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**The contents
The keywords
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of the**

DOCTORAL THESIS

**The missiological relevance of Luke 24:44-49
in the theology of the Acts of the Apostles**

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R e f o r m á t u s T a n á r k é p z ő K a r**

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A LUKÁCS 24:44-49 MISSZIOLÓGIAI JELENTŐSÉGE AZ APOSTOLOK CSELEKEDETEIRŐL SZÓLÓ KÖNYV TEOLÓGIÁJÁBAN

*Relevanța misiologică a textului Luca 24:44-49
în teologia cărții Faptele Apostolilor*

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The keywords of the doctoral thesis

The gospel of Luke, the great commission, the fulfilment of Scripture, the plan of God, enlightenment , Christology , the names and the work of Christ, the preaching of the gospel, Jews and nations, Jewish mission, Gentile mission, Peter and Paul, repentance, forgiveness, Jerusalem, the ends of the earth, the spread the word, apostles, God's new people, witness, persecution, the Holy Spirit, the theology of the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

Synthesis of the doctoral thesis

The thesis of my doctoral thesis is that the theology of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is put forward by Christ in the great commission given in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 24:44-49).

In the *Introduction* I proposed the *hypothesis* that the Lucan great commission (Luke 24:44-49) has a great bearing upon the formulation of the theology of the Acts of the Apostles. That is, in this great commission we find the frame and the summary of the theology of Acts. That would mean that the Lucan great commission is strongly theological, while the theology of Acts is intensely missiological.

So the *purpose* of my research is to prove that the summary of the theology of Acts is formulated in the Lucan great commission. The demonstration of this assumption will give us not only a clearer formulation of the theology of Acts but will also contribute to the theological unity of Luke-Acts.

The research is *needed*, because at the present time there is a great debate about what concepts should dominate the theology of Acts, and what *methods* we should follow in determining those concepts. The first relates to the contents, while the second to methodology. This problem necessitates the research. The fact is that Bible scholars formulate the theology of Acts in different ways. One example of this is the contradiction views of Hans Conzelmann and C. K. Barrett. Is Acts the story of a *victorious* church, which shows the triumph of resurrection and of glory (Hans Conzelmann), or is it the story of a *suffering* church, which emphasizes the theology of the cross (C. K. Barrett)? Charles Moule goes further and argues that the essence of Acts should not be sought in the whole of Acts but in the different *speeches*, especially in the sermons and defence speeches, while Beverly Roberts Gaventa says that the main message of Acts is to be found in the narrative sections of Acts and not in the speeches.

Regarding the relationship of Luke and Acts, the traditional view, according to which they are related on the level of authorship, story-line and theology, was recently questioned, especially by Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo. Parsons and Pervo argue that there is no connection between the two works as far as the narrative and the theology of the two books go (but only on the level of authorship).

The *methodology* of our research followed two main steps.

Firstly, I analysed the text of Luke 24:44-49 in an inductive way and summarized its main motifs. In the light of results of the study I formulated the following main themes of the great commission:

1). Realized salvation-history: fulfilment. This is the primary theme of Luke 24:44-45: "Then he said to them: 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."

2). Jesus is the Messiah: Christology. In Luke 24:46 the text of the great commission says: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead".

3). The Proclamation of the Gospel: Preaching. This is the theme of Luke 24:47: "And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name".

4). The Spread of the Word: Progress. This motif comes from the second part of Luke 24:47: the Word of the gospel "should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem".

5). The Testimony of the Disciples: Witness. Jesus continues his speech thus in Luke 24:48-49: "You are the witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." With this, Jesus clarified the task of the apostles and of the other disciples as his witnesses, which clearly described their role after his ascension.

Secondly, I did a research to see how Luke developed the enumerated five themes in the book of Acts. This formed the backbone of my research. I took the five topics one by one and I studied what kind of emphases each one is given in Acts. The finding of my research can be summarized the following way.

1). Realized salvation-history: fulfilment

In Luke 24:44-45 the Word of God shows that in and through Christ the scriptures were fulfilled, salvation-history was realized, and all these took place according to God's plan. I found that in Acts the salvation history of God, fulfilled in Christ, functions as an all-encompassing theological frame. In consequence, the events had to happen as they were described by Luke. The fulfilled salvation-history of God is characterized by plan, by necessity, and by newness.

The salvation-history fulfilled by Christ is characterized by the plan of God. This is seen from the following key words: βουλή (2,23; 4,28; 5,38-39; 13,36; 20,27), ἐπαγγελία (1,4; 2,33.39; 7,17; 13,23.32; 26,6), ὀρίζω (2,23; 10,42; 17,26.31), προχειρίζομαι (22,14;

26,16), τάσσω (13,48; 22,10), προκαταγγέλλω (3,18; 7,52), πρόγνωσις (2,23), προορίζω (4,28), ἐς προχειροτονέω (10,41).

God fulfils his plan consistently and is able to fulfil his word. Luke emphasizes that it is God who leads and governs the fulfilment of scriptures and the realization of salvation-history. This is shown by the fact that he is the central person of the events and by designations used for God in Acts. The God who fulfils the promises of the scriptures is described as „God” (θεὸς), „Lord” (δεσπότης), „Lord” (κύριος), „the Most High” (ὑψιστος), and he who „creates” (ποιέω). These designations give the assurance that the One who gave the promises is wholly able to do his will and to fulfil the promises of the Old Testament.

