of its accounts and the way in which they are connected".<sup>81</sup> In this way the most important contributions to *Actaforschung* in the early twentieth-century were written off by critical orthodoxy.<sup>82</sup>

The major new feature added to the discussion in the twentieth century has been the application of the method of *Formgeschichte* to the study of Acts. Here we think especially of Martin Dibelius, whose first of a series of essays appeared in a *Festschrift* for H. Gunkel in 1923.<sup>83</sup>

Dibelius rejects, in general, the approach of source criticism, which (in his view) overlooked the difference in situation between the Third Gospel and Acts. Whereas in the former the author is working with more or less fixed traditional materials, including written documents, the materials are much more fluid in the case of Acts. Here the author is a pioneer and must create his own literary form. As far as we know, he had no examples to follow in the task at hand, from whose works he could draw materials. This leads us to expect in the case of Acts a much greater influence of the author's own personality upon the development of his material.

The traditional elements upon which Luke has drawn in his writing are not written sources (with the possible exception of an itinerary document for parts of the central section of Acts), but rather independent stories, legends, etc., which have been gathered together, elaborated, and provided with connecting links by the author. With these exceptions, the main part of Acts is due to the author's own literary artistry. Thus while there may be occasional

[p.85]

older formulae of a kerygmatic or liturgical nature embodied in the speeches, they are as a whole the author's own creation. Even the account of the sea-voyage to Rome in 27: 1-28: 16 is more literature than observation. Whether the author was himself an eyewitness or making use of someone else's account which was in his possession, the narrative was elaborated by him according to existing literary models.<sup>84</sup> The abundance of nautical material and "secular" aspects of the story, which have been taken by many scholars as prime evidence for the fact

---

<sup>81</sup> Vielhauer, *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 50, n. 37.

<sup>82</sup> J. Dupont, *Sources of Acts*, 168n., writes of the reversal which has taken place since the first reactions of criticism against traditional opinions in the nineteenth century: "The situations are greatly changed today. The traditional conformism has not disappeared; but another conformism has come into being, an academic conformism, rooted in a reaction against tradition. It is no more critical than the old conformism was. The maturity of age will no more be confused with the revolts of adolescence than with the naïve docility of childhood. There is nothing surprising in the fact that, once it has arrived at maturity, exegetical scholarship should return to certain traditional positions. A traditional affirmation is not necessarily erroneous. At the level of critical thought, the reasons which make one opinion preferable to another are more important than the fact of knowing whether the opinion has been put forward by ecclesiastical or academic authorities." What Dupont calls "academic conformism" is equivalent to "critical orthodoxy" in my terminology.

<sup>83</sup> "Stilkritisches zur Apostelgeschichte", reprinted along with eleven other essays in his *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1951), E.T. *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, SCM Press, London (1956).

<sup>84</sup> Here he is following Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte religiöser Rede*, B. G. Teubner, Leipzig and Berlin (1913).

that this is the account of an eyewitness, are taken by Dibelius as betraying a literary purpose.<sup>85</sup>

Dibelius insists on the right to give Luke the title of "historian",<sup>86</sup> but by this he means something quite different from a chronicler of past events, or even a historian in the tradition of Thucydides and the best of the Greek historians.

We ascribe this title to him only because he did more than collect tradition. He tried to combine in his own way, into a significant, continuous whole, both the tradition current in the community and what he himself discovered. Secondly, he tried to make clear the meaning which these events contained.<sup>87</sup>

In his work as a historian, however, Luke "does not wish to present life with photographic accuracy, but rather to portray and illuminate what is typical; and this practice of aiming at what is typical and important allows the author of Acts partly to omit, change or generalize what really occurred".<sup>88</sup>

Dibelius does not give a detailed discussion of the question of the historical value of Acts. He insists from time to time that his observations concerning literary form do not necessarily imply that the narrative is unreliable. And he maintains the traditional authorship of Acts (though he dates it about A.D. 90). However, the general impression given is that Acts is more reliable as a source for the life and theology of the Church at the end of the first century than at the early days of the Church's existence.

This brings us back to where we began, to the period which Haenchen designates "the second phase of *Formgeschichte*,"<sup>89</sup> or the application of the method of *Redaktionsgeschichte* to the Book

[p.86]

of Acts and the recent discussions of the theology of Acts. Here the work of Dibelius is carried on, minus his view of the Lucan authorship of Acts and a few of his more conservative conclusions.

The main new feature added by Conzelmann, Haenchen, and company, it seems to me, is the emphasis on the theology of the author and the way this is seen by them to have influenced his writing. To Haenchen belongs the credit for having systematically applied the method elaborated by Dibelius to the interpretation of Acts as a whole. In the main, they have returned to a more negative judgment concerning the historical value of Acts than that of Dibelius, from whom they drew their initial inspiration.

In concluding this brief survey of what one may designate mainstream *Actaforschung* in Germany, one might be tempted to paraphrase the well-known lament of Artemas Ward: "The researches of many eminent scholars have already thrown much darkness on the subject; and it is possible, if they continue their labours, that we shall soon know nothing at all."

---

<sup>85</sup> *Aufsätze* (1961<sup>4</sup>), 15; *Studies*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. his essay, "Der erste christliche Historiker", *Aufsätze*, 108-19; "The First Christian Historian", *Studies*, 123-37.

<sup>87</sup> *Aufsätze*, 110; *Studies*, 125.

