

Peter's Justification of his Mission to the Gentiles in Acts 11:1-18

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The conversion of the Gentile Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:1-11:18, without observance of Jewish circumcision and dietary laws, was an epoch-changing event as the actual beginning of *missio and gentes* for the early Church. Peter served as an instrument of God's saving action by accepting the invitation from Cornelius, proclaiming to the members of Cornelius's household the risen Jesus as the Lord of all in whom God offers his forgiveness and salvation to all repentant converts, and mandating his followers to baptize them. After he returned to Jerusalem, baptized Jews rebuked him for having practiced commensality with Gentiles despite their moral and ritual impurity. Before we proceed to an exegetic exploration of his justification, we should briefly examine the role of Peter's homilies in Acts, and the conversion of Cornelius as a seminal event in the early Church's evangelization of the Gentiles.

1. Homilies of Peter in Acts

In exploring the genre and subforms of Acts, exegetes note that of the 1,000 verses of its Greek text, about 250, or a third, are comprised of discourses. There are ten Pauline and eight Petrine homilies, one of the risen Christ, one of Stephen, one of James, and so on.¹ Here are the homilies of Peter:

1. At the choosing of Matthias, who would replace Judas in the Council of the Apostles in post-resurrection evangelization (1:16-22);
2. On Pentecost in Jerusalem to Jewish pilgrims from Palestine and the diaspora (2:14b-36, 38-39);

¹ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Acts of the Apostles. A New Translation and Commentary*, Doubleday, New York 1998, 103-113.

3. In the Temple courtyard after curing the lame man in the name of the risen Jesus (3:12b-26);
4. Before the Sanhedrin, whose leaders refused to believe the miracle performed in the name of Jesus (4:8b-12,19b-20);
5. After the miraculous freeing from prison, before the Sanhedrin, where Gamaliel advised the leaders to have nothing to do with the Jesus movement until it either dies out or is confirmed (5:29b-32);
6. To the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household in Caesarea (10:34b-43);
7. To the baptized Jews in Jerusalem in defense of his mission to the Gentiles in Caesarea (11:5-17);
8. At the Conference in Jerusalem in AD 49, advocating for the commensality of baptized Jews and Gentiles in mixed local Churches (15:7b-11).

Scholars see that Luke used the same phraseology, style, and vocabulary in the narratives and homilies of Acts because he could not collect personal memoirs of the speakers or historical listeners for all 28 discourses in the book. However, in Paul's farewell discourse to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (20:18b-35), they identify elements of direct knowledge by the narrator "and the only speech evocative of Paul's personal style, though simplified for use in an historiographic work."² Numerous articles and monographs have been dedicated to discerning Luke's redaction or creative composition from traditional material of apostolic preaching to the Jews and the Gentiles.³ German commentators on Acts favor this approach to Luke's second volume.⁴ The American Catholic interpreter of Luke and Paul, Joseph A. Fitzmyer (1920-2016), reminds us that in Greek historiography homilies were used as a subform to produce a dramatic effect illustrating the author's purpose. Luke may also have been influenced by the Greek homilies of the author of Maccabees or Josephus Flavius. Fitzmyer points to the common conception that un-

² Ibid., 108.

³ In preparing this contribution, in addition to recent commentaries on Acts, I was able to consult K. HAACKER, "Dibelius und Cornelius. Ein Beispiel formgeschichtlicher Überlieferungskritik", *Biblische Zeitschrift*, vol. 24, 1980, 234-251.

⁴ In my research, I have used G. SCHNEIDER, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg 1980 (vol. 1) and 1982 (vol. 2); J. ZMIJEWSKI, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Pustet, Regensburg 1994.

derlies the speeches in Acts. The German exegete, Josef Zmijewski, sees in the missionary homilies of Acts three fundamental elements:

1. Introduction alluding to concrete situation;
2. Kerygmatic main section about Christ with Old Testament quotations as proofs;
3. Conclusion with warning to repentance and promise of salvation through Christ.

Zmijewski reconstructs seven lines of possible text of the kerygmatic or Christological section.⁵ Luke surely did not create the discourses of his speakers in Acts *ex nihilo*, but he did address them to his contemporary readers, not primarily to the individuals mentioned in the narratives. In this sense, Fitzmyer points out: "In Acts the speeches make up for the lack of the author's psychological analysis or reflections on the meaning of events recorded, because Luke has inserted them at crucial points in his narrative to explain a development in the history of the early Christian community. Thus, Stephen's indictment serves to make the rejection of the Christian Gospel by some Jews intelligible; Paul's speech to the Jerusalem crowd (Acts 22) explains the Christian mission to the Gentiles; Peter's evangelizing sermon at Cornelius's conversion explains that God Himself has ordained the mission to non-Jews; Paul's speech at Areopagus reveals how Christianity adapts itself to Greek culture and ideas".⁶

For an appreciation of Peter's discourses in Acts, we should briefly consider the place of Peter in Jesus's ministry and in the evangelization of Palestine.⁷ Accepting with most exegetes that Mark is the oldest canonical Gospel and that Luke may have used its material as one of his sources, we should note that, in addition to retaining Mark's episodes with Peter, Luke has added three new ones. The first of these is the miraculous haul of fish, where Peter confesses that he is a sinner and Jesus promises to make him *anthrōpous zōgrōn* – a

⁵ J. ZMIJEWSKI, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 125-128.

⁶ J. A. FITZMYER, *The Acts of the Apostles. A New Translation and Commentary*, 108.