The salvation-history fulfilled by Christ is characterized by necessity. This is shown by the use of δεῖ („must”) in three ways. Firstly, with reference to the necessity that characterized the life of Christ (he had to suffer, he had to die, he had rise from the dead, and he had to be received by heaven). Secondly, with reference to the necessity that characterized the service of the apostles (obedience toward God and mission toward humans). Thirdly, with reference to the necessity that characterized the disciples in general (trials, tribulations, and persecution).

The salvation-history fulfilled by Christ is also characterized by newness. This newness is seen in three ways: in recognizing the true nature of the Messiah, in understanding the scriptures, and in the practice of the Gentile mission. The suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, was new to the Jews because these events were not clear-cut and unequivocal for the Jews of the first century (Acts 2,31; 3,18; 17,3; 26,23). For the twelve apostles and the Jewish nation it was hard to accept that the Messiah would redeem Israel by his sufferings and death (characterization) and to accept that this Messiah was none other than Jesus of Nazareth (identification). The recognition that Jesus is the Messiah and that the scriptures were fulfilled in him necessitates divine and supernatural intervention, otherwise people remain blind concerning the person and work of Jesus. Among the examples Luke brings in this regard is the enlightening of the eyes of Saul and the opening of the heart of Lydia. At the same time it was new for the disciples to understand that they had to reach out in mission and evangelism towards the Gentile nations. This is especially dealt with in the second part of Acts.

The realization of the plan of God in salvation-history takes place through different means and methods: through the comprehensive work of God, through the reign of Jesus Christ, through the direct leading of the Holy Spirit, and through the appearance of angels and the experience of epiphanies, which together show that in all things it is God’s plan that comes to pass.

(1) *The comprehensive work of God* and his direct activities is a common occurrence in the book of Acts: it is God who raised his Son from the dead, he chose Matthias to be numbered among the Twelve, his hand is with the apostles so that the believing people may receive salvation through Christ, he initiates the mission among the Gentiles and destroys the partiality of the Jews.

(2) *The reign of Christ* becomes evident through the fact that God fulfils his plan for the kingdom through Christ's reign from heaven. The kingdom of God is a key concept in the Book of Acts: the second volume of Luke starts and finishes with the mention of the kingdom of God and it appears again and again at key points in the narrative. Jesus became king of this kingdom and is commissioned by God himself to rule from His right hand. Thus God's kingly rule is realized through Christ, who reigns over his people and over the whole world as an all-powerful king. Furthermore, he practices his rule in full accord with the will of God, which means that in fact it is God's plan that comes to realization in everything that happens.

(3) *The leading of the Spirit* too is an important aspect in the fulfilment of God's plan. Among the examples given in the book of Acts, I want to bring to the fore first the service of Philip in Samaria. After his effective ministry there the baptized believers receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Peter and John. Then through the leading of the Spirit Philip goes to the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza and leads the Ethiopian eunuch to faith in Christ. (Acts 8,26-40). Also Peter whose ministry in the house of Cornelius takes place according to the persuasive leading and surprising blessing of the Spirit (Acts 10,19-20.44-45; 11,15.17).

(4) *Angels and epiphanies* as well have an important role in the fulfilment of God's plan, as it is often through them that the apostles received divine guidance. The records about the appearance of angels and epiphanies give the impression to the reader that the events recorded are all under divine management and control. The true power belongs not to the Jewish leaders, nor to the Roman kings, but to God, who brings about his plan either through experienced opposition or despite experienced opposition (Acts 1,10-11; 5,19-20; 7,55-56; 8,26; 9,3-6; 9,10-16; 12,7-10.23; 18,9-10; 23,11; 27,23-24).

God's comprehensive plan, Christ's reign, the leading of the Spirit and the ministration of angels and epiphanies give to the reader the understanding that the mission in Acts is done within the plan of God. Because in Acts it is always God who is behind the recorded events, through this Luke provides the reader and interpretive grid through which one may understand that the theological context of the mission in Acts is God's plan for salvation.

2). Jesus is the Messiah: Christology.

The names of Jesus in Acts show that he is Lord, Messiah and Saviour. In Acts it is especially the resurrection of Jesus that is emphasized. The message about Christ – which is preeminent already in the great commission – receives an exceptional emphasis in the book of Acts.

Although Luke does speak about the death of Jesus on the cross, in Acts that is not the focus, as that was centre in the gospel of Luke. In Acts, instead, it is the glorification of Jesus – his resurrection, ascension and enthronement that is in the centre of gravity. This is so because Luke already dealt with the importance of the cross in the gospel when he described the ministry, sufferings and death of Jesus. In Acts Luke goes further and focuses especially on the events that followed the death of Christ, and on their theological relevance.

