

A Systematic Approach to the Christology of Peter's Address to the Crowd (Acts 2:14–36)

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Introduction

A friend gave me the idea for this article¹. Talking about Thomas Aquinas' Biblical works, he observed – not without sarcasm – how good it is that “nobody writes such commentaries anymore”. The idea is not just that of supporting Biblical criticism. Rather, it expresses a definitive judgment against any kind of Scholastic approach to God's Revelation. In other words, it implies the absolute rejection of traditional systematic theology in favor of either historical or narrative methods such as that adopted by Robert Jenson².

Obviously, today we have the advantage of Biblical criticism, and ignoring it would simply be foolish. However, Aquinas' theological approach to Scriptures cannot be simply ruled out. The opposite is true, as in many cases this kind of approach is the only possible one in order to preserve an orthodox Catholic understanding of the text. The Bible itself is a multifaceted work in which all the different literary genres, historical and geographical details, etc., serve a theological purpose. Everything that is in the Scriptures tends to the theological understanding of God through Jesus Christ and within the Church. It is only in real communion with the Church that either the theologian or the Biblical scholar can produce a safe and authentic addition to our understanding of God's Revelation. If this is true, we cannot get rid of a theological method which has been used by the Church for centuries, and that is – to some extent – intrinsic to the New Testament itself. Traditional theology cannot be dismissed so easily. There is still the need for a traditional systematic approach to the Biblical texts. As Professor Lee Keek affirmed in a lecture given at the University of Aberdeen in May 2005, Christology is still necessary because every Biblical narrative has a theological nature.

¹ The present essay would have not been possible without the help of Francis B. Watson, Andrew D. Clarke and Francesca A. Murphy. My gratitude goes also to my friend Chris Asprey.

² Cfr.: Robert W. JENSON, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York, 1997.

The Problem

The last two centuries have witnessed a dramatic change in our understanding of the revealed data. The rise of Biblical criticism has given us the tools to investigate the primary source of God's Revelation in a more complete and satisfactory way. The distinction between the various literary genres, the application of hermeneutic principles to the holy texts, etc., have allowed us to get closer to the true meaning and value of Holy Scriptures. On the other hand, Biblical sciences have sometimes crossed the boundaries of their own role, as some scholars have used them to attempt to overrule Church Tradition. In extreme cases theologians have *idolized* historical criticism to the point that they betrayed Tradition as well as the authentic criteria and purposes of Biblical sciences. This attitude has often been accompanied by an attempt to rule out the Scholastic approach to the texts, as this was seen as a threat against the systems these scholars produced.

The last century witnessed the rise of narrative theologies. These were the result of a reaction against the excessive use of historical methods. Unfortunately, even this kind of theology was conceived in opposition to traditional Scholasticism. Narrative theologies have contributed to a more profound understanding of God's Revelation. After Barth and Rahner the systematic theologian can no longer ignore the fact that any theological investigation must be Christocentric. However, this principle has sometimes been misunderstood to the point of relegating the Bible to the role of a *dogmatic narrative*. For example, when Christ, or even the Trinity, is completely identified with our history, the Bible becomes an account of a self-proclaiming and self-explanatory event. It is a narrative that expresses a theological truth, but in which there is no need and space for any theological interpretation of the events produced by the Church. In these theologies everything is at the service of the narrative. Poetry, myth, and even theological arguments assume their significance only in the context of the main story. The narrative is elevated to a supreme level so that it overshadows all other literary genres. When this happens, there is no tolerance for other approaches to the Biblical texts. The authors of these systems usually understand the claim that Jesus is the authentic Revelation of the Trinity as a claim that the only possible approach to the divine mysteries is the narrative one.

