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Can One Speak of a Conversion of Paul in the Book of Acts?

Jean-Noël Aletti

Introduction

The three pericopes of Acts that recount how Christ manifested himself to the persecutor Saul have for a long time been the subject of a detailed exegesis. If here repeating the history of the research is excluded, one must, nevertheless, point out the monograph of G. Lohfink that, for a little more than 50 years, has provided an almost exhaustive *status quaestionis*¹. Since then, the approaches to the narrative of Acts have notably changed: more than the study of the Traditions – and the Redaktionsgeschichte, it is the narrative approach, more sensitive to the ways of composing and narrating, that is followed today. This is the approach that this essay will use to examine Acts 9, 22 and 26.

For most commentators in recent decades, whether or not they practice the narrative approach, the narrative of Acts 9 as well as Paul's discourses in Acts 22 and 26 describe a *conversion*. Whether they be German², American³, Swiss⁴ or French⁵, for them, the encounter of Christ and Saul is really such. Less numerous, on the other hand, are those for whom, in these three passages, it is a matter of a vocation or a commission⁶.

¹ LOHFINK, Gerhard: *Paulus vor Damaskus. Arbeitsweisen der neueren Bibelwissenschaft dargestellt an den Texten Apg 9,1-19; 22,3-21; 26,9-18* (SBS 4), Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1965.

² Cf. HAENCHEN, *Acts*, 318 who entitles Acts 9 "The Conversion of Paul"; according to PESCH, Acts 9:1-22 describes "die Bekehrung des Paulus" (cf. *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 296).

³ Cf., for ex., TALBERT, *Conversion*, 141-153.

⁴ MARGUERAT, *La conversion de Saul*, 269-300; the position has not changed in the commentary MARGUERAT, *Actes*.

⁵ FLICHY, *La figure de Paul*, 55-93.

⁶ Thus, regarding Acts 9, FITZMYER, *Acts*, 419-420: "It is the story of the call of Saul. It is not an account of his psychological «conversion», as it is often characterized, but the story of how divine grace transforms even the life of a persecutor".

In the lines that follow, we will try to determine the genre of the three presentations of the encounter between Christ and Paul, to specify the reasons for it and, from there, to draw conclusions for interpretation.

1 A Brief Status Quaestionis

In order to determine the genre and the respective function of the three pericopes (Acts 9, 22 and 26) authors proceed by comparison (*synkrisis*), some emphasizing the similarities⁷, others highlighting the differences⁸. Let us begin by recalling the reasons for which they interpret the three passages differently.

Acts 9

As was pointed out above, J. Fitzmyer gives the title of “The Call of Paul” (p. 418) to this first narrative. For him, the text “narrates how Paul, who will become the hero of the second part of Acts, is transformed by the risen Christ himself” (p. 419), but it would be erroneous to interpret this transformation as a conversion, for at no time does Luke, the narrator, use this vocabulary.

Terms designating conversion, substantives and verbs, are frequent enough in Acts, as the list of their occurrences shows:

μετανοέω	Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20
μετάνοια	Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20
ἐπιστρέφω	Acts 3:19; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18.20; 28:27
(to turn to God)	(a citation of Isaiah 6:9-10)
ἀποστρέφω	Acts 3:26 (to turn away from wickedness)

It is true that these terms are not encountered in Acts 9 and 22, and if Paul does use them in Acts 26:18.20, it is not to describe the radical change to which Christ had invited him but the mission that is his to his people and the pagan nations: Christ, he declares, sent him to both “to open their eyes, that they may turn (ἐπιστρεφεῖν) from darkness to light”, an order which he says to have immediately and continually obeyed: “I declared that they should repent (μετανοεῖν) and turn (ἐπιστρέφειν) to God”. In short, Acts 9, 22 and 26 do not use the vocabulary of conversion in order to designate the encounter between

⁷ Such as WITHERUP, *Functional Redundancy*, 67-86.

⁸ Thus, MARGUERAT, *La conversion de Saul*, 275-281.

