Mission and Meaning
Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell

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The Concept of Jubilee and Luke 4:18-30

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The secondary literature dealing with the Nazareth pericope is immense.[1] However, our concern in this essay is strictly limited to the attempt to discern the presence, or otherwise, of specifically jubilary echoes on the lips of Jesus from Isaiah 61:1-2. What are we to make of such alleged echoes and how determinative are they to be upon the interpretation of Luke's concern for the outcast and marginalised?[2]

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1 For good surveys see H. Anderson, 'Broadening Horizons: The Rejection of the Nazareth Pericope in Light of Recent Critical Trends', *Interp* 18 (1964), 259-75, and especially the more recent C.J. Schreck, 'The Nazareth Pericope: Luke 4:16-30 in Recent Study', in F. Neirynck (ed.), *L'Evangile de Luc* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 399-471. An important recent work which was unfortunately unavailable to me at the time of writing is that of G.K-S. Shin, *Die Ausrufung des Endgültigen Jubeljahres durch Jesus in Nazareth: Eine historisch-kritische Studie zu Lk 4,16-30* (Bern: Lang, 1989).

2 Just one of the many enduring contributions of Peter Cotterell to the work of London Bible College, and to the world of evangelical theology, is the establishing of the 'MA in Aspects of Biblical Interpretation'. Amongst the many innovative aspects of this course, not the least was his pioneering of the module entitled 'Theology of the Poor'. The development of this option reflected Peter's constant commitment to detailed work upon the text of Scripture alongside realistic and serious engagement with the world as we experience it. 'Theology of the Poor' has been outstanding in this regard. Though the concern for issues of poverty, powerlessness and oppression arose naturally from Peter's own many years in Ethiopia, it fell to others to develop the course further and to determine the various foci around which students would wrestle with seemingly intractable problems. Inevitably Luke's description of Jesus' inaugural sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth has featured year by year.

The programmatic character of Luke 4:16-30 is now all but universally acknowledged. 'The Lucan story, transposed to this point in the Gospel, has a definite programmatic character.'[3] Thus its significance for our general understanding of Lucan theology can hardly be overestimated. There is, however, little consensus as to the nature of the programme envisaged by Luke. Some scholars, for example, see the pericope as demonstrating that God's will is to be carried out in spite of Jewish rejection of the Messiah in the contours of what, for Luke, had become the contrastingly successful mission to the Gentiles.[4] This clearly resembles Paul's perception as articulated in Romans 9-11. Jewish rejection leads to the offering of salvation to the Gentiles, and their acceptance of it. In the same year that J.T. Sanders expressed the foregoing viewpoint,[5] Robert Brawley argued that Luke's purpose was much more focused upon the experience of Jesus and his unacceptability 'in his own country' as a paradigm for his followers right up to the end of the Acts of the Apostles.[6]

As far as the Jubilee is concerned, one of the more surprising features of scholarly writing concerning the Nazareth Sermon in Luke 4 is the way in which commentaries have tended to make light of the idea of Jubilee,[7] whilst monographs and articles which

3 J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 529.

4 J.T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (London: SCM, 1987), 168.

5 It ought, perhaps, to be pointed out that Sanders thinks that Luke, unlike Paul (cf. Rom. 11:25-26), holds out no hope for the Jews.

6 R.L. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews. Conflict, Apology and Conciliation*, SBLMS 33 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), esp. 6-27.

7 This neglect is, of course, not confined to the commentaries. Many significant articles and monographs have been published which are cautious of emphasising any jubilary background. See especially: D. Hill, 'The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Luke iv: 16-30)', *NovT* 13 (1971), 161-80; R.C. Tannehill, 'The Mission of Jesus according to Luke IV:16-30', in W. Eltester (ed.), *Jesus in Nazareth* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972), 51-75; J.A. Sanders, 'From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults 1* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 75-106; B.D. Chilton, 'Announcement in Nazara: An Analysis of Luke 4:16-21', in R.T. France and D. Wenham (eds.), *Gospel Perspectives II* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 147-72; J. Kodell, 'Luke's Gospel in a Nutshell', *BTB* 13 (1983), 16-18; D.L. Bock, *Proclamation From Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, JSNTS 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), esp. 105-11; D.J. Bosch, 'Mission in Jesus' Way: A Perspective from Luke's Gospel', *Missionalia* 17 (1989), 3-21; P.G.R. De Villiers, 'The Gospel and the Poor: Let Us Read Luke 4', in P.G.R. De Villiers (ed.), *Liberation Theology and the Bible* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1987), 45-76.

champion this hypothesis continue to abound.[8] A brief survey of the most recent commentaries will be sufficient to demonstrate the point.

