THE JERUSALEM COMMUNITY
AS ROLE-MODEL FOR A COSMOPOLITAN
CHRISTIAN GROUP.
A SOCIO-LITERARY ANALYSIS OF LUKE'S SYMBOLIC
UNIVERSE

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ABSTRACT
This article focusses on the Lucan symbolic universe and ideology as it is reflected in his narration of the Jerusalem community in Acts 1:1-8:3. In this regard the author-narrator’s literary strategies in communicating the 'correct' ideological information to his intended audience to make them aware of the contents of their lifeworld and how to legitimately partake in its various socio-religious processes, receive particular attention. Finally, in an effort to come to terms with the performative functions of Acts, a possible social scenario is constructed in which this text functioned originally.

1 INTRODUCTION
The aim of this article is to investigate the symbolic universe and underlying ideology of the author of Acts as they are reflected in his narrative concerning the Jerusalem community in Ac 1:1-8:3, as well as the socio-communicative function of Acts. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's well-known phenomenological approach to the sociology of knowledge, and in particular their conception of 'symbolic universes' as being the highest level of legitimation of the social reality that humans create, form the basis of this analysis. Due to the fact that the available material in Acts is encoded in the narrative textmode, insights from the field of narratology will also be used in this investigation, since it is my contention that form and contents cannot be separated.

2 BERGER AND LUCKMANN'S CONCEPT OF 'SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE'
According to Berger and Luckmann, the existence of any social institution is the result of a process of 'habitualisation'; that is, the patterned repetition of human action (1967:70-75). Clear lines of conduct are connected to each role that the social actors play in this man-made social reality. But this reality must also be made meaningful and subjectively plausible to its members. Legitimation, which ‘...not only tells the individual why he should perform one action and not another...’, but...
'...also tells him why things are what they are' (1967:111), fulfils this function. Berger and Luckmann distinguish four levels of legitimation, namely:

1. language with its built-in legitimating explanations of reality,
2. propositions in a rudimentary form,
3. explicit theories by which an institutional order is legitimated in terms of a body of knowledge, and
4. symbolic universes.

According to the authors, symbolic universes integrate all sectors of the institutional order '...into an all-embracing frame of reference, which now constitutes a universe in the literal sense of the word, because all human experience can now be conceived of as taking place within it' (1967:114). In this final step in man's social construction of reality, the precariousness of the world is overcome. People's lives are now meaningfully ordered and everything is put in its right place. Not only does it integrate the realities of marginal situations in the life of the individual and the community (such as death) by incorporating them into an overarching universe of meaning, but it also gives order to history. Symbolic universes also encompass and refer to realities which do not occur in everyday experience. In this regard religion, with its symbolism, provides a particularly important and all-embracing 'protective canopy' over social reality. Symbolic universes, however, become problematic when they are no longer taken for granted by their inhabitants. This happens particularly when societies are confronted with groups which favour different interpretations of reality. Conceptual machineries designed to maintain their respective universes are then put into operation, of which mythology, theology and science are the most conspicuous (1967:125-134).

### 3 SYMBOLIC UNIVERSES AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament presents us with textual versions of the worlds inhabited by its authors and their readers, or, at least, with some aspects thereof. These worlds or symbolic universes, which encompass and give meaning to the lifeworlds in which social interaction between the inhabitants takes place, are of course the worlds as they are known, experienced and, as in the case with the New Testament documents, reflected upon by their inhabitants. Any attempt to analyse the symbolic universes in the New Testament is, however, faced with some difficulties:

In the first place, the New Testament offers only the outlines of these universes, since the various authors refer only to those aspects which are relevant to the purposes of their writings. Due to this lack of sufficient social data, it is therefore not possible to form a comprehensive picture of the symbolic universes reflected in these early Christian documents.

In the second place, the 'ideological' character of the New Testament must also
be taken into consideration, since most of these writings offer reflections upon, and justifications for, symbolic universes which are threatened in one way or another. For example they frequently address problems such as doubt and disagreement with persons and factions within their own communities in order to prevent them from "migrating" to other universes, and they also deal with conflicting religious interpretations of reality.

