RESPONSES TO VAN AARDE'S ARTICLE (PP 51-64)

By Prof J H Elliott, 819 Calmar Ave, OAKLAND Ca 94610, USA.


In debate with this thesis, Van Aarde disputes the proposition that in Luke-Acts the temple is replaced by the household (as the apposite symbol of life in the kingdom of God). Instead, he proposes (p54) 'that this "contrast" does not really articulate a shift in social institutions, but rather a broadening of an existing social institution (presumably the temple — JHE) as the result of a changed symbolic universe.' Regarding 'temple' as a metaphor allows one to appreciate 'other dimensions of its referential meaning' (p54). He reads Acts 7:48 to say that 'God does live in houses, but not houses built by men' and suggests that this be taken as a 'root metaphor' (p54). Moreover, relative articulation of this metaphor is connected with a change in the concept of 'God' (p54), understood as 'a shift in symbolic universe' and is seen as related to 'a tendency to broaden the temple as a theological symbol which had already started and which intensified during the Second temple period'. Finally, he intends to show that 'the temple, its sacrificial offerings and purifying rituals were closely related to the household, its meals and purifying ceremonies' (p54).

The second and third sections discuss the concept of metaphoricity and the language of analogy and sociology of knowledge (pp55-57) as a theoretical prelude to part 4 which treats temple and household. In the Bible, Van Aarde recalls, οἶκος is frequently used to designate the temple as the locus of God's presence, and this may be regarded as a 'root metaphor' suggesting that 'God lives in a house, just as people do and that as his house is holy so his people are to be holy (pp57-60). According to Van Aarde, Jesus, like the Pharisees, 'considered that the temple community should be extended to everyday life' (p59). But Jesus, in contrast to the Pharisees, relaxed access to the temple and thus 'broadened' the temple thereby creating new metaphors associated with the root metaphor of 'temple' (pp59-60). This broadening of the temple metaphor had parallels and antecedents in Ezekiel's vision of a new temple and in the Second temple period as the temple came to be conceived as a 'spiritual building' (p60).
and reconciliation was thought possible outside the temple cult, and in Qumran where the community thought of itself as the true temple or holy house. In Acts 15:16b Van Aarde sees in the reference to the 'erection of the fallen tent of David' an implied application to Jesus 'as legitimation of Peter and Paul's inclusive concept of God' (pp60-61).

Van Aarde points to Acts 7:44, 46 and 15:6 as referring to a 'mobile tabernacle which moved with the people of God' thus indicating the 'relativity of the temple as root metaphor, as reflected in Luke-Acts.' So in Luke-Acts the Jesus movement is not presented as having turned its back on the temple in Jerusalem as God's residence, and Jesus regards the temple as his father's house (Luke 2:49). But for him God was not restricted to the holy place but is believed to be among those with whom he is pleased.

'Subsequently, the Jesus movement extended this notion of an unlimited God to everyday life' (p61). In Acts 5:42 'and every day in the temple and in people's homes they (the apostles) continued to teach and preach the Good News about Jesus the Messiah' Van Aarde sees final confirmation of his thesis.

Passing over minor points of question or quibble, I would propose the following items for discussion:

1 Has the paper presented sufficient evidence to prove its main point which I take to be Luke's positive view of the temple and its broadening use as a positive symbol of God's presence? That it was so broadened elsewhere is beyond dispute; he could also have referred to the Pauline writings. But to demonstrate this for Luke-Acts, would not a more comprehensive analysis of the entirety of the Lucan material have been necessary?

2 Proof of this counter-thesis, furthermore, would require Auseinandersetzung with the total body of evidence which I have presented in my essay. Are the conclusions of this perhaps too preliminary?

3 What of the last text which he cites as support of his case, Acts 5:42? Does this not reflect as I have attempted to show, only a provisional phase in Luke's account of the early Church and its attempt at continued worship in the temple? From this point of conflict with the temple authorities here and in chapters 6-7, is not the temple replaced by the household as the locus of God's or the Spirit's presence?

4 How is Acts 7 to be read: as affirmation of God's continued presence in the temple or as a rejection of that notion? Does the title of his article accurately capture the apparent contrast between verses 47 and 48-50?

5 What is the evidence of the fundamental change in the symbolic universe which Van Aarde assumes? A broader question: What constitutes the essential ingredients of the 'symbolic universe' of Second temple Judaism and early Christianity? And how and under what conditions do such universes get altered?

