THE LUKAN AUDIENCE – REDISCOVERED?
SOME REACTIONS TO BAUCKHAM'S THEORY*

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ABSTRACT

Richard Bauckham rejects the viewpoint that the communities, which each Gospel addresses, can be reconstructed from the text. Basically he proposes that each evangelist had no particular audience in view, but envisaged as his audience any church to which his work may find its way. Bauckham's argument is briefly explained and some preliminary comments are given, before some of the support for his theory is discussed. Special attention is given to the research by Michael B Thompson on the communicability between the churches, so that the Gospels could easily and quickly have been disseminated throughout the Mediterranean world during the first centuries C.E. More support can be gleaned from the large amount of research done by Loveday Alexander on the matter of book production in New Testament times showing the relative ease of spreading the written gospel. Focus then shifts to the genre of Luke's Gospel with special attention to Luke's biographical nature. Various viewpoints are discussed, with special attention to the contribution of Richard Burridge in Bauckham's book, dealing with the use of *bioi* or *vitae* in ancient literature. Next the role of Luke as author is briefly discussed at the hand of some technical terms occurring in the prologue (Luke 1:1-4), the effect of these on the thrust and the purpose of the story and on its primary audience (Theophilus). Finally we try to offer some indications of Luke's audience in more general terms. Some seminal contributions to Luke's Gospel are briefly discussed, firstly from a historical-critical approach, as well as the attempts from a social-scientific angle. The cumulative force of these arguments is that the Gospels do not allow us to identify, beyond a high level of generality, the audiences for which they were written. The article is concluded with some suggestions for further discussion.

1.   *Introductory remarks*

In a recently published book on rethinking the audiences in the four Gospels, edited by Richard Bauckham (1998), some fascinating and thought-provoking ideas have been offered. My intention in this article is to look at the proposals in a critical fashion, focussing particularly on Luke's Gospel. The fact that I will focus particularly on how his theory effects Luke and the research on Lukan writings, also effects my approach in this article. What I offer here is something of a first impression, a kind of firing from the hip, with regard to Bauckham's fascinating book – most of it perhaps in sympathising with, if not in full support of, his theory!

Let us start with an overview of Bauckham's theory and some of the supporting contributions in his book.[1]

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2.   *Bauckham's viewpoint on the Gospel audiences*

2.1   The first Christian audience

It is important to note that Bauckham takes it for granted that all Gospels were in the first place intended for a Christian audience. He (1998, 10) acknowledges that "if any of the evangelists did envisage reaching non-Christian readers, they would surely have had to envisage reaching them via Christian readers, who could pass on copies of Gospels to interested outsiders through personal contact". In other words, he does not ignore the first audience or readers, although he rejects the possibility to reconstruct this audience as a "single" and "specific community" which can be sociologically reconstructed from the text.

Bauckham basically disagrees with the so-called "consensus" regarding how the communities, which each Gospel allegedly addresses, have been reconstructed from the text. I think that Bauckham has generalized too much the viewpoints dealing with such Gospels as John and Matthew. It is well-known that scholars have published extensively on the Johannine community and perhaps slightly less on the Matthaean and Markan communities. But I doubt whether this can to the same degree be applied to Luke. The fact that Luke mentions his "audience" by name (Theophilus) already puts him in a different category, as far as I am concerned. Lukan scholars, in my judgement, did not pay as much attention to the Lukan "community" as did happen with the other Gospels.[2] Because Luke clearly identifies his first audience (Theophilus) one need not "reconstruct" his first audience. The Lukan audience should therefore be located differently than those of the other evangelists. The "community" in which Luke found himself when writing, or the "community" of Theophilus, are of course something else. Both could have influenced Luke. The only question would be: in how far did these "communities" influence the main story?

There are of course some scholars who did try to locate the Lukan "community", such as Philip Esler (1987). He (1987, 2) argued that Luke shaped the gospel traditions at his disposal in response to social and political pressures by this community. Halvor Moxnes (1994, 379-389) also wrote about the social context of Luke's community, but he (1994, 379) was very careful, adding: "The Lukan text creates a narrative world, and it is this world we examine as we analyze the social relations, ethos, and symbolic universe of Luke. Still this does not mean that we now have a 'window' that opens onto the social situation of Luke's historical community." His approach seems to be in line with Bauckham's criticism on the attempts to reconstruct the Lukan community. Luke Johnson (1979), on the other hand, did write about the finding of the Lukan community but then in a very critical fashion,[3] rejecting the idea of reconstructing the Lukan community.[4]

More can be said for those scholars who tried to locate Luke's " community" by means of a literary analysis, e.g. Vernon Robbins (1991, 312) who looked at Luke's audience as implied readers to which the text refers and saw them as the "ideal community". There should be of course some links between the implied readers and the empirical audience. Any text should communicate with an empirical audience. The readers should be able to find meaning in the

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2   To this issue I will return later in paragraph 8: *Luke's audience*.
3   See also the work of Allison (1988) in the same vein.
4   He (1979, 89) claims that not even in Pauline research has there been unqualified success in drawing inferences about the social location of his addressees since "not every element in the document is determined by the place, the people, or the occasion". He also pointed out that not all the pastoral and theological concerns of a Gospel writer are determined by a situation of *crisis* among the readers. He (1979, 92) also mentions different reasons why Luke-Acts is even less to be understood by means of mirror reading.

social and cultural world which the text creates. There is sufficient evidence in Luke's Gospel of historically known personalities, places and events which require extratextual knowledge from his readers. From this one could draw a profile of the knowledge required of the readers and thus attempt to situate the empirical audience (cf. Moxnes 1994, 380; also Tyson 1991, 22-23). But this should not lead us to believe that mirror-reading of the text would reveal the character of the audience.

For these, and other reasons, it is my contention that one should deal with Luke in a different fashion than the other three canonical Gospels. In this regard Riches (1993, 233-234) has spoken a true word when he said: "Luke's parish seems to be a wider one than that of either of the other two Synoptic evangelists, and his concerns are those of the emerging church with its various settlements scattered across the empire." That, however, does not mean that the different contributions in Bauckham's publication did not reveal some very interesting and entertaining studies containing strong supporting evidence to increase our understanding of the possible Gospel audiences.

