

## JESUS, PROPHET LIKE ELIJAH, AND PROPHET-TEACHER LIKE MOSES IN LUKE-ACTS

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The prophetic dimension of Jesus, a central feature of the Third Gospel, was overshadowed by the messianic interpretations, which also incorporate other figures from the OT. In this article, I distinguish between a historical Jesus *prophet*, according to several biblical typologies, and a *paschal* Jesus Messiah, with the paschal extension of Prophet-Teacher “like Moses.” The latter is related to the interpretation of Scripture in the light of the event of the death, resurrection, and “assumption” of Jesus to glory.

This prophetic-magisterial office continues in the *ekklēsia* of the NT and is performed by different actors, from Peter and Paul to Stephen and Philip. It is a question not of authority or hierarchy but of interpreting the Scriptures in the light of the new “jesuanic” reality. Moreover, the prophetic activity of Jesus according to the model of the great prophets does not come to an end in the *ekklēsia*, as it was once thought. On the contrary, it proves evident in the strength of the witness of the paradigmatic first community of Jerusalem.

The Gospel of Luke is a fascinating work. The more one studies it, the more one realizes its inexhaustible richness. Very significant, for instance, is Luke’s construction of the figure of Jesus as a prophet. Because of the dominant theology, we are in the habit of “messianizing” everything about Jesus, and other dimensions of his character are absorbed by this messianic perspective or are altogether removed from our consideration. The traditional “messianic” reading of the Gospels has eroded and leveled the varied and differentiated jesuanic perspectives inscribed in the NT narratives. Our messianic lenses blur the richness revealed by Jesus’ figure in each of the Gospels.

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Concerning Luke, not only has the erosion that was originated in the traditional messianic reading submerged an important theme in the first-century Christian tradition, but it has also cut short Luke's jesusanic theology. In the Gospel of Luke, the prophetic character of Jesus is (a) the epistemological center (at the literary and semantic level) and (b) the essential kerygma (at the communicational level). Luke himself reveals how and at which moment the messianic condition branches off from the prophetic one, which is another example of Luke's originality.

### I. The Theological Plan of Luke

The "messianic" stage is basically paschal, insofar as it is rooted in Jesus' resurrection. Luke states it categorically in Acts 2:36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for sure that God has made that same Jesus whom you have crucified both *Lord* (κύριον) and *Messiah* (Χριστόν)." According to Luke's plan, the midrashic stories of the annunciation, birth, and childhood of Jesus are all paradigmatic. They point toward different "fulfillments" in his public life and to trans-significations in the life of his followers' community. For this reason, the messianic configuration of the risen Jesus (Acts 2:36) is anticipated almost esoterically in the episodes of his birth and the angelic epiphany: "Fear not. . . . For unto you is born this day in David's town a Savior, who is *Messiah the Lord*" (σωτήρ ὃς ἐστὶν Χριστὸς κύριος) (Luke 2:11). This sounds like an anticipation of Acts 2:36 and not a reference to Jesus' public ministry.

Luke foreshadows a similar anticipation in the story of Simeon (Luke 2:25–35): the Spirit had "revealed" (κεκληρηματισμένον falls under the heading of oracular vocabulary) to him that he would not die before seeing "the Messiah of the Lord" (τὸν Χριστόν κυρίου). For Luke, Simeon's words (vv. 29–32) point to the missionary preaching of the early church. Moreover, the language used to describe the soteriological function of this "Messiah" is the same as that which describes Yahweh's Servant in Isa 42:1–7 and 49:1–9a.

Simeon's second speech (Luke 2:34–35), in contrast, refers to Jesus' historical praxis as that of a controversial prophet. Luke puts into Simeon's mouth a *messianic* proclamation and a *prophetic* announcement. The third Gospel will develop the prophetic dimension, leaving the messianic (and heavenly) activity for the book of Acts. This activity is suggested by the multitude as Jesus is approaching Jerusalem (19:38)<sup>1</sup> and is accepted by him only after his resurrection (24:25–26, 44–46).

<sup>1</sup> The σωτήρ (Messiah/Lord of the angelic proclamation in Luke 2:11) becomes βασιλεύς in the popular manifestation of 19:38a. Both proclamations are united by a chiasmic structure ("glory in

That is the reason why the Gospel of Luke does not develop Jesus' messianic dimension; rather, this is left for the moment of the *τελείωσις* or consummation/perfection.<sup>2</sup> Such perspective is clear even in the episode of 3:15–18, where John the Baptist, “suggested” by the people to be the Messiah (v. 15), shifts their attention to the one who will baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (v. 16b), clearly alluding to Jesus' postpaschal soteriological activity, not to his historical role.

Later on, Jesus rebuked the demons before they could speak, because they knew he “was the Messiah” (Luke 4:41b). This means that Jesus' identity as “Son of God”—a polysemic and ambiguous designation—is shouted aloud (v. 41a), but not its messianic interpretation. Such is not the case with Mark 3:11–12, according to which the demons identify Jesus as the Son of God, “but he warned them firmly not to make him known (*φανερὸν*).” Only Luke adds the remark of 4:41b: “for they knew he was the Messiah” (*τὸν Χριστὸν αὐτὸν εἶναι*).

