

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

## CHAPTER 3:

### THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH: RESURRECTION

## IMPORTANT NOTICE:

This course is a revised traduction of the work “I Fondamenti del Cristianesimo” written by Rev. Piero Ottaviano and Didaskaleion.

The course is divided into units with a logical sequence. Therefore we suggest you to read them following their progressive order.

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## 3 THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH: RESURRECTION

In this section we shall see how **Jesus' resurrection makes up the foundations of Christianity.**

As evidence of this we shall analyze and compare some documents:

- the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, Ch. 15
- the kerygmatic speeches in "Acts of the Apostles"

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Our previous investigation has brought us to ascertain that:

- between A.D. 30 and 50 there began to form a religious group of Jews who claimed to be following the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth (whom they called "the Christ");
- Jesus is a historical figure who really existed; he gave rise to a religious movement and for that reason he was persecuted and finally put to death;
- his followers maintained that he had risen from the dead;
- within the communities being formed by his followers some books were circulated which were regarded as a standard of faith;
- such books are the written deposit of the first Christian preaching;
- we agree that we are currently in possession of either their original text, or of a text which is very close to the original.

### 3.2 OUR QUEST'S PURPOSE

We now wish to establish what the records would report about the first preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, namely, where his disciples would start from as they introduced Christianity to people who had never heard about it before. We shall see that their starting point was **the Resurrection.**

We will then analyze two documents:

- an excerpt from Paul's first letter to the Christians of Corinth;
- the kerygmatic speeches contained in "Acts of the Apostles".

### 3.3 DOCUMENT N. 1: 1<sup>ST</sup> COR. 15,1-14

This letter (the first of two to reach us) was written at Ephesus between **A.D 54 and A.D. 57**, most probably in A.D. 56. By this letter Paul tackles and solves various problems concerning the community's life, such as internal divisions, virginity and wedding, the offerings of meat to idols, the course of ritual meetings, spiritual gifts...

Finally, Paul also talks about the resurrection of the dead, - which some members of the community would deny -, by briefly referring to his first preaching, that he had formerly preached **in A.D. 51**.

We must point out that Paul was tackling quite a different question. In fact, he was trying to answer a question he had been asked by the Corinthians, namely, "whether the dead do rise again".

**But he does indirectly answer our question as well, thus making his preaching's starting point clear.**

*1. I remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, and to which you have taken your stand,*

- *I remind you:* now, in A.D. 56, I remind you of what I already told you in A.D. 51
- *gospel:* namely, good news. An important preaching/announcement of victory, welfare and salvation concerning the city or the people.

*2. by which you are saved, if you hold firmly to the words I preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain.*

*3. As a matter of fact, I passed on to you as of first importance (or you at first, or in first instance) what I have also received: **that Christ died on (for) our sins, according to the Scriptures***

- *passed on...received:* technical verbs of the ancient method of teaching. The teacher orally passes the message on to the pupil, who is to "receive" it and learn it by heart.
- *Christ* = Messiah = anointed with oil. To the Jews anointing would indicate the person chosen and destined by God to undertake a mission in favor of his people.
- *to die for/on our sins:* it is a typical Hebrew expression, which is never used by Greeks with such meaning.
- *the Scriptures:* this word would indicate the group of the Jewish holy books, i.e., the Old Testament. No quotation is given as to the texts of the Old Testament one should refer to.

4. *and that he was buried and that he was raised on the day the third according to the Scriptures*

- *the day the third*: though used by Greeks, such expression is peculiar to Hebrew<sup>1</sup>.
- *the Scriptures*: same remark as verse 3. It is still difficult to find out in the Old Testament some actual text saying exactly that Christ was to rise from the dead, and that this would happen "**on the third day**". Perhaps we are to refer to Isaiah 53,11 and Osee 6,2

5. *and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve*

- *appeared*: this conveys an objective fact, an event actually occurring in real world. A vision, on the contrary, is merely a subjective one<sup>2</sup>.
- *Cephas* = rock, stone. Aramaic nick-name of Simon Peter.
- *Twelve*: expression which is never used by Paul. It stands for the group of disciples which was closer to Jesus, namely the Apostles.

6. *After that he appeared to more than five hundred of brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, whereas some have fallen asleep.*

- *Verses 6-11*: Evidence in support of the affirmations made in the preceding verses. An apparition to such a great number of people is reported only here.
- *brothers* = Christians
- *fallen asleep* = died out

7. *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*

- Nowhere else within the New Testament is an *apparition to James* to be found.
- *Apostles* = messengers. Thus were called Jesus' closest disciples first, - the Twelve he had chosen - then also the witnesses of His resurrection.

