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ABSTRACT
Context is critical when discussing what Luke puts forth with his heroes and other narrated characters. To do this, some observations regarding the prevalent intellectual, spiritual atmosphere in a Greco-Roman urban centre are made as well as some suggestions for situating Luke-Acts within this general experience at a possible occasion for a probable audience. Luke basically accepts his society's values. His nuanced and sophisticated way of relating the Jesus story and the heroes of the Jesus movement to contemporary beliefs and values reflects an attempt at reconciliation. It would be quite difficult and complex to retell Luke's stories today, and a few remarks regarding this issue are made.

1 INTRODUCTION
Any consideration of the truth of one's convictions cannot be divorced from the kind of community one belongs to (or believes one belongs to) and what that community should be. Given this epistemological reality, the implication for a discussion of Christian truths and ethics is that such talk must include the identity of the community involved, the history and traditions of that community.

This is where the concept 'narrative' is significant. History and tradition exist as narratives. Every community and polity involve and require a narrative. 'The form and substance of a community is narrative dependent and therefore what counts as “social ethics” is a correlative of that narrative' (Hauerwas 1981:10).

Narratives are not neutral, as romantic ethnology would have us believe. They become authentic or inauthentic according to the 'interests' which they serve. A useful and interesting interpretation of the Lukan stories should attempt a delineation of such interests. That is, what did Luke put forth with his heroes and other characters which he, through his narratives, presented to his audiences?

2 NARRATIVE AND INTERPRETATION
Underlying my discussion is the assumption that with regard to the use of narratives the work of interpretation will be done as best possible. In other words, and once more an immense problem in its own right is at stake here,
anyone engaging a story to be retold, or generating some narrative, also assumes the responsibility to understand that narrative as best one can. Whether listening to a story, or reading one, or telling one, the very act of doing so includes asking questions about that story, trying to understand it.

We must consider a story in its context; we have an ethical obligation to let them tell their stories and not to make these storytellers into our own image, even if we admire them greatly. We can hardly claim to adopt a story in our quest for virtue whilst having no regard for those who taught us their stories.

With these remarks I invoke the complex activity of historical understanding. Interpretation is contextualising. Talking about a text is talking about its context, and the context-text continuum is a matter of imaginative construction, interweaving texts and their possible settings and circumstances with questions and explanations to picture some of the social, psychological, experiential and religious aspects of the people and their activities in, behind and around a story.\(^1\)

It is particularly the issue of realistic, possible and actual context that must be dealt with. At times, it seems as if for many New Testament scholars religious activity can only be understood in the setting of theology and church, implying that the study of a religion is the study of the learned understanding of doctrine. However, we need to understand how religion figures in the ordinary conduct of people’s lives. This study is an investigation of a part of earliest Christianity, a subsection of their ‘religious beliefs and practices in relation to particular social situations’ (cf Lienhardt 1971:397).

Guessing the setting of a communicative event is in a sense saying something about what one considers to be usual or normal for such a supposed situation. A concept of a situation and a perception of normality of performance in such a situation are inseparable in a pragmatic sense; one cannot be determined without determining the other at the same time.

3 SETTING

With the term ‘setting’ I refer to context in the sense of actual, relevant frame. The original setting is impossible to determine, but there are ways of increas-

\(^1\) Part of the context-text issue is the problem of the representation of ‘history’ in language. Despite the complexities involved we dare not neglect the rhetoric of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ in our moral discourses, including our use of narratives. Rowland (1987:268-271) argues extensively against the naïve use of narratives, emphasising the need to establish standards by which to evaluate moral questions, hence underlining the importance of interpretation.

To do this, some remarks regarding the prevalent intellectual, spiritual atmosphere in a Greco-Roman urban centre will be made as well as some suggestions for situating Luke-Acts within this general experience at a possible occasion for a probable audience. I will mainly make use of three sets of documents, namely the Punica, the writings of Josephus, and the Satyricon, in order to suggest a framework.

3.1 The general spiritual climate

3.1.1 The rise and establishment of the Flavian dynasty has some distinct characteristics that must be taken into account to understand early urban Christianity.

The fall of the Julio-Claudio imperial family and the war in Judaea was not at the time the world's only troubles: every part of the Roman empire was 'in a state of turmoil and panic' (BJ 7.79). The population of the Roman empire had experienced once more the disasters of civil war and the fierce effects of rebellion, and the imperative need of avoiding these.

Vespasian succeeded in restoring the Augustan system after it had been shaken to the foundations, and there followed more than a century of stability. The old republican nobility had been greatly reduced by executions and forced suicides under the Julio-Claudian emperors. Now a large number of new municipal families entered the senate under Flavian patronage.

Vespasian paid particular attention to the provinces. He seems to have encouraged the spread of Roman citizenship and was generous with grants of money and colonial status to cities (Wells 1984: 179).

It was particularly Domitian who saw himself, like Augustus, as curator morum et legum. He expended considerable energy in remaking society along lines suggestive of a sentimental longing for Augustan times. It was also Domitian who made a very significant contribution to the development of urban life in the Eastern provinces, particularly Asia Minor.

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2 The term Luke-Acts is used to indicate the series of performed stories of which the written remains we today describe as the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. 'Luke' is simply a designation for the author/narrator/performer of these stories. As will become clear further on, the emphasis is on the presentation, the performance of these narratives. For discussion of some background material and theoretical reflection see Botha 1992 and 1993.

