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# Awake and Change Luke's Didactic Approach to Evolving Perception

## Przebudźcie się i zmieńcie Dydaktyczne podejście Łukasza do zmieniającego się rozumienia tekstu

**Abstract.** Luke is a good narrative artist, and following the style of ancient historiographers, he writes a narrative account in terms of coherency, truthfulness, and usefulness concerning a moral and apologetic education. In a nutshell, his narrative is didactically constructed as Luke manages to confront delicate themes such as the universal dimension of the Church and acceptance of the Gentiles in sharing a common altar and table, inserting the motives with dietary distinctions at the important turning points of the narrative (Lk 15; Acts 10 and Acts 15). He tries to convince and teach his reader of God's plan of salvation in which all humanity is called to accept the message of life in a restored people of God through Jesus Christ.

**Streszczenie.** Łukasz jest dobrym artystą narracyjnym i podążając za stylem starożytnych historiografów, tworzy swoją relację narracyjną zgodnie z zasadami spójności, prawdziwości i użyteczności w odniesieniu do moralnej i apologetycznej edukacji. Krótko mówiąc, jego narracja jest skonstruowana dydaktycznie, a Łukaszowi udaje się przedstawić delikatne tematy, takie jak uniwersalny wymiar Kościoła i akceptacja pogan w dzieleniu wspólnego ołtarza i stołu, wprowadzając jednocześnie motywy różnic żywieniowych w ważnych punktach zwrotnych narracji (Łk 15; Dz 10 i 15). Próbuje on pouczyć swojego czytelnika i przekonać go, że w Bożym planie zbawienia cała ludzkość jest wezwana do przyjęcia przesłania życia w odrodzonym ludzie Bożym przez Jezusa Chrystusa.

**Keywords:** nascent Church; Luke's universal perspective; Jewish ritual purity and sharing a common table.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzący się Kościół; uniwersalna perspektywa Łukasza; żydowska czystość rytualna i wspólny stół.

## Introduction

Art has undeniable performative power to awaken and to change the heart of its observer. Recently, a mosaic of Fr. Marko Rupnik SJ was introduced in the baptismal chapel in my home parish church. The mosaic depicts the story of the merciful father taking the prodigal son into his embrace. While the left side of the mosaic brings to the fore the drama of the son as he experiences the extreme limit of his life – at its worst, sharing shelter with pigs – the right side exposes the father's embrace of his restored son. The polarity of the mosaic is striking, yet very telling. While the scene with the pigs seems abhorrent, it makes a strong impression on the believing visitor so that he may recall that through baptism he has been put to death in his former life marked by sin as well as brought to life with the embrace of Jesus' Father.

The performative power of creative expression is not limited to visual art forms since it can also be expressed through literary forms. However, it takes an artist of the word, as Luke certainly was, first to evoke an awakening in the reader and then to provoke the shift in perception in broadening his mind and accepting the logic of God's salvation as envisioned by the author and narrator of the story.

This article analyses episodes at the turning point of Luke's two-volume narrative (Lk 15; Acts 10; 15) and would like to show how Luke intelligently uses the Scriptures, employing elements which would be provocative for any Jew to show how the entrance and the acceptance of the Gentile world is part of God's plan.

### 1. General observations

I would like to begin a reading of the Lukan text with a few initial remarks related to: (1) the literary genre; (2) the Lukan travel narrative and his sources; (3) the conflict with the Pharisees and (4) Luke's attitude towards the Gentiles.

#### 1.1. Literary genre

It is not my intention to enter the vivid discussion concerning the literary genre of Luke-Acts as among scholars the discussion continues;<sup>1</sup> however, I cannot avoid the fact of Luke's narrative artistry.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Cadbury 1999; Plümacher 1972; Pervo 1987; Aune 1989; Sterling 1992; Alexander 1993; Barrett 1996; Dibelius 2004.

The beginnings of both Lukan volumes are marked by a preface (Lk 1:1–4; Acts 1:1), which served as a genre indicator for historiographical monographs of Luke's time. The use of literary elements such as the authorial first-person, the referral to eye-witnesses (Lk 1:2 αὐτόπτης), the naming of his work as an "orderly narrative account" (Lk 1:1: διήγησις), as well as elements less common such as a recapitulation summary of the first "book" (Acts 1:1: λόγος) and the dedication to "most excellent Theophilus" (Lk 1:3: κράτιστος Θεόφιλος) hint at Luke's aspiration to historiography, although such a normative prescription does not oblige Luke to entirely fulfil literary expectations. (Alexander 1993, 76–77)

Luke has adopted narrative techniques, artistic style, form, and motives known in the Hellenistic period and their literature to get the attention of readers in order to bring the Church's proclamation into their Hellenistic environment. Here Luke seems to follow Lucian's "How to write history" (Lucianus) as he invites the writers to proceed with the narrative after the preface smoothly, consistently with clarity "both by diction and the interweaving of the matter" (*Hist.* 55) aiming at truthfulness with "an eye to future expectations rather than with adulation and a view to the pleasure of present praise." (*Hist.* 63)

Luke's narrative tries to fulfil the demands of clarity, coherence, and truth, in addition to its usefulness. In fact, Luke aims both to compose an apologetic defence of the first Christian community regarding the Roman privilege of *religio licita* for the Jews (Sterling 1992, 384) as well as to achieve the acceptance of the members coming from the Gentile world by the Jewish members. (Gager 2007, 31–35; Ravens 1995, 204–211) To this aim, Luke sets his narrative at the junction between the Jewish tradition and Greco-Roman world to show the continuation of salvation history as Joel Green (1996, 290) observes:

Vis-à-vis the intertextual reverberations of the Lukan narrative with the LXX (i.e., external repetition), Luke inscribes himself in scriptural tradition, showing his debt to this previous story, and inviting his auditors to hear in this story the resounding continuation of that story. Vis-à-vis intertextual reverberations within Luke-Acts (i.e., internal repetition), Luke shows the great extent to which the story of the early church is inscribed into the story of Jesus, all as a continuation of the divine story of redemption.

