

The “Pentecost of the Gentiles” as Presented in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10 : 1–11 : 18): The Case of Cornelius and His Household

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Of the books of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles is unique. It has no precursors or imitators in the writings contained in the Christian canon, also with regards to genology and its content.¹ Furthermore, they provide us with a pretty unique image of the foundation and early growth of the Church. Of course, we should ask what kind of image it is: historical, mythological, theological, or theological-polemical. When reconstructing this image of the early Church, one must first present the author’s conception of the entire book and subsequently situate within it the fragment concerning the baptism of the first pagans (non-Jews), or the case of Cornelius and his home, which is discussed in Acts 10 : 1–11 : 18. Next, one should trace the history of the exegesis of a selected pericope in order to finally try to understand this description within the context of the latest research on New Testament texts by St. Luke.

1. Acts: Between Myth and History

The literary structure of the Acts of the Apostles can be enclosed in seven parts:²

- The beginning and growth of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 1–5);
- The tensions caused by Judeo-Christian Hellenists and the persecution of the Church (Acts 6–7);

1 Cf. K. Pilarczyk, *Literatura wczesnochrześcijańska*, [in:] *Historia literatury światowej w dziesięciu tomach*, vol. 1: *Starożytność*, red. T. Skoczek, Bochnia–Kraków–Warszawa [2003], p. 556–557; B. D. Ehrman, *Nowy Testament. Historyczne wprowadzenie do literatury wczesnochrześcijańskiej*, przekł. z jęz. ang. S. Tokariew, Warszawa 2014, p. 199–203.

2 Cf. F. F. Bruce, *Dzieje apostołskie*, [in:] *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, red. nauk. B. M. Metzger, M. D. Coogan, konsultacja wyd. pol. W. Chrostowski, konsultacja wersji oryg. B. Geller Nathanson [et al.], przekł. A. Karpowicz [et al.], 3rd ed., Warszawa 1999, p. 128.

- Spreading the Good News about Jesus Christ in Samaria as well as pagan milieus up through Antioch (Acts 8–12);
- The development of the mission from Antioch to Cyprus and Asia Minor (Acts 13–15);
- Resolutions concerning missionary activity among the pagans (Acts 15 : 1–16 : 5);
- The mission of Paul and his companions to the Aegean Sea (Acts 16 : 6–19 : 20);
- A lengthy epilogue of Paul's activity (Acts 19 : 21–28 : 31).

The book describes selected episodes presenting the spread of the Good News (the Gospel) beginning in Jerusalem and ending in Rome. However, it contains an additional level of the message, one that takes place with the aid of unique (religious) language.³ In the Acts, we read of Divine interventions during the selection of the successor to the apostle Matthias; God's intervention in the apostles' tongues like fire, which allowed them to speak in tongues; numerous healings; the angel's entrance into a jail to save Peter; the voice from heaven; numerous visions containing God's message; and the miraculous saving of a life after a snakebite. It is clear that the author of the Acts of the Apostles shares the vision of the world that was dominant in the world in which many things were explained by Divine intervention. The strong pneumatological accent in the creation of this image leads to conclusion that the foundation and growth of the Church is above all Divine and only human second of all, while the Holy Spirit ensures that the Gospels are preached by people effectively and that the Christian community is vibrant.⁴ That is why a Divine-human institution must be described using language that I have no qualms against calling mythical in order to render its essence conceived as such.

3 This is noted by J. B. Tyson, who sees a mythical image close to Bultmann's definition of myth in the depiction of the Acts (see R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, New York 1958, p. 15; R. T. Ptaszek, *Bultmann Rudolf*, [in:] *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 1, Lublin 2000, p. 736). According to this definition, every attempt at presenting everything that is eternal (Divine) as something that is temporal (steeped in history). Cf. J. B. Tyson, *Acts, Myth, and History*, [in:] *Acts and Christian Beginnings. The Acts Seminar Report*, ed. by D. E. Smith and J. B. Tyson, Salem, Oregon 2013, p. 15–18. This topic also concerns his lengthy article *Acts – A Myth of Christian Origins*, „Forum” Third Series 1 (2007) No. 2, p. 171–189, <http://www.westarinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Forum-12-The-Quest-of-Christian-Origins.pdf> (14.01.2017).