Thus, in the Gospel of Luke several persons indicate the messianic dimension of Jesus: an angel (1:32, David's throne), an inspired old man (2:26, Simeon), the demons (4:41), Peter (9:20), and the risen Jesus himself (24:26, 46). In both occurrences during Jesus' public life he emphatically rebukes the proclamation of his messiahship (4:41b; 9:21) with the word *ἐπιτιμάω*, “to command.” What is even more eloquent, Luke immediately remembers the first statement that Jesus had made about his passion, death, and resurrection (9:22). The subject expressed in the Synoptics here is not the Messiah but the Son of Man, identified with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.

Luke hermeneutically develops the messianic perspective in ch. 24: “hermeneutically,” because in the first episode (24:1–12) the figure of the Son of Man is reread in a paschal context (v. 7), and in the other two episodes the same is done with the figure of the Messiah (vv. 25–27 and 44–48). The prophets are not interpreted literally but *in sensu pleniore*, according to the reservoir of meaning eisegetically explored starting from the paschal experience of the early church, the *ekklēsia*. In this phase Jesus is already identified as the Messiah/Χριστός. The paschal theology of Luke 24 integrates the messianic dimension, which will define the heavenly soteriological activity of Jesus, who will be subsequently called Messiah (Christ) or “Jesus Christ.”

In sum, the third Gospel portrays an active Jesus Prophet, and the book of

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the highest / peace (2:14) // peace / glory in the highest (19:38b).” Is not the formula “glory in the highest” pointing, in Luke's perspective, to Jesus' glorification?

<sup>2</sup> This meaningful vocabulary has a special hint in Luke. Just at the structural center of the narrative of the journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44) Jesus sends a message to Herod: “I drive out demons and heal today and tomorrow, and on the third day I *τελειοῦμαι* (“shall be perfected/consummated”) (13:31–33).

Acts, a Jesus Messiah (seated as a king at the right hand of God [Acts 2:33]) proclaimed in the kerygma. This latter feature is condensed in the new name “Jesus Christ” (personal name + title) or simply “Christ” as a personal name (already seen in the earlier Pauline writings), and it becomes the essential theme of the missionary preaching in the Jewish context (e.g., Acts 17:1–3).

The activity of Jesus as prophet—outstanding in the Third Gospel—comes to an end in the book of Acts. The symbolic, transcendent Messiah replaces the historical prophet.<sup>3</sup> A heavenly prophet does not make any sense, as the prophet is a messenger, not a savior like the Messiah. Only on the symbolic level is Jesus Messiah simultaneously the eschatological prophet—a figure that originated in Deut 18:15, 18—who has a different meaning (Acts 3:22–23) as we shall consider later.

## II. The Prophetic Dimension of the Terrestrial Jesus

If we look at the OT we find several prophetic archetypes:

1. The paradigm could be Isaiah, Jeremiah, or any of the figures in the prophetic corpus.

2. Regarding the prophet Elijah, we can distinguish two representations in the OT: (a) The Elijah of the Deuteronomistic cycle (1 Kgs 17–2 Kgs 2) was a prophet and a healer (we will call him Elijah I). This first Elijah is “imitated” by Jesus in the Synoptic tradition. (b) The Elijah *redivivus* (better “returned/ *regressus*,” for he did not die but disappeared) belongs to a somewhat later theology, dependent on Mal 3:1 and 3:23, where he is announced as the precursor of Yahweh’s eschatological “visit” (this is Elijah II). In the Synoptic tradition, John the Baptist represents this Elijah II (in Luke 1:17, 76; 7:27).

3. Based on the promise of Deut 18:15, 18 the expectation of an eschatological prophet was generated in later rereadings. There are two forms of the promise in Moses’ speech in Deuteronomy:

Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren: him you shall heed. (18:15)

I will raise up for them *a prophet like you* from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. (18:18)

The second verse resembles the definition of a classic prophet. The formula “like me/like you,” nevertheless, expresses the much later vision of Moses as

<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on Jesus’ paschal messiahship is to counterbalance his non-messiahship on the historical level. In the same direction, the paschal high priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7) makes up for his historical non-priesthood.

“prophet,” a function validated neither by history nor by the transmission of the Torah. It can rather be interpreted as a midrashic extension that in turn presupposes the (virtual) disappearance of prophecy. The promised prophet “like me/like you” is actually different from the classic prophets, and also later. The difference lies in that the prophet reveals a new word of God, whereas Moses retransmits the Sinaitic word. Hence, if we read the text quoted above in its literary context (Moses’ discourse before entering the land [cf. Deut 1:1, 5]), it can be described as a “myth of origin” of Israelite prophecy. But if it is read in the chronological context of the last redaction of Deuteronomy (almost certainly in the Persian period), it means that Yahweh’s word is in the Torah and also in the interpretation of the “teachers” of Israel. That is why in the Gospel tradition the representation of Jesus as a teacher is so relevant. Jesus is the new Moses, and as a result we can fully understand the opposition between “it was said” (in the Law of Moses) and “but I say to you” in Matt 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43.