In his 1978 commentary, Howard Marshall accepts that v. 19 contains an allusion to the 'year of jubilee' but expresses the view that this is now 'made symbolic of his own saving acts'.[9] Fitzmyer merely observes that, in 11Q Melchizedek, the Isaiah quote is used in connection with Leviticus 25:10-13 and Deuteronomy 15:2.[10] No conclusions are drawn from this as to the interpretation of Luke. Christopher Evans merely observes that the language of verse 19 is 'based on the institutions of the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year described in Leviticus 25', but fails to draw any remarkable conclusions from this fact.[11]

Robert Stein concludes: 'although Isa 61:1-2 develops certain themes from the concept of the Jubilee Year (cf Lev 25:8-55), Luke did not seem to have been thinking of this here.'[12] In his 1989 contribution to the Word Biblical Commentary series, John Nolland acknowledges 'the Jewish tradition of using the language of Jubilee to image salvation' but adds:

> It is not finally an analysis of the language of Isa 61:1-2, but rather the perceived nature of men's bondage in the Lukan frame that must determine the force of the words as used here... The Lukan Jesus is no social reformer and does not address himself in any fundamental way to the political structure of his world, but he is deeply concerned with the

8 Amongst those who specifically relate Luke 4:16-30 to jubilary themes, see A. Trocmé, *Jesus and the Non-Violent Revolution* (Scottdale: Herald, ET 1973), esp. 19-76; A. Strobel, 'Die Ausrufung des Jubeljahrs in der Nazarethpredigt', in W. Eltester (ed.), *Jesus in Nazareth* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972), 38-50; J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994 2nd edn), esp. 28-33; P.D. Miller, 'Luke 4:16-21', *Interp* 29 (1975), 417-21; R.B. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubilary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Austin: Schola, 1977); D.P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: Fuchs, 1982), esp. 44-69; M. Arias, 'Mission and Liberation. The Jubilee: A Paradigm for Mission Today', *IRM* 73, 289 (1984), 33-48; J.M. Ford, *My Enemy is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), esp. 53-64; P. Hollenbach, 'Liberating Jesus for Social Involvement', *BTB* 15 (1985), 151-57; S.H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

9 I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 184.

10 Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 532.

11 C.F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, TPI New Testament Commentaries (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 271.

12 R.H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 157.

> literal, physical needs of men (Acts 10:38), as with their directly spiritual needs.[13]

The writings of Luke Timothy Johnson have evinced a real concern for themes of a socio-political nature,[14] but in his 1991 commentary he writes of the possible Jubilee resonances:

> This is possible, but the Gospel does not offer further support for this being Luke's point. Rather than picturing Jesus' work in terms of political or economic reform, Luke portrays his liberating work in terms of personal exorcisms, healings, and the teaching of the people. The radical character of this mission is specified above all by its being offered to and accepted by those who were the outcasts of the people.[15]

As we have already observed, in contrast to this chorus of apparent apathy, articles and monographs highlighting the significance of jubilary imagery to Luke's social concerns are numerous. Many are written from a very committed political or missiological perspective, reflecting understandable outrage at the conditions in which so many Christians (and others) are forced to eke out a miserable existence. The attraction of discovering a socio-political agenda behind Jesus' ministry is clear.

Some years ago, however, Bultmann pointed out that

> exegesis without presuppositions is not only possible but demanded. In another sense, however, *no* exegesis is without presuppositions, inasmuch as the exegete is not a *tabula rasa*, but on the contrary, approaches the text with specific questions or with a specific way of raising questions and thus has a certain idea of the subject matter with which the text is concerned.[16]

1. The Old Testament Background

One of the most noticeable of the Lukan redactional elements is the reading from Isaiah at the outset.

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me

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13 John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 197.

14 E.g. *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 39 (Missoula: Scholars, 1977) and *Sharing Possessions* (London: SCM, 1986).

15 L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 81.

16 R. Bultmann, 'Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?', in *Existence and Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), 289.