Christ and Saul. Fitzmyer, for this reason, concludes that it is not a matter of a conversion.

The absence of the vocabulary of conversion does not seem to disturb other commentators, such as D. Marguerat, who, regarding Acts 9, states: “One will not lose sight that ... the Lucan narration follows a *pattern* of a conversion narrative”⁹. It is by considering the surrounding episodes, which themselves also describe conversions, that this author is able to explain himself thus:

Acts 9 occurs within a series of conversions (Simon, then the Ethiopian eunuch, then Saul), by which is shown how God enlarges the circle of the elect; the decisive step will be taken in the encounter between Peter and Cornelius (see 10:34, 36). The theme that dominates the plot is not the exemplarity of the faith of the converted (neither Simon nor Saul are exemplars). The common theme is the surprising initiative that God takes in the choice of converts: Simon the avaricious magician, the mutilated Ethiopian excluded from the covenant, Saul the persecutor, Cornelius the unclean.¹⁰

But for Marguerat, one can speak of conversion only if one considers the totality of Acts 9 and not only vv. 1-19a¹¹, for Saul’s transformation is only pointed out in the verses that follow (vv. 20-31): there is a conversion because Paul passes from the state of a persecutor of the disciples of Jesus to someone, in total opposition to the first, who witnesses to this same Jesus, Messiah and Son of God (vv. 20.22). In short, in order to be able to speak of a conversion, it is necessary to take Acts 9 in its entirety.

Still according to Marguerat, this encompassing theme does not prohibit each micro-unit of having its own literary genre. The first (vv. 4-9) is a Christophany, and the second (vv. 10-16), a narrative of a prophetic vocation¹²: the dialogue between the Resurrected One and Ananias satisfying five of the six motifs of this type of narrative. In his commentary¹³, the same author notes five elements of appearance that repeat those of Old Testament appearances and are found as well in vv. 4-9 and vv. 10-16:

1. an appearance that opens a dialogue (between a divine figure and an Israelite),

⁹ MARGUERAT, *La conversion de Saul*, 270.

¹⁰ MARGUERAT, *La conversion de Saul*, 281-282.

¹¹ Such is the reproach that he makes to those, such as JOHNSON, *Acts*, 161, who separate Acts 9:1-19a and 9:20-31.

¹² MARGUERAT, *La conversion de Saul*, 286; MARGUERAT, *Actes*, 329.

¹³ MARGUERAT, *Actes*, 329.

2. a divine figure who calls to the individual by his name,
3. the individual reacts with a question,
4. the divine figure self-identifies,
5. a commission is delivered.

In vv. 4-9, the commission is vaguer than those in the corresponding narratives of the OT¹⁴, a reason for which Marguerat concludes that in Acts 9 there is “neither vocation, nor commission, but the order to go forth and wait”¹⁵. In short, the macro-narrative of Acts 9:1-31, which describes a conversion, is inspired by the narratives of Old Testament appearances in at least two of its micro-units.

In his commentary, C. K. Barrett himself also examined the literary genre of Acts 9 and thought that for the narrator of Acts it was both a conversion and a call:

Of greater importance as parallels are the OT stories of the call of prophets, notably Isa. 6:1-13; Jer. 1:4-10; cf. Gal. 1:15. These parallels suggest the question, raised acutely by K. Stendahl (*Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 1977, 7-23), whether the event should be described as a conversion or a call. The fact is that it is both: a conversion in the Christian sense is always at the same time a call.¹⁶

He immediately moderates this opinion by adding:

*It is true that Paul did not find a new God to worship; he would always insist that the God he worshipped as a Christian was the same God he had worshipped as a Jew – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ‘The Lord,’ however, whom he addresses and who addresses him is Jesus, and it is Jesus who determines the thought of God that is involved...*¹⁷

If he changed neither God nor morality, Saul did, nevertheless, radically change his attitude towards Jesus of Nazareth, whose disciples he was persecuting, and whom he henceforth announces as Messiah and Son of God.

