

CHAPTER II

The Role of the Christian Prophet in Acts

E. Earle Ellis

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In several passages in Acts, the phenomenon of prophecy is described to Christian disciples generally. Thus, the Pentecostal experience of tongues, which is identified as prophecy,¹ is manifested by the whole Christian community. Likewise, the Ephesian disciples “began to speak with tongues and prophesy” (Acts 19:6) upon their reception of the Holy Spirit. Ananias, who received a prophetic revelation concerning Paul, also is designated simply as “a certain disciple” (Acts 9:10). Alongside these texts is the equally significant fact that Luke restricts the term or title *προφήτης*, as it is used of his contemporaries, to a select number of “leading men” (cf. Acts 15:22) who exercise considerable influence in the Christian community.² Among them are a group from the Jerusalem church visiting Antioch, including Agabus (Acts 11:27 f.; cf. 21:10); a group resident in Antioch, including Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1);³ and the two prophets who accompanied the Jerusalem Decree to Antioch, Judas Barsabbas and Silas (Acts 15:22, 32). Peter also, who is not called *προφήτης*, nevertheless has the marks of a prophet, for example, in the knowledge of men’s hearts (Acts 5:3; 8:21 ff.; cf. Luke 7:39) and in the experience and proclamation of revelations in visions and dreams.⁴ Among such leaders

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perhaps should be included the four daughters of Philip “who prophesied”.⁵

¹ Acts 2:4, 11, 17 f. Probably the equation of the proclamation in tongues with prophecy arises because the various tongues are, in fact, the native, understood languages of the respective hearers. Similarly, the “prophecy” in Acts 19:6 probably is an interpretation of the preceding strange “tongues” (cf. Acts 10:46; 1 Cor. 14:13). This appears to be preferable to an identification of the two phenomena although that cannot be ruled out (cf. H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte* [Göttingen, 1963], p. 27). In 1 Cor. 14:5, 39. Paul also desires that the whole congregation should prophesy.

² Apart from references to Old Testament prophets cf. Lk. 4:24 7:16, 39; 9:8, 19; 13:33; 24:19; Acts 3:22 f.; cf. Acts 7:37 (of Jesus) and Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10; cf. Lk. 11:49 (of Christians). Cf. Lk. 1:76; 7:26; 20:6 (of the Baptist). The verb form always in Acts refers to Christians: Acts 2:17 f.; 19:6; 21:9.

³ It is probable *pace* J. Lindblom that both “prophets and teachers” describe the whole group. See below, p. 62.

⁴ Acts 10:10; cf. 9:10; 16:9; 18:9; 22:17 ff.; 27:23. Visions and dreams (Joel 3:1 = Acts 2:17) are specific manifestations of prophecy. Cf. Num. 12:6; J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 147f., 201. Apparently miracles were not necessarily or even usually associated with a prophet (*ibid.*, pp. 201 f., 217; cf. Jn. 10:41 with Lk. 7:26 par.). In Lk. 7:16 the disciples and the crowd make an explicit connexion between them; but Lk. 7:20 ff. better expresses the Evangelist’s view of the significance of miracles. Acts (2:17 f., 43; 5:12-16; 10:34, 40; 19:11 f.) distinguishes prophecy from miracle working and, like Paul (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Rom. 15:19), associates signs and miracles with the “apostle”, but not exclusively so (Acts 6:8; 8:6f., 13; 1 Cor. 12:28 f.; 14:22).

⁵ Acts 21:9. The patristic references (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3, 31, 4; 3, 37, i) suggest that their activity was not an occasional phenomenon but was a distinguished and long-remembered ministry. So, J. Lindblom, *Gesichte und Offenbarungen* (Lund, 1968), p. 179, who distinguishes them as persons who have the prophetic charism as “a continuing possession”. Cf. Lk. 2:36 where Anna is called a prophetess; Rev. 2:20.

In summary, Christian prophecy in Acts is represented as an eschatological power of the Holy Spirit from God (Acts 2:17) or from the risen Jesus (Acts 1:8; 2:17, 33; cf. Ps. 68:19 (18); Eph. 4:8). Although prophecy is a possibility for any Christian, it is primarily identified with certain leaders who exercise it as a ministry (see below). The specific "prophetic" functions of these persons is more difficult to establish. That is, which of their activities are specifically a manifestation of their role as *προφήτης*? What is the relationship of prophecy to other ministries in Acts? To identify the role of the Christian prophet it is necessary to discover Luke's understanding of what constitutes and what distinguishes prophecy.

I

Certain functions of the Christian *προφήτης* are clearly reminiscent of the role of the prophet in the Old Testament. In addition to the marks of the prophet mentioned above, these include the prediction of future events (Acts 11:28; 20:23, 25; 27:22), the declaration of divine judgments (Acts 13:11; 28:25-28), and the employment of symbolic actions (Acts 21:11). The prophets in Acts also expound the Scriptures and "exhort" and "strengthen" the disciples. Whether these activities also represent for Luke a distinctly prophetic function requires a closer look.