## 1.2. Luke's Travel Narrative

Scholars have compared the juxtaposition of the texts within the synoptic Gospels. The central part of Luke's gospel (9:51–19:44), i.e., the Lukan travel narrative, deviates from the regular adaptation of Marcan material, using a special,

unique material, in which Luke includes a large part of Jesus' teaching material. While the scholars believe that Luke's specific source<sup>2</sup> ended with Lk 18:41, the narrative continues with the narrative string of recalling that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem (9:51.52.53.56.57;10:38; 13:32.33; 17:11; 19:28.36) until he finally reaches the vicinity, Bethpage and Bethany (19:29), then the Mount of Olives (19:31), comes into a view of the city (19:41) before he finally enters the temple (19:45).

### 1.3. Conflict with the Pharisees

In different moments, the Lukan travel narrative makes explicit the theme of acceptance of both Jesus as the messenger of the kingdom of God as well as acceptance of those regarded as standing on the margins of society by the Jewish official authorities, represented by the Pharisees.<sup>3</sup>

The name Pharisees means "separated, saints," portraying their self-understanding and self-identity in the exact and accurate following of the Law. (Jeremias 1989, 379–380; Baumgarten 1983, 416–417) The Pharisees represent an influential stream of thought, a kind of philosophical school, and are related to the beginnings of both the Essenes and the Zealots (Jeremias 1989, 380–381; Horsley and Hanson 1985, 191–192). Thus, some scholars understand them as a pillar of continuity (Esposito 2015, 87–148); where even their ironic characterization has an apologetic aim. (Darr 1998, 116)

The presentation of this group is striking, as the reader is confronted not only with a black and white presentation but also with a more greyish or nuanced understanding of this group since it is mentioned neither at Jesus' trial as in other gospels (Lk 22:66; Mt 27:66; Mk 12:13) nor at the process against the apostles in the Acts (Acts 4:1; 5:17); however, they are mentioned as members of the community (15:5). The black and white presentation of this group is related to Jesus' critique of the group during the different meal scenes, as the Pharisees invite him at different times to dine with them (Lk 7:36; 11:7; 14:1), thus they would like to hear from him (11:53; 17:20). Concerning these occasions, Jesus expresses three-

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<sup>2</sup> The sources here are related to the Jerusalem tradition which also remains Luke's source for the narrative of Acts, as Adolf von Harnack (1886, 145–148) also proposes for the parts of the narrative of Acts that represent our interest: Jerusalem-Caesarea tradition (Acts 8:5–40; 9:29–11:18; 12:1–24) and Jerusalem-Antiochian tradition (Acts 12:25–15:35) as sources of Luke's perception of the events.

<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees pique Luke's interest as he refers to them 26 times in his Gospel and 7 times in the Acts. In comparison, they are referred to on 29 occasions in the Gospel of Matthew and 19 in John.

fold woes against them (11:42.43.44) and accuses them of being hypocrites both in prayer and deeds (12:1; 18:10) and greedy for money (16:14). The Pharisaic hypocrisy is related to the issues of cleansing and ritual purity (11:39–41) and social-religious welcoming (14:12–14), the group of people that are physiologically healed and socio-religiously accepted by Jesus (7:22).

#### **1.4. Luke's attitude towards the Gentiles**

Luke is the only one among the evangelists who extends his Gospel, the story of Jesus' life, to a second volume describing the life of the nascent community and its entry into the pagan world. This allows Luke to reveal and resolve the tension that accompanied the passage of the Christians only gradually from Judaism to the Gentile world. While Jesus remains on the prophetic path between Galilee and Jerusalem (9:51–19:44), the community of Jesus' disciples opens to the world mission through the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:8). Jesus' missionary activity is limited to the Jewish world (Mt 10:5–6; Lk 9:52), but Jesus sends his disciples to the wider world at the ascension (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47). Although the universality of Jesus' message is shown as a consequence of persecution in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 8:4; 11:19–20), this universality is, in fact, the heart of Luke's message, which is already reflected in the beginnings of the Gospel (Lk 2:32; 3:38; 4:25–27).

Luke's sensitivity and attention to the pagan world are clearer in comparison with the other Evangelists. The Gospels present, Jewish prejudices against the Gentiles, as the Gentiles only care for their own (Mt 5:47) and have empty religious rituals (Mt 6:7), as well as their positive attitude towards Jesus. The Gospel of John shows how the Greeks seek Jesus (cf. Joh 10:20–21), and the Synoptics show how at the time of Jesus' death, it was the Gentiles, such as the centurion, who recognized Jesus as "innocent" (Lk 23:47), as the "Son of God" (Mt 27:54; Mk 15:39). Yet, Jesus' attitude toward the Gentiles in Matthew and Mark is surprising. Despite the claim that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, he walks among the Gentiles in the area of Tiro and Sidon bestowing with healing Canaanite woman's sick daughter (Mt 15:21–28; Mk 7:24–37). Luke builds his relationship with the Samaritan and Gentile world gradually. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus walks through Samaria, but the villagers of a Samaritan village do not accept him. The narrative mirrors the historical fact of the tense relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans. This is evidenced both by the narrator's explanation of rejection because Jesus was "destined for Jerusalem" and by the reaction of the apostles James and John (cf. Lk 9:51–54). Luke's Jesus changes this tense relationship gradually: through rebuke (9:55), teaching (10:30–37), and healing (17:11–19).

Luke's special relationship to the pagan world comes to the fore with the account of the healing of the centurion's servant (Mt 8:5–13; Lk 7:1–10; [son of a royal official: Joh 4:46–54]). The Evangelist John plays with the theme of faith. Despite Jesus' critique concerning the "weak faith," of the king's official (Joh 4:50: οὐ μὴ πιστεύσητε), the latter, believing the word of Jesus (ἐπίστευσεν τῷ λόγῳ), returns home. Then, at the news of his son's healing, he and his whole family fully "believe" in Jesus himself (ἐπίστευσεν). In addition to the dimension of faith, Matthew and Luke also point out socio-religious issues. Matthew allows a personal encounter between the centurion and Jesus, showing the faith of a Gentile and Jesus' indication of the pagan world into the world of Abraham's promises (Mt 8:11–12). Quite differently, however, Luke is more gradual in his dealings with the Gentiles, as he twice involves mediators in the story: (1) a group of Jewish leaders who praise the centurion for being worthy of loving the nation and building a synagogue, and (2) a group of the centurion's friends with a message about the captain's worthlessness. Jesus values the centurion's message as expressing a faith he did not find in Israel. Luke tries to resolve the existing conflict with the help of a story. It is precisely the slow entry into the pagan world described in the Acts of the Apostles that invites the reader of the then and present time to openness to the pagan world.

