

The Sense of Audience in Luke: a Literary Examination

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'Sir, is it to us that you are addressing this parable, or to all men also?' Peter asks this question of Jesus at almost exactly the mid-point of Luke's gospel. The question alerts us to the importance of audiences in this gospel. A reading of the received text as a literary whole discovers that a ubiquitous and significant sense of audience distinguishes Luke's gospel. Jesus's mission defines itself in Luke's gospel through a dynamic relationship with his audiences, and the evangelist's project of witness, of instruction of conversion, too, accomplishes itself through the creation and manipulation of audiences.

From its outset Luke's gospel acknowledges a sense of audience as well as asserting a care for purposeful narrative structure. The gospel is introduced by a formal prologue to 'most excellent Theophilus', who was apparently undergoing or had recently undergone instruction in the faith.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you might know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. (RSV)

Things that have been accomplished among us are the marvellous events of the life, death and resurrection of Christ which have led to the rise of the new Christian church of which Luke's Theophilus is, or aspires to be, a member. Luke poses Theophilus as an audience, representing Christian readers or listeners of Luke's day, wanting to understand fully the basis and the demands of the belief which he now professes. Such listeners are heirs to a young tradition—narratives handed down—but by implication they are, too, the new witnesses, the young church which will continue to pass on that tradition. Luke's narrative is self-consciously part of the formation of a church. The 'order' of the narrative will therefore be significant. It must convey more than mere fact, more than scattered report; it must assert its truth by its coherence. By its telling it must make real to the audience the *impact* of the teachings which they/Theophilus have received. The narrative thus

poises itself centrally in a continuum between past and future as an ordered account which actively moves the events (and emergent tradition) of the past into the understanding (and continuum tradition) of the future.

The mode in which Luke chooses to do this in as much a dramatic mode as it is brilliant storytelling. Not just the events of Christ's life and ministry and death are given to us, but responses *to* them are made a lively part of the story we receive. As a result we are not only regaled with a history, but drawn into a drama, and our own experience as audience—measured against or coinciding with the experiences of audiences *within* the text—becomes the narrative's way of making the history meaningful, 'true' and instructive to Theophilus and to us.

Orderly narration takes the aspect of design, and Luke's text has clear designs on its audience. Goulder strongly argues that an evolving liturgical use of the gospels—which were read out in the churches initially at Passiontide, then through the year—became a designed aspect of the structure of the synoptic gospels.¹ This liturgical use implies significantly that these narratives were written *for* an audience, notably a listening audience, and that appeal to, challenge to, as well as characterisation of audiences are opportunities which Luke was not slow to seize upon in making Theophilus and his friends understand.

Indeed, if Theophilus didn't exist, Luke would have had to invent him because this gospel which assures us that the poor will be skinny enough to enter the eye of the needle and that the childlike in understanding are assured of entry to the Kingdom is *not* primarily addressed to these. It is, rather, written for those with worldly attachments and civic responsibilities,² with a degree of learning and experience, and even, maybe, money. It is addressed to those with the power to make—or fail to make—choices; in other words, the most excellent Theophilus. The Pharisees may not impinge largely on Luke's congregation, but people able to give large dinner parties do—and Theophilus little expects when he accepts the gift of Luke's ordered narrative what this letter-bomb of 'information' is going to exact of him.

Audiences and audience reactions become most significant once Jesus's public ministry has begun in chapter 4. But we are introduced to the sense of audience in the gospel's very first story, that of the angel Gabriel's revelation to Zacharias. In this passage we find established the difference between inner audiences (audiences functioning within the text: here the priest Zachariah, the people) and an outer audience, the audience of the gospel itself. Gabriel appears to Zacharias in the sanctuary and announces the birth and mission of John the Baptist. Zacharias asks 'By what shall I know this?' and for his doubt is struck dumb. The people praying in the temple, who have noticed Zacharias's delayed emergence, realise from his resort to sign language that he has had a vision, but its content, fully and importantly revealed to us, the gospel audience, remains hidden from them. Here, then, the inner

audiences have different experiences. Zacharias sees an angel. The people see him emerge dumb. *We*, the privileged outer audience, see all—the prophecy, the inadequate reply and its consequences, the people’s response. The information is necessary for our understanding of the story, of faith (or ‘how not to answer back to an angel’), and of the *appropriateness* of Mary’s response when the angel subsequently calls on *her*. Mary, despite perplexity at the angel’s unusual greeting, receives the news of her role in the Messiah’s birth with decisive acceptance. A comparison, therefore, of the two angelic annunciations gives us *both* a complete understanding of the identity of Jesus (a knowledge which will itself often privilege us, the gospel audience, over audiences within the text), and of His coming triumph, *and* a model for the selfless acceptance of God’s words and God’s ways.

