

The Good News of Restoration: Reading Luke-Acts Then and Now

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Abstract: After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE many religious groups in the Judeo-Christian community engaged in processes of reform. A two-volume New Testament document, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, is a voice that echoes through the ages in its appeal for a restoration of Israel's story. In calling for a restoration of Israel's creation ethic, it proclaims the creator God, as the parent of all humanity; God's Son, Jesus Messiah, as the harbinger for a new beginning; and God's Holy Spirit as the agent who has always dwelled indiscriminately amongst people of faith, actively stimulating a quest for global harmony and mutual respect in the midst of political, social and religious disorder.

INTRODUCTION

THE MELBOURNE COLLEGE OF DIVINITY was founded in 1910 and since that time the relationship between religion and society, both in Australia and globally, has been challenged by continual change. Never before have so many human communities been devastated by military battles, pandemic diseases, deliberate ethnic cleansing or natural disasters. Never has national political decision-making been so open to international scrutiny. Never in human history have local environmental and economic policies had the same degree of impact on the entire global population. Never has there been such intense debate between the ideas of science and religion. During this last century, the theological discipline of Biblical Studies has been profoundly challenged in the task of relevant interpretation for the diversity of contemporary religious communities. In response, innovative hermeneutical paradigms have emerged that can facilitate individualist reflections on the meaning of Scripture as well as stimulate informed communal proclamations within a multitude of audience settings. In

noting that the MCD centenary is occurring during the Year of Luke, this article draws on recent scholarship to propose a reading of the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles within a local and global context of social, political and religious reconciliation. It assumes continuity between the two documents,¹ and affirms a range of more recent hermeneutical approaches that seek to unveil a “broader context” for contemporary readers.² It encourages a re-reading of Luke-Acts that embraces a relevant restoration of the inclusive ethics of the ancient Torah, prophetic and wisdom traditions of Israel. Distinctive Lucan passages are explored with particular attention to source redaction, literary frames,³ and the characterisations employed throughout the carefully crafted narrative. Furthermore, the text is read through the lens of a contemporary Christian scholar with a Jewish heritage who has lived and worked amongst the Israeli-Arab population in Galilean city of Nazareth intermittently over the past thirty years. In employing this socio-narratological approach,⁴ I am proposing that significant theological concerns emerging from the Luke-Acts narrative, continue to echo with hermeneutical relevance into the diverse global political, economic and religious realms of the 21st century audience.⁵

RESTORING ISRAEL'S STORY

It is fifty years since Hans Conzelmann's innovative thesis argued for a Luke-Acts narrative continuity that saw the ancient story of Israel recalled in the first-century proclamation of Jesus Messiah and, finally, restored in the formation of the earliest messianic faith communities.⁶

1. See a review of scholarship on the unity of Luke-Acts in Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*. NICNT (Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 1997) 6-10.

2. An understanding introduced over two decades ago in the first issue of *Pacifica* by Brendan Byrne, “Forceful Stewardship and Neglectful Wealth: A Contemporary Reading of Luke 16”, *Pacifica* 1/1 (1988) 1-14, see p. 1.

3. Stephen Curkpatrick, “Parable Metonymy and Luke's Kerygmatic Framing”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25/3 (2003) 289-307, asserts that Luke's parable frames clarify theologically the unruly metonymic world of Luke's unique parables with their economic sketches of life's ambiguities and contradictions (p. 289).

4. David B. Gowler writes: “(A socio-narratological methodology) integrates insights into characterization by literary critics and the knowledge about cultural scripts among cultural anthropologists” (“Characterization in Luke: A socio-narratological approach”, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 19 [1989] 54-63, see p. 54).

5. Taking into account the salient reminder from Francis J. Moloney: “No single interpretation of any narrative should ever claim to have produced the final word.... Each gospel is the product of a world that is behind the text.... The interpreter, however, belongs to a world in front of the text” (“A Hard Saying”: *The Gospel and Culture* [Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2001] 91).

6. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960) first published as *Die Mitte der Zeit. Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1954). Conzelmann's theory has been affirmed by most contemporary scholars: “by and large” (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* [AB 28; New York:

Scholars have long recognised that the Third Gospel was composed at least ten years after the destruction of Jerusalem around 70 CE and there remains a strong assumption that it is a Gospel written by a Gentile for a Gentile readership.⁷ Certainly, the Third Gospel is unique in the way it is “concerned to correlate the events of Jesus life and ministry with those of the Roman Empire and Jewish history”,⁸ but it also assumes that its audience is familiar with the traditions of Israel as conveyed in story and Septuagintal poetic verse.⁹ More recent scholarship considers that a primarily Jewish provenance is more feasible on the basis that the documents were written at a time of Jewish dislocation, alongside literary evidence pointing to many initiatives for religious renewal amongst Jewish communities in both Palestine and the Diaspora.¹⁰

Doubleday, 1970] 18); Rick Strelan, on the contrary, thinks “that Conzelmann drew lines far too firmly, and too divisively...and in too linear a fashion” (*Luke the priest. The Authority of the Author of the Third Gospel* (Aldershot UK/Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2008) 18.

