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## **The Soteriological Aspect of Jesus' Death, in the Writings of St. Luke the Evangelist. An Analysis From the Perspective of Textual and Narrative Criticism**

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### **Abstract**

In the following study we deal with a very debated issue in Lukan theology, namely the place of Jesus' death in the soteriology of Luke-Acts. Against many Lukan scholars who play down the importance of Jesus' death in St. Luke's teaching on salvation, we claim that the evangelist presents it a ransom for sin, seal of the New Covenant and fulfillment of the Jewish Passover. In the first part we show that St. Luke regards the main events of Jesus' life as an indivisible saving whole and, consequently, being part of this whole, the death of Jesus is salvific. In the second part we study two important texts, Lk 22, 19-20 and Acts 20, 28, which explicitly assign redemptive value to Jesus' death and then we highlight some texts that allude to Jesus' death as the vicarious death of Ebed Jahweh.

### **Keywords**

New Testament, Luke-Acts, death of Jesus, salvation

## I. Introduction

A few decades ago a number of important commentators of St. Luke's work concluded that "the beloved physician" does not assign a direct soteriological value to Jesus' death. Thus Wilckens lists among the shortcomings St. Luke's theology his failure to clarify the soteriological aspect of Jesus' death: Luke-Acts proclaims *the fact* salvation through the coming of Jesus, but it does not explain *why* is salvation necessary to and *how* is it accomplished<sup>1</sup>. Conzelmann, in his turn, states that in the Lukan passion narrative "the suffering and death of Jesus gets no direct soteriological significance"<sup>2</sup>. Käsemann believes that in Luke's theology the cross appears as an accident: the consequence of a lack of understanding of the Jews, which was corrected by God through the Resurrection<sup>3</sup>. The argumentation of these theologians starts mainly from the following observations: a) St. Luke omits Mk 10, 45; b) The Cross plays no role in the proclamation of salvation in Luke-Acts; c) The way Luke uses the verb *paradidomi* does not imply atonement; d) Atonement is not among the ideas Luke has taken over from Isaiah 53<sup>4</sup>. The conclusion is, supposedly, that Luke promotes a *theologia gloriae* according to which the measure of the divine grace is given by the Church's missionary successes.

The more recent studies explore a wide range of possible interpretations of the cross: some consider that St. Luke sees Jesus' death as a fulfillment of God's will, with no further explanations; others see it primarily as a model of obedience to God, which must be followed by Christians<sup>5</sup>; others say that the understanding of Jesus' death as a ransom occupies in St. Luke's thought a place more important than is generally admitted<sup>6</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> U. Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1963, p. 216 sq.

<sup>2</sup> H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, London, 1960, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> E. Käsemann, „Das Problem des historischen Jesus“, in „Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche“, 51 (1954), pp. 125-153.

<sup>4</sup> H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. S. Garrett, *The Meaning of Jesus' Death in Luke*, in „Word and World“ (1992), pp. 11-16; J. B. Green, *The Death of Jesus, God's Servant*, in D. D. Sylva (ed.), „Reimagining the Death of the Lukan Jesus“, Athenum Monographien / Theologie: BBB 73, Frankfurt: Hain, 1990, pp. 1-28.

<sup>6</sup> Vezi D. P. Moessner, 'The Christ Must Suffer', *The Church Must Suffer: Rethinking the Theology of the Cross in Luke-Acts*, in SBLSP 29 (1990), pp. 165-195.

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others argue further that Luke does not accept such an interpretation of Jesus' death<sup>7</sup>. Other authors read the Lukan writings against the cultural background of that age and, based on conceptual similarities, say that Luke points to Jesus dying as an innocent martyr<sup>8</sup>. Finally, others see the death of Christ in Luke-Acts either as a display of God's justice<sup>9</sup> or as a prelude to the glorification<sup>10</sup> or as the exemplary death of "the lowly"<sup>11</sup> or of a great benefactor<sup>12</sup>.

In the following we take sides with those who assert that in the Lukan writings Jesus' death is redemptive, and we expose the arguments on which we rely.