> to bring good news to the poor.
> He has sent me
> to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovery of sight to the blind,
> to let the oppressed go free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

The quotation is an amalgamation of Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6.[17] As has frequently been noted, the citation breaks off in the middle of Isaiah 61:2 with Jesus holding back from declaring 'and the day of vengeance of our God'.

In her recently published review of the evidence, Sharon Ringe traces the development of Jubilee legislation.[18] The remote ancestors are to be found in sabbath year laws and royal amnesty decrees. Exodus 21-23 contains the seedbed of such ideas. Exodus 21:2-6 discusses the freedom or release of slaves, whilst Exodus 23:10-11 makes provision for sabbath rest for the land. The context is that of an agricultural society, motivated in their humanitarian concern by their own experience of liberation at the hands of God. Exodus 23:9 provides a rationale for the whole of this legislation:

> You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

The next resurfacing of the Jubilee motif can be observed in Deuteronomy 15:1-18. In the more settled and centralised political realities reflected here, the terminology of release is retained alongside provision for the cancellation of debt (vs. 1-6), lending (vs. 7-11) and procedures for liberating Hebrew slaves (vs. 12-18). There is modification of the received legislation. Verses 1-6 are designed to adapt the Covenant Code to a more urban and commercial environment. The possibility of tight credit is suggested in v. 9. As for slaves, unlike the previous legislation, they were not to be released empty-handed, women were to be included, and the timing of release was to be adapted to personal circumstances. Once again, Israel's liberation from Egypt is the motivating force.

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17 For a full discussion of the Lucan 'quote' see Bock, *Proclamation*, 105-11.

18 Ringe, *Jesus*. See also the treatment of the development in Old Testament jubilary thinking in J.A. Baker, 'Deuteronomy and World Problems', *JSOT* 29 (1984), 3-17; R. Gnuse, 'Jubilee Legislation in Leviticus: Israel's Vision of Social Reform', *BTB* 15 (1985), 43-48; H. von Waldow, 'Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel', *CBQ* 32 (1970), 182-204; C.J.H. Wright, 'What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel?' *EvQ* 56 (1984), 129-38 and 193-201.

> Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today. (Deut. 15:15)

In the face of the Babylonian threat, Zedekiah orders partial implementation of jubilary provisions (Jer. 34:8-22). Zedekiah's intentions are wholly mercenary and God's wrath is provoked when the shallowness of his offer is revealed. However the tendency to turn back to the Jubilee motif is clearly established. This is true also in the case of Nehemiah 5:1-13 and Leviticus 25. According to the latter, liberty was to be proclaimed throughout the land to all inhabitants (Lev. 25:10). Once again, included in this ideal is the redistribution of all property, the release of slaves and a fallow year for the land. Included in the legislation is provision for redemption of property, houses and slaves, the support of kith and kin and the prohibition of interest on loans.

In view of this frequent citing of the Jubilee motif, it is perhaps surprising that there is actually little, if any, evidence that the Jubilee legislation was effective at any time in Israel's history. Significantly, the prophets never appeal to the Jubilee as a clear economic proposal. Its ideals may be reflected metaphorically but they never point to its precise stipulations.[19] Robert Gnuse concludes:

> A great deal of uncertainty has arisen over the practical nature of the Jubilee institution. Whether Jubilee was ever practised in any form remains a matter of debate, but the weight of argument seems to be with the position which views Jubilee as an idealistic and unhistorical creation of exilic theologians.

Gnuse goes on, however, to speak of Jubilee as a 'vision of hope... [which]... offers a word of encouragement to social reformers today who are tempted to despair when the odds seem overwhelming and the progress minimal'.[20]

Thus we come to the Isaianic quotation. The context is the socio-political and theological disaster following the return from Exile. Third Isaiah promises restoration and hope to a generation disappointed by their experience of return. To address this generation with a message of hope, the prophet draws freely upon Jubilee imagery. Prophecy is not, of course, legislation. No detailed

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19 C.J.H. Wright, 'Jubilee, Year of', in D.N. Freedman *et al.* (eds.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), Vol. 3, 1028.

20 Gnuse 'Legislation', 47-48; cf. the view of Roland de Vaux: '...it was a Utopian law and it remained a dead letter' (*Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* [London: DLT, ET 1961]).

outline of necessary reforms is provided. No explanation as to how such pious hopes might be realised disturbs the surface of the prophetic vision. The intention of the prophet's words is to bring hope, a raising of the spirit, encouragement for downtrodden, dispirited and powerless Jews.