7. For example see Jack T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1987); Craig Evans, *Luke* NIBC (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1990) 1-3; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament. An Interpretation* rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1999) 219; Christopher Mount, *Pauline Christianity: Luke-Acts and the Legacy of Paul*. (Leiden / New York: Brill, 2002) 50; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville TN: Abingdon, 2003) 50. Contra: Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, 45, 57-59; Philip F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 31; Marilyn Salmon “Insider or Outsider? Luke’s Relationship with Judaism”, in Joseph B. Tyson (ed.) *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People: Eight Critical Perspectives*. (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1988) 76-82; Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green and Marianne Meye Thompson (eds.), *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids MI/Eerdmans, 2001) 149-154; Strelan, *Luke the Priest*, 110-113.

8. Frank Matera, “Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9.51-19.46)”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 51 (1993) 57-77, see p. 58. The political marker at the commencement of the Lucan narrative is King Herod, the Ruler (*basileus*) of Judea at the time of the conception and birth of John the Baptist, the son of a High Priest (Luke 1:5). Then the framework of political rule enlarges as the birth of Jesus is connected with a census demand from the Rome-based Emperor Augustus, with Judea being placed in the wider context of Syria when the province was under the “hegemony” of Quirinius. The arrest and trial of Jesus is framed by a warming relationship between the Jewish Temple hierarchy and the Roman overseer, Pilate.

9. Vernon K. Robbins, “The Social Location of the Implied Author in Luke-Acts”, in Jerome H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 305-332, see pp. 323-325; see also Thomas L. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings*. New Testament Monographs 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004) who argues that the Elijah-Elisha narrative forms a basis for the Luke-Acts narrative structure.

10. See E. P. Sanders, A. I. Baumgarten and Alan Mendelson (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Self-definition. Volume Two. Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (London: SCM Press, 1981); Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians. The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London / Philadelphia: SCM / Trinity Press International, 1991) 1-29; also Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants. The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM, 1993).

After the introductory historical and methodological frame (1:1-4), "Israel" is mentioned as many times in Luke's Gospel as it is in the Gospel of Matthew, with an additional thirteen references in Acts.¹¹ It is contained in prophetic statements surrounding both John the Baptist and Jesus (1:16, 54, 68, 80; 2:34) as well as being the descriptor for the community to whom Jesus ministers (4:25, 27; 7:9; 22:30; 24:21). It sets a social scenario for the unique Lucan infancy and childhood narratives (1:5-2:52) that are located in "an environment permeated by Second Temple Judaism".¹² The family of John the Baptist and, by inference, that of Jesus are depicted as having significant links to the Temple priesthood traditions of Abijah and Aaron (1:5). Mary, a "relative" of Elizabeth (1:36) as well as Joseph are depicted as observant Jews, open to Divine revelation, and as regular attendees at Jewish rituals and festivals (2:21-24, 41). Mary is portrayed as a distinctive prophetic character alongside other prophetic figures such as Simeon, Anna and John the Baptist, who all point to Jesus as Israel's hope for salvation, redemption and restoration (1:46-55; 2:32, 38; 3:15-17).¹³ The Gospel story reframes the expectations of those who are looking for the redemption of Israel. But it is not until the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus that his "foolish and slow of heart" followers are able to see a bigger picture of Israel than the one they had been expecting (24:13-27). In continuity, the finale of Acts (28:30-31) has parallels with the ending of 2 Kings (25:29-30) where "Jehoiachin was freed from prison in Babylon at the beginning of the Dispersion of Jews throughout the world; Paul, although awaiting trial, was free to witness in Rome at the beginning of the dispersion of the church throughout the world".¹⁴ According to Luke-Acts, the good news of the story of Israel that begins in Jerusalem is spilling out across the globe.

RESTORING JERUSALEM

Israel's story in Luke-Acts is supported by a particular narrative focus on Jerusalem.¹⁵ The author almost certainly assumes the reader is aware of the contemporary understanding of Jerusalem as the "centre

11. Acts 1:6; 2:36; 4:10, 27; 5:21, 31; 7:42; 9:15; 10:36; 13:17, 23; 28:20.

12. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 47.

13. Cf. James A. Sanders: "Luke's two annunciations in chapter 1 follow in detail the great annunciations in Genesis 15-18, 1 Samuel 1 and Judges 13, especially the annunciation to Hannah. Mary's Magnificat is but a bare reworking of the song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2)" ("Isaiah in Luke", in Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders [eds.], *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* [Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1993] 14-25, see p. 17).

14. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke", 18.

15. Fitzmyer points out "Luke deliberately omits from his source material that does not contribute to the over-all literary plan that he imposes on the story of Jesus.... Here the principle is probably a desire not to distract the reader's attention from Jerusalem" (*Luke I - IX*, 94).

of the earth" or the "navel/omphalos" of the whole creation. Certainly, literary evidence in the writings of Philo and Josephus point to this tradition within Judaism.¹⁶ On this basis, it is reasonable to suggest that the author depicts Jerusalem as the ancient geographic nascent centre from which new hope emerges, as well as being a remembered place of conflicted religious and political power throughout Israel's story.

