

# Introduction

In the opening chapter of the Gospel of Luke, the evangelist introduces a subversive image—that of a world turned upside down through status reversal—through the words of a surprising character, a sexually compromised, unmarried girl named Mary. This unlikely mother-to-be sings an unlikely song better suited to the celebration of a victorious army than to a private meeting between a once-barren pregnant woman and a pregnant virgin (Luke 1:39-56). Yet still Mary says of her God,

He has shown strength with his arm,  
he has scattered the arrogant because of the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has thrown down rulers from thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly.  
The hungry he has filled with good things,  
and the rich he has sent out empty. (Luke 1:51-53)<sup>1</sup>

From this opening declaration, Luke<sup>2</sup> continues to develop throughout his Gospel the idea of divinely initiated inversion between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, social insider and social outsider. The Lukan Jesus opens his public ministry with a reprise of the Magnificat's upward reversals for the poor and oppressed (4:16-30). Later, he repeatedly defines his teaching and healing work, and the reign of God that it proclaims, by this same theme of status reversal (for example, 6:20-26; 7:18-23; 13:30; 14:7-24; 18:9-14). Finally, Jesus' shameful death as a condemned traitor, even though he is, according to the Gospel narrative, the Son of God, sets up the crowning enactment of status reversal, as Jesus first humbles himself and is then exalted by God through resurrection and ascension.<sup>3</sup>

1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the New Testament, Hebrew Bible, and the Dead Sea Scrolls in this book are my own.

2. I use the name "Luke" throughout this book to refer to the third evangelist as a term of convenience, while acknowledging that we do not know who actually composed the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

3. John O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke*, JSNTSup 46 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 172. For a comparison of Jesus' ascension with the deification of the Roman emperors, see Gary Gilbert, "Roman Propaganda and Christian Identity in the Worldview of

The prominence of status reversal imagery in the Gospel of Luke has contributed significantly to its reputation for championing the cause of the poor, weak, and oppressed to a greater extent than many other New Testament authors. This same Gospel, however, has also been characterized as favorably disposed toward the Roman Empire, or as a peacemaker between church and empire. These characterizations seem to be in conflict with each other, for it is difficult to appease a powerful oppressor while at the same time convincing the oppressed that one is on their side. More recently, Steve Walton has argued that Luke presents both positive and negative aspects of the imperial order, maintaining an objective “critical distance” from the Roman ruling powers.<sup>4</sup> This study will explore that tension, arguing that it is evidence of what political anthropologist James C. Scott calls the “hidden transcript of resistance,” common to groups under material, personal, and ideological domination and humiliation. He suggests that we “interpret the rumors, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theater of the powerless as vehicles by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct.”<sup>5</sup>

In the following chapters, I will consider the subversive dynamics of some of Luke’s prominent status-reversal texts: the Magnificat (1:46–55), the Nazareth proclamation (4:16–30), and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (16:19–31). Through the tools of intertextual comparison, sociological analysis, and contextual interplay with historical and literary settings, I will explore the role of these texts of status reversal in Luke’s developing vision for living as Christian communities in the midst of imperial power. In this study, I will argue that the reign of God as espoused by the Gospel of Luke utilizes, among other strategies of imperial negotiation, a significant resistance to some of the dominant values and practices of the Roman Empire. Central to that vision is the challenge issued to readers and hearers from all levels of social status to confront and transform their prejudicial or dominating attitudes and actions in light of the reversals proclaimed in these texts.

Luke–Acts,” in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, SBLSymS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 243–47.

4. Steve Walton, “The State They Were In: Luke’s View of the Roman Empire,” in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 33–35.

5. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xiii.

## ROME, REVERSALS, AND THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

One common view of Luke's political perspective, which continues to be predominant today, is that the author was attempting to present his Christian communities as acceptable to the Roman Empire, and at the same time affirming the cultural and political status quo. Yet there is also general acknowledgement that Luke gives prominent place to Jesus' teachings on status reversals that celebrate divine shattering of the earthly status quo. As both of these seemingly contradictory aims are central to our study, they must be examined in more detail.

### THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

For some time, the conciliatory relationship between Luke and Rome was treated as a foregone conclusion. Henry Cadbury made the case in 1927 for reading Luke-Acts as a two-pronged defense of Christianity, arising from a need to explain why its great leaders Jesus and Paul were innocent despite the numerous charges brought against them in Roman courts, and from a need to argue that Christianity was a *religio licita* like Judaism.<sup>6</sup> Three decades later, Hans Conzelmann proposed only a slight tweak to this theory, arguing that Luke was motivated by the problem of the delay of the parousia. In Conzelmann's reading, the evangelist sought to forge a permanent settlement between the church and the Roman Empire by emphasizing the Jewish role in the various Christian trials, and minimizing the Roman one.<sup>7</sup>

Philip Esler and Paul Walaskay offer other modifications of essentially the same understanding. Using socio-redaction criticism, Esler identifies Luke's general strategy not as apologetic aimed at pagan Romans, but as legitimation aimed at Roman Christians who might be questioning their decision to join the new movement.<sup>8</sup> This legitimation tactic sought to assure community members that they could continue working for the Roman military or administration and still remain faithful Christians.<sup>9</sup> Walaskay, on the other hand, surveys various Lukan passages that would not endear the church to a loyal Roman.<sup>10</sup> He concludes not that Luke wanted to make the church acceptable to Rome, but

6. Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 308–16. It should be noted that the Roman practice of authorizing certain foreign faiths as *religio licita* is generally considered exaggerated or entirely fictitious today.

7. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 138–40.

8. Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lukan Theology*, SNTSMS 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 16–17.

9. *Ibid.*, 210.

that he wanted to convince the church to make its peace with living in the empire, by portraying Rome in the best possible light.<sup>11</sup>

While much work has been done on the signs of resistance to Rome that are found in historical Jesus research, the Q texts, and various New Testament authors,<sup>12</sup> only a few scholars have ventured to argue that the Gospel of Luke was anything other than conciliatory toward that first-century superpower. One notable exception is Richard Cassidy's 1978 work *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel*. Cassidy examines Jesus' social stance, his interactions with Palestinian and Roman rulers, and his trial and death, and concludes that Luke presents a Jesus who, although not advocating armed revolt, was openly critical of Roman officials and vassals, and especially of the imperial policy's reliance on violence, exploitation, and social hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> Although Cassidy's work draws attention to significant features of the Lukan presentation of Jesus, he tends to explain away passages that conflict with his thesis by arguing that the revolutionary parts of Luke-Acts override the conciliatory ones. In the end, this approach fails to make a convincing argument based on the entirety of Luke's work, in the same way that scholars who read Luke as friendly to Rome must sideline the subversive reversal texts by various (and in my opinion questionable) means in order to make their own interpretations work.

