scious of Hellenising liberals who were too ready to accept outsiders with less than rigorous requirements. Was Paul (Saul), a Diaspora Jew from Tarsus, commissioned to purge out these liberalising influences (Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:6; Acts 7:58; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11)? This is feasible, given the absence of attention to Judean (Christian) believers (Gal 1:22).

The narrative opens a tantalising seam with the division between the Hebraioi and Hellenistai (6:1).24 The presenting issue is a conflict over the daily distribution of resources to widows. However, there seems to be more to this, with Stephen’s theology questioning and delineating the apparent failure of central tenets of contemporary Jewish religious identity—Law and Temple (6:13-14; 7:2-53). This appears to be at issue here.25 The distribution of resources is always connected, however implicitly, to political issues. Specific and explicit social anxieties and conflicts usually mask more enduring tensions between mostly implicit social assumptions, expectations, and perspective.26 The seven leaders appointed to ameliorate the tensions over resources, all with Greek names, suggests an alternative leadership. The seven are “full of spirit and wisdom” (6:3), and Stephen is an irrepressible theologian (6:8-10), suggesting that their leadership extends beyond the presenting task of distributing food. The writer attempts to ameliorate a memory of division by depicting continuities between the apostles (as

25 The most likely source of conflict between Hebrews and Hellenists was extreme differences over practice of the law: see Haenchen, Acts, 267-268. The two factors that unified Judaism in its diversity—Torah and Temple—were under threat by Christian rhetoric as early as the Hellenist split in Jerusalem, and articulated by Stephen, for “[t]o attack the validity of [Temple and Torah] was to attack Jewish identity at its core...” (Sanders, Schismatics, 99, 95-99). Lüdemann suggests (Acts, 83) ‘historicity’ exists in the ‘hiatus’ over Law and Temple. Edward Schillebeeckx, Church: The Human Story of God (London: SCM, 1990), 149. Esler cites “pro-Temple” (Hebraioi) and “anti-Temple” (Hellenistai) factions in the early Jerusalem community, the latter being expelled (8:1). The presence in Jerusalem of a messianic movement announcing eschatological inclusive possibilities (i.e., Gentile participation in the temple—Isa 56:7), would have been an attraction to marginalised God-fearers (Esler, Community and Gospel, 135-148, 154-161). Hengel suggests that the Jesus movement may have been attractive to Hellenist Jews because of its ‘affinities with the universalist Greek-speaking world and perhaps even with some themes in Greek thought’ (Acts, 72-73). In this tradition, the Hellenists around Stephen were critical of the temple cult and Mosaic law.
26 Polhill overlooks the rhetorical nature of narrative when he suggests that “[t]he Hellenist widows were being overlooked—certainly not deliberately neglected but inadvertently left out” (Acts, 179 emphasis added.
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premier witnesses) and the Seven (as servants of the poor). Is
the Hebrew–Hellenist conflict over resources essentially an
intransigent theological conflict that leads to a martyrdom and
ensuing persecution? The evidence for a major split within
the Christian community is circumstantial but compelling, with the
Hellenists being scattered after Stephen’s death, while the
(Hebrew) apostles remain (unmolested) in Jerusalem. A large
congregation, zealous for the traditions of Israel, also remains,
inviolate, in Jerusalem throughout Acts (11:2-3; 15:1-2; 21:20-
24). These details belie the narrative’s innocent portrayal of
Christian persecution at the hands of hostile Jews.

Stephen’s theological legacy

Stephen appears to be the Christian church’s first theologian
of an alternative understanding of law (which he does not
reject) and the temple, which might be more acceptable to
Gentiles, sometime before Paul’s calling and mission. Further,
Greek-speaking believers are depicted making the missional
initiatives—they are porous to other groups, such as Samaritans
and Gentile God-fearers (i.e. an Ethiopian eunuch, 8:26-40). Saul
(Paul), it seems, seeks to root out this same group in Damascus
(9:1-2). The Judean churches, however, were not a focus of Saul’s


indicates that tensions around Torah and customs of Moses remain incorrigible
throughout the Acts narrative.

29 Johnson suggests (Acts, 141, 143) that the persecution marks a close to the
“Jerusalem section,” and the next phase of the narrative’s fulfilment of the
commission to be witnesses (1:8). However, Jerusalem continues to dominate the
rhetorical pitch of the story (cp. 11:1-3; 15:1-6; 21:17-24); and the commission
is not sustained by Jerusalem beyond Jerusalem. Further, Hengel notes (Acts, 74)
that the writer nowhere indicates “a return of those who had been driven out and
scattered” from Jerusalem.

