

**‘What if a Spirit or an Angel has Spoken?’ Narrative Modelling of the
Treatment of Dreams and Visions in The Acts of the Apostles**

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SHORT ABSTRACT

‘What if a Spirit or an Angel has Spoken?’ Narrative Modelling of the Treatment of Dreams and Visions in the Acts of the Apostles

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The reports of dreams and visions in the Book of Acts are widely accepted to portray moments of divine-human communication that demonstrate God’s continuing involvement in the life of His church. However, within the narrative there are inconsistencies between repeated reports of visionary experience (e.g. Acts 9, 22, 26), cases of prophecy being ignored (e.g. Acts 21:10-14), mixed responses to dream-visions (e.g. Acts 2, 10, 11, 15, 22), and nuances that suggest more is going on in the text than what would be required simply to show God’s hand at work.

This thesis will analyse the dream-vision reports within the Acts of the Apostles, assessing the extent to which they reflect wider first century attitudes towards dreaming, and their function within the narrative itself. It will be argued that at both of these levels of enquiry, the reports of dreams and visions demonstrate an awareness of the challenges that these phenomena pose for individuals and communities. This is reflected not only in the struggle to appropriately interpret dreams and visions, but also in the recognition of the potential risks posed by these phenomena. Indeed, it will be suggested that the inherent ambiguity and uncertainty that surrounds dreams and visions is something that is heightened rather than diminished within the upside-down world of the Acts of the Apostles. It will be argued that one finds a movement from the idealised representation of dreams and visions in the account of the first Christian Pentecost, to its more complex practical outworking. Through engagement with this story the reader/hearer is offered a means of understanding how dreams and vision might be treated, *mutatis mutandis*, within the context of their own community.

LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis will consider the presentation of dreams and visions within the Acts of the Apostles. It will be argued that alongside their positive portrayal and significance within the narrative, the reports of these phenomena can also be interpreted to illustrate an awareness of their ambiguity, and their potential misinterpretation and misuse. As the narrative progresses, the idealised view of dreams and visions as clear and persuasive divine communication that is found within the account of the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2) is tempered by a recognition of the accompanying need for the more rigorous discernment of such claims within a community context.

Scholarly treatments of this material to date have emphasised the function of the dream and vision reports in Acts as means of demonstrating divine involvement in the unfolding Christian mission that is recounted within the narrative. Not only do these encounters enable divine-human communication, they also function to foretell the future and guide decision-making. Indeed, some scholars have felt that this feature is a little too obvious in parts of the narrative, resulting in an unnecessarily heavy-handed presentation of this material. One of the most well known proponents of this view is Ernst Haenchen who offers the oft-quoted comment on Acts 10-11 that: ‘Here stands revealed a point of Lucan theology which can scarcely be claimed as a point in its favour: in endeavouring to make the hand of God visible in the history of the Church, Luke virtually excludes all human decision’.¹ This, argues Haenchen, reduces faith to little more than ‘the twitching of human puppets’.²

¹ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tr. from the 14th German edn. (1965) by Bernard Noble et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 362.

² Haenchen, *Acts*, 362.

A handful of later studies of the Acts of the Apostles have provided much-needed nuance to this view.³ They have reinforced the function of the dream and vision reports as a sign of God's hand at work, while also emphasising the continuing importance of human decision-making, and human interpretation of these phenomena. John B.F. Miller in particular is to be commended for his contribution. He recognises the need for human interpretations of visionary experience, and identifies moments within the Lukan narrative where the challenge of this task is documented.⁴ In this way he moves away from the suggestion that these phenomena function *only* to show God's hand at work, and the reduction of the need for human decision-making that accompanies such a view. However, Miller does not adequately deal with the flip side of this interpretative process that includes the potential for *misinterpretation* of both the meaning and legitimacy of dreams and visions.⁵ Indeed, within current scholarship on dreams and visions within the Acts of the Apostles there is strikingly little engagement with this question, or with the possible answers that the Acts narrative might provide. Where the interpretative challenges posed by dreams and visions are recognised, there is a tendency for this to be incorporated within a portrayal of a 'pious struggle' to interpret these moments of divine-human communication, a process that is held within the safety net of the assumption that *all* such experiences constitute divine communication.⁶

This is particularly surprising given the extent to which such features have been

³ These include John J. Pilch's social-scientific study, *Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004); David Allen Handy's doctoral dissertation, 'The Gentile Pentecost: A Literary Study of the Story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18)', Doctoral thesis, Union Theological Seminary, May 1998.; and John B.F. Miller's book: *Convinced that God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007).

⁴ Miller, *Convinced*, 19-20.

⁵ In fact, in his treatment of Paul's vision at Troas, Miller explicitly dismisses any consideration of these implications as 'unhelpful' (*Convinced*, 107).

⁶ In addition to Miller's work, this dynamic has been thus depicted by David Allen Handy, 'The Gentile Pentecost', and Michael James Day, 'The Function of Post-Pentecost Dream/Vision Reports in Acts', Doctoral thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994.

recognised elsewhere in early Christian literature. This perceived absence within the text of Acts has been explicitly acknowledged and lamented by J.D.G. Dunn, who finds the presentation of dreams, visions, and related phenomena in the Acts narrative wanting. Drawing an explicit comparison with the treatment of 'religious experience' in the Pauline Epistles, he criticises what he describes as the author's failure 'to take up the problem of an authority rooted in visionary experiences [...] in particular the problem that an authority based only on visions can be grossly abused'.⁷ Dunn suggests that Luke is uncritical in his presentation of dreams and visions in Acts, and that he fails to recognise the associated complexities, a state of affairs that leaves Dunn palpably frustrated by the author's apparent naïveté and the representation of these phenomena that this entails.⁸ In spite of the time and space Dunn devotes to this issue, however, this particular aspect of his argument remains not only unchallenged, but also essentially ignored by subsequent treatments of the Acts material.

This thesis aims to provide a corrective, both to the lack of engagement with this issue in existing scholarship, and to Dunn's interpretation of the function of these phenomena within the Acts narrative. Exegesis of the dreams and visions within Acts will offer an interpretation that allows not only for their positive perception and significant influence as evidence of God's hand at work, but also for the recognition of the difficulties they pose, and the potential threat they represent for both the individuals and communities depicted within the narrative. It will be argued that within the flow of the narrative, more profound and discerning attitudes towards dreams and visions emerge. As such, the interest of the present study lies primarily in the Acts narrative itself rather than in questions over

⁷ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975; repr. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 179.

⁸ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 195-6.

the historicity (or otherwise) of the reports. The thesis will use insights from narrative criticism as part of an attempt to understand the function of dreams and visions within the ‘narrative world’ of the Acts of the Apostles. This is understood to refer not only to the internal dynamics of the narrated story, but also to the space wherein this story is being told, which includes a recognition of wider attitudes towards dreaming within the cultural milieu of the text.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part I will begin with the Thesis Introduction, which will explore some of the challenges associated with the study of ‘experience’. The terminology of ‘religious experience’ will be assessed, and it will be suggested that attempts to offer precise definition of this category can be counter productive, unwittingly obscuring one of the core features of treatments of dreams, visions, and related phenomena within the primary texts, namely the ambiguity over what constitutes a legitimate claim to such experience. This section of the thesis will also briefly outline the method and aim of the current enquiry.

Following this, the first chapter will outline the contours of existing research into dreams, visions, and related phenomena within the text of Acts. It will be suggested that there is scope for a more nuanced portrayal of dreaming in Acts that takes seriously the complexities of some of the dream and vision reports. The work of J.D.G. Dunn will be subjected to more extensive analysis and critique at this point.

The second chapter will explore dreams and visions in the wider cultural context from which the Acts of the Apostles emerged. This will entail consideration of some of the other extant texts from the first century, with a focus upon the terminology, classification and function of dreams and visions within this literature. This is by no means intended to be an exhaustive study, but rather to demonstrate the range of attitudes towards these

phenomena, and their function within narrative texts, both of which will shape the subsequent analysis of the Acts of the Apostles.

Part II of the thesis comprises exegetical treatment of the dream-vision reports within Acts. These will be assessed with regard to their narrative function in shaping aspects of plot and characterisation, but also their function at the level of cultural context, in other words, the extent to which these accounts reflect the broader range of views outlined in the previous chapter. The third chapter will deal with the Pentecost story of Acts 2, a section of the narrative where the place of visionary experience as persuasive divine communication is easily observable. The references to dreams, visions, and related phenomena within this section form one of the most positive portrayals of dreams and visions within the story. However, it will be argued that this idealised presentation of these phenomena should not be attributed to an uncritical view that fails to countenance the potential for their misinterpretation or misuse. Rather, the idealised impression occurs as a result of a robust presentation that underscores the reliability and authenticity of what is being reported. The programmatic use of the quotation from Joel primes the reader to expect further occurrences of these signs of the last days as the narrative continues to unfold. However, these coming signs deviate from the idealised picture presented initially, encouraging engagement with the complexities of a practical outworking of the promise that is made regarding all flesh.

This is a promise that comes to fruition in the move to incorporate Gentiles into the community of believers, undoubtedly one of the key concerns of the narrative. The fourth chapter will deal with what is arguably the most significant moment within this process: the pouring out of the Spirit upon the first Gentile believers in Acts 10:1-11:18. This series of events is heavily dependent upon dream and vision reports, and is later justified by

claims to these same encounters. However, the impetus for this move comes from an unexpected source: the vision that both initiates this process and provides the key to its interpretation is located outside the community in the visionary experience of a pious Gentile. Thus, the hand of God is certainly at work, but perhaps not in the way that the community of believers would have anticipated. Just as with the account of the first Christian Pentecost, the reliability and authenticity of the dream and vision reports is underlined by several features within the narrative. In spite of this persuasive presentation, however, Acts 11:1-18 deals with the shock and questioning that such radical development provokes. Not only does Peter's struggle to interpret his own visionary experience in the light of Cornelius' request become apparent, there is also an explicit challenge to his interpretation. The analysis of these reports highlights an interpretative shift from an allegorical to a more literal understanding of the visionary experiences, offering further hints of the polyvalency and inherent ambiguity of such phenomena.

While the influence of Cornelius' dream or vision may be surprising given his initial status as an outsider to the community of believers, the report of Paul's visionary experience on the Damascus road represents an even more startling account of divine activity, given Paul's status as an active opponent to and persecutor of the believers. The Acts narrative describes the transformation Paul undergoes as a result of this dream or vision, and his subsequent move from a hostile outsider to a key member of the Christian community. The fifth chapter will deal with these three reports of Paul's experience in Acts 9:1-19, 22:6-16 and 26:12-18, and consider the function of the repetition of this report. It will be suggested that the subtle differences between the three accounts add nuance to the portrayal of dreams and visions, and that they also indicate the gradual inclusion of Paul as a member of the Christian community, further problematising any assumption of the

immediate persuasiveness of these phenomena. Indeed, in Paul's story within the Acts narrative we find an apparent dismissal of the significance of such claims by both believers and non-believers.⁹

The final chapter of the thesis will deal with other dream and vision reports within Acts that support the assertion that their inherent potential risk can be detected within the narrative. Examples of this include Peter's vision in prison and the subsequent confusion between angelophany and reality at Mary's house in Acts 12, the mixed reception of Agabus' prophecy regarding Paul's fate in Acts 21:8-15, the account of the Macedonian mission in chapters 16 and 17 and the unusual form of Paul's dream-vision at Troas, which, given the anti-climactic nature of the ensuing mission, raises questions about the interpretation or misinterpretation of Paul's experience within Luke's story. Finally, this chapter will deal with the ambiguous encounter with the slave-girl in Acts in this same section of the narrative, wherein it is unclear whether she represents a prophetic figure or a magical threat to Paul and his companions. The information provided in each of these accounts cautions against too ready an agreement with the idea that dreams and visions function only to demonstrate God's involvement with the early Christian mission.

Dunn is correct in his observation that within this material there are no explicit prohibitions or instructions regarding the appropriate discernment of dreams, visions and related phenomena, of the type noted in some other early Christian texts. There is very little that is black and white or clear-cut in the reports of the Acts of the Apostles, a factor that leads Miller to describe them as reports which 'resist simple categorisation', and

⁹ This is particularly apparent after Paul's arrival in Jerusalem in chapter 22, where his attempt to recount the tale of his conversion to the Jewish 'mob' (22:35) causes uproar and rioting, and any show of support from the Christians in Jerusalem is conspicuous by its absence.

others to say much the same thing in less polite terms.¹⁰ However, this thesis will argue that the shades of grey that typify the Acts accounts should not be interpreted as the naïve absence of any awareness of the challenges posed by dreams and visions, but rather as a subtle means of expounding the ambiguities, risks and rewards of engagement with these phenomena. Indeed, it will be suggested that the contours of this story are able to hold these aspects together far more comfortably, and far more fully, than the prohibitions and rules of engagement found elsewhere in early Christian literature.

¹⁰ Miller, *Convinced*, 4. See also Richard I. Pervo, *Profit With Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 74.

PART I

Thesis Introduction

The question cited in the title of this thesis is extracted from a scene of violent dissension within the Acts of the Apostles. It occurs as Paul stands before the Jewish council following his controversial appearance in Jerusalem and subsequent arrest by the Roman tribune. The process does not begin well as Paul ‘accidentally’ insults the high priest, causing shock among the members of the council (23:3-4).¹¹ However, Paul manages to divert attention from this *faux pas* by raising the contentious issue of the resurrection of the dead, appealing for the Pharisees to take his side against the Sadducees (23:6). Some of the Scribes respond to this appeal, proclaiming Paul’s innocence, and posing the provocative question, ‘what if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?’ (23:9). At this question, the dissension turns violent and the tribune orders Paul to be removed over fears for his safety (23:10).

Paul’s ruse works; he successfully deflects attention from himself to the rift between the two groups. However, in spite of his claim that he is on trial over ‘the hope of the resurrection of the dead’ (23:6), this statement at best represents only part of the story. In fact, it is visionary experience that lies at the heart of this scene. Visionary experience is not only the reason for Paul’s appearance before the council on account of the violent reaction to his double claim to such experience - the account of his Damascus road

¹¹ Some scholars have mooted the possibility that Paul genuinely did not recognise the high priest. David Daube suggests that Paul was in fear of his life at this point, (‘On Acts 23: Sadducees and Angels’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 109 [1990], 493-497 at 493), which would make a sarcastic comment seem out of place; E. Jacquier goes further, suggesting that Paul’s poor eyesight, or the confusion of the scene may have caused him to mistake the identity of the high priest (*Les Actes des Apôtres* [Paris: J. Gabalda, 1926], 659), one of the arguments which Ernst Haenchen dismisses as ‘desperate efforts’ (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tr. from the 14th German edn. (1965) by Bernard Noble et al., [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971], 640). The suggestion that Paul’s claim not to recognise the figure is a sarcastic reflection of the latter’s immoral behaviour is one of the more persuasive. For more on this, see F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 212.

experience, followed by the report of his ecstatic trance while praying in the temple (22:6-16; 17-21) - it also forms the basis of the question posed by the Scribes in 23:9. Indeed, the Lukan Paul's ruse has proven so effective that much scholarly attention has also been diverted by the rhetorical strategies of the speech towards the issue of Pharisaic and Sadducean beliefs in the resurrection, and in angel(s) and spirit(s).¹² This is certainly an engaging question, particularly given the scarcity of information from other sources concerning the latter part of the narrator's statement in 23:8, and the challenge of how it may fit with the former part.¹³ Yet there is a danger that, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, scholars can become so absorbed in this debate that the claims to *experience* which lie at the heart of this scene are largely overlooked.

In spite of the fact that Acts 23:9b poses a question that appears inseparable from these phenomena, visionary experience has barely been acknowledged in scholarly treatments of this verse. Its clearly provocative intent is deemed to highlight the success of Paul's rhetorical strategy and any additional commentary is rare. It is undeniable that the question posed in Acts 23:9b has a rhetorical purpose that is first and foremost connected to the rift between the Pharisees and Sadducees. However, no consideration has been given

¹² Although the word ἀμφότερα may more literally be translated 'both', there are other instances where it is used in reference to more than two components, including Acts 19:16, wherein it refers to seven people. In part, the translation depends on the overall interpretation of the verse, discussed below.

¹³ If the verse is taken at face value it appears to suggest a blanket Sadducean denial of the existence of spirits or angels. However, several alternative interpretations have been offered. There is not the scope to consider any of these in detail, so they are simply listed below: (1) the Sadducees did not reject the existence of angels and spirits per se, but objected to the cult of angels (F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (3rd edn., Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 466); (2) the rejection of the belief that a righteous person spends the time between death and resurrection as a spirit or angel (Daube, 'On Acts 23', 493); (3) rejection of the belief that humans would be resurrected as an angel or spirit (Benedict T. Viviano and Justin Taylor, 'Sadducees, Angels and Resurrection (Acts 23:8-9)', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111 [1992], 496-498); and (4) rejection of a specific angel and a specific spirit, namely the Holy Spirit and the Angel of the Lord and their eschatological role within Pharisaic belief (Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, 'Le couple de l'Ange et de l'Esprit; traditions juives et chrétiennes', *Revue Biblique*, 88 [1981], 42-61 at 60). For discussion of these alternatives see Floyd Parker, 'The Terms "Angel" and "Spirit" in Acts 23,8', *Biblica*, 84.3 (2003), 344-365.

to *why* the subject of visionary experience proves to be such an effective tool within this debate and what this might indicate about perceptions of these phenomena.

Part of the answer to this question undoubtedly relates to the significance that claims to visionary experience were generally afforded in the Graeco-Roman world, something that has been reflected in the treatment of these reports within the Acts of the Apostles. However, the account of Paul's appearance before the Jewish council illustrates that this cannot in itself provide a full explanation for the function of visionary experience reports within the narrative. Paul stands before the Jewish council in Acts 23:1-10 precisely because the report of his double visionary experience was met with such a violently negative reaction from the crowds in Jerusalem, a response echoed by the Sadducees following the Scribal question in Acts 23:9b. The high value placed upon such experience does not account for this backlash against Paul in Jerusalem, nor can it fully explain the violent outburst described in Acts 23:10.

Put simply, claims to visionary experience are not unequivocally persuasive, nor is their significance universally felt. This rather basic observation has been noticeably absent from many studies of these phenomena in the Acts of the Apostles. All too often the recognition of the significance of visionary experience has led to the assumption that these reports may be given a singular interpretation as wholly persuasive, incontestable evidence of God's hand at work.¹⁴ The story of Paul's appearance before the Jerusalem council reveals a more complex backdrop to the perception of these phenomena. While the high value placed on visionary experiences *per se* is not disputed, questions ought to be raised

¹⁴ This tendency will be demonstrated in the review of existing scholarship on the Acts of the Apostles within Chapter One.

about both the authenticity and interpretation of individual claims to experience such as those of Paul.

The violence that erupts as a result of the Scribal question marks the lack of agreement with the possibility it hints at: that Paul may have been spoken to by an angel or spirit.¹⁵ While it is possible that this is far removed from Sadducean beliefs, it is also worth noting the likely divergence between what is suggested by the Scribal question and Paul's interpretation of events on the Damascus road, as represented in Acts. The possibility of an authentic visionary experience may have been accepted, but this is unlikely to extend to the attribution of the heavenly voice to Jesus. Thus, the Scribal comment and its surrounding text offers a fleeting insight into the dissenting voices and multivalent interpretations that accompany Paul's claim and the wider issues it represents.

It could be suggested that such analysis over-inflates the importance of what is essentially a throw away remark aimed to provoke the Sadducees. However, regardless of how seriously one takes the Scribal question – whether it is akin to Gamaliel's warning to the Pharisees not to fight against God at the earlier meeting of the Jewish Council (Acts 5:27-40), or whether it holds little purpose other than as a rhetorical flourish – it raises questions about the status and function of visionary experience within the narrative world of the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁶ Within chapter 23:1-10 the validity and implications of claims to visionary experience are treated as an open question rather than as a foregone

¹⁵ Bruce Malina and John J. Pilch make the alternative suggestion that Acts 23:9 refers to the immediate context of the council. They argue that Paul slips into an altered state of consciousness and receives inspiration from Jesus in choosing his words (see Luke 21:14-15). Certainly, their suggestion that 'look intently' (*ἀτενίσας*) (23:1) signals an altered state of consciousness does find some support elsewhere in Acts (*Social Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008], 158). However, it seems highly unlikely that anyone would assume such inspiration based on Paul's performance thus far within the council, and it is difficult to see why his mention of the resurrection of the dead – a widely accepted idea among Scribes and Pharisees – should require the inspiration of a spirit or angel.

¹⁶ This is strengthened by the textual variant found in the Western text, which adds 'let us not contend with God'. (See B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London: United Bible Society, 1971], 487; E. Delebecque, 'Paul entre les Juifs et Romains selon les deux Versions de Act. Xxiii', *Revue Thomiste*, 84 [1984], 83-91 at 84).

conclusion. There is evidence not only of the importance of these phenomena for directing decision-making and marking boundaries, but also the challenges they pose as individuals and communities attempt to interpret and respond to them. This passage provides a glimpse of some of the more complex strands that contribute towards the presentation and perception of visionary experience, including the extent to which the outworking of this category within the narrative is one that is often controversial, stirring up challenge, correction, suspicion, and even violence.

This thesis will focus upon this often overlooked dimension, examining the function and effect of the visionary experience reports upon the characters and communities portrayed within the Acts narrative. The major instances of visionary experience will be analysed using insights from literary and historical-critical approaches. Particular attention will be paid to the decision-making processes surrounding these claims to visionary experience: the questions that are raised concerning their authenticity, the hermeneutical challenges they pose, and the implications of their acceptance upon the shape of the Christian communities portrayed within this narrative world. It will be argued that, contrary to the assumptions of existing scholarship, more critical assessments of visionary experience can be detected within the narrative. In addition to the well-recognised significance of these phenomena, this thesis will advance the idea that the Acts story also illustrates an awareness of the potential for misuse and misinterpretation of such claims.

The remainder of this introductory chapter will be divided into three sections. The first will address the rather fundamental task of identifying the specific subject for investigation within this thesis. This is not as straightforward as may initially be assumed, especially in the light of existing scholarly discussion and dissent regarding the boundaries

of particular ‘types’ of experience and the limits of specific definitions. Key aspects of this discussion within the last century of scholarship will be outlined, and an explanation will be provided concerning the scope and use of these categories within the current study. The second section of the Introduction will introduce the method that has been employed, with a particular focus upon the combined usage of literary-critical and historical approaches that this research has entailed. The third section will offer a more detailed account of the aim of this thesis and an explanation of the structure and focus of each of the subsequent chapters.

The Search for a Category: Parameters of the Current Enquiry

As indicated above, the conundrum posed by the Scribe in Acts 23:9b, ‘what if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?’, raises fascinating questions about the plausibility and perceived significance of such an occurrence, in both first and twenty-first century contexts. However, it is difficult to get far in addressing these lines of enquiry without first attending to the fundamental matter of the *nature* of such an occurrence: how ought a speaking angel or spirit to be understood? If this is, as described thus far, a ‘visionary experience’, what features mark it out as such? What are the criteria of this category, and where do its limits lie? How, if at all, is visionary experience different from the things that are seen using ‘ordinary’ human sight, or the images seen in the mind’s eye during a dream? Do the words of a spirit or an angel even need to involve ‘vision’ at all?

At the heart of this thesis lies a recognition of the importance of certain experiences such as dreams, visions and auditions in shaping the beliefs and behaviours of the earliest Christians. A survey of existing scholarship, particularly in the fields of biblical studies and

sociology, reveals lengthy gaps during which the role of such experiences goes almost entirely without mention. This can in part be attributed to the alternative concerns of individual scholars, such as an emphasis on the intellectual pursuit of doctrinal debate and theology more generally over against visions and dreams, which have often been deemed less worthy of attention, but the inherent challenges of the field can also be off-putting. While one might readily recognise the *theoretical* significance of such claims to experience, the challenge of delineating and accessing such experiences is rather more complex. As a result, forays into this field must be undertaken with caution. The difficulty of this task is oft-lamented and existing studies are peppered with words of warning, thus one can hardly begin an investigation within this field without an acute awareness of the inherent problems that it poses. The following paragraphs will outline some of the major difficulties attached to both the terminology and the category of experience. This discussion will conclude with an indication of the way in which both of these elements will be treated within the current project.

The significance of the experiential dimension has been acknowledged as a potentially useful avenue of research, albeit one that it can be problematic to subject to academic enquiry. Michael Oakeshott, writing on the philosophy of history, offers the cautionary note that, “[e]xperience”, of all the words in the philosophic vocabulary, . . . [is] the most difficult to manage; and it must be the ambition of every writer reckless enough to use the word to escape the ambiguities it contains.’¹⁷ Of course, ‘experience’ is not only ambiguous, it is also an incredibly broad category that encompasses a diverse range of sensations and occurrences. Attempts to divide the category into more easily

¹⁷ *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), xxi.

navigable sub-groups, each with their own associated ambiguities and complexities, have therefore been inevitable.

A range of terms have been proposed in the attempt to classify experiences such as that of the talking spirit/angel of Acts 23:9b – some rather more derogatory than others – but the modern backdrop for the study of such phenomena within the Christian tradition most naturally begins with the category of ‘religious experience’. ‘Religion’ is itself by no means a straightforward label, and it is therefore unsurprising that the coupling of these two unwieldy terms is accompanied by its own set of difficulties.¹⁸

‘Religious Experience’: More Trouble Than It's Worth?

The idea that religion is fundamentally experiential is pervasive, but the concept of a particular form of religious experience is a more recent phenomenon. Its roots can be traced to eighteenth and nineteenth century German idealism, and the work of figures such as Friedrich W.J. Schelling and Friedrich Schleiermacher, who identified and grappled with the notion of experience as a central element in the understanding of religion. This idea was subsequently taken up by History of Religions scholars such as Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem and Henry Corbin. During the same period, these connections

¹⁸ The difficulty of defining ‘religion’ can easily be demonstrated by reference to the forty-eight definitions offered in the appendix of James H. Leuba, *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its Origin, Function, and Future* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912): 339-363. For further discussion of the term ‘religion’ see J.Z. Smith, ‘Religion, Religions, Religious’, in Mark C. Taylor (ed), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-84; Melford E. Spiro, ‘Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation’, in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 85-126. For more on the challenges of the term ‘religious experience’ see John Bowker’s discussion of empiricism and theology in *The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978; repr. 2000), 212-243. One might also note the work of Wayne Proudfoot, who has strongly opposed any notion of religious experience as a primary phenomenon (*Religious Experience* [Berkeley, California; London, UK: University of California Press, 1985], 41-74; 155-236).

were also being explored in the work of William James, who approached religious experience through the lens of the emerging discipline of psychology.

The history of research in this field has already been outlined in some detail in a number of recent publications.¹⁹ While one or two have traced these developments over a period of several centuries, most have given particular attention to materials dating from the early twentieth century and onwards.²⁰ Although the importance of experience in shaping religion was undoubtedly recognised well before this period, the special interest in early twentieth century research is not entirely arbitrary: it marks the beginning of a period in which there was a resurgence of interest in the study of these phenomena, sparked in part by the renewed focus on human experience within psychology, an interest that filtered into other fields.²¹

William James's famous work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which contains his Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion, delivered at the University of Edinburgh from 1901-2, has been heralded as a seminal development within religious studies.²² It was notable at the time of publication not only for this new application of the psychological approach, but for the subject matter itself, which had previously only rarely been taken seriously as an object of academic enquiry. The aim of the book was to demonstrate that

¹⁹ Several surveys have already been completed of what Frances Flannery refers to as the 'long, but discontinuous, history of the study of religious experience'. (Frances Flannery et al, 'Introduction: Religious Experience Past and Present', in Frances Flannery, Colleen Shantz, Rodney A. Werline (eds.) *Experientia, Volume 1: Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 1-10 at 2. In addition to Flannery's own work, it is worth noting the following studies of the history of the term: Colleen Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6-14; Mark Batluck, 'Religious Experience in New Testament Research', *Currents in Biblical Research*, 9 (2011), 339-363.

²⁰ One commendable example of a broader survey of material is the work of Ann Taves, in *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Religion from Wesley to James* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²¹ For one example of earlier recognition of the importance of experience, see the treatment of German idealism in Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 39, 49, 54, 56.

²² *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

religious experience is a fundamental element of religion and, moreover, that it is integral to a proper understanding of the human condition. This proposal represented a move away from the emphasis upon doctrine and ideas that characterised much of nineteenth century scholarship on religion. The material is divided into twenty lectures and each one addresses a different aspect of James's wider enquiry, beginning with a justification of the study and questions of definition, followed by the examination of several different elements of religious life including conversion, mystical experience and 'saintliness'. In each case, James focuses upon more extreme cases, believing that these offer the best material for academic study.²³ Numerous anecdotal accounts are interspersed throughout the lectures, a style which represents James's radical departure from more traditional approaches by placing accounts of personal feeling at the heart of his enquiry.

James does not offer a formal definition of the term as such, underlining instead the difficulty of delineating what constitutes religious experience with any great precision. He writes:

[T]he truth must at last be confronted that we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn. The pretension, under such conditions, to be rigorously 'scientific' or 'exact' in our terms would only stamp us as lacking in understanding of our task. Things are more or less divine, states of mind are more or less total, but the boundaries are always misty, and it is everywhere a question of amount and degree.²⁴

Even so, James does outline several characteristics of the religious life, and of the mystical state, which he regards as a fundamental feature of individual religious experiences.²⁵

Characteristics of the latter include a sense of ineffability, a noetic quality, the transiency of the state, and the passivity of the recipient.²⁶ These are not offered as a set of criteria that

²³ James, *Varieties*, 38.

²⁴ James, *Varieties*, 38.

²⁵ James, *Varieties*, 368.

²⁶ James, *Varieties*, 290-292.

must be checked off in order for the presence of a mystical state to be accepted, but are rather intended to provide some anchoring points for enquiries within this field.

James's work saw a number of developments in the following decades.

Trajectories within this research include the study of biological (and, later, neurobiological) approaches to religious experience, as well as sociological and anthropological studies within this field.²⁷ The latter has emphasised in particular the cultural context not only of the *interpretation* of religious experience, but of the experiences themselves.²⁸

Given the wide-ranging intentions and diffuse outcomes of such research, it is perhaps unsurprising that the renewal of interest in these phenomena has also filtered into biblical studies over the last century. There are a number of parallels between the progression of research within this area and the broader trends already alluded to, although it is interesting to note that the work of James himself had little initial impact upon biblical studies.²⁹ The starting point for modern interest in this field within biblical studies was arguably the work of Hermann Gunkel, whose research on the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament remains influential today, not only in connection to his study of Spirit activity, but also in his insistence upon the need to study Christian origins in the light of

²⁷ Key contributions include the following: Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (3rd edn., Breslau, Trewendt und Granier, 1919); Rodney Stark, 'A Taxonomy of Religious Experience', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 5.1 (1965), 97-116; Alister Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); Eugene G. D'Aquili, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience, Theology and Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

²⁸ For further discussion of this see: Steven T. Katz, 'The "Conservative" Character of Mystical Experience', in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3-60; Sallie King, 'Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 56 (1988), 257-279.

²⁹ One exception to this trend is the work of A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933).

Jewish thought.³⁰ Key themes from this work were subsequently taken up by H.B. Swete, P. Gardner, H.W. Robinson, and Albert Schweitzer.³¹ Certainly, there was a willingness to consider the experiential dimension, but at times this seemed to have a primarily apologetic function, motivated as it was by embarrassment over the apparent ‘ecstatic excess’ of the accounts of Christian origins.³²

Later works have shown less reticence in acknowledging the transformative significance and influence of this dimension, particularly in relation to the beginnings of Christianity.³³ However, this more favourable shift in attitudes towards the *category* has frequently been accompanied by a less favourable shift in attitude towards the use of the *term* ‘religious experience’. Aside from the already acknowledged difficulty of defining either ‘religion’ or ‘experience’, some have felt the legacy of its earlier usage to have damaged the term beyond repair. This legacy includes the idea that religious experience is ‘perfectly sui generis and irreducible to any other’,³⁴ a view which served (either intentionally or unintentionally) to privilege religious experience reports as in some sense

³⁰ *Die Wirkungen des heiligen Geistes: nach der populären Anschauung der apostolischen Zeit und der Lehre des Apostels Paulus: eine biblisch-theologische Studie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1899). John R. Levison offers a helpful review of Gunkel's research within his own study, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 109-117.

³¹ H.B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1909); Percy Gardner, *The Religious Experience of Saint Paul* (London: Williams & Norgate; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1911); H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit* (London: Nisbet, 1928); Albert Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1930).

³² This tendency is particularly notable in the work of Schweitzer (*Die Mystik*, 1930), which broadly attempted to rescue the category of mysticism, as well as in Adolf von Harnack's study of Christian origins, *The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries* (London: Williams & Norgate; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), §5, §14.

³³ James D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1970); James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975; repr. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997); Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003); Christopher Rowland, with Patricia Gibbons and Vicente Dobroruka, ‘Visionary Experience in Ancient Judaism and Christianity’, in A.D. DeConick (ed.), *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Early Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 41-56.

³⁴ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, tr. John W. Harvey, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 7.

self-authenticating, and therefore neither accessible nor explicable by means of critical analysis.³⁵ As Colleen Shantz notes, while ‘in reality, the term might be accurately applied to any experience connected with one’s religious life or to participation in any religiously construed occasion’, in practice ‘it has often been mired in philosophical debates about the possibility of direct knowledge of God’.³⁶ As a result, a complex situation arises, whereby, as Ann Taves writes, ‘After decades of critical discussion of the concept, we can neither simply invoke the idea of religious experience as if it were a self-evidently unique sort of experience nor leave experience out of any sensible account of religion’.³⁷

This complex history of scholarship has led, perhaps rightly, to renewed efforts to delineate the parameters of enquiry. As a result, it has become *de rigueur* for significant space to be given to the task of definition of key terms at the outset of almost every recent study. One indicative example from the field of biblical studies can be found in the work of Luke Timothy Johnson.

Johnson’s book, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity. A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies*,³⁸ is an attempt to address the perceived widespread neglect of research into religious experience within the New Testament, offering an assessment of three categories of experience (baptism, glossolalia, and ritual meals). Alongside this, he devotes a considerable amount of space to an explanation of the advantages and pitfalls of research in this field, and to an exposition of the principles of his phenomenological approach. Johnson’s work is a valuable assessment of the current state of the field, and the case studies represent a significant step in filling the research gap that

³⁵ For further discussion of this legacy see Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), especially pages 3-4.

³⁶ Shantz, *Ecstasy*, 7.

³⁷ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 8.

³⁸ (Minneapolis: Fortune Press, 1998)

he observes. However, Johnson himself acknowledges that his analysis is experimental, and as such it is hardly surprising that the need for further research remains, or that certain correctives to his work could usefully be proposed.

As is the case with many other diligent researchers, Luke Timothy Johnson begins his study of religious experience in the New Testament by offering a rationale for his own particular definition of religious experience. Influenced by the work of Joachim Wach, Johnson defines religious experience as, ‘a response to that which is perceived as ultimate, involving the whole person, characterised by a peculiar intensity, and issuing in action’.³⁹ Johnson takes considerable care in the construction of this definition, and proceeds to use it as a guide for his interpretation of three categories of experience within the New Testament: baptism, glossolalia, and ritual meals.

While such a definition appears perfectly reasonable, its practical application, particularly in relation to the analysis of ancient texts, highlights immediate difficulties with such an enterprise. Indeed, it is questionable what these fourfold criteria can actually add to research in this area. For instance, should Paul’s account of his vision in 2 Corinthians 12:1-5 be discounted because it may have occurred ‘out of the body’ and thus may not involve the ‘whole’ person? Should the Transfiguration reports (Luke 9:28-36; Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10) be discounted because no obvious action results from them directly (other than Peter’s erroneous desire to build the three tabernacles)? The answer is, presumably, ‘no’. The rigid application of definitions of religious experience would result in an unrepresentative picture of these phenomena within the New Testament. If the definition of religious experience is restricted to a prescriptive list, then the heuristic

³⁹ Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 60. See also Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, edited with an Introduction by Joseph M. Kittagawa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 27-58.

potential of the term is largely lost. The same can be said for restricting religious experience to particular terms (e.g. 'vision'; 'trance') or specific features (e.g. the presence of a bright light; a feeling of peace). Such an approach will cause many instances to be missed, and still others to be included when perhaps they should not be.

A definition such as that offered by Johnson is only able to function as a guide rather than as a strict category, since at times certain elements are not present, and at other times their presence or absence cannot be determined. As a result, the question is raised whether the specificity of such a definition has any real function.

The Search for an Alternative: 'Vague Categories' and 'Special Things'

In spite of such thoughtful attention, therefore, there has been little progress towards a consensus regarding either the appropriate nomenclature or the parameters of the category. Alternative terms have been employed by some, including the language of 'revelation', 'strangeness' or 'specialness', as well as the decision to focus upon related categories/sub-categories such as spirit possession, ecstasy, miracle and magic, prophecy, or dreams and visions. Many of these alternative terms or research areas have their own complex histories or ambiguous parameters that must be tackled, such as the culturally determined nature of

attributions of 'strangeness' (namely, that which one person/community finds strange, another may not),⁴⁰ and the conflicting usage of the language of revelation.⁴¹

In an attempt to move beyond these linguistic entanglements, Colleen Shantz has proposed the use of religious experience as a 'vague category', arguing that such a designation allows us to 'define precisely what can be most useful about categorisation'.⁴² According to this understanding, religious experience would function to identify a level of similarity that occurs across a broad field of comparison and amongst seemingly diverse activities.⁴³ Thus, Shantz writes:

A demonstration of that vagueness lies in the fact that demon possession, a vision of the heavenly realms, ecstatic singing, an encounter with a healer, hearing the shofar sounded while standing in a crowd of one's compatriots on Yom Kippur, and excommunication can all be counted as religious experience by this definition. (To that list we could add ritual tattooing, chewing peyote, and so on.) Obviously what they all share in common is less immediately salient than the characteristics that distinguish them one from another. And yet,

⁴⁰ Rick Strelan's use of the concept of strangeness in his monograph, *Strange Acts: Studies in the Cultural World of the Acts of the Apostles* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), will be treated in the following chapter.

⁴¹ This issue can be demonstrated aptly in relation to the term 'immediate revelation', used to refer to a direct encounter between a divine being and a human, such as, within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the reported experiences of Abraham, Moses or Daniel. The nature of individual encounters and whether or not they should truly be regarded as unmediated has been a matter of some debate. (Key features of such debates have been helpfully outlined by Hindy Najman in her article: 'Angels at Sinai: Exegesis, Theology and Interpretive Authority', *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7:3 [2000] 313-33. One relevant treatment of 'revelation' within a community context can be found in John Ashton, "'Mystery" in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Fourth Gospel', in Mary L. Coloe and Tom Thatcher [eds.] *John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate* [Atlanta: SBL, 2011], 53-68.) However, the waters are further muddied when one considers the most well-known use of this term by the Puritan, Anne Hutchinson, at her 1637 civil trial in Newtown, Massachusetts Bay. While arguably alluding to an experience in the line of these same figures - Abraham, Moses, and Daniel - Hutchinson's own claim to immediate revelation was, rather ironically, very much a mediated encounter, making use as it did of verbatim quotations from the Geneva Bible. (See Michael G. Ditmore, 'A Prophetess in Her Own Country: An Exegesis of Anne Hutchinson's "Immediate Revelation"', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57:2 [2000], 349-92, especially 354-55.) It would be very difficult to separate this term from these complexities of its usage, or to obtain a clear consensus regarding its intended meaning. No doubt it would be more difficult still to reach an agreement on whether a specific account, such as that of Moses on Sinai or of Hutchinson in Massachusetts, in fact constituted 'immediate revelation'.

⁴² Shantz, *Ecstasy*, 10. The potential harmfulness of attempts to define religious experience has also been acknowledged in Caroline Franks-Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 29.

⁴³ Shantz, *Ecstasy*, 11.

the quality that they all share is enormously important in the survival of our texts (and to religion more generally).⁴⁴

This approach has much to recommend it, not least the avoidance of overly restrictive definitions which can often end up obscuring rather more than they clarify. Shantz rightly asserts that, ‘too rigid a conceptual boundary would in fact eliminate some of the most interesting questions’.⁴⁵

However, as she herself recognises, religious experience ought also to be understood as an emergent category, or second order term. In constructing the above list of phenomena, Shantz employs Melford Spiro’s anthropological definition of the core of religion as ‘culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings’.⁴⁶ Such an understanding clearly belongs at the secondary level of academic enquiry rather than as part of the self-understanding or proclamation of any particular religious group. Similarly, one would be hard pressed to find a single community of practitioners who would accept all of the phenomena listed above as being of equal validity or significance.

When it comes to claims to religious experience or revelation, therefore, it is apparent that there are two layers to the debate over the meaning and categorisation of these encounters/reports: the etic attempts of scholars to understand what is being described and how it ought to be related to other similar phenomena, and the emic attempts of individuals and communities to determine the legitimacy, interpretation and categorisation of the very same claim/report. This is something that has been recognised by

⁴⁴ Colleen Shantz, ‘What Are We Looking for and How Would We Know if We Found it?’ Unpublished paper, SBL 2008 Annual Meeting, Boston, p.7.

⁴⁵ Colleen Shantz, ‘What Are We Looking for and How Would We Know if We Found it?’ Unpublished paper, SBL 2008 Annual Meeting, Boston, p.7.

⁴⁶ Melford E. Spiro, ‘Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation’, in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 85-126 at 96.

Taves, who modifies the term ‘religious experience’ to ‘experiences deemed religious’, and devotes her monograph, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, to an exploration of the meaning and the parameters of each of the three words in that title. Of central significance to Taves’s contribution is the recognition that ‘there is no way to specify an inherently contested phenomenon precisely’. Instead she argues that it is the character that people ascribe or the explanation that they attribute to a particular experience that ought to shape our understanding of its significance.⁴⁷ Thus, she proposes that:

[W]e situate what people variously refer to emically (on the ground) as ‘religious’, ‘spiritual’, ‘mystical’, ‘magical’, and so forth in the context of larger processes of meaning making and valuation, and specifically in relation to the process of singularization (Kopytoff 1986), by means of which people deem some things special and set them apart from others.⁴⁸

This is a helpful differentiation, and while the particular approach that Taves employs (attribution theory) will not be picked up in the current enquiry, the demand for clarity over the emic and etic dynamics of study in this field will certainly be upheld.

The Quest for an Emic Category

If, therefore, the vague category of ‘experiences deemed religious’ is one that is best limited to second order enquiries, what markers for discussion of these phenomena should one expect to find within the primary texts themselves? Some of the sub-categories mentioned in the above paragraphs – the language of dreams, visions, prophecies, signs, wonders and portents – are, of course, present within ancient texts. What is less obvious is

⁴⁷ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 10-11

⁴⁸ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 10. Taves’s reference to Kopytoff here relates to: Igor Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’ in, Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

the extent to which such phenomena are categorised or grouped within these same texts. Arguably, such groupings can be found. One such example might even be apparent in the book of Acts itself, with its programmatic quotation from the book of Joel within the account of the first Christian Pentecost. Prophecy, dreams, visions, portents, and the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh are grouped together in this list of the signs of ‘the last days’ (Acts 2:17-21).

Elsewhere, and rather more conventionally, various phenomena are drawn together under the heading of ‘divination’. There are multiple examples of this, including the comments of first century CE dream-interpreter Artemidorus, who offers a list of more and less respectable forms of this art:

For everything else that the Pythagoreans say, and the physiognomists and the prophets who interpret dice or cheese or sieves or forms or the palms of hands or dishes or the dead, all this must be regarded as false and without foundation. For that is the nature of their techniques, and they do not have even the slightest knowledge of divination. [...] The only things that are true are the utterances of those who sacrifice, those who interpret the flight of birds, astrologers, observers of bizarre phenomena, dream interpreters and soothsayers who examine livers. And I will treat mathematical horoscope-casters later.⁴⁹

Similar groupings are not uncommon within other ancient texts, and it has been argued that divination, or *mantike*, existed as a conceptual category in Greek thought as early as the fifth century BCE.⁵⁰ The relationship between different types of divination may not be immediately obvious to the modern reader, but there is evidence within these texts for some established sub-categories, such as the distinction drawn between natural and

⁴⁹ II, 69. This translation is taken from William V. Harris’s rendering of Roger Pack (ed.), *Artemidori Daldiani Onirocriticon Libri V* (Teubner: Lipsiae, 1963). See Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 216-217.

⁵⁰ Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 8. For detailed discussion of the terminology of different forms of divination in ancient Greek thought, see Matthew Dillon, *Omens and Oracles: Divination in Ancient Greece* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2017), 3-8.

artificial forms.⁵¹ This is not to say, however, that divination was a category with rigid or clear-cut boundaries. Indeed, as Peter Struck has asserted, anything too definitive would surely contravene one of the essential principles of divination: its mysteriousness.⁵²

While some of the practices that Artemidorus lists rely heavily on technical expertise over and above personal ‘experience’, they highlight an important element that is all too easily obscured in the (secondary) quest for a fixed definition of the category: special meaning is not to be found in a distinct ‘type’ of experience or practice, but in the careful interpretation of phenomena that, on occasion, are to be deemed significant. Comments from ancient writers such as Artemidorus suggest that careful interpretation is required to attribute the appropriate significance to often apparently mundane phenomena such as the flight paths of birds, or, to refer to his broader intentions, to determine whether a dream is meaningful or meaningless.⁵³ The simple experience of a dream does not reveal very much in and of itself. In other words, this brief glance at ancient groupings of phenomena such as dreams, prophecies and portents, raises the possibility that there may be a *necessary* mysteriousness and ambiguity attached to them.

The Location of Ambiguity within the Enquiry

⁵¹ Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* 4 vols. (Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1879-82) II, 11.

⁵² Peter Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). See especially the section ‘The Semantics of Oracles, Omens, and Dreams’, p.187ff. Sarah Iles Johnston helpfully summarises this point as follows: “One of the most interesting things about the sympathetic explanation for divination, as Peter Struck has discussed, is that its apologists had to enforce a semantic system that was founded on mystification. That is, if the links between a given occurrence and what it portends were as obvious as the link between a crowing rooster and the coming dawn, divination would cease to be a special art - anyone would be able to do it” (*Ancient Greek Divination*, 13-14).

⁵³ The question of how representative Artemidorus’ views actually are will be addressed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

It is easy to attribute some of the challenges described in earlier sections to the limitations of language in accounting for human experience. Certainly, attempts to offer clear and extensively detailed definitions of key terms can be viewed as attempts to minimise ambiguity or confusion. However, such endeavours assume that the location of this ambiguity is only at the secondary level of external, critical enquiry. While, the discussion above outlines ample potential for such lack of clarity within scholarship, this secondary level of enquiry is not the only locus of ambiguity within studies of these kinds of phenomena. In fact, rather than being an undesirable aspect of scholarly attempts to delineate the field, ambiguity, confusion and uncertainty are core aspects of these experiences at the primary or ‘first order’ level. This factor in and of itself is suggestive of a more fruitful way forwards for research into these phenomena.

It is vital to recognise that questions over the legitimacy of claims to such encounters, or in other words, the boundaries of this category, do not simply arise as an unfortunate side effect of the confessional concerns or other personal bias of individual researchers. On the contrary, such debate is a fundamental aspect of approaches to these phenomena within religious communities themselves. In other words, this is both an etic and an emic concern.⁵⁴

The inherently contested aspect of particular terms and categories is something that has been recognised elsewhere, most notably in relation to the miracle/magic debate,⁵⁵ but also in studies of ecstatic prophecy, and the associated language of reason and madness:

⁵⁴ Ann Taves observes the way in which it can be hard, ‘to distinguish between our aims as scholars and those of the people we are studying.’ (*Religious Experience Re-Considered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* [Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009], 10).

⁵⁵ A helpful overview of the history of scholarship in this area is offered by Andy M. Reimer in his book, *Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 3-14.

the rhetorical and locative dimensions of these terms has been noted.⁵⁶ However, in spite of the close connection between these areas and the categorisation of religious experiences, revelations and special things, this is something that has not been adequately recognised within existing scholarship, particularly within biblical studies, wherein the function and validity of these claims has often been deemed rather more clear-cut than such an interpretation of the ancient context would allow.

This thesis will suggest that, within the ancient world, claims to such experiences are frequently treated not according to how they fit with an overall concept of what such a thing *is*, but on whether the experience is accepted within a particular community.⁵⁷ As will be demonstrated within the remainder of Part I of the current project, while ‘authentic’ or ‘legitimate’ experiences of this sort are generally treated as significant within ancient texts, there are also references to experiences that look very similar, but which can be misinterpreted, or which can function to mislead or deceive recipients. The determination of the legitimacy of a particular experience cannot be established in advance, but must be reconsidered afresh with every report. The establishment of the parameters of this category is not therefore a preliminary task to be ‘solved’ and then ignored, but rather it is the

⁵⁶ In her very useful study of prophecy and ecstasy within the early church, Laura Salah Nasrallah makes the observation that: ‘In the texts that I studied, I discovered that the terminology of reason and madness had no clear set of referents and that there was no undisputed definition of the essence of reason to which these texts appealed or even which they tried to debate.’ (*An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003], 6) According to her findings, specific definitions have not proven especially significant for the rhetorical strategies of the ancient authors in question. In accordance with this observation, Nasrallah does not attempt to offer definitions of ‘ecstasy’, ‘reason’ or ‘madness’. Rather, she studies the rhetorical function of uses of these terms.

⁵⁷ One might note Paul’s treatment of tongues speech in 1 Corinthians 14 as an illustration of this. He tells the Corinthians the kind of experiences of glossolalia that should be accepted within their churches. For example, he says that the Corinthians will be able to control this experience enough to speak in turns within a meeting, and that every instance of tongues-speech will be followed by an interpretation (14:27-8). For more on this see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000); Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction Through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). In relation to the rather general terminology of ‘the ancient world’, this language has been adopted as a reflection of the broad common ground in references to phenomena such as these from the work of Homer through to the end of antiquity. This will be demonstrated in detail in Chapter Two.

central task for the recipients of such experiences, and the communities to which they belong. In this sense, this is a category that is not necessarily best delineated by clear boundaries, but rather by the question of legitimacy.

Summary

In summary, therefore, it is apparent that there are multiple difficulties associated with the task of studying phenomena such as dreams, visions, divination, magic, spirit possession and other special or strange things. Some of these difficulties arise from the terminology of religious experience and its problematic legacy, although a satisfactory alternative category has yet to be proposed. Indeed, scholarly attempts to narrow the parameters for enquiry on the basis of modern terminology or attempts at categorisation are likely to be unhelpful, since these frequently obscure core questions of validity, veracity, and appropriate interpretation.

What, then, might this mean for research into these phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles, and for the terminology employed within this current project? There are two main insights from this discussion that will be taken forward within this thesis: First is the recognition that the language of ‘experience’ is contested and ambiguous. Where this language is used in the ensuing discussion, it is employed non-technically and as a ‘vague’ concept rather than with any rigid meaning intended.

Second, and in contrast to this loose designation, far greater precision is required in the differentiation between the level at which debates about the veracity, validity and categorisation of experiences is taking place. While some ambiguity is inherent to the category and thus neither can nor should be avoided, confusion over the emic or etic is far

more problematic. In response to this, the remainder of this thesis will avoid the language of ‘religious experience’, which has the potential to blur these boundaries. Since most of the ensuing analysis - especially in Part II - focuses upon the primary text of Acts, the terminology employed in Acts will be used, with a particular focus upon the language of dreams and visions. While this narrower focus is essential in order for the project to have a realistic scope, these phenomena will be studied in the context of the broader groupings which they are given within the narrative such as the already cited list of markers of the end of the age, and with close attention paid to their perceived significance and meaning within this context. The designation ‘Joel 2 phenomena’ will occasionally be used to refer to this loose grouping of special/strange things within the narrative of Acts itself. Within Chapter One of the current project, where the focus of the discussion is upon analysis of different scholarly theories, each with their own terminology and their own definitions of said terms, Taves’s terminology of ‘experiences deemed religious’ will occasionally be used to refer in general terms to the kinds of phenomena that are under consideration therein.

At this point it is possible to return once again to the Scribal question found in Acts 23:9b: ‘what if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?’ While the desire to categorise and comprehend the parameters of such encounters is an understandable one, there is another important aspect of this question that revolves around significance. Indeed, from a narrative perspective, the question mark over this possibility is crucial: the tension, suspense, and dramatic irony that occur at this point in the story are not simply created by a lack of comprehension from the members of the council, but by the inherent uncertainties that surround such phenomena. They can only serve as the narrative trigger for violent dissension if there was, indeed, dissension over the plausibility of Paul having had such an

encounter – or over the possibility of such an occurrence at all. This thesis will argue that the narrative function of dreams and visions in Acts is dependent upon their contested status within first century thought.

Concerns over legitimacy and validity are suggestive of an inherent ambiguity in the interpretation of these phenomena within the communities from which they emerge. Although this dynamic has been recognised within some studies of certain New Testament texts, such recognition is almost entirely absent from interpretations of these phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles. If this inherent ambiguity can be demonstrated, scholarly analysis of the dream and vision reports in Acts finds a different starting point. This, in turn, is likely to lead to different assessments of the function and significance of these phenomena within the text.

Method

In considering the Scribal question raised in the Acts narrative and the associated challenge of defining and categorising the possibilities raised therein, it has already been possible to identify two important avenues for further enquiry. The first of these relates to the narrative significance of references to dreams, visions and related phenomena within the story of the Acts of the Apostles. For example, the short Scribal question alone succeeds in creating tension, suspense, and dramatic irony for the readers/hearers of the account. However, this impact is dependant upon audience perceptions of these phenomena. For example, the violent reaction to the Scribal question relies upon an awareness of real dissension between different groups regarding the feasibility of an angel or a spirit communicating with a human being (or, indeed, existing at all). Therefore, this highlights an important second

avenue of enquiry, namely, the task of identifying first century attitudes towards the significance and function of dreams and visions in order to best understand their place within the narrative world of the Acts of the Apostles. Identification of these two strands naturally shapes decisions about the appropriate method for this study, which will focus upon literary and historical aspects of the text.