Recently, however, scholars have begun to approach Luke's perspective on the Roman Empire in a more balanced way. Steve Walton, in an essay from 2005,<sup>14</sup> surveys the positive *and* negative imperial interactions in Luke-Acts, concluding that Luke offers "critical distance" from the Roman Empire, which allows him to evaluate both its strengths and its weaknesses.<sup>15</sup> Gary Gilbert also presents a persuasive argument for a conflicted, multivalent relationship

10. Paul W. Walaskay, "And So We Came to Rome": *The Political Perspective of St. Luke*, SNTSMS 49 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 16–22.

11. *Ibid.*, 14.

12. See, e.g., Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2001); Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); William R. Herzog, *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul*, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); and Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

13. Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 61–62.

14. Walton, "State," 1–41.

15. *Ibid.*, 35. See also Peter Oakes, "A State of Tension: Rome in the New Testament," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context*, ed. John Riches and David C. Sim, JSNTSup 276 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 86–88.

between Lukan Christianity and the Roman Empire, mainly through analysis of Luke-Acts in relation to other literature and propaganda of the time.<sup>16</sup> Another significant voice in this conversation is that of C. Kavin Rowe, who examines the conflict between Rome and the Lukan communities at the “level . . . of the ordering principles of thought and their concomitant relation to praxis.”<sup>17</sup> The work of these and a few other scholars<sup>18</sup> yields significant insights for this project and its approach to the relationship between the Gospel of Luke and the Roman Empire, namely, that (1) a more nuanced (and likely more realistic) view of Lukan imperial negotiation is required, (2) with particular attention to the time of the evangelist and his earliest reading communities, (3) as situated through “thick” description of their social, historical, and cultural setting.

The need for nuance in our treatment of this topic is demonstrated clearly by Steve Walton’s concise review in two areas: (1) Luke’s positive engagements with the Roman Empire (for example, John the Baptist’s teaching that allows Roman retainers to keep their positions as long as they execute their work fairly [Luke 3:10–14]; the positive portrayal in Luke-Acts of Roman centurions and other officials [Luke 7:1–10; 23:46–47; Acts 10:1–48]; Paul’s respect for the Roman legal system and its repeated declarations of his innocence [e.g., Acts 22:22–29; 23:26–30; 25:1–26:32]);<sup>19</sup> and (2) the negative portrayal of imperial practices in Luke-Acts (such as corrupt officials like Felix who seek bribes [Acts 24:24–27]; Pilate’s execution of Jesus even when he believes him to be innocent [Luke 23:13–25]; the social and economic trouble caused by Paul’s evangelism [for example, Acts 19:23–41]).<sup>20</sup>

The work of Rowe deepens this understanding of the complexity of Luke-Acts and its attitude toward Rome.<sup>21</sup> In his book *World Upside Down: Reading*

16. Gary Gilbert, “Luke-Acts and Negotiation of Authority and Identity in the Roman World,” in *The Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meanings*, ed. Christine Helmer and Charlene T. Higbe, SBLSymS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 83–104; and Gilbert, “Roman Propaganda,” 233–56.

17. C. Kavin Rowe, “Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult: A Way Through the Conundrum?,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 298. See also his monograph: C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

18. Note in particular Yong-Sung Ahn, *The Reign of God and Rome in Luke’s Passion Narrative: An East Asian Global Perspective*, BibIntS 80 (Leiden: Brill, 2006); David Rhoads, David Esterline, and Jae Won Lee, eds., *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley*, PTMS (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); and Kazuhiko Yamazaki-Ransom, *The Roman Empire in Luke’s Narrative*, LNTS 404 (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

19. Walton, “State,” 20–23.

20. Ibid., 23–26.

21. Rowe, “Luke-Acts,” 288.

*Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age*, he draws upon such texts as the conflict between the apostles and the Ephesian worshippers of Artemis (Acts 19:18–40) to show that the Christian mission was not entirely innocuous in its effect upon the social, political, and economic world of the imperial provinces.<sup>22</sup> But he also argues that “the Christian mission as narrated by Luke is not a counter-state. It does not . . . seek to replace Rome or to ‘take back’ Palestine, Asia, or Achaia.”<sup>23</sup> He cites as support Paul’s multiple trials and acquittals before Roman officials such as Claudius Lysias (Acts 21:27–23:30), Felix (Acts 24:1–27), and Festus and Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:1–26:32).<sup>24</sup>

The work of Gary Gilbert illustrates yet again, through slightly different methods, the multifaceted relationship between Luke and Rome. In an essay entitled “Luke-Acts and Negotiation of Authority and Identity in the Roman World,” he compares Luke to writers of the Second Sophistic like Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom, who generally lived comfortably within the empire and even praised Rome at times, but also used their writings to modify or reject the imperial claim to superiority.<sup>25</sup> Like these Greek authors, Gilbert argues, Luke also gave tacit (partial) approval to Rome and its dealings with early Christians, but still urged his readers to develop an identity distinct from and superior to that dictated by Rome, thereby rejecting its major imperial claims.<sup>26</sup> Gilbert’s work is especially suggestive in that it holds together the entirety of Luke-Acts, both the parts that appear accommodating and those that appear resistant, rather than forcing it to align with one extreme or the other. In the words of Peter Oakes, there is, for Luke as for other residents of the Roman provinces, a “tension between appreciation and resentment. . . . Luke’s Rome is a mixture of efficiency, openness, justice, cruelty and corruption.”<sup>27</sup>

Another commonality between the studies discussed above is that they work on the historical and literary level of the evangelist and his earliest audiences, an approach that I will follow in this project. Although there is certainly value in reflecting upon the possible impact of Jesus’ teachings in early-first-century Palestine, the identification of specific passages as earlier or more likely “authentic” (that is, stemming from Jesus’ historical career) is fraught with uncertainties and, more importantly for this project, breaks up the narrative arc of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Rowe refers

22. Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 42–49, 51.