Luke's use of *παπακαλέω/παράκλησις* with reference to Christian prophets is relatively frequent. The verb is used to describe the proclamation of the Baptist⁶ as well as the ministry of those in Acts who are designated prophets.⁷ As a description of Peter's preaching, it may be one of the prophetic traits that characterize Luke's presentation of the apostle's ministry.⁸ In Acts 15:32 the phrase *παπακαλέω καὶ ἐπιστηρίζω* ("exhort and strengthen") is specifically connected to the fact that Judas and Silas are prophets.⁹ It is found elsewhere in the New Testament only

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in Acts 14:22, used of the prophets Paul and Barnabas, and (with the cognate *στηρίζω*) in the Thessalonian letters.¹⁰

The noun *παράκλησις*, which occurs in the New Testament only in Luke—Acts, Paul and Hebrews, is associated by Luke with the activity of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Furthermore, the written

⁶ Lk 3:18; cf. 7:26.

⁷ Barnabas (Acts 11:23), Paul and Silas (Acts 16:40), Paul (Acts 20:2). It is noteworthy, however, that the term is not used to describe the ministry of Jesus.

⁸ Acts 2:40 (*διαμαρτύρομαι καὶ παρακαλέω*); cf. 1 Thes. 2:12; above, p. 55, n. 4. On *μαρτυρέω* cf. also Acts 10:42 f.; 18:5; 20:21 ff.; Eph. 4:17. It appears at times to be virtually a *terminus technicus* for an utterance in the Spirit, i.e., prophecy.

⁹ F. J. F. Jackson and K. Lake, *BC*, 4, p. 182, noting the parallelism between Acts 15:27 and Acts 15:32, translate "Judas and Silas themselves, being prophets..." and reject the reading, "who also were themselves prophets", with its allusion to Acts 13:1 f.

¹⁰ 1 Thes. 3:2; 2 Thes. 2:17. The former describes the task given to Timothy, their "fellow-worker", by Paul and Silas.

¹¹ The church walks "in the *παράκλησις* of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31); the prophets Paul and Barnabas are invited to give a "word of *παράκλησις*", i.e., an exposition of Scripture (Acts 13:15); the Jerusalem Decree,

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παράκλησις of the Jerusalem Decree is set in parallel with the verbal "exhortation" of the prophets Judas and Silas, and the term "son of παράκλησις", applied to Barnabas in Acts 4:36, possibly represents "son of prophecy".¹² The understanding of παράκλησις as the specific ministry of a prophet is supported in the Pauline literature by 1 Corinthians 14:2 f. There the prophets' ministry of "edification" is accomplished by means of παράκλησις and παραμυθία¹³ which are, in the words of G. Stählin, "a part of the work of prophesying".¹⁴ A similar impression is given in Romans 15:4 f., where the Scripture or God gives παράκλησις and in 2 Corinthians 5:20 where God "exhorts" through Paul and Timothy.¹⁵ It is true that in Paul παράκλησις is not always explicitly identified as a Spirit-mediated, eschatological reality and, even as a charism, it can be listed alongside of and distinct from παράκλησις (Rom. 12:8). Nevertheless, it probably has a special connexion with Christian prophecy, even when that connexion is not explicitly expressed.

To return to Acts 15:32, in the light of the above considerations it is very likely that the fact that Judas and Silas are prophets is the basis of their ministry of παράκλησις.¹⁶ The clause should then be translated, "since they themselves also were prophets". It compares their verbal exhortation with the written, and also prophetic, παράκλησις of the Jerusalem Decree.¹⁷

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In Luke's thought παράκλησις is one way in which the Christian prophets exercise their ministry and, in this context, is a form of prophecy.

The interpretation of Scripture, usually in the synagogues, is a key feature of the missions of the prophets Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silas, as well as of Peter and other Christian leaders.¹⁸ This manner of teaching is elaborated in Acts 13:16-41 in the form of a synagogue homily. It may or may not be significant that the "prophets" in question also are "teachers". (The exposition of Scripture is ascribed to Barnabas [Acts 13:5; 14:1] but not to Silas.) Also

which is given through the Holy Spirit, is termed a παράκλησις (Acts 15:28, 31). Cf. O. Schmitz, *TDNT* 5 (1954-1968), pp. 794-96.

¹² *Bar-ne bū'ah* or *bar-nebiyya*, assuming that παράκλησις in Acts 4:36 means "exhortation". So, already commonly a century ago, J. A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York, 1884 [1857], I, p. 183; cf. H. J. Holtzmann (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, Tübingen), 1901, p. 45; Jackson and Lake, *op. cit.*, 4, p. 49; F. F. Bruce (*The Acts of the Apostles*, London, ²1952), pp. 130 f. If this interpretation is correct, his Christian name like Peter's (Matt. 16:18) describes what his distinctive ministry or function in the Christian community was or was to be (cf. Matt. 1:21; Acts 13:1). The clause, "called Barnabas by the apostles", makes improbable the suggestion that Barnabas was a family designation or surname.

¹³ That is, *paraklesis* and *paramuthia* show or define the nature of the *oikodome*. Similarly, H. D. Wendland, *Die Briefe an die Korinther* (Göttingen, 1965 [1936]), p. 109; H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen, 1969), p. 277; otherwise: A. Robertson and A. Plummer (*The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, Edinburgh, 1914), p. 206. Cf. 1 Thess. 2:12; Phil. 2:1 where these two terms are joined to describe respectively the ministries of Paul, Silas and Timothy and, more generally, the effects of the Holy Spirit in the congregation.

¹⁴ G. Stählin, *TDNT* 5 (1954-1968), p. 82. Cf. 1 Cor. 14:31.

¹⁵ Cf. also 2 Thes. 2:16 f.

