

The Speeches of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles

H.N. Ridderbos, D. Theol.

THE TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT LECTURE, 1961

[p.5]

In this monograph I wish to concern myself with a number of speeches in the first ten chapters of the Book of Acts attributed to the apostle Peter. The content of these speeches is of great importance. In the form in which they have been handed down to us they purport to give us, from the lips of the apostle, the first — perhaps we may say ‘theological’ — reflections upon the *magnalia Dei*, the great works of God in the coming of Christ, His death and resurrection, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit which proceeded from Him.

There are two methods which might be adopted in studying these speeches. One might separate the speeches from the literary context in which they occur, scrutinize the contents and try to distil a ‘theology of Peter’ from them. The objection to this method is that it considers the speeches entirely *by themselves* as documents about Peter and pays no attention to the function which they have in the literary and theological structure of the Book of Acts. Although I by no means wish to belittle the significance of these speeches as documents concerning Peter, and shall speak about that aspect later, I wish first to speak about the place and significance which they have in the structure and design of the Book of Acts as a whole.

THE PLACE OF THE SPEECHES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

The first thing that may be said in this connection is that the speeches of Peter, together with similar discourses by other persons, are of special significance for the literary structure of the Book of Acts. It is clearly the purpose of the writer of the book — who in our opinion is none other than Luke — by means of these speeches to give *illustrations* of the preaching and progress of the gospel in the various historical situations which the Book of Acts describes. Thus the speeches serve the writer as *material to characterize and illustrate his account*.

As evidence for this statement I would briefly draw attention to the following. It has been observed by many scholars that in Acts 1: 8 Luke gives a sort of programme of what he is going

[p.6]

to describe in the rest of his book.¹ Here the risen Lord says to His disciples: ‘You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.’² Later, when the author

¹ Cf., e.g. E. Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Meyer, *Kommentar*, 111¹⁰), 1956, p. 115. In his important article ‘The “Book of Acts” the confirmation of the Gospel’, *Novum Testamentum*, 1960, pp. 26-59, W. C. van Unnik opposes the view that 1: 8 can form a suitable starting-point for arriving at a correct insight into the purpose of Acts (p. 39). One can agree with him, but it is difficult to deny that 1: 8 and 9: 15 suggest the broad outline along which the account of Acts proceeds.

² All quotations are from the RSV.

comes to describe the preaching of the gospel *outside* the land of the Jews, we find a new and more detailed indication of the further contents of the book. The figure who then appears in the foreground is Paul. And it is said of him that he must bear the name of Christ 'before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel' (Acts 9: 15). The course of the Book of Acts accords with these two statements. It describes the progress of the witness to Jesus Christ. This witness begins at 'Jerusalem' (chapters 2-7), proceeds further in 'Judaea and Samaria' (chapters 8-11) and finally goes on its way to the 'end of the earth' (chapters 13ff.). In this latter stage we find described first Paul's activity as a witness among the 'Gentiles' (chapters 13-20), then his speaking before 'kings' (chapters 24-26) and finally his witness to 'the sons of Israel' (chapters 22, 28), entirely according to the programme sketched for us in 1: 8 and 9: 15.

Further, it is very remarkable that the position of the great *speeches* in Acts entirely accords with this scheme. They are held at exactly those places in the progress of the witness to Christ which are indicated in Acts 1: 8 and 9: 15. The first three speeches are held at Jerusalem where the gospel begins its course, two by Peter (2: 14-40; 3: 12-26) and one by Stephen (7: 2-53); then one at Caesarea, by Peter (10: 34-43), is recorded as evidence of the preaching of the gospel in 'Judaea and Samaria'. Of Paul's speeches three are given among the 'Gentiles' (13: 16-41; 17: 22-31; 20: 18-35), two before 'kings' (24: 10-21; 26: 2-23) and two before the 'sons of Israel' (22: 1-21; 28: 25-28). On the basis of this we may conclude that the speeches in Acts are typical, carefully selected examples or illustrations of the witness to Christ in its progress from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

The typical nature of the speeches is apparent not only from

[p.7]

the *geographical* progress of the gospel which they represent, but also from the diversity of the *persons* in the audiences to which they were addressed. The following list gives us an insight into this:

1. Acts 2: 14-40: Speech of Peter to the Jews and proselytes at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.
2. Acts 3: 12-26: Speech of Peter to the Jews at Jerusalem.
3. Acts 7: 2-53: Speech of Stephen before the Jewish Council.
4. Acts 10: 34-43: Speech of Peter to Cornelius, a proselyte, and his friends at Caesarea.
5. Acts 13: 16-41: Speech of Paul to the Jews among the Gentiles.
6. Acts 17: 22-31: Speech of Paul to the Gentiles on the Areopagus.
7. Acts 20: 18-35: Speech of Paul to Christians among the Gentiles.
8. Acts 22: 1-21: Speech of Paul to the Jewish people at Jerusalem.
9. Acts 24: 10-2 I: Speech of Paul to Felix.
10. Acts 26: 2-23: Speech of Paul to King Agrippa.
11. Acts 28: 25-28: Speech of Paul to the unbelieving Jews at Rome.

This analysis makes it clear that Luke's second book is not only, or primarily, a collection of documents setting out all that he knew of persons such as Peter and Paul. Rather, he selects from his material that which will help him achieve the purpose which he bears in mind throughout the book: that of describing the continuing work here on earth performed by the

ascended Christ through the service of His apostles. Thus, in his second book as in the first, Luke remains an *evangelist*, recording the coming and work of Jesus Christ.

Acknowledgment of these facts sets our desire for historical knowledge of earliest Christianity, the fate of the apostles, their theological insights and ideas, within bounds. These are valid also for our present subject. Possibly we would like to learn from Acts more about Peter and his 'theology'. But we must realize that Peter's speeches are not given us for this purpose. Luke is not interested in what is specifically Petrine or Pauline. Their joint significance in the service of Christ and the gospel is more important to his purpose than anything which is peculiar to the one or to the other. That is why the speeches in Acts cannot serve as a primary source for the 'theology' of Peter

[p.8]

and Paul. For that, one must always consult primarily their Epistles.

On the other hand, however, all this does not mean that we should agree with those modern scholars who ascribe only a *literary* significance to the speeches in the Acts and either greatly doubt, or entirely deny, their *historical* value. Since this opinion is often encountered in the more recent commentaries and monographs on Acts, it is not beside the point to go into this matter a little deeper.

It is often suggested that the speeches as we have them in the Acts were not delivered by the persons to whom they are ascribed (Peter, Stephen, Paul), but that they are rather the literary compositions of the author of Acts, namely Luke. The well-known German scholar Martin Dibelius, who has paid much attention to the literary composition of Acts, has, in particular, defended this view.³ In so doing he appeals to the function of speeches in classical history-writing, in particular in the works of Thucydides who constantly weaves speeches into his accounts, putting into the mouths of various persons speeches which are in fact his own compositions. This is by no means done in order to give a false or fictitious account of history. He uses the speeches: simply as a literary form by which he may better depict certain historical situations; and he presupposes that his readers will understand that they should regard the speeches in this way. According to the opinion of various modern scholars one must regard the speeches in Acts in 'the same way, *i.e.* as free compositions of the author Luke who intended thus to portray situations in the lives of the apostles in words purporting to come from their own mouths. Thus these speeches are of value in helping to set forth historical situations, but are *not* themselves historical. An author such as Dibelius denies their historicity almost completely.⁴

The arguments in favour of this view are chiefly as follows: that the speeches in Acts appear to be composed according to a 'fixed plan, which is considered to be the work of Luke; further, that the Greek of these speeches is largely that which is characteristic of both Luke's historical works; and finally, that one can trace little or no specifically Petrine or Pauline theology in these speeches. This, then, all serves as an argument for the view that, though Luke may here and there have made use of transmitted material, he composed these speeches himself, and that

³ M. Dibelius, *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte*, 1951, 120ff.