23. *Ibid.*, 87.

24. *Ibid.*, 64–83.

25. Gilbert, “Luke-Acts and Negotiation,” 96–97.

26. *Ibid.*, 104.

27. Oakes, “State of Tension,” 88.

to Acts as a “culture forming narrative” that seeks to construct “an alternative total way of life . . . that runs counter to the life-patterns of the Graeco-Roman world.”<sup>28</sup> We will gain clearer insight into the Lukan narrative and its effects if we study the finished product and its possible implications in the life of the earliest reading communities. It is this focus on the context of the Gospel’s composition that allows Gilbert to understand Luke-Acts as “a counter-discourse that . . . seeks to constitute an understanding of being a Christian in the Roman world.”<sup>29</sup> Warren Carter employs a similar focus on the imperial context of the evangelists and their audiences in his significant work on imperial negotiation in the Gospels of Matthew and John.<sup>30</sup> In this project, I will approach the Gospel of Luke in the same manner, as a complete narrative composed for Christian communities seeking, in Gilbert’s apt phrase, “to develop . . . a sense of place within the Roman world.”<sup>31</sup>

Flowing from this decision to focus on the compositional stage of the Lukan narrative is another pertinent method also observed in the work of Rowe, Gilbert, Carter, and others. A perceptive account of the impact of Luke’s narrative on its earliest audiences must be informed by an accurate understanding of the sociocultural world in which they lived. This contextual study must go beyond overt references to Rome in the text or a brief survey of the emperors and imperial officials at the time of the Gospel’s composition. These are important elements, but they are only starting points in developing a complete understanding of Luke’s sociohistorical context. The Roman Empire was, as Carter says, “the foreground, not the background, of late first-century daily life.”<sup>32</sup> As such, there is much insight to be gained from close attention to the political, economic, social, and religious context in which Luke and his readers lived their everyday lives. Walton, for example, discusses the administration of the Roman Empire and Christianity’s place within it before commencing with his survey of positive and negative imperial interactions in Luke-Acts.<sup>33</sup> Carter devotes multiple chapters to the topic of Roman presence and culture in both his books on imperial negotiation and the Gospels.<sup>34</sup>

28. Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 4.

29. Gilbert, “Luke-Acts and Negotiation,” 87. See also Rowe’s focus on general Christian readers of Luke-Acts in the late first century (*World Upside Down*, 11).

30. Carter, *Matthew and Empire*; and Carter, *John and Empire*.

31. Gilbert, “Roman Propaganda,” 237.

32. Carter, *John and Empire*, x.

33. Walton, “State,” 13–16.

34. Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 9–53; and Carter, *John and Empire*, 3–89.

Within such wide-ranging contextual knowledge, a sharper focus on more specific areas has also proven fruitful. To understand Luke–Acts in its Roman context, Gilbert effectively employs a narrower lens, that of the literature and propaganda that were well-known at the time. He argues that Luke adapts Roman imperial propaganda (found in literature, laws, imperial images, architecture, inscriptions, coins, games and other public spectacles) to support the Gospel’s claims about God and God’s place in the world.<sup>35</sup> Gilbert also compares Luke’s quest to provide Christian identity in the midst of the empire to the literary work of the Greek authors of the Second Sophistic and their reaction to the growing literary voice of Roman power.<sup>36</sup> Rowe, in a similar manner, grounds much of his work in a specific area of the Lukan social context—a detailed understanding of the imperial cult and the conflict caused by the competing claim that Jesus, not the emperor, is “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36).<sup>37</sup>

Such meticulous engagement with the world of the Roman provinces contributes significantly to these scholars’ deeper, more nuanced readings, as discussed above. The current scholarship on the imperial engagement of Luke (and the other evangelists) makes clear that this sort of “thick” sociohistorical description must be an important part of any discussion on imperial negotiation in the biblical text. In this study, I will consider carefully the Roman imperial setting of Luke’s Gospel and its earliest audiences throughout the following chapters. I have chosen, like Gilbert, to focus on one theme and type of literature, specifically texts of status reversal, in order to explore in some detail how these passages might have been understood in their ancient context.

#### STATUS REVERSAL AND THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Images of status reversal, where the reigning world order is turned upside down and inside out, can be found in all three Synoptic Gospels, particularly in the example of Jesus’ own life, death, and resurrection, and more explicitly in short, antithetic aphorisms attributed to him. Jesus offers such provocative declarations as the following: “Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30; cf. Matt. 19:30; 20:26; Mark 10:31); “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24; 17:33; cf. Matt. 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; John 12:25); “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:11; 18:14; cf. Matt. 23:12). In Luke, however, this idea

35. Gilbert, “Roman Propaganda,” 236–37.

36. Gilbert, “Luke–Acts and Negotiation,” 87–90.

37. Rowe, “Luke–Acts,” 280–94. See also his continuing argument in Rowe, *World Upside Down*, particularly 92–136.



of a “great reversal” has been developed to a significantly more extensive degree. Indeed, Allen Verhey argues that the idea of social reversal is central to both Lukan theology (especially Christology) and Lukan ethics.<sup>38</sup>

In his book *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke*, John O. York presents the fullest available survey of reversal as a Lukan theme.<sup>39</sup> He divides the relevant Gospel pericopes into either explicit or implicit examples of bi-polar reversal (that is, with both downward and upward reversals) and also situates them within a first-century Mediterranean context. He discusses our three focal stories (Luke 1:46-55; 4:16-30; 16:19-31) in some detail, as well as related texts such as the beatitudes and woes in the Sermon on the Plain (6:20-26); the anointing of Jesus by the sinful woman, whom Jesus treats as more honored than his Pharisaic host (7:36-50); the parable of the humble tax collector and the self-justifying Pharisee (18:9-14); and Jesus’ instructions for table fellowship (14:7-24). York focuses specifically on the function of the reversal texts not in a hypothetical earlier form, but in the Gospel itself, “in the progression of Luke’s message” and “as the repetition of a particular theme.”<sup>40</sup> At the end of his survey he concludes that the reversal pattern in Luke is related as much to social issues of status (honor and shame) as it is to physical and material conditions, and that the mixture of present and future reversals in the Gospel supports the “already-not yet” eschatology of Luke, as well as its two-pronged message of hope for those of little status and of warning to the elite.<sup>41</sup> One of my goals in the following chapters is to explore in much more detail this pairing of hope and warning in the status reversals.