3 Brief overview: Garzetti 1974: 228, 239, 241. Most textbooks concentrate on political and military matters concerning this history, of which a good sample is Grant 1979: 230-236. Still very useful despite its brevity is Charlesworth 1936.

4 Magie (1950: 566 ff) describes Vespasian's 'rehabilitation' of the empire's economy and correctly notes the Flavians' explicit policy of increased centralization of the administration and the advancement of provincial families (e.g. 582). Domitian's imita-
The Roman literary tradition of the late first century seems to recall some aspects of early Augustan literature. These writers have lived through catastrophe and are expressing their reactions. They tend to attribute the tragedies to divine anger and suggest the need for religious and moral revival. A nostalgic yearning for the values of old and attempts at reform (cf. amongst many references, Suetonius Vesp 8-10; Liebeschuetz 1979:166 n 5), and the implicit and explicit references to dealing with monarchy and a changing, 'new' aristocracy are indeed characteristic of the Flavian dynasty.

This is the period in which the ruler cult developed into a particularly powerful social phenomenon. One reason is the acceptance of monarchy by society. Monarchy is an alienation from the government of the community which tends to undermine the traditional civic values and ambitions. The inevitable personal power relations radically transform that which determines motivation, self-respect, values, dignity, honour.

3.1.2 This general experience is well illustrated by the Punica, an epic poem written by Silius Italicus, a senator whose public career reached its climax as proconsul Asiae in 77/8, the highest honour a senator could receive.

Silius Italicus (26-101 CE) certainly wrote the first six books, probably most of the poem, in the reign of Domitian. Brief summaries of what we know about Silius are available in Duff 1934 and Campbell 1970. The Punica is the longest extant Latin poem, generally described in disparaging terms—"Silius wrote poetry with painstaking diligence rather than natural talent", according to Pliny Ep 3.7.5—and is widely ignored by scholarship. Much of the prejudice against Silius' poetic skills is simply misplaced (Ahl, Davis & Pomery 1986:2493; Matier 1989). Ogilvie (1980:223) describes the Punica as a nostalgic work of escapism. I am not interested in the supposed lack of poetic qualities in Silius' poem. Though a historical epic (in more than 12 200 verses!) on the Second Punic War, the text is relevant to our study in various (and unexpected) ways. The Punica illustrates with considerable power the religious ambience of educated Romans of the late first century. His adaptations of historical material (from Livy and poetic material from Virgil), the speeches he invents, his vivid (at times) narrations and the characters he creates reveal much about the longing for Roman values, common didactic traditions, and more. The Punica presents the history of the world as a conflict between fides/pietas and furor, and demonstrates that fides, especially for a Roman, leads to a life of glory and success while a life of furor leads to disgrace and failure. Carthage manifests hatred and perfidy, whilst the Romans, with the exceptions of some of their leaders, have betrayed their heritage of fides and pietas. Only after the battle of Cannae the Romans re-evaluate their lives and return to the worship of the gods. The willingness to sacrifice personal happiness and well-being for one's country or family and gods gives the moral strength that leads to victory. Silius engages in some moralising; he has a rather low view of some of his contemporaries.
The pessimistic Bellum civile of Lucan, written before his forced suicide in 68 CE, shows the callousness of the gods (fate) and paints a dark picture of Rome in decline. Silius, two decades later, has a more constructive attitude towards his situation. His epic reflects a spirit not of opposition but one of support for the status quo. He views the current developments optimistically and prefers to show Roman virtues in action, the virtues that are the essential strengths of society. One such value concerns the facts of power. Virgil proclaims the divine appointment of Augustus: 'here, here is the Man, the promised one you know of, Caesar Augustus, son of a god destined to rule where Saturn ruled of old in Latium, and there bring back the age of god...' (Aen 6.791). Silius echoes this belief when he writes about the Flavian dynasty and Domitian as ruling emperor: 'Then, O son of gods and father of gods to be, rule the happy earth with paternal sway. Heaven shall welcome you at last in your old age and Quirinus give up his throne to you' (Sil 3.625-629).

The Punica, as one would expect, is full of Stoic ideas. In fact, Silius uses Stoic philosophy and motifs to infuse his narrative with optimism, evoking Virgilian confidence and hope. 'Virtue (virtus) is its own noblest reward' (13.663). The human mind contains a spark of divine intelligence. Heaven opens her gates to those who in life have sought virtue and preserved the divine element within them (15.68-78). 'Man is born for glory, if he can appreciate heaven's gift, and in pursuit of glory he is happy' (15.88-89). The great heroes of Rome show the traditional Stoic virtues: freedom from passion, no jealousy, opposition to emotional extremism and so forth; often they are impressive exempla of fides and patientia. 8

(10.657-658, 14.684-688) and is careful in making very clear that only the path of fides can avoid the depravities and excesses so evident in his own time and age. Vessey 1974 elaborates on Martian's attempts to secure Silius' patronage and Pliny's criticism of the whole effort. McDermott & Orentzel (1977) discusses Silius' praise of Domitian, emphasising that we should beware of uncritical acceptance of the hostile tradition about that emperor. Downing (1988) deals competently with the issue of the relevance of 'higher' literature to the study of early Christianity.

7 'And that he [Vespasian] shall have the right and power ... to transact and do whatever things divine, human, public and private he deems to serve the advantage and the overriding interest of the state', from the bronze tablet containing the law of investiture by the Senate conferring imperial powers on Emperor Caesar Vaspasian. See Corpus Inscriptionem Latinarum 6.930 (partly cited in Lewis & Reinhold 1966:89-91).

