3. Paul before Damascus

The most surprising feature of Paul’s commission in the Lucan Acts is the threefold narration of the story in Acts 9.1–30, 22.3–21, and 26.9–20. These are not parallel reports in different texts (as in the tomb of Rekhmire), or references to different episodes within the same text (as in the Acts of John). Luke obviously writes about the same event in all the three narratives, but he retells it with surprising discrepancies. There are similar ‘doublets’ and ‘triplets’ in many passages of the Jewish Scriptures.

The inclusion of three accounts of the same episode in the book and the differences between them can be explained in more than one way. Several studies assume different sources behind the three versions. In looking for the author’s purpose, scholars suggest that Luke offered complementary versions with different theological accents.

1. Acts of John 18, 88–9, 113, see Chapter 4.
2. Cf. von Dobschütz, ‘Die Berichte’; add 1 Samuel 9–11. Dobschütz cited parallels also from the Gospels, but concluded that ‘the relation of the three accounts in Acts to each other is yet different’.
3. Hirsch, ‘Die drei Berichte’, hypothesised that ch. 9 comes from Damascus, ch. 26 from Paul, and ch. 22 is a mixture of the two. Burchard, Der dreizehnte Zeuge, 52–88, suggested that ch. 9 contains a novelistic tradition, comparable to Joseph and Aseneth and Apuleius’ Metamorphoses 11, on which Luke elaborated in chs. 22 and 26 (120); ch. 26 contains Pauline tradition (128). Witherington, Acts, 309, suggests that Luke was present at the speech delivered before Agrippa (ch. 26), and used information from Paul for the other two accounts. Cf. Lentz, Luke’s Portrait, 19f. For earlier attempts, see Haenchen, Apostelgeschichte, 274–5.
4. Stanley, ‘Paul’s Conversion’, argued that ch. 9 expands Paul’s account in ch. 22 (325), while ch. 26 shortens the same (332–3); the three accounts emphasise, respectively, that Paul really saw Christ; that he saw him exalted in glory; and that he was inaugurated as a servant of Yahweh (338). Hedrick, ‘Paul’s Conversion’, 432, concluded that ch. 9 adapts a traditional miracle story of Paul’s conversion, whereas ch. 22 is an edited, while ch. 26 is an abbreviated, version of the legend; the three accounts were composed to correct and complement each
This chapter will approach these repetitions from a socio-rhetorical perspective, with an emphasis on the social world of the texts, and interpret the threefold narration as multiple attempts to define the narrative figure of Paul in *Acts*.

Already in the discussion of King Saul’s commission we found different ways of legitimation that the three episodes described: commission through epiphany, prophetic transformation of consciousness, and a sacramental act in the first narrative; mantic techniques and recognition by the people in the second one; and rising to political leadership as a fearful warrior in the third one. This shows that commission stories about the same hero (with the same sender and helper: Yahweh and Samuel) might situate the plot in very different social structures. In our reading of the three Lucan narratives about Paul’s commission we will be looking for literary strategies of creating social identity, making use of the social typology of commission that we described in Chapter 2 above.

*Acts 9*

(1) Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest (2) and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (3) Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. (4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ (5) He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (6) But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do’. (7) The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. (8) Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. (9) For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

other. Hedrick’s view of a ‘cumulative effect’ is followed by Witherington, *Acts*, 303–4. According to Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 90, ch. 9 presents Paul as the overthrown enemy, ch. 22 as the loyal Jew, whereas ch. 26 underscores his call as a witness and his faithful obedience to that call.
(10) Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias’. He answered, ‘Here I am, Lord’. (11) The Lord said to him, ‘Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, (12) and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight’. (13) But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; (14) and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name’. (15) But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; (16) I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name’. (17) So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit’. (18) And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptised, (19) and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, (20) and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God’. (21) All who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?’ (22) Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah. (23) After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, (24) but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; (25) but the disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. (26) When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. (27) But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the

5. For ‘the disciples’ against ‘his disciples’ (the latter supported by the oldest manuscripts) see Haenchen, Apostelgeschichte, 279 and Metzger, Textual Commentary, 366.
If we look at the account of *Acts* 9, we find a highly complex narrative, consisting of several minor episodes with the interaction of a number of characters. Still it has to be understood as one episode in the flow of the Lucan narrative: it is bracketed by accounts about the missionary acts of other apostolic figures. Philip baptises the Ethiopian eunuch in the previous section, and Peter baptises Cornelius in the next one. Paul’s story is also rounded off by a typical Lucan summary on the growth of the church.

The commission story of Paul (called Saul throughout in this narrative) can be divided into the following scenes: (1) Saul’s vision on the Damascus road (verses 1–9); (2) Ananias’ vision (10–16); Saul’s healing and baptism (17–19a); his preaching in Damascus (19b–22); his adventurous escape from the city (23–25); his acceptance in Jerusalem (26–28); and his escape from there (29–30). If we want to take the narrative context seriously—and this is the only possibility for literary analysis—we cannot reduce our investigation to the first three scenes.

The framework of the social texture of the story is drawn by the opposition of ‘disciples’ and ‘persecutors’. This basic scheme ex-
presses people’s relation to the central figure of Jesus. The dynamic is created by Saul’s moving from one side to the other. It is remarkable how passively he is dragged across this social field: he is hit on the ground, lead by the hand to Damascus, healed by Ananias, let down from the walls in a basket, introduced to the apostles by Barnabas, and again rescued and sent off by the disciples.

There are basically three levels of church authority involved in the process: a single disciple (Ananias), a local church (Damascus), and finally the supreme authority of the ‘golden age’, the board of the apostles in Jerusalem. Saul is taken before these authorities one by one, where he is examined and confirmed as a disciple. The narrative structure presents a bureaucratic machine which produces, so to speak, apostles from Pharisees. Immediate interaction with the divine sender is reduced to the annihilating demonstration of power on the Damascus road.

This narrative embodies the institutional model of commission, with the purpose of integrating the hero into the institutional framework of a community. This is first achieved through various stages of initiation. Saul’s annihilating experience of the divine power on the Damascus road causes temporary blindness. It is followed by the liminal stage in the house of Judas. Here Ananias, the representative of the divinity appears (the helper figure) and recovers Saul’s sight. Baptism is the final seal on the procedure. Then the new initiate is examined in practice. He produces a ‘masterpiece’ on which basis he is judged by the leading authorities of the community. His bold proclamation in Damascus is the credential which his second helper Barnabas presents to the board of the apostles. Barnabas appears as an ‘advocate’. He plays the role that is assigned to him also by the explanation of his name in an earlier passage of the book: ‘Joseph,
whom the apostles called also Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement”\(^{11}\).

The social structure we have here is a fully developed hierarchy. We have to notice that the original mission of the hero occurs within the framework of a similar system: as the agent of the high-priest, Saul is also part of a bureaucratic machine. He acts with official documents in hand. The ‘letters’ he asks from the high-priest most probably serve to identify himself in the synagogues of Damascus and ensure the support of the Jewish authorities of that place. It is ‘agent Saul’ of the high-priest’s police who manages to establish himself within a short period of time as ‘agent Saul’ of the community ‘of the Way’.