A contentious interpretative issue about Luke’s status reversals is whether they are to be taken literally or figuratively. Consistent with the conclusions from York sketched above, the reversals proclaimed in the Third Gospel are multifaceted, involving not only the material state of wealth or poverty, but also social values like status, power, honor, and shame. But the frequent attempts by Luke’s interpreters throughout history to spiritualize the reversals are simply not convincing. Rather, this approach seems to have offered, in both ancient and modern times, a way to domesticate the deeply unsettling reversals into something less threatening to the status quo. Taking the Magnificat as a test case, we find that Cyril of Alexandria, as early as the fifth century CE, was arguing that the formerly rich and powerful, and now deposed, rulers

38. Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 94.

39. York, *Last Shall Be First*.

40. Ibid., 40.

41. Ibid., 182–83.

mentioned in Luke 1:51–53 were the demonic powers, Greek philosophical schools, and Pharisees and other Jews who did not believe in Jesus<sup>42</sup>—that is, anyone who did not subscribe to faith as Cyril himself saw it. Such an interpretation expediently gave all the blessings of status reversal to Christians and all the downward reversals to their opponents. In a contrasting interpretation, though, Albert the Great (thirteenth century CE) identified the Magnificat’s proud rulers as those who use their power in an unacceptable manner—to oppress the poor, glorify themselves, and rule as tyrants.<sup>43</sup> Although these are ancient interpretations of only one Lukan status-reversal text, a similar debate continues today. To illustrate again with the Magnificat, an array of interpretations can be found in recent biblical scholarship, ranging from a call for military revolution to a celebration of those who are spiritually humble, and many readings in between.<sup>44</sup>

The literal-figurative debate has played out in Lukan scholarship particularly with regard to the issues of poverty, wealth, and use of possessions in the Gospel and Acts, beginning with the 1977 work *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, by Luke Timothy Johnson. Looking specifically and solely at the literary level, Johnson maintains that in the narrative world of the third evangelist, one’s right use of possessions and wealth is symbolic of acceptance of Jesus as Messiah and prophet. It also imbues one with the authority to assume a leadership role in the new Christian community, while at the same time serving as evidence of proper submission to such leaders.<sup>45</sup> Johnson does not, however, in any way deny that the extensive Lukan teachings on poverty and wealth have a literal meaning as well as a symbolic one:

Luke takes with great seriousness both the literal problem and opportunity presented by men’s [*sic*] actual use of and attitude towards possessions. . . . It is precisely this profound appreciation of the literal role of possessions that enables Luke to perceive the

42. *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 1:51. See further Edouard Hamel, “Le Magnificat et le Renversement des Situations: Réflexion théologico-biblique,” *Greg* 60 (1979): 56.

43. Hamel, “Le Magnificat,” 56.

44. See, e.g., J. Massyngberde Ford, *My Enemy Is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 19–23; Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, new updated ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 350–55; David Peter Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: Studien zum Neuen Testament und Seiner Umwelt, 1982), 74–83; and Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, NTT, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 88.

45. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 39, ed. Howard C. Kee and Douglas A. Knight (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977), 166–70, 202–3.

metaphoric possibilities to be found in the language of possessions for expressing the conditions of men's [*sic*] hearts.<sup>46</sup>

This assertion, unfortunately, is often overlooked by later scholars who build on Johnson's work in an effort to argue for entirely symbolic interpretations of Lukan reversals.<sup>47</sup> David Peter Seccombe, for example, takes the symbolism one step further and maintains that Luke followed Isaiah in equating the poor with Israel in an hour of need;<sup>48</sup> this effectively eliminates, in Seccombe's reading, any application of the Third Gospel to the literal poor and disadvantaged.<sup>49</sup>

Other voices in the debate, however, caution against such a strict separation between spiritual and social or material matters. Walter Pilgrim notes the impossibility of separating body and soul; it is a dangerous false dichotomy today, and would have been alien to the worldview of Jesus or Luke.<sup>50</sup> Unlike Seccombe, Pilgrim advocates a social and political understanding of the Gospel's reversals and concludes (with York) that Luke offers both comfort to the poor (that their place in God's reign is assured) and challenge to the rich (that they must work alongside God to help the less fortunate if they want to participate in this new reign).<sup>51</sup> In a similar manner, Joel Green observes that salvation in Luke includes both spiritual matters (repentance, forgiveness of sin) and earthly concerns (empowering the disadvantaged, reconciliation across social boundaries, healing).<sup>52</sup> The perspectives of Green and Pilgrim are particularly fruitful as readings of Luke's text and time, and they also align well with the direction of my own research.

In addition to the works noted above, which come from the discipline of biblical studies, the field of anthropology offers insight into the theme of status reversals. The work of James C. Scott shows that such reversals are an exceedingly common characteristic in the culture and traditions of subordinated peoples. He maintains that such texts of inversion appear "in nearly every major cultural tradition in which inequities of power, wealth, and status have been pronounced."<sup>53</sup> They attempt to counteract dignity-depriving public ideologies

46. *Ibid.*, 159.

47. E.g., Gary T. Meadors, "The 'Poor' in the Beatitudes of Matthew and Luke," *Grace Theological Journal* 6, no. 2 (1985): 306–7; and Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor*, 16–17.

48. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor*, 39.

49. *Ibid.*, 228.

50. Walter E. Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 14.

51. *Ibid.*, 160.

52. Green, *Theology*, 136, 152.

53. Scott, *Domination*, 80.

that depict the status quo as inevitable or divinely ordained, and the subordinated as inherently inferior to the elite.<sup>54</sup> He regards status reversals as one of many ways in which non-elites make subtle public declarations of their disagreement with the status quo, which casts them as “less than” in some way. In Scott’s view, these statements constitute a major part of the “hidden transcript of resistance.”<sup>55</sup> The connection of status reversals with the resistant folk culture of subordinated groups is central to this study.

