

'Critically Discuss the Narrative Function of the Roles of Peter and Paul as Portrayed in Luke and Acts.'

The Lukan corpus—comprising the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles¹—constitutes a theologically rich narrative, designed not merely to record historical events but to articulate a coherent vision of Church identity and mission. Central to Luke's work is his portrayal of Peter and Paul as distinct yet complementary apostolic archetypes, whose respective ministries shape the theological and narrative architecture of the second volume of the Lukan diptych. This study contends that through literary design and narrative structure, Luke constructs these figures not as oppositional, but as theological and ecclesiastical paradigms whose complementarity elucidates foundational aspects of the early Church's identity and vocation—namely, the dynamic interplay between the safeguarding of the apostolic deposit and the expansive call to evangelise.

This study proceeds through three sections of analysis. The first examines how Peter is presented as the embodiment of institutional cohesion and doctrinal continuity—the "rock" upon which Christ declared His Church would be built (Matthew 16:18). Luke portrays Peter as the guardian of apostolic tradition and ecclesial stability through his leadership, initiative, and authoritative pronouncements. He receives a personal call from Jesus following the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1–11), is named first among the apostles (Luke 6:14), and is given unique pastoral responsibility when Jesus prays that his faith may not fail so that he might "strengthen [his] brothers" (Luke 22:32). His speeches at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–36) and before the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7–11) serve as watershed moments that shape the Church's self-understanding—articulating a vision of unity that safeguards doctrinal integrity while responding faithfully to the socio-cultural plurality of the early Christian movement.² In this way, Peter emerges not only as a figure

¹ Though Acts is formally anonymous, scholarly consensus affirms that its author is the same as that of the Gospel of Luke. Owing to its dedication to Theophilus, together with the continuity of language, literary style, and theological emphasis, Loveday Alexander refers to the traditional attribution as 'one of the few virtually unchallenged conclusions of NT scholarship'. While the so-called "we-passages" (Luke D; Acts 15:36–18:28) have been taken to suggest that the author was a companion of Paul, the view that Luke composed both volumes remains the most coherent and widely accepted account of the internal evidence. As Alexander concludes, 'it is difficult to find any alternative which makes more sense of all the data than the traditional ascription'. See Loveday Alexander, 'Acts', in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. by J. Barton and J. Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1028–1061 (p. 1028).

² Although Luke himself avoids the term, C. Kavin Rowe argues that 'Christian' remains the most adequate descriptor for the nascent community, best capturing 'the pattern of communal life that Jews and Gentiles have together in their common confession of Jesus of Nazareth as Lord of all'. The term should not be understood as a chronological signal marking the complex parting of ways between Judaism and Christianity; rather, it serves as a reference to 'the community that Acts both presupposes and seeks to create', denoting the people who would subsequently be known by this title. See C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 15.

of leadership but as the stabilising centre of the apostolic community—tasked with guarding the deposit and securing the unity of the nascent Church.

The second section explores Paul's portrayal as the embodiment of missionary spirit, pastoral adaptability, and zeal for evangelisation. Unlike Peter, Paul is not chosen through a conventional process, but through an extraordinary divine encounter—struck down by a blinding light and called by the risen Christ outside of the normative framework of apostolic selection (Acts 9:3–6). From Acts 9 onwards, Paul emerges as a dynamic, mobile, and outward-facing missionary figure. His successive journeys (Acts 13–21) chart the Church's expanding horizon and underscore Luke's theological intent—signifying that, once formed from *within* through Peter, the Church is propagated *outwards* through Paul. Whereas Peter consolidates, Paul expands. It is *together*, developed by the Lukan narrative structure, that their ministries form a cohesive vision of the Church's salvific mission—first rooted in the apostolic community, then reaching outwards to enfold the world into its eschatological embrace, fulfilling Christ's commission to bring salvation “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The final section illuminates what renders Luke's portrayal distinctive: his sustained effort to harmonise these seemingly dichotomous apostolic models. Their distinctive roles are reconciled within a coherent ecclesial vision in which apostolic plurality is not a threat to unity but a source of vitality: the accent falls not on discord, but on the internal coherence of the apostolic witness.³ Through analysis of thematic parallels, rhetorical patterns, and narrative structure, this essay argues that Luke's portrayal of Peter and Paul offers a foundational model of ecclesial identity in which tradition and mission are held in vital tension. Their rhetorical convergence and narrative arc—from Peter's stabilising leadership to Paul's expansive outreach—reveal an integrated apostolic vision in which the Petrine paradigm of continuity and the Pauline paradigm of adaptability together constitute the essential dialectic of the first-century Church.