8. *And last of all, he appeared to me also, as to an abortion (or as to a child whose mother died as she delivered him).*

- *abortion/a child whose mother died as she delivered him*: Paul wants to stress that he is the least and the last of the Apostles (since his mother died in childbirth, he must be her last child).

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<sup>1</sup> In Hebrew, the adjective always follows the noun and it is always preceded by an article. This sentence pattern is not but seldom used in Greek. But verse 4 is to be found in the Greek's Credo, except for "the day the third", which probably did not sound that good in Greek, and was thus turned into "the third day".

<sup>2</sup> The reason for our translating "he appeared to" instead of "he was seen by" is that in Greek the object is expressed by a dative, and not by *apò* plus the genitive, which would mark out the agent.

9. *In fact I am the least of the Apostles, and I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, for I persecuted the Church of God.*

- *Church of God*: the assembly called forth by God.

10. *But by the grace of God I am what I am and His grace to me was not without effect, nay, I worked harder than any of them has - Actually not I but God's grace within me -.*

- *them*: the other apostles.

11. *Whether then it was I or they, this is what we preach and this is what you believed.*

- *they*: Paul is referring to the unanimous tradition of the other apostles.

12. *But if it is proclaimed that Christ was raised from the dead, then how is it that some of you claim that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

- Now Paul is talking about his problem: *whether the dead can rise again.*

13. *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.*

14. *And if Christ was not raised, then our preaching is meaningless, and your faith is meaningless, too.*

### 3.3.1 CONCLUSIVE SYNTHESIS

Here Paul does not mean to prove that Jesus has risen from the dead, but, meaning to tell the Corinthians that the dead do rise again, he starts from the commonly accepted statement regarding Jesus' resurrection.

Through this text we come to know:

- that the preaching of Jesus' death and resurrection is the starting point of Paul's preaching (*verse 3*);
- that Paul has not made it up: this is what he had actually been taught (*verse 3*) and thus the other apostles were also preaching (*verse 11*).

Thanks to Paul's testimony, we also learn that, if Jesus' resurrection was taken away from Christianity, Christian faith would have no more reason to be. (*verse 14*; cp. also v. 17 and 19).

***The Resurrection is therefore the mainstay of the whole Christianity.***

Through careful analysis of *verses 3b-5* we can tell that:

- both words and style are not Paul's. As he says, he has just received them;
- their original drafting, as per the reported semitisms, had been made in a semitic language, and therefore prior to the preaching to the Greek; so it must have been written shortly after Jesus' death;
- If we agree that these verses are:
  - *either a traditional formula of faith*, which was "passed on" by the preacher and "received" by the Christians as they were being evangelized,
  - *or a brief summarize*, meant as a reminder of the essential points of the teacher's speech, at the end of a more extensive lesson,

we can then assume that **Paul received them in Damascus** as he was converted and baptized, namely in **A.D. 36-37** (cp. *Acts 9,1-20; 22,6-16; 26,12-18; Gal. 1,11; 2,10*); *At Damascus there was a Jewish-Christian group, which might have translated the fundamental formula of faith from Hebrew/Aramaic into Greek, so as to make it easy to be understood for people who did not know any semitic language.*

- What we have here might be a formula of the first apostolic preaching dating back to no more than 6-7 years after Jesus' death (cp. *Acts 17,18; 24,21; 25,19; 26,8.23; Revelation 1,5*).

### 3.4 DOCUMENT N. 2: THE KERYGMATIC SPEECHES IN "ACTS OF THE APOSTLES"

**(ACTS 2,14-36; 3,12,-26; 4,8-12; 5,29-32; 10,34-43; 13,16-41; 17,18-31)**

	Quotation	Author	Place	Recipients
1	2,14-36	PETER	Jerusalem	the Hebrew
2	3,12-26	PETER	Jerusalem	the Hebrew
3	4,8-12	PETER	Jerusalem	Hebrew leaders
4	5,29-32	PETER	Jerusalem	Hebrew leaders
5	10,34-43	PETER	Jerusalem	pagan Cornelius
6	13,16-41	PAUL	Antioch of Pisydia	the Jews (synagogue)
7	17,22-31	PAUL	Athens	Greek scholars/archons (Areopagus)

The book "Acts of the Apostles" was written by Luke and is dated between A.D. 61 and 63 (some scholars place it about A.D.75). It contains a great number of speeches. There are altogether seven **kerygmatic** (= preaching the Christian faith) **speeches**.

These speeches may be regarded as preaching essays of Peter's and Paul's; Luke would hereby offer them to the Christian evangelists of his times, in order to enable them to make their message fit the various circles they were to preach to.