In this scenario there is no place for Scholastic theology, which is considered as a human-philosophical (and therefore illegitimate) attempt to grasp some bits of divine truth. Unfortunately for the theologians who completely reject the traditional method, their theologies do not seem to offer a valid alternative to Scholasticism as they often produce unorthodox conclusions. For instance, narrative

theologies often fall into pantheism. The Trinity is identified with human history and lost in its confusion with the world. Robert Jenson's theology is probably the most egregious example of how the narrative method can lead to dangerous positions. "Were God identified by Israel's Exodus or Jesus' Resurrection, without being identified *with* them, the identification would be a revelation ontologically other than God himself"³. If a theologian like Jenson, who is truly committed to ecumenism and to the dogmatic teachings of the Church⁴, risks sounding like a pantheist, it means that the narrative method is, at least, unsafe.

Those theologies that are an extreme expression of the narrative method find their reason to exist in the false perception that the *dramatic comedy*⁵ presented in the Bible is principally an account – certainly inspired – of a series of events. Obviously, nobody would deny that this story is theological and that it has a special character. Nevertheless, some narrative theologians seem to relegate the uniqueness of the Bible to the fact that this is a story about God. The extreme emphasis on the narrative rules out the importance of the structure and modalities of the writers' thoughts. Again, this happens especially when the theologian identifies the object of the story (God) with the story itself. If the story *is* God, then all that really matters is the chain of events – which are self-proclaiming – and not their theological interpretation by the Church. "The phrase 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' is simultaneously a very compressed telling of the total narrative by which Scripture identifies God and a personal name for God so specified; in it, name and narrative description not only appear together . . . but are identical"⁶.

For some of the proponents of narrative methods divine Revelation is special because it is about God or, as appears to happen in Jenson, it is identified with Him. Apart from this, it presents all the features of an ordinary story. It is a chain of events that points to the revelation of the divine in the historical Jesus. This understanding of the Bible is at least forgetful of the important role that the different literary genres play in the unfolding of the narrative. It is evident that the Holy Scriptures do not consist just in an account of events, but also in poetry, myth, prayers, etc. Now, the common feature of all these genres is not simply the fact that they are used to narrate a story. Rather, it is the fact that together with the narrative parts they offer a theological view of God's acting in our history. The Bible is not a *dogmatic narrative* in the sense that there are different levels of

³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cfr.: Francesca A. MURPHY, *The Comedy of Revelation, Paradise Lost and Regained in Biblical Narrative*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2000.

⁶ Robert W. JENSON, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

importance to which the various literary genres belong. The narrative texts cannot be considered as being more important than other texts. In fact, even narrative passages cannot be fully understood if we do not take into account the possibility that other literary elements, such as theological statements and principles, can be present within the narrative itself.

The Bible is a *theological drama*. It presents not only the historical events, but also, and most of all, the theological comprehension of the Church developed through Her reflection on the events themselves⁷. I believe it is fair to affirm that in the Bible there is no historical or narrative account that has been reported without any consideration for its theological meaning. For instance, the failure of the search for the historical Jesus has shown that it is quite improbable that we can even know the naked facts stripped from their theological significance. In the Bible we can find fundamental theological statements such as the *lemma Ioanneum*⁸, but also theological narratives, such as Peter's address to the crowd⁹.

The aim of the present essay is not to rule out those systems that differ from the Scholastic one, but to propose that the latter is a legitimate way to approach the Biblical texts. My reflections on narrative methods are simply meant to remind the reader that there is no theology that is intrinsically "safe". Only a system that is *truly* respectful of the teachings of the Church can give justice to Scripture. We will attempt to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Scholastic method by showing that even a piece of narrative preaching, such as Peter's speech, is in fact nothing other than the product of the Church's theological understanding of God through the Lord Jesus. Because a theological reflection is intrinsic to the nature of the text itself, I believe the passage can be legitimately approached with a traditional theological method. I hope that my choice of a Christological text will show that the Scholastic method does not betray the necessity of a theological discourse grounded and centered on Jesus. It is only because the Church is in communion with the living Lord that She could (and can) produce true theological statements. As long as the theologian grounds his investigation on such statements, and not on personal fancies, the traditional method can be not just completely appropriate, but also fully in accordance with the inner structure and truth of God's Revelation.

⁷ Jenson clearly states that there would be no Bible without the Church (*op. cit.*, p. 59). Nevertheless, he does not seem to escape the dangers of pantheism. Although this brief article does not allow me to produce a satisfactory argument, I would like to suggest that this "contradiction" is intrinsic to the narrative method, which is forgetful of the systematic nature of the Bible itself.

