

Considering the Spirit Afresh in the Gospel of Luke¹

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There can be little doubt of the magnitude of the Holy Spirit set in opposition to Satan among the earliest followers of the resurrected Jesus. Paul's entire mission is a struggle between God and Satan. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 2.18, a frustrated Paul states, "For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again—but Satan blocked our way." Or, in the only instance in which "Satan" is mentioned in Romans, Paul highlights an apocalyptic battle between God and Satan: "The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16.20). The apostle to the Gentiles states in 2 Corinthians 2.11, "And we do this so that we not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs." In the same letter Paul declares, "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor 11.14). Turning from Paul, Peter boldly tells his listeners to discipline themselves and keep alert, for their adversary—the devil, God's enemy—"prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5.8).

No New Testament writer, however, gives more significant weight to the work of the Spirit than Luke. For example, F. W. Horn summarizing the significance of the Spirit in Luke-Acts states, "Luke is surely the theologian of the spirit, not only in terms of statistics (*pneuma* 106 times; *pneuma theou*, 75 times; *pneuma hagion*, 54 times) but also in terms of his reflection on primitive Christian testimony and ideas concerning the spirit from the perspective of a concept of salvation history."²

In this study I explore, through the use of a social-scientific model of spirit aggression, representative examples in the Gospel of Luke of the powerful, forceful work of the Holy Spirit in doing good versus the powerful, aggressive, oppressive effects of the "spirit of evil" identified at its mythological source with the devil/Satan. On face value these appear to be two different trajectories within the gospel, but I will demonstrate their essential confrontational interplay as a way of highlighting significant motifs of Luke's theological message. These lines of inquiry are particularly evident in the healing activity of Jesus—"For if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11.20).³ But, lest we get ahead of ourselves, let me first present an overview of Luke's active, forceful vocabulary for good/the Spirit juxtaposed with Luke's active, forceful vocabulary for evil attributed to Satan/the devil/the Spirit of evil.

Active, Forceful Descriptions of Good

Often a vigorous, dynamic vocabulary—as in Luke's use of verbs especially—advances the narrative as it depicts the power and involvement of the Spirit of God in the lives of individuals and of the believing

1. A more scholarly treatment of this topic is entitled "Spirit Aggression in the Gospel According to Luke," in Stephen K. Black, ed., *To Set at Liberty: Essays on Early Christianity and Its Social World in Honor of John H. Elliott* (due for publication by Sheffield Phoenix Press, October 2014).

2. F. W. Horn, "Holy Spirit," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, et al: Doubleday, 1992), 3:277.

3. Unless otherwise noted all translations of the text are the author's.

community. The following limited litany demonstrates this truth: John, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Jesus are *filled* with the Spirit (Luke 1.15, 41, 67; 4.1). The Holy Spirit *comes upon* Mary as the power of the Most High *overshadows* her (Luke 1.35). The Spirit *rests* on Simeon (Luke 2.25) and *descends* on Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3.16). *Full* of the Spirit and *led* by the Spirit (Luke 4.1), Jesus returns to Galilee “filled with the *power* of the Spirit” (4.14) after which God *anoints* him with the Spirit to carry out his task of bringing good news to the poor (4.18; cf. Acts 10.38). Jesus’ connection to the Spirit, accordingly, is found as early as the angel’s annunciation to Mary (1.35) and the descent of the Spirit at his baptism (3.22).⁴

Active, Forceful Descriptions of Evil

The converse is also true. If we can speak of the “breath” or “wind” of the Spirit of God empowering Jesus to do good, we can also identify the “breath” or “wind” of an aggressive, powerful spirit of evil identified at its mythological source with the devil/Satan.⁵ This is not to say that Luke has a developed demonology, but he certainly is acquainted with the topic. Bovon notes, “Humans are afflicted by the devil and suffer from him”⁶ and such evil influence has its own vocabulary. In one passage (4.33), Luke combines *spirit*, *unclean*, and *demon*.⁷ One scholar believes that the “additional adjectives are needed . . . to negate any possible confusion between the spirits at work in the narrative.”⁸ He states further that by “attacking this one unclean spirit, the Spirit-empowered Jesus has initiated a ministry of ‘release’ constituting an onslaught against all the forces of evil.”⁹ In Luke the coming millennial age identifies the termination of the rule of Satan. The connection of the use of *spirit* in this vein and associating it inextricably with Satan is inescapable in the story of the healing of the crippled woman (13.11, 16).

