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The Open-Ended Nature of Luke and Acts as Inviting Canonical Actualisation

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ABSTRACT

Starting from generally accepted narrative insights, this article attempts to justify a canonical reading of Luke and Acts that actualises the Lukan text for contemporary theology and Christian life. It argues that one set of foundations for later actualisation was laid by the original author: that is, the text itself of Luke and Acts has built into it several invitations for its actualisation in later Christians' lives. Among these built-in occasions for canonical actualisation, this article focuses especially on the 'open-endedness' of Luke and Acts toward the future. It examines three specific openings toward actualisation and application: (1) an open-ended plot of Acts, which invites indefinite continuation of the Pauline proclamation; (2) open-ended extension of biblical promises into the future, and (3) open-ended broadening beyond the initial audience to all possible future generations of 'us' Christian readers.

1 INTRODUCTION

Reviews of my monograph, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of biblical narrative* (Kurz 1993) showed generally favorable reception of its narrative insights, but questions were raised regarding the canonical section. For example, Talbert's review (1993) noticed my pastoral motivation for linking narrative criticism with canonical criticism. But he contended that Parts 1-3 provide an interesting unity based on narrative insights, but with little theological application to contemporary Christians; whereas the addition of the less developed Part 4 on canonical reading mars the unity of the book and raises questions that are not resolved.

One of these questions needing further resolution might be expressed thus: Starting from generally accepted narrative insights, how can one more explicitly ground a *canonical* reading of Luke and Acts that actualises the Lukan text for contemporary theology and Christian life?

This article will maintain that one set of foundations for later actualisation was laid by the original author. The text itself of Luke and Acts has built into it several invitations to its actualisation in later Christians' lives, such as their 'open-endedness' toward the future. Let us focus especially on three ways in which Luke and Acts are 'open-ended' for canonical actualisation: (1) an open-ended plot of Acts; (2) open-ended extension of biblical promises;

and (3) open-ended extension of the initial audience.¹

2 OPEN-ENDED PLOT

The endings of Luke and Acts and transitions between the two books have prompted many scholarly questions. Important evidence for their solution has been what the respective prologues of Luke and of Acts reveal about the transition from one to the other book, as well as the relationship between the events in the Gospel and those in Acts. In the perspective of these two prologues, the ending of Acts, with its lack of closure and its openness to the future beyond the events narrated, provides a natural opening toward later canonical readings.

2.1 The prologue of Acts as transition from Luke to Acts²

The beginning of Acts recalls the 'first book' (πρῶτον λόγον) that the writer wrote, using the first-person-singular for the writer's individual creative act (ἐποίησάμην). This Acts prologue resumes the same communication situation between narrator and narratee with which the Third Gospel began. The same first-person *histor* is addressing the same narratee, Theophilus. He refers to the previous Gospel narrative as his 'first book' which he created for Theophilus, which treated 'all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day that he was taken up' (Acts 1:1–2 RSV).

Thus the prologue of Acts, with its unambiguous references to the previous account, its explicit parallelism with the Gospel prologue, and its reference to the events of the Gospel as all that Jesus *began* to do and teach (implying more activity by Jesus in the narrative to follow), presents itself self-evidently as a transition from the Gospel into Acts. Whatever closure the Gospel may have had is now re-opened toward the continuing narration in Acts (Parsons 1986:219–220). In this sense, the prologue of Acts renders Luke, 'the first book,' as at least in retrospect open-ended toward Acts.

2.2 Equivalences in the parallel prologues of Acts and Luke: The 'first book' (Acts 1:1) and the Lukan 'narrative' (*diegesis*, Lk 1:1)³

The transition from Luke to Acts (and therefore the 'open-ended' reading of Luke) can be appreciated more clearly by investigating which expressions in

¹ All three of these are grounded in relevant sections of Kurz (1993), which will be provided as references for anyone desiring further grounding for contentions in this article.

² See Kurz 1993:21–23; 73–76; cf 39–44.

³ See Kurz 1993:18–23; 39–44; 73–76.

Acts 1 correspond to which terms in Luke 1. Acts 1 refers to Luke as 'the first book' (τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον). The self-designation of this 'first book' (in the Lukan prologue) is the general term 'narrative' (διήγησιν). The first book calls itself simply a narrative, which in itself sheds little light on its contents or even genre (cf Bock 1991:198 and references).

More informative are the two prologues' expressions for the contents of that first Lukan narrative. Acts 1:1-2 refers to the content of the 'first book' as 'all that Jesus began to do and teach (περὶ πάντων...ῶν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν), until the day that he was taken up'. Luke 1:2 refers to the contents to follow as 'the things which have been fulfilled among us' (περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων).⁴ Since these expressions designate the same contents, they are evidently to be understood in this context as equivalent expressions.

Thus, Acts 1:1-2 identifies the Gospel's 'events that have been fulfilled among us' as 'all that Jesus began to do and to teach.' We saw how this verb *began* in Acts 1:1 implies more actions and teachings of Jesus to follow in Acts (as through his Spirit-filled followers), and thus a continuity between the accounts of the first and second books. Because in the first book the actions and teachings of Jesus are treated as 'events that have been fulfilled among us' (Lk 1:2), continuity implies that the appended actions and teachings of Peter and the Twelve, Stephen, Philip, Paul, and others to be narrated in Acts will also be viewed under the same perspective. Thus the focus on fulfilled events persists from the first into the second volume. The accounts in Acts will also be treated as 'events that have been fulfilled among us.'