2.2   The universal readership

Bauckham (1998, 11) pointed out that all contemporary writing about the Gospels shares the unargued assumption that each evangelist, himself no doubt a teacher in a particular church, wrote his Gospel for that particular church, with its particular situation, character, and needs at the forefront of his mind. His own alternative and the main thrust of his argumentation is that "an evangelist writing a Gospel expected his work to circulate widely among the churches, and had no particular Christian audience in view, but envisaged as his audience any church (or any church in which Greek was understood) to which his work might find its way".

Assuming Markan priority he puts a very down-to-earth question to support his viewpoint, namely: How is it that Matthew and Luke both had Mark's Gospel available to them?

It is generally taken for granted that by the time that Matthew and Luke wrote, Mark's Gospel had already circulated quite widely around the churches and was being read in the churches to which Matthew and Luke respectively belonged. Bauckham argued – and it seems to be correct – that Matthew and Luke must have accepted their Gospels to circulate at least as widely as Mark's had already done and that they both had an audience at least as broad as Mark's Gospel had already achieved. If one accepts that Mark had circulated widely, it seems rather improbable to suppose that Matthew and Luke would nevertheless have addressed their own Gospels to the much more restricted audience of their own communities.

My comments on this would be to remind Bauckham that, even though it is most probable that Luke's Gospel was meant for a wider public/audience, it was in the first place directed to an individual – different from the other three Gospels. If Theophilus was an historical figure and the primary addressee, which is generally accepted, one has to find arguments of how the wider audience was to be reached and why they are supposed to be the intended audience/implied readers.

2.3   The reading strategy

Bauckham's (1998) criticism is directed at scholars who attempt to reconstruct a community behind the Gospel text. He (1998, 22-26) therefore points out that these scholars *do not proceed* by arguing that certain features of a Gospel text are explicable only if understood as addressed to a *specific* Christian audience rather than to a *general* Christian audience. They rather come to

this viewpoint because of a *particular reading strategy*, without showing how this reading strategy does better justice to the text than another reading strategy. Bauckham deals with three aspects of this particular reading strategy:

(i)   Firstly, he criticised this reading strategy because it does not constitute evidence that a Gospel *addresses the specific situation of the evangelist's own community*. Quite often it does not address a circumstance peculiar to the evangelist's community, but a circumstance that would have been common in the churches of the late first century.

(ii)   Secondly, this reading strategy presupposes that *all textual indications* of the character and circumstances of the audience *must all apply to the whole of the implied audience*. But if the Gospels were written for general circulation and therefore envisage the range of audiences their authors might expect them to acquire in the churches of the late first century, then there is no reason at all why every aspect of a Gospel should be equally relevant to all readers or hearers. An evangelist might well address features of Christian life and social circumstances he knew to be fairly widespread in his time, without supposing his Gospel would therefore have no appeal or use in churches lacking some of these features. If this is true, the four Gospels survived precisely because, within a fairly short space of time, they did prove relevant enough to most churches to come to be used very widely. In other words, not everything in a Gospel need be there for all readers!

(iii)   The third aspect of this reading strategy that he criticises, is the *false deductions* made from certain features of the text. For example, it is not obvious what the study of the social status of characters in Mark's Gospel can tell us about the social status of Mark's implied audience. To suppose that one must correspond to the other presupposes far too crude a notion of the way readers find stories relevant to themselves. It is also doubtful what scope Mark allowed himself to manipulate his traditions. For example:

> Should we suppose that, had Mark been writing for a church composed largely of very wealthy people, that he would have omitted all the stories of destitute beggars and rather create stories about wealthy people? (1998, 26)

Bauckham's contention is that the reading strategy of these scholars are full of shortcomings as explained above. He, therefore, proposed that a Gospel text has to be treated as transparently revelatory of the community for which it was written because the interpretative aim of reconstructing this community would be defeated by any other kind of text.

3.   *Bauckham's hermeneutical observations*

Bauckham made some interesting hermeneutical observations worthwhile to consider:

(i)   The communities in which a Gospel was written, are likely to have influenced the writing of the Gospel even though it is not addressed by the Gospel. But it does not follow that we have any chance of reconstructing that community. The author could have resided in more than one community while he wrote his Gospel. And we cannot take it for granted that the author of a Gospel would have been influenced by only one community context. The author would have been well aware of the Christian movement as a more-than-local phenomenon and he would have had all kinds of contacts, personal and literary, with many churches other than his own. The way in which a creative writer is influenced by and responds to his context is simply not calculable. It is of no hermeneutical value since the

Gospels were not addressed to or intended to be understood solely by such a community. Bauckham is therefore adamant that the *implied readership* is not a specific audience but an indefinite readership. To this observation I would like to raise the question of whether Bauckham should not more clearly differentiate between the first audience and the later audiences – especially with regard to Luke. He did not prove beyond doubt that the evangelists wrote only with the wider audience in mind. The evangelist could have had a closer community in mind as his direct or primary audience. One could add the question: Is it *only* an indefinite readership or could it include the direct/primary audience? I consider it a moot question of whether he is not using his so-called "indefinite audience" in the same way as his "opponents" used their "specific audience".

(ii) A second observation of Bauckham is that the evangelists might have had in mind a range of churches located over a specific geographical area, or a scattered network of churches they knew. It was more a matter of diversity than a detailed reconstruction of very specific circumstances. The implied audience is not only larger than the present consensus about reconstructed communities, but it is also indefinite rather than specific. They wrote for any and every church to which the Gospel might circulate. A very essential feature of Bauckham's approach is his contention that the intended audience was an *open category*.

(iii) Bauckham's argument does not intend to decontextualize the Gospels and to render historical context hermeneutically irrelevant. The Gospels do have an historical context, but that context is not the evangelist's community. It is the early Christian movement in the late first century. The political, social, economic, religious and ideological contexts are useful, but are much less specific than the current consensus desires. It is more general than the context that most literature of that period addresses, or the context that most literature of any society in any period addresses. Bauckham (1998, 46) claims that literature addressing a specific community in a specific locality is very rare.

