

ABSTRACT TO THE THESIS OF HABILITATION

The Model of Apostolic Community In the Narrative Summaries in The Acts of the Apostles 1 – 5

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The Model of the Apostolic community has always represented a way worthy to be followed not only by monastics, but by all Christians. I decided to dwell upon this subject at the moment when this book, *The Acts of the Apostles*, started to represent for me, besides the book of the preaching of the Word of God by the Holy Apostles, mainly the book which reveals the wonderful link that can be created between God and man by faith.

Each of the twenty eight chapters written by the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke are as many proofs of confession of faith in Jesus Christ. From „all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up”, from the first chapter up to the last, in which St. Paul cures sick people, the Book of the Acts exhibits the true models to be followed by all believers. Among all the Books of the New Testament, this one represents – I believe – the essence of the faith in Jesus Christ. It is no accident that it was placed after the four Gospels – as a summary of them all – and before St. Paul’s Epistles – as a preparation for their reception.

What do the Acts of the Apostles actually consist of, and what is their significance for Christians? First, they represent those *acts of faith (apostolic practice)*; see the Greek title: *praxis ton apostolon*) which the Holy Apostles confessed by their preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, meaning a intertwining of faith and deeds – as the Holy Ap. James said in his Epistle (James 2: 20): „Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren?” Thus, the Acts of the Apostles are nothing else but confessions or manifestations of the way they understood to accomplish the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their every day life; moreover, they became models to be followed by all Christians.

After the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Christians became aware of their making up a unique reality founded on the faith in the resurrection of their Saviour Jesus Christ, living the fraternal communion ideal: „those who believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts, 4:32). The behaviour of the believers who sold their own estates and gave the whole of profit to the Apostles in order to be used in common interest for the benefit of those in need is in perfect harmony with the evangelical teaching of our Saviour.

There are three places in the first five chapters of the Acts where St. Luke interrupts the series of aorist tenses (the narrative tense) and introduces the imperfect (the description tense), drawing thus *three pictures of the Christian communitary life* (2: 42 - 47; 4: 32 - 35; 5: 12 - 16). There are three excerpts which should be read and interpreted together. The isolation and classification of individual, autonomous unities according to their literary forms led to the recognition of *a literary gender known as summary*. In the narrative structure of the second volume of St. Luke’s writings these excerpts were called *narrative summaries* by researchers. *Thus, a summary may be defined as a concise and relatively independent narrative expression which depicts a situation or an occurrence prolonged as an event recurrent and indefinite in time*. The purpose of summaries is double-folded: on the one hand, they offer a background perspective to the reader, while revealing the deep meaning of particular events (the way the Christian community lived or should live); on the other hand, they accomplish the role of throwing bridges between autonomous narrative unities.

The topic of *the first summary* (Acts, 2: 42 - 47) is *the internal life of the Christian community in Jerusalem*. This was characterised by two fundamentals (*notae ecclesiae*), according to the discipline indicated at line 42: *they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*. However, from a literary point of view, this summary unites the history of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts, 2: 1, 41) with Saints Peter and Paul’s activity in Jerusalem (Acts, 3: 1 - 4, 31). *The second summary* (Acts, 4: 32 -35) emphasizes the *goods communion* practiced by Christians, while introducing the following history about Barnabas’ generosity (4:36) and Ananias and Sapphira’s deceit (5: 1 -11). *The third large summary* (Acts, 5: 12 -16), emerges from the first two and stresses not so much on the fraternity aspect (only indirectly) as on *the Apostles’ healing presence and work*. Thus, he introduces the

history of their arrest and being taken to the Council of Israel (5: 17 – 41). The miracles performed by the Apostles, people's sympathy and the continuous growing of the community constitute three important aspects which St. Luke particularly emphasizes. Ancient Church Fathers and Writers who interpreted the Book of the Apostles or quoted from it, often used the early Christian community described by St. Luke as *a model or an ideal of life of the baptized*.