⁷ See the chapters "Peter in the Book of Acts" and "Peter in the Gospel of Luke", in R.E. BROWN – K.P. DONFRIED – J. REUMANN (eds.), *Peter in the New Testament*, Paulist, New York 1973, 39-56, 109-128. This is an ecumenical monograph, the fruit of team research by Catholic and Protestant exegetes in the United States, commissioned by their respective Church leaders.

fisher of men (Lk 5,11). This episode foreshadows the choosing of the Twelve (6:12-16), of whom Simon will be the leader. This is the story of Simon's call.⁸ The verb *zōgraō* comes from *zōos* – alive *and* *agrein* – hunt, to capture alive, to save people's lives. The participle is "used in the periphrastic future construction emphasizing linear or durative action".⁹ This metaphor for gathering in includes the sense that fisherman will catch human beings for God's Kingdom, an agency linked to the ministry of Jesus Himself. In Luke's account of the last supper, Jesus foretells Peter's denial (22:31-34), but commissions Peter the repentant sinner to give support to his brothers after he "turns back" (*pote epistrepsas*). Thanks to the effective prayer of Jesus, Peter will have the task of strengthening the dedication of his brothers to the crucified and risen Jesus. The Swiss Protestant exegete François Bovon (1938-2013) carried out his teaching ministry in the United States. In his commentary on Luke 22:32, he translates: "Mais moi, j'ai prié pour toi afin que ta foi ne fasse pas défaut. Quant à toi, une fois converti, fortifie tes frères". He shows that the verb *stērizō* (to strengthen) marks ecclesiastical ethics because Church leaders are commissioned to console, encourage, and strengthen their fellow Christians. While Paul applies this to the personal discipline of believers, "Luc utilise quatre fois, dans les Actes (Ac 14,22 ; 15,32.41 ; 18,23), le composé *epistērizō* dont l'emploi confirme le sens donné ici. Comme autrefois, la nourriture matérielle, le pain, fortifiait le cœur de l'Israélite et le préparait à l'action (voir Jg 19,5), de même, aujourd'hui, la parole apostolique (Lc 22,32) et le don de l'Esprit (Rm 1,11) soutiennent-ils la foi des chrétiens. Le verbe *stērizō* et le terme *adelphoi*, ainsi que le contexte de Lc 22,31-32, suggèrent une perspective post-pascale. Le leadership de Pierre est admis par Luc, ainsi qu'il l'est par Matthieu dans la fameuse sentence *Tu es Petrus* (Mt 16:18)".¹⁰

Luke concludes his Emmaus episode with the return of the two disciples to Jerusalem, after they had recognized the risen Jesus in the breaking of bread. Only after listening to the testimony of the

⁸ See exegetical exposition of the episode in J. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, Yale University Press, New York 1980, 559-570.

⁹ F. RIENECKER – C.L. ROGERS, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1982, 151.

¹⁰ F. BOVON, *L'Évangile selon Saint Luc (19,28-24,53)*, Labor et Fides, Genève 2009, 223.

Eleven, “The Lord has been raised and he has appeared to Simon” (Lk 24:34), and they were allowed to tell their story. This part of the Kerygma was preached also by Paul in 1 Cor 15:4-5, using the same verb *egeiromai*, but in the passive perfect tense. Here the form is the aorist passive, *ēgerthē* with the meaning “he has been raised up”, not “he rose”. This apparition to Peter alone is not presented in the third Gospel. “Nothing is said by Luke or in Paul’s use of the kerygmatic fragment about where the appearance took place. But the Lucan tradition would suggest a locale in Jerusalem, which would not be the same as John 21:1-23. This appearance to Simon Peter is the basis on which he will give strength to his brothers (Lk 22:32); it is the grace given by the risen Christ to the one who will play the leading role in the Christian community depicted in Luke’s second volume”.¹¹

American authors of an ecumenical monograph on *Peter in the New Testament* point out that the third evangelist has removed in his portrait of Peter harsh judgements present in Mark and Matthew, so that Peter’s career during the ministry of Jesus fits more smoothly with his role in the early Church described in Acts: “Luke takes pains to remind the reader that these denials were forgiven, for the risen Lord appeared to Simon. It is probably no accident that Peter is the last of the Twelve to be mentioned by name in the Gospel and the first of the Twelve to be mentioned by name in the Acts. If for Luke the Twelve Apostles are the bridge between the historical Jesus and the Church, Simon or Peter plays that role par excellence”.¹²

When we turn to Peter’s ministry in the early Christian community according to Acts, we notice that he is actively present in chapters 1 to 15 as the initiator of preaching to converted Jews and Gentiles. The author of the third Gospel and Acts agrees with other New Testament writings in ascribing to Simon-Peter the role of *Gemeindeleiter* – leader of the community.¹³ The German Catholic exegete, Gerhard Schneider, points out that in Luke’s own material of the third Gospel the name “Simon” is uppermost. In Acts 1-15

¹¹ J. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 1569.

¹² R.E. BROWN – K.P. DONFRIED – J. REUMANN (eds.), *Peter in the New Testament*, 127-128.

¹³ R. PESCH, “Petros-Petrus”, in *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 3, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1983, 193-201.

the name “Peter” is mentioned 56 times. On behalf of the Twelve, Peter is witness of the risen Christ and the first evangelizer of the Jews in Jerusalem (2:14-41, *Erst-Apostel, Erstverkünder*).¹⁴

Luke describes Peter’s mission in the early Church as strengthening his brothers, but this mission is performed also by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:21-22; 15:32-41; 16:5; 18:23). This would take into account the fact that in the time in which Luke was writing there existed in the Church a ministry of strengthening.¹⁵ The authors of the ecumenical monograph on Peter in the New Testament conclude that the Pauline letters reflect a conviction that Peter had a prominent role in the Jerusalem community, and that he was a leader who inaugurated the mission to the Gentiles. After the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15, James, the Apostles, and the elders play significant roles, probably because Peter “went off to another place” (Acts 12:17 – Antioch and later to Rome?). At the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15, “a decisive role is given to James, who enunciates his ‘judgment’ (15:19-20) that while the Gentiles should not be troubled over circumcision, they should be bound by four regulations. A decisive role is given to the Apostles and the elders who send the letter imposing James’s judgement upon the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (15:23). Peter provides the decisive witness; James provides the decisive judgment or decision; the Apostles and elders provide the sentence or the enforcement of the decision”.¹⁶ Since the Apostles convened in Jerusalem to discuss circumcision for baptized Gentiles (15:2), but the “Decree” speaks only of four regulations concerning commensality of converted Gentiles with converted Jews (15:29), most exegetes suppose that Luke has conflated two conferences of the Apostles and elders of Jerusalem into one, the first in about AD 49, where no ruling was handed down, and another 25 or 30 years later which had the ruling with four regulations. From the fact that Peter disappears after Acts 15,

¹⁴ G. SCHNEIDER, “Exkurs 6: Petrus in der Apostelgeschichte” in his *Die Apostelgeschichte* (vol. 1), 279-283.

