THE RELIGIO-HISTORICAL RELEVANCE OF LK 20:34-36

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The well known text of Lk 20:34-36, particularly 36, raises a religio-historical problem, not usually dealt with in the commentaries. The problem is as follows: the Lukan text, after mentioning that in the world to come, in the resurrection, men and women will not marry nor be given in marriage, and before explaining that the resurrected will be “equal to angels and sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”, inserts a motivation of its own, not to be found in the parallel texts of Matthew and Mark: “in fact, they cannot die anymore”. So the first impression is that this Lukan text posits a correspondence between marriage and death: where there is no death, there is no marriage, where there is marriage, there is death.

However, this connexion, nay this coincidence between the absence of marriage and the absence of death, is not a far-fetched one, if we consider the history of Christian thought, as we shall see. On the other hand, we may ask how old this conception is in the history of Christian spirituality.

The text of Luke 20:34-36 runs as follows: οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου γαμοῦσιν καὶ γαμίζουσιν, οἱ δὲ καταξιωθέντες τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐκείνου τυχεῖν καὶ ἀναστάσεως τῆς ἐκ νεκρῶν οὔτε γαμοῦσιν οὔτε γαμίζονται, οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀποθανεῖν ἔτι δύνανται, ἵσαγγελοι γὰρ εἰσίν, καὶ υἱοὶ εἰσίν θεοὶ, τῆς ἀναστάσεως υἱοὶ ὄντες.

Matthew and Mark are more succinct: ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἀναστάσει οὔτε γαμοῦσιν οὔτε γαμίζονται, ἀλλὰ ὡς ἄγγελοι θεοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ εἰσίν (Mt. 22:30). Ὑπάρχει γὰρ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστάσει, οὔτε γαμοῦσιν οὔτε γαμίζονται, ἀλλὰ εἰσίν ὡς ἄγγελοι ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (Mc. 12:25).

So, whilst the Matthean and the Markan texts only state that in the resurrection the practice and the institution of marriage will no longer exist, and that the resurrected will be as the angels in heaven are now, the Lukan text develops the argument in several directions.
First of all, an opposition is introduced between those belonging to this *aion* — being its ‘sons’ — and those who are (or will be) given the privilege to belong to that *aion*, i.e., resurrection — being sons of God —. True, as far as our specific problem is concerned, the meaning is fundamentally the same here as with the corresponding Matthean and the Markan logia, since these too found the whole argument on the difference between this condition of life, — that of not yet resurrected men and women, — and the final condition, — that of the resurrected. But the particular emphasis, in the Lukan text, on the unique dignity of those who will be admitted to that *aion* (οἱ δὲ καταξιωθέντες ...) is not devoid of significance in the general context of the logion.

The other peculiarity, already mentioned, of the Lukan logion is that the οὐδὲ γάρ ἄποθανεν ἐτι δύνανται inserted after the οὕτε γαμοῦσιν ... complicates the argumentation by introducing in it a third element and a special motivation, namely the mention of immortality, seen both as a quality of the *isangelia* and a formal alternative to the earthly régime to which marriage belongs (οἱ νῖοι τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ...). Due to this intermediary position given to immortality (better to say: to the cessation of mortality) in this very delicate context, we are committed to dwell on the question whether this can imply or not those conceptual associations concerning the primordial state of integrity and non-mortality of man in Paradise which were usual in the wisdom and the apocalyptic literature of the first centuries A.D. — this all the more since an exegetical trend of some Fathers sees in this Lukan logion a basic argument in favour of the practice of virginity, conceived not only as an anticipation of the condition of the resurrected and a testimony given to the world to come, but also as an instauration of the primordial condition of Adam.

1 Here we do not enter the question of the actual meaning of the Lucan logion, whether it alludes or not to an anticipation of the life *isangelos* (through the present *γαμοῦσιν*) for those made worthy of resurrection (in our opinion, given the context and the parallels, the answer should be negative. See for this question Van Eijk, quoted n. 2).

2 Cp. Ton H. C. Van Eijk, Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality, in Epektasis (Studies Daniélou), 220-235 and our, observations in the article Questioni storico-religiose relative al Cristianesimo in Siria nei secoli II-IV, in Augustinianum, 19. 1979, 41-52, which is preliminary to this presentation.