Within the Lukan corpus, Peter emerges as the quintessential figure of apostolic authority, institutional cohesion, and doctrinal continuity. His ministry forms a framework for articulating and stabilising early Church identity. This portrayal begins in the Gospel and reaches its fullest expression in Acts, where Peter is the primary protagonist until the narrative focus shifts to Paul in chapter 13.

Peter's distinctive role first appears in Luke 9:20, where he confesses Christ as “the Messiah of God”. This confession consolidates Peter's role as spokesperson for the apostolic community. More decisively, in Luke 22:31–32, Jesus defines Peter's ecclesial vocation: “I have prayed for you that your own

³ As part of her analysis of Lukan apologetic strategies, Alexander notes that episodes of inner-church disagreement occupy only a small portion of the Acts narrative. While tensions—such as those between Hebrews and Hellenists (Acts 6:1), or Paul and Jewish Christians (Acts 11:2; 21:18–22)—are not entirely absent, they are narratively condensed and subordinated to a prevailing emphasis on cohesion. As she observes, “Luke is at pains to stress the internal unity of the church rather than its dissensions”. See Loveday Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), p. 194.

faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers". Unique to Luke's Gospel, this passage proves programmatic for Peter's portrayal across both volumes. Christ's intercession ensures that, despite Peter's denial, his faith will ultimately endure, enabling him to function as the consolidating centre of the apostolic community and assume responsibility in restoring Jesus' followers to faithful discipleship after His death.⁴

This stabilising role becomes explicit in Acts. Following Christ's ascension, Peter takes the initiative in Acts 1:15–26, leading the process of selecting Judas' replacement and reconstituting the Twelve—symbolically reaffirming continuity between Israel and the emerging Church. His opening words—"the scripture had to be fulfilled" (Acts 1:16)—parallel Jesus' own declaration in Luke 24:44, thus designating Peter as heir to Christ's interpretative authority, entrusted with discerning and articulating the unfolding of God's salvific plan.⁵

At Pentecost, Peter's authoritative proclamation (Acts 2:14–36) establishes the hermeneutical paradigm through which the nascent Christian movement understands itself in continuity with Israel's prophetic tradition.⁶ The outpouring of the Spirit becomes the occasion for a theological exposition of the crucifixion and resurrection, interpreted not as aberration but as fulfilment. Grounding his message in scriptural exegesis, Peter cites Joel 2:28–32 (Acts 2:17–21) to frame the event eschatologically, then appeals to Psalm 16:8–11 (Acts 2:25–28) to assert that David foresaw the resurrection, and to Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34–35) to affirm Christ's exaltation. These citations reinforce Peter's role as interpreter of Scripture and authorised witness to the apostolic message.

Luke reinforces this apostolic authority through miracle narratives that closely parallel Christ's own ministry. Peter's healing of the lame man (Acts 3:1–10) recalls Jesus' healing of the paralysed man (Luke 5:18–26), while his raising of Tabitha (Acts 9:36–43) evokes the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40–56). These parallels authenticate Peter as the authoritative representative of the risen Christ. When Peter commands the lame man, "[i]n the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk" (Acts 3:6), his words deliberately recall Jesus' own healing pronouncement in Luke 5:23, signalling

⁴ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation: Volume One: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 264.

⁵ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation: Volume Two: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 20.

⁶ As Robert C. Tannehill observes, this follows Peter's earlier initiative in Acts 1:16–22, where his interpretative leadership in reconstituting the Twelve marks 'a first step in obedience' to Jesus' post-resurrection commission and signals the early Church's readiness to assume its apostolic vocation. Though modest in scope compared to the events that follow, this act of discernment serves as 'an important step in strengthening the community in the faith'—a faith shaken by Jesus' death but now galvanised through Peter's initiative. In choosing a twelfth witness, the community expresses its willingness 'to support the mission in response to Peter's leadership', thereby revealing how 'Peter and his companions will respond to the formidable task given [to] them by Jesus'. See Tannehill, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 21.

the continuation of Christ's work through apostolic mediation.⁷

The miracle at the temple gate prompts Peter's ensuing speeches at Solomon's Portico (Acts 3:12–26) and before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8–12), where he continues to frame the crucifixion and resurrection as the fulfilment of divine purpose, reinforcing theological continuity with Israel through the Church's rootedness in redemptive history. Miracles performed through the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6; 4:10, 30; 16:18; 19:13) become visible enactments of the resurrection's ongoing effects in the early Church and its mission.

