

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Orientation

Christians and Pharisees...would both claim to be faithful to Israel's God; they both appeal to the Scriptures for validation of their viewpoint; they both proclaim concern for holiness, forgiveness of sin, etc. But they are construing their systems on different core values, which imply different structures, and which prompt different strategies.

(Neyrey 1988a:80)

In the everyday life of the Jews in Palestine at the beginning of the first century CE, the relationship between God and man was expressed by the *Shema*, a prayer composed of three text segments (Dt 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41) which the faithful were to bind to the hand and the forehead and the doorposts<sup>1</sup> (cf Foerster 1955:145; 1968:106-107). The prayer (named after the first word in Dt 6:4) had to be recited twice daily by every Jew, and had essentially two elements – the confession that the God of Israel was an only God and, as a consequence, the setting apart of the believing Jews from those people who were not acceptable to God. The prayer served as a mnemotechnic device by means of which all were reminded of the vital importance of keeping God's commandments (like the custom of sewing blue-stranded tassels to the corners of their garments, referred to in Num 15:38-39), failing which all kinds of life-threatening sanctions were invoked. It was, in Neyrey's words, 'a sacred profession of belief which distinguished Jews from all other peoples in the ancient world' (Neyrey 1988a:82). In other words, the concepts imbued by the *Shema* were to remain a pervasive directional force in the everyday lives of the people. This means that the *core value* of Judaism was God's *holiness*, expressed by the utterance:

ἅγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιος, κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν  
(LXX, Lv 19:2)

The implication of this core value was that the categories of creation should be kept distinct, because all things in creation should replicate and express the divine order of classification, discrimination, and order (Douglas 1966:53). *Holiness* (ἅγιος), therefore, is exemplified by *completeness* (τέλειος, cf Mt 5:48; see discussion below) – ‘to be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind’ (Douglas 1966:54). This *wholeness applies not only to the physical body in respect of sacrificial animals or individual worshippers at the temple* (Douglas 1966:51), but is also extended to signify completeness in a social context (Douglas 1966:52). *Purity* therefore signifies a classificatory pattern associated with order, which is the desirable state (cf Douglas 1966:53). Impurity, conversely, is regarded as disorder and spoils the pattern (cf Douglas 1966:94). In a discussion on ‘dirt’ as *matter out of place* Douglas (1966:35) remarks on this definition:

It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt, then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the byproduct of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.

*Purity*, therefore, is an abstract term for the overall system of ideology, values, structures, and classifications that provide order to a given culture (Neyrey 1988b:127). For the adherents to Judaism the temple and its sacrificial system became the normative expression of that ordering system, and so of holiness (Neyrey 1988a:67; 1988b:127). Cues for the structuring of everyday life therefore had to be taken from the temple as locus of holiness and purity. Neyrey (1988a:67) describes the task of the investigator as follows:

It becomes the task of the observer to search out the structural expressions of this core value in the ‘maps’ which the Jews of Jesus’ time made to give shape and clarity to their world. By ‘map’ we mean the concrete and systematic patterns of organizing, locating, and classifying persons, places, times, actions, etc.

In respect to the application of this approach to *persons*, Douglas (1966:95) states an important principle which should be heeded in any effort at explaining individual or collective behaviour towards outcasts described in the Bible:

...persons in a marginal state...are people who are somehow left out in the patterning of society, who are placeless...

and again:

It seems that if a person has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being, all precaution against danger must come from others. He cannot help his abnormal situation.

(Douglas 1966:97)

Outcasts are therefore people who for some reason or other do not fit into any of the categories that structure society. They pose a threat to the accepted pattern and order of society, and therefore need to be neutralized – either by being ostracized, or eliminated, or by some other means.<sup>2</sup> Douglas gives the following description of the plight of such a person:

A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone...Pollution can be committed intentionally, but intention is irrelevant to its effect – it is more likely to happen inadvertently.

(Douglas 1966:113)

The polluting person therefore has no recourse – he/she is delivered up to the sanctions prescribed by the system.

Scheffler (1988) discusses the Gospel of Luke under the unifying theme of *suffering*. In formulating the aim of his study, Scheffler (1988:1) states his conviction that Luke's emphasis on the plight of social outcasts (women, children, Samaritans and gentiles) stems from a single concern – compassion for *any* suffering group. He is also of the opinion that Luke's portrayal of the suffering of Jesus is not only related to the remission of sins, but has a definite concrete relevance in so far as economic and social ethics are concerned (cf Scheffler 1988:2). For the purpose of analysis

and description Scheffler (1988:3) distinguishes six dimensions of suffering in the Gospel: economic, social, political, physical, psychological and spiritual suffering.

In a generally positive recension of Scheffler's work, Van Aarde (1989a:184) notes that the dissertation implies that Luke has portrayed Jesus' message as an *ethical* message. He expresses appreciation for Scheffler's insight that the ethical injunctions by Matthew and Luke are expressed by the expectations pertaining to God's children. In the case of Matthew the expectation is contained in the utterance: ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν (Mt 5:48) – that is, the *holiness* of the believers is emphasized in terms of *wholeness*. In Luke's case the expectation is described as follows: γίνεσθε οἰκτιρμονες καθὼς καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν οἰκτιρμων ἐστίν (Lk 6:36) – that is, the believers are expected to be *compassionate*. These distinctions correspond to what we have established above, namely that the term τέλειος indicates order and wholeness within the purity system, while the term οἰκτιρμων exhibits a particular Lukan understanding of that which is expedient. We can summarize by stating that the Gospel of Luke addresses ethical matters relating to real life experiences. At the same time it should be strongly emphasized that Luke is certainly not moralizing. His ethical injunctions are undeniably based in a system of (religious) values procured from his understanding of the prevailing symbolic universe. The gospel narrative in fact represents Luke's theoretical reflection about that symbolic universe. Based on a specific understanding of the wishes of God (who inhabits the symbolic universe), the narrative motivates people to become involved in the plight of anybody who has got hold of the wrong end of the stick in life – irrespective of the 'stick' – and hence has become a social outcast. The character of such involvement is expressed by the term οἰκτιρμων – *compassion*.