6 Finally, since we are concerned in this meeting with social-scientific models, how does this paper, which debates the conclusions of my essay, deal with the model of redistribution and reciprocity which I maintain makes plausible the contrast Luke draws between 'temple' and 'household' institutions? How might the paper benefit from further social-scientific analysis?
The core of Van Aarde's paper consists in his taking issue with J H Elliott's paper 'temple versus household in Luke-Acts: A contrast in social and symbolic realities' by suggesting that, rather than one symbol (temple) being replaced by another (οἶκος), the relative nature of symbols makes it possible 'to accept them while changing them'. Van Aarde suggests we do not have a shift in social institutions on this subject in Luke-Acts, but a broadening of an existing social institution as the result of a changed symbolic universe. What Stephen says in Acts 7:48 about the temple constitutes a root metaphor, that is a basic assumption we make about human existence. Van Aarde proposes that Luke, in fact, closely relates 'temple' to 'house'.

The social scientific perspective which Van Aarde employs is sociology of knowledge theory, in particular the symbolic universe notions developed by Berger and Luckmann. Van Aarde has, in a valuable way, developed this perspective by an analysis of the use of metaphor in the creation of such a universe.

Van Aarde embarks briefly upon a consideration of the relationship between metaphor, myth and interpretation, with particular reference to Bultmann's program of Entmythologisierung. I found this discussion provocative but too compressed. It would probably be useful for Van Aarde to set out in more detail his views on the relationship between these various concepts. It may be helpful for him to consider literary-critical theory in relation to the notion that a myth may have an 'intention' or that it may be re-interpreted other than by use of some kind of narrative criticism (for starters, see Brooks, C 1941. The heresy of paraphrase, in The well wrought urn).

In other words, at the theoretical level I consider that what Van Aarde has to say is important and challenging, but could do with some expansion of what is a highly compressed argument. In what sense, moreover, is the temple a metaphor, rather than, say, just part of the setting?

I also consider that the paper would benefit from a more detailed application of the social-scientific perspective to particular data in Luke-Acts. I make the following points:

a) The article focuses upon Acts 7:48 which Van Aarde translates as 'The most high God does live in houses, but not houses built by men.' I am unsure how this translation can be obtained from the Greek ἡλίθιος οὐχ ὁ ὅγιος ἐν κτεινητοῖς κατοικεῖ. On one view, this statement by Stephen is an expression of the negative theology of the type later popularised by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, rather than containing some reference to the characteristics of God intelligible on the basis of human analogy. I think Van Aarde should
explain how he comes to translate Acts 7:48 in this way. It does not seem to me that the word οἶκοις is necessarily to be implied after χειροποιήτοις since a virtually identical phrase occurs in Acts 17:24 with the word ναοῖς in this position.

b In section 5 Van Aarde offers the material used to support the proposition that the temple is 'broadened' as a symbol or metaphor. Although some material is provided as to this process in Jewish history, especially at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, it is not entirely clear to me to what material in Luke-Acts Van Aarde is referring. Thus, although I agree that Luke-Acts reports God's presence among the socially despised in and through the new dispensation inaugurated by Jesus, it is not clear to me what role the temple has to play in this process. Perhaps Van Aarde could refer to the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple in Acts 3:1-10. On one view, here we see a person previously excluded from entry into the temple by virtue of his physical condition who is cured and thereby enabled to enter (3:8-9). On the other hand this passage could be interpreted as one which is very traditional with respect to Jewish attitudes — not suggestive at all of there being anything wrong with the exclusion of such a man from the temple, merely that the miracle which occurs to him allows him to become part of the system, as it were. Accordingly, I believe that the article would profit by Van Aarde's proffering more data from Luke-Acts to support his thesis that the initial exclusivity with regard to access to the temple had become relaxed as far as Luke-Acts is concerned.

c I consider that the logic of Van Aarde's position on this question is such that he should engage more fully in a detailed conversation with the views of J H Elliott. This would, in my view, assist his argument. Thus, although he refers to his penultimate paragraph to Acts 5:42 (Every day in the Temple and at home they did not cease teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ), which is very difficult to reconcile with Elliott's basic proposition that the household replaces the temple in Luke-Acts, other material which he refers to in passing could be developed as relevant to the same issue. A key passage used by Elliott to support his thesis is Luke 18:9-14 (the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector). This passage does not, in my view, support Elliott because it does not propose a situation in which the house rather than the temple becomes the locus of justification, since the tax collector is himself justified in the temple. This is shown by the fact that he goes home 'having been justified' (δεδικαιωμένος — 18:14). Furthermore, the fact that the scene shifts from the temple to the οἶκος during the course of Acts may be explained simply by virtue of the fact that the focus shifts from Palestine to the diaspora. When the story requires it, the temple becomes a central focus once again — see Paul's return to Jerusalem in Acts 21.

7 Lastly I have found Van Aarde's argument very useful in considering how Babylon in the Old Testament becomes a metaphor (of Rome) in the Book of Revelation.