Acts portrays the resurrection as a transforming agent made manifest through the apostles' witness—whether in healing miracles, the event of Pentecost, or their proclamations to both Jews and Gentiles.⁸ For Luke, these wonders are not mere expressions of individual heroic virtue; rather, they function as testimony of Christ's abiding presence within His Church,⁹ reaffirming the apostolic office as a conduit of His continuing work in fostering unity, doctrinal continuity, and stabilising leadership.

Perhaps most significant is Peter's pivotal role in the Church's expansion beyond its Jewish origins. In Acts 10–11, Peter receives a divine revelation concerning the obsolescence of Jewish dietary restrictions—a profoundly disruptive vision for one committed to Jewish ritual purity.¹⁰ His initial resistance—"By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean" (Acts 10:14)—reveals his deep-rooted commitment to tradition.¹¹ Yet it is precisely this conservatism that renders his subsequent endorsement of Gentile inclusion all the more authoritative (Acts 10:34–43).

⁷ Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁰ From the fourth century BCE through to the second century CE and beyond, Jewish communities consistently maintained clear boundaries of distinction from Gentiles—boundaries perceived to be grounded in Mosaic Law. While interaction with Gentiles in public settings such as synagogues or marketplaces was not uncommon, the sharing of meals was a far more contested practice. As Philip Francis Esler notes, table-fellowship was 'fraught with the possibility of breaching the purity code'—a concern he identifies as 'one of the most crucial aspects of the Mosaic law for the maintenance of the separate identity of the Jewish *ethnos*'. The refusal to participate in full table-fellowship was 'an intrinsic feature of Jewish life for centuries', functioning as a key marker of covenantal fidelity and ethno-religious distinctiveness in contexts of pervasive cultural interaction. See Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 84.

¹¹ Peter's refusal to eat is emblematic of the Jewish prohibition against social and ritual association with Gentiles, who were traditionally regarded as unclean. The vision, as interpreted by Peter in Acts 10:28–29 and reaffirmed at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:9, signals a divinely initiated reorientation of covenantal identity—no longer grounded in ritual purity as defined by the Law, but in the impartial and eschatological outpouring of the Spirit. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles in Acts 10:44–47 confirms this transformation, effecting a movement from perceived impurity to sanctified inclusion. In this way, Luke portrays a shift from the ethnocentric boundaries of the Mosaic dispensation to the universal reach of the ecclesial community inaugurated in Christ. See Tannehill, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 135.

Peter's revelation prepares the narrative ground for the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–29), where his pronouncement on Gentile converts proves decisive, affirming that God "testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit" and "has made no distinction between them and us" (Acts 15:9). Crucially, Peter frames this not as departure from tradition but as fulfilment, exemplifying the balance between fidelity and openness to the Spirit's guidance that characterises Luke's ecclesiology.

As the narrative focus shifts towards Paul in chapter 13, Peter's role as guarantor of apostolic tradition remains foundational. Luke presents this transition not as a handover, but as the continuation of a singular apostolic vocation. Both Peter and Paul are divinely appointed witnesses, commissioned to proclaim the risen Christ in distinct contexts, yet oriented towards the same redemptive end. The motif of testimony recurs throughout their ministries, and their respective missions unfold in a narrative arc shaped not by institutional succession, but by the generative power of the resurrection, which inaugurates apostolic vocation.¹² Apostolic witness, for Luke, is not merely the transmission of past events but the Spirit-led participation in the outworking of God's eschatological plan. This is realised not only through Peter's ministry but equally through Paul's, as exemplified in his invocation of Isaiah 49:6, where he and Barnabas are identified as those whom God has appointed to "be a light for the Gentiles" and "bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).¹³ Thus, the gospel's spread becomes a unified mission, extending salvation from Jerusalem to the Gentiles.