While I accept the insights proposed by Scheffler and affirmed by Van Aarde, it is not sufficient to say that there is an injunction to become compassionately involved. Luke gives a very specific shade of meaning to this compassionate involvement – it has to contain the willingness to take the role of the servant, the δούλος, in dealing with these outcasts. The emphasis on this gives a clear indication of the social position or status of Luke's addressees. One would only formulate such a plea bargain in a fashion as elaborate as a whole narrative if an appeal was made to people who had a choice in the matter. In other words, Luke is calling on all people who do not share the stratum of the social outcasts to become involved according to the principle of *servicing* (διακόνειν). There is no indication, however, that Luke ever expects his addressees (presumed to be of high status) to vacate their statuses<sup>3</sup> (cf Van Staden 1988:352).

I consider Scheffler's work an important contribution in the clarification of Luke's interest in and understanding of Jesus. His differentiation between different kinds of suffering sensitizes the reader to take care not to confuse discrete categories of people, or to transfer the attributes or idiosyncracies of one category of sufferers illegitimately to another. In this respect Scheffler contributes to the *social description* of early Christianity, an aspect of research differentiated in a social-scientific approach to the text. At the same time I am not quite comfortable with his approach to the text under the unifying theme of *suffering*. I believe that such an approach can endanger precisely those positive aspects of differentiation noted above. Such a '*comprehensive view of suffering* in which different types of human suffering feature equally' (Scheffler 1988:2) to my mind represents a *view from below* – that is, it seems as if Scheffler has identified himself with the position of the sufferer, and consequently sees Jesus as having a comprehensive and encompassing compassion towards sufferers. By stating this, I by no means wish to negate or decry the fact that Jesus did have an encompassing compassion with any kind of suffering; on the contrary! I am of the opinion that one should rather view Luke's narrative *from the top*, as it were – that is, the primary interest should be in the *cause* of the position Jesus took in respect of the social outcasts. In other words: *Why* did Jesus espouse such an attitude of compassion towards them? In seeking the answer to this question, it seems that one would have to consider the crucial aspect of Luke's portrayal of Jesus' *religious ideology* or, as it is better known, his *theology*.

Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE the temple was not just a religious institution, but it was an economic and political one as well; it was the centre of national life in every respect (Horsley & Hanson 1985:231). According to Josephus (*Ant* 20, 251, quoted in Horsley & Hanson 1985:232) the Hasmonean monarchy was replaced by an aristocracy, and the High Priest and the chief priests were entrusted with the leadership of the nation. Saldarini (1988:298) expresses reservations about the assumption in most treatments of the Sadducees that all the chief priests and other leaders of Judaism in Jerusalem were Sadducees. He argues that Josephus does not say that all Jewish leaders were Sadducees, but that those who were Sadducees came from the governing class. If this was correct, it could be expected that the Sadducees would wish to retain the status quo, maintaining their own position as members of the ruling elite. This is, in fact, attested to by references in the New Testament about their rejecting the doctrine of life after death (cf Mk 12 par; Ac 23) – in other words, even in this respect they are not willing to relinquish power. The association of the Sadducees – as members of the ruling class – with the High Priest, the chief priests, other temple authorities (Ac 4:1; 5:17) and the Sanhedrin (Ac 23) suggests that the temple was controlled by political authori-

ties (Van Aarde 1990a). According to Saldarini (1988:234, 304) the Sadducees maintained the more traditional understanding of Judaism, and did not accept innovation. This brought them into conflict with the *Pharisees, who based much of their programme for Jewish life on a revised understanding of the purity laws and their application to all Israel:*

The application of purity laws to the people at large was a new mode of understanding Jewish life, law and Scripture and it is reasonable and even inevitable that the Sadducees or someone else should oppose them...If many of the Sadducees were priests or supporters of the traditional priesthood, they would have had another motive to oppose the Pharisees. The priests would not want the purity practices characteristic of the Temple and priesthood to be diluted by adaptation to the multitude.

(Saldarini 1988:234)

The *Pharisees wished to replicate the temple purity system in the everyday lives of the people.* The way they did this was by debating and teaching the law, using the purity regulations to impress upon the people the need for keeping pure by observing and safeguarding the boundaries. They denied the claim of any social outcasts on their patronage, especially their generosity. These social outcasts were judged to be unclean and unfit to be part of the social order (cf Saldarini 1988:176). To compound this problem, they extrapolated from the *social* unacceptability of the outcasts that this category of people would also be unacceptable to God, and therefore declared them to be outside the realm of God's merciful involvement, outside of the covenant.<sup>4</sup> Access to the temple – as the dwelling-place of God on earth – was denied to such people. In this way the Pharisees were vying for the attention and support of the people.

The Lukan *Jesus* had the same purpose as the Pharisees – replicating the temple purity system in the lives of the people. There is a marked difference, though, in that Jesus' scheme provides for the incorporation of the social outcasts amongst those who are deemed acceptable to God, while in the scheme of the Pharisees they are excluded. Saldarini (1988:179) remarks:

Luke's view of the Pharisees' social position is brought out in several passages where the Pharisees keep their distance from social outcasts. The contrast of the Pharisees with tax collectors and sinners is typological for

Luke and symbolic of the paradoxical rejection of Jesus by Judaism and acceptance of him by the Gentiles. The Pharisees are presented as the guardians of the normal social boundaries against Jesus who seeks to change the boundaries and reconstitute the people of God...(T)he Pharisees (and presumably the majority of the people) who reject those usually considered to be social outcasts, such as sinners and tax collectors, are contrasted with Jesus who initiates a new community which includes the outcasts.

Jesus debates the issue with the Pharisees, and holds them accountable for the unjust relationships brought about by the use of purity regulations to maintain social order. In terms of his conception of the core value as best expressed by *compassion*, Jesus understands the temple as a place that includes all people, and wishes to extend this understanding to all spheres of social life, in which the outcasts should be included (cf Van Aarde 1989b:6-8). This is not a simple difference of meaning – it is a major clash of ideologies, signifying opposition at a much more fundamental level than mere debate, namely different core values perceived to be prescribed by the symbolic universe. Luke portrays the Pharisees as separating themselves from the people and from Jesus.