Once more, active verbs advance the narrative and depict the violent forceful power of evil in human life. People are *oppressed* by the devil (Acts 10.38). In their subjugation, they may have “the spirit of an unclean demon” (4.33) or, as in the case of the women who follow Jesus, they first had been “healed of evil spirits and infirmities” (8.2). Warning his disciples, Jesus tells Peter, “Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat” (22.31).

Verbs of aggression describe the demon-possessed. People are *thrown down with a sudden motion/jerked* (4.35). Legion, bound with chains and shackles, breaks them and then flees into the “wilds” (8.29). Demonized, he seeks survival among the dead; saved, he is clothed, has his right mind, seeks to become Jesus’ disciple, and is commissioned by Jesus for missionary activity among his own people (8.34–39). In the case of an afflicted boy (9.37–43), his father testifies that a spirit suddenly seizes him. In the throes of the attack the boy shrieks, convulses, foams at the mouth, after which the spirit *bruises/mauls/shatters/crushes* him (9.39).

The effect of Jesus’ healings situates his ministry within a struggle between two dominions: that of Satan and that of God. In the Beelzebul controversy, Jesus casts out demons “by the finger of God” (11.20). He asserts that the “stronger person” *attacks/overpowers/takes away* the strong man’s armor and *divides* his plunder (11.22). When the seventy return to Jesus they report that the demons *submit* to them (10.17). It is then, in a prophetic vision, Jesus recognizes that his own mission, shared with his followers, spells the decisive defeat of all the forces of evil—“I watched Satan fall from heaven like a bolt of lightning” (10.18). Bovon

4. François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 151. Angels, a significant topic in Luke, will not be treated in this paper due to space restraints.

5. *Ibid.*, 141–42. Luke/Acts employs *the devil/slanderer* seven times (Luke 4.2, 3, 6, 13; 8.12; Acts 10.38; 13.10) and *Satan* seven times (Luke 10.18; 11.18; 13.16; 22.3, 31; Acts 5.3; 26.18).

6. *Ibid.*, 141. See Luke 13.16; Acts 10.38; 26.18.

7. For the phrase *unclean spirit*, see Luke 4.33, 36; 6.18; 8.29; 9.42; 11.24; Acts 5.16; 8.7; 10.14, 28; 11.8. For *demon*, see Luke 4.33, 35, 41; 7.33; 8.2, 27, 29, 30, 33, 35, 38; 9.1, 42, 49; 10.17; 11.14, 15, 18, 19, 20; 13.32; (17.18). For *evil spirit*, see Luke 7.21; 8.2; Acts 19.12, 13, 15, 16. For *spirit of divination*, see Acts 16.16. For other uses of *spirit* with malevolent intent or effects, see Luke 9.39; 11.26; 13.11.

8. Joel B. Green, “The Gospel of Luke,” in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 222.

9. *Ibid.*

summarizes it all with this thought, “Luke is aware of the power of supernatural forces that imprison humanity, but he knows far more about the power that can set the captives free.”¹⁰

A Social-Scientific Model of Spirit Aggression

To cast interpretive light on our topic I have created and applied a social-scientific model of spirit aggression to representative passages in Luke. The model has two interrelated components: First, I utilize certain etic insights from the work of Fritz Kramer pertaining to spirit possession among African tribes in the post-colonial European period that seem to parallel Luke’s treatment of the Spirit. Second, I set forth a taxonomic system of sickness and healing along the lines of witchcraft, sorcery, and spirit aggression in societies like ancient Rome.

Spirit Possession Among Sub-Saharan African Tribes

Drawing on Kramer’s research,¹¹ I emphasize four points. First, there is an apparent similarity of terms common to the African tribal context and the biblical witness that includes Luke-Acts. The words translated from Hebrew or Greek as *spirit*—denoting “wind,” “breath,” or “air”—appropriately mean the same thing among the African tribes: when one is animated by *spirit*, they recognize it as the phenomenon of another force touching or moving the person. Both in the biblical accounts and in the tribal cultures verbs like *filled*, *possessed*, and *led* characterize persons and groups that are spirit-influenced.