In brief, Luke endeavours to write a narrative account of the nascent Christian community in the style of ancient historiographies, thus including both apologetic and moral dimensions. In his Gospel, Luke shows more narrative freedom in describing Jesus' way to Jerusalem, as he manages to include many of his teachings about the kingdom of God and reciprocal relationships. The main conflict is presented with the positions of the Pharisees in terms of Jesus' acceptance of and sharing meals with the sinners and also with the Gentiles.

## 2. A close reading of the selected texts

### 2.1. The logic of the Merciful Father (Lk 15:1–32)

In the central part of the Lukan travel narrative, i.e., Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, the reader encounters three parables (i.e. about a lost sheep, a lost drachma, and a lost son), which uncover joy concerning the "lost/ found," or to put it in more radical words, the "dead/ come to life again." Using these parables Jesus reveals, as Jean-Noël Aletti (2012, 149) observes, both the "fatherhood of God" as well as his own identity through the story.

The narrative framework of the parables shows that Jesus associates with tax collectors and sinners without prejudice and fear of impurity, as he shares a meal with them, and they listen to him. Jesus' posture on the one hand gives birth to fertile ground for the proclamation of the word, and on the other hand, this posture confuses the Pharisees and scribes to grumble over him (Lk 15:1–2). Jesus, who at the beginning of the journey taught the teacher of the law the meaning of the law in the thematic framework of closeness and mercy (cf. 10:36–37), enacts his teaching bringing it to life. This makes it a stumbling block for some. This narrative framework is crucial to understanding Jesus' teaching, as he addresses the bearers of tradition and law, i.e., Pharisees and scribes to see the meaning of the law, which is in the fullness of joy and life (Ostmeyer 2011, 972). For this article, I will not enter into the redactional discussion (Forbes 1999, 211–214); however, considering the narrative frame and the context of the three parables is certainly pertinent for understanding the parable of the merciful father.

#### (a) Context

The context of the three parables is formed in a set of narrative gradation on several levels: (1) at the level of the *point of view* expressed through topographic elements: there is a movement from the external point of view (i.e., from outside in the desert to inside the house) to the inner point of view with a description of what is happening both inside the family as well as inside of the personality; (2) at the level of *relationships*: natural, material, family; (3) at the level of an *increasing loss*: one sheep out of a hundred, one drachma out of ten, and one of the two sons. All three occasions have a common motif of “joy,” which forms a narrative refrain. However, at the same time, the reader cannot ignore that this motif, which he or she encounters in the first two occasions, i.e., the joy when the shepherd “finds the sheep” (Lk 15:6) and the joy when the wife “finds the drachma” (15:9) becomes more complicated on the third occasion. The joy culminates, as the son was “dead and is alive again, was lost and has been found” (15:24), but at the same time, it is not yet complete, as it is just “beginning” because he must reach his older brother. But the father has yet to convince him that he had to rejoice because this “brother was dead and alive, and was lost, and is now found” (15:32).

#### (b) Narrative plot and structure

The structure of the third story is more complex, as it includes better-formed narrative characters. The younger son, with his desire to receive his share of in-



heritance and leave, triggers a *complication of the situation*. The situation is resolved with his return, but a new *complication of revelation* about the personality of the father and the sons arises.

The parable dedicates a great deal of narrative space to entering into the world of the younger son, as the reader follows this dramatic character from his decision to leave father's home to his inner meditation and finally, to his return home (Lk 15:11–24). His demand for an inheritance (Deut 21:17) expresses a desire for his father's death, as "any interest on the property was only payable after the death of the father." (Forbes 1999, 214) While the father without arguing fulfils his son's wish and gives him total freedom (cf. Lk 15:11–12), the son's desire for independence leads him ironically to the path of death, as the father will emphasize twice upon the son's return (15:24.32). This path of death encompasses several dimensions: (1) moral, (2) material, (3) social, and (4) religious. The younger son lives a debauched life, which includes prostitution (15:13.30). (Ostmeyer 2011, 968)

In addition, with the loss of property he loses his bond with his father's family and experiences a shortage when severe famine strikes (15:14). In this extraordinary situation, he joins the townspeople in pasturing pigs (15:15). Association with the townspeople and feeding pigs draws the reader's attention. The term κολλάω "join, associate" (Acts 9:26; 17:34) is specific, as it connotes physical "approaching" (Acts 8:29), "clinging and attaching to" (Lk 10:11) and even, the "intimate, bodily union of the spouses" (Gen 2:24; Mt 19:5). Thus, the association means to cross the boundaries by sharing the way of life concerning the religious-cultural dimension (Acts 10:28). In short, the son deviated from the faith of the fathers and accepted a pagan immoral way of life, which is a sin crying out to heaven (cf. Lk 15:18). This is symbolically displayed by feeding pigs and sharing their shelter. The son is degraded, as he has lost the dignity both of an heir as well as of a human being. The mention of pasturing pigs hints at the Gentile context (cf. Lk 8:26–39), in which the pigs are either for altar-sacrificial or table-dietary use, and indicates a situation that is not only unclean (cf. Mt 7:6), but on the verge of the abominable (cf. Lev 18:3–30). (Hasel 1991, 104–105)

The pigs are unclean by nature, i.e., they have "innate uncleanness" (Hasel 1991, 101), and although they do not make the persons who touch them ritually impure, they are, however, possibly related to idolatry. The symbol of pigs and unclean dietary issues emerge at different points of the Lukan narrative (Lk 15:16; Acts 10:11–15; 15:20). In order to gain a better understanding of the socio-historical context different studies have been done. Brian Hesse (1990, 197–201) enumerates different reasons for the interdict



on pigs for example: (1) ethnic/ political;<sup>4</sup> (2) ethnic/ religious;<sup>5</sup> (3) symbolic/ linguistic;<sup>6</sup> (4) environmental/ climatic;<sup>7</sup> (5) hygienic,<sup>8</sup> whereas Billie Jean Collins (2006, 156–176) focuses on the milieu of Hittite, Greek and Egyptian culture<sup>9</sup> showing how the pigs were related with the cult of feminine goddess connected with life, fertility and fate. The connection between the altar and the table indicates that women were responsible for growing, and on some occasions even for the sacrificial offering by killing the pig, dancing at the altar, and consuming the animal with its blood. For all these reasons the pigs were avoided by the Jewish people. While dying of hunger, as he did not receive any food, not even locusts (15:15), he recalls that in his father's house even tenants, who are not members of the family, have bread in abundance. Along with this memory, repentance awakens, as he admits his guilt: "I have sinned against heaven, and before you." (Lk 15:18) The phrase "to sin against heaven" is uniquely Lukan; however, the paradigm "to sin against God, the Lord" indicates the recognition of idolatry (cf. Deut 7:3–4; 1 Esdr 6:15; Jud 5:20). The son realizes that his life, the rejection of the father, and his filial dignity led him to the edge of life. However, the will for survival calls for his return and stay at the father's house, as a tenant (Lk 15:18). A long discourse to the younger son tries to gain the reader's sympathy for the younger brother. Thus, the reader wants the son to come to terms with himself and enter the father's joy.