(He) sees them as claiming another and higher social status and he criticizes them for it. The Pharisees have demarcated sharp and tight boundaries for society and have excluded the normal outcasts and also Jesus and in some cases the people. When Jesus refuses to accept their boundaries, they challenge his legitimacy and enter into a contest with him for control over society.

(Saldarini 1988:180)

The evidence seems to indicate that Jesus had no intention of gaining political ascendancy by his behaviour. His primary Galilean opponents, according to Luke, were the Pharisees (Saldarini 1988:181). Luke locates the Pharisees in Galilee and disconnects them from politics by separating them from the Herodians (Saldarini 1988:177). Saldarini (1988:177) is convinced that the hostility between Jesus and the Pharisees is not political – the latter are not sketched as being in league with the highest authorities. In fact, in one instance they are described as collaborating with Jesus when warning him to escape as Herod is seeking him (Lk 13:31). Significantly, also, we encounter the Pharisees for the last time in Luke's description of Jesus' en-

trance into Jerusalem (Lk 19:39-40); they do not figure inside Jerusalem at all (Saldarini 1988:177 note 9). All this serves to indicate that the intervention of the Pharisees is independent. They are not connected to the highest governing circles in Jerusalem – their activity is limited to Galilee, and they are presented as local leaders engaged in a contest with Jesus for influence and control in Galilean society (Saldarini 1988:178).

## 1.2 The aim of the study

This study wishes to indicate how the author (subsequently called *Luke*) of this Gospel interpreted the significance of Jesus' life – his birth, behaviour, death and resurrection – for social life in his own day. We proceed from the assumption that Luke would have interpreted the (oral and literary) traditions in terms of his own ideology. Ideology, as we shall indicate (cf chapter 3, sections 3.2.2-3.2.2.4 below), consists of two interrelated components – a *noetic component* and a *pragmatic component* (the *noumenon* and *phenomenon* respectively, in Kant's terms). The noetic component attests to the fact that an ideology is a reflective form of knowledge that has the object of legitimating a pre-reflective form of knowledge of a symbolic kind, known as the *symbolic universe* (cf 3.2.2.3-3.2.2.4 below). The noetic component of ideology is therefore necessarily evaluative. Connected to the evaluative noetic component on an intra-personal (or intra-group) level is the pragmatic realization of such knowledge and values which, in turn, would be defined in terms of factors that were socially relevant in a specific social situation. Ideology therefore mediates between symbolic universe and social situation in the sense that it defines the type of conduct that is expedient within a social universe constructed according to the integrative, symbolic values procured through a specific understanding of the symbolic universe.

My aim is therefore to indicate specifically the ways in which Jesus' religious ideology (theology) – in the double sense defined above – differs from the ideology of other parties (notably the Pharisees) that interact in the social situation of Luke's narrative world. The thesis is that Jesus differs (noetically) from the Pharisees in terms of his idea of God. Luke understands God in his involvement with man as characterized by the concept *οικτίρμων* (compassionate). His interpretation of this aspect of his religious symbolic universe is based on the historical record of God's compassion, most recently connected to the history of Jesus (Lk 1:1-4). Luke is especially interested to show that God's compassion is inclusive, not exclusive or provisional. This understanding of the nature of God's involvement with man becomes the ideology that is seminal to the Gospel (and most probably also to Acts). He casts his ideology in relief by having the character Jesus in the Gospel become the protagonist of the same values, and contrasting him with an opposing ideology of ex-



clusiveness, boundaries, and usage of purity laws. The reason for Luke's ideology in the Gospel should be sought in his reference group (that is, the dominant group to which he belonged), namely the early church. A concept such as 'compassion' would necessarily extend into the realm of action (conduct) and interaction in all spheres of life – that is, the noetical and evaluative component would inevitably have moral-ethical consequences in the sense that it needs to be applied.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, I would think that the credibility and survival of *any* belief system – which is what *evaluative noetics* amounts to – is totally dependent upon its translation into practicalities.<sup>6</sup> Part of our investigation therefore concerns the moral-ethical disposition and conduct promoted by the Lukan Jesus, which I believe consists in the (innovative) call for spontaneous role reversal on the part of the elite who are occupying positions in the higher strata of society.

Ultimately I hope to demonstrate how – in accordance with the symbolic universe reflected upon in the ideology/theology – the essence of (social) life is construed in Luke-Acts: is it to be found in the attainment of the coveted status sets of society expressed by certain roles, and concomitantly in the praxis dictated by the religious ideology that covets purity – that is, holiness (ἁγιος) and wholeness (τέλειος)? Conversely, is that essence located in social relations characterized by compassionate involvement with social (and consequently religious) outcasts? Are these alternatives mutually exclusive, and if not, how is life defined within such parameters?

My own concept of the relationship between literature and society being that literature is both social product and social force (cf 1.3.1.4 below), the question arises: does the author envisage his directives to be functional only within the institution of the church, or in the whole of society? In other words, how are the structural relations between the church and the rest of society portrayed?

If the results confirm the hypothesis, the next step is suggested by the question: *why* did Luke find it necessary to emphasize this ideological/theological position? How can we deduce important indicators about his own social situation by analysing the social situations in the narrative world he created?

This brings us to the matter of the strategy of the investigation – assumptions, methodological premises, procedure of analysis. In short, the pertinent factors relating to the investigative programme will have to be indicated.

### 1.3 Investigative programme

This study is intended to be a *social-scientific investigation* of a religious literary work in terms of the matters we have formulated above in the form of a hypothesis (cf section 1.2). However, the *subject* under consideration is neither sociology or an-

thropology or any other social science, nor is it literature – the subject is *theology*. This assertion is meant to assuage fears that the theological enterprise might be endangered by the use of the social sciences – I am aware of the difference in study objects. At the same time there is no doubt that the social sciences and theology overlap in so far as man as culturally defined being is concerned. Religion is part of the cultural make-up and social enterprise of all men, and therefore becomes a phenomenon studied by the social sciences. Man and his activity are integral to the perception and understanding of God, and therefore become the object of study in theology. In this way the two disciplines are interconnected, and even overlap in important respects. Both disciplines should benefit from a responsible engagement of each other's basic theoretical assumptions and methodological instrumentarium. This is what this study endeavours to accomplish.

