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A New Theophilus

by Werner G. Marx

Dr. Marx, formerly Principal of the Moravian Bible Institute in Nicaragua, presents an exciting new suggestion about the identity of the "most excellent Theophilus" for whom Luke composed his twofold history.

An interviewer asked Saul Bellow, the Nobel Prize winner, "How much are you conscious of the reader when you write?"

"I have in mind", he said, "another human being who will understand me . . .!"

When Luke wrote his Gospel and Acts he also had one person in mind. He wrote for Theophilus. The question of who Theophilus was has intrigued students of the Bible for nineteen hundred years. Moreover, we now know that to understand any piece of literature we must know the readership for whom it is intended. A paragraph taken from a technical journal can be easily differentiated from that of a literary magazine. So too, the *kind* of person for whom he wrote would influence Luke's choice of words, his selection of subject matter and even the turn of his sentences.

The dedication to Theophilus in Luke's two prefaces must not be confused with the dedication of a present-day book. His was not a gesture of gratitude, the recognition of some family or ideological kinship. Nor is it like the prefaces written by Horace, Vergil, Cicero or Josephus who dedicated their works to a famous patron expecting him to underwrite the cost of publication. A shadow hung over the author always reminding him to avoid anything that might seem offensive to his patron.

Luke's preface, on the other hand, does not betray even remotely such a mercenary intention. His was a far more profound purpose. I. Howard Marshall, reviewing New Testament literature says, "The central theme in the writings of Luke is that Jesus offers salvation to men."² As he writes, the image of Theophilus is ever before him. To win this man to a real faith in Christ is his primary objective!

Theophilus was a real person. The name was a very common one. It means "Friend of God." Some writers interpret the Preface to mean, "This book is written for every reader who is a *friend of God*."³ However, this Theophilus is addressed as κρᾶττιστε Θεόφιλε (Luke 1: 4) and fellow Christians in those days never addressed each other as "Your Excellency" — κρᾶττιστε. It was the correct way to address Roman officials such as Felix and Festus (Acts 24: 3; 26: 25), but a Christian official would have been called "Brother."⁴

Who might this "Excellency" have been? A very important authority in the Roman government had shown an interest in the Gospel. Persecutions were becoming more frequent. Regular citizens called Christians "atheists" because they

¹ John Hersey, *The Writer's Craft* (New York, 1974), p. 290.

² I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter, 1970), p. 116.

³ Alfred Plummer, *Luke* (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 5. also, historically, Origen, Salvanus, Hammond, Leclerc, etc. See William Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, 1868), Vol. IV p. 3221.

⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, 1946), p. 33; William Manson, *The Gospel of Luke* (New York, 1930), p. 3.

did not reverence the images. They were "divisive" and "anti-social."⁵ But if this man Theophilus (his real name probably protected by this pseudonym) could be convinced of the rightness of the Christian faith, his influence would help immensely in the furtherance of the message of salvation, and in the alleviation of suffering due to persecution. For his sake Luke says he has researched the life of Christ. He has personally interviewed eye-witnesses and read all available manuscripts. All this so that His Honour Theophilus may be convinced of the authenticity of what Jesus taught and did.

Since earliest times until the present seven names have been suggested in trying to identify Theophilus. Without using a definite name others have thought that this person must have been a Roman official, a resident of Rome, someone from Alexandria, or someone from Syrian Antioch. The seven names are:

1. Theophilus, brother-in-law to Caiaphas, was high priest A.D. 37-41.⁶

2. Theophilus, an official in Athens, convicted of perjury by the Areopagus. He had no known Christian connections.⁷ However, because of a tradition which says Luke wrote his history in Achaëa and Boeotia, it is thought that this man may be Theophilus.⁸

18 3. Theophilus of Antioch was a wealthy and distinguished Christian who converted a large hall in his home into a church. He is mentioned in the Clementine Recognitions (10.71), and is favoured by many because the anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Third Gospel (c. A.D. 170) states that Luke came from Antioch.⁹

4. Again, Luke could have given Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus, the name Theophilus as a pseudonym (Acts 13: 7-12).