The person of Christ is described by those titles which are given to him in Acts: Jesus is “Lord”, who brings in the kingdom of God and who reigns from the throne of heaven (κύριος – Acts 1,24; 2,36; 7,59-60; 10,36; 16,31-32; 22,16); “Saviour”, who saves his people by forgiving their sins (σωτήρ – Acts 4,12; 5,31; 13,23); “Servant”, who suffers, serves and gives (παῖς – Acts 3,13; 3,26; 4,27); “Christ”/“Messiah”, who suffers death and is risen from the dead, and who is no other than Jesus of Nazareth (χριστός – Acts 3,18; 17,3; 26,23); “Son of man”, who having served, suffered and die, now is glorified and reigns from the right hand of God (υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου – Acts 7,56, cf. Daniel 7); “Son of God”, the final Son of God, to whom Israel as God’s son in the Old Testament pointed forward and as Son, the true Son who has intimate relationship with his Father, and who shares the very nature and characteristics of God (υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ - Acts 8,37; 9,20; 13,33); „Prophet”, about whom Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 18,15, who consequently fulfils the role that Moses fulfilled at exodus, with the difference that Jesus does not point forward to any other prophet as Moses did for he himself is the final and eschatological prophet who through his resurrection from the dead became the new leader of God’s new people to lead them in a new exodus (προφήτης – Acts 3,22-23); As *Son of David*, he is crown prince and heir apparent to the throne (υἱὸς Δαβίδ – Acts 2,25-31; 13,22-23.34; 15,16-17); „Holy” and „Righteous”, whom the Jews denied and crucified (ἅγιον καὶ δίκαιον – Acts 3,14); Cornerstone, whom the Jewish leaders rejected (λίθος – Acts 4,11); „the Author of life”, whom God appointed to be leader and saviour, so that he may give repentance from sin and forgiveness of sins to Israel (ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς – Acts 3,15; 5,31); „judge” through whom God will judge the world (κριτής – Acts 10,42; 17,31); „king”, whose reign although shows no political threat to Rome, still demands absolute surrender to his kingship from his subjects (βασιλέα – Acts 17,7). In Acts we hear as a refrain from the lips of the apostles: “... in the name of Christ” (Acts 2,38; 3,6; 4,10; 9,34; 10,36; 10,48; 15,25-26; 16,18; 24,24). Water Baptism, healing from sickness,

getting peace with God, being ready to die, and the exorcism of evil spirits all happen in, through and for the name of Jesus Christ.

The work of Christ too is emphasized. The Christ of the great commission, especially his death and resurrection (Luke 24,46) is truly a key concept in the book of Acts where there are plenty of references regarding the life and work of Christ:

The life of Christ is “holy and righteous” (Acts 3,14), whose ministry spread from Galilee to Jerusalem, and about whom Peter presupposes that even in Caesaria Cornelius and his household knows certain information (Acts 10,37-39a).

The death of Christ took place by the hands of the Jews and Gentiles according to the eternal plan of God (Acts 2,23-24; 4,10), it was illegal and unlawful (Acts 3,14-15a), it was interpreted as an assault against God (Acts 4,26-28), it happened on a pole/tree, and therefore was considered accursed (Acts 5,30 10,39; 13,29; cf. Deuteronomy 21,22-23), it was the fulfilment of the OT scriptures, (Acts 13,29), and it purchased redemption for the whole church of God (Acts 20,28).

The resurrection of Christ for the apostles was a proven event (Acts 1,3; 10,41), it was necessary, as it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Acts 2,23-24) The apostles are the eyewitnesses (Acts 1,22; 3,14-15; 10,40-41; 13,31), and this is further attested and authenticated by the signs and wonders associated with them. (Acts 4,10). God confirmed and approved his Son by raising him from the dead (Acts 17,31), and thus he fulfilled the promises given by the prophets (Acts 13,32-33; 17,3). The thought of the resurrection of Christ was an unheard event for the Gentiles (Acts 17,18), but for the believers this is what guarantees their later glorious resurrection and because of this it is possible that light can be preached to the Gentiles (Acts 26,22-23). I regard the resurrection of Christ to be the backbone or the heart-beat of Christology in the book of Acts.

The ascension of Christ is closely linked to his resurrection and glorification, which need each other, build upon each other and complement each other. The resurrection and glorification of Christ are two sides of the same coin. In fact, the glorification of Christ started at the point of his resurrection, it continued in his ascension, and it reached its climax in his enthronement (at least from the point of view of this present dispensation of God’s salvation history). The ascension of the Messiah is the fulfilment of OT prophecies (Acts 2,34-35), it is an historical event, which happened exactly forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1,3) and was witnessed by the apostles (Acts 1,9-11). The Messiah’s ascension made possible his enthronement (Acts 1,9; 2,33-34), and at the same time is the prelude to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2,33).

The second coming of Christ was also accentuated by Luke. The disciples were not expected to wait in idleness and in mere contemplation (Acts 1,10), for that will be as it was the departure of Christ (Acts 1,10-11). His second coming will bring in the consummation of all things (Acts 3,20-21), the time of which is decided by God alone (Acts 17,31), and which will take place so that the final judgment may come about (Acts 10,42; 17,31).

Taking into consideration the names and titles of Christ, as well as his work and activities, we can say that Jesus is a God-man, who has both divine and human attributes and who fulfils divine as well as human tasks.

Concerning the divine nature of Christ we can observe that (a) Jesus shares with the Father in the divine attributes, for as that Father is omnipresent, so Jesus is always present with his people via the Spirit to help and lead them in every situation. As God is the Lord of glory, so is the Son, for he has the very glory of God in its fullness. (b) Jesus shares with the Father in the divine deeds, for as God forgives and saves, similarly it is possible to obtain salvation and forgiveness of sins through Jesus. Jesus is able to do all that the Father does. (c) Jesus shares with the Father in the divine throne, for he has ascended to the very right hand of God, and he is seated upon the throne of the royal majesty. This means that Jesus now rules over the world with full authority. (d) Jesus shares with the Father in the divine names, for as God is named Lord and Saviour in the Scriptures, so is Christ in the Book of Acts. (e) Finally, Jesus shares with the Father in the divine honour as well, for as God is worshipped by godly men, so Christ is venerated and in the Acts of the Apostles people pray to him.