¹⁶ So, E. Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen, ⁶1968), p. 395.

¹⁷ Acts 15:27 f., 31. E. Käsemann (*New Testament Questions of Today* [London, 1969], p. 74) has called attention to the parallel between Acts 15:28 and the edict of the Spirit reflected in 1 Cor. 14:37. See below, p. 61.

¹⁸ E.g., Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12 (Peter); 6:9-11; 7:2-53 (Stephen); 8:30-35 (Philip); 9:20-22; 13:5, 16-41; 17:2, 10 f., 17 (22-31); 18:4; 19:8; 26:22 f.; 28:23 (Paul); 18:24-28 (Apollos).

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this activity in Acts is not described as "prophecy" nor limited to "prophets". In what degree then can it be regarded as "prophetic" activity?

The interpretation of Scripture as an activity of a prophet was not unknown in the first century since it was explicitly ascribed to Daniel (9:2, 24). It may be inferred also from other Old Testament texts in which the prophet uses and reapplies older biblical phraseology and ideas.¹⁹ These phenomena support the views of S. Krauss and others who connect the prophets with the origins of the synagogue and regard them as the first to dispense religious teachings in such assemblies.²⁰ The rabbinic tradition, reflects a similar picture. According to the Targum to judges 5:9, Deborah, under prophetic inspiration, "did not cease to give exposition of the Torah."²¹ The rabbis, moreover, regarded themselves, as the teachers of Israel, to be the successors of the prophets: they sat "in Moses' seat".²²

With respect to the interpretation of Scripture, then, there was not a

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sharp division between the prophet and the teacher. This is perhaps to be most clearly observed in the Qumran community's "teacher" (*moreh*) and the wider number functioning as "instructors" (*maskilim*). In a perceptive essay Professor Bruce has compared the wisdom possessed by "Daniel the prophet"²³ and by the "wise" (*maskilim*) in Daniel 11, 12 with that of the "wise" at Qumran. "The *maskil* here, as in Daniel, is one who, having received from God understanding in his hidden purpose, is thus in a position to impart that understanding to others".²⁴ Without identifying themselves as prophets, the teachers at Qumran engage in an interpretation of Scripture that has as its model the activity of Daniel the prophet. This

¹⁹ For example, cf. Jer. 48:45 with Num. 21:28; 24:17; Jer. 50-51 with Isa. 13-14; Zeph. 2:15 (*zô't = αὐτή*) with Isa. 47:8. On Dan. 11:30 as a reinterpretation of Num. 24:24 see F. F. Bruce, "The Book of Daniel and the Qumran Community", *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, ed. E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 233. See also my article in the same volume, p. 61. Cf. 2 Chr. 13:22.

²⁰ Cf. L. Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden* (Hildesheim, 1966 [1892]), pp. 37 f.: Already in the Old Testament period older Scriptures were interpreted and in a certain sense changed. Ezra and the Levites appear as interpreters of the laws; the Chronicler makes use of midrash; Daniel is the interpreter of Jeremiah. The schools of the prophets become assemblies of the wise. S. Krauss (*Synagogale Altertümer* [Hildesheim, 1966 (1922)], p. 54) sees the incipient synagogue reflected in the "house of the people" (Jer. 39:8) = "house of assembly" (Ps. 74:8), which began as assemblies in the temple area. I. Elbogen (*Der jüdische Gottesdienst* [Hildesheim, 1967 (1931)], p. 235), on the other hand, finds the origin of the synagogue in assemblies in the Exile in which prophets "strengthened the religious consciousness of the people by readings from the Scriptures followed by teachings of exhortation and consolation". Cf. *SB* 4, p. 115. For a different view cf. B. Reicke, *The New Testament Era* (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 119 f.

²¹ *SB* 4, p. 116. Cf. R. Meyer, *TDNT* 6 (1959-1969), p. 817: According to the rabbis the prophets are "the oldest expositors of the Law..."

²² Matt. 23:2; R. Meyer, *op. cit.*, 6, pp. 818 f. "Since the temple was destroyed prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the wise" (Baba Bathra 12a). Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were viewed as the first members of the chain of rabbinic tradition (Krauss, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 f.). "Moses received... and delivered to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the great synagogue" (*Aboth* 1:1). See also J. Jeremias (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, London, 1969), pp. 233-245.

²³ So identified in 4Qflor 2:3. Cf. Dan. 9:22, 25.

²⁴ Bruce, "Daniel and Qumran", pp. 228 f. Cf. 1QS 9:17-19: the *maskil* is to conceal the teaching of the Law from the men of falsehood but to instruct the Community "in the mysteries (*razey*) of wonder and truth"; 1QH 12:11 f.: "as a *maskil* have I come to know thee, my God, through the spirit that thou hast given me, and by thy Holy Spirit I have faithfully listened to thy marvellous secret counsel (*sôdh*)." Similarly, of the Teacher of Righteousness, "to whom God made known all the mysteries (*razey*) of the words of his servants the prophets' (1Qp Hab. 7:4 f.).

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becomes more significant for the present essay when one observes the similarities between the method of biblical interpretation at Qumran and that in Acts 13:16-41.²⁵ In Acts, however, the interpreter is given the title "prophet" as well as "teacher".

Both terms also are applied to Jesus. It is clear from Luke 7:39 f. that they are not mutually exclusive: the one who is addressed as teacher may also be (the eschatological) prophet. Also, Jesus' teaching "in their synagogues"²⁶ often must have included *ipso facto* a midrash or exposition of Scripture.²⁷ It is less clear, however, to what degree such teaching is the cause of, or attached to, the conviction that Jesus is a prophet.