8 A Stoic theme which runs through the whole of the Punica is the imitation of Hercules. The mythical labours are interpreted allegorically as symbolic of victory over chaos, and Herculus is seen as a great benefactor who makes the world safe for humans. Hercules became a god through suffering and 'Herculean suffering' characterises the heroes of the Punica. 'The appeal of Hercules was of course not only due to the fact that philosophers had taken him up. Almost alone of the Roman gods he had a
In the *Punica* the intervention of the gods often dominates. Particularly the decisions of Jupiter prevail. This is not a perspective in which divine intervention and human action combine equally to achieve a particular result. In Silius’ poem Rome is saved simply by the miraculous intervention of Jupiter—not unlike what happens to Paul on his journeys. The *Punica* reflects a general tendency to consider the existence of god and of his moral demands the essential fact about the world and to pay less attention to the chain of natural cause and effect. The world is simply a place where supernatural government is concerned with moral behaviour.

Although society has changed, it provides a renewed opportunity to invoke the good values of earlier times. Society is basically good, we can live together if we can beware of uncivic behaviour, remain faithful to the gods, maintain social structures.

There are problems, yes, but people (upper class Romans for Silius) need only rediscover their heritage, the providential care of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Silius presents the wars of Hannibal as a test devised by Jupiter to shake the Romans out of sloth and complacency and so prepare them for their role of governing the world (3.571-587; Ahl, Davis & Pomeroy 1986:2504).


Dio Chrysostom describes how, while walking through the hippodrome, he encountered people playing the flute, dancing, performing tricks, reading out a poem, singing and recounting a history or tale (DioChrys 20.10). And Philostratus tells about Appolonius’ encounter with Elis, who, considering himself quite an ‘evangelist’ (ἐγκωμιαστικός τις εἶναι σφόδρα) for Zeus, was at the point of giving a public reading of an oration praising Zeus which he has written (VitAp 4.30). Neither are impossible as settings for Luke, but unlikely.

Assuming the very probable setting of patronage9 we should imagine a reading, a *recitatio*.

The “recitation” became the popular form of initial publication, providing the cheapest and quickest means of making works known to the largest educated recognizable personality, and his human origin and human failings made him more popular and approachable than other divinities. But in addition he evidently filled the growing need for a god who could serve as a moral pattern and this was only made possible by the way philosophers had allegorized his legendary achievements’ (Liebeschuetz 1979:173).

audience available before the invention of printing. ... All classical literature was written to read aloud, and the recitation is the logical development of the Symposium and the public performances of classical Greece (Sherwin-White 1966:115).

Such a recitation was of course more than mere reading: it was a presentation, a performance. The performance and the book worked in tandem—clearly shown by Tacitus’ Dialogus: it was the recitatio, not the book which made a man celebrated.10 The custom of organising such readings is a familiar aspect of Greco-Roman ‘sophistication’.11

Readings and performances were a common feature of the symposia and dinner parties given by the Greek and Roman wealthy in the age of Plutarch and Pliny and Luke.12 In fact, in view of Luke’s professed interest in eating together, in Christian banquets, we should probably look exactly here to find the actual setting for the presentation of his stories. Note how Jesus is idealised as teaching at a table (Lk 14; see further Steele 1984, Smith & Tausig 1990:54-57).

3.3 A possible audience

We can be even more precise about a possible audience if we continue with the above line of thought. How would a small group of wealthy, but non-aristocratic urbanites survive and prosper in the Roman empire? These were ‘fluid’ times of ‘new’ social formations in which merchants, artisans and freedpeople searched for powerful patrons and presented themselves as patrons. Although some early Christians were relatively wealthy, it is quite unlikely that they derived from the traditional ruling groups. Rather, the patrons and leaders of the Jesus movement should be sought amongst those whose origin or source of income condemned them to a restricted existence, even if they were rich.

10 ‘Recitations, however successful, are hardly ever reported round the whole city, let alone the provinces of this great empire’ (Tac Dial 10). Tacitus is exaggerating to praise oratory at the cost of book publishing. The point is evident: performance and publishing go hand in hand. Cf also Dialogus 2-3.

11 Seneca the elder attributes its invention to Asinius Pollio, though the custom must be quite old; Harris 1989:226. Pliny reproaches Septicius Clarus for not joining him for a considerable feast at which (or afterwards?) ‘you would have heard a comic play, a reader or singer, or all three if I felt generous’ (Ep 1.15.2). Pliny often mentions invitations to recitations: 1.13.2-4, 2.19.1, 3.18.4, 5.3, 5.12.1, 7.17.1-2. In 9.27 Pliny refers to a serial recitation of a work of history (Tacitus?).

12 Plut QuaestConv 7.8; Plin Ep 1.15.2. Succinct reviews of the (literary) symposium tradition in Smith 1987:614-617, Steele 1984:380-381.
They would necessarily have been urbanites, and thus part of the ambience created by the Flavian religious and moral restoration, propaganda and provincial promotion. 'At no time in the ancient world were the cultural and religious aspects of the public life of the towns mere trappings which urban elites could or could not afford' writes Brown (1978:34).