⁸ 1Jn 4:8; 16.

⁹ Ac 2:14–36.

The Text

The resurrected Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. This truth is the critical theme of the book of Acts. Indeed, it is also the key to unfolding the Christological dimension of Peter's address to the crowd. Here the divine-messianic character of Christ is worked out through the use of Old Testament prophecies and the consequent *demonstration* of how Jesus is their final and complete fulfillment. In other words, we can know that Jesus is the Christ and the Lord because He *is* the realization of God's promise to Israel¹⁰.

In presenting Peter's sermon Luke adopts a very well defined strategy¹¹. It is interesting to notice that the speech itself is quite systematic. Peter appears to speak according to a plan which allows him to prove his points. To some extent, we can affirm that Acts 2:14–36 constitutes a first attempt to develop a systematic Christology. Obviously, we cannot expect to find here the Chalcedonian formula. Nor we can expect Peter to speak as a forerunner of Thomas Aquinas. However, it is reasonably clear that Luke made an effort to organize the discourse, summing up the main topics and putting them in some kind of order. The argument proceeds in four steps. First, Peter shows that the messianic era has finally arrived in all its fullness. Secondly, he presents Jesus as an extraordinary man, proving his claim with the eyewitness accounts of the miracles and the resurrection. Thirdly, Peter draws a preliminary conclusion affirming that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. Finally, he sums up all the points. The result is that Jesus is proved to be the Christ and the Lord.

I will try to systematize the speech in order to see more clearly Luke's strategy. My claim is that we can find in the text two sorts of Christological syllogisms. It is through these two syllogisms that Peter explains the early kerygma. If this is true, we can affirm that the text has a systematic structure.

¹⁰ The Church is here the new Israel. God's promise of salvation is no more contained within the boundaries of one nation. The Apostles are sent to be Christ's witnesses "to earth's remotest end". (Acts 1:8).

¹¹ Most probably, the speech does not contain the exact words spoken by Peter. In compiling the sermon Luke was faithful to the original theological message. However, he was also quite free in arranging the structure of the discourse according to his own needs. We share Moffatt's position on the speeches in Acts. Possibly, the author trustworthily reports the general themes of the Jewish-Christian preaching of the period. However, we cannot consider the speeches as literary transpositions of what actually was said on every specific occasion. Most probably, the author had access to oral tradition, or even written sources, which he used to compose discourses satisfactorily harmonised with the period he was engaged in depicting. See: M. SOARDS, *The Speeches in Acts*, Westminster, Louisville, 1994. Furthermore, the style of Luke's speeches does not reflect the style of his narratives. The speeches are not composed in the elegant Greek used for the narratives: although Luke could not compile a *verbatim* account of the original speeches, he reported "at least the gist of what was really said on the various occasions" (BRUCE F.F., *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Tyndale Press, London, 1952, p. 18–21).

Setting the Scene

Before starting to analyze the syllogisms, we must take a look at the context in which the whole scene is located. We should consider at least two main factors that are fundamental to Luke's plan. First of all, the people that compose the crowd are all connected, in one way or another, to Judaism. The fact that they are from different nations does not disqualify them from being Jewish. In 2:5–6 we can read that these people are "devout men". All of them are believers. If we look at the ancient texts, we will notice that they have either "devout men" or "Jews". It is interesting to note that the Western text reads as follows: "Now the Jews who were living in Jerusalem were men from every nation under heaven"¹². In further developing of our analysis we must consider verse 11. Here we read that "Jews and proselytes alike" form Peter's audience. The two terms do not indicate additional classes of people. Rather, "they qualify the nations just enumerated"¹³. The Greek word *proselutos* denotes those Gentiles who were converted to Judaism and who undertook the complete observance of the Law, including circumcision¹⁴. If what I have said so far is correct, I believe it is legitimate to affirm that in our text Peter is speaking neither to unconverted Gentiles, nor to God-fearers. The latter category refers to those Gentiles who admired Judaism but accepted neither circumcision nor any other prescribed ritual. The knowledge that Peter is addressing Jews and proselytes is very important in the economy of our theological investigation, as it helps us to understand why Luke makes such strong use of Old Testament quotations. Peter's speech, as we have it in the book of Acts, would have been ineffective if the crowd were made up of Gentiles and people not accustomed to Scriptures. Luke's strategy works because the hearers of the sermon know about God's promise of salvation.