Barrett’s position is similar to that of Pervo, for whom designating Acts 9 as a “‘Conversion story’ is appropriate, but not sufficient, since there were many types of conversion stories”¹⁸. With Talbert¹⁹, Pervo thinks that there

¹⁴ Cf., for ex., Gen 31:13 and 46:3.

¹⁵ MARGUERAT, *Actes*, 330. He adds that it is more or less the same for the order given in Acts 10:20 (as Peter’s reaction indicates in 10:21.29).

¹⁶ BARRETT, *Acts*, 442.

¹⁷ BARRETT, *Acts*, 442. (emphasis mine)

¹⁸ PERVO, *Acts*, 233.

indeed exists various types of conversion and that it is for this reason necessary to specify to which type Acts 9 belongs:

Talbert introduced a new classification, dividing conversion stories into “moral” and “cognitive” types. Philosophical conversions usually involve a shift from vice to virtue, as in the tale of Polemon. Cognitive conversions include a new orientation to life and truth, a paradigm shift. Many stories are mixed. Luke’s source emphasized moral elements, as well as cognitive change. Paul’s own view of his conversion was cognitive. The desire for edification spurred the introduction of moral elements into essentially cognitive accounts.²⁰

Saul’s having changed neither God nor moral life after his encounter with Christ, it would thus not be a matter of a religious or moral conversion, only of a conversion of knowledge: he, who misunderstood Jesus, was led to know him, to recognize him and to become the witness to his being-Messiah. Such is, *grosso modo*, the position of a majority of exegetes regarding Acts 9.

Acts 22 and 26

For Acts 22, commentators who speak of a conversion narrative are much less numerous. Throughout his discourse, Paul indeed emphasizes the fact that he remained a faithful Jew, that he has not changed faith, since he shares with the religious elite – the pharisaical movement – the faith in the final resurrection of the dead: this emphasis on his fidelity indeed overshadows, if not eliminates, the vocabulary of change or the reversal of attitude.

One could object that the attitude of conversion is implied in the response that Saul makes to Christ: “What shall I do?” (in Greek: τί ποιήσω;), which denotes an order: “What *must* I do?”, and would reflect the awareness that Saul then had of *having* to change conduct, and thus of being converted. His reaction indeed seems to be exactly the same as that of the Jews united around Peter on the day of Pentecost and who, when he declared to them: “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36 RSV), would, deeply moved, respond with: “What shall we do?” (in Greek: τί ποιήσωμεν;), in other words: “What is it *necessary* for us to do” in order to change our behavior and our life? And Peter answers them: “Be converted!” (in Greek: μετανοήσατε). Is Christ’s injunction the same in Acts 22:10? Actually,

¹⁹ TALBERT, *Literary Patterns*, 96.

²⁰ PERVO, *Acts*, 233, n. 11.

in no way does it connote a call to conversion; it is, moreover, strange, for it puts off till later what Saul will have to do: “Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do” (RSV). It is to Ananias that Christ entrusts the task of telling Saul what he will have to do: “You will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:15 RSV). Saul’s life is clearly going to change radically since from a persecutor of Christ he must become his witness, and, if one follows the distinctions of Talbert and Pervo, one will perhaps say that it is not a matter of a conversion of mores but of knowledge. Such a conclusion would unfortunately not be pertinent, for, unlike Acts 2:38, the change is not a duty *but a gift*: God, declares Ananias, does not want Saul to change the knowledge that he had of Christ, but rather, because He, God, has (already) changed his views, Saul will henceforth have to witness to Christ whom He has made known to him: “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth, [because He wants you to bear witness] etc.” (Acts 22:14 RSV). The emphasis is not placed on a change of operation whether it be of life or of knowledge but on the commission that this change implies.