4 Cf. F. Gryglewicz, *Teologia Dziejów Apostolskich, listów katolickich i pism św. Jana Ewangelisty*, Lublin 1986, p. 15–16; W. Rakocy, „Będziecie moimi świadkami...” (Dz 1, 8) (*Dzieje Apostolskie*), [in:] *Dzieje Apostolskie. Listy św. Pawła*, oprac. A. S. Jasiński [et al.], Warszawa 1997, p. 42–47.

The very composition of Acts is strongly tied to the mythical conception, which sheds light on the presentation of the beginnings of Christianity. Certainly, the miraculous elements present in this book influenced not only its direct audiences (the second and third generations of Christians), but later generations as well. The role of the Acts of the Apostles in constructing a myth about the beginnings of Christianity is most evident in its basic themes, which in and of themselves are not filled with this miraculous aspect, which is visible in the previously presented literary structure of this book. The author of the Acts of the Apostles emphasizes above all the uniform nature of Jesus' movement.⁵ He introduces an inspiring narrative that presents an image of unity and harmony of the first Christian community and emphasizes the significance of the authority of the twelve apostles. Thanks to this, the reader learns that through their leadership this community can deal even with conflicts, making a just distribution of its goods in order to satisfy the needs of all its members. In the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus' early community is infused with faith in the Hebrew Bible, using it as a reference in order to explain the Church's new reality. It is also deeply attached to Jewish rites and traditions despite official Jewish authorities. The readers of the Acts learn that the Christian movement had its beginnings in Jerusalem under the direction of persons appointed by Jesus and who were witnesses of the Resurrected One, who implored them to stay in Jerusalem until the moment they would receive the Spirit, power from on high. Paul of Tarsus is also present in this image of early Christianity. Although he was not one of the Twelve, he was closely tied to the Jerusalem Church and the apostles and was a missionary with their permission. Above all, in their activity Christian leaders were guided by what is Divine, which is why the growth of the Church happened in an organized way. Thus the author of the Acts of the Apostles assimilated the mythological context and included within it the leading topics that served to present the beginnings of the Church.⁶

We can ask if these beginnings of the early churches could be described differently. An alternative description can be found only among the testimonies of Christians who lived at the time when the events took place. They can be found only in the epistles of Paul of Tarsus, which are a written source about

5 K. Pilarczyk, *Wokół problemu datacji Dziejów Apostolskich*, „Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 23 (2015) No. 2, p. 88.

6 *Ibidem*, p. 88–89.

the history of early Christianity. They provide us with an image of Jesus' movement which is not as consistent as that presented by Acts. It also had numerous factions and competing views, if not theologies. The problems occurring in the Pauline communities were not easy to solve. The apostles, among them Paul himself, were in these communities. According to him, the number of apostles (messengers bringing the Good News about Jesus) was not strictly defined; it was not limited to the Twelve, the official witnesses (Gk. *martyres*) who accompanied the historical Jesus. In fact, they were not necessarily even men. Although Paul knew and respected the twelve apostles who preceded him in faith, in his epistles he emphasizes his independence from them.

Looking at the Acts of the Apostles from the Pauline context, the mythic aspect of this book is even more evident, because one is tempted to say that its author presented an idyllic portrait of Jesus' first community. His narrative orders the topics in a way that they could support it. At the same time, the author is more removed in terms of time from what he describes than Paul, having a completely different perspective than the witnesses to the beginnings of the Church such as the Apostle to the Nations.

If the Acts of the Apostles is the founding myth of Christianity, the logical question is what their significance as a source for historical research is. What significance does the message contained within it, including that which concerns the case of Cornelius, have?

2. Acts 10 : 1–11 : 18 in the Structure of the Entire Book and Its Composition, Language, and Essential Message

The pericope that interests us belongs to the third part of the Acts which deals with the spread of the Good News about Jesus Christ in Samaria as well as in the pagan milieu up through Antioch (Acts 8–12). We can divide it into five episodes (scenes):⁷

- Cornelius' vision (10 : 1–8);
- Peter's vision (9–16);
- The description of Cornelius' messengers' arrival from Caesarea to Peter in Jaffa (17–23a);

⁷ Cf. F. Grygiewicz, *Egzegzeza Dziejów Apostolskich (r. 9–12)*, [in:] *Materiały pomocnicze do wykładów z biblistyki*, vol. 5, pod red. L. Stachowiaka, R. Rubinkiewiczza, Lublin 1982, p. 145.