Thirdly, we do not have much information available on the social contexts of the various Christian communities in the New Testament era. This kind of information is of course necessary in order to make sense of the dynamic relationship between the socio-religious realities of early Christianity and their efforts to maintain it (cf Elliott 1993:92-93).

Fourthly, we do not have access to all the semantic domains of the different early Christian communities' language systems. Language is undoubtedly one of the most important symbol systems of any universe, since it does not only encode most aspects of the social reality that come into being as a result of people's 'world-making' activities, but it also serves as the 'storehouse' of the community's established knowledge (cf Fowler 1986). It supplies the tools by means of which the inhabitants of a symbolic universe give expression to their ideas and beliefs, and it also plays a crucial role in the cognitive legitimation and maintenance of any symbolic universe. Every community therefore has its own linguistic codes with specific meanings attached to them. In the different forms of social interaction between group members these meanings are then shared with one another, so that they learn what the boundaries of their lifeworlds are, and how to legitimately partake in the different transactions and processes of their world.

In the fifth place, the New Testament does not present us with a single, homogeneous symbolic universe shared by all the respective early Christian communities. Although many aspects thereof overlapped, differences of opinion regarding the content and boundaries of these universes (Meeks 1986:120), as well as to the symbols and rituals that were used in the construction and maintenance thereof, existed from the earliest times. The boundaries of the early Christian communities' worlds were also not precisely defined and demarcated. While they struggled to create 'their own world', they simultaneously also had to defend it against conflicting definitions of reality.

Finally, the New Testament documents do not stand in a one-to-one relationship with the extra-textual reality to which they refer. In other words, they do not present their intended readers with 'objective' descriptions of certain episodes or facts, but rather with interpretations thereof, with the result that the mode of reference in these documents changes. This fact forewarns us against the so-called 'referential fallacy'; that is: 'construing the signifier alone as the sign and as referring directly to the real world, without regard to the signified as the conceptual aspect of the sign' (Lategan 1985:70). Any act of inscripturation, however, does not only abolish the
one-to-one relationship between the linguistic signs and their referents; it also creates a certain measure of distance between text and reader, which, again opens up a new world before the text, as well as new possibilities for the reinterpretation of reality.

In order then to come terms with Luke's symbolic universe and ideology as they are implicitly reflected in his narrative concerning the first Christian community in Jerusalem in Ac 1:1-8:3 (which functions as a 'pars pro toto' for his symbolic universe), we must keep the above-mentioned stumbling blocks in mind. It is obviously not possible to form a complete picture of his symbolic universe, but we can at least draw the outlines thereof.

4 THE JERUSALEM COMMUNITY ACCORDING TO ACTS 1:1-8:3

4.1 Ideology in Acts 1:1-8:3
Acts does not present us with the 'full picture', or for that matter, with an objective picture of the Jerusalem community. Luke, as we shall henceforth refer to the author-narrator, in his 'theological-history' (cf Aune 1987:116-141) portrays only those aspects of the early Christian movement which are relevant to his own purposes. However, the presence of certain anomalies in his presentation of the Jerusalem community does not discredit him as a historian (cf Hengel 1979:61 Squires 1993:20-23); Historical accounts are indeed not mere agglomerations of the 'bruta facta'. They represent subjective interpretations of the available information according to the perspectives of their authors, as co-determined by the circumstances of their production.

Luke formally makes use of the narrative mode in Acts (cf Powell 1991:100-106). As a literary product, the function of this narrative text is not merely to provide the readers with historical information or to address their aesthetic feelings and values (contra Pervo 1987:3), but rather to move them ideologically from one position to another (Tannehill 1990:4). Their opinions and attitudes must be altered so that intended actions may follow. From a pragmatic point of view, the text of Acts thus functions as an illocutionary force in its role as facilitator and meeting-place between author and readers according to a culture-specific set of rules which also govern the interpersonal relations within the boundaries of the selected textmode.