However well organised the institutions of the Christian community seem in the narrative, there are also several discrepancies in the text. Ananias is instructed by Jesus in a vision to visit Saul. He protests against the task, and refers to Saul as one who did much evil to the disciples in Jerusalem. Then he talks about the ‘high-priests’ (in plural, notwithstanding the singular of the former episode), who gave Saul authorisation (rather than an epistle). His words suggest that Saul was cooperating with the Jerusalem priestly circles on a larger basis. Jesus’ argument about Saul’s future role as a witness and martyr is enough to refute Ananias’ objections, but this calling is not actually ‘delivered’ to Saul by Ananias. Visiting the blind Saul in Damascus, Ananias talks to him about Jesus ‘who appeared to you on the road’. Notwithstanding Ananias’ claim, the first report does not mention that Saul saw Jesus—he saw only the flashing light that blinded him—but rather that he talked with Jesus\(^ {12}\). The heavenly voice promised him that in Damascus he would be told what to do, but Ananias gives him no instructions at all. Jesus told Ananias that Saul had seen a vision about him (Ananias), but Ananias forgets this obvious point of reference when visiting Saul. Instead, he mentions Saul’s first vision on the Damascus road, the one Jesus did not mention to him. Jesus also did not inform him about Saul’s blindness, and did not commission him to baptise Saul.

\(^{11}\) Acts 4.36, ὑδὲς παρασελήσως.

\(^{12}\) The difference is somewhat explained by the synesthesia that characterised the accounts of visions in antiquity, cf. p. 228, note 66 below.
From the next episode we learn that Saul proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah in the synagogues of Damascus. Then ‘everyone’ is upset by his words, and they recall him at once being the agent of the ‘high-priests’ (in plural). But whom does ‘everyone’ cover? And what was the precise reason of their astonishment? From the narrative context we know that the Damascus disciples were also members of the synagogue (v. 2). It is precisely for them that Saul went to Damascus. The reason of their surprise could not be the content of Saul’s preaching, but rather the change of his role. But where is Ananias, the disciple from Damascus who baptised Saul? Did he disappear, or did he forget to introduce the new convert to the community? A related question is from where did Saul receive the material that he preached. Again, one thinks of Ananias, but his role is not mentioned in this context either. The most probable solution is that Saul was inspired by revelation—an idea that can be inferred from all three accounts in Acts as well as from Paul’s autobiographical narrative in Galatians.

There were evidently members of the synagogues who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. They could be also astonished by the sudden change in Saul’s attitude. Their later plan to kill Saul, however, suggests that they also were scandalised by his message. But was this message so radically new for them? It would be surprising because the presence of the disciples in Damascus has been taken for granted throughout the narrative of Acts 9, and also in the introduction of the Damascus episode itself. Did they not preach in the synagogue? Or did they teach something else than Saul? Saul appears surprisingly lonely as he preaches his new heresy in the synagogues, much like on his later missionary journeys.

In sum, the rhetoric of the text affirms the boldness of Saul as a preacher of Jesus, while his status in the Damascus church remains unclear. The episode implies that the Damascus disciples were endangered by the agents from Jerusalem (like Saul) rather than by their co-religionists in the synagogue, and that the synagogue was tolerant toward the disciples but intolerant toward an enthusiastic guest-preacher. In any case, Saul’s person and proclamation was enough to undermine peace in Damascus, and the disciples found it best to re-

14. Cf. p. 46 above and p. 84 below.
move him from the stage. The whole situation, however, contradicts the efforts of the chapter to integrate Saul into the institutional framework of the disciples’ community.

Such an institutional integration is of course the major interest of the next episode. If we wonder why Ananias failed to smooth the conflict and integrate Saul into the Damascus community, we can be also surprised of the unexpected advocacy from the side of Barnabas in Jerusalem. Barnabas, similarly to Ananias at Straight Road, refers to the vision on the Damascus road, the knowledge of which Luke seems to assume with all his characters who take Saul’s part. Similarly to Ananias, Barnabas also interprets the vision on the road as seeing the Lord. In the narrator’s report, Jesus promised that Saul will be told in the future (λαληθεσται σοι) what to do, while Barnabas points out that the Lord revealed things to Saul (ἐλαλησεν αὐτῷ) in the epiphany. Barnabas also refers to the courageous proclamation in Damascus ‘in the name of Jesus’. The mention of ‘the name’ switches back to the description of Saul’s role in the dialogue between Jesus and Ananias. Again, there is no mention of Ananias as a witness to Saul’s baptism, and also the adventurous escape seems unknown or forgotten, though it would perfectly fulfil Saul’s calling ‘to suffer’ for the name and testify to his commitment. The conflict with a group of synagogue people and a second adventurous escape serve to create continuity with the ministry in Damascus, and also foreshadow the normal course of Saul’s missionary activity: preach and run.

This brief survey has shown the fragmentary nature of the narrative and the lack of a minute editorial work. It seems that the author combined various pieces of tradition in order to argue for Saul’s

15. The story of the Damascus road might have been generally associated with Paul’s person at the time of Luke, thus the knowledge of his characters of the narrative represents the knowledge of his readership. For the hypothetical ‘Paulusnovelle’ see Löning, Saulustradition, 62f, 93–7; Dietzfelbinger, Berufung, 78–9.

16. The ‘Hellenists’ (9.29) are probably identical with the diaspora Jews who initiated Stephen’s trial in 6.9–14. A closer analysis of that rather puzzling assembly is not with our task here. In the same story, Paul is probably associated with that formation (7.58), but he could as well belong to other groups involved in the action (6.11–3). For the (conceptional) improbability of the alternative reading “Ελληνας (Greeks) see Haenchen, Apostelgeschichte 280. Cf. Johnson, Acts 172, 198; Witherington, Acts, 240ff, 325.
unanimous acceptance and integration into the institutions of the Jesus-followers, but he only set them side by side rather than thoroughly harmonising them. In fact, the majority of readers will be completely satisfied by the narrative as it is, and unconsciously synchronise the contradicting elements.

Interestingly enough, the institutional type of commission that we discerned here has little background in the writings of the Old Testament. In none of the stories quoted in the previous chapter are there authorities confirming the divine call of the hero, or patrons who help them integrate into the institutions. The prophets who belong to the royal court are pictured in several passages as the ‘false prophets’, but nothing is told about their commission or appointment. On the other hand, we have a fully developed hierarchy in the Lucan story: Jesus is the supreme authority who instructs Ananias to act for him. Ananias’ sphere of action is restricted to Damascus. When it comes to introducing Saul to the apostles, the more influential Barnabas takes the new convert under his protection. The hierarchy from the top to the bottom thus includes Jesus, the apostles, Barnabas, Ananias and the rest of the disciples. In the Egyptian commission narratives we had similarly the supreme god Re, who commissioned the other gods (Thot) as well as the Pharaohs, who in turn commissioned the viziers, who dealt with the rest of the people.

There are also parallels in the other apostolic Acts and in Greco-Roman literature. The Acts of Barnabas and the Acts of Titus will be considered in detail later in our study. From Rome, we refer to the story of Gaius Flaccus, a negligent youth:

18. Barnabas was already introduced in Acts 4.36–7. Luke mentions him as an important donator, who sold his landed property and gave its price to the Jerusalem church. That the apostles gave him a new name (his original name was Joseph) suggests in itself hierarchical subjection, cf. Johnson, Acts, 87.
19. Cf. the seven ‘deacons’ in Acts 6, who are appointed in order to deal with the everyday matters of the community so that the apostles can concentrate on the ‘word of God’. Also Moses appointed ‘officers’ or ‘judges’ to deal with the minor cases of judgment in Israel while he represented the people before God (Exodus 18.13–27).
20. Livy 27.8.5–10, trans. F.G. Moore (LCL), adapted. The story plays in 209 BC.
Because of his irresponsible and dissipated youth Gaius Flaccus, who was odious to his own brother, Lucius Flaccus, and other relatives on account of the same vices, had been seized upon as flamen (flamen captus erat) by Publius Licinius, pontifex maximus. As soon as the charge of rites and ceremonies took possession of his soul (animum eius cepit), Gaius so suddenly put off his old character that no one among all the young men stood higher in the estimation and approval of the leading senators, both of his own family and strangers alike.