There are, of course, quite a few different theoretical approaches that can be distinguished within sociology. Some are interested in macro-sociological matters relating to groups, institutions and societies (i.e., functionalism, conflict theory), while others concern themselves with micro-sociological issues relating to individuals (symbolic interactionism, role theory). These perspectives are not necessarily exclusive of each other, so that one could fruitfully combine theories on the macro-sociological level with perspectives on the micro-sociological level in an investigation. For the purpose of this study we shall combine an understanding of societal order (macro-sociology) from the perspective of conflict theory, with an analysis of interaction patterns described in the text from the perspective of role theory and symbolic interactionism (micro-sociology).

Added to this, it is important to recognize the importance of the literary aspect in the construction of the analytical and interpretive methodology. The social sciences are used in a theological study for the purpose of constructing the social background from which the texts originated and against which the texts can be read and perhaps be better understood. The primary presupposition in this kind of exercise is that some sort of relationship between the text and the socio-historical environment from which it originated is envisaged. The text must in some way reflect its 'contextual history'.<sup>7</sup> The fact that it is ancient societies and/or communities which are under discussion implies that the only view we have of them is offered by (the) 'texts',<sup>8</sup> and a 'biased' view at that. Therefore the starting point of a sociological study is an analysis of the texts themselves (cf also Van Aarde 1988b:3). Janet Wolff (1977:18) states succinctly:

The question of interpretation is necessarily central to a discipline whose object is a text of one sort or another. The sociological study of literature presupposes an

understanding of the literature studied. If its object is to propose a theory of literature and society, or to perceive a relationship between them, it must start from a comprehension, explicit or implicit, of the works of literature themselves. It cannot be taken for granted that the sociologist's understanding of the literature studied is correct, or adequate. This is most clearly the case with the literature of the past or of another society, and the obvious immediate problem is that of understanding or translating the language correctly.

To orientate the reader with regard to the presuppositions and methodological problems involved in this kind of undertaking, some introductory remarks are given.

### 1.3.1 Literature and society – different perspectives

How this relationship between text and socio-historical environment is to be construed is a much debated issue within the sociology of literature, which is the sociological subdiscipline directed at exactly this problem. Attempts at defining the relationship include constructs such as the Marxist dialectic-materialist conception (cf Swingewood 1977; Steinbach 1974), the genetic approach of Lucien Goldmann (cf Routh 1977), the structuralist approach (cf Rutherford 1977; Bann 1977) et cetera. Routh & Wolff (1977:3-5) list the various approaches towards the relationship of literature and society according to the five broad conceptions that follow.

#### 1.3.1.1 Sociological awareness

A *sociologically aware* study of literature uses information of sociological relevance to the origins or condition of the text, primarily for the purpose of conducting a more informed literary criticism of the text. According to Routh & Wolff (1977:3) the hermeneutic tradition can be regarded as such an approach. In a sociologically aware study of literature, sociological problems or the development of theory are not at issue. The focus of the study is literature. Literary criticism which is informed by, and makes reference to, the social coordinates and conditions of the literature, is an example of such an approach. Literary critics may avail themselves of the findings and concepts of sociology as a tool for criticism. Both the theoretical work and practical criticism of literary scholars may be informed by or compatible with a socio-historical perspective on the work.

### 1.3.1.2 Literature as a kind of sociology

Literature is sometimes seen as a valuable source of information on matters of sociological interest. It is regarded as a description, and an exact description, of either the time in which it was written or of the time it refers to. Routh & Wolff (1977:3-4) state:

Literature has been used by some writers *as a kind of sociology*. It is seen as a source of data, often data of a type which would not otherwise be accessible to a sociologist, and as a carrier of crystallised values and attitudes, as well as information about institutions.

(A)spects of social life (are) studied by sociologists with the aid of concepts like role, anomie, bureaucracy and deviance....

To this they add:

The idea that literature tells us about social life raises a number of questions – apart from predictable arguments about ‘objectivity’. The fact that we are likely to confirm the validity of literary evidence by reference to sociological and historical ‘facts’ suggests a disparity between the two types of social commentary. It may be a legitimate exercise for a sociologist to take literary texts as a source of data, but this must be justified by advancing at the level of theory an explanation of how a generalized reality can be transformed into a specific expression.

(Routh & Wolff 1977:4)

Some careful consideration must therefore be given to the way in which sociological information (social facts) are absorbed into literature: reflectively or unreflectively?

### 1.3.1.3 The social genesis of literature

This approach considers the question of how literature arises in society. According to Routh & Wolff (1977:4) it would include theories which see literature as social facts or contradictions (including structuralism, and some versions of historical materialism) displaced on to another plane or as the symbolic transformation of social reality (semiotics).

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This type of sociology of literature tends towards sociological reductionism, because 'it cannot acknowledge the unique and imaginative qualities of a writer's work, and leaves no room for individual creativity...[T]he author becomes merely a "midwife" at the birth of a work of literature' (Routh & Wolff 1977:4; see also Routh 1977:150-152).

#### 1.3.1.4 Literature as social product and social force

Literature can be understood as both *social product* and *social force*, affecting society and continually involved in the process of social development (Routh & Wolff 1977:4). Taken on the micro-social level of the writer and the reader, writing is seen as a production which is both socially and historically situated and limited, but nevertheless capable of educating people politically, and transforming social conditions. On the macro-level the dialectical relationship of ideas and social structure within historical development is investigated.

#### 1.3.1.5 The effect of literature on society

This approach focuses on the ways in which literature can affect society, and effect social change. This power can be perceived as a social problem (e.g. in the case of pornography), or as a positive feature of literature (e.g. in the case of the Bible).

The above relational issues are contemplated and debated on the theoretical and philosophical plane. Depending on the stance taken, certain methods and models are chosen with which to obtain the information necessary for a construction of the relevant social environment.