The second element that we have to consider is the intrinsic unfolding of the speech itself. According to F. F. Bruce the sermon's structure is similar to those of other speeches in Acts¹⁵. "It consists of (1) introduction (vv. 14–21), (2) account of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus (vv. 22–36), interspersed with (3) Scriptural proofs (vv. 25–8, 34 f.), followed, after a brief interruption, by (4) an exhortation to repentance"¹⁶. Other scholars have subdivided the text in various different ways, and the reader might prefer one of these. However, my intention is not to recommend Bruce's position

¹² Cfr. *The New Jerusalem Bible – Study Edition*, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., London, 1994, p. 1801, footnote 2e.

¹³ *Ibid.* footnote 2f.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* See also BRUCE F.F., *op cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁵ 3:11–26; 10:34–43; 13:17–41.

¹⁶ BRUCE F.F., *op. cit.*, p. 88.

so much as to offer it as an example, in order to show that the speech has an inner structure which justifies my attempt to approach it from a "Scholastic" point of view. Bruce's idea of the speech shows that the text actually unfolds in a dynamic way, which entails a progressive understanding of the message. The whole speech moves towards the final conclusion that Jesus is the Lord, and it does it by developing through different theological moments. I believe that Luke's strategy to articulate the speech in four steps constitutes this dynamic nature of the text. This strategy, which mainly unfolds in points 2 and 3 of the structure suggested by Bruce, fits perfectly with the sermon's construction without altering it. In other words, I think it is legitimate to support the idea of the presence of a systematic (but still undeveloped) Christology in Peter's address to the crowd.

The First Christological Syllogism: Jesus is the Messiah

We have seen how the structure of the speech does not preclude the possibility of a systematic plan unfolding within the sermon itself. We have also realized that the religious background of the recipients of the speech, namely the crowd composed of adherents to Judaism, is the *conditio sine qua non* for Luke's strategy. Now we can take a look at the nature and the contents of the plan itself, and see that it unfolds according to a scheme – namely the use of syllogisms – which is not distant from the very structure of Scholastic theology. As a matter of fact Luke arranges two syllogisms through which he allows Peter to explain the Christian kerygma. The first one may be stated as follows:

1st Statement: God has fulfilled the Messianic Promise; therefore, we have a Messiah.

2nd Statement: Jesus is not an ordinary man: He performed miracles and He was resurrected from the dead.

Conclusion: Jesus is the Messiah.

If the above syllogism is correct, Luke's goal appears to be to show that Jesus is the Messiah. In order to verify the legitimacy of my argument, I must answer the following question: how does Luke have Peter reach such a conclusion? Obviously, to solve such a dilemma we must consider the statements of the syllogism itself. The starting point (and first statement) is the announcement that the messianic promise has been fulfilled. We will be able, through a brief analysis of the text, to see how Peter can make such a claim. Before the sermon Luke gives an account of Pentecost (2:1–13). The narrative presents miraculous events. Those who witness these events are "amazed and perplexed; they asked one another what it all meant" (v 12). The confusion of the crowd is a crucial element, as the speech begins with

an answer to their bewilderment. In verse 16 we have the introduction to the quotation from Joel 3:1–5¹⁷. The people in the crowd wonder what is the significance of the events that are taking place. Peter's answer is that they are witnessing the fulfillment of a prophecy. The words "*this is*" refer to the phenomenon of speaking foreign languages. This is a supernatural event and does not spring from drunkenness. In that precise moment they are experiencing a unique event. They are witnessing "that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (v.16). The signs are evidence of the fulfillment of God's promise, as Joel writes in his book. The beginning of the prophecy itself (v. 17) is indicative of Luke's purpose. The Old Testament text begins with the words "*After this*". In Acts these words become "In the last days". Here the author wants to show that those people are actually living "the last days". The messianic era has finally arrived¹⁸.