Two passages that bear upon this question are Mark 1:21 (cf. Lk 4:31)

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and Mark 6:2 (cf. Lk. 4:16; Matt 13:54). In the former text Jesus' exposition, in contrast to that of the Jewish theologians, is characterized by ἐξουσία. Although some commentators interpret ἐξουσία as pointing to the prophetic character of Jesus' teaching,²⁸ this is not as clear as one might wish. For the word is seldom if ever used elsewhere to describe a prophet's teaching²⁹ although it may, in the New Testament, represent his personal rights in the congregation or his miraculous powers.³⁰ The prophetic character of Jesus' exposition may perhaps be inferred, however, from its connexion with his miraculous powers, which also are described as a "teaching" (Mark I :27).³¹

In Mark 6:1-6 also both Jesus' synagogue teaching and his miraculous powers are the cause of the people's astonishment. Nevertheless, there are two significant differences: his teaching is

²⁵ Cf. E. E. Ellis, "Midrashic Features in the Speeches of Acts," *Hommage au Professeur B. Rigaux* (Gembloux, 1970), pp. 306 f.

²⁶ For example, Lk. 6:6; 13:10; Jn. 6:59; 18:20; cf. Mk.I:39 parr. In Matt. (4:23; 9:35) it is included in the editorial summaries of Jesus' ministry. Some of the "teaching in the temple" (ἱερόν; Mk. 12:35), which is primarily concerned with the exposition of Scripture, may have its historical setting in a synagogue in the temple enclosure. On the existence and services of such a synagogue compare Elbogen, *op. cit.*, p. 236; Krauss, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-72, 95; and I. Levy, *The Synagogue* (London, 1963), pp. 15 ff. Cf. Yoma 7:1; Sotah 7:7. One of the temple episodes, Mk. 12:1-12 parr. (= Isa. 5:1f. + parable + Ps. 118:22 + Dan. 2:34 f., 44 f.) has the form of an ancient synagogue homily. Cf. *SB* 4, pp. 173 f.: In the oldest form (pre-second century) "the speaker more or less reproduced the Scripture lesson or parts of it, thereby pointing to the exhortation, warning or consolation included in this or that word in it. Or he illumined the Scripture lesson by means of a parable and strengthened the words that he himself had added by a further Scripture text" (p. 173). For a different approach to Jesus' teaching cf. M. Hengel, *Nachfolge und Charisma* (Berlin, 1968).

²⁷ Cf. Lk. 4:16-28; Acts 13:14-43; Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber* 81 f.; E. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People* (Edinburgh, c. 1890), 2, 2, pp. 54 f., 76, 82; Elbogen, *op. cit.*, pp. 194 f.; *SB* 4, p. 171. A Greek inscription in a first century Jerusalem synagogue states that it was built "for the reading of the law and the teaching (διδασχῆ) of the commandments" (E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* [London, 1934], p. 70). *Imdh* (=διδάσκω) and its derivatives are used in the oldest rabbinic exegetical literature to couple the text to its exposition (cf. W. Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur* [Darmstadt, 1965 (1899)], I, pp. 94 ff.).

²⁸ V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London, 1959), pp. 173, 470; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 74; J. Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Göttingen, 1960 [1936]), p. 18.

²⁹ Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London, 1947), p. 96; G. Friedrich, *TDNT* 6 (1959-1969), p. 843.

³⁰ 2 Thes. 3:9; Paul and Silas (cf. Didache 13); Rev. 11:6.

³¹ Cf. E. Schweizer, *Dos Evangelium nach Markus* (Göttingen, 1967), p. 27.

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here described as σοφία, and Jesus compares or identifies his role with that of a prophet.³² The "wisdom" (σοφία) that is "given" to Jesus is recognized by his audience to be an extraordinary pneumatic power; the question is whether it has a divine or demonic origin. In an instructive essay on the concept of σοφία U. Wilckens writes that Mark uses his received picture of Jesus as a Scripture teacher to present him as the archetype of Christian charismatics.³³ Whether such a broad inference may be drawn from this text or not, it is true in any case that Jesus is so regarded in the primitive church.³⁴ Furthermore, probably no strong dichotomy should be made between the rabbinic "wisdom" of being learned in the Scriptures — the ordained rabbi³⁵ — and the "wisdom" of the knowledge of God's mysteries that is present in the prophets and teachers of Jewish apocalyptic, especially in Daniel and

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Qumran.³⁶ The context of the wisdom, that is, the biblical revelation, is the same. The difference in the case of Jesus, however, is not just that he, an unordained person, manifests the bearing and biblical knowledge of an ordained rabbi (so Daube). There is also a qualitative distinction. Like the synagogue teaching of his later follower Stephen, no one "could withstand the wisdom and the spirit" with which Jesus expounded the Scriptures.³⁷

While the limited amount of evidence does not allow certainty in the matter, it is probable that not only the miracle-working context but also the manner of Jesus' exposition of Scripture in the synagogue contributed to the conviction that he was a prophet. And it could do so because such exposition was regarded as the proper activity of a prophet. Very likely Luke, at least, views the same kind of exposition of "prophets and teachers", e.g., in Acts 13 also to be an exercise of a prophetic gift.³⁸ It is true that this conclusion depends in some measure on Luke's understanding of the relationship of "teacher" and "prophet" (see below). But it is supported as well by the mention given to Judas and Silas in connexion with the Jerusalem Decree.