### 1.3.2 Interpreting the text

The implications of the stated intention of a social-scientific study of the New Testament (cf. 1.2) are, first, that sociological data is needed for a construction of the socio-historical environment of a text. The primary sources from which to obtain such information relevant to ancient societies are texts – in this case, both biblical texts and non-biblical texts (which belong to and describe the same historical period as the biblical texts). This again, and importantly, implies that the texts should be approached and handled *as texts* – that is, according to their type and composition as described in the discipline of literary theory. In the case of a narrative text this would include such issues as the implied author, the ideological point of view, the function of the narrator, the roles of the characters, the plot, the implied reader, et cetera (cf. Chatman 1978; Petersen 1984:38-43). At least some integration between the methods of literary analysis and that of the social-scientific investigation is needed (cf. Petersen 1985:10-30).

A methodological first step in the social-scientific study of a New Testament text is therefore to ascertain the *type* of text and the *literary* principles according to which it can be studied (cf Van Aarde [1982b]:58). Second, what constraints are thereby placed on a *social-scientific* analysis of the text (cf Petersen 1985:1-42)?

What this boils down to, is that we should differentiate the different *units of analysis* that are of interest in this exercise. First, the basic unit of analysis of theology would be the unmistakably *religious* literary work. Second, the basic unit of analysis of literary criticism is the same literary work, but the character of its content is of no real consequence. It is studied in *literary-theoretical* terms – genre, composition, consistency to the norms of its kind. Finally, a social-scientific analysis is also interested in the text, but then in terms of its embodiment of *social values* and the insight it offers into the symbolic and social levels of its socio-historical time frame.

As far as the *interpretation* of a text goes, a formidable amount of literature has been forthcoming on the subject by scholars such as Dilthey (cf Palmer 1969), Betti (1962), Gadamer (1965; see Palmer 1969; Herzog 1983), Hirsch (1967), Palmer (1969), Ricoeur (1976), et cetera. This literature is highly informative and has done much to define the interpreting act. However, before engaging the task of interpretation itself, there are certain matters I consider important, because they can determine to a large extent the questions we ask of the text and the answers we get from it. These matters are related to our own preferences with regard to kinds of literature; to the question of whether it is at all possible to ascertain the ‘real’ meaning of a literary work; and to the literary presuppositions with which we approach a text. We shall now attend to these issues in the order as stated.

### 1.3.2.1 Why choose to interpret a specific text?

I use the term ‘interpret’ here not in the sense of the interpretation done by a naive reader, but as referring to the concerted efforts of informed readers to establish the most likely meaning of the text. Does a text present itself, as it were, for interpretation? Is it the form or the subject of a text that attracts us to it? By which laws or customs do we decide that one text is worth interpreting, and another not? Is it because of the stature the author or poet has attained? Is it because of a consensus about the stature of the work itself? Or is it because the theme or subject of the work lays claim to our attention by being of importance to our existence?

I would argue that our interest in a text is influenced primarily by social factors. Great literary works, like those of Shakespeare, have achieved greatness because of a consensus, according to certain criteria, that they are great. These criteria are actually *formulae* (Coward 1977:11) according to which we are conditioned to read texts. Where do the criteria come from? Coward (1977:9) states:

Our personalities and therefore our tastes are unique, but they are shaped by factors some of which impinge on us all, and our literary likes and dislikes, like our political or moral opinions, are not autonomous. They are inevitably determined by the experience we have, the social and ethical climate, by cultural priorities and other existential phenomena which affect our judgment and our feelings as readily as an attack of gout.

We are therefore conditioned in our choice of a text we wish to interpret by several factors relating to social life: fashion, taste, social status, academic standing, et cetera. The same goes for a biblical text. From infancy (cf Berger & Luckmann 1967:129-37 regarding the process of 'primary socialization'), or by the process of 'conversion' (cf Berger & Luckmann 1967:157-163 regarding conversion as alternation during the process of re-socialization), we have been conditioned to accept the Bible as authoritative, that is, as elucidating the origin and the ultimate meaning and goal of life, and as being prescriptive regarding our attitude and conduct *in everyday life*. So, even in our choosing a literary text from the Bible to interpret, we are guided by social factors (cf Berger 1973:42-60 for a description of religion as legitimating the social reality).

### 1.3.2.2 Does a text have a meaning?

Any thoughts – unspoken, spoken, written, acted, expressed in some art-form, conscious or unconscious – can only be constructed from and in terms of that which is known. If something has no meaning, it simply means that we cannot relate it to what is known, and therefore cannot accommodate it within our frame of reference. It is not possible to formulate thoughts on something that one does not know, except to philosophize about the category of the 'unknown'.

What is known to us are facts, interpretations, ideologies, world-views and beliefs pertaining to past history, or to present location in time, space and social environment, and to conjectures about the future (cf Gurvitch 1971:21-42).

A text, as a literary expression of thoughts, embodies all the above factors while speaking on and having some specific subject in mind. Such a literary text may be composed for different reasons. Normally, an enterprise such as composing a literary text of any magnitude is conducted with the intent of communicating some viewpoint relating to one or more of the above factors to a specific (probable) or an unspecified (possible) group of readers. This includes texts that comprise artistic self-expression, where the implied reader is the author himself. Referring to the de-

bate on this issue, the following question now arises: as far as the readers are concerned, does such a text have a (single identifiable) meaning?

The lexical ambiguity of words is demonstrated by the phenomenon of polysemy – that is, a word may have more than one dictionary definition (cf Combrink 1984: 27). Being constructed of language, which is intrinsically polyvalent, a text is also polyvalent (cf Combrink 1984:28-30). This polyvalence is described, according to semiotic theory, in terms of the concepts *denotation* and *connotation* (cf Eco 1976: 54-57). A word or expression would therefore simultaneously denote meaning and connote (some other related) meaning. Eco (1976:57; see also discussion in chapter 3, section 3.2.1) explains:

Thus a single sign-vehicle, insofar as several codes make it become the functive of several sign-functions (although connotatively linked), can become the expression of several contents, and produce a complex discourse...I am saying that usually a single sign-vehicle conveys many intertwined contents and therefore what is commonly called a 'message' is in fact a *text* whose content is a multilevelled *discourse*.