## II. The unity of the Christ event

For a correct understanding of the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke-Acts it is essential to recognize that Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension/exaltation constitute a whole whose parts have their full meaning only in the perspective of it.

i) *Analempsis*. A major section of the third Gospel begins by announcing Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, in 9, 51. St. Luke says that "the days drew near for him to be taken up (*tes analempseos autou*". The word *analempsis* is a *hapax legomenon* in the Greek Bible, but from its occurrences in the contemporary extrabiblical literature it may be concluded that, at the time when St. Luke used it, this was becoming a *terminus technicus* for "the

<sup>7</sup> B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> C. H. Talbert, *Martyrdom in Luke-Acts and the Lucan Social Ethic*, in R. J. Cassidy, P. J. Scharper (ed.), „Political Issues in Luke-Acts”, New York: Orbis Books, 1983, pp. 99-110.

<sup>9</sup> R. J. Karris, *Luke 23, 47 and the Lukan View of Jesus' Death*, in D. D. Sylva (ed.) „Reimagining the Death of Jesus”, pp. 68-78.

<sup>10</sup> E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of the Luke-Acts*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, pp. 66-67.

<sup>11</sup> J. Kodell, *Luke's Theology of the Death of Jesus*, in D. Durken (ed.), „Sin, Salvation and Spirit”, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979, pp. 221-230. By "the lowly" Kodell refers to those who are humble and ready to receive the salvation of God.

<sup>12</sup> F. W. Danker, *Imaged as Beneficence*, in D. D. Sylva (ed.) „Reimagining the Death of Jesus”, pp. 57-67.

ascension of the Blessed One<sup>13</sup>. Klostermann considers that it's possible that this term might indicate not just the ascension but also, like *exodos*, the different stages of Jesus' passing from earthly to heavenly life<sup>14</sup>.

ii) *Anelemphte*<sup>15</sup>. That *analempsis* refers to the entire complex of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension/glorification is confirmed by the manner Luke uses the passive aorist of the verb *analambano*<sup>16</sup>. This form occurs five times in the New Testament, four of which in the Acts of the Apostles. The fifth is found in I Tim 3, 16, which is obviously a Christian hymn. Instead of listing the salvific acts of Christ the Lord, the hymn's last verse says just *anelemphte en te doxe*. The hymn does not belong to the beginnings of the Church, but to a later period in which the mission to the gentiles was being carried out for several years (*ekerychthe en ethnesin*). At that time, probably close to the writing date of the two Lukan works, *anelemphte* had become a term indicating the salvific acts ending the Lord's earthly life, and those immediately following<sup>17</sup>.

In Acts 10, 16 *anelemphte* marks the ending of St. Peter's vision. Otherwise, the term occurs only in the first chapter of Acts (v. 2; 11; 22) and obviously applies to Jesus' ascension. This triple use at the beginning of Acts shows that the ascension (*analempsis*), which began in Lk 9, 51, ended. The fact that the ascension started in Lk 9, 51 is implied by the presence in this verse of the verb *sympleroo*, which also occurs in the first verse of Acts 2: *Kai en to symplerousthai ten hemeran tes pentekostes* ("And when the day of the Pentecost came"). In the writings of St. Luke the verb *sympleroo* is further found in Lk 8, 23 - with the basic meaning, indicating the filling of the boat with water - and, as already told, in Lk 9, 51 where it is likewise included in an infinitival construction with temporal meaning: *En to symplerousthai tas hemeras tes analempseos autou*. In the light of Acts 2,1, Lk 9, 51 can be translated thus: "When the days of His ascension came", implying that all the subsequent events are stages of Jesus' ascension. From this perspective we can say that at the moment of

<sup>13</sup> A. Plummer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908, p. 262.

<sup>14</sup> E. Klostermann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, Tübingen, 1929, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Plummer, *Luke*, p. 262: "The verb *anelemphte* occurs frequently in the New Testament and may be considered as the usual biblical term for the ascension: Mk 16, 19; Acts 1, 2.11.22; 10, 16; I Tim 3, 16. Cf. I Mac 2, 58; Sir 48, 9; 49, 14; III Kgs 2, 11".

<sup>16</sup> R. Zehnle, *The Salvific Character of Jesus' Death in Lukan Soteriology*, in „Theological Studies” 30 (1969), p. 426.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

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Acts 2, 1 the ascension (*analempsis*) of Jesus is accomplished and the mission of the apostles is about to start.