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Hesse (1990, 197) introduces second hand referral to Antonius when he writes: "[A]s the pig is valuable to the settled farmer only, the nomads, who have always felt superior to the farmer, came to despise the pig as well as the farmer who bred it."

<sup>5</sup> Brian Hesse (1990, 198) refers to de Vaux's claim that "this revulsion for the pig, which became second nature to the Israelites, was reinforced by the ritual usage which they saw made of it in certain pagan rites."

<sup>6</sup> Mary Douglas (1966 [2002]) argued that the dietary prohibitions were for symbolic boundary-maintenance; however, the relation between altar and table should be observed. Hasel (1991, 106–116), following Douglas, indicates that the distinction between clean and unclean is antediluvial and it is to be related with holiness, separateness for God.

<sup>7</sup> Due to specific physiology and behaviour of pigs, these animals are missing in the hot areas and in the nomadic herds. (Hasel 1991, 199)

<sup>8</sup> Pig seems to take a role of a vector for disease such as trichinosis. (Hasel 1991, 200).

<sup>9</sup> Collins, followed by Koot van Wyk (2014), presents the multifaceted approach to the pigs. As on the one hand neither pig nor dog should enter in the precincts of Hittite sanctuary, on the other both pigs and dogs were used as a sheep guardian. Most importantly, the pigs were used in a sacrificial context in different religious and national *milieu* from Hittites, Egyptians, and Greeks to Etruscans. They were related with feminine divinities in relation with goddess of birth, fertility, and fate as Hannahanna, Demeter and Kore, Circe, Ceres.

The reader is surprised by the father's action. He is certainly aware that his son has crossed the boundaries. However, seeing him from afar, he is internally moved (Lk 15:20: *σπλαγχνίζομαι*) not by rejection but rather by mercy. The semantics of *σπλαγχνίζομαι* and *σπλάγχνον* indicate more than just a pity, as it refers to (1) the inward parts of the body, i.e., the beginnings of life that are sacred and should remain untouched; (2) the inner seat of heartfelt emotions. As on the one hand, the reference to the inner body parts indicates the boundary of uncleanness (2 Macc 6:8; Acts 1:8), on the other, compassion, mercy, and empathy display the crossing of boundaries in order to protect or save a life (Lk 7:13; 10:33). The father is willing to cross the boundaries of "clean and unclean" or "life and death" in order to get his son back alive. The father's concern is not the boundaries or offense against him, but rather the life and well-being of the son. The father has a priority in decision-making. His attitude of inner mercy is displayed as he runs to his son, interrupts him in recognition of his unworthy life, and immediately bestows on him the fullness of filial dignity, for his return is a cause for joy (Lk 15:20–24). The restoration of filial dignity is marked by the "robe," *στολή* (15:22), i.e., a long, ceremonial garment worn by wealthy people in high positions. It is telling that in the NT both the angel as the messenger of Jesus' resurrection (Mk 16:5) as well as the multitude of resurrected (Apoc 7:9) wear this white robe as a symbol of life of God's children. Also, the subsequent feast confirms the filial dignity. The dietary situation shifts from the son's longing for the carob pods to the sacrifice of the calf fattened with a grain (cf. Lk 15:15–16.23). (Harrison and Yamauchi 2015, 306)

With the return of the younger son, the story does not end, as the rejoicing has only been inaugurated (Lk 15:24). Thus, the additional complication of the *narrative plot* arrives, as for the first time the older son steps on the stage at the celebration for the return of the younger son. The reader is astonished at the reaction of the older son. Returning home from the field, hearing music and dancing, he makes his inquiry into what is going on with the servant instead of with the father. The son's feelings are transparent: anger and jealous stubbornness (15:28: *ὀργίζω*). For him, his brother does not count anymore. Since he has devoured his father's livings with an impure life, he is like an outcast (15:30). Here, the older son condemns the sacrificial action of the father (15:27.30). The son's anger, as it evokes both the anger of Jacob (Gen 31:36) as well as that of Cain (Gen 4:5–7), it is clear that he is misjudging, as he knows neither the father nor his own identity. The father approaches him as well to listen to his unjust accusations that in all his years he has not afforded him even a kid, while now giving a fattened calf to his sinful and wasteful son. The older son tells the truth about the younger son but remains blind as he does not see the father in relation to himself and his brother. The resolution turning

into a second complication of the story in terms of recognition. Whether Karl Rengstorf's (1967) proposal (i.e., the Jewish praxis to cut off a person from the community for breaking the rules of society) might be pertinent or not, the open ending is required for the pace of the narrative proposal. The reader should decide for himself whether it is time for him to enter the embrace of the father's home.

Both brothers wound up in captivity, where there is no life: the younger one ended far from the house where there are no pods to feed upon (Lk 15:16); the elder in the house where there is not even a kid (15:29). The younger son must go through the ordeal to recognize the truth and prosperity in the father's house. The whole story, however, leads to an older son who suffers from "spiritual myopia," that he does not see the father caring for him, and that everything he has is meant for both the older son and his younger brother (15:31–32). In both cases, the father approaches with mercy, steps out of the house to receive them (15:20, 28). If he gives the younger one symbols of sonship, the older son, who already has it all on the outside, he gives the word "child," as if the parent wanted to attract the new-born to himself, to enter into the father's feelings (care for the son) and in the younger son recognized his brother. The story leaves an open ending, but continues with the theme of "wealth," as it was the attitude towards goods that blurred the notion of happiness and life for both sons: the younger man's empty stomach helped him realize that everything is necessary for living with his father; the elder who is with the father, however, has yet to discover the dignity of the son to whom the father gives everything. If the episode shows the father's attitude towards both sons, the goal of everything is coexistence between the brothers (Ps 133:1) and the harmony of the whole family (Derrett 1967, 58–59), which remains a problem in later stories. At the same time, it is becoming clear that Jesus has the attitude of a father in himself to win over sinners and the righteous (Aletti 2012, 156).

