

Spirituality in the Gospel of Luke¹

There is a big congruence in materials and construction of the synoptic Gospels. In spite of this congruence the attention for each Gospel has revealed that each of them is pervaded with a specific spirituality. Already in the nineties of the previous century some attention was paid to the way Mark introduces his readers to the mystery of the identity of Jesus and to a way of life that exists in unselfish love.² This article will direct its attention to some characteristic features of the spirituality present in the Gospel of Luke. The point of departure is the description of spirituality in the classical work of Kees Waaijman. He calls spirituality the divine-human relational process of transformation.³

This article is about biblical spirituality. Biblical spirituality is about what is happening between biblical text and its readers. The meaning of a text is the result of a circular interactive process. A reader attributes meaning to a text on the basis of the information which that text gives to the reader. If we combine this with the definition of spirituality, we may see that biblical spirituality is a twofold reality. Biblical spirituality is about the question of how the divine-human relational process is present in the biblical text. But it is also about the question of how these texts influence the spirituality of the reader. Biblical spirituality is about spirituality within the Bible, but it is also about the influence of the Bible in the divine-human relational process of its readers.

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² Huub Welzen, "An Initiation into Mystical Life: The Gospel According to Mark," *Studies in Spirituality* 5 (1995): 86-103.

³ Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

A History Guided by God

An important point in the spirituality of the Gospel of Luke is the relation of its readers to the reality Luke writes about. It is important that we recognize Luke as an historian. Luke is called the first Christian historian.⁴ Normally this opinion is based on Acts. But the characterization of Luke as an historian should not be restricted to Acts. Luke-Acts must be seen as one unity. They are the two volumes of one work.⁵ A quick look at the prologue of the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:1-4) makes clear that the characterization of Luke as an historian is applicable to the gospel too. In the prologue of the Gospel we can also see the characteristics of historiography in antiquity. Luke uses the words and expressions typical for that genre of history.⁶ We should read the prologue in that manner, where Luke characterizes his narration as *διήγησις*; a technical term which denotes the classical style of historiography.

Our aim is an inquiry into the characteristic features of the spirituality of the Gospel of Luke. From this point of view some remarks on historiography in the prologue are important. The first one is that the readers of historiography participate in the same reality as the characters within the book. This is not the same as in fiction. In fictional literature the characters of a story participate in a different reality from that the readers of that story. On the other hand, in historiography characters and readers participate in the same reality. But they do this at a different moment in time. One can see this very easily through the following example. Julius Caesar wrote *De Bello Gallico*. For us as the readers of this book, it is possible to visit all the places described in that text, even though we live more than twenty centuries after the events described in the book. Such a participation in the reality of a story is not however possible in the case of fiction. We shall see that this kind of participation in the same reality of a book is very important for the spiritual impact of the Gospel of Luke.

A second remark concerns the phrase in the prologue of the Gospel “about the events that have been fulfilled among us.” As Richard J. Dillon⁷ points out the use of the participle perfect passive is here very striking. The use of the perfect tense means that the events described in the book have a lasting influence across

⁴ Martin Dibelius, “Der erste christliche Historiker,” in *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte*, 5th ed. Heinrich Greeven (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 108-119.

⁵ Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: MacMillan, 1927).

⁶ Isak Ioannes Du Plessis, “Once More: The Purpose of Luke’s Prologue,” *Novum Testamentum* 16, no.4 (1974): 259-271; Josphe A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 288-289.

⁷ Richard J. Dillon, “Previewing Luke’s Project from his Prologue (Luke 1:1-4),” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981): 205-227.

the time of its readers. Besides, a passive form is used. In the Gospel of Luke a passive form is often a *passivum divinum* indicating God as the acting person. We also note the root “to fulfill” in the word used. This root indicates among others the fulfillment of scriptures. As a consequence Dillon relates the prologue of the Gospel to all those passages in Luke where the evangelist speaks about the fulfillment of scriptures, especially Luke 24. In this way it becomes clear that the history which Luke narrates is a history initiated by God.

A third remark relates to the way how in verse 2, the history which Luke narrates is specified. Verse 1 ends with the “account of the events that have been fulfilled among us.” Verse 2 goes on with the word *καθώς*: “just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses.” Verse 2 is not a common relative clause. This verse is a modifier that indicates how to understand the events mentioned in verse 1. It clearly states that it is about the events just as they were handed on. The events are taken as handed on: in their value. Luke does not tell the events just as they are, but as events of kerygmatic importance for the original audience of Jesus and readers of the Gospel. As he states in verse 2, his narration must be understood in the same way as the narration of those who wrote before him. His *διήγησις* is tradition, kerygma of direct importance for his readers.