Regarding the human nature of Christ we notice that although he was human as everybody else, he also differed from other men in this sense: As far as the service is concerned he was the true Servant of Yahweh, who was faithful to God unlike Israel and he did good to all both in word and deed. Moreover, regarding his sufferings and death – again, unlike Israel – he suffered innocently and did not deserve those he received. He set aside his rights, and accepted the will of God concerning his death. It is clear, therefore, that Jesus is the connecting link between the Israel of the OT and the church of the NT, and he is the one who unifies the people of God in both dispensations.

3). The proclamation of the Gospel: Preaching.

In the Book of Acts the gospel is preached mainly by Peter and Paul, which is followed by an invitation to repentance and by the promise of the forgiveness of sins. In the Lucan great commission there are three infinitives, of which the third is about the

preaching of the gospel: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24,47). Thus Christ speaks about three scriptural/divine necessities in the great commission: about the necessity of his death, the necessity of his resurrection, and the necessity of preaching repentance and forgiveness in his name. These are the very things which had to happen (his death and resurrection) and have to happen (the preaching). Under the main theme of preaching of the Word I examined such subthemes as the propagation of the gospel, the preachers of the gospel, and the invitation of the gospel.

The propagation of the gospel is described by the use of such common keywords as the infinitive of “preaching” (κηρυχθῆναι), the verbal form of evangelism (εὐαγγελίζω), and “teaching” both as noun (διδαχῆ) and as verb (διδάσκω). We also know about other expressions as well: proclamation (καταγγέλλειν, Acts 4,2), the service of the word (διακονία τοῦ λόγου, Acts 6,4), teaching the people (διδάσκοντες τὸν λαόν, Acts 5,25), disputing (συνεζήτει, Acts 9,29), and instruction (κατηχημένος, Acts 18,25).

The noun of “preaching” (κήρυγμα, κηρύσσω), the infinitive of “preaching” (κηρυχθῆναι) first of all mean proclamation, declaration, promulgation, annunciation, which is connected primarily with the kingdom of God and with the reign of Christ. Although we read about both Peter (Acts 10,42-43), and Paul (Acts 9,20) that they “preached” the word, Luke uses this expression especially in connection with the apostle Paul (Acts 19,13.15-16; 20,25).

Evangelism too, both as a noun (εὐαγγέλιον) and as a verb (εὐαγγελίζω) appears in the Book of Acts (Acts 8,25.40; 14,7.21; 16,10). Luke often describes the work of Peter and John, of Philip and of Paul (and his co-workers) as “evangelism”, as those who “evangelized” the good news, usually without clarifying what is precisely the content of the good news. What is sure, however, is that when the apostles evangelize, they make Jesus the object and content of “evangelism” (Acts 5,42; 8,25; 11,20b; 17,18), or of the “evangel”, that is of the “good news” (Acts 15,7; 20,24; 8,4; 15,35; 21,8). For them the “preaching of Christ” is a concept large enough to include the details of the life, death, resurrection, ascension and present reign of Christ, its necessity and theological significance. When the apostles “evangelize”, they sometimes speak about the Word, other times about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, as well as about the fulfilment of the promises given to the fathers.

For the apostles the gospel in a nutshell, therefore, is what Jesus Christ already specified in the great commission: “the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24,46-47). The *content* of the gospel here cannot

be repentance, because that never appears as proclaimed news but as a demand and as a call. Given the fact that the gospel is “news”, by its very nature it is never something that men have to do, but as something that somebody else did earlier, and about which the proclaimers (the evangelists) give an account in their preaching of the gospel. This has to be believed by those who listen to it. Repentance is the action which is done after the people hear the good news about Jesus. Moreover, the content of the gospel cannot be the forgiveness of sins either, because despite the fact that it is good news in itself, it never appears as the content of the gospel. Rather, the forgiveness of sins is the consequence, the fruit, and the blessing of the gospel, if the hearer accepts the invitation, that is the call to repentance, which is followed by the preaching of the good news. The content of the gospel, therefore, must be that about which the news speak (i.e. Christ), and not that which demands (i.e. repentance), nor what it promises (i.e. forgiveness of sins). This is true despite the fact that the conversion of the hearers, by which the listeners should react to the gospel, is closely connected to the good news. The good news about which the gospel speaks is no other than the work of God accomplished through Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, to which the OT scriptures pointed forward, and on the basis of which God now commands to all people everywhere to repent and offers the promise of the forgiveness of sins. The content of the evangelism, therefore, is God himself, in the person and work of Christ, through the Holy Spirit. In other words, the good news is “his name”, for it is “in his name” that the respective blessings should be preached (Luke 24,46-47). This is why Luke so often says that the apostles simply preached “Christ”.

The noun “teaching” (διδασκαλίη) and the verb “to teach” (διδάσκω) is also a significant expression in Acts. Both “teaching” (διδασκαλίη – Acts 2,42; 5,28; 6,1-2; 13,12; 17,19) and “to teach” (διδάσκω – Acts 4,2.18; 5,21a.25.28a.42a) are often mentioned by Luke. The teaching of the apostles is accepted by the entire church, it permeates the whole of Jerusalem, it has power and authority, people like Sergius Paulus marvelled at it, and it was completely new to those in Athens.