He also attempted to revive the old usage that the flamen was automatically invested with senatorship. Indeed, he achieved his goal, but not so much by his position as a flamen, but rather by the sanctity of his life (magis sanctitate vitae). Here the action of a powerful patron (the pontifex maximus) precedes the encounter with the sacred. The result is integration into the institutional order (as opposed to earlier ‘negligence’), acceptance by the authorities, and advance in the social hierarchy.

Finally we refer to Lucian’s Peregrinus Proteus, whose career among the Christians is a parody of the institutional form of commission narrative:\footnote{The Passing of Peregrinus 11, trans. A.M. Harmon (LCL). Lucian wrote his story shortly after the death of Peregrinus in AD 165.}

It was then that he learned the wondrous lore of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And—how else could it be?—in a trice he made them all look like children; for he was prophet, cult-leader, head of the synagogue, and everything, all by himself:\footnote{Peregrinus was προφήτης, θεοκριτης, ευναγισθευς.}

He interpreted and explained some of their books and even composed many, and they revered him as a god, made use of him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector, next after that other, to be sure, whom they still worship [...].

Lucian suggests that it was not at all difficult to integrate into the institutions of the Christians and make quick advance there. He even might have had the opinion that their leaders—or many of them—were charlatans. It is interesting to look at Lucian’s account of the imprisonment of Peregrinus:\footnote{The Passing of Peregrinus 12.}:

\footnotesize

22. Peregrinus was προφήτης, θεοκριτης, ευναγισθευς.

23. \textit{The Passing of Peregrinus} 12.
Well, when he had been imprisoned, the Christians, regarding the incident as a calamity, left nothing undone in the effort to rescue him. Then, as this was impossible, every other form of attention was shown him, not in any casual way but with assiduity; and from the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison, while their officials even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then elaborate meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read aloud, and excellent Peregrinus [...] was called by them ‘the new Socrates’.

Similarly to the martyrdom texts in the apostolic Acts, imprisonment provides here an opportunity to demonstrate the solidarity of the community. The bribing of the guards and the presence of the women in the prison are especially typical. Though among the apostolic Acts we read about the celebration of the eucharist rather than about ‘elaborate meals’ (δειπνα ποιήλα), and prayers and hymns rather than the reading of sacred texts. Although the Christian Acts never call their heroes ‘the new Socrates’, Lucian’s ironic remark proves that such imprisonment episodes reminded ancient readers of Plato’s Socrates in Phaedo and Crito.

In sum, Acts 9 describes Paul’s integration into the institutions of the primitive Christian community. The community is represented by its members with authority, and the helper figure appears as an advocate on the hero’s side. Integration is especially expressed and promoted by common rituals and actions of solidarity. Such narratives may turn into career stories, talking about positions and titles achieved, as shown by the Egyptian texts, the parody by Lucian, and some later apocryphal Acts.


One fourth of the Lucan *Acts* (chs. 22–8) is dedicated to Paul’s custody. Paul’s trial is given more elaboration than any other event in the Lucan books: the two years of Paul’s trial are told in one fourth of *Acts* which relates the events of thirty years. Proportionally, the ‘Pauline apology’ occupies the largest part of Luke-Acts, comparable only to the middle section of the gospel (*Luke* 9–19). It is in this framework that the second and third accounts of the Damascus story are told.

In these two cases, we hear the story from Paul himself. That is to say, not only is the story told from his point of view, but also the narrative voice shifts to him. In other words, we have to do with Pauline autobiographical narrations within a Pauline biographical narrative. This is similar to the farewell speech in Miletus, where Paul talks about his ministry in Asia Minor. But the Miletus speech, which also contains apologetic elements, was delivered before a sympathetic audience, while the Damascus story is told both times before hostile listeners.

Paul himself calls these two speeches ‘apologies’. In the first case it is an *ad hoc* self-defence before the angry crowd in Jerusalem, while in the second case it is a formal forensic apology before governor Festus and King Agrippa. This is indicated also by Agrippa’s

28. For a chronology see, for example, Becker, *Paulus*, 32–3.
32. Some caveats are in place before the discussion of those texts. Firstly, as Mack, *Rhetoric*, 49, warns, rhetorical patterns were ‘never understood in antiquity as rigid templates’. Secondly, these speeches are *prosopopoeiae*, ‘inventions of a writer on the basis of what a speaker probably would have said, analogous to the speeches in Greek historians’ (Kennedy, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 37). Finally, ‘the speeches in *Acts* are often too short for the occasions to which they are attributed; […] those in the classical historians are generally much longer’ (*ibidem*, 115; cf. Veltman, ‘Defense Speeches’, 252, 256). Cf. note 29 above.
words ‘You have permission to speak for yourself’\textsuperscript{33}. The rhetorical form of the speeches is underlined in both cases by Paul’s stretching out his hand—just like earlier in Antioch of Pisidia—assuming a usual orator’s position\textsuperscript{34}.

In Acts 22, Paul speaks ‘in the Hebrew dialect’—that is, in Aramaic\textsuperscript{35}—after his command of Greek has testified to the colonel Claudius Lysias that he is not an Egyptian terrorist\textsuperscript{36}.

(3) I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. (4) I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, (5) as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. (6) While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. (7) I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ (8) I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Then he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting’. (9) Now those

\textsuperscript{33.} Acts 26.1.
\textsuperscript{34.} Acts 21.40, 26.1, cf. 13.40, 19.33. Luke may want to show by this gesture that Paul is a professional orator. The motif probably was a literary topos, cf. Apuleius, \textit{Metamorphoses} 2.121. We can compare it to the advise of Quintilian, \textit{Education of the Orator} 11.3.141, ‘The left arm should only be raised so far as to form a right angle at the elbow, while the edge of the toga should fall in equal lengths on either side’. Trans. H.E. Butler in LCL; cf. 11.3.159.
\textsuperscript{36.} Acts 21.37–8, ‘The tribune replied, “Do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?”’ Luke clearly means that Paul’s cultivated Greek made it impossible to take him for a bandit. Josephus, \textit{Jewish War} 2.261–3 and \textit{Jewish Antiquities} 20.169–71, reports that an Egyptian false prophet took a mass of people (through the wilderness) to the Mount of Olives. Luke confused this movement with the terrorism of the Sicarii, who were also active under Felix; Horsley and Hanson, \textit{Bandits}, 167–70.
who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. (10) I asked, ‘What am I to do, Lord?’ The Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do’. (11) Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus. (12) A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, (13) came to me; and standing beside me, he said, ‘Brother Saul, regain your sight!’ In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. (14) Then he said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; (15) for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. (16) And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name’. (17) After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance (18) and saw him saying to me, ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me’. (19) And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. (20) And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him’. (21) Then he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles’. (NRSV, adapted)