Jesus’s ministry, begun in Galilee, is almost immediately a story of audiences and the story *works* by creating and exploiting relationships between the inner audience and the gospel audience. The two audiences may share understanding *or* they may have different understandings. When the two audiences share the same understanding Jesus’s words may achieve the effect of instruction, they may come across as an invitation to self-scrutiny or a challenge to belief. Sometimes the gospel audience shares understanding with a *part* of the inner audience—with those who believe, with the disciples, etc,—at the expense of others. An interesting passage which seems to work this way occurs in chapter 8 (8:4—8). Jesus has just told the crowd the parable of the sower and the seed, and he has concluded, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear’. When his disciples ask him the parable’s meaning, he says ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God, but to the rest they are given in parables, in order that *they may see without perceiving and hear without understanding*’. Luckily for the disciples and for those of us who may not quite have placed the significance of the seed in its four environments, Luke’s Jesus proceeds to explain the parable. We seem, like the disciples, privileged to know the revealed secrets. We may for a moment infer that we, too, are special.

Complication comes when we realise that what the explanation contains is a story about an audience—the hearers of the word of God (which was the ‘seed’) and how they *respond*, having heard. The four possibilities are translated into (by being translated out of) the metaphor of the seed. Disbelief, failing belief, over-weak belief and active belief in the Word are the possibilities addressed to the disciples *and* importantly to the gospel audience. It is *about them*.

When the audience within the text and the outer (gospel) audience have *different* understandings, the text becomes rich in dramatic irony and prolepsis. Such devices involve us, letting us glimpse the causes and feel the building suspense of impending tragedy. In Luke, however, such superior knowledge is never allowed to generate smugness. The very first scene we witness of Jesus’s public ministry in Luke is his appearance in

the synagogue in Nazareth, 'where he had been brought up' (4: 16—30). This scene follows upon the episode of the temptations in the wilderness (4: 1—13) where Jesus has triumphed over the devil's tests and resisted his taunts, but which concludes with the devil leaving him 'until the appointed time'. The phrasing ('If you are the Son of God ...') looks forward, as the gospel audience may know (and *will* know on any reading after the first), to the taunts of the soldiers and the rulers and of the unrepentant thief at the crucifixion (23:35, 37, 39): 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself'. These reminders alert us to the devil's 'appointed time' and with this sense of foreboding we enter upon the narrative of Jesus's public ministry.

In the synagogue Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah a passage which, significantly, concerns ministry and describes Jesus's ministry 'to *preach good news* to the poor', etc. The passage concerns understanding and freedom. Jesus interprets the scripture, as would be appropriate to the reader, and this privileged synagogue audience is prepared to understand. But he interprets *astonishingly*: 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'. Here and now the good news is realised; Jesus himself is its interpretation. Needless to say, the audience does not understand. At first receptive, impressed, ('All spoke well of him and were astonished at the gracious words coming from his mouth'), nevertheless they don't quite get it. Jesus senses their resistance to his message and goes on the attack (with a very puzzling change of tack). 'No doubt you will quote me this proverb, "Doctor, heal yourself"; and say, "Do here also in your native place the things which we have heard were done in Capernaum."' And he gives them an illustrated lecture on the greater understanding shown by foreigners in the Old Testament when Israel failed to understand. This attack on his own people is too much for them and their perplexity turns to rage so that they drive him out of the city. Audience reaction is important in the story. The sympathetic audience in the synagogue fails to understand, finds itself abused, and changes its mood. It turns away from Jesus, actively attacking him. *Our* response should be different and it is guided *by* the response of the internal audience.