The great preachers of the good news in the Book of Acts is Peter and Paul and to a lesser degree Stephen (and Philip). The reason I think Luke regarded them as the main proclaimers of the gospel is because their sermons are reported in a more detailed way. Of them Luke focuses most of his attention on Peter and on Paul.

The apostle Peter appears as a person, who is the central figure in the apostles’ interaction with Jesus and in the witness of the apostles about the death and resurrection of Jesus. We can be sure to say that Peter is not only the flag-bearer of the other disciples’ viewpoint, but the mouthpiece of the early church as well. Peter is described as a preacher,

whose sermon is characterized by a call to repentance (Acts 2,38.40; 3,19b; 5,31b; cf. Acts 8,22; 10,42k; 15,8), by an eschatological perspective (Acts 2-3), by the universal salvation (Acts 2,39; 10), by focusing on Christ (Acts 2,33.36; 10,36), and by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2; 10). He is preaching the gospel as an eye-witness (Acts 2,32; 3,15; 5,32; 10,39; 10,41; 13,31). I also pointed out that there are lots of common elements in the Lucan great commission and in the sermons of Peter, which confirms our hypothesis, according to which the great commission bears an important significance in the formulation of the theology of the Book of Acts.

Stephen the martyr draws attention in his sermon about Israel's past history mainly of Israel's disobedience to God and to the rebellion of the Jews against the servants of God. Luke reports the sermon of Stephen in the most detailed and lengthy way in the whole book of Acts (Acts 7).

The apostle Paul has the most numerous sermons in Acts. I classified his speeches in three main types of categories: (1) Sermons preached to the Jews (Acts 13,6-41.46-47); (2) Sermons preached to the Gentiles (Acts 14,15-17; 17,22-31), and (3) his defence-speeches, which were spoken both before Jews and before Romans (Acts 22,1-21; 23,1-6; 24,10-21; 25,2-11; 26,2-29; 28,17-28). The message of Paul was often described as being "the word of God". The Jewish people who listened to Paul, heard "the Word of God" preached to them. He was especially a preacher of repentance: we gather from Acts that whenever he preached the gospel and evangelized (εὐηγγελίζετο), he "preached Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17,18), which always challenged the listeners and called for a change.

The invitation of the gospel is a common factor in the Book of Acts, where the preachers often asked for a reaction from the part of their hearers. However, the fact that the listeners will accept the offer of salvation and will change their lives according to the will of God is not guaranteed by the preaching itself. Nevertheless, the message about the Lord is still preached, and it is this which is used by God as a tool so that the hearers may give a positive answer to the preached gospel. The invitation of the gospel is given especially in four different expressions: „everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord" (Acts 2,21), „Repent therefore, and turn again" (Acts 3,19; 2,38; 5,31; 11,18; 17,30; 20,21; 26,20;), „believe in the Lord Jesus" (Acts 5,14; 8,12; 9,42; 11,17; 14,23; 16,31.34; 18,8; 19,4; 24,14; 26,27; 27,25), „rise and be baptized" (Acts 2,38.41; 8,12-13.36; 9,18; 10,47-48; 16,15; 18,8; 22,16).

The forgiveness of sins is presented by Luke as the blessing promised to those whose reaction to the preached gospel is positive (Luke 24,47), which can even be described as salvation itself. Whoever hears the gospel and reacts to it in a positive way, to him it is

promised the his sins will be forgiven here and now (Acts 2,38; 5,31; 26,17-18; cf. Luke 1,77).

I concluded that in the Book of Acts the preaching of gospel by the apostles, the propagation of the good news, the main preachers of the gospel and the invitation of the gospel are not only in harmony with the great commission but more likely are the direct outflow of it. What Christ commanded to his apostles before his ascension , after the pouring out of the Holy Spirit the apostles were zealous to obey, with an exemplary dedication and faithfulness.

4). The Spread of the Word: Progress

After Christ had risen from the dead, he commanded his disciples that the good news should be preached “to all nations”, together with repentance and forgiveness of sins (Luke 24,47). The preaching of this gospel, that is of the Word of God, will start in Jerusalem and will continue to be preached to the very ends of the earth. The progress and growth of the Word is such a phenomena in the Book of Acts to which many will oppose, nevertheless it is still effective. As the gospel progresses and is preached “beginning from Jerusalem”, it never stays there, but from the circle of the Jewish Christians is spread toward the nations toward the end of the earth (Acts 1,8).

Although in Acts 1,8 we find four geographical descriptions (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth), it is easier to divide Acts into a “threefold arrangement.” This is so, because it seems that Luke unified the mission done in Judea and in Samaria. Moreover, in the threefold division we see more clearly the fulfilment of the promise of the new exodus prophesied by Isaiah. Luke first focuses on “Jerusalem”, from where the word start to flow out, then he turns to the awaited unified Israel, to which the double expression “Judea and Samaria” points. Thirdly, he continues and closes his account by the inclusion of the nations among the new people of God, who through the preaching of the apostles hear and accept the good news, the preaching which continues to spread to the very ends of the earth.