⁴ Haenchen's judgment is even more radical, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[p.9]

they have no historical core or content, but must be regarded as literary products similar to those in Greek historical writings.

This view, which has found many supporters among the German *form geschichtliche* (form-history) school (although not *only* there), is strongly disputed by others⁵, in our opinion on solid grounds. It is certainly true that Luke's work is not primarily biographical. It is also true that in his rendering of the speeches of Peter and Paul he does not permit himself to be guided by motives of a historical-theological kind. But this by no means indicates that these speeches have no historical value and that we must attribute them to Luke instead of to Peter or Paul. Luke has undoubtedly taken great care to allocate to each of these speeches a place in the Book of Acts as a whole. But this kind of arrangement is also true of the discourses of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew; yet no-one would wish to compare those discourses to the speeches in Thucydides. Therefore, to our mind, to maintain that these speeches are more or less free compositions of Luke shows a total lack of appreciation of his writings. For even though Luke's book may not be a biography of Peter or Paul, none the less the value of it depends upon the historical character of his information. For it is his purpose to depict the confirmation of the Gospel in the deeds and in the preaching of the apostles. Therefore the *content* of the preaching and the *manner* in which it was done were no less important than its geographical extension.

It is, upon reflection, hard to imagine that Luke should not have been acquainted with the content and manner of the apostles' preaching. He had no need (as did the Greek historian) to give new life to vague figures out of the dim past by putting into their mouths speeches of his own composition in order that they might appear, speaking, in his account. Luke knew from what he had himself seen and heard how Paul made his appearance and preached. And he had no lack of connection with people such as John Mark and Philip who had personally experienced the first years of the Church at Jerusalem.⁶ This does not, of course, mean that there was a shorthand account of everything that the apostles had said on any and every occasion. But it was not difficult for those who had heard the apostolic preaching again and again, to remember its content and the way in which Peter in particular, the great spokesman of the early days, had

[p.10]

witnessed to Christ. No-one who thinks of the recording of the history of salvation in its historical context need be surprised that Luke could not recover and reproduce the very words which Peter had spoken. It is not strange that the Greek form of this preaching should bear the characteristics of Luke's own linguistic style and manner of expression.⁷ But that does not mean that the fixed plan and stereotyped construction of these speeches, the method of citing Scripture and the peculiarly archaic expressions occurring in these speeches, stemmed from Luke and not from Peter. For just as certain expressions and stylistic characteristics in these speeches may be attributed to Luke, so on the other hand may it be asserted that the *content* of Peter's speeches does *not* bear the marks of the Hellenist Luke. We shall have occasion to return to this matter of content in detail later. But here it may already safely be stated that

⁵ For a summary of the discussion, see B. M. F. van Iersel, '*Der Sohn*' in *den synoptischen Jesusworten*, 1961, pp. 31ff.

⁶ Cf. Bo Reicke, *Glauben und Leben der Urgemeinde*, 1957, p. 7.

⁷ Particulars in van Iersel, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-40.

neither the Christological terminology nor the remarkable method of citing Scripture in these speeches — to mention just two points — bear the marks of later development. We may rather assert that they have a decidedly ‘old-fashioned’ character.

The same is true of the *construction* of these speeches, the underlying pattern which they show. Careful analysis shows that the same elements constantly recur in these speeches.⁸ This is very clearly the case with the three speeches of Peter in Acts 2: 14-36, 40; 3: 12-26; 10: 34-43. After the *exordium*, in which the concrete occasion for the speech is discussed, there follows in all three speeches *the testimony concerning Jesus of Nazareth*, in which the following elements may be distinguished: (a) His ordaining by God; (b) His miracles; (c) His death and resurrection; (d) the agreement of the Scriptures; (e) His exaltation in heaven; (f) the apostles’ authority as His witnesses. Then follows in all three speeches the *paraenesis*: (a) the call to conversion in the light of the judgment; (b) the promise of the forgiveness of sins; (c) the call of the Jews first, and then the Gentiles.

This pattern, which apart from some change in order recurs almost unaltered in Paul’s speech in Acts 13: 16-41, and also determines the main contents of the speeches in chapters 17, 20, 22 and 26, should not be regarded as a free invention of Luke,

[p.11]

but rather as the basic pattern of the historical apostolic preaching.⁹

These general considerations enable us to form a tentative judgment about the speeches of the apostles in general and about those of Peter in particular. These speeches should be regarded not as a literal record of the exact words of Peter, Paul, *etc.*, but as illustrations of apostolic preaching in various characteristic situations. As such they reproduce the general form of the original preaching of the apostles. The speeches of Peter in particular show very characteristic ‘old’ elements, as will become apparent from the rest of this paper. These speeches are, therefore, of untold significance for our knowledge of early Christianity, and in particular the original apostolic *kerygma*. Particularly in reference to the speeches of Peter we are dealing with the foundation upon which Christ promised to build His Church, Matthew 16: 18; *cf.* Ephesians 2: 20; Revelation 21: 14. It is with this especially in mind that we will now attempt to analyse further the characteristic contents of these speeches.

⁸ Cf. my article ‘Karakter en structuur van de grote redevoeringen, opgenomen in de Handelingen der Apostelen’, *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 1934, pp. 49-86, 225-244; M. Dibelius, *op. cit.*, pp. 142ff. and his earlier work *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*², 1933, p. 15; C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*⁷, 1951, pp. 7ff.; E. Schweizer, ‘Zu den Reden der Apostelgeschichte’, *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 1957, pp. 1-11.

⁹ E. Schweizer comes to a different conclusion: ‘Offenkundig ist zunächst die *Einheit* der Reden, vor allem in ihre Gesamtstruktur, aber auch in einer ganzen Reihe von Einzelheiten. Es dürfte deutlich sein, dass er und derselbe Verfasser sie gestaltet hat, indem er nur bei Einzelpunkten Traditionen aufgenommen hat’, *op. cit.*, p. 10. The evidence that the general pattern of these speeches goes back to the apostolic tradition itself is, however, far greater. The heart of it is to be found also in Paul’s traditional witness in 1 Corinthians 15: 1-8, as Dodd (*op. cit.*) has pointed out (see his survey at the end of the book); see also van Iersel, *op. cit.*, p. 42. And the repetition of special elements (for instance in the quotation of the Old Testament) does not prove the hand of the same author of these speeches, but rather the stereotyped character of the apostolic preaching; for further details see the present writer’s article quoted in note 8.