Peter proves his claim by referring to the Holy Spirit as the source of the extraordinary events that are taking place in that very moment. As they are familiar with the Scriptures, the people in the crowd know that the Spirit of Yhwh gifts men with extraordinary powers¹⁹. What is happening now is not different from what happened during the Exodus. It is the work of that same Spirit through whom – in the past – God has bestowed His gifts on His people. Peter is affirming that the extraordinary events all can witness are the works of the Spirit of Yhwh. In other words, He uses the Old Testament quotation in order to create a link between the present and Israel's history. Most importantly, we cannot forget that the quotation has a prophetic nature. This means that Peter is not suggesting a mere literal correspondence between Scriptures and present events. He is saying that what is happening now is what Joel himself had foreseen. "I shall pour out my Spirit on all humanity" (verse 17), and again "Even on the slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my Spirit" (verse 18). This is the most crucial moment in Israel's history. It is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. Luke has already anticipated this moment in the preceding chapter. "You are going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (1:5); "You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you" (1:8). Now the promise is fulfilled, as the author himself confirms: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves" (2:4). The fulfillment of the promise is repeated in verse 33. "He [Christ] has received from the Father the

¹⁷ According to the original Hebrew chapter divisions. In the Septuagint 3:1 corresponds to 2:28 and 4:1 to 3:1.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that the Church understands Herself has holding the authority to give a theological interpretation of Scriptures. Luke does it at the point of "altering" the words of the prophecy, to make it more theologically meaningful.

¹⁹ See, for instance: Gn 41:38; Ex 31:2; 1S 16:13; Dn:45f.

Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit”.

It is clear from the text that the link between the Holy Spirit and the *ruah* of Yhwh serves the author's initial purpose. In reality, in the Old Testament the outpouring of God's Spirit is associated with the messianic era²⁰. It is not hard to see what Peter is trying to do here. He wants to let his listeners know that they are witnessing the fulfillment of all the prophecy. Now, it was commonly held that many Scriptural prophecies, in particular the one quoted, explicitly referred to the coming of the Messiah (3:24). According to Joel the outpouring of the Spirit is directly and intimately connected to the messianic era. The occurrence of the last days could mean to Israel only one thing: the Messiah they were waiting for has arrived. This demonstrates the first part of the syllogism that God has fulfilled His messianic promise. The logical consequence is that the Messiah is now a reality. There cannot be a Messianic Age without a Messiah. He is no longer the One that the people of God have to wait for. He is already here. This leads us to the second statement: Jesus is no ordinary man.

In verse 22 Peter affirms that Jesus performed “miracles and portents and signs”. The Greek term *dunameis* could be translated as “mighty works”. These have been worked through Jesus by God and are the “powers of the world to come”²¹. The miracles were believed to be the mark of the Messiah. We know this also from extra-Biblical sources²². In his Gospel Luke had already given an account of the extraordinary things that Jesus had done. Here he needed just to affirm His power without giving further evidence of it. The *miracles argument* functions as an introductory proof to the *demonstration* that Jesus was sent by God. However, the definitive proof of His messianic role are not the signs He performed, but His resurrection from the dead.

Luke develops his argument quoting Psalm 16:8–11. According to Peter, here David is speaking of the resurrection of the Christ (verse 31). The psalm must be understood as a prophecy, as the king could not have spoken about himself. David is dead and buried, as everybody knows (verses 29–32). According to the author this fact proves that the dead king spoke about one of his descendants. Peter's claim is that the prophecy is about Jesus, and this claim is grounded on the fact that the Apostles, and many others, are eyewitnesses of His resurrection. Peter is talking about something that he saw with his own eyes. Here the crowd is left with two options. Either they think that Peter is a liar, or they accept that Jesus was really raised from the

²⁰ See Nb 11:29; Ezk 36:27; (obviously) Jl 3:1–2; and especially Zc 4:6 and 6:8.