4. Finally, there is ecstatic prophecy, both in the OT (the tradition of the “sons of the prophets” in 1 Sam 10:5; 19:20–24; 2 Kgs 2:3; Joel 3:1–5) and in the NT (Acts 2:17, 21; 11:27). The event of Pentecost, which seems to follow this line (according to the quotation of Joel 3), is actually interpreted by Luke—in Peter’s words—as a prolongation of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, which was already fulfilled by Jesus (see Acts 2:22 along with v. 43 and 3:1–10).

### *The Prophetic Consecration in Nazareth*

As is well known, Jesus’ self-presentation takes place in the synagogue of Nazareth on a Saturday (Luke 4:16–30). The Isaianic text “appropriated” by Jesus (4:21)—the announcement of Isa 61:1–3—has a prophetic profile. The person who speaks there is appointed to announce good news to the poor, liberation to the captives, vision to the blind (the structural center of the quotation), and a time of divine favor.<sup>4</sup> It is the description of a prophet, not a Messiah.

Jesus’ presentation causes conflict with the people of Nazareth (4:22b, 30), and conflict is the usual outcome of the prophetic activity. Both the logion “no prophet is honored in his own country” (4:24) and the two examples of Elijah and Elisha (4:25–27) focus the attention on the prophet. Moreover, the evocation of both prophets is cataphoric, as it anticipates what follows. What comes next is a description of Jesus as κηρύσσων (preacher/announcer) and θεραπεύων (healer), both activities recalling Elijah and Elisha, the two prototypes of therapeutic prophecy.

<sup>4</sup> As we have argued elsewhere, there is no reference to the Jubilee in Isa 61:2a. See “Del año jubilar levítico al tiempo de liberación profético (reflexiones exegéticas sobre Isaías 61 y 58, en relación con el jubilo),” *RIBLA* 33 (1999): 76–96.

In the rest of ch. 4 (vv. 31–44)—a kind of anticipated summary of Jesus' mission—both “prophetic” functions are joined together in a chiasmus: he teaches (vv. 31–32) / heals (vv. 33–37) // heals again (vv. 38–41) / announces (vv. 42–44). Jesus' oral activity also has a magisterial connotation (vv. 31–32: διδάσκων, διδασχῆ, λόγος), which was perceived as fundamental in the Jewish context, especially related to the interpretation of Scripture.

*Jesus' ἀνάλημψις in the Footsteps of Elijah*

Luke's emphasis on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in the central section of his Gospel (9:51–19:44) is well known. To be more precise, one should speak of his “assumption” (ἀνάλημψις), not his “ascension” (ἀνοδος). This last lexeme is never used, but it became familiar in a more elaborated christology. Jesus' assumption is programmatically indicated in the first sentence of the section (9:51a):

And it came to pass, when the days of his assumption were being fulfilled/ accomplished, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Coming from the north, one has to *ascend* to reach Jerusalem. Actually, Luke recalls this in 19:28, almost at the end of the journey: “he went before, ascending (ἀναβαίνω) up to Jerusalem.”

As usual, Luke is here “imitating” an episode of the OT; he evokes the figure of Elijah according to 2 Kings 2. In ch. 7, Luke collects a series of miracles “imitating” parallel miracles of Elijah and Elisha.<sup>5</sup> At the center of the narrative (7:24, 35) is a dispute between Jesus and the people (vv. 24, 29) about John the Baptist as a prophet in the style of Elijah, the precursor promised in Mal 3:1 and 3:23 (Elijah II). But there is also another representation of Elijah, as preacher and healer (Elijah I). This characterization cannot be applied to John, about whose therapeutic activity (if any) the Gospel tradition is silent. However, it perfectly corresponds to Jesus, as we noted when we spoke about the Nazareth episode.

Now, the Greek text (LXX) of 4 Kingdoms 2 gives us a clue to Luke's midrashic search. Verse 1 introduces the theme: “And it happened that when Yahweh was about to *take* Elijah up (ἐν τῷ ἀνάγειν)<sup>6</sup> to heaven . . .” Elijah requests Elisha to remain sitting (κάθου) while he goes to Gilgal, Jericho, and the Jordan River, respectively (vv. 2, 4, 6). It is the same request that Jesus

<sup>5</sup> This issue has been studied extensively; see, e.g., Thomas L. Brodie, “Towards Unraveling Luke's Use of the Old Testament: Luke 7:11–17 as an *Imitatio* of 1 Kings 17:17–24,” *NTS* 32 (1983): 247–67; idem, “Luke 7:36–50 as an Internalization of 2 Kings 4:1–37: A Study in Luke's Use of Rhetorical Imitation,” *Bib* 64 (1983): 457–85.