Second, there is a certain dualism in the biblical and African examples. Among the African tribes one can be moved or possessed by the spirit: *being moved* indicating “an encounter with the divine in its beatific, healing, regenerative form” and *possession* described as “being overwhelmed in the sense of being taken over by a demonic, infernal or evil spirit which makes itself evident in a person’s personality in a harmful or destructive way.” Kramer states, “the difference between being moved and being possessed depends on which power is recognized as the agent.”¹² Thus, there is a certain dualism in the African example even if that dualism resists a reduction to good and evil. It should be noted that the data of Luke sets forth a dualism of good and evil, but does not embrace Iranian dualistic influences. Rather, Luke stresses an arena of two empires opposing each other—one led by God and angels, the other by Satan and demons. Christopher Hutson has pointed out to me in an email exchange that “these are not equally matched empires in Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. Satan is a creature of God, and Satan’s ‘empire’ amounts to a rebellion that will be crushed in the eschaton.”

Third, again following Kramer who depends on the work of Evans-Pritchard,¹³ we learn that in the formulation of an anthropological theory among African tribes *spirits* and *divinities* are “refractions of social reality.” Apparently, this means that spirit-filling and/or possession marks a change of direction, bending, or deflection within the social setting of individuals and/or the community. However, we are warned not to read into the African or Lukan data modern rationalism or psychoanalytic interpretations; instead, our task is to “translate” the cosmology of the Dinka (or Luke) into modern language, to use their divinities as the basis of our understanding. A practical result of this would be a shift of language: for example, instead of saying someone has *caught* an illness, both the Dinka and Luke would say that someone has been *seized* by an illness. The critical point is that the illness’s source of origin is not psychological but cosmological. Therefore, it is wrong to think of the devil as an abstract power of evil. In the case of the Dinka, the powers of the cosmos, present in both animals and landscapes, recur in the person possessed. Kramer concludes that the decisive boundary is not one which divides African and European conceptions of the social and individual constitution of the subject, but rather one which divides cosmology from psychology.

The crossover point between cosmology and psychology is found in the microcosmic refractions of the powers within the individual. I am reminded that in the third gospel, Jesus’ healing ministry has to do with individual and community wholeness, a cosmic restoration that locates his mission in the midst of a struggle

10. Bovon, 142. See Acts 5.19; 12.7–10; 16.25–30.

11. Fritz Kramer, *The Red Fez: Art and Spirit Possession in Africa* (London, New York: Verso, 1987).

12. *Ibid.*, 60.

13. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 106–110.

between the empire of God and that of Satan. Luke's discussion of the return of the unclean spirit (11.24–26) apparently indicates that it is insufficient for a person just to be freed from the power of Satan: a new power must replace the old sovereignty—that is, the dwelling place or power of the person or community must become the dwelling place or power of God's Spirit.

Fourth, symptoms of spirit possession appear to be similar in both cultures. Kramer describes the common indicators in the African examples: “a sudden transformation to bestial behavior, deep sleep, raging, uncustomary, barbarian sounds and bestial cries, appalling grimaces and great agitation, such that the person concerned is unable to remain in one place and goes in search of solitude, etc.”¹⁴ Perhaps the classic example of such behavior in Luke is the story of the Gerasene demoniac called Legion (8.26–39).

Spirit Aggression and Illness

A number of stories in Luke involve Jesus as an Israelite healer, a social reality that raises the question as to how illness is experienced and treated in advanced agrarian societies analogous to the Roman Empire. Hahn writes, “Anthropological observers in a variety of non-Western settings have noted that, in addition to roughly equivalent generic matters, sickness is connected to two broader phenomena: cosmological or religious forces, and social relationships and interpersonal conflicts.”¹⁵ In medical anthropology, *illness* denotes a social-cultural perspective in which “many others besides the stricken individual are involved.”¹⁶ Both patients and healers are “embedded in a cultural system,” and it is the “whole system that heals.”¹⁷ Attitudes and actions are embedded in the total fabric of life. The Blums maintain, “Health beliefs and practices must be viewed within the context in which they occur, since focusing on them in isolation distorts or detracts from their meaning and function.”¹⁸ Jesus as an Israelite healer should not be viewed in isolation, but in association with the cultural *system*. Systems theory, accordingly, considers social relations and cultural expectations of societies in understanding sickness and healing. Sickness and healing belong to the organized patterns of thinking, judging, and behaving shared by members of a society. This arrangement is different from the biomedical approach largely operative in advanced industrial societies like the United States and northern Europe, in which the focus too often is on a narrow hierarchy of molecules, cells, organs, and human bodies. As a result, persons in advanced industrial settings do not readily see Jesus' healing activity as essential to his task in a social-political sense.