Though Paul does not explicitly identify the case in which he defends himself (quaestio), it can be inferred from the context. Before his arrest, Jews from Asia charge him with (a) teaching against the Jewish people, the Torah, and the temple; and (b) defiling the temple by bringing in Greeks37. The charges do not have to be formally repeated in the speech, since they are clear from the narrative. The main line of defence (ratio) can be concluded from the speech itself: Paul transfers responsibility for his deeds to God38. The story of the Damascus road constitutes the proof to Paul’s defence39. Had Paul not been inter-

38. Kennedy, Rhetorical Criticism, 134, writes: ‘Since Paul does not deny that his actions have been inconsistent with the law, the stasis is best regarded as metastasis, transferring responsibility to God’. Plato’s Socrates argues similarly, cf. p. 14 above.
39. Long, ‘Paulusbild’, 98, identifies verse 3 as narratio, and verses 4–21 as the proof. In the text, however, nothing indicates such a division.
rupted by the mob\textsuperscript{40}, Kennedy suggests, he could have added also Scriptural evidence and concluded by an exhortation\textsuperscript{41}. A comparison with the defence before Agrippa, however, suggests that we should not expect much more formal rhetorical argumentation\textsuperscript{42} even if the speech were completed\textsuperscript{43}. In \textit{Acts} 26.22–3 Paul claims that he preaches ‘nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place’, and concludes with a Lucan creed rather than a Scriptural quotation: ‘that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles’\textsuperscript{44}. We have to conclude that the main emphasis in this speech (ch. 22) falls on the retelling and reframing of the commission story, which serves itself as an argument supporting the \textit{ratio}\textsuperscript{45}.

\textsuperscript{40} Interruption occurs also in the Greco-Roman parallels, cf. Veltman, ‘Defense Speeches’, 252.

\textsuperscript{41} Kennedy, \textit{Rhetorical Criticism}, 135.

\textsuperscript{42} Witherington, \textit{Acts}, 668, claims: ‘In which [the \textit{narratio}] Paul will insinuate what the following proofs will involve, but they are never developed’.

\textsuperscript{43} One has to keep in mind the warning of Kennedy, \textit{Rhetorical Criticism}, 37: ‘Only a few speeches in the New Testament, the Sermon on the Mount and the defense of Stephen, for example, are extensive enough to represent an entire speech without compression or abbreviation’. Cf. note 32 above.

\textsuperscript{44} Cf. \textit{Luke} 24.25–6: ‘Then he [Jesus] said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”’ In both cases, Luke quotes an early Christian hermeneutical thesis rather than any actual testimony. For the elementary rhetorical use of citation, see Hermogenes, \textit{Progymnasmata}, in Hock and O’Neil, \textit{Chreia}, vol 1, 177; cf. Mack, \textit{Rhetoric}, 44, 46. Luke uses lot of real scriptural testimony at other places, cf. Fitzmyer, ‘Use of the Old Testament’ and Sanders, ‘Prophetic Use’.

\textsuperscript{45} Although this is not a standard \textit{dispositio} when compared to the rules of the handbooks, it has its exact parallel in Plato’s \textit{Apology}. In Socrates’ first speech, the \textit{narratio} of the Chaerephon oracle and its consequences also served as a major part of the proof (see pp. 12f above). This manner of composition was probably taught by Isocrates (436–338 BC). De Strycker and Slings, \textit{Apology}, 60, observe: ‘According to Syrianus, the well-known Neo-Platonist [...] Isocrates taught that “one should narrate the event (τὸ πρᾶγμα), what preceded it (τὰ πρὸ τοῦ πρᾶγμας) and what followed it (τὰ μετὰ τὸ πρᾶγμα), and make clear the intention with which each of the parties acted in their own way”. [...] When we compare the Narration of the \textit{Apology} with those of the Orators, we find that they have scarcely anything in common; however, the Narration in the \textit{Apology} confirms exactly to Isocrates’ advice’. And so the narration of Paul, we may add.
The narrative of Acts 22 contains only three episodes, of which the vision in the temple is found only in this version. The introduction of the first vision is further amplified, so that it can serve also as a description of Paul’s career and thus as an exordium of the speech⁴⁶. The reference to the time (‘at noon’) may serve to underline the authenticity of the first person narrative⁴⁷, but we also find it elsewhere as a topos of commission narratives⁴⁸. We find three major changes here as compared to Acts 9: (a) The insertion of the notice about the travelling companions into the dialogue stresses the exclusivity of the vision. In the first version this remark occurs only later. There, others hear the voice, but do not see the light. Here, everyone sees the light but only Saul hears the voice⁴⁹. (b) Saul’s question ‘What shall I do?’ gives emphasis to the act of commissioning. (c) The three days of blindness and fasting are omitted.

These changes suggest that the motif of divine election and commission came to the foreground, while the defeat of the persecutor is less important. The tendency is confirmed by the changes made in Jesus’ promise: ‘You will be told about everything’ that has been

⁴⁶. The way Luke changed here the grammatical person from the third to the first (cf. Acts 9.1–3 and 22.4–6) is in the manner of a typical school exercise, cf. Theon, Progymnasmata, 101. This also suggests that the author created the speech from a third person narrative rather than of any kind of notes or personal memories. For studies representing some form of the latter opinion, see Brown. ‘Paul’s Hearing’, 319–22, to which add Stanley, ‘Paul’s Conversion’, 325 and Withington, Acts, 309.


⁴⁸. In addition to Acts 22.6 and 23.10, it is found in the commissions of Thutmose IV (pp. 29 above), Epimenides (Diogenes Laertius, Lives 109, cf. pp. 47ff above), and Thomas (Acts of Thomas 2, Bonnet, Acta apostolorum, vol 2/2, 101, line 8, cf. p. 120 below). For noon as a typical time for epiphanies in antiquity, see Bremmer, Afterlife, 128 and 185, note 5. Versnel, ‘Epiphany’, 48, quotes IG XIV, 1014 on Pan appearing ‘overtly, not in a dream but in the middle of the day’.

⁴⁹. For a survey of scholarly opinions on this difference, see Meyer, ‘Light and Voice’, 28–30, who considers both versions as ‘equally appropriate ways of declaring that Paul’s fellow travellers did not share in his christophanic encounter’ (34). Yet, Luke’s moving this remark earlier in the second narrative suggests to me a stronger emphasis on exclusivity. For a classical example of exclusive revelation, see Iliad 1.193–8, where only Achilles can see Athene: ‘none of the others saw her’; cf. Dodds, Greeks, 14–5.
assigned (τέτοκταί) to you to do’. The vision of Ananias, so central to the structure of the first narrative, is eliminated. Ananias is not called a ‘disciple’ either, but rather his ethos is established by his credentials as a devout Jew: ‘pious according to the Law’ and ‘testified to by all the Jews’. There is not only no vision, but also no reference to Ananias’ commission to come to Paul. We are not told how he learned about Saul and how much time has passed since Paul’s vision on the Damascus road.

Paul’s healing is reported with a few words—without mentioning the laying on of hands—and then the event is interpreted as a sign of divine election. The conclusion is drawn: Saul should quickly get baptised and be cleansed from his sins. The episode is considerably different from the first version. It is more crisply and logically told, and it contains inside links which make up for the lack of description of outside circumstances. Thus Jesus’ words ‘you will be told’ are here actually fulfilled by Ananias. Also the promise ‘you will be my witness’ points further toward Saul’s temple vision. This version of the Ananias episode provides a real joint between the visions on the Damascus road and in the temple.