The gospel audience, too, hears the prophecy and its message of good news reaches us as a promise fulfilled *in* Christ, as we know from our familiarity with the end of the story. The 'today' of the story is both the past and the continuing condition of our faith. Other aspects of the discourse take on meaning for an audience which has heard the story before. The seemingly incongruous 'Physician, heal thyself' becomes proleptic of the sneers of the rulers at the crucifixion (whose words have already associated them with the devil's taunts), 'Others he saved, let him save himself', and of the bad thief's 'You are the Messiah, are you not? Save yourself and us'. By implication, then, we associate the hostile response of the synagogue audience with the hostility of the chief priests and scribes who will, in the end, bring about Jesus's death. Both are, like
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the 'Israel' of Jesus's discourse, 'chosen' groups: worshipping in synagogue and temple (people from whose midst the Messiah is *expected* to come). And this develops another of the scene's (and the gospel's) significant themes: the difference is here signalled between the elect, the chosen people, and people who choose God. 'No prophet is in favour in his native place' announces the resistance Jesus will meet throughout his ministry from his own people, the Jews, the Nazarenes, Jerusalem, and the welcome *and* faith he will find among strangers. The gospel audience understands, but only by virtue of *further* understanding that its privilege is not only on account of hearing God's word, in which it is like the synagogue audience, or of knowing the end of the story, but on condition of having chosen and continuing to choose the God and the mission that the understanding entails.

The structure of the narrative in Luke's gospel, notably the *placing* of certain scenes or parables within the overall narrative is itself sometimes a source of irony, or generates multiple awareness by its manipulation of the audience.³ Chapter 17 begins with an emphasis on faith and an example showing what faith looks like. The story of the ten cleansed lepers, one of whom returns to give glory to God (17: 11–19), is the latest of several episodes showing us what faith looks like—the centurion's servant, the woman who anoints Jesus's feet, Jairus, and the intercalated episode of the haemorrhaging woman. After this history of saving faith, Jesus tells the Pharisees and the disciples that the Kingdom of God will come unlooked-for, and he tells the disciples that the coming of the Son of Man will be a time of trial and suffering. He then tells them a parable 'about the need for them to pray continually and not to be discouraged'.

This parable (18: 1–8) is of the widow seeking justice in a dispute who so persecutes the judge 'who did not fear God and who had no respect for man' that this tough cookie crumbles and gives in to her persistence. Jesus then says if the unrighteous judge so gives in, 'will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night ... He will speedily see justice done them', but he adds, uncomfortably, 'Nevertheless, will the Son of Man, when he comes, find faith on the earth?' Immediately he goes on to preface the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18: 9–14) with the words, 'He also told this parable to some who were confident of their own righteousness and who treated everyone else with contempt'. The unrighteous judge story allows the audience to nurse certain assumptions. Widows are probably good or deserving (her cause therefore probably deserves 'justice' against her 'enemy'). The parallelism in the story associates the fate of the widow with the fate of the elect (and we're confident that the elect deserve vindication). We put aside niggling inconsistencies like the fact that widows, marginal figures, are certainly *not* among the social elect conventionally. And why that odd question about faith? The audience puts it aside, the audience is assured, they (we) like the widow will be

vindicated, because they (we) are, after all, the elect. Or are they? Might we not remember that it is not God's chosen but those who choose God who are the elect now? And might not the next address 'to some who were confident of their own righteousness' be registering Jesus's (or Luke's) awareness that his listeners have too readily assumed their election, taken for granted their vindication? If the disciples or Theophilus thought it was enough to learn to pray continually they were perhaps mistaken. They must know *how* to pray in humility as well as in hope.

It is no accident that we next glimpse the simple faithful—or merely hopeful (it doesn't matter)—bringing their babies to be touched and Jesus telling his disciples not to stop these unsophisticates, but rather to make their own understandings childlike. By the time he has followed this up by telling the rich ruler that if he doesn't sell everything he has and give to the poor he won't get through the eye of the needle, it's no wonder that the exasperated hearers say, 'then who *can* be saved?' They've been made to see themselves as needing to pray (but maybe not assiduous enough at it), as doubtful in their election, as too adult and as too rich. To this unsettled sense of self and destiny Jesus answers, 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God'. Confidence in this—and the actions of selflessness and humility which follow on from it—is what, for Luke, faith is. Whether you see, as the disciples should but don't when Jesus proceeds to outline the coming events of his death and resurrection, or whether you don't see but do understand, as the blind man does whom Jesus next heals, doesn't matter so long as you lose your sense of 'things possible with men' and acquire a belief in 'things possible with God'. The whole section ends as it began, with an illustration of faith. It has cultivated along the way an understanding—very necessary to Theophilus and those still waiting—of the challenge alluded to in the question 'will the Son of Man (who will according to tradition be a judge, presumably righteous), when he comes find faith on earth?'