### (c) Development of the theme

The purpose of the parable can be summarized as follows: Jesus wants to address the Pharisees and scribes who grumble at him (Lk 15:2) and who are trapped in their ideas precisely because of their greed for money (16:14). What they cling to is not merely ritual purity, but unjust conduct. Greed for money can blind a person to the extent that he instrumentalizes the religious system for his own needs while forgetting the meaning of things and the dignity of himself and others. Whereas the parables in Lk 15 try to expose the theme of "joy" [rejoicing] (Lk 15:8.9.[23.24.29.32]) finding its echo also in Lk 16:32. Although Lk 16 elaborates the theme of dealing with one's money, it is under-

stood that all the means are to be used for the relationship that leads to heaven. The parable of the merciful father recalls the dignity of the “child” to both sons, regardless of their life experience. As a brother, he is supposed to live together, with the feeling of a father. This demand becomes apparent later when the rich man, whom Abraham also calls “child,” is himself excluded from the blessing of life because of his blindness to Lazarus (16:25).

## 2.2. The turning point in the mission (Acts 10:1–48)

The whole sequence of the episode of Cornelius represents a milestone in the Acts of the Apostles, so it is important to look at how it is placed in the context of the whole narrative.

### (a) Context

Cornelius’ story represents a turning point because the community from the Jewish world and Samaria (Acts 9:31) begins to expand into the pagan world. This breakthrough is achieved by the apostle Peter for two reasons. First, immediately at the beginning of the life of the community, Peter took the lead in discerning the measures to be taken for the growth of the community (1:15–26). Second, after meeting Cornelius, Peter slowly disappears from the scene of the story as the action moves to Antioch, where we meet Barnabas and Saul, the pioneers of the world mission (11:26).

The transition to the pagan world is wisely prepared. With Stephen’s death, the community disperses to Samaria (8:1), where Philip operates, and where Peter and John are sent to confirm the community in the Holy Spirit (8:14–17). Philip continues his work and, after he baptizes the eunuch of the Ethiopian queen, he arrives at Caesarea (8:40). It is Caesarea that represents the place of the temporary refuge of the former persecutor Saul (9:30) and the decisive place where the two worlds meet, i.e., pagan, and Jewish. God, who bestows peace and consolation in the community of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (9:31), guides Peter’s journeys to meeting Cornelius at his home in Caesarea (10:27). After this sequence the reader is ready to accept the truth about the first pagan community of “Christians” in Antioch (11:19–20) taking care both for the community in Jerusalem (11:29–30) as well as for further mission (13:2). The mission in the Gentile context follows the pattern “first to the Jews then to the Gentiles” (cf. 13:46), envisioned by the prophet Isaiah: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6), that has gained a messianic interpretation (Lk 2:32) and as it had at first, it now serves to give a scriptural proof for the Gentile mis-

sion (Acts 13:47). However, this will trigger dissension and a call for further resolution.

(b) Narrative plot and structure

The interchange between different scenes in Cornelius' sequence aims to show to the reader how both Peter and the community must open themselves to the Gentiles to whom the Spirit of God leads them.

The introductory presentation of the pious pagan Cornelius (10:1–2) is followed by a complication as the angel announces that Cornelius' actions (prayer and almsgiving) have reached God, who responds to this memorial prayer (10:4). However, God's action must pass through the active cooperation of Peter (10:5–8). To this end, a new narrative plot, depicted by Peter's vision, which requires his reflection, is inserted to prepare a gradual encounter with Cornelius in the Gentile home. First, Peter receives Cornelius' emissaries at his home. Second, Peter departs and entering Cornelius' home he overcomes the socio-religious boundaries as a sign of recognizing God's plan. The climax of the story is Peter's speech (10:34–35), as he validates God's will and proclaims the resurrection and judicial role of Jesus Christ. Here God confirms the mission by the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (10:44). If the narrative plot is composed of the web of God's intervention: seeing (10:3–6), staggering (10:10–16), the inner or proclamatory voice of the Holy Spirit (10:19–20.46), these events then have to be confirmed by the Jerusalem community (11:1–18).

In the episode of Cornelius' conversion, the reader might notice the specific, Jewish-like characterization of Cornelius as devout (Sir 11:22), God-fearing (Lk 1:50; 2:25), and righteous (Deut 16:20; Lk 1:6); as one who prays at the hour of prayer (Sir 4:5; Lk [2:37]; 5:12; 10:2).

The terms are placed in a crescendo connection with the Jewish world. The term "pious" (εὐσεβής), which appears only twice in the Acts of the Apostles and marks the wise man in the wisdom literature (Sir 11:22), reveals a Hellenistic background. Meanwhile, the parallel adjective "godly" (φοβούμενος), which Luke uses most often from the authors of the New Testament, is more familiar to the Jewish world (Lk 1:50; 2:25). Even more, the Jewish mindset is attributed to the term "righteous" (Acts 10:22: δίκαιος), which marks a man who follows the Lord (Gen. 6: 9) and fulfils the Jewish law (Deut 16:20), which also applies to a narrative like NT (Mt 1:19; Lk 1:6; 23:50).

Second temple Judaism develops the idea that prayer, alms-giving, and the study of the Torah represent a spiritual sacrifice, equal in value to that

performed in the temple (cf. Tob 12:12; 1 QS 8:1–9) so that the offering of the righteous man cannot be disregarded (Sir 35:9). Cornelius resembles Simeon, who is yearning for Israel's consolation and salvation, i.e. the Messiah appointed also to the Gentiles (Lk 2:32). All this prepares for a reversal of mentality, but it can only happen with God's intervention. This characterization is a decisive turning point: the heavens, previously closed for the Gentiles, are now opened to allow Cornelius to achieve the message of salvation (cf. Acts 10:4). Cornelius "sends" for Peter (10:8) according to the divine command (cf. 10:5[20].32.33) because a new stage of the mission is at stake.<sup>10</sup> (Bolt 1998, 194–195)