It is only in the Lucan Gospel narrative that a number of significant actions are described as occurring in Jerusalem. The annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist occurs in Jerusalem (Luke 1:24); and the Jerusalem temple is a place where Jesus is brought repeatedly in his infancy, throughout his childhood and during his adolescence (2:22-38, 41-50). In the Lucan temptation narrative, unlike its Matthean parallel, the final focus is on the potential challenge Jesus will have with the Jerusalem temple system (4:9-12 // Matt 4:1-11). During his ministry, people are depicted as coming to Jesus from Jerusalem (5:17; 6:17).¹⁷ At his transfiguration, the conversation Jesus has with the two patriarchs of the Torah and prophetic traditions, Moses and Elijah, is reported to be centred around his "departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (9:31). It is, also, only in Luke that Jesus is depicted as setting "his face to Jerusalem" (9:51) and the consequent journey to Jerusalem is emphasised repeatedly in the narrative (13:22; 17:11; 19:11, 28). Jerusalem is seen as a focus in Jesus' teaching (10:30-37; 13:1-5), and his prophetic words (13:33-34; 18:31; 19:11-28; 21:20-24; 23:28) and it is only in Luke that the prescient Jesus, anticipating a tragic outcome, is described as having "wept over the city" before entering it and confronting "robbers" in its temple (19:41-45).¹⁸ In line with the other gospels, Jerusalem is the location for his betrayal, trial, execution and burial and resurrection (22:3; 22:47 – 24:12).¹⁹ But it is also the place of some post-resurrection appearances unique to Luke, as well as of Jesus' ascension (24:13-53), before which he tells the disciples to remain "in the city" until they have been clothed with power from on high (v 49). When two of Jesus' followers have their eyes opened in Emmaus,

16. Philo in *Legatio ad Gaium* 294; and Josephus in *War*, 3:51-52 For an extensive exploration of this topic see Philip S. Alexander, "Jerusalem as the 'omphalos' of the World: on the History of a Geographical Concept", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982) 197-213; Michael Tilly, *Jerusalem – Nabel der Welt: Überlieferung und Funktionen von Heiligtumstraditionen im antiken Judentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002).

17. Noting, however, that there are parallels between Luke 6:17 // Mark 3:8 // Matt 4:25.

18. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume One: The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress, 1986) 258-260.

19. Of the 143 times Jerusalem is mentioned in the New Testament, 91 of these references occur in Luke-Acts, 13 in the Gospel of Matthew, 11 in the Gospel of Mark and 13 in the Fourth Gospel. The Apostle Paul mentions Jerusalem 10 times. Three of the four remaining references are in the Apocalypse of John, with the remaining reference in the Letter to the Hebrews.

they return to Jerusalem to learn from the disciples there that Simon also has seen the risen Lord (24:33-34).

In continuity with the Gospel, Acts begins with the commissioning of the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4-26). The Pentecost experience influences both the apostles and many others in Jerusalem (2:1-13) and is the occasion of Peter's explanatory sermon (2:14-47). People are healed in the Temple precinct and Peter's proclamations continue to be heard there (3:1-4:4). The apostolic preachers are confronted, arrested and then released by the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem (4:1-22). The gathered believers form themselves into an ordered community in Jerusalem (4:23-5:16). Some are arrested again, imprisoned, miraculously released, re-arraigned but this only serves to attract more followers (5:17-6:7). In Jerusalem Stephen proclaims his faith and is martyred (6:8-8:1), followed by a period of persecution that commences in Jerusalem and then spreads throughout the region. A young man named Saul, educated as a Pharisee in Jerusalem, is complicit in the persecution of this new movement. In the midst of all this, however, the central leadership of the growing group remains in Jerusalem (8:14, 25) and Saul/Paul returns to them briefly after his conversion (9:26-28), as does Peter after his sojourn among the Gentiles on the coast (11:2-18). The apostles are depicted as returning repeatedly to Jerusalem during their missionary travels (12:25; 13:13, 31; 15:2-4; 18:22; 19:21; 20:16, 22), with Paul, on his final visit to Jerusalem, "demonstrating his full observance of Scripture by joining publicly with four men who had taken an oath and undergoing with them the required rites of purification and paying for the shaving of their heads" (21:17-26).²⁰ Jerusalem is not only the place from where the Church is administered (16:4), but it is also where conflict occurs amongst the various religious factions (21:27-35).²¹ Ultimately, in Acts it is the place of Paul's arrest, defence and trial, as well as threats to his life (21:27-23:24; 25:1-5).

The late first-century audience of Luke-Acts almost certainly knew that, in accordance with the Jesus' prophecy (Luke 19:43-44), the Romans had set up ramparts surrounding the city of Jerusalem and crushed it to the ground.²² The narrative suggests an underlying divine plot according to which these events re-play/rewind Israel's past in order to offer a new beginning and a way forward into the future.²³

20. William Loader, *Jesus and the Fundamentalism of his Day: The Gospels, the Bible and Jesus* (Melbourne VIC: Uniting Education, 1997) 101.

21. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 1991) 79-107.

22. Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Strathfield NSW: St Paul's, 2000) 156.

23. Jerusalem as the centre of the earth is the topic of a number of Rabbinic texts also. Examples are: *Breishit Rabbah* 56:10, where not only is Jerusalem described as the "navel" of the earth but also, in 59.5, as the "light of the world". R. Yochanan says Jerusalem "is

There is a sense in which the Jerusalem Temple has had every opportunity to be an appropriate place of mediation between God and humanity, but ultimately “the doors are closed” by outside forces.²⁴ For Luke-Acts, the restoration of Jerusalem will not occur in a building of stone but in the person of Jesus Messiah, Son of God, whose influence through the ever-present Holy Spirit continues to bring about reversals in the power structures of the day.²⁵ The narrative affirms the ancient hope of Israel for a reversal in human power initiatives (1:51-52) that will be manifested in good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed (4:18-19; Acts 1:6-8).²⁶ It points to an opportunity for a new beginning.

RESTORING CREATION

In addition to the geographic element of Jerusalem as a literary theme for new beginnings in Luke-Acts, there is an accompanying socio-cultural element. Alongside the characterisation of significant people in places of power are depictions of relatively powerless people. A barren older woman and a fertile young virgin hear good news of unexpected pregnancy (1:24-38); shepherds in fields, rather than rulers in palaces, are first to hear the voices of angels proclaiming the “good news” of a saviour’s birth (2:8-18); and women, men, children, lepers, slaves, the disabled and those possessed by demons find healing and liberation (4:38-41; 5:12-25; 6:6-11; 7:1-10; 8:26-55; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 17:11-19).

In contrast to Matthew (1:1-17), Luke delays the genealogy of Jesus until after the baptismal narrative where the proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God is connected with the name of “Adam” also described as “son of God” (3:23-38).²⁷ The “inclusion” formed in the genealogy around this title contains both a suggestion and a promise that the human “family” of God will be inclusive once more. This offers a way forward to address one of the biggest stumbling blocks being faced by the reforming Judeo-Christian movements. Jew and Gentile, by virtue of their common heritage through Adam (“son of God”), can hold

destined to become the metropolis of all countries” (*Shmot Rabbah* 23.10); in the future all nations would be “daughters of Jerusalem” (*Tanh B. Deut* 4). www.jafi.org.il/education/jerusalem/jsources.html accessed 12 February 2010.

24. Mary Coloe, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2001) 68. This theological understanding is developed more fully in the Fourth Gospel.

25. Note that the “Holy Spirit” is referred to 13 times in Luke and 41 times in Acts, compared to 5 times in Matthew, 4 in Mark and 3 in John.

26. See Job 5:11; 12:19; 15:29; 1 Sam 2:1-8.

27. Cf. Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 189: “As a literary form, genealogies are concerned as much with theological and apologetic issues as with historical; in them resides much social power.” Later, in the Transfiguration narrative, Jesus is affirmed again as the “chosen son of God”, and his followers are commanded to listen to him (9:35).

hands as brothers and sisters. There is no mention of Eve, but it is implicit that women and men are recognised as faithful followers alongside each other.²⁸ Mary, the mother of Jesus, is affirmed as an exemplary woman of faith because of her obedience to the “word of God” rather than because of her “womb” and “breasts” (11:27-28). The reader is left in no doubt that the mission of Jesus inaugurates a new creation, in which humanity will have a new start.

While the genealogy establishes Jesus’ lineage in this way, it soon becomes clear “that at this time lineage is not the issue, patronage is”.²⁹ As a consequence, the geographic and anthropological composition of this newly disclosed “genesis” is confronted by the temptation to replace, yet again, the God-creator patronage with a dynasty of human design and control (4:1-13). The Temptation narrative discloses Jesus’ allegiance as he consistently quotes Torah and refuses to align himself with anyone else but his Father, the God of Israel. In the unfolding drama of Luke-Acts, the allegiances of the various characters, including the followers of Jesus, are similarly challenged. The “second Adam” will affirm a place at the table and in the synagogue for many who had been excluded in the past (5:29-32; 7:36-50; 14:1-24; 16:19-31; 17:7-10; 22:14-30); the Son of God will “bring a light to the Gentiles”, who will no longer “sit in darkness” (1:79; 2:32). The depiction of Samaritans in positive light (10:33; 17:16) portrays Jesus, as the saving restorationist who “worked for healing between alien peoples”.³⁰ In addition, Jesus’ status as “son of God”, offers hope to readers who live in a world whose emperor also claims this title, but where non-Romans have little access to the benefits of citizenship and are generally relegated to the bottom of the social ladder.³¹

At the same time, Philip Esler has argued that “among the members of Luke’s political community were a number of Romans serving the empire in a military or administrative capacity, and that part of Luke’s task was to...demonstrate that faith in Jesus Christ and allegiance to Rome were not mutually inconsistent”.³² It is a Roman centurion, concerned about the illness of his slave, who approaches synagogue “elders” and sends them to petition Jesus on his behalf (7:1-10); and it is a centurion who judges Jesus as “innocent” at his crucifixion. In

28. This contrasts with another early Christian tradition that holds Eve responsible for human sinfulness and can be saved only through childbearing (e.g., 1 Tim 2:13-15).

29. Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “Legitimizing Sonship – a Test of Honour: A Social-scientific Study of Luke 4:1-30”, in Philip F. Esler (ed.), *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995) 183-197, see p. 190.

30. Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford, *My Enemy is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1984) 83.

31. Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. rev. ed. (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 243-96.

32. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 210.

addition, centurions play positive roles in Acts (10:1-23; 22:25-29; 27:1-6, 31-32, 43-44).³³ As Brendan Byrne notes, good news in Luke becomes a message of hope “for the human race as a whole. It will be Jesus’ messianic role to confront and overthrow all the forces that seek to thwart that dignity and the destiny to which it leads.”³⁴ In Luke-Acts these “forces” are inevitably in confrontation with the concept of God’s “rule” or “kingdom” (*basileia*), to which I now turn.

RESTORING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Throughout the Lucan narrative two kingdoms are always present and both have political, economic and religious boundaries.³⁵ One is the kingdom “of this age”, the other is the “kingdom of God” that is at the heart of the prayer “your kingdom come!” (11:2). In defining the citizenship of the two kingdoms there is a range of literary signifiers that help the reader to identify the allegiances to which the characters belong. There are some who decide to align with the powerful, while there are others who choose to embrace voluntary powerlessness.³⁶ The use of wealth and roles of prestige undergird many of these comparative states with several characters being described as masters and rulers, and often addressed as “Lord”.³⁷ So the reader is invited to discern not only which “lords” are aligned with the kingdom of this world and which “Lord” rules the kingdom of God, but also to which kingdom the reader belongs.

A difficulty for readers of most English translations of Luke-Acts is the author’s persistent use of the related Greek terms *archōn* and *hyparchontes*. These words never appear in the Gospels of Mark and John, and while present three times in Matthew, there are forty-three examples of their use in Luke-Acts.³⁸ Translated variously as “owner”, “occupier”, “possessor”, “possessions”, “resources” and “property”, there are both positive and negative elements depending upon the

33. Centurions can also be antagonistic in Acts: e.g., the centurion escorting Paul to Rome by sea (27:11).

34. Byrne, *Hospitality of God*, 41.

35. Anthony J. Saldarini points out that in “the Roman empire and Jewish Palestinian society, religion was embedded in the political and social fabric of the community” (*Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* [Grand Rapids MI / Cambridge UK / Livonia MI: Eerdmans / Dove, 2001] 5).

36. In regard to the latter Amy-Jill Levine remarks: “Their poverty was voluntary, not imposed, just as was their choice of fictive kin over biological or marital relations.” (“Theory, Apologetic, History: Reviewing Jesus’ Jewish Context”, *Australian Biblical Review* 55 (2007) 57-78, see p. 63).

37. Luke’s Gospel uses the term “Lord” 104 times compared with Matthew 80 times, Mark 18 times and John 52 times.

38. Luke 16 times and Acts 27 times. In Luke the word comes from the mouth of Jesus eleven times with the narrator using it four times and the character Zaccheus, once. In Acts it is the narrator who uses the term most (14), but it also comes from apostolic characters ten times and once by antagonists bringing magistrate before the court.

party to whom the described character or organisation owes allegiance. Those who are possessed by the kingdom of God are differentiated in their actions from those who are possessed by the kingdom “of this age”.³⁹ There are “children of darkness” and “children of light”;⁴⁰ there is “wisdom” and “shrewdness”.⁴¹ There are “rulers and the ruled”, but even amongst the ruled there are graded elements, including individuals who were retained by the rulers to maintain order. This social stratification created a situation where some were “placed in an acute conflict of loyalties between the traditions they were responsible for cultivating and interpreting and the rulers for whom they worked and on whom they were politically-economically dependent”.⁴² According to Anthony Saldarini, the Pharisees “functioned as a political interest group which had its own goals for society and constantly engaged in political activity to achieve them . . . They were a literate, corporate, voluntary association which constantly sought favour with the governing class”.⁴³ At the same time, there are depictions of local religious leaders who align themselves with Jesus. For example, Jairus, the *archōn* of the synagogue in Capernaum (8:41), and Jerusalem leaders such as Joseph of Arimathea, “a member of the Sanhedrin” (23:50); there are politically connected women Joanna, Susanna and “many others” who provide for Jesus “out of their resources *ek tōn hyparchontōn*” (8:3). On the other hand, there are Pharisees who are described as “lovers of money” (16:14) and who, along with Jesus’ own disciples, are confronted directly about their commitment to “possessions (*hyparchonta*)” in a number of sayings and parables.⁴⁴

The sayings material is mostly directed towards Jesus’ own followers and includes statements such as: “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions (*tōn hyparchontōn autōi*)” (12:15); “sell your possessions (*hyparchonta*)” (12:33); “none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions (*pasin tois eautou hyparchousin*)” (14:33). The rules of judgement on the retention of worldly possessions are underlined significantly in Acts. Peter, the

39. Luke 16:8; 20:34.

40. See Luke 16:8.

41. “Wisdom” (*Sophia*) is personified in Jesus (2:40, 52; 7:35; 21:15), while managers who operate with self-interest in the business of their overseers are described as “shrewd (*phronimos*)” (12:42; 16:8).