- Events in Cornelius' house;
- Peter's account of Cornelius' baptism before the Jerusalem elders and the explanations of his behavior in Caesarea (11 : 1–18).

The pericope is reminiscent of a verbose tale with numerous reiterations of Cornelius' traits (10 : 1–2, 22, 35), his vision, and the sending of the messengers to Peter (10 : 3–8, 22 : 30–33) as well as Peter's vision (10 : 9–16, 11 : 5–10). Several descriptions are repeated twice, as if the author wanted to emphasize them. We can find certain analogies between them and the three descriptions of Saul's conversion, although they had a different meaning for the early Church.

The language of the story is thoroughly mythical. Cornelius' and Peter's human experiences are explained by the intervention of an angel (10 : 7, 11 : 13), which is called holy (10 : 22) or an angel of God (10 : 3) and looks like "a man in dazzling robes" and who is called "sir" (Greek *Kyrios*). Peter's vision took place during a time of ecstasy (10 : 11, 11 : 5). When it is described, there is talk of heaven opening (10 : 11), a vessel from heaven emptied and taken to him (10 : 11, 16; 11 : 5, 10), a voice from heaven (10 : 13, 11 : 7, 9), Peter referring to this voice as "sir" (Greek *Kyrios*; 10 : 14; 11 : 8), and a command given to Cornelius by the angel, a command given to Peter by the Holy Spirit to go to Cornelius.⁸

To the surprise of the faithful, the essence of the message contained in the pericope concerns the pagans, who, to the surprise of all, were given "the gift of the holy Spirit" (10 : 45), which the apostles and faithful from Judea understood as meaning "that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God" (11 : 1) and that "God has then granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles too" (11 : 18).⁹ What is important in this message immortalized by Luke is that he does not direct this statement to Cornelius at a personal level, but to all the pagans. His conclusion is that no person is unclean (10 : 28); that Jesus is the "judge of the living and the dead" (10 : 28); that "everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through His name" (10 : 43); and that he also refers to "all the earth's four-legged animals and reptiles and the birds of the sky" (10 : 12).¹⁰

⁸ Cf. *Acts and Christian Beginnings. The Acts Seminar Report*, op. cit., p. 123–134.

⁹ Cf. H. Pelc, *Wezwanie do metanoi w mowach Piotra według Dziejów Apostolskich*, Kraków 2004, p. 127–162.

¹⁰ Cf. F. Gryglewicz, *Egzegzeza Dziejów Apostolskich (r. 9–12)*, op. cit., p. 150–151; H. Ordon, *U progu uniwersalizmu Kościoła. Rola perykopy o chrzcie pierwszych pogan (Dz 10, 1–11, 18)*, [in:] *Kościół*

Luke ascribes this breakthrough, which took place in the Church through the inclusion of the pagans, to God Himself. Referring to his vision, Peter directly tells Cornelius that God has “shown” that there is no longer any difference among people and that all have the same access to Him. God has purified what Peter, in accordance with the message of the Torah, considered to be unclean, bearing in mind food, while the vision referred to people, both Gentiles and Jews. The aim of Peter’s vision was to emphasize that the mission of preaching the Gospel to people belonging to the polytheistic world, primarily Greco-Roman, is the work of God Himself. Previously, according to Luke, God’s work was that He “anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power” and thanks to this He moved on, “doing good.” Next, God resurrected Jesus and allowed Him to appear to the apostles for some time (10 : 40), after which He asked them to preach about Jesus’ importance in the history of every person and all peoples (10 : 42). After all, God imparted (Gk. *edoken*) the Holy Spirit not only on the Jews, but on the Gentiles as well. In Luke’s narrative, this allowed Peter to arrive at the conclusion that „God shows no partiality” (10 : 34), that “whoever fears Him and acts uprightly is acceptable to Him” (10 : 35). As a result, Peter recommended the baptism of Cornelius and the members of his household. Rejecting this would be opposition to God’s will (11 : 17).¹¹

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter’s role in bringing the pagans to faith in Jesus Christ and admission into the Church is of secondary importance. Luke presents him as simply the one who fulfills God’s wishes. In it, we can even see pathos, because the weight of this act has the marks of Divine intervention and its effects are far-reaching, as they designate the Church’s later history and ensure it is vibrant.