It is worth establishing who *are* the audiences within Luke's Gospel and what part they play in its drama. In a sense, Jesus inherits a ready-made audience. Crowds had already gathered around John the Baptist. In fact Jesus is presumably among these crowds when he is baptized and the heavens open. Henceforth Jesus himself is followed by, accompanied by, pursued by, surrounded by, later protected by (and possibly even condemned by) crowds (*ho ochlos*). The crowds accumulate in response to Jesus's preaching and his miracles. Early in the Gospel, crowds are invariably amazed, astonished, afraid at what they see, but they follow, and they spread report. As a result 'crowds grow'; 'Great crowds were going along with him' (14—25); at one point, we're told, 'thousands of people had gathered, so that they trod upon one another' (12.1). When Jesus teaches in the temple they even regularly 'get up early' to hear him.

The crowd is never a uniform entity, nor entirely faceless. Faces emerge, and they are *very* varied. There are Jesus's chosen disciples, there are Pharisees and Gentiles, rulers and poor widows, Roman centurions and tax collectors, blind men, chief priests, scribes, and pious women. In different places, obviously, the composition of the crowd will vary—Galileans in Galilee, Jews in the Temple.

Although at first the crowd's reactions seem fairly uniform (all that astonishment), in time we become aware of different responses within the crowd. Some believe; some question, challenge Jesus, or grumble. This seems fairly predictable and realistic. And we must remember that the Pharisees and teachers who question Jesus, and the chief priests and scribes who oppose him, always emerge from the crowd to speak, or hide themselves (and their spies and *agents provocateurs* 20:20) within it.

The reactions of the crowd are important; so are the logistics of where they are, how they are deployed in relation to Jesus and within themselves. Often with a crowd gathered round, Jesus—or Luke—places the object of focus 'within the middle'. This occurs with the demoniac (4.35) and the man with a withered hand (6.8). In the synagogue audience when the latter is cured are scribes and Pharisees who are made furious by this Sabbath-day healing; even at this early stage this enemy within discuss among themselves what they should do with Jesus. When Peter denies Jesus three times (22:55ff) he is seated among a group around a fire 'in the middle of the courtyard' of the high priest's house. It is an awful moment for Peter when he (and we) find that Jesus is *his* audience. 'The Lord turned and looked at Peter ...' .

The Sermon on the Plain exploits an open space and a large, varied audience. Luke's Jesus has come down from the mountain and addresses a 'great crowd' gathered on the plain. The crowd includes 'His disciples and a great number of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon ...'. In Luke the Beatitudes (6.20) are a *direct* address to the audience: 'Blessed are *you* poor ...', 'Blessed are *you* who hunger now ...', 'Blessed are *you* who weep now ...'. And we may guess that the crowd is not only mixed in their geographical origins but in their fortunes, too. For after addressing the poor, etc., Jesus turns to the advantaged, and again speaks directly, 'But alas for *you* rich ...', 'Alas for you who are full now ..., Alas for you who laugh now ...'.

The passage began, 'He lifted his eyes towards his disciples and said ...', but as he delivers the Beatitudes he clearly speaks to the whole gathering, and he must also be seen to speak to the gospel audience. This wide audience then narrows, with the address, 'I tell you who are listening', by self-selection, and to those listeners he gives the commands, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you ...'. Again this is direct address; the balanced rhetoric of oppositions employed throughout the sermon persists as the rightness of the conduct Jesus commands is enforced in the audience's mind by contrast with what 'sinners' do. But these structures do not persist in the commands

themselves; rather, the oppositions are violated and the 'listening' audience must abandon its sense of polar categories and 'just' conduct to embrace a new active ethic of love where there is no desert, of giving without return. While eschewing the ways of sinners those who would be like God must actively love them all the same.