42. Richard Horsley, “Palestinian Jewish Groups and their Messiahs in Late Second Temple Judaism” in Wim Beuken, Seán Freyne and Anton Weiler (eds.), *Messianism through History (Concilium)*. London / Maryknoll NY: SCM / Orbis, 1993) 14-29, see pp. 15-16.

43. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 281.

44. Saldarini notes that “In the Gospel Luke increases the number of mentions of Pharisees as follows: alone 7:36; 13:31; 14:1; 16:14; 17:20; 18:10-14; with scribes 11:53; with lawyers or teachers of the law 5:7; 7:30; 14:3 (*Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 174, n.1).

apostle, is depicted as having no money, literally: “no silver or gold possesses me (*ouk hyparchei moi*)” (Acts 3:6), while Stephen is “fully possessed with the Holy Spirit (*hyparchōn...pneumatōs hagiou*)” (7:55). The early group of “those who believed” in Jerusalem held no personal possessions (*hyparchonta*)” and were committed to sharing their resources with each other under the direction of the apostles (4:32-37). Those who retained anything for their own benefit are confronted by the story of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), two people from the community who retained the “power to control possessions” (5:4) but once their deception was revealed they both fell down and died .

In an examination of the narrative characterisations in Luke-Acts, David Gowler notes, “the narrator divides people into two camps;”⁴⁵ there are those who retain the Torah ethos that recognises all things belong to God, and those whose identity is linked closely with their possessions. Ultimately, it is about discerning to which “king of the Jews” the characters (and consequently the readers) will give their allegiance, and whether, if acknowledging Jesus as their messianic king, they will participate in restoring the revealed traditions of Israel.⁴⁶

RESTORING THE JUBILEE

The first detailed public proclamation of Jesus that is described in the Gospel of Luke is often described as the “Nazareth manifesto” (4:16-30). The narrative frame is that of Jesus, an observant Jewish man, reading and interpreting a Sabbath passage from the book of Isaiah in his home synagogue. Initially, Jesus is praised by the congregation and his family connections are affirmed. There is no obvious rejection of Jesus’ implicit messianic claim,⁴⁷ but the positive response soon turns to anger as his interpretation (or midrash) of the text highlights specific, confronting elements in the traditions of Israel that had been suppressed for centuries.⁴⁸ The Nazareth congregation is reminded of ancient prophetic acts of restoration experienced by Gentiles and women, but even more significantly they are reminded of “the year of the Lord’s favour” (4:19).

45. Gowler, “Characterization in Luke”, 55.

46. The ultimate revelation of who is truly “the Ruler of the Jews (*Basileus tōn Ioudaiōn*)” is disclosed in terms completely outside of the ethics of ruling bodies (Luke 23:3, 37-38).

47. Seán Freyne, “The Early Christians and Jewish Messianic Ideas”, in *Messianism through History* (note 43 above) 30-41, see p. 35. Freyne notes that the messianic claim in the Isaiah text is obscured in English translations. “[T]o anoint, ‘*echrisen*’ rather than the name *Christos* is used, suggesting a more dynamic understanding of the role in terms of the stipulations of the jubilee year”.

48. Sanders notes that it is “the opposite of Mark and Matthew’s report that it is Jesus who rejects the people for their unbelief. Thus Luke stresses that what offended Jesus’ contemporaries was his hermeneutics” (“Isaiah in Luke”, 20).

Most scholars see this as “an allusion to the year of Jubilee”, a Levitical directive that probably had never been practised. A Jubilee Year demanded that every fifty years there should be “a return to one’s property and one’s family – a homecoming – in which the family land that has been forfeited in the normal transactions of business is returned”.⁴⁹ For Sean Freyne this Lucan depiction of messianic hope was “inspired by the circumstances of his own community comprising rich and poor. It was the social setting rather than any particular Jewish depiction of the role that shaped his particular presentation of the career of Jesus as messianic.”⁵⁰ What may have been good news to some was becoming very bad news for others. The Nazareth Manifesto can be read as an affirmation of the long received Hebrew concept of “the God who delivers”, but in this instance it is Jesus who is depicted as the ultimate “benefactor to the people of Israel” and hence equivalent in status to God.⁵¹ In his proclamation, the recently “ordained” Son of God stands in the prophetic tradition of John the Baptist (3:3-17) and claims continuity with the One “who can disrupt any circumstance of social bondage and exploitation, overthrow ruthless orderings of public life, and authorise new circumstances of dancing freedom, dignity and justice”.⁵² The conflict that begins at this moment will now continue with increasing fervour, and the central theme of Jesus divine status and his consequent capacity to “release from debt (*aphesis*)” will be two of the greatest challenges for readers of the Lucan narrative.⁵³

The prayer that Jesus teaches his followers includes the request to “forgive us our sins as we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us” (11:4). Those who had accrued wealth and status at the expense of others were expected to re-distribute their gains. In

the cultural world in which the author Luke wrote, being “rich” entailed a range of social obligations which went beyond possessions. Indeed, in ancient Palestine it was understood that all goods existed in finite, limited supply and were already distributed. This included everything in life: not only material

49. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 1997) 189-190. See Lev 25:1-17.

