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Paul *as Pastor* In Acts

By Kenneth L. Cukrowski

Fascination with popular works like Thomas Moore's *The Care of the Soul* and M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled* shows the interest in the care of the soul by our contemporary culture. However, long before works like Moore's and Peck's, individuals discussed and practiced the care of the soul, or psychagogy. Psychagogy can include "what we mean by spiritual exercises, psychotherapy, and psychological and pastoral counseling."¹ Indeed, one can compare the relationship between the psychagogue and his pupil to "the modern parallel . . . of the church-minister with members of a congregation."² These traditions stretch back to before the time of Socrates and can be seen in Greco-Roman writers roughly contemporaneous with Luke, authors like Seneca, Plutarch, and Epictetus.

What, if anything, does psychagogy have to do with Paul's pastoral work in Acts? For one thing, Luke, who demonstrates a knowledge of Greco-Roman literary types (e.g., prologues, speeches, sea voyages), not surprisingly also shows a familiarity with standard psychagogical themes and often describes Paul's work with that language. Thus, while we will not be interested in detailing all the background material, it is useful to know that Luke often draws from this tradition and that his readers would recognize much of Paul's activity as fitting within this psychagogic tradition.

Paul's Pastoral Activity

Readers of Acts will be familiar with interpreters who focus on the conversions in Acts or analyze Paul's actions to derive insights for modern missionary activity.³ How-

ever, while we will attend to Paul's preaching, we will also examine the more neglected activity that comes *after* the churches have been established. We begin with Paul (then, still Saul) and Barnabas' commission by the church at Antioch (13:1-4). After preaching in Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, Paul begins a return trip that passes back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (14:21). Here, in a tightly compressed narrative of two verses, we have a distillation of Paul's pastoral work with the disciples in those cities:

[They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,] strengthening (*episterizo*) the souls of the disciples, exhorting (*parakaleo*) them to continue (*emmeno*) in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed. (14:22-23)

Luke tells us that Paul 1) strengthens souls, 2) exhorts, 3) warns about future trials, and 4) provides structure by appointing leaders. This pastoral activity is easy to overlook because of the condensed nature of the account. In general, Luke's descriptions of Paul's pastoral work are typically concise. That is, Luke does not record speeches of Paul strengthening a Publius in his grief or exhorting a Secunda in her marriage to a pagan. Thus, it may be easy to think that Luke is not interested in what happens after the disciple is made. Quite the contrary!

Paul's Return Trips

Luke shows his interest in Paul's commitment to his converts by detailing Paul's return visits to communities, by describing Paul's activity during those visits, and by noting the duration of Paul's stays. Luke does, in fact, report on the spread of the Gospel through Paul's effort. But Luke also comments on a number of trips that Paul makes to communities that he has already established. Notice how Paul's second missionary journey begins. Paul says to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are" (15:36). Luke then reports that Paul "went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening (*episterizo*) the churches" (15:41). After passing through Derbe, Lystra, and other cities, Luke records: So the churches were strengthened (*stereo*) in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily" (16:5). Again, in a compressed account, Luke tells us about a return trip through Galatia and Phrygia: "After spending some time there (i.e., Antioch in Syria) he departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening (*episterizo*) all the disciples" (18:23).⁴ In 19:1–40, Paul passes back through Ephesus (see 18:19–21).⁵ Carl Holladay aptly summarizes Paul's pastoral activity:

Luke has especially stressed pastoral aspects of Paul's ministry: perfecting quasi-Christians through additional teaching (19:1–7; also 18:24–28); preaching (19:8–10); his ministry of healing, competing with other miracle workers, and the complete elimination of pagan, magical practices from the church (19:11–20); developing further mission plans (19:21–22); and fully engaging the social, economic, and political life of the city and region (19:23–41).⁶

To this list, one should add that after the uproar in the theater in Ephesus, Paul "sent for the disciples and, having exhorted (*parakaleo*) them, took leave of them" (20:1). True to plans (19:21), Paul then departs for Macedonia (20:1). Although Luke does not specify where in Macedonia he visits, the reader does not stray too far to imagine Paul returning through Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. In any case, after passing through Macedonia and giving "much encouragement" (*parakaleo*), he "came to Greece" (20:2), which the reader is probably correct in assuming means return trips through Corinth and perhaps Athens.⁷

Paul's Strengthening and Encouraging

Although proclamation is not absent in these return visits (e.g., 19:8–11) and although the pastoral activities can be quite diverse (note Holladay's description of Paul's pastoral activity at Ephesus), the actions that most characterize Paul's activity in his return trips are strengthening (*episterizo*) and encouraging (*parakaleo*). In fact, three of the four times that *episterizo* is used in the New Testament, it describes Paul's activity in his return trips.⁸ "Encouraging" is the word that characterizes Paul's work as he leaves the churches in Philippi (16:40) and Ephesus (20:1). In fact, encouragement epitomizes Paul's activity as he passes back through Macedonia (20:2). Interestingly, three of the times that encouragement is mentioned, it is connected with "abiding" or "remaining" (i.e., 11:23 "remain faithful"; 13:43 "continue in the grace of God"; 14:22 "continue in the faith"). Although Paul's pastoral activity is not limited to strengthening and exhorting, notice that Luke uses these two actions to characterize Paul's work.