Absent from the Gospel narrative and unacquainted with Jesus' earthly ministry, Paul is summoned not through proximity to Christ or apostolic formation, but by a revelatory intervention of immediacy. In Acts 9:3–6, Luke recounts how, on the road to Damascus, Saul is struck by "a light from heaven", cast to the ground, and directly addressed by the risen Lord. This is no ordinary calling but a theophanic encounter—a moment of eschatological unveiling effecting a radical conversion.¹⁴

Luke portrays this event not as personal awakening but divine election. The risen Christ's declaration that Paul is "an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15) echoes Jesus' earlier predictions that disciples would be brought before rulers to defend their faith (Luke 12:11–12; 21:12). His designation as

¹² Rowe, *World Upside Down*, pp. 120–121.

¹³ Here, the Isaianic vision (Isaiah 49:6) and Jesus' final commission (Acts 1:8) converge, presenting the apostolic mission as the continuation of both divine prophecy and Christ's instruction. This convergence serves Luke's theological purpose by presenting the Gentile mission as the Spirit-empowered fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and Christ's eschatological mandate.

¹⁴ The term 'conversion' is used here not in the modern sense of changing religions, but in its biblical sense: a radical reorientation of life and vocation. At this stage, Christianity functioned as a sect within Second Temple Judaism rather than a distinct religion. Paul's experience on the Damascus road reflects a prophetic call and a theophanic reversal—what Luke presents as a divinely initiated turning onto "the Way" (Acts 9:2, 17). See Alexander, 'Acts', p. 1039; and Karl Rahner, *Theological Dictionary* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p. 102.

"chosen" aligns with Jesus' elect-status (Luke 9:35; 23:35), underscoring that Paul's vocation extends the Messiah's mission.¹⁵

Though not a companion of Jesus' earthly ministry, Paul's encounter with the exalted Christ—seeing the Righteous One and hearing His voice—qualifies him to bear "witness" (Acts 22:14–15; 26:16)¹⁶ and stands as the only post-Pentecostal Christophany recorded in the New Testament.¹⁷ The Pauline mission is thus marked by continuity with Israel's history and with the prophetic destiny of the apostolic witness as envisaged by Christ himself.¹⁸ Bereft of sight and speech, he enters three days of darkness before emerging transformed: baptised, healed, and sent.¹⁹ This transformation is central to Luke's narrative, recounted three times (Acts 9, 22, 26).²⁰

This reconstitution exemplifies the dynamism defining Paul's ministry. His calling arises not from gradual formation but divine initiative—disorienting and reconstitutive. Whereas Peter's leadership develops through shared experience (Luke 5:8–10; Acts 10:9–16), relational authority (Luke 22:31–32; Acts 2:14–42), and confessional clarity (Luke 9:20; Acts 4:8–12), Paul is thrust into apostleship by divine appointment (Acts 9:15; 13:2–3). Missionary spirit is intrinsic to his identity, embodying the disruptive gospel that he proclaims. Paul's transformative encounter thus becomes the narrative lens through which the subsequent outreach to the Gentiles is framed—his personal conversion symbolising and inaugurating the Church's broader missionary trajectory.²¹

¹⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series, Volume 5 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 165.

¹⁶ Tannehill, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 98.

¹⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer notes that Paul's encounter with the risen Christ is the only 'post-pentecostal appearance of the risen Christ to anyone' recorded in the New Testament. Paul himself 'speaks of this appearance of Christ and relates it to pre-pentecostal appearances accorded to others' (cf. 1 Cor 15:8), thereby asserting the legitimacy of his apostolic commission as fully continuous with the foundational witness tradition. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 31 (Anchor Bible 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 421.

¹⁸ Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian*, pp. 53–54.

¹⁹ Craig S. Keener affirms that although Paul was not converted to a different religion, he underwent 'a new way of life and thinking'—a process best described as 'a reconfiguration rather than a repudiation of his essential Jewishness'. Luke, he notes, frames this episode within a broader pattern of conversion narratives, linking it literarily with the transformative experiences of the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26–40) and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18). See Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 2: 3:1–14:28* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), p. 1615.

²⁰ Jacob Jervell notes that Luke's extensive focus on Paul—despite his being already well-known to readers—is not to recount biography but 'to explain and defend him and his role', given Paul's controversial status within both the early Church and the Jewish world. See Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 82–83.