50. Freyne, “The Early Christians and Jewish Messianic Ideas”, 36. Freyne sees here a “general prophetic call for justice, even when that demand was itself inspired by the hopes for an ideal Israel, associated with the arrival of the Messiah”.

51. Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 159.

52. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 208, points to *yš*, *pdh*, *yšc*, *‘lh*, *g’l* as Hebrew “verbs of deliverance that refuse to accept as a given any circumstance of oppression”.

53. *aphesis* is used ten times in Luke-Acts, compared with once in Matthew, Ephesians and Colossians, and twice in Mark and Hebrews.

possessions, but also honour, friendship, love, power, security and status".⁵⁴

William Loader notes that "there was nothing contrary to biblical law" in these actions and teachings of the Lucan Jesus; "it is abuse which is under fire, never the Scripture and its laws".⁵⁵ On the basis of central Levitical and Deuteronomic understandings (Lev 19:18, 34; Deut 5:10; 6:5; 10:19; 13:3; 30:6) a tradition of Israel that had been left behind, lost, damaged or ignored by those who were thought to be wise, was in the process of being restored now by unexpected people in unexpected places (10:25-36). The common inheritance of the children of Adam is recognised again and the recalcitrant ones are welcomed home unconditionally (15:1-24). The Parable of the Unjust Steward (16:1-9) and the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31) can likewise be seen as stories of "honour restored".⁵⁶

On the surface it would seem that it is "the Pharisees" who are being characterised by the author of Luke-Acts as "antagonists" deviating from the true inheritance of Israel. But there are Pharisees who come to Jesus to learn from him (5:17; 17:20), who invite him to eat with them (7:36; 14:31) and who warn him of potential danger (13:31). Other named Pharisees such as Gamaliel and the Apostle Paul are open to the possibility of a restored community relationship with God (Acts 5:34; 23:6; 26:5). There appear to be those who are faithful to their inheritance in Israel and open to new revelation from within that inheritance, while others are re-aligning themselves with other possible ways forward. Ultimately, the conflict is amongst "insiders" rather than with "outsiders", and if the author is an "insider" writing to "insiders", then, as Marilyn Salmon notes, "we must read the text differently".⁵⁷

In attempting to create amongst "insiders" an awareness of the value of their inheritance in Israel and in encouraging an expectation of new possibilities, the Third Gospel invites readers to find themselves within a number of unique parables as well as within some that have been edited distinctively from their synoptic source. The Parable of the Wine and the Wineskins (5:33-38) asserts that while there are new developments happening, replacing them may not be appropriate as the "old" is "better". One commentator suggests that in this parable Jesus confronts "his opponents as peddlers of "new wine" in contrast

54. Rachael Oliphant and Paul Babie, "Can the Gospel of Luke Speak to a Contemporary Understanding of Private Property? The Parable of the Rich Fool", *Colloquium* 38/1 (2006) 3-26, see p. 9, citing Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 400.

55. Loader, *Jesus and the Fundamentalism of his Day*, 109, 115.

56. David Landry, "Honor restored: New Light on the Parable of the Prudent Steward (Luke 16:1-8a)", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000) 287-309.

57. "How we define the author in terms of first-century Judaism determines how we read Luke-Acts" (Salmon, "Insider or Outsider?", 82).

to the ancient purpose of God, which is being actualised into his ministry";⁵⁸ another view is that "just as old wine is preferred to new, people – good religious people – are slow to surrender long-treasured expectations".⁵⁹ It is time for new beginnings, but the foundations will rest again on the original rock of creation (6:46); furthermore the journey will not be one of instant gratification but of "patient endurance" (8.15), a strong Pauline theme.⁶⁰ Jesus' followers will leave everything behind as they follow him (5:11, 28; 8:2-3; 9:23-25; 10:4), whatever they accumulate they will share (6:29-38; 7:36-50; 9:12-17; 11:5-8), and it is by identifying with their neighbour's distress that they will understand themselves (6:39-45).

Already amongst the many religious movements of Judaism there is evidence that some, such as the Essenes, "stood as champions of 'the poor' of this world and bearers of a heroic morality which allowed them to continue to play a recognised influential role as one of the major Jewish movements of their time".⁶¹ On the other hand, there were other groups who Josephus records as conniving with Archelaus to receive significant financial benefit for "having taken no part in the insurrection".⁶² Reading the Parable of the Pounds in this context leads to a very different interpretation from that usually expounded. In fact, four pre-Constantinian early church commentators on this Lucan parable see the "Nobleman-King" and his two compliant servants as antagonistic characters, while the servant who faithfully preserves the resource he is given is understood to be the main protagonist in continuity with the story of Jesus. After Constantine, readers tend to see the ruler and his support personnel as heroes, while the non-compliant are read as antagonists.⁶³

58. Achtemeier, Green and Thompson (eds.) "The Gospel of Luke", in *Introducing the New Testament*, 153.

59. Byrne, *Hospitality of God* 61. Contra Richard N. Longenecker, *New Wine into Fresh Wineskins. Contextualizing the Early Christian Confessions* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1999) ix-x, 132, 174-76.