In societies like ancient Rome, sickness and healing may be classified along the lines of witchcraft, sorcery, and spirit aggression. “Without exception,” Murdock states, “every society in the sample which depends primarily on animal husbandry for its economic livelihood regards spirit aggression as either the predominant or an important secondary cause of illness.”¹⁹ Spirit aggression assumes that sickness is a misfortune due to the effect of cosmic forces on human lives. The sun and moon belong to this array of cosmic forces. The sun's power gives warmth and life; it also causes headaches. Seeds, women, and the moon wax and wane together, and ill people may be moonstruck. For example, the demon-possessed son in Matthew 17 is literally *moonstruck* (17.15); that is, he is under the moon's cosmic influence or power. Often the Greek is translated to indicate that the boy is an *epileptic*.

Further, the religious and political implications of scenes like the Beelzebul controversy (11.14–23) hinge on whether Jesus casts out demons by the prince of demons (11.15) or by the “finger of God” (11.19). Luke's language is unequivocal, forceful, uncompromising, and violent (11.20–23). Jesus' ministry of healing is situated within the struggle between two dominions—Satan and God's—in which Luke presents Jesus as a Spirit-led servant-prophet who struggles with the religious and political powers of Jerusalem.

14. *Ibid.*, 61.

15. Robert A. Hahn, *Sickness and Healing: An Anthropological Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 24.

16. John Pilch, “The Health Care System in Matthew: A Social Science Analysis,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* (1986): 102.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Richard Blum and Eva Blum, *Health and Healing in Rural Greece: A Study of Three Communities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), 20.

19. George Peter Murdock, *Theories of Illness: A World Survey* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 82.

Applying the Model to John, Elizabeth, Mary, and Zechariah

Drawing from our model, the four comparative points are demonstrated. First, there is the common usage of *spirit* terminology in Luke (1.15, 35, 41, 67; 2.25–27). Second, those *moved* by the Spirit—John (1.15), Elizabeth (1.41), Zechariah (1.67), and Simeon (2.25–27)—are *filled* with the Spirit; that is, they have an *encounter with the divine* in a powerful *beatific* fashion. They are *moved*, but not *possessed*. The verb *to fill* in the New Testament is found almost exclusively in Luke. Luke indicates with this word the presence of the Holy Spirit (see 1.15, 41, 67; 2.25, 26; 3.16). Consequently, the cosmic Spirit has *residence in the Baptist* (1.15; see 1.76). Like Samson (Judg 13.4) and Samuel (1 Sam 1.11), John is required to abstain from strong drink so that only the Holy Spirit fills him. His mighty prophetic mission is to lead the people back to their God and, in so doing, restore their relationship with him. John functions as the forerunner of the messiah (Mal 4.5–6) and his task is rendered with the spirit and power of Elijah (1.17). John’s message makes clear that God’s coming kingdom will be wrath for those unprepared for its judgment (3.7). Setting their lives in order requires the crowds to share food and clothing with those in need (3.11; cf. Acts 2.44–47; 4.32–35). His message to tax collectors (who collaborated with foreign powers) and soldiers (who carried out the political will of foreign powers) corresponds with a social repudiation of cheating and extortion. Ultimately, John’s preaching is placed within the prospects of Isaiah’s proclamation of Israel’s restoration (3.4–6; see Isaiah 40).