5. Lucius Junius Annaeus Gallio. This brother of Seneca was perhaps the most eminent Roman that Paul met (Acts 18: 12-17).

6. B. H. Streeter nominates Titus Flavius Clemens, heir-presumptive of the Emperor Domitian, even though he does not appear in the pages of our New Testament. He is roughly a contemporary of Luke and the fact that he may have been executed because of his interest in Christianity (his wife, Domitilla, was a baptized Christian) makes Streeter's suggestion attractive.¹⁰

7. Philo Judæus. J. A. Bengel, following Bar Bahlul's arguments that Theophilus was an Alexandrian, believes that Philo was Theophilus. His Hebrew name was *Yedidyah*, the equivalent of Theophilus.¹¹

8. To this list, I believe the name of King Agrippa II should be added. Why he

⁵ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York, 1975), Vol. I, pp. 811f.

⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xviii, 123; xix, 247. The edition of Flavius Josephus' works followed in this essay belongs to the Loeb Classical Library, translated by Ralph Marcus, H. St. J. Thackeray and Louis H. Feldman (London, 1926-65).

⁷ Tacitus, *Annals*, ii, 55.

⁸ Jerome, *Comm. in Matt.*, Proem.

⁹ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke* (Grand Rapids, 1952), pp. 17f.

¹⁰ B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London, 1930), pp. 534-539.

¹¹ J. A. Bengel, *Ordo Temporum*, ed. 2, p. 196.

has not been suggested before is a mystery. Possibly it may be because so many have stereotyped him as a rascal or, at best, an inconsequential princeling.¹²

He deserves a much better evaluation. Of all the Herods he was the best.¹³ But because of the "negative press" that Agrippa II has received, it is necessary to remind the reader in some detail of the positive and excellent qualities this king had.

I. HISTORICAL SUPPORT

Agrippa II qualifies as an official in good standing with Rome. The Herods were always loyal to Rome and Agrippa I's son, called Marcus Julius Agrippa, grew up a member of Caesar's family. Neither Moses in the Pharaoh's household nor Daniel in Babylon had better opportunities for a first-class education.

Nor was Agrippa ashamed of his Jewish background. At the early age of seventeen, soon after his father's death and still sharing the intimacy of Claudius's family, he was able to influence the Emperor in favour of the people of Jerusalem in a delicate matter which had to do with the priestly vestments. The Jews were pitted against the Governor of Syria and the Procurator of Judea, but Claudius ruled in favour of Agrippa and the Jews.¹⁴

Agrippa was made King of Chalcis at the age of twenty-three.¹⁵ Three years later he was given the territory of his uncle Philip: Trachonitis, Batanaea, Gaulanitis, Abilene (the tetrarchy of Lysanias) and the tetrarchy of Varus. Soon thereafter Nero became Emperor and added four toparchies (townships) to Agrippa II's domains. One of these, Julius, in Perea, consisted of the city and fourteen surrounding villages,¹⁶ undoubtedly some of those visited by Jesus and his disciples. In addition, ever since his twenty-first year, this young prince was put in charge of the high-priestly vestments in Jerusalem. He appointed the high priest and he was treasurer of the temple.¹⁷ No position among the Jews of that time ranked higher.

Perhaps nothing shows more how successful a ruler Agrippa II was than to compare his rule with that of his neighbours to the south who sought to administer Judea. Agrippa governed a scattered territory made up of mixed races but he maintained unbroken control for fifty-one years, while Judea was racked by strife. Procurators came and went until the Jewish state ceased to exist in A.D. 70. By contrast Agrippa II's holdings grew after that date.

A good measure of Agrippa's imperial stature is to study his speech when he (temporarily at least) dissuaded the Jews from rising up against the Romans. He was returning from a visit to Alexandria when a delegation of chief priests, the Sanhedrin, and high ranking citizens went as far as Jamnia to welcome him and to

¹² For example, Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (new English version, vol. i, Edinburgh, 1973), p. 475, applies such words as "indolence and weakness" to his account of Agrippa II.

¹³ So writes R. B. Rackham in *The Acts of the Apostles*, Westminster Commentaries (London, 1910), p. 458; "Of all these Herods, Agrippa II comes out the best."