3. From the History of Research on the Pericope

The theological interpretation of the causes for directing the mission of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles cannot prevent us from asking the question of who from a historical perspective led to this breakthrough. Did this happen thanks to Peter or thanks to Paul? In attempting to answer this, we should

w *światle Biblii*, red. J. Szlaga, Lublin 1984, p. 73–81.

11 F. Gryglewicz, *Egzegeza Dziejów Apostolskich (r. 9–12)*, op. cit., p. 152.

look at the pericope that is of interest to us from a broader perspective, subjecting it to historical criticism. It can help us to better discover its meaning.

Previous research on it is helpful in this regard.¹² Martin Dibelius (1956) believed that its fundament was the pietistic story of conversion analogous to the one from Chapter 8 of the Acts of the Apostles about the conversion of the Ethiopian courtesan, which was supposed to inspire the Christians. According to Dibelius, Luke added four elements to this legend: Peter's vision of animals sacrificed to be eaten (10 : 9–16) and reminiscences of the vision (10 : 27–20a), including two explanatory speeches (10 : 34–43, 11 : 5–18). The visions were supposed to pertain to separate traditions whose aim was to eliminate the Jewish legacy of dietary commandments related to *kashruth*, or ritual purity, from Christian practice. Luke gave them broader, symbolic meaning, extending them to people considered to be unclean (10 : 28b). The story of Cornelius conversion emphasized in this way gained fundamental meaning in Luke's book, because it justified the decisions of the Christian elders in Jerusalem described in Acts 15 : 16–18.¹³ Dibelius' view began to be questioned in the 1970s by K. Loening,¹⁴ who claimed that Peter's vision was part of a broader story that was a justification for Acts 11 : 3 ("You entered the house of uncircumcised people and ate with them") and Galatians 2 : 12 ("For, until some people came from James, [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised").

The speeches from the pericope about Cornelius also give rise to problems. Peter's speech, which was certainly edited by Luke, bears similarities to Paul's teaching. The thought that God "shows no partiality" (10 : 34) frequently appears in the Pauline epistles (see: Galatians 2 : 6, Romans 2 : 4, Ephesians 6 : 9). Peter's speech (10 : 36–43), especially its beginning, is similar to Paul's speech in Antioch of Pisidia (13 : 23–31). The conclusion pointing at Jesus as

12 Cf. *Ewangelie i Dzieje Apostolskie*, wstęp, nowy przekł. z Wulgaty, koment. przez E. Dąbrowskiego, Poznań 1961, p. 146–169; G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, Berlin 1983, p. 2–15 (Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament, 5); J. Taylor, *Dzieje Apostolskie*, [in:] *Międzynarodowy komentarz do Pisma Świętego. Komentarz katolicki i ekumeniczny na XXI wiek*, red. nauk. wyd. oryg. W. R. Farmer, współred. S. McEvenue, A. J. Levoratti, D. L. Dungan; red. nauk. wyd. pol. W. Chrostowski, współred. T. Mieszkowski, P. Pachciarek, Warszawa 2000, p. 1369–1370.

13 M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of Apostles*, New York 1956, p. 109–122; por. R. J. Dillon, *Dzieje Apostolskie*, [in:] *Katolicki komentarz biblijny*, red. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, Warszawa 2001, p. 1213–1214.