In contrast to the sermon's open setting, one of the most important sections of the Gospel—ch.20—takes place entirely in the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus teaches day after day in the temple and the audience is again a mixed one. Luke tends to refer to the crowd in the temple as 'the people' (*ho laos*). This is his usual word for Jewish worshippers—which is what within the temple precinct we necessarily have. It may carry overtones of 'the chosen people' and here, interestingly, 'the people' who 'listen with close attention' prove Jesus's allies, their presence and protection enabling him to continue his teaching and keeping the chief priests and scribes, who are also in the crowd, at bay. Many of the arguments he has in this temple discourse are with chief priests, scribes, or elders; many of his parables are told against this group and the rich and powerful. Though often he addresses 'the people' he means the elders to hear too—and they do. They never take the point of the lesson but they are readily infuriated and alarmed by the insults and the attacks. What prevents them from taking action against him is 'the people'. Whether the scribes flatter him or send spies to trap him into sedition, he outwits them and the 'presence of the people' ensures that they remain quiet. Even while they are busy seeking a way to put him to death (21.22), 'they are afraid of the people'. The crowd, 'the people' here, thus becomes an important figure in the drama and the politics of the story.⁴

Once Jesus has an audience he uses it as an occasion for teaching, Luke, too, teaches by the way his text interacts with its audience—as well as that audience with the audiences in the story. Manipulation of the audiences—internal *and* external—is common. Luke often dislocates his audience's self-awareness or their sense of their relationship to Jesus's words. We have seen something of the manipulation of the audience in the Sermon on the Plain. When he goes on to tell them parables (6:39ff) the parables seem to refer to the present context—the disciples' mission. But the parables can also be understood by the external audience, and they constitute lessons for conduct. These parables link faith and goodness with action. 'Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them' (6:47)—and here note the words allow their address to widen out to all time—'I shall show you whom he is like. He is like a man building a house ... upon rock', and his counterpart, whose foundationless house collapsed, is 'he who heard and did nothing ...' (6.49). This has become an address to the audience *as* an audience. It is about how they are going to *use* that position. They have *heard*, and what will they do? *Being in the audience isn't enough*—the audience must not just hear the words, but '*do them*'.

How Luke's Jesus manipulates his audience and how Luke manipulates *his* may be seen in the parable of the prodigal son. The story (15:11ff) follows on from the parables of the lost sheep and the lost drachma. The setting for this discourse is as usual of a crowd gathering. It is a mixed crowd: uncomfortably so for some. 'All the tax-collectors and sinners were drawing near to hear him.' And as a result the Pharisees and the scribes are 'grumbling'. So he addresses them directly: '*Which of you* who has 100 sheep ...'. And he unfolds these parables about the rejoicing there will be among God's angels over one sinner who repents. Then he embarks simply on another story. 'He said "A man had two sons ..."', and follows on in a pattern which *seems* to resemble the previous two examples. But it's not really the same. First of all it's much more elaborate. When the prodigal son has run through his money and is hungrily wishing he could eat carob pods with the pigs, he breaks into soliloquy, telling himself (and the audience) how he'll return and humble himself to his father. The audience is thus made to know his thoughts and they wonder what the father's reaction will be. They then *see* the father's response (his guts stir—*esplagnisthē*—at the sight of his son) and the son's (he just manages to deliver half the prepared speech when his father starts ordering the food for the homecoming party). The audience *also* sees the elder son's reaction. He isn't inclined to rejoice: 'he was angry and would not go in'. He whinges. And the father replies, 'Son, you are always with me, and all I have is yours. We had to enjoy ourselves and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life, he was lost and has been found'. The dialogue between the father and elder son is every bit as important here as the father's response to the prodigal—*because* the elder son is *precisely in the position of the Pharisees and scribes* (Cf. 11: 1–2). He is the eldest (therefore of importance like these, closer to the father) and he grumbles when the sinner is allowed home. Jesus is pointedly addressing *all* elements in his audience. The import of the story is threefold. The father's response to the prodigal does not judge and his joy at the return offers hope for sinners just as v.7 and 10 did. The elder son's response is like that of the Pharisees, so again we have an instance of 'the chosen' who seem not ready to make the right choice. And we have a reminder to the Pharisees that the sinners *are* their brothers. The passage ends reinforcing the rejoicing and the recognition of this bond.

The parable, then, extends itself because the lesson to the *internal* audience (especially the Pharisees and scribes) includes the lesson of brotherhood and of the need for participation in God's love as well as the lesson that God rejoices over the repentance (however motivated) of sinners. The external audience traditionally is glad to know that the prodigal is forgiven and taken back—but it must also realise that if it righteously considers itself superior to the prodigal, it is implicitly forming an identification with the righteousness of the elder brother. The external audience, too, must learn not just to accept that there is a

forgiving father, but learn to rejoice *with* him ('because he is kind to the unthankful and the evil' 6:35).