The narrative shifts to portray Peter, who abides in this setting which is on the edge of (1) ritual purity, as he resides in the house of "Simon, a tanner" (9:43; 10:6); and also (2) topographical juxtaposition between earth, sea, and heaven, as he abides "by the sea" and stays "on the housetop" (9:43; 10:9).<sup>11</sup> Thus, Peter finds himself on the fringes of human habitation, while contemplating the greatness of God. This initial description already announces to the reader that something is about to happen. However, Peter adheres to tradition, as the temporal setting of the prayer "at the sixth hour" seems to indicate. Peter enters the divine through revelation on two levels: (1) vision (open heaven: Lk 3:21; Acts 7:56) and (2) interpretation (Lk 3:22; Acts 7:31). The vision remains unclear – i.e. like a vessel (cf. Acts 9:15) containing all the living beings as in the account of creation and Noah (cf. Gen 1:24.26; 6:20) – and calls for the additional explanation that follows the scheme: (1) command, (2) rejection, and (3) explanation. (Marguerat 2011, 431–432)

The command "kill and eat" (Acts 10:13) implies ritual sacrifice (Exod 8:25; Deut 12:15); the Passover (Mk 14:12), and the joy at the common table (Lk 15:23). However, it becomes problematic because of the presence of the ritually impure animals that taint all the others (Lev 11). Peter shows himself as a good representative of the Jewish people that he would prefer death than to eating "impure," "common" food, or even pork (1 Macc 1:47.62). Therefore, so also the encounter with strangers (i.e. Gentiles) who eat impure animals and food sacrificed to the idols, or live immorally, is problematic (4 Bar 7:37).

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<sup>10</sup> The verb "to send" refers mostly to the divine act in sending His agents (Lk 1:19.26) – Jesus (Lk 4:18.43; Acts 3:26; 10:36), the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 3:20), and Jesus' messengers – to proclaim the Kingdom of God (Lk 9:2; 9:52; 10:1) and salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17; 28:28).

<sup>11</sup> In the minds of people, the sea represents a primordial chaotic force that only God manages to dominate by His divine and creative power (Job 38:8.16; Isa 40:12), the only one capable to place limits on it and control the forceful creatures that abide therein (Job 40:25; Isa 27:1).

Moreover, some rabbis later indicate instances of judgment due to eating Gentile's food (*Song Rab* 7:8). For this reason, also the Gentiles considered the Jews as separatists and haters of humanity (3 Macc 3:3–7). (Lester 1998, 51–52; Keener 2013, 1769–1770) However, in this Peter contrasts, both Cornelius' as well as Ezekiel's obedience (cf. Ezek 2:8–3:3; Acts 10:5–8) and thus has to convert to the Lord in order to confirm his brothers once again (cf. Lk 22:32).

Although the strangers are to be treated with respect and care (cf. Lev 19:33–34; Deut 27:19), meeting them and sharing meals with them is to be restricted due to idolatry (Deut 18:9–14) and immorality (Deut 20:16). (Bauckham 2005, 111) Every observant Jew, knowing the list of impure animals (cf. Lev 11–16) would reject such a command, as Peter does; he claims never to have tasted anything “common/unclean” and “impure” (Acts 10:14). The word pair “common” and “impure” mutually explain each other, revealing the semantic field that goes from the “ritually impure” to the “common.” The latter term κοινός, deriving from Hellenistic culture, has a broader semantic field; namely, it demarks not only “ritually impure” (Mk 7:2), but also “general or collective,” as Luke illustrates how the community's members hold everything in common and share all goods and break bread together (Acts 2:44; 4:32).

God's answer, “What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy” (Acts 10:15), resolves the situation. Peter, despite the tradition that “nothing impure comes from heaven” (m. *Sanhedrin* 59b), discerns the vision and the voice. The “thing” Peter saw ascends back to heaven, as Jesus was taken to heaven at his ascension (cf. Acts 1:2). Along with the initial characterization of Cornelius and Peter, where God's action already indicates a transcendence of the ordinary, an encounter with the proclamation of Jesus' reign and the coming of the Holy Spirit, which connects the life of the whole community, can take place. Peter applies this vision directly to the encounter with Cornelius by recognizing God's impartiality since God accepts everyone who fears Him and works righteously (cf. 10:34–35). Thus, as Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead, everyone who believes in Jesus receives the remission of sin (10:42–43).

Peter's proclamation of “remission of sin in Jesus' name” evokes earlier speeches, but only through the Spirit these become the “words of salvation” (cf. 2:40–41; 11:14; 13:26). The Spirit confirms Peter's words and repeats the initial event (2:4), but also prevails over the condition of the baptism in Jesus' name (2:38). Peter will connect the event to Jesus' promise of the “baptism in the Spirit” (cf. Acts 1:5; Lk 3:16). Thus, if the Spirit is given also to the Gentiles who believe in Christ, it must mean that God has purified these Gentiles of their moral impurity. God once again demonstrates His power (Acts 4:31) by giving conversion that leads to life (11:18) and by cleansing hearts through faith (15:9). For this reason, Richard Bauckham (2005, 115) concludes that “the



distinction between the Holy people Israel, separated for God, and the profane peoples, separated from God, has been abolished.” However, baptism must follow both as inclusion in the messianically renewed people of God and as the expression of divine intervention in repentance and forgiveness (Acts 10:48).

The conversion of Cornelius is decisive for the subsequent Gentile mission, as it is not the work of men, but God. (Wilson 1973, 177) For this reason, Peter refers to this event twice. First, as he arrives in Jerusalem, he retells the event (11:5–17) by arriving at two conclusions: (1) the faith of the Gentiles and (2) God’s intervention that cannot be hindered (10:17). The community recognizes the event as a conversion that leads to life is given by God (10:18). Second, on the occasion of the Jerusalem assembly, Peter retells the event concisely by affirming God’s intervention in: (1) choosing him so that the Gentiles would hear and believe the words of the Gospel; (2) knowing their hearts, bearing witness for them, and bestowing them the Holy Spirit (15:7–8). Therefore, Peter claims that there is no distinction, as God has purified their hearts through faith (15:9). (Bauckham 2005, 105)

### (c) Development of the theme

The motif of “pure-impure” is tied to the broader theme of accepting pagans. If the duality of the pure-impure in vision is meant in connection with animals (10:14), Peter, after discerning and following God’s allusion (10:19), realizes that exceeding the limits of the pure-impure refers to accepting people (10:28). The motif purely and impurely exposes the issue of Jewish separatism. This was strengthened under the influence of the Pharisees, who wanted to extend the ritual sanctity of the temple to homes, especially during the Roman occupation. The Gentiles did not follow the rules of the diet, so the Jews had to avoid this contact (Neh. 9:2). The problem of the community is entering and eating with unclean Gentiles. Jesus was also reproached for this (cf. Lk 15:2ff.), and he responded by telling the striking parable inviting his audience to accept their brothers and sisters as a members of their family, as I have already pointed out. The nascent community has already done the first step in sharing table distinguished by the gift of salvific joy and sincerity of heart (Acts 2:46). Sharing meals at the common table does is not based on purity except for the unity of pure hearts (4:32) and the fellowship with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (4:33). Cornelius’ story invites a further step both by Peter (Acts 10:28) and the community (11:3). If Peter has already realized the unity at the encounter with Cornelius (10:34–35); however, through the bestowal of the Spirit (10:44–48) God confirms the event so that also the Jerusalem community would accept it (cf. 11:17–18).