This focus on fulfilled events looks both backward and forward. *Fulfilled* looks backward to the promises of scripture and the biblical plan of God for his people. The events of both Luke and Acts are grounded in God's saving plan. *Among us* is an open-ended expression, identifying the tale's narrator as a member of the community among which the events happened, and perhaps including the tale's expected audience in that same community. What happened first in the Gospel, as well as what is about to be narrated in Acts, did and will take place 'among us.' 'We' are part of this history that is narrated in both volumes.

Therefore what Jesus did and taught in the Third Gospel and what Peter and the Twelve and Stephen and Philip and Paul did and taught in Acts can be readily perceived in a canonical interpretation as fulfillment of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, as well as the foundational events on which the canonical readers' own history is grounded. In this perspective, the

⁴ For the notion of fulfillment in the admittedly secular Greek term, *πεπληροφορημένων*, cf Johnson (1991:27).

prologue invites later canonical readers to actualise the narrative of Luke and Acts so that it applies paradigmatically to the readers' Christian history and their own experiences of God's saving plan.

2.3 The gap of an open-ended Acts account⁵

The decision about where to end a narrative is perhaps the most important one in plotting (Kurz 1993:30). The ending determines whether the narrative (or drama) is comic or tragic or open to further development.⁶ The debate on whether or not Luke-Acts is a tragic story hinges mostly on the interpretation of the climactic quotation of Isa 6:9–10 at the end of Acts (28:26–27) and the following statement about the Gentiles' greater receptivity in 28:28. Van de Sandt (1994:347–58) assesses the earlier debate and argues that verse 28 does not imply God's abandonment of Israel as a people. Rather, verse 28 interprets the prophetic rebuke of Isa 6:9–10 in verses 26–27 in light of allusions to Ezekiel 2–3 LXX, which has a similar combination of prophetic call with comparison between the obduracy of God's people and greater receptivity of the Gentiles. The combination of Isa 6:9–10 with Ezek 2:3 and 3:6b functions as a prophetic rebuke and challenge of God's people to change.⁷ At any rate, the very persistence of the debate about whether or not Acts remains open to mission to the Jewish people is a further pointer to the open-endedness of Acts, with its canonical relevance for future Christian readers.

The peculiar way in which the ending of Acts seems to 'stop before the end,' has aroused much discussion. Not only does it discontinue before Paul's death, but even before the end of the stated two-year period of imprisonment. I suggested, following Cadbury and St. John Chrysostom, that deliberate ending before foreshadowed outcomes was a known Greco-Roman practice, which also was followed by Luke's apparent Gospel source, Mark.

⁵ See Kurz 1993:28–36, cf 153–155.

⁶ Palmer (1993:73) remarks against Tannehill's theory of Luke-Acts as tragic: 'The end of Acts is neither "tragic" nor "triumphant", but open.' Cf Tannehill 1990:348, and more recently, Fusco 1996.

⁷ Kurz (1993:153–55) had focused on the Lukan use of Isa 6:9–10 as the climax of his motif of misunderstanding. Van de Sandt (1994) adds the very helpful insight that the allusion to Ezekiel 2–3 LXX in v 28 is an intensifying of the prophetic rebuke in Isa 6:9–10. Fusco (1996) is another careful argument for Isa 6:9–10 in Acts 28 as a prophetic challenge to Jews that still leaves hope for future Jewish conversion. A fine gathering of the main protagonists and opinions (with bibliography) in the question whether or not Luke despaired of further Christian mission to the Jews appears in Tyson (1988). See also the bibliographical subsection 5.5, 'Judaism, the Jewish People, and the Gentiles,' in Green (1994). The most available expression of the interpretation of Luke-Acts as tragic in view of this final citation of Isa 6:9–10 is Tannehill (1990:346–53, esp :348).

Unlike those early readers who added the canonical longer ending to Mark, Luke apparently did notice the deliberate Markan gap but imitated it at the end of his second, rather than his first, volume (Kurz 1993:30–31, 34–35; Cadbury 1968:322, citing Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts* 55, Migne PG 60.382).

In two articles, Marguerat (1993a, 1993b) relates the suggestion by Chrysostom and others to the ancient 'rhetoric of silence' and to the kind of suspended ending attested in the work of Homer, Greco-Roman poetry, and in historiography such as Herodotus.

According to Chrysostom, the incomplete ending of Acts: (1) is the effect of a literary strategy well-attested in non-Christian literature; (2) aims at activating the reflection of the reader; (3) requires that it be filled up by extrapolation from the previous narrative. (Marguerat 1993a:77; cf 1993b:5)

Marguerat refers to the list of ancient works that violate the Aristotelian rule of narrative closure that was made by Magness, 'avec exagération' about the frequency of ancient narrative suspension.⁸

The effects of this narrative convention are significant for canonical reading of Acts (cf Davies 1983). I suggested that ending Acts with Paul preaching the Gospel boldly and unhindered avoids the excessive closure that Paul's death would have given, and moves the narrative toward the future time of the intended readers. The open ending of Acts hints that the kind of proclamation carried on by Paul continues to the present of the time of writing and even the time of reading (Kurz 1993:31). Marguerat (1993a:81 = 1993b:10, referring to Kermode 1979:65) specifies three effects of the convention of narrative suspension:

- (1) Narrative suspension is a literary device whereby the author, by failing to bring certain narrative data to their resolution, hinders the closure of the narrative world for the reader.
- (2) The closure effect must be achieved by the reader, who, in order to satisfy the need for completion, is tempted to finish the story in consonance with its plot (*Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, Herodotus).
- (3) The narrative, even without closure, may end up with a scene (*Aeneid*, *Odyssey*) or a declaration (Herodotus) that functions in the way of a metaphor or a synecdoche and induces the outspoken outcome of the narrative.