While, as will be outlined in the next chapter, research into dreams and visions within Acts has been surprisingly limited, the recognition of the significance of literary critical insights for illuminating understanding of the book has been relatively extensive. A number of important pieces of scholarship have already been carried out in this field, from the initial redaction critical forays into Luke-Acts made by Ernst Haenchen and Hans Conzelmann, through to more recent explorations of characterisation and narration in one or both of the books of the Lukan corpus.⁵⁸ At the heart of many of these more recent enquiries is the concern to treat the text as a single narrative, rather than reading it piecemeal. In line with this, the interest of the current project lies in the ‘final form’ of the text of Acts, with limited attention given to matters of manuscript variation or redaction of sources.

The treatment of a text as a narrative naturally serves to direct attention towards certain features such as plot, style, and characterisation, and there is no doubt that these must form an important part of such analysis. However, the vast majority of literary approaches also demand attention to historical context, not necessarily in the attempted

⁵⁸ Other important texts in this field include: Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986-1990); Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997); Joel B. Green, ‘The Book of Acts as History/Writing’, *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, 37 (2002), 119-27; Joel B. Green, ‘Narrative and New Testament Interpretation: Reflections on the State of the Art’, *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, 39 (2004), 153-66 F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

reconstruction of actual historical figures or events, but in the formulation of a plausible conceptual world to which author and intended audience might belong.⁵⁹ Thus, H.R. Jauss proposes:

Whenever a writer of a work is unknown, his intent not recorded, or his relationship to sources and models only indirectly accessible, the philological question of how the text is 'properly' to be understood, that is according to its intention and time, can best be answered if the text is considered in contrast to the background of the works which the author could expect his contemporary public to know either explicitly or implicitly.⁶⁰

As Charles H. Talbert makes clear, this should not be limited to those texts that the ancient reader was *consciously* aware of, but rather should be understood to refer to the 'broader societal ways of looking at the world'.⁶¹

As is the case in any discipline, literary critical approaches to the study of the Bible have their own technical terminology. While some reference will be made to aspects of plot, characterisation and style, the goal of this thesis is not literary-critical analysis *per se*, but rather the understanding of dream and vision reports within the narrative world of Acts.⁶² This 'narrative world' is distinguishable from both the 'real world' in which events may have taken place, and the 'story world', which comprises the world in which the characters live and act. The narrative world is the space inhabited by narrator and narratee,

⁵⁹ Greater and lesser exceptions to this tendency can be found within reader-response criticism, wherein the implied reader is constructed from a closed and autonomous text. (See, famously, Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974], and, Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* [Cambridge, Mass.; London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1980], as well as John Barton's thoughtful reflection on reader-response theory within the 'time-warp' of Biblical Studies: 'Thinking About Reader-Response Criticism', *Expository Times*, 113 (2002), 147-151.)

⁶⁰ H.R. Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *New Literary History*, 2.1 (1970), 7-37 at 19.

⁶¹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts in its Mediterranean Milieu* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 16.

⁶² A similar approach has been adopted by Andy M. Reimer, in his study of miracles and magic in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana. He concisely summarises his own intentions by writing that, 'my goal is to hear the story rather than analyse the discourse in detail'. (*Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana* [London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 26.) To borrow a further phrase from Reimer relating to his own interest in narrative worlds, 'I am analysing the social world of the narrative of Acts, rather than analysing the social world of the hypothetical historical Paul' (*Miracle and Magic*, 27).

and thus exists somewhere in between the story world and the real world (of the reader).⁶³

It can be understood to constitute attention to three key elements as they are portrayed in the text in question: settings, characters, and events.⁶⁴ The narrative world is the space in which the process of story-telling takes place. All of this is to suggest that the narrative shape of the Acts of the Apostles is critical to the message it contains:

[N]arrative is not a description or account of something that already exists independently of it and which it merely helps along. Rather, narration, as the unity of story, story-teller, audience, and protagonist, is what constitutes the community, its activities, and its coherence in the first place.⁶⁵

The intention of this project is not, however, to demonstrate a particular method in action, but rather to be guided by the content of the Acts of the Apostles itself.⁶⁶ The interest of this thesis is in the place that dreams and visions occupy within this narrative world. This entails engagement with literary and stylistic features, as well as attention to historical context, especially in the reconstruction of broader attitudes towards dreams and visions in the first century.

Summary of Thesis Aim

The aim of this thesis is to assess the place and function of dreams and visions within the Acts narrative. It will be argued that while the dream and vision reports function to show

⁶³ Steven Sheeley, *Narrative Asides in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, repr. London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 34-35.

⁶⁴ David M. Rhoads, *Reading Mark: Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 95-97. For the obvious reason of their narrative structure, much of the consideration of this approach to New Testament studies has focused on one or more of the Canonical Gospels.

⁶⁵ David Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity', *History and Theory*, 25.2 (May, 1986), 117-131 at 128.

⁶⁶ Early forays into the question of methodology were influenced by Jonathan Roberts, *Blake, Wordsworth, Religion* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010). Influenced by Gadamer's critique of the over-reliance on method, his study adopts a series of different interpretative approaches as part of an attempt to understand the texts in question. The present study does not go this far, but it is the intention of this work to be guided where possible by the text of Acts, rather than by the rigid application of an existing method.

God's hand at work, they also illustrate the complexity of the discernment of the divine as dreams and visions are interpreted and assimilated into the life of the community. The presentation of these phenomena is much more nuanced than has been allowed by some, and the complexities of the reports reflect a recognition of the complexity of the subject matter. This thesis will suggest that the narrative of Acts demonstrates an awareness of the potential for the abuse and misuse of claims to significant dreams and visions, offering its audience a didactic story of how these important phenomena might be incorporated appropriately into the life of the church.

It will be suggested that the narrative treatment of dreams, visions, and related phenomena moves from the simple to the complex, and the structure of the thesis itself will broadly follow this pattern. At the heart of the thesis lies the demonstration that in Acts there is a pattern in which the simple (Acts 2) is juxtaposed with the complex (Acts 10-11, 15) and the salutary story of Paul (Acts 9, 22 and 26) is offered as a warning of the false avenues that can be opened up in the exploration of the implications of dreams and visions for ecclesial life.

Presentation of Material

The material in this thesis is split into two parts. The remainder of Part I will outline two important strands of existing research that will be drawn together in this project. The first of these, dealt with in Chapter One, concerns current research on dreams, visions and related phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles. A survey of recent scholarship will be offered, followed by a brief summary of the shape and state of this field of enquiry. The second strand, dealt with in Chapter Two, concerns current research on the place of dreams

and visions in the first century Mediterranean world. Matters of definition, categorisation, and the range of attitudes towards these phenomena will be addressed, with a particular eye to the narrative function and significance of dream and vision reports. The Conclusion to Part I will bring these two strands of enquiry into conversation with one another. It will be argued that much of the existing scholarship on dreams and visions within Acts rests on outmoded assumptions regarding the character of these phenomena within the ancient world, and the need for an alternative framework that takes seriously the nuances of first century perspectives will be asserted and outlined.

Part II of the thesis comprises exegesis of a number of passages from the Acts narrative. The purpose of this section is not to offer extensive engagement with existing secondary literature upon the passages, but rather to outline key points in the presentation of dreams, visions, and related phenomena as they are presented in Acts. Chapters Three, Four and Five will deal with the three major instances of significant dreams and visions within the text: in Chapter Three, the outpouring of the Spirit at the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2), which not only includes elements of visionary experience, but also contains the programmatic prophecy regarding dreams and visions as markers of the end of the age. In Chapter Four, Peter's vision of the vessel and Cornelius' apparently corresponding vision (Acts 10:1-11:18) will be addressed, and in Chapter Five, Paul's visionary experience on the road to Damascus, including the two repetitions of this account within the narrative (Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-21; 26:12-23). Chapter Six will deal with several of the more minor dream and vision reports, focusing predominantly on Paul's Macedonian mission (Acts 16:1-17:15), but also addressing Peter's apparent angelophany in prison (Acts 12:6-17) and Agabus' prophetic visionary claims in 11:27-30 and 21:8-14.

This exegetical material is intended to underline the inherent ambiguity of dreams and visions as they are presented within the Acts narrative. The thesis conclusion will review these findings, and offer some comment on their implications for broader interpretations of the story of the Acts of the Apostles.

Chapter One: Literature Review

In spite of the apparent significance afforded to dreams, visions, and related phenomena within the text of Acts itself, academic studies on the subject are few and far between. To date, only one monograph and a handful of unpublished doctoral dissertations have been produced that focus on this material alone, along with several further publications that have devoted individual chapters to the consideration of these phenomena as they are presented in the Acts narrative. The findings of these studies will be outlined in the ensuing discussion, along with a treatment of some commentaries on Acts that have proved influential within this narrower field.

Just as with the treatment of the terminological questions in the Introduction, and for broadly the same reasons, this review focuses upon research over the last century. This is not an entirely comfortable decision, for there is naturally much of interest to be found within earlier scholarship: indeed, there is a striking homogeneity between treatments of dreams and visions within Acts by its earliest and its most recent commentators, and the tracing of this trajectory would be a fruitful avenue for further research.⁶⁷ However, since there is hardly the scope to undertake such a task within the current project, it has been

⁶⁷ Little work has been done to date that focuses specifically on the early reception of religious experiences in Acts, though note Kenneth Bruve Welliver, 'Pentecost and Early Church: Patristic Interpretation of Acts 2', PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1965; and Francois Bovon, *De Vocatione Gentium: Histoire de l'interpretation d'Act. 10,1-11,18 dans les six premieres siècles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967). Indeed, more general works on the reception of Acts are also sparse, a factor which Andrew F. Gregory attributes not so much to lack of interest in the subject, but rather the lack of ancient evidence (*The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period Before Irenaeus: Looking for Luke in the Second Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 299. In addition to Gregory's important contribution to this field, other relevant scholarship includes H.J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (London: A. and C. Black, 1955); Werner Bieder, *Die Apostelgeschichte in der Historie: Ein Betrag zur Auslegungsgeschichte des Missionsbuches der Kirche* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1960); Karl Shuve, 'The Patristic Reception of Luke and Acts: Scholarship, Theology, and Moral Exhortation in the Homilies of Origen and Chrysostom', in Sean A. Adams and Michael Pahl (eds.), *Issues in Luke-Acts: Selected Essays* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2012), 263-286.

deemed preferable not to treat the earlier scholarship at all, rather than to simply give the appearance of having done so by mentioning only the most well-known works in passing.

Thus, this section offers a chronological review of the most relevant scholarship relating to dreams, visions and associated phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles from the last century. It is not limited to those works that have only treated dreams or visions, nor to those texts that have adopted particular terminology, but rather includes also the work of those who have carried out more wide-ranging research, focusing on topics such as Holy Spirit activity, community initiation, or miracles: topics that nonetheless make a contribution to the understanding of dreams and visions within this text. Research on these same phenomena within other biblical or early Christian texts have not been included within this review, although some of the most influential of these works will be dealt with subsequently.

Overview of Key Resources from the Secondary Literature

Alfred Wikenhauser

While the already-noted significance of Gunkel's work for igniting interest in research into the role of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament ought not to be overlooked, it was Alfred Wikenhauser who was one of the first to direct attention towards the interpretation of dreams and visions within these texts.⁶⁸ Key to his approach is a comparison of the vision accounts in the New Testament with similar material from roughly contemporaneous extra-

⁶⁸ 'Religionsgeschichtliche Parallelen zu Apg. 16,9', *Biblische Zeitschrift*, 23 (1935-1936), 180-186; 'Die Traumgeschichte des Neuen Testaments in religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht', in T. Klauser and A. Rucker (eds.) *Pisciculi. Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums. Festschrift Franz Joseph Dölger* (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1939), 320-333; 'Doppelträume', *Biblica*, 29 (1948), 100-111.

biblical sources. He pays particular attention to the form of the double vision, which, as will be noted in the next chapter, is a likely first century development in the literary construction of vision reports. This proposal has a particular bearing on his interpretation of Ananias' visionary experience in Acts 9, leading Wikenhauser to challenge existing classifications of this account as an interpolation.⁶⁹ Wikenhauser does not offer any consideration of the implications of these findings for the broader interpretation of these phenomena within Acts, though his analysis lays important foundations for future research in this field.

Ernst Benz

In 1952 Ernst Benz produced a study that focused on Paul's visions as depicted both in the epistles and within the book of Acts.⁷⁰ Benz surveys the major visions within Acts, including those accounts attributed to figures other than Paul. He emphasises the consistent significance of such phenomena at key turning points within the church's early history, stating that in certain instances, such as Acts 10:1-16, claims to visionary experience function as the sole source of justification for revolutionary change.⁷¹ Benz argues in favour of an egalitarian character to these phenomena, connecting them to a wider charismatic framework that he regards as characteristic of the church as a whole.⁷² While Benz's comments offer a helpful framework and foundation for study in this field, they

⁶⁹ 'Doppelträume', 111. See also John B.F. Miller's treatment of this contribution in *Convinced that God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts* (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2007), 82.

⁷⁰ *Paulus als Visionär: eine vergleichende Untersuchung der Visionsberichte des Paulus in der Apostelgeschichte und in den paulinischen Briefen* (Wiesbaden: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz in Kommission bei F. Steiner, 1952)

⁷¹ *Paulus als Visionär*, 88.

⁷² *Paulus als Visionär*, 92-93.

also constitute an over-simplification of the Acts material. In spite of a repeated emphasis upon the function of these reports in the legitimation and development of the Christian movement, Benz offers no insight into how or why these these phenomena in particular were deemed a sufficient justification for such innovation, nor does he consider the hermeneutical challenges that they may have posed. This is especially surprising given Benz's aim to trace the trajectory of visionary experience from its charismatic beginnings to its role in the contemporary Church, wherein it would seem reasonable to anticipate the significance of such questions.

Ernst Haenchen

Ernst Haenchen's commentary on the Acts of the Apostles remains an essential resource for twenty-first century scholarship.⁷³ His work pioneers the understanding of Luke as a creative author of the Acts narrative, rather than simply as a compiler of sources.

Haenchen's concern over the apparent lack of historicity in parts of the narrative leads him to characterise the work as one of fiction, although this is not reflected in any holistic treatment of the whole story, since in many ways Haenchen maintains the compartmentalised approach of source and form critics.⁷⁴

Haenchen is probably the most well known proponent of the view that dreams, visions, and related phenomena in Acts function to show the hand of God at work in the lives of the early Christians. Writing on the Peter and Cornelius story of Acts 10-11, Haenchen famously comments that, in his attempt to make the hand of God visible within

⁷³ *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tr. from the 14th German edn. (1965) by Bernard Noble et al., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971).

⁷⁴ For a more extensive summary of Haenchen's work, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), xii.

church history, Luke has all but excluded the possibilities for human decision-making. This, he argues, brings faith very close to becoming simply ‘the twitching of human puppets’.⁷⁵ He does not regard this as a positive feature of the narrative, commenting that this is a ‘peculiarity of Lucan theology which can scarcely be claimed as a point in its favour’.⁷⁶

Certainly, many have found Haenchen’s argument compelling, and it is undeniable that part of the purpose of Luke’s reports of these phenomena must indeed be to show God’s hand at work within the world. As with Benz’s work, however, this is an over-simplification of the evidence, and it seems unlikely that it can offer a complete account of Luke’s purpose. Although some of the reports within Acts appear similarly simplistic, the majority are significantly more complex. This suggests that something more sophisticated may be occurring within the presentation of these phenomena in the Acts narrative. While Haenchen has been explicitly criticised (as will be seen below), many of his implicit assumptions remain. This thesis will oppose this perspective, suggesting that the opposite may in fact be the case: the ‘divine incursions’ as represented by Luke *demand* human interpretation. They are by no means of such compelling force that they must be obeyed or that doubts must be stilled. This is particularly apparent in Acts 10:1-33, the passage at which Haenchen directs his comment. Here, Peter shows considerable uncertainty in the face of his vision (10:14, 17, 19), and one finds hints at a lengthy process of interpretation that continues into the following chapter of the narrative (11:1-18). The struggle to discover the meaning of dreams and visions is recognised and reported within the text of Acts.

⁷⁵ Acts, 362.

⁷⁶ Acts, 362.

J.D.G. Dunn

J.D.G. Dunn has produced two books that focus on the activity of the Spirit within the New Testament: *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, published in 1970, and its sequel of sorts, *Jesus and the Spirit*, published in 1975.⁷⁷ Although neither focuses purely on the Acts of the Apostles, both devote significant space to this text, and, particularly in the case of Dunn's 1975 publication, represent an important contribution to the study of these phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles.

The first book focuses on Holy Spirit baptism and the question of where it fits in the process of Christian conversion and initiation. Dunn sets out to undertake a total re-examination of the New Testament material, aiming to challenge traditionally accepted views regarding this issue. In an attempt to generate fresh insight, Dunn approaches the material with the perspective of Pentecostalism at the forefront of his enquiry. The Pentecostal movement claims that Holy Spirit baptism is an experience that is distinct from the moment of conversion or salvation, and one that is marked by glossolalia. *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* aims to establish whether or not the New Testament texts document such a notion of Holy Spirit baptism as separate from the process of conversion-initiation. Dunn concludes that this is not the case, arguing instead that the New Testament portrays Holy Spirit baptism as an integral part of the believer's conversion. Indeed, Dunn goes so far as to suggest that such experience functions as the 'chief element' within this process.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1970); *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1975).

⁷⁸ *Baptism*, 4.

Dunn examines material from across the entire New Testament and this includes a lengthy treatment of the Acts of the Apostles. This material is particularly significant for the purposes of Dunn's engagement with Pentecostalism, since much Pentecostal theology is built upon interpretations of baptism in Acts. Dunn contests such readings of the text and convincingly demonstrates the vital role of Holy Spirit experience in the formulation of Christian identity within the narrative. This influential study contains much to recommend it, although its engagement with the issues at the heart of the present study is limited to the final pages, wherein Dunn poses several questions concerning the discernment of Holy Spirit activity, questions that he aims to answer within the second book, *Jesus and the Spirit*.⁷⁹

As stated, Dunn's second book aims to answer several questions raised by the first. He phrases the task as follows: '[a]ccepting that the gift of the Spirit is what makes a man a Christian, how do he and others know if and when he has received the Spirit? In what ways does the Spirit manifest his coming and his presence? What indications are there that the Spirit is active in a congregation or a situation?'⁸⁰ As Dunn explains, these questions formed the starting point of his research, although the scope was subsequently broadened beyond experience of the Spirit to incorporate related phenomena. Thus, in this second book, Dunn approaches the New Testament with the purpose of understanding these activities within the life of Jesus and the first Christians, and determining whether or not there were any features that marked them out as distinctively Christian.

Using a historical-critical approach, Dunn treats claims to dreams, visions and related phenomena within the first decades of Christianity, starting with the experiences of

⁷⁹ *Baptism*, 229.

⁸⁰ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 6.

Jesus and ending with a brief overview of attitudes towards these phenomena in the second century, reflected in the Johannine and pastoral epistles. A common thread running through much of this analysis is the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, first in Jesus' own religious life, and subsequently in the lives of his followers. For Dunn, it is this that provides the distinctiveness, dynamism and indeed the essence of Christian encounters. He details the differing expressions of this relationship that can be found in various New Testament texts, paying particular attention to the Pauline idea(l) of charismatic community. This term serves to underline a strong connection between its two elements: the idea that, in Dunn's words, 'charisma and community belong together'.⁸¹ The practical outworking of this corporate dimension is accompanied by its own set of challenges, including questions over the appropriate interpretation and level of authority of claims to such encounters within this context. This theme is highly significant for the book as a whole: on the first page, Dunn introduces the study by asking the question, 'how do we distinguish "activity of God" from the merely physiological or sociological, or indeed from the more sinister forces and pressures active in any society?'⁸² Recognising the complexity of the answers to such questions, Dunn offers an extensive analysis of how these issues are dealt with within the Pauline epistles and second century communities.

In his treatment of the Acts material Dunn laments the absence of any such recognition, stating that 'Luke is content to report the early church's reliance on visions, as on prophetic utterances, without comment.'⁸³ He perceives this as a major shortcoming of the book, writing, 'where again Luke is perhaps open to criticism is in his failure to take up the problem of an authority rooted in visionary experiences – which he could presumably

⁸¹ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 259.

⁸² *Jesus and the Spirit*, 1.

⁸³ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 179.

have done by citing appropriate examples – in particular the problem that an authority based only on visions can be grossly abused.⁸⁴ For Dunn, the book of Acts depicts dreams, visions, and related phenomena with much excitement and enthusiasm, clearly conveying the power and dynamism of this aspect of Christian life. This, however, is at the cost of a more critical presentation that also recognises the associated challenges of such phenomena.

Dunn is one of the few scholars to explicitly address the important question of whether or not the Acts narrative displays an awareness of the potential for the misuse of visionary experience. His answer is a negative one, and is formed in explicit contrast to the treatment of the same material within the Pauline epistles. In spite of the significance of this question, Dunn's work has been largely ignored by later scholarship on these phenomena within Acts. This question, and the answer proposed by Dunn will hold a central place within this thesis, although several major limitations of Dunn's research will be outlined in due course.

In spite of the fact that Dunn's comments throughout both of these influential books appear to demand that the topic should receive future attention, additional studies within this field largely failed to materialise, leading Luke Timothy Johnson to describe 'religious experience' as a 'missing dimension in New Testament studies' in the title of his 1998 book.⁸⁵ He blames this lack of attention upon the almost exclusively theological concerns of the historical critical method, a judgement echoed by Larry W. Hurtado in his treatment of the subject five years later.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 179.

⁸⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortune Press, 1998).

⁸⁶ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), see especially p.66.

Jacob Jervell

Jacob Jervell wrote several important texts on Luke and Acts during his career, although it is a single article on the presentation of Paul within Acts that draws most of the focus here.⁸⁷ In this article Jervell proposes that, in contrast to the claim made in Bruno Bauer's much earlier work and echoed since by others such as Haenchen, 'Paulus ist für Lk trotzdem nicht primär der Wundermann'.⁸⁸ In his 1850 publication, Bauer painted a picture of the two Pauls of the New Testament: the Paul of words found in the Epistles, and the wonder-working Paul of magical deeds found within Acts.⁸⁹ Here, Jervell makes a case for the opposite scenario, arguing that it is the Paul of the Epistles who attaches the greater significance to his own miracle working.⁹⁰

While Jervell's concerns are in part source-critical, the article also engages with the legitimising function of miracle stories in the Acts narrative, necessary for all of the Apostles except James, whose authority is deemed to have been sufficiently established without the need for supportive examples of his wonder-working.⁹¹ Crucially, however, this is not an idealised account in which suffering and failure is mitigated by miracles. On the contrary, Jervell emphasises the suffering of the Paul of Acts, and uses this to assert the difference between this portrayal and the usual characteristics of 'divine man' (*theios aner*)

⁸⁷ 'Die Zeichen des Apostels: Die Wunder beim lukanischen und paulinischen Paulus', *Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* 4 (1979), 54-75. Jervell's well-known and distinctive perspective on the Jewishness of Acts is most fully represented in his book: *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972).

⁸⁸ 'Die Zeichen des Apostels', 58. Bauer's work, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Eine Ausgleichung des Paulinismus und des Judenthums innerhalb der christlichen Kirche* (Berlin: Gustav Hempel, 1850) falls outside the twentieth and twenty-first century focus of the current chapter.

⁸⁹ This thesis is summarised at the outset of Bauer's work: *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 7-12.

⁹⁰ 'Die Zeichen des Apostels', 60.

⁹¹ 'Die Zeichen des Apostels', 60; 74-75.

traditions.⁹² Furthermore, the presentation of miracles in the Acts narrative is not straightforward: the potential for their misinterpretation is clearly demonstrated in the story of the healing at Lystra (Acts 14:1-18), an account which, for Jervell, hints at their need to be viewed in connection with the proclamation of the Word.⁹³

Visions and auditions are mentioned as part of Jervell's treatment of miracles within Acts, though it is clear that these do not constitute a key part of his analysis. However, his recognition of the nuances within the miracle stories in Acts represents an important challenge to the overly simplistic interpretation of their portrayal from other quarters, and this is a point that will be drawn in to the more focused analysis of dreams and visions within this thesis.

David Allan Handy

David Allan Handy's doctoral thesis deals directly with the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11.⁹⁴ He argues that Luke's narrative strategy is similar to that of a simplified detective story which functions to help the reader experience the profound struggle of the characters to understand the visionary experiences of the chapter and their implications. He claims that the variations in the accounts play a major role in the story, drawing readers in just as a modern-day detective story might.⁹⁵ Handy is to be commended for his recognition of the human struggle to make decisions in interpreting and understanding dreams and visions. His recognition of the merits of literary critical and sociological

⁹² 'Die Zeichen des Apostels', 64. Certainly, one might disagree with this aspect of Jervell's argument, but this point is not of central concern for the current project.

⁹³ 'Die Zeichen des Apostels', 65.

⁹⁴ David Allan Handy, 'The Gentile Pentecost: A Literary Study of the Story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18)' PhD Dissertation, May 1998, Union Theological Seminary.

⁹⁵ 'The Gentile Pentecost', 1-2.

approaches to biblical texts will be echoed in this thesis, and the implications of his research can fruitfully be applied to the rest of Acts.

However, Handy's thesis also has its limitations. The most notable of these is the failure to recognise the way in which the different reports of visionary experience within the Peter and Cornelius account do not always complement each other. At times it appears that the re-telling of the visions also involves a reinterpretation of their meaning, rather than simply building on and developing the previous renditions.⁹⁶ As a result, doubt is cast on Handy's notion of a developing narrative in which suspense is built, and wherein the evidence converges to form a single coherent picture. In contrast to this it will be argued here that the interpretation of the unfolding events is at times corrected and replaced, while at other points apparently contradictory interpretations are not resolved. This material will be dealt with fully in Chapter Four, where it will be shown that the overall picture is rather less neat than that which Handy has proposed.

John T. Squires

John T. Squires has produced a monograph on divine providence within the text of the Acts of the Apostles.⁹⁷ He offers an extensive analysis of key moments of decision making within the Acts narrative, which includes treatment of some phenomena such as prophecy that could be identified as 'religious experiences'. While Squires's work contributes much to the understanding of broader themes such as fate and the action of God within human history, he offers little consideration of the potential misinterpretation of prophecy, or of

⁹⁶ One example of this is the retelling at the beginning of chapter 11, which suggests a more literal interpretation of Peter's vision than was initially implied. This will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

⁹⁷ *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

moments of mistaken understanding concerning the will of God. Such absence is interesting in its own right, since it demonstrates once again the lack of consideration of such ideas within the Acts narrative.

Michael James Day

Michael James Day's doctoral thesis is one of very few projects that treats all of the post-Pentecost dream and vision accounts within the text of the Acts of the Apostles.⁹⁸ His thesis comprises a comparative study of the dream and vision reports within the book of Acts and those found in a range of other ancient texts, separated into the categories of Old Testament, Ancient Romances, Ancient Histories and Ancient Biographies. He separates the dream and vision reports in Acts into four categories: those that issue a directive, those that lead to conversion/calling, those that give assurance of character, and those that reveal supernatural confirmation of character. While Day acknowledges instances of suspicion over the validity or veracity of dreams within the Greek background material, this attracts little more than a passing comment in his assessment, and no such questions are raised concerning the dreams and visions within Acts itself, all of which are deemed to validate the providential nature of the Christian movement.

Day's work in categorising a range of ancient dream and vision reports offers a useful foundation for further enquiry, but his conclusions concerning the place and function of these reports within Acts fail to account for the complexity and nuance contained therein.

⁹⁸ Michael James Day, 'The Function of Post-Pentecost Dream/Vision Reports in Acts', Doctoral thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994

John J. Pilch

John J. Pilch uses a consideration of the social context of phenomena such as dreams and visions to inform his understanding of the Acts narrative.⁹⁹ Although the purpose of the book is primarily pastoral, its enthusiastic analysis of altered states of consciousness (ASCs) in Acts makes an interesting contribution to scholarship. Following F. Scott Spencer's outline of Acts, Pilch takes a sociological approach to the text, using insights from cultural anthropology and ritual studies. Pilch characterises ASCs simply as exhibiting a level of awareness that differs from that of 'normal waking consciousness'.¹⁰⁰ He includes such states as drunkenness, road trance, and daydreaming during a lecture or class within this definition, and this helps to emphasise the prevalence of these experiences within everyday life. Having listed some common examples of ASCs, Pilch makes the accurate observation that while the experiences themselves are prevalent in all human life, their interpretation is culturally determined.

Pilch correctly challenges the contemporary 'western' view of ASCs as psycho-pathological phenomena, and recognises the importance of the cultural milieu of the ancient Mediterranean. However, his presentation of ASCs as wholly positive and utterly central to life is just as limited as the western tendency to dismiss these experiences or regard them as pathological. While many of his observations are extremely useful, the characterisation of his reading as one that is sensitive to the first century context is not entirely successful.

⁹⁹ John J. Pilch, *Visions and Healings in the Acts of the Apostles: How the Early Believers Experienced God* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Visions and Healings*, 1.

For example, Pilch describe the latent discourse of ‘our’ culture and that of ‘the biblical world’. He characterises the former as sceptical of ASCs, with a tendency to attribute their occurrence to pathology/mental illness. As for the latter, Pilch asserts that, ‘the latent discourse is basically the Israelite tradition that believed that God’s communication with human beings in altered states of consciousness was normal’.¹⁰¹

Although Pilch continues to use the term ASCs, it becomes clear at this point that he is no longer referring to ASCs in the same sense as he was previously. Scientific ‘western’ culture does not tend to attribute road trance to mental illness, nor to interpret daydreaming in a lecture as pathological (!); only certain types of ASCs are met with scepticism. The same can be said for the Israelite tradition, with only certain ASCs being understood as communication with/from the divine realm. A false impression is formed if all of these encounters are understood in the same way. While some may well have been understood as communications from God in the biblical world, they were not ‘everyday’ occurrences in the same way as daydreaming or drunkenness. In both ‘western’ and ‘biblical’ culture, certain of these experiences are understood as having a special meaning and as potentially requiring a special interpretation that is not demanded by a daydream or drunkenness.

While Pilch does not use the language of emic and etic within this book, he is essentially attempting an emic reading of ASCs in the book of Acts. However, because of the narrowness of his understanding of the latent discourse – which he himself characterises as a hermeneutical key – Pilch’s interpretation is similarly limited.¹⁰² To cite one example, Pilch attributes the story of Jesus eating the fish in Luke 24:41-43 to a

¹⁰¹ *Visions and Healings*, 5.

¹⁰² *Visions and Healings*, 17.

rabbinic tradition that expects the eating of food in the world-to-come. Thus, he says, while the ‘modern scientific western perspective’ would deny the possibility that a dead man could eat fish, Jesus’ cultural contemporaries would have understood that Jesus *was* really eating the fish within this context of a heavenly meal.¹⁰³ However, the suggestion that the consumption of a piece of broiled fish ought to be regarded as a sufficient indicator of the meal on a golden table with three golden legs that *Hagig* 14b describes is far-fetched to say the least. Furthermore, the western perspective that Pilch characterises as missing the point, has, in fact, precisely grasped the authorial intention: a dead man cannot eat fish, therefore, Jesus is not dead, but alive. Luke 24:37-39 explicitly corrects the view that the disciples were seeing a ghost or spirit.

In spite of these limitations, some aspects of Pilch’s work are mirrored within this thesis. First, the narrative of Acts itself will be analysed rather than an attempt being made to access the actual historical events that may or may not lie behind the text, and second, the intention of this project is to understand the use and function of the dream and vision reports of Acts within their own context.

Rick Strelan

Rick Strelan’s study of the Acts of the Apostles casts the net a little wider, incorporating those accounts which might be deemed ‘strange’ by modern readers of the text, such as the ascension of Jesus, language of spirit possessions, angelophanies, (other) visions, the power of Peter’s shadow and Paul’s possessions, curses, accounts of raisings from the

¹⁰³ *Visions and Healings*, 17.

dead, and prison escapes.¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to see such diverse phenomena grouped together in a single study, although unfortunately Strelan does not spend significant time outlining the framework for such a grouping. While this enables him to avoid some of the challenges of experiential language, the alternative grouping of these ‘strange acts’ is arguably equally problematic, not least because it is unclear to what extent Strelan imagines these acts to be ‘strange’ to the intended audience of the book. The following extract from the treatment of Jesus’ ascension demonstrates this ambivalence:

These acts are ‘strange’ to me, and I assume also many reading this book at the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially if they were born, as I was, around the middle of the twentieth century. It does not follow, of course, that Luke’s original audience or Luke himself also thought them strange. In fact, **I am arguing that they were not at all strange to them**, but were understood and interpreted within their cultural framework and experience. **The bottom line is that Christians were convinced of a most strange and paradoxical act**, namely that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth had been raised by God from the dead and had been elevated by God into the heavenly world with status and authority.¹⁰⁵

Such comments do rather limit the clarity of Strelan’s findings regarding ancient attitudes towards such phenomena, but the overall contribution of the book is nonetheless notable on account of the assertion of the significance of these acts, both for the Lukan narrative and within the cultural context from which the text emerged.

Strelan’s core emphasis is upon power: its importance in the ancient world and the way it was communicated and demonstrated by means of the ‘strange acts’ listed above. He uses analysis of the first century social context to assert the importance of Christian demonstration of the superior power of their god, and asserts the significance of ‘signs and

¹⁰⁴ Rick Strelan, *Strange Acts: Studies in the Cultural World of the Acts of the Apostles* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004)

¹⁰⁵ *Strange Acts*, 26 (Emphasis mine).

wonders' within this task, especially given the absence the absence of Christian temples or other public spaces where this god could be promoted by other means.¹⁰⁶

With a framework such as this one, it is perhaps inevitable that Strelan's focus is on the legitimation of the Christian religion over against other movements. Little space is given to the treatment of these 'strange acts' among the Christians themselves, nor to the internal processes by which such signs and wonders were assessed and interpreted. There is no real sense that the narrative or the historical function of these phenomena might extend beyond the legitimising quest of early Christian authors. This is particularly surprising in the light of Strelan's identification of the likely audience of the Acts of the Apostles as 'already Christian',¹⁰⁷ since it is debatable how great the need for legitimation would be within such a context. Some questions, therefore, are not simply unanswered, but unasked within this monograph.

John B.F. Miller

Far more compelling is John B.F. Miller's work on visionary experience within Luke-Acts.¹⁰⁸ Like Handy, Miller also attributes the complexities of Luke's presentation of visionary experience to development within the narrative. He argues that there is an interior and an exterior element to reports of visionary experience within the book of Acts. The exterior element is the 'divine irruption' of God's hand at work. This element has been

¹⁰⁶ *Strange Acts*, 28-29.

¹⁰⁷ *Strange Acts*, 31.

¹⁰⁸ *Convinced that God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts* (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2007). See also John B.F. Miller, 'Dreams/Visions and the Experience of God in Luke-Acts', in Frances Flannery, Colleen Shantz, Rodney A. Werline (eds.) *Experientia, Volume 1: Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 177-192.

widely observed and commented upon. The interior element is the character's unfolding and developing understanding of their experiences. It is this element that he argues has been neglected. In order to correct this perceived neglect, Miller focuses on Lukan anthropology: the human treatment of visionary experiences.

Miller notes the way in which dreams and visions in Luke-Acts 'resist simple categorisation'.¹⁰⁹ He proposes that character filtration is the most convincing explanation for the variations and developments within the reports of dreams and visions in Acts. He uses this term to 'distinguish between the perspective of a character and that of the narrator'.¹¹⁰ This, Miller argues, enables a distinction to be drawn between different points of view within the narrative, not all of which are infallible: a distinction is drawn between the reliability of the narrator and that of certain other characters.¹¹¹ This approach encourages the reader/listener to view certain events – including visionary experiences – through the lens of a particular character. In some respects this argument is compelling as an explanation of the nuances within the dream and vision reports in Acts. Certainly, Miller's recognition of the nuances within the Acts reports of visionary experience is a welcome contribution in a field of enquiry where this has often been glossed. He writes:

Luke's variegated presentation of visionary experiences as a form of divine communication is striking, and this variety is found on both ends of the revelatory experience. These dream-visions depict divine communication coming through manifold intermediaries: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, angels, and even Moses and Elijah communicate with the people in Luke's story. Perhaps even more interesting are the varying human responses to these experiences, and the ways in which this pattern of communication and response are worked out in the narrative.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *Convinced*, 4.

¹¹⁰ *Convinced*, 17.

¹¹¹ *Convinced*, 17.

¹¹² *Convinced*, 5.

In spite of this, however, Miller does not take these observations to their logical conclusion. He recognises the need for human interpretations of visionary experience, and identifies moments within the narrative where the challenge of this task is documented. In this way he moves away from the suggestion that these phenomena function only to show God's hand at work, and the accompanying reduction of the need for human decision-making. While this successfully side-steps overly idealised conceptions of a 'golden era' of church history, Miller's work contains its own idealistic streak. He does not adequately deal with the flip side of this interpretative process that includes the potential for mistakes over both the meaning and legitimacy of visionary experiences, and the implications this has for debates over group boundaries and membership.

Indeed, this communal dimension is not fully dealt with in Miller's study. His focus on the viewpoint of individual characters overlooks the significance of group dynamics in dictating the treatment of claims to visionary experience. Moreover, character filtration may not be an adequate explanation for all of the discrepancies in the presentation of this material. For example, the differences between the three accounts of Paul's visionary experience on the Damascus road (9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18) may not only be attributable to the filtration of different characters (the narrator in the first account, and Paul in the later reports) and Paul's developing self-understanding, but also to the differing audiences to which the later reports are directed, and the rhetorical intentions of the speeches in which they are found.

One of the most significant contributions that has been made by Miller is his recognition of evidence for both positive and negative evaluations of dreams and visions in antiquity. While it must be conceded that the evidence for negative evaluations is scant, Miller is able both to justify this trend, and to show that these elements can nonetheless be

found.¹¹³ Miller's work takes seriously the degree to which interpretations of experience were challenged and corrected in antiquity, and recognises the implications that wider attitudes towards dream and vision reports have for the study of these phenomena within the Lukan corpus. He challenges the uncritical acceptance of 'general conclusions about the universal belief in dream-visions' in antiquity, arguing that it is only with a recognition of more diverse perspectives that one is able to appreciate the complexity of dream and vision reports in the Acts of the Apostles.¹¹⁴ In his survey of the extant material, Miller identifies instances of uncertainty over both the source and veracity of dreams and visions. He writes, 'knowing that the ancients often viewed dream-visions with uncertainty will help to illumine texts in which different characters offer contradictory interpretations of the Spirit's guidance.'¹¹⁵ Miller uses these observations in support of his argument for the necessity of human involvement in the visionary reports within Luke-Acts.

Edith M. Humphrey

Edith M. Humphrey has analysed visionary experience within the New Testament from a rhetorical perspective.¹¹⁶ As part of this work, she offers brief treatment of a handful of vision reports in the Acts of the Apostles, paying particular attention to the function of repetition within these accounts. Unlike so many other scholars working in this field, Humphrey's rhetorical approach primes her to recognise the place of power-plays within these texts. She briefly outlines broader research that has focused upon this issue, but,

¹¹³ *Convinced*, 21-64.

¹¹⁴ *Convinced*, 21.

¹¹⁵ *Convinced*, 63.

¹¹⁶ *And I Turned to See the Voice: The Rhetoric of Vision in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007).

whilst acknowledging the significance of this dynamic, she labels such an approach as a ‘violent’ reading of the text, preferring instead to adopt a literary-rhetorical approach that focuses on the impact of the text on a ‘sympathetic community of readers’.¹¹⁷

By making this choice, however, Humphrey side-steps the study of an extremely significant dynamic. It is *not* simply contemporary interpreters who have imposed this dimension upon ancient sources, but rather that power struggles form part of the fabric of many of these texts. This thesis will argue that claims to visionary experience function precisely in relation to the power-plays that Humphrey declaims as violent impositions upon these sources. It will be suggested that Luke, too, seems to have understood visionary experience not only as means to show God’s hand on His people, but in exactly those terms set out above. These experiences make statements about community status and the power struggles that were part and parcel of the emergent Christian movement. Furthermore, the apologetic nature of Luke’s work may mean that he was not writing for the ‘sympathetic community of believers’ that Humphrey imagines.

John R. Levison

John R. Levison has made a significant contribution to this field with his work on the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁸ Building on the work of Hermann Gunkel, Levison surveys Spirit activity throughout the New Testament, although his extensive engagement with Old Testament

¹¹⁷ *And I Turned to See the Voice*, 26. For more on socio-rhetorical methods see Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1996); David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1991).

¹¹⁸ *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2009).

texts and extra-biblical sources means that his contribution to knowledge reaches well beyond the confines of the New Testament.

Levison devotes a single chapter of his work to the Acts of the Apostles, yet this relatively brief treatment of the material adds much to the existing body of research on these texts. Paying particular attention to the story of the slave-girl in Acts 16:16-19 and the account of the first Christian Pentecost in Acts 2, Levison highlights some of the surprising and confusing aspects of the presentation of Spirit activity within the Acts narrative. He observes the way in which these stories do not quite fit the expectations of what the work of the Holy Spirit might look like, writing that, 'in both stories, something incomprehensible presses up against the narrative as it stands or as we would expect it to stand'.¹¹⁹

Levison's observations concerning the tensions underlying the Acts story between ecstasy and restraint, comprehension and incomprehension, mania and order, represent a key development to research in this field. However, his treatment of related phenomena such as prophecy, as well as his analysis of the visionary experiences of Peter and Paul reflect more traditional interpretations of the material. Prophetic activity is contrasted with the ecstasy or near-ecstasy of tongues-speech, and is understood as being clear and reliable, while the function of Peter and Paul's experiences is limited to the demonstration of the hand of God at work.¹²⁰ While the untidiness of Spirit activity is underlined, there is no aware of its associated risks, nor of the complexities of other aspects of the presentation of these phenomena within the Acts narrative.

¹¹⁹ *Filled with the Spirit*, 324.

¹²⁰ *Filled with the Spirit*, 357-365.

Summary

Although it is true that signs, wonders, miracles, dreams, visions and related phenomena have not received as much scholarly attention as they might have deserved, this review of literature demonstrates that their importance within the Acts of the Apostles has to some extent been recognised. Their function as signs of God's hand at work has been noted frequently and remains undisputed, although at times the perceived heavy-handedness of Luke's presentation has been lamented. Within more recent scholarship greater nuance has been added to this picture wherein the need for human interpretation of these phenomena is highlighted alongside the major function of these reports as markers of divine presence.

In spite of this development, however, later treatments of the material have tended to perpetuate the wholly positive view of their function asserted within much of the earlier Acts scholarship. Even where the interpretative challenge posed by claims to these experiences has been recognised, this has often remained sheltered under the umbrella of what might be termed the 'hand of God view'. In Miller's work, for example, which goes further than most in moving beyond the limitations of this explanation, the struggle to interpret Paul's dream or vision at Troas is couched in terms of how God might be directing the Christian mission, rather than in terms of whether the dream or vision is a sign of God at work at all. Indeed, Miller explicitly dismisses such a consideration, suggesting that more negative questions such as this one miss the point.¹²¹ In essence, therefore, current scholarly treatments have tended to offer a sanitised interpretation of these phenomena within the Acts narrative. It may be that this reading merely reflects a wider idealising tendency within the text, although one might quickly point out the less

¹²¹ Miller, *Convinced*, 107.

than ideal nature of such a view of dreams and visions. However, any such conclusions are based largely on conjecture, since critical engagements with the material have, either intentionally or otherwise, set these questions to one side.

This is perhaps unsurprising given the tendency within this body of scholarship to focus on the 'vertical' dimension of these encounters - as a marker of divine communication and access to the divine world and its purposes (in other words, the analysis of the nature of the interaction between divine and human, worldly and other-worldly, that such experience signifies) - to the exclusion of the 'horizontal' dimension, which concerns the interpretation, outworking and effect of claims to visionary experience in the context of human interaction within the groups or communities in which they occur. The vertical focus favoured by scholars to date is undoubtedly a vital component of research in this field, but in itself it cannot offer a full picture of the function of these phenomena within the text. An engagement with the horizontal approach is crucial, offering a far greater opportunity to deal with questions of critical awareness or the potential for the misinterpretation of such experiences. Apart from anything else the supposed vertical approach, in which there is communion with the divine is always mediated through human agents. There is no such thing as direct access. It always comes through dreams, visions, auditions, and the like, received and perceived by humans. The horizontal is always primary.

Thus, an exclusive focus on the vertical is problematic. Furthermore, even this vertical dimension hints at greater complexities than those allowed by scholars to date. Miller's research demonstrates that there are two aspects of the interpretation of claims to visionary experience: the first is the question of appropriate interpretation and response, which, while not entirely separable from the experience itself, has to be explored using a

horizontal approach. The second, however, is more directly connected with the worldly-other-worldly relationship that tends to form the focus of vertical enquiries: the question of the source of reported experiences and whether, for instance, it is divine or demonic. This issue of the source and veracity of dreams and visions crops up at several points within the Acts narrative (e.g. 12:9, 15; 16:9, 16-18), although even Miller has left these questions unexplored. Thus, there is a need for further enquiry in this field, particularly in relation to this horizontal dimension and the treatment of claims to visionary experience within a communal context.

Overall, therefore, it is apparent that one especially neglected aspect of research into dreams, visions and related phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles is the consideration of the potential for the misinterpretation or misuse of these encounters. Where this issue has been raised within the secondary literature, it has almost always been dismissed as an unhelpful line of enquiry, or set aside as something that is (lamentably) absent within the text of Acts. This thesis will offer an alternative perspective on this issue, suggesting that matters of possible misinterpretation and potential misuse are inherently connected to dreams and visions themselves within first century thought, and, moreover, that this dimension can be identified within the portrayal of these phenomena in the Acts narrative.

The Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles: Differences in Approach

What is perhaps most interesting about scholarly treatments of dreams, visions and related phenomena in the Acts of the Apostles is the extent to which they are *not* corroborated in

the scholarly literature of other early Christian texts. Research on these phenomena within many of these texts is just as sparse as treatments of the Acts material, with very few monographs dedicated solely to this issue. However, interpretations of these reports of these phenomena have more often been explicitly connected to a context of community dispute and the associated issues of the potential misinterpretation or misuse of such claims. One need look no further than the Pauline epistles to find a high regard for dreams, visions, and related phenomena, coupled with an awareness of their challenges and the potential for their misuse, with 1 Corinthians 14 offering one of the clearest examples of this: Paul describes the value of prophetic activity and glossolalia, while simultaneously issuing instructions for its proper use. Similarly, in *Didache* there is clear evidence of the high regard given to prophetic activity, tempered by cautionary notes such as the discussion of acceptable prophetic/spirit-inspired activity in chapter 11. Again, the issue of the legitimacy and validity of such activities is explicitly discussed within the debate over the New Prophecy (also called Montanism) in the writings of Eusebius.

One example will be outlined further in order to demonstrate this observation: the treatment of the Pauline epistles. There is hardly the scope to offer an extensive review of the scholarship in this area here, but a handful of examples will be cited in the hope of demonstrating the substantially different questions that have at least occasionally been asked of these texts: questions that remain conspicuous in their absence from scholarship on Acts.

Three books will be mentioned briefly. The first of these is Antoinette Clark Wire's *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction Through Paul's Rhetoric*.¹²² Wire uses a rhetorical-critical approach to analyse 1 Corinthians, aiming to re-construct what can be

¹²² (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

known of the community to which the letter was addressed, with particular attention being paid to the role and status of the female prophets within this group. She documents Paul's attempts to persuade his readership, recognising the significant part played by claims to religious experience within this venture, particularly in Paul's treatment of prophecy and tongues-speech in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Wire's reconstruction suggests that the focus of the Corinthian women prophets was on the freedom and creativity of the Spirit, a facet of their communal life that was likely to have been confidently presented to Paul in previous correspondence.¹²³ Paul, writing in opposition to this, advocates a limited number of prophetic speakers and a more reflective process of dealing with their utterances. He also challenges those who might disagree with him, suggesting that those who do not recognise what he writes are not recognised by God. In other words, they are not true prophets.¹²⁴ From the outset, therefore, dreams, visions and related phenomena are strongly connected with human struggles over influence, status, and authority.

The second of the three books that deal with the Pauline corpus is the work of Laura Salah Nasrallah, which has already been drawn into the discussion of the parameters of the category of 'religious experience'. Like Wire, she adopts a rhetorical-critical approach, although in this case her aim is not to understand the use of revelatory experience in the Pauline epistles *per se*, but rather to use her analysis of Paul's letters on the one hand, and of the so-called Montanist 'crisis' on the other, to explore how such experiences functioned within inter-community disputes. She argues against the Weberian idea of the institutionalisation of charisma that implicitly undergirds much of the scholarship in this field, an idea that assumes a gradual decline of prophecy as charismatic

¹²³ Wire, *Corinthian Women*, 135-158. See especially 135-6, 148.

¹²⁴ Wire, *Corinthian Women*, 155.

religious communities mature. Nasrallah argues instead that disputes over the validity and veracity of claims to religious experience represent ‘isolated moments of struggle’ that do not necessarily contribute towards a model of the overarching decline of charismatic activity. These are important issues that will be returned to in due course, but at this point it is Nasrallah’s treatment of the Pauline material that is of interest. Like Wire, Nasrallah turns her attention to the text of 1 Corinthians, although she goes much further in the formulation of her conclusions concerning the role of these phenomena within this text, interpreting Paul’s rhetoric as part of an attempt to ‘establish his authority, to limit the field of knowledge to which the Corinthians had access, and to challenge one of the primary ways in which the Corinthian community was constructing its identity’.¹²⁵ In other words, rhetorical-critical approaches to these texts demonstrate that struggles over authority and status lie at the heart of Paul’s references to these phenomena.

However, these findings are not limited to the field of rhetorical criticism; alternative methodological approaches to the Pauline epistles have yielded similar results. The third example in this brief survey of Pauline scholarship is Colleen Shantz’s study, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle’s Life and Thought*. Shantz adopts an approach that is predominantly influenced by neuroscience in order to examine what she terms the ‘embodied’ Paul. In the first chapter, Shantz demonstrates the persistent bias within existing Pauline scholarship that portrays Paul as an opponent of ecstatic excess.¹²⁶ In the fourth chapter she attempts to re-frame this tendency to place Paul on one side of the debate, suggesting instead that his treatment of these phenomena is more nuanced: at times Paul uses them in the service of other debates such as the question of his apostleship, and

¹²⁵ Nasrallah, *Ecstasy*, 61.

¹²⁶ Shantz, *Paul*, 38-45.

at other times he attempts to influence the way in which particular ecstatic practices are carried out in a communal context.¹²⁷ Throughout, there is an awareness of both the significance of claims to ecstatic experience in their own right, and their influence and significance within community dispute.

Here, therefore, there is clear recognition that the reports of dreams, visions and related phenomena have a complex function within these texts. They function as rhetorical devices, used in attempts to persuade readers/listeners of the text or to discredit opponents. The veracity and validity of such claims is frequently acknowledged to be uncertain, and subject to much dispute. In contrast, any such recognition of these complexities is deemed to be absent from the Acts narrative.

Thus far, the most extensive treatment of this matter within the Acts of the Apostles is found in the work of J.D.G. Dunn, who, as already noted, draws a negative conclusion regarding the presence of this dynamic, contrasting this to its careful consideration within the Pauline Epistles and other early Christian texts. Given that this thesis intends to deviate significantly from this stance, a more detailed overview and analysis of Dunn's argument is called for at this point.

Assessment and Response: Further Analysis of the Work of J.D.G. Dunn

As already noted, Dunn characterises the accounts of Holy Spirit activity in the Acts of the Apostles as enthusiastic but naïve representations of certain phenomena that suggest a disconcerting lack of awareness of any potential for the abuse of claims to such

¹²⁷ Shantz, *Paul*, 145, 197-203.

encounters.¹²⁸ Moreover, for Dunn, the Acts accounts fail to properly identify the distinctive character of Christian experience over and against apparently similar claims from pagan sources, a major contributing factor in Dunn's classification of these reports as lacking in the appropriate level of critical awareness.¹²⁹

In stark contrast to this, Dunn argues that the reports within the Pauline Epistles demonstrate precisely that which is lacking within Acts: evidence not only of the awareness of the potential pitfalls that accompany claims to what he terms as 'religious experience', but also a sustained attempt to deal with these difficulties. This analysis of the function of these phenomena within the Pauline epistles will briefly be surveyed here, since the identification of key markers of critical awareness of abuse and misinterpretation within the Epistles may help in delineating more sharply what is deemed to be absent from the Acts of the Apostles. Dunn's treatment of the Pauline material is divided into three chapters of his book, each of which will be summarised below. To avoid unnecessary confusion, Dunn's own use of the term 'religious experience' will be repeated in the ensuing overview of his work.¹³⁰ However, for the reasons outlined in the Introduction, this terminology will be avoided in the subsequent analysis and critique of this work.

In the first of these chapters (chapter VIII) Dunn examines the basic concepts that he identifies as playing a part in Paul's conception of religious experience: grace, spirit, and the associated notions of *charisma(ta)* and *pneumatikos*, as well as miracles, revelation, inspired utterance and service. Dunn explores the ways in which these concepts are presented within the Epistles, emphasising in particular the meaning of charisma as an

¹²⁸ This point is made repeatedly throughout Dunn's treatment of the Acts material. See especially *Jesus and the Spirit*, 167, 177-179, 190, 195.

¹²⁹ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 168.