²¹ Heb 6:5.

²² See, for instance: Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX.8.6.

dead. Obviously, the author implies that the second option is the true one. Therefore, since the Nazarene is the only one who has been raised to life by God after His death on the cross, He must be David's descendant, the one about whom the king himself wrote.

At this point Luke has presented us with two elements. The first is the coming of the Messianic Age, and therefore of the Christ. The second is the supernatural events – especially the resurrection – which denote Jesus as an uncommon man. The following logical conclusion is that this extraordinary man, who performed signs and who has been resurrected by God, is the Messiah (v. 36).

From the Messiah to the Lord

To reach the affirmation that Jesus is the Messiah is, indeed, an important achievement. Nevertheless, for Luke it is not enough. There are several reasons for this. First, we know that for the Jews of that time the title "Messiah" had a political connotation. What they expected was the restoration of an earthly kingdom. Most probably, this was what the Apostles still believed even immediately after the resurrection (1:6). If we read the four Gospels we can see that Jesus Himself did not use the title "Messiah". On one occasion only does He possibly refer to Himself as "the Christ" (Mk 14:61–62). Furthermore, in the Gospels there are only four passages where Jesus seems to accept this title²³. Possibly, He did not want people to misunderstand Him. He did not want them to think He was a worldly ruler come to restore the historical kingdom of Israel. The Church soon realized that Jesus is more than a temporal king. This is why Luke could not be satisfied with announcing the coming of the Messiah. He had to explain who Christ really is.

Moreover, the miracles and the resurrection are not only exceptional events that testify to Jesus being the Son of David. In the Gospels every single miracle is a sign of salvation. Every miracle marks a passage from a state of slavery to a state of freedom; from being ill to being healthy, from being under the influence of the devil to being free, from being hungry to being filled. It is clear that there is something more about this Jesus than simply being the Messiah (in the political sense of the term). This is what Luke wants to show. In the sermon Peter introduces Jesus as a man (verse 22), subsequently calling Him the Christ (verse 31), and ends by proclaiming that this man is the Lord.

²³ Mt 16:16–17, Mk 5:1–20; 10:46–52; 14:61–62. For a more detailed exposition of the problem see: John DRANE, *Introducing the New Testament*, Lion Publishing plc, Oxford, 1999, p. 66–70.

We should not fail to note that although the term *man* is probably used here in a literary sense, it might be understood as having a broader meaning, referring to the title *Son of Man*, which Jesus used quite frequently. The Christological title itself is not explicitly used, but we should consider two important factors. First, the word *man*, in the wider context of the whole sermon, leads to the proclamation of Jesus as the Lord (v. 36). Secondly, the title *Son of Man* is used in the Gospels more than any other to describe Jesus. Therefore, it was probably very familiar to Peter, Luke and the early Christians. If this is true, the term *man* could have a broader meaning than its literal one. I would like to propose the idea that this word should be understood as an allusion to the Lordship of Jesus, and invite the reader to remember that one of the implications of the title *Son of Man* is eschatological. The *Son of Man* is the one who will return on the clouds of heaven on the day of the Parousia. This use of the title can be found in Daniel 7. Luke utilizes it in this way at least four times in his Gospel²⁴.

The Second Christological Syllogism: Jesus is the Lord

The second syllogism follows the path that Luke takes in affirming that Jesus is the Lord. We will see in the next chapter that Peter's speech is not a clear statement of the two natures of Christ, nor a fully developed Christological doctrine. At this point, Peter's Christology is still at a primitive stage. However, it would be incorrect to deny that his address to the crowd intends to affirm Jesus' divinity. Such an affirmation is achieved through the *promise-fulfillment* theme. In the context of the second syllogism this theological theme is, if possible, even more central than in the first one. In order to understand who Jesus really is, we have to comprehend the nature of God's promise of salvation. Hopefully, the systematization of the material will help us in our task. The second syllogism reads as follows:

- 1st Statement: God's promise is a promise of salvation and it is fulfilled through the Lord.
- 2nd Statement: Jesus has been raised to life and to the right hand of the Father. He is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation.
- Conclusion: Jesus is the Lord.