¹⁵ “Doch weiss Lukas, dass in der Person des Paulus und anderer Verkündiger fortgeführt wurde, was in seiner Sicht Simon-Petrus grundlegend begonnen hatte. Die Vollmacht und der Auftrag, die dem Petrus von Christus erteilt waren, leben auch in der nachpetrinischen Zeit in der Kirche weiter” (Ibid., 283).

¹⁶ R.E. BROWN – K.P. DONFRIED – J. REUMANN (eds.), *Peter in the New Testament*, 50.

these scholars suppose that "Luke's primary interest was not to give a description of authoritative structure in the early Church, but to substantiate a *heilsgeschichtlich* claim that would establish a connection between the churches of late first-century Christians (in which Luke lived) and the Jesus of Palestine through the medium of Apostles and missionaries".¹⁷

Recent researchers of Acts stress the historical and social situation of Luke's addressees.¹⁸ In his 1973 article on the discourses of Peter in Acts, the Belgian exegete Jacques Dupont (1915-1998) drew attention to the instruction of the risen Christ in Luke 24:48-49, where he mandated the Apostles to be his witnesses before Israel and the Gentiles, and this is the task performed by Peter and Paul in their missionary homilies.¹⁹ While in writing his Gospel Luke significantly depended on existing preached material about Jesus, in the Acts "les discours missionnaires, en particulier, lui fournissaient l'occasion de remettre ses lecteurs en contact direct avec le message apostolique, et de continuer ainsi sa mission d'évangéliste".²⁰ He calls the pre-Pauline kerygma of 1 Cor 15:3-5 a small Symbol of faith, and he argues that it sums up the missionary discourses in Acts that Luke has elaborated based on traditional material reflecting apostolic preaching in the early Church. Peter was the representative of the Apostles in formulating their sermons, but he was taking the floor together with them (see Acts 2:14; 5:29; 4:13; 8:24; 10:39). "Il est clair que, dans la pensée de Luc, Pierre est inséparable de ses compagnons d'apostolat. Cette observation entraîne une conséquence importante pour l'interprétation des discours. Les lecteurs modernes seraient facilement portés à y chercher des indications sur la manière personnelle dont Pierre prêchait, sur les idées théologiques ou les expressions qui caractérisaient sa prédication : bref, sur ce qui le

¹⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹⁸ T. PENNER, "Madness in the Method? The Acts of the Apostles in Current Study", *Currents in Biblical Research*, vol. 2, n. 2, 2004, 223-293. He points out that literary analysis has taken over the task of *Redaktionskritik* and would like modern scholars to pay more attention to the title *Hristos* in view of the ruler cult. He cites a list of 453 titles of articles or books he has examined.

¹⁹ J. DUPONT, "Les discours de Pierre dans le Actes et le chapitre XXIV de l'évangile de Luc", in F. NEIRYNCK (ed.), *L'Évangile de Luc: Problèmes littéraires et théologiques. Memorial Lucien Cerfaux*, Bibl. ETL, Gembloux 1973, 329-374.

²⁰ Ibid., 355.

distinguait des autres apôtres. Il faut bien se rendre compte que ce point de vue ne correspond aucunement à celui de Luc. Ce qu'il veut faire connaître à ses lecteurs en leur présentant les discours de Pierre, c'est la prédication apostolique comme telle, ou 'l'enseignement des Apôtres' (II,42). Qu'on ne s'étonne donc pas en constatant que les textes nous renseignent si peu sur la personnalité du prince des apôtres: ce n'est pas ce qui intéresse Luc, qui veut justement montrer en Pierre le porte-parole du groupe apostolique".²¹

2. Conversion of Cornelius and his Household in Caesarea²² (Acts 10:1-48)

Peter's justification of his mission to the Gentiles in Caesarea is based on his personal experience of this event confirmed by six baptized Jews from Joppa who joined him on his pastoral visit to Cornelius's home. This is why we should have a brief exegetical insight of the event before we proceed to analyzing Peter's apologia to the baptized Jews of Jerusalem. This is a favorite episode among New Testament scholars in the Acts.²³ Dupont, in the section on Peter and Cornelius of essay on the salvation of the Gentiles according to Acts, pointed out: "Luc attribue une importance considérable à cet épisode dans l'économie de son ouvrage : non seulement il lui accorde un développement en apparence presque anormal, mais il s'arrange délibérément pour faire de Corneille le premier gentil reçu dans la communauté chrétienne. De même que l'arrivée de Paul à Rome et sa prédication aux païens de la ville impériale constituent le point d'aboutissement de sa carrière apostolique, on peut dire que, dans l'optique de Luc, le baptême de Corneille constitue, lui aussi, le point d'aboutissement de la carrière apostolique de Pierre, son inter-

²¹ Ibid., 372-373.

²² This is the title given by Fitzmyer to the whole Cornelius section in Acts 10:1-11:18 in his *The Acts of the Apostles*, 446-473. Although aware of other possibilities, he divides the Cornelius episode into five subsections: a) Cornelius's Vision (10:1-8); b) Peter's Vision (10:9-16); c) Welcome for Messengers from Cornelius (10:17-23a); d) Peter's Testimony in Cornelius's House (10:23b-48); e) Peter's Self-Defense at Jerusalem (11:1-18).

²³ C. LUKASZ, *Evangelizzazione e conflitto. Indagine sulla coerenza letteraria e tematica della pericope di Cornelio (Atti 10,1-11,18)*, Engelbert-Humperdinck-Schule, Frankfurt am Main 1993.

vention après laquelle il ne lui reste plus qu'à s'effacer en laissant Paul seul en scène".²⁴

Czeslaw Lukasz proceeds to the Cornelius episode in Acts convinced that Luke presents the evangelization of the first Gentiles as Peter's testimony to the universality of the Gospel, and eliminates obstacles that prevent the full integration of baptized Gentiles in the Christian community.²⁵ Here is the way he sees the literary and theological correlation: "Ciò che concatena in maniera più forte 10:1-48 con 11:1-18 e tutte le parti della Pericopa di Cornelio (PC) fra di loro è il tema dei pagani. Nel corso del nostro studio vedremo che in esso si distinguono due componenti: l'evangelizzazione e la questione dei contatti sociali. L'asse tematica di evangelizzazione unisce soprattutto la parte 10:1-48, mentre l'unità di tutta la PC è data dall'asse tematica delle relazioni sociali tra giudei e pagani. In questa ottica, la sezione 11:1-18 non è una ripetizione di 10:1-48, ma serve per promuovere la commensalità, come ulteriore approfondimento dei rapporti sociali".²⁶