3.3.1 Josephus attempts to show forth the essence of Judaism as the history of a transcendent deity who is also providential and morally demanding (cf, e.g., AJ 1.14-15, 19-20). Judaism has no unseemly mythology, and once one cuts through the unbefitting mythologies of Greco-Romanism—like many other enlightened people—one finds some truths not unlike those of Judaism (Contra Apionem 2.237-251, 281). Luke thinks along similar lines in constructing a theology in which the Gentile world does not know God, yet does honour him (Acts 17.23; Haenchen 1971:529), and carefully contrasts mythological opinions with reverence for the true God (Acts 14).

Josephus reveals, through several prayers and other allusions in his works, his faith in the Creator God who has a special relationship with his 'children' (sons) to whom he has promised his gracious aid and protection (AJ 1.272-273, 4.40-50, 20.89-90, for examples). Josephus summarised his intentions in his introduction to the Antiquities:

The main lesson to be learned from this history by any who cares to peruse it is that men who conform to the will of God, and do not venture to transgress laws excellently laid down, prosper in all things beyond belief and are rewarded by God with felicity; whereas, in proportion as they depart from the strict observance of these laws, things else practicable become impracticable, and whatever imaginary good they strive to do ends in irretrievable disasters (AJ 1.14-15).

Such ethical providential theism is not strange to Luke's thinking (cf the exposition in Squires 1993). Luke and Josephus can be 'apologetic' (Acts 17.34, 26.28, AJ 20.17-98) but they accept the intellectual and moral respectability of their own groups. For Luke and Josephus, enlightened Greeks and Romans and Christians and Jews (those of their respective groups) are on the same side. 'Most excellent Epaphroditus' and 'most excellent Theophilus' are not being attacked for idolatrous ignorance. The Stoic-inclined listeners believing themselves to be sophisticated are exposed to a variation of their own theology, reminded of its value and subtly inspired to expand their tolerance.13 The listener is shown that these (respective) 'strange' groups are

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13 Both Josephus and Acts contain a number of 'unmistakeably Stoic-sounding' (the wording comes from Haenchen 1971:530) phrases; see Downing 1982.
already somehow in agreement with one. They are not unlike that to which
one's own belief might well lead one to.

What they [Luke and Josephus] were primarily aiming to do was entertain high-
minded pagans, by displaying their respective group's story and beliefs and prac-
tices as interesting and respectable variants of what their readers themselves already
believed and meant to live by: intriguingly different in detail, but in essence the
same, a largely independent witness to the commonly accepted religious truth
(Downing 1982:558).

Luke's prayers and speeches are his way of saying there is common
ground between Christians (even some Jews) and high-minded pagans. For
Luke, as for Josephus, the 'good' pagans are acceptable: all there is to hope
for is that they will recognise Christians and/or Jews as allies in belief.

Following a proposal of Downing (1980:32), that Luke 'tries to express his
message in terms that may make sense to the same sort of readers as Josephus
had in view', we can elaborate by saying that both authors are employing a
narrative rhetoric which creates in the like-minded listener an experience of
piety and tolerance as well as confirmation of certain oppositions. There are
those who accept God's providential care and those who reject it. Or, as
Luke sees the correlation, those who act with kindness and understanding
and those who act out of greed and stubborn opposition to God. Storytelling
not only functions to transmit beliefs and generate commitment but also
legitimise and reinforce relationships and to create and sustain symbolic
oppositions (cf Helmer 1993).

Fundamentally we see how Luke accepts society's values. Not only did he
(most probably) accept patronage as the way to survive and to encourage the
propagation of his story, but his nuanced and sophisticated way of relating
the Jesus story and the heroes of the movement to contemporary beliefs and
values reflects harmonising interests.

3.3.2 Who would take a fairly unknown sage or teacher, representing a
'new' teaching and telling strange stories of suspect origins and content under

14 In Simeon's prayer, for instance, at the beginning of his Jesus story (Lk 2:29-32)
universalism is very evident and continuity with Judaism stressed—counteracting dis-
trust of new religions. Luke often stresses the goodness of God (ἀγαθοθυργόν, Acts
14:17) in the prayers and speeches of the story's heroes (e.g., Acts 4:24-30, 14:15-18,

15 Lk 12:15-21, 16:14-17; Acts 5:1-11. On παθοιεία and the φιλάργυροι and the cos-
mological consequences see Moxnes 1988:139-153. Resisting God (e.g, σκληρύνω and
cognates, Acts 7:51, 19:9, 26:14), secret rebellion (e.g Lk 2:35) and arrogance (exalting
oneself) are fundamental motifs in Luke-Acts (cf, from many discussions, York
his or her wings? We must picture the situation of an itinerant teacher/storyteller, moving from patron to patron, in quest of meals, support and recognition; often only a step ahead of some aggrieved group or person and living a life featuring personal and collective assault—much like Paul, Apollos and even Jesus is depicted in Luke-Acts. Who would invite someone like Luke as a compliment to their table?

Probably someone not unlike the famous (though fictitious) Trimalchio. He and his kind represent the wealthy and ambitious freedmen who succeeded by their ability, if not their scruples. Among such groups, apostles of new gods were more likely to gain an audience than among the aristocracy.

The use of the Satyricon seems appropriate: early Greco-Roman novels appealed to some of the same groups as did mystery religions and Christianity. Cautiously used, this text is useful for illuminating certain kinds of people and life styles. To do this, one should look beyond Petronius’ aristocratic point of view and his contempt for the nouveaux riches, those undeserving, fortuitous riff-raff infringing the margins of elegant social life. Paul and Peter may have been quite different than the scheming and unscrupulous charlatans, Encolpius and ‘friends’, but their portrayal by Petronius illustrates what the expectations were that Luke (and the historical Paul for that matter) had to deal with.