One could still object that the act of conversion is not excluded since Ananias asks Saul to be baptized “for the purification of his sins” (Acts 22:16)²¹, in other words, to be converted. Actually, it is still a matter of a gift; by offering him Baptism, Ananias is proposing to Saul a rite that, for those hearing Paul in Acts 22²², represented an act of purification to which every pious Jew often had to submit himself. Ananias’ invitation is that of a pious Jew addressing another pious Jew. In fact, in this discourse, a greater importance is given to the commission entrusted by Christ to Saul (Acts 22:17-21) since this is what provokes the listeners’ anger.

Even more clearly than in Acts 22, in Acts 26 almost the only thing retained from the encounter is the commission entrusted by Christ to Saul, and commentators nearly unanimously admit that the horizon of conversion has practically disappeared. Of course, they do not uniformly interpret the purpose of the encounter, Paul’s discourse for some having a hidden agenda, “a defense of Christianity, which is now set out in its relation to Judaism”²³, while for

²¹ In Greek, βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας. The expression ἀπολούω τὰς ἁμαρτίας is a hapax.

²² For the Jewish hearers of Paul, but not for the Christian reader, obviously.

²³ FITZMYER, *Acts*, 755.

others it is a “legitimation of the evangelization of the nations”²⁴. But conversion remains off stage, and here we will keep this result in mind.

At the end of this brief *status quaestionis*, it is possible to conclude that the question of a conversion is not truly settled for Acts 9:1-31. It thus remains to examine this chapter more closely.

2 A Conversion in Acts 9?

2.1 *An Examination of the Reasons in Favor of a Pattern of Conversion*

The argument most frequently put forward by commentators in favor of a conversion comes from the change in Saul’s attitude narrated in Acts 9: he had been fighting against Jesus and his disciples (vv. 1-2), but after the encounter with Jesus, he immediately announces that he is the Messiah and Son of God (vv. 20.22). The absence of the vocabulary of conversion would thus not prohibit the presence of the *pattern* of conversion. In short, although Saul changed neither God nor moral conduct, can one not affirm with Pervo and others that there was a ‘cognitive conversion’? This argument is unfortunately not very convincing since for the narrator of Acts the vocabulary of conversion is religious (leave behind the idols in order to turn to the true God) and/or moral (leave behind a life of sin in order to live according to the will of God). By saying that there is a conversion of another type – a cognitive conversion –, the commentators are proposing a *pattern* that is not the narrator’s.

In favor of a conversion, could one, nevertheless, not invoke the fact that after the encounter with Christ, Saul fasts for three days (Acts 9:9)? This argument is itself also weak, for (i) the verb to fast (in Greek, νηστεύειν) is not used in Luke/Acts in order to obtain forgiveness (unlike in Lev 23:27-28); it does not symbolize a conversion but a devotion; additionally, (ii) it is not present in Acts 9, the narrator using the combination ‘to eat/to drink’ (ἐσθίειν/πίνειν) that, moreover, in Luke/Acts is not related to the various conversions²⁵.

²⁴ MARGUERAT, La conversion de Saul, 299.

²⁵ Cf. Lk 5:30.33; 7:33.34; 10:7; 12:19.29.45; 13:26; 17:8.27.28; Acts 9:9; 23:12.21.

We have already pointed out another argument put forward by D. Marguerat, according to which Acts 9 would belong to a series of pericopes narrating conversions:

Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus is part of a sequence that opens Chapter 8 with the persecution against the Church in Jerusalem (8:1-3), which follows the martyrdom of Stephen. The movement of the Christian diaspora in Samaria (Act 8) extends up to the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10), which inaugurates the access of non-Jews to salvation. Acts 9 occurs within a series of conversions (Simon, then the Ethiopian eunuch, then Saul), by which it is shown how God enlarges the circle of the elect: the conclusive step will be taken in the encounter between Peter and Cornelius (see 10:34-36).²⁶