Anthropological and sociological study also contributes another consideration to the spiritual-material debate, the location of the interpreters themselves. In the context of modern-day scholarship (particularly in Europe and North America), they are often ensconced in privilege within the status quo and thus greatly endangered by the disruptive demands of true status reversal. The vehement espousal of spiritualized and therefore “safe” readings of the Lukan reversals by wealthy and elite readers, even today, reinforces the conviction that there is something deeper, more threatening, and more potentially transformative at work here, alongside the more conciliatory strategies of imperial negotiation. If these passages are indeed part of a strategy of hidden resistance by non-elites, as I will argue, this deeper meaning must include an element of real social commentary and change, or at least the desire for such. Otherwise it would not have to be hidden, nor would it create the need for such passionate (and sometimes convoluted) opposition from the socially and materially comfortable.

#### *UNEXPLORED TERRITORY IN THE STUDY OF ROME, REVERSALS, AND THE GOSPEL OF LUKE*

Although good work nuancing Luke’s attitude toward the Roman Empire has emerged in the last several years, as demonstrated above, there is much more still to be done. An approach that forces Luke to be either completely accommodating or completely resistant has too often dominated investigation into the work of the third evangelist. My project will attempt to correct this tendency by a reading that takes seriously the more subversive side of Luke, yet keeps it in conversation with the multiple strategies of negotiation evident in the Gospel. The insightful contributions outlined above are essays or journal articles, with the exception of Rowe’s monograph *World Upside Down*, which focuses almost exclusively on the book of Acts. Thus there is a need for more

54. Ibid., 199. See also his sections on “Symbolic Inversion, World-Upside-Down Prints,” 166–72; and “Rituals of Reversal, Carnival and Fêtes,” 172–82.

55. Ibid., 172. The work of Scott will be discussed in full detail in chapter 1 below.

detailed and sustained attention to the complexities of the imperial-Christian dynamic as it is portrayed in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>56</sup>

Another area that has yet to be developed to its full potential is the sociological role of status reversals in Luke's narrative and in the earliest audiences' historical context. How might the subversive underpinnings of such a theme affect our understanding of Luke's various recommendations for approaching the imperially sanctioned status quo? The application of sociological and anthropological models to biblical texts is in general well accepted, although not without cautions. Critics of the method raise two principal concerns: (1) social scientific criticism is reductionist and discounts religious, theological, and individual factors; and (2) it is anachronistic to apply modern models to ancient peoples.<sup>57</sup> The former is certainly a possible temptation, but one that this project will avoid by attending closely to similar themes in other religious literature and by placing the study's sociocultural conclusions into the context of the larger narrative. Indeed, this sort of integration with other interpretative strategies is where social scientific criticism can make its most valuable contributions.<sup>58</sup> Religion hardly exists and functions within a vacuum devoid of social, political, and cultural structures and should not be treated as if it does. In light of this unavoidable fact, the advantages outweigh the concerns of anachronism because it is better by far to apply consciously a carefully chosen sociological model than to impose unconsciously one's own cultural norms and values on the biblical text.<sup>59</sup>

56. The recent monograph by Ahn, *The Reign of God and Rome in Luke's Passion Narrative*, approaches the text from a similar perspective as mine, specifically arguing that the entire text of Luke (not only the conciliatory or only the resistant passages) needs to be considered equally (89), and that its religious and political aspects should not be separated from each other, nor the Jewish authorities from the Roman authorities (90). We reach similar conclusions about Luke's (albeit ambivalent) resistance to the values of the Roman Empire (211–12), but the focus of his study is exclusively on the passion narrative, specifically Luke 19:45–21:38, while my work looks at one theme, that of status reversal, as it develops through the Gospel narrative. Yamazaki-Ransom, on the other hand, studies in his book *The Roman Empire in Luke's Narrative* both the Third Gospel and the book of Acts. His work covers a broader scope than my own, but with a different lens, specifically Luke's portrayal of Roman officials, including Roman procurators and Herodian rulers (3–4). His research interest, however, is quite different from my own in his focus on the function of these portrayals to “illuminate the theology, Christology, and ecclesiology of Luke-Acts” (200). My study will maintain a central interest in the political, social, and economic ramifications of the proclamation of status-reversal texts in the midst of the Roman Empire.

57. Stephen C. Barton, “Historical Criticism and Social-Scientific Perspectives in New Testament Study,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 74–75; and Esler, *Community and Gospel*, 12.

58. Naomi Steinberg, “Social-Scientific Criticism,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, Vol. 2 K–Z, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 481.

Scholars are coming to realize that early Christianity was much more immersed in the cultural and political world, and consequently was much more sociopolitical, than has been previously recognized.<sup>60</sup> This is true for the work of the third evangelist as much as for Jesus, Paul, and the other Gospel authors. But most of the concentrated application of Scott's model to the New Testament has focused on the earliest historical sources: Mark, Q, and Paul.<sup>61</sup> There has been little application of sociopolitical models like that of Scott (discussed briefly below and extensively in chapter 1 of this work) to the Gospel of Luke, perhaps because of Luke's entrenched reputation of (only) sympathy towards Rome.<sup>62</sup> The time is ripe, then, to reconsider these two areas of Lukan research, the theme of status reversal and the complex view of the Roman Empire, in conjunction with each other and in light of the historical and social context of the world of the Roman provinces. The tools employed in this task will be intertextual literary analysis, the sociological work of Scott on resistance strategies of subordinated groups, and contextual studies of stratified societies in general and of the Roman Empire in particular.

### METHODS OF ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The following chapters comprise a close, focused study of three specific texts from the Gospel of Luke that proclaim coming or present status reversals (such as the poor and lowly being lifted up while the rich and powerful are thrown down): Mary's song known as the Magnificat (1:46-55), Jesus' initial proclamation at Nazareth and the response it provokes (4:16-30), and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (16:19-31). Status reversals are, of course, present and even prominent in passages other than the three that will serve as a focus for this study.<sup>63</sup> In the end, though, three were selected for manageable detailed analysis, and I chose the three specified passages for several reasons. First, they all contain special Lukan material not found in the other Gospels; this preempts the argument that such texts were so universally accepted in the Jesus tradition that Luke could not conceivably leave them out.<sup>64</sup> Second, they are sizable pericopes with clear, bold, and carefully constructed proclamations

59. Esler, *Community and Gospel*, 15.

60. Todd Penner, "Contextualizing Acts," in Penner and Vander Stichele, *Contextualizing Acts*, 19.

61. See, for example, the essays in Horsley, *Hidden Transcripts*. Several of these will be discussed in chapter 1 below.

