

## COMMENTARIES ON ACTS

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Let us begin with the appearance in 1933 of the great commentary by Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, based on a fresh English translation of the Greek text. This formed Volume IV of the encyclopaedic work on *The Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by F.J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake and published by Macmillan. Part of this enterprise, which ran to five volumes (1920-33), covered the Acts of the Apostles, but no further part was published. Volume V was a companion volume to the commentary; it contained Additional Notes which could not be conveniently accommodated in the commentary proper. Volumes I-III had dealt with prolegomena to the study of Acts.

It was claimed at the time, certainly with justice, that no book of the Bible had been subjected to so exhaustive a treatment in a single work as Acts received in these five volumes. While the editors probably thought of their work as launching a new era in the study of Acts, it may more truly be viewed as marking the end of an era. But while it is inevitably dated, it cannot be neglected by the student of Acts, and this is specially true of the commentary volume. This volume expounds Acts in the light of practically everything that could be said of the book at that time from the viewpoints of historical, literary and textual criticism.

On the historical side, a sequel was provided by Cadbury in his Lowell Lectures on *The Book of Acts in History* (New York: Harper, 1955). In these he illustrated the narrative of Acts from each of the overlapping cultural contexts in which the book is set.

The main reason for viewing *The Beginnings of Christianity* as marking the end of an era is that the perspective from which it was compiled has been replaced by one which treats Acts as being basically the work of a theologian who subordinated historical fact to theological appropriateness. Another factor tending to play down the former concentration on arguments for or against the historicity of Acts was the new emphasis on form criticism or 'style criticism'.

Commentaries and other studies on Acts since the 1930s have been influenced, positively or otherwise, by the work of Martin Dibelius. This influence was intensified with the publication of his posthumously collected *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*; the German text of this collection (1951) was followed in 1956 by an English translation, published by the SCM Press. Dibelius insisted on the primary importance of the 'style criticism' of the book. Attention should be paid, he held, to Luke's literary creativity rather than to the story he told.

In the years that followed, some commentators have taken the line that Dibelius's arguments amounted to conclusive demonstration; others have appraised him more critically.

Among the latter was C.S.C. Williams, whose volume on Acts appeared in A. & C. Black's New Testament Commentary series in 1957. Williams' untimely death not long afterwards (a sad loss to New Testament scholarship) has perhaps led to a measure of neglect of his commentary: it remains, in fact, a work of high value. He reckoned seriously with the work of Dibelius and, where he disagreed with Dibelius, gave sound reasons for doing so. Even a German scholar conceded that, while 'Dibelius is not of course refuted' by Williams' arguments, they are nevertheless 'well worth thinking over'.

That scholar was Ernst Haenchen, who in 1956 produced a new commentary on Acts for the well-established 'Meyer' series. This commentary ran through several editions in rapid succession; the fifth edition (1965) was translated into English, the translation being published in 1971 by Blackwell of Oxford. The translation of Haenchen's *Acts* is the most thorough and comprehensive commentary on the book to have appeared in English since the early 1930s.

For all its merits, Haenchen's commentary is unnecessarily sceptical: Luke, he thinks, allowed himself the freedom enjoyed nowadays by writers of the better class of historical fiction. Luke, indeed (he finds), is not above suppressing historical fact in order to highlight his own theological perspective: for example, he has 'to suppress the fact that long before Paul reached Rome the Christian mission had got a foothold and created a community there' (*Acts*, p. 103). But Luke does no such thing: he tells how Paul, when thirty or forty miles distant from Rome, was greeted by 'brothers' from the city who had walked out to meet him and escort him for the rest of his journey. These 'brothers' were certainly Christians (Paul's contact with the Jews of Rome is introduced a little later in the narrative); their appearance at this point bears witness to the existence of a Christian community in Rome and to Luke's ready recognition of its existence. He had no need to introduce those 'brothers' so incidentally as he does if their presence caused him any embarrassment.