Therefore, Luke does not allow the life of Jesus to be divided; for him this is a coherent and saving whole. If he attributes soteriological value predominantly to Jesus' exaltation it is because *now* He saves as glorified Lord. So, the death of Jesus is salvific because it is an essential part of Christ event. Going deeper into the matter though, we shall try to find out what is the intrinsic value that Luke attaches to Jesus' death.

### **III. The death of Jesus as redemption**

In this section we shall examine briefly two texts which are fundamental for St. Luke's redemption theology, namely Lk 22, 19b-20 and Acts 20, 28. In the past half of of century these texts have been thoroughly studied. Speaking about the criticism of Lk 22, 19b-20, a famous scholar says: "The Lucan account of the Last Supper is a scholar's paradise and a beginner nightmare; for it raises problems in almost every department of New Testament studies and has provided a basis for a welter of conflicting theories"<sup>18</sup>.

Regarding the textual issue of the Lk 22, 19b-20 fragment, until the sixth decade of the last century prevailed the idea that the short version is the original and v. 19b and 20 were added subsequently by copyists<sup>19</sup>. Currently this consensus is gone, but the debates on the authenticity of these verses continue.

In the case of Acts 20, 28, the textual problem is not so serious, but the interpretation of the text and the origin of its theology (St. Luke or St. Paul?) are matters on which no unanimous agreement was reached.

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<sup>18</sup> G. B. Caird, *Saint Luke*, Westminster Pelican Series, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; 1963, p. 237.

<sup>19</sup> For the seeming consensus, prior to 1950, about the short reading, see K. Snodgrass, *Western Non-Interpolations*, in „Journal of Biblical Literature” 91 (1972), pp. 372-374. The author considers that this consensus originates in the work of the British scholars F. Westcott și F. J. A. Hort, who in their critical edition of the text of the New Testament say that Lc 22, 19b-20 are „Western non-interpolations”, deeming them as unauthentic.

## i) Lk 22, 19-20

Although textual criticism of recent decades has been increasingly inclined to recognize the long variant of the words of institution of the Holy Eucharist as authentic, in recent times Bart Ehrman promoted strongly the idea of Wescott and Hort, that the short version would be the original. The short text appears in Codex Bezae and other ancient Latin manuscripts, and omits the material written in italics: “<sup>19</sup> Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, *which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*<sup>20</sup> And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, *This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*”.

Ehrman’s arguments are: external testimonies for both versions go back to the second century AD and therefore can not clarify the situation; in this case, the Western version must be seriously taken into account; the usual explanations for an alleged omission by copyists - eg. their desire to harmonize the Lukan version with the Marcan and Matthean ones, or to keep secret the Eucharistic words - are inadequate; vocabulary and more importantly, the theology of the additional material are contrary to the Lukan use and thought<sup>20</sup>.

Despite Ehrman’s insistence on the probability and importance of the short version, its restriction to just a few Western testimonies cast doubts on its authenticity, even though this is not a decisive argument. Regarding the attempt to explain the appearance of the short version through a possible abbreviation of the text by copyists, it is true that some ideas are implausible but others are relevant. While it is clear that Luke wants to say that after this Supper Jesus will not eat and drink with His disciples anymore, the tradition represented by Codex Bezae seems to understand that Jesus will not even taste the Passover meal (in the Greek column of the codex, at Lk 22, 15, the pronoun *touto* is divided into *tou* and *to*, and so he have the sentence *epethumesa tou to pascha phagein* that creates the impression that Jesus’ desire to eat the Passover with His disciples was not fulfilled [cf. the use of the genitive article after *epithumeo* in I Tim 3,1; Ex 34, 24 LXX; Prov 23, 3.6 LXX; Sir 16, 1]). The removal of the verses 19 and 20 wipes out Jesus’ tasting from the supper (Lk 22, 20) and the second cup which is not mentioned neither in the other Synoptics nor in

<sup>20</sup> B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 198-209.