¹⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xx. 7-12.

¹⁵ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, ii. 223.

¹⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xx. 159.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xv. 407.

inform him that great numbers in Jerusalem were at the point of open rebellion, because of the atrocities committed by Procurator Gessius Florus.¹⁸

Agrippa hurried to Jerusalem, called together the populace and delivered a speech which for rhetoric and logic is one of the best antiquity has preserved for us.¹⁹ Agrippa II's breadth of knowledge of contemporary history and of the organization of the far-flung Roman Empire shows that he was no petty courtesan but a true ruler. That he was able to conjure up such a speech on so short notice shows why this man was respected in Alexandria, in Antioch and in Rome as well as in Jerusalem.

The oration occupies twelve pages in Josephus, or 295 lines.²⁰ In it Agrippa speaks of thirty-nine different people and places. It is thrilling to know that here is a personage in the Bible who had a world-view—that he has knowledge of Britain, France, Germany and India. If all these countries bowed to Roman arms, how could Jerusalem hope to survive?

Consider (he says) what a wall of defence had the Britons, you who put your trust in the walls of Jerusalem: the ocean surrounds them; they inhabit an island no less in extent than the part of the world in which we live; yet the Romans crossed the sea and enslaved them, and four legions now secure that vast island.²¹

20 And don't think, he argues, that God will help you. How do you think so vast an empire as Rome's could have been built up without God's aid? If you observe your religious holy days during this revolution that you contemplate, you will be easily defeated as when your fathers fought against Pompey. But if you decide not to keep your religious rules then how can you expect God to be on your side?

. . . Spare the Temple and preserve for yourselves the sanctuary with its holy places . . . As for me, I call your sanctuary and God's holy angels and our common country to witness, that I have kept back nothing which could conduce to your preservation; as for you, if you decide aright, you will enjoy with me the blessings of peace, but, if you let yourselves be carried away by your passion, you will face, without me, this tremendous peril.

Having spoken thus, he burst into tears, as did also his sister. Thus for the moment, Josephus adds, Agrippa dispelled the menace of war.²²

Much more could be cited from Josephus and from the Talmudic literature but two incidents will suffice to illustrate Agrippa II's true stature.

During the war that led to the destruction of Jerusalem, at one point Agrippa II sent 2,000 horsemen and 3,000 foot soldiers from his northern states to add to the Roman forces.²³ No petty prince could have equipped such an army.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, ii. 336-337.

¹⁹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, 1939), Vol. III, p. 1383, says, "The oration by which he sought to persuade the Jews against the rebellion is a masterpiece of its kind and became historical."

²⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, ii. 345-401. The place names Agrippa describes in this speech read like an echo of the book of Acts: Egypt, Alexandria, Ethiopia, Asia, Parthia, Cyrene, Cappadocia, Pamphylia, Cilicia, Bithynia, Macedonia, Athens, Illyricum, Dalmatia, Rome and Spain.

²¹ *Ibid.*, ii. 378.

²² *Ibid.*, ii. 401, 402, 406.

²³ *Ibid.*, ii. 481, 497.

Again, in A.D. 64, Agrippa II finally completed construction of the Temple in Jerusalem which Herod the Great had begun in 19 B.C. However, this cessation of work suddenly threw 18,000 men into the ranks of the unemployed. Given the explosive conditions of that time, this threatened to generate serious trouble. King Agrippa showed his sagacity as well as his financial prowess by putting these thousands to work paving with marble the streets of Jerusalem.²⁴

Thus Agrippa II qualified in a historical sense as the "Most Excellent" in Luke's Prologue. We now turn to the internal evidence in Luke's writings which also supports this identification.²⁵

II. INTERNAL SUPPORT

At the very beginning of Paul's career, the Holy Spirit had promised that he would witness before kings (Acts 9: 15). Sixteen chapters later in A.D. 61 Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea. He had appealed to Caesar to avoid being remanded to Jerusalem. Quite unexpectedly King Agrippa came to town to welcome the new procurator, Festus, to Judea. And equally unexpectedly Paul was given the opportunity of explaining his case before the king (Acts 25: 23-27). This was Paul's greatest opportunity. Agrippa's influence extended far beyond the boundaries of his own kingdom. He was well known in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Rome. All government authorities were aware that he was an adviser of emperors—of Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian in turn. For Paul at this moment, and for Luke years later, to persuade Agrippa of the truth of the gospel and of the benevolent nature of the Christian movement, was of supreme tactical importance.