<sup>6</sup> This verb is the equivalent of ἀναφέρω (Luke 24:51).

makes to his disciples “to remain seated” (καθίσατε) in the city “until you are invested with power from above” (Luke 24:49). “While crossing” the Jordan River, Elisha asks Elijah to give him two parts of his spirit (2 Kgs 2:9). Immediately Elijah is “taken up/ascended/assumed” as into heaven. The verb is ἀνελήμφθη (v. 11, as in vv. 9 and 10).<sup>7</sup>

Such is the story of Elijah’s “assumption” into heaven. The lexicon is exactly the same as that which Luke employs when describing Jesus’ “assumption” to heaven in Acts 1:11: “This Jesus, who was taken up [lit., “the one taken up, ὁ ἀναλημφθεῖς] from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Now, it is evident that according to Acts 1:11 the new coming of Christ will not be a *parousia*,<sup>8</sup> but rather a κατάλημψις, the opposite of his ἀνάλημψις. Could we call this expected person “Elijah III,” an exclusive idea of Luke? It is now the case not of a precursor but of the eschatological savior himself.

According to the apocalyptic vision of Daniel, the Son of Man will come “in a cloud” (ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλῃ [Luke 21:27]).<sup>9</sup> In the frame of the Elijah tradition, however, Jesus is “assumed” (ἀναλημφθεῖς, as in Acts 1:11), “raised” (ἐπήρθη [Acts 1:9a]), and “received by a cloud” (νεφέλῃ ὑπέλαβεν αὐτόν [Acts 1:9b]). He shall come “in the same way” in his κατάλημψις. Actually, the motif of the “assumption” belongs not to the tradition of the Son of Man but to that of Elijah, which is abundantly explored by Luke. Additionally, it is possible to find a melding of this tradition with that of Moses ascending to Mount Sinai, entering into the *cloud* (Exod 24:12–18, esp. v. 18a), and later descending with his face appearing radiant (“glorified” in the Greek version; cf. Exod 34:29–35).

Furthermore, we can explore another aspect in the story of the transference of the prophetic Spirit in 2 Kings 2. Once Elijah has disappeared (in a whirlwind, not a cloud, v. 11) something happens that is very significant. Now Elisha is the one who divides the waters of the Jordan River (v. 14), as had Elijah before (v. 8) and, much earlier, Moses himself (Exod 14:16, 21). But this is not all. When the prophetic group looking at these episodes observes Elisha’s gesture, they exclaim: “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha” (2 Kgs [4 Kgdms] 2:15). The verb used (ἐπαναπέπνυται) is overcharged with particles that mean “on” and “up” (ἐπι-ανα-παύω). It is not the Spirit “in” the interior of an individ-

<sup>7</sup> The KJV’s fragmented version (“to be taken from” [vv. 9, 10]; “went up” [v. 11]) corresponds to the MT (the verb נָשָׂא in vv. 9, 10, and נָשָׂא in v. 11), while in the LXX we read the same lexeme three times: ἀναλημφθῆναι (v. 9), ἀναλαμβάνόμενον (v. 10), and ἀναλήμφθη (v. 11).

<sup>8</sup> The word παρουσία is never used by Luke, not even in the apocalyptic speech of Luke 21:8–28; in 21:27 the verb ἐρχομαι is used alluding to Dan 7:13 (as in Mark 13:26). On the other hand, Matthew has παρουσία in 24:3, 27.

<sup>9</sup> In Dan 7:13, however, the figure “like a man” does not descend to earth; the scene as a whole is celestial.

ual, with a meaning of purification (Isa 4:4b; Ezek 36:26, 27), but the Spirit resting “on/over” someone, appointing this person for a concrete function of leadership (as in the case of the elders in Num 11:17)<sup>10</sup> or communication (as in the case of the prophets in Isa 61:1).

It is possible that in the subsequent episode in Acts, the evangelist wants to represent the community that receives the Spirit on Pentecost—just after Jesus’ “assumption” (Acts 2)—as the typological actualization of what formerly happened to Elisha. The fiery tongues “came to rest upon” each of the participants (Acts 2:3). This symbol is immediately identified with the Holy Spirit: “All were filled (ἐπλήσθησαν) with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). The image echoes Luke’s tradition about different people who received the Spirit (Zechariah in Luke 1:67; Jesus in 4:1; the disciples of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:51). The connection (via the symbolic “on”) with the tongues of fire is not lost.

This is therefore new evidence of Luke’s construction of Jesus’ figure as a prophet in the style of Elijah. Following the idea of Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, we can speak of “interfigurality”: Elijah and Jesus are counterfigures, or interfigures.<sup>11</sup> When Jesus-Elijah is taken up to heaven, however, he does not take the Holy Spirit with him. The Spirit is given to the *ekklēsia*, as Elijah’s spirit was transferred to Elisha. According to this fact, the first activity of the *ekklēsia* is precisely therapeutic (Acts 3:1–10) and kerygmatic (3:12–26). The effusion of the Spirit on the community, anticipated in Joel 3:1–5, is fully expressed in Pentecost, as Peter interprets it in his first kerygmatic speech (Acts 2:14–36; esp. vv. 17–21).