In the case of Elizabeth (1.41), when Mary greets her kin, the child in Elizabeth’s womb leaps as Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. Here, the force of the term *filled* is best qualified by the verb used as a prophetic sign to Elizabeth, “the babe *leaped* in her womb” (emphasis added); that is, the unborn child reacts with the clumsy jumping and love of motion manifested in young animals.²⁰ A significant social refraction (change of direction) is underway by means of the lives of these two women. Mary, too, has experienced how divine power in the Holy Spirit replaces masculine begetting (1.35).

In the final case, the father of John, Zechariah (1.67), being *filled with the Spirit*, utters a prophetic prayer of God-given wisdom amidst the setting of his family’s community. The prayer answers the fundamental question, “What then will this child become?” (1.66). Accordingly, God’s historical deliverance for Israel begins anew. The prayer interweaves the two stories of John and Jesus into one tapestry depicting God’s salvific purpose. In John and Jesus, God comes to set things right—to look favorably on his people, to redeem them, to raise up a savior who saves his people from their enemies and all who hate them. John’s task as prophet of the Most High is to go before the LORD to prepare his way, to provide knowledge of salvation “by the forgiveness of their sins” (1.77). As a result, those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death will have light to guide their feet into the way of peace. Zechariah’s prayer, prompted by the Spirit’s filling, accentuates the faithfulness of God in the coming deliverance and restoration of God’s people.

Third, even though there are no explicit indicators of a dualism of God and Satan or of being demonically possessed in the aforementioned data, there is a proleptic adumbration of the struggle between God and Satan identified especially in the hymn of Mary (1.46–55) and Zechariah’s prayer (1.68–79). For example, in Mary’s hymn, the LORD as a merciful and powerful Savior (1.47) has “lowered the powerful” and “raised up the lowly” (1.52). He has “filled the hungry with good things” and “sent the rich away empty” (1.53). The prayer of Zechariah petitions the “LORD God of Israel” (1.68) to save his people from their enemies and all those who hate them (1.71, 74). Bovon states, “When Luke analyzes the tragedy of human captivity, the devil is usually the true enemy . . .”²¹

Finally, I make a few additional observations concerning the notion that being filled with the Spirit is a refraction of social reality—that is, the Spirit’s filling of a person marks a change of direction, a bending, or alteration of the course of social reality. I limit my observations to John the Baptist, but similar types of descriptions could be made of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Simeon. As noted above, before his birth, John is *filled* with the Holy Spirit (1.15, 41). His name, given before his birth (1.13), marks a change of direction from traditional familial practices (1.60–63). The child is reared, not in his parents’ village but in the desert, where he becomes “strong in spirit” (1.80). All of this points the reader to a significant refraction of social

20. Bovon, 58n36.

21. Bovon, 73. See 13.16; Acts 10.38.

expectations that manifests itself and is connected inseparably to John's preaching of repentance to Israel—a message that is set within and over against the reign of Tiberius, the authority structures of the empire, the local rulers, and the power brokers of the Temple (3.1–2).

Applying the Model to Jesus

The application of our model to Luke's portrait of Jesus is organized in two ways: first, we examine the baptism (3.21–22), temptation (4.1–13), and outset of Jesus ministry in Nazareth (4.14–30) and then we consider four examples of Jesus' ministry of healing—the man with an unclean spirit (4.31–37), Simon's mother-in-law (4.38–39), the man with a withered hand (6.6–11), and the crippled woman (13.10–17).

The Baptism of Jesus.

At his baptism (3.21–22) the Holy Spirit *descends* upon Jesus *in bodily form as a dove*, which is followed by the voice from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (3.22, NRSV). In keeping with our model, what transpires follows Kramer's thought of one “being moved by the spirit”—that is, Jesus experiences a *beatific* overwhelming. Two considerations are worthy of mention: First, out of Israel's past, Luke draws upon the beginning of the first of the so-called “Servant Songs” (Isa 42.1) as well as Psalm 2.7—thus Jesus is anointed by the Spirit of the Lord as God's son to “bring forth justice to the nations.” Second, the scene is so pivotal that it begins a sequence of events related to his temptation (4.1) and the beginning of his entire messianic task (4.14, 18–19; cf. Acts 10.37–38).