Given their remarkably converging ideas, we shall make a literal translation of the first one only:

### 3.4.1 ACTS 2,14-36

Luke thus relates:

Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost. Spirit has come down on the Apostles (who had locked themselves into the supper room for fear of the Jews) and made them get out and testify to Christ's resurrection. When the apostles start speaking, the onlookers realize that they are speaking foreign languages and preaching quite the same things as once preached by ancient prophets. Somebody starts making fun of them and somebody hints that they must be drunk. Peter speaks for all:

*14. Peter stood up with the other Eleven, raised his voice and addressed them by saying: Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you: lend me your ears and listen to my words.*

*15. In fact, these fellows of mine are not drunk, as you might think - As a matter of fact it is the third hour of the day -*

- *the third hour: 9:00 a.m.*

*16. but what is happening is what was spoken by prophet Joel:*

- *Joel 3,1-5: to the Jews, any fact relevant to faith ought to have been previously announced by the Old Testament (cp. Amos 3,7)*

*17. "And thus it will be: in the last days - God says - I will pour out my spirit upon every flesh and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young people will see visions and your old people will dream dreams*

- *to prophesy: to speak in God's name, also in odd ways.*

*18. and also on my servants, both men and women, will I pour out my spirit on those days, and they will prophesy, too.*

*19. And I will show wonders in the heaven and send signs on the earth below, such as blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

*20. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon will be turned into blood before the coming of the day of the Lord, the great and glorious (day).*

- *the day of the Lord: according to some prophets (e.g., Micah 7; Zechariah 9-11) that will be the day when the Lord will set Israel free and punish its enemies; according to others (Joel, Amos 5; Abdias; Sophonias 1) that will be the day when the Lord will punish all evil people, including evil Jews as well. It was generally thought that it would be the beginning of the Messianic era.*



21. *And thus will be: everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved".*

22. *People of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazirite, the man accredited by God to you by power and miracles and signs, which God did among you through him, as you well know,*

- *verses 22-24: they hold a résumé of the gospels.*
- *Nazirite: of Nazareth, or somebody who vowed to be a Nazirite (Numbers 6).*
- *man: such "theological ignorance" of Peter's (or Luke) is quite surprising (cp. Luke 24,19): does he still ignore that Jesus is God? Or does he say so just in order to stress that Jesus is a man, too?*

23. *this man, who by God's set purpose and foreknowledge was handed over to you to be crucified by the hands of the unjust,*

24. *God indeed raised from the dead, by dissolving the labour of death, for it was not possible that death should keep its hold on him.*

- *quotation from Psalms 17(18),5-6 LXX; 114(116), 3 LXX.*

25. *As a matter of fact, David says about him: "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken.*

- *shaken/unseated: cp. a horseman who gets unsaddled during a battle.*

26. *this is why my heart rejoiced and my tongue exulted, and besides also my flesh will rest in the hope*

27. *that you will not abandon my soul (= life) in the Hades, nor let your saint see decay.*

- *hades: the place of the dead, according to both Greek and Latin; the Jews call it Sheol.*
- *saint: person consecrated to God. Apparently referred to David, according to Peter it is actually referred to someone else. Whom?*

28. *You let me know the paths of life, you will fill me with joy by letting me see your face".*

- *From Psalm 16,18-11. Many psalms were ascribed to David.*

29. *Brother men, I can tell you confidently that patriarch David died and was buried and his sepulchre is here to this day.*

- The question is understood: what about Jesus' corpse? His sepulcher was found empty.

*30. Since he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that the fruit of his loins would sit upon his throne,*

- From Psalm 132,11; 89,4-5

*31. seeing what was ahead he spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to the Hades, nor would his body see decay.*

*32. This Jesus (whom) God did raise - whose witnesses we all are -.*

*33. Exalted at/by God's right hand, he has received from his Father the Holy Spirit of the promise (namely: the promise of the Holy Ghost), he poured out this (Spirit) that you can see and hear.*

- *at/by the right hand of God* = by the power of God
- *right hand*: referring to the fact that eastern kings would have their firstborn sons sit at their right hand during public celebrations.
- *promise*: see Joel (cp. verses 17-21 above).

*34. As a matter of fact it was not David who ascended to heaven, and yet he wrote, "Thus said the Lord to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,*

*35. until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet".*

- **not David...heaven:** In fact, David is dead and buried.
- Psalm 110,1. It is a revision of this psalm. It was originally meant as a psalm for a king ascending the throne: "The Lord-God said to my Lord-the king...". Since David was then believed to be its author, this psalm became a messianic psalm. "The Lord-God has said to my Lord-Messiah..."