Our last remark concerns the appearance of the word “us.” Verse 1 speaks about “the events that have been fulfilled among *us*.” Verse 2 says “just as they were handed on to *us*.” Some interpreters see “us” in verse 1 as referring to the contemporaries of Jesus, and “us” in verse 2 as referring to contemporaries of Luke. For our understanding the boundaries between the two meanings are not so sharp. Both the characters within the Gospel of Luke as the readers of this Gospel participate in one and the same history: a history in which God has taken an initiative for a history of salvation. Both words and events in this Gospel have the aim of offering God’s salvation to humankind.

By way of conclusion, we may here say that Luke tells us about a history guided by God. God has taken an initiative in the history of humankind. The goal of this initiative is salvation. Luke is not only writing about God’s initiative and salvation as events that happened in a distant past. He is also providing the readers of his gospel the possibility to participate in these events and salvation, by reading and appropriation.

The Central Theme of Liberation

The central theme of the Gospel of Luke is liberation or salvation. Luke uses several words to indicate this central theme: salvation, liberation, peace, release, freedom, redemption and remission (of sins). Both God (1:47) and Jesus (2:21)

are called “saviour.” God is the one who is the source of salvation. Jesus is the one who brings salvation. Salvation concerns liberation from mortal danger and death; it relates to healing from illness, the rescue of people with unclean spirits, and the remission of sins. It is also salvation from an oppressive way of observing the law and from marginalization in the community. Liberation in a religious-political sense of the word must also not be excluded. Sometimes words appear in the context of liberation connoting the liberation from the slavery in Egypt (e.g. 1:68-69). An eschatological and apocalyptic dimension is also present in this theme. This becomes clear, for example, in the discourse about the end of time. The coming of the Son of Man with power and great glory implies that redemption is drawing near (21:28).

Two Areas of Problems

Two areas of problems form the background for the Gospel of Luke.⁸ Two important problems played a role in the Christian communities which Luke addresses. The first area of problems is related to the fact that the community for which the Gospel has been written, was a multiform community. It was no longer composed from one and the same social layer. Its members had different cultural and religious backgrounds, resulting in a problem of relationships between rich and poor members of the community. The second area of problems relates to the delay of the *parousia*. We will see how these two areas of problems exercised influence on the spirituality of the Gospel of Luke.

A Multiform Community

In the multiform situation of the Christian community of the last quarter of the first century AD, members of that community did not originate from one and the same social layer. Wealthy and prosperous people, and people in power also became members of the Christian community. The cultural and religious backgrounds of the members of the community were thus not the same. One of the problems that emerged was therefore that of community building between rich and poor, and between persons who exercised influence and others who did not. Luke reproaches his readers’ lust for money (16:14) and greed (12:15), for their striving for places of honour at meals and banquets (14:7-14) and in the synagogues (20:46), and for their yearning for power, respect, esteem, and status as righteous (20:46; 18:9), while devouring the houses of widows and orphans (20:47). He reproaches his readers that for avoiding companionship with those

⁸ Huub Welzen, *Lukas: Belichting van het Bijbelboek* (Leuven: Vlaamse Bijbelstichting, 2011).

who had a bad reputation in the community (5:27-32; 7:36-50; 15:1-2; 19:7), even though the message of salvation is also addressed to them (15:7,10; 19:10). Luke wanted to transform this conduct of his readers. He therefore confronts them with the ideal of Jesus and how he identified with the poor of his time (4:16-21; 6:20-23) in opposition to the rich (6:24-26).

Sometimes people refer to Luke's reproaches in a naïve way, in terms of an individual morality. They talk about a sliding back of individual members of the Christian community towards a pre-Christian ethos. Luke's reproaches should, however, be understood as being directed against an egocentric and materialistic way of life, characterized by motives of gain and acquisition of possessions.

It is here clear that Luke's reproaches should be interpreted in terms of a culturally and socially fixed ethos rather than in terms of an individual morality. Luke's reproaches are directed against a social way of life based on the principle of reciprocity which formed the basis of social intercourse in Hellenistic society. Generosity was only extended with a view to a security of the repayment by the receivers. This attitude of *do ut des* was prevalent among the readers of the Gospel of Luke.⁹ Luke resisted this attitude out of concern to and solidarity with people who were unable to repay or reciprocate received generosity, and because of this, they were excluded from any support.