62. A similar point is made by Warren Carter, "James C. Scott and New Testament Studies: A Response to Allen Callahan, William Herzog, and Richard Horsley," in Horsley, *Hidden Transcripts*, 91-93.

63. For a full survey, see York, *Last Shall Be First*, 40-162.

of explicit status reversal, and generally occur at pivotal points in the Gospel. Finally, all three focus on reversals that are not merely religious or spiritual, but also social, political, and economic, with all the ramifications that such reversals entail.

Each Lukan reversal passage will be examined through three interrelated areas or spheres in order to elucidate its role in the Gospel, especially with regard to the Gospel's influence on its audiences' relation to the cultural norms, social systems, and ruling authorities of the day. My reading strategy is similar to Vernon K. Robbins's socio-rhetorical criticism, which is grounded in a conviction that texts are best understood when studied through several different lenses, both diachronic and synchronic. Specifically, he defines socio-rhetorical criticism as examination of a text at four levels (or textures, in his terminology): inner texture (rhetorical workings of the pericope itself), intertexture (allusions to other literature), social and cultural texture (unseen social norms working behind the text), and ideological texture (authorial purpose in including the passage).<sup>65</sup> Within this model, there is some flexibility with regard, for example, to what comparative literature one uses and what sociological and anthropological models are engaged. For my particular research concerns, Robbins's inner texture, the rhetorical study of the text, is more illuminating when considered in concert with the other three areas, particularly the final two, leaving three areas of inquiry in which the rhetoric of the text is engaged throughout. Although they are differentiated from one another in theory, in practice the inevitable overlap and interplay between these various spheres add to the dynamic reading of the Gospel.

#### INTERTEXTUALITY

The first consideration of this project is an intertextual comparison of the Lukan reversals with older or contemporaneous texts that have either similar forms or similar themes of reversal, or sometimes both. The goal of this comparison is not to posit sources, direct influence, or even direct contact, but to examine other settings within the cultural milieu of the Lukan reading communities in which status reversals were declared and celebrated. Interplay between different texts that reinterpret one another through a dialogical relationship, as posited by Julia Kristeva,<sup>66</sup> will be important in this area of inquiry, as well as the larger

64. For an example of this perspective, see Luise Schottroff, "Das Magnificat und die Älteste Tradition über Jesus von Nazareth," *EvT* 38 (1978): 304–6.

65. Vernon K. Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth, and the Magnificat as a Test Case," in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight, JSNTSup 109 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 171.

context and concepts invoked by each textual quotation or allusion.<sup>67</sup> Audience understanding and attribution of meaning will also be considered alongside possible authorial intention and interpretation.<sup>68</sup> These techniques will allow us to better understand Luke's use of the imagery of reversal, particularly where he has nuanced the theme in a unique way.

A strong connection between Luke-Acts and the Hebrew Bible is already acknowledged among Lukan scholars,<sup>69</sup> as the evangelist frequently quotes and alludes to the Septuagint. Luke's narrative goes to great lengths to demonstrate Christianity's continuity with the faith of Israel, expressing a theological conviction "that God who brought salvation to his people in the Old Testament continues to do this, especially through Jesus Christ."<sup>70</sup> Themes of status reversal are no exception to this close relationship with the Hebrew Bible, as we can see, for example, in the quotation from Isaiah 61 and 58 in Luke 4:18-19, and in the similarities between the Magnificat and Hannah's song (1 Sam. 2:1-10). Thus the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint will be important resources in this sphere of inquiry. Other comparative literature, however, must be considered as well. My study will include texts that are pertinent to each of the three passages examined based on significant thematic or formal parallels, including examples from the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Greco-Roman literature.

### SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The second sphere to be examined, the social constructs influencing and expressed by status reversal themes, is central to my study and will form the backbone of its thesis. Primarily, I will consider how Scott's model of hidden resistance enlightens our understanding of the Gospel text. In interpretative work that views Luke as wholly conciliatory toward the Roman Empire, scholars often cast Luke as a pragmatist who sought to enable Christianity to survive in the midst of imperial power.<sup>71</sup> This move, some maintain, might

66. Steve Moyise, *Evoking Scripture: Seeing the Old Testament in the New* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 138-39.

67. Warren Carter, "Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7-9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15-16," *JBL* 119 (2000): 505.

68. Moyise, *Evoking Scripture*, 135-36. See also Carter, "Evoking Isaiah," 505n8, particularly his description of the "authorial audience."

69. See, e.g., the various essays in Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

70. Robert F. O'Toole, *The Unity of Luke's Theology: An Analysis of Luke-Acts*, GNS 9, ed. Robert J. Karris (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984), 17.



have been motivated by the delay of the parousia<sup>72</sup> and a desire to “blunt the apocalyptic appeal” of anti-Roman sentiments in certain Christian communities.<sup>73</sup> Such assessments of the Gospel’s political views, though, often struggle to explain the subversive nature of the status reversal texts that are so central to its narrative, and are seldom able to incorporate them satisfactorily into their arguments.<sup>74</sup> Scott’s model can provide part of a solution to this quandary. Much scholarly attention has been given to open rebellion and armed revolt on the part of subordinated peoples, and when these factors are absent, non-elites are often viewed as passive and accepting of their domination.<sup>75</sup> But Scott argues that multiple layers actually lie between these two extremes, and in these layers the dominated are well able to express their resistance to the status quo in which they live.<sup>76</sup> I will show that this form of resistance, more subtle than open revolt, is present in the Gospel of Luke, as one of several different strategies for imperial negotiation. Such resistance is evidenced by the status reversal texts, among other factors.

