ΠΑΡΡΗΣΙΑ IN ACTS

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“'Freedom of speech,'” writes W. C. van Unnik, “has a prominent place in Acts. Everyone perusing its pages will see that the noun and the verb often recur in all parts of the book, so that it may be styled one of the 'keywords'.” This “prominent place” is just as much a function of where in the narrative παρρησία occurs as it is a function of the number of occurrences. Both the noun παρρησία and the verb παρρησιάζεθαι are found, the noun in narratives taking place in Jerusalem and Rome, the verb in the intervening accounts of travel. The noun παρρησία occurs four times in the account of Pentecost and its aftermath, first at Pentecost (2:29), second in connection with Peter and John’s defense in Jerusalem (4:13), and twice immediately thereafter (4:29, 31). After this cluster of occurrences the noun does not occur again until the very end of the book in 28:31 (κηρύσσων τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διδάσκων τὰ περὶ τοῦ ήσου Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάσης παρρησίας ἀκμαλύτως). The verb occurs seven times in Acts 9–26. All occurrences but the last are doublets. The verb is found twice in connection with Saul’s conversion (9:27 and 9:28), twice in the account of Paul’s first missionary journey (13:46 and 14:3), twice in Ephesus (18:26 and 19:8) and once in the account of Paul’s interview before Agrippa (26:26).

The word παρρησία has an extensive tradition in Greek philosophy. In the classical period “freedom of speech” meant the right of the male citizen to express himself in the assembly (ἐκκλησία) of the

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1 I am most grateful to Richard I. Pervo, Robin Scroggs, Michael White, John T. Fitzgerald (the editor of this volume), and my colleagues in the Hellenistic Moral Philosophy and Early Christianity Group for invaluable discussion and constructive critique of an earlier version of this paper.


3 In general observations, παρρησία will stand for “παρρησία or παρρησιάζεθαι.” I translate these terms as “frank speech” and “speaking frankly,” and, alternatively, as “bold speech” and “speaking boldly.”

4 There are four variant readings, not well attested, which may be ignored: 6:10; 9:20; 14:19; 16:4 (van Unnik, “The Christian’s Freedom of Speech,” 283).
πόλις. When παρησία is employed in its classical sense, H. Schlier observes, three aspects of the term may be emphasized: (i) παρησία is close to ἔξοψις when the right to speak is emphasized; (ii) παρησία is associated with ἀλήθεια when accuracy of speech is emphasized (or claimed); and (iii) the boldness of παρησία may be emphasized if obstacles to speech are at issue.5

In the Roman and Hellenistic period “frank speech” acquired the meaning of speech by the friend, who, unlike the flatterer, does not seek to please but to be honest.6 In this period παρησία is most often associated with the moral freedom (ἠλευθερία) to speak truth (ἀλήθεια). In this context παρησία is a quality or virtue of an individual, not a right possessed by a group. The individual may be required to exercise παρησία in the face of intimidation because the moral philosopher is obligated to speak the truth to a ruler.7

Van Unnik finds in Acts a connection between παρησία and proclaiming Jesus to Jews in the presence of opposition and threats.8 He writes that παρησία in Acts “is closely connected with the proclamation of the gospel; it denotes the freedom with which it is proclaimed by him who himself is there [in Rome] on trial. It is, however, not the profession in the law-court, but the missionary activity that is carried out with all clearness and without outward hindrance.”9 Here van Unnik describes the usage of παρησία in Acts to be that of public discourse and thus consistent with the classical meaning of the word. But van Unnik’s observations require refinement in three regards. First, not all the references to παρησία in Acts entail opposition. Apollos speaks in Ephesus without opposition (18:26) and Acts concludes with the statement that παρησία in Rome is unhindered

5 Heinrich Schlier, “παρησία, κτλ.,” TDNT 5.871-86, esp. 871-72.
6 This usage is analyzed most thoroughly in the papers in Part One of this volume.
7 David Konstan, “Friendship, Frankness and Flattery” (paper presented to the Hellenistic Moral Philosophy and Early Christianity Group at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Francisco, CA, November, 1992) 18. A revised version of this paper appears as Chapter One of this volume. See also Chapter Two, where Troels Engberg-Pedersen discusses Plutarch’s treatment of this point in his treatise How To Tell a Flatterer from a Friend.
8 “In Acts it is typical that this παρησία is always mentioned in connection with preaching in the synagogues and to the Jews” (“The Christian’s Freedom of Speech,” 280). “It is not so much the opposition which provokes the ‘freedom of speech’ on the side of the Christians,” van Unnik continues, “but their παρησία which provokes opposition and danger” (ibid., 282).
9 Ibid., 279.