The most famous section of the Satyricon (15.26-78), Trimalchio’s banquet, brings together wandering opportunists with successful ex-slaves. The listeners to the Satyricon are entertained with a burlesque of emulating the nobility. Cultured people held symposia, both actual and literary. And ‘upwardly mobile’ members of society—which was a real possibility under the Flavians, particularly in the provinces of Asia Minor and the major urban centres seeking imperial patronage—did the same.

Luke, undoubtedly the most socially pretentious of the evangelists, would not have been a stranger to this situation. No wonder the Lord’s Supper and other meals are very important to the narrator of the Lukan stories.\[18\]

\[16\] The ancient romances are relevant in a wide variety of ways and possibilities. Reardon (1991:30, 169) quotes a remark by Fry that ‘there are close connections between the imaginative universe of romance and Christianity’. I am simply focusing on one small aspect of one narrative. See further Hägg 1983:81-108; Reardon 1991:169-172 and, very stimulating, Pervo 1987.

\[17\] Obviously the Satyricon is no direct view on social and historical realities—‘any more representative of real life in the first century than Dallas...in the late twentieth’ (Downing 1988:225)—but with care, remains an invaluable source for certain experiences, values and other information.

Through Trimalchio we glimpse a section of society which, despite wealth, is in the eyes of those who hold the reins a mere cipher; donkeys posing as horses. An illustration of this is Satyricon 57 (the setting is the excessive laughter of Ascyltus which is getting on the nerves of one of Trimalchio’s cronies).

How dare he laugh like that! Did his father pay cash for him? You’re a Roman knight, are you? Well, my father was a king.

‘So, why are you only a freedman?’, you ask. Because I went into service voluntarily. I wanted to be a Roman citizen, not a subject with taxes to pay. And today, I hope no one can laugh at the way I live. I’m a man among men, and I walk with my head up. [More similar claims follow in the ensuing discussion].

One is immediately reminded of the emphasis in Luke-Acts on honourable, eminent origins: Davidic descent for Jesus and Paul shown as the important Roman citizen and distinguished Jewish scholar.

An audience of ‘in-between’ people is involved here. They are restricted by prestige and rank, but enabled by money and circumstance. More relevant is to realise that they were people of liminal status. The very contact across social strata that they enjoyed probably contributed to limited acceptance on both sides of social barriers. These people were considered persons of dubious and indeterminate standing by most of the people who had dealings with them.

People in such a situation, described in social-psychological terms as ‘isolates’ are often highly motivated to initiate the transmission of rumours, gossip and new traditions (cf Koenig 1985:114). Communication is a continuous process of proposing various relationships between those taking part in the conversation; promoting histories, particularly ‘new’ ones, represents special opportunities to transform or influence relationships.

3.3.3 Luke-Acts fits into settings like these. Clearly Theophilus was not a patron in the really powerful group but one of those aspiring, open to truths that can affirm a new situation. And the audience would be from those who are willing (and desperate) to assert that their actual status is somehow regal and their esteem by heavenly standards rather high.

Trimalchio teaches us about those willing to listen to stories of liberation. Authority is a problem for this ex-slave: setting and keeping limits with his guests, whether slave or aristocrat, is difficult, even strange. The narrative is suggestive of a context for the Lukan heroes who show forth that marvellous, hopeful situation of inappropriate familiarity between master and slave. Not only God’s champion, Jesus, but also Peter and Paul cross all sorts of barriers.
Trimalchio’s banquet illuminates—despite the parodying—the uncomfortable world of successful retainers, freedmen and ex-slaves now at sea due to new circumstances. In the Satyricon, Fortunata is the living image of this status dissonance: the wife who puts up the silver for the sake of her husband’s fortune (76), the mistress who will not eat until the slaves have been fed. For Luke, and hopefully for Theophilus too, Jesus and Peter and Paul show how one can find wisdom and miracle.

4 THE LUKAN HEROES AND MORAL VALUES

4.1 Luke and moral affirmation

Luke’s view of moral virtue, despite many nuances and sophistication, is quite basic: Whatever happens is simply the result of the predetermined intention and purpose of God, the master of the universe (δεσπότης, cf Acts 4:24). Luke describes a universally significant, morally upright movement that promises its adherents future power with present stability. Joining this movement is to gain spectacular respectability without upsetting the powers that be. The following aspects illustrate this point.

4.1.1 In Luke’s symbolic world Satan has a kingdom (Lk 11.20). However, God the King, has recently brought his realm closer (or upon people) through his champion, Jesus. The presupposition is ‘a neatly hierarchical world’. This double hierarchy is, as Meeks (1993:115) reminds us, fundamentally different from the single hierarchical map that others, like Plutarch, tried to impose on the world. The conflict between the two realms of God and Satan is a structuring theme in Luke-Acts, vividly portrayed by, amongst other, the exorcisms. In the narration about the continuing adventures of the movement after Jesus’ death the plot of ‘Satan’s fall’ (Lk 10:18) is extended in the consecutive humiliation of Satan’s allies, the demons and the magicians. Simon Magus learns, just in time, that candid sincerity (ἡ ἑπίνοια τῆς καρδίας, Acts 8:22) makes the difference when making one’s choices. God’s power is not for personal gain. Less fortunate were the sons of Sceva who underestimated Satan’s power (Acts 19:14-16). Paul also effectively exorcises the spirit from the slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16-21). So influential and unstoppable is the word of God (κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος) that it conquers the greed underlying the practice of magic (Acts 19:18-19).