In opposition to this social ethos that threatened to fragmentize the Christian communities at the end of the first century, Luke formulates a spirituality of salvation and liberation. This spirituality is communal. It aims at building up Christian community life. It is a spirituality that is directed towards others. Concern for others, for the stranger and for the marginalized is diametrically opposed to the idea of an egocentric self-sufficiency that aims to determine its own future. A point of departure of this spirituality is that God is the lord of people's future. However, this does not mean that people are absolved from the obligation to realize liberation and salvation with each other and to each other.

An important factor in this spirituality is the element of God's solidarity with the humble and the poor. One could say that this communal spirituality unsettles the social ethos of antiquity in two ways. The first way is the fundamental one. Instead of an exclusive and self-directed attitude, Luke propagates an inclusive and outward-looking spirituality. Secondly, Luke unsettles contemporary ethos through God's solidarity with the poor. Against the background of 'reciprocity', Luke lets his readers know that they should benefit the poor and the humble without hesitation; and that reciprocity

⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Horn, *Glaube und Handeln in der Theologie des Lukas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 220-223.

on behalf of these people would be taken over by God. God would pay back through this communal spirituality. Luke rejects the idea that people justify themselves, and that in so doing, one person would be superior to another. Looking down on others implies that those who exalt themselves are not in a correct relationship with God.

This communal spirituality of liberation has an eschatological nature. The realization of liberation is influenced by the definitive intervention of God in history. The transformation of the readers who Luke addresses is influenced by the approaching judgment. Transformation was therefore still possible. Perhaps this is the reason why a number of parables in the Gospel of Luke have an open end, such as the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, or the parable of the great dinner in Luke 14. But there is also the threat that there would come a moment when transformation would no longer be possible. This is clearly the case in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31).

Living Towards the End

The second area of problems is caused by the delay in the expected return of Jesus. In the oldest writings of the New Testament the longing to the second coming of Jesus is intensely perceptible. For instance, the theme of the First Letter to the Thessalonians is coloured by this expectation. People thought that the *parousia* and the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God were so near, that they feared that those who had died in the interim would not participate in the second coming of Christ.

In the last quarter of the first century the situation had completely changed. The belief that was prevalent in the first Christian generations still remained unfulfilled. Within this context, one can understand that such unfulfilled belief was destined to gradually fade out.

The Situation of Luke's Readers in History

For Luke's reaction to this second area of problems, it is important to see how he situates his readers in history. In Jesus' address about the end of time in Luke 21 there is a clear distinction between the events of the year AD 70 and the events at the end of time. The clear distinction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming of the Son of Man carries the implication that there is a period of time in between. For the audience of Jesus in Luke, all that Jesus says about the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming of the Son of Man was meant to happen in the future. But for the readers of the Gospel who lived in the last quarter of the first century, the situation was different. For them, the fall of Jerusalem and the

destruction of the temple in the year 70 after Christ were events of the past. But the coming of the Son of Man was still a future event for them.

The address about the end of time in Luke 21 does not only make a distinction between the fall of Jerusalem and the *parousia*; it also relates them to each other. The relation concerns the reaction of God to the refusal of his offer of salvation. Luke interprets the events of the year 70 as a consequence of Jerusalem's refusal of Jesus. The events at the end of time have a similarity with the events of the destruction of Jerusalem. The only difference is that at the end everything is brought to a cosmic level. For those who accepted the word of God and persevered, the coming of the Son of Man is not a threat, but a liberation. But for those who refused the word of God, it is a judgment.

The Relation of the Narrated and the Communicative Situation (Lk 19:11-27)

This relation of the characters in this Gospel and its readers is really shocking. We will show this with the help of the parable of the king and his slaves in Lk 19:11-17. Within the context of the Gospel of Luke this parable is a key text. The parable is a mirror of the events surrounding Jesus. Already from the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus is presented as a king.¹⁰ This theme of the kingdom of Jesus becomes extraordinarily dramatic when it is related to the theme of the coming of the Son of Man and the destiny of Jerusalem.¹¹ The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem does not mark the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is received as a king by his disciples (19:28-38), but he is refused by his opponents (19:39-40; 19:45-21:38). A trial takes place, followed by an execution and an ascension into heaven. Earlier in the Gospel, these events are referred to as an exodus (9:31) and an elevation (9:51). All these events belong to the manifestation of the Son of Man. Jesus speaks about this in Lk 22:69: "But from now the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." After the events in Jerusalem, the Son of Man would be invisible, but would appear again. During the time that the

¹⁰ Huub Welzen, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures for us?" (Lk 24:32): Spiritual Hermeneutics as a Heuristic Model for the Spiritual Aspects of Intertextuality within the Lucan Corpus," in *Seeing the Seeker: Explorations in the Discipline of Spirituality: A Festschrift for Kees Waaijman on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, eds. Hein Blommestijn et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 169-197, esp. 174-179.