14 K. Loening, *Die Saulustradition in der Apostelgeschichte*, Münster 1973, p. 95–96.

a judge corresponds to Paul's speech on the Areopagus in Athens (17 : 31).¹⁵ Consequently, this pericope, which emphasizes the role of God Himself in bringing the Gentiles to the Church and Peter's role in this, essentially legitimizes Paul's future activity in the Greco-Roman sphere. Therefore, we can ask: is this something like Paul's apology edited by Luke on the basis of some material preceding Luke? There is consensus among exegetes that 11 : 1–18 is Luke's conclusion in which he presents the significance of the conversion of the centurion; this is a precedent in its significance for the Church, not an episode of a local nature related to the Christian community in Caesarea. In any case, Luke does not present to us the beginnings of this community and does not make use of any local tradition, as he does in relation to other Christian communities (such as Malta and Troad; G. Schille).¹⁶ For Luke, the episode related to Cornelius is a preparation for his version of the events that he links to the so-called Council of Jerusalem (H. Conzelmann).¹⁷

Also surprising is the parallel between Luke 1 : 5–56 (the annunciation to Zechariah, Elizabeth, and her visit by Mary) and Acts 10. It has been noted by R. Morgenthaler and J. Weiss and expanded by H. Ordon.¹⁸ Apart from the similar literary structures that appear in them and would confirm Luke's editing of both texts, they are united in terms of theme: the idea of salvation, which is also a theme penetrating both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. It is something like a liaison between the pericopes, between the annunciation and the presentation and the episode of Cornelius. Only a soteriological perspective allows us to interpret the relationship between these seemingly unrelated pericopes. It also allows us to solve their structural similarities. It can be synthetically presented in the statement: "the salvation that began in the Jewish world transcends its boundaries and is directed towards all people."¹⁹

15 Cf. *Ewangelie i Dzieje Apostolskie*, op. cit., p. 312–313.

16 Cf. *Die Apostelgeschichte*, von G. Schille, op. cit., p. 21.

17 H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2nd ed., Tübingen 1972, p. 69. Cf. T. Tułodziecki, *Sobór Jerozolimski jako następstwo sporu apostolskiego w Antiochii (Dz 15, 1–35)*, „*Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia*” 1 (2008), p. 141–160, <https://doi.org/10.12775/BPTh.2008.007>.

18 H. Ordon, *Historiozbawcza perspektywa św. Łukasza. Struktura i teologia Łk 1, 5–56 oraz Dz 10*, [in:] *Chrystus i Kościół. Wybrane teksty Nowego Testamentu*, red. F. Gryglewicz, Lublin 1979, p. 101–110.

19 H. Ordon, *Historiozbawcza perspektywa św. Łukasza*, op. cit., p. 109; W. Rakocy, *Paweł apostoł Żydów i pogan. Łukaszowy obraz powstania i rozwoju Pawłowych wspólnot*, Kraków 1997, p. 206–207.

What message do we encounter when we read the pericope about Cornelius? Is Luke's literary composition based on previous legends? Is this a historical account that had been reconstructed seventy to ninety years after the events that had taken place in Caesarea? Is this an apology by Paul of Tarsus edited by the author of the Acts of the Apostles, which was supposed to theologially defend the apostle against accusations that he unlawfully directed the mission of evangelization to the Gentiles, thus giving it a universal nature and breaking with its initial Jewish particularism? Is this a correction of the image of Paul, whom some of the Christian communities in the early second century wanted to see as the only apostle (Marcionism),²⁰ rejecting the authority of other witnesses?

Before we answer these questions, it is worth looking at these three topics in detail. First, let us deal with the figure of Peter, who plays an essential role in the episode related to Cornelius. The decision to baptize Cornelius and the members of his household, in which we see a breakthrough in the history of the mission to evangelize, is tied to him. Such significance is not ascribed to either the conversion of the courtesan of the Ethiopian queen (without the participation of Peter), the evangelizing work of the "Hellenists" from Rome among the inhabitants of Samaria, or their activity in Antioch among the Greeks. However, in light of earlier sources (including the Pauline epistles) he is not convinced of the need to break with its narrow conception as a mission directed at the Jews, at the same time demanding that the Judeo-Christians live in accordance with the Torah and closely follow its commandments, including ritual purity and circumcision. This is attested in the Epistle to the Galatians, in which Paul writes:

And when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews [also] acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy (Galatians 2 : 11–14).