The episode begins with two parallel visions. The Roman military commander Cornelius in Caesarea, who has accepted belief in the unique God of Jewish revelation, sees an angel of God who transfers to him God's message that his prayers have been accepted. The angel tells him that God wants him to bring Simon into his home from Joppa. Simon is the leader of the Jesus movement among the

²⁴ J. DUPONT, "Le salut des gentils et la signification théologique du livre des Actes", *New Testament Studies*, vol. 6, 1959/1960, 132-155 (quotation 146-147). Dupont was translator and interpreter of Acts in *La Bible de Jérusalem. La sainte Bible traduite en français sous la direction de l'école biblique de Jérusalem. Nouvelle édition entièrement revue et augmentée*, Cerf, Paris 1978. He points out: "Aux yeux de Luc la conversion de Corneille n'est pas un simple cas individuel. Sa portée universelle ressort du récit lui-même et de son insistance sur les visions de Pierre et de Corneille, et surtout du lien mis par l'auteur entre cet événement et les décisions du 'Conseil de Jérusalem', cf. 15,7-11,14. Deux leçons distinctes semblent se dégager: 1^o Dieu lui-même a montré que les païens devaient être reçus dans l'Église sans qu'on les astreigne aux prescriptions de la Loi, cf. 10,34-35,44-48 ; 11,1,15-18 ; 15,7-11,14 ; et Ga 2,1-10 ; 2^o Dieu lui-même a montré à Pierre qu'il devait accepter l'hospitalité d'un incirconcis: on sent ici le problème des rapports entre chrétiens issus du judaïsme et chrétiens issus du paganisme, cf 10,10-16,28-29 ; 11,2-14 ; et Ga 2,11-21".

²⁵ C. LUKASZ, *Evangelizzazione e conflitto. Indagine sulla coerenza letteraria e tematica della pericope di Cornelio (Atti 10,1-11,18)*, 27-28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

Jewish people. Cornelius sends two servants accompanied by a soldier to Joppa (11:1-8). On his tour of Christian communities consisting predominantly of converted Jews, Simon Peter stayed for a time in Joppa, a coastal town 50 km south of Caesarea. He was accommodated in the house of Simon the tanner. While the three delegates from Cornelius are approaching Joppa, Peter sees the heavens open and an object resembling a large sheet bearing unclean animals forbidden for consummation to Jews due to their dietary laws. Three times Peter hears a voice telling him to prepare his meal from the meat of these animals because God has made them clean (10:9-16).

Peter understood this vision as God's sign to welcome the messengers from Cornelius, and go with them to the house of a Gentile who was well-disposed toward asking for instruction about the movement of Jesus in a country controlled by the Romans. Peter took six converted Jews of Joppa to be his traveling companions and later on to give witness to the event among the baptized Jews in Jerusalem (10:17-23). In the meantime, Cornelius called his relatives and close friends to meet Simon Peter on his arrival. Considering him a special envoy of God, Cornelius fell at Peter's feet but the Apostle declined this sign of extraordinary respect, insisting that he was merely a human being. Peter reminded Cornelius and his household members that normally Jews are not allowed to associate with Gentiles, but said that he had been instructed by God not to consider Cornelius's home unclean. When Peter asked Cornelius why he had sent for him, Cornelius recounted his vision from four days earlier. He thanked Peter for coming and declared: "We are all here present in the presence of God to listen to all the instructions that the Lord has given you" (10:24-33). In his introduction to this episode, Luke depicted Cornelius as "a devout and God-fearing man, along with his household, giving alms to Jewish people and praying to God constantly" (10:2). God-fearer (*phoboumenos ton Theon*) is Luke's name for those Gentiles who had accepted the faith in one God and had begun taking part in synagogue worship, but who, for the sake of their cultural identity, could not accept circumcision and dietary laws (Acts 9:31; 10:1,22,35; 13:16,26). Another similar expression is "God worshipers" (*sebomenoi ton Theon*) (13:50; 16:14; 17:4,17; 18:7). In addition to his significant charitable assistance to Jews (*poiōn eleēmosynas pollas to laō*), Cornelius was a regular participant in worship at the local synagogue, but not a proselyte or a Judaized member. Therefore, he was well informed about Jewish non-association with Gentiles and about the dietary laws.

Peter's sermon in Cornelius's house (10:34-43) is a missionary homily of the early preachers of Christianity, which recalls Jesus's original call for conversion and belief because in his preaching and healing ministry the Kingdom of God is at hand (Mk 1:14-15; Mt 4:12-17). It also recalls Jesus' inaugural speech in the synagogue of Nazareth according to Luke (Lk 4:16-30), as well as Jesus' answer to the disciples of the Baptist (Mt 11:4-6; Lk 7:22-23) and the Pauline kerygma (1 Cor 15:1-11). The ministry of Jesus is being continued by the ministry of Peter, Paul, and other authorized evangelizers in the early Church²⁷.

Peter first highlights his new experience that God shows no partiality, he is no respecter of appearances (v. 34). In LXX and in several New Testament writings *prosōpolēmtēs*, *prosōpon lambanein* comes from the Hebrew *naśah panim* ("to lift the face"), and denotes the gracious act of someone who lifts up a person's face by showing them favor. In this context, it means that God does not favor only Jews. God's impartiality in providing eschatological salvation to all humans is a central theological axiom in the New Testament (Rom 2:11; Col 3:25; Eph 6:9; 1 Petr 1:17; Jas 2:1.9). Through the advent of Jesus Christ, God sent peace to all humanity and made Him the Lord of all, in the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus who died a violent death on the cross, but God raised Him up and made Him manifest (vv. 36-40). "The message 'God sent to the children of Israel', Peter now understands, already bore that implicit message of peace and reconciliation between peoples. In principle, therefore, the extension of the mission to the Gentiles is a continuation of Jesus's own words and work".²⁸ The glorified Christ appeared to His historic companions and commissioned them to call repentant Jews and Gentiles to conversion in order "to receive forgiveness of sins through his name". While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came down upon Cornelius and his household confirming the fact that Gentiles can be spiritually reborn, and therefore admitted to bap-

²⁷ F. NEIRYNCK, "Luke 4:16-30 and the Unity of Luke-Acts", in J. VERHEYDEN (ed.), *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 1999, 357-395. F. WILK, "APG 10,1-11,18 im Licht der lukanischen Erzählung vom Wirken Jesu", *Ibid.*, 605-617; A. DEL AGUA, "The Lucan Narrative of the 'Evangelization of the Kingdom of God'. A Contribution to the Unity of Luke-Acts", in *Ibid.*, 639-661.