¹¹ Sjeff van Tilborg, "De koning en de tien slaven (Lc 19,1-27)," in *Parabelverhalen in Lucas, van Semiotiek naar Pragmatiek*, eds. Bas van Iersel et al. (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1987), 217-250.

Son of Man is invisible, Jerusalem would be destroyed (19:43-44; 20:20-24) but after that, the Son of Man would become visible for everyone: “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (21:27-28). These things were expected to happen within the span of one generation (21:32). The coming of the Son of Man would also be the time of the proximity of the kingdom of God (21:38).

The words of the sympathizers of Jesus at his entry into Jerusalem in 19:38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord” are premature if they are taken to mean that the entry is the establishment of the kingdom of God. Indeed, they are the beginning of the events in Jerusalem, that is to say of the exodus and the elevation of the Son of Man and His sitting at the right hand of the power of God.

Within this context the end of the parable that the enemies of the king would be slaughtered (19:27) bears a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, the killing of its inhabitants and children (19:43-44), and to their being taken away in captivity by the gentiles (21:20-24). In the Gospel of Luke, this parable anticipates Jesus’ references to the end of Jerusalem. If the listeners of Jesus would not repent, the same would happen to them as to the Galileans who had been murdered by Pilate, or the eighteen who died when the tower of Siloam collapsed over them (13:1-5). Jesus had often tried to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her brood under its wings, but they were not willing (13:34-35). This portrays the same reality as in the parable of the wicked tenants: the owner of the vineyard will come and destroy the tenants (20:16). Jesus is the stone that the builders rejected. “Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces: but when it falls on any one it will crush him” (20:18). Yet, this is not the end of time (21:9). The end would be the coming of the Son of Man (21:27), and the proximity of the kingdom of God (21:31).

In Luke, Jesus continuously confronted Jerusalem with the reminder that for her that was the last opportunity for repentance. If the city repented, it would avoid the fate that threatened her. For the readers of Luke it is important to see the similarity with their own situation. Luke stresses the coming of the Son of Man and his judgment. How the readers of Luke fared during this judgment, depended on the extent to which they were transformed by the word of God. Faith, endurance, and prayer are presented as the characteristics of the longing desire to the liberation in the end.

Faith, Endurance, and Prayer

For a description of the transformation of the Gospel readers, the metaphor of fruit-bearing offers a good starting point.¹² John the Baptist uses this metaphor in his proclamation. He stresses the need of repentance. In this context he speaks about bearing fruits worthy of repentance (3:8). The need of repentance is underlined by the wrath to come. In 3:9 the metaphor goes on: “Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Bearing good fruit or not is the criterion for the survival of the trees. After John the Baptist, there will come someone who is more powerful. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire (3:17).

The parable of the seed (8:4-15) is about the word of God. It describes different situations.¹³ In the first situation, although the word is heard, it does not have effect in faith and salvation, as it is taken away by the devil. The second situation is that the word has an impact on its listeners, but these believe only for a while and in a time of temptation they fall away. The third situation embraces those who are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. The four and last situation describes those who bear fruit because the word is sown in an honest and good heart, and they bear fruit with endurance. The word “endurance” (ὑπομονή) brings to mind the atmosphere of the temptations of the time and the eschatological catastrophes. We meet the word “endurance” in the discourse about the end of time. In Lk 21:19 Jesus promises life to those who will endure. The way to endure the temptations of the end is to stand up and raise one’s head (21:28). In Lk 21:36 Jesus speaks about watchfulness and prayer in order to obtain the strength to escape all the things that would happen.

The parable of the barren fig tree (13:6-9) uses the same wording about the cutting down of trees just as John the Baptist does.¹⁴ The parable is told within a context of repentance (13:1-5).

The parable of the wicked tenants (20:9-19) interrupts the narrative about the coming events in Jerusalem, including its destruction which is described as a future event.¹⁵ The enormous threat of these coming events is manifest.

¹² Huub Welzen, “Naar een pragmatiek van het Lucasevangelie,” in *Parabelverhalen in Lucas*, 281-321.