THE SPEECHES OF PETER

Further consideration shows us that we are particularly concerned with *three* speeches, namely Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2; his speech to the Jews after the healing of the cripple in Acts 3; and his speech to Cornelius and his company in Acts 10. Besides these we may mention Peter's speech in Acts 1; Peter's defence before the Jewish Council in Acts 4: 9-12 and in 5: 29-32; finally also the prayer of the Church after the release of Peter and John, Acts 4: 24-30. From all this extensive material the speech in Acts 1 stands apart. This speech is important not so much for our knowledge of the original apostolic *kerygma*, as for the insight it gives us into the apostolate itself. In this respect the speech in Acts 1 throws light upon

[p.12

the character and significance of the work of the apostles in the Acts, including their speeches. Thus the core of our subject resides in the speeches in Acts 2, 3 and 10. They were delivered on *three* separate occasions and each has its own particular importance. The speech in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost serves especially to explain the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; the speech in Acts 3 lays emphasis on the fact that the door of salvation is still not yet shut for the Jews, even though they crucified Jesus, in fact it stresses that God appeals to them first of all. The speech in Acts 10, on the other hand, especially opens the door to the Gentiles. Because of this triple point of view one might give preference to dealing with the content of these three speeches separately, one after the other. In this case one would regard the speech in Acts 2 as the foundation for the speeches in Acts 3 and 10, in fact for all the other speeches in Acts. Each of the other two speeches (in Acts 3 and 10) would then have to be dealt with from its respective point of view, namely of *Jewish* (Acts 3) and *Gentile* (Acts 10) participation in salvation. Although this method has many attractions, one objection to it is that it would involve much repetition. For, as we have already noticed, all the speeches in the Acts, and particularly the three given by Peter, are composed on the same pattern and plan. It therefore seems better to work from the basis of this pattern and consider the speeches in synthesis. Thus, the factors which they have in common receive the greatest attention, and at the same time we have an opportunity to make use of the more incidental statements of Peter before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 and 5, and of the very characteristic prayer of Peter and the Church at the end of Acts 4. According to the common pattern of the speeches all this material may conveniently be grouped into four sections: (a) eschatology; (b) apostolicity; (c) Christology; (d) paraenesis. The third of these is naturally the most important. It is also closely connected with the *paraenetic* element with which all the speeches end, and with the '*according to the Scriptures*' which, particularly in the speeches of Peter, plays such an important part.

a. Eschatology

The first thing that comes clearly to the fore in Peter's speeches, and what one might call the ground on which all his preaching rests, is the consciousness that the time of eschatological fulfilment has dawned. This is explicitly stated in only a few places. But it is the great presupposition behind his whole *kerygma*, and everything else finds its place and its significance *within* this

[p.13]

eschatological setting. This is most clearly expressed at the beginning of the great speech on the Day of Pentecost. In replying to those who mistook the gift of the Holy Spirit for drunkenness, Peter states that in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit the prophecy of Joel concerning the last days is fulfilled (Acts 2: 16, 17):

‘this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:
“And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh”.’

In Joel this phrase ‘the last days’ means the time that immediately precedes the day of the Lord (*cf.* Acts 2: 20). In the *kerygma* of Peter we do not find any strict boundaries set between different eschatological times. What is clear is that with the coming of Christ the messianic age, so long predicted by the prophets, has begun. The fulfilling of the prophecy *has* begun and is demonstrably present: ‘*this* is what was spoken by the prophet’ (2: 16); ‘what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, ... *he thus fulfilled*’ (3: 18); ‘all the prophets... proclaimed *these days*’ (3: 24); ‘*this* is the stone which was rejected by you builders’ (4: 11); Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel *now fulfil* in Jerusalem all that ‘thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place’ (4: 28); what happened to Christ is according to ‘the definite plan and foreknowledge of God’ (2: 23); just as also in the betrayal and the fate of Judas the preceding prophecy ‘*must be fulfilled*’ (1: 16).

When there is mention here of God’s ‘plan and foreknowledge’ and of the fact that the prophecy *must* be fulfilled, it is not only a divine foreknowledge or ‘predestination’, whereby all things follow their unavoidable course, that is intended. This ‘plan ‘and’ foreknowledge’ and this ‘must’ represent the terminology of the history of salvation, of the great eschatological drama, which is now being enacted. As has already been said, this consciousness dominates the speeches of Peter, just as it is also the great presupposition in the preaching of Jesus and Paul, in fact of the whole New Testament. Peter speaks of this fulfilment in a comprehensive way, by which I mean that he includes in it both present and future. The fulfilling of the prophecy and the dawning of the great future is partly already realized, namely in the coming, the death, the resurrection, the glorification of Christ and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; it belongs partly to the future, for it is also Christ who is ‘the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead’ (10: 42). The parae-

[p.14]

nesis in the speeches is thus also aimed at the repentance of the hearers in view of the ‘great and manifest day’ (2: 20), which is still awaited. The ‘being saved’ which is constantly mentioned (2: 21, 40, 47; 4: 9, 12; 5: 31) has both a present and a future significance.

It is well known that the relation between the present and the future aspects of salvation in the New Testament forms one of the most debated problems in New Testament literature. We must notice that in the speeches of Peter there is no trace of any *tension* between the two points of view. Again, the relation between the two and the significance and length of the interval between Christ’s ascension and second coming do not constitute a subject for conscious reflection in the speeches. The only place in which Peter discourses on these things in his speeches is the difficult statement in 3: 19-21, where he addresses the unconverted Jews as follows:

‘Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ

appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.'

The emphasis in this passage is on the still awaited revelation of the Messiah Jesus. This does not alter the fact that in Him the prophecy has already found its provisional fulfilment (cf. 3: 22, 26). But there is still a distance between the beginning and the end of 'these days' of the fulfilment (verse 24). The time of repentance is further prolonged and the promise of the great future and of the messianic salvation remains valid even for unbelieving Israel. That is all included in the divine plan of salvation. The ascension of Christ signifies a new interim period. This is the meaning of the words that the heaven 'must' receive Him until the time for establishing all things. This 'must' happens in accordance with the eschatological plan of salvation of God. We are of the opinion that the difficult expression 'times of refreshing' in verse 20 is also to be understood of the future messianic time of salvation and the second coming of Christ. The salvation of the coming age is here contrasted with the oppression which the Jewish people also share in the present age.¹⁰

[p.15]

It is a remarkable fact that neither here nor in any other part of the *kerygma* of Peter in the Acts does the *nearness* of the second coming of Christ receive any special emphasis. Although the final fulfilling of the prophecy by the return of Christ in the flesh was certainly at the centre of interest among the early Christian Church, we read nothing in these first chapters of the Acts of an expectation that this final coming of the Lord in the flesh was immediately at hand.

It has become a sort of dogma for some modern scholars, especially in Germany and Switzerland, that the first Christians lived in the expectation of the immediate nearness of Christ's *parousia* (the so-called *Nah-erwartung*). Because there can be no appeal to the Acts for support of this theory, Luke's work is seen in recent literature as a first attempt at giving an *a posteriori* theological explanation for the failure of Jesus to appear, coming on the clouds. To this end Luke is supposed to have attempted to introduce a new co-ordination between the history of God's great deeds in Christ and the continuing history of the world. In doing this he is supposed to have departed from original Christianity which, according to this theory, made no allowance for the continuance of world history but lived in the consciousness of the imminence of the end.¹¹ The discrepancy which some declare to exist here rests, in my opinion, on two unwarranted conclusions. In the first place the fact that the sense of expectancy of the imminent end of the world is lacking in the Acts in general, and in Peter's speeches in particular, *by no means* indicates that the sense of living at the turning-point of the ages is lacking, nor that the eschatological perspective has taken on infinite dimensions. As we have been able to demonstrate, the speeches of Peter are, upon closer examination, full of the certainty that the fulfilling of the prophecy (Paul would say 'the fullness of time') has arrived and that therefore in the 'eschatological present' the expected fulfilment of the divine plan of salvation and of the work of the Messiah has already begun. However, the fact that the

¹⁰ It is true that we do not elsewhere find the expression *καίριοι ἀναψύξεως* as a description of the coming of the Messiah or the future world. The same thought, however, is expressed in 2 Thessalonians I: 7 and in *Pirqe Aboth* iv. 17 (cf. Strack- Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, II, 1924, p. 626).