The open ending of Acts, especially because of this second effect of its narrative suspension, provides a ready invitation to treat Acts from the per-

⁸ The quoted judgment is from Marguerat (1993b:7 = 1993a:78); he refers (with inaccurate page references, 1993b:6 n 16, and in 1993a:77 n 5) to Magness (1986:25–47). Cf the sophisticated contemporary readings of Mark's ending in Danove (1993) and Hester (1995).

spective of canonical readers. The lack of closure invites continuation. The same kind of open-endedness that has motivated suggestions that the Pastoral Letters are the Lukan sequel to Acts (e.g., Quinn 1978) can also invite later generations of 'us' Christian readers into Paul's mission of 'preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered' (Acts 28:31 RSV). Certainly, those canonical readers can acknowledge that 'the Lord Jesus Christ,' whom they, as well as Paul and the narrator of Acts, accept as Lord, continues to be taught and the kingdom of God preached in their own day as it was in Paul's and in the narrator's time.⁹

Further, Acts ends before several important predictions prophesied within the narrative are fulfilled, such as Paul's death, the destruction of Jerusalem, and 'the times of the Gentiles' (Lk 21:24). *Reading Luke-Acts* has argued that at the time when the narrative was written, the first two of these predictions have been fulfilled, and that the 'times of the Gentiles' are continuing. Only the triumphant return of Jesus on the cloud remains to be fulfilled (e.g. Kurz 1993:31, 57, 72; cf 148; cf Kurz 1977, and Carroll 1988:107-114). This is *a fortiori* true of the situation of the canonical readers. An ending thus open to the future is especially suited to being applied to the time and situation of later canonical readers, for the tension between 'already and not yet' in fulfillment of the narrative's promises provides a natural invitation to actualise the narrative and apply it to the canonical readers' situation.

3 OPEN-ENDED PROMISES

3.1 Extending the biblical narrative: From *Histor* to biblical narrator¹⁰

The Lukan use of a biblical kind of omniscient narrator throughout most of Luke and Acts provides a clue to the kind of narrative Luke and Acts were meant to be. Using a biblical narrator signals that this narrative is a traditional extension of the biblical history of God's people, which applies biblical promises to the time of the story and beyond, even up to the present of the expected (and later canonical) readers. Such application of scriptural

⁹ Marguerat (1993a:87-89=1993b:18-20) points out that the final scene in Acts 28:30-31 functions by way of metaphor and the same syntactic use of the imperfect tense used in Acts summaries to describe ideal community states. The picture of the exemplary pastor Paul's self-supporting mission of preaching God's kingdom and teaching about 'the Lord Jesus Christ' with boldness and without hindrance functions paradigmatically for those wishing to continue the Pauline mission of evangelism to fulfill the Lord's unfinished assignment to witness 'to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8). The idealised picture of Paul in 28:30-31 is not just to celebrate the past but is meant to be recreated in the life of the readers.

¹⁰ See Kurz 1993:10-12, 39-44.

promises to the present of the readers further contributes to the open-ended nature of Luke and Acts.

Reading Luke-Acts pointed out how attention was drawn to this biblical narrator by the abrupt transition in narrative manner and Greek style, from the first-person *histor* in Luke 1:1-4 to the third-person omniscient narrator using heavily Septuagintal Greek from Luke 1:5 throughout chapter 2 (Kurz 1993:11-12, 42-44, 46-47).

In the prologue, the implied author projects the *persona* of a historian who gathers earlier accounts, traces eyewitness accounts and traditions from the beginning of the events recounted, and has access to inside information. His purpose is to provide assurance (*ἀσφάλειαν*) about the information which his narratee received (*κατηχήθης*). This narrator uses technical Greco-Roman language common in prefaces, which signals a serious purpose for the narrative to follow.¹¹

But with shocking abruptness the flowing periodic sentence in 1:1-4 gives way to a semitic style that sounds even more awkward because of its stylistic contrast to the opening sentence. With a calculated 'crudity,' the narrator now imitates the biblical phraseology and style of the Greek translations of the Hebrew scriptures. The omniscient narrator of the origins of Jesus' life and ministry in Luke 1-4 uses an obviously biblical style, and focuses especially on how biblical promises are being fulfilled. Thus, the biblical promises from Jewish tradition are applied to the life and ministry of Jesus, and later to his followers in Acts.

This overt attempt to draw attention to a shift from technical Greek style to biblicist style signals an intention to 'continue that biblical tradition' (cf Kurz 1993:11; Johnson 1992a:406, esp :408; Dahl 1966:152-53). As 1 Maccabees updated the biblical history to the time of the Hasmoneans, so Luke (along with Acts) updates it further to the preaching of Paul in Rome, and, through use of prophecies of Jesus and Paul within Luke and Acts, to the time of the writing of Luke-Acts.