¹³⁰ Dunn does not offer a definition of 'religious experience' as such, but he does briefly outline the scope of his use of this term. He also uses the term 'charismatic experience', but is clear that the former is more comprehensive and broad (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 3-4).

experience of the activity of God at a particular moment in time and as the ‘inevitable outworking’ of the gift of grace. In other words, for Dunn, charisma is not a human ability, nor an experience contained within sacramental activity, but the work of the Spirit.¹³¹

In the second of these chapters (chapter IX) Dunn examines the corporate dimension of religious experience within the Pauline Epistles. He begins by asserting the close connection between charisma and community, suggesting that the Spirit is essential for the formation of a charismatic community, and that believers are members of this community only as charismatics.¹³² In this context, Dunn once again raises the issue of how one might discern the presence of true charisma within community life, an issue he further addresses in the proceeding chapter.¹³³ Here, Dunn concludes that Paul demonstrates a consistently positive view regarding all charismata that weren’t detrimental to community life, with bolder endorsements being given in those contexts where the risk of abuse was less, such as in Thessalonica.¹³⁴ He also suggests that for Paul, charismata are associated with their own checks against possible abuse, including alternative forms of authority, and the considered evaluation of the community as a whole.¹³⁵

Dunn’s third and final chapter on the Pauline Epistles (chapter X) treats in greater depth the issue of how authentic charismatic experience ought to be identified, addressing the issue of what in the Pauline conception of these phenomena contributed towards their distinctively Christian character. While recognising that charismatic experience is not in itself uniquely Christian, Dunn proposes one major difference between Christian and non-Christian religious experience within the Pauline corpus: the notion of Christ-

¹³¹ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 253-257; see also 205-209.

¹³² *Jesus and the Spirit*, 265.

¹³³ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 271.

¹³⁴ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 297.

¹³⁵ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 299.

consciousness. As the term itself suggests, this refers to the central position of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith within the religious experiences of the first Christians, to the extent that such phenomena are framed within this context. Dunn also emphasises the positive effects of authentic charismatic experience in expressing Christ's love and building up the community.¹³⁶ Dunn later summarises Paul's vision of charismatic community as that of 'a church whose authority lies preeminently in apostle and charisma, and where both can be measured by all in terms of the criteria of gospel tradition, love and the good of the church'.¹³⁷

Dunn's treatment of the religious experience reports in both Acts and Paul's letters places a high currency upon the distinctiveness of Christian experience. In the Pauline texts this finds expression in the afore-mentioned notion of Christ-consciousness, an umbrella motif that connects common characteristics of a wide range of charismatic experiences within the Epistles, both the ecstatic and the more mundane. It is quite apparent that this issue is of central importance to Dunn, although one may ask whether it is in fact a necessary criterion for the detection of the critical awareness with which he concerns himself. In the case of the Epistles, it is clear that the characteristics that form the overarching motif of Christ-consciousness do demonstrate such critical awareness. Indeed, these features represent an attempt to combat such risks in encounters with religious experience. Paul's letters offer a means of identifying authentic experience on the basis of its community enhancing impact and Christ centred focus, although the practical application of such characteristics is doubtful, dependent as they are on an awareness of the longer-term impact of individual claims to experience.

¹³⁶ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 341.

¹³⁷ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 359.

In summary, therefore, Dunn argues that the Pauline Epistles demonstrate an awareness of the potential abuse of claims to religious experience, and that, in an attempt to minimise this risk, Paul instructed the communities in Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica concerning the appropriate place and use of these experiences. In particular, Dunn suggests that Paul had a conception of a distinctively Christian form of religious experience, which functioned as a community building dynamic, and for which the figure of Christ was central.¹³⁸ There is much to commend Dunn's assessment of the Pauline material, although the degree of admiration that Dunn evidently holds for the Pauline notion of charismatic community is perhaps less compelling.¹³⁹ What seems to be clear is that within the Epistles, the risk of the misuse and misinterpretation of claims to religious experience is managed by the implementation of a clear set of criteria.

It is quite apparent that for Dunn, the book of Acts does not demonstrate this same awareness, offering a representation of these phenomena that is well-intentioned but inadequate. He refers to Luke as 'a valuable but indiscriminating guide when it comes to asking questions about the religious experience of the earliest Christian communities.'¹⁴⁰ Dunn attempts to be fair to Luke in making this judgement against his treatment of religious experience, writing, 'he only appears in such a poor light because he has to stand comparison with other NT writers who saw the problem in all its sharpness and could not ignore it.'¹⁴¹

In no small way Dunn's observations are accurate. Within the Acts of the Apostles there are indeed no explicit permissions or prohibitions regarding the use of such claims

¹³⁸ Dunn also recognises a more general notion of religious experience within the epistles that refers to the inspiration of the Spirit in words and service (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 341).

¹³⁹ Dunn writes, 'for myself I have to confess that it is the vitality and maturity of the Pauline exposition which is most attractive' (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 360).

¹⁴⁰ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 195.

¹⁴¹ *Jesus and the Spirit*, 168.

within community life, no explicit acknowledgement of the issue of the possible abuse of these phenomena, and no explicit recognition of their distinctiveness from seemingly similar experiences recorded from beyond the boundaries of the Christian movement. Crucially, however, these observations need not lead to the conclusions that Dunn has drawn. Moreover, while his identification of the intrinsic issues connected with claims to charismatic experience is valuable, his treatment of the relevant material in Acts remains unsatisfactory.

There are two major criticisms that can be levelled against Dunn's work. First, his insistence on the need for a recognition of the distinctiveness of Christian religious experience is questionable, and second, his analysis is limited by an overarching notion of the institutionalisation of charisma that betrays unhelpful assumptions regarding 'primitive' attitudes towards these phenomena. This distorts his argument and renders his conclusions unpersuasive. These criticisms will now be expounded in greater depth.

The Distinctiveness of Christian Experience

As noted, Dunn finds no recognition of the distinctiveness of Christian dreams, visions, and related phenomena within Acts, barring an occasional differentiation between magic and miracle that, for Dunn, is marred by the fact that it could just as easily be explained by the *superiority* of Christian experience than by its *distinctiveness*.¹⁴² Part of Dunn's critique refers to the absence within Acts of specific elements of distinctiveness within the accounts of these phenomena, such as the notion of sonship, which Dunn identifies as a significant feature of the experience of Jesus and that envisioned by Paul. In the main, however, he

¹⁴² *Jesus and the Spirit*, 168.

focuses his attention upon the lack of differentiation between practitioners of magic and performers of miracles: insiders and outsiders within the text of Acts.

Although Dunn recognises some emphasis on the name of Jesus within the Acts narrative, he laments the unsystematic and haphazard way in which the issue of distinctiveness is generally portrayed within the book, claiming that Luke is 'either unable or unwilling to address himself to that task'.¹⁴³ Certainly, there is ready support for Dunn's assessment within the text. For example, the Pythian slave-girl of Acts 16: 1-18 is an ambiguous figure whose status as an outsider is not immediately apparent, the activity of the itinerant Jewish exorcists in chapter 19:13-17 is not ostensibly different from 'Christian' exorcism (although the results are), Simon the magician is baptised into the Christian community yet subsequently challenged (and cursed) as a result of his desire to acquire the power of the Holy Spirit (8:4-24), and at certain points the activities and treatment of the apostles and other Christian intermediaries appears no less 'magical' than that of their opponents (5:14-16, 19:11-12, 28:1-6). In other words, the lines of distinction between positive and unthreatening encounters, and dangerous and unedifying 'magic' can not always be easily drawn within Acts.

What is more open to question, however, is the degree to which this should inform the understanding of whether or not the text displays a critical awareness of the potential misuse of such phenomena. While the portrayal of dreams, visions and related phenomena may well appear to be unsystematic within the text, the establishment of a clear set of criteria with which encounters with these phenomena must be assessed is far from the only means of dealing with its potential challenges, nor is it even necessarily the best. On the

¹⁴³ Dunn notes the way in which, 'wonders and signs are attributed variously to the Spirit of God, the name of Jesus and the hand of the Lord, without any attempt being made to explain the relationship of these concepts of power. More frustrating is Luke's failure to clarify the relationship between the miracles of the early church and the parallel miracles in Jewish and Hellenistic religion' (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 170).

contrary, any such system negates the continuing need for such awareness since claims can simply be categorised according to a pre-existing set of criteria that necessitates their conservative character and narrows their potential impact. Such categorisation is dependant upon clear community boundaries, and a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders, typically denoted in terms of the ‘edifying holy activity’ within the community, and the ‘dangerous magical practices’ carried out by those outside of it.

Unlike the question of critical awareness surrounding the types of phenomena that Dunn treats, which has been significantly overlooked outside of his research, this more specific issue of the differentiation between ‘miracle’ and ‘magic’ has received greater attention, and significant developments have been proposed, particularly in the decades since *Jesus and the Spirit* was written. The history of research in this field has been traced by Andy M. Reimer in his 2002 publication, *Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.¹⁴⁴ Although this issue is peripheral to the central focus of this thesis upon dreams and visions, Reimer’s contribution can usefully be included at this point as a means of demonstrating the inadequacy of Dunn’s insistence on the necessary distinctiveness of authentic Christian experience.

Miracle, Magic and Community Boundaries

Reimer traces two developmental stages in the treatment of this issue. The first stage comprises the absolute definitions offered by nineteenth and early twentieth century social anthropologists, wherein fundamental differences were identified between the categories of miracle and magic. Thus, miracle was viewed as supplicative, whereas magic was viewed

¹⁴⁴ (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

as manipulative.¹⁴⁵ The second stage, influenced by the framework of the sociology of knowledge, replaced these absolute definitions by relative ones, which recognised the crucial role of group identity in the definition of miracle and magic.¹⁴⁶ This is typified by Robert M. Grant's famous observation that 'your magic is my miracle and vice versa'.¹⁴⁷ While this second stage is important, Reimer argues that the use of such a framework leads to an inevitable solution of 'inter-group polemic', and that it cannot progress much further beyond this point. He writes:

The charges and counter-charges of magic are immediately met with a newly formed habit of assuming that the 'reality' of this situation is simply inter-group polemic. Inter-group polemic, with two self-interested parties talking past each other, is all we perceive as we skim over the 'manifest' motives of the text or speech acts and dive headlong into 'latent' motives such as group definition.¹⁴⁸

Reimer's own contribution to this issue, in common with other scholars such as Anitra Kolenkow, is to suggest that even within classic examples of this sociology of knowledge perspective, one can find hints that amongst ancient writers and readers there is some sort of shared ground for appeal.¹⁴⁹ There may well have been no objective criteria by which individuals might have proved themselves to be miracle-workers rather than magicians, but

¹⁴⁵ This view can be found in the work of James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A History of Myth and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1922); Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1948); Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁴⁶ The term 'the sociology of knowledge' refers to the connection between human ideas and the context from which they emerge. Work in this field has been strongly influenced by the framework offered in Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books, 1967).

¹⁴⁷ Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 93. See also A.F. Segal, 'Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition', in R. van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren (eds.), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 349-375; Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

¹⁴⁸ Reimer, *Miracle and Magic*, 10.

¹⁴⁹ Kolenkow's findings are presented in 'A Problem of Power: How Miracle Doers Counter Charges of Magic in the Hellenistic World', in George MacRae (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature: 1976 Seminar Papers* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), 105-10.

grounds for appeal are nevertheless listed, which, he argues, suggests that the categories are not quite as empty as the sociology of knowledge framework implies. Thus, Reimer argues in support of the existence of identifiable strategies that were more widely used as a defence against accusations of magic. These include withdrawal from social networks, the abandonment of livelihood, disregard for personal safety, the avoidance of ambition, and the downplaying and dissipation of power.¹⁵⁰ Unlike the specific characteristics that can be found in Dunn's treatment of the Epistles, and that Dunn laments as absent within the Acts of the Apostles, these function more generally as markers of potential risk. For Reimer, the legitimate intermediary is one who can navigate these risks.¹⁵¹ While such markers cannot be plucked wholesale from Reimer's argument and applied to the issue at hand within this research, they hint at the possibility of an alternative approach to the text of Acts, and an alternative means of demonstrating critical awareness of the potential abuse of claims to visionary experience within the narrative.

A major advantage of Reimer's work over that of Dunn is his recognition that the question of determining authentic charismatic experience cannot simply be a question of determining community boundaries. While differentiation between insiders and outsiders plays an inevitable role in community identity construction, the struggle over the validity and meaning of claims to religious experience must be at least partially located *within* the communities of believers depicted in Acts themselves. The use of dream and vision reports and accounts of related phenomena do not simply occur at moments of struggle between insiders and outsiders, and any attempt to maintain these lines of distinction is especially inappropriate given the wider concerns of the Acts narrative to illustrate the widening and

¹⁵⁰ These are summarised in Reimer's conclusion: *Miracle and Magic*, 245-250.

¹⁵¹ *Miracle and Magic*, 47-48.

shifting of such boundaries to incorporate ‘all flesh’ within the vision of Christian community. In the upside down world of the Acts of the Apostles it is not always easy to establish who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’, so to use such categories as markers for authentic experience would be foolhardy. Dunn’s insistence upon traditional lines of distinction between insiders and outsiders fails to take into account the function of the wider narrative, and is not a satisfactory criterion for the recognition of critical attitudes towards charismatic phenomena.

Authorial Naïveté

The second aspect of the critique of Dunn’s work concerns his criticism of the naïveté of the author of Acts, either in his own attitude towards these phenomena, or in the handling of his sources, and his explanation of this charge as the attempted recreation of a golden age of charismatic community among the earliest Christians.¹⁵² In spite of his repeated references to this apparent naïveté, Dunn himself acknowledges that the charge is not without its difficulties: first, it is not echoed in other early Christian writings such as those of Paul, and thus cannot purely be a reflection of a wider cultural phenomenon, and second, Luke proves himself to be an otherwise competent author and editor. All this suggests that the presentation of Joel 2 phenomena within the text is not the act of an author who knew no ‘better’ or who was a victim of a culturally dictated credulity with regard to charismatic experience, but rather that this has some purpose. The question of how one might go about detecting authorial intention is a thorny one, but it is apparent that

¹⁵² Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 169.

naïveté alone cannot offer a satisfactory explanation for the presentation of these reports within the Acts narrative. For Dunn, this leads him to the suggestion that:

Perhaps the fairest way to evaluate Luke's treatment at this point is to recognize him as one who, on looking back from the comparative calmness and sophistication of later years, was enamoured and thrilled by the enthusiasm and power of the early mission as he heard of it from older witnesses and reports. If so, it is quite likely that he wrote his account of Christian beginnings with the aim of conveying something of the same impact and impression to his readers; many of these past and present would testify to his success.¹⁵³

While Dunn recognises the critical attitudes towards these phenomena that were present at the period in which Luke was composing Acts, and even at the earlier point at which Paul was writing, he seems content to attribute a far greater credulity to the Christian believers a few decades prior to this, stating, 'Luke here of course no doubt accurately reflects the unquestioning enthusiasm of the earliest days of the Jerusalem community before the questions and problems arose.'¹⁵⁴ It is not clear whether Dunn entirely holds to the historical accuracy of such a presentation, but even if it is regarded as mere idealisation on the part of the author of Acts, the notion that this portrays any kind of ideal betrays a deeper assumption regarding the naïveté of ancient believers who simply accept the desirability of the undiscerned dominance of charismatic claims.

The Ghost of Max Weber and the Need for an Alternative Approach

This leads the discussion to a further critique of Dunn's work: the notion of the institutionalisation of charisma, and the associated assumptions regarding 'primitive' attitudes towards dreams, visions and related phenomena. Before demonstrating the

¹⁵³ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 169.

¹⁵⁴ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 190.

limitations of this approach, a brief summary will be offered of the model of religious development that is often referred to as the institutionalisation or routinisation of charisma.

This was initially proposed by Max Weber, who argued that ‘charismatic authority’, that type of authority that typifies many emerging religious movements, must inevitably be transformed into a more stable form if the movement is to survive in the long-term.¹⁵⁵ This may result in developments such as the introduction of norms for recruitment, the availability of ‘charisma’ only through office, ritual, or tradition, and decreasing opportunities for spontaneous charismatic activity.¹⁵⁶

This notion of charisma is connected to that of ‘experiences deemed religious’, though perhaps not in the direct way one might at first assume. Weber credits Rudolph Sohm with the initial development of the concept of charisma, which was based on the latter’s understanding of the term *charismata* within the Pauline epistles.¹⁵⁷ The term refers to ‘gifts’, which appears to include gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, glossolalia, and the interpretation of glossolalia (1 Cor. 12:4-10). Thus it is apparent that the Pauline concept of charisma is closely connected

¹⁵⁵ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, tr. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1947). See also Frank Parkin, *Max Weber* (Chichester: Ellis Horwood Limited, 1982); Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (London, University Paperbacks, 1966); Martin Albrow, *Max Weber's Construction of Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1990). Weber defines charismatic authority as, ‘a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader’. (*Theory*, 358-359.) This is contrasted by two additional forms of authority: traditional, and rational-legal. Frank Parkin usefully summarises the three forms as follows: the grounds for traditional authority is ‘obey me because this is what our people have always done’; for rational-legal authority it is ‘obey me because I am your lawfully appointed superior’; and for charismatic it is ‘obey me because I can transform your life’. (*Max Weber*, 77.)

¹⁵⁶ These ideas are taken up in Bendix, *Weber*, 303-4; and in the field of New Testament studies, by Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-historical Study of the Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 65; Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978), 180.

¹⁵⁷ Weber, *Theory*, 328. See Rudolph Sohm, *Kirchenrecht* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1892-1923)

– though not necessarily exclusively so (Romans 12:6-8) – with experiences deemed religious. Sohm’s conception of the term does not reflect this element of the Pauline usage. He uses the term ‘charismatic organisation’ to denote the transmission of the authoritative teaching of the word of God.¹⁵⁸ The definition sees further development in the hands of Weber, who widens it to incorporate figures outside the Christian tradition such as shamans. Peter Haley notes that, ‘distinct motifs of unrestraint, frenzy, and disregard for inherited commands are added in the Weberian conception.’¹⁵⁹ While Weber associates the idea of charismatic authority with a particular individual rather than with ‘gifts’ that can be more widely accessed, his development of Sohm’s work re-incorporates *some* elements of experiences deemed religious; in particular those that may be categorised as ‘ecstatic’.¹⁶⁰ This has led to the perception of a linear development from a movement characterised by ‘irrational’ frenzied experiences deemed religious, to one characterised by ‘rational’ doctrines, traditions and conventional organisational structures.

Critique of Max Weber

This thesis does not intend to either credit or discredit the depiction of this process of development. Indeed, it would be difficult to do so when focusing only upon a single text, and thus a single point in any such development. However, what is more open to challenge

¹⁵⁸ *Kirchenrecht*, 28; 151. See also Peter Haley, ‘Rudolph Sohm on Charisma’, *The Journal of Religion* Vol. 60, No. 2 (1980), 193

¹⁵⁹ Haley, *Sohm*, 196.

¹⁶⁰ This element of Weber’s work has been criticised by Peter Worsley, who rightly notes that, ‘far from being intensely focused on the person of the leader, then, we find movements which, empirically, are eminently millenarian, but in which the leader may be (a) absent; (b) not a single person at all, but with leadership divided amongst several people; (c) where the functions of prophet and organiser, at least, are separately embodied in two distinct persons; (d) where the leader is often one of a number of local leaders, rather than a single central figure (as Weber implies); (e) where the prophet is an insignificant person; (f) where the symbolic importance of the leader only becomes significant after his physical removal’ (*The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of ‘Cargo’ Cults in Melanesia* [New York: Schocken Books, 1968], xvi-xvii).

is the all-too-common assumption regarding the uncritical nature of the first phase of charismatic authority. An important differentiation needs to be made between a positive view of the significance and authority of charismatic experience, and a lack of awareness of its potential misuse. In other words, the communities that fit this earliest phase of the process of institutionalisation ought not to be assumed to be uncritical of the phenomena that lie at their heart.

This has to some extent been recognised in the work of Laura Nasrallah, who has offered a robust critique of Weber's proposals on the grounds of his perception of history as a linear development and the way in which the idea of routinisation seems to be dependent on this.¹⁶¹ Nasrallah challenges the historicity of the notion of a linear process of development, arguing instead in favour of what she terms a 'model of struggle'.¹⁶² She criticises the adoption of totalising accounts of history, which she argues are often employed because of the way in which they seem to offer a complete account.

One of the key contributions of Nasrallah's work is the recognition of the rhetorical function of much of the language of rationality and madness within the ancient world. She writes:

Arguments about the phenomenon that encompasses divination, prophecy, dreams, visions, and ecstasy [...] are launched in contexts of struggle and debate. These struggles are especially concerned with epistemology, with what can and cannot be known, and with the authority gained and religious identity constructed from claims to perceive the communication and intervention of the divine in the present day.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁶² Nasrallah, *Ecstasy*, 24. Nasrallah borrows the term 'model of struggle' from the work of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza – see for example 'Re-Visioning Christian Origins', in *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1999), 237.

¹⁶³ Nasrallah, *Ecstasy*, 2.

Nasrallah is able to identify the significance of claims to prophetic experience within ancient discourse, and the way in which debates over such experiences are almost always debates over group boundaries. They set ontological limits for group members and function as a tool with which authors can assert the authority of their own views.

Nasrallah also highlights the connection between such experiences and authority within communities. For example, she writes in her conclusion that:

Analysing a range of texts in antiquity, we found that despite all their accusations of madness and rationality and their uses of *mania*, *amentia*, and terminology of a sound mind, they are not interested in defining reason or madness or in setting forth a theory of history's periodisation. Rather, by using these discourses, the texts seek to shore up their own authority and that of their community, to establish a community's identity and borders over and against others, and to delimit realms of knowledge – to fix the boundaries of what can be known and how it can be known.¹⁶⁴

Such recognition offers an important caution against too ready an application of Weber's model within the study of early Christian texts. It is impossible to detect a phase of development, no matter how early, in which one finds only the prophetic or the charismatic, without the associated debates over validity, veracity, and authority. Nasrallah correctly identifies claims to such experience as battle grounds within and between the factions and communities depicted within early Christian texts. It is likely that Nasrallah's overall argument against the Weberian model goes beyond what the evidence allows, since, firstly, it seems difficult to entirely deny a process of development within religious movements, and secondly, the rhetorical discussions that she treats appear to largely favour the language of rationality over that of ecstasy, which may hint at the kind of routinising tendency, however disconnected, that she is so eager to deny. However, her recognition of the contested nature of accounts of prophetic experience offers a vital corrective to the way

¹⁶⁴ Nasrallah, *Ecstasy*, 198.

in which Weber's work, as well as broader suppositions concerning 'primitive' attitudes to such phenomena, have influenced and limited research.

Pentecostal Reaction to the Work of J.D.G. Dunn

As already noted, Dunn explicitly articulates the starting point of his two volume work as a reaction to Pentecostal readings of the New Testament.¹⁶⁵ It is unsurprising, therefore, that his work triggered a number of responses from self-consciously Pentecostal scholars.

While a number of these scholars have offered their own analysis of the dreams, visions and related phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles, focusing in particular on the Pentecost accounts and the reports of glossolalia, much of this research has revolved around the question of 'what really happened?' at the expense of any consideration of the awareness (or otherwise) of the potential for misinterpretation or misuse of such phenomena.¹⁶⁶ Even where the matter of the contemporary application of Lukan teaching is raised, consideration of this issue is largely absent, as encapsulated by William Atkinson's telling comment on the responsibility of believers to scrutinise biblical teaching:

¹⁶⁵ Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 1-8.

¹⁶⁶ This is perhaps best encapsulated in James B. Shelton's formal response to Dunn's work, which entirely fails to mention this aspect of Dunn's proposal ('A Reply to James D.G. Dunn's *Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts*', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 4 [1994] 139-143). More general examples include: (1) The work of Gerald Hovenden upon glossolalia in the New Testament, which situates this material within a much broader cultural context that includes Old Testament and Inter-testamental texts, as well as 'pagan' examples of inspired speech (*Speaking in Tongues: The New Testament Evidence in Context* [London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002]). There is much of interest within this work, but the closest Hovenden comes to consideration of misinterpretation of these phenomena is in the question of how normative such experiences were within early Christianity (p.101-102); (2) Robert Menzies' monograph on the Spirit in Luke-Acts (*Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* [London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004], first published as *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991]), which locates divergent interpretations of Spirit baptism among the first Christians across the insider-outsider divide rather than within the boundaries of the Christian community itself (p.219), and which asserts a Lukan portrayal of the Spirit as the source of prophetic inspiration without even raising the matter of the potential for the misuse of such claims (p.230).

We Pentecostals celebrate all good teaching from the Bible that is offered today, whatever the context. But we have a right to be concerned about teaching that either ignores the place of the Holy Spirit in Christian life and service or actually denies that the Spirit works in manifest, charismatic ways today.¹⁶⁷

It is not possible to offer a full analysis of Pentecostal responses to this material in Luke-Acts, but the evidence of some of the most prominent works of biblical analysis emerging from the context of Pentecostalism suggests that the consideration of the potential misuse and abuse of these phenomena is as absent here as Dunn claims it to be within the Acts of the Apostles.

Conclusion

Dunn's negative assessment of the reports of dreams, visions, and related phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles relies on unfavourable comparison with the explicit criteria for assessing the validity and veracity of these phenomena that can be found within the Pauline Epistles, as well as an interpretation of the lack of distinctiveness of Christian experiences of these phenomena within Acts as evidence of lack of critical awareness for their potential misuse or misinterpretation. It has been argued above that the issue of the distinctiveness or otherwise of Christian dreams, visions and related phenomena within Acts ought not to be used as a criterion to assess awareness of their potential misuse, and this is an issue that will now be set aside.

The second aspect of Dunn's argument that has been highlighted here is the assertion of the naïveté of the author of Acts in his idealised presentation of Joel 2

¹⁶⁷ William Atkinson, *Baptism in the Spirit: Luke-Acts and the Dunn Debate* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 137.

phenomena within the narrative. The detailed exegesis of key passages within the Acts of the Apostles in Part II of this thesis will be used to challenge this reading of the text, and to support an alternative proposal wherein the opposite is in fact the case. However, Dunn's assertion raises a more fundamental question relating to the extent to which the supposed lack of critical engagement with these phenomena within Acts is typical or atypical for first century portrayals of these experiences. If widespread credulity and lack of awareness of the risks associated with claims to such experiences can be detected elsewhere, then Dunn's reading of Acts could at least be situated within a plausible historical context. If, however - as Dunn himself seems to hint - this is not a 'typical' first century or early Christian attitude, such a reading of the Acts of the Apostles becomes an intriguing puzzle, and the apparent naïveté of its author represents an anomaly that merits further examination, and perhaps even reassessment.

The third significant criticism of Dunn's argument concerns the reliance upon a (largely assumed) Weberian model of religious development. In its simplest form, there is a danger that any such model pushes critical analysis of charismatic phenomena to later phases of development rather than recognising their presence at the earliest stages of any such process. This reflects the post-Enlightenment view that ancient people held 'primitive' attitudes towards experiences deemed religious, and that they shared the neat separation between natural and supernatural that characterises modernity. This thesis will argue that ancient attitudes towards these phenomena were far more sophisticated than such depictions allow. Indeed, it is precisely *because* potentially significant dreams and visions were part and parcel of the fabric of the ancient world that the need to recognise them and deal with them was part of everyday life. In other words, the horizontal

dimension referred to earlier in this thesis - the consideration and interpretation of claims to such experiences within a community context - was absolutely necessary.

In order to respond adequately to Dunn's proposal it is necessary first to explore attitudes towards dreams, visions and related phenomena within the cultural context from which the Acts of the Apostles emerged, and second, to re-examine the dream-vision reports within the Book of Acts in the light of these findings, with a view to establishing the extent to which such attitudes are mirrored within the Acts narrative. It is to the first of these tasks that the next chapter will turn.

Chapter Two: Dreams and Visions in the Ancient Mediterranean

All of the available evidence suggests that dreaming, in one form or another, is a universal human experience. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that some of the ideas concerning the function and meaning of dreams also span cultures and time periods. Indeed, part of the fascination of study in this area comes from these common threads of experience and interpretation. References to dreams also span many different mediums, from inscriptions upon the walls of ancient temples to depictions in modern art and film. The ubiquity of dreaming raises a number of challenges, both in terms of identifying the scope and boundaries of any particular study within the field, and also in establishing the prevalence and dominance of attitudes towards dreaming in a specific time and place.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the function, meaning and significance of dreams and visions within the cultural milieu from which the Acts of the Apostles emerged. This will entail examination of the terminology of dreaming, and consideration of the social and historical functions of dreaming and dream and vision reports within this period. Once these parameters have been outlined, attention will be given to the range of attitudes towards these phenomena within both Graeco-Roman and Jewish contexts. Particular consideration will be given to the question of the extent to which the potential for the misinterpretation of dreams and visions was recognised, either by the individual dreamer or by others. Following this, attention will be turned to dreams and visions within a narrative context. Several indicative examples will be assessed with a view to establishing whether the narrative function of dreams and visions simply mirrors the broader socio-historical context, or whether there are particular features of dreams and visions within this setting.

Establishing a Context for the Acts of the Apostles

The natural starting point for such discussion is to ask what actually constitutes the cultural milieu of the book of Acts. This is a question that has attracted significant scholarly debate in its own right, both in terms of the possible setting and intended audience of the text, and the literary genre to which it is likely to belong. As a result of the interest in the finished story of Acts, questions of dating and authorship do not require particular attention here. As the ensuing chapter will demonstrate, attitudes towards dreams and visions across much of the span of the Hellenistic period are strikingly consistent, thus any attempt to offer a precise date for the composition of Acts would add little to the argument of this thesis, especially given the fact that almost all such proposals fall into a fifty year timespan. Similarly, the question of the authorship of this volume, or its arguable connection to the Gospel of Luke, has limited relevance to the current project, other than to the extent that this can illuminate understanding of the purpose of the book. These are issues that have been addressed in detail elsewhere, and these discussions will not be rehearsed here.¹⁶⁸

Of greater relevance in establishing the context for the book are perceptions of its intended purpose. As might be expected, a number of different proposals have been made, including the apologetic intentions of the text, either as part of an effort to defend the

¹⁶⁸ Key texts that offer detailed discussion of these issues include, on the matter of dating: Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 79-85, and Richard I. Pervo, who challenges the popular scholarly view of a date for Acts in the 80s, proposing instead that this is a second century work (*Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and The Apologists* [Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge Press, 2006]). On the question of authorship: Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols (Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchenvluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986) i:27; Rebecca I. Denova, *The Things Accomplished Among Us: Prophetic Tradition in the Structural Pattern of Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 230-231. On the narrative unity of Luke and Acts: Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986-1990), i:1-9; Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

church from the Roman Empire, or as an attempt to reconcile Pauline and Petrine factions amongst early Christian groups;¹⁶⁹ theological intentions, particularly in relation to the need to account for the delay of the Parousia;¹⁷⁰ or pastoral intentions in offering teaching, guidance, and encouragement to Christian believers.¹⁷¹ However, any attempt to establish the purpose of the text prior to analysis of its contents demands the kind of circularity that has already been criticised in relation to the attempts to define ‘religious experience’. Moreover, it is highly likely that a multiplicity of purposes motivated the composition of this text.

One key issue that spans this debate and occupies much attention throughout the narrative is the explanation of the Gentile mission. Richard I. Pervo aptly summarises the situation as follows: ‘The fundamental problem of Acts is the validity of the Gentile mission. Everything else is prelude and excursus, sideshow and background.’¹⁷² It would be difficult to underestimate the radical significance of this development, from a social as well as a theological perspective. The inclusion of the Gentiles, and, in particular, their apparent inclusion without the need for circumcision, subverts existing conceptions of group boundaries and further complicates the identification of insiders and outsiders within the narrative world of the Acts of the Apostles. The rapidly expanding boundaries of the Christian movement render any assessment of the validity or veracity of claims to experiences deemed religious on the basis of group membership increasingly problematic,

¹⁶⁹ Haenchen, *Acts*, 15-24; Robert L. Brawley, ‘Paul in Acts: Lucan Apology and Conciliation’, in Charles H. Talbert (ed.), *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 134-43.

¹⁷⁰ Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, tr. Geoffrey Buswell (London: Faber, 1960), 135ff.

¹⁷¹ Robert L. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 17-18. These proposals, alongside several others, are briefly outlined in Mark Allan Powell, *What are they Saying About Acts?* (New York; Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1991), 13-19. A fuller survey has been attempted by W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd edn (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1989). See also the detailed treatment of this matter in Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012-2015), i: 435-458.

¹⁷² Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 264.

thus forcing the challenge of the appropriate treatment of such phenomena into the spotlight.

This core concern for the Gentile mission has shaped the majority scholarly view of Acts as a text with a predominantly Gentile setting and audience. However, it would be almost impossible to overestimate the diversity and variety that is encompassed in deceptively simple terms such as ‘Gentile’, ‘Hellenistic’ or ‘Graeco-Roman’, so this alone represents a vast range of possible sources and influences upon the text. Moreover, in spite of the likely Gentile setting for the book, it would be foolish to suppose that it lacks Jewish influence. While the scholarly debate over the nature of the portrayal of the Jews within the text of Acts remains unresolved, there is far greater consensus regarding the significance of the story of God’s people, as portrayed in the Septuagint, in determining the structure, themes, and content of the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁷³ This, coupled with the likely influence of Diaspora Judaism upon both author and audience of the book, means that Jewish perspectives upon dreams and visions, especially as they are portrayed within the Septuagint, ought to be taken seriously. In addition to this, nascent Christianity itself forms an additional strand of the context from which the text of Acts emerges, and the possibility of distinctive Christian treatments of dreams, visions and related phenomena should not be dismissed.

Overall, therefore, the cultural diversity of the first century Mediterranean world means that possible influences upon the text of the Acts of the Apostles are wide-ranging

¹⁷³ Lawrence M. Wills’s article, ‘The Depiction of the Jews in Acts’, offers a helpful overview of the different scholarly perspectives (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 110.4 [1991], 631-654). More detailed treatment of key themes within this debate can be found in Joseph B. Tyson, *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts* (Columbia; South Carolina University Press, 1992).

and numerous and the task of pinpointing likely sources for the book is a notoriously difficult one.¹⁷⁴ With this in mind, C. Kavin Rowe's words of wisdom seem especially apt:

[A]side from some basic generalities, we have no idea where Acts was written, or for whom, or at what particular time, or where it was to be sent (if indeed only one place was intended). In light of such ignorance, the proper hermeneutical posture is practice a kind of interpretive asceticism in relation to what Acts' actual readers would have made of Acts. 'Readers' in this book thus functions primarily as a placeholder for Christian readers of various kinds in the late first century and as a word that allows us to talk about the overall theological vision of the narrative of Acts. In simple terms, to 'read' Acts is to think Christianly in the late first century Graeco-Roman world.¹⁷⁵

For the purposes of this enquiry, therefore, the idea of the 'context' of the Acts of the Apostles will remain rather general. The focus within most of this chapter will be upon extra-biblical references to dreams and visions that can be dated within the first century CE, although some examples from the previous and following centuries are included. In the main, these texts are 'Gentile' and written in Greek, although occasional exceptions to both of these are also cited. Towards the end of the chapter, brief consideration will be given to the question of distinctively Jewish attitudes towards dream-visions, and also to the possibility of early Christian developments in this field. Finally, a handful of significantly earlier texts will be included as part of the treatment of the source and location of dreams and visions, since a number of first century beliefs about this appear to have stemmed from older Greek epics such as the writings of Homer.

The aim of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive survey of the extant literature, nor to precisely catalogue the extant references according to their geographical location, genre or purpose. A number of such projects have already been undertaken, and

¹⁷⁴ Helpful discussion of the state of scholarship, especially relating to the sources of Acts, can be found in Todd Penner, 'Madness in the Method? The Acts of the Apostles in Current Study', *Currents in Biblical Research*, 2.2 (2004) 223-293.

¹⁷⁵ *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.

the intention of the ensuing discussion is to offer an overview of the key components of this exiting research. It will be suggested that, if these findings are taken seriously, they have the potential to offer a fresh perspective upon the dream and vision reports within the Acts of the Apostles.

The Landscape of Dreaming: Terminology, Classification and Function

The Terminology of Dreams and Visions

A range of terms are used within the Greek literature to denote dreaming. J.S. Hanson gives the full list of Greek terms occurring in dream reports as follows: *ὄναρ*, *ἐνύπνιον*, *ὄραμα*, *ὄψις*, *φάσμα*, *φάντασμα*, *φαντασία*, *ἀποκάλυψις*, *ἐπιφάνεια*, *ὄπτασια* and *ὄρασις*, while Gil H. Renberg finds ninety-nine different means of referring to dreams, visions or messages from the gods within Greek and Roman epigraphy, although, of course, this study employs rather looser criteria in gathering terminology, and incorporates Latin as well as Greek.¹⁷⁶ A number of proposals have been made concerning the specific meaning of many of these terms, and the ways in which they might have related to one another.¹⁷⁷ Many of these suggestions are grounded in the content of technical ‘dream-books’ wherein focused attention is given to precise definitions and differentiations. One of the most notable texts within this category is the collection of

¹⁷⁶ J.S. Hanson, ‘Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity’, in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Principat II:23.2 (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980) 1395-1427 at 1407-8; Gil H. Renberg, “‘Commanded by the Gods’: An Epigraphical Study of Dreams and Visions in Greek and Roman Religious Life’, DPhil Dissertation, Duke University, 2003, 2.

¹⁷⁷ A detailed study of the use of *ὄνειρος*, *ὄνειρον*, *ὄναρ* and *ἐνύπνιον* in the period of classical antiquity is offered by Ben Hemingway in his doctoral thesis (‘The Dream in Classical Greece: Debates and Practices’, DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2008, 50-76).

dream-interpretation manuals of Artemidorus Daldianus, dubbed the *Oneirocritica*. These five books, written around the middle of the second century A.D., were intended as an apology for certain forms of divination and provide a record of many dreams and their outcomes. These volumes have not always been received sympathetically, but since they represent the only complete dream books to have survived from the period, they ought to be taken seriously as a resource for study in this field.¹⁷⁸

Artemidorus focuses on two terms in particular: *ἐνύπνιον* and *ὄνειρος*. He defines the former as non-predictive, and therefore indicative of a present state of affairs,¹⁷⁹ and the latter as indicative of a future state.¹⁸⁰ It is the second category that forms the subject of Artemidorus' enquiries, and he further splits this into *ὄνειροι θεωρηματικοί* and *ὄνειροι ἀλληγορικοί*. Unsurprisingly, the allegorical dreams occupy much of his focus, since it is these that most often require the work of a dream interpreter. Artemidorus is not alone in the attempt to classify different types of dream. A similar attempt can be found in the later (fifth century) writing of Macrobius: *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*. A.H.M. Kessels persuasively argues in favour of a shared origin for the dream classification systems outlined in both of these works, contrasting these with the alternative approach found in the writings of Posidonius and Cicero, with a Jewish adaptation employed in the writings

¹⁷⁸ Russel M. Geer begins his article 'On the Theories of Dream Interpretation in Artemidorus' with the comment - oft repeated since - that, 'The work of Artemidorus Daldianus on dreams enjoys a well-deserved neglect.' *The Classical Journal* 22:9 (June 1927), 663-670 at 663. More recently, William V. Harris has made extensive use of the books within his monograph, but nonetheless describes Artemidorus as 'a man of monumental gullibility (whose book would have aroused the scorn of many other ancients)' (*Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* [Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2009], 114).

¹⁷⁹ 'For example, it is inevitable that, in a dream, a lover imagines that he is with his boyfriend, and a frightened man observes the thing he fears and, again, that a hungry man eats and thirsty man drinks...' (I.i) This translation is taken from *Oneirocritica*, in Daniel E. Harris-McCoy, tr., *Oneirocritica: Text, Translation, Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 47.

¹⁸⁰ '*Oneiros* is a movement or condition of the mind that takes many shapes and signifies good or bad things that will occur in the future' (I.ii).

of Philo of Alexandria.¹⁸¹ In contrast to Artemidorus' five-fold system, these authors appear to demonstrate a three-fold explanation of dreaming, as follows:

[T]here are three ways in which men dream as the result of divine impulse: first, the soul is clairvoyant of itself because of its kinship with the gods; second, the air is full of immortal souls, already clearly stamped, as it were, with the marks of truth; and third, the gods in person converse with men when they are asleep.¹⁸²

Kessels attributes the differences between these systems to the different questions that they were intended to address, with the system employed by Artemidorus focusing upon the predictive value of dreams and the associated interpretative challenges, and the outline in Cicero's work asking how it is possible for human beings to obtain such insights into future events through dreams.¹⁸³ In this sense, many of the same beliefs about dreaming occur within both systems, and in Greek texts that emerge from this system such as the work of Philo of Alexandria, there is some terminological overlap, with *ὄνειρος* broadly functioning as the key term to denote divinely significant/predictive dreams, and with sub-categories within this for theorematic and allegorical dreams.¹⁸⁴

In spite of this, however, it would go too far to suggest an absolutely consistent and thoroughgoing terminology of dreaming within either Jewish or Hellenistic thought.

Artemidorus himself recognised a distinction between the technical and everyday usage of key terms, writing in the preface to Book Four of the absence of precision required within

¹⁸¹ A.H.M. Kessels, 'Ancient Systems of Dream-Classification', *Mnemosyne*, 22 (1969), 389-424 at 395-398.

¹⁸² 'Sed tribus modis censeat deorum impulsu homines somnare: uno, quod praevideat animus ipse per sese, quippe qui deorum cognatione teneatur; altero, quod plenus aër sit immortalium animorum, in quibus tamquam insignitae notae veritatis appareant; tertio, quod ipsi di cum dormientibus colloquantur.' (Cicero, *On Divination*, I:64). Given the fragmentary nature of the extant writings of Posidonius, much of the reconstruction of his ideas derives from Cicero. For Philo's re-working of these ideas see, *De Somniis*, especially I:1-2.

¹⁸³ Kessels, 'Ancient Systems', 399-400.

¹⁸⁴ These connections are outlined particularly clearly in Derek S. Dodson, *Reading Dreams: An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2009), 50-51.

colloquial speech. This is reflected in a number of references to dreaming in other ancient texts, including places where none of the so-called ‘technical terminology’ is deployed. At certain points, individual authors appear to favour particular terms, while at other points multiple terms may simply be being used for the purpose of linguistic variation.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the Acts of the Apostles is one such case, for there the term *ὄραμα* is heavily favoured (7:31, 9:10, 9:12, 10:3, 10:17, 10:19, 11:5, 12:9, 16:9, 16:10 and 18:9). The only deviations from this term occur in 2:17 with the use of *ἐνύπνιον* and *ὄρασις*, at 26:19 with the use of *ὄπτασία*, and at 25:23 with the use of *φαντασία*. The linguistic variations in 2:17 are best explained as part of the quotation from the Septuagint at this point: this is the prophecy taken from the Book of Joel and applied to the ‘last days’ in Acts. Given the way in which the rest of the Acts narrative likely functions as partial fulfilment of this prophecy, differentiations between types of dream and vision on terminological grounds is simply unpersuasive, since otherwise there would be no dreams or visions at all within Acts that fulfil the prophetic brief outlined in its programmatic second chapter.¹⁸⁶

Overall, therefore, the range of terminology used for dreaming is indicative of the fact that, at times, differentiations were drawn between types or forms of dream or vision, but also that these differentiations cannot reliably be pinned to the terminology itself.

The Classification(s) and Function(s) of Dreams and Visions

¹⁸⁵ For example, Matthew’s Gospel favours the term *ὄναρ*; Aelius Aristides uses the term *ἐνύπνιον* to refer to more than one ‘type’ of dream; Plutarch appears to use the terms *ἐνύπνιον* and *ὄνειρος* interchangeably, and Josephus uses both *ἐνύπνιον* and *ὄνειρος* to refer to the same dreams in his retelling of the story of Joseph (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 2.75). These examples, and several others, are noted by Juliette Harrison in *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 63-65. In addition, Philostratus (writing a little over a century later than most of the above examples) also switches terminology from *ὄναρ* to *ὄψις* part-way through one account of a dream or vision (*Vita Apollonii* 4.34).

¹⁸⁶ Interestingly, however, in the case of Luke-Acts, precisely this task has been attempted by Heinz Schürmann, who has argued for a distinction between the uses of *ὄραμα* and *ὄπτασία* (*Das Lukasevangelium*, 3 vols [Freiburg: Herder, 1969] i:32 n.39).

There has been debate over the place of waking visions within this landscape. The distinction between these visions and the dreams that take place during sleep is almost always sharply drawn in twenty-first century ‘western’ parlance, in both technical and non-technical treatments of these phenomena. However, there has been significant debate over whether or not this same distinction can be found within ancient texts. This issue initially arose in works of scholarship that assumed a developmental model whereby so-called ‘primitive’ people were simply *unable* to tell the difference, not only between dreams encountered during sleep and waking visions, but between the states of dreaming and waking themselves.¹⁸⁷ While this developmental model has since been rightly criticised, the question remains whether or not dreams and visions were accorded value or meaning on the basis of whether they occurred during sleep or while a person was awake.

This question is more difficult to answer than might at first be imagined. In his study of the ancient Greeks, E.R. Dodds ascribed two modes of vision to all human beings: *ὕπαρ* and *ὄναρ*, or, in other words, those things that are seen as part of waking reality, and those things that are ‘seen’ during sleep.¹⁸⁸ It is uncertain which of these categories ‘waking visions’ might best fit into. While this is listed as a third category in its own right within one second century text, *The Sacred Tales* of Aelius Aristides, this view does not appear to be reproduced anywhere else, even in the works of Aristides himself.¹⁸⁹ In the absence of any definitive statement on the matter, attempts to address this question must

¹⁸⁷ As recently as the 1960s and 1970s there are instances where such views are propounded. For example, in his commentary on Origen's *Contra Celsum*, Marcel Borret claimed that until the Roman period, the ancients thought dreams and waking experience equally real. Discussion of this matter, including further examples from twentieth century scholarship, can be found in Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 2.

¹⁸⁸ E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), 102.

¹⁸⁹ *Sacred Tales* II.18. This has been observed by Luther H. Martin, ‘Artemidorus: Dream Theory in Late Antiquity’ *Second Century* 8 (1991), 97-108 at 99.

largely rely upon examples from individual texts, in the hope that these may shed some light on the rather more shadowy broader picture.

Certainly, there are examples where waking and sleeping encounters are differentiated, such as within one likely second century CE excerpt from the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, when the narrator talks of his mother's visionary experience: 'Suddenly she perceived – it was no dream (*ὄναρ*) or sleep, for her eyes were open immovably, though not seeing clearly, for a divine and terrifying vision (*φαντασίαν*) came to her...'.¹⁹⁰ Another text from the same period contains a similar clarification within the account of one woman's experience at an asclepion: 'The woman thought that the god's appearance was a dream (*ὄψις ὀνειράτος*), but it proved at once to be a waking vision (*ὑπαρ μέντοι ἦν αὐτίκα*). For she found in her own hands a sealed tablet.'¹⁹¹ This example presents its own interpretative challenge, namely, whether this 'waking vision' should be understood as in any way different from a 'normal' state of wakefulness. Is this a third category akin to that mentioned within the *Sacred Tales*, or does this conform instead to the two modes of vision outlined by Dodds? Certainly, the idea that an individual thought that they were dreaming when in fact the experience was 'really' occurring is attested elsewhere within this period, including within the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter's escape from prison brings about a string of misunderstandings over the level of reality at which the story is occurring, including the information that Peter thought his escape was 'just' a dream or vision (*ἐδόκει δὲ ὄραμα βλέπειν*).¹⁹²

While, therefore, there are instances where the state of wakefulness or sleep is explicitly included in the dream or vision account, there are numerous other examples

¹⁹⁰ *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* XI.1381 (lines 107-113).

¹⁹¹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10.38.13.

¹⁹² Acts 12:6-11, here at verse 9.

where this information is simply not provided. Outside the technical dream-books, there are no specific terms to denote a waking vision or a dream that occurs during sleep, and this, coupled with the high level of consistency between the form and structure of reports of dreams and visions in antiquity has led some to suggest that differentiations should not be drawn along these lines, or, at the very least, that the boundaries between these two categories was ‘*unschärfer*’.¹⁹³ This is the reason for J.S. Hanson’s introduction of the hyphenated term ‘dream-vision’, subsequently picked up by J.B.F. Miller, and also to be used within this rest of this thesis.¹⁹⁴ Others have been critical of the total elision of these categories, noting that where distinctions are made, this is almost always for the purpose of asserting the greater significance of the waking vision, suggesting a difference in attitude towards two distinct phenomena.¹⁹⁵ However, such assertions are often made within ancient texts not to foreground a waking vision over against a dream during sleep, but rather to underline the ‘reality’ of the encounter as having a tangible significance that stretches beyond the dream-world completely. Thus, it is not uncommon for a dreamer to find a physical ‘token’ that remains with them after the dream-vision has ended, proving that the messenger seen in the dream was present with the dreamer.¹⁹⁶ The reason for the use of the term ‘dream-vision’ here is not on the grounds that there were no differences at all between waking visions and dreams during sleep, but rather that it is not

¹⁹³ Gregor Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prinzipat und Spätantike* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000)

¹⁹⁴ The language of ‘dreaming’ will also be used in relation to waking visions as well as those that occur during sleep.

¹⁹⁵ Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen*, 33.

¹⁹⁶ See Plutarch’s general reference to ‘tokens’ (*Moralia*, 585.E), as well as widespread assertions of real healings that occurred during incubated dreams at asclepiions. Other well known examples include the much earlier provision of a real golden bridle in Pindar’s *Olympian Odes* (13.65); and the later case of Perpetua and the lingering taste of the cheese from her dream when she awakens (*The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* IV. 9).

always easy to tell which of these is being referred to by an ancient author, for whom classifications and distinctions seem usually to have been drawn along other lines.

As indicated above, one of the most fundamental distinctions that appear to have been drawn between different dream-visions in antiquity is that of the significance or insignificance of a particular encounter. This identification of some dream-visions as insignificant has not always been adequately recognised within traditional scholarship in the field, resulting in a distorted impression of attitudes towards dream-visions in antiquity.¹⁹⁷ It is certainly the case that, outside the philosophical discussions that aimed to dismiss the significance of all such experiences, references to meaningless dream-visions are few and far between. However, there is a clear pragmatic reason for the scant evidence in support of this category: dream-vision reports are generally included within texts for a reason, thus those deemed to be entirely insignificant and that resulted in no action were unlikely to be attested.

However, even dream-visions such as these were believed by some to communicate information of a different sort, namely, knowledge concerning the health of the dreamer. Alongside the use of dream healing in theurgic medicine such as within the Greek sanctuaries of Asclepius,¹⁹⁸ dream-visions had a role in the medical sciences from a very early point, with the Hippocratic treatises asserting the predictive - though not necessarily

¹⁹⁷ William V. Harris aptly summarises the situation as follows: “Careless writers have often said that almost everyone in Greek and/or Roman antiquity believed that dreams came from the gods and predicted the future. [...] Their doctrine is in effect that the Greeks and Romans were far removed from the modern world in which every sane person supposedly knows that dreams have no predictive value. In this respect, however, the distance between ancient and modern is shorter than is often suggested” (*Dreams and Experience*, 123-124).

¹⁹⁸ For multiple reports of such dream-visions and an extensive description of the cult, see Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, 2 vols (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1945). See also, S.M. Oberhelman, ‘Dreams in Greco-Roman Medicine’, in Wolfgang Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 37.1 (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 121-156.

divine - value of dreams, and Aristotle outlining their diagnostic significance.¹⁹⁹ In the second century CE, Galen not only made medical diagnoses along these lines, but occasionally even claimed to receive knowledge of appropriate treatments by means of his own dream-visions, although this positive view was far from unanimously held among medical practitioners in this period.²⁰⁰ The reason that dream-visions were felt by some to be able to function in this way was because of their connection to the mind or body of the dreamer. This belief also gave rise to naturalistic explanations for dream-visions so that they were understood by some to function as markers of anxiety or wish-fulfilment, or even simply as reflections of the activities of the day.²⁰¹

As for those dream-visions that *were* deemed to have significance for predicting the future or as a vehicle for divine-human communication, references to several sub-types can be found, as indicated in Artemidorus' distinctions above. Thus, it is apparent that some ancient authors distinguished between theomatic and allegorical dream-visions, with only the latter category deemed to require an interpretation since the message of the former was already sufficiently clear. Distinctions were also drawn between divine and non-divine dream-visions, and between those that were sought and unsought.²⁰² Sought and unsought dream-visions are afforded different values in some texts, although there is little broader consensus regarding which of these types should be considered most valuable. Modern interpreters have differentiated between audio-visual dream-visions, auditory dream-visions (auditions), and visual dream-visions,²⁰³ between symbolic dreams and message

¹⁹⁹ Hippocrates, *Regimen IV, or Dreams*, LXXXVI; Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia*, 461a.

²⁰⁰ *On Diagnosis from Dreams*. The authorship of this text has been disputed by some. For further discussion of Galen's understanding of dreams, see S.M. Oberhelman, 'Galen: On Diagnosis from Dreams', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 38.1 (1983) 36–47.

²⁰¹ Textual examples of such dreams are not common, but can be found, such as the king's dream of his beloved in Chariton's *Callirhoe*, 6.7.2.

²⁰² Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, I.ii

²⁰³ Hanson, 'Dreams and Visions', 1407-1413.

dreams,²⁰⁴ and between internal and external dream-visions.²⁰⁵ More or less detailed classifications can be found within both the primary and secondary literature, and there are advantages and disadvantages to the different levels of precision and detail that each provides, not to mention the associated question of how recognisable each classification would be to either a first century or a twenty-first century audience.

For the purposes of this enquiry, two general sub-types should be noted that have been observed by ancient and modern commentators alike: the message dream-vision and the symbolic dream-vision.²⁰⁶ Both types had the potential to be deemed significant, either for the individual dreamer or for someone else for whom the content of the dream was intended, but the key difference between the two types was in the mode of delivery. A message dream-vision entailed the appearance of a dream figure - often, though not always, a god or other divine being - who communicated an immediately intelligible message to the dreamer. In contrast (and as its name suggests), the message of a symbolic dream-vision was couched in symbolism of some kind - in pictures, imagery or coded language - and the meaning of the dream was not always obvious to the dreamer themselves.²⁰⁷ Crucially, it is not simply the content of the dream-vision that differs between these sub-types, the mode of delivery is also distinctive.

²⁰⁴ Harrisson, *Dreams and Dreaming*, 65-66.

²⁰⁵ See the discussion in Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 48.

²⁰⁶ One key early scholarly proponent of these categories was A. Leo Oppenheim in, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East. With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream Book* (The American Philosophical Society: Philadelphia, 1956), 185; 190.