¹¹ See Ph. Vielhauer, 'Zum "Paulinismus" der Apostelgeschichte', *Evangelische Theologie*, 1952, pp. 1-15; H. Conzelmann, 'Die Mitte der Zeit', *Studien zur Theologie des Lukas*³, 1960; E. Käsemann, 'Das Problem des historischen Jesus', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1954, pp. 125ff.

emphasis in Peter's speeches is sometimes not on the future but much more upon the manifest work of God in the present cannot be summoned as evidence that the speeches (or even the whole book of Acts) are of a later date, since this emphasis shows a radical change of spiritual climate

[p.16]

from that of earliest Christianity, as far as eschatological expectation is concerned. These speeches are much rather evidence of the tremendous certainty of the first Christians that they lived at the turning-point of the ages. It was simply because what had *already happened* was of such immense importance to them that their attention was focused less upon the expected consummation, than upon the fulfilment which had already begun. The death and resurrection of Christ, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, was, so to speak, for the moment enough to claim all their spiritual attention, to cause them to announce the good news to others and to spur them on to action. Not only the future but also the present, not only the heaven but also the earth in all its extent and need had already come to stand for them in a different light: the light of the salvation and power of the Lord.

There is therefore, in the second place, no ground for supposing a discrepancy between the so-called *Nah-erwartung* of the original Christian Church, and the spiritual climate of the Acts in which the eschatological future is already supposed to have receded into the background. Where, we may ask, do we find the original Christian Church gathered together in the attitude supposed to have existed among them by the protagonists of this *Nah-erwartung* theory? Where have they been depicted as speaking, acting, carrying on in the world in a manner different from that described in the Acts of the Apostles? Where has the sense of the nearness of Christ's return hindered them from seeing their earthly vocation, the missionary command, even the whole continuing history of the world and mankind, in the light of the fulfilment already seen in Christ; and where has the *Nah-erwartung* led to idleness and disinterestedness in temporal life, *other than where the church was side-tracked*, as in Thessalonica where rebuke was necessary on the apostle's part? What do we really know of the life of the original Christian Church apart from what we learn from the Acts of the Apostles? This being so, there is no ground for doubting the historical credibility of the Acts or of the original apostolic *kerygma* as depicted for us in the speeches of Peter. We have no documents which can better enable us to appreciate the eschatological setting of the life of the early Christian Church than these speeches and the picture which Luke draws for us in the first chapters of Acts. We therefore agree with those scholars who are of opinion that the representatives of the so-called 'consistent eschatology' view are guided more by dogmatic than by historical criteria. Our conclusion on this point is that the character of the eschatological

[p.17]

consciousness in the speeches of Peter must be regarded as of extreme importance in forming a right judgment on New Testament eschatology.

b. Apostolicity

A second point that deserves separate attention is Peter's constantly repeated appeal to the fact that he was an *ear-* and *eyewitness* of what he preached concerning Christ, in particular His resurrection from the dead. In this connection the speech in Acts 1 prior to the election of

Matthias is of special importance. In it two things become clear, *firstly* that there were others besides the twelve disciples who could act as witnesses of all that had taken place since the baptism of John; and *secondly*, that none the less the commission and ministry of being a witness was limited to the twelve. Matthias was chosen in Judas's place to *become* a witness to the resurrection of Christ together with the eleven (1:22, *cf.* verse 26); and the function of being a witness is spoken of as 'this ministry and apostleship' (verse 25). Thus right in the first chapter the unique character of this function of being a witness is made plain, and it is identified with the apostolate.

This observation is of importance in clearly distinguishing the character and authority of what is said and done in the rest of the Book of the Acts. Thus it is certainly no coincidence that this special *being a witness* is constantly mentioned in the speeches, particularly in those of Peter. When he speaks of the resurrection of Christ in his speech on the Day of Pentecost he immediately follows it with the words 'of that we all are witnesses' (2: 32), and in 3: 15 the same words occur in the same connection. In both chapter 4 and chapter 5 in the speeches before the Sanhedrin there is again this consciousness of being witnesses: 'we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard' (4: 20) and 'we are witnesses to these things' (5: 32). Peter speaks more fully and more deliberately about this function of being a witness in his speech to Cornelius: 'And we are witnesses to all that he (Jesus) did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem' (10: 39); and when he tells of Jesus' appearance after His resurrection he says that this appearance did not take place before 'all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead' (10: 41, 42). Thus the witness of the

[p.18]

apostles is here linked up with the history of salvation itself. They have been chosen by God for this and have been commanded by God to witness (*cf.* Acts 1: 2).

This emphasis on the witnessing character of apostolic preaching is important in two respects. In the first place this lays the greatest possible emphasis on the *factual* content of the preaching. The original *kerygma* rests upon what has *happened*. And the resurrection forms the very heart of this. The entire apostolic preaching can be described as ear- and eye-witness testimony to the resurrection. It is always concerned with the great *deeds* of God in Jesus Christ. It is these to which faith must be directed, and it is because of these that repentance must commence. In 1 Corinthians 15 we find that the apostle Paul lays the same emphasis on facts, especially on the fact of the resurrection. But the importance and force of so doing is nowhere revealed more strongly than in the speeches of Peter. In this respect, too, they bear the hallmark of foundation-laying apostolic preaching.

In the second place it is of outstanding significance that this function of being a witness is identified with the apostolate as fully authorized by God and Christ. All that 'Jesus began to do and teach' (1: 1) is continued and confirmed by the witness of the apostles. Thus they receive their own special place in the history of salvation. Not only the great deeds of God in Christ Jesus themselves, but also their *proclamation* by God's appointed witnesses, belong to the execution of God's plan of salvation. Therefore the written record of the words and deeds of the apostles as set down in the Acts of the Apostles is not merely meant as biography of the apostles or a sketch of the history of the early Church — the Acts is far too fragmentary and incomplete for such a purpose — but as evidence of the certainty of the Christian faith (*cf.* Lk.

1: 4)¹² and of the foundation of the Church in the whole world. The ‘uniqueness’ (*Einmaligkeit*) of the apostolate is thereby of special significance. The number of the apostles is limited because the apostolate is inseparably linked with being an ear- and eye-witness and because the certainty and foundation of the faith lies in their ministry. Therefore the apostolate is *genus suum*, and apostolic succession in the personal sense of the term is in conflict with the peculiar place of the apostles in the history of salvation, and a contradiction in terms. The apostolic witness is much rather the canon of the New Testament Church, the delimited standard of Christian preaching and

[p.19]

Christian life.¹³ It is this apostolicity — the guarantee of the factual content of salvation and of the authoritative form of its proclamation — which comes very emphatically and intentionally to the fore in the speeches of Peter, and which gives these speeches their special place in the history of revelation.

c. Christology

The most important thing preserved for us in the speeches of Peter is naturally their witness concerning Christ. We have already drawn attention to the fact that in the speeches in Acts, especially those of Peter, the witness concerning Jesus Christ reveals a certain fixed form, in as much as there are some elements in it which constantly recur. These elements concern, then: (a) Christ’s divine mission; (b) His miracles; (c) His death and resurrection; (d) His exaltation in heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; (e) the agreement of all this with the Scriptures.

In particular Peter’s speech in Acts 10 contains this pattern in rather extensive form and it is well known that some believe that they have been able to discover here the basic pattern for the Gospel of Mark.¹⁴ Thus the speeches of Peter deserve special attention as an example and illustration of the original apostolic *kerygma* concerning Christ.