### III. The Prophet Jesus in the Style of the Great Prophets

The prophetic representation of Jesus is not exhausted in this brilliant typology inspired by the story of Elijah. Israel’s long prophetic tradition has transmitted such figures as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel, and others. These prophets were not *therapeutai* but only announcers of Yahweh’s word, either in the form of accusation and complaint or in the positive form of blessings and promises. Concerning the first form, the prophetic word was normally

<sup>10</sup> Wrongly translated as “in you” by the *Christian Community Bible* (Manila: Claretian Publications/St. Paul’s, 2000) but rendered correctly by the NRSV (“upon you”).

<sup>11</sup> See Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, “Aging and Birthing: Open-Ended Stories and a Hermeneutics of Promise,” in *Los caminos inexhaustibles de la Palabra (las lecturas creativas en la Biblia y de la Biblia): Homenaje de colegas y discípulos a J. Severino Croatto en sus 70 años de vida, 40 de magisterio, y 25 en el ISEDET*, ed. Guillermo Hansen (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Lumen, 2000), 387–411.



rejected and the prophet persecuted (Jeremiah's case is paradigmatic), while the second form is characteristic of the later prophets or the final rereading of the preexilic prophets.<sup>12</sup>

Such representation is fundamental in the Gospel tradition about Jesus, and it is regrettable that the theological tradition has avoided it. The prophetic aspect is reduced to the fulfillment of OT prophecies (textual prophecy) once the christological reading of texts was established. Or, according to common perception, it has to do with the prediction of the future. But the biblical prophet is an interpreter of the present rather than an announcer of the future—symbolic and utopian in any case. Jesus eminently fulfilled this prophetic function, and the Synoptic tradition expressed his rejection, suffering, and death with the literary patterns and motifs of Jeremiah's history, especially Jeremiah 26. Although Jeremiah was defended by Shaphan and liberated (26:24), however, Jesus was condemned (Mark 15:15).

### *The Axis of Luke's Gospel Confirming Jesus' Death as a Prophet*

If the rhetorical analysis of manifest structures can help us, it is worth noting that in the center of the journey narrative (9:51–19:44) is the scene concerning Herod "the fox." After Jesus' message to Herod about his activity until he is "consummated," he comments to the Pharisees who have come to warn him about Herod's intention:

Nevertheless, *it is necessary* (δεῖ) <sup>13</sup> that I walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following; for it would not be fitting for a prophet to perish outside Jerusalem. (13:33)

Jesus defines himself as a prophet. This scene prepares for the episode in 23:8–12, where Jesus is despised and scorned by Herod, which contributes to Pilate's decision.

It is not possible for Jesus to turn aside from his objective, Jerusalem, in spite of the good advice of the Pharisees (13:31). He "must" go to Jerusalem because the prophets—following Israel's great tradition—acted mainly in Jerusalem, and it was in Jerusalem that they were rejected and persecuted. Immediately, Jesus addresses the city, but this time without defining himself as a prophet who will die there. Rather, he defines the city as "the killer of prophets":

<sup>12</sup> See José Severino Croatto, "La estructura de los libros proféticos (Las relecturas en el interior del corpus profético)," *RIBLA* 35–36 (2000): 7–24.

<sup>13</sup> The verbal form δεῖ ("it is necessary") is an important kerygmatic and theological expression in the Gospel of Luke (2:49; 4:43; 12:12; 13:14, 16, 33; 15:32; 18:1; 19:5; 22:7, 37; 24:44).

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *the one who kills the prophets* (ἡ ἀποκτείνουσα τοὺς προφήτας).<sup>14</sup>

*Jesus, the Prophet-Teacher of Deuteronomy 18*

Let us return to the promise of Deut 18:15, 18 that we quoted above. This promise is interpreted by Luke in Acts 3:22–24, during Peter’s second kerygmatic speech (3:12–26). This text is not clear at first glance, since Luke is probably recording three ideas that do not overlap:

1. The fulfillment in Jesus—using Luke’s vocabulary of πληρόω—of all that the prophets have said, in this case concerning the sufferings of the now proclaimed Messiah (Deut 18:18)
2. The preparation through conversion (Acts 3:19) of the time of ἀνάψυξις (“refreshment, relief”; v. 20a) and ἀποκατάστασις (“restoration”; v. 21),<sup>15</sup> coincident with the (eschatological) arrival of Jesus, appointed beforehand (προκεχειρισμένον) as Messiah (v. 20b). Acts 3:21—“whom indeed it is necessary<sup>16</sup> that heaven retain”—retrospectively refers to the description of the new Elijah’s assumption and to the announcement of his return (“he will return in the same manner as you have seen him go there”) (Acts 1:11)
3. The promise of a prophet “like Moses” (Acts 3:22–26) who announces the conversion from wicked ways (v. 26).