³² Cf. Lk. 13:33. C. K. Barrett (*op. cit.*, p. 97) objects to taking the proverbial expression, "a prophet is not without honour except in his own country" (Mk. 6:4), as representing Jesus' literal estimate of his ministry. But even if Jesus is only referring to an (admittedly) common view of himself, "by not merely adopting the view but also preparing to exemplify it, Jesus numbers himself among the prophets" (Friedrich, *op. cit.*, p. 841; cf. pp. 843 f.). Of course, for both Jesus (cf. Lk. 7:26) and the Evangelist "prophet" is not a category exclusive of any other, higher role. Cf. O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 44.

³³ U. Wilckens, *TWNT* 7 (1964), p. 515; cf. P. Bonnard, *L'évangile selon S. Matthieu* (Neuchâtel, 1963), p. 213. The accusations that Jesus was demonically inspired concern not only his miraculous powers (Mark 3:22 parr) but also his teaching (Jn. 8:48, 52; 10:19 f.; Mk. 3:21; cf. D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* [Harmondsworth, 1963], p. 123). Also, according to the rabbinic tradition Jesus was condemned because he practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. The latter charge is couched in the words of Deut. 13:8 f., the condemnation of a false prophet (Sanh. 43a). Cf. Justin, *Dial.* 69; J. L. Martyr, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York, 1968), pp. 64-68.

³⁴ Cf. E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London, 1961), pp. 189 f. (23b). See above, p. 258.

³⁵ Wilckens, *op. cit.*, 7, pp. 505 f. Daube (*op. cit.*, pp. 207, 216) thinks that the passage represents Jesus to be teaching as though he were an ordained rabbi.

³⁶ See above, p. 59 Cf. Wilckens, *op. cit.*, 7, pp. 503 ff.

³⁷ Acts 6:9 f.; cf. 6:8 (δύναμις); Lk. 2:46 f., 52. Although he did not follow out its implications for the synagogue teaching of Jesus, C. H. Dodd rightly called attention to this distinction as an important clue for understanding "Jesus as Teacher and Prophet" (*Mysterium Christi*, ed. G. K. A. Bell and A. Deissmann [London, 1930], pp. 56 ff.).

³⁸ The eschatological interpretation of Scripture in Acts 2, Acts 7, and elsewhere is no different even when προφήτης is not used and the location is not the synagogue (but cf. Acts 6:9). Cf. Lk. 4:22 with Acts 4:13.

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E. Käsemann has noted the similarity of the words in the Decree, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28), to the promulgation of eschatological law elsewhere in the New Testament. He thinks that the latter is the work of Christian prophets, and that often "holy Scripture provided the primitive Christian prophets with the stylistic form in which to clothe their sentences of holy law".³⁹ Indeed, the formula λέγει κύριος in Acts 1:16-18 reflects something more: the *exposition* of Christian prophets.⁴⁰ In addition, the theme of the citation, the inclusion of the Gentiles, is specifically the "mystery" that according to Paul "has now been revealed to (Christ's) holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit".⁴¹

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This theme is, in turn, directly related to the "new temple", a major motif in the λέγει κύριος quotations.⁴² Taken together, these facts strongly suggest that the prophets Judas and Silas were not chosen incidentally to accompany the Decree. Probably they were chosen because they had already exercised an influential role in establishing (or proclaiming) the biblical rationale upon which the provisions of the Decree were justified.⁴³

The foregoing discussion enables us to return to the question raised earlier and to answer it with some measure of confidence. The interpretation of Scripture was indeed regarded, under certain conditions, as prophetic activity.⁴⁴ And it is likely that Luke does so regard it, even in such persons as Peter and Stephen who are not given the explicit appellation a προφήτης.

II

The persons in Acts named προφήται exercise a rather widespread ministry and they do so in a varied fashion — singly or in groups, traveling or in settled congregations. The content of their activity also is varied — prediction (Acts 11:28; 20:23, 25, 29 f.; 21:11), specific direction of the community in its decisions (Acts 13:1 f.; 15:27) and teaching by exhortation and biblical exposition.⁴⁵ Yet, as was noted at the outset, persons who are not termed "prophets" exercise some of the same functions. This fact raises two questions that must be answered if the role of the prophet in Acts is to be placed in clearer perspective. First, in view of the breadth of the prophetic function, why is the term relatively so restricted? Furthermore,

³⁹ E. Käsemann, "Sentences of Holy Law in the New Testament", *New Testament Questions of Today* (London, 1969), p. 77; cf. pp. 74, 76 ff. The content and style of the Decree itself are admittedly quite different from Käsemann's "Sentences of Holy Law".

⁴⁰ Like the texts that Käsemann adduces, the λέγει κύριος quotations also sometimes include the theme of *jus talionis* (Rom. 12:19; 14:11; 1 Cor. 14:21; Heb. 10:30). And they form a distinct class of quotations that are most likely the product of Christian prophets. Cf. E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh, 1957), pp. 107-12, 146 f.; Lindblom, *Gesichte*, p. 188. It is also worth noting that Acts 15:14, 15 ff. follows a recognizable midrashic style, Current Event? Scripture (cf. Ellis, "Speeches", pp. 308 f.; B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* [Uppsala, 1961], pp. 252, 260) and that traces of a midrashic literary form are evident elsewhere in James' speech (Acts 15:14-21; cf. J. W. Bowker, *NTS* 14 [1967-68], 107 ff.).