Not only does this procedure extend the biblical story forward to the time of writing, but it implicitly inserts the 'events fulfilled among us' in both Luke and Acts into the scriptures themselves. If 'the things Jesus began to do and teach' in Luke and the events of Acts are treated as part of the biblical history of God's saving plan, these two volumes take on a similar kind of open-ended canonical nature as had the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History when used in later Jewish settings (as when the zeal of Mattathias is compared to the zeal of Phinehas in 1 Macc 2:23-26). The result is a rela-

¹¹ Since the publications mentioned in the notes and bibliography of Kurz (1993), see also Bock (1991); Dillmann (1994); Alexander (1993).

tively overt inducement for Luke-Acts to be read canonically, as scripture (long before they were officially 'canonised' by the Church). Thus, canonical reading of Luke and Acts by later generations of Christians is not a substantial leap beyond the expectations originally built into the narrative itself (cf Barrett 1996).

3.2 Plotting through promise-fulfillment¹²

The Lukan characterisation of the Gospel events as 'events brought to fulfillment among us' is incorporated into the plotting of the episodes gathered not only from previous (already plotted) Gospels, but from disparate oral and written sources, and interwoven together into the singular plots of Luke and of Acts respectively. Promise-and-fulfillment is considered by many to be the dominant principle of plotting Luke and Acts.¹³

The reference in Luke 1:1 to events narrated in the Gospel as 'events fulfilled among us' indicates that the following narrative is intended to pass on to Theophilus traditions known 'among us,' rather than to create original (and hence fictional) stories. The preface claims originality not for fictional stories but in the plotting of traditional accounts and episodes gleaned from oral and written sources. This originality takes the form of framing and linking and introducing and contextualising traditional accounts and episodes. One of the main principles for structuring these episodes into a plot is through promises that have been fulfilled (e.g., to Abraham in Mary's song, Luke 1:46-55). However, the Lukan narrator balances the notion of 'events fulfilled among us' with the complementary theme, 'for this was not done in a corner (*οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐν γωνίᾳ πεπραγμένον τοῦτο*)' (Acts 26:26) (Kurz 1993:47, 107, 187, 206; Malherbe 1985-86). He sets the Christian events in the broad context of world history. In Luke 3:1-2, he situates the beginning of the Baptist's prophetic career in the context of world and Palestinian rulers, extending the traditional prophetic call narrative of Jer 1:2-3 beyond the local king of Judah to the world rule of Tiberius Caesar. Promises and fulfillment take on a worldwide dimension.

Plotting through promise-fulfillment takes several forms in Luke and Acts, including (1) foreshadowing of future events by the narrator, (2) parallelism between Jesus and Paul, (3) explicit references to fulfillment by the narrator, (4) farewell addresses (Lk 22, Acts 20), or (5) eschatological periodisation (Lk 21).

¹² See Kurz 1993:17-31, esp. 19-23, 28-30; plus 77-81.

¹³ E.g., Bock (1991:196-97) prefers this two-part promise-fulfillment structure to Conzelmann's famous three-part salvation history (promise, Jesus, church). Cf Johnson 1991:14-21; Marshall 1970:77-83 and works cited.

(1) An example of plotting through prophetic foreshadowing occurs at the end of Jesus' temptations by the devil in Luke 4:13, when the narrator ominously concludes this account with, 'And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time (*ἄχρῳ καιροῦ*).'

(2) The pattern of foreshadowing through parallelism in Luke and Acts, as in descriptions of Jesus in Luke parallel to descriptions of Paul in Acts, is also well known (Kurz 1993:49; cf Johnson 1992b:409-10). For example, the narrator uses the same phrases to describe Jesus entering the Nazareth synagogue 'according to his custom' to teach (*εἰσῆλθεν κατὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν καὶ ἀνέστη ἀναγνῶναι*) as to describe Paul entering the Thessalonika synagogue: *κατὰ δὲ τὸ εἰωθὸς τῷ Παύλῳ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ σάββατα τρία διελέξατο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν* (Acts 17:2). The kinds of activities (such as teaching, healing, exorcising) that Jesus does in the Gospel, his followers, Peter and the Twelve, Stephen, Philip, and Paul, do in Acts. The journeys and trials of Jesus in the Gospel foreshadow the journeys and trials of Paul in Acts. The martyr's death of Stephen in Acts echoes in several details that of Jesus in the Gospel.¹⁴

Not only are the accounts of disciples in Acts patterned after those of Jesus in the Gospel, but narratives of Jesus are in turn patterned after accounts of Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and the prophets in the Jewish scriptures. Thus Jesus can be portrayed in both Luke and Acts as 'the prophet like Moses' to whom people must listen (Lk 9:35; Acts 3:22). As Elijah and Elisha raised widows' sons from the dead and multiplied food to feed followers, so Jesus does in Luke (and Peter and Paul raise a widow and a boy in Acts).