²⁰⁷ These two sub-categories of dream-vision are well documented within the secondary literature, though not always using the same terminology. Thus, E.R. Dodds and William V. Harris refer to the first sub-group as 'epiphany dreams' (Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 1-2-121; Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 23-26; 34-37), while R.G.A. van Lieshout terms them 'passive dreams' (*Greeks on Dreams* [Utrecht: H&S Publishers, 1980], 16); Harris refers to the second sub-group as 'episode dreams' (p.23-26; 46-47), while Scott B. Noegel calls them 'enigmatic dreams' (*Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* [New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2007], 7).

William V. Harris has studied the message dream-vision in detail, and suggests that it no longer seems to occur as a modern 'western' dream form.²⁰⁸ He outlines the features of this type as follows: Attention is focused on a single visitor to the dreamer; the visitor is a divine or authoritative figure, though may occasionally be disguised; the visitor makes a pronouncement or gives an admonition, and the meaning of this message is clear to the dreamer, or becomes clear.²⁰⁹ In the Graeco-Roman context, such dreams are usually received only by high status royal individuals, although parodies of the form also exist, such as the account of Isis and all of the Muses appearing to a slave in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*.²¹⁰ This example suggests that the form must have been sufficiently well-known for the parody to be understood by Apuleius's second century CE audience, and highlights a literary function for dream-visions that will be examined shortly. This is not, however, to suggest that message dream-visions were recognised by all as a distinctive category, but rather that this is one of the ways in which dream-visions were sometimes classified in antiquity.

Symbolic dream-visions were often felt to require the assistance of an expert in order to determine their meaning and significance. The interpretation of such dream-visions would generally be classified as a form of divination. This, in itself, represents a vast area of enquiry and differentiations and nuances can be observed between Greek and Roman attitudes towards divination, not to mention distinctive Jewish and early Christian perspectives.²¹¹ In very general terms, divination could be divided into

²⁰⁸ *Dreams and Experience*, 23. This is something that Harris attributes to the secularisation of European thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (p.24).

²⁰⁹ *Dreams and Experience*, 36-37.

²¹⁰ XI.19. See Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 25; 30-31.

²¹¹ For further discussion and an overview of scholarship to date, see Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 23-29.

‘natural’ (unlearned) and ‘artificial’ (learned) subtypes.²¹² Dreaming falls into the first category, although the art of dream interpretation is arguably a learned or technical skill, practised by both independent interpreters, and those attached to particular shrines and gods. As writers such as Cicero and Artemidorus indicate, interest in divination and attitudes towards its many forms varied widely, and there is debate over the extent to which an individual would be able to make a living as a dream interpreter in the Mediterranean during the first century.²¹³ Crucially, however, where interpretation of dream-visions and other forms of divination were occurring, there was an inherent and necessary ambiguity to the process of interpretation.²¹⁴ The interpretation of symbols within dreams and visions was highly contextualised, and at times counter-intuitive.²¹⁵

The discussion thus far has focused in particular upon the potential for dream-visions to convey important messages to the individual dreamer, in more or less comprehensible forms. Divination also had a corporate function, perhaps best illustrated by the ecstatic prophecies of the Pythia at Delphi, who sometimes attracted delegations from distant cities whose governors sought Apollo’s wisdom.²¹⁶ There is also some evidence for a public function for dream-visions and their interpretation, with occasional records of dream-visions being used as proof in the courts, as propaganda, and as a means of sealing or securing religious authority.²¹⁷ As with the place of dreaming within the medical

²¹² See Cicero, *On Divination*, II:xii; Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, II.69.

²¹³ See the discussion of this issue in Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 168.

²¹⁴ This has already been discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.

²¹⁵ One such example can be found in Artemidorus’ explanation of the different possible interpretations of an individual dreaming that they had no nose, where the correct interpretation of the dream differs at different points in the life of the dreamer (*Oneirocritica*, IV.27). See also his assertion that the state of mind of the dreamer must be taken into account in order to make an accurate interpretation (I.7).

²¹⁶ An extremely helpful overview of the activities of the Delphic oracle is provided in Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 33-75.

²¹⁷ For further discussion of these functions see Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 155; 166-167; 176.

sciences, however, the use of dream-visions in the public sphere attracted voices of dissent and scorn, as well as voices of support.²¹⁸

In order to complete this varied picture, it is also important to note the metaphorical use of the language of dream-visions. Modern English uses the language of dreaming in phrases such as ‘beyond my wildest dreams’, and there are loose parallels to this kind of sense within some of the Greek texts dating from around the first century CE. Thus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (late first century BCE) speaks of writers who ‘never even dreamt’ (*οὐδ’ ὄναρ εἶδον*) of what makes composition attractive, and Plutarch refers to those who dream of the future (*ὄνειρώττουσιν*) in a manner that suggests this refers to future hopes, rather than actual dreams.²¹⁹ The language of dreaming is also used metaphorically to refer to that which is insubstantial or weak, or even to that which is deemed to be delusional.²²⁰ While these examples do not refer to specific dream-visions, these broader connotations of the language of dreaming contribute towards the overall picture of the perception of these phenomena.

Chronological Developments in Dream-Theory?

As hinted at the outset of this chapter, it is rather easier to establish the range of different attitudes towards dreaming in antiquity than to establish the weight of opinion in any particular time or place. Attempts have been made to outline chronological developments

²¹⁸ One notable example of this kind of treatment of dream-visions is the mocking dialogue found in Cicero, *On Divination*, II.lxiii-lxiv.

²¹⁹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De Compositione Verborum*, 4.128; Plutarch, *Gaius Marius*, 46. These examples, and several others, are noted by Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming*, 54.

²²⁰ Examples of such usage can be found as early as the writings of Homer, and continue to the first century CE and beyond. Harris lists a number of texts that use the language of dreaming in this way in *Dreams and Experience*, 139-141.

in attitudes towards dreaming, and one proposal that has persisted throughout the last hundred years of scholarly enquiry is that there was increased enthusiasm for dream interpretation in the first and second centuries of the Common Era. This claim can be supported to some extent by evidence of the apparent complexity of the possibilities of dream interpretation (as presented, for example, by Artemidorus), by the notable increase in inscriptions referring to the appearance of the gods in dream-visions from the first century to the second, and, conversely perhaps, by the official criticism of irresponsible dream interpretation under the Severans.²²¹ In spite of this, however, it is clear even from the brief discussion above that voices of dissent and opposition could also be readily detected within this period, and, moreover, that uncertainty and ambiguity over the meaning of dream-visions was an important component of their use within divinatory practice. Indeed, perhaps one of the most surprising findings concerning ancient Greek perspectives on dream-visions is that tensions over the validity and veracity of dream-vision reports and their interpretations can be detected from the writings of Homer in (or even before) the eighth century BCE, right through to the second century CE and beyond.

The Source and Location of Dreams and Visions

Overall, there is something that might best be described as an element of consistent inconsistency within Greek attitudes towards the interpretation of dream-visions that are deemed to be in some way significant. In certain cases this extends as far as apparently

²²¹ The legislation against irresponsible dream interpretation gives the instruction that, ‘those who pronounce or bandy about or knowingly invent things under the pretext that they are doing so “on the instructions of the gods” must by no means go unpunished’ (Ulpian, *VII. De officio proconsulis in Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio*, xv.2.6). This example, and that of the increased number of inscriptions referring to the gods in dream-visions, is found within Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 201-209.

contradictory interpretations given to the meaning of a dream-vision.²²² Angelo Brelich begins his study of the place of dreams in ancient Greek thought by raising precisely this point, and responding thus:

What then are we to conclude from the heterogeneity of expedients employed by the ancient author to explain apparently misleading dreams? I think there is but one possibility: that explanations are *secondary* to a tradition according to which dreams could announce events exactly contrary to their context.²²³

This is a tradition that Brelich locates, first and foremost, within the Homeric literature and the location of dream-visions therein, which retained its influence well beyond the first century CE.²²⁴

The key idea to be taken up from this corpus concerns the gates of horn and ivory through which dreams pass, described in *Odyssey*:

Then wise Penelope answered him again: “Stranger, know that dreams (ὄνειροι) are baffling and unclear of meaning, and that they do not at all find fulfillment for mankind in every case. For two are the gates of shadowy (ἀμεινῶν) dreams, and one is fashioned of horn (κεράεσσι) and one of ivory (ἐλέφαντι). Those dreams that pass through the gate of sawn ivory deceive (ἐλεφαίρονται) men, bringing words that find no fulfillment. But those that come forth through the gate of polished horn bring true things (κράινουσι) to pass, when any mortal sees them. But in my case it was not from there, I think, that my strange dream came.²²⁵

²²² Angelo Brelich gathers together some indicative examples as follows: ‘A sick man asked Zeus in a dream if he could recover. The god signified yes, but the sick man died. Was the dream false? No, because in signifying yes, the god lowered his head and looked toward the earth, the dwelling place of the dead. A man sees in a dream that his son is about to be buried in Olympia. Actually, his son wins an agonistic contest. Certainly, because Olympic winners, precisely like the dead, receive honor, commemorative inscriptions, and so on. To dream of riches presages misfortune. Why? Because riches are in actuality not a good, but give worries. And so forth. Sorrow, suffering in a dream: joy in reality, because we know very well in our hearts that sorrow and joy alternate in such a way that heralded joy can only follow a dream’s suffering.’ (‘The Place of Dreams in the Religious World Concept of the Greeks’ in G.E. von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois [eds.], *The Dream and Human Societies* [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966] 293-301 at 295.)

²²³ Brelich, ‘The Place of Dreams’, 296.

²²⁴ The continuing significance of Homer's treatment of the subject throughout subsequent centuries is exemplified in the early fifth century CE writing of Synesius, Bishop of Cyrene: ‘If the Penelope of Homer tells us that two different gates allow the passage of dreams, and that one permits the escape of deceiving dreams, it is because she lacks a correct knowledge of the nature of dreams; better instructed she would have made them all go out of the door of horn. She is convicted of error and ignorance when she refuses to believe a vision which ought nevertheless to inspire her with confidence’. (*On Dreams* XVII, tr. Isaac Myer [Harvard College Library: Washington DC, 1888], 25)

²²⁵ Homer, *Odyssey: Volume II: Books 13-24*, tr. A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), XIX.560-69, p.274-277.

Much debate has ensued regarding the significance of the material that each of the gates is made from, and a number of different explanations have been proposed.²²⁶ While the wordplay in the passage (e.g. the similar sounding words for ‘ivory’ and ‘deception’) hints at an allegorical or symbolic significance of the gates of dreams, it is important not to overlook entirely the spatial location of the gates, and the implications that this may have for the understanding of dreams and visions.

Within the Homeric worldview, this place (with its own gates) called ‘Dream’ existed beyond Oceanus, which was understood to be the river that encircled the ‘real’ world of the living. As a result, it was regarded as being in some ways a mirror image of this real world, comprising images and ghosts, and existing in close proximity to the dwelling place of the dead.²²⁷ Brelich goes so far as to suggest that ‘Dream’ had its own spatial and temporal location within Greek thought, with connections being made between the place of dreams and the time of chaos that pre-dated ordered society.²²⁸ If such an explanation is taken seriously, the images or people seen in dream-visions can to some extent be understood to exist independently of the mind of the dreamer, as an external ‘reality’ of sorts. Yet, this is a reality that is shadowy at best, often insubstantial, connected to the chaos of a primordial earth, and the darkness of the world of the dead. The message dream-visions that come from such a place are not to be ignored, yet they are also to be approached with caution and care. To return to the gates of horn and ivory, therefore, it

²²⁶ Suggested meanings include: (a) The connection between the gates of horn and the eyes, and the gates of ivory and the teeth, with the implication that what is seen is more trustworthy than what is heard; (b) The idea that horns point upwards towards heaven, whereas tusks point down towards the earth, with the implication being that dreams associated with the earth are deceptive; (c) horn is transparent, whereas ivory is opaque, and therefore the dreams that come from the ivory gates are false. These possible interpretations, along with a number of others, are discussed by A. Amory, ‘The Gates of Horn and Ivory’, *Yale Classical Studies*, 20 (1966) 3-57 at 4-6, and Anghelina Catalin, ‘The Homeric Gates of Horn and Ivory’, *Museum Helveticum*, 67.2 (2010), 65–72 at 66-67.

²²⁷ This is discussed briefly by Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 14-15.

²²⁸ ‘The Place of Dreams’, 297-298.

would be overly simplistic to interpret these as relating simply to true and false dream-visions. The dream-visions that pass through the ivory gates have the potential to be dangerous, and the meaning of all dream-visions is to some extent obscure, since neither horn nor ivory are truly transparent.²²⁹

Such ideas about the location and origins of dreams retain sufficient currency within some circles of later Greek thought to be parodied, such as within Lucian's treatment of the dream world in the mid-second century CE satire, *A True Story*. As Patricia Cox Miller observes: 'Caricatures, after all, depend on familiarity for their satiric punch'.²³⁰ However, the existence of such parodies also highlights the way in which these explanations were not always taken literally. In other words, it does not escape later commentators that the idea of the gates of horn and ivory originates within an imaginative narrative. There is a reality and an unreality, a tangibility and an intangibility to perceptions of dreaming. Harris sums up as follows:

A perhaps unexpectedly complex history has emerged. Different kinds of Greeks and Romans reacted to their dreams, and to the dreams of others, in different ways. Life and literature diverged, and many a story was told about remote times and places that would not have been credited if they had been told about the person in the next house. It also seems probably that the weight of opinion shifted from time to time.²³¹

This discussion raises the important question of the significance of genre for the presentation and interpretation of dream-visions, and especially of the function of dream-vision reports within ancient narratives. Before addressing this issue, however, it is

²²⁹ Amory, 'The Gates of Horn and Ivory', 34; Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 17.

²³⁰ Lucian, *Phalaris. Hippias or The Bath. Dionysus. Heracles. Amber or The Swans. The Fly. Nigrinus. Demonax. The Hall. My Native Land. Octogenarians. A True Story. Slander. The Consonants at Law. The Carousal (Symposium) or The Lapiths*, tr. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913)), 338-339. This account includes four gates rather than Homer's two. See Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 26-27.

²³¹ *Dreams and Experience*, 225.

necessary to briefly consider the extent to which Jewish and Christian attitudes towards dreaming diverged from the picture that has been painted thus far.

A Distinctive Jewish Perspective?

Just as with the study of dream-visions within ancient Greek thought, the question of distinctive Jewish perspectives upon dreaming comprises a vast field of enquiry in its own right.²³² As noted briefly in the review of the literature on dreaming in Acts, John B.F. Miller has produced a helpful survey of key resources that are likely to reflect Jewish perspectives on dreaming during the period in which the Acts of the Apostles was produced. As a result of his analysis Miller is able to conclude that, while positive attitudes towards dreams and visions are broadly consistent across both Jewish and Graeco-Roman sources, negative attitudes are more divergent. Thus, generally, in non-Jewish Graeco-Roman literature negative views of dreams and visions are to be found in their dismissal as psychosomatic phenomena, and in the idea that the gods may send intentionally deceptive dreams. In contrast, in Jewish texts dreams are occasionally dismissed on psychosomatic grounds, but Miller finds just one instance of a potentially deceptive dream (1 Kings 22:19-23). Dreams and visions in this body of literature are more frequently regarded as suspect due to their association with ‘false prophecy’.²³³ Miller suggests that the tendency he detects within the Graeco-Roman literature is only applicable to the Acts narrative at

²³² A recommended starting point for detailed exploration of dream-visions in the Hebrew Bible is Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament* (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1953). This monograph treats the fundamental categories of symbolic and message dreams, but also briefly considers those passages in the Old Testament where dream-visions are presented as valueless (p.150-154) and the outright rejection of dreaming as a form of divine revelation (p.155-170).

²³³ *Convinced that God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 62.

rare points, and that more can be found in common with the Jewish trend that delineates between ‘true’ and ‘false’ prophecy. However, this backdrop alone may not adequately be able to account for the rapidly shifting group boundaries in Acts, nor the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit upon ‘all flesh’.

Miller’s observation of this general trend is persuasive. However, he does not fully recognise the implications that these different attitudes towards visionary experience might have upon the understanding of perceptions of these phenomena. Discounting the issue of psychosomatic dreams for the time being (since evidence of these is found within both bodies of literature), the Graeco-Roman and Jewish views provide two potentially different social locations for doubtful practices: in Graeco-Roman literature suspect dream-visions occur amongst community members themselves, whereas in the Jewish literature such experiences are often attributed to those outside the boundaries of the ‘in-group’. In the latter case, therefore, apparently negative perceptions of visionary experience do not reflect attitudes towards the phenomena themselves, as such, but rather they form part of a rhetorical device that functions to delineate group boundaries. In part, this may reflect the location of deception in Jewish versus Graeco-Roman analyses of dreaming. The playfulness and mischievousness of the Greek gods leads them at times to send deceptive dreams that are intended to mislead the dreamer.²³⁴ It is possible that this can be connected with the Greek willingness to make fun of the gods, something that is less plausible as a feature of Jewish thought. Just as within broader Graeco-Roman attitudes towards dream-visions, however, Jewish texts indicate that not all dream-visions were believed to be sent by God. The idea that dream-visions were sent by and/or featured angels is relatively well-

²³⁴ For example the deceptive dream sent by Zeus to Agamemnon in Homer’s *Iliad* 2:77-83.

attested, and there are also instances where dream-visions are said to have a demonic origin, although this seems to have been a later development.²³⁵

Overall, therefore, elements of uncertainty about the meaning and significance of dream-visions can also be located within the boundaries of the community. In texts from the Hebrew Bible, this is apparent in the multiple possible meanings of the visions of Zechariah and the esoteric significance attributed to certain symbolic dream-visions.²³⁶

Cautious attitudes towards dreams, visions and related phenomena can also be detected within the understanding of the inherent riskiness of theophanies.²³⁷

Early Christian Interpretations of Dreaming

In contrast to the idea of increased interest in the interpretation and significance of dream-visions in the first and second centuries of the Common Era, it has been suggested that Christianity attempted to distance itself from these practices in an attempt to gain greater respect, and to give an impression of the rationality of the religion. In some instances, dream-visions were associated with demons who fostered beliefs in the Greek gods by

²³⁵ See, for example, *Berakoth* 55b, wherein a good dream is deemed to have been sent by an angel, and a bad dream by a demon (*The Babylonian Talmud: Volume 1*, tr. Maurice Simon [London: Soncino Press, 1948], 341). This example is discussed in Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 63-64.

²³⁶ Discussion of the multiple meanings of the dream-vision reports in Zechariah can be found in Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, 'The Polyvalence of Zechariah's Vision Report' in Elizabeth R. Hayes and Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (eds.), *'I Lifted My Eyes and Saw': Reading Dream and Vision Reports in the Hebrew Bible* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 16-29. Attention is given to symbolic dream-visions in the Hebrew Bible in Shaul Bar, *A Letter That Has Not Been Read: Dreams in the Hebrew Bible*, tr. Lenn J. Schramm (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2001), 44-77.

²³⁷ See for example, Frances Flannery's emphasis upon the importance of, 'the recognition that from at least the period of the Priestly school (c.a. sixth century BCE) to well into the medieval rabbinic period, it was widely held in Judaism that direct exposure to the presence of divinity was dangerous. This danger is perhaps best illustrated by the Mishnaic tale of the "Four Who Entered Pardes", in which four prominent rabbis ascend to heaven, resulting in only one successful journey alongside madness, death, and apostasy (b. Hag. 14b). The kind of divinity which one encounters matters: being in the presence of an angel is safer than being in the presence of the Most High. Early Jewish texts considered dreams to be a way of softening the dangerous impact of theophanies.' ('Esoteric Mystical Practice in Fourth Ezra and the Reconfiguration of Social Memory', in Colleen Shantz and Rodney A. Werline [eds.], *Experientia, Volume 2: Linking Text and Experience* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012], 45-70.)

these means.²³⁸ The extent to which this distancing attempt occurred more broadly within early Christianity is uncertain, and the use of dream-visions persisted within patristic texts, wherein symbolic dream-visions were sometimes used as a vehicle for the interpretation of Scripture.²³⁹ What seems clearer is that, within those early Christian texts that did continue to record dream-visions, the form and function of these reports remained broadly consistent with the patterns noted above, although it is, of course, possible to identify distinctive Christological content within certain dream-vision reports.

The Significance of Narrative for the Treatment of Dream-Vision Reports

In addition to the wide range of functions and interpretations of dreaming noted above, it is apparent that references to these phenomena occur across a range of literary genres. At times, concepts of dreaming appear to be readily transferred from one genre to another, so that, for example, Artemidorus incorporates quotes from the imaginative epics of Homer and the tragedies of Euripides within his *Oneirocritica*, alongside references to works of medicine and astrology.²⁴⁰ The actual processes by which particular dream texts become part of cultural memory or imagination is beyond the scope of this enquiry, but what is significant for the current project is the recognition of the narrative forms and functions of many dream-vision reports. Indeed, aside from the shorthand of epigraphical inscriptions, which usually bypass the specific details of a particular dream-vision, almost all dream-

²³⁸ Justin Martyr, *Apologia I*, I.14, tr. Cyril C. Richardson, in Library of Christian Classics Volume 1: Early Christian Fathers (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 249. This example, and the wider scholarly proposal, is discussed in Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 63-65 and Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 69-70.

²³⁹ Patricia Cox Miller, 'Dreams in Patristic Literature: Divine Sense or Pagan Nonsense?' *Studia Patristica* 18.2 (1989), 185-189 at 186; Dodson, *Reading Dreams*, 42.

²⁴⁰ Steven M. Oberhelman, *Dreambooks in Byzantium: Six Oneirocritica with Commentary and Introduction* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 21.

vision reports are formulated as narratives. As Patricia Cox Miller writes: '[I]n order to be subject to interpretation, a dream had to be told or written. In the most immediate sense, dreams were a phenomena of language as well as of psychic imagination and divine intention'.²⁴¹ The outcome of such recognition ought to entail, firstly, treatment of the literary features of dream-vision reports, and secondly, consideration of their place within the co-text and literary contexts in which they appear.²⁴²

The Form of Dream-Vision Reports

Analysis of a wide range of dream-vision reports in antiquity has been used to argue that the form of such reports shows a remarkable degree of consistency. Hanson summarises his own extensive survey of the evidence by writing, 'especially in formal, literary ways, the fundamental character of dream-vision reports does not significantly change from the Homeric poets to the end of late antiquity'.²⁴³ While it would go too far to suggest a single set form for these reports, Hanson identifies the following pattern: (1) Scene-setting information. Varying levels of detail are offered, incorporating the identification of the dreamer by name, the identification of the place, the time of the dream and the mental state of the dreamer; (2) The report of the dream-vision. This might include the use of technical terminology, as well as, in an audio-visual dream-vision: the identification of the dream

²⁴¹ *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 39.

²⁴² See also Harrison's comment: 'It is because dream reports are deliberate acts of narration that it is so important to examine them as literary forms' (*Dreams and Dreaming*, 50), and Janet Downie's analysis of dreaming in the distinctive narrative contexts of Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica* and Aristides's *Sacred Tales*. In the introduction to this article Downie notes: 'Implicitly, all divination is concerned with connect-ing human narrative (either of an individual or of a community) to cosmic or divine narrative, but dreams offer a particularly expansive narrative terrain, and both Artemidorus and Aristides are alert to the capacity of dreams to create meaning in this way' ('Narrative and Divination: Artemidorus and Aelius Aristides', *Archiv Für Religionsgeschichte*, 15.1 [2014], 97–116 at 98).

²⁴³ Hanson, 'Dreams and Visions', 1396.

figure, the description of the dream figure, the position of this figure, the message of this figure, the departure of the dream figure, and, the possible repetition of the dream-vision. In auditions, Hanson notes the way in which the language of vision often prevails. In visual dream-visions, the dreamer is more likely to observe events passively, although some of these same features may be present; (3) Reaction; (4) Response of the dreamer; (5) Summary.²⁴⁴

Others have disagreed with Hanson's observations, including Harris, who memorably refers to this claim of the consistency of the dream form as 'simply an aberration'.²⁴⁵ However, this objection is largely tied to Harris's own thesis of the gradual disappearance of the epiphany dream form, and a fairer reading of Hanson's proposal would take seriously the acknowledged generalisations in the construction of this pattern. One development to Hanson's approach can be found in the reference to the 'script of dreams' within Derek S. Dodson's monograph on dreams within Matthew's Gospel. Dodson's analysis incorporates examples of Graeco-Roman historiography, biography (including the Acts of the Apostles), and fiction, and as well as considering the formal structure of dream-vision reports, he also attends to matters of rhetoric, style, and imitation.²⁴⁶ Overall, he suggests that dreams within these texts function at two distinct levels. Firstly, they reveal divine instructions and/or foretell the future. Secondly, they function at the narrative level to develop the plot and contribute towards character development.²⁴⁷ This recognition of the two levels of function for dream-vision reports

²⁴⁴ Hanson, 'Dreams and Visions', 1405ff.

²⁴⁵ Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 49.

²⁴⁶ Dodson, *Reading Dreams*, 53-133.

²⁴⁷ Dodson, *Reading Dreams*, 133.

within narrative texts is an important one. However, as will be suggested below, greater nuance can be added to the range of functions at both of these levels.

The Functions of Dreaming Within Narratives

The first level of function can be viewed in close connection to the range of functions outlined in the earlier sections of this chapter. Dreams within narrative texts must, first and foremost, function in a way that reflects the broader cultural context. This is a necessary feature of the comprehensibility of the narrative. Unless otherwise indicated, these dream-vision reports have the potential to convey the same range of meaning and significance as the dream-vision reports in temple inscriptions, medical texts, dream books, and so on. However imaginative a narrative may be, if it deviates from accepted expectations regarding the function of dream-vision reports, it needs to inform its audience of this fact.²⁴⁸ For the purposes of the current enquiry, this level of function will be termed ‘the level of cultural context’.

In contrast to Dodson’s summary, therefore, the function of dream-visions at this level has the potential to signify more than a divine imperative or a prediction of future events. Dream-visions within narratives can also reflect the broader cultural context that at times regarded them as ambiguous in meaning, or even deceptive. Indeed, several examples of precisely such readings of dream-vision reports within narrative texts have been noted above. Having said this, it would be an over-simplification to suggest that the

²⁴⁸ As Harrison writes: ‘Dream stories in imaginative literature do, however, reflect the place held by dreams within the cultural imagination. If a dream within a story is designed to be viewed in a different way to the way in which dreams are normally viewed the culture of the author, then this new set of rules must be explained. [...] Dreams are used in certain ways within ancient literature by convention and without special explanation. We can assume, therefore, that the use of dreams in this way may reflect commonly held ideas about dreams’ (*Dreams and Dreaming*, 14).

narrative function of dream-visions precisely mirrors this cultural context, especially in relation to the weight of particular attitudes towards dreaming. For example, fewer instances of utterly meaningless dream-visions should be expected within narrative texts (or, indeed, in any written form), simply because there is a far less clear motive to record such dream-visions than those that proved to be significant in some way.

This recognition in turn leads to the second level of function, which will here be termed ‘the level of narrative function’. As Dodson rightly indicates, this can include elements such as plot development and characterisation. Aspects of plot development might include the increase or decrease of suspense, the explanation or justification of decisions, creation of moments of dramatic irony wherein the audience’s level of knowledge differs from that of certain characters, and narrative hinges that facilitate changes of scene, connections, or next steps within a story. Aspects of characterisation might include the demonstration of the support of God/the gods for a particular individual or group, revelation of the motivations of a particular character, comparison of two or more characters, or as a means of facilitating flash backs or flash forwards in the life of that individual. In addition to these features, dream-vision reports within narratives may in certain cases have a didactic function. This is not something that has received extensive scholarly attention, especially in relation to dream-visions within antiquity, but it is an aspect of the narrative function of dreaming that will be explored further within the treatment of dream-visions within the Acts of the Apostles.²⁴⁹

Overall, therefore, narrative reports of dream-visions have a double layered effect upon the story. The precise nature of that effect varies widely, with a multiplicity of

²⁴⁹ Brief treatment of the didactic function of dream-visions in the Middle Ages can be found in Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 125-126.

possible functions for these phenomena that echoes the multivalency and uncertainty that surrounds the function of dream-visions at the level of cultural context. This contributes to a double layer of ambiguity that will prove important for the argument of this thesis.

The Dream of Josephus: An Indicative Example of the 'Script of Dreams'

In order to demonstrate this double level of the function of dreaming within narratives, one of the texts analysed by Dodson as part of his construction of the so-called 'script of dreams' will be treated briefly here. The following example is taken from the first century historiography, *Jewish War*; and the selected passage outlines Josephus' account of his own dream experiences:

But as Nicanor was urgently pressing his proposals and Josephus overheard the threats of the hostile crowd, suddenly there came back into his mind those nightly dreams, in which God had foretold to him the impending fate of the Jews and the destinies of the Roman sovereigns. He was an interpreter of dreams and skilled in divining the meaning of ambiguous utterances of the Deity; a priest himself and of priestly descent, he was not ignorant of the prophecies in the sacred books. At that hour he was inspired to read their meaning, and, recalling the dreadful images of his recent dreams, he offered up a silent prayer to God. 'Since it pleases thee,' so it ran, 'who didst create the Jewish nation, to break thy work, since fortune has wholly passed to the Romans, and since thou hast made choice of my spirit to announce the things that are to come, I willingly surrender to the Romans and consent to live; but I take thee to witness that I go, not as a traitor, but as thy minister.'²⁵⁰

This is not a dream-vision report so much as an interpretation of several earlier dream-visions that Josephus claims to have experienced. The dream-visions are unequivocally described as being God sent, although their status as message or symbolic dream-visions is not entirely clear: Dodson argues that the reference to 'dreadful images' is indicative of

²⁵⁰ Josephus, *The Jewish War: Volume II: Books 3-4*, H. St. J. Thackeray, tr., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 102-105.

symbolic dream-visions, although the presence of a dream figure - not a divine envoy such as an angelic being, but rather God Himself - may suggest very significant message dream-visions.²⁵¹ The content of these dream-visions foretold the fate of the Jews and their Roman conquerors, yet the implication of this account is that this content was to some extent enigmatic: the utterances were 'ambiguous' and demanded the skilful interpretation of a priestly dream interpreter, in the form of Josephus himself.

At the level of cultural context, this passage certainly functions to demonstrate the divine imperative that allegedly lay behind Josephus' decision to surrender to the Romans. Belief in divinely sent dream-visions is clearly displayed, as is the idea that, when accurately interpreted, dream-visions can foretell the future. The reference to the 'fate' of the Jews is indicative of a worldview in which God is in control of the unfolding events, no matter how catastrophic they may seem, and the place of Scripture and prophecy within human history is also asserted through the words of Josephus' 'silent' prayer. However, the portrayal of these dream-visions and their interpretation within the passage suggests that this view of dreaming is one that requires some degree of justification. The clearest indication of this is found in the ending of the prayer, where the alternative interpretation of Josephus' surrender as an act of treachery is articulated. The preceding discussion of the series of dream-visions is intended to ameliorate any such interpretation of his actions. The challenge involved in the task of divining the meaning of dream-visions is also acknowledged, and the trustworthiness of Josephus' interpretation is underscored not only by the multiple dream-visions he experienced, which hints at the difficulty of accurately interpreting a single dream, but also by the claim of divine inspiration for the interpretation of these dream-visions. Ascribing the interpretation of these dream-visions to God lends an

²⁵¹ Dodson, *Reading Dreams*, 100.

authority to this claim that could not be achieved by a merely human interpretation, even if that human happened to be a priest, a dream interpreter, and perhaps also a prophet.

Analysis of the specific terminology of dreaming could also be included here, but since the extant Greek form represents a later translation of the original Aramaic version, it would be unwise to place too much weight upon this.

At the level of narrative function, this passage contributes to the development of the plot by providing an explanation for Josephus' own decision to surrender to the Romans, and thus his eventual occupation in writing this account of the history of his people. It also offers insight into the understanding of the character of Josephus. His piety and faithfulness are strongly emphasised, and the reference to his ability to interpret dreams may situate him within a line of dream interpreters that includes figures from the Hebrew Bible such as Joseph. Although the reference to prophecy is nominally only an indication of Josephus' knowledge of biblical prophecy, this, too, may hint at Josephus' own status as a divinely inspired prophet.²⁵² The passage serves to underscore Josephus' own authority and significance, and this is likely only strengthened by the distancing effect of the use of the third person.

Overall, analysis of this passage suggests that the strong claims made about the source, meaning, and significance of Josephus' dream-visions indicate rather more than the author or narrator's positive view of these phenomena. There are a number of extremely positive aspects to the presentation of these dream-visions: the claim that God Himself

²⁵² In his analysis of dreams within the writings of Josephus, Robert Karl Gnuse asserts that: 'Perhaps the most important observations are those which connect Josephus' own ability to receive and interpret dreams with some form of the prophetic identity. Josephus views a true prophet in the full sense as one who receives revelation from God, predicts the future on the basis of this experience of inspiration, and writes a "history" which interprets the events of human experience. The biblical prophets would meet these criteria for him most effectively' (*Dreams and Dream Reports in the Writings of Josephus: A Tradition-Historical Analysis* [Leiden; New York; Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996]), 269.

appeared to Josephus on several occasions, the function of these dream-visions in foretelling not only the future of an individual but that of a nation (or even an Empire), the divine inspiration facilitating the interpretation of the dream-visions, and the role of God as Josephus' witness. However, these elements may be indicative of the expectation of a rather more mixed view of dreaming among Josephus' audience: these claims are necessary in order to underscore the significance of Josephus' dream-visions and the reliability and authority of their interpretation. In other words, these are not automatic features of all dream-visions, but particular to the circumstances outlined in the passage above.

Specific Features of Dreaming in Narrative Sub-Types

In addition to the treatment of the narrative function of dream-visions, further distinctions have been proposed on the basis of sub-types of narrative texts. Thus, Harrisson differentiates between fictive and other narratives, writing that:

A religious or secular leader using a prophetic dream to justify his actions needs the dream to be as clear-cut as possible, but the author of a work of imagination will often prefer to present dreams in a more complex way (which may be why they often prefer symbolic dreams).²⁵³

In addition, she suggests that audience attitudes towards dream-visions may differ according to these sub-types, with a greater willingness to 'suspend belief' regarding dream-visions in works of fiction, or even a difference in the place for the misinterpretation of dreams within epic poetry versus tragedy.²⁵⁴ Over exuberant portrayals

²⁵³ Harrisson, *Dreams and Dreaming*, 132.

²⁵⁴ Harrisson, *Dreams and Dreaming*, 77; 149.

of dreams, visions, and related phenomena within non-fiction narratives such as Graeco-Roman historiography have at times been criticised, even within the primary literature.²⁵⁵

Certainly, it is possible that specific knowledge of the genre and/or sub-type of a narrative text has the potential to helpfully shape the interpretation of the dream-vision reports therein. As yet, however, insights remain speculative, and it is difficult to establish any set patterns that stretch beyond particular texts, or that cannot equally be accounted for by the concerns of an individual author. Furthermore, it would be difficult to confidently deploy this information in relation to the Acts of the Apostles, since arguments concerning its genre are far from being resolved. Given that it is not feasible to explore this question in depth within the current project, the ensuing analysis will remain largely at the level of ‘narrative’, rather than incorporating genre specific insights.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an overview of the classification and function of dream-visions within the cultural milieu of the Acts of the Apostles. Loosely defined, this was taken to include predominantly Greek textual evidence from the first century CE, although some texts from the surrounding centuries were also included, as was the much earlier example of the references to dreaming within the Homeric literature, which shaped later views on the source and location of dreams, as well as the range of attitudes towards these phenomena. Brief consideration was given to the matter of distinctive perspectives upon

²⁵⁵ See Josephus’ defence of his accounts of dream-visions in *Antiquities* 17.354. This example, and several others, are offered by Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming*, 84. For extended discussion of the portrayal of ‘signs and wonders’ within ancient fiction see Eckhard Plümacher, *TEPATEIA: Fiktion und Wunder in der hellenistisch-römischen Geschichtsschreibung und in der Apostelgeschichte*, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 89.1-2 (1998), 66-90.

dream-visions within Jewish literature (especially the texts of the Hebrew Bible), and within early Christianity, and while certain tendencies received particular emphasis within these contexts, overall it was deemed possible to identify a similar range of attitudes towards these phenomena. Crucially, this range included, on the one hand, the idea that dream-visions could contain divine instructions and/or foretell the future, and, on the other hand, uncertainty about the source, veracity, and validity of particular dream-visions, and ambiguity over their meaning and significance.

This discussion was followed by an exploration of the narrative form and function of dream-visions. The general consistency of the form of dream-vision reports was noted, and it was asserted that, while at one level (the level of cultural context), dream-vision reports in narrative texts should be expected to exhibit largely the same range of functions as encountered elsewhere, a second level of function (the level of narrative function) could also be identified for dream-visions within these texts. This second level entails contributions to plot developments and characterisation, as well as potentially to the didactic function of particular texts. More precise observations on the grounds of a specific genre or narrative sub-type were briefly raised, but set aside for the purposes of the current enquiry.

Conclusion to Part I

The discussion within Part I of this thesis began by establishing the parameters of the current enquiry, both in terms of the appropriate terminology and categorisations for the study of experiences deemed religious, and in terms of the narrower focus within this thesis upon dreams and visions within the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles.

The first chapter outlined the current state of research into dreams, visions and related phenomena within the Book of Acts, noting the frequent recognition of the significance of these phenomena in demonstrating divine involvement in and approval of the development of the Christian mission, and the small number of more recent projects that have attended to the narrative significance of dreams and visions within the story of Acts. One aspect of the existing research that was highlighted in particular was the tendency to regard the presentation of this material in Acts as in some sense ‘idealised’, failing to account for the potential for the misinterpretation or even the outright misuse of these phenomena within a community context. One of the most extensive treatments of this issue is found within the work of J.D.G. Dunn, and this was analysed in greater depth within the second part of the chapter. It was argued that Dunn’s work rests on some unhelpful assumptions concerning the supposed distinctiveness of Christian experience, the naïveté of the author of the Acts of the Apostles, and a Weberian model of development that allows very little space for critical engagement with phenomena such as dreams and visions in the earliest ‘charismatic’ phase of the existence of a religious movement.

Brief comparison with the treatment of other early Christian texts, and of the Pauline Epistles in particular, demonstrated that in these texts the complex function of reports of dreams, visions and related phenomena has more readily been recognised. Their

significance for the rhetoric of a text and their use in asserting the authority of the author can be seen, as can the disputed nature of their interpretation. In other words, a rather different picture of the presentation of these phenomena emerges within the scholarly literature on Paul. It was suggested that a first step in interrogating this difference between the treatment of dreaming in Acts and in the writings of Paul was to attempt to establish attitudes towards these phenomena within the broader cultural context from which these texts emerged.

This was the task of the second chapter, which offered an overview of the classification and function of dream-visions within roughly contemporaneous texts, predominantly emerging from a Gentile rather than Jewish context. It was demonstrated that a vast array of different attitudes towards dreaming can be detected. While at times these differences can be connected to the diverse opinions of individual writers, there are many instances where this range of views is attributable to beliefs about the varying significance and function of particular types of dream-vision. Not all dream-visions are god sent or predictive, and not all require interpretation. Various sub-types can be identified, and these demand attentiveness to form and content (e.g. message and symbolic dream-visions) as well as to the source of an individual dream-vision (e.g. the gates of horn and ivory; divine and non-divine or angelic and demonic dream-visions).

There are a surprising number of elements of consistency across the centuries from the time of Homer to the writings of professional dream-interpreters such as Artemidorus in the second century CE, but in spite of this, it is difficult to identify any widely accepted system for the classification of dreams. This contributes towards the overall uncertainty found within the task of understanding individual dream-vision reports. A similarly extensive range of views can be found within narrative texts, within which dream-vision

reports have two levels of function: the level of cultural context and the level of narrative function, which pertains to their significance in shaping literary features such as plot and characterisation.

Overall, therefore, it is apparent that, while the first and second centuries of the Common Era might plausibly be designated as a period of particular enthusiasm for the potential significance of dream-visions, there was inherent uncertainty over the meaning and interpretation of symbolic dream-visions, while the source of message dream-visions was equally uncertain, and at times encounters with dream figures could even be dangerous. All of this suggests that the apparent lack of awareness of the range of possible meanings and functions, and the potential for misinterpretation of dream-visions within the Acts of the Apostles is not a 'typical' first century attitude towards these phenomena. This is a point that needs to be emphasised, since precisely this assumption - that people in the first century Mediterranean world were essentially uncritical in their attitude towards dreaming - has featured in certain scholarly appraisals of the period.²⁵⁶

This leaves two possibilities for the interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles, both equally interesting. On the one hand, it may be that the Book of Acts is atypical in its portrayal of dream-visions, and that this narrative simply does not reflect the wider cultural context from which it emerges. Certainly, it should be understood that this broader awareness of the potential abuse and misinterpretation of dreams, visions and related

²⁵⁶ See for example, Naphthali Lewis's unattributed quotation: 'In the words of a distinguished French scholar, written nearly a hundred years ago, in antiquity "there was no people, and practically no individual, who did not believe in divine revelation through dreams"' (*The Interpretation of Dreams and Portents in Antiquity* [Mundelein, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 1996] Reprint of the 1976 Samuel Stevens Hakkert & Co. edition from the Aspects of Antiquity series, 5). William V. Harris summarises some earlier scholarship as follows: 'Careless writers have often said that almost everyone in Greek and/or Roman antiquity believed that dreams came from the gods and predicted the future. [...] Their doctrine is in effect that the Greeks and Romans were far removed from the modern world in which every sane person supposedly knows that dreams have no predictive value. In this respect, however, the distance between ancient and modern is shorter than is often suggested' (*Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* [Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2009]).

phenomena by no means demands that the same awareness must also be present within the Acts of the Apostles. This deviation from broader cultural patterns would, however, make the presentation within the Acts of the Apostles all the more remarkable, and worthy of far more attention than it has received thus far. On the other hand, it may be that the Book of Acts does, in fact, demonstrate an understanding of dream-visions that more closely matches that found within the wider cultural milieu, albeit within the parameters of the narrative genre. It is this second possibility that forms the hypothesis for the current project.

PART II

Chapter Three: The First Christian Pentecost

The exegetical task of this thesis begins with the account of the first Christian Pentecost. This omits the very first visionary experience reported within the book, namely the account of the ascension of Jesus (1:6-11). If the book is treated as the second volume within the Lukan corpus, this account is an expanded re-telling of the concluding verses to the Gospel of Luke (24:50-51), a book that contains a number of other references to dreams, visions and related phenomena, as well as accounts of the responses to these phenomena, including the encounter between Zechariah and Gabriel (1:8-20), the Annunciation (1:26-38), the Magnificat (1:46-55), the Benedictus (1:68-79), the angelic appearance to the shepherds (2:8-15), the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism (3:21-22), the temptation of Jesus (4:1-13), the Transfiguration (9:29-36), the vision of Satan's fall (10:17-20), the angelic appearance on the Mount of Olives (22:39-46) and the resurrection report (24:4-7).

Analysis of these passages from the Gospel offers a potentially fruitful avenue of enquiry in its own right, although it has been suggested even by those that support the unity of Luke-Acts that there are notable differences between the pre- and post-Pentecost dreams and visions within the Lukan corpus, as well as between Jesus' experiences and those of his disciples.²⁵⁷ While this is an area of research which offers rich possibilities for future research, therefore, it is not something that will be treated within this thesis, which thus begins within the second chapter of Acts and with the story of Pentecost. While the rationale for this decision is partly a pragmatic one, it is also connected to the desire to focus upon the place of dreaming within the earliest Christian communities as they are

²⁵⁷ This is something that has been given particular attention in the work of Bart J. Koet. See, for example, 'Why Does Jesus Not Dream? Divine Communication in Luke-Acts', in Bart J. Koet, *Dreams and Scripture in Luke-Acts: Collected Essays* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 11-24.

depicted in the Acts of the Apostles. It is possible that the dream-vision reports associated with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus represent a special case, meaning that these earlier reports may have a different place and function within the narrative.

The account of Pentecost marks a new phase in the life of Jesus' followers as the promise of their now ascended leader is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Spirit upon the believers.²⁵⁸ The Apostles take up the mantle of leadership and Peter explains the astonishing events in the light of biblical prophecy. Three thousand new believers are added to the group, and all devote themselves to fellowship: listening to the Apostles' teaching, sharing their possessions, and praising God in the midst of further signs and wonders. There is little doubt concerning the significance of the story for the wider Lukan narrative, and the importance of visionary experience within this story should not be overlooked. Indeed, dreams, visions and related phenomena lie at the heart of these events, not only in the report of what has already occurred at Pentecost, but also in the motif of prophetic fulfilment and promise, and the re-framing of Joel 3:1-5 (MT 2:28-32) within a first century eschatological context.

This chapter will address the presentation of these phenomena in this passage and their function within the Acts account. The discussion will be divided into four main sections. First, an assessment will be offered of the Pentecost events themselves, with attention being given to what is actually being described and how, if at all, this might fit within the broader framework of the Acts narrative. While historicity is not the chief concern of this thesis, the connection between 'story' and 'reality' has relevance for the

²⁵⁸ It may be more accurate to suggest that it is the twice recounted ascension story (Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11) that forms the crucial pivot in Luke's presentation of salvation history. For further discussion of its transformative significance within the Lukan story see Steve Walton, "'The Heavens Opened': Cosmological and Theological Transformation in Luke and Acts' in Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough (eds.), *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2008), 60-73 at 65-68.

interpretation of these phenomena and of their programmatic function within the wider narrative. Second, the interpretation of these events will be treated, including the use of the citation from Joel within Peter's speech. Third, the outcome of the Pentecost events will be assessed, with particular consideration being given to the nature of the depiction of the Christian community, and the extent to which this ought to be understood as idealised, or even as utopian in character. This will further the afore-mentioned treatment of story and reality, and it will be proposed that this, too, has an impact upon the interpretation of dream-visions. Fourth, these strands will be drawn together in considered discussion of the function and interpretation of dreaming within Acts 2. It will be argued that, while the picture painted of the first Christian Pentecost is to some extent an idealised one, it is also a picture that is grounded in an aspirational reality that places dreams, visions, and related phenomena at the centre of the newly emerging community, and prompts the reader to anticipate further signs of the outpouring of God's spirit as the narrative develops.

What Does the Pentecost Story Describe? Analysis of the Acts Account (2:1-13)

The first issue to be addressed is that of which characters experience the outpouring of the Spirit. Luke begins this section by writing that 'they were all together in one place' (2:1), but who are they 'all' – does this refer to the Twelve apostles or to the 120 believers? There are some elements to suggest that the Spirit came only upon the Twelve. For example, the reference to 'they' in 2:1 could refer to the newly re-formed group of twelve apostles in 1:26 (directly after the appointment of Matthias). If this were the case, the gathering in the 'upper room' (1:13) may have some parallels to the 'upstairs room' used for the Passover

meal described in Luke 22:12, thus underlining the connection between Jesus' ministry and commission and the events that are about to unfold.

If there were others present at the beginning of the account, they quickly drop out of the scene (2:14, 37), and the rest of the chapter focuses on the Apostles alone of the believers. Even so, the earlier hints of a larger crowd play their part in attesting not only to the power of what has occurred, but also to its authenticity: this is a truly corporate experience. Although the focus inevitably falls upon the leaders of this small group, the way in which *all* are able to experience the outpouring of the Spirit in this way establishes a trend that is continued throughout the narrative: access to these phenomena is open to all group members.²⁵⁹

But what is it that they experience? Something *like* wind enters the room, something *like* fire is among them, and they are able to speak in other tongues. To deal with the wind and fire first, both are significant symbols within the biblical writings. For instance, J.D.G. Dunn observes that:

Both wind and fire were typical of theophanies within the Jewish traditions; in particular, 'wind' was a familiar analogy to the divine *pneuma*, and fire is prominent in the traditions regarding Sinai; alternatively, the tradition of the Baptist's threat of a coming baptism in *pneuma* and (148) fire (Luke 3:16) could have suggested the elements of the vision to Luke. But, as we have already seen, indications are lacking that Luke was influenced by the Sinai tradition; the ὄσπερ and ὡσεὶ (*like* a wind, *like* fire) tell against it [...]. So too it must be judged unlikely that the elements of the vision were determined by the Baptist prophecy, for so far as Luke was concerned, Jesus had already radically reinterpreted that prophecy (Luke 12:49f; Acts 1:5).²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ In this account, there is an important later caveat to this egalitarianism whereby access to interpretation of dreams, visions and related phenomena remains in the hands of the leader(s) alone: this issue will be taken up shortly.

²⁶⁰ J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975; repr. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 147-148.

Dunn is perhaps right not to take the seeming parallels as seriously as some, but at the same time the significance of ὠσπερ and ὡσει may not lead in the direction that Dunn has implied, in differentiating this account from Scriptural analogies. On the contrary, this terminology precisely alludes to such analogies, and thus places what has occurred within this line of tradition, while at the same time identifying the events of Pentecost as distinct in some way from these traditions.

Speech in other tongues

By far the most commented on and puzzled over element of this account is the reference to speech in other tongues. In Luke's narrative, the first people to hear tongues-speech ask 'τί θέλει τοῦτο εἶναι' (Acts 2:12) – 'what can this mean?' To a large extent the phenomenon continues to provoke such a question for its modern interpreters. There are two key issues that need to be addressed regarding the meaning of the phenomenon as presented in Acts: firstly, what does the narrative suggest that tongues-speech *is*, and secondly, what might this tell us about the understanding of its place and role within Christian community? Apart from its occurrence in Acts 2, tongues-speech is mentioned at only two other points in the narrative (10:46-7; 19:7), and elsewhere in the New Testament only in 1 Corinthians. In Acts 2 tongues-speech *does* seem to be the miraculous ability to speak foreign languages. Just as in the Epistle, the phenomenon is described as 'other tongues' (similar to the Isaiah citation of 1 Cor. 14), but here the context seems to much more strongly support an identification of tongues-speech as foreign languages.

The term alone is not enough to support an identification of foreign languages, and nor, without the appropriate context, is ἑτέρας γλώσσας (2:4). Here, however, the answer

is given much more clearly in verse 6 – ‘each one heard them speaking in his own language’, which is reiterated by the crowd themselves in verse 8, when they exclaim ‘how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language’. It is difficult to see how anything other than speech in foreign languages can be placed as the subject of these verses.

Some, however, have suggested that Luke still had in mind what may be termed ‘ecstatic speech’, but that a miracle of hearing also took place, so that the crowd understood this speech, each in their own language. Such an approach also has the advantage of making the reference to the Judeans in the list of nations slightly less bizarre (for if this was a miracle of *speech* it is difficult to understand why the Judeans are so amazed to hear the believers speak in their own native tongue). It also perhaps makes the accusation of drunkenness fit better to the story, for ecstatic-type speech far better fits the stereotype of drunken behaviour than does fluency in foreign languages.

However, this argument also adds some difficulties to our understanding of the narrative. Firstly, as pointed out by Ernst Haenchen, if this was a miracle of hearing and believers were therefore speaking ecstatically, the fact that the surprise of the crowd is linked to the identification of the believers as Galileans makes little sense because a Galilean could speak a spirit-language as well as any other person.²⁶¹ Secondly, this focus on a miracle of hearing rather than speech makes the Joel 2 prophecy even less appropriate than it already seems to be. Overall, therefore, the miracle of hearing argument is unconvincing. This is based not on any grammatical or syntactical arguments, but on the consideration of the passage as a whole. Luke is depicting the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. He describes this in terms of tongues like fire and a sound like rushing wind, as

²⁶¹ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tr. from the 14th German edn. (1965) by Bernard Noble et al., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 169.

well as the miracle of tongues-speech (or, as some would have it, the miracle of hearing). The Spirit falls on each of the believers, and this is indicated by a tongue of fire resting on each of them. The miracle of hearing would require the Spirit to then fall in addition and in a different way upon the crowd, which would seem to defeat some of the point of the dramatic account of the giving of the Holy Spirit.

It seems, therefore, that for Luke, tongues-speech is the miraculous ability to speak unlearned foreign languages which are then understood (by normal, rather than miraculous means) by native speakers of those languages. This is one distinction between Pauline and Lukan depictions of tongues-speech. Some have interpreted the conclusions drawn so far to indicate an additional distinction between the presentations of tongues-speech in Corinthians and Acts: that Paul requires an interpretation, whereas for Luke, tongues-speech is intelligible, so no interpretation is required. Certainly, this is one way in which foreign languages could have functioned within the narrative. However, this distinction is not as well-defined as some have assumed. Although the crowd hear words in their own language, to say it is 'intelligible' to them perhaps goes too far. The effect of the words is one of bewilderment and confusion. The narrative suggests that an interpretation is very definitely required.

Part of the response to tongues-speech was simply that the crowd gathered in the first place (2:6). They are described as bewildered (2:6), amazed (2:7, 12), astonished (2:7) and perplexed (2:12). This suggests that what the crowd was hearing was unfamiliar to them. It could be the fact that the believers are speaking in foreign languages that elicits this reaction, or it could be that the content of the speech causes the amazement and bewilderment. Acts 2:6-7 clearly states that the people in the crowd are bewildered

‘because’ they hear the believers speaking in their own language. However, verse 12 could also refer to ‘God’s deeds of power’, that is to say, to the content of the speech.

Therefore, it is possible that for Luke, both elements of the tongues-speech cause a reaction of amazement and bewilderment, but certainly the phenomenon itself leaves the crowd asking ‘what can this mean?’. This phrase also occurs in Acts 17:20 when Paul is in Athens. This question to him involves the speech on the Areopagus. In chapter 17 those who question Paul have already heard some of his teaching and want an explanation for this. Interestingly, the phrase occurs here after an accusation of incoherent speech (17:18, although this is hardly the same type of incoherent speech as tongues-speech might constitute). It seems, then, in both uses in Acts, to constitute a request for clarification, rather than for an explanation from scratch, or as representative of a total lack of understanding.