(iv) Bauckham's argument does not underestimate the diversity of the four Gospels. It denies the consensus that this diversity requires a diversity of readers. For example: John does not imply that its intended readers were a distinctive branch of Christianity different from the readership of the other Gospels. It implies only that its author wished to propagate his own distinctive theological rendering of the Gospel story. The evangelists probably had different understandings of Jesus and his story etc. That does not mean that each Gospel was written for a different community.

(v) Bauckham attacks the misplaced desire of historic specificity. Modern biblical scholarship wants to define the historical meaning of the text as specifically as possible by defining its historical context as closely as possible. He (1998, 48) gives the following example to illustrate his point:

Just as we know that we have understood 1 Corinthians 8-10 better when we have studied pagan sacrificial meals in Corinth, so we think we shall know more precisely what Luke's teaching on wealth and poverty means if only we can define just where the dozen rich people in Luke's community belonged in the social hierarchy and exactly how they were actually treating the poor.

(vi) He reminds us that texts vary in the extent to which they are context-specific. In this regard Bauckham refers to Umberto Eco's (1981, 9-10) viewpoint that one should differentiate between "closed texts" defining their implied reader very closely (see idol-meat in Corinth), and "open texts" which leave their implied readership more open, and

consequently leave their meaning more open to their real readers' participation in producing meaning. The Gospels are to be considered as relatively open texts. For example: Various first century churches hearing Matthew's Gospel with regard to Jesus' command to love one's enemies in differing situations would have understood this to mean rather different things. Therefore, to think we do not know what Matthew meant unless we can pin down what sort of enemies his community had, is trying to read an open text as a closed one.

4.   *Some preliminary comments on Bauckham's viewpoint*

4.1   Which audience is it that Bauckham has in mind?

I am personally delighted by Bauckham's basic critique of the way the Gospel audiences are understood in current New Testament scholarship. He (1998, 2) correctly points out that "in the end (it is) the hermeneutical issue whether a Gospel should be read as a narrative about Jesus or as a narrative about a hypothetical Christian community that scholars can reconstruct behind the Gospel". He clearly chooses for the first option and with that I would concur.

Whether this should lead him (1998, 4) to state that the Matthean, Markan, Lukan, and Johannine communities should disappear from the terminology of Gospels scholarship is highly debatable. For instance, to which community is he referring? Bauckham is probably referring to the reconstructed community. But the question remains: What about the community in which the author finds himself when writing? Even if the author was moving about when writing, one would still expect him to be influenced by the general conditions of the church and in particular that of the immediate addressee. Bauckham himself criticised the social-scientific scholars for the fact that they do not sufficiently differentiate between the social context of the audience and the author, or that they do not take the author seriously but reckon that it is possible to reconstruct the social conditions of the readers/audience simply from the side of the community they find in the text. My concern is that Bauckham himself does not take the first readers/audience seriously enough – especially with regard to Luke; in other words, that he did not differentiate sufficiently between the author's context/community, the primary audience, and the wider audience he claimed to be the true audience of the evangelists. I fear that both the so-called "consensus opinion" and Bauckham's viewpoint takes too much for granted here.

I do not think that it is simply a matter of choosing between the wider audience (Bauckham's favourite) and the reconstructed community (social-scientific favourite). The fact that Luke pertinently mentions the name of his direct addressee/audience (= Theophilus), in contrast to the other evangelists, makes Luke's wider audience as speculative as those of the other evangelists. So, both Bauckham's wider audience and the social critics' reconstructed audience are speculative. Both will have to supply us with the necessary arguments and proof on why they consider their options to be better.

4.2   What about Luke's intention?

Although it is unnecessary to turn to a naive assumption that Luke's Gospel is a direct transcript of historical reality,[5] one should rather recognize that Luke's primary intention was to narrate the story of Jesus in the ultimate and universal meaning it has for Christian faith. The (hi)story of

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5   Cf. the contribution of Francis Watson in Bauckham 1998, 7, 195-217.

Jesus remains an *interpretation of the life of Jesus* and should not be understood in any way as an historical representation of the actual events.

Even though we can no longer really know exactly what Luke had in mind, it is in my humble opinion a fallacy to think that we can know nothing. I was never totally happy with the fashionable view of a so-called "author's intention fallacy". I think that we have to take seriously the fact that the author had a specific intention/purpose when writing his Gospel.[6] No one writes such a large book without some clear intention. Although we should be careful what we say about the author's intention, one should not shirk from trying to get the main picture of each of the Gospels from analysing and interpreting the content. The influence of "Luke's community and context" cannot be ruled out, but these factors cannot replace the main thrust of Luke's story about the central figure of the story. What became of this story and how this story was understood throughout the centuries are not without significance.

Let us now turn to some of the other contributions in Bauckham's book, to see in what way they can supplement or support Bauckham's theory.

5.   *Support for Bauckham's theory*

5.1   Communicability between churches

Bauckham's theory that the Gospels were meant for a wider audience received support from research into the communicability between the early Christian churches. In an interesting and entertaining article Michael B Thompson (1998, 49-69) showed convincingly that churches from A.D. 30 to 70 had the motivation and means to communicate often and in depth with each other. The early Christian movement was not a scattering of isolated, self-sufficient communities but rather a network of communities with constant, close communication among themselves. Mobility and communication in the first-century Roman world were exceptionally high (see examples in Bauckham 1998, 32ff.). Leaders moved around. Letters were sent from one church to the other. There are evidence of close contacts between the churches in this period. Even the conflict and diversity in early Christianity supports the picture of the early Christian movement as a network of communities in constant communication.[7]

Thompson (1998) showed that many churches were less than a week's travel away from a main hub in the Christian network. It could therefore not have taken long for Mark's Gospel to spread right through the Mediterranean world, especially if it was written in Rome and with the endorsement of Peter's preaching. He has little doubt that Acts and the early epistles preserved good evidence that the early churches had strong reasons for staying in close touch with each other. This has the following significance for the Gospels:

(i)   First of all Thompson (1998, 69) reckons that it is more likely that the Gospels were written not over a period of decades, but within only a few years of each other. Evangelists probably did not write in ignorance of their predecessors. It is quite possible that congregations and authors would want to produce their own version of the Gospel story

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6   I have the impression that Bauckham is also inclined to say that the author's intention is foregrounded and not the diversity of characteristics of the communities to which the Gospels were directed.