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I Cor 11, 24-25. What the shortening of the text does not solve is the difficulty brought in by the adversative conjunction *plen* at the beginning of v. 21. In the short reading the phrase “the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table” stands in contrast with Jesus’ words “This is My body” - a forced juxtaposition, because the hand of the traitor is not opposed to Jesus’ death, symbolised by the breaking of His body, but the very means by which this occurs. It appears, then, that the short version preserved in Codex Bezae and other ancient Latin manuscripts represents an attempt to attenuate the difficulty seen by a copyist in the Lukan text and eliminate Jesus’ eating from the supper<sup>21</sup>.

The problem of the vocabulary seems to strengthen this conclusion. It is true that in the long text appear words that St. Luke does not use elsewhere - such as “remembrance” - but the phenomenon is no different from what we find in the sermons of Acts, which each contain specific words. Jeremias signals the fact that Luke uses here a liturgical text, which he takes over without processing it<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, certain items of vocabulary link the long text to the surrounding material. Second person plural (“for you” - twice) corresponds well to the context: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover *with you*” (v. 15); “Take this and divide it among *yourselves*” (v. 17). The shedding of Christ’s blood corresponds to other references to martyrdom, expressed in the same language, found in Luke-Acts (Lk 11, 50; Acts 22, 20). It can be also noticed that in the Lukan version of the words of institution are intertwined elements of tradition recorded by St. Mark (that Jesus gave the bread to the disciples; Mk 14, 22; Lk 22, 19) and that recorded by St. Paul (breaking of body “for you”; I Cor 11, 14; Lk 22, 19). It is not be impossible for this weaving of traditions to be the work of a copyist, but it is more likely that it is the result of Lukan composition in order to establish a link to the context<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Jeremias (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 159) claims that the short reading is an *aposiopesis*, that is an attempt to protect the eucharistic formula from desecration, by writing just its beginning, the remainder being known only by the believers. E. E. Ellis (*The Gospel of Luke*, Greenwood, S. C.: The Attic Press, 1966, p. 256) considers that the short reading is the result of the separation of the communion from the love-meal that initially preceded it.

<sup>22</sup> J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 110.

<sup>23</sup> See J. B. Green, *The Death of Jesus*, WUNT 33, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1988, pp. 28-42.

Due to the subjective judgements surrounding them, theological aspects of this textual problem should not be given too much importance in opting between the two readings. Ehrman's statement that nowhere in Luke-Acts is the the death of Jesus presented as redemption stands on three points: the interpretation of Acts 20, 28, which we will soon examine, the absence of any explicit development of the theme of Jesus' death as a ransom for sin, despite numerous allusions to Ebed Yahweh suggesting such an interpretation, and the omission by St. Luke of the so-called "ransom saying" of Mk 10, 45. The last two remarks provide only arguments of the absence which, especially in this case, are weak<sup>24</sup>. In conclusion, we can say with reasonable certainty that both external and internal arguments support the authenticity of Luke 22, 19-20<sup>25</sup>. In this case, it is clear that Luke attributes redeeming value to Jesus' death, especially through the allusion to Jer 31, 31-34. By breaking the body of Jesus and shedding His blood "for you" a new covenant is founded in which the sins and transgressions are forgiven. These verses are fundamental to Luke-Acts and they demonstrate the inadequacy of John's baptism for the forgiveness of sins and the necessity of faith in Jesus (cf. Lk 3, 3; 24, 47; Acts 19, 4). Luke wants these things to be remembered and, in their light, the entire subsequent narrative of Acts to be read - an idea that appears in Acts 20, 28.

## ii) Acts 20, 28

The second explicit reference to the death of Christ as a sacrifice of atonement appears in Acts 20, 28, where interpretation and textual problems are again intertwined. Regarding the text, the exegete must choose between "the Church of God" and "the Church of the Lord". Although the external evidences are broadly balanced, it is likely that in the original text

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<sup>24</sup> W. J. Larkin jr. (*Luke's Use of the Old Testament as a Key to His Soteriology*, in „Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society” 20 (1977), pp. 325-335) says that the absence of Mk 10, 45 need not be attributed to Luke's express desire to omit it, because it can be explained thus: 1) the evangelist wants to link directly the prediction of the passion to the next episode, in which Jesus' divine power is proved by the healing of a blind man (cf. Lk 18, 31-34 și 18, 35-43); 2) he wants to avoid repeating similar materials, even if independent; 3) St. Luke's special interest in the non-Markan material that forms the narrative of the journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9, 51- 18, 14). Like Bock and others, Larkin considers that Is 53, 12, quoted in Lk 22, 37, offers the historical foundation for the vicarious atonement and forgiveness of sins in Luke-Acts.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Green, *The Death of Jesus*, pp. 35-42.