²⁸ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 5, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 1992, 195.

tism without first being circumcised (vv. 41-44). The fundamentals of this sermon correspond to Peter's homily to Jewish pilgrims on Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14-36.38-40).

The Croatian Franciscan priest Mario Cifrak, in his dissertation on the Christology of Peter's homilies in Acts, identifies in the Cornelius episode the need for conversion in terms of accepting Jesus as the Lord and universal Judge: "Während des irdischen Lebens Jesu war der Friede zugegen; nach der Auferstehung gewährt sein Name die Vergebung der Sünden. Durch ihn ist Gott am Werk, also ist sein Name Gottes Name. Um dem Gericht am Tag des Herrn zu entkommen und gerettet zu werden muss man jetzt schon den Herrn anrufen (cf. Apg 2, 21-22). Kornelius glaubt an den Herrn, Gott Israels, den Richter. Jetzt weiss er, dass der Herr und der Richter Jesus ist. Jetzt kann er ihn anrufen, um gerettet zu werden".²⁹ Although he was already a believer in the God of Jewish revelation, Cornelius had to change his mentality and conduct as a result of the advent of Jesus (*metanoein*). Peter and the six baptized Jews who came with him to Caesarea "were bewildered because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles too" (v. 45). In a certain way, they too had to convert by admitting Gentiles to the Christian community without circumcision. "Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, Peter understands that he must welcome Cornelius and his friends into the community as they are, without obliging them to undergo conversion to Judaism. God has no favorites, makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and gives the Holy Spirit to both (4:31 and 10:44). For someone to be pleasing to God it is necessary and sufficient to have an upright heart. That Peter would undergo a conversion after which he would 'strengthen' his brothers and sisters had been foretold by Jesus (Lk 22:31-32). As Peter progressively absorbs the truth that Christ is risen and living with the Church in his Holy Spirit, he is able to throw off older habits of thinking and acting – even those with the most respectable authority behind them – and to encourage others as well to live in a new way".³⁰

²⁹ M. CIFRAK, *Die Beziehung zwischen Jesus und Gott nach den Petrusreden der Apostelgeschichte. Ein exegetischer Beitrag zur Christologie der Apostelgeschichte*, Echter, Würzburg 2003, 264.

³⁰ J. TAYLOR, "Acts of the Apostles", *The International Bible Commentary. A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twentieth Century*, William R. Farmer, Collegeville, MN 1998, 1524.

3. Peter's Apologia to the Baptized Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18)

Through the encounter between Peter and his Jewish critics in the holy city, Luke justifies Peter's action and establishes the link between the Church in Jerusalem and this first Gentile mission. Baptized Jerusalem Jews rebuked Peter for having associated with Gentiles and eaten with them (v. 3). Due to their ethnic and religious background, this would involve giving up their identity. In terms of inclusion in God's covenant, circumcision and observing dietary regulations meant ritual holiness and the separateness of this people, based on the commandments of God. Such ritual separation symbolized rejecting involvement with the idolatry of pagan religions. "Therefore, the question of how meals could be holy yet shared with unclean people is not an easy one. Peter's opponents imply that by being with and willing to eat with Gentiles, he has abandoned his own heritage as a Jew, and has also jeopardized the identity of the messianic community as the people of God".³¹ Since the canonical text is more important than the interpretation of scholars, let us first examine the text as translated by Fitzmyer in his 1998 commentary on Acts:

¹ Now the Apostles and brothers who were in Judea heard that Gentiles had welcomed the Word of God. ²So when Peter came up to Jerusalem, circumcised believers confronted him, ³saying, "You entered the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them." ⁴Peter explained it to them step by step from the beginning. ⁵"I was at

³¹ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 200. Circumcision and dietary regulations are important to the Jews of Luke's time and to modern followers of Judaism. See J. KLAUANS, "Concepts of Purity in the Bible", in A. BERLIN – M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, 2041-2047; D.M. Freidenreich, "Food and Table Fellowship", in A.-J. LEVINE – M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, 521-524. Freidenreich concludes: "The New Testament, however, reflects the degree to which Jesus and his immediate followers conformed to Jewish dietary practices. It highlights, moreover, efforts on the part of the first leaders of the new movement to accommodate both Jewish and Gentile followers within a single community". See also CH. E. FONROBERT, "Judaizers, Jewish Christians and Others", *Ibid.*, 554-557; J.R. ROSENBLUM, *The Jewish Dietary Laws in the Ancient World*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2015.

prayer in the town of Joppa, when in a trance I had a vision. I saw an object resembling a big sheet come down, being lowered from the heavens by its four corners, and it moved up to me. ⁶As I stared at it, I could see and make out four-legged creatures of the earth, wild beasts and reptiles, and birds of the sky. ⁷I also heard a voice say to me ‘Get up, Peter! Slaughter and eat.’ ⁸But I said, ‘Not on your life, sir, for nothing common and unclean has ever entered my mouth!’ ⁹A second time the voice from the heavens spoke out, ‘What God has made clean, you are not to call common.’ ¹⁰Three times this happened, and everything was drawn up again to the heavens. ¹¹Just then three men arrived at the house where we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹²The Spirit told me to go with them without hesitation. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered that man’s house. ¹³He informed us how he had seen (the) angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send someone to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter. ¹⁴He will tell you things by which you and all your household will be saved.’ ¹⁵As I began to address them, the Holy Spirit came down upon them, just as it did on us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered the Word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with a Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷So if God gave them the gift he gave us when we came to believe in the Lord Jesus, who was I to be able to stop God? ¹⁸When they heard this, they stopped objecting; instead they began to honor God, saying, “So, God has granted life-giving repentance even to Gentiles.”