So far as scepticism goes, it would be an exaggeration to say that Hans Conzelmann's commentary starts where Haenchen's leaves off, but it would be the exaggeration of a fact. Conzelmann's commentary first appeared in 1963 in the German series *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*; the second edition (1972) has been translated into English for the 'Hermeneia' series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). Conzelmann's historical scepticism may be illustrated by his interpretation of Barnabas and Paul's missionary journey to Cyprus and South Galatia (Acts 13.4-14.23) as Luke's creation of a 'model journey', conceived as 'the pattern for subsequent missionary activity'. There are features about this part of Luke's narrative that make it very likely that this journey is indeed presented as a paradigm of Paul's missionary procedure, but that provides no ground for the conclusion that no such journey took place. Similarly, the voyage narrative of Acts 27 is not the report of an eyewitness (the 'we' is a literary device); Luke constructed it according to

an established stylistic model which he had in mind. The voyage narrative certainly does lend itself to comparative stylistic criticism, but the *prima facie* impression it gives of being an eyewitness report loses none of its persuasiveness on that account.

But when that has been said, Conzelmann's commentary is a most valuable handbook for the students of Acts. It is more concise and technical than Haenchen's. Its adducing of literary and inscriptional parallels to illustrate the text is particularly helpful.

Even scholars of the eminence of Haenchen and Conzelmann are not immune from the temptation of failing to verify their data: both, for example, reproduce Kirsopp Lake's erroneous statement that in Acts 16.1 'Phrygia' must be a noun and cannot be an adjective (as the rendering 'the Phrygian and Galatian region' implies). There is, in fact, ample evidence that it can very well be an adjective.

Volumes on Acts have appeared as a matter of course as part of various commentary series that have been published over the years. The Torch Commentaries included a slim volume on Acts by R.R. Williams, limited in treatment in accordance with the scope of the series, but well designed to be helpful to the young reader who lacks much background knowledge (London: SCM Press, 1953). The theme of Acts, as indeed of Luke's twofold history, is seen to be 'Nothing can stop the gospel!'; the exposition of the work brings this out.

To the Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible the volume on Acts is contributed by one of the general editors of the series, J.W. Packer (Cambridge University Press, 1966). As the headmaster of a grammar school, he is well qualified to provide the kind of information required for the intelligent reading of Acts. An essay at the end, 'I am a follower of the new Way', shows the response which Luke hoped readers of his twofold work would make. The NEB text is reproduced in full.

The commentary on Acts in the New Clarendon Bible series is the work of R.P.C. Hanson, a distinguished authority on the history and thought of the early church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); it is aimed at much the same class of reader as Packer's commentary. Here the RSV text is reproduced in full. Hanson is as independent a thinker as Haenchen and Conzelmann, but he is not so prone to unnecessary scepticism as they are. His work is based on the scholarly study of textual and historical problems in Acts; one could have wished that he had the opportunity of giving us a full commentary on the book at a higher academic level than that required by the policy of the New Clarendon Bible.

In 1967 also appeared the commentary on Acts in the Anchor Bible, by the Danish scholar Johannes Munck (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday). The volumes in the Anchor Bible are of wildly uneven quality; Munck on Acts represents a middle-of-the-road position. It suffers from the fact that the author was a sick man when he wrote it; indeed, he died two years before it was published. The final editing and preparation for the press were undertaken by a group of American scholars, who added a

few appendices setting forth eccentric theories on some aspects of Acts with which Munck himself would not have agreed. His work is stronger on the historical side than in form-critical and theological issues. Like C.S.C. Williams' commentary in the Black/Harper series, this commentary too is provided with an *ad hoc* English translation. Munck's translation (like his commentary as a whole) was written in Danish, and turned into English by others. The translation reads well, as also does that of C.S.C. Williams; the latter is the better of the two (but what we have in the Munck volume is the translation of a translation). There is one clause in Acts which is rarely translated in such a way as to bring out the exact nuance of thought: that is the first clause of Acts 17.25, where Paul is too often represented as telling the Athenians that God is not served by human hands. But both Paul and Luke would agree that God is indeed served by human hands, but not in the sense that he needs such service. Not even Williams and Munck get it right here; the best rendering known to me is that of the NEB (the work, I think, of T.W. Manson): 'It is not because he lacks anything that he accepts service at men's hands.'

The New Century Bible is based on the RSV, although its text is not reproduced at length. For this series Acts has been expounded by William Neil (London: Marshall, 1973). Neil had great gifts as a communicator, and for the ordinary Christian reader who wants to know what the biblical text means there can be fewer better guides to the study of Acts than this commentary. He gives a lucid account of scholarly study and debate up to the time of writing. He takes full account of Luke's theological outlook, but does not consider that this impairs his historical reliability: on the contrary, Acts is 'a basically accurate account of what happened, recorded by a man whose evidence we have good cause to trust'.