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appeared the phrase “the Church of God”. The other reading appears to be the result of a copyist attempting to alleviate the difficulty of the expression “the Church of God that He obtained with His own blood”, which introduces a possible hint of Patripassianism. Many modern commentators choose to translate “the Church of God that He obtained with the blood of His own Son”, considering that this is the meaning implied in the original text. But this also is an attempt to eliminate the uncomfortable reference to the blood of God. Therefore we are dealing with an allusion to the death of Jesus expressed in striking terms, which need to be explained.

Ehrman's theory, which says that for Luke Jesus' blood is saving not as a ransom but as leading to assume the guilt for the death of Jesus<sup>26</sup>, is unconvincing. The theme of guilt for the death of Jesus is present only in the speeches in Jerusalem and disappears after Acts 7. Moreover, in Acts it is not the proclamation of Jesus' death that leads to repentance, but the proclamation of His resurrection.

Phrases like “the passion of God”, “the crucified God” or “the blood of God” are not unusual in Christian authors until the end of the second century AD, when modalist Monarchianism made necessary a more precise delimitation of the works of the Father and of the Son, in order to avoid Patripassianism<sup>27</sup>. We shouldn't be surprised by the presence of these phrases in New Testament authors. The previous mention of Jesus' blood (Lk 22, 19-20) makes it clear that when speaking of God's blood Luke actually refers to Christ's blood and, at the same time, just as the Apostolic Fathers, he boldly states Jesus' divinity. The explicitness of this statement does not amaze us, because in Acts St. Luke presents the exalted Jesus as equal to the Father<sup>28</sup>. Even St. Paul, who utters in the text the words we are examining, has in his epistles some open confessions of the divinity of Christ (cf. Rom 9, 5; I Cor 8, 6; Col 2, 2).

We should neither overlook the biblical allusions present in this Lukan verse. The verb *peripoieomai* (rendered by “to obtain”) has soteriological connotations and could also be translated by “to spare for himself” or “to

<sup>26</sup> B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Sf. Ignatie Teoforul, *Epistola către Efeseni* 1, 1, in „Scrierile Părinților Apostolici”, EIBMBOR, București, 1995, p. 188; B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>28</sup> See Adrian Murg, *Dumnezeirea Mântuitorului Iisus Hristos, coordonată principală a hristologiei Faptelor Apostolilor*, in „Teologia”, anul XIII (2009), nr. 3-4, pp. 125-140.

save for himself” (see Lk 17, 33; Mal 3, 17 LXX; Num 22, 33 LXX; Ps 78, 11 LXX). The term also comprises the sense of possession, which refers to the miracle of the Exodus in which God saved and acquired a people for Himself. Israel is for God His chosen people (*segulah*; LXX *periousios*; Ex 19, 5; Deut 7, 6; 14, 2; 26, 18; cf. I Pe 2, 9; Ps 73, 2). Then, the comparison of the people of God to a flock originates with the events of the Exodus as well (Ps 77, 57; cf. Num 27, 15-17). We can say therefore that the blood of God looks to the Exodus’ Passover and suggests a typology in which Christ transcends the old Passover<sup>29</sup>. If this interpretation is correct, then St. Paul’s farewell speech to the priests of Ephesus takes up the idea of Luke 22, 19-20 where Jesus’ death (more precisely His blood) is interpreted as a new covenant. Furthermore, the explicit affirmation of Christ’s divinity makes Acts 20, 28 a fundamental text.