But they deserve attention not only because of this general significance. Also of importance are the elements which are *peculiar* to this witness to Christ. In the first place we may mention the fact that in these speeches *the earthly picture of Christ’s Person and work* comes particularly clearly to the fore, more so, for example, than in the Epistles of Paul. We here come in touch with a still fresh and vital impression of the historical life of Jesus. This finds expression, for example, in the constant reference to *Jesus of Nazareth* (2: 22; 3: 6; 4: 10; 10: 38), a name which, outside the Gospels, occurs only in Acts. Likewise the use of the name *Jesus* without any further qualification is characteristic of these chapters of Acts, as a glance at the concordance will show us. Another important fact is that Peter speaks of the early life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus in such a wide variety of ways and in such detail. Here there is not yet any such fixed terminology as one finds in the later preaching and confession of faith in Christ. In his speech

[20]

¹² Cf. van Unnik, *op cit.*, pp.53ff.

¹³ Cf. O. Cullmann, *Tradition*, 1954, p. 102 and my book *Heilsgeschiedenis en Heilige Schrift*, 1955, pp. 59ff. (English translation to be published shortly by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.)

¹⁴ Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*⁷, 1951. pp. 27ff.

on the Day of Pentecost Peter speaks of Jesus as both he and his audience had known Him from personal observation and experience: ‘a man attested to you¹⁵ by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus... you crucified¹⁶ and killed by the hands of lawless men (the Gentiles)’ (2: 22, 23). Similarly in chapter 3 it is said that God glorified His Servant Jesus. The Jews, however, delivered Him up and denied Him (as Servant of God) in the presence of Pilate, although the latter had decided to release Him. The Jews, however, denied the holy and righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to them, but killed the Author of life (Acts 3: 13ff.).

In all these utterances (which could be supplemented with others, *cf.* 4: 27; 5: 30; 10: 37ff.) it is perfectly clear that the preaching of Christ in the speeches of Peter is most closely linked with the historical events. We are here at the sources of apostolic preaching and it may safely be stated that the human and historical colour of the Person and work of Christ is preserved more clearly here than in later preaching. Many scholars therefore draw the conclusion that the Christology in these first chapters of Acts has in many respects a ‘primitive’ character. Some speak of the ‘adoptionism’ of these chapters.¹⁷ According to this theory only *through* and *after* His resurrection was Jesus made both Lord and Christ (to use the words of Acts 2: 36). J. A. T. Robinson goes even further. He agrees with this exegesis of Acts 2: 36, but is of opinion that in Acts 3: 20 an even more primitive idea is to be found, namely that Jesus will only be the Christ on His return from heaven. Thus Peter speaks of Jesus to the Jews as the future Christ whom God shall send them. Robinson calls this ‘the most primitive Christology of all’ and thinks that in Acts 2 and 3 two different, contradictory, Christologies are to be found.¹⁸

In our opinion the drawing of such a line of demarcation within Jesus’ Messiahship, whether one sets it at the resurrection or

[p.21]

even puts it in the future, does not fit within the limits of unprejudiced exegesis. Certainly the picture of an earthly and human Jesus of Nazareth is clearly to be observed in Peter’s speeches. But this does not at all mean that for Peter Jesus’ supernatural and messianic significance began only with His resurrection and exaltation, or even with His return from heaven. Rather the opposite is the case. The very way in which the powerful impression of Jesus’ earthly life continues with Peter makes it plain that for him Jesus’ supernatural and messianic significance was not simply the result of His resurrection from the dead. Undoubtedly he speaks in Acts 2: 22 of Jesus as *a man*, but he adds in the same breath that this man is *attested, authorized* by God by means of mighty works and wonders and signs. This authorization did not refer only to something future, but was proof of His divine mission, of His being clothed with divine authority from the very beginning. It is true that the name Christ or Messiah is not mentioned here, but one cannot argue from silence. Elsewhere in the

¹⁵ ἀποδεικνύμενον, ‘altermüchtige Wendung’, Dibelius, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁶ προσήξαντες, ‘fix to’ or ‘fix on’, here used absolutely to mean ‘crucify’; in this sense a *hapax legomenon*.

¹⁷ In the footsteps *e.g.* of J. Weiss, *Das Urchristentum*, 1917, pp. 85ff.

¹⁸ J. A. T. Robinson, ‘The most primitive Christology of all?’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1956, pp. 177-189. Robinson writes: ‘Jesus is here (Acts 12-26) still only the Christ-elect, the Messianic age has yet to be inaugurated. Jesus has already appeared, as the forerunner of the Christ he is to be, in the promised role of Servant and Prophet...’ (p. 181). In Acts 2: 36 he finds another Christology expressed. Here Jesus is the Christ *by virtue of the resurrection* (p. 183).

speeches Jesus is expressly called the Messiah before His resurrection. In 3: 18 Peter speaks expressly of the *suffering of the Christ* and in 4: 10 he speaks to the Sanhedrin about Jesus *Christ* of Nazareth whom they crucified. Similarly in 4: 27 in the prayer of the Church it is said that God has *anointed* His Servant Jesus, and in 10: 38 that Jesus of Nazareth was *anointed* with the Holy Spirit and with power and thus did miracles of healing. If one wishes to persist in the so-called *adoptianism* of Acts 1-13, then it will be necessary to explain all these explicit statements of Jesus' Messiahship even before His exaltation as later interpolations, which is what Robinson does, even within the framework of chapter 3.¹⁹ However, it is a much more natural solution to take Acts 2: 36 and 3: 20, where Jesus' Messiahship is spoken of in connection with His exaltation and return from heaven, not exclusively but inclusively. Certainly Christ's resurrection represented a change, even in His messianic dignity. It was then that God gave sure proof that He had made Him both Lord and Christ, just as Paul says in Romans I: 4 that God then designated Him Son of God in

[p.22]

power. But these passages do not prove that before His exaltation Jesus had not yet had the dignity of the Messiah and Son of God. In the same way in 5: 31 it is said that God exalted Him at His right hand as Prince (AV) and Saviour, while in 3: 15 we read that the Jews killed the Prince (AV) of life. Thus here also are instances of the inclusive sense being used. What Christ became through His exaltation, He was already, albeit in another, more hidden manner. Any idea that one must distinguish between a Jesulology and a Christology in Peter's speeches, the one before and the other after His exaltation, is to my mind foreign to the apostolic tradition. It bears all the hallmarks of a later idea.

Of course in saying this we do not deny that the portrayal of Jesus as the Christ in the speeches of Peter has a special, perhaps we might say primitive, character, in that the terms in which Christ is referred to seldom or never occur later. And on the other hand these speeches lack a number of elements which are characteristic of the later Christology (for example that found in the writings of Paul and John), such as the explicit naming of Jesus as God.

Of great significance in this connection is the great *variety* of names and qualifications attributed to Jesus in these speeches of Peter. Not only does he say in Acts 2: 36 that God has made Jesus both *Lord* and *Christ* (cf. 10: 36), but, in a most characteristic way, as many as four times he names Him the *servant* of God, or God's holy servant (3: 13, 26; 4: 27, 30). Elsewhere he speaks of the *Holy* and *Righteous one* (3: 14), the *Author* or *Prince* of life (3: 15), the *Leader* and *Saviour* (5: 31), the *prophet* foretold by Moses (3: 22ff.).

All these Christological titles and qualifications deserve separate study, but present limitations forbid it. However, it is important to avoid an 'atomistic' approach which tries to distinguish between a number of separate 'Christologies' that Luke has linked together in an unhistorical way. Rather it is the total picture of all these names which is characteristic for the speeches of Peter. And if one wishes to speak of 'primitive' Christology here, then one must do justice by one as well as another of these titles.