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For the uninitiated, Luke's repetition of Paul's conversion story in Acts 26 is hard to understand. After recounting the event itself (Acts 9: 13-25), Paul again speaks of it on the steps of the Temple (Acts 22: 1-21) and then one more time before Procurator Felix (Acts 24: 11-21). Another recapitulation (Acts 26: 2-23), especially since it has already been decided that Paul is to go to Rome, seems excessive.

A satisfactory answer to this problem could be that Agrippa II is Theophilus. All of Luke's writing seems to be leading up to this final, most dramatic and most eloquent moment in the lives of both men. King Agrippa enters the Judgement Hall in Caesarea together with his sister Bernice and Procurator Festus in the midst of a great display of pageantry, followed by military commanders and lastly by the notables among the civic population.²⁶ Agrippa, in keeping with his eminence, takes charge of the proceedings and Paul speaks as if he alone were in the presence of the King.

It is conceivable that years later, as Agrippa read these words at the end of the

²⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xx. 219, 222.

²⁵ It is very possible that Luke saw Agrippa II's coins bearing the inscriptions φιλορώμαιος or φιλόκαισαρ (see LeBas et Waddington, *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines*, t. iii, no. 2365.) This may explain how Luke arrived at his pseudonym, φιλόθεος.

²⁶ The eyewitness quality of this chapter leads us to believe that Luke too was present. The first sentence of the next chapter begins the last "we section", showing that Luke was close by. Moreover the polished quality of the Greek in Chapter 26 is reminiscent of the Preface of the Gospel.

second volume dedicated to him, he was strongly reminded of that moment of truth when he had said, "A little more, and your arguments would make a Christian of me!" (Acts 28: 28—Jerusalem Bible).²⁷ A Jewish writer on the New Testament says:

The idea is, "thou persuadest me a little (or in some degree) to become a Christian," i.e. I begin to feel the force of your persuasive arguments, and if I hear you any longer, I do not know what the effect may be. This is neither sportively nor bitterly ironical, but complimentary and courtly, no doubt expressing a sincere admiration of Paul's eloquence and logic . . . but not a genuine conviction of the truth of Christianity, as may be gathered from the later history of this man . . .²⁸

1. The first piece of evidence that King Agrippa II very likely is Theophilus rests, then, upon my explanation of why Paul's conversion story is repeated in Acts 26. The weightiness of this chapter has puzzled many commentators. But if Agrippa II is Theophilus, then this *Apologia pro Vita Sua* of Paul comes as the climax and capstone of Luke's literary work.²⁹ All of the Gospel and all of Acts were written to supply that "little more or much more" that was necessary to make of the king a convert to christianity. Chapter 26 is for Agrippa a grand refrain, reminding him and bringing him back to this Moment of Decision.

2. Why is "Your Excellency" missing in the opening sentences of Acts? Undoubtedly because, with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Agrippa no longer enjoyed the prestige of Jewish kingship. The honorific title no longer fitted.³⁰

On the other hand, if Acts was completed before A.D. 70, then the puzzle remains. One may conjecture, in keeping with this thesis, that Luke accompanied Paul on his final missionary journey to Spain, Crete, and Macedonia. Very possibly Luke remained in Achaea and completed Acts there, as tradition says. He could have delivered the manuscript personally (without being able to really finish it), for Agrippa passed through Achaea in the winter of 68, the year Nero died.³¹ The Jewish rebellion had started in 66 and Agrippa had placed himself solidly on the side of the Romans. His influence with Vespasian and Titus was as strong as ever, but he no longer was the most excellent leader of the Jewish people.