60. Rom 2:7; 5:3; 8:25; 15:4; 2 Cor 1:6; 6:4; 12:12; Col 1:11; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:4; 3:5; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 3:10; Titus 2:2. "Endurance" is employed in non-Pauline texts (Heb 10:36, 12:1; Jas 1:3, 5:11; 2 Pet 1:6) and five times in Revelation. It is reiterated later in Luke's eschatological discourse (21:19) but never appears in the other Gospels.

61 Gabriele Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis. The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids MI / Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 1998) 180-188. Citing Josephus and Philo, Boccaccini notes "sexual abstinence and voluntary poverty as the two essential features of the Essene movement". Note also Saldarini: "To picture the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes as the only or as the dominant groups in first century Judaism as many treatments implicitly do, is to underestimate the diversity of Judaism" (*Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 10).

62 Josephus, *War* 2:66-71, cited in Massynghaerde Ford, *My Enemy is My Guest*, 83.

63 See Eusebius, *De theophania* 19; 2 Clement 8:5; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book I, V1.4; Book II, XXXIV.3, cited in Merrill Kitchen, "Rereading the Parable of the Pounds: A Social and Narrative Analysis of Luke 19:11-28", in David Neville (ed.), *Prophecy and Passion: Essays in Honour of Athol Gill* (Adelaide SA: Australian Theological Forum, 2002) 227-246, see pp. 238-239.

READING LUKE-ACTS IN 2010

Alongside the literary cues pointing to significant first-century political contexts, Luke-Acts tells stories of reversal designed to impact on the newly forming faith communities that would emerge in a few more decades as formative Rabbinic Judaism and the Christian Church. The Lucan project offers in this way a reminder that contemporary Judaism, Christianity and Islam have each emerged from a common complex social mix of religious expressions that honour the story of Israel. The idea that the Christian church supersedes Judaism, or that Islam supersedes Christianity means dismissing this story of Israel to replace it once again with human-centred religious structures. The audiences of Luke-Acts, both then and now, are reminded of this true legacy of Israel over and over again.

Luke-Acts is a story of people who are being encouraged to explore a future with the kind of mutuality and interdependence that openly honours their inheritance as children of Adam.⁶⁴ It is a story that looks to Jerusalem for new beginnings and finds an unexpected Messiah who is the opposite of any other kings that have been known. Today Jerusalem remains central to the identity of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and in spite of profound internal strife stirred by the kingdoms of this age, there are people of all three faith communities who recall common stories and proclaim their common inheritance by working together towards just and peaceful solutions.⁶⁵

Luke-Acts is a story that reminds its readers of the jubilee ethic of Israel: a commitment to the redistribution of wealth and land for the common good. There are just five more years left to achieve the goals of a contemporary "jubilee" vision, the Millennium Declaration, made by 189 United Nations member states in 2000. The declaration stated that "We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women, and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected."⁶⁶ In 2010, "there are still one billion people living on less

64. Jürgen Moltmann describes the community of Acts 4:31-35 as "original Christian Marxism" where there is "enough for everyone" (*The Source of Life. The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl [Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 1997] 103-110).

65. For example, Peace Now www.peacenow.org.il, Rabbis for Human Rights (www.rhr.israel.net), Ta'ayush – Life in Common www.taayush.org, Yesh-Guvul – There is a Limit <www.yeshguvul.org>, the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre (www.sabeel.org>, Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel www.adalah.org>, Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People <www.rapprochement.org>. Note also, Mazhar Mallouhi, Amal Mallouhi, Yusuf Metta and Daoud Abdul Qader (eds.), *The Gospel of Luke: An Oriental Reading* (Beirut: Al Kalima Press, 1998). This Arabic translation and commentary of the Gospel of Luke has contributed to productive conversations and greater mutual understanding.

66. www.caritas.org.au/blueprint/The%20goals/ accessed 15 February 2010.

than one dollar per day, and more than 820 million people going to bed hungry every single night". In 2010, Luke-Acts continues to confront the popular understanding of what is now known as "prosperity theology" as well as a widespread expression in the Western world for instant gratification.

Luke-Acts is a story about the kingdom of God. This kingdom is not defined geographically or in ethnic terms, but it has an open table and invites everyone to enjoy its hospitality – men, women and children, politicians and prisoners, poor and rich, Jews, Christians, Muslims and those of any other religious persuasion. It is a kingdom of dialogue where every conversation partner is valued. Like some of the characters in Luke-Acts, there will be those who will seek to control entry into the banquet and even choose not to join the celebration. Perhaps, they are so secure in tightly boxed and domesticated faith understandings that they feel threatened by the open nature of the invitation they are being offered. Sadly, Luke-Acts is not so much a story about "others": it continues to be a story about "us".