²¹ James D. G. Dunn observes that the conversion of Paul functions as 'the headline under which the subsequent expansion into Gentile territory takes place', underscoring its narrative and theological significance within Luke's broader ecclesiological framework. See James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), p. 76.

From Acts 13, Paul dominates the narrative as the Church's principal agent of expansion. His journeys through cities such as Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Rome are theological as well as geographical, crossing ethnic and religious boundaries in fulfilment of Acts 1:8. Luke's literary design is evident: Peter consolidates the apostolic community, while Paul embodies its centrifugal thrust. Together, their ministries form the ecclesial dialectic between stability and expansion that structures the Lukan narrative.

Whether reasoning with Jews in the synagogue (Acts 13:14–43; 14:1; 17:1–3), debating Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34), or engaging with Roman officials (Acts 24:10–21; 25:8–12; 26:1–29), Paul contextualises the gospel without compromising its integrity—proclaiming Christ in forms intelligible to diverse audiences.²² His epistolary claim that he has “become all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22) finds narrative expression in this versatility.

Among his missionary endeavours, the Aegean mission (Acts 16:6–20:38) defines Paul's apostolic activity, influencing Christian identity and thought.²³ The churches founded in Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus would become the primary recipients of his letters. Though Luke omits Paul's epistolary work, he presents the expansion as divinely initiated: the Spirit's guidance to Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10), divine reassurance in Corinth (Acts 18:9–10), and miraculous events in Ephesus (Acts 19:11–12) affirm that Paul's dynamism is theologically grounded, not self-directed.²⁴ These journeys signify the Church's outward progression as a continuation of Christ's mission.

This synthesis of evangelistic fervour and pastoral adaptability defines Paul's Lukan portrait: not merely a wandering preacher, but the embodiment of the Church's outward impulse—propelling the gospel across cultural, ethnic, and political boundaries. His ministry, marked by suffering and violent resistance, is consistently portrayed as genuine apostolic testimony.²⁵ Paul anticipates suffering in Jerusalem, understanding that God's plan for him entails suffering.²⁶ Such trials do not undermine his authority; rather, they reveal a defining feature of early Christian leadership: preparing believers for affliction. In this vision, suffering is not merely a path to virtue but a participation in kingdom hope—orienting the faithful towards eschatological life with God.²⁷ Paul and Barnabas warn that “through many persecutions . . . we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), articulating a theological truth already embodied in their own bruised and bloodied witness. The gospel's authenticity is not measured by success but by the tested resilience of its

²² Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 2*, p. 2157.

²³ Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 213.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See Acts 13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:22–24; 20:23; 21:11–13; 2 Cor 11:23–28.

²⁶ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 3: 15:1–23:35* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 748.

²⁷ Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 2*, p. 2181.

bearers.

The narrative reaches its climax in Acts 28:31, where Paul, under house arrest in Rome, continues "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance". Far from subdued, this final verse is theologically charged: the gospel remains unshackled, advancing even within the empire. Luke's pairing of "proclaiming" and "teaching" suggests the full range of apostolic ministry.²⁸ That Paul exercises this ministry "without hindrance" from the heart of imperial Rome powerfully encapsulates Luke's vision of the gospel's unstoppable advance.

The proclamation that concludes Acts is the culmination of a consistent theme in Paul's ministry. He had earlier "spoken out boldly and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God" in Ephesus (Acts 19:8), declared to the Ephesian elders that he had "gone about proclaiming the kingdom" (Acts 20:25), and testified to it before his confinement (Acts 28:23). Notably, the closing message of Acts is the same one affirmed in the midst of persecution: Paul—having warned that "[i]t is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22)—now continues that message in the capital, confirming that the kingdom's path is one of faithful endurance.²⁹

Thus, Paul emerges as Luke's quintessential figure of missionary dynamism. His vocation is defined by fervent evangelisation, pastoral adaptability, and an unrelenting drive to extend Christ's salvific reach. In Paul, Luke offers a paradigmatic vision of the Church in motion: rooted in apostolic tradition, driven by missionary zeal, fulfilling the Lord's commission to bring the gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

If Peter represents the anchoring force of apostolic stability and Paul the outward momentum of missionary expansion, Luke refuses to set them in opposition. Instead, he presents them as complementary agents of a unified apostolic vocation. Each bears witness to one gospel through two modes of service—tradition and mission, preservation and proclamation. This apostolic dialectic becomes the foundational framework through which the Church is formed, governed, and sent.