Benjamin R. Wilson underscores the geographic markers in the narrative of the Cornelius episode, because Caesarea, Joppa, and Jerusalem represent three markedly different contexts for first-century Jewish-Gentile relations. Caesarea was the seat of the Roman governor, with a majority Gentile population. Joppa was a Jewish fortress in the time of Maccabees and an insurgent city, while Jerusalem was the center of Jewish monotheism with increasingly strained relations with representatives of the Roman authorities after the sudden death of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44. Peter clarifies that his visit to Cornelius’s home occurred through divine intervention, while Jerusalem believers gradually affirm the ethnic and spatial universality of the Christian mission and accept Peter’s experience as divinely commissioned outreach to the nations: “The geographic movements in the story are not extraneous to the develop-

ment of the plot. Rather, they are an integral part of what makes the behavior of Cornelius and Peter remarkable, the intervention of God so necessary, and the conversion of Cornelius so significant for the trajectory of the early Church in Acts³²

In v. 1 “the Word of God” that Gentiles of Caesarea have welcomed (*dehormai* – receive, accept) is Peter’s proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ as Lord and Judge through whom all humans can receive forgiveness of their sins. Luke seems to distinguish the attitude of the Apostles from that of “brothers” in Judea. *Adelphoi* is Luke’s name for baptized members of the Christian community, regardless of their social origin and position (Acts 1:16; 9:30; 10:23b; 11:12,29; 12:17; 14:2; 15:3,22,32,33,40; 17:6,10,14; 18:18,27; 21:7,17,20; 28:14). In these instances, “brothers” are not blood relatives; the term denotes closeness experienced by those bonded together through baptismal faith in Christ. Since in Acts 2:29 and 3:17 Peter addresses Jews assembled in Jerusalem with this title, in the same way as Paul in Pisidian Antioch (13:26,38), in Jerusalem (23:1,5,6), and in Rome (28:17), it is clear that Jewish Christians took over this designation from their fellow Jews, who used it commonly in addressing one another.³³

In v. 2 baptized Jews are called “circumcised believers – *hoi ek peritomēs*, those of circumcision”. These Jewish Christians were scandalized by what they heard about Peter’s conduct in Caesarea and, therefore, they rebuked him: “You entered the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them!” (v. 3). They were concerned for the law and covenant fidelity and for the Jewishness of Jesus’s movement. The general Jewish view was that Gentiles were inherently unclean. Their complaint expressed more a statement than a question; they criticized the leader of the Christian community because of this (*diakrinomai* – to get a decision, contend, dispute). In their belief, if Gentiles were to be admitted to the believing community of baptized followers of Christ they must become like Jews, which included circumcision for men and dietary observation for all.³⁴ In Luke’s

³² B.R. WILSON, “Jew-Gentile Relations and the Geographic Movement of Acts 10:1-11:18”, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 80, n. 1, 2018, 81-96 (quotation from 96).

³³ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 222.

³⁴ D.L. BOCK, *Acts*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI 2007, 406-407. He transfers the respective text of *Jubilees* 22:26: “Separate thyself from the nations,

Gospel, Jesus practiced commensality with sinners as a sign that God offers them conversion and forgiveness of sins. He was criticized for this by the scribes and Pharisees. He justified his actions explaining that he has come to call sinners to repentance (*eis metanoian* – 5:32) and that angels rejoice over one sinner who repents (*epi henī hamartōlō metanounti* – 15:7.10). The objection of baptized Jews to Peter's commensality in Caesarea may be based on the question, are uncircumcised men fit for conversion? The question of *metanoia* – repentant conversion – is a connecting thread between the accusations (11:3), Peter's homily (11:4-17), and the final answer (11:18).³⁵

In vv. 4-11, Peter explains, “step by step” (*kathexēs*, successively, in an orderly sequence), the vision that motivated him to associate with Cornelius, baptize him, and share table fellowship with his household members. The adverb *kathexēs* occurs in Lk 1:3 and 8:1 as well as in Acts 3:24 and 18:23. It may contain a chronological aspect, but the real emphasis is on a complete presentation of material, a succession or order.³⁶ Together with “explain” (*ektithēmi*, used again in Acts 18:26 and 28:23), Luke understands it as “recitation in order”, having a peculiarly convincing quality. In vv. 5-7, Peter recounts the basic parts of his vision depicted in 10:11-13. In v. 6 there is a vivid addition: “As I was gazing (*atenisas*), I looked carefully (*katenoun*) and saw (*eidon*)”. Luke's artistic instinct is to make Peter's first-hand report more anecdotal and colorful.³⁷ Peter received a vision three times in a row, during which he tried to reject eating the meat of unclean animals, but a supernatural voice explained: “What God has made clean, you are not to call common!” (vv. 8-9). *Here he hints at his personal need for conversion regarding the association of Jesus's followers with Gentiles* without their being circumcised or observing Jewish food regulations. Interpreters recognize this voice as

and eat not with them: and do not according their works, and become not their associate; for their works are unclean, and all their ways are a pollution and an abomination and uncleanness”. The *Book of Jubilees* is a Jewish apocryphon rewriting the story of Gn 1 and Ex 14, which originated in Hebrew at around 100 BC. See *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* 1990, 67:16-24.

³⁵ C. LUKASZ, *Evangelizzazione e conflitto. Indagine sulla coerenza letteraria e tematica della pericope di Cornelio (Atti 10,1-11,18)*, 183-186.

³⁶ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, 298-299.

³⁷ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 197.

the voice of the risen and glorified Christ: "Der Grund des Hörens auf die Stimme des Herrn ist, dass Gott die Speisen für rein erklärt hat. Der 'himmlische', Jesus kennt diese Tatsache. Petrus soll 'Gemeines' und 'Unreines' essen. Wenn das jetzt rein ist, dann auch die Menschen, die das essen. Die Überwindung der Unreinheit öffnet den Menschen die Möglichkeit, gerettet zu werden".³⁸

In v. 11, with the expression "in the house where we were", Peter implicates his Jewish companions, mentioned in v. 12. Compared to 10:23c in v. 12, there is a new detail stating that there were six brothers from Joppa. Peter must have told them about his vision: they considered it genuine, joined him in his journey to Caesarea, and entered with him into Cornelius's house. In 10:45 they were identified as "circumcised believers" (*hoi ek peritomēs*). Here they are witnesses to the event and supporters in Peter's defense before the Jerusalem community. He made them participants in receiving uncircumcised Gentiles into the Christian community, because they had heard his sermon proclaiming the risen Christ Lord and universal Judge, they saw the result of the Spirit's outpouring and made no objection to the baptism of Gentile converts.