Finally, 11Q Melchizedek takes up this theme of eschatological hope in the expectation of ten Jubilees taking place before divine judgment in 'the year of Melchizedek'.[21] The expectation is that Melchizedek 'will make them return. He will proclaim liberty for them, to free them from [the debt] of all their iniquities. And this will [happen] in the first week of the jubilee which follows the n[ine] jubilees'. Interestingly, forgiveness is now linked to liberation. The expected intervention has already become eschatological in character. The Jubilee *trajectory* has touched ground again with words which echo Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Isaiah.[22] It will reappear in Luke's account of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth.

According to M.P. Miller, 11Q Melchizedek contains essentially a *pesher* interpretation of Leviticus 25:13 and Deuteronomy 15:2 interwoven around Isaiah 61:1-2, which is the controlling text.[23] This judgment has been subjected to considerable criticism. It now appears more likely that it is Leviticus 25 which provides the controlling structure to the midrash.[24] This same combination of legislative (Lev. 25) and eschatological (Isa. 61) is evident in other intertestamental and rabbinic sources. Beasley-Murray concludes:

> These three elements of interpretation – the eschatological understanding of the jubilee proclaimed in Isaiah 61:1ff., the duality of grace for the elect and vengeance on the rest, and the identification of the proclaimer of the jubilee with the agent of God authorised to put it into effect – are of

21 F.G. Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 139-40. See also M. de Jonge and A.S. van der Woude, '11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament', *NTS* 12 (1966), 301-26.

22 For the concept of trajectories in biblical writing see J.M. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 1-70 and, more recently, J. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 40-43.

23 M.P. Miller, 'The Function of Isaiah 61:1-2 in 11Q Melchizedek', *JBL* 88 (1969), 467-69.

24 This had been the position of J. Fitzmyer, 'Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11', *JBL* 86 (1967), 25-41. More recently see B. Chilton and C.A. Evans, 'Jesus and Israel's Scriptures', in B. Chilton and C.A. Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 281-335, esp. 321-27.

unusual significance for understanding Luke's narrative of Jesus in Nazareth.[25]

The question we are faced with is to what extent Luke's Jesus is recalling his hearers to a literal enactment of the Jubilee legislation of the Old Testament with its redistribution of wealth and its curtailment of the power of the rich and influential. Alternatively, has the hope of such socio-economic egalitarianism been simply shunted off into a spiritual future with no real expectation in concrete terms? Already we have observed considerable reinterpretation of the Jubilee motif. The concrete specifications of earlier legislation dissolve into metaphor and a vision of future, indeed eschatological, hope.

2. Rejection in Nazareth – the Lukan Redaction

The rejection of Jesus in the synagogue in his home town is to be found in Mark 6:1-6a and Matthew 13:54-58 as well as in Luke.[26] Their accounts are much briefer.[27] Only Luke records Jesus' actual sermon – his citation of Isaiah 61:1-2 and his reference to Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (vs. 25-26) and to the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian (v. 27). The citation of Isaiah 61:1-2 with Isaiah 58:6 is, however, very unlikely to be Lukan. Indeed, the likeliest hypothesis is that it is the work of Jesus himself.[28] Whilst both Mark and Matthew comment upon the rejection of unbelief, Luke strengthens the sense of intensity to the point of murderous intent (vs. 28-30). This emphasis is achieved at the expense of the assertions in Mark 6:5-6 concerning Jesus' inability to perform any acts of power in Nazareth owing to their unbelief. From 4:31 onwards, following the

25 G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 87.

26 The question of Luke's dependence upon Mark (or indeed Matthew) is much debated. The majority view is well summed up by G.N. Stanton: 'Luke has probably used part of Mark's account in verses 16, 22 and 24, but the origin of the other verses is much disputed... But whatever may have been their origin, in their present form these verses clearly betray the stamp of Luke's own hand' (*The Gospels and Jesus* [Oxford: OUP, 1989], 91).

27 'The most obvious problem is the inescapable redactional activity of the author.' Peter Cotterell and Max Turner *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989), 51.

28 See Chilton 'Announcement', 163-65 and C.A. Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel*, JSNTS 94 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 109ff.