This synthesis is most apparent in Acts' structure: chapters 1–12 focus on Peter; from chapter 13, Paul becomes central. This division reveals a theological ordering: the Church is gathered and stabilised under Peter before being propelled outwards through Paul's evangelism. Inward formation precedes outward proclamation. Peter grounds the witness; Paul extends it. Together, they form a cohesive ecclesial identity rooted in fidelity and movement.

The intentionality of this symmetry is further reinforced by Luke's carefully crafted parallels between the two apostles. Both perform miracles that echo Jesus' own ministry: Peter heals a lame man at the temple gate

²⁸ Keener observes that the combination of "proclaiming" and "teaching" in Acts 28:31 likely functions as a *merism*, encompassing the full scope of Paul's ministry. He further argues that the phrase 'without hindrance' underscores the divine sanction of this mission and 'reveals that God is genuinely with the movement', even within the heart of imperial Rome. See *Ibid.*, p. 1245.

²⁹ Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 3*, p. 960.

(Acts 3:1–10); Paul heals a lame man in Lystra (Acts 14:8–10). Peter raises Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36–43); Paul raises Eutychus (Acts 20:9–12). Each confronts a magician—Peter with Simon Magus (Acts 8:9–24), Paul with Elymas (Acts 13:6–12). Both are imprisoned and miraculously freed (Acts 12:6–11; 16:25–26), and both proclaim the risen Christ before hostile audiences, whether Jewish or Gentile. These deliberate literary parallelisms serve to highlight the unified nature of their apostolic witness. Though distinct in temperament and context, their ministries converge in the same divine mission. Luke thus narrates the life of the Christian mission as a continuation and embodiment of Jesus’ own life, rendering the apostolic ministry a visible enactment of the *missio Dei* shaped by a Christological norm.³⁰

This convergence is not abstract but realised concretely in Acts 15—the Council of Jerusalem—where the two apostles stand together at a decisive turning point in the life of the Church. Paul and Barnabas report the signs and wonders God has performed among the Gentiles; yet it is Peter who interprets these events, affirming that God “made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:9) and declaring that salvation is by grace—not through the inherited demands of the Mosaic code, which neither their ancestors nor they were able to bear (Acts 15:10). “God made a choice among you”, he proclaims, “that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers”, establishing his God-ordained role as the initiator of Gentile inclusion. In this moment, Peter assumes the role of doctrinal arbiter, guiding the Church through a moment of theological uncertainty with apostolic authority. Paul does not dispute Peter’s authority, but speaks within the unity of the apostolic gathering. The final decree reflects both impulses: it affirms the inclusion of Gentiles while making measured concessions to Jewish sensibilities. Far from compromising the gospel, this synthesis ensures that the Church remains one body, faithful to its origins while responsive to the Spirit’s ongoing work.³¹

It is within this context that Luke’s editorial decisions acquire theological weight. Most notably, he omits the confrontation between Peter and Paul described in Galatians 2:11–14. This was no incidental quarrel: Paul claims to have opposed Peter “to his face” over his withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentile believers. Yet Luke, aiming to preserve the image of a coherent

³⁰ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, p. 173.

³¹ Dunn emphasises that Acts 15 represents the culmination of the Cornelius narrative, arguing that Peter—“forced by clear directive and approval from God”—set a decisive precedent by receiving a Gentile “as a full member of the new movement . . . without requiring him first to be circumcised”. This event, he contends, more than any saying of Jesus, “made Peter the bridge-man who spanned and held together the Gentile mission of Paul and the conservatism of the Jerusalem church under the leadership of James”. See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 199.

apostolic witness, passes over the event without mention.³² His silence, however, is not evasive but constructive. Rather than centre conflict, Luke foregrounds apostolic harmony. He deliberately reframes what might otherwise be viewed as irreconcilable difference—not as schism, but as synthesis.³³

By refusing to frame this apostolic dialectic within the prevailing binaries of accommodation or subversion, Luke articulates a new way of understanding the Church's identity and mission—one that offers a theologically grounded alternative to Graeco-Roman patterns of religious and political thought.³⁴ Unlike imperial ideologies which resolve plurality by dominance, Luke's ecclesiology upholds a unity that is not sameness but coherence—a unity formed not by erasure of difference but by fidelity to a shared revelation.