⁴¹ Eph. 3:3-5; cf. Rom. 16:25. Note the use of γνωρίζω and (in Acts) γνωστός.

⁴² Eph. 2:20; cf. Acts 7:48 ff.; 2 Cor. 6:16 ff. On Heb. 8:8-12 cf. Ellis, *Testament*, p. 108.

⁴³ Similarly, Lindblom, *Gesichte*, p. 185 n. Significant also is the fact that the Decree is termed a παράκλησις (see above, pp. 57 f.).

⁴⁴ Cf. B. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London, 1946), p. 134: "In the case of Christian prophets ... the searching of the Scriptures ... was an important part of their task..."

⁴⁵ Lindblom, *Gesichte*, pp. 180-88.

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what is the relationship of the prophet to other designated ministries in Acts, specifically the apostle, the teacher, and the elder?

Long ago H. B. Swete distinguished between those in the primitive Church who on occasion prophesied and a relatively small number who were known as οἱ προφῆται, "forming a charismatic order to which a recognized position was given in the Church".⁴⁶ In a recent study J. Lindblom reaches a similar conclusion, apparently independently, and enumerates as such "berufsmässige Propheten" Agabus and his companions (Acts 11:27 f.), the Antioch circle (Acts 13:1 ff.), Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32), and the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).⁴⁷ This kind of distinction, which is supported by several texts in Paul and in Revelation, may be the best

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explanation of the matter.⁴⁸ E. Schweizer rightly cautions against making a sharp distinction in the earliest period between official or "ordained" and unordained ministries, and the *caveat* applies to Luke's own time as well.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, a special recognition and authoritative status appear to be conferred upon the *persons* of those who have manifested certain charisms in a prominent and/or continuing manner.⁵⁰

Except for the twelve apostles (Acts 1:22, 6:2, 6) Luke shows little interest in defining the ministries that he names. Even in that case it is "the twelve" whose ministry is (partly) explained by apostleship, not apostleship by the twelve. This is clear from the fact that Luke can also call them "disciples" and name other persons apostles.⁵¹ The latter instance presents a further complexity in that "the apostles Barnabas and Paul" are previously named "prophets and teachers". Thus, the triad of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28 are clustered around and apparently applied to the same persons in Acts.⁵² Also, in Acts 20:17, 28 the editorial "elders" is equivalent to the term "bishops" in the speech of Paul that follows (cf. Phil. 1:1). In part the ambiguous nature of the specified ministries in Acts is traceable to the differing terminology in Luke's sources, terminology that he is unconcerned to conform to a consistent pattern. But

⁴⁶ H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (London, 1910), p. 377.

⁴⁷ Lindblom, *Gesichte*, p. 179; see above, p. 56.

⁴⁸ There is an apparently recognized group of prophets (in Corinth) whom God "appointed (ρίθημι) in the Church" (1 Cor. 12:28; cf. 14:29 ff.; Acts 20:28) and who "have prophecy" (1 Cor. 13:2). Similarly, Rev. 22:9.

⁴⁹ Schweizer, *Church Order*, pp. 102f., 184-87 (5i, 7m, 22efg). See below, p.66.

⁵⁰ For example, in the case of apostleship cf. 1 Cor. 9:1 ff.; 12:28 f.; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; 12:11 f.; Gal. 1:1, 17 ff. Further, H. Greeven, "Propheten, Lehrer, Vorsteher bei Paulus," *ZNTW* 44 (1952-53), 1-43 "by προφῆται (1 Cor. 14:29) specific, known persons appear to be meant..." (pp. 4 f.); teaching also is designated not just as an activity (Rom. 12:7) but also with reference to specific persons (pp. 16 f.). [See R. Schnackenburg's essay in the present volume, pp. 287-303. Edd.]

⁵¹ Lk. 9:12, 16 (22:14, 30, 39); Acts 14:4, 14; 15:6, 13 (?James); cf. Acts 1:25 f.; Gal 1:19; Lk. 11:49. Otherwise, Gerhardsson, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁵² M. Goguel (*The Primitive Church* [London, 1964 (1947)], p. 111) shows that the triad of gifts in 1 Cor. 12:28 are embodied in Paul. A fourth-century work, which may reflect a much earlier textual tradition of Acts 13:1 ff, identifies, Barnabas and Paul as "prophets and teachers", the others as "prophets". The text is given in Bruce, *Acts*, p. 253; cf. T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1953 [1909]), 3, p. 28. On the basis of τε instead of καί before Manaen and Saul (Acts 13:1) W. M. Ramsay (*Saint Paul the Traveller* [London, 1896], p. 65) concluded that they were teachers and the others were prophets. But this is a slight basis for distinguishing the functions (so Haenchen, *op. cit.*, p. 338). Probably both titles apply to all. Cf. Fascher, *op. cit.*, p. 185; Zahn, *op. cit.*, I, p. 116; Schweizer, *Church Order*, pp. 72, 183 (5k, 22c). Otherwise, Lindblom, *Gesichte*, p. 176 n.