Peter reminds his Jerusalem addressees that the Spirit had told him to go with three envoys of Cornelius "without discriminating" (*mēden diakrinanta*), an expression used also in Acts 10:20: in no way partiality should be exercised against them because they are Gentiles (Acts 10:34; 15:9). In the presence of six Jewish brother witnesses, Peter reports that an angel appeared to Cornelius telling him to call Simon Peter who will "tell him things by which you and your household will be saved" (vv. 13-14). This is a review of Acts 10:30-33, but he does not mention the centurion's name or the complimentary detail of his prayers to the God of Israel and his many alms to the Jewish people (*tō laō* – 10:2). Telling the things by which Cornelius, his friends, servants, and slaves will be saved embraced the sermon of Acts 10:36-43, a summary of Jesus's healing ministry, proclaiming God's reign, and His violent death and vindicating resurrection with a summons to repentance (*metanoia*) and baptism in His name. In the third Gospel, God's Kingdom occurs 38 times and in Acts eight times. It is a *Leitbegriff* in Luke for

³⁸ M. CİFRAK, *Die Beziehung zwischen Jesus und Gott nach den Petrusreden der Apostelgeschichte*, 279.

whom Christian missionaries continue Jesus's preaching ministry, and to preach the Kingdom of God means to teach about the Lord Jesus (Lk 9:60; Acts 28:31). God's reign is the appearance of salvation in the teaching and healing ministry of the Lord Jesus.³⁹ Through Peter's visit and teaching, a group of Gentiles were saved directly by an act of God.

While Peter was proclaiming salvation to Cornelius through the Lord Jesus, the Spirit descended on the whole group "just as it did on us at the beginning" (v. 15). In this allusion to the Pentecost event, "we" signifies the Apostles and the Galilean witnesses to the crucified and risen Jesus but also other believing pilgrims in Jerusalem. Since to Peter and his Jerusalem audience the Spirit was the sign of the *eschaton* promised by John the Baptist in Luke 3:16 and Acts 1:5, Peter understands that God wants him to admit repenting and believing Gentiles into the Christian community without circumcision. Peter's wording in vv. 15-16 is close to Acts 10:44 and 47. He interpreted the descent of the Spirit on members of Cornelius's household as baptism with the Spirit just as Jerusalem Jews were baptized on the first Christian Pentecost. This was the way the Lord had shown that these Gentiles were also a part of the plan of salvation.

In v. 17, Peter asked his baptized fellow Jews in Jerusalem: "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us when we came to believe (*hemin pisteusasín* – aorist participle with inceptive meaning⁴⁰) in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to be able to stop God?" Peter justifies his permission to let them be baptized with water as a confirmation of their faith and admits them to the new community of those who accept the eschatological salvation available in Christ. Peter could not hinder their inclusion in the blessings of the people of God. The Greek expression "*issen dorean*" (identical gift) means that Gentile candidates for baptism were cleansed and indwelt by the divine sacred presence. God has made them capable and suitable and no one should resist their inclusion. Peter's procedure was not the re-

³⁹ Cf. A. WEISER, "Reich Gottes' in der Apostelgeschichte", in C. BUSSMANN – W. RADL (eds.), *Der Treue Gottes trauen. Beiträge zum Werk des Lukas. Für Gerhard Schneider*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg 1991, 127-135.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. ZERWICK – M. GROSVENOR, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, vol. 1, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 1974, 387.

sult of human calculation but a direct order given by the Spirit. “Peter has begun to think in terms of the gift of God for salvation. It is because the outpouring of the Spirit shows that God has given ‘the same Spirit’ to Gentiles as to Jews that Peter has taken the step of baptizing them. This gift proves in fact that ‘God is no respecter of appearances’ and accepts the righteous from every nation. The experience of the Spirit among Gentiles also deepens Peter’s understanding of Jesus’ Word (11:16). It is when he sees the Gentiles speaking in tongues and praising God that he ‘remembers’ the saying of the risen Lord about the baptism in the Spirit (Acts 1:5). What is most fascinating about this remembrance is that Jesus spoke the words to a small band of Jewish followers. The words of Jesus are given a new understanding because of the continuing work of the Spirit”.⁴¹

Luke concludes the Cornelius episode with the approving remark of Peter’s Jerusalem addressees: “So God has granted life-giving repentance even to Gentiles!” (v. 18). The Greek expression *metanoia eis zoēn*, Fitzmyer translates here as “life-giving repentance”. Luke’s *metanoia*, *metanoein*, *epistrophē*, and *epistrephein* have a basis in the Old Testament Hebrew *šûb*, and mean “to change one’s mind or purpose, return, repentance, conversion”. In Acts 2:38, Peter concluded his discourse to Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem: “Reform your lives (*metanoēsate*) and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins”. Exegetes who write in English point out that *metanoia*, *metanoein* are interchangeable with “conversion” or “repentance”.⁴² The verb *metanoein* is a favorite Lukan term and occurs 13 times (Lk 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 16:30; 17:3, 4; Acts 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26,20), while the corresponding noun *metanoia* occurs 11 times (Lk 3:3, 8; 5:32; 15:7; 24:47; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20). In New Testament-era Greek philosophy, *metanoia* meant “change of one’s mind” in the sense of discovering new values and harmonizing one’s moral conduct accordingly. Therefore, conversion and repentance are at the heart of the Christian faith, a change of one’s whole stance toward the divine that affects the person in a total way. According to

⁴¹ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 201.

⁴² K. HUGHES, “Conversion”, in C. STUHLMEYER, *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 1996, 171-175; I. NOWELL – B.E. BOWE – G. OSTDIEK, “Repentance”, *Ibid.*, 830-835.

Mark 1:15 in Jesus' movement, repentance and faith are two dimensions of the same response: "Together they would signal a person's entire response to the invitation of God, given now, once and for all, in the person and ministry of Jesus. All relationships and priorities must be reordered in light of the call to repentance (Lk 14:26-33). Repentance demands a fundamental change of heart and attitude, and it calls us to an ongoing perseverance to 'seek the Kingdom of God'"⁴³ Luke's version of Christ's Easter mandate consists of the permanent assignment of disciples to preach in his name "repentance (*metanoian*) for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations – beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk 24:47).