Nazareth pericope, Luke returns to his Marcan source and follows it fairly carefully.

A fairly rough analysis of the discourse structure of Luke 4:16-30 highlights the main features.[29]

Stage	Jesus at Nazareth	(vs. 16-17)
Episode 1	The reading from the prophets	(vs. 18-20)
Episode 2	Sermon 1	(v. 21)
Episode 3	Response – 'Joseph's son'	(v. 22)
Episode 4	Sermon 2	(vs. 23-27)
PEAK	Response – the attempt to kill him	(vs. 28-29)
Closure	'He went away'	(v. 30)

This analysis of the broader discourse structure reveals that the narrative is moving inexorably to the subject of Jesus' rejection at the hands of his home synagogue. We begin, though, with what can only be regarded as a christological orientation to the scene. First, Jesus announces the beginnings of his messianic task – a direct claim to be God's anointed messenger. Second, in v. 21, Jesus announces that the Scripture quoted is fulfilled in their very hearing. The first reaction of the crowd is in v. 22 – astonishment at his teaching. Wonder that this should come from Joseph's son, is also recounted by Mark and Matthew. Seccombe argues that the forthcoming hostility is discernible even at this point since the crowd is offended at Jesus' claims.[30] Their reaction at this stage has however, been better described as 'pleased puzzlement'.[31] Even the failure to continue the reading to the end of Isaiah's phrase, 'the day of vengeance of our God' (quite a legitimate practice in Jesus' day) does not, at this point, seem to have triggered any hostile response.

Jesus' observation concerning the ineffectiveness of a prophet in his place of origin is common to all three synoptic gospels (Mark 6:4; Matt. 13:57; Luke 4:24). But Luke develops this point. In Luke, Jesus draws the attention of the crowd to the experience of two other prophets – Elijah and Elisha. Due to the action of God in depriving the land of rain, Elijah's ministry in Israel was forestalled and he was able only to bring succour to the widow in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:1-24). Similarly, Elisha's ministry was ineffective against those suffering from leprosy in Israel, but he managed to effect an

29 For a brief introduction to the methodology of discourse analysis, see Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 230-92; S.E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 298-307.

30 Seccombe *Possessions*, 66-69.

31 Sanders, 'Isaiah 61', 93.

outstanding miracle in the healing of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:1-19). Two principle points emerge from these examples. First, the ineffectiveness of the prophets' ministry in Israel. Second, the resultant temporary transference of God's blessing via the prophet to these two Gentiles.[32]

The introduction of these incidents from the Old Testament narrative dramatically broadens the focus of Jesus' original citation of Isaiah 61.

> By this enriching juxtaposition of the acts of Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah 61, Jesus clearly shows that the words meaning poor, captive, blind and oppressed do not apply exclusively to any in-group but, on the contrary, apply to those to whom God wishes them to apply.[33]

The omission of Isaiah's final phrase begins to take on a renewed force. The echoes of Jubilee are being redefined to include those who hitherto had been marginalised, even those who previously might have been regarded as enemies.[34]

André Trocmé and John Howard Yoder both argue for a this-worldly interpretation. Trocmé argues that Isaiah's message was one of social liberation. 'Jesus was indeed proclaiming a Jubilee, consistent with Moses' sabbatical instructions in AD 26, a Jubilee capable of solving the social problems of Israel at that time.'[35] He insists that the themes of remission of debt, liberation of slaves and redistribution of capital are emphasised throughout Jesus' ministry. According to Yoder, Luke raises the expectation of something visible on socio-political terms, with a thorough restructuring of economic relations.[36]

However, in sharp contrast to these approaches, R.B. Sloan argues that the Jubilee trajectory had already been rendered eschatological. Any hope of current enforcement had been lost, even if it had ever been a reality in the past, which is in itself doubtful. Sloan regards even the presentation in Leviticus to be shot through with an eschatological emphasis. He highlights a number of principal areas which are eschatological in expectation – the call for restoration of personal dignity and social equality, cultic features associated with

32 One is tempted to draw attention to the argument of Paul in Romans 11, which also begins with reference to the Elijah narratives.

33 Sanders, 'Isaiah 61', 97.

34 The identity of the 'marginalised' is much disputed. I take the view that is likely that they are to be restricted to the outcasts of Israel (Luke 7:1-35 excepted, a passage which Luke has derived from Q).