¹³ Wim Weren, “De parabel van het zaad (Lc 8,1-21),” in *Parabelverhalen in Lucas*, 22-54.

¹⁴ Toon van Schaik, “De vijgeboom met kans op vruchten (Lc 13,1-9),” in *Parabelverhalen in Lucas*, 110-132.

¹⁵ Wim Weren, “De parabel van de wijnbouwers (Lc 20,9-19),” in *Parabelverhalen in Lucas*, 251-280.

In the metaphor of the fruit-bearing, one perceives a connection between repentance, belief, endurance, prayer and watchfulness. A vibrant illustration of these concepts appears in the parable of the widow and the judge (18:1-8)¹⁶ which is told in an eschatological context. This context starts in 17:20 with the Pharisees enquiring when the kingdom of God would come. Within this eschatological context one can understand the disciples' desire "to see one of the days of the Son of Man" (17:22). In the faith of the widow, one can perceive Luke's understanding of faith, endurance, and the prayer of those who live in the days before the coming of the Son of Man. In the cry to God, day and night, we may hear the persistent prayer in the times preceding the end of time. In granting justice without delay, we may also hear God's answer to this persisting prayer and the faith Jesus' followers in the days of Luke.

The Impact of the Book: A Double Transition in the Prologue

For the expected impact of the Gospel and the corresponding transformation of its readers we return have to the prologue (1:1-4). In this prologue, Luke says that he is part of a process of tradition. This process has started because of a double transition: the transition from the eyewitnesses to the servants of the word; and the corresponding transition from events to word. We will here discuss the importance of both transitions.

The Gospel as Word of God

In the Gospel of Luke the word *λόγος* (word) has the common neutral meaning of "something that is said." Sometimes the powerful impact of the word of Jesus becomes visible; for instance in 4:31-37; 7:7 and 24:19. This word of Jesus is the word of God (5:1; 8:11; 8:21). In the Acts of the Apostles, the followers of Jesus also proclaim the word of God (Acts 4:29,31; 6:2,7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5,7,44,46,48; 16:32; 17:13; 18:11).

The word *λόγος* is also used as a reference the Gospel of Luke as evidenced in Acts 1:1: "In the first book (*λόγος*) I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven."

The preaching of Jesus, the preaching of the disciples of Jesus, and the Gospel of Luke are all connected to the word of God that is mighty and effective. By reading the Gospel, the readers communicate not only with the text, but also with the word of God. The nuances of the word *λόγος* as indications of several communications make this possible. By participating in the communication

¹⁶ Bas van Iersel, "De rechter en de weduwe (Lc 18,1-8)," in *Parabelverhalen in Lucas*, 168-193.

between text and reader, the reader also participates in the communication of Jesus and his listeners and in the communication of the disciples and their audience. In all these levels, the word of God is communicated. The reader participates in the communication of the word of God and in the liberating impact of this word. This becomes possible by the transition from the eyewitnesses to the servants of the word (1:2).

From Eyewitnesses to Servants of the Word

The transition from eyewitnesses to servants of the word may be perceived in Luke 24. In the story of the women and the empty tomb, the women remembered how Jesus had foretold in Galilee that the Son of Man had to be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again (24:6-7). A reference is here been made to the announcements of the death and resurrection of Jesus in 9:22 and 9:44, which in the Gospel of Luke were proclaimed in Galilee. The narrator mentions explicitly that the women indeed remembered the words of Jesus (24:8). This memory of the words of Jesus, offers a key to an understanding the death and resurrection of the Lord. It is precisely that memory that leads the disciple to preach. When Luke informs the reader that the women returned from the tomb and told everything to the eleven and the rest, one may understand this to be a form of preaching. In fact, the women here become an example of the transition from eyewitnesses to servants of the word.

In the story of the disciples of Emmaus we learn how the eyes of the disciples were opened and how they recognized Jesus (24:31). The unknown traveller in this episode is recognized as being the Resurrected Jesus. This recognition leads to his disappearance from their sight.¹⁷ Although at first sight, this seems to be a remarkable and strange fact, it has a certain plausibility in the theology of Luke-Acts. The aim of Luke-Acts is to help its readers experience how the story of Jesus leads to the same liberation as that experienced by the contemporaries of Jesus. Therefore, Luke had to bridge the chasm in time. He did so by presenting a process of tradition that had already started and had then reached the time of his readers. The recognition of Jesus in the story of the disciples of Emmaus intends to show the disciples' complete understanding of the story of Jesus. They were thus enabled to be servants of the word after Jesus' departure. They executed their new task by going to Jerusalem and informing the other disciples about what had

¹⁷ Sjeff van Tilborg and Patrick Chatelion Counet, *Jesus' Appearances and Disappearances in Luke 24* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

happened, and how Jesus had become known to them in the breaking of the bread (24:33-35).