This fragment of Peter’s speech affirms something quite important: now Jesus is neither the prophet of the classic tradition, nor Elijah I, nor the former teacher, but the prophet-teacher on a different dimension—as risen. Through his resurrection, he becomes not only the glorious Messiah but also the interpreter of Scripture, as it is clearly stated in two references: Luke 24:27 (“he explained [διεμύνηυσεν] to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”) and 24:45 (“then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”). Such hermeneutical function—during the “intermediate time”—is what the Christian community needs in order to be constantly “interpreting” the Scriptures and proclaiming the good news of salvation.

It was pointed out at the beginning of this article that Luke, who proposes

<sup>14</sup> Luke 13:34 is not to be translated “killing the prophets”: the participle with an article indicates a permanent attribute and is equivalent to a definition.

<sup>15</sup> For the other two occurrences of this noun, both in Acts, see 22:14 and 26:16. Paul is predetermined as witness and preacher of good news to the nations.

<sup>16</sup> Again, the impersonal verbal form δεῖ, of which neither heaven nor Jesus is the subject (as in all English, German, and French versions). A better translation is, for instance, the Spanish Reina Valera 1995 (“a éste, ciertamente, es necesario que el cielo reciba hasta . . .”).

the missionary *ekklēsia* as a permanent paradigm, usually advances an archetypal model in the historical Jesus himself. This is clearly expressed in the story of the transfiguration (Luke 9:28–36). First of all, the location (the mount, Moses, the glory, the cloud) unmistakably refers to Sinai. But what is Elijah doing there? We must remember that Elijah went to Horeb (Sinai) after being rejected by Israel (1 Kings 19), perhaps to nourish himself with Yahweh's word, which was not heeded at all in Israel. Nevertheless, we suspect there is something else.

The conversation with Moses and Elijah, which the three disciples did not hear because they were sleepy (Luke 9:32), was with a luminous Jesus (v. 30), and the subject was "his *exodus* that he had to *fulfill* in Jerusalem" (v. 31).<sup>17</sup> Was it an informal conversation, a pastime? Certainly not. First, the word ἕξοδος is parallel to ἀνάλημψις of 9:51. Second, Luke uses in both cases his favorite terminology of "being filled" (πληροῦν/συμπληροῦσθαι), thus indicating that something anticipated is now about to be fulfilled. Third, the cloud that hides the three speakers (Jesus, Moses, and Elijah) foreshadows Luke's description of the "assumption" of the risen Jesus. It was inside the cloud (on Mount Sinai) that the divine revelation was received. So this "Sinaitic" frame joins the prophet Elijah to the interpretation of the divine word.

The break takes place at the moment of the theophany or "logophany," when it is proclaimed—following the tradition of the prophet/Servant of Isaiah 42:1, "this is my son, the one I choose." Now, this declaration is immediately connected to the promise of a prophet "like Moses": "To him shall you listen" (αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε [Luke 9:35 = Deut 18:15]). Moses and Elijah disappear. This is quite significant. From this moment on, the risen Jesus (anticipated in the transfiguration) will be the only mediator, interpreter, and teacher for the Christian community. The risen Jesus will replace both the prophet-teacher Moses and the prophet Elijah. Jesus alone remains. As a paschal event, the transfiguration surpasses the historical Jesus. The historical Jesus was a "healer"-prophet (like Elijah I) and a teacher (like the rabbis). The risen Jesus, however, will be the prophet-teacher "like Moses," according to Deuteronomy 18. As such, he will be the interpreter of Scriptures (the Torah) for the Christian *ekklēsia*.

I think this is why Luke gives two different moments for Jesus' "assumption." According to Luke 24:50–53, it happens on the same day as his resurrection, but, according to Acts 1:1–11, it takes place after forty days. This discrepancy is certainly not the result of negligence or incoherence. Luke is a

<sup>17</sup> The translation of the NJB, "passing," is unacceptable, as is that of the KJV/NKJV, "and spoke of his *decease* which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." In these translations, the symbolism is lost.

fine theologian who would never allow himself to be incoherent. Rather, he “needs”—better yet, he shows that the Christian community needs—to understand that the invisible presence of the prophet-teacher working through his Spirit was anticipated in a visible demonstration of the risen Jesus as interpreter of the Scriptures concerning the kingdom of God. This was important in the paschal time of the *ekklēsia*. That is why Luke describes Jesus’ activity during forty days—a symbolic number indeed: “To whom also he presented himself alive by many infallible proofs (τεκμηρίους) after his passion, being seen by them forty days, and speaking the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ) (Acts 1:3).

Luke does not explain the content of “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” He is referring, however, to the reinterpretation of all Scriptures from the perspective of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and in relation to the proclamation of the good news “up to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8; cf. Luke 24:27, 44–48).