¹⁹ Robinson qualifies the words τὸν χριστὸν αὐτοῦ in Acts 3: 18 as an exegetical interpolation by Luke himself, not as an 'integral part of the original speech' (*loc. cit.*) and thus he arrives at no less than *three* contradictory 'Christologies' in Acts 2 and 3, namely that of Acts 2: 36, that of Acts 3: 20 and that of Luke himself. It is no small objection to Robinson's theory that not only 3: 18 but also 3: 21 appear to oppose it: the words ὃν δεῖ σὺρανον μὲν δέξασθαι have according to the context Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν as their antecedent, and thus refer to Him as the Christ already at the present time.

In Acts 3: 22 Jesus is called the *prophet* foretold by Moses. This identification, which occurs also in the speech by Stephen (Acts 7: 37), can easily be connected with Jesus' earthly activity before His resurrection and exaltation. Yet it would be most arbitrary to contend on the basis of this that Peter regarded Jesus

[p.23]

before His resurrection exclusively as a prophet. It is said in the same connection that all the prophets since Samuel have spoken of Jesus. And that cannot refer only to Jesus' significance as a prophet. There belongs here quite certainly what is said in the second book of Samuel about the seed of David, *cf.* Acts 2: 13: 33-37 *etc.*, where the messianic *kingship* of Jesus comes to the fore.

Of particular importance in this connection is the repeated qualification of Jesus as the *servant of God* or *His holy servant* in chapters 3 and 4. There is a lively discussion among scholars²⁰ as to whether we may see here a reference to the prophecies of Isaiah 52 and 53, or whether the origin of this name for Jesus carries a more general character. Other persons in the Old Testament are also called servants of God, for example David, as in Acts 4: 25.

It is my opinion that it is difficult to divorce this fourfold application of the name Servant to Jesus from Isaiah 52 and 53. Not only does the explicit reference to Isaiah 53 in the account of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8: 32 point in this direction, but there are also the implicit allusions to the prophecy of Isaiah in Acts 3 and 4. Perhaps the clearest of these is in Acts 3: 13 where it is said that God' glorified his servant', which is a clear allusion to the similar words in Isaiah 52: 13 (*cf.* 52: 11). Also the *anointing* of Jesus as the holy Servant of God (4: 27, *cf.* 10: 38) appears to contain an allusion to Isaiah 61: 1.²¹ and thus points in the same direction. And finally the whole picture of the humbling and the exalting of Jesus as the Servant of God is completely in agreement with the falling and rising line (the 'catabatic' and 'anabatic') of Isaiah 53. It is true, one may wonder why the comparison between Jesus' suffering, death and exaltation and that of the Servant in Isaiah 53 is not worked out in more detail, and in particular why the vicarious nature of the Servant's suffering in Isaiah 53 is not made explicit in Peter's speech. But this does not tip the scales. No-one can decide with certainty whether *all* the implications of this equation were fully worked out right from the beginning of the preaching of the apostles. We have a few *examples* only of Peter's apostolic preaching. And it is obvious from these few examples how far reaching and complicated the Christological concept already is

This is apparent also in the linking of the Christological con-

[p.24]

ception of the Servant of the Lord with that of the *anointed* of the Lord which has its roots in Psalm 2. We find this connection made in Acts 4: 25-30. On the one hand the description *παῖς* must continue to be translated 'Servant' and not 'Child' or 'Son'.²² The anointed of the

²⁰ See the extensive survey in van Iersel, *op. cit.*, pp. 52ff.

²¹ C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*. 1952, p. 94; O. Procksch, *TWNT*, 1. 1933, p. 103 ('Es' ist klar . . .')

²² This is for example the rendering of Haenchen, *op. cit.*, p. 187, *cf.* p. 169. He accepts the argument of J. Gwiess, *Die Urapostolische Heilsverkündigung nach die Apostelgeschichte*, 1939, p. 46: 'Die Exegese der Ps. 2: 1f. in 4: 27 setzt den ἅγιος παῖς mit dem χριστὸς κυρίου (v. 26) gleich. In v. 7 aber nennt der Psalm den

Lord of Psalm 2: 2 and Acts 4: 26 is the anointed Servant of God (verse 27), through whose name *healing*, signs, and wonders, are performed (verse 30). This latter fits in with the prophecies of Isaiah 53 and 61. On the other hand this Servant is the anointed of God of Psalm 2, that is He who shares in God's *royal* dignity, the Son of God, who shall rule over all who have rebelled against His might, such as Herod and Pilate, together with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel. Here the view-point of Christ's position of power dominates, in comparison with which the opposition of His enemies may be characterized as but vain imagination (4: 25). Here we are in the same atmosphere as in Acts 2: 34, 35, where on the basis of Psalm 110 both the title of *Lord* and that of *Christ* are assigned to Jesus (10: 36).

In this connection also should be mentioned the role which is assigned to Jesus at the end of all things, namely that at His coming the 'establishing of all things' (ἀποκατάστασις πάντων) shall take place (3: 21), and that He is ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead (10: 42).

Here, although there are no explicit quotations from the Old Testament, in the context reference is constantly made to the prophets for these statements. We may think of the prophetic words which speak of the coming of the Lord to judge the whole earth (*e.g.* Ps. 98); and probably also of the prophecy of Daniel concerning the Son of man²³ seated at the right hand of power, coming on the clouds of heaven, to whom all power is given (Dn. 7: 13ff.; Mt. 26: 64; 28: 18).

I will conclude this part with two comments.

The first concerns the affirmation, which is constantly given

[p.25]

in the speeches under consideration, that everything which forms the content of the *kerygma* concerning Jesus Christ is *according to the Scriptures*. This element which we have constantly observed above deserves a little more of our attention. It is becoming increasingly realized that it is difficult to overestimate the enormous significance which this 'according to the Scriptures' had upon the formulation of the original apostolic preaching. To illustrate this, from the point of view of Britain, I need only refer to the book by C. H. Dodd which is dedicated to this theme: *According to the Scriptures*.

The speeches of Peter in the beginning of Acts are clear proof of the tremendous formative significance of the Old Testament for New Testament Christology. These speeches are truly *full* of citations, allusions, direct and indirect references, all of which involve the Old Testament and which set the Person and work of Christ in the light of the Old Testament. It is not too much to say that the material for the *kerygma* concerning Christ in these speeches is borrowed from the Old Testament. What significance should we attach to this, and what does it tell us concerning the origin of Christology?

messianischen König selbst υἱὸς κυρίου. D.h.: hier in Kap. 4 (und damit in Kap 3!) wird πᾶς als υἱὸς verstanden', *op. cit.*, p. 169. But hereby is all the evidence in favour of the rendering 'Servant' and of the connection with Isaiah 52, 53 (see above) all too easily set aside. On the other hand the identification of the Servant of the Lord with the Anointed in Ps. 2 is not unlikely (see the text).

²³ Cf. Haenchen, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

The term Old Testament *testimonies* is mostly used in this connection, and of course this name may be used. Yet it would be a very inadequate expression of the whole truth if we were to say that Peter and the other apostles used the Old Testament only as *evidence* for the veracity of their preaching.