On the informative and directive levels, Acts provides the readers with the 'necessary' and 'correct' knowledge of their symbolic universe in order to adjust their behaviour accordingly. Obviously this kind of knowledge is not value-free, but reflects the religious ideology of the author. Ideology, which in this context is not used in a pejorative sense, but rather as a reference to the shared values, norms and practices of a particular group (cf Joubert 1990:339), is encoded in the lexical and grammatical-syntactic structures of Acts. An investigation of its narrative structures...
and the strategies employed in the communication process could therefore tell us a great deal about the author's ideology. From a sociology-of-knowledge perspective, any religious ideology also represents a form of systematic reflection upon a prior body of endangered knowledge possessed by the inhabitants of a specific symbolic universe. This is obviously the case with the recipients of Acts (cf sec 5). Due to the fact that many inhabitants of this symbolic universe did not completely internalise all the typifications, meanings and obligations associated with their new roles as Christians in their dommunication and interaction with significant others, such as Luke, they did not draw the boundaries of their world in exactly the same way as he did. Luke is therefore forced not only to supply more 'specialised' knowledge concerning the problem areas in question, of course within the limits of the narrative textmode, but also to define the boundaries of their universe.

Luke's dramatic story concerning the Jerusalem community is realistic; it supposes a reference point in the extra-textual reality. He attains this sense of realism and reference with the help of various literary techniques. Already in the prologue (1:1-8) Luke, by making use of 'iterative narration' (cf Genette 1980:116), creates the impression that Acts is a factual, researched report on the early Christian mission (cf the short references to his previous work, and to the explicit reader, Theophilus, as well as his summary of Jesus' last discourse with his disciples). The author's third-person narration in this part of the story, as well as the fact that he does not refer to the characters' emotions, but rather concentrates on descriptions of their religious actions, also implicitly contributes to the 'objective' picture which he wants to present of the first Christian community. According to Stanzel (1984:150), first-person narrators, due to their existential involvement in their stories, as a rule seem less reliable in their portrayal of episodes than third-person narrators who can conceal their ideological viewpoints behind the narrated events in the story.

Luke makes use of various narrative techniques in Ac 1:1-8:3 to attain progression in the story and to impose a formal structure on the narrated events (cf Kurz 1993). In this regard different narrative forms, such as speeches (2:14-36; 3:12-26) and scenes (1:1-2:13; 6:1-7), are used to great effect. Another prominent narrative form in Ac 1:1-8:3 is summaries (2:42-7; 4:32-5; 5:12-16). Narrators usually make use of summaries when they describe aspects crucial to the plot and meaning of the story as a whole, while scenes are primarily used to describe the actions and thoughts of the characters in greater detail. The summaries function as micro-narratives within the plot of Acts (Mussner 1984:27). They deviate from the general narrative pattern of scenes and speeches and do not have any temporal connection with the surrounding material, a literary technique applied with great effect by the narrator to emphasise on these passages.

Acts is structured around the theme of the Holy Spirit who, together with God and Jesus as implicit protagonists in the story, continues the work of the risen Jesus through Peter, the explicit protagonist (and later on in the story, Paul), and the other
Apostles (cf Gowler 1991:177). The author-narrator identifies himself with the ideological viewpoint of the implicit and explicit protagonists. This is reflected in his commentary on the narrated events: he judges the Jerusalem community's responses to Peter and the other Apostles' words and deeds in very positive terms (cf 2:43; 5:41) while, on the other hand, his comments concerning the antagonists in the first eight chapters, namely the Jewish religious leaders, are very negative (cf 3:12-26). Luke's descriptions of the Apostles and the Jerusalem community also reflect his ideology: he refers to them as: οἱ πιστεύοντες (2:44), while the 'outsiders' are: ἡ σκολιὰ γενεὰ (2:40), and: οἱ πονηροί (3:26). The Jerusalem community is also portrayed as a God-fearing community who visit the temple daily (2:46a); who share their meals with one another in a spirit of unity (2:46b); who continually praise God (2:47a); whose members are καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία (4:32), and whose behaviour is continually, and visibly, influenced by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the most important inhabitants of their universe in the metaphysical sphere. For example: when their existence is physically threatened (4:23-31), they simply pray to God, and in response He intervenes directly in their social world (cf 4:31).

