



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

September 30, 2018, Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and History

Question: "Why does the Catholic Church claim that the Acts of the Apostles is a reliable account of the history of the early Church when it is clear that it is a work of ideology?"

Answer: "Acts is an extremely reliable historical record. Every historian has a point of view, and the fact that Saint Luke was writing from a Christian point of view does not mean that he was not accurate with his historical record."

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is based on the evidence of eyewitness accounts, such as Saint Luke's Gospel narrative (Lk 1:2).

It is easy to tell who the eyewitnesses in Acts were: Peter is a major source for Chapters 1 through 12; Paul for Chapters 13 through 28; Philip for Chapter 8; and Priscilla and Aquila for Chapter 18. Luke himself was an eyewitness for what scholars call the "we" passages, where the narrative switches from third person to first person, describing what "we" did (e.g. Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

Luke's attention to detail is shown in many ways. For example, in chronicling the travels of Paul, he gives specific information about the time that it took to arrive at different locations. This information is accurate, and it could not have simply been looked up in a reference work in the ancient world. This suggests that Luke or someone in Paul's circle kept a travel diary. The fact that Luke does not give parallel information about travel times in the first part of the book, when Peter dominates the narrative, shows that Luke was faithful to his sources. He used the information that they provided and did not invent such details.

The archaeologist Sir William Ramsay, initially a skeptic of Acts, reviewed the evidence and concluded: *Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historical sense; he fixes his mind on the idea and plan that rules in the evolution of history; and proportions the scale of his treatment to the importance of each incident. He seizes the important and critical events and shows their true nature at greater length., while he touches lightly or omits entirely much that was valueless for his purpose. In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.*

- Fr. Lewis