30 Haenchen alludes to a gloss-over in the face of dissonance between memory
and rhetoric in “a cleavage in [the writer’s] ideal picture of the primitive
community...” (Acts, 266). Concerning the apostles remaining in Jerusalem while
others were persecuted, Haenchen suggests that “the author must be following a
line imposed on him by a tradition concerning Stephen.” That is, the narrative
speaks against the writer’s rhetoric (Acts, 266, 273). Sanders cites temple law and
law as the “most likely causes of bitter conflict between Jewish Christians and non-
Christian Jews” (Schismatics, 95). Equally, this conflict could be inter-Christian.

31 Stephen speaks of non-observance of the law (7:53), but not its rejection:
Lüdemann, Acts, 81-82.
persecution. After his *Acts conversion,* Saul joins the disputes alongside the Stephenite dispersion against the pro-Jerusalem Hellenists. Dispersed Hellenistic Jews initiate the Gentile mission (notwithstanding *Acts* portrayal of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius, and the latter’s conversion). *Acts* unfolding story gets ahead of its missional rhetoric—others are already there.

The Samaria mission is led by a Hellenist (Philip), which is given legitimacy after the fact by apostles still resident in Jerusalem (8:14-17). Philip and the Ethiopian make the link between Jerusalem and the “ends of the earth,” a commission given to the Twelve at the beginning of the narrative. The Damascus church was there before Saul’s persecution. Judean Christians eventually recognize the validity of Gentile inclusion in the church with Peter’s vision, in the face of reluctance (*Acts* 10:9-16). Not everyone is happy, however, for there is Judean

32 Paul “did not think of it [Christianity] as a different religion. Even as an apostle to the Gentiles, he still remained Paul the Jew, Paul the Israelite” (Dunn, *Paul*, 717-718). Paul never ceases to be a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3:5; Rom 9:1-5; 11:1), belonging to a remnant in Israel, which had always sought to maintain covenant faithfulness to the gracious calling of God—after Isaiah’s universal vision (Rom 11:1-5, 13-16; 15:7-13). Paul’s description of his revelatory experience (δοξάσας 1 Cor 15:8 [5-8]; ἡμεῖς δέ 1 Cor 15:8 [5-8]; ἐν ἑαυτῷ 1 Cor 15:8 [5-8]; ἡμεῖς δέ 1 Cor 15:8 [5-8]; ἐν ἑαυτῷ 1 Cor 15:8 [5-8]) is elusive as to its precise nature. His conversion is frequently read from *Acts,* not his own correspondence. The three versions of Saul’s conversion in *Acts* appear to be at odds in their detail (9:1-22; 22:3-21; 26:4-20).

33 There is dissonance between the virulent deputes with Hellenists (*Hellenists* 9:29) and the declaration of pervasive peace (9:31), reflecting an irrepressible memory of schism (6:1-2) contesting the writer’s ecumenic portrayal. Hensen alludes to a gloss-over in the writer’s sudden shift from “Hellenistic Jews” to “Saul” as persecutor after the death of Stephen—“he is the persecution in person,” whose “conversion brings immediate peace . . . (9:31)” (*Acts,* 298).

34 By the writer’s admission, the persecuted dispersion (8:1 non-apostolic) precipitated a mission among the Gentiles (11:19-21) in contrast to the dramatised event in which Peter introduces the Gospel to the Gentiles (10:1-48; 11:4-17) (Achtemeier, *Quest for Unity,* 37-38). “Hellenists were the first to take the step to the Gentile mission, and not Peter through the conversion of Cornelius” (Lüdemann, *Acts,* 85, 136-137). Among the Hellenist believers, it appears that some were expelled because they were Hellenists, but who nevertheless identified with the Jerusalem resistance to more liberal perspectives of gospel (11:19).

35 Lüdemann suggests (*Acts,* 105) that the writer could not have the Ethiopian come on stage as a “Gentile” convert, because the Peter-Cornelius sequence is central to the unifying pitch of *Acts.* In an attempt to sustain the writer’s primacy of the Peter and Cornelius sequence, Tannehill suggests that “[t]he conversion of the Ethiopian was a private and isolated event that had no effect” (*Acts,* 137). For Dunn, the eunuch is “arguably the first full Gentile conversion...” (*Acts,* 103).