The Old Testament does not merely confirm the apostolic preaching concerning Christ *a posteriori*. It rendered the apostles a far greater service. It had a *formative* significance for their preaching. The apostles actually *came to understand* who Jesus was and what significance His coming and work had, from the Old Testament. The light which they still lacked in many respects dawned on them from the Scriptures. We must not imagine that when the apostles were called to spread abroad their witness to Christ they already possessed an all-round theology and an all-round Christology. They were ear- and eye-witnesses of the great deeds of God in Christ. But Jesus' self-revelation was in many respects veiled for them during His earthly ministry. How could they suddenly have realized all at once what it was that they had witnessed? Therefore when Jesus had ascended into heaven there was only one way to avoiding falling into error the study of the Old Testament. It was also not merely an emergency measure a reverting from the fulfilment to the prophecy. No, Jesus Himself had referred them to the Scriptures

[p.26]

(cf. Lk. 24: 27): 'It is they that bear witness to me' (Jn. 5: 39). And so we see that the apostles (and in particular, Peter) when they preach Jesus, do so in the light of, and with material from, the Old Testament. They needed this source not only in order to provide the Jews with scriptural proofs. They needed it themselves in order to find their way to the full light and to bring others there. *Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet.*

It is difficult to express in a few words what significance all this has for a right understanding of the sources of New Testament Christology. In Christ the Church is bound not only to the New Testament but also to the Old.

The revelation of God in Christ cannot be understood otherwise than as the continuation and fulfilling of what He has done of old in the history of His people, and has spoken through His servants the prophets and psalmists. Salvation is granted to us in the vessels of ancient Israel. The Old Testament cannot be understood without the New, but the New remains incomprehensible without the Old, especially where Christology is concerned.

The second comment is this. Although the Christology in the speeches of Peter in many respects finds its expression in the prophetic language and figures, it cannot by any means find its actual origin or explanation in the prophecies.

New Testament Christology is in no respect the *postulate* of Old Testament prophecy. Prophecy certainly sets the figure of Christ in the correct and full light. But Christ is the fulfilling, not the product, of the prophecy.

We must go one step further. We have seen how in Peter's speeches not *one* but *many* prophecies provided the material for the formulation of Peter's *kerygma*. Not only the prophet in Deuteronomy, but also the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah, the King in Samuel, the Son in Psalms 2 and 110, and the Son of man in Daniel 7 all serve to illumine the significance of Christ. We are here confronted with a decisive insight. Salvation is given us in the vessels of

Israel. But no single one of them is able to contain the fullness of the salvation revealed in Christ. None of the figures of prophecy was able to outline Jesus Christ in His fullness. Every context in the preceding history of salvation proved to be too small to express what was to come.

The fact that this is apparent from the speeches of Peter is important for more than one reason. We have heard the idea that the Christology in these speeches is primitive. But the use which Peter makes of the Old Testament in order to express his

[p.27]

preaching concerning Christ clearly teaches us how inadequate this term 'primitive' really is. For Peter, too — perhaps we may say *just* for Peter — the supreme significance of Jesus of Nazareth was not an awakening idea but a firm reality. He names his Lord with all the names of the Old Testament. But it is as if no attempt to spell out that Name in prophetic terms really succeeds in expressing it fully. A prophet, *the* prophet, but *more* than a prophet. The Servant, the Son of David, the Son of man, yes, He was all of these; yet He was *more* than the Servant and the Son and the Man, yes, more than all of them put together. What was written of *the Name of God Himself* in the Old Testament was true of His Name also: 'Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (2: 21; 4: 12).

Peter is certainly the first in his preaching. Others will join him and the words of Peter will develop in their words. But they will never exceed Peter in the gloriousness of his witness concerning Jesus Christ. For there is no other name, nor any higher name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved, than the Name which Peter proclaimed in the beginning under *many* names.

d. Paraenesis

As we have indicated above, the paraenetic application forms part of the fixed pattern of the speeches of Peter as well as of others in the Acts of the Apostles. In every case it forms the conclusion. In a certain sense it may be stated that all that has been said in the speeches concerning the eschatological, the apostolic and the Christological aspects is nothing other than the preparation and great presupposition for the real purpose of the speeches: to stir up the audience to repentance, to bring them to faith and to forgiveness of sins. 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' are the closing words of Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost. And we find the same in Acts 3: 19: 'Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.'

This constantly repeated appeal is important for more than one reason. It sheds light upon the apostolic preaching. This is not only a matter of theological reflection, but demands a decision. It has been remarked that the speeches in Acts are constantly set in *direct* speech, and not, as in most pagan history writing, in indirect speech.²⁴ Thus the apostolic, authoritative

[p.28]

²⁴ Dibelius, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

character of these speeches becomes even more apparent; moreover they are directed not only to the original audience, but to all who read them. Just as the whole of the Book of the Acts is a continued preaching of Christ, so it is also a concrete appeal to repentance and the forgiveness of sins. This is nowhere expressed more powerfully than in the speeches.

In the second place there is an indestructible interdependence between the *character* and the *content* of this paraenesis and what has been said above about the eschatological and Christological character of these speeches.

The content of the paraenesis can be summed up in one phrase: *save yourselves*. 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation', says Peter on the Day of Pentecost (2: 40). Herein lies an allusion to the word already quoted from Joel: 'It shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (2: 21). Those who give heed to this appeal are plainly called 'those who, were being saved' (2: 47). And this 'being saved' recurs in the rest of the Petrine utterances (*cf.* 4: 12; 11: 14). Van Unnik rightly maintains that 'salvation' (σωτηρία) is the determining and decisive factor in the Acts.²⁵ However, what this σωτηρία involves can be understood only in the light of the eschatological and Christological aspects of Peter's speeches. It is being saved with regard to the great day of the Lord (2: 20, 21); it is being saved from the judgment that will overtake the unrepentant generation (2: 40); the receiving of forgiveness of sins in the light of the return of Christ (3: 19, 20), the Judge of the living and the dead (10: 42, 43). Yet, as we have already seen above, σωτηρία is not only a future affair for which one must prepare by repentance and conversion (3: 19). The salvation of which Peter speaks has a present significance and is wider than being set free from the coming judgment. The healing of the cripple in chapter 3 is also spoken of as 'salvation' in the Greek (4: 9), and it is clear from what immediately follows that the word is used in no secondary sense: 'And there is salvation (σωτηρία) in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (4: 12). Thus 'being saved' relates to the whole of human existence, just as the fulfilment which has dawned in Christ has an all-embracing significance, and just as it is already the prayer of the Church that God may stretch out His hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be performed through the name of His holy servant Jesus (4: 30).

[p.29]

Thus the σωτηρία proclaimed in the paraenesis must be understood in the closest connection with the Person and work of Christ. We must be saved through His name (4: 12); yes, He Himself is the Saviour (5: 31). This connection between Christ as Saviour on the one hand and the salvation granted in Him is constantly expressed in Peter's speeches and in the first chapters of the Acts by the words: *in the name* (Acts 3: 6; 4: 10, 12; *cf.* 4: 7, 17, 18; 5: 28, 40); *through the name* (4: 30; 10: 43); *on the basis of faith in his name* (3: 16); on (the basis of) *the name* (2: 38); or simply through *his name* as agent (3: 16). However difficult it may be to translate or paraphrase these Hebraizing expressions in an adequate manner,²⁶ it is clear that they all intend to indicate the power of, the connection and fellowship with the Person of Christ. The constant reference to the name is not intended to dissociate the ascribed σωτηρία from the Person of Christ, but indicates Him as the one who in the fullness of His power and fellowship is the Author of the σωτηρία, which He causes to be preached by His apostles (11:

²⁵ Van Unnik, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

²⁶ Cf. Bietenhard, *TWNT*, V, p. 270.