This second sphere, then, will explore the selected passages in Luke to illuminate how they may have communicated resistance to the imperial status quo. I will first consider the reversal text itself (divided into segments as appropriate to each passage) in light of Scott’s model, and then apply a similar method to the immediate literary setting in which the reversal text is located, for example, Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, during which she proclaims the Magnificat (Luke 1:39–45), or Jesus’ dispute with the Pharisees that prompts his telling of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (16:14–18). The sociocultural analysis based on Scott’s model in this section of each exegetical chapter (chapters 3–5) will also be enriched by insights from studies of agrarian societies, aristocratic empires, and the Roman Empire in particular. Dennis Duling wisely cautions that Scott’s general theory must be balanced by contextual specificity.<sup>77</sup> Thus I will incorporate Gerhard Lenski’s in-depth study of social stratification,<sup>78</sup> John

71. Conzelmann, *Theology*, 138–40; and Walaskay, “*And So We Came to Rome*,” 66–67.

72. Conzelmann, *Theology*, 14; and Walaskay, “*And So We Came to Rome*,” 14.

73. Walaskay, “*And So We Came to Rome*,” 67.

74. A fuller survey of scholarly views on Luke and empire can be found above.

75. E.g., the exclusive focus of Stephen L. Dyson on military revolts in his two articles: “Native Revolts in the Roman Empire,” *Historia* 20 (1971): 239–74; and “Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire,” in *ANRW* 2.3, ed. Joseph Vogt, Hildegard Temporini, and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), 138–75. For an example in biblical studies, see Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). He concludes that since the Lukan Jesus does not advocate an overthrow of Roman rule (95), complete submission with no alteration of existing political, social, or economic structures is the only alternative (114, 123).

76. Scott, *Domination*, 18–20.

H. Kautsky's treatment of aristocratic politics,<sup>79</sup> and a wide variety of classical Roman studies.<sup>80</sup> Another important question is raised by Scott's observation that the reversals envisioned by oppressed peoples usually take one of two forms, either total inversion (where the formerly subordinated become the dominant rulers and vice versa), or leveling (which envisions a world entirely devoid of status distinctions).<sup>81</sup> The task of determining which of these types of reversal is espoused within the Lukan narrative will be explicitly addressed in my sociological analysis, as well as engaged throughout the study.

### CONTEXTUALITY

The third and final sphere of this project's research method has two major components: literary context and historical context, or, more specifically, each reversal text's relation to the rest of the Gospel narrative and to the earliest Lukan audiences.<sup>82</sup> First, I will engage the literary context of each status reversal passage by putting the insight gained from careful attention to the intertextual and sociological dimensions of the text into conversation with the entire Gospel and the Lukan ethic, worldview, and theology—especially its complex approach to the Roman Empire. The hidden resistance revealed in the diachronic examination of these three passages will be incorporated at this stage into a synchronic reading of the wider Gospel narrative. Specifically, I will consider how each pericope relates to other status reversal texts both before and after it in the Lukan narrative, as well as how its subversive imagery interacts with, enhances, and even transforms the larger themes and more commonly recognized negotiation techniques of the Gospel and Acts. The development elsewhere in Luke-Acts of themes, events, and characters that are central to

77. Dennis C. Duling, "Empire: Theories, Methods, Models," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context*, ed. John Riches and David C. Sim, JSNTSup 276 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 73.

78. Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (1966; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

79. John H. Kautsky, *The Politics of Aristocratic Empires* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

80. E.g. Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Janet Huskinson, ed., *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity, and Power in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2000); Christopher Kelly, *The Roman Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jerry Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2009); and C. R. Whittaker, "The Poor," in *The Romans*, ed. Andrea Giardina (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 272–99.

81. Scott, *Domination*, 80–81.

82. The question of who these earliest reading communities may have been is treated in detail in chapter 2 of this study.

status reversal texts will illumine their meaning and function in the focal pericopes.

The second part of this section of each chapter will consider the social and historical context of the communities of Jesus-followers who were the earliest readers of Luke's Gospel. It will engage the models of hidden resistance and imperial stratification at the level of the Lukan audiences, asking how, in their own situation of imperial domination, they might have heard, evaluated, and responded to the messages of reversal and resistance as proclaimed and enacted by the Lukan Jesus. The exact geographical, social, and historical location of the third evangelist's community (or communities) has proven notoriously difficult to pinpoint with any confidence.<sup>83</sup> But much insight can still be gained from a focus even on general Christian readers in the Hellenistic cities within Roman-controlled Greece and Asia Minor, and I shall fruitfully engage that sociocultural milieu in this final step of my analysis. In this, I follow Rowe's commitment to engaging fully with the "cultural encyclopedia" of the late-first-century Roman world in order to understand better the biblical text of Luke-Acts as written within that world.<sup>84</sup> Reading from the perspective of "Christian readers of various kinds in the late first century"<sup>85</sup> is a general specification, certainly, but also, as we shall see, an effective one that sheds new light on the status-reversal texts considered in this project. This final section of the analysis of each focal passage will add yet another illuminating layer to the developing understanding of Luke's diverse tactics of imperial negotiation, an area that is too often absent in discussions of the Luke-Rome relationship, as well as in treatments of wealth and poverty in Luke-Acts and of the Lukan theme of status reversal.

## OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapters 1 and 2 will provide a firmer methodological and contextual foundation for my work with the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 1, "Hidden Transcripts, Models of Empire, and the Gospel of Luke," undertakes an extended exploration of the sociological models engaged especially in the second sphere of my research method. I begin with an overview of the influential models of empire that provide insight into the Lukan communities'

83. See, e.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, AB 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 57; and Luke Timothy Johnson, "On Finding the Lukan Community: A Cautious Cautionary Essay," in *SBLSP* 1979, vol. 1, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979), 87–100. See further the discussion in chapter 2 below.

84. Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 8–9.

85. *Ibid.*, 11.

everyday experience of living under Roman rule, specifically Lenski's model of social stratification in agrarian societies<sup>86</sup> and Kautsky's study of politics and power in aristocratic empires.<sup>87</sup> Then I survey in detail the theory of hidden transcripts of resistance, as laid out by Scott in his 1990 book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. This section gives an overview of his argument for public and hidden transcripts and the various levels of resistance employed by subjugated peoples, with special focus on the role played in such resistance by imagery, texts, and festivals of status reversal. All three of these models are illustrated with specific examples from the Roman imperial world. The final part of chapter 1 presents a review of previous scholarship applying these imperial models, particularly that of Scott, to the New Testament Gospels, and shows how this monograph builds upon that work.