Combrink (1984:28) states that these concepts (*denotation* and *connotation*) serve 'as illustration of the fact that a single sign-vehicle functioning within more than one code can convey more than one message'.

In order to determine the most probable meaning of a word or expression in a specific usage, the context has to be taken into consideration. The context of a *word* is provided by the immediate and wider co-text. The context of a macro-text, however, is the text itself. Susan Wittig (1977:96), discussing the 'plurisignificance' or 'multivalence' of a text, demonstrates that parabolic text allows for multiple meanings, indeed, calls for it, because 'the semantic structure of these texts is capable of generating a multiplicity of meanings, of creating a variety of significations'. Referring to the works of Roman Ingarden and Wolfgang Iser, Wittig (1977:100, note 8) states:

(They) are concerned with texts which are syntactically incomplete – where the reader must fill out the details of what happens or the details of description. Here, I have extended their concept to the semantic structure, arguing that when the second-order signified is not supplied, the perceiver is challenged to fill up that incom-



plete structure by providing his own signification. The parable text, then, is *semantically* indeterminate.

This, then, is the origin of the multivalence of texts: different readers allocate different significations (cf Wittig 1977:91-92). However, there are certain constraints intrinsic and extrinsic to the text which prohibit the conferring of just any meaning on it (cf Wittig 1977:87-92). Furthermore, referring to the historian's axiom that a text is first and foremost evidence of the time in which it was written, Petersen states that additional constraints are provided by the contextual history, which has to be constructed from the text itself (Petersen 1985:5-7). Included in this contextual history is the matter of authorial intent. Although, notwithstanding the constraints, the unit (semantic or textual) might still retain some ambiguity, the possibilities are at least lessened and defined and, even allowing for metaphorical application, a probable meaning can be distilled from the possible.

In summary: Granting the multivalence of a text, it is clear that as soon as textual constraints and contextual information pertaining to the socio-historical determinants of the *text itself* are brought into play, definite constraints are placed upon this multivalence. Reference to the 'radical indeterminacy' of a text by someone like Derrida (cf Petersen 1985:6), amounts to assigning the text the property of a multi-faceted reflective disco-ball – what 'comes out' depends on what (colour of light-beam) 'goes in', from what angle. This is to say that a text is perpetually changing its meaning, depending on the 'coordinates' of the interpreter. However, such change or changeability can only be perceived and described with reference to a constant. If all were relative, no real change could be perceived, and to say that something has many meanings would be meaningless. Therefore the notion of radical indeterminacy, denying a constant, delivers interpretation up to complete subjectivism and relativism. Even in admitting and demonstrating multiple meanings, there still is a constant – I would argue that the constant is the text itself, containing the meaning intended by the addresser to the addressee(s). Uncovering this meaning is what the whole exegetical exercise is about. This is not to succumb to the 'intentional fallacy' or the 'genetic fallacy' (cf Van Aarde 1985:551-562), for the *explanation* of a text must be distinguished from its *understanding* (cf Combrink 1984:33). Explanation is the process of uncovering the probable among the possible meanings of the text by concentrating on co-text and context. Understanding, as the 'fusion' (Gadamer) or the 'interpenetration' (Herzog 1983:118, note 10) of horizons, could only be effected by the dialectical relationship between interpreter and text. Ricoeur (1981:158, quoted by Combrink), describes this process as the *appropriation* of a text. In this

sense understanding is a subjective process, and one would have to acknowledge the multiple *significance* of a text as the meaning-for-the-reader.

In view of the above argument, it becomes clear that the resolve and intention of the author must be of some importance (cf Lanser 1981), or there would not have been a text. The variable factor does not lie with the author, who wanted to convey a specific message to his readers, but with the reciprocal relationship between the text and its interpreters. I therefore hold for a *probable*, as opposed to *possible*, meaning of a text that could be approximated by means of a scientifically constructed and verifiable methodology (see also Ricoeur 1976:79; Eco 1979:9). As for explanation, I do not mean that one could necessarily ever arrive at the original meaning of the text, but in principle such a meaning exists, being the verbal meaning of the author (cf Hirsch 1967), and one ought to at least strive towards defining it as closely as possible. Wolff (1977:24), discussing Hirsch, formulates this as follows:

The interpretation always remains a probability, but one which is supported by evidence, and which appears to be more probable than alternative hypotheses in the light of the evidence.

### 1.3.2.3 Literary presupposition

As far as presuppositions concerning the subject of the investigation go, I take for granted the narrative quality of Luke-Acts and will make use of the concepts of narrative exegesis (cf chapter 3, sections 3.4-3.4.2 below).

While Luke-Acts constitutes a double-volume work of a single author, this study will concentrate on the Gospel. The indication of the author that the story continues in the book of Acts (cf Ac 1:1-5), however, has led me to assume that some themes and motifs found in the Gospel are in all probability continued in the book of Acts.<sup>9</sup> This assumption will be tested to the extent that references in Acts may be cited, but no detailed investigation of that work will be undertaken.

As far as the Gospel itself is concerned, the whole strategy of the author is relevant. *Strategy*, according to Elliott (1981:11), is the 'deliberate design of a document calculated to have a specific social effect on its intended hearers or readers'. This is also called the *pragmatic dimension* (Elliott 1987b:2) of a text by which the text is intended to serve as an effective medium of social interaction. Elliott (1987:2b) distinguishes the following features that may serve as evidence of a text's strategy: A text

1. *describes* selected features concerning the situation (narrative world and social world), the sender(s) and receiver(s) and their relationship; (in narrative, the mode

of emplotment of the story [romance, satire, comedy, tragedy] and the question of the relation of narrative world to social world);

2. *emphasises* these selected features;

3. *evaluates* these selected features;

4. *proscribes or criticises and/or prescribes or praises* certain actions, norms, sanctions, actors, traits, roles, institutions, attitudes, ideas, beliefs etc.;

5. *explains, justifies, and legitimates* ##1-4 and attempts to provide a plausible and persuasive rationale for the integration of experience and aspiration, group values and goals and lived reality; (in narrative, the modes of formal argument [formist, contextualist, organicist, mechanistic] and ideological implication [anarchist, liberal, conservative, radical]).