Culpepper, commenting on the Spirit descending upon Jesus as a dove in bodily form, believes Luke employs language that “emphasizes both tangibility and inexpressibility.”²² Moreover, in a period previously viewed as dormant *vis-à-vis* the working of the Spirit in Israel, Luke apparently sees in the entire birth narrative a renewal of the activity of God's Spirit. Jesus, at the inauguration of his mission, obtains the support and the endowment of divine power. There is no evidence of a psychological change. Rather, what transpires is a cosmological shift, a refraction or bending of reality.

The Temptation of Jesus.

With the temptation of Jesus we openly confront for the first time the dualism typical of *spirit* in Luke's gospel: on the one hand the powerful, benevolent work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus; on the other, the powerful, aggressive, oppressive “spirit of evil” identified with the devil/Satan in Luke-Acts. This follows our model not only in terms of an encounter with the divine and the presence of the demonic but also because the scene poses a refractive test of Jesus: Will he depend on God's provision for his needs (4.3–4)? Will he worship the devil (4.7) in order to have the glory and authority of the kingdoms of the earth? Will he test God by casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple wall to be saved by angels (see Ps 91.11–12)? These are christological tests of the messiah. However, Green observes that

the tests faced here encapsulate all the tests Jesus would meet during the course of his ministry. And tests would certainly continue—not merely where demonic forces or Satan himself is mentioned (e.g., 4:33–36; 22:3), but throughout his ministry as he encounters forces hostile to God's purpose. As we have learned, behind all such opposition stands the devil, so that Jesus can characterize his whole ministry with the language of testing (22:28).²³

Green adds, this “is most obviously true in the case of Jesus' healing activity, for in almost every account the source of the ailment is traced back to Satan—cf., e.g. 13:10–17; Acts 20:38.”²⁴ Following our model, Jesus' tests as well as human illness are cosmological challenges and should not be interpreted psychoanalytically.

22. Allan R Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections* (NIB, 9; Nashville: Abingdon Press), 91.

23. Green, 196.

24. *Ibid.*, n44.

For example, the issue of *bread* (subsistence) is implicit to the precarious situation facing the widow at Nain (7.11–17; see 1 Kgs 17.17–24; 2 Kgs 4.32–37; Luke 4.25–26). By resuscitating her son, not only does Jesus ameliorate, if not secure, the woman’s domestic survival, but his action also refutes any notion that her son’s death was due to a cosmological punishment. In raising him, reality has been refracted.

Or in the feeding account of the five thousand (9.10–17), when Jesus blesses the food, “he transfers his power to the bread and the fish”; that is, being that he is anointed by the Spirit, a power “goes forth from him and makes the miracle possible.”²⁵ This can be contrasted to the devil’s temptation that Jesus exercise power to satiate his own hunger. Herbert (1964: 65–72) compares the feeding miracle to Jesus’ refusal to transform the stone into bread (4.1–4) and contrasts the two episodes with each other.²⁶

The Outset of Jesus’ Ministry in Nazareth

Following our model of spirit possession we recognize, again, the use of common terminology including not only the literal word *spirit* but also phrases describing its animating force or reflecting “the fact that the spirit of a phenomenon is seen to be that which touches or moves a person.”²⁷ Verbs like *filled* and *led* or a noun like *full* characterize the relationship of the Spirit to Jesus in Luke chapter 4. Jesus is “full of the Holy Spirit,” “led by the Spirit,” “filled in the power of the Spirit,” or, as stated a bit differently in the quotation from Isaiah 61, “the Spirit of the LORD is upon [him]” (4.1, 14, 18). Bovon states, “These repetitions are anything but literary clumsiness. Luke is trying to say that, in Jesus, God’s power and justice have become active and perceptible again in the world and in history.”²⁸

The inaugural sermon and its hostile response provide a programmatic answer to the question, what kind of mission will Jesus pursue? Guided by the Spirit and in opposition to the devil’s testing, Jesus’ primary mission is “to proclaim good news to the poor” (4.18). Not only are the poor confronted continuously with subsistence issues (1.52–53; 6.20; 7.22; 14.13, 21; 16.20, 22; 18.22; 21.3) but they are also identified in the social world of Luke by a number of other disadvantaged conditions such as “education, gender, family heritage, religious purity, vocation, economics, and so on.”²⁹ Luke uses the key verb *release* twice: “release to the captives” and “release to those oppressed” (4.18). It is a word that means “forgiveness” and by extension “human wholeness”—freedom from the devil’s power (see 13:10–17; Acts 10:38). Culpepper states, “Jesus released persons from various forms of bondage and oppression: economic (the poor), physical (the lame, the crippled), political (the condemned), and demonic. Forgiveness of sins, therefore, can also be seen as a form of release from bondage to iniquity (Acts 8.22–23).”³⁰ The recipients of Jesus’ spirit power experience a cosmological, historical realignment. Their lives are altered in a radical fashion.