In order to understand the first statement we have to go back to Joel's prophecy. In verse 20 we can see how the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church does not constitute in itself the fulfillment of the promise. Rather, the outpouring of the Spirit is the sign that the

²⁴ Lk 17:30; 18:8; 21:36; 22:69.

promise has begun to be fulfilled. The *Parousia* constitutes the last step in the realization of God's plan of salvation. The essential point that we should note is that the "great and terrible day" is no more called the day of Yhwh, as it is in the Old Testament text²⁵. Luke refers to it as "the day of the Lord". This is the first indication of the author's intention. The second is verse 21, where Peter tells us that the Parousia is a day of salvation. The logical implication of these two affirmations is that this Lord whom Peter is talking about happens to be our Savior. This is a "sub-syllogism" contained within the first statement of the second main syllogism. If the Parousia is the day of the Lord and a day of salvation, then this Lord must be our Savior. The further implication is that this Lord is divine. We can infer this from the use that Luke makes of the term *Lord*. The Greek term *Kurios* translates the Hebrew *Adonai*, which was used as a substitute for *Yhwh*, as Jews did not dare to pronounce God's name. It is clear that for our author "Lord" and "God" are synonyms. The question that arises from this affirmation is: "who is this Lord who fulfils God's promise of salvation?". Answering this question is the aim of the second syllogism.

Jesus' resurrection is once again the door to our comprehension of Luke's purpose. In verse 24 we have an outstanding Christological affirmation. Jesus could not be held in the power of Hades²⁶. This fact tells us at least two things. First, death could not defeat Christ because He *is* life. He is the source and "the prince of life" (3:15). Secondly, Hades could not enslave Jesus because He is sinless. In verse 38 Peter declares that, in order to receive the gift of the Spirit, one must repent and "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins". This is an implicit affirmation of the sinless nature of our Lord, as He could not save us from our sins if He had sinned Himself. If this is true, we can conclude that in Luke's theology the victory of Jesus over death is a testimony of His divinity. No created human being can be the source of life, nor can s/he be without sin²⁷.

The ultimate seal on the claim that Jesus is our Savior is the fact that He is now sitting at the right hand of the Father (verse 33). This is a further element that indicates that He is the Lord referred to in Joel's prophecy. The last quotation from the Old Testament (verses 34–35) is the final confirmation of Christ's divinity. David is once again cited²⁸. The psalm states that the Lord sits at the right hand of God. Hence, since it is Jesus who has been "raised to the heights by

²⁵ J1 2:11. See also 4:15–17.

²⁶ Some texts have either "Sheol" or "death" instead of "Hades".

²⁷ The dogma of the Immaculate Conception implies that the Virgin Mary has been *preserved* from sin. However, she is not sinless in the same way as Christ ontologically *is*.

²⁸ Ps 110:1.

God's right hand" (verse 34), He must be the Lord announced by the prophets. The logical conclusion cannot be different from the one given by Peter: "the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified" (verse 36).

A Primitive Christology

We have seen that Luke, in his effort to give an account of Peter's sermon, adopts a precise strategy. We have also seen how the author's plan can be made even more evident by systematizing (in the fashion of Scholastic theology) the contents of the speech. What we should consider now is at what extent the Christology in the discourse is developed. In other words, does this Christology represent a mature exposition of the doctrine or is it still at a primitive level?