14). In that sense the paraenesis contains an appeal to *faith* in His name (3: 16), to *being baptized* in His name (2: 38), to *being healed, being saved, receiving forgiveness* through His name (3: 6; 4: 12; 10: 43) — it can even be said that it is His name which brings this σωτηρία to pass (4: 12; cf. 3: 16).

Thus it is in the closest connection with the Person of Christ, in the fullness of all His names and in the way in which He was led by God, that the σωτηρία preached by Peter must be understood. In Him, the blessing promised to Abraham for all the peoples on earth, comes first to Israel (3: 25, 26; cf. verse 13). In Him God fulfils the promise given to Israel of old (2: 39), and confirms His covenant (3: 25). He has done this by sending Him to Israel and causing peace to be preached through Him (10: 36). He has communicated to them the blessing promised to Abraham by raising up His servant and sending Him to them and by turning every one of them from their wickedness (3: 26). This is all primarily concerned with the σωτηρία which has taken place ‘in Christ’s coming into the world, His appearance among mankind as a prophet (3: 22, 23), as Doer of good and Healer, as Deliverer from the power of the devil (10: 38; cf. 2: 22). However, when Israel betrayed and denied His servant Jesus, God glorified Him, and it is, in particular, the preaching of Him whom God has exalted to be Christ and Lord that determines the char-

[p.30]

acter and content of the σωτηρία in Peter’s speeches. By His exaltation the opportunity for conversion and forgiveness of sins has not been taken from Israel, but prolonged even further (5: 31; cf. 3: 19ff.); in fact the testimony of the prophets that *in every nation* he who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to God (10: 35), and that *every one* who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins (10: 43), has been fulfilled. It is also He who is exalted at the right hand of God who has now received the promise of the Spirit from the Father, that is to say the authority to grant the Spirit to those who believe in Him and obey Him (2: 33, 38; 5: 32). But this exaltation of Christ in heaven also involves an interval, a temporary dispensation of salvation (3: 21). Only when this is completed according to the divine plan will the σωτηρία embrace all things in heaven and on earth and the time of establishing of all things dawn (3: 21); and only then will He who is already Lord of all (10: 36), as the divinely appointed Judge over living and dead, bring the salvation foretold by the prophets to its perfect culmination (10: 43; 3: 21).

When we consider the whole, it becomes clear that this paraenesis and the σωτηρία offered in it is nothing other than the reverse side and counterpart of the Christological *kerygma* in Peter’s speeches. That is to say, also, that although limited in its explanation it is all-embracing in its purport. The limitation most frequently pointed out is that the σωτηρία has been related to Jesus’ earthly appearance as Prophet, Servant of God and Doer of good, but not to His suffering and death; and that the significance for salvation of Christ’s exaltation, but not of His humiliation, has been expressed.²⁷

This question is very closely related to what has been said above about the connection between the name Servant of the Lord in Acts 3 and 4 and the prophecies of Isaiah 52 and 53. Now if — as I, in company with many others, believe — there are sufficient grounds for supposing that the Servant of the Lord in Acts 3 and 4 is none other than that of Isaiah 52 and 53, is it really conceivable that the significance for salvation of Jesus’ humiliation and death

²⁷ So again van Iersel, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

with reference to the forgiveness of sins, should not have been obvious to those who witnessed to Him in this way? — especially when, as is the case in Acts 3: 13, it is said in immediate connection with Christ's death, that God has, in this injustice done to the Holy and Righteous One, fulfilled

[p.51]

what He had foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, namely that the Christ should suffer (3: 18); and when there follows in 3: 19: 'Repent... and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.' It is true that no explicit connection is made between this and Jesus' death, but, nonetheless, here already are all the elements (God's plan of salvation — Christ's death according to the Scriptures — the Servant of the Lord — the blotting out of sins) that not only prepared for and made possible²⁸ the statement 'Christ died for our sins', but in fact essentially contained it.²⁹

In the paraenesis of Peter's speeches it is clear that the expressions used are very *general*, just as in the whole of the Book of the Acts. The proclamation is in the forefront, the explanation awaits further development. But what is true of the Christology is also true of the soteriology: it contains in essence the whole New Testament preaching of salvation. For this σωτηρία is in no other than Him who came at the great turning-point of the ages to fulfil God's plan of salvation. And just as the salvation granted in Him is that which not just *one* but *all* the prophets have proclaimed, so must it also be confirmed and unfolded in the Book of the Acts not once but constantly afresh, not just by one but by many witnesses, with the Holy Spirit Himself as a fellow-witness and constant teacher (5: 32; 10: 10ff.). Peter is the first great witness. He lays the foundation on which Christ builds His Church. But together with his name the names of *all* the other apostles will be written upon the twelve foundations of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 14; cf. Eph. 2: 20).

This lecture was delivered in Cambridge on July 11th, 1961 at a meeting convened by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research. It was subsequently published by the Tyndale Press in 1962.

Prepared for the web in March 2005 by Robert I Bradshaw by kind permission of the copyright holder.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

²⁸ Dodd writes: 'The Jerusalem-kerygma does not assert that Christ died *for our sins*.' However, he adds: 'Since the Jerusalem-kerygma applies to Christ the Isaianic title of "Servant", the way was at least open to interpret His death on the lines of Is. liii.' He points out that Paul includes the statement (that Christ died for our sins) in that which he had 'received' (*The Apostolic Preaching*⁷, 1951, p. 25).

²⁹ Cf. also G. Sevenster, *De Christologie van het Nieuwe Testament*, 1946, pp. 307ff.

The Acts of the Apostles, often referred to simply as Acts, or formally the Book of Acts, is the fifth book of the New Testament; it tells of the founding of the Christian church and the spread of its message to the Roman Empire. Acts and the Gospel of Luke make up a two-part work, Luke's "Acts", by the same anonymous author, usually dated to around 80-90 AD, although some experts now suggest 90-110. The first part, the Gospel of Luke, tells how God fulfilled his plan for the world's salvation through the Jesus' chief disciple, Peter (also called Simon Peter or Cephas), has been associated with Rome for nearly 2,000 years. The earliest testimony to the apostle Peter's presence in Rome is a letter from a Christian deacon named Gaius. Writing probably toward the end of the second century C.E. - so, around 170 or 180 C.E. - Gaius tells about the wondrous things in Rome, including something called a tropaion (see below for more) where Peter established a church - in fact, the Church, the Roman Catholic church at the site where St. Peter's Basilica is today. But there are other traditions besides Peter's. Peter then reports on Cornelius' speech to him and his companions. The important detail added here is that Peter recounts Cornelius saying that the angel told him that Peter "will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved" (Acts 11:14). The overt claim of salvation does not appear in Acts 10. What Peter means here by "at the beginning" is Pentecost. As I noted in Acts of the Apostles Online Commentary 32, Luke considers the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles as the second instance of Pentecost. This is the basis for Peter's seemingly unilateral decision to baptize Cornelius and his household. The Acts of Peter. From "The Apocryphal New Testament" M.R. James-Translation and Notes Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924. Written, probably by a resident in Asia Minor (he does not know much about Rome), not later than A. D. 200, in Greek. One or two important quotations from lost portions; a small fragment of the original in a papyrus; certain passages - speeches of Peter - transferred by an unscrupulous writer to the Life of St. Abercius of Hierapolis. A Latin paraphrase of the martyrdom, attributed to Linus, Peter's successor in the bishopric of Rome, was made from the Greek, and is occasionally useful. I. But rise up and go quickly unto the house of the apostle Peter, and thou shalt see my glory; he shall make known unto thee what thou must do.