In this context, the story from the Acts of the Apostles about Peter's role in accepting Cornelius into the Christian community as well as his justification for eating along with the Gentiles, which was a violation of the Torah

20 K. Pilarczyk, *Wokół problemu datacji Dziejów Apostolskich*, op. cit., p. 86.

(Leviticus 11), to the Jerusalem elders seems incoherent. Nearly sixty years ago E. Dąbrowski reflected upon this matter. He wrote:

Naturally, no one will deny that Luke had on numerous occasions intervened in the sources available to him, but we should forget about the main principles of his writing in order to maintain that he used his intervention to create fictional events in the service of his theology.²¹

However, some contemporary exegetes believe that at that moment Luke rewrote the history of the mission of evangelization, replacing Paul with Peter, thus ensuring that his book would be coherent in terms of composition and theology. Luke did not change the essence of its chronology, only the main human protagonists. Why, though, did these historical details mean so much to him? Perhaps he was more interested in emphasizing God's own intervention in the history of the Church and adding a groundbreaking turn in its mission to the authority of Peter himself, the most important person among the *martyres*.

The second detail concerns Cornelius. Luke depicts him as a centurion of the "Italic Cohort" stationed in Caesarea, a port city built by Herod the Great and inhabited by numerous Gentiles, including Roman prosecutors; hence its later derogatory description as the "daughter of Edom" in rabbinical sources.²² Thus during the time when the events took place in Cornelius' house, around 36–37 AD, as the chronology of the Acts shows, just several years after the conversion of Paul, the Roman soldiers probably could not be stationed in Caesarea during the life of Herod Agrippa I (d. 44 AD). Luke's reference to the "Italic Cohort" seems anachronistic. It is present in the sources only between 69 and 157.²³ It appears that Luke adds the episode of Cornelius to these later historical realities, not paying any particular attention to them. Likewise, Cornelius' traits are reminiscent of the characteristics of the pious centurion from Capernaum (Luke 7 : 4–5). Is he then a "typical" Gentile, and a soldier to boot, who is considered to be among those who "fear God" (Gk.

²¹ *Ewangelie i Dzieje Apostolskie*, op. cit., p. 314.

²² H. L. Strack, P. B. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 2: *Das Evangelium nach Markus, Lukas und Johannes und die Apostelgeschichte*, München 1969, p. 688.

²³ Cf. Z. Rostkowski, *Kontekst historyczny cesarejskiej mowy Piotra (Dz 10, 34–43)*, „*Studia Teologiczne*” 16 (1998), p. 31–34; *Ewangelie i Dzieje Apostolskie*, op. cit., p. 308–309.

jobumenoī ton theon),²⁴ sympathize with the synagogue, and follow Jewish practices (prayer and alms)?

We can say little about the beginnings of the Christian community in Caesarea, but there is no reference to him even in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*. Hence Jerome's belief that the converted Cornelius became the founder of the Gentile Church of Caesarea (*Adversus Jovinianum*, 1 : 39) and the reference to Cornelius, the second bishop of the city, in the *Apostolic Constitution* (7 : 46) are clearly legendary (E. Dąbrowski). Thus we can ask if Cornelius is not something of a Christian "eponym" whose historicity cannot be confirmed and has been added to Luke's etiological stories in order to explain how the mission of evangelization shifted from the Jews to include the Gentiles as well. The audiences of the Acts of the Apostles themselves live in the reality of its persistence and its continuation. Now, their author does not try to describe their historical beginnings but rather to give a theological justification for them so that the second and third generations – ethno-Christians, but also Judeo-Christians – saw it not only as the work of Paul of Tarsus or even Peter but as the realization of God's plan sealed with the authority of the apostles, including Peter himself, into which Paul with his missionary activity would later be included. In Luke's theological conception, this plan is clear. Salvation occurred through Jesus Christ and continues to take place due to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This was first experienced by the Jews, which Luke presented in the story contained within the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and later by Gentiles (the story of Cornelius is the so-called "Pentecost of the pagans" or the "second sending of the Holy Spirit").²⁵ Both accepted the Word of God, converted, and believed in Jesus Christ.