35 Trocmé, *Jesus*, 47.

36 Yoder, *Politics*, 32.

the Day of Atonement and especially the emphasis upon faith. The Jubilee was to be enacted only every fifty years. Hence expectant faith was required of those who sought some measure of restoration.[37]

Sloan appears to be correct. It is not clear, however, that his analysis exhausts all that could be said. In the second edition of *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder is complimentary about much of Sloan's analysis, but describes it as 'overdone "eschatological" or metaphorical spiritualisation'.[38] In this context Yoder quotes approvingly the words of D.W. Blosser:

> The Jubilee is not simply a theological concept providing insight into the nature of God; it is a guide for living which is to be observed in normal daily practice among believers... These Jubilee acts are not simply to be expected in the future, they are to be given concrete expression among the people of God in the present... what had been expected in the future can now be experienced in the present because we are now living in the new age... characterized by Jubilee activity among the believers.[39]

What both Yoder and Blosser seem unable to accept is that, certainly in the context of Luke's gospel, Jesus' use of the Jubilee motif by way of Isaiah, is metaphorical. Such 'concrete expectation' is not expected. Indeed there is no evidence of its being a fixture on the Jewish calendar,[40] nor of its being practised.[41] And indeed once the motif had passed from the Palestinian sphere into a more Gentile environment, the overtones of socio-economic reform, however eschatological, would be rendered inaudible. Moreover the most characteristic requirement of the Jubilee is not alluded to by Jesus – that of return to ancestral property. Jesus used the Isaiah text in an established eschatological and messianic way similar, though certainly not identical, to the usage found in 11Q Melchizedek.

3. The Announcement of Jubilee and the Power of Metaphor

In the final analysis questions of Old Testament antecedents and the debate as to whether a literal jubilee was ever realised in ancient Israel are beside the point. Sharon Ringe follows Paul Ricoeur in

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37 Sloan, *Year*, 162-63.

38 Yoder, *Politics*, 74.

39 D.W. Blosser, 'Jesus and the Jubilee: The Year of Jubilee and Its Significance in the Gospel of Luke' (PhD dissertation, University of Saint Andrews, 1979), 297, cited in Yoder *Politics*, 74.

40 *Pace* Strobel, 'Ausrufung'.

41 See J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), 303.

asserting that metaphor and symbol serve to provide a bridge between the present world and the transformation offered us in Christ. Ringe avoids discussion of an actual Jubilee. Instead she speaks of a set of Jubilee images.[42] They are a loosely-defined motif, not a set of proposals.

In so doing Ringe releases us from the necessity of continually examining ultimately unresolvable issues of background and history. In the final analysis it is irrelevant whether the Jubilee was ever actually celebrated or put into practice. Instead the Jubilee motif must be interpreted in terms of how language functions within the reading community.

Looked at slightly differently, but with the same result, Cotterell and Turner point out:

> Our understanding of metaphor depends on our knowledge of the presupposition pool of the creator of the metaphor, and is further enhanced by the availability of a cotext from which the purpose of the metaphor might be deduced. Metaphorical language is like any other manifestation of real language in that it is to be understood only in a context.[43]

It is ultimately perhaps not surprising, then, that writers of commentaries, concerned as they necessarily are with the functioning of any pericope within its cotext and the text more broadly, pay so little attention to the Jubilee background of Luke 4. Whilst the Isaiah citation clearly opens up a large potential Jubilee background, it is difficult to see how that is worked out clearly in the text. On the other hand, why can both Yoder and Sloan, so similar in presuppositions and methodology, arrive at such varied interpretations? In actual fact the former is reduced to a literalism, which can be dismissed by drawing attention to what Jesus actually did during the course of his ministry and the way in which his call to discipleship seems so distant from Jubilee expectations.[44] Sloan, on the other hand, focuses too narrowly upon the single metaphor of God's eschatological salvation.[45] Seccombe, who is so convincing in his reading of the Jubilee motif as simply 'part of the traditional imagery of the eschaton', allows a broader range of reference:

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42 Ringe, *Jubilee*, ch. 1. She draws especially, though not exclusively, upon Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

43 Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 301.