The crowd are described as being perplexed in 2:12, and this may be a reaction that is specifically linked with experiences of Joel 2 phenomena (that is, with experiences of the different phenomena described in the Joel 2 citation in Acts 2 such as dreams, visions, and prophecy), or of miracles in a slightly wider sense. The word only occurs in these contexts within Luke-Acts. In Luke 9:7 it describes Herod’s response to the rumours that John the Baptist had been resurrected, that Elijah had appeared and that the ancient prophets had arisen. More clearly, it occurs in Acts 5:24 as a response to the miraculous escape from prison, and in Acts 10:17 as Peter’s own response to his vision. It is hardly used programmatically throughout Luke-Acts in these contexts, but where it does occur it suggests being perplexed not at some new teaching, but at an experience or reported experience. In all of these instances of the use of the word, it is closely followed by a desire to know the truth of what is going on. This could reflect Luke’s understanding of

how dreams, visions and related phenomena should be responded to, with a desire to understand the truth of what happened. There is arguably an element of ‘testing’ in this – *all* of the crowd is described as being perplexed, and some of these go on to sneer and accuse the believers of drunkenness. This perplexed reaction is part of a process of decision making with regard to the authenticity and validity of an experience that does not necessarily result in its acceptance. This desire for explanation and interpretation is crucial to an accurate understanding of Luke’s presentation of these phenomena.

It seems likely that tongues-speech was unintelligible to the believers. This is speculation as the text gives us no clue to the reaction of the believers. Peter and the other disciples are the only ones who remain explicitly in the narrative beyond the first few verses. Similarly, one can do little more than speculate over whether the believers had any control over the phenomenon. The evidence for how much self-control the believers were able to exercise once the Spirit had come upon them is slightly mixed. On the one hand, Peter is able to coherently address the crowd in response to their accusations; this suggests that he was able to stop speaking in tongues at a time when he chose to. On the other hand, however, Luke tells us that Peter, when he was speaking, ‘raised his voice’ (2:14), and it seems likely that this was necessary in order to be heard over the noise of the other believers as they continued to speak in tongues.

There is a third category of people introduced into Luke’s narrative, and that is ‘the others’ who make the accusation of drunkenness against the disciples. It is unclear who ‘the others’ who make this accusation actually are. The previous verses strongly emphasised that all in the crowd were amazed and perplexed, whereas verse 13 seems to be introducing a new category of people.

One of the most interesting elements of the passage is the accusation of drunkenness in 2:13, particularly because this is essentially the *only* element to which Peter explicitly responds.²⁶² It is this awkwardness that causes Haenchen to suggest that the drunkenness refers to an ‘ecstatic’ rather than ‘foreign languages’ idea of tongues-speech which forms a bridge to the Joel citation within Peter’s speech: ‘that is why Luke connected this sermon not to the miracle of the *languages* - which could not moreover be suitably linked with the Joel citation - but to the mockery in verse 13, hence to the idea of the *ecstatic speech*.²⁶³ It is not that Luke changes his mind about what kind of speech he is describing; these elements are compatible with the foreign languages idea. It is the case, however, that it is these elements that Luke chooses to draw out and explain, perhaps even to apologise for.

The confusion of drunkenness with genuine indwelling of the Spirit is not unprecedented. For example, in 1 Samuel 1 the priest mistakes Hannah’s state of prayer as a state of drunkenness. It’s interesting that this accusation of drunkenness comes not because of a noisy babble of sounds as seems to be the case in Acts 2, but because of silence. 1 Samuel 1:13 reads, ‘Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk’. A few verses later Hannah describes what she was doing as ‘pouring out my soul before the Lord’ (v15). In contrast, the ‘pouring out’ in Acts is God pouring out his Spirit.

It is possible that the accusation of drunkenness is essentially a charge of irrationality, made against the lack of reason behind what these ‘others’ have heard. Although the discourse of rationality/madness does not appear to be *strongly* present in the

²⁶² The accusation becomes slightly less out of place if one takes into account the possibility of there being three different Pentecosts, as alluded to in some Qumran texts. One of these was the Feast of New Wine.

²⁶³ Haenchen, *Acts*, 185.

text of Acts, the response to this charge may represent a new way of dealing with the distinction that is commonly drawn between rationality and supernatural experience. Peter's response has the effect of showing that this unprecedented (in Luke's presentation) phenomenon can be fully explained through its prediction by Joel, and through the more recent actions of Jesus. In this sense, it fits into a wider schema, and so perhaps becomes less irrational. Luke secures the place and role of the Spirit, not by dampening it down, but by showing that even in all its strangeness it can be explained.

There are doubtless other parallels and connections that can be drawn from the Pentecost account; most significantly its association with John the Baptist's prophecy, and the similarities to the Exodus account of the giving of the law at Sinai. Interesting as these parallels are, they shed little further light on the question of the form of tongues-speech. For Luke, tongues-speech is something that has been prophesied about, but which in itself is something new.

One further element of tongues-speech in Acts that marks it out as different to the Corinthian presentation is that here, tongues-speech seems very clearly to be a gift *from* God directed to and for the benefit of the crowd (and possibly the believers themselves). This is a contrast to the Pauline contention that tongues-speech is directed *to* God. This indicates that Luke most likely saw tongues-speech as having a different function to the one which Paul assigned it. Its place at the initiation of outsiders into the Christian community is, again, different to Paul's presentation of it as part of the ongoing life of the community of believers. These functional differences would benefit from closer examination.

At this point it can be surmised that tongues-speech in Acts 2 is unintelligible to, and to some extent beyond the control of, the speaker. The words are recognisable to the

listeners but cause confusion. Therefore, just as for Paul, an interpretation is required, though it is perhaps not clear whether this is an interpretation of the phenomenon as a whole, or a specific interpretation of the Pentecost event.

Other Instances of Tongues-Speech

There are two other passages in Acts that refer to tongues-speech. Each will be examined briefly in relation to the same questions that have been posed concerning Acts 2: what is being described, and how might this inform the understanding of the place and role of this phenomenon in Luke's presentation of Christian community.

Acts 10

The first such mention is in Acts 10:46-7. This passage has sometimes been referred to as the Gentile Pentecost, and Peter certainly seems to regard it as strongly similar to the earlier event. In 11:15 he says 'the Holy Spirit fell upon them *just as* it had upon us at the beginning'. Similarly in 11:17 he says, 'if then God gave them *the same gift as he gave us*'. The gift may have been the same for the author, but the setting in which it occurred was not, and this may offer further insight into the purpose of the gift within Luke's narrative.

There are a number of elements of this account that seem to constitute a reversed order to the Acts 2 account. For example, here it is Peter's explanation that precedes the experience of tongues-speech, whereas in Acts 2, Peter's speech serves as an explanation or justification of the phenomenon. In chapter 10 it is the other way round: the experience of those who are listening to Peter serves to validate what he has come to discover.

There are further elements of reversal apparent in the account, and Peter himself draws a comparison between what the Gentiles experience and what happened at Pentecost. Although all those who are ‘astounded’ are Jews, the characters in chapter 10 are Jewish Christians, whereas the crowd in chapter 2 have not yet ‘converted’. So in chapter 10 the ‘outsiders’ amaze the ‘insiders’ and through this gain membership of the community of believers. In some sense, therefore, the experience still has a similar result in paving the way for admission into the Christian community. However, in the earlier account it seems to have functioned to draw outsiders in, whereas here it causes insiders to accept outsiders. In some respects therefore, it is for the benefit of believers.

Similarly, the overall outcome is one of baptism into belief (though this time for the tongues ‘speakers’ rather than ‘hearers’), but the tone is very different, and the function of tongues, in spite of the common outcome, seems different as well.

Much has been made of the fact that here Luke simply refers to ‘tongues’ not ‘other tongues’. This has sparked the debate over whether here, too, it is a case of other existing languages being spoken, or whether it is essentially what might be described as a ‘heavenly language’. In some respects this could constitute another reversal – that the ‘outsiders’ are speaking in languages that are understood by the ‘insiders’, but this is not made clear. They are described as ‘speaking in tongues and extolling God’ (10:46). If the latter was part of the former then it can be concluded that the language must have been understood by the Jews who were listening. If the two elements are separate, then the narrative offers no clues regarding the content of the tongues-speech. Here, tongues-speech is the required evidence upon which it is to be accepted that Gentiles, too, can receive the Holy Spirit. It seems that the Pentecost experience provides a foundation and a yardstick against which new encounters are measured.

Acts 19

The third passage in which tongues-speech is mentioned is Acts 19:1-7. This, again, has a different flavour to the other occurrences of this phenomenon. Here, the phenomenon does not appear to cause any ‘amazement’ or surprise. It falls much more into the category of being something routine, or even expected. Although there is here an association with baptism, tongues-speech itself occurs after the event as a consequence of Peter laying hands on the individuals; as in chapter 10, and contrary to chapter 2, it is those undergoing ‘conversion’ who experience the tongues-speech .

In this text it can also be noted that once again tongues-speech does not occur on its own. Here the account describes people speaking in tongues *and prophesying*. In the other passages it was mentioned that they also praised God.²⁶⁴

The Explanation of Events at Pentecost

Returning once again to the account in Acts 2, the explanation for what has been experienced is given by Peter. It is noteworthy that an explanation was necessary. The experience was not self-explanatory for the crowd, and there is no indication that the believers themselves really understood what had just occurred, so the explanation could have been as much for them as for the bystanders. However, this does not seem to be any

²⁶⁴ The occurrence of a reference to tongues-speech within the longer ending of Mark ought also to be noted. Mark 16:17 refers to people speaking in ‘new tongues’ as a sign of their genuine status as believers. It is uncertain whether the use of ‘new’ refers to foreign languages or to a new *type* of language (such as angelic or heavenly speech), nor even whether the author had in mind a language at all. This occurrence is simply a passing reference to some form of this phenomenon. This is not in itself without significance precisely because such references are so sparse within the New Testament.

kind of 'interpretation' of the tongues-speech in the way that the Corinthian correspondence appears to imagine. In some respects an interpretation has already occurred in that the listeners heard words in their own language. So it is perhaps both the phenomenon itself and the words that were heard 'about God's deeds of power' (2:11) which now require Peter's interpretation.

There is no explicit statement that Peter is inspired by the Holy Spirit in any way as he speaks. There are occasions within Acts when this does occur (for example 4:8; 7:55; 13:9), though it is difficult to see any pattern in the way in which this phrase is used, so it may well go beyond the evidence to see its absence in 2:14 as in any way significant. However, even if this cannot be taken as evidence of a rational rather than Spirit-inspired explanation, Peter is clearly removed from those who experienced tongues-speech.²⁶⁵ He speaks of the other believers without including himself ('*these* are not drunk as you suppose' [2:15]), and immediately takes on the role of an objective observer. He makes no claim here to any experience of his own as part of the explanation. This is different to Paul's claims in 1 Corinthians, and it also differs from Peter's claims in Acts 10. This detachment could serve to make Peter seem more rational and more credible to those who are listening. The experience may also need to be authenticated to some extent. Certainly it seems that it alone cannot achieve the conversion or salvation of the crowd.

Peter's first response is a very logical one: he answers the accusation that the believers are drunk by pointing out how early it is in the morning. Having disproved (though not that convincingly!) the assumption of some of the members of the crowd, Peter

²⁶⁵ The extent to which rationality should be distinguished from Spirit-inspiration requires further research. Certainly Laura Salah Nasrallah (*An Ecstasy of Folly*) believes this distinction to be crucial to Paul's discourses, but the extent to which any such criteria can be applied to Acts remains to be seen.

goes on to offer his own explanation by quoting Joel 3:1-5a (MT 2:28-32a). He makes no mention of the experience itself, but immediately grounds his answer in Scripture.

The Citation from Joel

There is a scholarly consensus that the citation from Joel has a programmatic function within the Acts narrative.²⁶⁶ However, it is far less clear exactly what this function is perceived to be. The citation from Joel begins with the introductory sentence ‘this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel’. This in itself should not be glossed over without comment. Firstly, the author is using a prophecy to justify or explain the events of Pentecost: prophecy is being justified with prophecy, and one prophetic vision is being justified by another. Although Peter is locating the events in a respectable tradition, it is still a tradition of *experience*. There are several differences between the form of this Joel quotation in the LXX and its form within the Acts narrative. These differences will briefly be examined, and their significance assessed for the understanding of these phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles.

The first difference concerns the mention of ‘the last days’. This has usually been understood as reflecting an eschatological concern, although even Hans Conzelmann, who is well known for his assertion of the significance of the phases of salvation history and the delay of the parousia within Acts, expresses doubt that this represents a Lukan change to the citation.²⁶⁷ It may be more likely that it originates with one of his sources.

²⁶⁶ For example, F. Scott Spencer writes: ‘strategically situated in the middle of the two-volume Lukan narrative, the Joel citation provides both a preview of past events and preview of coming attractions’ (‘Out of Mind, Out of Voice: Slave-Girls and Prophetic Daughters in Luke-Acts’, *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches*, 7 [1999], 133-155 at 135).

²⁶⁷ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, tr. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 18ff.

The second difference between the rendering of this text in Acts and the Septuagint is that the position of the old men and the young men is reversed. Commentators have largely ignored this change, and with some justification, for it is difficult to find any compelling explanation for it, nor does it have any obvious implications for the interpretation or outworking of the quotation within the rest of the Acts narrative. Regardless of the ordering at this point, however, the description of the young and old men differs in one notable way from the rest of the figures listed: whereas both sons and daughters will prophesy, and both male and female slaves will have the Spirit poured out upon them, the visionary experiences of the young and old men are separated by the use of two distinct terms. The young men *ὀράσεις ὁψιούνται* and the old men *ἐνυπνίους ἐνυπνιασθήσονται*. This raises the question of whether these terms denote distinct categories of visionary experience. If this is the case, no real indication is given to the means of differentiation.²⁶⁸

The third change is found in 2:18, where Luke makes the addition *καὶ προφητεύσιν* to Joel 2:29 (LXX 3:2). For Luke, slaves too will prophesy, and this seems to be a specific outcome rather than more general pouring out of the Spirit that suffices within the Joel passage. Thus, prophecy is twice mentioned in the citation, suggesting its strong significance for Luke. If even slaves will prophesy this suggests that ‘all flesh’ (which at this stage refers only to Jews) will have the capacity not only to experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but to experience it in a way that is useful to others and in a way which can be authoritative. This seems to suggest that all in the community of believers (which

²⁶⁸ As William V. Harris notes, a connection is made by Euripides between dreaming and old men: ‘When the tragedians compare useless old men to dreams - as Euripides does four times - that tells us something about how little they valued dreams as well as old men’ (*Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* [Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2009], 139-40). However, such a connection could equally indicate the insubstantiality of dreaming, rather than any comment on its value. It is uncertain whether this idea was present within the wider cultural milieu.

appears to have been predominantly Jewish at this stage) have the potential to exercise authority over the community through prophecy.

The fourth change to this verse is that for Luke the slaves are *δούλους μου* and *δούλας μου*: these slaves are God's slaves. This has implications for the boundaries of the group of believers and the location of significant dreams and visions. Finally, in 2:19 Luke adds *σημεῖα* to the Joel citation. This is generally understood to be a reference to miracles, and these phenomena certainly feature heavily in the rest of the narrative.

Peter's Speech: Rational Response or Spirit-Fuelled Utterance?

Having looked at the content of this speech, it is important to now address the question of what kind of response this is to the events of Pentecost. For example, is it a translation, an interpretation, an explanation or a justification, or some combination of these possibilities? Broadly speaking, there are three possible ways to view Peter's speech. First, it could be that the speech is closely linked to the event itself, and that Peter's speech is an interpretation or a translation of the foreign languages spoken 'in the Spirit' just as the tongues-speech had been. This idea is initially compelling. The position of Peter's speech within the chapter could further support this as it appears to be primarily directed to address the accusation of drunkenness made by 'the others'. It seems clear that these 'others' could not have heard the believers speaking in their own languages, for as has already been discussed, drawing a conclusion of drunkenness from this would make very little sense. In this context, it would be precisely these people who require a 'translation' of what the believers have been saying, and so it seems initially plausible at least, that this is how Peter's speech functions.

However, the way in which Peter sets himself apart from the other believers has already been noted, and if the drunkenness accusation is in any way to be linked with an accusation of irrationality it would make sense for Peter's speech to be of a different 'type' to that which these people have reacted against. It is not only the 'others' who respond to Peter's speech by asking what they must do to be saved. This suggests that what Peter was saying was new to the rest of the crowd (and maybe even to the believers as well), and that all were hearing for the first time the Pentecost message.

It is the second model that probably most readily fits with the Pauline presentation. That is the suggestion that Peter's speech is not a translation of the tongues-speech, but an explanation specifically linked to this unique event. This would suggest that, as Paul seems to argue, interpretation is necessary when tongues-speech occurs. The problem with this is that no such explanatory speech is offered at other points in Acts, and the evidence at this point is not strong enough to allow the assumption that such interpretations of tongues-speech were present elsewhere, particularly in chapter 10, where the account is otherwise quite a full one. While this proposal harmonises some aspects of the presentation in Acts with the ideas presented in 1 Corinthians, this is not significant grounds for its adoption.

The third possible explanation is that Peter's speech functions as an explanation not only of what has occurred on Pentecost, but of the other instances of tongues-speech, and indeed other occurrences of visionary experience throughout Acts. This would account for the lack of explanation at other points, and also underline the programmatic importance of the citation from Joel for the whole of Acts. Numerous phenomena are described here, including dreams, visions, and prophecy, as well as signs and portents. These have clearly not all been fulfilled in the Pentecost event, thus it seems that Peter's speech is an interpretation not only of what has happened already, but of what is to happen in the future.

The Post-Pentecost Community of Goods as an Interpretative Tool for Acts

The outcome of the Pentecost account is that 3000 new believers are added to the group.

The chapter ends with an account of the shared fellowship of these believers: devoted to the teachings of the Apostles and to prayer, sharing their possessions and praising God.

The conclusion of this chapter, to a stronger degree than the rest of the Acts narrative, presents an idealistic view of the community of believers. F. Scott Spencer observes that:

[S]uch a brief, universal sketch of community life runs the risk of being superficial and idealistic. One minute the crowd is ‘cut to the heart’ by Peter’s sharp incriminations (2:37); the next it has converted en masse and become a paragon of mutual charity.²⁶⁹

Spencer’s observation reflects the concerns of much of the scholarship on this chapter.

Questions are raised regarding whether or not this account ought to be characterised as a utopian one. It is not simply the description of the newly enlarged community of believers that might be seen to fall under the heading of utopianism.

The precise nature of the so called ‘community of goods’, referred to here in Acts 2 and also in Acts 4:32-37, has been the subject of some scholarly attention. The general consensus is to regard the description of a community that had all things in common as lacking any grounding in the actual historical setting of the earliest Christian communities. Interpretations have therefore ranged from the suggestion of utopian allusions within the Acts material, to the interpretation of these references as relating to ideals of friendship.²⁷⁰

The former emphasises the kind of social utopia found within Hellenistic philosophy, while

²⁶⁹ Spencer, *Acts*, 40.

²⁷⁰ One proponent of the first of these views is D. L. Mealand, ‘Community of Goods and Utopian Allusions in Acts II-IV’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 28 (1977), 96-97. In contrast, the second of these views has been proposed by Alan C. Mitchell, ‘The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111 (1992), 255-272.

the latter is likely to have a much more prescriptive hortatory function. This particularly relates to the connection between the references to having ‘all things in common’ (ἐἶχον πάντα κοινὰ or ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινὰ) to these same phrases within Plato’s *Republic*, and the connection of ideas of *koinōnia* with Pythagorean ideals of friendship that include the sharing of possessions (though not the loss of private ownership).

One notable exception to these groups of proposals is the work of Brian J. Capper, who has argued in favour of the historicity of the Acts account of the community of goods, and who finds a plausible historical parallel in the Essene communities, and the *Rule of the Community*, a text that forms part of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 6:13-23).²⁷¹ Further difficulties are encountered in the question of whether the Acts material is suggestive of communal ownership, or of the preservation of private ownership. This debate has less bearing on the discussion of dreams and visions here.

While it is difficult to confidently establish the strength of the connection between the Acts account and the historical situation of the early church, it is in any case possible for *both* utopian and idealising elements to be presented within this material, as Christopher M. Hays has convincingly argued.²⁷² Not every member of Luke’s audience may have identified all of the Platonic and Pythagorean connections, but there are sufficient elements within these texts that point to the idealised features that characterise the community of goods.

Since these discussions have tended to focus on a narrow range of texts, the implications of these insights for the understanding of the preceding report of visionary

²⁷¹ Brian J. Capper, ‘The Palestinian Cultural Context of the Earliest Christian Community of Goods’, in Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 323-356.

²⁷² Christopher M. Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics: A Study in Their Coherence and Character* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 195-208.

experiences at the first Christian Pentecost have not been considered. However, the idealised conclusion to this section of the Acts narrative hints at the possibility of an idealised element within the earlier part of the story.²⁷³ Arguably, the account of the recruitment of the 3000 and the depiction of the dream-visions and their interpretation can also be characterised as idealistic. Within this chapter one finds some of the strongest evidence in support of the ‘hand of God’ view. The Apostles wait passively in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Spirit, which subsequently manifests its power in them and gives them miraculous abilities. In his critique of Acts 10, Haenchen argued that the emphasis upon divine involvement reduced the role of the human characters to little more than ‘the twitching of puppets’.²⁷⁴ Here, however, the phenomenon of tongues-speech could be regarded as an act controlled not only by a puppeteer, but also a ventriloquist. However, the undeniable impression that these phenomena are occurring at God’s hands need not reflect an uncritical attitude towards these phenomena, but rather can be attributed to a watertight presentation of the Pentecost events. No room is left for questions over the reliability or validity of the report. Even the charge of drunkenness is so improbable that it does not represent a genuine challenge or raise a feasible alternative to the explanation offered in the narrative. Here, there is no uncertainty: God’s spirit has been poured out, and even the most casual reader/hearer of this story cannot fail to understand the significance of these events.

Summary of the Function of Dream-Visions in these Accounts

²⁷³ As C.K. Barrett suggests in relation to the reports of tongues speech in Acts 2: ‘The church from the beginning, though at the beginning located only in Jerusalem, is in principle a universal society in which universal communication is possible’ (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Volume 1 [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994-1998], 108).

²⁷⁴ *Acts*, 362.

At the level of cultural context, the account of the first Christian Pentecost represents an interesting conundrum. On the one hand, the events are presented as being unprecedented and totally new, but on the other hand, in order for the phenomena described to be understood by the readers/hearers of the story, it is necessary for them to be located within a broader context, which includes Old Testament prophecy, the instructions and promises delivered by Jesus to his disciples, and the conventions for reporting dreams, visions, and related phenomena within the first century. While the reaction of the ‘crowd’ functions to demonstrate alternative perspectives upon the depiction of these events, this only occurs after the initial confident portrayal of the experience in the upper room as divinely sent and highly significant. However, this positive presentation of visionary experience is one that is argued rather than simply assumed, with features of the account such as the multiple recipients of the outpouring of the Spirit functioning to underscore the trustworthiness of what is being described, however improbable it may seem.

At the narrative level, the events of the first Christian Pentecost and their interpretation within Peter’s speech help to construct audience expectations for the shape of the rest of the narrative. The central place that dreams, visions and related phenomena will occupy within the story is established, although, as will be demonstrated, the significance of these phenomena by no means mitigates the interpretative challenges they pose.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, it is clear that the account of the first Christian Pentecost contains an extremely robust report of visionary phenomena: the coming of the Spirit is a corporate experience that is corroborated by many other witnesses and supported by biblical prophecy. Peter is able to offer a detailed interpretation of what has occurred, and the cumulative effect is the addition of 3000 new believers to the Christian community. These unusual occurrences are met with no serious challenges, and the results are overwhelmingly positive. Here, one finds an idealised account in which these phenomena function to illustrate God's hand persuasively and powerfully at work among the believers. However, this idealistic portrait need not also be regarded as superficial. When considered as part of the wider narrative, the idealism of Acts 2 is tempered by an engagement with the practicalities and challenges of communal living within the developing story of the Acts of the Apostles. The programmatic quotation from the book of Joel promises further outpourings of the Spirit and places dreams, visions and prophecy at the heart of what is to come within the narrative.

This thesis does not intend to dispute the function of dream-vision reports as a means of illustrating God's hand at work. However, it will be proposed that as the story of the post-Pentecost Christian group unfolds, one finds evidence of a more complex practical outworking of the idealised picture painted thus far. This entails not only the recognition of their potential to offer divine revelation, but also the risks that are posed by these ambiguous experiences that push, and sometimes cross, the boundaries of social convention.

Chapter Four: The Gentile Pentecost

Chapters 10 and 11 of Acts represent a significant milestone within the narrative. The ‘everyone’ of Acts 2:21, and the ‘all flesh’ of 2:17 take on a new meaning that incorporates not only Jews, but also Gentiles. The aim of this chapter is to explore the way in which dream-visions contribute towards this major development, which has been dubbed by some as ‘the Gentile Pentecost’.

This section of the narrative contains a high volume of dream-vision reports: Cornelius’ vision is reported four times, first by the narrator (10:3-6), then by Cornelius’ slaves (10:22), next by Cornelius himself (10:30-32), and finally by Peter (11:13-14). A fifth report is mentioned but not described (10:8). Peter’s vision is reported twice, first by the narrator (10:9-16) and then by Peter (11:4-12). Peter is also given instructions by the Holy Spirit (10:19-20), and this same Holy Spirit falls upon the Gentiles, causing them to speak in tongues (10:44-48; 11:15). As noted in the Introduction, the prevalence of such reports has led certain scholars to despair at the lack of room for human decision-making within the account. However, while dream-visions undoubtedly have a major role in directing this new development, the situation is more complex than these readings have allowed. This chapter will argue that human consideration of the boundaries, limits and implications of dream-visions is to be found at the heart of the story of Peter and Cornelius.

The treatment of this material will begin with an analysis of Acts 10. Its consequences for the admittance of Gentiles into the Christian community will be noted, especially in connect to the implications this may have for the treatment and interpretation of dream-visions. It will be suggested that, as the boundaries of the Christian movement are widened to include Gentiles, the boundaries of access to divinely sent dream-visions

and to their accurate interpretation are also widened. This may have an influence upon how legitimate experiences are determined within the life of the community.

This chapter will then examine Peter's defence of these events before the believers in Judaea (Acts 11:1-18), asking how this fits with the earlier material. It will be argued that, far from negating the need for human involvement, the discrepancies between the accounts in chapters 10 and 11 illustrate the way in which Peter re-works the interpretation of his own dream-vision when presenting it to a fresh audience. This implies a fluidity of interpretation of experience within Acts that has not previously received sufficient attention. Finally, the further treatment of the Gentile decision in Acts 15 will briefly be considered. This material offers additional insight into the way in which Peter's dream-vision fares within a wider context of communal decision-making.

Cornelius' Visionary Experience (10:1-8)

The scene-setting information for the first report of Cornelius' vision covers two main areas: details about Cornelius, and details about the situation within which the vision occurred. Cornelius' profession as a centurion is described. There is no indication of a negative attitude towards these figures within the Lukan corpus, although F. Scott Spencer notes a passing critique of military personnel in the references to Pilate's involvement with Jesus' death (3:13; 4:27).²⁷⁵ This profession, representative of the occupying forces, is in some ways archetypically 'Gentile' and 'other' for the Jewish believers who have thus far

²⁷⁵ F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 109.

dominated the narrative.²⁷⁶ This not only sets up the strong contrast in the story between Jew and Gentile, but may also help to underline Cornelius' function as a representative of all Gentiles, since his acceptance is similarly representative and wide reaching. Equally, however, he is portrayed as a man of piety and prayer (as shown within the vision itself, and also as hinted at by the mention of the ninth hour in 10:3) who has concern for the Jews. These credentials help to form a bridge over the gap between Jew and Gentile. In terms of the cultural context of dreaming, Dennis R. MacDonald suggests that Cornelius' status as an officer helps to portray him as a worthy recipient of a significant dream-vision such as this one.²⁷⁷

The setting of the vision itself is not extensively outlined. The only detail that is provided is a reference to the time of day (10:3), and this partly serves to further emphasise Cornelius' piety. However, just as was noted in the report of the first Christian Pentecost, its occurrence in the daylight may serve to underline its reliability. The specific time suggests a context of prayer for the visionary experience, which has a similar function. For the most part, information about the man takes precedence over information concerning the setting for the vision. This adds to the notion that both Cornelius' profession and his piety play a vital role in the events that are about to unfold.

²⁷⁶ David Allan Handy sees an echo of the story of the centurion's servant in Luke 7:1-10 at this point. Certainly, as Handy observes, both are described as devout and generous towards the Jews. Handy sees a further connection over the issue of entering the home of a Gentile. He suggests that Luke 7 implies Jesus' willingness to enter a Gentile household, noting the contrast between Jesus and Peter's attitudes. (David Allan Handy, 'The Gentile Pentecost: A Literary Study of the Story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18)', Doctoral thesis, Union Theological Seminary, May 1998, 44-45. In many ways this is quite a compelling observation. However, Peter's reluctance is essentially over *eating* with a Gentile, and this should not be overlooked. Furthermore, the 'defilement' that Handy refers to was not permanent. That Jesus would risk defilement does not automatically indicate a view that Gentiles were 'clean', merely that Jesus was willing to undergo temporary defilement in order to heal someone. In contrast, the message of Acts 10-11 appears to be that contact with Gentiles brings about no such defilement. In this sense the contrast is not as stark as Handy suggests, particularly given Peter's presence in the home of Simon the Tanner, who may also have been regarded as 'unclean' (see below).

²⁷⁷ Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003), 44-45.

The form of the initial report is similar to those found in other literature of the ancient world. This form has been outlined in the second chapter of this thesis. It will be noted shortly that both the reports of Peter's vision also fit this framework, providing a common thread between the experiences of the two individuals. This, too, offers a subtle bridging of the gap between Jew and Gentile.

That the form of the vision reports appears to follow convention suggests that the author was familiar with the way in which other visionary reports were usually presented, and that he had no wish to deviate from such a model. Whereas in Acts 2 the events described are presented as being unprecedented, with the report of tongues-speech in particular purporting to describe a new phenomenon, here there is no attempt to differentiate between the dream-vision that he is reporting and wider trends within antiquity. In spite of the profound significance of these visionary experiences as triggers for abrupt change with regard to admission of Gentiles, therefore, the reports themselves are structured in a way that would most likely be familiar to Luke's intended audience.

The first report of the vision itself begins at 10:3, and it is presented in a very definitive way – the use of 'clearly' (*φανερῶς*) emphasises the certainty of what Cornelius sees. His 'terrified' (*ἐμφοβος*) response in 10:4 is typical of angelophanies at earlier points in Luke-Acts (e.g. Lk. 1:12; 29-30; 2:9), and the way this fits such a model is suggestive of the genuinely divine origin of what Cornelius sees. The vision itself consists of a simple set of instructions, and the text reveals no questioning of the content or validity of the experience. In some senses, therefore, Cornelius' vision is straightforward. What is more noteworthy is the identity of the *recipient* of this form of visionary experience. This point will be expounded further below.

Acts 10:8 recounts the way in which Cornelius told his slaves and a pious soldier ‘everything’ before sending them to Joppa. This is, then, a fifth, unheard retelling of the visionary experience, which further emphasises the frequent repetition. David Allan Handy suggests that while Cornelius may have told everything to his servants, the readers/hearers are yet to receive a full account of the visionary experience. His thesis proposes that this account is comparable to a simplified detective story in which more information is gradually revealed to the reader in order to draw them into the story.²⁷⁸ While it is certainly true that each report reveals different information to the reader, it is not necessarily accurate to see this as a progression, with each report building on the previous one. This thesis argues instead that the reports at times offer conflicting interpretations of the visionary experience in order to best persuade the audience to which they are directed. It seems more likely that the ‘everything’ of 10:8 acts as a shorthand for the information already provided in the text. Handy’s argument requires that Cornelius withholds information (or that his representatives do) from other characters in the narrative, and from the readers/listeners. This does not fit the exaggeratedly pious nature of Cornelius’ character presentation.

The second report of Cornelius’ vision occurs at 10:22. No further information on the setting of the vision itself is provided, though it is noticeable that once again the report is prefaced by an assertion of Cornelius’ personal piety. The exaggerated nature of the claim that Cornelius is ‘well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation’ can also be observed (10:22).²⁷⁹ This alleged universal Jewish respect may also be significant in providing subtle support for Peter’s later decision. The acceptance of Gentiles is certainly

²⁷⁸ Handy, ‘The Gentile Pentecost’, 1-2.

²⁷⁹ Handy, ‘The Gentile Pentecost’, 80.

unprecedented, but the information in 10:22 suggests that Peter's decision reflects a degree of existing approval for Cornelius. He is the most appropriate, acceptable Gentile candidate possible. This adds a faint element of group involvement to the decision.

This vision report itself adds little to what is already known. The slaves tell Peter of the angel's command that he should be summoned so that Cornelius may hear what he has to say. Although this was implicit within the first report, Peter's role as speaker is made explicit at this point. This provides some basis for Peter's otherwise unprecedented remark of 11:14, which will be examined shortly.

The third report of the visionary experience is made by Cornelius himself, and it is broadly similar to the first. In 10:30 he describes the angel of the previous two accounts as 'a man in dazzling clothes' (*ἐν ἐσθήτι λαμπρᾷ*). By not simply claiming to have seen an angel, but instead describing the physical appearance of the figure, Cornelius' claim seems more reliable – it is supported by details of what he saw, which others can then reassess for themselves. His description may in some sense be validated by the reference to the men 'in white clothes' (*ἐν ἐσθήσεσι λευκαῖς*) in Acts 1:10. Furthermore, the instructions of the earlier figures in white preceded the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost: 10:30 could therefore hint at the 'Gentile Pentecost' which shortly follows Cornelius' description, just as the first Christian Pentecost followed the description in 1:10, although this linguistic parallel alone would not really be strong enough to support such a claim.

Handy notes that in this report the angelic figure speaks of Cornelius' prayer (singular), rather than his prayers (plural) as in the first report.²⁸⁰ If Cornelius has received his vision as a result of a specific prayer rather than because of his more generally devout lifestyle, his request would be extremely powerful: resulting in the ultimate acceptance of

²⁸⁰ Handy, 'The Gentile Pentecost', 81-2.

all Gentiles. However, too much should not be made of this minor difference, particularly as there is little verbatim agreement between the two statements, making this variation less obvious.²⁸¹ There is no evidence in the text to suggest that the author imagined an incubated or otherwise deliberately sought out visionary experience here.²⁸²

The final report of Cornelius' experience is given by Peter to the Jerusalem Christians in chapter 11. Peter describes the figure that appeared to Cornelius as 'the angel'. This use of the definite article is slightly unusual within the context of Peter's speech, where he has not yet mentioned an angel. This could be explained with the suggestion that Peter saw the voice of his own vision as belonging to the same figure who spoke to Cornelius. However, it may have very little significance, particularly as an angel has been referred to in differing ways at three earlier points within the narrative. However, it can be noted that Acts 7:38 also contains a reference to 'the angel', and at this point it refers to the angel who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. This raises the issue of whether or not Peter had this same special angel in mind.

What is most interesting about this final report is that Peter describes the angel instructing Cornelius that Peter would, 'give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved' (11:14). Much debate has been sparked over whether this should be seen as part of Cornelius' vision as Peter's account implies, or whether this is Peter's own interpretation of events being placed on the lips of the angel. This statement does not,

²⁸¹ One may observe a link to Luke 1:13 at this point. This is the angel's message to Zechariah informing him that his prayer has been heard – *εἰσηκούσθη ἡ δέησίς σου*. Of course, the word *προσευχή*, is not used at this point, though the sense of the two words is similar. Even so, there are no other occurrences of *εἰσηκούσθη* in Luke-Acts (nor, indeed, in the New Testament as a whole), so it may be that the author was consciously drawing a parallel at this point to underline the authenticity of Cornelius' experience. It would probably go too far to take the parallel any further than that.

²⁸² Its likely occurrence within the context of structured prayer may have some significance, though it can hardly be suggested that the author felt that this was the only appropriate context for visionary experience, given Peter's own vision within this same account. As mentioned above, the most likely function of the mention of timing is in reinforcing Cornelius' piety.

as some have assumed, place the hand of God so heavily on the series of events as to make human decision or intervention redundant. Rather, it acts to counterbalance the otherwise strong individual involvement of Peter within the narrative. This highlights the strong persuasive power of visionary experience: here it is being used as a justification as well as an initiation of events.

Peter's Visionary Experiences (10:9-24)

Having considered the reports of Cornelius' experience, the reports of Peter's visionary experience will now be examined. From the outset this is complex. One of the most challenging elements is simply in defining what experience the author is trying to describe. In 10:10 the narrator offers the information that, 'ἐγένετο ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἔκστασις'. It is unclear exactly what the author may have been referring to by his use of the word ἔκστασις. Whilst it was used to refer to often quite frenzied prophetic utterance, both in the LXX and in the wider Graeco-Roman world, the information provided in the chapters themselves – that Peter was praying on the rooftop while waiting for food to be prepared – make this type of ecstasy an unlikely explanation for Peter's experience.

The text also suggests that this ecstasy (or 'trance', as it has often been translated) is not synonymous with the visionary experience itself. At two points it is made clear that he had the vision while he was in this ecstatic state (10:17, 11:5). Because the information about what Peter's experience was is provided at these other points, one may question what purpose this reference to an ecstasy serves. One suggestion may be the link that it provides to two Old Testament incidents of a different type of ecstasy. The LXX versions of Genesis 2:21 and Genesis 15:12 use ἔκστασις to refer to a kind of deep sleep. 2:21 refers to the deep

sleep God brought upon Adam while He removed one of Adam's ribs to create the woman, and 15:12 refers to Abram's deep sleep in which God speaks of the future of Abram's descendants, and then makes a covenant with him.

There are not strong linguistic parallels between the accounts beyond this common use of ἑκστασις, although the list of animals in Acts 10:12 perhaps finds some common ground with the list in Genesis 2:20 – the preceding verse to Adam's ecstasy. Both refer to 'the birds of the air' (πετεῖνὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) and some manuscripts have also included 'beasts'. Although this most likely functions to harmonise it with Peter's report in chapter 11, both 10:12 and 11:6 may quite reasonably represent an attempt to draw a closer parallel to the θηρίοις τοῦ ἀγροῦ of Gen. 2:20 (though it may instead carry the meaning of 'wild beasts'). In any case, the parallel still stands with the earlier mention in Genesis 1:24 of the different kinds of animals. The context of this passage is the creation of Eve, and thus, in a more general way it has associations with the formation not of the Jewish people, but of the entire human race, both Jews and Gentiles. This has some relation to the issue at stake within Acts 10 and 11. As a result, there is some support for the idea that the author was making a deliberate link between the ἑκστασις of Peter and that of Adam.

As for the later Genesis passage, Abram's ἑκστασις is also preceded by the mention of animals; in this case Abram makes a sacrifice to God of a heifer, a female goat, a ram, a turtle dove and a pigeon (15:9-10).²⁸³ Although there is no common vocabulary between this description of the animals and Peter's description in Acts, Abram's sacrifice of 'clean' animals may not be entirely insignificant. The wider context of this passage is Abram's question over his descendants, and God's subsequent covenant with Abram. It therefore has a focus on the beginnings of the Jewish nation. There is a distinction between the

²⁸³ This might usefully be compared to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

single nation focus of Genesis 15, and the multi-nation focus of Genesis 2. The issue in Acts 10 and 11 concerns precisely this: the relationship between the Jews as a nation, and the Gentiles. Therefore, it could be contended that the common use of ἔκστασις in each of these three passages may be intended to link Acts to both the Genesis sections, and perhaps more importantly, to highlight a link between the two Genesis sections themselves. While it is clear that the content of each ‘ecstasy’ is very different, Luke may use the term to place Peter in a line of succession with Adam and Abraham. Just as Luke takes his genealogy all the way back to Adam in Luke 1, there is evidence to support the idea that in Acts 10 and 11 the author is once again making use of the figures of Abraham and Adam as representative of the Jews, and of all the nations.

Luke does use the term ἔκστασις at three other points within his writing – it describes the reaction of the crowds to the healing of the paralysed man in Luke 5:26; the reaction of the crowd after the healing of the man at the Beautiful Gate in Acts 3:10; and finally to describe Paul’s experience whilst praying in the temple in Acts 22:17. Paul’s experience also occurs in the context of prayer. He sees a vision while he is in this state, though the passage gives us no further clues as to precisely what the author may have meant by the term.²⁸⁴ As for the earlier references, they seem to describe something very different to the experiences of Peter and Paul. The word is used to refer to the awe and amazement felt by the crowds, therefore these references are not able to add much to the understanding of the use of term in Acts 10 and 11.

In summary therefore, while it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions about what Luke may have meant by ἔκστασις, the most likely explanation is that it refers to an

²⁸⁴ For more on this issue see O. Betz, ‘Die Vision des Paulus im Tempel von Jerusalem. Apg. 22. 17-21 als Beitrag zur Deutung des Damaskuserlebnisses’, O. Böcher and K. Haacker (eds.) *Verborum Veritas* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1970).

altered state of consciousness – possibly a sleep-like state – similar to that of Adam and Abram in the Old Testament. The use of the term functions to flag up further connections with the two Genesis passages briefly examined above.

The scene-setting information provided suggests that the author wished to portray Peter as seeking out a visionary experience of some sort. Prayer, fasting, sacrifice, and sleeping in a holy place all functioned as preparations for such experiences.²⁸⁵ As well as spending time in prayer, Peter's hunger could be seen as a further preparation for visionary experience, although the fact that his experience happened while he was waiting for food to be prepared makes this less compelling, since this would not be the normal context in which a dream-vision was incubated. However, it can be noted that Peter is praying before he has this experience. The timing of Cornelius' vision may suggest he was also at prayer when his vision occurred. If this was the case it would draw the two characters together, once again offering a subtle bridging of the gap between Jew and Gentile.

In spite of the context of prayer, the scene-setting information provided suggests an unlikely place for a visionary experience. This is not simply because Peter is waiting for a meal to be prepared, but, far more significantly, because Peter is in the home of Simon the Tanner. There has been disagreement over how significant this element of the story should be seen to be. Certainly, Luke does not make any explicit comments about how tanners may have been perceived, since because of their handling of animal carcasses tanners were regarded as unclean by Jews, and consequently occupied a position on the periphery of Jewish society.²⁸⁶ This negative attitude towards tanners has been documented in a number

²⁸⁵ Violet MacDermot, *The Cult of the Seer in the Ancient Middle East. A Contribution to Current Research on Hallucinations Drawn from Coptic and Other Texts* (London: Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1971), 41.

²⁸⁶ F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) p113. See also rabbinic texts noted above.

of rabbinic texts (Pesahim 65a; Shabbath 1:2; Megillah 3:2; Beba Bathra 2:9; Kiddushin 82b; Ketuboth 7:10),²⁸⁷ although the extent to which this is reflected within older Jewish texts has been challenged.²⁸⁸ It is also uncertain how strong this attitude was within day-to-day life, and whether or not Luke or his readers would have been aware of this issue.

However, the functional redundancy of the repeated mention of Simon's job (9:43, 10:6, 10:32) suggests that it is likely to have a role beyond that of simple background information. In a story that revolves around the issues of the clean and the profane Peter's willingness to accept hospitality from such a figure is likely to be highly significant. This willingness may suggest that whilst Peter's vision asks of him something previously unheard of, he was himself moving in a similar direction reflected by his lack of concern over his host's occupation.²⁸⁹

In his examination of the Cornelius/Peter story Handy makes much of the way that an angel enters the house of a Gentile. He argues that this underlines the fact that entrance into a Gentile home is acceptable.²⁹⁰ In his consideration, however, Handy entirely ignores the possible significance of visionary experience within the tanner's house. Dream-visions are sometimes associated with sacred places within the Old Testament, for example, Samuel experiences God as he sleeps in the temple (1 Sam. 3), and in Genesis 28:16 Jacob concludes upon awakening from his dream that the place in which he was sleeping must have been a sacred one. This is hardly a state of affairs that can be applied to all visionary experiences, but the examples of Samuel and Jacob raise the possibility that within the

²⁸⁷ For further discussion of this see, Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period*, tr. from 3rd German edn with author's revisions (London: SCM, 1969).

²⁸⁸ Isaac W. Oliver, 'Simon Peter Meets Simon the Tanner: The Ritual Insignificance of Tanning in Ancient Judaism', *New Testament Studies*, 59 (2013), 50-60.

²⁸⁹ This view is echoed by J.D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), 130.

²⁹⁰ Handy, 'The Gentile Pentecost', 85. The extent to which angels can be regarded as setting precedents for human behaviour is uncertain.

Acts account, the open heaven over the previously liminal, borderline home of a tanner is not unrelated to the changes that are about to be put into place with regard to those on the other side of this border – the Gentiles. The rooftop setting of the experience (rather than in the heart of the tanner’s home) could also symbolise a state in which Peter is drawing close to the boundaries but not yet crossing them.

What information does the form and setting of Peter’s vision offer regarding its function? The information provided at the outset offers small clues that hint at the momentous change that is about to occur: the conventional structure which underlines the reliability and authenticity of the visionary experience, the link to Abram and Adam and the location at Simon’s house. Of course, these elements alone are not enough to suggest what is about to happen. However, as the story unfolds they support what is suggested by the more explicit instructions. Not only does this underline the purpose of the story more clearly, it also functions as part of Luke’s understanding of how dream-visions might appropriately be treated. While Peter’s dream-vision may *appear* to occur completely out of the blue, the readers/hearers of Luke’s story are surrounded by clues and supporting evidence so that while the dream-vision seems to command something new, it does not do so standing alone within the text. The most obvious supporting element comes from Cornelius’ corresponding dream-vision already examined above.

In the light of this contextual material, the discussion will now move to the content of the two vision-reports. Within the first report in 10:11-16 the overall description of the vision is less certain than that of Cornelius, in which he is described as seeing clearly (10:3). Verse 11 describes ‘something like’ a large sheet, and verse 16 refers to ‘the thing’ (τὸ σκεῦος) as it was taken back up to heaven. Although this term refers to a vessel or a container, and is therefore not necessarily imprecise, the resulting image is hardly

clear-cut. This doesn't necessarily mean that Luke's Peter is unsure of what he was seeing, but it suggests that it was, at least, harder to put into words. The symbolic nature of Peter's vision and its contrast to the clarity with which Cornelius' experience is described is a point that will be returned to shortly.

In spite of being something of an imprecise term within the context of Acts 10, the 'vessel' of verse 11 and 16 may also be an allusion to the initial purity laws in Leviticus 11. Within Leviticus 11 there is a reference to a vessel and the issue of whether its contents are clean or unclean (11:33-34). If this use of *σκεῦος* is to be seen as an allusion to Leviticus 11 it would underline the fact that the author is facing head-on the way in which Peter's vision nullifies certain Old Testament purity laws. This focus in chapter 10 is particularly interesting in the light of Acts 15, wherein certain purity laws appear to be upheld contrary to the instructions of Peter's vision.

A more clear-cut allusion is to Ezekiel 4:14. Handy has noted the way in which Peter's protest against the instruction of his vision parallels Ezekiel 4:14a in the first report, and 14b in the second report.²⁹¹ This is particularly striking since, in Ezekiel's case, the Lord changes his mind and allows the prophet an alternative to making himself unclean. In contrast, Peter is firmly told three times to 'kill and eat'. Given the minimal variations between the two reports of Peter's experience, these minor differences in phrasing stand out more, thus further highlighting the link to both parts of Ezekiel 4:14.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Handy, 'The Gentile Pentecost', 46.

²⁹² The act of eating itself within the context of a dream-vision may also be significant. Juliette Harrison notes one such reference to eating within her survey of the dreaming in the Graeco-Roman corpus: 'The Hippocratic dream book [...] does note that seeming to eat one's normal diet in a dream indicates malnourishment, and means that the dreamer should eat in real life what they seemed to be eating in the dream' (*Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination* [London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013], 194). However, it is difficult to know how representative such an interpretation was.

As a general rule, the author of Acts uses Old Testament allusions in order to support and validate the experiences of the first Christians. One of the most noticeable examples of this is the use of the prophecy from Joel within Acts 2. In contrast, at this point the LXX allusions only serve to underscore the stark difference and novelty of the command that Peter receives. However, within the passage as a whole the biblical evidence is shown to be less clear cut than this, for Peter's own decision is supported by allusions to certain other texts, especially within Peter's statement that 'God shows no partiality' (10:34).

To return to the vision report, the heavenly voice that Peter hears is not attributed to any particular character. While Peter refers to the figure who is speaking as 'Lord' in 10:14, there is no reason that this should be interpreted as a reference to God or to Christ rather than to an angel. In spite of the detail of the vision report, therefore, overall the reader/hearer is left with an unclear impression of what Peter saw, and with a report of the words of an unknown voice. Although this uncertainty does not have a significant effect on the vision-report, it does stand in contrast to Cornelius' encounter with the angel, and his description of its appearance already discussed above.

Peter's vision has a more symbolic content than the clear-cut instructions and obvious application of Cornelius' vision. It would be easy to assume that of the two experiences, Peter's is the more significant; here is a high status apostle with a complex message given under an open heaven. Within the Graeco-Roman world, however, message dream-visions such as Cornelius' were generally given a much higher status than those that were symbolic. A. Leo Oppenheim goes as far as to suggest that in the Old Testament Jews

have message dreams and Gentiles have symbolic dreams.²⁹³ If this were the case, then this Acts account presents a striking and potentially very significant reversal of these types. However, given the existence of a number of exceptions to Oppenheim's suggestion, this distinction is hardly as clear-cut as he implies.

More convincingly, however, Frances Flannery-Dailey observes a general trend within Greek literature that men have message dreams and women have symbolic dreams.²⁹⁴ This reinforces the idea that message dreams were accorded a higher status than those that were symbolic. There is also the suggestion that message dreams are more transparent and therefore require less interpretation than symbolic dreams, which are more reliant upon intuition, emotion, and interpretation. The extent to which Luke would have been aware of these stereotypes is uncertain, however, given his apparent awareness of the usual literary structure of dream-vision reports, it seems entirely plausible that Luke would have been aware of these general trends.

Both the symbolic nature of the experience and Peter's sleep like state may function to limit the extreme shock of an encounter with the divine, particularly one in which such radical instructions are given. Oppenheim, for example, notes that:

The essential features of the theophany ... its dramatic, soul-shaking impact, the shattering inroad of the supernatural into the reality of this world, the terror-inspiring sight of the deity, etc. have disappeared in the transfer from consciousness to dream. The change in reality-level acts as a cushion to soften the contact between God and man.²⁹⁵

The extreme change that Peter is instructed to implement could provide a rationale for the means by which his experience is described. Whether or not this is the case, the way in

²⁹³ A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East. With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream Book*. (The American Philosophical Society: Philadelphia, 1956), 207.

²⁹⁴ Frances Flannery-Dailey, *Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests. Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 30.

²⁹⁵ Oppenheim, *Dreams*, 192.

which Peter's vision is described illustrates that high status members of the Christian community do not have any kind of special or enhanced access to God.

Even in his altered state of consciousness and within the symbolic vision, Peter disagrees with the heavenly voice. His disagreement is based on his established belief system. This suggests that the visionary experience alone is not at first sufficient to override his existing norms and values. The fact that Peter holds firm to his beliefs while he is in a state of ecstasy underlines his great faithfulness and adherence to the Jewish law. This sort of sleep-like state is one in which existing boundaries and rules can be ignored or overruled. For example, Flannery-Dailey writes of the way in which, 'dream logic allows for the traversing of spatial, temporal and ontological boundaries such that within the confining dream frame, almost anything imaginable is logical'.²⁹⁶ In spite of this freedom, however, Peter is opposed to the instruction that he should change his behaviour, even within the frame of the vision itself, let alone in any context outside of this experience.

Acts 10:16 describes the way in which this instruction to 'kill and eat' occurred three times before the vision ended. Unlike Peter's threefold denial of Jesus at the end of Luke, however, there is no explicit disapproval of the way in which Peter challenges the heavenly voice within his vision. Certainly, there are no negative consequences to his disbelief, unlike, for example, Zechariah in Luke 1, who loses the ability to speak after questioning the angel in his vision just once. In fact, Peter's questioning of the vision has a significant place within his presentation of events to the Jerusalem Christians in chapter 11.

After this repeated instruction, the vision abruptly ends (10:16). As has already been mentioned, the second report of Peter's experience is very similar to the first. Aside

²⁹⁶ Frances Flannery-Dailey, *Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests. Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 249.

from the report in chapter 11 being placed on the lips of Peter rather than those of the narrator as in the first account, the only differences are a minor change to the phrasing of Peter's protest as already noted above, and the slightly longer list of animals which Peter saw in/on the vessel. This second report adds little to the knowledge of the content of Peter's vision. This fairly close similarity stands in contrast to the four-fold repetition of Cornelius' experience wherein new details are continually added. This may serve to underline the reliability of Peter's vision-report, though as will be seen shortly, his account to the Jerusalem Christians as a whole contains some striking new claims.

Peter himself has a further experience that may exert an influence on his actions amongst the Gentiles. Alongside the repeated report of Peter's vision he also has an encounter with the Holy Spirit at 10:19-20. Some scholars have considered this to be a second visionary experience. J.S. Hanson, for example, goes so far as to suggest that it is this experience, not the symbolic dream-vision that should be paired with Cornelius' experience.²⁹⁷ In some respects this is compelling due to the clear instructions that would then be paralleled in the 'double'-visions. However, this fails to take into account the parallel forms of the earlier vision reports.

The instructions of the Spirit to Peter are not actually necessary – Luke's audience already has the information that the Spirit provides. However, this confirmation to Peter may well be a crucial element of the decision-making process. Once again the reader sees that Peter's startling vision does not stand alone.

Peter's Speech and the 'Gentile Pentecost' (10:25-48)

²⁹⁷ Hanson discusses this passage in full in, 'The Dream Vision Report and Acts 10:1-11:18: A Form Critical Study', Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1978.

Peter's speech to the Gentiles offers further insight into how he understood his own experience. In 10:28 Peter informs the Gentiles that 'God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean'. Interestingly, however, Peter does not explain to the Gentiles how God has made this clear to him. Throughout his speech he makes no reference at all to his own visionary experience. This stands in stark contrast to the way in which Cornelius tells Peter of his experience. Instead, a significant part of Peter's speech focuses upon witnesses and testimony, and the obedience to and fulfilment of commands.