An important result of such biblical intertextual parallelism is to provide continuity in plotting disparate episodes through God's overarching plan of salvation from the prophets through Jesus to the disciples in Acts (see Kurz 1993:16, 22-23, 79-80, 87, 138, 142-43, 151-52). This biblical principle of continuity then flows easily into further canonical actualisation of similar patterns for lives of later canonical readers of Luke and Acts, as in the motif of imitation of Christ, as when Christians in prayer or liturgy insert themselves imaginatively into these Lukan accounts, and as in many parallels between the wonders and sufferings of Christian saints to those of Jesus in the Gospels and the apostles in Acts. As God sent prophets or his Son Jesus

¹⁴ Acts 7:59-60: 'he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'" Luke 23:34, 46: 'Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" [if 23:34 is genuine]... Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit"' (RSV).

or Peter or Paul to preach good news of salvation, so he sends contemporary canonical readers to do likewise.

(3) In some key places the narrator of Luke and Acts structures his account by at least implicit references to fulfillment. Thus Luke 9:51 begins the 'journey to Jerusalem' section: 'Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ἀναλήψεως αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς τὸ πρόσωπον ἐστήρισεν τοῦ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ. In similar phraseology, Acts 2:1 prefaces the pivotal Pentecostal account thus: Καὶ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς ἦσαν πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό. Sometimes these allusions to fulfillment are on the lips of Jesus, as in his passion predictions: 'Behold we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished (τελεσθήσεται, Lk 18:31b RSV).

(4) Regarding the prophetic thrust of the farewell addresses in Luke 22 and Acts 20, *Reading Luke-Acts* builds on earlier publications, which argue that these farewell addresses have a special relationship to the future of the intended audience, beyond the end of the story time (Kurz 1993:59–61, 99–100; cf Kurz 1985; Kurz 1990). These farewells depict the hero (Jesus or Paul) preparing for future generations as he is about to leave his disciples. Many of the issues which the farewell addresses emphasise are consequential in the time and experience of the intended audience. For instance, in his farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:18–38, Paul presents himself as a model for how later pastors are to treat their congregations (20:18–21, 26–28). His willingness to suffer for the gospel is an example for later Christian leaders (20:22–24). His warnings about false teachers from within and without the community apply to the time of the intended audience and concern a perennial problem readily applied also to later situations of canonical readers (20:29–30). His example of not taking financial advantage of his churches is valuable not only for the situation of the implied readers but for those of canonical readers as well (20:33–35). Accordingly, the further move beyond the future situation of that original intended audience to even later canonical readers is not a difficult one to make. The prophetic thrusts of the farewell addresses lend themselves easily to canonical actualisation by the later Church.

(5) The most elaborate structuring of the future plot line through prophetic eschatological periodisation occurs in Luke 21:7–28. In the eschatological sermon of Jesus over the Jerusalem temple, Lukan redaction emphasises stages in the coming trials. Thus 21:8 instructs listeners not to fear the rumors of wars signal the end of the world, 'for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once' (RSV). Periodisation is inserted after the traditional predictions of natural and cosmic disasters in 21:10–11: 'But before all

this, they will ... persecute you...' (Lk 21:12 RSV). Much more clearly than Mark 13, Luke 21 separates the destruction of Jerusalem into a period distinct from the final cosmic disasters: 'But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near' (*τότε γινώτε ότι ἤγγικεν ἡ ἐρήμωσις αὐτῆς*, Lk 21:20 RSV). 'For these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written' (21:22 RSV). Another stage follows after the fall of Jerusalem: 'and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (*ἄχρι οὗ πληρωθῶσιν καιροὶ ἐθνῶν*, 21:24 RSV). The final stage in the Lukan eschatological periodisation pertains to the cosmic disasters and triumphant return of the Son of Man on a cloud: 'Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near' (*ἀρχομένων δὲ τούτων...διότι ἐγγίξει ἡ ἀπολύτρωσις ὑμῶν*, 21:28 RSV). Since Luke and Acts already structure the history of salvation from the promises to Abraham through the final eschatological fulfillment when Christ returns, later canonical readers can insert their own times and situations into this eschatological periodisation of history as easily as could the original intended readers.

Hence this promise-fulfillment principle functions on several levels and stages: from the Jewish scriptures to the Gospel of Luke, from Luke to Acts, within Acts (extending God's salvation beyond Jews to Gentiles), and into the future beyond the open ending of Acts. Promises and fulfillments provide the main overarching principle of organising the 'events fulfilled among us' into God's saving history, from the events narrated in the Jewish scriptures to the eschatological return of Christ.

3.3 From scriptures (Christian OT) to the Gospel of Luke¹⁵

Three significant ways that the promise-fulfillment motif helps structure the Gospel of Luke as events fulfilling biblical promises appear in (1) the explicit references in the infancy narratives to the fulfillment of biblical promises; (2) the quotations from Isaiah and the prophets that ground the beginnings of the ministries of the Baptist and Jesus in Luke 3-4; and (3) the Lukan theme that according to the scriptures, the Messiah must (*δεῖ*) suffer.

(1) The Lukan infancy accounts make some explicit references to God's fulfilling biblical promises. Mary's song in Luke 1:54-55 ends on this note: 'He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever' (RSV). Zechariah's prophecy at the naming of his son John (Lk 1:68-79) has this as a major

¹⁵ See Kurz 1993:16, 17-36, 47-49.

theme: God has visited and redeemed his people (1:68), raised up a Davidic horn of salvation as he promised through prophets of old (1:69–70), keeping his promise to their ancestors to save them from their enemies (1:71–75).¹⁶

(2) The Third Gospel parallels the Markan grounding of the Baptist's ministry in a prophecy from Isaiah 40 (Lk 3:4–5): the voice in the wilderness calls to prepare the way of the Lord (Kurz 1993:47). In addition, Jesus' inaugural address at Nazareth (Lk 4:18–21) identifies Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit as his anointing as Christ/Messiah to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Kurz 1993:49).

