Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Compassion – the essence of life: A synopsis

This study has two main objectives – to be both a *methodological exercise* and a *theological enterprise*. It is a *methodological* exercise in that it applies social-scientific theory and method to the study of a New Testament subject, and a *theological* enterprise in its effort to divulge the author's understanding of (certain aspects of) the symbolic universe by an analysis of his ideological bias. That ideological bias, evident in his literary work, represents his theology.

We have conducted this investigation on the basis of the hypothesis that Luke composed his Gospel with the purpose of redefining the understanding of his readers concerning the disposition and conduct of 'insiders' towards 'outsiders' and of elites towards non-elites. This basis signifies the fact that our interest was directed towards the *contextual* rather than the *referential* history of the text (cf chapter 2, section 2.4 for the distinction). We accepted as part of the premise of our investigation the thesis by Resseguie, namely that the Gospel of Luke is structured in terms of two opposing ideologies (cf chapter 4, section 4.4.2.2) – an exaltation-oriented ideological perspective imputed to the Pharisees, and a humiliation-oriented perspective connoted to Jesus.

We have also conducted an investigation into the works of six major exponents of the social-scientific study of the New Testament, namely Gerd Theissen, John G Gager, Wayne A Meeks, Bruce J Malina, John H Elliott, and Norman R Petersen (cf chapter 2). The investigation was not the usual general survey – it concentrated on specifically two aspects:

- The approach towards the literature of the New Testament.
- The role of social science theory (and method) in the respective works.

The purpose of that investigation was both to serve as an introduction to what is done in the field of the social-scientific study of the New Testament, and to give an indication of the important role the two aspects mentioned above would play in the present work.

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Methodologically speaking, in a cross-disciplinary study such as this one it is especially important to reach a sufficient measure of competence in the discipline(s) *not* one's own. For this purpose we investigated those aspects of literary and social-scientific theory we thought relevant to the purpose of this study (cf chapter 3, sections 3.4-3.5.4). We believe that the results of our investigation have demonstrated the compatibility of narrative criticism and social-scientific methods. Valuable data have been generated by treating the narrative as an imagined social world and by performing certain social-scientific analyses on it. On the micro-level the analysis of role, status and expectations in terms of the theoretical perspective of *role theory* (cf chapter 3, section 3.5.3.2), and the evaluation of actions in terms of sanctions and legitimations, revealed certain patterns which provided important clues to the ideology of the author. These findings were corroborated by interpreting the data in terms of three conceptual models – the patron-client model (cf chapter 4, section 4.4.3.5 a), the honour-shame model (cf chapter 4, section 4.4.3.5 b), and the purity model (cf chapter 4, section 4.4.3.5 c). These models are applications of the theoretical perspective of *symbolic interactionism* (cf chapter 3, section 3.5.3.1). At the same time we have indicated that the study is not intended to be a full social system analysis, but a *partial* analysis – known as a *contextual analysis* – focusing on individuals, but locating the role of the individual with reference to its group context (cf chapter 4, section 4.3). Basic to our model was the exposition of theory directed at explaining the interaction between individuals within the system. In addition the model needed to include a theoretical perspective on the social structure itself, which could provide an explanation of the higher-order level of group structure and intergroup behaviour. As our macro-sociological perspective we chose *conflict theory*, thereby indicating the premise that first-century Mediterranean culture was agonistic in terms of social (especially intergroup) dynamic, and that the Gospel of Luke reflects and comments upon this aspect of social life.

Even before methodological matters receive attention, however, there are other important questions of principle that should be resolved. One must be very clear about the relationship between the various disciplines that are to be employed in the investigation. In what frame of reference will the results of the study be interpreted: a theological, sociological, or narratological frame? We have indicated that the subject of this study is *theology* (cf chapter 1, section 1.3). To look for an author's *theology* in a literary work is identical to looking for his *ideology* (cf chapter 3, sections 3.2.1-3.2.2.4). Theology, furthermore, is a kind of knowledge that is closely linked to another kind of knowledge – the knowledge comprising the *symbolic universe*. Symbolic universes, as we indicated (cf chapter 3, section 3.2.2.3), is related to the matter of *legitimation* – that is, *explaining* the institutional order by ascribing cog-