Luke adds two significant elements to the interpretation of this conflict. At the end of the pericope on the Beelzebul story he inserts the saying, ‘He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters’ (Luke 11:23). To the opposing camps of the unseen world corresponds a radical division in the human world. Paul, on the right side of things, effec-
tively curses Elymas Magus, who dared to obstruct God and thereby revealed himself to be full of deceit and villainy, a true son of Satan (ὑλος διαβόλου, Acts 13:10). The moral implications of such a divided, apocalyptic universe becomes clear. The choices one makes, things done or left undone, determine one's position with regard to the great divide. Within such a plot of supernatural conflict, 'the exercise of virtue is more than progress toward the individual's goal of the well-crafted life, rewarded with honor and ultimate happiness: it is enlistment on the side of God against the forces of darkness' (Meeks 1993:204).

The second element characterising Luke's dualistic world view is his emphasis on the plan and foreknowledge of God. The ethics of Luke-Acts, while having several basically conventional subsidiaries, such as civic concord, communitarian economics, freedom and courage, in its essential perspective maintains a God's eye view of reality. The heroic and civic virtues of the positive characters are all subordinated to the plan of God, the success of which is guaranteed by God and his Spirit against all opposition.

Luke's frequent use of διαίτησις which operates much as the Greek notion of πρόνοια (Danker 1981:46-47) creates an awareness of the all pervasive activity of God. Luke likes to attach προ- to verbs to indicate God's preordaining involvement in the lives of his characters. The truth claims implied in the narrative of both volumes are backed by the assertion that all this happened 'by the deliberate will and plan of God' (Acts 2:23), the Creator whose power extends over world and history (Acts 4:24).

The moral narratives within which Greek and Roman writers depicted the development of character are marginal and fragmentary by comparison. Meeks writes (1993:210):

If anything may be said to be unique in Christianity's contribution to Western ethical sensibilities, it is this dramatic history of everything and all peoples, centering on the erratic response of God's elect people to God's speaking and acting, and culminating in the calling to account of every creature for what they have done in God's world.

This all inclusive, dramatic perspective gives the experience of being capable of a vast scope, a truly all encompassing point of view that imbues life with a profound sense of meaning, of belonging, of ultimate power and success.

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4.1.2 Luke-Acts deals extensively with the connections of the Jesus movement to the traditions and institutions of Israel and the Greco-Roman world. Through the events experienced by the disciples and the adventures of the apostles Luke demonstrates the appropriate interaction with the larger world and of life within urban communities. The early disciples in Jerusalem, for instance, are depicted as realising simultaneously the ideal of Greek friendship—friends are ‘united in heart and soul’ and ‘have all things in common’—and the biblical picture of Israel’s holy beginnings in the wilderness, when ‘there was never a needy person among them’ (Acts 4:32-37).

The heroes in this story exhibit not only considerable piety as required in Jewish tradition and practice but also harmlessness toward the institutions and authority of Rome and the provincial cities. They are models of civic virtue, by no means ‘advocating practices which are illegal for Romans to adopt and follow’, as their accusers say (Acts 16:21). They practise only legitimate social customs—often customs acknowledged (and sometimes accepted, though not always espoused themselves) by powerful regional and political figures such as Sergius Paulus the proconsul of Cyprus, the Asiarchs or the 

Persons—who could be citizens, freedmen, ex-slaves or even slaves (see Garnsey & Saller 1987:118-125)—participating in the Roman sphere of power wishing to maintain power, or gain power, encourage clients or attract adherents, had to make clear that their movement or group was a virtuous part of lawful society. Hence the antiquity and influence of the group’s traditions were paramount values (MacMullen 1981:2-4; Esler 1987:214-215).

The deity of such a group should be present and powerful throughout the 

exhibiting universal significance. This is what Silius is showing with his elaboration of the power of century old traditions. Jupiter Optimus Maximus is known and manifestly active wherever Romans go, and Silius eloquently pleads that the pious should realise this and therefore take him seriously. Luke too does this, about his God.

The travels of Luke’s heroes play a very important part in the portrayal of the universal scope and power of Luke’s God who creates and rules over all aspects of society. In the progression of their travels across the 

the heroes of Luke quote from and show extensive familiarity with the Jewish scriptures and customs, highlighting their own ancient roots. Their stories link with Jesus, who is a major link in the dealings begun by God with Abraham (even Adam!) and continued through history with Moses and

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21 ‘...Luke has here completely fused his OT heritage, transmitted via LXX, with Greek material....In short, Luke is here suggesting that the primitive Church also realized the Greek communal ideal!’ (Haenchen 1971:231, 233; Joubert 1995:54).
David and Israel. Luke tells us that Jesus teaches no διδομένη καυνή, such as Mark is claiming (Mk 1:28, Lk 4:36). The ancient, ancestral faith is self-evident to Greeks and Romans (e.g. Plutarch Moralia 756B) and without hesitation Luke tells us about their devotion to the ancestral God (ὁ πατρίδος θεός, Acts 24:14; discussion in Esler 1987:216-217).