(3) A widely recognised redactional emphasis of Luke's Gospel is that according to the scriptures, the Messiah must (*δεῖ*) suffer. Not only does Luke share with Mark the three passion predictions of Jesus (Lk 9:22,44; 18:31–33). Material unique to the Third Gospel (Lk 24:26–27; cf 24:46; 17:25; Acts 17:2–3; 26:23) makes repeated claims that the scriptures insist on the necessity that the Messiah suffer and thus enter his glory (Kurz 1993:70, 107).

These references illustrate how prophecy-fulfillment functions as plot transition from the Jewish scriptures to the Gospel of Luke.

3.4 From Luke to Acts¹⁷

Several prophetic motifs help structure the plot and transition from the Gospel to Acts, among them: (1) prophecies in Luke 24:44–49 that lead directly into Acts, among them the especially important one that it is written (*Οὕτως γέγραπται*) that the Messiah must be proclaimed to the nations; (2) prophecies in the preface in Acts 1 that introduce the rest of Acts and structure the plot of Acts, especially Acts 1:8.

(1) Luke 24:44–49 shows both Jesus' own words and the prophecies about him in the tri-partite Jewish scriptures (the law, the prophets, and the psalms) foretelling that 'the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem' (24:46–47 RSV). The suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah have been described in Luke 22–

¹⁶ Kurz 1993:16, 20. My research assistant, Kevin Miller, also pointed out that Mary's song is presented explicitly in the framework of a celebration of fulfilled promises: 'And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord' (Luke 1:45 RSV). Since her song also mentions fulfillment of Jewish scriptural promises (1:54–55), the context links fulfillment of both OT and NT promises.

¹⁷ See Kurz 1993:21–23.

24. The preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations will be narrated in Acts, where the action begins in Jerusalem (24:47). Likewise to be recounted in Acts are the prophetic emphasis in 24:48, 'You are witnesses of these things' (RSV). This witnessing will require 'the promise of my Father,' the Holy Spirit, which Jesus will send upon them as they obey his command to remain in the city 'until you are clothed with power from on high' (24:49 RSV, fulfilled in Acts 1-2).

(2) Acts 1:8 is commonly understood as a programmatic prophecy that functions as the equivalent of a table-of-contents for the plot of Acts. The prophecy that 'you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you' (1:8a) is fulfilled in Acts 2. That 'you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem' is recounted in Acts 2-7; 'in Judea and Samaria' in Acts 8-12; 'and to the end of the earth' (as far as Rome) in Acts 13-28. It is debated whether 'the end of the earth' refers to Rome or remains as an unfulfilled prophecy at the open-ended conclusion of Acts (cf Johnson 1992a:10-11, 26-27; Pesch 1986:69-70; van Unnik 1973:386-401). Certainly the wording allows for the possibility that later readers can understand 'the end of the world' as an open-ended invitation to canonical readers to continue as Jesus' witnesses to the entire world.

3.5 Promises expanded from Israel to Gentiles in Acts¹⁸

Already in the introduction to the Lukan Gospel, Symeon's prophecy about Jesus to his parents in Luke 2:32 foretold that Jesus would be 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel' (RSV). Already in the Lukan prelude the readers are informed that the salvation that has come in Jesus will benefit not only the Jewish people of God but all the Gentile nations as well. By the end of the Third Gospel, the salvation of the Gentiles has not yet become evident, for most of Jesus' public ministry affected Jews, except for a few quasi-symbolic turns to individual Gentiles.

The programmatic prophecy of Jesus in Acts 1:8 is not unambiguous about a turn to Gentiles in Acts, but certainly is open to that interpretation. It predicts that the disciples will be his witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and Judea (presumably mostly to Jews), in Samaria (to Samaritans) and to the end of the earth (possibly initially to diaspora Jews but, by analogy to the Samaritans in Samaria, probably with at least an openness to Gentiles as well). A clearer if still implicit allusion early in Acts to salvation of Gentiles occurs in the programmatic Joel prophecy quoted in Peter's inaugural

¹⁸ See Kurz 1993:18-22, 87-89, 93-94, 108-110.

Pentecost address: that 'in the last days... I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh... And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Acts 2:17,21 RSV). Peter's response to the query of his listeners about what they should do (2:38) can legitimately be interpreted as open both to the future and to the Gentiles: 'For the promise [of the Holy Spirit] is to you and to your children and to all who are far off' (2:39 RSV).

As expected from Acts 1:8, the first apostolic preaching is to the Jewish people of God, beginning in Jerusalem. The legitimation of the turn to the Gentiles in the plotting of Acts takes place primarily in Acts 10-11 and 15, through the Peter-Cornelius incident and the so-called Jerusalem Council. It took a triple vision from God to overcome Peter's reluctance and to open him toward the conversion of Gentiles as Gentiles, without first having to become Jews. This principle is confirmed after debate in the Jerusalem meeting in Acts 15. The conflict that occasioned the meeting was between Paul and Barnabas and some unidentified people from Judea who taught the Christians at Antioch that they must be circumcised to be saved (15:1-2).