36 Yet according to Paul’s memory, Peter, along with Barnabas, was necessarily rebuked after baulking at commensality with Gentiles in the church, and plays no part in the Gentile initiatives (10:1-48; Gal 2:1-14). Peter becomes the spokesperson for this new Gentile phase of mission (10:34-43; 11:4-17; 15:7-11).
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displeasure over the Gentile mission as Jerusalem Christians take issue with Peter over the Cornelius incident (11:1-3). Having the Jerusalem Church "praise God" for the Gentile mission in response to Peter's speech (11:18) and to the issue of commensality with the uncircumcised (11:3), is clever narrative rhetoric. Acts has played down the Greek speaking mission to the Gentiles in order to make a significant point about Peter's seminal mission to the Gentiles (10:1-11:18). This creates an ecumenical impression in which Jerusalem always takes the initiative, with equal roles attributed to Peter and Paul in the mission to the Gentiles. Meanwhile, the narrative plays out its other story with a mission initiated by Hellenic Jewish believers fleeing the Jerusalem persecution, which occurs among Greeks at Antioch, which in turn initiates further mission to the Gentiles (13:1-3). Sent by the Antioch church, the mission of Paul and Barnabas precipitates the Jerusalem council, which officially approves of the Gentile mission (15:6-29). This mission is symbolised by Paul reaching Rome, the apostolic mission extending to "the ends of the earth"—the dominant story for the remainder of the narrative (Acts 16-28). The Acts' memory depicts Jerusalem responding to divine initiative, while Jerusalem also appears resistant to Gentile inclusion, except as Jewish

in contrast to the impressions given by the Jerusalem meeting (Gal 2:1-10) and Antioch conflict (Gal 2:11-14). Acts creates an ecumenical portrait of Christian origins by reconciling Jerusalem and Antioch over Gentile mission, and Peter and Gentiles over the issue of commensality with unclean Gentiles. The Cornelius story portrays Peter in opposition to a Gentile mission for which he must receive divine prompting, however. Tannehill notes (Acts, 134, 143-144) that within Luke-Acts tradition Peter has already been exposed to this commission (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8), and articulates it in speeches (2:39; 3:25-26)—yet this comes as a new, disturbing and perplexing revelation (10:9-17; 34b-36). Peter's speech in Jerusalem (11:1-17) functions as Jerusalem verifying this next phase of mission in the face of objections over the issue of table fellowship (commensality) with unclean Gentiles (11:3). According to Galatians, Peter's Gospel "to the circumcised" (RNSV) "of circumcision" τῆς καιρότητος; Gal 2:7 is "the gospel which includes circumcision" (Frank J. Matera Galatians [Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992], 76).

37 Dunn, Acts, 153.

38 While "Hellenists" (6:1) are Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora (Ἑλληνικοί), "Greeks" (11:20) are Greek-Gentiles (Ἑλληνες), the latter being used to delinate ethnic distinction between Jews and Greeks on several occasions (14:1; 16:1; 19:17; 21:18; 17:12). Johnson, Acts, 105, 203. Dunn also makes this distinction for 11:20, referring to 14:1; 18:4; 19:10; 20:21 (Acts, 154).

39 In Paul's account of the Jerusalem council (Gal 2:1-10), he makes no mention of the decree to Gentiles that was made in the Acts' version (15:28-29). For discussion on this point, see Achtemeier, Quest for Unity, 89-91.
proselytes (15:1-2). The Acts' rhetoric, it seems, is not a memory of "what happened," but rather, a memory of "what should have happened," thereby creating ineluctable tensions in the text.

Memory as anticipation

Memory is never objective because it is always mingled with interested interpretation and anticipation. According to Gadamer, we can never separate ourselves from the effects of our tradition, these effects, in the form of contemporary issues, and questions, shape our evaluation of tradition. Because we are always in a context of time, we cannot step out of our own horizon into another, without projecting our presuppositions, prejudices, and perspectives into this other horizon. Hence, our reading of the past is modified by a contemporizing effect in interpretation, as issues and questions of our contemporary context are addressed. Hence, a "fusion of horizons," past and present inevitably occurs. Memory also has the extraordinary capacity to suppress difficulties experienced, focusing on aspects from the past that justify present actions and consolidate specific anticipation for the future. In this way, memory might also include denial, but this does not erase the difficulties encountered. Memory is a desire for the idyllic—a cogent and unified past, retrieved in order to be invoked for the future. More than half a century later, Acts remembers the idyllic scenario of church origins as the outward triumph of the Christian movement from Jerusalem. Paul has told us about some of the difficulties in being an apostle to the Gentiles. The Acts writer simply remembers that they happened, with all the Apostles on one side

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40 This is a central issue in Paul's letter to the Galatians.
41 Johnson, Acts, 270. Rhetoric is prescribing the way things should be, through a guise of describing the way things are. See Bible and Culture Collective, The Postmodern Bible (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) 156-177.
43 Paul saw nationalist zealotry among messianists (with its adherents pejoratively described as "dogs," "Judaisers" Phil 3:2-6) as a threat to this Imanic gospel—Israel's destiny being fulfilled eschatologically (after the prophetic "the days are coming") in God's representative One—for Israel, and (after Isaiah) for the nations (Rom 15:7-13).