At 10:34 Peter says 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality'. This is a possible allusion to Deuteronomy 10:17 which states that God 'is not partial'.²⁹⁸ Interestingly this does occur within a list of instructions about both circumcision and how strangers should be treated. Not only are the Israelites told to treat strangers with love (10:20), but 10:16 is an instruction that the Israelites should circumcise their hearts. This could refer to the kind of circumcision that Peter now believes to be most appropriate – both for Jews and Gentiles. While the immediate context of Acts 10 does not concern the question of circumcision, the re-telling of the Cornelius incident in chapter 15 (and to an extent the comment by the Jerusalem Christians in chapter 11) is likely to be concerned with this issue. An allusion to circumcised hearts at this point may therefore be significant.

²⁹⁸ Acts 10:34 and Daniel 2:8 (LXX) share the phrase *ἐπ' ἀληθείας*. While this is not a very strong connection, it is a particularly fascinating one. This section of Daniel 2 is an extended discussion of authentic and inauthentic dream interpretation. King Nebuchadnezzar requests that the wise men tell him not only the interpretation of his dream, but the content of the dream itself. He states that if they are able to do the latter he will be able to trust that their interpretation will also be correct (2:9). The faint allusion to this passage could underline further the God-given nature of Peter's understanding. In Daniel 2 the king has a dream that troubles him, and that he finds difficult to understand. He seeks the advice of the wise men to tell him the meaning of his dream. The answer of the wise men and of Daniel himself is that only God can tell the king his dream (and therefore by extension offer a true interpretation). This could serve to confirm that Peter's interpretation here is a true one and is God given. Much as these two passages offer interesting possibilities when they are linked together, it would have to be a very alert listener indeed to make a link to Daniel 2 simply through the phrase *ἐπ' ἀληθείας* in Acts 10:34.

Further Scriptural allusions have been proposed to Peter's vision in Acts 10, including the idea that this passage contain echoes of the story of Jonah. Such potential parallels can significantly contribute to the understanding of the function and significance of visions within these chapters, and, by extension, within Acts as a whole. For example, if an allusion to the Jonah story is accepted as part of the Acts account of Peter's dream-vision, the characterisation of Peter is likely to be focused upon the Jonah-like image of a reluctant messenger to the Gentiles, protesting in some way against God's call. If this is the case, Peter's vision instructs him to do something to which he is utterly opposed. If Peter is 'running from God' in the same sense that Jonah was, the visionary experience which transforms the story becomes particularly powerful as it facilitates a complete turnaround in the face of significant protest. In contrast, if the cue of Peter's stay with Simon the Tanner is accepted as more central, his vision pushes him further in a direction he has *already started to move in*. The vision remains significant, and remains a challenge to Peter, but it functions alongside other elements of the narrative which push him in the same direction. It does not stand alone quite as starkly as if it was the only thing calling Peter to take a completely new direction.

However, while the two stories may contain common elements, at almost every point of legitimate comparison, the narratives are moving in opposite directions. For example, the shared geographical location of Joppa functions as the place where Jonah runs away from his encounter with God, whereas Peter's location with Simon the Tanner is indicative of the direction God will continue to ask him to move in. The responses of the two characters to their respective visionary experiences also differ widely, and Peter's initial confusion over the meaning of his dream-vision finds little similarity with Jonah's anger and bitterness at the instructions he receives. Overall therefore, the alleged parallels

between Jonah and Peter do not really stand under scrutiny and should therefore be rejected.

To return to the wider features of the Acts narrative, it appears that Peter is supporting the idea of making no distinction at all between Jews and Gentiles. In 10:47 he emphasises that they have received the Spirit just as the Jews did on the first Christian Pentecost, and this is reiterated in his speech in 11:17. It seems reasonable to state that his decision is initiated by his visionary experience, interpreted via Peter's encounter with Cornelius, and later confirmed by the outpouring of the Spirit. On an individual level, therefore, Peter's vision is persuasive. This is also true in a more public setting, but shared experience, and the uniquely Christian phenomenon of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, appear to hold a greater weight in such a situation.

This section ends with the baptism of Cornelius and his household (10:48). The question of whether baptism should be considered a sufficient marker for full membership of the Christian group is a complex one, even when only treating the relevant Acts material. What can be noted with some confidence is that the Gentiles appear to be admitted to the group in the same manner as the Jewish believers in Acts 2:41 with no behavioural demands explicitly placed upon them.

What, then, can be surmised from the above analysis of Acts 10? The significant role of dream-visions in bringing about the widening of the boundaries of the Christian community is self-evident, but what does this development suggest about the boundaries of access to these phenomena? The answer to this question lies in a consideration of Cornelius' dream-vision, particularly in taking seriously its place as the most frequently reported dream-vision within the Acts of the Apostles.

As noted above, one of the most noteworthy features of this dream-vision report is the identity of its recipient as a Gentile, albeit a pious one: a man who is outside the boundaries of the Christian community. Any perception that access to dream-visions in themselves was restricted to insiders seems unlikely. Although the circumcised believers express amazement at the outpouring of the Spirit upon Cornelius and his household, the occurrence of this vision does not in itself contain the same shock factor. While this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is presented as a uniquely Christian phenomenon, the same cannot be said for visionary experience. The already noted lack of distinction between dreams and visions in the ancient world emphasises this further: it would be nonsensical to suggest that only Christian believers had the capacity to dream, although of course, not all dream-visions were accorded equal significance. While it may not be unheard of for a Gentile to have a visionary experience, the influence this has upon the direction of a movement to which he does not (yet) belong is striking.

At the first Christian Pentecost the role of outsiders was found to be a passive one: they heard the amazing phenomenon of tongues speech, but they relied on Peter, one of the insiders, to provide an interpretation that made sense of their experience. Here, not only do Cornelius and his household experience tongues-speech for themselves, Cornelius has a role in directing the action to this point. Cornelius' vision is not simply an experience that leads to his own initiation into the group, it provides the interpretative key for Peter's visionary experience and functions as a vital cog in the move towards the acceptance of the Gentiles.

This makes the influence and impact of Cornelius' experience unusual. One possible interpretation of this is that group membership can no longer be regarded as a precursor to legitimate experience in the book of Acts. This could be regarded as part of

the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh that was promised at the first Christian Pentecost (2:17). This is complicated by the context of the story in chapter 10: it seems probable that legitimate experience remains located among the in-group, and that Cornelius' vision thus underlines the major shift in boundaries that the group undergoes. The notion of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' is not dispensed with, but rather re-defined.

It is likely that the Acts of the Apostles reflects (and perhaps contributes to the development of) one particular model of dream-vision reporting within the ancient world: that of the double dream-vision. J.S. Hanson observes that the visionary experiences of Peter and Cornelius offer, 'an involved complex of three dream-vision reports, which [...] seems to be the earliest Christian example of the elaboration of the dream-vision report'.²⁹⁹ This lends further support to the idea that Luke situates his writing within the broader context of ancient dream-vision reporting. His awareness of the form of these reports is highly suggestive of a broader awareness concerning their use and function within other ancient texts.

A further feature that should be emphasised is the extent to which Cornelius' experience influences Peter's interpretation of his own vision. It is not only that Gentiles have access to significant dream-visions, but that they can also have a hand in the interpretation of such phenomena. While Peter's speech indicates his authoritative position, the interpretation is reached through the double dream-vision and the interaction between the two figures. The interpretation of dream-visions appears to be a corporate process, not one imposed by an authority figure.

²⁹⁹ 'Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity', in Hildegaard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Principat II:23.2 (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 1395-1427 at 1422.

The development of this story in chapter 11 will now be considered, with a particular focus upon the surprisingly fluid nature of the interpretation of these phenomena.

Acts 11:1-18: Multivalency and Re-Interpretation of Visionary Experience

In Acts 11 Peter's decision comes under fire from 'the circumcised' (believers) in Judaea. The designation of the Judean Christians as *οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς* matches that of Peter's companions in 10:45 suggesting that the two collectives belong to the same group, rather than to opposing factions. Their challenge makes no reference to dreams or visions: the Gentiles are described as having accepted the 'word of God', and the criticism directed at Peter concerns table fellowship: the accusation that Peter ate with uncircumcised men. It will shortly be proposed that this focus upon food and shared meals contributes towards a re-interpretation of Peter's experience.

In contrast to his speech to the Gentiles, Peter's explanation to the believers in Jerusalem is heavily focused upon the two visions. Just as in the original account, Peter's re-telling is set within the context of his prayers. There is a double emphasis upon the extraordinary activity since in 11:5 Peter states: 'in a trance, I saw a vision'. In this re-telling of the experience there is also an emphasis upon Peter's close examination of what was happening during the visionary experience itself. Peter describes the way in which the sheet-like object came close to him and mentions his own close examination of it (11:5-6). He also reports his initial objection to the vision, as well as the fact that it occurred three times. This reiterates the idea that this questioning of what was said in the vision is not necessarily to be frowned upon, and that the double confirmation of the initial message gives greater clarity to what Peter claims to have heard.

Of particular interest in the retelling of events are two elements that were not part of the earlier narrative. The first is in 11:12, where Peter describes how the Spirit told him to go with Cornelius' men, which was already known from the information in 10:20. However, Peter also says that the Spirit told him 'not to make a distinction between them and us', which does not occur in the earlier version. It is certainly a conclusion that Peter has reached by the time he makes his speech, but here he seems to be turning his own interpretation of the vision into a command from the Spirit. The same thing occurs a few verses later, as Peter is re-telling Cornelius' vision. He claims that the Spirit told Cornelius that Peter 'will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved' (11:14). This is not mentioned in the original account of the vision, nor in Cornelius' re-telling of what occurred. Again, it seems that Peter is framing the conclusions he has made and the outcome of the events as having been both divinely predicted and commanded.

There are some further nuances within the report and the inclusion of certain elements that do not depend on the persuasiveness of claims to visionary experience. For example, Peter refers to the word of Jesus concerning John's baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (11:16). He also mentions his six companions. F. Scott Spencer correctly notes that: 'This quantification serves to strengthen the support of these witnesses; it also makes for a total company of seven (six plus Peter) dealing with a dietary crisis, reminiscent of an earlier group of table-servants in the Jerusalem church (6:1-6)'.³⁰⁰ This also helps to place Peter within a communal context. Although he is clearly the key actor, the decision starts to resemble a group decision more closely than it would have without this information.

³⁰⁰ Spencer, *Acts*, 118.

To return to the criticism made against Peter, it has been noted that the focus on food at this point is somewhat curious given the fact that chapter 10 does not mention Peter eating with the Gentiles. Moreover, the sharing of meals amongst Jews and Gentiles may have been possible if only vegetables were consumed.³⁰¹ However, Peter's report of his vision undergoes subtle changes that deal directly with this issue. Here the re-telling of the vision includes an extended list of the animals that Peter saw (11:6), and a re-phrasing of his protest to the Lord (11:8). Each of these might feasibly contribute towards a more literal interpretation of the vision: whereas in chapter 10 Peter applies his vision to the issue of people, here its only application is to food.

The acceptance of the Gentiles comes as a result of the separate instruction from the Spirit not to make a distinction between 'them and us', and also from the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Gentiles. Peter's speech in chapter 11 may be taken to represent a subtle change of emphasis that utilises a literal, rather than symbolic, representation of the vision of the vessel in order to win over the Jerusalem Christians. The vision retains its power of persuasion, but at this point the same vision persuades a different group over a different issue.

Peter's confusing vision becomes more clear-cut when presented to the Jerusalem Christians. For example, he makes no mention of his own puzzlement in the face of his experience. Arguably, the more literal connection of the vision to the issue of food helps present the experience as a higher status literal 'message' vision, rather than the 'symbolic' vision that was described in chapter 10.

³⁰¹ This is suggested in Galatians 2:12. See also Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert. The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 233.

The significance of Peter's vision within the context of decision-making may be indicated through the use of *ἀναστάς*. It occurs initially within the first vision report at 10:13 (and at the same point in the vision report at 11:7). It is then repeated at 10:20 as Peter is instructed to go with the men who Cornelius has sent, at 10:23 when Peter invites the Gentiles into the home where he is staying, and again at 10:26 where Peter instructs Cornelius to get up. The repetitions function as an echo of the instructions of the vision, illustrating its subtle influence upon the development of events.³⁰²

However, what appears to have been truly significant to Peter, to those who accompanied him, and even to Cornelius and his household, is not visionary experience as such, but the very public pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Peter's comment that, '*If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us*' (11:17) suggests that it is this that confirms the position of the Gentiles. He finishes his speech with the question 'who was I that I could hinder God?', which makes it very hard for the circumcised believers to object in any way to all that has occurred. Interestingly, therefore, in spite of the emphasis on Peter's close observation and questioning of his visionary experience, there is a desire to place significant instructions within the supernatural experiences themselves, rather than in their considered interpretation or application.

This overall impression that for Peter, as well as for the circumcised believers, it is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is of greatest importance is particularly interesting because, as others have observed, Cornelius and his household did not receive the Spirit in exactly the same way that the believers gathered in Jerusalem had (2:1-4). In fact, the only

³⁰² The word is used again in 15:7, where Peter stands up in front of the elders and apostles to defend his actions amongst the Gentiles. This could be viewed as Peter's application of his visionary experience within the context of decision-making.

similarities are that on both occasions the Spirit was poured out relatively unexpectedly, and those who received it spoke in tongues, to the astonishment of bystanders.³⁰³

Following Peter's comments the conclusions drawn by the circumcised believers appear to match those drawn earlier by Peter and his companions: that 'God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life' (11:18). The re-interpretation of Peter's vision of the vessel from a symbolic dream-vision to a higher status literal dream-vision is used to persuade the circumcised believers of the legitimacy of the conclusion that Peter has already reached.

Acts 15: Visionary Experience Ignored or Upheld?

To gain a full impression of the function of visionary experience within Luke's presentation of the decision to admit Gentiles into Christian community it is necessary to examine Acts 15. Not only does this chapter contain a detailed account of the debate over this issue, it also incorporates a further mention of the events of chapters 10 and 11. Chapter 15 illustrates a somewhat less subtle shift than that which has been explored between Acts 10 and 11 and it offers a new response to the issue of Gentile admission into Christian community. The present discussion will begin with a broad overview of the key sections of the chapter, then proceed to an examination of the use of dream-visions within the decision-making process. This thesis will argue that the impact of visionary experience on the presentation of decision-making also contributes to the understanding of the function of these reports within the account.

³⁰³ Even the tongues-speech does not occur in exactly the same way, however. In Acts 2 the bystanders seek salvation as a result of hearing the believers speak in tongues. In contrast, at this point in the text those who experience tongues-speech are themselves 'saved'.

The entirety of Acts 15 is concerned with this disagreement and the later disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. The first thing that should be noted is that the author shows little apparent embarrassment over documenting in detail an account of disagreement, although, of course, it has been suggested in the light of Galatians that here Luke offers a very sanitised version of events, especially in accounting for the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas.³⁰⁴ Within the context of the Acts narrative, however, the author nonetheless makes it clear that disagreement within the church is acceptable. One could even go so far as to suggest that the chapter functions loosely as a model for how to deal with such disagreements.

In terms of the structure of the narrative as a whole, one view is that the book can be split in two with chapter 1-12 representing the first section, and chapters 13-28 the second. Within this context, Richard I. Pervo suggests that, ‘there is a strong case for viewing chap. 15 as the watershed’.³⁰⁵ Within the structure of the chapter itself, F. Scott Spencer proposes that there are four stages – dissension, discussion, decision, dissemination. He also offers a very neat A-B-A structure for each of the stages.³⁰⁶ Spencer’s argument is compelling, and these headings have been reproduced below. Where Spencer’s proposal falls short, however, is that he does not venture to discuss *how* decisions are made, and what it is that informs each of these stages – for example the use of Scripture, appeal to visionary experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and so on. The present discussion will offer initial consideration of these issues within each of Spencer’s proposed stages.

³⁰⁴ This element of Luke’s account is referred to in Galatians 2:13 where Barnabas is described as being ‘led astray’ by hypocrisy. This is noticeably different to Luke’s description of a disagreement over John Mark.

³⁰⁵ Pervo, *Acts*, 290.

³⁰⁶ Spencer, *Acts*, 152-154.

Stage One: Dissension (15:1-5)

The disagreement is set up as being between two groups, rather than between individuals amongst the believers. The decision to send Paul and Barnabas to discuss the issue further is also presented as being a corporate decision (15:2). The phrasing of 15:5, that the Gentiles should be *ordered* to keep the Law of Moses suggests that these Jews conceived of themselves as superior to the Gentiles. The whole chapter represents a decision being made on their behalf with none of them present to speak for themselves or to present a case.

Stage Two: Discussion (15:6-18)

The discussion does not include the whole church, nor does it include believers who are not in some kind of leadership role; only the apostles and elders are permitted to gather together and consider the matter. In chapter 11 those who oppose Peter are not referred to as apostles or elders but simply as Christians from Jerusalem. Although their links with Jerusalem may have increased their status, they still appear to be ordinary members. They judge what Peter is saying, and choose to accept it. In contrast, chapter 15 suggests that only those higher status members of the church are able to participate in the process of decision-making. It is difficult to know how much significance to attribute to this, or how paradigmatic either chapter 11 or 15 were intended to be.³⁰⁷ What can be said with greater

³⁰⁷ One might usefully note the account of Acts 21:17-26 at this point. This is the slightly puzzling incident of Paul's purification rite, seemingly carried out as a result of instructions from the church elders.

confidence, however, is that the sphere of influence is not merely contained within the group of apostles and elders. The Gentiles and those of the sect of the Pharisees have either directly or indirectly influenced the debate (11; 15:5).

There is also an apparent development in the understanding of the meaning of the reports in chapters 10 and 11. Acts 15:9 makes a clear link between what happened to the Gentiles and the cleansing of their hearts. This links Peter's vision of the clean and unclean animals more closely into the subsequent events. There was no explicit recognition within the earlier chapters that the Gentiles were in need of any kind of 'cleansing' in order to be saved.³⁰⁸

The other notable aspect of this version of the report is Peter's change of attitude regarding the law. Whereas in chapter 10 he exhibited a strong desire to keep the law, even within his vision, in this report he speaks of the law as a burden (15:10). He states that what the believers from the sect of the Pharisees are proposing puts God to the test. Luke T. Johnson notes that the word *πειράζετε* (test) also occurs at 5:9 in the account of Ananias and Sapphira's attempt to deceive the church.³⁰⁹ This association only serves to underline the seriousness of Peter's accusation. In 15:11 he advocates grace almost as an alternative to the law. He says, 'on the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.' At this point in the report he reverts to the first person plural in contrast to the first person singular with which he began. It appears that at the moment which he wishes to advocate something new he speaks of corporate belief rather than of his own view, although it is uncertain who Peter is aligning himself with by doing this. The most natural assumption would be that he is referring to the elders and leaders

³⁰⁸ The reference does not represent a new idea within Judaism, however, as the notion of a clean heart may well be an allusion to Psalm 51. A similar idea is also expressed in 1QH (particularly hymn 16).

³⁰⁹ Johnson, *Acts*, 272.

present at the meeting. This indication of the relationship between the group and boundary crossing is extremely interesting, but can hardly be regarded as paradigmatic for Acts, for just a few verses later James takes an approach that is in stark contrast to this.

In considering James's quote from Scripture, Spencer notes that he uses the Greek rather than the Hebrew form of this passage (though this may not be surprising considering Luke's widespread use of the LXX elsewhere), and in contrast, the Aramaic version of Peter's name 'Simeon'. This, he argues, is suggestive of an inclusive strategy, for both Jew and Gentile are represented within the linguistic choices within the citation.³¹⁰ This is fairly compelling, and further evidence of this strategy can be seen below, with the shared basis of Scripture being used to support James's argument.

Stage Three: Decision (15:19-29)

Acts 15:19 contains one of the most striking elements of this passage: the decision about what to do about the Gentiles appears to be made by one individual on behalf of the whole church. The wide application of this individual decision is made clear in the following verse, where the instructions for what to do next are once again in the first person plural.

Within this section the effort to present James as an impartial overseer of the decision making process can also be noted.³¹¹ His decision is clearly linked to the evidence presented above, and later in the chapter there is the attempt to distinguish the leaders of the Jerusalem church from those who suggested that the Gentiles should be circumcised (15:24).

³¹⁰ Spencer, *Acts*, 156.

³¹¹ This does not necessarily match the presentation of this figure elsewhere. Galatians 2:12, for example, presents him as a figure who is swayed by pressure from those around him.

Throughout the chapter the author clearly stands against the circumcision party, yet in spite of this the conclusion that is reached seems to be a compromise between the desires of both groups. When Peter chose to baptise Cornelius and his household in chapter 10 he placed no conditions upon their acceptance, because for him the action of the Holy Spirit was conclusive. In chapter 15, conditions are placed upon the Gentiles. These conditions focus upon adherence to some food laws, which is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Peter's vision concerned precisely this issue.

The vision has been interpreted (or perhaps re-interpreted given its previous interpretation in Acts 11) in chapter 15 to relate to the cleanness of the hearts of the Gentiles. Because of this it has lost its more literal instruction not to call particular foods unclean. In some respects, therefore, while the evidence of the chapter *appears* to favour Peter's argument, it also goes against the more literal instruction of his visionary experience. Chapter 15 could go as far as to present a contradictory form of decision making, with Scriptural argument replacing insights from dream-visions. The decision seems to be made on a thoroughly rational basis because whilst some evidence of corporate experience of the Holy Spirit is cited, on the whole the decision is a compromise made after the presentation of two arguments, and supported with the use of Scripture.

Stage Four: Dissemination (15:30-16:5)

This final stage gives quite a confusing impression because the content of the letter referred to the consent of the whole church, yet at this stage the Gentile members rejoice at the decision that has been made (underlining the authority of the Jerusalem Christians for the rest of the church). However, in contrast to this impression of unity and rejoicing, one

finds disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-40), and the circumcision of Timothy (16:3). These two features suggest that harmony is not restored, and the circumcision in particular implies that the issue discussed throughout the chapter, and seemingly resolved, may remain problematic in its application.

The overall impression given by chapter 15 is that, just as in Acts 10 and 11, there must be a shared basis for decision-making within the church, although, of course, this shared basis is not identical in each case. That is not to deny that certain individuals have the status to make decisions on behalf of the group, but even James's assertion is based on compromise, on hearing both arguments, and on the shared basis of Scripture. This does not necessarily mean that Scripture is replacing the authority of claims to visionary experience, it is simply a shared basis for corporate decision-making. Although James states the decision, his presentation as rational overseer suggests that it occurs as a consequence of group discussion. Chapter 15 still appears to represent an attempt to show the shared basis of decision-making.

Acts 15:7-9 sees a further brief account of the events in Acts 10 and 11. Within this report, placed on the lips of Peter, there is no mention of Cornelius or his vision, nor are Peter's own experiences mentioned. The only element of the previous reports that is reiterated is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles in the same manner in which it was poured out upon the Jews at the first Christian Pentecost. The decision to mention only this part of the story offers the possibility that the communal experience of Gentiles is far more significant than the personal experience of an Apostle. What appears to count here is not the personal set of instructions received by Peter, but the shared experience of non-Jews. This is particularly striking – and perhaps deliberately so – when it is precisely the admission of Gentiles that is at stake within this chapter. Rather than

choosing the common ground of Jewish Scripture in which to ground his argument, Peter chooses the (presumably) controversial issue of the status of Gentiles.

Chapters 10 and 11 appear to emphasise the importance of shared group experience over the experiences of individuals. Peter and Cornelius' visions perhaps become more and more a part of group identity through their frequent repetition. This may suggest that corporate decisions are made through the evidence of corporate experiences. However, some have suggested that the evidence of Acts 15 implies a very different approach to decision-making. The case that Peter makes to the Jerusalem Christians consists almost entirely of a report of visionary experience and the action of the Holy Spirit. These elements – as interpreted by Peter – are sufficient to persuade his opponents of the rightness of his actions. Within his account in chapter 11, there are no references to proof-texts from Scripture, in spite of the significant change that Peter is advocating. It is accepted almost entirely on the basis of recent experience – both on an individual and group level.

The other notable aspect of this version of the report is Peter's change of attitude regarding the law. Whereas in chapter 10 he exhibited a strong desire to keep the law, even within his vision, in this report he speaks of the law as a burden (15:10). He states that what the believers from the sect of the Pharisees are proposing puts God to the test. This presentation of Peter does not totally match the Peter seen at the beginning of chapter 10. It is uncertain whether this is deliberate character development on the part of the author, or indeed whether this seeming difference was intended at all.

In some respects, therefore, while the evidence of the chapter *appears* to favour Peter's argument, it also goes against the instructions of his visionary experience. The visionary experience is used in chapters 10 and 11 to support admission of the Gentiles

into Christian community. This admission is also the result of the debate within chapter 15, so in this sense there is no change of purpose. However, all of the emphasis upon not making a distinction, either in the literal *or* the symbolic sense of the vision is over-ruled. A distinction is made between what the Gentiles and the Jews are required to do. The demands upon Gentiles are largely in accordance with that which would have most likely been a part of Judaism already, so Peter's apparently groundbreaking visionary experience appears to be over-ruled (though obviously not explicitly), not simply in favour of compromise, but in fact, in favour of the existing system being maintained. This perhaps suggests that it is not the outcome of the narrative so much as the process it describes which may have been at the heart of Luke's rhetorical strategy.

Summary of the Function of Dream-Visions in these Accounts

At the level of cultural context, Peter's rooftop encounter in Acts is portrayed as a symbolic dream-vision, in which the imagery is highly significant for the development of the Christian mission. It is not immediately apparent that this dream-vision is meaningful, and the double dream-vision motif is deployed within this account, not simply to corroborate the content of Peter's dream-vision, but rather to offer a much needed key to its accurate interpretation. As Derek S. Dodson notes: 'The double-dream narrative proves particularly helpful in illustrating the inventiveness of dreams. As a sophisticated literary device that facilitates plot development at critical points, the double-dream report attracts embellishment and invention.'³¹² The dream-visions of Peter and Cornelius are revealed to

³¹² *Reading Dreams: An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2009), 102.

be divinely sent, and they direct not only the actions of the individuals in question, but also the direction of the Christian mission as a whole. The account highlights both the ambiguity and the multivalency of dream-visions, even those of such significance as these.

At the narrative level, the story of Peter and Cornelius marks a major turning point in the mission of the church, with the cumulative effect of the multiple dream-visions and the process of their interpretation leading to the incorporation of the Gentiles within the Christian community. The pace of this story is somewhat slowed down by the symbolism of Peter's dream-vision since the interpretation is not immediately provided, and its meaning is further shaped as the narrative progresses. There is space for the reader/hearer of this story to puzzle over the content of Peter's dream-vision. As Dennis MacDonald asserts: 'There is no guarantee of victory in the first or second accounts of Cornelius' vision, but when Peter retells the tale he adds that the angel had told Cornelius to send for the apostle to hear the words "through which you and your house will be saved" (11:14).'³¹³

In terms of characterisation, Peter is certainly portrayed as the recipient of a highly significant, divinely sent dream-vision. However, this is arguably a less impressive form of visionary experience than the message dream-vision, in which a dream figure is understood to visit the dreamer. Peter is reliant upon the much clearer content of Cornelius' dream-vision, although his authority is barely tempered by this comparison, since the final statement of the interpretation of both dream-visions rests with Peter.

Conclusion

³¹³ Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer?*, 47.

In these three chapters, therefore, Peter's vision is described, interpreted, re-interpreted, and then implicitly over-ruled. It is hard to move forwards from this simply with the sense that the vision functions within the narrative to show God's hand upon decision-making. The subtlety and complexity of the presentation as analysed above weighs against drawing such a conclusion, for evidence of God's hand at work could easily be presented in a far more simplistic form. The elaborate and lengthy presentation of visionary experience results in the establishment of a rule that seems to have already existed and that stands in conflict with the vision itself. Yet, according to the text, it was visionary experience that served to persuade and convince. Interestingly, however, it is the instructions of the visionary experience and not those of the Jerusalem council that are ultimately followed as the mission develops, suggesting a further dimension to the developments accounted for above.

This varied response shows the versatility and ingenuity of uses of dream-vision reports. It is unlikely that the stages of development should be seen as programmatic or as a model in themselves, but they do illustrate some principles that may be applied more widely in Acts. For instance there is an emphasis upon the significance of corporate experience (and the corporate dimension within decision-making as a whole) and its precedence over individual experience. The reason for this may well reflect a desire to present the interpretation of dream-visions as something that needs to be tested and can only then be deemed to be trustworthy. The fluidity of interpretation illustrates the rhetorical and contextual use of dream-vision reports. This signifies a move in the opposite

direction to Ernst Haenchen's argument, highlighting the ways in which dream-visions open up the possibilities for human involvement and interpretation.³¹⁴

The main concern of the story of Cornelius and Peter is a re-clarification of the boundaries between 'clean' and 'unclean'. The developments are echoed in the presentation of dream-visions within this account where the boundaries of access to legitimate experience, and its interpretation, are extended to certain individuals who were previously outside the limits of the Christian movement.

These findings suggest that traditional readings of the dream-vision reports within these chapters may stand at odds with the overall intentions of the narrative. The location of the story of Acts within the upside down kingdom brought about by the decisive actions of Jesus, and the widening of group boundaries to incorporate Gentiles necessitate a re-framing of the typical means of assessing the validity of dream-vision reports, which all too often have depended upon the identification of the claimant as either an insider or outsider. In addition to this broader, thematic observation, the multi-valency of Peter's vision report has been outlined, along side the dissension regarding its meaning. These ideas will be carried forwards into the next chapter, which undertakes an analysis of Paul's visionary experience in Acts.

³¹⁴ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tr. from the 14th German edn. (1965) by Bernard Noble et al., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 362.

Chapter Five: Paul's Experience(s) on the Damascus Road

Having already discussed the accounts of the first Christian Pentecost and the so-called Gentile Pentecost, attention in this chapter will turn to the last of the major dream-vision reports within the narrative: Paul's visionary encounter on the road to Damascus. This event has undisputed significance; indeed, J.D.G. Dunn goes so far as to suggest that Paul's transformation as a result of his visionary experience was the 'most important single influence within first-generation Christianity'.³¹⁵ Although the extent to which the Acts material offers a historically accurate portrayal of Paul's experience is uncertain, the importance of this event within the narrative itself is undeniable, especially given the threefold repetition of the account (9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18). The purpose of the current chapter is to determine the effect of these three reports upon the understanding of the presentation of dream-visions within the narrative, and in particular the presence or otherwise of critical attitudes towards these phenomena.

To date there has been little scholarly engagement with this question. Such a state of affairs may initially seem unsurprising since there is little explicit evidence of any awareness of potential misuse of dream-visions within the passages. In spite of this, however, the presentation of Paul's experience and its reception among the Christian believers has significant implications for the assessment of this issue. This is not only because of the importance of these accounts within the narrative, but also because the story of Saul the persecutor's transformation into Paul the proclaimer of the Christian message offers a valuable insight into the function and impact of dream-vision reports as markers of

³¹⁵ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 2.

Christian identity. The response to Paul's claim to revelatory experience and the speed and ease of his resulting integration into the Christian community offers an insight into the significance and influence of dream-visions within these sections of the narrative. The current chapter will focus on precisely this matter, analysing the role of visionary experience within Paul's transformation, and using the resulting insights to inform the understanding of attitudes towards dream-visions within the text of Acts as a whole.

The chapter will begin by analysing the accounts of Paul's experience, focusing on each of the three reports in turn. Following the discussion of the first report, the question of why one finds three versions of this story in Acts will be addressed. It will be suggested that part of the explanation for this repetition might be found in the uncertain status of Paul's membership of the Christian community.

The Life of the Historical Paul

While in traditional scholarship and the popular imagination the Acts account of Paul's experience has dominated, modern biblical scholarship has, perhaps unsurprisingly, tended to prefer the evidence of the Pauline Epistles as a source for the life of the historical Paul. This has at times resulted in the near-total dismissal of the Acts of the Apostles as a reliable source, other than in those instances where the account agrees with the Epistles. Certainly there are notable discrepancies between these works, including the timing of Paul's visits to Jerusalem, the length of his ministry, potential differences in Paul's theology, especially in relation to his attitude towards circumcision, and an apparent lack of awareness in Acts

of the Jerusalem collection, to name but a few examples.³¹⁶ Accounts of what happened during Paul's 'conversion' also appear strikingly different in Acts and in the Epistles, and one would be hard pressed to harmonise texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:3-11, Galatians 1:11-20, and especially 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 with the all too familiar story of the Damascus road.³¹⁷

This presents a clear difficulty to those who are attempting to reconstruct the life of Paul, but, while the underlying historical questions are by no means irrelevant to the present study, the decision to direct attention towards the narrative world of the Acts of the Apostles rather than to spend too long in search of the historicity of this account means that these difficulties can, to some extent, be set aside. Of course, as the ensuing argument will demonstrate, this decision to focus only upon the Acts narrative does not entirely resolve the problem of multiple reports of a single event, since the three accounts within Acts present their own hermeneutical difficulties, as different features emerge and take priority in each of the reports.

The Acts account of Paul's experience on the Damascus road has frequently been understood as an example of instantaneous conversion. Indeed, the association has become so strong that the term 'Damascus road experience' sees widespread use in both popular and technical texts well beyond the field of biblical studies. In truth, however, there are

³¹⁶ For more detailed discussion of the portrayal of Paul in Acts see Philipp Vielhauer, 'On the "Paulinism" of Acts', in Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (eds.), *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 33-50; Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 71-126; John Clayton Lentz Jr., *Luke's Portrait of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Christopher Mount, *Pauline Christianity: Luke-Acts and the Legacy of Paul* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2002), 1-10.

³¹⁷ The suggestion that the account from 2 Corinthians should be understood to relate to Paul's initial 'conversion' experience has not been convincingly argued. This identification of this experience is treated by Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 827ff. For extensive discussion of the passage from 2 Corinthians in its own right, see James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, Maryland; London, UK: University Press of America, 1986); Paula Gooder, *Only the Third Heaven: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 and Heavenly Ascent* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

several difficulties with this designation: first, the Damascus road experience is only a feature of the Acts account, and is not explicitly included within Paul's own descriptions of his experience; second, scholars have challenged the notion that Paul underwent a conversion at all, arguing that the continuation of his self-identification as a Jew makes assumptions of his move from one religion to another rather problematic;³¹⁸ third, the instantaneous nature of Paul's conversion might also be challenged. This is something that will be taken up at a later point in the present chapter.

This chapter will adopt the language of 'recruitment' in relation to Paul's experience, in order to situate the Acts accounts within the broadest possible context, and to avoid unnecessarily limiting the interpretation of the account via application of strict external parameters.³¹⁹ There is perhaps an unhelpful circularity in attempting to define a phenomenon prior to studying a particular manifestation of this phenomenon (and then using this study to inform the definition, and so on). This fits the wider aim of the thesis in considering experiences deemed religious as a vague category in order to incorporate ancient debates about legitimacy and authority as fully as possible. Indeed, while it may not have been characterised by the same terminological debate as modern scholarly discussion, there is a sense in which the question of 'what on earth happened to Paul' has

³¹⁸ Krister Stendahl offers the well-known comment that, 'there is not - as we usually think - first a conversion, and then a call to apostleship; there is only the call to the work among the Gentiles'. ('Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 56.3 [1963], 199-215 at 204-205.) While he does not focus as closely on this issue of conversion, the work of E.P. Sanders can also help illuminate this debate. See in particular, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 496. See also, G.J. Inglis, 'The Problem of St. Paul's Conversion', *The Expository Times*, 40 (1929), 227-31; Beverley Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).

³¹⁹ This is influenced by recent social-scientific studies of Paul's experience (and perhaps also by the frustrating stalemate that has come to typify the call/conversion debate). In response to this, some scholars have argued instead for the terminology of 'recruitment' to be employed. This attempt to sidestep these disputes is explicitly acknowledged by Dennis C. Duling, 'Recruitment in the Jesus Movement in Social-Scientific Perspective', in John J. Pilch (ed.), *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honour of Bruce J. Malina* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2001), 132-175 at 137.

proven to be similarly occupying within its ancient context.³²⁰ Certainly, the significance of Paul within Acts has often been highlighted, alongside the recognition that this significance may not be for entirely positive reasons: while in many ways Paul is portrayed as a model Christian, the space he occupies within the narrative may also reflect the difficulties that his story and his stance might have posed among the early Christian communities.³²¹ This ‘problem’ will be taken up again in the conclusion to this chapter.

The First Account of Paul’s Experience (9:1-19)

The figure of Paul is introduced in Acts 7:54 – 8:3, a section of the narrative which describes his approval of the stoning of Stephen (8:1) and the way he ‘ravaged’ the church by taking many of its members to prison (8:3). This is a stark contrast to the behaviour of the ‘devout’ men in 8:2 who bury Stephen. While he is not one of the men throwing stones, 7:58 sees the killers lay their coats at Paul’s feet. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that Paul is part of this group, and the fact that his name is the only one mentioned within this passage (with the exception of Stephen’s) ties him all the more closely to the heart of the action. Therefore, as the account in chapter 9 begins, the reader has a clear-cut image of Paul as a determined persecutor of the church. His commitments and his aims are unambiguous. This impression, reinforced in the first two verses of the chapter, helps to illustrate the complete turn-around that his visionary experience represents.

³²⁰ For further terminological analysis see the lexical summary of conversion in the Appendix to Peace, *Conversion*, 346-353.

³²¹ One might note the way in which Ernst Haenchen characterises Paul as ‘the’ problem within the Lukan corpus (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tr. from the 14th German edn. (1965) by Bernard Noble et al., [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971], 121.

As a result, it is difficult to deny the ‘out of the blue’ occurrence of the vision within the narrative. In contrast to Peter’s experience in Acts 10, where earlier parts of the account offered hints of what was to come, Paul’s experience is unexpected. Arguably, Paul’s experience is also unsought. J.W. Bowker famously suggested that Paul’s vision may have occurred as part of a *merkabah* contemplation he was engaged in as he travelled, and thus that it was a sought after experience of some kind.³²² However, while this may have some historical credence, it is unlikely that the author of Acts would have been aware of the ins and outs of this practice. The fact that Bowker takes much of his evidence from the text of Acts does little to help his case therefore, as it is extremely unlikely to have been part of the author’s presentation of the story.³²³

As noted in the previous chapter of this thesis, within Acts 10 both Peter and Cornelius experience their visions during a time of prayer. They are shown as devout men who are seeking God, and their visions occur within this context. Within the present account, the opposite appears to be true.³²⁴ Paul is simply described as ‘going along’ (v3), and it would take a significant stretch of the imagination to interpret any kind of activity of prayer from this statement alone. Indeed, the reference to his ‘drawing near’ to Damascus (v3) implies that the completion of his own journey and thus the fulfilment of his own intentions, was close at hand. The vision occurs ‘suddenly’ (v3), which clearly illustrates the element of surprise that was part of the experience. Part of Paul’s response is to fall to the ground (v4), and again this suggests a shock that is not in keeping with the suggestion

³²² J.W. Bowker, “‘Merkabah’ Visions and the Visions of Paul”, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, (1971), 157-173.

³²³ Bowker, ‘Merkabah’, 167-168.

³²⁴ C. Burchard offers the interesting but ultimately unconvincing possibility of a closer connection between Paul’s experience on the Damascus road and the Cornelius tradition within Acts 10 and 11. He notes the way in which Paul foresees Ananias’ coming, while Cornelius receives the mandate to send for Peter (*Der Dreizehnte Zeuge: Traditions- und kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukas’ Darstellung der Früzeit des Paulus* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1970], 54). This probably imposes an unnecessary level of complexity to the already complex narratives of Acts 9-11.

that he was seeking out an experience of this kind. During his experience, Paul questions the voice he hears, asking ‘who are you?’ (v4). Again, this stands in contrast to Peter and Cornelius who appear to recognise who is speaking to them, as does Ananias, whose vision is reported further on in Acts 9. Therefore, the evidence suggests that this visionary experience is to be understood as an unsolicited and surprising element of Paul’s journey. While it was noted in Part I of this thesis that the value and significance attributed to sought versus unsought dream-visions varied depending on the context of individual texts, the likely impact of this emphasis within Acts would be to underline the divine agency behind Paul’s experience.

Further insight into the purpose and function of this account within the narrative can be gained through consideration of the location of this experience. It occurs on the roadside, and, as already noted, there is no special context of prayer or worship. When considering the wider narrative context it is notable that the account follows a different type of encounter with God on the roadside: that of Philip, who is sent south from Jerusalem to Gaza where he meets the Ethiopian eunuch, who is returning from worshipping and is reading Scripture (8:27-28). Paul, in contrast, journeys in the opposite direction from Jerusalem to Damascus.³²⁵ While both recruitments to Christianity occur at the roadside, the contexts differ significantly. The extent to which it would be unusual for a man so removed from the activities of prayer, worship, and a pious life to have an experience such as Paul’s ought not to be overlooked. Throughout Acts it is largely only those who are devout and pious who are able to experience the truth of God. Acts 9 illustrates clearly that Paul does not fall within this category. Given the likelihood that

³²⁵ The direction of these encounters is unlikely to symbolise anything more than the spread of God’s activity away from Jerusalem.

Luke's audience would have been familiar with Paul and his central place in the church, this negative portrayal of his past and his journey may in itself contribute to the surprise that is woven into this section of the narrative.

At this point, the character of Paul also appears in sharp contrast to the devout figure of Stephen. In his commentary on the book of Acts F. Scott Spencer notes several points of comparison between the story of Stephen's Christophany and Paul's vision on the Damascus road. For example, Paul 'covered his ears' as Stephen described his vision, but now Paul's ears are 'forcibly attuned to the words of Jesus himself'; Stephen saw Jesus' glory before being struck by rocks, whilst Paul could see nothing after being struck by lightning; Instead of interceding for others as Stephen did, Paul seeks personal understanding (9:5). Finally, Spencer suggests that Paul's encounter may function in some senses as an answer to Stephen's prayer.³²⁶ In this way, astute readers/hearers of the story will find Paul's position as an enemy of Christ emphasised.

Paul's destination is also significant, especially in the light of his commission to go to the Gentiles which is described in the later part of this first account. Damascus was a growing city that was part of the Decapolis, and a centre for Graeco-Roman culture with many trade routes converging upon it. In some senses, therefore, it was an archetypically Gentile city, and Paul's experience was not simply geographically close to the borders of this place, but also ideologically so. There is an irony in that he was heading there to find Jewish Christians, but, according to the Acts story, God's plan was for him to go there and, ultimately, to seek out Gentiles not Jews. Because it occupies such an archetypically 'Gentile' place, Paul's own intentions to seek out Jews there stands out as almost inappropriate – its location jars with the intentions of the mission.

³²⁶ F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 96-97.

After Paul has fallen to the ground he asks ‘who are you Lord?’ (9:5). The somewhat ambiguous use of *kyrios* throughout the book of Acts has been well-documented, and here this ambiguity contributes towards a degree of irony within the text. It is most likely that at this point Paul uses *kyrios* simply as a term of respect; any other use would make little sense following his request that the speaker identify himself. However, the verse quickly reveals that it is Jesus who is speaking, and for both the author and the intended audience, he is ‘the’ *kyrios*: Paul has given Jesus his true title without even realising it.

The voice in the vision simply instructs Paul to ‘get up and enter the city’ (v6). This was, of course, Paul’s original intention. While this visionary experience can hardly be seen as anything other than a pivotal point within the account of Paul’s life in Acts, the instructions given add nothing to his existing plan. While the voice of Jesus asks Paul, ‘why do you persecute me’, even the command to cease doing this is implicit rather than explicit within the vision. As will shortly be noted, Paul’s instructions are given by Ananias, rather than directly by a heavenly voice. To some extent this stands in contrast to the emphasis upon divine agency as a result of the unsought nature of this experience: here, Paul’s recruitment and subsequent mission are tied closely to the earthly Christian community, as well as to its heavenly Lord.

Paul is not the only character who is affected by the visionary experience – it also has an impact on his travelling companions. As will become apparent, this is a particularly problematic feature of the account, since the later versions identify different aspects of the experience that are experienced by Paul’s companions. In this first account, ‘the men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one’ (9:7). While an initial response might be to read a difference between their experience

and that of Paul, if one takes the preceding text seriously, then it would seem that Paul also did not ‘see’ anybody, only the light from heaven flashing around him. Interestingly, therefore, although he is the addressee, the experience appears to be shared in its entirety with his travelling companions. To all intents and purposes this is a corporate experience, though it is directed at a single individual. This is important, given the expectation within Graeco-Roman dream-vision reports that those dreams which have relevance for groups of people or even nations will be experienced by more than one person.

As the vision ends, Paul is blinded. Elsewhere in the narrative blindness occurs as a punishment: in Acts 13 it is pronounced by Paul over Elymas the magician because he tried to turn Sergius Paulus the proconsul away from Christian faith. This is not all that far removed from Paul’s intentions at the beginning of Acts, so it is conceivable that his own blindness could also be regarded as punishment.³²⁷ However, the clearest effect of Paul’s blindness is that he must be ‘led by the hand’ – it forces him to become a follower rather than a leader.³²⁸ It could also be suggested that this blindness contributes to the liminal place of Paul in Acts, a theme that will be taken up in the later sections of the current chapter.³²⁹ Paul’s experience leaves him weak, dependent on others, and at the threshold of the Christian community. His subsequent healing and baptism occur at the hand of Ananias, who also receives a vision.

Ananias is simply described as a disciple in Damascus. This use of *μαθητής* in 9:10 echoes its use in 9:1 as the term to describe the group that Paul was persecuting. In contrast

³²⁷ Certainly there is evidence of the existence of such attitudes in the first century CE, as suggested by the lengthy account of the man born blind in John 9.

³²⁸ For a more detailed treatment of this aspect of the account see Dennis Hamm, ‘Paul’s Blindness and its Healing: Clues to Symbolic Intent (Acts 9; 22 and 26)’, *Biblica* 71 (1990), 63-72, and Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2008), esp. 184-197.

³²⁹ For example, Steven C. Muir regards this as typical for his model of affliction-healing as a means of initiation within the book of Acts. (*Healing, Initiation and Community in Luke-Acts: A Comparative Analysis*, Doctoral dissertation University of Ottawa, 1998).

to some of the other visionary experiences in the book of Acts, no further information is provided about this figure: there are no assertions of his piety, nor is he described as being engaged in an activity such as prayer or worship. Just as for Paul on the road to Damascus, Ananias appears to receive his vision out of the blue.

In contrast to Paul, however, Ananias is not perplexed by the identity of the voice, simply replying, 'here I am Lord', to the calling of his name (9:10). What follows in this vision is a detailed set of instructions for Ananias to go to the specific location where Paul is to be found. Ananias is told to lay his hands on Paul so that he might see again. However, this instruction is given not as a direct command to Ananias, but as part of a description of a vision that Paul has received. Paul is described at this point as praying, and it is likely that this refers to a fresh vision, rather than a more detailed exposition of the Damascus road vision, although there is no explicit evidence for this. This creates the interesting scenario by which Ananias is given his instructions by means of a vision *report*, but one that is being reported in his own vision. While it is not unusual for visions to be closely connected or for two people to be reported to have complementary visionary experiences, the form of Ananias' vision is uncommon when compared to those in the rest of Acts and with other ancient texts. In some senses, much of the information that Ananias is given would make more sense if it were given to Paul (either directly or indirectly). And yet it is not: Paul is dependent on his new community to provide him with information.

The story continues to offer a report of miraculous healing, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon Paul. While both of these encounters are noteworthy in their own right, what is perhaps more interesting is that which is *not* reported here: there is no mention within this account that Ananias discloses his knowledge of the divine plan for

Paul.³³⁰ Moreover, following his healing and baptism, Ananias vanishes from the narrative, taking with him this knowledge of the divine plan.³³¹ This creates a situation of dramatic irony whereby the reader is privy to information that Paul does not know. However, this lack of knowledge of the divine plan must also be extended to every other character that remains in the story; they know no more than Paul concerning God's plan for him.

In many respects Ananias' dream-vision is very straightforward. Aside from the unusual 'vision report within a vision' structure, the content of the account appears to be fairly typical. While Ananias questions the Lord's instructions, an immediate response and resolution to this challenge is presented within the story. The function of this report within the Acts narrative connects Paul to the Christian community, and introduces the existence of a specific divine plan for Paul. The presentation of such a plan on the lips of the risen Jesus, and given to a reliable source, sets up the potential for future difficulties, especially given its apparent lack of disclosure to the relevant parties. Where there is a plan, there is also the potential for misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and a failure to accomplish this same plan.

In terms of the narrative structure, the reaction of the disciples in Jerusalem has been shown to parallel that of Ananias' response. Thus, both Ananias and the disciples are hesitant about accepting Paul (9:13-25; 9:26-30); both receive reassurance, Ananias from the Lord, and the disciples from Barnabas (9:15-16; 9:27); both then spend time with Paul (9:19b; 9:28a); Paul preaches the Christian message (9:20-22; 9:28-29); in both sections the Jews then plot to kill Paul (9:23-24; 9:29b); but in both instances Paul is able to escape

³³⁰ Although such disclosure is described within Paul's report of the experience in chapter 22, the temptation to simply read this back into the first account ought to be resisted, since any such assumption could cause the narrative effect that this omission creates within chapter 9 to be overlooked.

³³¹ As will be seen shortly, a rather different version of Ananias' earlier role is recounted by Paul in the second report of these experiences.

(9:25; 9:30).³³² In this way it is more than simply the reports of visionary experience that are repeated within these accounts.

Paul's own claim to significant visionary experience has quite a limited function within this narrative. In many respects, Ananias' vision appears to be much more significant. Moreover, Paul's roadside dream-vision doesn't even feature in the confusing account of Ananias' dream-vision; rather, it is a later dream-vision of Paul's that is described. This makes the later repetitions of the Damascus road dream-vision all the more intriguing. Far from elevating Paul's status, this dream-vision reduces it: he moves from being a powerful figure within one group to a dubious initiate within another. So this account does facilitate a change of status, but not the one that we might expect.

Furthermore, the reader now knows more than the character of Paul – for s/he, along with Ananias, is privy to the details of Paul's commission, while he himself does not yet hold this information. This only serves to emphasise his low status at this point in the narrative. Indeed, the voice of the narrator is necessary within this account since Paul's own perspective is overly limited.³³³

The Second Account (22:6-16)

The second account of Paul's Damascus road experience occurs in Acts 22:6-16. It is part of Paul's defence speech to the crowd in Jerusalem who accuse him firstly of teaching against the Jewish people and their law, and secondly of defiling the temple by bringing Greeks into it (21:28). In an aside, the narrator gives the reason for these accusations as the

³³² Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Revised edition. Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2005), 88.

³³³ Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 82-83.

sighting of Paul in the city with Trophimus the Ephesian, and the assumption that they had also been in the temple (21:29). This explanation highlights the enduring significance of Jewish (purity) laws for Luke's audience, for the story is immediately interrupted in order for the accusations to be discredited. The possibility that Paul would contravene Jewish purity regulations is not to be entertained for even a moment. In fact, the accusation is almost denied before it has even been raised, for the verses immediately preceding the indictment against Paul describe his participation in a purification rite in the temple (21:23-26, especially verse 24).

It is perhaps because of the aside that the content of Paul's speech reflects little of the specific accusations made – they have been so firmly rebuffed that little more needs to be said. He does not address the second accusation at all, and, although a 'flat denial' of the first accusation has been proposed, the evidence from 22:3 and 22:17 offered in support of this constitutes little more than an indirect allusion within this speech (though it is dealt with more fully in chapters 24 and 25).³³⁴ Instead, Paul describes his Jewish credentials and upbringing, his visionary experiences both on the Damascus road and later in the temple, and his commission. Rather than dealing with the accusations one by one, Paul embarks upon a broad defence of his character, placing special emphasis on his Jewishness. It seems that his method of defence is to try to align himself as closely as possible with his accusers, by identifying himself as a devout Jew just as they are (22:3). It is in this context in which the account of the Damascus road vision occurs.

Following the immediate dismissal of these claims by the narrator, Paul proceeds to make a defence before the crowd. The speech itself has a chiasmic structure that has been

³³⁴ Spencer, *Acts*, 204.

well recognised in scholarship to date.³³⁵ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch suggest that the central point of the chiasmus is the point at which Paul is told to use what he has seen and heard in his vision as a means of bearing witness.³³⁶ Its significant place within Paul's defence to the angry crowd suggests that claims to significant dream-visions could be considered to be both important and credible. However, before making too hasty an assertion of the function of this dream-vision as a simplistic 'trump card' within the debate, it must be noted that the experience does not form the only defence, and, moreover, that the most obvious claims to Paul's credibility, status and authority are to be found in other elements of this speech.

This is clear from the outset, wherein Paul, speaking Aramaic, identifies himself with the crowd (*ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατερεῖς* [22:1]) then describes his birth in the important city of Tarsus (22:1) and his strict Jewish upbringing (22:3). Paul also claims that the high priest and the council of elders can testify to the truth of these statements (22:5).³³⁷ These appeals to status and authority are interesting in the light of the account of the Damascus road vision that occurs in Acts 9. There, it was noted that because of his dream-vision Paul moved from being part of the inner circle of one group to acceptance as a low status 'ordinary member' of the new group. Here, however, Paul asserts the status and authority that come from his earlier membership of a different group. In his consideration of status, Wayne Meeks notes that: 'Most individuals tend to measure themselves by the standards of

³³⁵ See for example, Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 191. For more general observations concerning the nature of the speeches in Acts, see F.F. Bruce's classic study, *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Tyndale Press, 1942); Also, Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

³³⁶ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 155.

³³⁷ Paul is therefore using claims to status and authority that his audience will be able to relate to. Arguably, however, this backfires with his claim to Roman citizenship in 22:3. While such a claim prevents him from being flogged, it also prevents his release in 26:32. This negative consequence could be regarded as a discouragement of the use of socio-political status claims, though this is not certain.

some group that is very important to them – their reference group, whether or not they belong to it – rather than by the standards of the whole society’.³³⁸ Paul asserts the status and authority that come from his earlier membership of a different group to that which he now purports to defend. This use of status markers that would most likely be meaningful to Paul’s Jewish audience fits the common view that the differences between the three accounts may largely be due to the contexts in which they occur.