This is the hermeneutical task that the *ekklēsia* must carry out. It is inaugurated by Peter’s speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–36) and will continue with the four other kerygmatic speeches of Peter himself (3:12–26; 4:8–12; 5:29–32; 10:34–43) and also that of Paul in Antioch of Pisidia (13:16b–41). These six speeches—kerygmatic and paschal in content—all express the nucleus of the new “creed,” centered on Jesus’ death and resurrection. They are all messages to the Jewish people and have to do with the rereading of the Scriptures in the light of the paschal mystery.

To this group we must add Stephen’s great speech (Acts 7:2–53), which has a distinct significance for Luke. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, underscores the symmetry between Moses and Jesus, both being “leaders and judges”: “It was this Moses whom they rejected when they said ‘Who made you a ruler and judge (ἄρχοντα καὶ δικαστήν)?’ and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator (ἄρχοντα καὶ λυτρωτήν). . .” (v. 35; cf. v. 27b). Moreover, both were rejected like all the prophets: “Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One . . .” (v. 52; cf. vv. 35, 39, 51). The second deacon, Philip, likewise plays a hermeneutic role when he meets the minister of the queen of Ethiopia:<sup>18</sup> “Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture (ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῆς γραφῆς ταύτης),<sup>19</sup> he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.” From among the seven deacons (Acts 6:5–6), Luke is interested only in the first two, Stephen and Philip. Both of them act in the same way the apostles do, as ministers of the Word (διακονία τοῦ λόγου). This function is actually the interpretation of the Scriptures with Jesus as its key.

<sup>18</sup> Philip was probably a Diaspora Jew; it would not make sense for him to be a Gentile.

<sup>19</sup> This refers to Isa 53:7–8, quoted in 8:32–33.

This hermeneutical role is important in the early years of the Christian community. During the Jerusalem council, the matrix of a long tradition, Peter interprets God's recent manifestations (Acts 15:7b–11), and James, too, turns to the Scriptures (15:13b–21). Paul, in his speech to the Gentiles in Athens (17:22b–31) does not appeal to the Scriptures because they are unknown to his audience. Nevertheless, he interprets their own religiousness (see vv. 12 and 31). Paul's "testament" in Miletus, however, is addressed to the elders of the region of Ephesus (20:18b–35). He refers to his ministry as preacher, teacher, and witness (vv. 20–21), which in Luke's perspective is related to the interpretation of the Scriptures, as can be seen in the key text of 17:2b–3: "Paul . . . argued with them from the scriptures (ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν), explaining (διανοίγων) and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.""<sup>20</sup>

We should not forget that in the three accounts of Paul's calling (Acts 9:3–19; 22:3–21; 26:2–23) Luke inserts a very short hermeneutical speech of Jesus himself, who ascribes to Paul the figures of the persecuted prophet (9:15–16; 26:17),<sup>21</sup> the prophet to the nations (22:18, 21; 26:17),<sup>22</sup> and the servant-announcer of Isa 42:1–7 (Acts 26:15–18).<sup>23</sup>

At the end of Acts, Paul, already in Rome at a meeting with the Jews of the city, "set forth testifying earnestly (ἐξετίθετο) to the kingdom of God, persuading them about things concerning Jesus (περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ), both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning till evening" (28:23). A hermeneutic exercise on Isa 6:9–10 comes next (Acts 28:25–28). Then the conclusion of the Lukan book of Acts stresses that Paul was proclaiming (κηρύσσων) the kingdom of God and teaching (διδάσκων) "the [things] concerning the Lord Jesus Messiah with entire freedom of speech and without restraint" (28:31). The formula τὰ περὶ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ—or its equivalents in v. 23 and Luke 24:27b—refers neither to Jesus' public life nor to OT "jesuanic" matters. Rather, it refers to the christological interpretation of the OT from the global event of Jesus—his life, death, resurrection, and "assumption" or glorification.

<sup>20</sup> The Messiah of the Scriptures is Jesus ("Jesus is Christ"); in the confession of faith, however, Jesus is the Messiah (hence "Christ is Jesus").

<sup>21</sup> These verses are based on the story of Jeremiah's call (see Jer 1:1–18).

<sup>22</sup> The previous parallel with the prophetic figure of Jeremiah allows for a further association in these words: "Go, for I send you far hence, to the nations" (Acts 22:21). The translation "prophet to the nations" is usually used for Jer 1:5 and Luke 24:47, but "to the Gentiles" in Acts 22:21 misses the relation between these texts, which is much clearer in the LXX (προφήτην εἰς ἔθνη in Jer 1:5; εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Luke 24:47; and εἰς ἔθνη in Acts 22:21).

<sup>23</sup> "To open their eyes" (ἀνοίξει ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν) is taken from Isa 42:7 (LXX ἀνοίξει ὀφθαλμοὺς τυφλῶν), the first "song" of the Servant, in which the Servant is not a suffering individual but the announcer of good news to the Diaspora ("light to the nations," v. 6).