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the lack of concern itself suggests that for Luke no less than for his traditions there is a certain ambiguity and fluidity in the designation of ministries. On the one hand, the Spirit is itself the gift and to be "full of the Spirit" implies the empowerment to manifest a variety of gifts (Acts 2:33; 6:3, 8 ff.). On the other hand, certain persons may be so identified with a specific gift as to be recognized and set apart in the community on that basis. For Paul also certain persons are set apart in terms of a specific charism (1 Cor. 12:28).⁵³ At the same time one person may manifest a multiplicity of charisms (1

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Cor. 12:31; 14:1; 2 Tim. 1:11), and (some) charisms and charismatics may be grouped in an undifferentiated manner as πνευματικά and πνευματικοί (1 Cor. 14:1, 37; 3:1).

In this context it is not always easy to distinguish the role of the prophet from that of other ministries. Seeking to do so, G. Friedrich concludes that "teachers expound Scripture, cherish the tradition about Jesus and explain the fundamentals of the catechism, the prophets... speak to the congregation on the basis of revelations..."⁵⁴ While this distinction may be true as far as it goes, it does not give sufficient weight to the teaching role of the early Christian prophet. Predictive prophecy, of course, presents no problem. But as the above discussion has shown, there is no clear division in Judaism or the primitive church between the teaching of a prophet and of a teacher. Likewise, the false prophets in the church teach (1 Jn. 2:22, 26 f.; 4:1 ff.), and the false teachers in the church correspond to the false prophets of the Old Covenant (2 Pet. 2:1). As H. Greeven rightly recognizes, both the prophet and the teacher expound the Scriptures and the sayings of the Lord, and in this area the transition from teaching to prophecy is "gewiss fließend".⁵⁵ For Paul prophecy apparently is a formal term embracing various kinds of inspired teaching.⁵⁶ The teaching of the prophet apparently overlaps that of the teacher and can be distinguished from it only by the manner in which it is given or by the recognized status as "prophet" of the one who is teaching. In Acts also various kinds of teaching are present in the activities of the prophets. Probably the same relationship between the prophet and the teacher is assumed. But one cannot speak with assurance, especially since διδάσκαλος occurs only in Acts 13:1.

There also is an overlapping of the roles of apostle and prophet. Indeed, E. C. Selwyn argued that "apostles" were "prophets on circuit" in contrast to "prophets in session".⁵⁷ That is, an apostle is simply a prophet who is sent (ἀποστέλλω) as a missionary. In support he cites Didache 11:3-5.

But concerning the apostles and prophets (τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν) do according to the ordinance of the gospel. Every apostle who comes to you receive as the Lord... But if he remains three days he is a false prophet.

⁵³ See above.

⁵⁴ Friedrich, *op. cit.*, 6, p. 854; cf. Gal. 1:12.

⁵⁵ Greeven, *op. cit.*, p. 29; cf. Fascher, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

⁵⁶ Goguel, *op. cit.*, p. 265. Neither προφητεία nor διδασκαλία occurs in Luke-Acts; in Acts διδάσκαλος appears only at 13:1.

⁵⁷ Cf. E. C. Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets* (London, 1900), pp. 24 f.; *Saint Luke the Prophet* (London, 1900), pp. 35, 27-32. So also, Fascher, *op. cit.*, p. 180. Selwyn's works contain considerable information and some good insights, but they are marred by an erratic style and by unsupported and extravagant assertions.

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The usage is remarkable, and it is one possible explanation why Barnabas and Paul on tour are called apostles (Acts 14:4, 14) but are named prophets only while resident in Antioch (Acts 13:1). However, it is more likely that

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the shift in terminology reflects Luke's use of a different tradition. In any case the explanation hardly accords with the use of the terms elsewhere in Acts where "apostles" reside in Jerusalem and "prophets" travel.

To pose the question differently, is there any activity 'ascribed to the Christian prophet that is not also true of those named apostle? Apparently there is none. The example of the apostle Peter, mentioned above, illustrates that every activity of the prophet — including prediction, exhortation and biblical exposition — can also be ascribed by Luke to the apostle.⁵⁸ On the other hand, unlike the prophets the apostles do "many wonders and signs" (2:43), witness to the resurrection of Jesus (1:22; 13:31; cf. 26:16), exercise an authority in the congregations, and impart the Holy Spirit (8:15 ff.; cf. 19:6). It may be significant that it is in connexion with one of these activities, miracle-working, that Barnabas and Paul are named apostles.⁵⁹ Likewise, in the Pauline literature the mark of an apostle includes "signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. 1 Cor. 9:1). In summary, the ministries of the apostle and the prophet in Acts may be compared to two concentric circles, in which the circle of the prophet's activity is somewhat smaller.

Christian "elders" (πρεσβύτεροι) appear in Acts as a leadership group in the congregations of Jerusalem (11:30; 21:18), Galatia (14:23), and Ephesus (20:17). Their function is "to shepherd" (ποιμαίνειν) the church of God (20:28), a term whose cognate ποιμήν is listed in Ephesians 4:11 among the spiritual gifts. In Acts the elders also are given their task by the Holy Spirit (20:28) even though they may be appointed by a prophet or apostle (14:23).⁶⁰ The description of the prophets Judas and Silas as "leading men" apparently sets them apart from the "apostles and elders" in Acts 15:22 (so Haenchen). However, several facts suggest that the elder, like the prophet, had a teaching function in addition to his responsibilities of general oversight of the community.