What is still intriguing in this episode is the careful circumvention of all Christian vocabulary. Ananias is introduced as a pious Jew, talking about the will of the God of the fathers and about the vision of the Righteous One. Identifications like ‘Jesus the Messiah’ or ‘Jesus the Son of God’ are avoided in the whole story. While the ‘Righteous One’ is also a messianic name, applied to Jesus by Peter and Stephen earlier in the book50, it also allows a wide range of associations with biblical heroes or with Yahweh51. The call of Saul is depicted here as something to be interpreted in the context of Jewish piety, and deeply rooted in Israel’s tradition.

The third episode is mentioned only in this version. The vision in the temple further links Saul’s career to traditional Jewish topoi. He is not only shown himself as a pious Jew praying in the temple, but his vision also evokes the call of Isaiah. Already ‘the glory of that light’ in verse 11 echoes ‘the glory of Yahweh’ in Old Testament epipha-

51. Cf. for example Genesis 7.1, Job 32.2, Psalms 7.12, 2 Maccabees 12.6.
nies, alluded also in Isaiah’s temple vision. As the reference to Isaiah shows, the frequent Jewish topoi in this version are hardly to be understood as apologetic arguments before a Jewish audience. Paul is not presented simply as a pious Jew, but rather as a prophet called by Yahweh. This is an offensive rather than a defensive manoeuvre. Imitating Isaiah with an apologetic purpose would surely miss the point. From Josephus we know that there was no shortage of prophets in Israel in the first century AD: ‘Impostors and demagogues, under the guise of divine inspiration, provoked revolutionary actions and impelled the masses to act like madmen’. Indeed, Claudius Lysias has just concluded that Paul was not the Egyptian false prophet—was Paul intending to prove the opposite? Especially in that narrative context, it is hard to believe that Paul wants to establish his ethos before his fellow Jews as a prophet. The real importance of the use of Jewish vocabulary is to reinterpret the Saul-story of chapter 9 against a specific cultural and literary background—for the implied reader rather than for the assumed Jerusalem audience.

The episode itself is briefly told and clearly structured, similarly to the previous one. The only difficulty is produced by Saul’s words:

Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him.

Relying on the standard framework of a commission story, exegetes understand Saul’s answer functioning as a protest against the divine

52. (Exodus 16.7, 24.16, etc.), cf. Isaiah 6.3.
54. As Veltmann, ‘Defense Speeches’, 256, concludes, Paul never makes a claim of innocence in the introductions of the Lucan apologies (as most of the heroes do in the Greco-Roman parallels).
55. Josephus, Jewish War 2.259; cf. Horsley and Hanson, Bandits, 160–89; Boring, ‘Early Christian Prophecy’.
56. Alternatively, one may argue that Paul identifies himself as an oracular prophet in his speech. For oracular prophecy in the first century AD, see Boring, Sayings, 22–52; Horsley and Hanson, Bandits, 172–87. Paul, however, does not tell the future (as Agabus does in Acts 11.28 and 21.10–14); rather he appears as a charismatic leader.
The words are similar to Ananias’ objection in Acts 9.13–14, additionally relating also Saul’s role at Stephen’s death. Jesus’ answer to Paul, as well, is an abbreviated form of his answer to Ananias in Acts 9, beginning with exactly the same words: ‘Go, because I…’. Paul’s words, however, simply cannot be understood as a protest against what Jesus first tells him. They are rather arguments confirming Jesus’ claim that Paul was not accepted in Jerusalem: ‘Of course not’, Saul answers, ‘because I was well known as a persecutor of the Church’. The point he makes here is identical with the argument of the synagogue members of Damascus (9.21), who claimed that Saul’s ethos completely undermines his message. Moreover, the solution is similar: ‘hurry and quickly leave the city’.

It is characteristic of this narrative that we do not learn of any contact with the disciples in Damascus and Jerusalem. In the second version of Paul’s commission we find nothing from the institutional framework of the first story: the disciples, Barnabas, the apostles, helpers and rescuers, ‘walking in and out’, the peaceful growth of the church are all forgotten altogether. The use of Jesus’ name is avoided again. As I have suggested earlier, in Acts 22 Saul’s commissioning and legitimisation come directly from the God of Israel. Whereas mediation by helper figures was foremost in the previous version, in this narrative the immediate communication with the sender receives the major emphasis. This narrative mainly represents the ‘prophetic’ model of commission. The integration of the hero into the institutional framework of a community gives way here to the election of the individual as a messenger responsible for his deeds only to the sender. This is expressed by the final word of the story: ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the nations’ (22.21). This echoes Jeremiah’s commission: ‘I appointed you a prophet to the nations’ and ‘Today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms’.

A prophetic role assumes the hero’s ambivalent status in a community. On the one hand, he remains a member of his social group; on

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58. So Hubbard ‘Commissioning Stories’, 120; Mullins, ‘Commission Forms’, 606; Storm, Paulusberufung, 64.
59. See especially verse 14, ‘the God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will’.
60. Jeremiah 1.5 and 10.
the other hand, he becomes responsible to his sender rather than to his group. It is precisely Paul’s loyalty to Jewish culture and society that is emphasised throughout this narrative. Nevertheless, the rhetorical framework of the text shows him standing alone before the crowd, and arguing that he has to act as God ordered him to do. The conflict is best characterised by the dialogue in the temple: Paul (preaching about Jesus) is not accepted in Jerusalem, and therefore he is sent to the ‘nations’. This motif is typical of Acts, together with the fact that Paul tells the story precisely to his own people by whom he is rejected in the narrative, and from whom he has turned away already several times in the book. This ambivalent position in one’s social group is the most characteristic of the prophetic commission.

Acts 26

Paul tells his commission in Acts for the second time before king Agrippa⁶¹. For this occasion, Luke makes the political elite of Caesarea gather in the royal audience hall: Agrippa and his wife Berenice (‘with great pomp’, πολλῆς φαντασίας), the proconsul Festus, the military leaders, and the nobility⁶². The narrative suggests that Paul is handled as a captive of strategic importance for the Empire⁶³. If for the first time he told his story to the mob, now he retells it before an exclusive audience.

(2) ‘I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defence today against all the accusations of the Jews,

(3) because you are especially familiar with all the customs and contro-

⁶¹. Identifiable as Herod Agrippa II; cf. Fitzmyer, Acts, 748–9. Not indicating the language of the speech, the author lets us assume Paul told this defense in Greek.

⁶². Acts 25.23. Who were exactly the άνδρες κατ’ ἐξοχήν? The expression κατ’ ἐξοχήν is attested in the meaning ‘par excellence’ (Liddell and Scott, Lexicon, 599). Probably we do not have to think of a specific social group here: Luke wants to assure the reader that there was ‘everyone who counted in the city’.

⁶³. Pervo, Profit with Delight, 32ff, comes to the same conclusion in connection with Saul’s transport to Caesarea (Acts 23.23–35): ‘It required 470 men and two days to rescue Paul from the hands of his co-religionists. […] While enjoying the excitement, the reader is assured, not for the first or the last time, that Paul is a VIP’.
All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee.

And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death.

By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities. With this in mind, I was travelling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. 

When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads”. I asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The Lord answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me”.