7   In this regard we should mention that Bauckham suggested that writing a Gospel could have taken years and travelled with the author on his journeys. Whether one can really speak of "years" (cf. Bauckham 1998, 36) with regard to Luke can be questioned in view of the fairly fluent and fast movement one finds in both the Gospel and Acts – but this remains an open question for me.

once they knew that believers in another place had theirs. They may want to supplement or complement the traditions they received from their neighbours with additional sayings, stories, and emphases, or even correct and supplant them. Luke's prologue (1:3) is a good example of this.

(ii) Secondly, we have proof in Luke's prologue referring to *many* (πολλοί) other efforts (1:1). A community would probably not want their gospel traditions to be kept secret, but rather that the knowledge of their existence be rapidly and widely disseminated. It is therefore less likely that the Gospels were produced for a select few, and more likely that they were written with an eye to their dissemination (1998, 70).

5.2   Book production in New Testament times

Further support for Bauckham's viewpoint came from the work of Loveday Alexander (1998, 71-109) showing that there was abundant material evidence for book production among early Christians.[8] It also enhances the viewpoint of Thompson about the amount of communication between the early churches. The sheer volume of early Christian papyri from the second century onwards testifies to this fact.

Although the evidence comes mostly from the second century onwards, the volume of written material does indicate the early popularity and the widespread use of written material. One could gather from this that written material must have been fairly widely used during the period of the writing and disseminating of the canonical Gospels. The fact that the codex form became popular amongst Christians for their writings (cf. those found in Egypt) earlier than pagan books, might be due to the advantage of this form of writing for its portability, and perhaps because it was easier for checking references and for teaching purposes (Alexander 1998, 76).

Although oral performance was the primary means of publication in Greco-Roman antiquity, Alexander (1998, 90) emphasized that "the lines of demarcation between oral performance and written text (or between author and reader) are much more complex and less clear-cut than our experience of 'print culture' might lead us to expect". We should also remember that when we talk about the composition of written Gospels we are already talking about texts that have in some degree made the transition from their primary oral situation. Furthermore, the crossing of the oral/written boundary is often connected in the ancient world with an extension of the audience beyond the limits of the primary oral situation (Alexander 1998, 90).

Alexander (1998, 91-99) illustrated the diversity of both motive and means involved in the circulation of texts in the ancient world. She used four models of the ancient world to show this diversity and the intricateness of the process. I summarise the main characteristics as follows:

(i)   *Corresponding scholars model:* Scholars corresponding with one another showed the awareness that books are for sharing.

(ii) *Rhetoric performance model:* Rhetoric took place essentially as oral presentation of carefully crafted speeches appropriate to the occasion. A brief note of the main points in a speech was often held ready in hand. A written text may also be used to preserve the gist of a speech long after the original oral situation is past.

(iii) *Disappearing lecture notes model:* Although the "living voice" of the teacher was considered superior to learning from books, written texts of oral lectures circulated widely,

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8   See the recent work by Gamble (1995).

both with and without their authors" consent. The written text of an oral performance may have been extended and added to in different ways.

(iv) *Patronage model:* Dedicating a book to a patron was another means of extending the book's audience (cf. Luke's prologue). This is in line with the court tradition of hospitality to a travelling poet or scholar involving the provision of not only board and lodging but also a social context for the public performance and discussion of the work. Once available in a patron's house or library a book would be implicitly available to any of the patron's friends who wished to read or copy it.

From these arguments/models it is clear that the written text could reach a wider audience (both in space and time) than the oral performance could have done.

From the evidence that she has collected, as briefly stated above, Alexander drew some tentative conclusions:

(i)   The "private" factor in the copying and production of texts continued to be important alongside the commercial copying of the book trade. The social networks in which this happened were not limited to the "upper class" but there were also networks for the technical and scientific interests. She (1998, 100) agrees with Gamble's research (1995) which indicated that the Christians had such networks too, which were a variant of the normal patterns for the circulation of books in the ancient world.

(ii) The writing of the Gospels itself implies the crossing of an invisible boundary between the implicitly limited audience of an oral performance and the wider audience that can be reached by a written text (see Galen's stories as example of the continuity between oral performance and written text; Alexander 1998, 101-102). One should not see the process in terms of a simple dichotomy, viz. that oral = specific audience, and written = general audience. Rather, the apparent ease with which the Gospels made the transition suggests that the oral teaching that lies behind the written texts was itself perhaps more generally conceived "for all Christians" than we have been accustomed to think (1998, 100-101). Elsewhere Alexander (1993, 187) has shown that Luke's dedication of his work to Theophilus "does not mean that it is a private communication for one reader only; dedication is a widely recognized literary courtesy". Dedication, such as that to Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4), seems to be linked very often with a desire to "fix" a fluid tradition by depositing a definitive form of the text in the care (and probably in the library) of a patron. Where the patron is somehow seen as facilitating the "publication" of the book, this should be associated with the ancient conventions whereby the aristocracy were expected to provide a "hearth" for the public performance of a poet's work, as well as a meeting place for wandering scholars and teachers. The patron could provide another kind of hospitality for an author's work in his library, where the text could be "deposited" for consultation and copying by his friends. Alexander (1998, 104) even thinks of Theophilus as an equivalent to the patrons of the house churches known from the Pauline letters. The network model implies a multiplicity of intersecting lines of communication.

I consider Alexander's (1998, 104) illustration of the plurality of interweaving networks as a warning to us to look critically at Bauckham's theory, by not over-simplifying the dichotomy between a "local" and "general" circulation of texts within the churches.

6.   *The genre of Luke*

Let us now have a look at the genre of Luke and see what light it might shed on his audience. As far as Luke and Acts are concerned there has been a bewildering diversity of opinion with regard to the kind of literature they represent (cf. discussion in Du Plooy 1986, 7ff.). There has been no real finality amongst scholars about this issue. This is true also of the Gospels in general. There is only one consensus, namely that the gospel genre is not *sui generis* (cf. Vorster 1984, 22).