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nitive validity to its objectified meanings, and *justifying* that order by endowing its practical imperatives (custom; role expectations) with normative authority. This raises the question of the manner in which a symbolic universe is constructed, what factors influence the composition of such symbolic universe, and how it functions conceptually and socially. Is it constructed in order to confirm the status quo or to challenge it? Is the symbolic universe a replica of the social world, or does the social world conform to the values prescribed by the symbolic universe? When does a symbolic universe come into existence? If it has an integrative function for the purpose of maintaining the current social order, is the symbolic universe constructed simultaneous with or subsequent to the social universe? This is really a question about the relationship between belief systems and the social reality in terms of causality. Is it sufficient to say that one is a result of the other, or one is maintained by the other, or is there a much more complex dialectical relationship between the two?

The relationship between these two kinds of knowledge, as we stated, has to do with causality.

Theologically speaking, we hypothesized that the *religious ideology or theology* of the author was derived from his interpretation of the essence of God in his relationship with man (cf chapter 1, section 1.1). In other words, we argued that Luke understood God's actions towards man as characterized by the element of compassion, and that he advocated this value and recommended that it become part of the expectations attendant upon especially the roles that were linked to a high status (i e the rich, the powerful, the authoritative). This implies that Luke is moving to change the practical imperatives (role expectations) prevalent in his social world to conform with his understanding of the values of the symbolic universe. This was confirmed by the analyses relating to our test case, Luke 14:1-24. A clear pattern emerged in the assessment of actions, showing that status-seeking and exclusivity was negatively evaluated, while humbleness and caring received endorsement. This was corroborated by the results of an investigation of the sanctions and legitimations pertaining to such actions – self-asserting behaviour was both empirically and metempirically rejected, while humbleness and compassion was shown to find empirical and metempirical approval (cf chapter 4, section 4.6.2-4.6.2.3).

If we accept the fact that a symbolic universe serves to legitimate the social order, we have to postulate that Luke is arguing from and presenting a totally new symbolic universe. This I find just as inconceivable as I found Moxnes' contention about the uniqueness of Luke's message (cf chapter 4, section 4.6.4). We therefore have to explore another avenue, namely that of the dialectical relationship between the two kinds of knowledge. In our discussion on this subject (cf chapter 3, section

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3.2.2.3), we indicated that while the symbolic universe legitimates the social world, the symbolic universe itself needs to be legitimated when challenged. A symbolic universe consists of a body of pre-theoretical or pre-reflective knowledge. Its legitimation is constituted by a body of *reflective knowledge*. If the symbolic universe is religious in nature, then its legitimation, as a reflection on a religious symbolic universe, is known as *theology*. However, we have indicated that legitimation is not the only thing that theology does for the symbolic universe – it may also *modify* that universe (chapter 3, section 3.2.2.3). On the basis of this information I contend that Luke's view is intended to be both a *legitimation* of the values he finds in the symbolic universe, and a *modification* of the symbolic universe of his readers. The prevalent social order was strongly divided into elites and non-elites, who had very little to do with one another except in constructing mutually beneficial, asymmetrical relationships described as *patron-client* relationships. The elites, furthermore, seem to have been involved in horizontal relationships based on the principle of reciprocation in equal measure. People not of their status were regarded as 'impure', and not given any consideration for fear of 'pollution' (cf chapter 1, section 1.1). Such conduct was quite in keeping with the practical imperatives (role expectations) at that level of society, which expectations were given normative character by deriving them from the symbolic universe. Luke advocates a new value derived from the symbolic universe – compassion (οἰκτίρμων), being inclusive, so that both the marginalized people in society and the outsiders can be accommodated. That is a theological enterprise, pure and simple.

While we have set out to perform a social-scientific investigation of the religious symbolic universe reflected in Luke's ideology/theology (cf title of the present work), we were at pains to indicate that a social-scientific investigation of this kind need not be regarded as reductionist in that it would of necessity reduce theology to social dynamic (cf chapter 3, sections 3.2.2-3.2.2.4). The results of our investigation have shown that Luke's call, based on his core value derived from the symbolic universe, is for compassion and caring towards all people, even those originally thought of as 'polluted'. We believe thereby to have proven our hypothesis and validated our model.

That means that we have accomplished our theological goal as well. For even today, as in Luke's time, compassion should be the essence of life.

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