The *direction* of the progress of the word is interesting too in Acts: although we find in the OT that the nations were generally invited to come *to* Jerusalem *into* the temple to worship Yahweh (Zechariah 8,20-22), in the Book of Acts the universal practice was that the word preached by the apostles and by the disciples started *from* the temple and *from* Jerusalem toward the very ends of the earth. In this way the word would reach the nations in the whole earth without asking them to go to a pilgrimage in Jerusalem. The centripetal direction of the word in OT is changed to a centrifugal one in the NT (Acts 1,8; 8,4.39; 22,21; 28,31).

The confirmation of the progress of the word are often mentioned by Luke in the summaries he gives in different places in the story of Acts (Acts 6,7; 9,31; 12,24; 16,5; 19,20; 28,30-31). These summaries point to the growth of the word and shows to the reader that of the two options given by Gamaliel earlier which is taken by God (Acts 5,38-39). These summaries show not only that the spread of the gospel is realized but also that the progress is exceptional and far-reaching.

It seems that Luke puts great emphasis upon the progress of the “word of the Lord”, that is, on the growth of the “world of God.” He mentions several times its progressive growth, which Jesus promised already in the great commission and in Acts 1,8 (Acts 4,31; 8,14.25; 11,1; 13,5.7.44.46.48; 16,32; 17,13; 18,11).

At the same time Luke also points out that *the true author of the progress of the word* is not man but God. Whatever role is given to the human personae the spread of the gospel – to Peter or Paul, for e.g. – God never plays just a side role in Acts. Luke several times shows explicitly that finally it is God who takes responsibility for the growth of the gospel. In Acts it is God who consistently empowers people for witness. The direct interventions of God throughout Acts gives the impression that it is the “hand of God” which gives deliverance to the apostles in critical circumstances to continue to preach the good news about Christ to the people (Acts 5; 11,21; 13,47; 14,27; 15,12; 28,28). Therefore, the spread and progress of the good news from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth is set into motion not by the apostles, but *by God*. The apostles are only tools used by God and by the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is a mistake to speak about Peter or about Paul as the main actors of Acts, for it is God who is its main character. To him is reckoned the merits of every advance of the word.

Moreover, Luke shows that *the word breaks through geographical, social and ethnic barriers*. The main characteristic of the progress of the word in the Book of Acts is that the preaching of the apostles crosses geographical borders, bridges social differences and demolishes ethnic barriers. The word of God therefore progresses not just in a geographical way. In order to remain faithful to the report given by Luke in Acts we have to take into account its social, ethnic and cultural progress as well. Although Luke gives special emphasis to Jerusalem (Luke 24,49; Acts 1,4.6-7; 8,14.25; 9,27), for that is the city from which the word of the Lord starts to flow (cf. Isaiah 2,1-4; 35,8-10; Micah 4,1-5), nevertheless Jerusalem is never the destination but only the central starting point of the gospel’s progress.

As we approach the end of Acts, Luke gives the reader two important piece of information about both Paul and his message: (1) while the Christian message is rooted deeply in the scriptures of the Jewish people, (2) its scope is universal and is able to reach the every part of society, even the rulers of the nations (Acts 26,22-23). One example of the far-

reaching power of the gospel is given in Acts 16: here the word is preached not only outwardly for it penetrates the human hearts as well (Acts 16,14); its power captures not only women and merchants (Lydia), but also low servants who are in both physical and spiritual slavery (the girl with a spirit of divination), and even men who have the power of Rome and stand in relatively high social status (the Philippian jailor). It is important, therefore, that we should not think of the progress of the word in a linear, calm and easy way, without any resistance, but a growth which takes place in persecution and prevails against all kinds of opposition. In all these circumstances, as the word about Christ grows it also automatically results in the growth of the church.

In Acts 28,30-31 Luke shows that *the progress of the word is unstoppable*. Because the literary ending of Acts is open-ended, we can conclude that the spread of the gospel not only breaks through different barriers but it is also continuous and unstoppable. At the end of the book the focus is not on the imprisonment of Paul but on the faithfulness of God and on the continuity of the preaching of the word. Thus the program given in Acts 1,8 is not fulfilled by Paul's arrival to Rome. Reaching the "ends of the earth" is only fulfilled symbolically by this (if Rome is considered as representing the end of the earth). The open ending of Acts probably functions in two ways: (1) it suggests to unstoppable nature of the gospel, and (2) it expects the reader to continue the progress of the word.

The spread of the gospel in Acts is thus such a central theme which is anticipated in the great commission, promised in Acts 1,8, confirmed several times in the summary narrative of the book of Acts, and continues to spread in an unstoppable way even at the very end of the book. It is truly hard to think of a motif that has a wider scope and longer reach than this.

5). The testimony of the disciples: Witness.

When Jesus told the disciples in the great commission that he had to suffer and to rise from the dead, he continued and said: „You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24,48-49). From this it is clear that *the main responsibility of the disciple is to bear witness*.

As far as the witness of the apostles is concerned, their main function in the Book of Acts is to testify about the *resurrection* of Jesus. They are presented as the teachers who interpret the meaning of Scripture concerning its teaching about Christ. Being the witnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus they could confirm the truthfulness of these events. They fulfilled their function as witnesses by the very power the Holy Spirit gave them that

Jesus had promised them. Moreover, they testified about what they had seen despite the fact that they had to suffer for it.