In a narrative, unlike a theological discourse, the identity of the speaker and the placement of a speech matter a lot. The frequency of an idea or phrase is much less important than by whom and when it is expressed<sup>30</sup>. Consequently, we must not overlook the fact that this unique, clear assertion of the redemptive nature of Jesus’ death in Acts is placed in a crucial point and is made by a character Luke presents as a chosen vessel of Christ to carry out the missionary program set out in Acts 1, 8 (Acts 9, 15). Without underrating the importance of St. Paul’s subsequent testimony, St. Luke presents his speech in Miletus as the end of his mission to the Churches. This idea is present in the whole discourse, from the apostle’s prediction that he would not see the priests from Ephesus anymore (Acts 20, 25), to the fact that somehow they become responsible not only for the Church in Ephesus, but for “the Church of God”. Thus, by the words of St. Paul who says that Jesus Christ won the Church with His own blood, Luke shows that the redemptive death of Christ is the foundation of everything that happened in his narrative from the crucifixion on. Far from being of secondary importance, these two explicit statements about the redemptive character of Jesus’ death frame and dominate all the in-between narrative material.

<sup>29</sup> J. Jeremias (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, pp. 139-159) finds this typological relation in Lk 22, 19-20. Therefore, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Egyptian Passover lamb and all Passovers preceding Him.

<sup>30</sup> R. C. Tannehill, *Narrative Criticism*, in „A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation”, R. J. Coggins, J. L. Houlden (ed.), SCM Press & Trinity Press International, 1990, p. 488.

### iii) Allusions to the death of Christ as redemption

How comes that Luke uses many biblical allusions to Jesus' death as vicarious sacrifice, and yet, he doesn't develop them? The answer lies, on the one hand, in his desire to emphasize the resurrection of Jesus, and on the other hand, in the above-mentioned bracketing structure. The understanding of Jesus' death as redemption reflected in Luke 22, 19-20 and Acts 20, 28 is reinforced by repeated references to Ebed Yahweh, breaking of bread and divine necessity of Jesus' death.

#### 1) *Jesus as Ebed Jahweh*

The most important allusion is found in the episode of the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8, 27-39), in which the latter reads Isaiah 53. The quotation recorded by St. Luke speaks about the undeserved death of the Servant (Is 53, 7-8). But even before the two Isaianic verses, in 53, 6 appears the idea of redemption that comes to mind to anyone who is acquainted to Jesus' words at the Last Supper and the book of Isaiah.

Beside this passage from Acts, there are other places where Jesus appears as the Isaiah's Servant: the sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4, 18-19; Is 61, 1-2), and passion episode (Lk 22, 37; Is 53, 12). Joel Green notes that Lk 22, 37 is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus quotes the Servant Songs<sup>31</sup>. In the episode of the passion, as well, we find a saying unique in the Gospels, in which the centurion who was present at the crucifixion of the Lord confesses that "This man was righteous" (Lk 23, 47) - words through which St. Luke reminds us again of the Servant Songs (cf. Is 53, 11)<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, Luke believes that these songs reflect a broader understanding of the Messiah's mission, including the salvation of the Gentiles (cf. Acts 13, 47)<sup>33</sup>.

The recognition of Jesus as the Servant lies behind the speeches in Acts, where the status reversal theme is inspired by the biblical motif of

<sup>31</sup> J. B. Green, *The Death of Jesus, God's Servant*, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> See R. J. Karris, *Luke 23, 47 and the Lukan View of Jesus' Death*, pp. 68-78.

<sup>33</sup> J. B. Green, *Death of Jesus*, in J. B. Green, S. McKnight (ed.), „Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels”, p. 161. Larkin (*Luke's Use of the Old Testament* p. 331) proves that this quotation functions as a "context pointer" making the entire Servant Song in Isaiah 53 an instrument for interpreting the passion that is about to take place.

the suffering righteous' vindication, found in Is 52, 13-53, 12. When St. Peter proclaims that "the God of our fathers, glorified His servant (*pais*) Jesus" (Acts 3, 13) and that the people denied the "Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3, 14), he uses a language taken over from 52, 13; 53, 11. The peculiar element that distinguishes the Ebed within the broad category of the suffering righteous is the idea that through the Ebed forgiveness is granted (Is 53, 4-6.10-11). This theme figures in the Lukan narrative. The saving of the thief on the cross and the omission of the dereliction cry ("My God, My God, why has you forsaken me?"; Mk 15, 34) differentiate the Lukan passion narrative from the Markan presentation of Jesus as a suffering righteous, and draw it close to the ideas found in the Servant Songs<sup>34</sup>. Likewise, the gift of forgiveness of sins is central in the missionary sermons in Acts (2, 38-39; 3, 18-20; 10, 43; 13, 38-39).