After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would
proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles’. (24) While he was making this defence, Festus exclaimed, ‘You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!’ (25) But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. (26) Indeed the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am certain that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. (27) King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe’. (28) Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?’ (29) Paul replied, ‘Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am—except for these chains’. (NRSV)

Paul’s speech before Agrippa is the best elaborated of his apologies. He begins with an exordium, containing an appeal to the judge (verses 2–3) and an introduction to establish his ethos before the audience (4–5). Similar to the apologies before the Sanhedrin and before Felix, Paul states that he is on trial because of his hope in the resurrection of the dead (verses 6–7). His main argument seems to be that resurrection was promised by God to the fathers and is hoped for by every pious Jew. The point for judgment is whether ‘God raises the dead’ (verse 8). His proof consists of two main parts. In the first part (verses 9–21) he retells the conversion story, in the second part (22–27) he refers to scriptural evidence, and finally he concludes by an exhortation (28–29).

Does this mean that we have to read the third narrative of the conversion story as an argument for resurrection? In that case the encounter with the risen Lord should prove that there is in fact resurrection from the dead. This, however, does not seem to be a major concern in the story. If we look at the broader context, we will recog-

64. Cf. 23.6 and 24.21.
65. We cannot speak of scriptural citation as proof in this case, cf. note 44 above.
66. This analysis certainly applies the rules with freedom (cf. note 32 above), extending the speech to the subsequent dialogue. For different dispositions, see Neyrey, ‘Forensic Defense, 221’; Witherington, Acts, 737. The perplexing issue is again that the bulk of the speech consists of a narratio. This is a classical problem also in the analysis of Galatians 1.11–2.14, cf. Kennedy, Rhetorical Criticism, 144–9.
nise that the theme of ‘resurrection’ became involved in Paul’s defence speeches only in an indirect way: Before the Sanhedrin, mentioning it was a trick inspired by the situation to stir dissension between Pharisees and Sadducees. Later before Felix, Paul recalls this episode as the only occasion when he had caused disturbance. In neither case is ‘resurrection’ the actual focus of the defence. This also suggests that the *quaestio* of the speech before Agrippa should not be taken literally. Beyond some formal references to ‘Moses and the prophets’, we do not find real arguments supporting this point. Nevertheless, the story does make claims about Satan and conversion, which are missing from the other two versions. Although resurrection is not especially argued for here, the third version—rather than the previous two ones—betrays a definite interest in theological argumentation.

The presentation of Saul as a persecutor is elaborated into an episode of its own. A series of new motifs are invented. We are informed about Paul’s voting for the execution of Jesus’ followers, and his authorisation by the ‘high-priests’—in plural, as Ananias and the Damascus disciples formulated it in *Acts* 9. Whether ‘voting’ means a formal participation in jurisdiction or not, the importance of Paul and his official status in these actions is clearly emphasised here. He himself punished the Jesus-followers. His role as an ‘inquisitor’ is suggested in that he forced the disciples to ‘blaspheme’—most probably against Jesus. Altogether, he was ‘furious beyond measure’. The rhetorical function of this catalogue is to embellish the topic ‘Saul the persecutor’ as much as possible in order the make the ‘conversion’ all the more impressive.

This is a typical technique applied by Greco-Roman conversion stories: When describing the outrageous youth of Polemon, Diogenes Laertius adds that ‘he actually carried about with him money to procure the immediate gratification of his desires, and would even keep sums concealed in lanes and alleys. Even in the Academy a piece of three obols was found close to a pillar where he had buried it for the

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69. This can be understood in the context of *prosopopoeiae*: Luke wants to show that Paul was a theologian of resurrection—an issue that Paul himself argued with much vehemence in *1 Corinthians* 15.
same purpose." In the previous section of this chapter we have discussed the conversion of Gaius Flaccus, where Livy applies similar topoi. Let us also quote the story of Thespesius by Plutarch:

[He] spent his early life in great dissipation, and then, soon running through his estates, had for some time practised a further villainy brought on by his straitened circumstances. Reversing his attitude toward wealth, he now courted it [...] Abstaining, then, from no shameful act conducive to gratification or gain, he accumulated no very considerable fortune, but in a brief space a prodigious reputation for villainy.

In these stories the detailed and even passionate description of the hero’s moral corruption prepares the way for the climax of the narrative that brings about a radical change in the hero’s behaviour. We find the same tendency in Paul’s narrative, although he is concerned about his attitudes toward Jesus and his followers rather than his moral character. Consequently, the motif of conversion is stressed in Acts more than in the other two accounts.

The narration of the epiphany contains a number of new details. Though it happened at noon, the light was ‘brighter than the sun’, it shone around Paul as well as his companions, and all of them fell on the ground. It is for the first time stated that Paul actually saw the light. As also the substitution of ‘shine’ for ‘flash’ and the complete omission of blindness suggest, the motif of defeat or punishment is almost completely eliminated, while the moment of revelation is confirmed. The theatrical details prepare the way for the commissioning.

That the heavenly voice spoke ‘in the Hebrew dialect’ serves double purposes. First, it underlines the authenticity of the revelation. It also prepares the use of the name ‘Saul’, supposing that Paul’s audience did not know his Jewish name. In this way the clause stresses the distance between the Greek-speaking Hellenist Paul and the Aramaic-speaking Jew Saul.

The famous ‘kick against the goads’ is probably a direct quotation from Euripides, and it fulfils the rhetorical topos of ‘citation of

authority’. It is in sharp contrast to the claim of Jesus speaking ‘in Hebrew’, and shows that Paul the Hellenist prevails here above Saul the Jew.

According to the rules of commission stories, we read reassurance of the divine protection. Then the task of Paul is more closely specified:

To whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that

72. For classical expositions of the problem, see Windisch, ‘Christusepiphanie’ and Vögeli, ‘Lukas und Euripides’. The key passage is Euripides, Bacchanals 795, θόσουμ’ ἄν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον ἢ θυμοῦμενος / πρὸς κέντρα λαχτίζομι θνητὸς ὄν θεόν. (‘Better slay victims unto him than kick / Against the pricks, man raging against God’. Trans A.S. Way in LCL. Cf. Euripides, frag. 604, πρὸς κέντρα μὴ λάχτιξε τοῖς κρατοῦσι σοι.) W. Nestle, Windisch and Vögeli pointed out further coincidences between Euripides and Luke, and claimed that the latter used the parallels consciously in an attempt to picture Paul as one ‘fighting against god’ (θεομάχος). Smend, ‘Untersuchungen’ 36–7, gives other occurrences of ‘kick against the goads’ suggesting it was a proverb, but maintaining Luke’s direct dependence on Euripides (41).

Johnson, Acts, 435 and Witherington, Acts, 745, mention three additional references. The phrase is quoted as a proverb by Julian the Apostate, ἐπὶ τῇ ἐξόδῳ 5.5 (Oration 8.246B): δὲ φησιν ἡ παροιμία, πρὸς κέντρα λαχτίζειν. His witness from the fourth century AD is hardly a decisive argument on Luke’s usage. God uses κέντρον to force humans also in Psalms of Solomon 16.4 and Philo, On the Decalogue 87 (varia lectio). For the ‘god-fighters’ (θεομάχοι) of Greek literature, see pp. 124f below.

73. Acts 26.17, ἡξαρούμενος ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν. In Acts the middle voice of ἡξαρώνω is used consistently in the sense of ‘deliver’ or ‘rescue’ (e.g. from Egypt), similarly to the Septuagint: Acts 7.10,34, 12.11, 23.27; cf. Exodus 3.8 and Psalms 36.40 (37.40 LXX). This is consistent with the classical usage of ἡξαρώμενοι ἐκ, cf. Liddell and Scott, Lexicon, 581 and Supplement 120. The alternative translation (followed by few, e.g. the Dutch Leidse Vertaling) is ‘choosing you’. In this meaning (‘choose for oneself from the booty’) the verb usually appears with a genitive (Liddell and Scott, ibidem), but the addition of ἐκ is not surprising since the classical genitivus separationis is normally completed by ἐκτός or ἐκ in the New Testament (Blass – Debrunner – Rehkopf, Grammatik, 145, §180). However, Paul’s election ‘from the nations’ is very difficult to interpret in the context of Acts.
they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me⁷⁴.