Investigation into the history of genre research shows many attempts to find an analogy, e.g. Hellenistic parallels such as biography, aretalogy, tragedy, tragi-comedy; Semitic parallels such as covenant, biography of a righteous person, prophecy, apocalypse, Easter haggadah, and midrash (cf. Vorster 1984, 12-17, 21; Barr and Wentling 1984, 74). Other researchers have compared the passion narrative with stories of persecution and vindication in Jewish literature (Nickelsburg 1980, 155ff.), with Roman-Hellenistic memorabilia and diatribe (Kruger 1982, 34-41; cf. Du Plooy 1989, 8) and so forth. There has been little agreement on the genre of the Gospels. In his contribution to Bauckham's book Burridge (1998, 113) concurred with this when he stated that the Gospels are not unique as far as their genre is concerned, since all communication is produced within a context of other communication.

As far as Luke's Gospel is concerned, it shows very much a character of its own. This may be due to the fact that he was probably the only non-Jew amongst the evangelists – coming from a strong Hellenistic background. Plümacher (1972 and 1979) had shown that Luke used many literary forms and motives, techniques and style from Hellenistic literature. He applies them to suit his own purpose (cf. Brown 1974, 113).

Luke showed in his prologue (Luke 1:1-4) that he wanted to be considered as a good historian, using "eye-witnesses" (1:2), and that he had "carefully investigated everything from the beginning (and) write an orderly account" (1:3). He also emphasised that his story was "totally trustworthy" (= "that you may know the certainty of the things") (1:4). The verb ἐπιγνῷς as used in Luke 1:4 is often linked in Luke with some cognate form of ἀσφάλεια (see Acts 2:36; 21:34; 22:30; Du Plessis 1974, 270) and expresses *certainty* or *reliability*. The adverbial use of ἀσφαλῶς in Acts 2:36 expresses the certain knowledge that God made Jesus Messiah and Lord! This proves to be Luke's intention right through his Gospel. This is the *truth* which Luke wanted to report.

With this last phrase in his prologue Luke emphasized his intention to write a trustworthy narrative about Jesus which might help Theophilus to come to a decision. It focussed primarily on the trustworthiness of Luke's Jesus-story, but it has implications for the conditions of any implied community. This certainty or trustworthiness is closely related with the plot of this Gospel as a whole, namely, that *God has revealed his plan of salvation for all mankind in Jesus Christ*. From the prologue one gets the impression that it was Luke's intention to strengthen his implied readers' faith by indicating how the will and grace of God had been revealed in the life of Jesus. He wanted to convince his readers that Jesus came to fulfil the will of God, and thus strengthen their faith or lead them to a decision to follow this Jesus. This phrase, about the reliability of Luke's Jesus story, could support Bauckham's theory that the Gospel should be read as a narrative about Jesus rather than as a narrative about an hypothetical Christian community (cf. 1998, 2). This is further enhanced by the fact that there are no traces in the prologue of the conditions of a community in crisis that could be mirrored in the text as some scholars would like

us to believe.[9] We find no mention of a particular community or of a communal crisis as explanation of why Luke has written.

Luke's historiography will probably not comply with modern history writing but such a comparison would not be fair or relevant. We have to judge him by his own peers and within the context of his own time. On the one hand he claims to be a good historian but at closer inspection one realises that he uses a fictive order when it suits his theological purpose (cf. Du Plessis 1982, 19-28). William Kurz (1987, 196) has spoken a wise word to explain this: "History refers to events that took place and fiction to what could or should happen; its credibility comes from the fund of human experience shared by the author . . . and the reader."

Many researchers into the genre of Luke have suggested that it comes closest to ancient biography (*bios/vita*). They compared the lives of a philosopher such as Pythagoras, Moses, Jesus of Nazareth, and Apolonius of Tyana and concluded that al four of these are so-called aretalogies in which the life of a wise man is praised (cf. Robinson and Koester 1971).

Charles Talbert (1974) studied the literary patterns and the genre of Luke-Acts and suggested that it is a dual Greco-Roman biography in which the life and doctrine of the founder (Jesus) and life and teachings of his followers (apostles) are described. He considered this to be parallel to the so-called *diadochai* in Greco-Roman literature in which the life and teachings of a philosopher is described. He acknowledged, however, that the third part of such a "life", in which the teachings of the founder are explained, has actually been woven into the fabric of the first two parts and did not appear as a separate entity. The degree of similarity is, however, still so much that it cannot be ignored, especially in light of the fact that Luke is the only evangelist to write a follow-up for his Gospel (cf. Du Plessis 1995, 20).

To consider Luke's Gospel as a biography seems to me the most useful comparison as far as Luke is concerned.[10] This has lately been emphasized by Richard Burridge (1998, 113-145; cf. also his 1992 monograph on this topic). In his contribution to Bauckham's book he (1998, 121) made a study of ten examples of ancient biography and concluded that "'Lives' (βίοι or *vitae*) form a diverse and flexible genre, yet still one with a recognizable family resemblance in both form and content."[11]

Burridge (1998, 132-133) did show that we do find examples of a *bios* written for people outside the author's group in the philosophical schools of the fourth and third centuries B.C. (cf. Aristoxenus' *bios* of Socrates, the life of Cato, and Tacitus' life of his father in law, Agricola). From these biographies it is clear that the portrait of the subject matters more than the readership, and this is true of most ancient biographies. Even when there is a particular point being made about the subject, as with Socrates, Cato or Agricola, the books are intended for wider circulation. Therefore: if Greco-Roman *bioi* are not written solely for specific communities, then interpreting the Gospels as *bioi* provides a critique of much community-based sociological

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9   Dale Allison (1988, 66) notes that the prologue has been formulated in "frustratingly general terms" and gives good reason for inferring that "its author anticipated that Luke-Acts would enjoy wide circulation" beyond the bounds of any single audience.

10   As early as 1982 I (Du Plessis, 1982, 26) tried my hand at defining the genre of Luke's Gospel and came up with the following comprehensive description: "'n Biografiese verhaal met 'n dramatiese inslag en met 'n pastoraal-teologiese opset maar met die aanspraak van historiografiese deeglikheid."