The Christian use of the term πρεσβύτερος is clearly derived from Judaism where it was used of a group in the Sanhedrin and of the community and/or synagogue leaders.⁶¹ Traditionally the elders in Judaism were a "lay nobility", heads of ancient patrician families. In the first

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⁵⁸ See above, p. 64. Cf. Friedrich, *op. cit.*, 6, p. 850.

⁵⁹ Acts 14:3 f., 10, 14. Their authority over the congregations is indicated in the same chapter (14:23) but its description is perhaps more reminiscent of Acts 13:1 ff. than, for example, of Acts 6:6. It should be added that miraculous signs also are ascribed to Stephen and Philip, persons who are called neither apostles nor prophets. Cf. Acts 6:8; 8:6 f; Schweizer, *Church Order*, pp. 196 f. (24b).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 183 f., 186 (22df). Cf. 1 Pet. 5:1 f. The term πρεσβύτερος does not appear in the Pauline literature outside the Pastoral Epistles where, like Acts 20:17, z8, it is equated with ἐπίσκοπος (Tit. 1:5, 7; cf. Phil. 1:1).

⁶¹ According to G. Bornkamm, *TDNT* 6 (1959-1969), pp. 662 f., the elders in Acts 11:30; 21:18 resemble a synagogue council; the "apostles and elders" in Acts 15 reflect a different tradition and, patterned after the Sanhedrin, function "as a supreme court and normative teaching office for the whole Church". Similarly, Gerhardsson, *op. cit.*, p. 251. But does this give sufficient weight to the charismatic and prophetic nature of the assembly's actions?

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century, however, persons who also had been trained as scribes were preferred when community or synagogue leaders were chosen. That is, one who was selected to be elder was likely to be a theologian.⁶² For the early Christian community this would correspond to a charismatic person, e.g., a teacher, even though he may have been titled *πρεσβύτερος* (in conformity with the Jewish custom) or *ἐπίσκοπος* within the organizational structure.

This view of the matter accords with a number of New Testament texts. (i) As they do in Judaism, the elders in Acts 15 and Acts 20 function as guardians of the tradition, although the similarity is qualified by the role of the Spirit among the Christians.⁶³ (2) The Christian elder may exercise a specific ministry of teaching (I Tim. 5:17; 2, 3 Jn. 1).⁶⁴ However, the same kind of ministry may be exercised without reference to any name or title.⁶⁵ Although in Acts the elder is a part of the organized expression of the church, he is very likely selected on the basis of certain spiritual gifts.⁶⁶ And his ministry itself is doubtless viewed as a manifestation of a charism. Therefore, the role of the prophet may overlap that of the elder as it does that of the apostle and the teacher, especially in certain teaching functions. But unlike the prophet the apostle (in Jerusalem at least) and the elder or 'shepherd' are incorporated into the organizational structure.

III

At a number of places in Acts the early Christian mission is viewed as a continuation of Jesus' mission and as a contest between conflicting spirit-powers. The former is expressed most clearly as the immediate action of the exalted Lord himself (Acts 1:1 ("began"); 9:5; 10:13; 16:7; 22:18; 23:11). The contest is explicit in the encounter of Peter with Simon Magus (8:9-24) and the encounter of Paul with the false prophet Barjesus (13: 6ff.)

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and the medium in Philippi (16:16). The same kind of *conflict* may be inferred from the episode of the Jewish exorcists (19:13-20). The role of the Christian prophet is related to both of these Lukan themes. The prophet is the Lord's instrument, one among several means by which Jesus leads his church. As one who makes known (*γνωστός*) the meaning of the

⁶² Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 236 f. The Sadducees obtained their scribes from within this lay nobility, i.e., the "elders", who thus functioned as interpreters and guardians of the tradition (p.231).

⁶³ Cf. also, I Pet. 5:1f.; Schweizer, *Church Order*, p. 200 (241).

⁶⁴ Concerning 2, 3 John cf. Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 6, p. 671. The elder also may be expected to exercise gifts of healing (Jam. 5:14). According to Didache 15 the bishops and deacons "also perform the service of the prophets and teachers". "Bishop" (*ἐπίσκοπος*) is here equivalent to *πρεσβύτερος*.

⁶⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Thes. 5:12 with 1 Tim. 5:17.

⁶⁶ Cf. Acts 6:3; Schweizer, *Church Order*, p. 184 (22e). The absence of the term in Paul (outside the Pastorals) is remarkable and its use possibly "represents a later assimilation to Jewish forms" (*ibid.*, p. 200). But in view of the early necessity of structure (Acts 6) and the Church's identification of itself as the true Israel it is more likely that in some Jewish-Christian communities the term was used in an official way from the beginning. Cf. B. Reicke, "The Constitution of the Primitive Church," *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (New York, 1957), pp. 143-56. A comparison of Acts 1:20b, 25 *ἐπίσκοπή, ἀποστολή* with Acts 20:17, 28 (*πρεσβύτερος, ἐπίσκοπος*) suggests that for Luke the apostle may be a special kind of elder just as the Twelve are a special kind of apostle (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1; see above, p. 65). This would place Acts 15 in a different light and clarify both its relation to Acts 11:30; 21:18 and the readings of Codex Bezae at Acts 15:5, 12, 41 ("elders.").

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Scriptures, exhorts and strengthens the congregation, and instructs the community by revelations of the future, the Christian prophet manifests in the power of the Spirit the character of his Lord, who is the Prophet of the end-time (3:22).

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