The passages in Lk 14 applied to the theme of *meals* will serve as the units of analysis for this study. They are chosen because they are suggestive of purity concerns, occur in a setting of dispute, and consequently embody opposing ideologies informed by different understandings of the prevailing symbolic universe. Furthermore, the implementation and arrangement of the metaphors could be fruitfully analysed for the bias of the author on the one hand, and for information concerning the socio-historical reality on the other.

### 1.3.3 Methodological problems

As for methodology, the following remark by Rockwell (1977:32) might suggest to the reader the problems involved:

What is wanted is a formula that will cover every form of literary expression and can be used as a key to its place and function in every form of society. It is unlikely, however, that such a formula can be found; and certainly we may say that it never will be found by empirical quantitative methods: we will never have all the data on every type, let alone every example, of literature...(W)e must instead attempt to understand society by inductive reasoning and by modelmaking, the imposing (or preferably the discovery) of patterns.

Because information on a society obtained from a single text or even a corpus of texts is limited and, in addition, has already been interpreted and used within an ideological framework, one cannot simply employ a text as a database from which to construct the contextual world that lies behind it (cf sections 1.3.1.2 and 1.3.1.3 above). Such a procedure would amount to a denial of the complexities involved in the social genesis of a text on the one hand, and of the metaphorical and referential characteristics of a text on the other. Stegemann (1984), for instance, conducting a 'sociohistorical interpretation' of the social category of the *poor* in the Gospels, seems to have succumbed to this methodological fallacy. He does not outline an overall theoretical perspective on the types of literature that form the subject of his investigation. Rather, he employs an eclectic semantic method in identifying the terms and phrases that pertain to the stated objective of his study, namely to determine the socio-historical position of the earliest Christians. This is a legitimate method in determining the meaning and reference of the words he has chosen as reflecting the social circumstances of a certain sector of society. It is doubtful, however, whether such an across-the-board reconstruction does justice to the nuances the author wanted to convey by his work. Stegemann seems to categorize the poor primarily in socio-economic terms (cf Hollenbach 1987:54). This is in accordance with categories that characterize modern industrialized society, but does not do justice to the possible cultural understanding of the poor in first-century Palestine.

It seems to me that Stegemann might have fallen prey to two kinds of fallacy. First, a *referential fallacy* regarding the way in which a text refers to its contextual world (cf Petersen 1978:39), and second, the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness* (cf Van Aarde 1985:568-571) regarding the way in which a text from antiquity might be applied to present-day problems. He is also guilty of what I would call the fallacy of the implied 'irrelevance of the author', leaving out of consideration the individual creativity of the author in choosing, arranging, and conferring meaning on his material (cf section 1.3.1.3 above).

### 1.4 Chapter sequence

The sequence according to which the investigation will proceed is outlined below.

#### 1.4.1 Chapter 2

In this chapter I shall give an outline of the present state of research on the subject of the social-scientific study of the New Testament, by discussing and evaluating the work of certain major exponents of this subdiscipline. Their approach to the literature, and their theoretical exposition and methodological application of the social sciences to the New Testament will be taken into consideration.

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### 1.4.2 Chapter 3

This chapter defines theoretical matters applicable to this study. It includes a discussion of general theoretical issues, such as whether the implementation of social-scientific concepts and methods in exegesis signifies a paradigm shift; concepts from the field of literary theory useful to demarcating a verifiable method of research – more specifically narrative exegesis; and information about macro and micro-sociological perspectives relevant to an understanding of the social-scientific approach.

### 1.4.3 Chapter 4

Chapter 4 contains the construction of a research programme embodying a correlated synthesis of the salient features from both the literary and the social-scientific fields. This includes: identifying and describing the problem; the formulation of a hypothesis; the construction and use of interpretive models to test the hypothesis; the identification of the analytical tools to be used in the test; the analysis itself; and finally, the synthetic interpretation of the data generated by the analysis.

In line with the methodological programme suggested by the quote from Rockwell (cf section 1.3.3 above), narrative texts should be taken as systems of interaction and be analysed by means of models. With inductive reasoning, the findings can be utilized to construct the social background for the text. For the purpose of this investigation the *narrative world* (Petersen 1978:9-48; 1985:7, 32-33 note 3) of Luke-Acts is recognized as one system of interaction, and the *contextual world* (Petersen 1985:7) as another. For an analysis of the social institutions, statuses and roles, interaction patterns, ideologies, and symbolic universe(s) depicted in the narrative world, the micro-sociological theoretical perspective of interactionism will be used in juxtaposition with the macro-sociological theoretical perspective of conflict theory. In addition, certain concepts from the sociology of knowledge as propounded by Berger & Luckmann (1967) will be utilized.

The literary analysis will be based on modern literary theory, and not (from the perspective of) the traditional historical-critical approach. However, this study should not be seen in opposition to the historical-critical approach, but supplementary to it. The designated text segments will not be analyzed as isolated units, but in relation to and as functional within the surrounding and wider context of Luke-Acts. We are aware, of course, that proof of the hypothesis will be relevant to the test case, and only provisionally for the whole of Luke-Acts.

### 1.4.4 Chapter 5

In conclusion this chapter discusses the implications of the results of the investigation for the (probable and possible) readers in terms of the ideological perspectives

(core values) of holiness and wholeness versus compassionate involvement, relating to church and society. Subjects that may merit further investigation are also suggested.

## 1.5 Summary

### 1.5.1 Social-scientific study of texts

A social-scientific study of the New Testament presupposes a relationship between the text and the socio-historical environment from which it originated. This relationship can be described in different configurations, in each of which specific elements are accentuated (cf sections 1.3.1.1-1.3.1.5). This study supports the view that a text is both a *social product*, its formation being prompted by some societal (including religious) stimulus, and a *social force*, able to effect some change within society.