Having set forth Luke’s use of the Spirit in relation to Jesus, we now examine four representative examples of his healing activity using both components of our model, especially healing observations related to agrarian societies like ancient Rome.

Four Examples of Jesus’ Healing Activity.

Our first two examples—the exorcism of a man with an unclean spirit in the Capernaum synagogue, a public, Sabbath day setting (4.31–37) and the “exorcism” of a fever from Simon’s mother-in-law at Simon’s house, a private, domestic location (4.38–39)—advance Jesus’ mission of “release to the oppressed” (4.16–30). Our model of spirit aggression casts light on both accounts; that is, both stories illustrate how sickness and/or demon possession is connected to two broader phenomena—cosmological or religious forces as well as social relationships. In both settings Jesus *rebukes* the malady in a way

25. Bovon, 357.

26. Herbert, Arthur G., “History in the Feeding of the Five Thousand,” *StEv* 2 (1964): 65–72.

27. Kramer, 67.

28. Bovon, 151.

29. Green, 211. This can be seen in 4.16–30 through the non-Israelite examples of the widow of Zarephath and the leprosy Syrian, Naaman.

30. Culpepper, 106.

that reminds us that among the Dinka tribal peoples, instead of saying someone has *caught* an illness, they will say that person has been *seized by* the illness.

In the synagogue account, Luke unabashedly if not redundantly identifies the man as possessing “the spirit of an unclean demon” (4.33) And yet he is present at a religious communal gathering of Israelites on the Sabbath. When the demon cries out, “Let us alone! What have you to do with us? . . . Have you come to destroy us?” (4.34), the reference to *us* most probably comprises the community of demons and marks the power of Jesus against all the host of evil (4.1–13; 3.16; 11.14–23; 13.16). Jesus then *rebukes* the unclean spirit and commands it, “Be silent, and come out of him!” (4.35, NRSV)—and it does.

In the case of Simon’s mother-in-law, the social environment of Simon’s house accents the extremity of the illness and the meticulousness of the act of healing in an atmosphere marked by thanksgiving and hospitality. According to Luke, Jesus places himself above her, bends down over her, and verbally *rebukes the fever*—a redactional emphasis missing from Mark (1.31) and Matthew (8.15). The NRSV then translates, “and it *left her*” (emphasis added). The fever entered her and the fever left her. The fever seized her. The fever behaved like a demon. Culpepper puts it well, “The fever is seen as the cause of her illness, not a symptom of an infection.”³¹ The woman’s illness is a misfortune due to the effect of cosmic forces on human lives. She suffers from spirit aggression; Jesus liberates her of spiritual oppression.

Apparently, in this instance, there is no political/religious clash between Jesus and the synagogue authorities. However, that changes in chapters 6 and 13. Both stories depict a major refraction of social reality. The first case involves a man with a withered right hand (6.6–11; Mark 3.1–6; Mt. 12.9–14). As Jesus teaches, the scribes and Pharisees watch him to see if he would heal on the Sabbath, “so that they might find an accusation against him” (6.7). We now have a Sabbath controversy within the institutional setting of a synagogue. Concerning the man’s condition, Culpepper observes, “Only Luke adds that it was the man’s right hand, the hand normally used for work, gesturing, and greeting. Since one performed chores of bodily hygiene with one’s left hand, that hand was not to be presented in public. The man had lost the use of his good hand, presumably forcing him to use his left hand in public, thereby adding shame to his physical disability.”³²

The reference to work raises a probable economic factor. The misfortune of the man’s deformed condition has familial consequences in restricting his contribution to his household’s survival. Healed, his family’s productivity is assuredly ameliorated and the man’s social standing within the community is dramatically altered. Jesus invites him to get up and join him before the entire assembly (6.8). The authorities’ reaction to Jesus’ riveting and deliberate demonstration carries forward the synagogue reaction at Nazareth (4.16–30). The authorities are *filled with fury/hot anger* and discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus (6.11). Ironically, while Jesus is filled with the power of the Spirit, the political/religious authorities are filled with fury and not the liberating purposes of God.