The Jerusalem community is also depicted in the summaries as the embodiment of the ancient Greek ideal of friendship. Prominent philosophers and writers, such as Aristotle, Euripides and Plato, promoted the idea that friends should share their material possessions with one another (cf Klauck 1989:69-100). Aristotle, in his Ethica Nicomachea (IX 8 1168b) for example, describes friendship as follows: οἱ παρομοίαι δὲ πάσαι ὁμογενεμονοῦσιν ὅλον τὸ μία ψυχὴ καὶ κοινὰ τὰ φίλων. The expression: ἀπαντά κοινά in Ac 2:44 and 4:32 has a direct bearing on the term: κοινά τὰ φίλων, which was already in use as early as the fifth century BC Luke obviously then wants to convey the message to his intended readers that '...was bei
den Griechen als ein Charakteristikum des goldenen Zeitalters oder philosophischer
er Utopie galt, die Urzeit auch der christlichen Kirche gekenzeichnet hatte.' (Plümacher 1972:18).

Luke does not only make use of Greek traditions in his description of the Jerusalem congregation. They are also depicted as the embodiment of the promise in Dt 15:4 that there would not be any poverty amongst the people of Israel if they obeyed God's commands (cf. 4:34). Whereas the main emphasis in the summaries falls on the Jerusalem community as embodiment of the Greek ideal of friendship, it is prominently portrayed in Peter's speeches and in the scenes as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises in the Torah and the Prophets (cf sec 4.2). According to Horn (1983:43), it is: '...die Verwirklichung im Schnittpunkt sowohl jüd. als griech.
Hoffnungen....' The application of these traditions in the description of the first Christian congregation therefore not only reflects the Lucan ideology, but in all probability also supposes an extra-textual audience that was acquainted with the normative cultures of Israel and Hellenism.
4.2 Symbolic universe, ideology and characterisation in Acts 1:1-8:3

Luke's ideological viewpoint in Acts, which is reflected in his language as well as in his commentary on the narrated events, helps to dictate the intended readers' perception of, and their responses to the different characters in the story and the values they represent. In this regard his aim is obviously to move them to fully accept his own perception of reality, which, according to his reflection thereon in the text, is presented as being a direct continuation of the religious universe proclaimed by Peter and the other Apostles.

Peter and the rest of the Apostles (who function as helper-characters in the story), as the 'visual representatives' of Luke's symbolic universe, dominate events in the first eight chapters of Acts. Within the story-time of the narrative, the readers gradually gain more insight into these characters. In fact, they become analytic tools by calling attention to what is going on in the story as the plot unfolds. As the readers then begin to form an image of Peter's character in particular, by connecting and assessing his actions, certain expectations are set up, which, in turn, offer a setting for his subsequent actions.

Luke then presents Peter, and to a lesser extent the other Apostles, as authoritative revealers of God's salvation plan and as miracle workers (cf 3:1-10; 5:12-16). For example: on the day of Pentecost, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which was accompanied by a sound like the roaring of a gale and tongues of fire (2:1-13), Peter is able to explain these supernatural events in a public address as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. An important religious symbol of Israel, namely, one of its holy books (which were 'officially' used in the conceptual legitimation of their symbolic universe), is thus reinterpreted to accommodate and sanction these events. As a matter of fact, Peter consistently reinterprets Israel's history, as well as the present social and symbolic realities of the characters within the narrative, in terms of the Christ-event (2:22-36; cf also Barrett 1991:238). This Messianic reinterpretation of reality of course holds important implications for them, as well as for the intended readers: They are now all invited to become part of this new interpretation of reality, which is exclusive, since it provides the only legitimate means of getting into the right relationship with the inhabitants of the metaphysical sphere. No other religious version of reality is able to save the people of Israel (4:12). The same also holds true for the Gentiles. Throughout Acts, Luke makes it clear that those Gentiles who accept Jesus Christ as God's ultimate revelation, such as Cornelius (Ac 10), equally share in his eschatological salvation.