Similarly, the blindness in chapter 9 is now reinterpreted. Acts 22:6 refers to a ‘great light’ shining from heaven. This differs from the flashing light described in 9:3. In this second account, Paul’s blindness is explicitly attributed to the ‘brightness’ or even ‘glory’ of this light. Whilst the fact of Paul’s blindness remains consistent between these accounts, there is a different quality to the affliction in chapter 22 than that described in chapter 9. In the first account, the condition seems to symbolise Paul’s spiritual blindness – as noted above, it may even represent a punishment similar to that inflicted upon Elymas in Acts 13 – he, too is ‘unable to see’ and has to grope for someone to ‘lead him by the hand’. In contrast, the blindness in Paul’s account of his experience might more closely be linked with heavenly glory – it is almost because he is ‘dazzled’ by the incredible experience. In the first account therefore, the blindness suggests that Paul is a spiritually blind ‘sinner’, yet here in Acts 22 he is a man who has been privileged with a glimpse of heavenly glory.³³⁹

According to the account in Acts 22, this heavenly light is also visible to Paul’s travelling companions, though they are not blinded by it as Paul is. This is an apparent

³³⁸ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003), 54.

³³⁹ Although there is a reference to Paul having his sins washed away by baptism in 22:16, this appears to be a more general ritual of admittance rather than a specific reflection of Paul’s sinfulness. Spencer offers the suggestion that this serves to emphasise Paul’s continued (even increased?) commitment to purity following his visionary experience (*Acts*, 209).

reversal of their experience in 9:7 where they see nothing but hear the voice: in 22:9 they see the light but do not hear anything. Spencer offers the plausible suggestion that this is part of the increased emphasis on the visual in the second account of the Damascus road experience.³⁴⁰ He argues that the reason for this is that it is much harder to argue against or to dismiss a claim to visual experience than it is to ‘quibble over the meaning and significance of words [Paul] claims to have heard’.³⁴¹ There may well be some truth in this, but Paul’s resulting blindness represents something of a challenge to this symbolism. Even so, this reversal emphasises that it is not only the interpretation of a dream-vision which is open to adjustment in the light of rhetorical intentions and audience; the details of the event itself are equally open to being ‘re-described’.

The part played by the whole community in chapter 9 is also reduced at this point. The experiences of others apart from Paul are drawn in to support Paul’s claims, but here, unlike in chapter 9, Paul is the only recipient of full visionary experience as there is no reference to Ananias’ vision. There is a move in the direction of greater emphasis on Paul as an individual. Malina and Pilch suggest that Ananias functions here as an interpreter of Paul’s experience.³⁴² Certainly, Ananias’ explanation of Paul’s recruitment fulfils the prediction/instruction of the vision, but it seems questionable whether it can be considered to be an interpretation of the vision itself, which is actually fairly self-explanatory. In Acts 22 Paul is clearly instructed to go to Damascus where he will be told everything that has been assigned for him to do (22:10). While more information is necessary, an interpretation is not required.

³⁴⁰ Spencer, *Acts*, 210.

³⁴¹ Spencer, *Acts*, 210.

³⁴² Malina and Pilch, *Acts*, 156.

Another change between this account and the earlier one in chapter 9 is that in this report there is an elaboration on the two characters who are significant for Paul within this experience: Jesus and Ananias. Jesus is described both as ‘the Nazorean’ (22:8) and ‘the Righteous One’ (22:14). It has been suggested that the inclusion of the first of these titles is curious, given Stephen’s controversial earlier claim that ‘Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on’ (6:14). Given that such a reference is unlikely to have been in Paul’s best interests, the association may instead be with the word ‘Nazirite’, and the connotations of holiness that accompany this.³⁴³ In the words of Spencer, this would serve as a reminder that, ‘Paul had entered the Jerusalem temple not to defile it but to fulfil a Nazirite purity vow (cf. 21:23-28).’³⁴⁴ The use of ‘Righteous One’ occurs in Ananias’ speech rather than in the visionary experience on the lips of Jesus. This raises some interesting christological implications, though there is not the scope to examine these here.

As for the figure of Ananias, in this account the information is offered that he was ‘a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there’ (22:12). This information presents him as a reliable and pious figure which is likely to make his actions within the story more credible, and his words more trustworthy. Malina and Pilch suggest that this information reveals even more about Ananias. They argue that the phrase ‘a devout man according to the law’ (22:12) indicates that he was an Israelite holy man or *hasid*.³⁴⁵ The only other figure who is described in this way within Luke-Acts is Simeon (Luke 2:25), the man who blessed Jesus in the temple. Certainly he is a prophetic figure, though it is uncertain whether the shared word alone is enough to view

³⁴³ Spencer, *Acts*, 209.

³⁴⁴ Spencer, *Acts*, 209.

³⁴⁵ Malina and Pilch, *Acts*, 156.

Ananias in a similar light. Nonetheless, he is described in a way that would most likely find favour with the Jewish audience.

In spite of the absence of Ananias' claim to visionary experience, this account also contains two visions, although it may go too far to consider them to be a double vision (that is to say, two visionary experiences that support one another). In 22:17-21 Paul describes his vision as he was praying in the temple in Jerusalem, the very place where Paul was seized by the angry Jews he now defends himself to. The context of this experience underlines Paul's commitment to the temple. This experience has Paul explicitly 'see' Jesus, rather than the great light and the voice that identifies itself as Jesus that was found earlier.

The experiences are unrelated in terms of their content and the time of their occurrence, but the way in which the temple experience follows the Damascus road experience in Paul's speech is suggestive of a link between them. It could be that the temple experience does have the function of a double vision, by serving to authenticate a visionary experience which occurred in more unusual circumstances. This is accomplished firstly by showing that this is not the only experience which Paul had, and secondly, that if the temple vision is likely to be authentic given its location and context of prayer, this validity might be extended to the first. Spencer notes a similarity between Paul's temple vision and that of Isaiah in which he, too, was sent to preach (Is. 6:19). He suggests parallels with Paul such as that Isaiah answered the visionary call by expressing his own inadequacy (6:5), and that he learned that his own people would resist the message (6:9-13).³⁴⁶ These parallels from Scripture further increase the authenticity/reliability of the visionary claim.

³⁴⁶ Spencer, *Acts*, 210.

Paul ends this account by reporting that he would be sent far away to the Gentiles (22:21). This forms a significant element of Paul's commission, and contrary to the account in chapter 9, Paul receives this information directly from Jesus, not from other people, although this is something that has already been implied by Ananias (22:15). At this point the crowd become so angry that they refuse to listen anymore. Paul's defence to them has not, therefore, been successful. His account of his background may have persuaded the Jews to hear him out for a time, but the reports of his dream-visions and their consequences are not well received. In this section of the Acts narrative, therefore, there are two claims to significant dream-visions which appear to be very carefully described in a way which is likely to have the maximum positive impact on Paul's audience. In spite of this, however, they have no discernible positive effect, and could even be considered to have had a negative effect.

This is not to suggest that Paul's self-identification as a Jew is incompatible with his recruitment to the Christian movement, but rather that several features of the second account challenge any idea that Paul's membership amongst the Christian believers was well established at this point. These include the appeal to previous status claims, the re-interpretation of the cause of blindness, and the attempted reduction of the role of the new community. In asserting his Roman citizenship (22:25), Paul makes a further attempt to align himself with a particular group. Yet it later becomes apparent that this attempt, too, spectacularly backfires as Acts 26:32 reveals that if Paul had not appealed to the Emperor by citing his Roman identity, he could have been freed. Paul's status is uncertain throughout the presentation of this defence.

The Third Account (26:12-18)

The final account of Paul's Damascus road experience occurs in Acts 26:12-18 as part of Paul's defence to King Agrippa. In a similar manner to the account in chapter 22, Paul emphasises his devout Jewish upbringing, and as in all the accounts, he references his prior persecution of followers of Jesus. Yet here, in contrast to chapter 22, Paul deflects any significance that may have come from his Jewish background, instead drawing attention away from this onto the hope of the resurrection (26:6-7), a promise that his Christian community have taken on with special reference to Jesus.

There is a much greater verbal content to the overall vision within this account, with Paul receiving his commission within the vision directly from Jesus himself. The commission he is given is broadly similar to that found in Acts 22, and to that which was given to Ananias in Acts 9. In fact, this very moment functions as part of a fulfilment of the prophecy given to Ananias where it is predicted that he will stand before 'kings' (9:15). The Acts 9 prophecy also contains a prediction that Paul will suffer (9:16), which perhaps stands slightly in contrast to the words of Acts 26:17 in which Paul is assured of rescue from both the Jews and the Gentiles. This is particularly interesting given that from one perspective at least it is precisely this 'rescue' that is currently within Agrippa's hands.

There are some discrepancies between this account and those that have already been examined. For example, the light that shone during the vision is described here as being 'brighter than the sun' (26:13), and in this account both Paul and his companions fall to the ground (26:14). The implication here is that it is only Paul, however, who hears the words which are spoken. It is emphasised that the words were spoken 'in the Hebrew language' (26:14), which makes the Greek saying that follows all the more curious. While the prophecy given to Ananias may be seen to be being fulfilled within this section, no

mention at all is made of Ananias himself, nor of Paul's blindness and need to be led by the hand (though there are visual references in 26:18, such as that the fact that he is being sent to open the eyes of the Gentiles in order that they may turn 'from darkness to light'). Here, Paul is a strong character, even surviving Jewish attempts to kill him (26:21).

Just as was found to be the case within Acts 22, this vision does not exactly have the desired effect. Although the speech is directed to Agrippa, Festus' response to the speech as a whole is to accuse Paul of madness (26:24).³⁴⁷ It is less clear whether or not the character of Agrippa is persuaded, due to the ambiguity of his comment in 26:28.

However, while his reports fail to convince his immediate audience, it is through these rejections that Paul's solidarity with the Christian believers is fully established. One example of this is the way in which Paul's defence speech is a defence of Christianity as a whole, rather than a defence of Paul as an individual. Robert L. Brawley notes that the reference to chains in 26:29 shows the complete reversal of Paul's position from the earlier chapters of Acts in which he was attempting to imprison the men and women of 'the Way' (8:3; 9:2; 22:4; 26:10).³⁴⁸

Paul in Acts: Making Sense of the Three Accounts

Joseph A. Fitzmyer suggests that in each of the three accounts, a different element of Paul's identity is emphasised. In the first he is a 'chosen instrument', in the second a

³⁴⁷ See Laura Salah Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5-11 for an extended discussion of the language of rationality and madness in the debate over the authority of claims to prophetic experience in the early church.

³⁴⁸ Robert L. Brawley, 'Paul in Acts: Aspects of Structure and Characterisation' in David J. Lull (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), 100.

‘witness’ and in the third a ‘prophet’.³⁴⁹ The prophetic motif is most likely present from the outset, and as has already been noted, several studies have suggested that Acts 9:1-19 is modelled on the prophetic calls of the Hebrew Bible. Fitzmyer also notes the allusions to Old Testament prophets in 26:16-18, the reference to Moses in 26:22, and Paul’s question to Agrippa of whether or not he believes the prophets in 26:27.³⁵⁰ This question of whether Paul takes on a prophetic identity towards the end of the third account is particularly interesting given the distinctive relationship some prophets have to norms of social and group status. For example, Robert R. Wilson writes that without the support of a group within society ‘prophets can find no permanent place within the social order’.³⁵¹ This link between Paul’s uncertain status throughout much of the Acts narrative and his eventual prophetic role could fruitfully be explored further.³⁵²

Talbert has also proposed an explanation for the three accounts of Paul’s visionary experience. He regards the reports as complementary, with the first depicting Paul’s experience as ‘a conversion, in which Christ changes an opponent into an ally’, the second depicting the experience as ‘a conquest, in which Christ overpowers his enemy’, and the third depicting ‘a commissioning, in which Christ chooses an emissary’.³⁵³ The proposed gap between Paul’s conversion (to use Talbert’s term) and commissioning echoes this same interpretation of the gradual process of Paul’s transformation in Acts.

³⁴⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 755. See also David M. Stanley, ‘Paul’s Conversion in Acts: Why the Three Accounts?’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 15:3 (1953), 337-338.

³⁵⁰ Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 755.

³⁵¹ Robert R. Wilson, ‘Early Israelite Prophecy’, *Interpretation* 32 (1978), 8.

³⁵² In particular, there are potential parallels between Paul’s journey in Acts and the story of Joseph and Aseneth. For more on this see Rees Conrad Douglas, ‘Liminality and Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth’, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 2.3 (1988), 31-42.

³⁵³ Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 83.

Of particular interest is the question of the extent to which Paul ought to be understood as a model for Christian discipleship within Acts. Alan F. Segal notes three phases in the early reception of this material whereby Paul's experience on the Damascus road was first understood to be deeply special and personal to him; second as a model of Gentile conversion, though not comparable with the experiences of the disciples; and third, a deliberate attempt to present Paul's experience as paradigmatic.³⁵⁴ This offers the potential for the dual recognition of the difficulties posed by the figure of Paul, and his simultaneous role as a model for Christian conversion and discipleship.

Summary of the Function of Dream-Visions in these Accounts

At the level of cultural context, Paul is presented as experiencing a message dream-vision on the road to Damascus. The dream figure is that of Jesus, whom Paul has been persecuting. A figure of exceptionally high status and authority, Jesus' words are to be trusted and obeyed. Even so, Paul is literally and figuratively left in darkness following this experience, and the involvement of other people is required to enable Paul to move forwards in his newly received mission. Of particular significance is the figure of Ananias who receives his own message dream-vision. The reports of Paul's experience follow the conventions of dream-reports in the wider literary context, and the use of the double dream-vision motif functions to add reliability to the overall account, for there is no need for reliance upon just one dream-vision report.

At the level of narrative function, the repeated accounts of Paul's dream-vision contribute to his characterisation within Acts. While the reactions of both believers and

³⁵⁴ Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 19.

non-believers to Paul's claims are at best uncertain, and at worst, violent, Paul himself does not question the meaning or the significance of his dream-vision. The frequently doubtful responses of the other characters provide an interesting foil for Paul's own assurance of his mission and calling, although it is unlikely that Paul's journey is intended to function as a model to be emulated for the readers/hearers of this story.

The plot of the book is punctuated by the three accounts of Paul's visionary experience. Suspense is generated by the dramatic reactions of other characters to the dream-vision reports. Paul's experiences of rejection, violence, imprisonment and much worse are in no small way caused by his dream-visions, both in terms of the missionary imperative that he himself derives from them, and the reaction of others to the reports, including his cautious treatment by the other believers. In this way dream-visions are shown to be risky phenomena that, even when divinely sent, may lead to suffering and danger.

The subtle differences between the three accounts may function to raise questions for the readers/hearers of the text, whose recollection of the details of each report is challenged by these shifting features. In this way, while Paul's own response to visionary experience may not be portrayed as a model to be emulated, the audience response to his story in Acts might elicit a desirable stance of careful scrutiny of the details of dream-vision reports, and an understanding that meaning is not simply conveyed by uncritical repetition of the content of a particular experience.³⁵⁵

Conclusion

³⁵⁵ The idea of the participation of the audience within the story of Acts has been explored by Cathy Reiko Maxwell, 'Hearing Between the Lines: The Audience as Fellow-Worker in Luke-Acts and its Literary Milieu', DPhil dissertation, Baylor University, 2007. These findings could usefully be developed in relation to dream-visions.

This assessment of the three reports of Paul's visionary experience in Acts challenges the view that a full account of his recruitment to the Christian movement can be found in Acts 9:1-19. While the promise of membership is contained within that passage, the process spans the majority of Paul's story within the book. Paul embodies within himself the group as a whole, and his personal defence becomes an apologetic on behalf of the wider Christian community. Ronald D. Witherup notes that Paul's stature increases as the three accounts progress, and the role of Ananias and the group decreases.³⁵⁶ This is further developed in the chapters following the repeated vision-reports. The rest of Paul's journey is unaccompanied by other Christians; he alone is their representative.

Given the extreme suspicion over the authenticity of Paul's recruitment, and the lengthy process of his acceptance, as well as its culmination in Paul's role as an extremely significant figure, even a prophet, it seems unlikely that his experience should be regarded as 'normative'.³⁵⁷ However, the three-fold repetition of the report hints at its intended significance for Luke's audience. In Acts 26:18, Paul describes his divine call as being sent to the Gentiles, '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'. In some senses this also describes Paul's journey from the motif of his blindness and true sight, to the eventual finding of a place amongst the Christian believers. Witherup notes the way in which 'in the retelling again and again a familiar story takes on new power'.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Ronald D. Witherup, 'Functional Redundancy in the Acts of the Apostles: a Case Study', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 15 (1992), 70.

³⁵⁷ Although this is precisely the view of Peace, *Conversion*, 10.

³⁵⁸ Witherup, 'Functional Redundancy', 85.

Through the repeated accounts of Paul's story, Luke's audience may also be able to participate in a process of transformation and of finding their own place within the Christian community. More than this, the presentation of Paul's experience could be interpreted to represent the lengthy and often problematic journey to membership in the Christian community, and in this sense it could well be seen as a model to prepare Luke's audience – perhaps even Theophilus himself – for the challenges posed by Christian identity.

Chapter Six: Other Dream-Vision Reports in Acts

In Chapters Three, Four and Five, the three major dream-vision reports within the Acts of the Apostles were analysed: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the first Christian Pentecost, the influential visions of Peter and Cornelius in the lead-up to the so-called Gentile Pentecost, and the three reports of Paul's Damascus road experience. It has been suggested that the Pentecost story of Acts 2 offers an idealised account of visionary experience that illustrates God's hand at work and, through the programmatic citation of the prophecy from Joel, hints at a story of church life wherein dreams, visions, prophetic abilities, signs and portents will be poured out upon all the believers. The subsequent events surrounding the Gentile Pentecost and Paul's recruitment show a more complex practical outworking of the earlier idealised picture that poses interpretative challenges and that demands human decision-making.

However, the notion of the *appropriate* treatment of dream-visions, assumes the possibility of its *inappropriate* treatment, something that has all too often been overlooked or dismissed within Acts research. The challenges involved in understanding the implications of dream-visions necessitate awareness of the potential for both misunderstanding and deliberate abuse of such claims. This goes beyond the attribution of prohibited practices to opponents, and the negative portrayal of magical practice outside the limits of the community. This is something that has not adequately been recognised within existing treatments of these phenomena within Acts.

While it has already been noted that such designations are able to usefully inform understanding of dream-visions, it has been suggested that these critical attitudes can also be detected within the in-group depicted within the Acts narrative. The current chapter will

explore this issue further, highlighting moments of disagreement and doubt over dreams, visions and related phenomena within the Christian communities. It will be argued that the accounts of Peter's angelophany in prison (12:6-17), Agabus' prophetic action regarding Paul's fate (21:8-14), and Paul's visionary experience at Troas and the first part of the subsequent Macedonian mission (16:6-34) serve to underline the challenges of both detecting and interpreting these phenomena, while Stephen's vision (7:55-60) and the story of the prophesying slave-girl (16:16-24) highlight the risks attached to dream-visions and their interpretation.

There are several other passages within the Acts of the Apostles that could be identified as referring to dreams, visions, or related phenomena. These include the first prison escape, aided by an angel (5:19-21a); the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, in which Philip receives instructions from an angel (8:26-40); Paul's dream-vision report during the storm at sea, in which he describes the appearance of an angel of God (27:23-24); and a further dream-vision experienced by Paul in which he receives instructions from the Lord (18:9-11). There are also multiple references to the actions of 'the Spirit', perhaps most notably in relation to the calling of Barnabas and Paul (13:1-4), but also at 16:6-7; 19:21; 20:22-23; and 21:4. There is not the scope to treat all of these examples here, so the fuller reports listed in the previous paragraph have been selected for further analysis.

Stephen's Martyrdom and the Vision of the Open Heaven (7:55-60)

The martyrdom of Stephen is accompanied by a dream-vision that is described by Stephen as it is happening to him. This is immediately preceded with the information that Stephen

is filled with the Holy Spirit (7:56).³⁵⁹ The crowds are so enraged at what Stephen claims to see within this vision that they stone him to death. This, then, is a brief dream-vision report that has tragic consequences for Stephen. Scholarly focus on Stephen in Acts has typically been directed towards the lengthy speech that precedes this experience, and the introduction of the figure of Paul as an onlooker in Stephen's death. Within this broader context, parallels emerge between the figure of Jesus and that of Stephen, with particular connections between Stephen's martyrdom and Jesus' crucifixion.³⁶⁰ There is arguably also an element of prophecy and fulfilment within the story of Stephen in Acts. His criticism of the way in which the Jewish ancestors rejected and killed the prophets (7:52-53) is reenacted almost immediately afterwards with Stephen's own martyrdom.

While the vision report itself may be short, it, too, contributes to the understanding of these phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles. Even within the space of this short account, there are elements of repetition: the vision is first described by the narrator (v.55), and then by Stephen (v.56).³⁶¹ This underlines the reliability of Stephen as a witness.³⁶² The reference to the crowd covering their ears in v.57 is suggestive of an attempt to avoid hearing blasphemy, but while this may relate to the earlier content of Stephen's speech, it appears that it is the visionary context that proves particularly unbearable. This serves to demonstrate the human dangers posed by such claims. Holy Spirit encounters and

³⁵⁹ The D text offers the alternative reading: ὁ δὲ ὑπάρχων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ which may connect more closely with ideas of ecstatic experience. This text is only weakly attested however.

³⁶⁰ While Ben Witherington III (among others) has offered an extensive list of comparative features, it is striking that many of these connect the Markan account with the events of Acts, while only a handful are attested in both Luke and Acts. This reduces the strength of such comparison, though the parallelism is still a sufficient feature of this account. (See Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1998], 253).

³⁶¹ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 197.

³⁶² Stephen's testimony, however, reveals at least one surprising feature: the Son of Man is standing, rather than seated. A range of explanations have been proposed for such variation, some with significant Christological implications, while others have suggested that Jesus is welcoming Stephen, or, indeed, that the posture has little significance within the Acts account.

visionary experiences have real earthly risks attached to them. This contributes towards the overall impression that the Acts narrative demonstrates awareness of the potential dangers of dream-visions.

The reference to the heavens being opened (v.56) hints at the liminal location that can be associated with dream-visions: the experience is ‘betwixt and between’, something that is encapsulated by the way in which Stephen is described as looking into heaven (v. 55), an image that evokes the nearness and yet the distance of the open heaven in Acts. In this way the account of Stephen’s dream-vision paints a clearer picture of the location of such experience on the borders between earth and heaven. Dream-visions in some sense enable a crossing of boundaries, but such a journey is also risky. There are both earthly and heavenly dangers attached to such encounters.

Peter’s Nocturnal Escape and the ‘Angelophany’ at Mary’s House (12:6-17)

Acts 12 contains reports of angelophanies that have been regarded in a similar manner to the visionary experiences of Acts 10; as accounts that function to show God’s hand at work to the exclusion of any potential for human decision-making. Such an observation is arguably more justifiable here, since the roles of both Peter and Herod are strikingly passive. Peter’s inactivity stands in sharp contrast to the other reports from prison (5:17-20; 16:25-28). Ernst Haenchen notes the effort required to rouse Peter from his sleep, and the way in which the angel even has to tell him the order in which he should put on his clothes (12:8).³⁶³ Unlike his experience in chapter 10, Peter’s angelophany requires no human

³⁶³ Haenchen uses the somewhat unrefined language of the angel to support his argument that the account did not originate with Luke, who, he argues, always has his heavenly beings speak in ‘dignified’ and, where possible, ‘biblical’ language (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tr. from the 14th German edn. [1965] by Bernard Noble et al. [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971], 390).

interpretation: by the time he has realised the nature of what is occurring, his escape from prison is accomplished. Nor do the believers at Mary's house offer much by way of a considered response to Peter's escape. They are simply amazed (ἐξέστησαν) and listen in silence to Peter's instruction to tell James what has happened (12:16-17). As John B.F. Miller has observed, 'for both Peter and his fellow believers, there is a lag as they find it difficult to believe what God has done'.³⁶⁴ To some extent, therefore, human perception is temporarily suspended in response to the miraculous events. Later in the chapter Herod is also presented as helpless in the face of divine intervention. He is struck down by an angel of the Lord, and he meets a swift and unpleasant death (12:23).³⁶⁵

As a result of this focus on the supernatural, scholars have largely dismissed the possibility of finding anything beyond the most basic historical information from the passage.³⁶⁶ Attempts to discover the narrative function of the chapter have been similarly fruitless, with several scholars questioning whether it really adds anything to the narrative at all, and others proposing explanations that are not wholly convincing.³⁶⁷ Overall, therefore, little of promise has been found within this chapter, and the material has usually

³⁶⁴ John B.F. Miller, *Convinced that God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts* (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2007), 219.

³⁶⁵ Within his commentary, J.D.G. Dunn gives the sub-heading 'A Cautionary End-Note' to this section of the narrative (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996], 165).

³⁶⁶ Dunn writes: 'It would be hazardous to try to reconstruct "what actually happened", enmeshed as any first-hand report now is in Luke's delight in the miraculous and skill as a storyteller' (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 161). However, one should avoid the assumption that events could not have been historical simply because they record miraculous activity. See the discussion of this issue in Gerd Lüdemann, *The Acts of the Apostles: What Really Happened in the Earliest Days of the Church* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2005), 162-3, see also page 23.

³⁶⁷ See I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 206. These explanations have usually focused upon the idea of apostolic succession, and the transfer of power away from the Twelve to a new group in Jerusalem (see O. Cullmann, 'Courants multiples dans la communauté primitive. À propos du martyre de Jacques fils de Zébédée', *Revue de Sciences Religieuses*, 60 [1972], 55-68). However, as Ben Witherington III has noted, 'Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22 and 16:4 portray Peter and the apostles as still on the scene in Jerusalem and still having authority, though it is true that by the apostolic council James is now the leading figure. Furthermore, there is no reason to take 11:30 as a clue to the new form of Jerusalem leadership after the apostles. It may well refer to those who were in charge of practical aid, mentioned in Acts 6. The most one can say is that this narrative intimates that Peter will no longer be the leading authority figure in Jerusalem, and that James is *already at this time* the one to whom this report must especially go.' (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998], 388).

been dealt with only briefly. It will be argued here that in spite of the less than subtle divine intervention that characterises the passage, it also teaches something about human perceptions and treatments of dream-visions. This comes in the form of two mistakes over these phenomena: first, Peter's assumption that his escape from prison is not really happening, but is only a vision (12:9), and second, the assumption that Rhoda has not really seen Peter, but instead his angel (12:15).

This place of a double mistake has been overlooked in favour of a different doubling: that of Peter and Herod's encounters with angels. As well as their close textual proximity, the story of Peter's escape and Herod's death have a shared vocabulary in the form of the verb 'to strike' (12:7: *πατάξας*; 12:23: *ἐπάταξεν*). In both cases this refers to angelic activity, and this may function to emphasise the different experiences of the two figures: Peter is rescued, while Herod is killed.³⁶⁸ This may contribute towards a proposal that, in spite of the widening of the boundaries of the Christian movement, there remains a firm distinction between insiders and outsiders.

However, although it can certainly be seen that Peter and Herod stand opposed to one another within the narrative, too close a comparison of these supposed 'angelophanies' may be misleading. While Miller refers to the experiences as a 'double-vision', the characterisation of the Herod story as 'visionary experience' is in itself questionable, let alone any function as a double-vision.³⁶⁹ It seems more probable that the report of Herod's death should not be regarded as a vision report, but rather the attribution of Herod's fate to a divine cause. Arguably this could still be understood as part of the programmatic citation of Joel's prophecy in Acts 2, but it is more likely to represent the widespread association

³⁶⁸ Miller, *Convinced*, 217.

³⁶⁹ Miller, *Convinced*, 17.

between sickness or disability and divine punishment for sin (e.g. John 9:2). The possibility that this is an account of a dream-vision ought not to be precluded, nor should the significance of such attributions be dismissed.³⁷⁰ However, the juxtaposition of Peter and Herod and the emphasis upon divine approval versus divine disapproval may cause another feature of the Peter account that is not echoed in that of Herod to be overlooked, namely Peter's misunderstanding of the level of reality at which his escape is occurring.

Following the initial instructions by the angel, the narrator writes that '[Peter] did not realise what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision' (12:9). This feature has been noted as a narrative device that adds dramatic effect to the story, and the believers' dismissal of Rhoda's claim as an angelophany has been similarly regarded as a comic twist within the story. However, the use of these narrative devices is also suggestive of an acceptable place for the misconstrual of dream-visions within community life. There is no negative response to this particular form of misinterpretation.

The Figure of Agabus and Responses to Prophecy (11:27-30; 21:4-14)

A more complex example of disagreement concerning dream-visions can be found in Acts 21:4-14. This section of the narrative finds Paul part way through his farewell journey among the communities of believers. In Caesarea, Paul and his companions are visited by the prophet Agabus, who informs Paul of his fate should he continue his journey to

³⁷⁰ It can be noted that Josephus' account of Agrippa's death allows marginally more space for its interpretation as a significant dream-vision, since he sees a harbinger of his fate in the form of an owl perched above his head (*Antiquities* 19.8.2 §346). For additional references to Agrippa's death and parallels to the description of Herod being eaten by worms see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 491.

Jerusalem. Within the account there are differing opinions concerning how Paul should respond to Agabus' prophecy, and the issue is further complicated by the apparently conflicting advice given 'through the Spirit' just a few verses prior to Agabus' arrival. This difficulty of harmonising these assertions of the divine will brings the issue of dealing with the associated authority of such claims under the spotlight. These features will be analysed in a little more detail below, beginning with the treatment of the figure of Agabus.

Agabus makes an earlier appearance in the narrative in Acts 11:27-30. There, he travels from Jerusalem to Antioch as one of a group of prophets (*προφῆται*). This is the first such explicit designation of any of the characters within Acts, although certain others may be regarded as having a prophetic function of sorts.³⁷¹ This term is the same one used to describe the Old Testament prophets (e.g. 3:18; 7:52; 8:28) and within the programmatic citation of Joel in Acts 2:17-21.

Agabus predicts a severe famine over 'all the world', and the narrator immediately informs us of the accuracy of this prediction, stating that this occurred during Claudius's reign (11:28). Since news of this fulfilment immediately follows the prophecy itself, the narrative allows no room to doubt Agabus' claim.³⁷² Although he is something of an outsider amongst the Christians at Antioch, his position as one among a group of prophets, and the origins of this group in Jerusalem, serves to underline Agabus' reliability and standing within the wider Christian community. This passage serves to emphasise and develop the relationship between Antioch and Jerusalem. Agabus' ability to act as a spokesperson for God is further emphasised because, alongside his identification as a

³⁷¹ Figures such as Stephen, Philip, Paul, and Peter. See Spencer, *Acts*, 119.

³⁷² While the historicity of this claim may well be dubious, and at the very least the extent of the famine may have been exaggerated, within the narrative context his prophecy is established as accurate.

prophet, his prediction in 21:28 is made ‘through the Spirit’ (*διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος*). The significance of this phrase for the current argument will shortly become apparent.

Strictly speaking, the content of Agabus’ prophecy does not demand that the believers take any action by way of response; in some sense the prophetic word is value-neutral. Certainly, a specific response is not detailed within the prophecy but must instead be determined by the disciples. However, logic demands that a response is required, and the nature of this response is shaped by the content of the prophecy itself.

It is this account, therefore, and Agabus’ proven record as a prophet, that forms the backdrop to his second appearance in chapter 21. The account begins in a similar way, with Agabus’ arrival amongst the group from a different location.³⁷³ Unlike the account in chapter 11, Agabus appears to be travelling alone. However, the collective prophetic context of the previous account remains on account of the presence of Philip’s four prophesying (*προφητεύουσαι*) daughters. The use of the participle as opposed to any designation of these women as ‘prophets’ has furthered the afore-mentioned debate concerning prophetic activity in the book of Acts. The text allows us to do little more than speculate, although one might reasonably share Spencer’s disappointment that this fulfilment of the Joel 2 citation nonetheless leaves the women as ‘little more than window dressings’ within this scene.³⁷⁴

Agabus takes centre-stage, performing a symbolic action followed by a word of explanation for which he claims Holy Spirit authority. This stands in contrast to the situation in chapter 11 in which the Spirit-inspired nature of Agabus’ words was pointed out by the narrator. It has been suggested that this account contains a number of features

³⁷³ It is, at least, a purportedly different geographical location: Agabus is described as coming down from Judaea, although this is somewhat confusing given that the Caesarean setting also places this account within this region.

³⁷⁴ Spencer, *Acts*, 197.

that mirror prophetic prototypes in the Hebrew Bible. David E. Aune notes the rarity of any such tendency within Jewish prophecy, although it is difficult to know how to interpret this divergence within Christian tradition.³⁷⁵ Several scholars have observed the inaccuracy of Agabus' prophecy, with David Hill pointing out that, 'the fact that his word did not strictly come true would have made this prophecy "false" by Old Testament standards.'³⁷⁶

Following Agabus' words there is disagreement between Paul, the 'we party' and 'the people' over what Paul should do. Just as was the case in chapter 11, Agabus' statement is in itself neutral: it contains information concerning what would happen to Paul if he were to go to Jerusalem, but does not offer guidance on the appropriate course of action. Indeed, it may be that Agabus' prophecy should not be regarded as conditional at all: it is interpreted in relation to Paul's decision to travel to Jerusalem, but Agabus may simply be stating an unavoidable future event.

There are three strands of response to the potential threat that 'Jerusalem' poses for Paul. The first is that of Paul himself. Within the wider context of the Acts narrative as a whole, a developing understanding of his 'mission' to Jerusalem can be detected, so that in 19:21 Paul 'resolves in the Spirit' to go to Jerusalem, but by 20:22 he is 'bound in/by the Spirit' to make this journey. In other words, there is a strengthening in his understanding of the necessity of the Jerusalem trip. Agabus' prophecy strengthens an already existing understanding that Paul has concerning the suffering that awaits him there.

The second response, (not to Agabus, but to the Jerusalem mission) is that of the Tyrian believers in 21:4 who, 'through the Spirit' tell Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. This phrase arguably ought to be taken seriously as an indicator of visionary phenomena since it

³⁷⁵ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 12.

³⁷⁶ David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 108.

is precisely this phrase that can be found in Agabus' first prophecy in the Acts narrative (11:27-30). It has a clear association with this type of activity, and so, while this is a very brief reference, it ought not to be dismissed.

The third response is the reaction of the believers and the 'we' that represents the narrative voice. This collective responds to Agabus' prophecy by begging Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. While part of this can be attributed to the fact that no one wants a companion to experience suffering, regardless of whether or not this is part of the divine plan, their eventual acquiescence that 'the Lord's will be done' (21:14) suggests a wider concern than this purely emotional one. It seems likely, therefore, that both Paul's decision to go on to Jerusalem, and the collective objections of the 'believers' and the narrator are all grounded in interpretations of dreams, visions, and related phenomena.

In the longer term, one might argue that the determination of whether a prophecy is true or false is to be found in whether or not the events predicted actually occur. The continuation of Paul's journey beyond chapter 21 suggests that his decision is deemed to be the right one, not least because he takes the gospel message before a king, which is part of the plan for Paul outlined by God (to Ananias) in Acts chapter 9. What this might mean therefore, is that those who opposed Paul's decision were 'wrong' in their interpretation of prophecy. This offers the interesting possibility that in Acts pious insiders (the 'believers') and even the narrator himself misinterpret the meaning of a dream-vision.

Characters' misinterpretation of the divine plan or of visionary experience is not unheard of within New Testament texts. In the Gospel of Luke, for example, both Mary and Zechariah effectively 'misinterpret' their visionary experiences by expecting Jesus to be a very different kind of figure to that which he turns out to be. Essentially this is unproblematic, since the views represented by these characters are developed and

modified, even ‘corrected’ as the narrative develops. To some extent, Mary and Zechariah are at times ‘unreliable’ voices within the narrative, although this does not extend to a wholly negative portrayal of these characters. Perhaps, within the Lukan corpus at least, and within the Christian communities that his story depicts, there is room for misinterpretation and mistakes.

Such a proposal becomes particularly interesting when one turns back to the Agabus account, because it is the narrator’s voice that is implicated as mistaken within the debate. This may appear to go against the usual understanding of the function of the so-called ‘we passages’ in Acts, which have typically been understood to underline the proximity of the narrator to the action, and thus the credibility of the account.³⁷⁷

If it were possible for the narrator to get it ‘wrong’ and yet remain a trustworthy voice, this would offer significant insight into the ancient perception of dream-visions, and would challenge any suggestion that ‘mistakes’ over the interpretation or identification of such phenomena were unacceptable within the community context. It might privilege such debate over and against a dominant single voice that defines and interprets these phenomena. It is also suggestive of a recognition within the text of the complexities and difficulties associated with dream-visions which some such as Dunn have not found to be present in the narrative.

Anti-Climax and Trouble in the Mission to Europe (16:6-17:15)

³⁷⁷ Hans-Josef Klauck writes (concerning Acts 16:16-18) that, ‘it is probably Luke himself who has imprinted this ‘we’ form on specific textual material, either in order to introduce himself as an eyewitness or else to signalise that he is drawing on material from the group of Paul’s companions, e.g. from Silas. At any rate, his intention is to strengthen the impression of credibility in his narratives.’ (*Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles*, tr. Brian McNeil [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, 63]. See also, J. Wehnert, *Die Wir-Passagen der Apostelgeschichte. Ein lukanisches Stilmittel aus jüdischer Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

The final section of the narrative that this thesis will examine is Paul's dream-vision at Troas and the subsequent mission to Macedonia in Acts 16:6-17:15. Aside from discussion of the introduction of the 'we' clause in 16:10, the Troas episode has received little attention in its own right, having been the subject of just three scholarly articles in the past seventy-five years.³⁷⁸ This lack of interest within the secondary literature has been rather dramatically corrected in John B.F. Miller's study of dream-visions in the Acts of the Apostles, in which these five verses occupy two chapters of the book, and form the crux of his argument.³⁷⁹

The account begins by reporting the frustrated attempts of Paul and his travelling companions to visit Asia and Bithynia. This lack of positive guidance is apparently remedied by Paul's nocturnal vision of a man from Macedonia. On hearing of Paul's experience the group (here for the first time encapsulated by the 'we' clause) 'immediately' (εὐθέως) try to go to Macedonia, 'convinced that God had called us' (συμβιβάζοντες ὅτι προσκέκληται ἡμας ὁ θεός) (16:10).

The ensuing series of events do not match such a promising beginning. John Calvin offers the apt observation that:

Abandoning the work that they had in hand, the holy men quickly cross the sea, as if the whole Macedonian nation was going to come and meet

³⁷⁸ Alfred Wikenhauser, 'Religionsgeschichtliche Parallelen zu Apg. 16,9', *Biblische Zeitschrift* 23 (1935-1936), 180-186; Edmond Farahian, 'Paul's Vision at Troas (Acts 16:9-10)' in Gerald O'Collins S.J., and Gilberto Marconi (eds.), *Luke and Acts* (New York; Mahwah, New Jersey.: Paulist Press, 1993), 197-207; B. Schwank, 'Setze über nach Mazedonian und hilf uns!' *Reisenotizen zu Apg. 16, 9-17, 15*, *Erbe und Auftrag* 39 (1963), 399-416. For a survey of treatments of this passage within the secondary literature see Bovon, *Luc le théologien: Vingt-cinq ans de recherches* (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1978), 318-19, 375.

³⁷⁹ *Convinced that God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007).

them, eager to ask for help. Now the outcome corresponds to their expectation so little that nearly all doors are closed for them to speak.³⁸⁰

On arrival in Macedonia, the believers do not meet any Macedonian men, but rather a group of women gathered outside the city gates. Their next encounter is also with a woman, a fortune-telling slave girl who follows Paul and his companions for several days. Paul's actions in ordering the Pythian spirit out of the woman lead directly to the flogging and imprisonment of the entire group. Whilst in the prison overnight, a violent earthquake causes the doors to open wide. Paul and Silas step in to prevent the subsequent suicide of the jailer, who instead becomes a believer and is baptised. The next morning the believers are asked to leave the area, so they travel on, only to cause chaos in Thessalonica. Miller notes the swift conclusion to this episode that is found in the hushed departure from the entire region of Macedonia at 17:14-15.³⁸¹

While the mission contains moments of success, the overall impression is one of anti-climax. The tension within this episode has not received extensive scholarly attention, having been observed only by John Calvin, F. Scott Spencer, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, and John B.F. Miller. Of these, only Miller has moved beyond simple observation to consider the implications of this tension for the understanding of the narrative. In the following paragraphs it will be considered whether Miller's argument can offer a satisfactory explanation for the discrepancy between Paul's vision and the events in Macedonia.

The consensus of both the characters in the narrative and the subsequent scholarship is that Paul's vision represents a divine instruction for the believers to travel to Macedonia. While Miller broadly concurs with this idea, he suggests that the Troas story

³⁸⁰ John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles, 14-28* (trans. John W. Fraser; London: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), 70-71. This useful quotation has been flagged up by Miller in his survey of the literature on the Troas episode (*Convinced*, 66).

³⁸¹ *Convinced*, 105.

reveals rather more about Luke's anthropology than has previously been allowed. The key feature of Miller's argument is his proposal that there is an absence of direct divine agency, from Paul's personal decision to journey to re-visit the believers in 15:36 through to 18:9-10, where Paul is instructed to stay in Corinth. He contests that this serves to emphasise the necessity for human decision-making and interpretation of the divine will within the book of Acts.³⁸²

The assessment of this proposal will begin with an analysis of Paul's dream-vision in 16:9. While Miller's suggestion of a lack of divine agency from 15:36 through to 18:9 is not entirely convincing, the apparent lack of divine agency in Paul's visionary experience is a striking feature of the account. As Miller has observed, it is the only instance in the Lukan corpus where a dream-vision is unaccompanied by divine agency of some sort.³⁸³

While this need not necessarily challenge the authenticity of Paul's experience, it does stand out from the rest of the Lukan depictions of such experiences. Certainly, lack of agency does not in itself preclude an interpretation of Paul's dream-vision as constituting divine guidance, and the description of the figure as a Macedonian man has sparked some interest. John J. Pilch reflects on this identification, commenting that:

In this episode, Paul did not see a specific person with a name, but rather a person from a geographical region, a Macedonian. This is typical for people like Paul who is a collectivist personality living in a collectivist culture. Such cultures tend to stereotype. [...] It is likely that he recognises the man by his distinctive garb.³⁸⁴

³⁸² *Convinced*, 91-108.

³⁸³ *Convinced*, 96-98. He writes, 'although Luke does not adhere to a rigid formula in his descriptions of dream-visions, divine agents appear in practically all of the visionary passages in Luke-Acts' (97). As Miller notes, possible exceptions include Luke 24:4-7, Acts 1:10, and Acts 9:12, though the first two would appear to refer to angels, and the last occurs in a clear context of divine agency.

³⁸⁴ John J. Pilch, *Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles: How the Early Believers Experienced God* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), 116-117.

The question of whether those who belong to so-called collectivist cultures experience noticeably ‘collectivist’ dreams is an interesting one, but Pilch’s comments rather miss the point here. Certainly the speculation about his clothing is unnecessary: within the context of a dream, the dreamer is able to ‘know’ the identity of a person, regardless of their appearance or whether they are already familiar to the dreamer.³⁸⁵

Miller concludes his two-chapter study of this passage by raising the question of whether the characters’ interpretation of Paul’s vision was wrong.³⁸⁶ His own response to this is to suggest that such evaluations are unhelpful, arguing that, ‘the point is not whether the characters interpret Paul’s dream-vision correctly. The point is that they *have to interpret* Paul’s experience.’³⁸⁷ Again, while Miller raises an important point about the necessity of human interpretation of visionary experience, he fails to engage with a potentially interesting question. His conclusion misses something important, and is guilty of an anti-climax which mirrors that which he observed in the Troas account. It is impossible to adequately deal with the necessity of human interpretation of dream-visions if one does not also take seriously moments of misinterpretation. If this issue is sidestepped then something important is missed within Acts: the recognition of the potential pitfalls and problems of dream-visions that many scholars have previously been unable to find within the narrative.

Prophet or Threat? Paul’s Ambiguous Encounter with the Slave-Girl (16:16-24)

³⁸⁵ Alfred Loisy also considers the question of how the man was recognised to be a false one, see: *Les Actes des Apôtres* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1920), 627.

³⁸⁶ Derek S. Dodson observes that: ‘The “Western” text of Acts, as witnessed in Codex Bezae, provides a reading that fills out the response element by specifically noting that Paul told his companions about the dream: “thus when he had gotten up [Paul] related (*diegesato*) to us the vision, and we perceived (*enoesamen*) that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to the ones in Macedonia”’ (*Reading Dreams: An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew* [London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2009], 102).

³⁸⁷ *Convinced*, 107.

Acts 16:16-18 briefly depicts Paul and Silas's encounter with a fortune telling slave-girl in Philippi. This short account in fact represents a rather more protracted interaction that spans many days, during which time the girl frequently cries out concerning the identity of Paul and Silas as servants of the Most High God as she follows them on their journey. Paul eventually invokes the name of Jesus and commands the spirit to leave the girl, which has an immediate and dramatic effect: the girl's divinatory abilities are lost, and her owners drag Paul and Silas before local magistrates who beat and imprison the two men.

In spite of the rather unfortunate outcome to this episode in 16:19-24 (which nonetheless leads to the conversion of the jailer and his household), this story has often been interpreted as a demonstration of the triumph of Christianity over so-called pagan religion.³⁸⁸ The slave-girl has been characterised as a pathetic figure whose fortune telling fools the naïve and the gullible, bringing profit to her greedy masters. Paul's reaction has been characterised as an exorcism, and, moreover, one that shares many features with those attributed to Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament. Consequently, Paul's actions have been understood not only as an expression of the 'superior' power of Christianity, but also as a means of highlighting the 'unsophisticated' and potentially 'fraudulent' nature of pagan religious practice.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ This thesis follows C. Kavin Rowe in opting to use the term 'pagan' in spite of its associated difficulties. Such usage is not intended to suggest that 'pagan religion' was a monolith, but that, as Rowe notes, there is enough of a 'common core' to paganism to allow us to use the term to refer to this broader range of beliefs and practices. (*World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* [New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 181. See also Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 31-38).

³⁸⁹ Proponents of this view include T.F. Torrance, 'St Paul at Philippi: Three Startling Conversions', *Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941), 62-74 at 65-66; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tr. Bernard Noble, Gerald Shinn, Hugh Anderson, and R. McL. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 495; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 583, 586-7; Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, ii, (Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 113; and, to some extent, James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), 220. The phrase 'the triumph of Christianity' is taken from Fitzmyer (*Acts*, 583).

Although forms of this explanation have been widely adopted, this reading of the account is not without its difficulties. Four key problems can be identified with this view: first, the depiction of this story as a ‘triumph’ rather overstates the case, second, the reduction of the slave-girl’s mantic abilities to an example of primitive ‘superstition’ does not take seriously the proximity of her activities to those outlined in the programmatic use of Joel at the first Christian Pentecost (2:17-21), third, neither the significance nor the extent of the ambiguity within the account has adequately been recognised, and fourth, this view fails to offer a satisfactory explanation for the delay of many days prior to Paul’s reaction. Each of these issues will now be outlined in greater detail, before an alternative interpretation will be proposed for this account.

Triumph?

The first issue is the idea of Christianity’s ‘triumph’ over paganism. While it is clear that Paul’s exorcism of the slave-girl illustrates the power of the name of Jesus (and potentially sets up a contrast between the Holy Spirit and other *πνεύματα*), it seems equally clear that the overall character of the encounter is not one of triumph. As a direct result of this episode Paul and Silas find themselves dragged before magistrates, stripped, flogged, and chained up in prison.³⁹⁰ Although the charges levelled against the missionaries don’t seem to fit, and thus the reader may believe the punishment to be undeserved, one is still hard-

³⁹⁰ Although they are later released, this prison account stands in contrast to those reported in Acts 5:18-19 and 12:1-11: here there is no divine agency at work, and there is no escape by the prisoners (Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1998], 497-8). This contributes towards the lack of ‘triumph’ present in the encounter with the slave-girl and its aftermath. (However, one might also consider E. Zeller’s suggestion that the story corresponds to a wider motif of honourable behaviour during unjust imprisonment (‘Eine griechische Parallele zu der Erzählung Apostelgesch. 16, 19ff’ *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 8 [1865], 103-108).

pressed to view this as an outright triumph, even within the ‘upside-down’ world of the Acts narrative.³⁹¹

Furthermore, this notion of a triumphant victory does not fit the wider context of the mission to Europe. As already noted, while the mission contains moments of success, the overall impression is one of anti-climax. While commentators have been hasty to point out that even the conversion of one or two new believers ought not to be dismissed, it would nonetheless be difficult to characterise this mission as a resounding success.

*Primitive Superstition?*³⁹²

Proponents of this view have tended to portray the slave-girl’s masters as charlatans who were engaged in a kind of trickery that exploited gullible passers-by for financial gain.³⁹³ This certainly reflects the cultural context of many twentieth and twenty-first century commentators, and the depiction of pagan religious practice as somehow ‘primitive’ or ‘unsophisticated’ is not uncommon. What is of greater interest however is that while such views have received correction in more recent studies, treatments of this particular passage remain largely unaffected. For instance, C. Kavin Rowe criticises Ernst Haenchen’s interpretation of Acts 14, writing that:

³⁹¹ For a more detailed consideration of this issue see C.S. de Vos, ‘Finding a Charge that Fits: The Accusation against Paul and Silas at Philippi (Acts 16:19-21)’ *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 74 (1999), 51-63.

³⁹² This pejorative term is used intentionally to underline the double standard that has often been at work in divergent treatments of Christian and pagan practices, whereby the former are upheld and the latter dismissed in spite of few obvious differences in aim or form. For a lengthier treatment of this issue see Andy M. Reimer, *Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 6-8; Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 1-4.

³⁹³ Johnson observes that: ‘The mention of profit-taking places these religious merchandizers with others in Luke’s narrative whose wickedness is connected to avarice.’ (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992], 294).

[T]his reading is, at best, to replace ancient religious practice with its philosophical critique, or already to adopt unawares the perspective of Paul and Barnabas. At worst, it is no less than a radical modernizing of the text, in the sense that it dismisses fundamental aspects of pagan religion as mere silliness.³⁹⁴

In contrast, there appear to be no attempts to correct similar depictions of the story of the slave-girl in Acts 16.

What is less clear is the extent to which this view of the slave-girl's activity may reflect attitudes towards such practices within the first century CE. It is highly unlikely that the girl's fortune-telling ability would have been received with the same respect as, for instance, that of the Pythia at Delphi. Certainly, Luke Timothy Johnson has described the activities of the slave-girl and her masters as 'the equivalent of an urban dog-and-pony show', citing two ancient sources in which such practices were satirised.³⁹⁵ While arguments from absence are somewhat risky, it seems likely that these satires also reflect some level of engagement with these supposed charlatans, at least by certain sectors of Graeco-Roman society. Any blanket disapproval of the practice thereby seems unlikely. Suspicion of 'divination' within Judaism is better documented, although the justification behind this tends to reflect an association of the practice with genuine risk rather than with human exploitation of the gullible.³⁹⁶

This is an important distinction to underline, and one that has not always been adequately recognised within treatments of this account. While the girl's activities have been branded as a kind of charlatanism reserved for the naïve, Paul's reaction has been

³⁹⁴ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 21. Haenchen questions whether the scene depicted is really plausible, and draws the conclusion that it is not (*Acts*, 432).

³⁹⁵ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 298. So, for example, Lucian of Samosata, *Alexander the False Prophet* and Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 8:26-30. However, this type of critique on philosophical grounds is not what Paul offers.

³⁹⁶ Miller observes this trend in his treatment of attitudes towards dream-visions in the Hebrew Bible (*Convinced*, 40-53).

treated as an exorcism, and thereby a response to demonic possession. The strength of Paul's reaction does not fit such an interpretation of the girl's behaviour. Indeed, according to this reading, Paul's response would appear not so much as a mark of the triumph of Christianity, but rather as the over-reaction of Christianity against a completely insignificant opponent. One is led to conclude that Paul's supposed exorcism of the slave-girl is a case of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

More significant than this distorted impression, however, is that this view entails an extremely wide gap between pagan and Christian practice, for there is little space for a connection between this sort of 'charlatanism' and the use of the name of Jesus.³⁹⁷ While this may reflect the views of particular scholars, it overlooks certain features of the account itself. It is undoubtedly the case that find exploitation lies at the heart of this story, as well as a preoccupation with material wealth that stands in contrast to the portrayal of the Christian community. However, if this were really a case of charlatanism, the reaction of the slave-girl's masters is difficult to comprehend: no hope of economic gain has been lost if the girl is simply a fraud. More significantly, however, there are also potential parallels between the girl's activity and the programmatic prophecy from Joel in Acts 2:17-21.³⁹⁸ Given this proximity, and Paul's eventual exorcism of the girl, too strong a dismissal either of her, or her mantic abilities appears ill advised.

Ambiguity Within the Account

³⁹⁷ Interestingly, however, one may find precisely such a connection in Acts 19 and the exorcistic attempts of the sons of Sceva.

³⁹⁸ These will be underlined in more detail below.

The ambiguity within this account has been recognised by proponents of the ‘triumph of Christianity view’, although its function has often been limited to one of dramatic irony at the narrative level. Proponents of the above view have often assumed that the slave-girl’s words were intended to refer to the Christian God, and, if anything, that such terminology would constitute a clear explanation of the identity of this God in terms that pagan hearers would have understood. This view has been challenged by scholars such as P.R. Trebilco, who has argued that the use of the term in this context is far more ambiguous.³⁹⁹

This sense of ambiguity extends beyond the words of the girl and includes her intentions within the story. As F. Scott Spencer has noted:

Either she sincerely wants to honour Paul and his companions as authentic messengers of the God of Israel, whom she now confesses publicly as the ‘Most High God’, supreme over Apollo and the other Greco-Roman deities, or she maliciously sets out to expose Paul’s monotheistic (Yahwistic) mission in hopes of stirring up anti-Judaic hostility and driving Paul out of the city.⁴⁰⁰

In spite of valuable correctives offered by scholars such as Trebilco and Spencer, however, recognition of this sense of ambiguity has not satisfactorily been developed into an overall explanation regarding the function of the account within the wider Acts narrative.