Something should be said about the necessarily restricted treatments of Acts found in one-volume commentaries on the Bible, or even in multi-volume commentaries like the Interpreter's Bible. For Volume IX of the Interpreter's Bible the introduction and exegesis were provided for 'The Acts of the Apostles' by G.H.C. Macgregor (New York/Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1954). Macgregor was a fine New Testament scholar (as is evident from his commentary on John in the Moffatt series, published in 1919), and the scholarly quality of this work on Acts is evident throughout, but his closing years were dogged by ill health, and it was widely felt that this work failed to deal with some crucial issues in the study of Acts that had more recently come to the fore. Even so, however, the fact remains that this is a good commentary: what it does contain retains positive worth.

The second edition of Peake's *Commentary on the Bible* (London: Nelson, 1962) contained a section on Acts by G.W.H. Lampe—replacement for the section contributed to the first edition (1919) by Allan Menzies of St. Andrews University (a man ahead of his time in New Testament scholarship). In the limited space available Lampe

presents much relevant information and shows himself alive to the interaction of Luke's theological interest and literary skill: his treatment of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 is a fine example of this. After considering Paul's narrative in Galatians, he concludes that Luke has most probably fused the accounts of two separate occasions.

The section on Acts in the *Jerome Bible Commentary* (London: Chapman, 1969) was entrusted to J.A. Fitzmyer (one of the general editors) and A.J. Dillon. The main purpose of Acts, it is said, was to demonstrate the power and guidance of the Spirit in the church, so that readers might be encouraged to avail themselves of his power and guidance in their turn. The author was also concerned to stress the importance of Jerusalem as the seat of authority. (This is true, until the account of Paul's disastrous last visit to Jerusalem; from that time Jerusalem forfeited its preeminence, and the note on which Acts ends conveys a hint, I think, that henceforth the preeminence will belong to Rome.)

In 1971 the publishers of the Interpreter's Bible produced a shorter and independent work (not an abridgement of the larger one), *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, edited by C.M. Laymon. This work was later reissued in several volumes as *The Interpreter's Concise Commentary*: the commentary on Acts by William Baird is included in Volume VII of this later edition (1983). While concise, it is an illuminating and helpful piece of work. Luke is understood to view his narrative as the unfolding of the divine drama of redemption: the Gentile mission is the eschatological action of God. The Council of Acts 15 is seen as the midpoint of the story: the interest moves away from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean world.

Not exactly a commentary, but the posthumously published text of a course of university extramural lectures, is *The Acts of the Apostles: Ten Lectures*, by Arnold Ehrhardt (Manchester University Press, 1969). These lectures were delivered ten or twelve years before they appeared in printed form. About the same time as they were delivered—to be precise, on St. Luke's Day, 1957—Ehrhardt read to a more academic audience in the University of Durham a paper on 'The Construction and Purpose of the Acts of the Apostles'; it was published the following year in the Scandinavian journal *Studia Theologica*, and later in his collected volume of essays, *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (Manchester University Press, 1964). In both these works Ehrhardt argued that Luke's technique was that of historical biography; his purpose was to write a volume on 'The Gospel of the Holy Spirit' as a sequel to the earlier volume on 'The Gospel of Christ'. He was no worse a historian for being a theologian, and no worse a theologian for being a historian (the same, in fact, might have been said of Ehrhardt himself).

The volume of ten lectures takes the reader through Acts, with special attention being directed to the leading characters. Ehrhardt does not find James the Just a very sympathetic character, and he finds cause for criticism in Peter, particularly in his rough rejection of Simon

Magus: 'The Church lost a man here, who might have been saved; St. Peter trampled down the new plantation of St. Philip'. Luke writes of those leaders in calm and balanced recollection: James, Peter and Paul were all dead, and 'much animosity, so it seems, had also died with them'.