In the temple (ch. 20) the officials hear and do not understand; they form an imperfect identification with the parable-matter. They always seem to recognize that they are being attacked—like the teacher of the law in chapter eleven who says, as Jesus breaks up yet another dinner party—'Teacher ... you insult *us* also!'—but they don't take the point. This has ironic consequences in their reaction to the parable of the vineyard owner (20: 9—16) who sends first his slaves to be abused then his son to be killed by the farmer-tenants who have refused to give him his fruit. The owner finally gets cross and destroys the farmers. The scribes and chief priests 'knew that he had spoken this parable against themselves', but are kept from 'laying hands' on *him* because they fear the people. So the audience has been the officials *and* the people. The message is for *both*. Vineyard owners/God will be avenged; bad farmers like the chief priests and scribes (entrusted with bringing forth the vineyard's fruit (those very people) will be punished. What evidently is *not* clear to the elders is the meaning of the fate of the owner's son, the heir. If the officials saw that Jesus's analogy was with himself, and the treatment meted out to the son just that which they are contemplating for him, they wouldn't 'seek to lay hands' on him, for fear of God's anger. But instead, being afraid of *Jesus's* mission and of the people, they proceed to act out the story they have heard.

'Sir, is it to us that you are addressing this parable, or to all men also?' Peter's response to Jesus's caution of readiness (12:41) calls attention to the very enterprise which is Luke's gospel and to its mode of operation. Jesus does not answer at once, but at last 'to the crowds' he says, 'You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; how is it that you do not know how to interpret the present time? Why do you not make your own judgement of what is right?' The answer to Peter's question seems to include *both* the disciples *and* all men. Indeed, in alluding to his own mission and its wide effects in 'division' of houses, families, Jesus has already made clear the common necessity for vigilance. At this mid-point the audiences come together—all the interior ones, and the external one, present and future. The focus is *on* the audience. Jesus's warning admonishes 'all'—the disciples, the crowd, the gospel audience, the young church, the Jewish people; in short, the world. All are told that the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected time; and *all* are challenged: 'Why do you not make your own judgement of what is right?'

The mention of division and the challenge to judgement echo the ever-present motif that the chosen are those *who choose*. It looks forward to the increasing tension of the apocalyptic passages in Chapters 17, 20 and 21 and the divisions (between the people and the chief priests and scribes) in the temple audience in Chapter 20. The apocalyptic

passages tell all audiences what is to come—locally (incorporating the history of the original audience) in martyrdoms and the destruction of the temple, and cosmically (extending the reference to eschatological views) when the Son of Man will come ‘in a cloud and great glory’ (21:27).

Audiences in Luke’s gospel ‘hear’ and also ‘see’. Seeing is crucial to the process which most characterises this gospel, by which audiences actively become witnesses. Those who ‘see’ and those who don’t ‘see’ betray themselves by their actions in Luke’s gospel. ‘Blessed are the eyes which see what you see’, Jesus says to the disciples in ch. 10. But what they ‘see’ is only understood in the light of the resurrection. For this reason the external audience is always privileged even over the chosen disciples. The motif of seeing is everywhere: when Jesus speaks of the eye as a lamp in chapter 11; when the generation seeking a sign are told to ‘see—something more is *here*’; and when Jesus apostrophises Jerusalem saying ‘you will not *see* me ...’ (13:31, and cf. 19:42). When Jesus heals the blind man, the passage moves interestingly from his disciples’ failure to ‘see’ the meaning of his words concerning his death and rising, to the blind faith of the blind man who is given his sight, to the changed mood of the crowd who believe *when* they ‘see’.