During his pastoral visit to "dedicated people of God" (*hoi hagioi*) at Lydda, Peter cured the paralyzed Jew with the Greek name Aeneas in the name of Jesus Christ. Many inhabitants of that town and region came to belief "and were converted to the Lord – *epestrepshan epi ton Kyrion*" (Acts 9:32-35). The unique Lord here is the risen Christ in whose name the paralyzed man was healed. The process of coming to belief and conversion is expressed through the positive verb *epistrehpō*, to change or turn to the Lord Jesus, preached by Peter. Luke points out that Hellenists who had to withdraw from Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom came to Antioch "and began to address the Greeks preaching to them about the Lord Jesus (*euangelizomenoi ton Kyrion Iēsoun*). The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord" (*pisteusas epestrepshen epi ton Kyrion* – Acts 11:20-21). The essence of their mission activity was proclaiming the risen Christ as *euangelion*, good tidings for Jews and Gentiles. In their response, Luke characterizes belief and conversion as positive assent to Christ the Lord. In his conclusion of the Antioch episode, Luke points out that in Antioch the followers of Jesus were given the name *christianoi* (11:26). Besides converting to Christ as their existential Lord, adult candidates in Antioch had also to convert to the Church as a community of Christ's disciples. Conversion in Acts is Christocentric and ecclesial.⁴⁴

⁴³ B.E. BOWE, "Repentance – New Testament", *Ibid.*, 832. See also J. DUPONT, "Repentir et conversion d'après les Actes des Apôtres", in *ID.*, *Études sur les Actes des Apôtres*, Cerf, Paris 1967, 421-457.

⁴⁴ Cf. J. DUPONT, "La conversion dans les Actes des Apôtres", *Ibid.*, 468-475.

In 10:45, Luke pointed out that the six baptized Jews of Joppa, who entered Cornelius's house with Peter and witnessed the descent of the Spirit on believing and repenting Gentiles, "were bewildered because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured on Gentiles too" (*kai epi ta ethnē*). Lukasz points out that: "Luca contrasta in anticipo il futuro atteggiamento di *hoi ek peritomēs* di Gerusalemme, creando un precedente e una sfida. Contro questi 'parenti' di Gerusalemme, *hoi ek peritomēs pistoi* porteranno la testimonianza (11:12). Il loro stupore per l'effusione dello Spirito *kai epi ta ethnē*, sembra prefigurare la lode di Dio per il dono della metanoia *kai tois ethnesin* (11:18). La comparsa del gruppo in questo punto della narrazione evidenzia come Luca sia condizionato nell'attuale presentazione della conversione dal conflitto descritto in 11:1-18"⁴⁵. Lukasz concludes that *metanoia* in Acts has an exclusive and an inclusive meaning of repentance that requires the rejection of sin and the assumption of a new moral conduct. *Eis zōēn* – means eternal life, because "life" in v. 18 is interchangeable with "salvation" in v. 14. Therefore, the *metanoia* of Cornelius and his household members encompassed repentance for their sins, personal faith in Christ as Lord, forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit, acceptance into the Church through baptism and the acknowledgment of circumcised Christians that their conversion leads to salvation and life eternal.⁴⁶ In the Cornelius episode, Luke reminds Jewish fellow Christians that Gentiles do not live in permanent moral impurity, which would prevent them from associating with the believing community of Christ's followers. Therefore, vertical equality of Gentile and Jewish Christians should be expressed by horizontal equality through commensality.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ C. LUKASZ, *Evangelizzazione e conflitto. Indagine sulla coerenza letteraria e tematica della pericope di Cornelio (Atti 10,1-11,18)*, 158.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 212-213.

⁴⁷ J.H. ELLIOTT, "Household and Meals vs. Temple Purity: Replication Patterns in Luke-Acts", *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, vol. 21, n. 3, 1991, 102-108. Elliott reads Acts 10:1 and 11:18 as the importance of inclusivity, not eliticism in Jesus's movement. See also A. BARBI, "Cornelio (At 10:1-11:18): percorsi per una piena integrazione dei pagani nella Chiesa", *Ricerche Storico Bibliche*, vol. 1-2, 1996, 277-295. Barbi concludes: "Si sente infatti in questo racconto paradigmatico l'eco di difficoltà che sono state reali nella storia della Chiesa primitiva; vi si nota la riflessione del teologo che vede la storia guidata esemplarmene dall'inizia-

4. Conclusion and Prayer

At the level of Luke's historical addressees, Peter's justification of his socialization and commensality with converted Gentiles was an impetus to Jewish Christians to be open to converts of Gentile origin: "L'accesso alla nuova relazione con Dio, rivelatosi in Gesù Cristo, diventa uguale per tutti gli uomini e deve esprimersi in una nuova qualità di relazioni interpersonali".⁴⁸ Some exegetes see in the Cornelius episode an impulse toward ecumenical contacts and cooperation.⁴⁹ Reading this homily in the light of contemporary *missio ad gentes*, we should look in it for stimulation to missionary activity that is essential to being Christ's disciples in our time and place of witness. This activity makes the Church an apostolic community, a sacrament of salvation in Christ the universal Savior. It is the permanent task of Christian shepherds and all baptized men and women.

I find very inspirational the opening prayer of the Mass for the evangelization of peoples, form B: "O God, you have willed that your Church be the sacrament of salvation for all nations, so that Christ's saving work may continue to the end of the ages; stir up, we pray, the hearts of your faithful and grant that they may feel a more urgent call to work for the salvation of every creature, so that from all the peoples on earth one family and one people of your own may arise and increase".⁵⁰

tiva divina; si avverte la preoccupazione pastorale e missionaria che vuole favorire l'ingresso dei pagani e la loro piena integrazione nella comunità ecclesiale. In tal modo l'episodio di Cornelio si rileva ricco di memoria storica, di riflessione teologica e di ansia pastorale congiunte nella tensione di favorire la pacifica e piena accoglienza degli stranieri-pagani nella Chiesa".

⁴⁸ C. LUKASZ, *Evangelizzazione e conflitto. Indagine sulla coerenza letteraria e tematica della pericope di Cornelio (Atti 10,1-11,18)*, 235.

⁴⁹ T. O'LOUGHLIN, "Sharing Food and Breaking Boundaries: Reading of Acts 10-11:18 as a Key to Luke's Ecumenical Agenda in Acts", *Transformation*, vol. 32, n. 1, 2015, 27-37.

⁵⁰ *The Roman Missal. English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition*, Magnificat 2011, 1278.