To return to the point of this section, all this activity is prophetic and magisterial. The risen Jesus himself begins it (Luke 24); it is continued by the first Christian witnesses (Acts of the Apostles); and it is finally legitimated by the christological rereading of the title “prophet like Moses” of Deut 18:15, 18. Such legitimacy—hermeneutic once more—is inscribed in the story of the transfiguration; it is repeated in Peter’s speech in Acts 3; and it is finally reiterated in Stephen’s discourse: “This is that Moses who said to the sons of Israel: ‘A prophet will the Lord raise up for you from among your brethren, like me’” (Acts 7:37 [author’s trans.]). Thus, the prophetic function of Jesus survives beyond its terrestrial realization in the figure of the “prophet like Moses.” This prophet is now the risen Jesus. Jesus is no longer Elijah, but the eschatological prophet who inspires in the *ekklēsia* the new interpretation of the Scriptures.

#### IV. The Prophetic Testimony of the Original *Ekklēsia*

Finally, Jesus’ prophetic role in the style of the great prophets of Israel develops into the testimony of the preaching of the first Christian community. Such a testimony would lead to rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom. The proclamation of the good news of salvation presupposes a rereading of the Scriptures by which the prophetic role “like Moses” is manifested. Such an interpretation of the Scriptures is in conflict with the traditional vision. In the book of Acts, the witnesses of the risen Jesus are rejected not because of accusations regarding social injustice or improper forms of cult but because of their affirmation that Jesus—who was condemned by the authorities of Jerusalem but now is risen and “made Messiah” (Acts 2:36)—is the savior of all those who invoke him (2:21). This is an extremely daring declaration, which bursts on the religious society generating the conflict. Persecution and rejection are the outcome of proclaiming salvation through Jesus with *parrhēsia* (freedom of speech). This situation is prefigured also in the infancy narratives, in this case in Simeon’s words: “Behold, this child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign of contradiction” (εἰς σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον)? (Luke 2:34).

Stephen—the “interpreter” rather than the deacon—also remembers this situation as he was asking his audience, clearly alluding to the rejection of the Just (Jesus, the suffering Servant):<sup>24</sup> “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” (Acts 7:52a). It is fitting that this sentence brings us unmistakably back to Luke’s fourth beatitude: “Blessed are you when human beings hate you . . . for thus their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:22a, 23b). These

<sup>24</sup> The title “Just” in Acts 7:52b alludes to the Isaianic Servant, so called in Isa 53:11 (“the just, my servant” [LXX δικαιοῦσαι δίκαιον]).

hermeneutic connections are quite clear for Luke, and they lie at the basis of his kerygma.

## V. Conclusion

Jesus fulfills everything that was foretold about the prophet (Luke 4:21), the Son of Man (18:31), the Messiah (24:26, 44–48; Acts 3:18), or “these days” (Acts 3:24). But above all, Jesus develops a multiple prophetic function for himself: (1) in the tradition of the great prophets; (2) as Elijah I (prophet and healer); (3) being killed, just like the prophets; and (4) as eschatological prophet-teacher, interpreter of the Scriptures. This prophetic-magisterial activity includes the affirmation of Jesus’ paschal messiahship, and the “jesuanic” prefiguration of the prophet who is rejected and condemned to death. In the last instance, Jesus’ paschal messiahship is the reverse of his terrestrial prophetic activity. This activity is clarified and interpreted by his new prophetic-magisterial role “like Moses,” which is also paschal.

The prophetic perspective of Jesus’ activity is so intense in the Lukan *magnum opus* that it is astonishing that it could be replaced by the messianic readings, and that such interpretation became almost the only one. The blurring of the prophetic dimension of Jesus in the theological tradition—not only in the exegetical tradition—is connected to the absence of a prophetic typology in the nomenclature of the saints. The saints can be confessors, virgins, martyrs, doctors, but there are no prophets in the Christian catalogue. St. Catherine of Siena was a true prophet, but when she was canonized she was designated a “doctor of the Church.” It is a symptom of the loss of the prophetic meaning and praxis, which was absorbed by other functions not related to that role. A new reading of the double Lukan work can help us recover this important dimension, which is rooted in the paradigm of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River, a wondrous archetype of prophetic, not messianic, consecration.

This prophetic dimension of the Christian testimony is being recovered in the spirituality and theology of the last decades and is urgently needed in different contexts. The prophet Jesus is the paradigm for the Christian prophetic mission. To see Christ (the Messiah) as a heavenly king and monarch is not very suitable today, because of so many sad experiences with monarchies in our world. Fortunately, not only in Latin America but also all over the world we have brilliant examples of prophets, many of whom were martyrs, even though the church does not recognize them as prophets. We are in a time when prophetic activity is most timely and urgent. Fortunately, too, we have in the double Lukan work a solid and provocative theology of prophetic Christian praxis.



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