In the story of the appearance of Jesus to the eleven, the same transformation is also present. To become preachers of the word, the comment of the narrator, that Jesus “opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (24:45) is important. This comment makes it clear that it is not only concerned with an explanation of the scriptures, but also about a change in the way that the scriptures are understood. The disciples are thus introduced to a complete insight of the meaning of the life, death and the resurrection of Jesus, and they are prepared for their ministry as described in Jesus’ own words in 24,47, namely, to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. This proclamation is further described in the book of Acts. In the Canticle of Simeon (2:29-32), the salvation of all nations is translated into a glory for Israel and a light of revelation to the gentiles. Israel’s liberation is thus the subject of the first part of Luke-Acts, while the liberation of the gentiles forms the subject of the second part. This also belongs to the history guided by God.

Forms of Presence

In the last chapter of the Gospel, the readers are related to the story in an intensive way. In this chapter, Luke’s opinion about the impact of the word reaches its climax. In experiencing the resurrected Christ and his absence, a transformation comes into being, echoing what has already been described in the prologue of the Gospel. The eyewitnesses will become servants of the word. Through the transformation of the events “that have been fulfilled among us” (1,1) and through the transformation of the eyewitnesses to servants of this word, a process of tradition has been initiated, reaching till the time of Luke’s readers. The preaching of God’s liberation is no longer dependent on the presence of Jesus in the flesh. History guided by God is continued in the preaching of the word.

The Gospel of Luke also participates in this process of tradition. The reading of the Gospel has the same liberating impact as that which is described in the Gospel’s episodes that narrate Jesus’ encounters with a number of persons. By reading the Gospel, readers may experience the same liberation and salvation which the characters within the Gospel narrative have experienced. The readers participate in the same God-guided history as the characters whom Luke described in his Gospel.

The concluding chapter of the first part of Luke-Acts indicates in its own way how the readers may keep alive the idea of God's liberation.¹⁸ The first way is the remembrance of the words of Jesus. The women in the tomb hear: "Remember how he told you" (24:6-7). What Jesus said is also brought to the memory of the eleven and their companions: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you" (24:45). Keeping alive the words of Jesus is thus a kind of Jesus' presence in the community.

A second access to the presence of Jesus comes through the reading of scriptures. All that is written in the scriptures is related to Jesus; to the meaning of his life, his passion, his death and his resurrection (24:6-7,25-27,44); but also to the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins (24:47). To understand this meaning of scriptures, it is not only these texts which need to be opened (v.32), but also the eyes (v.31) and the minds (v.45) of the disciples towards this new meaning of the scriptures. The scriptures reveal the meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; but at the same time, it is also true that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reveal the meaning of the scriptures. Participating in this "circular" process of attributing meaning to scriptures leads the disciples to a stronger longing and desire: "Were not our hearts burning within us?" (24,32).

Desire, faith, endurance, and prayer are all ways that make up for the absence of Jesus. But the last chapter of Luke shows also that Jesus is present in the gathering of the Christian community, where the scriptures are opened, where Jesus' words are handed over, where the experiences with the Risen Lord are shared, and where the bread is broken. The liberation that occurred in the Gospel of Luke goes on across the world through readers of the same Gospel who appropriate the liberation which this Gospel proclaims. This is the way the readers of the Gospel of Luke participate in the history guided by God.

Conclusion

Luke is an historian. He writes a history of liberation in which God takes the initiative. The readers are part of this history of liberation. Two problems in the Christian communities which Luke addresses are important for an understanding of the specific spirituality in his Gospel. The first problem was that the multiformity of these communities threatened to fragmentize them. To avoid splits in the community, Luke presented a spirituality of inclusiveness. Jesus is a model for this inclusiveness. The second problem was the delay of the *parousia*. Luke assured his readers that the end was soon to come. A spirituality

¹⁸ Huub Welzen, *Lukas*, 433-436.

of faith, endurance, and prayer was needed. Luke presented his gospel as the word of God in the same way that the words of Jesus to his disciples were the word of God. The readers of Luke may learn from the characters in the Gospel what would happen if they accepted this word, and what if they did not. Luke's readers thus participated in the history of God in the same way as the characters of the Gospel.

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