11   Burridge (1998, 121) claims that Bultmann made a mistake when he stated that Gospels were not biographies because he compared them with *modern* biographies. Luke did begin his Gospel with the birth of Jesus and it ends with his death/resurrection, but most of the actions are concentrated during a brief period of his adult ministry. Luke does not describe any personality development of the main character as could be expected in a modern biography.

analysis of the Gospel audiences. These examples suggest that writers had certain types of people in mind when writing for wider circulation, which is more like our modern concept of "market" rather than just one narrow community.[12]

Burridge thinks that interpreting the Gospels as ancient *bioi* confirms that this development towards "audience" implied within each Gospel is more helpful than imagined hypothetical communities. It is, however, to be noted that he uses the phrase *"more helpful"* because his suggestion also refers to a hypothetical audience!

This reminds me of the thorough study of ancient narratives by Susan Marie Praeder (1980) who identified Luke-Acts as an "antiquity story" which forms part of the sub-genre: Christian antiquity narrative. The fact that she qualifies this as a *"Christian"* narrative is significant in that it reveals something of the content and thrust of these writings – focussing on the main character and his message and not on the conditions of the readership.

One of the results of Burridge's (1998, 123) research which I found very interesting was his illustration of how biography focusses on *one particular person*. He showed how in ancient biography around a quarter or a third of the *verbs* are dominated by one person, the hero, while another 15-30% of the verbs can occur in sayings, speeches, or quotations from the person. He found the same in the Gospels. In Luke for instance, Jesus is the subject of nearly 20% of the verbs, while about 40% are spoken by him. Jesus' deeds and words are therefore of vital importance for the evangelists as they picture Jesus for their audiences.[13] The centrality of the main character in the Gospel of Luke is of importance when one determines its purpose and audience.

Burridge thus sees the Gospels, not as clear glass windows on the historical Jesus, or as polished mirrors in whose reflection we can see anything we place before them. He (1998, 124) sees it rather as "a piece of stained glass *through which* we can catch the occasional glimpse of what is behind them and *in which* the main picture has been assembled using all the different colors of literary skill – and it is the portrait of a person". Although I like his return to the notion of the Gospels as windows *"through which"* one can have a glimpse of what is behind them, I consider his metaphor of a *"stained glass"* window as too optimistic and glorified. I would personally prefer to speak of this window as an *opaque* or even *dirty glass* through which one can have some kind of impression of the events behind.

I liked the way Burridge (1998, 120-124) emphasized the fact that the Gospels are about a person and not about theological ideas (reconstructed from the community's needs). Every passage should first be interpreted in the light of the biographical genre of the whole before other factors are taken into consideration. We need to ask what this story wants to tell us about the author's understanding of Jesus. Burridge (1998, 120-124) illustrates this by showing how the evangelists differ on how they characterize Jesus' disciples:

> For Mark they have "no faith" (Mark 4:40), for Matthew they are "men of little faith" (Matt 8:26), while in Luke they ask Jesus to "increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). The point of each passage is not to tell us about the disciples but rather about Jesus.

Thus, interpreting the Gospels in the light of their biographical genre, as being about a person rather than about community ideas or problems, has some immediate benefit in their interpretation.

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12 See also the work of Mary Ann Tolbert (1989, 59-79, 303-306) referring to "popular literature;" and Mary Ann Beavis (1989, 171) speaking of a "more general audience".

13 I have not been able to check whether this might be true of other genres as well, but it should make an interesting study on its own.

7. *The role of Luke as author*

The creativity of the author as theologian has been restored by *redaction criticism*. The more recent trend, however, has been to move towards the driving force behind this creativity, and this driving force has been considered to be the particular needs of his narrowly defined community (cf. Burridge 1998, 126). This is inclined to make of the author again a glorified stenographer. Against this one can reason that the biographical genre of the Gospels points rather towards the evangelist's creative personality. Literary theory suggests that communities do not write books (Burridge 1998, 126). Unlike static communities, authors move around, collecting ideas and developing their understanding. We find this referred to in Luke's prologue, namely, that ideas get refined by wider experience and by the collection of source material (Luke 1:3). "While authors may write for groups of people or communities, this is better seen as their response to the needs or desires of perceived markets or audiences" (Burridge 1998, 126-127).

In view of the authors' response to the needs of their audience our first concern should not be to find the social needs and problems of Luke's "community" in individual pericopes in Luke's Gospel, but rather to see how they further the larger literary goal of the author (see Johnson 1979, 87-100 in this regard). Because of the limitations of reconstructing the historical situation of the text I prefer using *narrative criticism* as a more useful procedure to understand the text and its context. In my own commentary on Luke (1995) I made use of narrative criticism as method of analysing and understanding the Gospel stories as a whole. In this way one can make use of the information available from social scientific research without deluding yourself into thinking that you can really reconstruct the original situation.[14]

With regard to Luke's Gospel we find that the high occurrence of technical terms from ancient rhetoric occurring in the prologue emphasizes the *narrative* character of the whole Gospel. One of the important terms is διήγησις.[15] A διήγησις is not only a comprehensive and complex narrative, but it had even in pre-Christian rhetoric faith as point of departure (cf. Güttgemanns 1983, 15). Luke wanted to convince Theophilus – and thus all his readers – that what he (i.e. Theophilus) had heard (κατηχήθης) about Jesus is trustworthy. Vernon Robbins (1991, 322) has shown that the honorific appellation "most excellent" for Theophilus gives us an important look into the social location of the thought of the implied author. It shows a stance of respect, suggesting that the implied author wanted to communicate upwards with his implied readers. Although Theophilus is probably an historical person, he represents narratologically the implied reader (which could include all future readers). The direct (primary) audience (Theophilus) would represent a higher status in the social order than ordinary peasants. Whether this was really the ultimate audience which Luke had in mind, is of course an open question. Theophilus himself could have been a "God-fearer" (see Esler's arguments) but there is no indication of this in the text itself. In his prologue Luke gives the impression that he is aiming to explain Jesus' life and teaching in the first place to Theophilus, but that could include any target group who needed a trustworthy story to come to a decision with regard to the central figure in this story. Burridge (1998, 143-144) thinks that Luke was more likely aiming at a Gentile market niche and that his audience and that of the other evangelists could therefore on occasion have been the same people.