### 1.5.2 The literariness of a text

At the same time a text is also a literary construct, and should be honoured as such. This implies that an integration of the principles of literary theory and those of the social-scientific method(s) employed, is required. In this case insights from literary criticism, macro and micro-social theoretical perspectives, sociology of literature, sociology of knowledge, anthropology and social psychology are considered in the construction of the conceptual model(s) which will direct the extraction of some workable information from the text (cf chapters 3 and 4 below).

### 1.5.3 Interpreting a text

An investigation such as this seeks to contribute to the process of interpreting a text, also known as the hermeneutical process. One should be clear as to *why* a specific text is chosen, and *for what purpose* that text is to be interpreted (cf sections 1.3.2-1.3.2.1 above). Referring to the hermeneutical debate on the meaning of texts, one should also decide whether one is pursuing *the* probable meaning, or simply one amongst several possible but legitimate meanings of the text (cf 1.3.2.2 above).

### 1.5.4 The intention of the study

This study seeks to demonstrate how, in accordance with the symbolic universe, the essence of social life is construed in Luke-Acts: is it to be found in societal structural relations, rigidly defined by measures calculated to ensure purity? Or is it to be sought in interpersonal social relations, characterized by compassion and the willingness to serve the marginal people of society (cf sections 1.1 and 1.2 above)?

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### 1.5.5 The meal – a case study

The so-called *banquet parables in the Travel Narrative* of the Gospel of Luke – Lk 14:(7)8-11, 12-14, (15)16-24 – will serve as a case study in this investigation. They were chosen because of their highly social theme and the hierarchical differentiation assigned to the roles utilized in them. At the same time they serve as indicators of ideological differences within a setting of dispute. An analysis of the metaphorical reference of the elements of these parables might shed some light on the stated aim of this study (cf section 1.2 above).

### 1.5.6 Methodology

A text cannot be employed as a straightforward database from which to extract sufficient information to construct the contextual world that lies behind it (cf section 1.3.1.2 above). Rather, by making use of inductive reasoning and by applying models, one may discover patterns that could suggest something about the socio-historical background of a text (cf section 1.3.3 above). In this study Luke-Acts is taken as a system of interaction resembling, but at the same time revising, the system of interaction of the contextual world from which it sprung (cf section 1.3.1.4 above). *Interaction* is associated with the *roles* played by the characters in the narrative, and the roles signify status. The analysis will therefore be conducted from the perspectives of *role theory* and *symbolic interactionism* as it is understood in interactionist theorising (cf sections 3.5.3-3.5.3.3 below).

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## 1.6 Endnotes: Chapter 1

1. Dt 6:8-9; 11:18, 20; Num 15:38-39.
2. This process is also referred to as *social control*, which is applied to deviant members of society either to get them to conform to acceptable standards of behaviour, or to neutralize them.
3. Even the passage in Acts 3:32-37 provides shaky ground for assuming that Luke exhorts 'rich' people to actually become poor. In fact, in passing judgment on the behaviour of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac 5:4), Luke's Peter explicitly indicates that there was no obligation on the owners to sell their land in the first place, and even after they have sold it the decision as to what to do with the proceeds of the sale is entirely theirs. It is only after they have decided to give it all to the apostles and then keep part of it, that they incur the penalty.
4. Van Tilborg (1986:31-34; cf also Kee 1989:70-102 on the subject of the Covenant), in a discussion on Matthew 5:7, argues that the concept of 'mercy' (ἔλεος) was central to the biblical covenant-practices: 'It is unthinkable to have a Jewish covenant without love, mercy, compassion, pity, fidelity, etc...' (Van Tilborg 1986:31-32). He indicates that this theme is redundant in the literature contemporaneous with the Gospel of Matthew: 'God's mercy is a central topic widespread in the actual paranes of Matthew's time and long thereafter' (Van Tilborg 1986:32). The concept of 'mercy' (ἔλεος) used here in Matthew is equivalent to the concept of 'compassion' (οἰκτιρῶν) in Luke. Louw & Nida (1988) not only list the two terms under the same semantic domain, namely 'Moral and ethical qualities and related behavior' (Louw & Nida 1988:742), but under the same subdomain as well, i e 'Mercy, merciless' (Louw & Nida 1988:751). On the basis of Van Tilborg's exegesis one can deduce that the critical stance taken in Luke's narrative towards the Pharisees included the notion that they misunderstood and misrepresented the whole covenant relationship. Van Tilborg's description of a covenant relationship exhibits striking similarities with the relationships described in terms of the patron-client model (cf chapter 4, section 4.4.3.5 a). A study of the covenant in terms of this model may yield fruitful results (cf Malina 1988a).
5. Note the correspondence to the indicative-imperative scheme recognized in theology.



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6. This is actually confirmed by the theory of cognitive dissonance, which states that adherents to a belief system would – in the face of social ridicule because of their beliefs being proved false – actually *make* their beliefs true by translating them into practical deeds, especially by proselytizing (cf Gager 1975; see below Chapter 2).
  7. The text's 'contextual history' is not to be confused with its 'referential history' (cf Petersen 1978:9-23, 33-39, 81-92; 1985:6-10).
  8. The term 'text' as used here is more inclusive than denoting a purely literary text in its final version. Van Aarde (1988b:3) argues that, in order to construct the context of a specific text where information on the reader is scant or absent, more substantial material is needed. Such material could be acquired by focusing on aspects from other 'texts'.

Other 'texts' could be fragments in the co-text that have occurred previously or will occur later. They could also be references to pre-texts, for example quotations from and allusions to other texts, or the use of sources. Seen thus, each text is part of a constellation of texts. Every text presupposes an earlier one. Besides the other fragments in the co-text and references to pre-texts, intertextuality involves any human situation which, as a result of the essential denotative function of language, encroaches upon a text.

(Van Aarde 1988b:3)

In this sense a 'text' may also be constituted by artefacts and other archaeological material.

9. The assumption that the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts form a unified narrative has recently been challenged by Dawsey (1989). He contends that certain factors such as differences in genre, stylistic characteristics and sequence (Acts following the Gospel) prohibit an uncritical assumption of narrative unity between the two works, and that an assumption of sequence should not necessarily lead to one of unity (Dawsey 1989:49-50).