<sup>88</sup> *Aufsätze*, 119; *Studies*, 136-37.

<sup>89</sup> *Comm.*, 37.

The results of a hundred and thirty-odd years of critical research in Germany have been rather negative as far the historical value of the Book of Acts is concerned. The "consensus of opinion" of at least one influential group of scholars seems to be that Acts tells us a good deal about the life and theology of the Church during the last decades of the first century, or the first of the second; but as for the "three crucial decades"<sup>90</sup> with which it is overtly concerned, it tells us very little that is really reliable.

However, the study of the history of Acts-criticism leaves one with the uneasy feeling that a great deal of the evidence has been overlooked by the representatives of *redaktionsgeschichtlich* approach to the Book of Acts. For one thing, there is a notable absence of reference to those scholars—continental, British, and American—who have taken a more positive view toward the historical value of Acts.<sup>91</sup> The fact that nearly all non-German scholars, and even a few Germans, have taken and continue to take a different view of the matter does not seem to bother them. Those who have dared to disagree with the "consensus of opinion" of this one stream of

[p.87]

critical opinion have been regarded as uncritical traditionalists (when, in fact, this has definitely *not* been the case). Both the views of the writers who have differed and the evidence brought forward in support of their views have tended to be ignored by the members of the Conzelmann-Haenchen school.

Connected with this ignoring of the evidence of the opposition is, I believe, a false critical methodology. The criticism recently made by R. M. Grant of some American New Testament scholars could be levelled at the tradition of German criticism which we have been considering. He writes:

Few American New Testament scholars base their work on the foundation of classical philology or Graeco-Roman history.... To a regrettable extent they devote themselves to dealing with methodology, as if this would provide them with "instant history". Neglecting the concrete actuality of the ancient historians, of papyri, inscriptions, coins, and other archaeological remains, *they then seek to advance learning in their field by reading one another's books.*<sup>92</sup>

This, in fact, is the real point of showing the connection between recent critical thought and the Tübingen criticism. I am not, of course, arguing for guilt by association. Rather, my point is that the recent views have been based much more on a tradition of criticism than on *a careful study of the text of Acts itself in the context of the historical setting of the Graeco-Roman world*. It is a well-known fact that those who have come to the study of the Book of Acts from the point of view of this larger historical context, apart from the presuppositions of

---

<sup>90</sup> Title of a recent study of Acts by F. V. Filson, London, Epworth (1964).

<sup>91</sup> The most important contributions of the twentieth century have been by W. M. Ramsay, T. Zahn, A. Harnack, E. Meyer, R. Morgenthaler, F. F. Bruce, B. Gartner, B. Reicke, E. Trocmé, C. S. C. Williams, J. Dupont, A. N. Sherwin-White, and J. Munck. H. J. Cadbury and the editors of *The Beginnings of Christianity* (5 vols., 1920-33) take a somewhat equivocal position in regard to the trustworthiness of Acts, but my own view is that they provide the material for a positive evaluation of Acts.

<sup>92</sup> *JBL* 87 (1968), 48 (emphasis mine). Cf. his own balanced approach to the Book of Acts in his *An Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, Collins, London (1963), 133-47.

a certain critical tradition, have, almost to a man, been convinced of the essential reliability of Acts as a source of early Christian history.<sup>93</sup>

Recently I have read a number of reviews of the commentary on Acts by the late Johannes Munck, which he wrote for the *Anchor Bible*. The main criticism in the mind of some of the reviewers seemed to be that Munck had been bold enough to disagree with the Conzelmann-Haenchen interpretation of Acts. (I suppose the reviewers would say, "He failed to come to grips with the views of Conzelmann and Haenchen.")

Whatever may be the merits and demerits of the work, of Munck,

[p.88]

it is important to point out that agreement or disagreement with the views of other scholars is not the test of the value of a New Testament scholar's work. The real question is: Does he come to grips with the New Testament data with which he is working? The question is equally relevant to the work of all scholars.<sup>94</sup>

---

© 1969 Ward W. Gasque. Reproduced by kind permission of the author.

Prepared for the Web in May 2008 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

---

---

<sup>93</sup> Cf., for example, the statement of A. N. Sherwin-White: "For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming.... Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted." *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1963), 189.

<sup>94</sup> Admittedly, it is no answer to the questions raised by the Conzelmann school merely to suggest, as I have done, the use of a wrong-headed critical methodology by the representatives of this approach to the Lucan writings. It is beyond the scope of the present essay to provide a detailed answer to their objections to treating the Book of Acts as a reliable historical work; however, I would express the personal conviction that the writers referred to in footnote 91 have provided conclusive evidence which points in this direction. Still, there is the need of an up-to-date work similar to A. Wilkenhauser's *Die Apostelgeschichte and ihr Geschichtswert* (n. 79) which would treat all the evidence in a systematic fashion. [And who is better qualified than the author to produce this work, when once he has completed his present assignment? ED.]

However, contributions of earlier epochs in the history of literary criticism and New Testament study are integrated into current approaches. For example, the issue of reference originating in the mimetic theories of classical antiquity is raised implicitly and explicitly. Implications of literary study for theology are suggested. The relationship between redaction-critical and literary approaches is examined. Theoretical and exegetical essays growing out of feminist literary study are offered. Orality, allegory, deconstruction, ideology, sociological criticism, rhetorical criticism, narrative