Luke is not writing an apologia pro imperio and he does not hide the faults of some Romans. Like any other good, realistic storyteller he keeps his narrative interesting with the at times indifferent, at times incompetent and at times even corrupt officials. With care he shows that the Jesus movement offers no threat to the political and social fabric of the Roman empire. The onus for Jesus’ death, and to a large extent for Paul’s hassles, falls on misguided Jews. Jesus, Peter and Paul are in no way engaged in subversive activities.

4.1.3 What of material realities? Given Luke’s probable audience of participants benefiting in some manner from the imperial network of power, that is, persons like centurion Cornelius, Levi and Zacchaeus the tax collectors, Lydia the maker of purple dyes, people wealthy enough to own homes and have a considerable salutatio, the story relates to the realities of wealth, status and influence. For Luke wealth, though it can be dangerous, is an opportunity to show forth the love of God, to be merciful like He is. Luke admires the correct use of wealth (Lk 16:8-9, 3:11, 12:42), and evokes, in his Jesus story, powerful images of Jesus as benefactor and of the reversal of opposite human conditions due to divine action.

Moxnes argues that Luke speaks from the perspective of ‘the moral economy of the peasant’ (1988:164, cf. 154-169) and sees a continuing relevance in Luke’s forceful ‘shattering of stereotypes’. York writes eloquently about Luke’s ‘harsh warning’ for those ‘still living under the value system of the world’ (1991:184). This is to concentrate on the part of Luke-Acts that one admires. Luke knows no ‘other’ value system; what he does is to suggest possible reversals within that system. In his story he provocatively creates events and situations to fascinate his audience, not offend them. ‘Though the believers in Acts display social consciousness, there is little evidence of a total social revolution under way, as the Magnificat might imply’ (Juel 1983:91). It is jealous Jews and some wicked men who claim that ‘these men turn the world upside down’ (Acts 17:6).

Jesus’ criticism of wealth (e.g. Lk 18:22) comes from someone who himself owned nothing, and when Luke tells about the apostles implementing such ideals the romantic idealising is all too clear. Christian views about the morality of wealth were marked from the beginning by contradictions and accommodations, ‘a peculiar mixture of positive and negative themes’
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(Countryman 1980:209). Luke may admire the moral economy of the peasant, but he admits and accepts that the promotion of his movement was dependent on the protection and support of the people with greater wealth and higher status than any peasant.

Shady characters play their part. Luke tells about the lovers of money: the Pharisees (Lk 16:14). Luke wants his audience to respond that they, praise God, are not like that. They, like Zacchaeus (19:8) know how to deal with money and not let it be their god.22

Charity was widely admired as a virtue in antiquity.23 And this is exactly how Luke presents the supposedly revolutionary teaching of Jesus and the demands of God: to be merciful (Lk 6:36), to give freely (14:33) and abundantly (Acts 4:37). Giving generously to the poor is important: it will determine what one receives (Lk 6:38), bring in blessings (Lk 14:14), ensure treasure in heaven (Lk 18:22) and even get God's attention (Acts 10:4). This is the context for wealth according to Luke: the rich member of the Jesus movement carries the responsibility of almsgiving.

4.2. Telling Luke's story today

Because Luke tells his stories so well, and because we are so familiar with our own traditions it is important that we first remind ourselves of how difficult it actually is to tell Luke's narrative today.

For one thing,

I think it important to stress what we might call the "strangeness" of the Greco-Roman and Jewish-Palestinian worlds in which Christianity originated. Until we recognize the gulf between them and us, we cannot cross it in any meaningful way nor begin to make sense, in our own terms, of their alien experience. ... I merely reaffirm that one of the cardinal purposes of the student of early Christianity must be to pursue this distinction, for without doing so, [one] may find [oneself] with

22 It is interesting to note the following maxims concerning wealth in the Satyricon: 'Believe me, have a penny, and you're worth a penny. You got something, you'll be thought something' (77.6). 'The name of friendship endures so long as money lasts' (80.9). 'The love of learning never made anyone rich' (83.9). 'Poverty is the twin sister of good sense' (84.4).

23 Strictly speaking one should distinguish between the tradition of almsgiving in Judaism and benefactions in the Greco-Roman world, in that the Torah prescribed welfare for the poor and Greco-Roman philanthropy was supposedly to be directed at one's friends and fellow citizens (Countryman 1980:103-107). Such distinctions reflect the (biased) dichotomy of a distinct Judaism versus a distinct paganism, and tend to emphasise particular words usually absent in the other tradition. Both activities are clearly related, and as Danker (1981:43-44) has convincingly shown, the concept of philanthropy is indeed a dominant Greco-Roman cultural value (or social motif).
nothing more than the odd pieces of a puzzle which cannot be fitted together, half of them being modern and half ancient (Countryman 1980:211-212).

Following from this, secondly, we tend to forget that in a very real sense Luke's narratives antedate traditional or classical Christianity. Like other ancient texts we should be careful not to filter Luke's stories through an anachronistic theological debate (see Phillips 1986, particularly his discussion of magic and religion, :2722-2723). Luke's use of soter-terminology has deceived many contemporary scholars to read him with a 'christianising theory of religion' which assumes that 'religion is essentially designed to provide guidance through the personal crises of life and to grant salvation into life everlasting' and hence imposes a distinction between religion and politics (cf Price 1984:15-19, 247).