Consequently, Luke presents Jesus' death not as that of a hero or a martyr, and not even a suffering righteous, but as that of the suffering Servant-Messiah by whom God offers forgiveness of sins. These Christological ideas outlined on the background of the Servant Songs support the two references to Jesus' redemptive death. Given Luke's abundance of allusions to the Isaianic Servant, it is more than obvious that the author expects the reader to see the death of Jesus in this way presented above.

## 2) *The breaking of bread*

St. Luke also wants his reader to understand that by breaking the bread the Church fulfills the Lord's command: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk 22, 19). Noting that the disappointment and confusion of the two disciples who were walking to Emmaus were scattered not only on the road, when Jesus spoke to them, but especially in the house, at the breaking of bread (Lk 24, 30-32), David Moessner deems Jesus' words at the Last Supper as the climax of biblical testimony and the focus of revelation<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, as in the case of the two statements of Christ's redemptive death, the communal practice of breaking bread brackets, in Acts, the presentation of the Christian mission of spreading the Gospel. St. Luke first mentions the breaking of bread in a summary describing the liturgical and communal life of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 2, 42.46), and then when he presents St. Paul's stay in Troas, on his return from the third missionary journey

<sup>34</sup> J. B. Green, *The Death of Jesus, God's Servant*, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> D. P. Moessner, *The Christ Must Suffer*, p. 182.

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(Acts 20, 7.11). Given their place in the narrative, these references to the Holy Eucharist prove that the breaking of bread was a general practice in the Church. St. Luke thus indicates the central place held in the Church from the very beginning by the remembrance of Christ's redemptive death.

#### **3) *The death of Jesus as a divine necessity***

For St. Luke, as for the other evangelists, Jesus' death is not simply a product of human ignorance and wickedness that God subsequently annulled through the Resurrection. On the contrary, the passion of the Messiah is contained in God's will and plan that must be fulfilled. This theme appears not only in the prediction of the passion (Lk 9, 22.43; 18, 31) and betrayal (Lk 22, 21) but also when Jesus identifies Himself with the Ebed (Lk 22, 37; Is 53, 12). The divine necessity of Jesus' death is shown in what is written about him (Lk 24, 26-27.44-47; Acts 3, 18; 10, 43; 13, 27; 17, 3; 26, 23). Because He is the Messiah, Jesus must fulfill the mission of the suffering Servant. This recurring motif subtly converge toward the interpretation as ransom that Jesus gives for His death (Lk 22, 19-20), because this reveals the divine reason of the cross. So Saint Luke does not only say that Christ died because it was God's will, but further adds the interpretation that Jesus gives to His own death.

### **III. Conclusion**

In his account of the Last Supper, Luke establishes through the words of Jesus that the death he was to die would be on behalf of others. Jesus' statement occurs in a theologically charged context and draws on central Old Testament themes of salvation. When rightly understood in relation to these backgrounds, it is apparent that Luke is interpreting the death of Jesus as a sacrifice that atones for the sins of God's people and ushers in the new eschatological covenant with God. Far from being a minor or unimportant point for Luke, this statement is set at a climactic place in the narrative, and at a strategic location for introducing the immediately following passion of Jesus. Furthermore, Luke goes on to emphasize the significance of Jesus' words for his narrative by drawing his readers' attention back to them in subsequent episodes. In the Emmaus account, the breaking of bread in Acts, and Paul's farewell charge to the Ephesian elders, Luke

reaffirms the atoning nature of Jesus' death and highlights its foundational importance for the establishment of God's new covenant people. The key locations of these texts within the structure of Luke-Acts suggest they are meant to inform the rest of his narrative.

The image of the Isaianic Servant is very helpful in elucidating the importance of Jesus' death. We've seen that the icon of the Ebed is a constant presence behind the Lukan text. In these circumstances it is natural to look at the death of Jesus as a ransom, or a sin offering (Is 53, 10). The idea is clearly stated in the two passages studied, Lk 22, 19-20; Acts 20, 28, whose paramount importance is seen from the perspective of narrative criticism. In these verses Jesus' death appears as the sealing sacrifice of the New Covenant, the antitype of the Jewish Passover and as a means for the redemption of God's people.