The story of Zacchaeus (19: 1—10), significantly following that of the blind man, tellingly foregrounds the importance of seeing. Zacchaeus tries to see (*ezētei idein*) Jesus as he passes amidst the accustomed ‘crowd’, and being a short man he resourcefully climbs a tree in order to see (*hina idē(i)*). Jesus ‘sees’ (*eiden*) Zacchaeus in his perch, and invites himself to the tax-collector’s house. The reaction of the wider audience is predictable: ‘seeing (*idontes*) this, they all grumble. When Jesus announces that ‘Today salvation has come to this home’ he returns to the sight motif, ‘For the Son of Man came *to look for (zētēsai)* and to save ...’. The lord looks for those who see. The chosen people are those who choose. And those who choose are those who are more than mere spectators, mere audience—they are those who witness. In Ch 21 when Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple and the suffering to come, he also says, ‘The result for you will be opportunity to bear witness.’ Throughout the story those who have witnessed by their faith have been ‘saved’ on the spot. They have invariably not been of ‘the chosen’. Immediately when Jesus dies, the centurion—a stranger, a Gentile—is moved, not just to see, but to witness, ‘The centurion *saw* what had happened and gave glory to God, saying “Really this man was innocent” ’.

After Jesus’s resurrection the audiences for his appearances are the disciples. On the road to Emmaus, when the two he joins are prevented from recognizing him, Jesus first makes himself the audience and hears out Cleopas’s account of the recent events, their hopes, their doubts. Reminding them of the necessity for the Messiah to suffer, he

explains—as he will again to the disciples in Jerusalem—‘in all the scriptures the passages about Himself’. He makes them again an audience—a gospel audience even. Here we rediscover the importance of audiences in Luke’s story and in the events recounted. Jesus says to the disciples, ‘You are witnesses of these things. And I am about to send upon you what My Father promised’. Their mission is to be, as he has just told them, ‘that repentance (*metanoian*—a turning about leading to the forgiveness of sin) should be proclaimed in His name among all the nations beginning from Jerusalem’. This is where they are—this is where, in the story, we are. In the end is a beginning. The result of Jesus’s mission is that audiences have been turned into witnesses. They have become more than passive watchers or listeners, they have chosen to become hearers and tellers. They no longer see Jesus going about, teaching, healing; they witness to his divinity. They are those who have ‘turned’ and will ‘turn’ others⁵—the young Church, its new members—Theophilus even. The gospel audience hearing this writing read out or reading it is also such an audience. The challenge of Luke’s gospel is that they should become witnesses. To this effect he has ordered the words of *his* eyewitnesses; to this effect his words continually make his audience aware of Jesus’s audiences—for the audience response is what teaches. Through the dramatic involvement of the gospel audience in an experience which ‘turns’ them and makes them among those who *have* chosen God’s word the evangelist’s mission becomes Jesus’s own.

- 1 Michael D. Goulder, *Luke A New Paradigm*, Sheffield, 1989, vol. 1, chapter 5 (pp.147–177).
- 2 Goulder notes that the settings of Luke’s parables reflect the ‘middle-class world of Luke’s own experience’ (*ibid.*, pp. 98–99), and elsewhere supposes a Roman middle class element in his audience (p. 131).
- 3 I consider the material *around* the parables an essential and significant part of the narrative’s working. Whatever the sources of Lukan material, and whether or not the author of the received version is ‘Luke’ or a redactor, the organisation of this narrative is coherent, its characteristic features consistent, and it achieves an internally consistent significance. See also Goulder, *ibid.*, p.123.
- 4 I disagree with Robert C. Tannehill’s view (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, Philadelphia, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 143–163) that Luke’s crowd moves uniformly from support to hostility, culminating in the demand for Barabbas’s release. I find it significant that the group shouting for Barabbas is not referred to as ‘the crowd’ *ho ochlos*—the usual designation or ‘the people’ *ho laos*—the usual designation for Jewish worshippers. An anonymous phrase is used *anēkragon de panplēthei*— ‘they all shouted together’. Many people are around—chief priests are there, when Jesus is led away ‘women’ and ‘a great company of the people’ follow. A visiting Cyrenian is caught up in the events. The crowd as usual is split, and it is perhaps not farfetched to attribute the shouts for Barabbas’s release to a loud, loutish section of the crowd probably bussed in by the chief priests for the purpose.
- 5 As has often been noted, repentance or recognition in Luke is a ‘turning’—turning from worldly attachments, turning to follow him, turning back from Emmaus. It is amusing, therefore, to find Jesus accused before Pilate of ‘turning’ the people *apostrephonta ton laon*. The irony is fulfilled, I think, when we recognise that the purpose of the witnesses, the new church, the gospel is to continue Christ’s work of ‘turning the people’.