This dissension was resolved by a gathering of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. First Peter narrated his experience with Cornelius (15:7-9), and the principle he derived from it: 'But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will' (15:11 RSV). Then Barnabas and Paul gave their confirming experience of the signs and wonders worked by God in their ministry among the Gentiles (15:12). The mediating and deciding opinion is provided by James, the current head of the church at Jerusalem (15:13-21). He argues that scripture confirms the experience narrated by Peter, Barnabas, and Paul. To support this he cites Amos 9:11-12 (cf also Jer 12:15), re-interpreting and applying it to this new situation (as the Qumran pesharim had done): 'I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen... I will rebuild its ruins... that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name' (*ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐφ' οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ' αὐτούς*, Acts 15:16-17 RSV). The so-called Apostolic Decree that resulted and the letter promulgating the decision allude to the preaching of Moses 'from early generations' and 'in every city,' and to God's promises to Noah (Gen 9:3-4). In light of the narrated experiences of Peter, Barnabas, and Paul, passages of scripture from early on are seen to refer to salvation of Gentiles. Therefore, this turn to the Gentiles is not some new development unwarranted by God's own biblical blueprint for salvation.

Acts goes on to portray the Pauline missionary pattern as one of Paul speaking normally first to Jews, then to Gentiles (e.g., Acts 13:46; 18:6). Acts ends with a climactic Pauline anticipation that Gentiles will accept the good news (possibly an appeal to Roman Jews not to be shamed by Gentiles who

listen when the people of God do not; cf Fusco 1996, Palmer 1993): 'Let it be known to you than that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen' (28:28 RSV). The extension of the promises beyond Jews to Gentiles is thus definitively confirmed by the end of Acts, which may be related to the ἀσφάλεια promised to Theophilus in Luke 1:4.

3.6 Promises for the future beyond the open end of Acts¹⁹

This section can be brief, since most of its elements have already been mentioned. Among promises for the future beyond the end of Acts, three seem especially significant for the canonical reading of Acts. The first is implied by Acts' open ending itself (Acts 28:31). Paul is portrayed preaching (κηρύσσων) the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus boldly (μετὰ πάσης παρρησίας) and unhindered (ἀκωλύτως). This ideal picture of Paul the pastor is meant as a model for the intended audience (see Marguerat 1993a:87–89 = 1993b:18–20 and the discussion above). The actualisation of this ideal of Pauline mission by canonical readers is an easy further step.

A second major Lukan thrust into the future beyond the end of Acts is the eschatological periodisation in Jesus' prophecies in Luke 21, that deals not only with the destruction of Jerusalem but with times of persecution, a post-destruction period of the Gentiles, and the eschatological cosmic signs and return of Christ. These cosmic signs and Christ's return remain still in the future, not only of the intended audience but of all canonical readers as well. Both the envisaged readership and all later canonical readers can locate themselves within the timeframe of this eschatological periodisation.

A third important Lukan window onto the future beyond the end of Acts is Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. The concern that future church leaders follow Paul's example, and about the dangers of false teachers both from within and outside the community, both naturally extend beyond the times of the intended audience to those of canonical readers as well.

All of these 'windows into the future,' which are already inscribed within the original texts of Luke and Acts, provide natural entrées for later canonical interpretation and actualisation by future Christian readers to the end of time.

¹⁹ See Kurz 1993:29–31, 34–36, 71–72, 142–43, 148.

4 OPEN-ENDED AUDIENCES

4.1 From the 'we/us' in Acts 16–28 to 'us' in Luke 1:1–4²⁰

Chapter 7 of *Reading Luke-Acts*, 'Narrative claims of "we" in Acts' (Kurz 1993:111–24), identifies claims that the 'we' in Acts 16:10–28:16 refers to a group contemporaneous with Paul on his later journeys. Sometimes they accompany Paul on journeys, including the shipwreck in Acts 27. Sometimes they are distinguished from Paul who is waiting for them at Troas (Acts 20:5–6). Sometimes they are unobtrusive eye-witnesses and observers of Paul (e.g., on the ship and at Malta in Acts 27–28). Rarely do they enter the action itself: an exception is their joining with others to dissuade Paul from continuing to Jerusalem, where, as Agabus was prophesying, Paul would be captured (Acts 21:10–14).

Chapter 4, 'The prologue to Luke's Gospel: Narrative questions' (Kurz 1993:39–44), identifies the 'us' mentioned in Luke 1:1–2 not with those earlier sometime companions of Paul in Acts but with a broader and more recent group, a group at the time of writing which includes the implied author and perhaps Theophilus as well.

In Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1 the exchange between a first-person narrator and second-person singular narratee named Theophilus provide further insight into both the original *Sitz im Leben* of the writing of these two volumes, and into the openness toward an expanded canonical audience already built into the original narrative. The first-person-singular 'I/me' refers to the narrator, who is identified with the implied author in his *persona* as a *histor* narrator who carefully composes his account from previous reports and sources. This narrator communicates directly to a second-person-singular narratee (who can stand in for the implied reader) in the time and act of writing. The first-person narrator identifies himself as part of the 'we/us' group in Luke 1:1–4, as part of those among whom these events have been fulfilled (1:1) and to whom they were passed down by eyewitnesses and ministers of the word (1:2).