3. Another word in the Preface now becomes clear — καταχήθης — "that you may know for certain the truth of what was plainly told you" (Luke 1: 4). This word in post-New Testament times came to be used for catechizing, but never in the New

²⁷ John Calvin, commenting on this verse and specifically on "a little more," says, "I do not dislike that that ἐν ὀλίγῳ doth signify as much as almost." *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, 1949) Vol. II, at Acts 26: 28.

²⁸ Samuel Sandmel, *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament* (Cincinnati, 1956), p. 891. The interpretation of this verse needs to be guided (1) by Paul's response. He does not react as if Agrippa II had spoken jestingly, sarcastically or ironically. (2) Josephus, speaking of Agrippa II says "flattery is contrary to his nature" and "he is far above irony" (*Vita*, 367).

²⁹ So F.F. Bruce; *The Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1962) pp. 438, 440.

³⁰ (He retained his client kingship around and north-east of the Lake of Galilee, but with the disappearance of the Jewish state his special relationship with it came to an end. Ed.)

³¹ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, iv. 498-500 and note.

Testament.³² Here, Luke says, “What Paul plainly expounded to you in Caesarea on that occasion, is what I now present to you — that you may know for certain.” As in all good writing, the introductory statement has its clearest echo in the climax of the book. “You wanted more, in order to be convinced. Here it is, O Friend of God.”

4. Another vexing problem can now be solved. When Luke dated the beginning of John the Baptist’s ministry he gave a five-point anchor. John began preaching in the

fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar when
Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,
Herod was tetrarch of Galilee,
Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis and
Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene (Luke 3: 1).

To refer to the first three is understandable for Jesus was a boy when Tiberius Caesar began to reign, and was active in His ministry during the time of Pontius Pilate and of Herod Antipas. But of what interest are Ituraea and Trachonitis — nowhere else mentioned — to the New Testament reader? No one has really had a convincing answer. Perhaps they are mentioned only in Luke because this was home territory for Agrippa II.³³

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Likewise, Abilene, far to the north, has mystified commentators even more. Why should Luke include Lysanias and Abilene, so completely foreign to anything in the life of Jesus? Could it be because this was part of the territory given to Agrippa I by Claudius Caesar and then to his son, Agrippa II? The reference seems to be a little key Luke has slipped in to show Theophilus that his book was written just for him. Thus we may finally have the solution to the mystery of Abilene.

5. The history which Luke has so thoroughly investigated begins, “In the days of Herod, King of Judea . . .” (Luke 1: 5). What better way to begin a book dedicated to the great-grandson of this King! Luke has more references to the Herods than the other Gospels combined. Commentators attribute this to a special source of information Luke had. But can we not also say that he is emphasizing this kind of information to show Agrippa how intimately his family was involved in the story of Jesus?

On the other hand Luke does not, as injurious to his purpose, mention the slaughter of the boy babies in Bethlehem (Matt. 2: 16-18), nor does he record the circumstances of the death of John the Baptist (Mark 6: 14-29; Luke 9: 7-9). However, he does speak of Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward, who had been healed by Jesus (Luke 8: 3) and of Manaen, one of the group of prophets and

³² Of the eight times that *κατηχέω* is used in the New Testament, two (Acts 21: 21, 24) mean “accuse”; in none of the other instances does “catechize” fit: Acts 18: 25; Ro. 2: 18; I Cor. 14: 19; Gal. 6: 6 bis. See Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (London, 1959). If my Agrippa-Theophilus interpretation is accepted we have a beautiful illustration of the meaning of *κατηχέω* at that time, comparing Luke 1: 4 with Acts 26.

³³ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, iii, 56, 57.

teachers in the Antioch church,³⁴ who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch (Acts 13: 1). Moreover Luke speaks of Agrippa II's sisters, Bernice and Drusilla, without casting aspersions, as other writers are known to have done.³⁵

Also it is highly significant that only Luke records Herod's role in the trial of Jesus (Luke 23: 6-12). He seems to be informing Agrippa that Herod Antipas was greatly interested in Jesus. The picture is not wholly complimentary to him but it does one thing. It shows that though Herod Antipas had the opportunity to execute Jesus, he did not side with the vociferous Jewish leaders but returned Jesus to Pilate uncondemned.