The “house-home” is a motif that depicts the building as well as the family and the house community and the way in which the Gospel message spreads (Acts 1:13; 2:46; 16: 32–33). In Cornelius’ home in Caesarea, a “house church” is born, based on hospitality and a common table (2:46; 16:15.34). The narrative combines two dimensions: (1) the horizontal, which is built over three cities: Caesarea, Joppa, and Jerusalem, and (2) the vertical, which manifests itself as a relationship with God: prayers, almsgiving, diversion, the Spirit of God. This interweaving of dimensions seeks to introduce the reader to the realization that the Jewish Christian community is now opening a mission to the pagan world. This mission is not burdened with the dimension of ritual purity, as taught by Jesus (cf. Lk 10:7–8; 24:47), and it is not about idolatry (cf. Acts 15:29), but about trusting in God (10:15.28) and being a man who fears God and is righteous (10:34). Although this openness is confirmed by the Spirit himself (cf. 10:44), the Jewish world will reject all this (cf. 13:45–46; 18:6) and strengthen the existing socio-ritual boundaries (cf. 20:30).

### **2.3. The resolution (Acts 15)**

The conversion of the first Gentile is decisive for the narrative plot. For the general acceptance, it is Peter, as a prominent figure of the Jerusalem Church, who is witness to this crucial event. The Church has been prepared by God to take a further step into the Gentile world. From Caesarea the narrative shifts to depict the community in Antioch, consisting of both Jewish and Gentile disciples, defined as “Christians” (11:26). Since this community has embraced the faith in “the Gospel of the Lord Jesus,” the first to do so during the persecution of the original Jerusalem community, it enjoys primacy over the other communities of Gentiles (cf. 11:19–21) and is set in its universal mission by the decision of the Spirit in choosing Barnabas and Saul/ Paul (13:2). The question of the Gentile mission, i.e. the Gentiles’ membership of the people of God, with or without circumcision, demands a decision on the part of the Jerusalem Church (15:1.5).

#### **(a) Context**

This episode represents the resolution regarding the Gentile mission and the acceptance of the Gentiles (or God-fearers) as equal members of the Christian community. To this end, the foregoing episodes of Peter (Acts 10–11) and Paul (Acts 13–14) are evoked and, subsequently, validated by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Certainly, as some scholars such as Ben Witherington (1998, 439) would say it “is the most crucial chapter,” since “here the matter must be

resolved as to what constitutes the people of God, and how the major ethnic division in the church (Jew/Gentile) shall be dealt with so that both groups may be included in God's people on *equal footing*, fellowship may continue, and the church remain one." Moreover, the monotheistic theological concern is defended, as all the people should be taken under the guidance of God's name. In fact, as Alan Thompson (2008, 88) argues, Jesus' lordship is introduced in the first chapters of Acts with the claim that "the relationship between the theme of the unity and the theme of law at this stage appears to be a claim for the new Christian community under the lordship of Christ as the true people of God," so Witherington (1998, 439) sees the emergence of Luke's universalism in Acts 15, since the ethnic diversity, permitted and united under one emperor, is here presented through one God who forms "one redeemed people gathered out of the many."

(b) Narrative plot and structure

The Judaizers, following Paul and Barnabas' mission, propose circumcision as a requirement for salvation (Acts 15:1; Gal 2:15ff.).<sup>12</sup> Paul and Barnabas enter into debate with them arriving only at dissension and conflict, *στάσις*, that required a final resolution for the community in Jerusalem (Acts 15:4: i.e. received by *ἐκκλησία*, the elders and the apostles). The Jerusalem community takes a crucial role at the origins of and discernment of the community's activities (5:11), and confirmation for each stage of the mission (cf. 8:14–17; 9:31; 11:1–18). The narrative tension is progressively formed, as the delegation first finds confirmation from the disciples in Phoenicia and Samaria (15:3) and, the reference to the initial debate is repeated (15:5), so also at their arrival in Jerusalem (15:5–22). However, the situation of conflict should be resolved by the decree that the witnesses bring with them as a document of resolution (15:22); however, the graduality of this resolution is formed by the sequence of speech and silence of three prominent persons: Peter (15:7–11), Paul and Barnabas (15:12–13a) and James (15:13b–21) that each in his turn presents a personal account of the divine plan. The decision in Jerusalem is accepted by the Church in Antioch (15:31).

Peter, as a prominent member of the Jerusalem Church, recounts his experience of God's intervention in cleansing hearts through faith and by the

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<sup>12</sup> Some manuscripts as codex Athous Laurae (Ψ) the Judaizers are described as the believers "from the party of the Pharisees" that (1) explains narratively the conflict with Paul, the former Pharisee and (2) stresses their presence among the believers with the another mentioning in Act 15:5.

gift of the Holy Spirit (15:7–9); however, the shift from the personal narrative (11:5–16) to the theological statement (15:7–11) is obvious. By claiming that he was chosen to bring the “word of the gospel” to the Gentiles so that they might believe (15:7), he evokes the encounter with Cornelius, as he presented Jesus as God’s messenger, who had been preaching good tidings of peace and has become the Lord and the Judge of all (10:36.42). Moreover, once again the connection with the original bestowal of the Spirit is reaffirmed (10:47; 11:15.17). The gift of the Spirit enables the purity and cleanness that is no longer obtained by the observance of the Law and the dietary prescriptions (cf. Lev 11–18; Deut 14; Acts 10:14–15; 11:8–9), but it is, as Simon Butticaz (2011, 313) affirms, “a gracious gift of God revealed in Jesus Christ.” Peter speaks with divine authority since God has indicated the acceptance of the righteous God-fearers (10:35) by cleansing and forgiving sins through faith in Jesus (10:28.43). It is neither clean nor unclean, neither acceptable nor abominable, because faith in Jesus has provided the only required “cleansing of hearts” (15:9), and thus, shared living and even eating is possible (cf. Gal 2:11–14). For this reason, Peter judges this discussion to be senseless, since it puts God to the test (Acts 15:10) and they seem to fight against God which does not bring life but destruction (5:39).