*36. Therefore may the whole House of Israel be assured that God made this Jesus whom you have crucified both Lord and Christ.*

### 3.4.2 A BRIEF CONCLUSION

- a)** As you can see from the text, the style of the speech (particularly *verses 22-24*) is labored, contrary to the normal style used by *Luke*, which is generally very fluent. Should we regard it as the writer's ability to imitate *Peter's* style, or an expression of the historian's respect for a more ancient record?

Had *Luke* actually wanted to re-form *Peter's* style, then why not the contents of his preaching, as well? - particularly the comment about Jesus' being "man accredited by the God" (v. 22)? –

Anyway, this is no important question as far as our search for the beginning of the first apostolic preaching is concerned: what we are more interested in is learning that Luke deems this speech to be the fundamental speech of Christianity's first preaching. Notice also that *verses 22-24* are presented as a synthesis of the Gospels' contents.

**b)** To sum up, this is Peter's (or Luke's) outlook:

- both resurrection and glorification (= being at the right hand of God) had been prophesied to in the Old Testament and they applied to Jesus, not to David.
- Jesus has gone through both, by rising from the dead and by sending the Holy Spirit.
- Therefore, Jesus is the Messiah as prophesied by the Old Testament.

**c)** From this speech (as well as from the others, which are not reported here) it appears that the nucleus of the first Christian preaching was:

- **It was preached that Jesus had risen from the dead (verse 32)**
- **and that, therefore, he was the Christ (verse 36).**

### 3.4.3 COLLATION OF 1<sup>ST</sup> COR 15 AND ACTS 2

**a) Common features:**

1. Jesus died.
2. According to God's foreknowledge (the Scriptures? *1 Cor. 15,3*).
3. He was buried.
4. He was raised from the dead (*Acts* explicitly relate that the author of the resurrection is God).
5. Peter and the other apostles are witnesses of the resurrection.

**b) Features which are found, or widely expounded, only in 1st Cor 15:**

1. Jesus died for our sins: this is not a mere comment of the fact concerning his death, (like in *Acts*), but a theological explanation of the very fact.
2. Jesus is being called "Christ" and not "the Christ". His role as "anointed one" (= Christ = Messiah) has already become a proper noun.
3. Reference is clearly made to apparitions (*verses 5-8*), like in *Acts 10,41-42* and *13,31*.
4. Jesus has risen on the third day (this reference occurs also in *Luke 24,21* and *Acts 10,30*).

**c) The collation's results**

1. Even though it is shorter, the formula as quoted in *1st Cor 15,3-5* is richer of ideas than the speeches reported in *Acts*.
2. There is greater balance in *1st Cor* as regards the elements which it is made up of (death, burial, resurrection, apparition) than in *Acts, ch. 2* (and all other speeches of the Acts, as well). In the latter case, more importance is given to Jesus' resurrection and glorification, than to his suffering and dying on the cross. In *Acts* the reflection about Jesus' death, which was prior to their writing, is missing and *Luke*, who had been *Paul's* travelling companion for a long time, certainly did not ignore it - only he did not quote it -. Perhaps this happened because he wanted to keep to the historic datas he had about the early days of Christianity, or perhaps because the document he was quoting did not mention it.
3. Let us try to explain these remarks by **formulating a theory**:
  - Probably the speeches contained in *Acts* do not report the very words of the apostles, but *Luke's* subsequent reflections (suffice it to compare the speeches of *Acts* with *chapter 24* of the *Gospel according to Luke* - they are both by the same author!).
  - Nevertheless, when writing this report *Luke* availed himself of even more ancient material than the formula of *1st Cor 15*, which allows us to go back to a kind of preaching which was almost contemporary to the events described, and, therefore, a much more reliable one.
  - Most probably the extraordinary announcement that the apostles had to give, namely the resurrection-glorification of Jesus, had completely drawn their attention and, as a result, they could not focus on the religious importance of his death.

**NUCLEUS - CHRONOLOGY - a probable hypothesis -**

Document	Drafted	Received	Preached	Written
Formula of 1 <sup>st</sup> Cor 15,35	about A.D. 34	A.D. 36-37 Paul's conversion	A.D. 51 Corinth	A.D. 56 Ephesus
Peter's synthesis of Acts 2	about A.D. 32	?	?	A.D. 61-63

This reasoning would not lose its value even in case the formula of 1st Cor 15 proved to actually have been written later. Paul would regard it as the summary of the whole traditional gospel.

4. The gospels that we have today present themselves as the development of the kerygmatic speeches contained within Acts. They are the result of the first communities' enquiries after the way for better getting to know about Jesus' life and teachings so that they would be able to comply with them in a better way.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

These texts introduce to us the nucleus of apostolic preaching, which held nothing but the assertion - though still not stabilized - of one fact:

**God raised Christ from the dead.**