Undoubtedly, the vocabulary of conversion is explicitly used in two of the episodes mentioned by Marguerat. Peter indeed invites the magician Simon to be converted (μετανοεῖν, Acts 8:22), and in Acts 11, after Peter narrates his encounter with Cornelius to the Judeo-Christians of Jerusalem, who have reproached him for entering into the homes of the uncircumcised and eating with them, they change their opinion and exclaim: "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance (μετάνοια) unto life" (Acts 11:18 RSV). On the other hand, the vocabulary of conversion is lacking in the episode of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40), and it is easy to see why: Philip did not ask this eunuch to be converted, for he had to change neither God nor morality – the passage actually implies the opposite, that he is a pious man, for he reads the Holy Scriptures of Israel even while travelling! One will perhaps say that he receives from the hands of the deacon Philip Baptism (Acts 8:38) and that to receive Baptism is for the narrator synonymous with conversion. It is not, however, what the narrator emphasizes: to this mutilated man, excluded from the cultic assemblies of Israel²⁷, the faith in Jesus Christ, crowned by Baptism, brought joy (Acts 8:39). No mention is made of repentance, of the confession of sins, of penitential practices, *only of joy*. As the vocabulary of conversion is equally absent in Acts 9, for analogous reasons – Saul neither changes God nor morality –, one cannot describe all the pericopes of Acts 8–11 as conversion narratives. It is more appropriate to say that in these chapters the Good News is spreading and connecting with recipients more and more distant:

- with the episode of Simon the magician: the schismatics of Samaria;

²⁶ MARGUERAT, La conversion de Saul, 281-282.

²⁷ Cf. Deut 23:2.

- with that of the Ethiopian eunuch: those excluded from the Jewish cult;
- with Saul, future apostle to the pagans: the most zealous enemy of Jesus;
- with Cornelius: pagans.

Another clue also allows seeing that there is not a religious conversion in Acts 9: neither the narrator nor Christ gives Saul another name; the latter will only become Paul in Acts 13:9²⁸, at the time of the first mission with Barnabas. The name change occurs at least one year after Saul's arrival at the Church of Antioch (Acts 11:25), in other words, when Paul is already a disciple and herald of Christ.

The arguments that allow interpreting Acts 9:1-31 in terms of a conversion are thus scanty. After having reread this chapter and shown that it could not be a matter of a conversion narrative, it will be necessary to try to outline the project of the Lucan narrator.

2.2 The Reasons for Rejecting a Pattern of Conversion

Let us briefly recall that, during the Christophany, the Resurrected One does not declare to Saul that he is guilty, a sinner, nor does he enjoin him to do penance. One will perhaps say that when he is self-designating, the Resurrected One says to Saul: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5 RSV). Can one indeed not interpret the "whom you are persecuting" as a reproach? Is not Saul implicitly called to self-accuse, or at least to apologize? But at no time does Saul ask for forgiveness, express any regret, indeed, remorse. In this Christophany, the narrator does not note any sentiment at all, neither in Christ, who speaks neither of being offended, nor unhappy, nor moved by compassion, nor in Saul, who does not confess his sins, or even his mistakes or his ignorance, who does not express the slightest joy nor show himself full of gratitude for not having been punished, rejected. The self-designation of Christ thus does not have the function of setting in motion a *pattern* of conversion²⁹.

Can the fact that in Acts 9:5 – as well as in 22:7 and 26:14 – Saul finds himself on the ground perhaps be interpreted as a punishment? The formulation

²⁸ An observation that one finds in EISENBAUM, *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 40: "Interestingly, the one thing that does not happen in ch. 9 that one would expect is the name change from 'Saul' to 'Paul' – that happens suddenly and without explanation in 13:9".

²⁹ The observation is valid for Acts 22 and 26 where the sentiments are off stage as well.

here is important: it does not say that Saul was thrown to the ground, the passive implying that it was done by Christ, but that Saul, as well as all those who were accompanying him, in 26:14, fell to the ground³⁰; the verbs are intransitive and do not directly refer to a divine causality. In addition to the linguistic formulation, Paul's reaction, very laconic, does not authorize supporting the sense of a punishment: Saul's attention does not focus on the fact of having fallen but on the identity of the one who calls to him. Furthermore, narratively, the fact of falling to the ground aims at emphasizing the power of the intervention of the Resurrected One: a strong light, which imposes itself, renders Saul blind but leaves his intellectual faculties intact.