Paul's Extended Stays

In the New Testament world, the time that wandering charlatans spent in any one city was usually brief. Pass the hat and get out of town was the *modus operandi*. Dio Chrysostom describes the "hurried exit" of false philosophers (*Oration* 32.11). In contrast, Luke emphasizes the length of Paul's stays. Granted, a number of times his stay is cut short; one reads of plots on his life (9:23–25, 29; 20:3), persecution (13:50; 17:10, 13–14), an attempted stoning (14:4–5), and an actual stoning (14:19). Nevertheless, Luke repeatedly stresses the time that Paul stays. For instance, he remains "many days" in Damascus (9:23), "a year and six months" in Corinth (18:11), and "two years" in the Hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus (19:10).⁹ More significantly, Luke records Paul's reflections on his ministry in Ephesus (20:17–38), a city where Paul spent "three years" (20:31).

Paul's Speech at Miletus

Thus far we have dug to unearth details of Paul's pastoral activity, primarily focusing on Paul's work after conversion. The Miletus speech, however, provides a wealth of information about Paul as minister in his capacities as an evangelist and as a nurturer of churches. One could discuss the hardships that Paul endures (20:19), the public and private nature of his ministry (20:20), the content of

his preaching (20:21), his admonition to the leaders at Ephesus (20:28–31), his attention to the individual (20:31), his example (20:35), or the role of prayer (20:36). Instead, we will focus briefly on Paul's boldness (20:20, 27).

Bold Speech in Acts

Even a casual reader is struck by the number of times that Luke stresses the boldness of those who preach. Luke notes the boldness of Peter and John (4:13), the church (4:29, 31), and Apollos (18:26). But more than anyone else, Paul is described as speaking boldly.¹⁰ Luke notes Paul's bold speech in Damascus (9:27), in Jerusalem (9:28), in Antioch of Pisidia (13:46), in Iconium (14:3), in Ephesus (19:8), and before King Agrippa (26:26). Luke's final words describe Paul's bold preaching and teaching in Rome (28:31). Not surprisingly, when Luke summarizes Paul's activity in Ephesus, Luke mentions Paul's boldness (20:20, 27).¹¹ Paul's boldness does not consist in railing at or insulting his hearers, as some practiced bold speech in New Testament times. Rather, Paul teaches and preaches boldly (20:20–21), declaring those things which profit (20:20) his hearers. Because he has spoken in this manner, he is “innocent of the blood of all” of them (20:26). That is, Paul has been candid in telling them what they need to hear; their response to this message is now the issue.

Conclusion

After looking at these pastoral aspects of Paul's ministry, what can one take away? Certainly Luke is interested in the spread of the Gospel. However, one sees that much more is involved in Paul's activity with churches than mere conversions; return visits in which strengthening and encouraging take place play a prominent role. Churches would profit by investing as much fervor into strengthening, encouraging, and retaining existing Christians as is put into conversion. Also, the number of times that Paul returns to churches should alert us to the need to attend to follow-up with individuals. In a similar vein, the stress that Luke places on the length of Paul's stays challenges the mobility and short tenures of many who would tend to the needs of congregations. On a personal note, I was struck with this when speaking with a former preacher of the congregation that I attended. He had had the longest tenure of any of the many preachers in the congregation's forty-year history. Those members whom he had taught and worked with were among the most faithful and productive mem-

bers over twenty years later! Finally, the boldness with which Paul speaks functions not only as a critique against those whose “frankness” destroys rather than profits their hearers, but also as a call for those in pulpits to speak out on topics that confront the hearer with the demands of the Gospel.

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¹A. J. Malherbe, “New Testament, Traditions and Theology of Care,” in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 787. Portions of this article are drawn from my dissertation, “Pagan Polemic and Lukan Apologetic: The Function of Acts: 20:17–38” (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1994).

²Benjamin L. Hijmans, *ASKESIS: Notes on Epictetus' Educational System* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959), 92. For more on the psychagogic tradition, see A.J. Malherbe, “Pastoral Care in the Thessalonian Church,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 375–91 (see footnotes for guidance to other works in English). Additionally, a number of excellent sources are written in French.

³For a brief description and critique of attempts to use Paul's activity in Acts as a model for mission work, see J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), pp. 235–39. Deeper methodological reflection on the use of Paul's example is needed, however, in Stott and most discussions.

⁴For the initial trip through Galatia and Phrygia, see 16:6.

⁵For the initial visit to Ephesus, see 18:19–21.

⁶Carl L. Holladay, “Acts,” *Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 1107.

⁷Luke also has Paul pass back through Troas (20:6–12), but Paul's activity there on his first visit is not described (16:8–11). In addition, Paul passes through other places (e.g., Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea in 21:3–14), where he may or may not have done previous work (note Paul's destinations and general activity in 9:30; 11:26, 30; 12:25; 26:20).

⁸See Acts 14:22; 15:41; 18:23. The only other use in the NT describes Judas and Silas' strengthening of the church in Antioch (15:32).

⁹See also “a whole year” at Antioch (11:26), “a long time” in Iconium (14:3), “no little time” in Antioch (14:28), “some time” in Antioch (15:33; James and Silas), the delayed departure in Philippi (16:39–40), “many days longer” in Corinth (18:18), “some time” in Antioch (18:23), “three months” in the synagogue in Ephesus (19:8), “a while” in Asia (19:22), and “three months” in Greece (20:3).

¹⁰Note also Paul and Barnabas' bold speech in 13:46 and 14:3.

¹¹Although the expression for boldness in 20:20, 27 is different from that used in other examples, it is an equivalent expression.