In earlier days Ehrhardt had been Professor of Roman Law in the University of Frankfurt, and was able to illustrate the New Testament with material not readily accessible to the theologian. For example, in dealing with Cornelius in Acts 10 he illustrated the spiritual hunger from which a serious-minded Roman soldier must have suffered by a military calendar of feast-days found at Dura-Europos, which shows how 'the Roman army kept its Church parades with the same punctiliousness and drabness as any other army'. This is a lively and interesting introduction to Acts; it ought to be better known than it is.

The 1980s have witnessed the appearance of two important commentaries in German—Jürgen Roloff's *Die Apostelgeschichte* in the series *Das Neue Testament Deutsch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), and Gerhard Schneider's massive two-volume contribution to Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 1980, 1982). These make a more positive assessment of Luke's quality as a historian than do many recent German commentaries, while they fall in no way behind those others in critical outlook and method. Roloff's is more general in its appeal than Schneider's (in keeping with the character of the two series to which they respectively belong); Schneider's is specially helpful in its bibliographical information. If Haenchen and Conzelmann deserved (as they did) to reach a wider public by means of an English translation, so do Roloff and Schneider.

Martin Hengel's *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1979) is the translation of a German work which appeared a few months earlier; it is not a commentary, but a study of that obscure period in the history of primitive Christianity which stretches from the death of Stephen to the apostolic council of Acts 15. Like all Hengel's work, it is well worth study. He treats Acts with critical seriousness as a work with the main stream of Greek historiography, and takes issue by name with Haenchen and Conzelmann. He examines Luke's probable sources for the period: where these were inadequate, their inadequacy is reflected in his work; where they recorded controversies which he found unedifying, he smoothed the record over. This tendency need not be counted a demerit: even today there is no history writing, or even historical research, without its 'pre-understanding' or 'heuristic interests'.

One of the most recent commentaries in English is I. Howard Marshall's volume on Acts in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: IVP, 1980). This replaces an earlier work by E.M. Blaiklock (1959), which restricted itself to the historical aspect of Acts. As befits the author of *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster,

1970), Marshall pays equal attention to the theological aspect. Primarily, however, he thinks that Luke was neither historian nor theologian but evangelist. He interacts repeatedly with Haenchen's commentary, which he recognizes as 'an outstanding piece of scholarship'. The series to which Marshall's commentary belongs presupposes readers of the New Testament in English; in this respect it resembles Hanson's commentary in the New Clarendon Bible, and these two stand together as the best available commentaries on the English text of Acts. From time to time Marshall elucidates the text by means of a paraphrase; when he does this, the New Testament translator may pick up useful hints.

One more commentary must be mentioned, although it has not yet appeared. For a long time now C.K. Barrett has been preparing the first-ever commentary on Acts for the International Critical Commentary; there are signs that this work is now within sight of completion. We are encouraged to look forward eagerly to its publication not only by Professor Barrett's well-attested expertise as a commentator on other New Testament books, but also by a series of lectures and essays, from his Peake Memorial Lecture on *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (London: Epworth Press, 1961) to his contribution on 'Paul Shipwrecked' to the recent *Festschrift* for A.T. Hanson, *Scripture: Meaning and Method* (Hull University Press, 1987). These provide strong evidence that, when at last we greet this work, it will commend itself as the best available commentary on Acts.

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## TWO ZAIREAN SWAHILI BIBLES: DEALING WITH DIGLOSSIC DISTANCES

**The author<sup>1</sup> is currently teaching in the American Thought and Language department of Michigan State University. His interest in Zairean Swahili stems from being a Peace Corps volunteer in Bukavu for two years**

In this article I present an overview of the Swahili diglossic situation that exists in Zaire, discuss linguistic aspects of two recent Zairean Swahili Bible translations in light of this diglossia, and then consider the results of a "Translation Preference" test. The difference between the two translations reflects a tension in dealing with Zairean Swahili diglossia that has existed since the early colonial period; vernacular Swahili has

<sup>1</sup> Much of this article's sociolinguistic evaluation of the Swahili Bible translations and the Zairean Swahili speech situation is based on my dissertation (1988) research in Bukavu, the capital of Zaire's easternmost province. This research was funded by Fulbright-Hayes and National Science Foundation doctoral dissertation grants. I wish to thank Bishikwabo, Ron Butler, and Walter Heylen for their insights concerning the translations discussed in this paper, and Mark Huddleston of Pioneer Bible Translators for his thorough, and humbling, critique of an earlier draft of this paper.