44 Seccombe is quick to point out such inconsistencies.

45 Sloan, *Year*, 162-63.

> Jesus announces the final Jubilee of God, which is the long awaited time of Israel's salvation. He spells it out in terms of release from captivity and oppression, and opening of the eyes of the blind, images which to a Palestinian audience (and as we have seen, to Luke also) meant the end of Israel's subjugation to Rome and the breaking of the Satanic oppression of sickness, possession, sin, and ignorance.[46]

The possibility of a reprise occurs in Luke 7:22.[47] Luke presents Jesus' response to the disciples of John the Baptist whose faith is momentarily disabled as he languishes in Herod's prison. An almost identical cluster of images is drawn upon by Jesus to describe his current activity and, presumably, to reassure John that he really is the one that John identified as the Christ. But what is significant is that rather than focusing narrowly upon the most characteristic provisions of Jubilee legislation, Jesus stresses more general elements which are more readily observable within his ministry:

> And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.'

The connection between the passage just quoted and the Isaianic quotation in Luke 4:18-19 is somewhat tenuous. There is mention neither of the empowering messianic spirit nor of any characteristically jubilary consequences.[48] All that can be said with certainty is that, given the Nazareth pericope's function as a cornerstone to Luke's theological enterprise, further development of the metaphor has been undertaken.

In this respect then Bosch is correct in describing what he identifies as Luke's three-fold missiological emphasis – empowering the weak and lowly, healing the sick and saving the lost – as an indissoluble unity. They fall identifiably within the orbit of Jesus' reappropriation of the Jubilee motif in Luke's gospel.[49] Land management, financial provision and the treatment of slaves are undeniably and justifiably the concerns of the much earlier Jubilee legislation, but the Isaianic Jubilee metaphor has been broadened out and refocused by Jesus in a way different from that at Qumran.

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46 Seccombe, *Possessions*, 62.

47 Trocmé, *Jesus*, 42, makes passing reference to Luke 11:4, but we need not concern ourselves with that here.

48 See R.P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts*, JSNTS 54 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 161-77, esp. 168, n. 5.

49 Bosch, 'Mission', 4.

This is not to deny Luke's socio-political concerns. The reversal in fortunes of the rich and the poor is prominent from the outset in the Song of Mary (1:46-55) and continued in Luke's version of the Beatitudes (6:20-26). York rightly points out that Luke makes no 'priority system' between physical and spiritual conditions.

> Unlike Matthew, who is clearly more interested in the spiritual conditions of the individual, Luke equates them: physical conditions equal spiritual conditions. The socio-economically deprived are those spiritually blessed, those who are recipients of the Kingdom. Those physically well off in this age already have their reward.[50]

In a recent article, Howard Marshall has summarised what, according to Luke, Jesus did in his ministry:

> (a) He brought the good news of the Kingdom of God and salvation to the people and offered it to all who would receive it, whether economically rich or poor.
> (b) He befriended the people who were poor and needy in his own society. Within the group of disciples they experienced a new status in society.
> (c) He cared physically for the sick with mighty works of healing.
> (d) He fed the hungry.
> (e) He strongly commended the giving of alms by the rich.
> (f) He criticised the rich and violent. He voiced God's future judgement against them. There were those, like Zacchaeus, who heeded his words and who underwent a conversion that altered their way of life.[51]

This seems a fair summary, in keeping with the programmatic statement of Luke 4:16-19, but it is really only a metaphorical fulfilment of the jubilary undertones of that passage.

In conclusion, the question remains as to whether Jubilee imagery has any validity in a society such as our own which has little of the background which might have sprung to the minds of Jesus' hearers or even that of Luke's own. Sadly one of three things tends to happen. Either the imagery is contentless, leaving the reader mystified as to what is being implied. Or else it is somehow suffused with expectations relating to the identically-named celebrations late on in the reigns of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth in the United Kingdom, but which have really no direct relationship to anything

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50 J.O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke*, JSNTS 46 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 55-62, citation 60.

51 I.H. Marshall, 'The Interpretation of the Magnificat: Luke 1:46-55', in C. Bussmann and W. Radl (eds.), *Der Treue Gottes Trauen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 191.

very tangible. Or else it is referred back illegitimately to the concrete stipulations of Leviticus 25. Luke himself points the way forward by not dwelling upon Jubilee imagery but by allowing it to be redefined by the content of Jesus' own ministry as he describes it in the pages of his gospel.