Ananias could himself have been able to use a vocabulary of conversion ("The Lord appeared to you so that you might be converted, etc."), but he declares to Saul that the Lord appeared to him so "that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17 RSV). Conversion is off stage.

The preceding observations thus invite concluding that the *pattern* used by the narrator is not that of a conversion. Would it thus be a matter of a vocation narrative?

2.3 *A Vocation Narrative?*

Even a quick reading of Acts 9:1-19a cannot but notice that Christ does not give a mission to Saul. The only order that the latter receives is to go to Damascus and to wait so that one may tell him what he will have to do. On the other hand, this order, that has nothing to do with sending him on a mission, is not followed by a question or an objection from Saul, as one sees in the OT narratives: (i) a mission pronounced by God or his representative, (ii) a question or objection from the human character, (iii) a divine response – often accompanied by a sign. The one to whom Saul's mission is revealed is Ananias. As we noted above, for Marguerat³¹, vv. 10-16 form a narrative of a prophetic vocation: the narrator really does use the *pattern*, but for Ananias, not for Saul.

If one examines more closely what Christ reveals to Ananias of the identity and the mission of Saul, one can only be surprised, for Christ does not tell Ananias what he must say. Christ even saves for *later* revealing to Saul what he will have to suffer for his name (v. 16). In v. 15, moreover, the identity

³⁰ The verb πίπτω in Acts 9:4 and 22:7; καταπίπτω in 26:14.

³¹ Cf. *supra*, n. 12.

of Saul stated by Christ – “he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (RSV) – is not the order given to Ananias, but his motivation, a necessary motivation so that Ananias may consent to go see Saul: he is not told to reveal to Saul this mission; the only thing that he must do is to go impose his hands on Saul in order to give him sight (v. 12). One could believe that Christ had chosen Ananias so that he might transmit to Saul the mission that will subsequently be entrusted to him. Yet, this is not it at all. Neither Ananias, nor Saul, nor the reader know when Saul will begin his mission nor when he will have to suffer for Christ.

Unlike the narrative of Acts 9, Paul’s discourses in Acts 22 and 26 indicate that there was a sending by Christ himself. No longer will the correct question for exegetes be what is right from the narrator of Acts 9 and Paul in Acts 26 but why does Acts 9 describe the encounter of Christ and Saul neither as a conversion nor as being sent on a mission.

2.4 The Reasons for the Choices of Acts 9

The thesis that will be followed in the succeeding lines is that one can only answer the preceding questions by taking into consideration the dynamic of the macro-narrative of Acts.

The Sending on a Mission in Acts 13

If in Acts 9 the narrator is pointing out to his reader in a inchoative way that Paul will have to announce Christ to everyone, but first to the nations (in Greek, ἔθνη), that is to the pagans, it is so that this reader may see how Saul is progressively going to be integrated into the mission: one could not expect the first communities to welcome him with open arms, and the objection raised by Ananias is typical of the reticence encountered by Saul during his first steps as a disciple of Christ. The narrator thus presents a progressive insertion of Saul into the Church and his participation is more and more active in the announcement of the Gospel. The sending on a mission only becomes explicit in Acts 13, an official commission ordered by the Holy Spirit but made public by the Church. The call and the sending not being expressed to Saul before Acts 13, the narrator in Acts 9 only provides the information to his reader, which explains the absence of the vocation narrative *pattern*. The unfolding of the whole is not:

- Saul directly called by Christ, is sent on a mission, which then comes to the awareness of the Church;
- but inversely: the Spirit makes known the call to the Church, which sends Saul on a mission.