Indeed, Paul himself affirms this convergence. "He who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised", he writes, "worked through me also for the Gentiles" (Galatians 2:8). One gospel, two commissions. The Spirit is not divided, nor is Christ. What distinguishes Peter and Paul is not doctrine but context; not allegiance but assignment. Paul's missionary zeal does not displace Peter's foundational role, nor does Peter's institutional leadership hinder the Church's outward movement. Together, they form an integrated vision of apostolic identity in which the gospel is both rooted and roaming, both guarded and given.

That Acts concludes with Paul in Rome—preaching "the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31)—is no accident.³⁵ Though Peter's presence is absent from these final verses, his theological imprint is unmistakable. Paul does not speak a new gospel; he proclaims the same truth that Peter affirmed at Pentecost and Jerusalem.³⁶ The Church has moved from Jerusalem to the heart of the empire, not by discarding its past but by fulfilling its calling. Rome

³² Dunn argues that Paul's dispute with Peter at Antioch 'raised the same fundamental issues' as the circumcision of Titus (Gal. 2:1–10), and that Paul 'failed to persuade' Peter and the other Jewish believers, resulting in a 'breach . . . much deeper than disagreement over Mark's suitability'. This rupture, which likely prompted Paul's departure from Antioch, is a dimension that Luke 'has chosen to draw a veil' over in order to maintain the portrayal of apostolic solidarity. See *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³³ C. K. Barrett cites Ferdinand Christian Baur's analysis that the portrayal of Peter and Paul in Acts reflects "a deliberate deviation from historical truth in the interest of a particular tendency". According to Baur, Acts omits the deep tensions that Paul describes in Galatians 2, presenting instead a harmonised narrative in which the older apostles, represented by Peter and James, declare themselves to be on the same side as Paul. See C. K. Barrett, 'How History Should Be Written', in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. by Ben Witherington, III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 33–57 (p. 38).

³⁴ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, pp. 135–137.

³⁵ Paul's references to the kingdom of God at both the beginning (Acts 28:23) and end (Acts 28:31) of his final scene in Rome serve to bracket the passage, forming an *inclusio*, signalling that the kingdom remains the central theme of Paul's proclamation. This literary framing highlights both the continuity of Paul's message with Jesus' own teaching (Acts 1:3, 6) and the theological culmination of Luke's narrative: that the kingdom is now fully extended to the Gentiles as well as to Israel. See Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 4: 24:1–28:31* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), pp. 314, 462.

³⁶ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity Volume 2*, p. 352.

becomes not a departure from apostolic origins but the symbolic culmination of the Church's outward movement—initiated and steadily advanced by God—in the heart of the Gentile world.³⁷ Though Acts does not narrate the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, tradition affirms that both died in Rome—sealed in blood, their shared witness founded the Roman Church and signified the gospel's arrival at the centre of the world's power.

In the final analysis, Luke's vision of the apostolic Church is not bifurcated between a conservative Peter and a progressive Paul. It is rather a unified ecclesial witness manifested in two apostolic expressions. Peter preserves the deposit; Paul expands its reach. Together, they form the living paradigm of the Church's vocation: to hold fast to what has been received, and to bear it boldly into the world.

In conclusion, Luke presents Peter and Paul not as opposing figures but as complementary apostles whose vocations converge within a unified ecclesial vision. Peter embodies the Church's inhalation—drawing it inwards towards its apostolic centre. Through leadership, scriptural interpretation, and decisive action, he shapes the theological and institutional framework of early Christian identity. Paul, by contrast, represents its exhalation—an outward movement into the Gentile world. His journeys mark the gospel's geographical and theological expansion beyond Jewish boundaries. Yet Paul's mission unfolds within structures secured by Peter's foundational role, demonstrating that the Church's expansion rests on the stability of its apostolic witness.

Luke portrays apostolic plurality not as a threat to unity but as the means by which the Church fulfils its dual vocation: preserving the apostolic deposit and proclaiming it universally. The ministries of Peter and Paul, though asymmetrical, are mutually implicative—each essential to the Church's identity and mission. Luke's ecclesiology envisions the Church breathing in through Peter and out through Paul, shaped by faith and transformed by the gospel.

³⁷ Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 4*, p. 463.

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