6. There is general agreement that Luke had a Roman official in mind when he wrote the preface. It is letter-perfect. No preface in secular literature has finer Greek. But then come the Nativity chapters and the climate suddenly changes. The contrast is inexplicable – if Luke were writing for a Roman – because these chapters and much of what follows have a distinct Aramaic, Jewish Old Testament flavour. But if Luke were writing for Agrippa, this change would not seem strange. In fact, Agrippa could have understood it and appreciated it.

24 7. Turning to Acts we now ask, If Luke wrote his Gospel to win Agrippa to the faith, what can be said of his purpose in writing Acts? Clearly, it is an orderly account of the expansion of the Church, under direction of the Holy Spirit, as it spread from Jerusalem to Rome. But in the process Luke can be seen to be answering questions Roman authorities would be asking about these Christian groups which were cropping up everywhere.

What connection was there between the life and teachings of Jesus and the activities of Peter and Paul? Luke shows that the linkage between the good news about Jesus and the new movement was not accidental but close and direct (Luke 24: 49; Acts 1: 4-8). He enlists Stephen, a Hellenized Jew like Agrippa, now become a Christian, to give a review of the Old Testament base for the faith and berate the Jewish leaders for refusing to pay attention to the leadings of the Spirit (7: 2-53). Hopefully Agrippa II is listening!

Is this then a sub-group of Judaism? Is it an insignificant sect destined to die out? No, this is a growing, virile movement, something not done in a corner (26: 26)! Three thousand joined the ranks in one day (2: 41) and soon the number had grown to five thousand, counting only the men (4: 4). In an amazing sequence of events the Holy Spirit taught that this new faith was also for non-Jews (11: 1-18).

Does it appeal only to the uneducated, the riff-raff of society? On the contrary, many Jewish priests have joined (6: 7). A cabinet member (8: 26-38), a sorcerer (8: 9-13), a Roman centurion (10: 1-48), a Roman proconsul (13: 12), a Greek lady and an Athenian judge (17: 34) all were converted, until finally we find Paul preaching the gospel in Rome itself (28: 31).

If a complaint is brought against a Christian, qua Christian, how would a Roman official handle it? A highly esteemed authority, Gallio, brother of Seneca, set an important precedent. In Corinth he ruled that Christian beliefs, being off-shoots of the Jewish religion, were not legitimate matters to be brought before a Roman court

³⁴ Significantly the word "Christian" occurs only three times in the New Testament and Agrippa II accounts for one of these. Surely he must have learned the word on one of his extended visits to Antioch (Acts 11: 26). Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, ii. 481, iii. 29.

³⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xix. 275, xx. 138.

(18: 12-16). Civil cases relating to Christians must not be settled by rioting or mob violence,³⁶ the town clerk of Ephesus explained, but lawfully in the Roman courts (19: 35-41).

Nero had only recently burned Christians alive in his gardens. Should not all Roman authorities follow his example and stamp out this unwelcome religion? A respected Jewish rabbi, Gamaliel, gave the best answer to this question. If the movement is of human origin, let it alone and it will wither on the vine, "but if it be of God you cannot overthrow it" (5: 33-40). King Agrippa I killed James the apostle (12: 1-3), but when he laid hands on Peter, God Himself intervened (12: 4-11). When Roman authorities jailed Paul in Philippi, an earthquake opened the prison doors and unfastened the prisoner's chains (16: 25-31).

"If anyone thinks of persecuting the Christians, he should learn of me," we can paraphrase Paul's testimony in the presence of Agrippa II; "I was the first and most rabid persecutor. But I found out I was absolutely wrong. This Jesus is no myth. He is alive and powerfully effective in the lives of His believers in the world today" (see Acts 26: 9-19).

Thus Luke sought to meet the objections of his Theophilus by using concrete examples from the actual history of the Church.