Although a few expressions in this passage occurred already in the earlier versions (‘send out to the Gentiles’ and ‘forgiveness of sins’), here we find a completely new topic introduced: the conversion from darkness to light and from the power of the Satan to the power of God as well as the promise of the share among the holy. The conflict between the powers of God and Satan is an important theme in Luke-Acts⁷⁵, and it is occasionally combined with ‘light and darkness’, as in the expression ‘power of darkness’⁷⁶. Luke also uses the phrases ‘turn to God’⁷⁷ and ‘fruits worthy of repentance’⁷⁸ elsewhere in the context of conversion, and ‘share’ occurs in a comparable meaning⁷⁹. In the Miletus speech Paul uses both ‘repentance to God’ and ‘inheritance among all who are sanctified’⁸⁰. But the combination of all these elements into a theology of conversion, especially the application of the dualistic symbolism of light and darkness (reminding one of the vocabulary of the Gospel of John), is particular to this passage in the Lucan books⁸¹.

This version of the story of ‘Paul before Damascus’ stands very close to the philosophical examples presented in the previous two chapters⁸². The ideal Cynic described by Epictetus, the commission of

⁷⁶. Luke 22.53. In other passages, such as Luke 1.77–9, 2.30–3, Acts 13.47, darkness and light symbolise salvation (under the influence of Isaiah 42.6–7) rather than conversion.
⁷⁹. Acts 8.21, οὐχ ἑστίν σοι μερίς οὐδὲ κλῆρος ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ (You have no part or share in this). Cf. Acts 1.17, 7.5. For the idea of ‘lots’ in antiquity, see pp. 219–224 below.
⁸⁰. Acts 20.21,32.
⁸¹. Cf. Poimandres 28; Joseph and Aseneth 8.10, 15.12; 1 Peter 2.9; 2 Clement 1; Norden, Agnostos theos, 6–7.
⁸². Malherbe, Paul, 154–63, identifies important philosophical themes in Acts 26. Like moral philosophers, Paul claims divine guidance, does not confine his activity to a corner (retiring from the public, of which Christians as well as Stoics
Socrates and Dio Chrysostom, and especially the claim that Pythagoras, Epicurus and others received their doctrines from divine revelation. Though Paul claims that these ideas are derived from Moses and the prophets (cf. vv. 22–23), from the narrative one concludes rather that these doctrines were revealed to him on the Damascus road. He emphasises his obedience to the ‘heavenly vision’, and gives a picture of his early activity of wandering preacher demanding ‘conversion to God’ and ‘deeds appropriate to conversion’. There is no talk about Ananias, Barnabas, baptism, disciples, or ‘the Way’, but also no mention of ‘Son of God’, ‘Jesus the Messiah’, or prayers in the temple. What we have here is the message of Lystra and Athens. Paul urges people (much in the style of Epictetus) to convert to God, and warns them (much in the style of the Stoics) to revise their morals.

Paul is, indeed, emancipated here from any institutional framework as a wandering philosopher who exclusively obeys his ‘daimonion’—to speak with Plato’s Socrates. Let us add one more passage from the *Apology*:

Well, supposing, as I said, that you should offer to acquit me on these terms, I should reply, Gentlemen, I am your very grateful and devoted servant, but I owe a greater obedience to God than to you (πείσομαι δὲ

were), speaks fearlessly before rulers, and offers himself as an example (*Acts* 26, vv. 16–7, 22, 26, and 29; Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.29.36, 55–7). Like Paul (v. 24), the Cynics were often regarded mad because of their ascetic life or unconventional behaviour.

83. These were argued in 9.20 and 9.22, respectively, but they are missing also from chapter 22. In 26.23, however, Paul quotes scriptural arguments (see p. 72 above) about the Messiah.


86. Note that Socrates’ ‘daimonion’ tells him rather what not to do: ὃτι μοι θείον τι καὶ δαιμόνιον γένεται: [...] ἐμοὶ δὲ τούτ’ ἐστὶν ἐκ παιδᾶς ἀρξάμενον φωνῆ τις γεγομένη, ἢ ὅταν γένηται αὐτὶ ἀποτρέπει με τούτο δ ἐν μέλλω πράττειν, προστρέπει δὲ οὔπωτε (…that I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience […], a sort of voice which comes to me, and when it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on). *Apology* 31c–d, trans. H. Tredennick in Hamilton and Cairns (eds), *Plato*.

87. Plato, *Apology* 29d.
μᾶλλον τῷ θεῷ ἡ ὑμῖν), and so long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practicing philosophy and exhorting you and elucidating truth for everyone that I meet. I shall go on saying, in my usual way, ‘My very good friend, you are an Athenian and belong to a city which is the greatest and most famous in the world for its wisdom and strength. Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honor, and give no attention to thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?’

When we apply the category ‘philosophical’ to the third narrative of Paul’s commission experience, we have to be aware that in philosophy itself there are various types of commission narratives, and they are told in different situations with different purposes. These might fall rather far from the philosophical ideal of Socrates and Epictetus. Favorinus, for example, the disciple of Dio Chrysostom, told a kind of ‘commission story’ before the emperor—quite in the manner as Paul before Agrippa—as an excuse for his opportunism in the question of whether he should take the service of high-priest:

O Emperor, he said, I had a dream of which you ought to be informed: My teacher Dio appeared to me, and with respect to this suit admonished and reminded me that we come into the world not for ourselves alone, but also for the country of our birth. Therefore, O Emperor, I obey my teacher, and I undertake this public service.

The application of the ‘commission story’ means ‘I obey you but only because I obey the revelation’. The social rhetoric of this story—if we want to apply to it our own typology—is institutional rather than philosophical. Other philosophers’ commission stories can be called ‘prophetic’: Socrates obeys the god, quarrels with his people, and is put to death by them. In sum, philosophy itself has its different types of commission—but this falls beyond the scope of our study. Our category of ‘philosophical’ commission, as in the other two cases, basically designates a narrative structure and a sociological model, where the hero is commissioned directly by the sender, without any reference to an institutional framework, owes loyalty only to the sender, and acts much on his own, obeying his ‘daimonion’.

88. The story of Favorinus (c. AD 80–c. 150), as recorded by Philostratus, Lives of the Sophists 490, trans. W.C. Wright in LCL.
Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I have suggested that commission narratives can be interpreted with the help of the three categories of ‘institutional’, ‘prophetic’ and ‘philosophical’. This typology proved helpful in interpreting the threefold narrative of Paul’s commission in the Lucan Acts. We found that the orientation of the first version is institutional. In this story Paul is integrated into different groups and institutions of the community ‘of the Way’. This is understandable also in the broader narrative context, where also Matthias, Barnabas and the seven Hellenists are appointed and supervised by the ‘twelve’. In the second version, Paul addresses his fellow Jews in Jerusalem: the major issue here is his relation to his co-religionists. In this case, his commission defines his call against his religious background. Again, the problem which here culminates is present already in the larger narrative framework. Earlier in chapter 15, Luke arranged for an apostolic conference whose subject was the relation of Paul’s teaching to Jewish tradition. Although he let the conflict be formally settled there, it becomes acute again from chapter 21, where Paul is attacked by James and his conservative party. In order to conciliate them, Paul performs purification rituals in the temple and takes four men with him, whose costs he pays himself\(^9\). This leads to the confrontation with the mob in the temple, which provides the immediate context of the second narration of the commission story.