Those who see Luke's works as 'largely concerned simply to present salvation to his readers' and therefore as 'to a large extent timeless' (e.g Marshall 1970:219) fall into this biased anachronistic trap. It is doubtful that Luke would have wished his audience to perceive his stories as unlike anything else they had ever heard. Few have laboured more diligently to absolve the Jesus movement of the charge of novelty. Luke's 'divine author' can only be at home in an ancient worldview, so well described by MacMullen (1981:73-94). And his description of evil through the agency of demons is quite strange to my experience.

This is, of course, not to deny any contemporary value to Luke's stories and his way of telling them. It is to deny the claim that there must be some relevance; we may or may not find something for our times. What historical understanding does is to allow us dialogue with others. One interesting perspective, I think, with which to grasp what Luke has done, is to relate his vision to the enduring problem facing religious persons: the conflict between civility and conviction. How can one achieve a meaningful interaction between tolerance and belief in truth, a sort of practical, realisable 'theology and ethos that fuse civility and conviction' (cf Marty 1981:136)?

Like many others of his time and social location, Luke experiences God and society, trivial life and piety as the same. He tells his stories to conserve and protect this way of life. Given this plausible interest in the well-being of a section of society—their well-being is best for all—Luke probably accepts that order is 'the primary imperative of social life' (like Berger 1977:16 does). He is, in Berger's apt description, a conservative, 'a man who thinks daringly but acts prudently' (:19).

Luke does not propose a recipe nor a philosophical analysis/foundation for the problem of 'civil commitment', but he does deal with it.

Instead of alternatives advocating resistance or withdrawal, Luke proposed that the world be Christianised. In hindsight his proposal is easily denounced as a sellout. ...
Appealing to all that was progressive and idealistic in the church's structures, Luke offered, so to speak, its services to the imperial society of his day. Christianity, which Luke viewed as a renewed form of Judaism stripped of its limitations, had both the interest in and the means for elevating the rude and unwashed masses, for promoting urbanity and ethics, community and loyalty. Luke was something of a prophet who wished to share a vision (Pervo 1987:138).

For Luke religion and politics, money and piety, prayer and healing flow together. He tells about God who determines all, his ideal world is a triumphant, grand and exciting one. But to move from reality to the ideal has its dangers. For one, it can be too quickly and too readily assumed that the ideal has been realised. Luke's hope then becomes distorted application. No community will benefit from the victorious grandiosity of a neatly hierarchical cosmology and the excitement of unrealistic expectations. Indeed, such a vision most easily leads to exactly that haughty, arrogant and dictatorial mindset that Luke brandished as characteristic of the sons of Satan. Furthermore, we need to be critical about his romantic vision of the interface between rich and poor. There are no magical resources available, as history in its inexorable and painful way has taught us.

At least Luke did not cop out. He tries to show a world of civilised conviction. The problems remain, though. His vision challenges us to bring into the conversation the complexities of truth, that elusive yet mighty 'interconnection between religious language and politics' (Price 1984:245). Religion constructs power by defining strategic relationships (real and perceived) between different parties. Religion is not only that, but it is at least that much. Like Luke and those whose lives he 're-enacts' for us, the cultural and religious aspects of public life are no mere trappings which we may or may not afford.

5. CONCLUSION

The gospel of Luke is much like ancient biography and Acts has been shown to have similarities to Greco-Roman romances, Greco-Roman technical treatises and historical works. A lot of comparative literature plays a role in these characterisations and every proposal has some very convincing aspects. However, what all these characterisations do share, most importantly, is the context of use or communicative event. They are usually formally sponsored literature, to be recited to upper class audiences.

It is likely that Luke and Josephus wrote in the same decade. They wrote for patrons they both honour as κρατιστος. Though Josephus, the newly

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created Roman citizen writing in Greek, aspired to great audiences he proba-
bly could not do so explicitly; not allowing himself as much as a well-
established equestrian Italian such as the Plinys would (cf Rajak 1984:201).

The same applies to Luke. We should imagine his audience as consisting
of persons with some wealth but of problematic social standing, who were far
more likely prospects for a different religion than members of the senatorial
and equestrian orders. When we speak of patrons interested in Christianity,
we should rather think of Trimalchio's guests than of Seneca, the younger
Pliny or Plutarch.

In his narrativisation of Jesus' heroic obedience and Paul's exemplary
behaviour, Luke shows his belief in the value of good relations with those
around and above one, wishing, like Josephus, 'to reconcile the nations and
to remove the causes of hatred' (AJ 16.175). At the heart of his position lies
the conviction that co-operation and harmony between the teachings of Jesus
and the larger world are not only possible, but are to the advantage of both.

Luke's heroes espouse the true essence of τὰ ἐθνί παραφά (Acts 28:17),
offering their perspective to serve all. The emphasis on such commonplaces
has a persuasive function: the world is indeed as one sees it. We are listening
to a wisdom seeking to rationalise far more than it attempts to provoke and
challenge.

Telling one's history in Luke's way may have its place at times, but it is a
tightrope to walk. What Luke is doing is an attempt to undergird a basic per-
ception of reality. The social function of these stories is not to communicate
new ideas or propose alternate courses of action.

For those purposes critical analysis and historical understanding of the
Christian past could be of greater value. At the end of the twentieth century
our community is quite aware of the effects of underestimating values like
tolerance and civility. In our quest for a true and lasting public space,
humility is in order. Humility and a willingness to learn.

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