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14 This concurs with the work of scholars like David Rhoads (1982) (on Mark), Jack Kingsbury (1988) (on Matthew), Richard Tannehill (1986 and 1990) (on Luke-Acts), and Alan Culpepper (1983) (on John).

15 It is remarkable that Luke does not use the term εὐαγγελίον like Mark 1:1 for instance!

Of course, scholars who consider Luke's first audience to be his own community, need not disagree with Burridge's last remark above in so far as the later audience is concerned. The difference lies in whether one speaks of Luke's primary audience or his ultimate audience. As long as one does not clearly differentiate between the two, it might be misleading as to which audience is at stake. For Bauckham Luke's primary audience is not the issue, although he does not seem to differentiate properly between the two.

8.   *Luke's audience*

Has Bauckham succeeded in providing us with a clearer defined audience for Luke's Gospel? As early as 1898 Alfred Plummer (in his ICC Commentary on Luke) dismissed the idea that Luke wrote only for Theophilus, and claimed: "It is evident that he writes for the instruction and encouragement of all Gentile converts . . ." (Plummer 1964, xxxiv). Plummer's view of Luke is different from the scholars dealing with Mark, Matthew and John (cf. also Bauckham 1998, 14). Plummer (1964, xxxiv) came up with the viewpoint, generally accepted amongst Lukan scholars to-day, that "Theophilus is to be the patron of the book with a view to its introduction to a larger circle of readers. Perhaps Luke hoped that Theophilus would have it copied and disseminated, as he probably did."

With regard to Luke's intended readers, Joseph Fitzmyer (1981, 57-58) stated the widely held view that Luke was written for a Gentile Christian audience, or at least one that was predominantly Gentile Christian. This view is based on Luke's obvious concern to relate his story of the Christ-event and its sequel to a Graeco-Roman literary tradition. His prologue – unique amongst the Gospels – is a good example of how Luke links up with a Graeco-Roman literary tradition. Luke alone addressed his Gospel to an individual bearing a Greek name (though it could have been borne by a Jew). Fitzmyer (1981, 58) also pointed out that Luke shows a clear desire to relate the salvation promised to Israel in the Old Testament to Gentiles or non-Jews.

Jacob Jervell (1972) has made a good case for the idea that the Gentiles have gained a share in what had been given to Israel, i.e. the salvation of God sent first to the reconstituted Israel (cf. Acts 15:16-18) is by God's own design sent further to the Gentiles without the law, especially when part of Israel rejected the invitation (cf. Acts 13:46; Fitzmyer 1981, 58). Although it is possible that Paul's Christian readers might have been under attack from their Jewish neighbours because of Paul's controversies (cf. Jervell 1972, 177), one cannot conclude from this that they are therefore themselves Jewish-Christians (cf. Fitzmyer 1981, 59). Although it still remains speculative, Fitzmyer might be closer to the truth about the readers of Luke being Gentile Christians in a predominantly Gentile setting, than Gentile Christians in a predominantly Jewish setting.[16]

Fitzmyer has given at least six good reasons, based on specific examples from the Lukan text, why he thinks the Third Gospel has a gentile destination (cf. Fitzmyer 1981, 58). We do not have to enter into these arguments because they seem to be fairly reasonable. Most Lukan scholars speak of Luke's audience in *general* terms as probably Gentile. To try to pinpoint them more precisely will only lead to speculation. By the time the Gospels were being written the Jewish synagogues were no longer open for the Christian gospel and the gentile mission became the

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16 Jervell (1972, 68, 146-147, 174-175) did intimate the links Luke strove to forge between Judaism and Christianity but he refused to accept that there were a significant number of Jews in Luke's community. Cf. also Esler 1987, 31.

target. The Christian message was universal and free from any particularistic limitations (see Acts 10:34-35; 28:28).

In a more recent publication Francois Bovon (1989, 23) differentiated more finely between three different target groups of Luke: educated Gentiles, Hellenistic Jews, wavering Christians. Bovon, however, leaves no doubt that Luke expects from his rich friend Theophilus to distribute his two works to a *"breiteren Publikum"* (my italics). He thinks of Luke's audience as representing the Hellenistic form of Christianity. He does not try to reconstruct Luke's "community" but rather speaks of Luke's *implied readers* in general terms as being part of the *universal community* to which he addresses himself in his two writings. Bovon (1989, 25) does, however, localize them "in der städtischen Situation der lukanischen Gemeinden" (plural!). He (1989, 26) states that for Luke the gospel has its roots in the activity of the Twelve, but for the remainder it is the witnessing of the "Hellenisten" which had the best chance of success in spreading the gospel message. From this one can deduce that for Bovon the " audience" of Luke is, above all, the full complement of readers, from Theophilus to the rest of the Roman world, and up to the present reader.

Philip Esler (1987, 31) prefers to think of Luke's readers (= community) as being mostly gentile God-fearers, previously associated with a synagogue, who became Christians and not gentile idolators who became Christians. Although Esler correctly pointed out the large number of Gentile "God-fearers" who became Christians, he is inclined to underplay the occasions where Luke (in Acts) described purely Gentile conversions or interest shown by Gentiles in the gospel. For instance the episode of Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7). This happened shortly after Paul started his missionary task in Asia Minor. Add to that the events at Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), the gaoler at Philippi (16:29-34), in the agora and Areopagus in Athens (17:17-34), and in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus (19:9-10).

Wayne Meeks (1983) did point out the difference in focus between Paul and Luke (in Acts). While Paul gives the impression in his letters that his mission was primarily to the Gentiles (see Gal 1:16, 2:7-9; Rom 1:5, 13-15 etc), Luke puts the emphasis on the conversion of "God-fearers" associated with the synagogue. Esler (1987, 43) links up with this view by stating that Luke has shaped his version by modifying a source or by creating his own account. It is of course true that Luke (especially in his Gospel) modified his narrative to suit his theological purpose, but again I would suggest that Esler gives a one-sided picture of the difference between Luke and Paul. As he (1987, 43) himself acknowledged Meeks did concede that one should not take Paul's statements absolutely.