The apostles had their unique role in spreading the Word. When Luke talks about the “apostles” in Acts, he usually refers to the Twelve, those chosen by Jesus. Even though the expression “apostle” is used once or twice for others as well (Acts 14,4 and 14), it is important to note that for Luke it generally refers to those twelve apostles about whom he often says that they are the eyewitness of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2,32; 3,15; 5,32; 10,40-41; 13,31). According to the Jewish court law, the apostles should testify only about what they have heard and seen. This they did with such a zeal that in fact they were unstoppable. Because of what they had experienced with the risen Jesus, they represented the truth about Him and challenged the hearers to bring about a change of verdict regarding Jesus. Moreover, the witness of the apostles is in accord with the testimony of the Father, who by the power of the Holy Spirit allows that signs and wonders may be performed to strengthen the testimony of the apostles about the resurrection of Jesus (cf. Acts 5,32).

The apostles are the leaders of God's new people. For the Jewish believing ear, the number “twelve” may have brought to mind a certain connection between Israel of the OT and the church of the NT. In this way the Twelve refers to the restoration of Israel in which the apostles have a key role. Those converted at Pentecost got organized around the Twelve: they repented and turned to God as the apostles told them to do (2,38), they were devoted to understand the apostles' teaching (2,42). From this point onward the apostles began to function as the leaders of the people of God and things happened in the church mainly as they had been told would happen. Thus they seem to be the rulers of the restored Israel and the community which is formed around them is the community of the eschatological Israel which was born and owns its existence to the glorification of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This community is united and awaits the consummation of all things which will take place at the parousia. Thus the church became “apostolic”. A clear example of this is in Acts 3-5, where Luke shows that while the Jewish leaders lack authority and trustworthiness in the eyes of the people, the apostles are recognized increasingly as their true leaders. Their leading role is seen in the fact that the first disciples were devoted to their teaching (Acts 2,42), the other disciples put their gifts in front of the feet of the apostles (Acts 4,35.37; 5,2), the wicked members of the community fall and die at the apostle's feet (Acts 5,5.10), they are the ones who propose a solution to problems in the time of crisis (Acts 6,2), they authenticate the mission of Philip in Samaria (Acts 8,14) and they defend the mission done among the Gentiles (Acts 10,1-11,18), they decide to accept Saul into the community of the Jerusalem church (Acts 9,26-28), and they are the main leaders of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15,2-4).

In light of all these examples it becomes evident that they are the ones who function as the leaders of the new people of God. In fact, they comprise the nucleus of the restored people of God.

The apostles are the true teachers of the people. There a number of examples in Acts which emphasize the teaching responsibility of the apostles. This is evident first in Acts 2,42, which clarifies what is it to which the first disciples dedicated themselves: to the teaching of the apostles. Moreover, the new people of God will no longer study the law of Moses according to the teaching of the Levites and priests but according to the interpretation of the apostles, who point to the fulfilment of those scriptures in Jesus. Thus the apostles become the twelve judges of the new Israel who warn the new people of God by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (cf. Acts 4,2.30; 5,20.25.28.42; 6,4). What is more, the apostles are not just the teachers of the Jews (Acts 4,2.17; 5,20; 25), but of the church as well (2,42.46; 5,42). Consequently, I think we are justified to view them as the teachers of the entire Israel: they teach both the unbelieving as well the believing Jews, and later both the believing Jews as well as the believing Gentiles (and non-believing ones too).

The apostles form the nucleus of the restored Israel. The declaration of James in Acts 15,16, according to which God will return to rebuild the fallen tent of David so that even the Gentiles may search for God shows that Luke views the restoration of Israel as something that is actually under progression. In consequence the apostles are seen as the nucleus of the new Israel which was renewed at Pentecost by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. To the restored Twelve (Acts 1) gathered others, and together they numbered 120, that is 12x10, to whom from Pentecost onwards all the rest were added. The significance of the number twelve therefore was not in its disjunction of the past but in its continuation and in its renewal.

In Acts the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers for witness. Regarding this I stressed the following important points:

(1) *The Holy Spirit is the spirit of prophecy* which was promised in the OT long time ago. This means that the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost was not an unanticipated event, but about which the prophets prophesied in the past. In this sense the gift of the Spirit forms a connecting link between the OT and the NT. If there is anything new in all this – and there is – then it found in its fulfilment as well as in the fact that the Spirit is now given to all members of God's people and for ever.

(2) *The Holy Spirit the prime mover of the events of salvation history.* In the salvation history presented by Luke it is the Holy Spirit which should be seen as the main force behind the mission, which unifies and authenticates the whole missionary movement. In fact, it is the Holy Spirit who initiates the mission (Acts 2,4; 8,29; 10,19.44; 11,12; 13,2.4, etc.), he gives

power to the apostles for witness among Jews and Gentiles (Luke 24,49; Acts 1,8; 4,31; 9,17.31), he gives counsel to the apostles in their decision-making process (Acts 15,28; 16,6-7; 19,21; 20,22-23; cf. 5,3; 6,3.5.10; 9,31; 13,9 and 16,18), and he is the source of the visions and dreams so that to give new revelation and guidance to the apostles (Acts 9,10-18; 10,10-20; 16,6-7.9-10; 18,9-10; 22,17-18; 23,11).