8. Luke must have found in Agrippa a kindred spirit. When Paul said, "You are an expert on Jewish customs and on controversial questions about them" (26: 3), he was not using flattery for Agrippa was exactly that and continued so to be. He supplied Josephus with information on the Jewish War and when his work was published, Josephus presented him with a copy. He wrote Josephus no less than sixty-two letters, two of which Josephus quoted *in toto*.³⁷

No candidate for Theophilus, in my opinion, so neatly fits the bill as Agrippa II, a Roman authority, companion of five Emperors, a friend of the Jews, interested in history and all problems relating to it, keenly aware of what was going on in the world. This Theophilus not only was a contemporary of Luke, but we know just how, when, and in what way he made contact with Christianity. Since the Romans regularly looked to him for advice in matters concerning the Jews (and concerning a Christian in the case of Paul), this Theophilus was the key man Luke needed to convince of the truth of the gospel.

If Agrippa was to form a balanced judgement of who Jesus was and of how to deal with the growing numbers of His followers, *someone* needed to start at the beginning and put in order the crucial events of this inchoate and burgeoning religion.

9. Some readers may question why Luke, if he intended his books for Agrippa II, should write in the third person. On a familiar plane this can be explained by the fascination a person experiences in reading about himself in a letter someone

³⁶ Agrippa himself had shown the way when a Christian had been killed, mob-style, in Jerusalem. The high priest Ananus had "James, the brother of Jesus who was called Christ, and certain others" stoned. Upon learning this Agrippa II forthwith deposed Ananus and replaced him with Jesus, the son of Damnaeus (Josephus, *Antiquities*, xx. 199-203).

³⁷ It is very interesting that in his second letter to Josephus (*Vita*, 362, 366) Agrippa uses this very word (καταγγέλω) to say that he will clearly inform the Jewish historian about what transpired.

else has written. It enables the subject to stand off to one side, so to speak, and see himself as others see him, something video-taping has made possible in recent times.

At a deeper level Sören Kierkegaard's solution to the epistemological problem of communicating spiritual truths can help us understand Luke's method. "If the recipient is to learn anything," explains S.K. scholar Raymond Anderson, "he must discover it for himself . . . (He) is faced with a puzzle which he must unlock for himself."³⁸ In describing Kierkegaard's indirect communication Anderson seems to be speaking of Agrippa II:

Indirection, however, becomes necessary if the objective content is known and accepted while inwardness is lacking. Thus, to arouse inwardness in a person who has an essentially correct understanding of what it is to be religious, who is not earnestly striving to live up to this understanding, and who does not notice the contradiction but continues to think of himself as a religious person, requires indirection; for such a person lives in an "illusion" which is immune to the frontal attack which characterizes the traditional forms of discourse.³⁹

Luke has allowed Theophilus to view Christ and His church as an interested observer. He has answered one question after another and now Agrippa is brought up fair and square to see as if for the first time that memorable occasion in Caesarea, and to give him once more the opportunity to rectify the decision he had sidestepped them.

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10. In general, if Agrippa II is recognized as a possible Theophilus, then much light can fall on many passages. Luke has as broad a world view as his Theophilus. He sees the Jewish nation as blind to its true destiny. The incipient Church becomes the true Israel. Reactionary Jewry is the force that got Christ crucified and Paul into chains. It is they and not the Romans who are at the root of the Church's troubles. Three times the Roman procurator declares Christ innocent (Luke 23: 4, 14, 22). For Agrippa it is these same reactionary Jews who are responsible for the fall of Jerusalem. And it is this resurrected Jewish faith in its Christian dress and rising from the ashes of Jerusalem, gathering in Romans and Greeks alike, that should recommend itself to Agrippa II.

We can now sit down and re-read Luke-Acts, bearing in mind this king, Agrippa II—officially a Roman, culturally a Greek, keenly interested in things Jewish, reminded of his family's close involvement in the life of Christ, and, most of all, of his own unforgettable encounter with Christ's messenger, Paul. We can now appreciate Luke's major themes, his evangelistic emphasis, his careful choice of some words and avoidance of others. To see that Luke wrote always longing that these meticulously selected words would make of King Agrippa a Christian and a protagonist of the faith, and to read Luke-Acts in this light will be a fresh and rewarding experience.

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³⁸ Raymond E. Anderson, "Kierkegaard's Theory of Communication," in Lewis A. Larson, *Kierkegaard's Presence in Contemporary American Life* (Metuchen, N. J., 1970), pp. 214f.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.