Chapter 2, "The Context of Luke and His Reading Communities," establishes the historical context of the earliest audiences reading Luke and their possible social composition. The tense and paradoxical relationship between Rome and the Greek East is addressed as part of a "thick" description of the full social, economic, religious, and political environment in which Luke and his readers lived. I also consider the social diversity that most likely existed within the early Christian communities, and perhaps particularly within those known to the third evangelist. The contextual work done in this chapter will provide an important grounding for the third sphere of inquiry in the next three chapters, as that section of each chapter will consider the likely reactions of Christians of various status levels to the reversals proclaimed in our focal texts.

In chapters 3 through 5, which form the main body of this study, I apply the research methods outlined above to three especially significant status reversal texts from the Gospel of Luke. Mary's song, traditionally known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), will be the focus of chapter 3. Intertextual comparisons (the first area of inquiry) are made with women's victory songs in the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha, hymns from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Greco-Roman reversal texts, and I will demonstrate that the Magnificat is a later development of this ancient victory song tradition. The second sphere closely attends to the personal and communal status reversals inherent in both the text of Mary's song and its narrative setting of her meeting with Elizabeth. The Magnificat is Luke's initial declaration of God's vision for the world. Status reversals comprise a significant part of that vision, and of the upcoming ministries of John and Jesus, the children about to be born, who will begin to

86. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, particularly pp. 189-296.

87. Kautsky, *Politics*.

make it a reality. The final section on contextuality examines how these status reversals in Luke 1:46–55 introduce and foreshadow the work of Jesus, whose very life will be a story of status reversal. Study of the wider literary context shows the development of the theme throughout the Gospel, and study of the social world of Luke’s audiences explores the possible impact of singing such a song of reversal within a mixed group of Jesus-followers.

Chapter 4 delves into the important and complex pericope narrating Jesus’ controversial return to his hometown of Nazareth and his teaching in the synagogue there (Luke 4:16–30). We find in this passage extensive development and nuancing of the role of status reversals among the various imperial negotiation strategies of Luke. Particular attention is given to the challenges posed to the non-elite beneficiaries of status reversal. While the Magnificat was inconclusive on the question of whether its reversals involved inversion or social leveling, Jesus’ declaration of “the year of God’s favor” (Luke 4:19) is uncompromising in its call for non-elites to work alongside repentant elites in creating alternative social communities that give concrete expression to the reign of God. In the process, these non-elites must reform their own ideas of hierarchy and superiority. The intertextual treatment in chapter 4 focuses on Jesus’ quotations of Trito-Isaiah in Luke 4:18–19 and on ancient festivals of reversal such as the Hebrew Jubilee and the Roman Saturnalia. The sociological analysis carefully applies Scott’s model to Jesus’ Scripture reading, the Nazareth congregation’s reaction, and finally to Jesus’ inflammatory illustrations of prophetic help for non-Israelites (Luke 4:25–27, drawing from 1 Kgs. 17:8–24; 2 Kgs. 5:1–19). The jarring dissonance between Jesus’ ideas and those of the Nazarenes is one of the first indications that Luke is indeed proclaiming resistance, but with an unexpected twist. The final, contextual section of chapter 4 explores the possible ramifications of Jesus’ readiness to critique both the right of the dominants to rule and the assumption of the subordinates that only they should receive God’s help.

As the Nazareth proclamation demonstrates the challenges posed by Lukan status reversal to the non-elites in Luke’s audiences, chapter 5 of this project explores the message of these reversals for elite readers and hearers, through close study of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19–31). Intertextually, Jesus’ parable of stark reversal in the afterlife is compared to Aesop’s fables, to an ancient Egyptian tale of underworld reversal, and to the Greco-Roman author Lucian’s reflections on the poor, the rich, and their eternal fates (in his narratives *Gallus* and *Cataplus*). As in the Magnificat, Luke takes another common literary form, the story of status reversal after death, and adapts it slightly but significantly in Luke 16, to demonstrate that God’s

effecting of status reversal is based not simply on morality, but on the clear injustice of conspicuous wealth accumulated at the expense of those of no status, no power, and great poverty. This conclusion will be supported through the second and third spheres of research, as I consider the role of status reversal in the parable itself, in Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees that prompts its telling, in connection with the rest of Luke's Gospel, and in the life of Luke's mixed communities. This parable of status reversal, told near the end of Jesus' ministry and complementing the proclamation at its beginning, makes the case yet again that the Lukan status reversals add a clear resistant strain to his treatment of the imperially endorsed and maintained status quo. But they were resistant in such a way that demanded change, voluntary initiation of downward reversal, and greater equality from all in Luke's audiences, no matter their status as defined by dominant sociocultural values.

The conclusion summarizes findings from the preceding chapters and confirms Luke's careful nuancing of his call for resistance to, and transformation of, imperial values and the Roman social hierarchy. It also includes a survey of other possible connections between the Gospel of Luke and Scott's hidden transcripts of resistance, beyond this project's focus on texts of status reversal. This brief exploration will lead, finally, to consideration of the book's implications for further study of Luke-Acts in the context of the Roman imperial world, and its implications for the life of the church and for other interested readers of Luke's Gospel today.

## MOVING FORWARD

I anticipate that this project will have important ramifications both inside and outside of the relatively small sphere of Lukan scholarship. The model of hidden resistance enables one to discern strategies for negotiating power imbalances that are evident in various times and places throughout history, and is thus enlightening not only for the study of Luke and other biblical books, but also for church history, missiology, modern-day groups that are forced to exist under domination and oppression, and all of us as we negotiate life in our own imperial contexts. The seeds of this project began in my own reflections and ruminations on contemporary issues of domination and subordination, and how I (as a Christian, a minister, and a professor) ought to participate in, support, question, and reform today's prevailing systems of power. This process addresses issues that range from the personal (how do I as a woman in traditionally male fields like ordained ministry and theological education navigate the various levels of acceptance and rejection with which I am faced?), through the group (how long can or should a group retain the label "oppressed" in settings where

strides forward are being made and they are being treated equitably?), to the global level (how to deal with and eventually prevent situations where the power balance has been reversed to the extent that the formerly weak are now oppressing others?). Since its inception, the church has been engaged in a constant balancing act between weakness and power, between the margin and the center, between gaining influence and selling out. A better understanding of the way in which this tension played out in the Lukan communities will give communities of faith today an important resource to ponder, question, adapt, reflect upon, and learn from. It is to this ultimate end that I hope my project will make a meaningful contribution.