Luke achieved the different characterisations of Paul’s commission in Acts 22 and 26 partly by relying on different traditions of Jewish Scripture. When portraying the young Saul in Acts 7–8 and his commission story in chapter 9, he drew on the narrative about the appointment of King Saul in 1 Samuel 9–11\(^9\). There we find a typically institutional concept of divine commission. Namely, the one that Jewish tradition inherited from Egypt\(^9\). The narrative of Paul’s trial, in turn, makes use of the biography of Jeremiah\(^9\). The blueprint that Luke used this time is characteristically a prophetic narrative in terms

\(^9\) Acts 21.23f, 27f.
\(^9\) See Chapter 1, 34ff.
\(^9\) See p. 32, note 25.
of our typology, and Paul’s story as well as Jeremiah’s one presents the conflict of the prophet with his people. In this section, Luke inserted the second account of Paul’s commission. Paul’s vision in the temple alludes to the temple vision of Isaiah and emphasises Paul’s rejection in Jerusalem. This whole narrative section thus focuses on the conflict between the prophet and his community. In the final part of Acts, Paul finds himself, again, in conflict with James and his conservative party in Jerusalem. Paul’s primary conflict is thus with his fellow-Christians, from which the conflict with the visitors of the temple arises.

The third narrative addresses the problem from a radically new perspective. Paul is elevated, so to speak, above the frameworks of institutions and religious tradition. Nothing else than the heavenly revelation is left from the commission story. The message entrusted to him is neither Christian nor Jewish: Luke picks up here the philosophical line of the Athenian scene where Paul debated with Epicureans and Stoics. The reactions of the proconsul Festus and King Agrippa are probably to be understood as sarcastic as was the reaction of the Athenians. Thus, on the one hand, Luke seems to admit that Paul is not a really convincing philosopher. On the other hand, he lets Paul make extensive and adventurous journeys across the Mediterranean, and attests his ability to address different audiences all over the re-

93. See Chapter 1, p. 40f.
95. Acts 21.22f and 27f. In order to conciliate James’s party, Paul takes four men with him to the temple and pays the costs of their purity rituals.
96. Acts 26.24 (μείνῃ Παῦλε· τὰ πολλὰ σε γράμματα εἰς μανίαν περιτρέπει) and 26.28 (ἐν ὀλίγῳ με πείθεις χριστιανὸν ποιήσῃ), cf. 17.18 (τί ἐν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν) and 17.32 (ἀκουσόμεθά σου περὶ τοῦτον και πάλιν). Especially Agrippa’s answer in 26.28 and the interpretation of ἐν ὀλίγῳ gave much headache to the exegetes. Malherbe, Paul, 161–3, quotes contemporary opinions about instant conversion: ‘accounts of such conversions, or the claim that one had undergone a sudden change, expectedly met with ironic, if not sarcastic responses. Such responses are the more intelligible when it is recognised that the conversion accounts had a protreptic purpose, especially when they drew attention to the speaker or another convert as an example to follow’. Agrippa recognised such a purpose in Paul’s account, and he rejected the impetuous response.
gion. He certainly needs a model other than that of the disciple or the prophet, and the figure of the wandering philosopher is at his hand.

In sum, the narrative of the Lucan Acts makes use of all the three types commission, picturing Paul alternately as a disciple, prophet and philosopher.

Appendix: the Acts of Paul

The Acts of Paul in its extant form does not contain the commission of Paul. There is, however, a text that was preserved in Coptic (like a great part of this Acts) and relates Paul’s commission:

My brothers, listen to what happened to me while I was at Damascus during the time when I used to persecute the faith in God. When His mercy—which proceeds from the Father—came to me, it was his Son whom he announced (ἐγγέλλημα τοῦ Χριστοῦ) to me so that I might live in Him, for there is no life outside of the life in Christ. So it was that I entered into a great assembly (ἐκκλησία), helped by blessed Judas, the Lord’s brother, the one who from the beginning had given to me the high love of the faith. At that time I lived my life as a believer in grace, aided by this blessed prophet and by the revelation of Christ, begotten before all time. Since He was proclaimed, I rejoiced in the Lord, nourished by His words. As a result, when I was able to be judged worthy of the ministry of the word, encouraged (προσεπείδω) by Judas, I spoke to the brothers, and I did it in such a way that I was loved by those who heard me. But when evening came, I left the agape which Lemma, the widow, with her daughter Ammia, were giving. I walked, therefore, at night, desiring to go to Jericho of Palms.

The basic motifs of the narrative agree with the accounts of Acts as well as of Galatians 1: Paul was a persecutor of the Church, but he became a Christian in (or near) Damascus. The report of his stay in

97. This seems to be consistent with Paul’s own claim in 1 Corinthians 9.20.
99. Rordorf, ‘Paul’s Conversion’, 143, suggests that the author knew Galatians, but did not know Acts (contra Pervo and Bauckham).
Damascus is more coherent than in *Acts* 9. Paul does not ‘immediately’ preach, but rather follows the catechesis of Judas and speaks only when prompted by the latter. He is perfectly integrated into the community: when he speaks to the brothers they ‘love him’ and two women accompany him when he leaves. Judas from Straight Street (*Acts* 9.11) is identified as the Lord’s brother, probably Judas Thomas ‘the twin’, from the authority of Thomasine texts of Early Christianity\(^\text{100}\). His role as a helper is quite different from that of Ananias and Barnabas: Judas does not baptise Paul, nor escorts him to higher authorities. Judas himself represents authority in the story, and he accepts Paul without hesitation from the first moment.

While describing Paul’s relation to the Church as smooth as possible, the text nevertheless maintains that Paul’s gospel of Jesus (the Son) was revealed to him directly by the Father. The latter claim is also implied by the accounts of *Acts* (especially in ch. 26, see above), and corresponds to Paul’s claim in *Galatians* 1.15–6\(^\text{101}\). However, in his early period as a believer, Paul is lead by two authorities: the ‘blessed prophet’ (most probably Judas) and the revelation of Christ. We probably can understand this in such a way that Paul’s revelation becomes interpreted with the help of an official prophet of the Church. In that sentence, Paul’s ‘mentor’ is mentioned in the first place, having a higher authority than his private revelation. In other words, Paul’s gospel has to be adjusted to tradition, and his claim on independent authority is limited by the existing institutional order\(^\text{102}\).

\(^{100}\) Rordorf, ‘Paul’s Conversion’, 142.

\(^{101}\) Similarly Rordorf, ‘Paul’s Conversion’, 139.

\(^{102}\) Brock, ‘Acts of Paul’, 120–4, interprets the text of the papyrus in the context of the *Acts of Paul*, and suggests that Paul’s commission by the Father, his subsequent trip to the desert, and his activity in the *Acts of Paul* imitate the gospel narratives. Although this is an interesting perspective, we have to notice that Paul’s authority here is not as unquestionable as Jesus’ in the Gospels, and is less independent than in the rest of the *Acts of Paul*. A detailed exegesis of the text will be possible when the Coptic text is published.