Finally, the third historical topic related to the pericope about Cornelius is related to Peter's first vision, which unambiguously tries to nullify the Jewish principle of dividing foods into pure and impure ones as well as the practice of separation, including the prohibition of common meals, between Jews and Gentiles.²⁶ Contemporary research (D. E. Smith, J. B. Tyson) questions if they could have been presented and applied so unambiguously during the time when the Acts of the Apostles were written (the late first and early second centuries) by Judeo-Christians in the first decade or two after the Paschal

²⁴ *Ewangelie i Dzieje Apostolskie*, op. cit., p. 316–321.

²⁵ T. Siuda, *Duch Święty w Dziejach Apostolskich*, [in:] *Księga Dziejów Apostolskich*, red. J. K. Pytel, Szczecin 1999, p. 321–323.

²⁶ Z. Rostkowski, *Kontekst historyczny cesarejskiej mowy Piotra (Dz 10, 34–43)*, op. cit., p. 27–28.

events.²⁷ It appears that we are dealing with yet another anachronism in the pericope under analysis.

4. Old Dilemmas and New Proposed Solutions

In conclusion, one should ask if the pericope about Cornelius is the founding myth of the Christian mission to the Gentiles. Many contemporary scholars who work with ancient literature seek to distinguish between history and myth within it. Previously, early Christian texts tended to be considered mythical by them.²⁸ Thus they believe that early Christianity cannot be recognized by Acts as a historical source, as many historians have done up through the present, because it describes its foundation as a founding myth of the Church. At the same time, they do not rule out that there could be historical elements in this mythical message. Although it is dominated by non-historical themes, which should be emphasized, the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles can contain many historical materials derived from earlier sources or traditions based on historical memoirs. This leads to one of the most difficult problems related to research on the Acts of the Apostles, distinguishing between what is historical and what is mythical. At the same time, we should not debase its mythical dimension related to the beginnings of Christianity but instead skillfully interpret it, making use of contemporary theories of myth. Taking into consideration the preferred later date of the writing of the Acts of the Apostles (the beginning of the second century), we can find in them much more information about the history of Christianity, including the early second century.

A complete novelty in the Acts of the Apostles is that their author bound together the supernatural, redemptive dimension with the temporal and empirical one without mixing them together and severing the entirety, while in the temporal sphere he used a kind of explanation without a cause. For Luke, every event in salvation history, including directing the mission of evangelization towards the Gentiles, is two-dimensional: natural and at the same time supernatural, mundane and simultaneously redeeming, and historical and

²⁷ *Acts and Christian Beginnings. The Acts Seminar Report*, op. cit., p. 131–134.

²⁸ Cf. L. H. Martin, *History, Historiography, and Christian Origins. The Jerusalem Community*, [in:] *Redescribing Christian Origins*, ed. R. Cameron and M. P. Miller, Atlanta 2004, p. 263–273; G. Lüdemann, *The Acts of Apostles. What Really Happened in the Earliest Days of the Church*, Amhest, NY 2005.

eternal without identifying one order with the other.²⁹ The author of the Acts of the Apostles gave birth to a new, mythical image of history into which Christ entered, thus initiating the Church among the Gentiles. Calling this image mythical should not be a cause for concern. We can see in this a way leading towards generalizations and the presentation of historical facts. That is the path of the author of the Acts of the Apostles. For him, the point of departure were the mysteries as facts: the appearance of Church communities, their first moments among the Jews and Gentiles, persecutions, and conversions. Luke saw the *gesta Dei*, God's activity, in these facts at an empirical level. For him, empirical events are realistic, but at the same time they create sacred history because they have their Divine dimension and meaning and form part of God's eternal plan. Through this, they become mystery events and do not remain "naked" as natural events, introducing them into the sacred world. The medium that binds together what is empirical with what is extra-empirical is the main word. Thus the religious message in the Acts of the Apostles, including the pericope about Cornelius, is based on firsthand witnesses and servants of the word (Luke 1 : 2). In the natural order, one cannot explain things through words but rather through other things. However, in the metaphysical and sacred (Divine) order, the word explains the thing. With regards to the Acts of the Apostles, this word is the Word of God. Thus at the highest level the establishment and the beginnings of the Church is explained through the God who "speaks."³⁰ Thus it is unsurprising that in Luke's presentation the early Church begins with facts and leads to the mystery as well as God's plan broadly depicted in its entirety.³¹ Presented as such, even in historiography, the word is not only an empty memory, solely a tool for communication, but it belongs to the kind of language that John Langshaw Austin would call performative.³² This category could explain the unique traits of Luke's work, which was written for Christians not primarily to be only an account of the Church's past but also an introduction to its reality. His aim is not to inform

29 Cf. C. S. Bartnik, *Historiologia w kulturach starożytnych*, Lublin 2000, p. 255.

30 *Ibidem*, p. 255–256.