According to Luke, the symbolic universe proclaimed by the Apostles creates a meaningful and stable world for its inhabitants, where every aspect of life is accorded its rightful place. In the first place it determines and regulates people's ultimate orientations and behaviour in relation to the inhabitants of the metaphysical reality (cf also Neyrey 1991:271-304). Especially in Peter's speeches the point is made that both Jews and Gentiles who accept his version of reality, are now consid-
ered to be the only ones who are at peace with God, while those who reject it are regarded as sinners.

Secondly, this symbolic universe orders history. In Ac 1-8:3 Israel's history is given a new meaning, since the Jerusalem community is now considered to be the legitimate heir and recipient of God's promises to Israel. Its members now experience Christ's reign through the Spirit, which not only bestows meaning on their earthly existence with all its suffering (3:23-31; 5:17-42; 7:54-8:3), but also on individual members' deaths (7:59-60).

In Ac 1-8:3 the apostolic (= Lukan!) symbolic universe is 'visualised' in the different symbols, rituals and forms of social interaction within the Jerusalem community. These aspects of course help to create and transmit the knowledge needed by people to legitimately partake in the processes of their lifeworld through different processes of internalisation. According to Luke then, baptism, as an initiatory ritual, signifying the converts' switch from the world of sinners to the Christian community, fulfils an important function in this regard (2:38-41). Other rituals, such as the Jerusalem community's communal meals at different homes (2:42,46; cf Blue 1994:130-138), their daily prayers (2:42,47; 4:24-30), their laying of the proceeds of the properties they sold at the Apostles' feet (4:34) in order to help needy fellow-believers, the instruction of the Apostles (2:42; 4:12-26), as well as the signs and miracles performed by them (3:1-12; 5:12-16), all serve to distinguish them from other groups. Within the framework of Acts these means of religious expression play a crucial role in determining and ordering the contents and borders of the Lucan universe. By partaking in these types of rituals and socio-religious activities, the intended readers are thus also assured that their behaviour is in accordance with God's will.

The Jerusalem community is presented by Luke as a renewal movement, a purged version of Israel's faith (the 'eschatological Israel'), from which the afore-mentioned have broken away. In other words, the members of the Jerusalem community, according to Luke's construct, did not leave the parent body to form a new faith, but rather to reestablish the old one from which Israel had drifted. In this regard Luke refers to a number of practices, rituals and symbols which suggest continuity between Israel's beliefs and those of the Jerusalem community, such as their use of the former's holy books, their belief in Yahweh, their regular visits to the temple (2:46; 5:12) and many of its members' obedience to the Mosaic law and ceremonial practices (11:1-18; 21:20). However, there is one serious discontinuity between them, namely, the Apostles' proclamation of Christ as the ressurrected Messiah to Jews and Gentiles, which, according to Luke, distinguishes them from Israel in general, and which forms the basis of their symbolic universe.
5 THE PRAGMATIC FUNCTION OF ACTS

Acts, as a pragmatic text, fulfils an important socio-communicative or performative function. As an 'authoritative' narrative about the nature of the recipients' reality and their place within it, it also serves as a response to their needs and problems. Throughout the narration Luke therefore communicates the 'correct' information to them in order to make them aware of the contents and borders of their lifeworld and of how they can legitimately partake of its various socio-religious processes.

From a religious perspective, the author's intention is to get his readers to identify fully with the contents of Peter's sermons and the exemplary behaviour of the Jerusalem community, the members of which serve as the embodiment of Christ's promise in 1:8. According to Luke, God's plan of salvation has been fully revealed in the apostolic kerygma and wholeheartedly accepted by the Jerusalem community, as his narration of their positive responses to the Apostles' message so vividly illustrates. In this regard his various comments on the sermons and miracles of the Apostles articulate, guide and anticipate the response which he eventually wants to elicit from his recipients (cf. 2:47; 3:10-11; 4:4; 4:21; 5:11; 5:42; 6:6-7).