The Absence of a Conversion

As we have already pointed out, the narrator in Acts 9 and Paul in Acts 22 and 26 do not use the vocabulary of conversion in order to describe the change that took place in Saul. The reason for it is given by Paul himself in Acts 22: he never renounced his pharisaical faith! By emphasizing in this way the full continuity of this faith with that of Israel, a faith in the resurrection, Paul clearly implies that he has not changed God and thus religion. The macro-narrative of Acts thus indirectly answers the accusation of being a new religion that began to be disseminated at that time concerning the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Place of Acts 9 in the Macro-narrative

Why has the narrator placed the narrative of the encounter between Christ and Saul at this point in Acts? It is once again the progression of the macro-narrative that allows giving a pertinent answer. Indeed, if one considers what is said in it about Saul's relationship to the pagans, things are presented like this:

- (a) in Acts 9, Christ announces to Ananias (and the narrator to his reader) that Saul will be a herald of Christ to the pagans (v. 15),
- (b) in Acts 10, Peter is sent to the home of pagans and announces Christ to them,
- (c) in Acts 13, Saul and Barnabas decide to go to the pagans (v. 46),
- (d) in Acts 15, the apostles officially designate Paul and Barnabas as heralds to the pagans (v. 25); for it is said in v. 23 that the letter of the apostles was sent to believers from pagan origins.

The progression shows that Acts 9 has a dual function: to announce the future sending of Saul to the pagans and to place this announcement before their conversion. The reader could have wondered why, if Paul was destined to be a witness of Christ to the pagans, he was not the first to announce Christ to them. It was not he, but Peter, whose authority was uncontested. And if the narrator emphasizes Peter's resistance to going to the pagans, it is so that one may not criticize the apostles for having abandoned the Law lightly and

irresponsibly. The resistance was in order to highlight God's absolute initiative. By narrating that Peter was the first to announce Christ to the pagans, the narrator thus freed Saul/Paul from all criticism: if he became a missionary to the pagans, it is certainly because it was necessary to be called to this by Christ but also because he was sent by the Church, with the full agreement of the apostles, and not driven by an inner demon. As Marguerat quite rightly says in his article and his commentary, Acts 9 shows that, regarding the mission of Saul/Paul, from the beginning the mediation of the Church was at work.

Neither a narrative of a conversion nor a narrative of a vocation, what then is the function of Acts 9? That of presenting for the first time the motifs that are going to run throughout the episodes concerning Paul: Christ's initiative towards him, the gift of the Spirit, his call announced to the Church and later transmitted by it, lastly his testimony to the pagans.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that the ideas accepted in biblical exegesis are not always good counselors. Monographs and commentaries declare, without careful verification, that Acts 9, 22 and 26 narrate the conversion of Saul/Paul. And as the latter changed neither God nor moral conduct, they invoke a new type of conversion, a *cognitive* conversion, this category unfortunately not corresponding to the orientation of the macro-narrative of Acts. It seemed to us more in keeping with the exegetical approach to examine the reasons for the absence of the vocabulary of conversion in these three passages and in others – as that of the encounter of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. We have thus been able to verify that the absence of the vocabulary of conversion was not insignificant, that it would be in support of the challenge to which the apostolic and postapostolic generations wanted to respond, namely that the Christian movement was located in the direct line of the biblical faith and in no way ought to be considered as a new religion.

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Zhrnutie

Veľký počet komentátorov považuje Sk 9, 22 a 26 za rozprávania o obrátení Šavla/Pavla. Tento príspevok poukazuje na tento konsezus ako na nie dostatočne exegeticky podložený. Je totiž nevyhnutné sa spýtať, prečo narátor nikdy nepoužíva slovník obrátenia, aby podal rozprávanie o stretnutí medzi Kristom a Šavlom na ceste do Damasku.

Kľúčové slová: Pavol, Sk 9, obrátenie, povolanie.

Summary

Numerous commentators actually accept Acts 9, 22 and 26 as narrating the conversion of Saul/Paul. This article is proposing to show that this consensus is not exegetically well-founded and that it is necessary rather to ask why the narrator never uses the vocabulary of conversion in order to speak about the encounter between Christ and Saul on the road to Damascus.

Keywords: Paul, Acts 9, conversion, call.

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