The case of chapter 13 involves a crippled woman, the final example of a Sabbath controversy in a synagogue setting (13.10–17) and one that emphasizes the socially perceived link between illness and an evil spirit (13.11). Drawing upon our healing model, the woman’s condition should not be interpreted from a biomedical perspective: Green indicates that some describe her as having a “protracted *spondylitis ankylopoietica*” or some form of hysteria.³³ He rightly argues that Luke is not “really interested in a biomedical diagnosis” but attributes her condition, instead, to a *spirit*. What is needed, Green declares in another study, is an ethnomedical perspective: “this woman’s illness has a physiological expression but is rooted in a cosmological disorder.”³⁴ Green rightly observes that “most of Luke’s accounts of ‘illness’ could more accurately be termed ‘disorder accounts.’”³⁵ However, I would add that the disorder encompasses all involved: the afflicted person, the person’s family, and the larger community (in this case a local synagogue).

31. Culpepper, 111.

32. *Ibid.*, 134.

33. Green, 521.

34. Joel B. Green, “Jesus and a Daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10–17): Test Case for a Lukan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus,” *CBQ* 51 (1989): 647n12.

35. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 521.

The leader of the synagogue addresses the congregation by recalling the words of Deuteronomy 5.13 (see also Exodus 20.9–10). His goal is to maintain the traditional reading and faithful teaching of the Law; he asserts that how one interprets the Sabbath law is critical to fostering Israelite identity—certainly, the woman’s misfortune has lasted eighteen years and so does not justify an infringement of Sabbath legislation. However, Jesus argues from a lesser issue of caring for the needs of animals, a point granted by the teachers of the law (14.5), to the greater issue of caring for an oppressed woman. If it is right to care for domestic animals on the Sabbath, it is right to relieve human distress. Thus, the resultant healing is a refraction of the woman’s communal status. This is so because Jesus now identifies her as a “daughter of Abraham.” She, like Zacchaeus (19.9), is one of God’s chosen people (Gen 12.2–3). Her liberation from Satan’s bondage is most appropriate: her affliction conflicted with God’s purpose of salvation made in his covenant with Abraham and the central reason for Jesus’ Spirit-inaugurated ministry (4.18). Every aspect of the incident points to a communal setting where honor and shame are at stake. The woman has lived a life of shame for eighteen years. Healed, not only does she have honor among the congregants and her family but she can also be now, more than ever, a productive member of her family. It is her opponents, who claimed institutional honor, who are now shamed (13.17).

Conclusion

Space restraints prevent us from examining other examples in Luke or, for that matter, from opening up a wealth of evidence in the book of Acts where the disciples of Jesus take up his role of rejected prophet.

It is sufficient to say, that based on the evidence of our model and the third gospel, Jesus’ mission is clearly set within a cosmological struggle between two opposing dominions: that of Satan and that of God. The bending, deflection, or change of course of reality in the social setting of both individuals and the early Christian community are altered significantly by the Spirit-filled Jesus. Ultimately, God’s Spirit-led servant-prophet is challenged by the religious and political powers of Jerusalem. The heart of those hostilities is anticipated and adumbrated in the temptation account where—for the first time—the powerful, benevolent work of the Spirit in Jesus is openly attacked by the powerful, aggressive, oppressive spirit of evil. As the writing unfolds, the stories of sickness and/or demon possession are connected to two broader phenomena: cosmological or religious forces, and social relationships. While I do not claim that the insights I’ve shared through this demonstration are unknown to Luke-Acts scholars, using a social-scientific model of spirit aggression casts additional light on the writing and better focuses our perceptions as to how Luke’s audience would have heard the reading of the third gospel—and how we can be more empathetic listeners as well.

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