Halvor Moxnes (1994, 379) also rejected the idea that we have a "window" onto the social situation of Luke's historical community, but in spite of this he attempted to delineate the social situation of the historical Lukan community! But he (1994, 380) described it in quite general and tentative terms. He is unwilling to situate "Luke's location" in any one city, such as Ephesus or Antioch, and opts instead for "an urban setting in the eastern parts of the Mediterranean". He (1994, 387) reckons that Luke's "empirical readers" constituted "a group of non-elite persons who are culturally and ethnically mixed but who also include among them some who come from the elite periphery". The fact that Moxnes can only provide a very general outline profile of Luke's likely readers can be interpreted as a reinforcement of the position of those who argue that the Gospels were not written for particular "communities" at all (cf. Barton 1998, 189).

In spite of the reticence by most Lukan commentators some scholars (mostly from a social-scientific approach) have attempted to explain the differences between the Gospels as locked up in their audiences. Consequently they have tried to reconstruct these audiences from the text as

specific communities[17] with specific social needs which can be traced from the text. In this approach the text serves as a mirror of the community. This happens because the meaning of the text lies less in what the author meant than in how the text functions to legitimate the interests of the community.

Barton (1998, 177), however, claims that this approach is based on the axiomatic grounds that a group will receive, preserve, and transmit traditions that sustain and advance its particular needs and concerns. For example, the hostility to wealth and the exaltation of the poor in Luke reflect a community made up of people from the margins of society. Such functionalism considers the text as little more than the "product" of a hidden substructure of sociological factors and forces, and it is strongly reductionist in its handling of the meaning of the text (cf. Stowers 1985, 5:149-181). Barton (1998, 177) comments on this as follows: ". . . such approaches tend to draw attention away from the original participants' ways of seeing things, play down the individual and particular in favor of what is judged as typical of the group, and redefine the personal, spiritual, or mystical dimension in terms of the political and communal." He (1998, 178) also finds support in a remark by B Holmberg (1990, 124-125, 139):

> The postulate of complete and positive correlation between a text and the social group that carries and receives it is implausible. To read the Gospel narratives as if they were uniformly allegories of early church life is, if nothing else, somewhat unimaginative.

I would like to agree with Barton's (1998, 178-179) contention to move away from positivist historical criticism and functionalist sociology which distract attention away from the text towards what the ingenious scholar can show lies behind or beneath the text. A combination of sociological exegesis and literary criticism is more useful – as argued above with regard to Luke as author (§7). Identifying more precisely and more vividly the social location of the beliefs and behaviours of the characters and groups presented in the Gospel narratives allows the text itself and the author implied in the text to be understood with ever deeper levels of appreciation.[18]

The cumulative force of the preceding arguments is that the Gospels themselves do not allow us to identify, beyond a high level of generality, the audiences for which they were written (cf. Barton 1998, 193). Great caution and moderation is required for any attempt to describe the communities.

The quest for the Gospel audiences and their social location is not illegitimate. It is an important act of the historical and social-scientific imagination. We must be aware of the social dimension of the reality of the Gospels – whether of the world behind the Gospels, or of the world within them, or in front of them which we inhabit as interpreters. But we should not be tempted to reduce the Gospel texts from their role as primary witnesses to God-in-Christ to the status of incidental by-products of something putatively more fundamental, "the community" – especially if we foreclose on the possibility that the Gospels are open texts intended, not only for audiences of believers, but for audiences of unbelievers as well (cf. Barton 1998, 194).

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17 Because of the ambiguity of the term "community" Barton links up with A P Cohen's definition. According to Cohen (1985, 11) *community* is itself a verbal symbol that people use in various ways to express their sense of similarity and difference, of relationship and boundary.

18 A good example would be the collection edited by J H Neyrey, *The social world of Luke-Acts*, 1991.

9.   *Suggestions for further debate*

I have shown my agreement with Bauckham's theory, but also my points of difference. In conclusion and for the sake of further discussions I would like to summarise the most important points of difference, and suggest a few points for further debate and research:

(i)   In a discussion of Gospel audiences I would suggest that *Luke be treated differently* from the other Gospels because of the fact that Luke clearly identifies his first audience (Theophilus). As far as Luke is concerned one need, therefore, not really "reconstruct" his first audience. The Lukan audience should be dealt with in a different fashion and should be located differently than those of the other evangelists. Even though it is most probable that Luke's Gospel was meant for a wider public/audience, it was in the first place directed to an individual – different from the other three Gospels.

(ii)   Because of what was said in the previous comment, I would suggest that Bauckham *differentiate* more clearly between the *first audience* and the *later audiences* – especially with regard to Luke. He did not prove beyond doubt that the evangelists wrote *only* with the wider audience in mind.

(iii)   Bauckham should pay attention to the question of whether the Gospels deal *only* with an *indefinite readership* or whether the readership could include the *direct/primary audience*. He should ask himself whether he is not using his so-called "indefinite audience" in the same way as his "opponents" used their "specific audience". One should not forget the speculative nature of both Bauckham's wider audience and the social critics' reconstructed audience.

(iv)   Due consideration should be given to Loveday Alexander's research on the *plurality of interweaving networks*. Bauckham should be critically aware not to over-simplify the dichotomy between a "local" and "general" circulation of texts within the churches.

(v)   I believe that the *Lukan intention* should also be brought into the equation if one seriously discusses the Gospel audience. One need not return to a naive assumption that Luke's Gospel is a direct transcript of historical reality, but should rather recognize that Luke's primary intention was to narrate the *story of Jesus* in the ultimate and universal meaning it has for Christian faith. The influence of "Luke's community and context" cannot be ruled out, but these factors should not replace the main thrust of Luke's story about the central figure of the story.

(vi)   The importance of the narrative character of Luke's Gospel (see previous point) has been supported by the results of Burridge's research illustrating how ancient biography focusses on *one particular person,* and how this is also true of the Gospels – in particular, Luke's Gospel. More research into the kind of *linguistic statistics* offered by Burridge should help the debate on the Gospel audiences. I agree with Burridge in emphasizing that the Gospels are about a person and not about theological ideas (reconstructed from the community's needs). Every passage should first be interpreted in the light of the biographical genre of the whole before other factors are taken into consideration.

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