We saw earlier how *among us* in Luke 1:1 is an open-ended expression, which includes certainly the narrator and perhaps the audience, and that the events of both the Gospel and Acts take place 'among us,' so that 'we' also may belong to this narrated history.

Moreover, the range of inclusiveness in the first-person plural 'we' or 'us' can easily expand or contract with little notice.²¹ The expandable nature of

²⁰ See Kurz 1993:111–24 (chap 7); 1993:39–44 (chap 4).

²¹ E.g., for the expansions and contractions of the 'we' group in Acts 27, see Kurz (1993:114–120). Cf. Bovon (1989:35–36), on the varying inclusiveness of this phrase in Luke 1:2–3: 'Ἐν ἡμῖν [in v 3] ist unpräzis' (:35).

'we' and 'us' provides warrant for including more members under its umbrella significance. Insofar as this expandable nature makes it an easy step to generalise the phrase 'among us' beyond an original community and audience to include any future audience or any reader's community, the phrase 'among us' lends itself readily to open-ended reinterpretation toward the future.

Also, whether or not Theophilus in Luke 1:3 is an actual person, the fact that the name 'Lover of God' can be interpreted as a symbol of any Christian reader (and was so interpreted in patristic times) makes it possible to include Theophilus (as narratee, and by extension, any implied readers for whom he may stand) within this same 'us' group. Narrative criticism thus alerts us to notice that certainly the narrator and plausibly the narratee Theophilus and implied readers and intended audience of Luke and Acts belong to the group designated by 'among us.' If an argument can be made for including Theophilus and the intended audience in this group, that provides another open-ended invitation to canonical actualisation by later readers who are also 'lovers of God.'²²

4.2 Canonical reading: Broadening 'us' indefinitely²³

This first-person-plural phrase 'among us' thus invites extension beyond any original audience to include all future canonical readers. A canonical reading of Luke and Acts, which is based on these narrative foundations, is invited: the readers of canonical Luke and Acts are implicitly encouraged to identify with the group among which these initiating events took place, and in fact they readily do so. These initiating events look back to the Jewish scriptures as fulfilling them, and look forward to the later church history of the canonical readers as happening 'among us,' who learn the narrative's lessons, celebrate its victories, and fortify ourselves (by prayer and watching and sharing in community living and worship) to undergo its trials.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Christian believers of all centuries have spontaneously entered imaginatively into the stories of Luke and Acts and have applied their lessons to their own communities and themselves. For this they have often been criticised by historical-critical purists. Yet a major concern for writing *Reading Luke-Acts*

²² This is to acknowledge the scholarly debate about whether or not Theophilus is a Christian, i.e., one 'among us.' Cf Kurz 1993:40-42; Bovon 1989:39; Fitzmyer 1981:299-300.

²³ See Kurz 1993:159-83 (chapters 10-11).

(one that has been important to my scholarly writing since one of my earliest articles; see Kurz 1979), and an aspect of that book that raised some questions among reviewers, was its attempt to welcome ordinary Christian canonical readers into the 'insider group' of legitimate readers of Luke and Acts (and all the scriptures). This essay has been an attempt further to delineate a canonical approach grounded in narrative and historical criticism, one that would enable contemporary readers to actualise and apply Luke and Acts to their own religious concerns.

This article has tried to ground that narrative-based canonical reading on three literary foci: (1) the plot of Acts as 'open-ended' toward the future, with special openness to canonical actualisation by later readers; (2) Lukan extension of the application of salvation-history promises from scriptural to open-ended promises: from promises to Abraham and the ancestors in scripture, to Jesus and the disciples in the Gospel of Luke, to the followers of Jesus in narratives in Acts, to Christian readers of the canonical books in the indefinite future; (3) the transition from the initially addressed Lukan audience to the open-ended canonical readers of Luke and Acts. Because of these literary signals embedded in the text of Luke and Acts by their original author, I have argued for the expectation, even by the author, that Luke and Acts would be actualised by later readers in a way similar to Christian actualisation of early Jewish biblical texts.

Thus the narrative principles from contemporary literary criticism applied to Luke and Acts have helped to uncover not just another helpful way to elicit meaning from the Lukan texts. If contemporary readers can without abuse include themselves among the community connoted by the 'us' in the Lukan prologue, the normal liturgical, meditative, ethical, and spiritual uses of Luke and Acts that Christians have made through the centuries until today are legitimate and even necessary canonical extensions beyond the minimal readings allowed by exclusive use of historical criticism.

Not all forms of contemporary literary criticism are equally helpful for contemporary religious use of Luke and Acts by Christians, among them most notably certain uses of deconstruction, which can be even more alienating than some of the distancing effects of historical criticism. In *Reading Luke-Acts*, this necessitated some controversial cautions in discussing some ways contemporary secular literary criticism can help 'put Humpty Dumpty together again' after some of the historical-critical atomising of the biblical text (Kurz 1993:3-6, 169-76, 182-83). It is not necessary here to repeat in detail these caveats. Their mere mention can sufficiently nuance this optimistic assessment of the continuity between canonical use of Luke and Acts as scripture today with the original intended uses built into the Lukan narratives, and therefore the legitimacy of canonical use.

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