Luke's readers obviously did not fully share in his religious perception of reality. But can we in any way ascertain what their social situation was like? Although this is quite difficult, due to a shortage of information, as well as to the fact that Acts, as an autonomous literary-theological interpretation of reality, is not directly transparent with regard to historical data, we can at least draw some of the outlines of their lifeworld. Our presupposition in this regard, following Gumperz (1982), is that language does not only reflect important aspects of its physical and social environments, but also the values of the different speech communities who use it.

Luke probably wrote Acts for a mixed Christian group consisting of Jews and Gentiles. His references to the Old Testament on the one hand, and his narration of Paul's gentile mission later in Acts on the other hand, point in this direction. Whether this group was predominantly Jewish or predominantly Gentile is not possible to determine (cf. in this regard Sanders 1987; Jervell 1988; Stegemann 1991 Sanders 1993; Merkel 1994). However, Luke's frequent references to conflict within the Jerusalem community concerning the validity of Jewish laws and rituals (6:1-7; 11:1-18; 15:1-29), probably point to the fact that serious differences of opinion existed amongst the recipients in this regard. Although they were unified concerning the kerygma of Jesus as the resurrected Messiah, they did not fully agree on the rituals and symbols which 'visualised' and legitimised their symbolic universe. The Jewish Christians still kept the circumcision as initiatory rite, which signalled their being part of God's elect. The only way in which the Gentile Christians, according to them, could fully share in these privileges was through circumcision. Jewish Christians' rituals were mainly organised around the identification and removal of all forms of impurity from their ranks according to Jewish religious laws. On their
part Gentile group members probably did not entertain a strict classification system with regard to purity rules. Instead they placed great emphasis on 'internal' aspects, such as repentance and conversion. They considered their bodies as being under constant attack from demonic powers which could cause them to seek their own honour instead of that of God and the community (5:1-11). Therefore their rituals focussed on the maintenance of barriers between Christians and non-Christians in general (cf. the 'faith-principle' in 4:23-31), and the 'protection' of their hearts (20:17-35). Due then to the sustained efforts of the Jewish Christians in particular to maintain their cultural practices and values, these factions became polarised around their own symbols.

Luke now writes to his readers in order to 'correct' their understanding of reality and to clarify their position as believers. In this regard he makes it clear that their roots lie in Israel. Christianity is not a new religion, since the God of Israel is still the same God who is now at work in the Christian movement through Christ and the Spirit. At the same time, however, Jesus' resurrection and the events at Pentecost (2:1-39) clearly separate them from the dominant Jewish culture. Only those Christian groups who adhere to the apostolic teaching, and not the historical Israel, are therefore the legitimate heirs to God's promises.

In Ac 1-8:3 Luke also leads his readers to reinterpret their existing (culturally orientated) value systems in the light of the symbolic universe proclaimed by Peter and the other Apostles. This entails knowledge of the fact that, in spite of continuities with Israel's religion, serious discontinuities exist with regard to the keeping of certain rituals. Therefore Jewish group members, in accordance with the apostles' authoritative prescriptions in this regard, must not 'force' Gentile Christians to keep the circumcision. On their part Gentile members must respect the 'legitimate' cultural practices of Jewish Christians (cf 15:28-29).

6 SUMMARY

Luke wrote Acts to a cosmopolitan Christian group. As a dramatic narrative about the Holy Spirit's work in the formation and world-wide growth of the Christian movement, it 'visualises' his own symbolic universe. In this regard Luke's description of the role of Peter in the formation of the Jerusalem community and the latter's exemplary behaviour serves as an important identification medium for the recipients of Acts. Luke (indirectly) communicates the message to them that, although their religious roots lie in Israel, their faith in Jesus as the Messiah separates them from Israel in general. They must therefore regard their respective cultural rituals, ceremonies and values as subordinate to the unifying apostolic kerugma about Jesus. As a group which adheres to the apostolic teaching, they must then, on analogy of the Jerusalem community, fully comply with the Apostles' commands and teaching.
WORKS CONSULTED


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