31 Zob. G. Vermes, *Twarze Jezusa*, przekł. J. Kołak, Kraków 2008, p. 161–167.

32 Zob. J. L. Austin, *Mówienie i poznawanie. Rozprawy i wykłady filozoficzne*, przeł., wstępem i przypisami opatrzył oraz skrowidze sporządził B. Chwedeńczuk, przekł. przejr. J. Woleński, Warszawa 1993. This is in reference to language that is not only a unique act of speech (in that it describes something) but activity as well (it impacts reality).

the reader, but above all to form him or her.³³ This reality is nothing more than the transcendental dimension of the religious world, which gains its realness in the ritual (sacramental, devotional, mystery-related) “happening” of the myth.³⁴ Evoking it allows the religious person to participate in holy events and at the same time feel the overwhelming realness of these events. That is the essence of Luke’s myth: it is not consistent with a certain old and transcendental reality. It does not say that “the truth is that it was such and such,” that the mission to the Gentiles happened in one way and not another, but it engages individuals in the recreation of sacred history. Instead, the essence of the myth consists of the possibility of participating in more than its detailed reflection, although without separating it from the reality guaranteed by the testimony of the *autoptoi* and, better still, *martyres*, as in the case of the pericope about Cornelius (this is how it differs from Gnostic myths). The myth plays an essential role not only in legitimizing the Christian social order, in the description of the previous religious world, but above all in establishing the present religious world and seeing it as the entirety (*universum*). This has been formulated even more precisely by G. van der Leeuw, for whom the myth is not a speculation, explanation, or interpretation of the religious world but experienced reality,³⁵ including the mission of evangelization among the Gentiles, which is part of God’s plan of salvation.

33 Cf. K. Backhaus, *Lukas der Maler. Die Apostelgeschichte als intentionale Geschichte der christlichen Erstepoche*, [in:] K. Backhaus, G. Häfner, *Historiographie und funktionales Erzählen. Zur Konstruktivität in Gechichtstheorie und Exegese*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2007, p. 47. In the Polish literature, Andrzej J. Najda does not call the language of the Acts of the Apostles performative, but historical-paradigmatic and considers the book itself to be paradigmatic historiography – por. A. J. Najda, *Historiografia paradygmatyczna w Dziejach Apostolskich*, Warszawa 2011 (Rozprawy i Studia Biblijne, 39).

34 Cf. G. van der Leeuw, *Fenomenologia religii*, z niem. przeł. i wstępem opatrzył J. Prokopiuk. *Mityczno-rytualna kreacja i odtwarzanie uniwersum religijnego*, „Przegląd Religioznawczy” 2006 No. 1 (219), p. 77.

35 Cf. G. van der Leeuw, *Fenomenologia religii*, z niem. przeł. i wstępem opatrzył J. Prokopiuk. Warszawa 1997, p. 364.

Abstract

The "Pentecost of the Gentiles" as Presented in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10 : 1–11 : 18): The Case of Cornelius and His Home

Research on the beginnings of Christianity using the historical method brings about many difficulties, mainly due to the scarcity of sources. One of the most interesting is the canonical book of the Acts of the Apostles, which is unique among the New Testament books, also with regards to genology and its content. It provides us with a unique image of the beginnings and growth of the Church. The author asks if this is a historical, mythical, theological, or theological-polemical image. In his research, he focuses on only one theme presented in this book: the historical watershed moment of directing the mission of evangelization towards the pagans. First, he situates the pericope in question in the conception of the entire book. Next, he summarizes the history of its exegesis and subjects it to historical criticism, finally finding within it an important chapter of early Christian mythology. While not negating its historical roots, he notes its theological message, which was especially important for the Christian community of the early second century.

Keywords: New Testament; Acts of the Apostles; St. Luke; baptism; history of Christianity; myth

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