(3) *The Holy Spirit is given to every believer by definition.* The general impression is that in Acts repentance and faith is followed not only by baptism but also by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Luke views the Holy Spirit as a gift given to the believers at the time of their conversion and not later at a “second blessing” experience. This means that in Acts the Holy Spirit is like a soteriological necessity, through which the renewal of Israel takes place (Acts 2,38; 8,15-17; 10,44-45; 19,2). Moreover, the Holy Spirit is given once and for all at the new birth, which is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, after which we may talk about being filled again and again with the Spirit, just as it happened to the apostles. It seems therefore that Luke does not justify the so-called modern “second blessing” theology, but justifies the second, third and tenth blessing and the repeated filling by the Holy Spirit.

(4) *The Holy Spirit is God.* The way in which Luke presents the Spirit brings into focus the contribution of Acts to the doctrine of pneumatology. I refer here first of all to the divine nature of the Spirit as the third person of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5,3; 8,29.39; 16,7; 20,28). For Luke, therefore, the Spirit is not just a force, let alone a movement, but it represents the very presence of the divine.

(5) *The Holy Spirit empowers for witness.* By far the most clear function of the Holy Spirit in Acts is that it give strength to testify about Christ. We read about it first in the great commission: “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24,49). Here we find the exact source of the so-called expression “power from on high”, the significance of which is developed throughout in Acts (Acts 1,5.8; 4,29.31; 8,4).

(6) *The Holy Spirit is a Christ-centred Spirit.* The Holy Spirit never draws attention to himself but to Christ. His main endeavour that Christ may be magnified, to inspire the apostles to mission, and to give them power and authority to testify about Christ (Acts 2; 4,31; 8,29; 16,6-7).

Witness in the midst of persecution. The testimony about Jesus in the Book of Acts does not happen because of human cleverness, but because of the divine power. Paradoxically, sometimes it is the very witness of the apostles that *generates* opposition to the gospel and brings about the persecution of the apostles (Acts 6,10-11; 9,20-23.29).

Moreover, their suffering for the gospel is characterized by *necessity* in the Book of Acts. By the very fact that the first Christians testified about Jesus, that he is the long-promised Messiah, that in his name the hope of resurrection is realized, and that in him there is salvation and forgiveness of sins, they were persecuted and killed. Thus the persecution of the followers of Jesus become a fact and the disciples have to learn that suffering is inseparable from their faith (Acts 9,16; 14,19.22; 20,23; 21,14).

But the *reaction* of the apostles to suffering and persecution is joy: although God decreed that they should suffer for the name of Christ, Luke does not give the impression that they suffer bitterly. The exact opposite is the case: whenever they give expression to their reaction we read that they rejoiced because they were made worthy to suffer for Christ's name (Acts 5,40-41; 13,52; 16,25; 20,24; 21,13).

With his counsel, *Gamaliel presents the reflection of the opponents* to the gospel preached by the apostles. He gives the advice to the Jews of the Sanhedrin that they should let Peter and John free and wait to see the end of their movement. From his point of view the death of Jesus upon a cursed cross is an enough factor to effect the break-up of their movement if the origin of their teaching is only human (Acts 5,38). Now it seems that Luke builds upon the advice given by Gamaliel and the fact that Christianity stands the trials of time is used as a *test-case* for authenticity by which it can be proved the legitimacy of the disciples' teaching. Thus the logic of the whole narrative of the Book of Acts is that the teaching of the apostles is from God precisely because it is unstoppable and because it is victorious in the midst of persecution.

However, God is not slow to give *divine help to the suffering witnesses*. This help is given to the suffering apostles through the experience of the divine presence (Acts 4,23-31), through supernatural intervention and angelic deliverance (Acts 5,18-19; 12; 16), through dreams and visions (Acts 7,55), and through heavenly encouragements (18,9-10; 23,11).

In the final chapter *Summary and Conclusion* I did two things. First, I summarized the main arguments of my research, then, secondly, I draw the conclusions. I stated that the original hypothesis of this doctoral research was verified and proven: it is the great commission of Christ that Luke summarizes the main motifs of the theology of the Book of Acts. On the basis of my study it becomes evident that the theology of Acts is strongly missiological – the content of which is found in Luke 24,44-49 – and that the great commission is deeply theological. The themes of the great commission therefore clearly summarize the motifs of the theology of Acts and vice versa. It is my conviction that once this is seen and understood by the reader, it becomes nearly impossible to dismiss it afterward in the course of a new study of the theology and mission of the Book of Acts. I am thinking here

of such specialist theologians like Howard Marshall, David Peterson, and Darrell Bock, who despite the fact that they wrote highly important books in this field – which I also used in writing my research – none of them said that the great commission in Luke 24 is the prism through which the themes of the theology of Acts are to be formulated (nevertheless they lined up a list with similar motifs).

A secondary benefit of my research is that the traditional view – according to which the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts belong together not just on the level of authorship but on the level of literature and theology as well –, became once again strengthened with a new element.

I demonstrated that through the great commission of Christ we found *the clear scriptural framework* of the theology of Acts. The themes usually formulated by biblical scholars as forming the theology of Acts were found succinctly in the thematic components of the great commission. In the light of this from now on we can formulate the elements of the theology of Acts in a more objective way than it was possible before. Instead of relying upon ourselves in deciding which themes should form the theology of Acts, we can build upon the author himself.

In this way we found a biblical solution to our original problem.

Soli Deo Gloria.