The Delay of Many Days

The delay of many days (πολλὰς ἡμέρας) prior to Paul’s reaction is one of the more puzzling features of the passage. There are two common explanations for this phenomenon, although neither is able to offer a satisfactory account. The first is the

³⁹⁹ P. R. Trebilco, Paul and Silas, ‘Servants of the Most High God’ (Acts 16:16-18), *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 36 (1989), 51-73. This issue will be dealt with in more detail below.

⁴⁰⁰ F. Scott Spencer, ‘Out of Mind, Out of Voice: Slave-Girls and Prophetic Daughters in Luke-Acts’, *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches*, 7 (1999), 133-155 at 148.

suggestion that Paul simply got ‘fed-up’ with the girl, and duly responded out of annoyance.⁴⁰¹ However, it seems unlikely that this represents sufficient reason for an *exorcism* of the girl; this would surely constitute something of an over-reaction.

The second reason that has been offered for this delay is Paul’s understanding of the trouble that will be caused by his actions.⁴⁰² Certainly such fears prove to be well founded as the story develops, and Paul and Silas find themselves in significant danger from both the authorities and crowds of local people as a direct consequence of the exorcism of the slave-girl. Yet it is questionable whether this would have been likely to function as a deterrent to the character of Paul as he is depicted within the Acts narrative. Elsewhere in the text he is depicted as a fiery individual who, far from shying away from persecution and danger, actively seeks it out (e.g. 21:13). As a result, it seems unlikely that the delay in Paul’s reaction ought to be attributed to such a cause.

An Alternative Reading

While it is clear that, ultimately, Paul and his companions successfully manage the situation with which they are faced, and that the power of the use of the name of Jesus is proven over against other forms of spiritual power, the exaggeration of this to the idea of a triumph gives a distorted impression of what is being described in Acts 16:16-18. The

⁴⁰¹ So Dunn, who comments, ‘that Paul responded, after many days of this, with annoyance has an authentic ring’ (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996], 221).

⁴⁰² Klauck, *Magic*, 69. Another explanation of sorts is found in the rejection of the phrase ‘after many days’ as a part of the original account. See, for example, Hans Conzelmann, who writes, ‘the original version probably told of only a single encounter between Paul and the young woman and an immediate exorcism. The extension of time seems artificial and tendentious: it wants to suggest that, in view of the consequences of this encounter, Paul must have been carrying on missionary activity for some time’. (*Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, tr. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987], 131). The intention here, however, is to deal with the passage as it appears in the Acts narrative rather than to address earlier forms of the account.

totalising effect of this view flattens the account and blocks serious consideration of subtleties within the narrative. So, for example, Joseph Fitzmyer's adherence to this view is so strong that he simply dismisses extraneous features, writing of 16:18 that: 'To ask how Paul would have discerned that a spirit was at work in her is to miss the point of the story. He rebukes the spirit and so exorcises the girl; that is the Lukan intention.'⁴⁰³ In contrast, it is the argument of this thesis that both the ambiguity that is present at several points, and the delay prior to Paul's exorcism of the girl provide vital clues to a proper understanding of what is occurring in this short account. In fact, it will be suggested that the former functions to explain the latter: the delay in Paul's reaction is precisely because of the ambiguity of the slave-girl's words, and serious question marks over what she represents.⁴⁰⁴ Paul is faced with this challenge as an inherent feature of the practical outworking of the prophecy from Joel and the negotiation of the boundaries of the emerging and expanding Christian movement. This story does not represent an account of Christianity's easy triumph over inferior paganism, but rather an illustration of the challenges of distinguishing between true and false prophetic fulfilment within the Acts of the Apostles. Far from being a one-dimensional means to an end within the narrative, the girl can be viewed from two perspectives: as a prophet of the last days and as a potential threat to the missionaries. Each of these perspectives will now be dealt with.

The Slave-Girl as a Prophet of the Last Days

⁴⁰³ Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 587.

⁴⁰⁴ This view has briefly been noted by I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 268-69.

There is a general consensus within scholarship on the Acts of the Apostles that the quotation from Joel 3:1-5 (MT 2:28-32) in Acts 2:17-21 functions as a programmatic statement for the wider narrative. Peter’s use of this prophetic text is not only an explanation of the events of the first Christian Pentecost, but a promise of what is still to come. This prompts the reader/hearer to anticipate further signs of the outpouring of God’s spirit as the narrative develops. Upon encountering the slave-girl in chapter 16, therefore, part of this text may immediately spring to mind: ‘Even upon my slaves, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days and they will prophesy’ (καί γε ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου καὶ προφητεύσουσιν [Acts 2:18]).

While the girl is not explicitly referred to as a *δούλη*, but rather as a *παιδίσκη*, there is little doubt that she can be placed into the category of ‘female slave’ especially given the repeated mention of her masters. A possible allusion to Acts 2:18 is further underlined with an additional reference to slaves contained within the girl’s cries concerning Paul and Silas (16:17).⁴⁰⁵ As Spencer has observed: ‘If we limit our search strictly to the word *doule*, then we find no examples of female slaves/servants in Luke or Acts, speaking or otherwise, outside of Mary in the birth narrative.’⁴⁰⁶ Any argument in favour of rigid adherence to the specific vocabulary of the Joel citation in the search for its fulfilment is on shaky ground, for within such parameters there would also be no ‘dreams’ (*ἐνυπνίον*) and no ‘visions’ (*ὄραω*) in Acts that would count as part of this statement from Joel.

⁴⁰⁵ Monique Veillé correctly recognises the potential connection this draws between Paul, Silas, and the slave-girl. She comments: “[Q]uand elle emploie le terme de « serviteurs » pour l’appliquer aux apôtres – et, de plus, c’est cette fois le mot *doulos*, esclave, qui est utilisé – elle exprime une curieuse identité formelle entre la condition des apôtres et la sienne. Seraient-ils des collègues, finalement?” (M. Veillé, ‘Actes 16/16-24’, *Études Théologiques et Religieuses*, 54 [1979], 271-78 at 274).

⁴⁰⁶ Spencer, ‘Out of Mind’, 136.

As a result, it is clear that the passage has a focus upon slaves, although the question of whether any of them are prophesying is a rather more contentious issue. Before addressing this, however, it must be noted that, unlike the LXX version of this section of Joel, in Acts 2:18 the reference is not simply to slaves, but to ‘my slaves’ (*δούλους μου* and *δούλας μου*) – those slaves that belong to God. One might question whether a distinction can therefore be drawn between two types of slave within this later section of the narrative, with Paul and Silas (and other members of the ‘we’ party?) on the one side, and the slave-girl on another. Certainly, from the moment the figure of the slave-girl is introduced, the Lukan audience is also informed of the pythian spirit (*πνεῦμα πύθωνα*) with which she is associated, and this could be seen to immediately exclude her from any of the categories in the Joel prophecy, which refer to signs of the outpouring of God’s (Holy) Spirit.⁴⁰⁷ However, the case may not be as clear-cut as this.

The tendency within scholarship on this passage to simultaneously over-state and under-state what is being described has already been noted. Thus, the girl’s activities are often reduced to the level of primitive superstition (or even dismissed altogether as a kind of charlatanism), while Paul’s response is characterised as an exorcism akin to those undertaken by Jesus in the Gospels. At the heart of this issue, then, is the question of the nature of the spirit that the girl is associated with.

There is a general consensus that the *πύθων* was at least ‘originally’ associated with the Delphic oracle as the mythical snake that was killed by Apollo when he took control of the site. It appears later to have been used to refer to a kind of ventriloquism, possibly as a

⁴⁰⁷ *πνεῦμα πύθωνα* is found in P⁷⁴, a, A, B, C*, D* 81 and 326, while the genitive form *πνεῦμα πύθωνος* is found in P⁴⁵, C³, D¹, E, Ψ, 1739 and the Majority Text. The accusative form is generally favoured as having weightier attestation amongst the earlier witnesses, and being the more difficult reading in terms of its relationship to the word *πνεῦμα*. For a fuller discussion of this issue see Todd Klutz, *The Exorcism Stories in Luke-Acts: A Sociostylistic Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214-15.

development upon the idea that the Pythia spoke with a voice that was not her own.⁴⁰⁸ John R. Levison has noted the association of such ventriloquism with idolatry, witchcraft, and necromancy in the Septuagint, and this may have contributed towards negative impressions of the pythian spirit in Acts 16.⁴⁰⁹

However, the connection in the current account may be a rather weaker one than this. It is possible that the term could have functioned as an indication of the girl's religious allegiance, and thus the term 'pythian spirit' could be understood in a similar sense to 'Holy Spirit' or 'unclean spirit' elsewhere in the New Testament.⁴¹⁰ While it is clearly an entity that is distinct from the Holy Spirit, it is not necessarily an 'unclean' or 'evil' spirit that would automatically be excluded from any positive role in the development of the Christian community.⁴¹¹

In spite of the outward looking, inclusive, mission to the Gentiles, the fulfilment of the Joel prophecy appears to demand some sort of membership or belonging. Although the fact that the slave-girl follows Paul and Silas could be regarded as an expression of her desire to be a disciple, she emphatically does not belong with them. This stands in direct contrast to the figures of Paul and Silas, who are 'slaves of the Most High God'. However, in Acts 10 and 11 one can already find a case in which the visionary experience of an 'outsider' (Cornelius) played a key role in major decision-making for the Christian

⁴⁰⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.438-447; Plutarch, *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 9 and *The Oracles at Delphi* 21; Lucian of Samosata, *Phalaris*, 2:12. See the discussions in Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 586; Johnson, *Acts*, 293; Lynn Allan Kauppi, *Foreign But Familiar Gods: Greco-Romans Read Religion in Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 29; Klauck, *Magic*, 65-66.

⁴⁰⁹ For instance Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Isaiah 8:19; 29:4; 1 Chronicles 33:6, and (LXX only) 2 Chronicles 35:19. (John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* [Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2009], 319).

⁴¹⁰ See Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Liberation Perspective*, tr. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 186.

⁴¹¹ Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 322; Reimer, *Women*, 160. This is in contrast to C.W. Stenschke, who comments that, 'the real origin of her ability was not recognised or not considered reprehensible. Luke portrays a Gentile naïveté vis-à-vis the demonic'. (*Luke's Portrait of Gentiles Prior to their Coming to Faith* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 195).

community, and was only subsequently admitted into the group. The earlier promise of the outpouring of the spirit upon all flesh, and the subsequent shift in the boundaries of the Christian community creates ambiguity in this matter.

While the double emphasis upon slaves within the account may hint at the promise of Acts 2:18, this does not represent sufficient grounds upon which to claim its fulfilment. It must be asked whether or not the slave-girl does, in fact, prophesy. The consideration of this issue falls into two parts: first, the question of whether or not she speaks the truth, and second, the issue of the distinction between ‘prophecy’ and ‘divination’.⁴¹²

In 16:17 the girl is described as crying out (*ἔκραζειν*), saying ‘these men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation’ (*οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δουλοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου εἰσὶν οἵτινες καταγγέλλουσιν ὑμῖν ὁδὸν σωτηρίας*). While it is clear that this may be interpreted as a factual statement concerning the Christian mission, certain elements of the verse have been deemed rather more problematic.

The most notable of these is the use of *τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου*. Although some have argued confidently in favour of the use of this term to refer to the Jewish God, even in pagan contexts, others have been more cautious, claiming that while such usage in the Septuagint is clear, its use in a non-Jewish context may be considerably less certain.⁴¹³

⁴¹² The criterion of ‘truthfulness’ appears to be one significant aspect of the determination of true versus false prophecy within the Hebrew Bible. However, this is not without its difficulties, especially for those prophecies that refer to future events and thus can only be judged retrospectively. In fact, one frequently finds a notable lack of criteria behind the discussion of this issue. This has led to the suggestion that such judgements may be rather more strongly founded upon ideas of community membership and boundaries. This has some relevance to the present discussion of the slave-girl as a quasi-prophetic figure. For more on true and false prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, see Richard J. Coggins, ‘Prophecy – True and False’ in Heather A. McKay and David J.A. Clines (eds.), *Of Prophets’ Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on his Seventieth Birthday* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 80-94. For the consideration of this issue within early Christianity see É. Cothenet, ‘Prophétisme dans le Nouveau Testament’ *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément* viii (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1972), Cols. 1222-1337 at 1273-75.

⁴¹³ Reimer, *Women*, 165; Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans; Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1996), 83-103. Trebilco, ‘Paul and Silas’, 51-73. Spencer has criticised Trebilco for overplaying the difference between the title *ὁ ὑψίστος* and the longer phrase. (*Acts*, 148).

Spencer underlines the use of the phrase in the truthful words of the Gerasene demoniac (Luke 8:28), and additionally points out the similarities between the girl's message and the vocation of John the Baptist (Luke 1:76-77; 3:3-6).⁴¹⁴ It is difficult to know what to make of such connections since, on the one hand the connection with Zechariah's prophecy may point to a prophetic role for the girl, but on the other hand the link to the Gerasene demoniac may suggest a demonic origin to her words. There is not the scope to examine this issue in depth here, but it seems that there is at least sufficient doubt over the use of the term to render the girl's words ambiguous. This is underscored by additional ambiguity over the use of *ὁδὸν σωτηρίας*, where it has been questioned whether the lack of definite article may misrepresent the Christian message as simply one 'way' among many.⁴¹⁵

The multivalency of the girl's words, coupled with the ambiguity over her intentions that has been noted above prevents the drawing of any firm conclusions over whether or not the girl's statement is truthful. While some interpreters have viewed this uncertainty as a source of frustration, this effect may in fact make an important contribution to the overall understanding of the passage.⁴¹⁶ This point will be developed below.

One further consideration in addressing the question of whether or not the girl can be described as prophesying is that of the term used to describe her activities. The word is *μαντεύομαι*, which is 'the technical term for ecstatic prophecy in the Hellenistic world'.⁴¹⁷ However, it has consistently negative connotations in the LXX and is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT, which F.F. Bruce attributes to the fact that 'the pagan associations of the word

⁴¹⁴ Spencer, *Acts*, 148.

⁴¹⁵ See the discussion in Klauck, *Magic*, 68.

⁴¹⁶ So, for example, Klauck's comment that, 'we see, therefore, that the affirmation of the slave-girl is more ambiguous than might be desired' (*Magic*, 68).

⁴¹⁷ Johnson, *Acts*, 294.

made it unsuitable for use in Christian contexts'.⁴¹⁸ Although the word does refer to a kind of prophetic activity, one wonders whether the clearly and consistently pejorative use of the term elsewhere (Deuteronomy 18:10; 2 Kings 17:17; Micah 3:11) outweighs any potential ambiguity that may occur as a result of this.

Paul's eventual response leaves little room for doubt concerning the question of whether or not the slave-girl can be regarded as a prophet of the last days. In spite of this, however, the proximity of her activity to that promised in the Joel citation should not be ignored. It is not so much the final outcome, but the possibilities of what the girl may represent that contribute towards the present discussion.

Paul's Response: Irritation and an Exorcism?

Paul's response has been understood as an exorcism motivated by the fact that he becomes 'fed-up' or 'irritated' with the girl's persistent cries. However it is questionable whether the two features of this interpretation really fit together; whether an exorcism would constitute an appropriate response to the feeling of being fed-up. Although exorcism is likely to have been more of an everyday occurrence in the first century than in the twenty-first, within the Lukan corpus it appears to be a serious and risky activity. The only other attempted exorcism in Acts backfires when the seven Jewish exorcists are attacked and overpowered by the possessed man (19:13-16), and one might also note the failed attempts of Jesus' disciples to cast out a demon in Luke 9:37-43 (Mk. 9:14-29; Mt. 17:14-20). In spite of the power of the name of Jesus, exorcism is not something to be undertaken lightly. The word

⁴¹⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 360.

διαπονηθείς (16:18) has been understood in a stronger sense than this, to denote Paul's annoyance with the girl. However, even this, if it is understood to be directed purely at the repetitive nature of the girl's behaviour, is unsatisfactory, given the potential risks of exorcistic activity. Moreover, such a translation does not fully capture the sense of the Greek.

In its active sense, the verb carries the meaning of working or labouring over something, while suggested translations of the passive include 'troubled' and 'worked over'. It could be suggested that instead of pointing to Paul's annoyance with the slave-girl, *διαπονηθείς* could indicate a process of 'working out' what it is that the girl represents, and what the appropriate response might be. This is not intended to imply that an intellectual process of analysis is at work here, but rather that the use of this term may reflect something that Paul has been wrestling with and carrying over the many days of his encounter with the girl. Translations such as 'annoyed' and 'fed-up' tend to imply that Paul's response is a purely emotional, potentially spur of the moment reaction. In contrast, the term has a stronger connection both with what proceeds it – the exorcism which is not adequately explained by such a theory – and what precedes it – not simply the repetitive behaviour of the girl, but also the ambiguity of her words and intentions. The use of *διαπονηθείς* may hint at the difficulty Paul is faced with in determining how to respond to the girl's abilities. Such a reading has the added advantage of explaining the delay of many days while Paul was considering these things.⁴¹⁹

Further insight may be gleaned from occurrences of the word elsewhere. The only other New Testament occurrence is in Acts 4:2. At this point, it describes the response of

⁴¹⁹ The issue is not only over the strength of emotion at work in Paul, but also what it is directed at. It has been suggested that Paul's reaction may not be a response to the girl's persistent behaviour, but to the source of her mantic abilities. This may find some support in the reversal of order found in Codex Bezae, which detaches *διαπονηθείς* from the first part of the verse.

the Sadducees, the captain of the temple and the priests to Peter and John's speech. Their reaction following this is to imprison Peter and John. This also suggests a stronger sense to the word than mere irritation. Perhaps more significant, however, are the two further occurrences of the word within the canonical/apocryphal literature: Ecclesiastes 10:9 and 2 Maccabees 2:28. In both of these cases it has the sense of 'working over' an issue. Although there is no real reason to suppose a connection between these passages and the use of the term within the Acts of the Apostles, such examples ought at least to be considered as an alternative to the translation 'annoyed'. This understanding of *διαπονηθείς* has been noted, although its implications for the interpretation of the story have not been adequately addressed to date.⁴²⁰

The discussion now turns to the action that results from Paul's working over of the situation: the apparent exorcism of the girl. The narrative states that Paul, *'ἐπιστρέψας τῷ πνεύματι εἶπεν παραγγέλλω σοι ἐν ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐξελθεῖν ἀπ' αὐτῆς (16:18)'*. This has widely been interpreted as an exorcism, and, moreover, one that contains a number of parallels to Jesus' exorcistic activities in the Gospels. In fact, this almost-prophetic figure who almost fulfils part of the Joel prophecy is frequently referred to as the subject of the only successful exorcism by one of Jesus' followers in the New Testament.

Darrell L. Bock makes a direct comparison to Mark 5:1-20, paralleled in Luke 8:26-39, for here the characters are in 'polytheist territory', there is the use of the term 'Most High God', economic loss is involved in each of the accounts, and the incidents end with a request for the exorcist to leave the jurisdiction.⁴²¹ Further similarities include the

⁴²⁰ Johnson notes that the passive sense of the verb has the meaning 'to work over' (*Acts*, 294).

⁴²¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 405-6. Having said this, however, a crucial distinction between the two reports is that following this exorcism the man is healed and reincorporated into the life of his community. The account in Acts 16 gives no information concerning such an outcome.

use of a common ‘formula’ for exorcism (ἐξελεθελν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς) and the confirmation of the spirit’s departure (ἐξῆλθεν αὐτῆ τῆ ὥρα), as well as the reference to an immediate response.⁴²² These parallels have been seen to connect the figures of Paul and Jesus. Indeed, Klutz refers to a sense of continuity and harmony between Jesus and Paul as the ‘most important rhetorical aim in this unit’.⁴²³

This view is not without its difficulties, and as Levison notes, ‘if Paul’s alleged exorcism in Acts 16 is intended to mirror Jesus’, [...] it does so incongruously’.⁴²⁴ He goes on to observe a number of differences between this account and earlier exorcisms, including the extended period of time over which this activity occurs, and the ways in which the girl’s behaviour contrasts that of the demon possessed.⁴²⁵ Kauppi has also taken up this theme, arguing on the basis that there is no struggle from the supposed demon, there is no danger to the girl, no indication that the spirit is unclean, and the subsequent charges brought against Paul suggest that ‘Luke is narrating the expulsion of something other than a demon’.⁴²⁶ Certainly, this fits what has already been observed concerning the differentiation of the pythian spirit from an unclean spirit. However, later evidence attests that in spite of this difference, the πύθωνες were exorcised *as if* they were demons.⁴²⁷

As a result, while one should be hesitant about drawing too close a connection between the activities of Jesus and those of Paul at this point, the activity bears close resemblance to exorcism reports elsewhere, and can reasonably be considered to be

⁴²² See Luke 2:38; 7:21; 10:21; 12:12; 13:31; 20:19 (Johnson, 1992:295). For more on ‘the same hour’ see Joachim Jeremias, ‘*Ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ (ἐν) αὐτῆ τῇ ὥρᾳ*’, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, 42 (1949), 214–217.

⁴²³ Klutz, *Exorcism*, 211.

⁴²⁴ Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 320.

⁴²⁵ Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 320–21.

⁴²⁶ Kauppi, *Foreign but Familiar Gods*, 28.

⁴²⁷ Kauppi, *Foreign but Familiar Gods*, 31. What is less clear, however, is the extent to which this was influenced by the Acts account. (See also Klutz: ‘Ultimately, from the perspective of the narrator of Acts, [this sort of spirit] is just as noxious as any of the impure spirits expelled earlier by Jesus’ [*Exorcism*, 215]).

broadly similar. This entails a recognition of the seriousness of Paul's actions within the account, and the incongruity of such a response with an emotional reaction such as irritation. In the light of all this, the question of the rationale behind Paul's quasi-exorcistic activity is raised. Further insight into this question may be gained by a brief exploration into the character of the slave-girl herself.

The Character of the Slave-Girl

More than one commentator has referred to the slave-girl as a pathetic figure, doubly exploited by both the pythian spirit and her human masters.⁴²⁸ Certainly, her position as a slave cannot be denied, and as a young, female slave she is low in status even within this category. In spite of the constraints of this position, however, and within its obvious limitations, it should be recognised that as a result of her connection with the spirit she is able to have a significant influence. As a woman who was needed by her masters for their livelihood, she is also unlikely to have been ill-treated. Here one finds a woman with a voice – and a loud and a persistent one at that. What is more, it appears to be a truthful voice, and one that may frequently have been well-received.⁴²⁹ In other words, the slave-girl's mantic activity furnishes her with a louder voice and a more valued role than she would otherwise have had.

All of this underscores the fact that Paul's treatment of her must not be regarded as a liberation or as a healing. She is not sick, nor does she show signs of being unduly controlled by the spirit: while her crying out has been linked to the behaviour of the

⁴²⁸ Spencer, *Acts*, 166; Klauck, *Magic*, 72.

⁴²⁹ In contrast to the evidence for Judeo-Christian suspicion of this sort of activity, and cases where it is ridiculed on philosophical grounds, Klutz suggests that within a pagan context, such mantic prophecy would generally have been well-received, or at worst regarded as a neutral activity (*Exorcism*, 215).

demon-possessed within the Gospels, the use of this same verb in the report of Stephen's speech in Acts 7:60 suggests that this language is not only the preserve of demonic or unclean spirits.⁴³⁰ Moreover, if this is an attempt at liberation it appears to have backfired: although the narrative does not reveal the outcome for the girl, speculations concerning her subsequent Christian conversion are unfounded, and it seems far more likely that she ended up in a worse position as a consequence of Paul's actions; certainly, there seems little reason to suppose that she would have been freed as a result of these events. By removing her mantic abilities, Paul has effectively disempowered the slave-girl.

Further clues to the understanding of the girl may be found in her juxtaposition with Lydia; the other female character encountered on this missionary journey. The story of the slave-girl is both preceded and followed by references to Lydia (16:14-15, 16:40), which sets up the former in contrast with the latter.⁴³¹ Several notable differences between the two women emerge. In addition to distinctions between their material wealth, Spencer has observed that unlike Lydia, who he defines as a 'passive hearer and helper', the slave-girl is an 'active announcer and annoyer' of Paul.⁴³² The most notable difference, however, is in the outcome for each of the women. Lydia becomes a member of the Christian community, offering hospitality to the missionaries, and appearing to use her home as a meeting place for a new group of believers (16:40). In contrast, as has already been noted, the slave-girl's fate remains undisclosed. Her uncompassionate treatment at the hands of Paul does not promise much by way of a sympathetic future for her within the wider church.

⁴³⁰ See the discussion on this verb in Reimer, *Women*, 158-60.

⁴³¹ However, there is some debate over the temporal sequence of these events, since the journey to the house/place of prayer (τὴν προσευχὴν) in v.16 has been equated with the Sabbath day journey in v.13. See Haenchen, *Acts*, 495; F.J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity: Part 1: The Acts of the Apostles* (London, Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1933), 192.

⁴³² Spencer, *Acts*, 166.

What does this suggest about the rationale behind Paul's 'exorcism'? While the notion of Paul's reaction as irritation may fit the reduction of the girl's mantic abilities to the realm of superstition, it has been argued that neither of these points is satisfactory: the force of *διαπονηθείς* implies a more considered response than simply one of irritation, and this is matched by both the seriousness and the potential risk posed by exorcism. It has also been argued that although the characterisation of the slave-girl is ambiguous, both the interpretation of her activity as prophetic fulfilment and the possibility that it constitutes an example of divination, a practice widely condemned in the Septuagint, suggests against too hasty a dismissal of this figure. The idea of the exorcism as an example of the healing of an afflicted individual has also been rejected, since the supposed parallels to Jesus' treatment of the demon-possessed are not exact, and there is no evidence of the liberation of the slave-girl. What remains, then, is the idea that Paul's actions function to remove a potential threat, either to the missionaries themselves, or to their activity.

The Slave-Girl as a Potential Threat

This threat is posed by way of a two-fold confusion that the girl's words pose to her hearers. First, as noted above, the ambiguity of the girl's words raise questions over whether they are really a statement about the Christian God. These words may confuse those who hear them regarding the religious affiliation of the missionaries. Although no other passers-by are mentioned until the appearance of a crowd in the scene before the magistrates (16:21-23), hints at such an outcome can be found in the charges brought against the group by the girl's owners, particularly in the reference to their Jewish identity:

the only people aside from the ‘we-party’ who are sure to have heard her words are left with a confused perception of what the missionaries represent.

Second, the slave-girl’s mantic activity may also give a confusing impression of the appropriate means to gain an understanding of Christianity. This is not something that is simply achieved through spirit-filled activity, or the repetition of particular phrases, but through more rational understanding and community membership. The already noted contrast with the figure of Lydia contributes towards this impression: she becomes a member of a newly formed community, constructed around her home, whereas the story of the slave-girl does not find such resolution.

While the positive value attributed to spirit-filled activity within the prophecy from Joel in Acts 2:17-21 has been noted, its occurrence within the wider context of Peter’s speech to the crowds at the first Christian Pentecost must also be recognised (2:14-36). This explanation of events suggests that witnessing the phenomenon of speech in other tongues, though comprehensible, cannot provide the full picture.⁴³³ This is further underscored by consideration of the words of the demon-possessed in the Gospels: while their statements may be factually correct, their words are rejected. A similar idea may be at work within the depiction of the figure of Balaam in Numbers. While what he said was in accordance with Israelite belief, what he encouraged people to do led him to be remembered as a negative figure.⁴³⁴ Although neither of these cases offer precise parallels to what is found in Acts 16:16-18, they contribute towards the suggestion that true prophecy belongs within a community context, and contributes towards community-

⁴³³ This portrayal of tongues-speech as ‘foreign languages’ (2:7-11) may already reflect a rationalising tendency towards these phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles, although the later occurrences (10:46; 19:6) are less clear-cut.

⁴³⁴ Balaam is of particular interest since both Philo and Josephus attribute the kind of ventriloquism associated with the pythian spirit to this figure. (Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 319-320).

building. Without the ‘negative example’ of the slave-girl, this may not be something that is adequately understood by readers of the Acts narrative. In this way, Acts 16:16-18 can be interpreted as a test case for the negotiation of the boundaries of the Christian community.

Treatments of this account that assume a clear-cut distinction between pagan and Christian religious practice fail to capture the inherent challenges of discerning who ought to be ‘in’ and who ought to be ‘out’ of the Christian community, particularly in the light of the expanding and shifting boundaries of the movement. While these developments represent a challenge to existing value systems and membership criteria, there remains a distinction between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ and between acceptable and unacceptable practices.

The confusing nature of this passage has been reflected in the interpretative attempts of later commentators. In essence, however, this thesis argues that the ambiguity found at several points within these three verses is not a difficulty that needs to be resolved, but rather an important feature of the story itself. The unresolved questions within this account lead the reader/hearer to question, alongside Paul, what the slave-girl represents, and what might be an appropriate response.

While there is no denying that ultimately the missionaries overcome the obstacles with which they are faced – in the short term they are miraculously freed from prison by an earthquake (and subsequently dismissed by the magistrates) – it is not the case that the story of the slave-girl forms a simplistic example of Christianity’s easy victory over paganism. Within the figure of the slave-girl, one finds hints of a prophet of the last days and a deceptively influential woman whose actions pose a potential threat to the Christian movement. While the girl is ultimately dismissed, she personifies the potential dangers and abuses of dream-visions. And most importantly of all, these dangers occur on the very

edges of the programmatic use of Joel 3:1-5 (MT 2:28-32). The pouring out of the spirit in the last days is not immune to potential abuse, misuse, and misinterpretation of dream-visions.

Summary of the Function of Dream-Visions in these Accounts

At the level of cultural context, the multiple dreams, visions, and related phenomena treated within this chapter demonstrate something of the range of functions for dreaming within the wider cultural context. As emphasised in Part I of the thesis, this range of functions is not simply attributable to the differing perspectives of individual authors, but rather it indicates the potential of dream-visions to be significant or insignificant, angelic or demonic in origin, and for their meaning to be couched in symbolism or clearly stated within the dream-vision itself. Accurate understanding of the meaning and significance of dream-visions is not something that can be pre-determined, but must rather be shaped by the context and content of individual dream-visions and their recipients.

At the narrative level, many of the dream-visions treated within this chapter contribute to the plot by adding unexpected twists, delightful surprises, and numerous moments of suspense. As already articulated, this function is dependant upon the inherent uncertainty, ambiguity and risk associated with dreaming, and this function of dream-vision reports within the Acts narrative should be understood as a demonstration of awareness of this perspective. Without the presence of doubt, dream-visions could not function in this way.

In terms of characterisation, several of the dream-vision reports treated here offer a window into the inner life of individual characters. This is especially notable in relation to

the report of Stephen's visionary experience, which goes beyond this to outline a Jewish perspective upon the Christian mission, embodied in the character and experience of Stephen. This account does not include the uncertainty or ambiguity found within many of the other dream-vision reports, although the martyrdom of Stephen once again highlights the risks of such divine encounters.

Conclusion

The aim of the final chapter has been to demonstrate that the dream-visions contained within the Acts of the Apostles are not only difficult to interpret and located among surprising people in unexpected places, they are also risky. This assertion of the danger posed by dream-visions as presented in the Acts narrative is a key aspect of the contribution of the current project. It has been argued that these experiences not only expose claimants and their communities to the dangers of retribution and rejection by other human beings, but that dream-visions involve inherently risky encounters with shadowy figures, heavenly beings, and perhaps even God Himself. Such experiences necessitate a journey to a liminal location, and this, too, entails unavoidable risks.

Conclusion to Part II

The purpose of Part II of this thesis has been to analyse the function of dreams and visions within the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, with particular attention being given to the question of whether their presentation is indicative of an awareness of the potential for the misinterpretation or even abuse of these phenomena within the boundaries of Christian community. The dream-vision reports in Acts were evaluated at the level of cultural context, meaning the stated type, source and purpose of the described dream-vision, and at the level of narrative function, meaning the significance of the dream-vision report in shaping the story of Acts, especially in relation to aspects of plot and character development.

Analysis of dreaming in Acts at the level of cultural context echoed the findings within much earlier scholarship that one central aspect of the presentation of these phenomena is their demonstration of God's involvement in the unfolding Christian mission, and the place of that mission within a broader understanding of salvation history. Dream-visions are presented as powerful moments of divine-human communication, and their content, when interpreted correctly, offers a means of foretelling the future at both an individual and a corporate level. As a result, dream-visions represent an important tool for decision-making, contributing to the radical new direction of the Christian community in incorporating the Gentiles. The somewhat circular way in which dream-visions are also presented as fulfilment of earlier dream-visions, especially those found in the Scriptures, lends authority to their overall significance and place within God's plan for human history.

However, analysis of the dream-vision reports within Acts resulted in two important qualifications of this largely positive portrayal of these phenomena. Firstly, the

function of dream-visions as moments of divine-human communication that have the potential to foretell the future is argued for rather than simply assumed. Many of the dream-vision reports include details that underscore their authenticity and reliability, such as the presence of multiple witnesses (Pentecost, Paul's experience on the Damascus Road) or the corroboration of additional dream-visions (Peter and Cornelius, Paul and Ananias). The accounts of Peter and Paul's respective dream-visions follow the formal general structure of dream-vision reports found elsewhere in the literature of the first century, and this is indicative of an awareness of the expected conventions in reporting these phenomena. This, in turn, suggests an attention to detail and some degree of literary sophistication in the presentation of dream-visions in Acts.

The second qualification to the broadly positive portrayal of dream-visions is that the treatment of these phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles demonstrates awareness of other perspectives. The accusation of drunkenness in the story of the first Christian Pentecost (2:12-15) highlights one alternative interpretation of the events described, though the unfolding narrative indicates that this view is mistaken. The third account of Paul's visionary experience is met with an accusation of madness from Festus (26:24-25), and this, too, indicates that not everyone is persuaded by these claims. However, it is not only 'outsiders' to the Christian movement who voice these alternative perspectives. Disagreements and uncertainty regarding the veracity and interpretation of particular dream-visions are also portrayed as emerging from among the believers. For example, Ananias' reaction to his own dream-vision is one of anxiety and resistance (9:13-14), and there is disagreement over the appropriate response to Agabus' prophecy concerning Paul's fate (21:12-14). Furthermore, Agabus' prophecy is only partially fulfilled, which hints at the symbolic nature of the imagery used within this prophecy. The apparent lack of

success of the Macedonian mission that was inaugurated by Paul's dream-vision at Troas (16:9-10) raises questions about the interpretation of this experience, and the unusual story of the fortune-telling slave-girl (16:6-22) portrays a darker side to the art of divination.

Analysis of dreaming at the level of narrative function underlined the significance of the dream-vision reports in shaping and developing aspects of characterisation and plot within the book of Acts. In terms of characterisation, the dream-vision reports in Acts enable access to the thoughts and motivations of individual characters and contribute to understanding of their place, status, and authority within the community of believers. In terms of the plot, dream-visions provide important structure within the narrative by functioning as flash-forwards (Pentecost) and flashbacks (the repetition of Paul's dream-vision on the road to Damascus) to important points within the story. They also function as narrative 'hinges' that facilitate the transfer to new sections or settings within the narrative (Paul's dream at Troas). Most importantly of all for the purpose of the current project, the dream-vision reports in Acts also help to create suspense within the plot. The reason that they are able to function in this way depends precisely upon the ambiguity and uncertainty that surrounds these phenomena: the amazement at the events being described that encourages a reader/hearer of the text to ask, 'can this really be true?'; the challenge of interpreting the symbolic imagery of dreaming such as that of the unclean food within Peter's dream-vision (10:11-16), the meaning of which is not immediately resolved within the narrative; uncertainty over the source or reliability of divinatory practice (16:6-22) and even the delightful surprise over the level of reality at which Peter's angelophany and escape from prison is taking place (12:6-11).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to argue that the presentation of dreams and visions within the Acts of the Apostles demonstrates an awareness of the complexity and challenge involved in correctly responding to these phenomena. Dreams and visions in Acts are presented as having the potential to foretell the future and to facilitate divine-human communication, and the significant dreams and visions experienced by Gentiles and Jews alike are to be regarded as markers of the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh, and as signs of the end of the age. However, their portrayal within the Acts narrative also includes an awareness of the contested nature of these phenomena, and of the inherent risks involved in discerning the meaning and significance of individual dream-vision reports, both in terms of the potentially violent reactions such reports may evoke in others, and in the potential for their misinterpretation.

Chapter Review

Part I began with the Thesis Introduction, in which the complex category of ‘religious experience’ was explored. It was acknowledged that reports of such phenomena are difficult to subject to academic enquiry, and that this is a task that is further complicated by the legacy of earlier such attempts. However, it was also noted that some of the lack of consensus over the limits and parameters of research in this field is not a result of inadequate attempts to define the category, but rather that it reflects the inherent ambiguity of encounters with these phenomena, for observers and participants alike. An attempt was made to separate the ‘etic’ and ‘emic’ components of this debate, with the language of

‘religious experience’ reserved for second order enquiries, and the decision to use the term ‘experiences deemed religious’ to refer to the ‘vague’ and generalised categorisations of experience that occur at this level.

Attention then turned to the way in which phenomena such as dreams, visions, trance, ecstatic prophecy, portents and so forth were connected or categorised within primary texts from the first century of the Common Era. Two indicative examples were briefly discussed: the grouping of what were termed ‘Joel 2 phenomena’ within the Acts of the Apostles (2:17-21), gathered together as markers of the last days, and the list of different forms of divination included within Artemidorus’ *Oneirocritica* (II.69), which were differentiated on account of their truth or falsehood. Additional analysis of the language of rationality and madness within Laura Salah Nasrallah’s work led to the suggestion that, first, there is little evidence for consensus over the parameters of such categories within extant texts, and second, that a number of treatments of these phenomena within the primary texts were driven not by concern over definition, but rather by a concern to establish the legitimacy of particular claims to such experiences.⁴³⁵ This is not something that has been adequately picked up in existing research, particularly within studies of dreams, visions and related phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles, and it was suggested that the absence of such recognition represented an oversight that limited understanding of the scope and significance of the dream-vision reports within the Acts narrative. It is this gap within existing research that the current thesis has attempted to address. The decision to focus on dreams and visions rather than the full range of ‘Joel 2 phenomena’ was one that was primarily guided by the scope of the current project.

⁴³⁵ Laura Salah Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).

The method of the thesis was also outlined briefly within the Introduction. Emphasis was placed upon the narrative form of the Acts of the Apostles, and the intention to analyse the dream-vision reports within this context was stated. Importantly, however, the goal of this project was not to understand the Acts narrative in its own right, but rather to explore what the narrative presentation of dreams and visions might indicate about the function and significance of these phenomena within the ‘narrative world’ of the Acts of the Apostles. This was understood to refer not simply to the interior story of the Acts narrative, but to also incorporate the space within which the process of story-telling takes place.

The first chapter of the thesis offered a more in depth analysis of the current state of the field, and this discussion began with an outline of the most significant texts to date that have dealt with dreams, visions and related phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles. For reasons of space and scope, this was limited to works of scholarship produced within the last century. Overall, it was suggested that there was already ample recognition of the function of the dream-vision reports in the Book of Acts as markers of divine involvement in the Christian mission. However, the tendency for scholars to focus upon the vertical dimension of the reports of these phenomena (namely, the interaction between the divine world and human beings facilitated by such encounters), has been at the cost of sufficient focus upon the horizontal dimension (namely, the human task of treating and interpreting claims to such experiences within a community context). This horizontal dimension, and in particular the possibility of the misinterpretation or misuse of dream-visions, was highlighted as a particular point of focus within the current project. Brief comparison of the findings of Acts researchers and a sample of scholarly treatments of the same phenomena within the Pauline Epistles demonstrated that this gap in attending to the

horizontal dimension was by no means a defining feature of broader treatments of these phenomena within other early Christian texts.

The latter part of this chapter offered a more detailed analysis of the work of J.D.G. Dunn, one of the few scholars to engage with the horizontal dimension and with the question of misuse of these phenomena.⁴³⁶ It was suggested, however, that Dunn's research in this area is limited by an overly narrow conception of distinctive Christian 'religious experience' that does not reflect the ideology of the book of Acts. Moreover, it was argued that such research has been overly influenced by a quasi-Weberian model of the development of religious movements whereby one might identify an initial 'uncritical' phase of formation centred upon charismatic experiences that are only later subjected to (or replaced by) more rational forms of enquiry. This characterisation was challenged, and an alternative was proffered in which such experiences were subjected to critical enquiry from the outset. It was suggested that in order to shine further light upon the accounts of dreams, visions, and related phenomena within Acts there was a need for an alternative starting point that was not constrained by assumptions concerning 'primitive' perceptions of these phenomena. This was to be accomplished by an exploration of dreaming within the wider cultural context from which the text of Acts emerged.

The second chapter of the thesis addressed the treatment of dream-visions within this broader context, focusing in the main upon first century Greek texts, and exploring the terminology, classification, and function of dreaming. It was discovered that an extremely wide range of different perspectives could be identified, and that attitudes towards dream-

⁴³⁶ James D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1970); James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975; repr. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997).

visions spanned from dismissal of these experiences as meaningless right through to the belief in divine communication or prediction of the future within dream-visions.

Importantly, it was found that this range did not simply reflect the viewpoints of different individuals or groups, with some having a positive attitude towards the significance of dream-visions and others rejecting such beliefs. On the contrary, individual writers outlined a range of possible interpretations of dream-visions, which may in part have been influenced by beliefs about the source and location of different dream-visions. Moreover, even those dreams that had the potential to reveal divine communication were often full of confusing imagery that required careful interpretation, and this ambiguity was only heightened by the existence of malevolent, false, or deceptive dream-visions.

Overall, while positive attitudes towards the significance of dream-visions were amply attested (perhaps particularly in the first and second centuries of the Common Era), this view was tempered by significant uncertainty over various aspects of the experience and interpretation of dreaming. Such uncertainty was also attested in the presentation of dream-visions within narrative contexts, and it was proposed that two levels of function could be detected for dream-visions within narratives: the level of cultural context, and the level of narrative function. Both of these levels reflected elements of the ambiguity of dream-visions and their interpretations, and this was demonstrated with the indicative example of Josephus' account of his own dream-vision in *Jewish War* (3.351-254).

Part I of the thesis concluded with an outline of the intended approach to the dream-vision reports within the Acts of the Apostles. This included an attentiveness to the horizontal dimension of dreaming within the story of Acts, and it would also take seriously the uncertainty surrounding dream-visions within the wider cultural context. Two possibilities were raised at this point: either, as Dunn has argued, the Acts narrative fails to

recognise the potential for misinterpretation and misuse of dream-visions, which would make it a fascinatingly anomalous text in terms of its attitude towards dreaming, or, the hypothesis of the current project, the Book of Acts does demonstrate this awareness, albeit within the parameters of the narrative genre.

Part II of the thesis comprised exegetical analysis of some of the dream-vision accounts within Acts, beginning in Chapter Three with an exploration of the the account of the first Christian Pentecost. This chapter analysed the description of the events themselves as well as of the explanation and interpretation provided within Peter's speech. Brief attention was given to the challenges posed by the quest to harmonise the phenomena described in Acts 2 with the later Acts reports of tongues-speech. It was argued that the Pentecost account represents an interpretative key for the unfolding story of Christian origins, and the central place afforded to dreams, visions and related phenomena within this account was also significant for the interpretation of the book as a whole. The value thus afforded to such phenomena was noted, but, contrary to much existing scholarship, it was suggested that this was something that the Acts account argued for rather than simply assumed. The events of Pentecost are portrayed as divinely promised, scripturally supported, multiply attested and widely witnessed. While these astonishing events are portrayed as 'new', they contain a number of typological echoes from Old Testament texts, as well as following the wider literary form of dream-vision reports.

The transformative impact of these experiences is also clearly portrayed in the number of witnesses who join the Christian community. The latter part of this chapter addressed the brief description of the so-called 'community of goods' depicted at the end of the Acts account, and the likely nature of this community was explored. It was suggested that the idealised portrayal of this group, an impression that is subsequently

problematised as the narrative unfolds, might offer an interpretative hint for the understanding of dreams, visions and related phenomena within the Acts narrative. It was suggested that the account within Acts 2 may be similarly idealised, and that consideration of the narrative as a whole would reveal a rather more complex relationship with these phenomena.

The fourth chapter examined the visionary experiences of Peter and Cornelius, and the function of these reports within the decision to welcome Gentiles into the community of believers. Particular attention was given to the acceptance of the experience of an outsider, not only as an 'authentic' divine encounter, but as an interpretative key for the development of the Christian movement. This chapter argued that the series of events that led to the Gentile Pentecost challenged any easy placement of the parameters of significant or divinely sent dream-visions along group boundaries, whereby insider experience is deemed authentic and outsider experience inauthentic, perhaps even demonic. It was suggested that the central themes of the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh and the associated expansion of the Christian mission offered a framework for the Acts story in which the need for careful appraisal of individual dream-visions occupies a vital place. Assessment of the second account of Peter's experience in Acts 11 offered an insight into the human struggle to interpret dream-visions, as well as their apparent multivalency, representing a further challenge to the characterisation of these phenomena only as signs of God's hand at work.

The fifth chapter treated the repeated reports of Paul's experience upon the road to Damascus. While some analysis was offered of each of the three accounts in turn, the focus of the chapter was in considering the significance and function of the multiple versions of this story. It was argued that, in spite of popular characterisation of the 'Damascus road

experience' as one of instantaneous conversion, the process of Paul's transformation in Acts was far more lengthy than has previously been allowed, and that it is perhaps not until the third account of his experience that Paul truly becomes a representative of the Christian community. Further consideration was given to the nature of this community as it is portrayed in Acts, and the idea of the liminal location of the Christian movement as a whole within Luke's model of salvation history was introduced.

The sixth chapter offered further discussion of the risky nature of dreams, visions, and related phenomena within the narrative. Exegetical analysis of several briefer accounts was offered in support of this proposal, including the martyrdom of Stephen (7:55-60), Peter's escape from prison (12:6-17), the prophecy of Agabus (11:27-30; 21:4-14), Paul's dream at Troas (16:6-10), and the subsequent encounter with the prophesying slave girl (16:16-24). These accounts hint at the challenges of appropriate interpretation of these phenomena, and it was suggested that the encounter with the slave girl in particular represented awareness of and engagement with the issue of the abuse of divinatory practice. This did not come in the form of a simple prohibition, but in a carefully negotiated encounter with an ambiguous figure whose intentions were unclear. This led to the conclusion that, while dream-visions retain their significance throughout the Acts narrative and maintain their function as signs of God's hand at work, they are also presented at times as ambiguous, unpredictable, difficult to interpret and potentially dangerous phenomena.

Suggestions for Further Research

There is much work that could be done to build upon and develop the work of this thesis, and three areas in particular would benefit from further enquiry. The first concerns the question of community identity construction and the depiction of authority within Acts. The current project has analysed the function of one source of authority and influence, but this could be developed through comparison with other sources such as Scripture and the theological and Christological claims made by the characters within Acts. In other words, the dream-vision reports represent one piece within a much larger jigsaw. This broader question has been touched on within existing scholarship, primarily that which has focused upon leadership patterns among the earliest Christians,⁴³⁷ or within studies of biblical prophecy.⁴³⁸ However, the significance of these findings need to be drawn into conversation with the nuances of the portrayal of dream-visions outlined here.

The second avenue for further enquiry concerns the way in which narrative (and in particular, the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles) is used for teaching. The notion that narrative forms a highly effective didactic device has been raised briefly at several points within this thesis, but it would be beneficial to examine the dynamics of this process in far greater detail.⁴³⁹ In concluding his study of religious experiences and the activity of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, J.D.G. Dunn describes four models of corporate ‘religious experience’ that he believes can be detected within different texts: the Lukan

⁴³⁷ For example, James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971); Simon J. De Vries, *Prophet Against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (1 Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (London, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979).

⁴³⁸ For example, Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision-Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); Graham Shaw, *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1983).

⁴³⁹ This has been considered in relation to the Lukan corpus in William S. Kurz, ‘Narrative Models for Imitation in Luke-Acts’, in David L. Balch (ed.), *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 171–89; John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992).

model, the Pauline model, the model of the Pastoral Epistles, and the Johannine model.

Dunn summarises the first of these as follows:

First, there is Luke with his uncritical glorying in the vitality of the charismatic and ecstatic experiences of the first generation. His presentation excites and enthuses, but because he glosses over the problems involved and all but ignores the strains and stresses that characterized the same period, his treatment provides no lasting paradigm or norm for Christian experience, individual or corporate. Those who try to set up Acts in this role will soon find themselves faced with the questions which Luke avoided.⁴⁴⁰

This thesis has challenged Dunn's portrayal of the Lukan attitude towards these phenomena, and has demonstrated its failure to adequately deal with the nuances contained within the Acts narrative. However, there are some parts of Dunn's concluding statement that are correct: Acts does not offer a normative paradigm for responding to dreams, visions, and related phenomena. Far from representing a failure on the part of the author, however, Dunn's expectation that one *should* be able to find such features within New Testament texts, and particularly within the context of a narrative such as the Acts of the Apostles, demonstrates his own failure to understand what is truly significant within the Lukan portrayal.

Just as was noted in the treatment of the terminology of religious experience, the desire for well-defined categories and clear compartmentalisation can be unhelpful. As soon as one is able to grasp hold of a concept, to outline its parameters and to list its features, the need for critical assessment of the veracity or validity of such experiences is lost. Whether the boundary lines are drawn around the edges of particular communities, or on the grounds of criteria such as those posed by Dunn on the basis of his analysis of the

⁴⁴⁰ J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975; repr. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 359.

Pauline Epistles, however carefully these parameters are constructed, once they are in place the need to question and the need to approach individual claims to such experience with caution is lost.

In essence, dreams, visions and related phenomena offer an opportunity for the crossing of boundaries and the transformation of expectations. They occupy a place of paradox, and are located in between the heavenly and the earthly, the now and the not yet, the rational and the ecstatic. They are also situated in the difficult place that lies between truth and falsehood, discovery and confusion, belonging and alienation. In spite of Dunn's repeated observation of the potential for the misinterpretation and abuse of these phenomena, his quest to provide definitions offers at best an inadequate solution to this problem.

In contrast, the story of the Acts of the Apostles is able to expound both the risks and the rewards of these phenomena in a far more sophisticated way than has previously been allowed for. In part this can be attributed to the suitability of the narrative genre for capturing complexity and for modelling the appropriate response to such challenging phenomena. Indeed, the significance of this feature of the Acts narrative may well go beyond the reports of 'Joel 2 phenomena' to address the broader difficulties faced by the earliest Christians: the perpetual liminality of the Christian community within the upside down kingdom depicted within the story. In this sense the significance of these phenomena within the Acts of the Apostles may extend to model the challenges of occupying an ambiguous and uncertain place within the *cosmos*. The hand of God is at work, and the encounters within dream-visions offer a key to navigating both the awe and the disruption of this divine activity.

In considering an appropriate method with which to engage with location, space, and place in the analysis of dream-visions, socio-anthropological perspectives may have much to contribute: this is a third avenue for further research.⁴⁴¹ Approaches to boundary-crossing and community membership might usefully be informed by ritual studies such as the work of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner,⁴⁴² and also by contemporary analysis of religious movements, such as the work of Thomas Tweed and Kim Knott.⁴⁴³

In addition to these three possibilities, the analysis of dream-visions could in itself be developed through engagement with earlier receptions of the Acts of the Apostles, particularly in relation to Patristic treatments of this material. Research in this field could also be extended by means of comparison between the reports in Luke and Acts, an area that has only minimally been treated to date.

Closing Comment

This thesis has agreed with John B.F. Miller that these phenomena ‘resist simple categorisation’.⁴⁴⁴ It has been suggested that, while the frequent references to dreams and

⁴⁴¹ For general discussion of sociological approaches to biblical studies, see, Gerd Theissen, ‘Die soziologische Auswertung religiöser Überlieferungen: Ihre methodologischen Probleme am Beispiel des Urchristentums’, *Kairos*, 17 (1975), 284-299; Philip J. Richter, ‘Recent Sociological Approaches to the Study of the New Testament’, *Religion*, 14 (1984), 77-90; David G. Horrell, ‘Introduction: Social Scientific Interpretation of the New Testament: Retrospect and Prospect’, in David G. Horrell (ed.), *Social Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 3-27.

⁴⁴² Arnold Van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage: Étude Systématique des Rites* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1909); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick; London: Aldine Transaction, 2007). See also Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Mark McVann, ‘Rituals of Status-Transformation in Luke-Acts: The Case of Jesus the Prophet’ in Jerome H. Neyrey (ed.) *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), 333-360; Dennis C. Duling, ‘Recruitment in the Jesus Movement in Social-Scientific Perspective’, in John J. Pilch (ed.), *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honour of Bruce J. Malina* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2001), 132-175.

⁴⁴³ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2006); Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2005).

⁴⁴⁴ John B.F. Miller, *Convinced that God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God’s Will in Luke-Acts* (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2007), 4.

visions within the narrative reflect their significance in enabling divine-human communication, foretelling the future, and affirming the unfolding plan of God, the complexity of the reports and the diverse responses they elicit reflect the inherent ambiguity of these phenomena. The flexibility of this category enables its effective use as a tool in community-identity construction, but equally opens up the category to potential misinterpretation and misuse.

In closing, the discussion returns to the question used in the title of this thesis, ‘what if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?’ This is the question posed by the Scribes from among the Pharisees to their Sadducean opponents during Paul’s stormy appearance before the Jewish council. It is a question that aptly sums up the issues that are faced in the use and study of dreams, visions, and related phenomena. They are an effective rhetorical tool that are frequently used in an effort to clinch arguments, yet they are also significant in their own right, because, where the genuine encounters with the divine facilitated by dreams and visions can be detected, everything changes. The meaning of dreams and visions is difficult to grasp hold of, as the reports of these encounters are always secondary, and vulnerable to misinterpretation or even to deliberate misuse. Yet these difficult phenomena, where they can be adequately detected, are the promised sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit among God’s people.

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