While Paul and Barnabas reopen the discussion with the catchphrase “signs and wonders” that connect them with Peter and Jesus (15:12; cf. 2:19.22.43; 14.3) (Wall 1998, 443) and encapsulate the divine action both in their mission for the conversion of the Gentiles by affirming that “the doors of faith are opened” (14:27; 15:3), the decisive, mediating role is given to James. For him, as a corollary of God’s visit (Acts 15:14; Lk 1:68), the Gentiles are taken to form the messianic people of God (cf. Deut 14:2; Zech 2:15). The universal extension of the people of God here proposed requires a scriptural argument. Thus, James by introducing the citation Amos 9:11–12 interprets the Church’s present situation by connecting “the people for his name” (Acts 15:14) with the metaphor of “David’s tent” (Acts 15:16). Therefore, the “fallen tent” represents the fall of nationalistic tendency, whereas the restoration of this tent does not hint at Jerusalem but at the coming of the universal people who worships God in Jesus Christ. (Marguerat 2015, 104–106) Using the idiomatic expression “all the nations over whom my name has been invoked” (Acts 15:17), James evokes the initial Pentecost (cf. 2:21.39) and some prophetic texts that portray the building of the future temple (Hos 3:4–5) and the conversion of the nations (Jer 12:15–16; Is 45.20–23) in order to indicate that now all the nations are the Lord’s people (cf. Acts 18:10). As Simon Butticaz (2011, 321) justly summarises: “all the humanity, divided between Israel and the rest of the world, seems to be called to take part in the eschatological event.”

The four prohibitions included in the apostolic decree, to refrain from: sacrificing to idols, sexual immorality, things strangled, and blood, obliged every foreigner within Israel (cf. Lev 17–18) shows the reaffirmation of the biblical tradition. (Bauckham 2005, 119–120) Whereas the prohibition of πορνεία seems superficial (P<sup>45</sup>), or “out of the place in what otherwise appeared to be a food law;” yet, the warning for the Gentile believers to avoid either marriage within prohibited Levitical degrees (Lev 18:6–18) or mixed marriages with pagans (Num 25:1) or participation in pagan worship represents a kind of spiritual adultery. Moreover, the Western version of the text shifts the meaning of the decree from ritual requirements to a moral law (Metzger 2000, 379–381). The four elements of the prohibition contained in the Alexandrian text seems to reflect the original text. Witherington (1998, 460–463) suggests that the four elements evoke 2 Macc 6:4–5 with the temple as a common denominator. The ἀλίσημα τῶν εἰδώλων “pollution of idols” in Acts 15:20 can relate to εἰδωλόθυτος, i.e., food sacrificed to idols which in 2 Macc 5:2 is understood as swine’s flesh. Craig Keener (2014, 2270–2271) connects the problem of idol-tainted food and immorality as the common temptation to God’s people living in a pagan world (cf. 1 Cor 10:7–8; Rev 2:14.20) due to multiple associations and social demands as a feast of imperial cult or as table-sharing within friendship and patronage networks that provided less certainty about the source of the food.

James’ proposal is seen as a realization of the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:21). Moreover, the resolution of the community’s internal conflict in Acts 15:22, signaled by sending the decree back to Antiochia, demonstrates that the community is more apt to resolve the conflict in terms of discernment of God’s will (cf. 15:28). To this aim, demonstrating the prominence this decree has in its narrative reverberation (15:20.29; 21:25) shows its importance. (Witherington 1998, 450)

### (c) Development of the theme

The decision causes joy and is the final stage of the mission to the ends of the world. God’s plan to introduce the Gentiles to the messianic people of God (15:14) is confirmed later in the narrative. First, in Corinth, God claims to have “many people” in the city (18:10) and second, Paul, recounting his Damascus’ experience, sees it as a divine mandate to open the eyes of the Gentiles so that they may “receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that is sanctified by faith in me” (26:18). Lastly, in Rome, Paul’s mission seemingly comes to an end. Once again, the Jewish audience does not listen (Acts 28:25–27; cf. Isa 6:9–10). The narrative plan on the Church’s mission (Acts 1:8) has reached its goal at the centre of the Roman Empire, but neither the Jews nor

the Gentiles have listened to the Word of salvation. For this purpose, an open-ending to the story (28:28) functions both as a prophetic critique and as such also represents a hope for Israel, as well as an invitation to the reader to listen and to accept the Word of salvation.

In brief, a close reading of the selected narrative episodes show a common thematic issue in terms of ritual purity and acceptance of those standing on the fringes of Jewish socio-religious beliefs either morally or ethnically. Both the open ending of the parable of the merciful father (Lk 15:32) as well as the conclusion of the bestowal of the Spirit on the Gentiles (Acts 10:48) and the final announcement of the apostolic decree (Acts 15:35) tend to show to the reader how the plan of God's mercy (Lk 4:16–30; Acts 1:8) is fulfilled throughout the narrative. The narrative invites the reader to allow this God's embracing power into his or her life.

## Conclusion

Art is a powerful means of persuasion, as it awakens the heart and calls for some changes. This article has analysed episodes at the turning point of Luke's two-volume narrative (Lk 15; Acts 10; 15) in order to demonstrate how Luke skillfully uses the Scriptures and disturbing elements concerning ritual purity in order to show how the entrance and the acceptance of the Gentile world is the part of God's plan. The common life cannot consist solely of purity laws but can exist only by God's mercy. However, this mercy cannot be privatized but rather should unite the world under the rule of God. The progressive reading of these three episodes shows how dietary issues have to make space for the conversion of hearts accepting and transmitting God's mercy. The fellowship of the community is thus enabled through faith and fellowship with Christ. Despite all the differences, Luke invites the reader to awake and change to recognize first God's salvific action on his or her behalf and second, to transform his or her attitude towards the brothers and sisters and people accompanying his or her life.

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