No doubt, Luke presents us with quite a rich theological picture of Christ. The author makes some significant affirmations. In his address to the crowd Peter starts by calling Jesus a man and finishes proclaiming that He is the Christ and the Lord. He is the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Implicitly, it is also stated that Jesus is the source of life, and as such, He is without sin. On the other hand, the affirmation of the divinity of Christ is worked out neither through the use of titles such as "Son of God"²⁹, nor through an explicit exposition of its theological implications. Rather, such an affirmation springs from a systematic theological reflection on the particular historical event of the resurrection. It is through this direct act of God in our history that Jesus has been constituted the Lord and the Messiah. As we have already seen, the resurrection is central to both the syllogisms. However, the text shows that Peter is not content with the proclamation of the simple historical fact. Rather, he uses this fact as the ground for his theology, even if this appears rather underdeveloped by Chalcedonian standards. The apostle is not afraid of re-interpreting the Scriptures in the light of his theological goal. He even changes the words of the prophecies. This is not an alteration of God's Revelation, but a fuller understanding of it that the Church acquired in Her communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit. We have to note that before the outpouring of the Spirit the apostles do not comprehend Jesus' promise of salvation (1:6–11). It is only after Pentecost that they can elaborate its theological meaning. If this is true, we have to admit that the historical event in itself, in this case the resurrection, is not self-proclaiming. Rather, it needs to be theologically understood and proclaimed by the Church. The primitive stage of Peter's Christology is a confirmation of our claim that the

²⁹ In the book of Acts this title is used for the first time by Paul (9:20).

Bible is not simply a narrative, but the theological comprehension of God's acting in our history. Sometimes this comprehension is expressed in the form of a theological narrative – which can be even systematized as it happens in Peter's speech – and sometimes it assumes other forms, such as poetry, myth, and also pure theological statements as in the case of the *lemma Ioanneum*.

Peter's final affirmation (verse 36) represents the primitive belief of the Apostolic Church³⁰. The early Christians were not threatened by *subordinationism*, therefore they were not concerned with developing a clearer and deeper doctrine. Obviously, Peter does not imply that Jesus was not the Lord before His resurrection and exaltation. In 3:18 it is clearly stated that it was the Christ who suffered on the cross. However, in the sermon there is no reference to the pre-existence of Jesus and to His unique relation with the Father³¹. It would seem that the resurrection is here considered as the seal to Jesus' right to be called "Lord" and "Messiah". This primitive Christology is the sign of the progressive theological understanding of God's Revelation. Maybe, the early Christians did not become immediately aware of the divinity of Jesus. It is not immediately after the resurrection that the Church became able fully to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Rather, this happened only in communion with the resurrected Lord through the outpouring of the Spirit.

Conclusion

Peter's sermon is simply meant to announce the kerygma of the early Christians. Although Luke adopted a syllogistic structure, he did not change the general message of the speech. The final product is an example of the immediate post-resurrection Christology organized in a systematic structure which is not completely dissimilar from more recent traditional theology. Similarly, my attempt to highlight this kind of structural arrangement aims to make the fundamental theology more comprehensible and to emphasize the presence in the speech of an already pre-existing order. The system of two syllogisms arranged in a "four point literary plan" is not intended to alter the theological message and the original structure of the sermon. Rather, it is meant to show that even a piece of narrative preaching has theological and systematic elements without which no understanding of the text would be possible.

Obviously, it cannot be denied that the event of the resurrection is the central fact of the speech. However, it must be accepted that this real fact, which truly happened, is as much theological as it is

³⁰ For a confirmation see, for instance, Ac 13:32–33; Rm1:4; Heb 1:5; 5:5; etc.

³¹ Cfr.: BRUCE F.F., *op. cit.*, p. 96.

historical. Indeed for Peter it is both. The preaching of the Church is grounded on the historical acting of God in the world. However, the historical events are just the first moment of this preaching. The Church has reflected on these events and has produced theological statements which constitute the final body of Her doctrine. The huge mistake made by some of those who reject the traditional method is the assumption that the Bible is the embodiment of the first level of the preaching of the Church. We cannot reduce the Scriptures to a narrative, an account of the events, even if this is theological or even dogmatic. The opposite is true. The Bible is the product of the Church and the exposition not just of the naked facts, but of the way in which the Apostles and their immediate successors have understood them through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As I hope I have demonstrated above, even the narrative texts do not escape the theological (even systematic) framework in which they were comprehended and transmitted. For this reason we should not be content with those theologies which reject any kind of traditional approach in favor of purely historical or narrative methods. Paradoxically, although their main concern seems to be a strict faithfulness to the texts, these theologies irremediably end up in making the Bible poorer and less comprehensible.

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