

# TANGAZA COLLEGE

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THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

**The Jerusalem Community: A Lukan Model for  
Small Christian Communities in the  
AMECEA Region**



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Author: Chisanga Patrick, OFM Conv.

Tutor: Fr. Aelred Lacomara, CP

*This is a long paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts  
degree in Religious Studies*

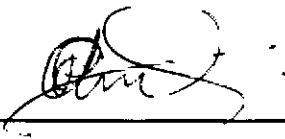
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### **Student's Declaration**

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for Academic Credit to any other Institution. All sources have been cited in full.



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Patrick Chisanga

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this paper to my Dad, Mr. Paul W. Chisanga, who, as first chairman of St. Kalolo (Charles) Lwanga, Small Christian Community in Kamuchanga, Mufulira (Zambia), planted in me the seed whose fruit is this work.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **General Introduction**

Luke is the only one among the evangelists who draws our attention to what immediately followed the Gospel story of Jesus, namely the birth and growth of a community constituted in the Spirit of the risen Christ. This is the Jerusalem community presented at the beginning of his second work, the Acts of the Apostles. He describes the members of this community as having been of “one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32) and summarizes their everyday life as characterized by unwavering faithfulness to “the teaching of the apostles and the communion, the breaking of the bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

This Lukan description of the first Christian community has played a very significant role, especially in the second half of this century, as the Church renews itself in the light of the second Vatican Council ecclesiology. It has been the inspiring model for the decisive option by the Bishops who constitute the Association of the Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA)<sup>1</sup> to establish Small Christian Communities (SCC) in the region as a pastoral priority in response to the challenges of time.

The need to rediscover this original Christian identity mark comes with greater urgency today when so many Catholics are leaving the Church to join small, often very fundamentalistic and sectarian groups. What is given as the main reason for this is the appeal of a close-knit community which provides a greater sense of belonging. In view of this pastoral challenge, this paper re-affirms the fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> The East African region referred to in this paper consists of the seven countries which make up the AMECEA: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

significance of the SCC as a necessary return to the original model of Christian living suggested by Luke in his description of the first Christian community at Jerusalem.

The first chapter of this essay takes us back to the roots of this community, viewed as *A Community in Formation*. Jesus takes the initiative to gather disciples around himself and, as he journeys toward Jerusalem, forms them into a community of authentic witnesses. In the second and central chapter, Luke takes us into the inner life of *The Spirit-filled Community* through his summary presentation of its everyday activity as consisting in continuous perseverance in “the teaching of the apostles and the communion, the breaking of the bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). These elements will constitute the four parts of this chapter, developed in the light of the Lukan summaries, particularly Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35. The final chapter views the option for SCC by the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) as *A Return to the Lukan Model* of an ideal Christian community characterized by a unique spiritual-material solidarity.

It is hoped that this presentation will bring about a greater appreciation of the SCC as a truly African and authentic Christian way of responding to the renewed post-Vatican II and African Synod vision of Church toward the third millennium.

## Chapter One

### A Community in Formation

The story of the community constituted by the Spirit of the risen Christ has its humble beginnings in a handful of Galileans whom Jesus summoned and prepared for participation in his mission as he traveled with them toward Jerusalem. They heard his word and observed his deeds and all the events that took place there. Thus constituted as authentic witnesses (Luke 24:48), they were commissioned to proclaim their experiences to all the nations (24:47; Acts 1:8). However, they had to stay in the city until they are clothed with strength from on high (24:49); the Spirit of the risen Christ to guide and empower them for a world-wide mission.

This chapter reviews the formation course of this community offered by Jesus according to the Third Gospel. Jesus takes the initiative of gathering disciples around himself and prepares them for participation in his mission through instruction on the various aspects of discipleship which become the characteristic elements in the daily life of the primitive community at Jerusalem according to Acts 2:42.

#### ***A. Jesus Gathers Disciples***

All the evangelists present Jesus as constantly surrounded by companions whom he summoned to himself during his public ministry. These are generally designated as disciples (*mathetai*); a term which refers to a master-student relationship. In the ancient world every famous philosopher had a number of pupils attracted to his thought system. The prophets such as Elijah-Elisha and John the Baptist also had bands of followers. The rabbis, too had their own disciples called the

*talmidim*.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore understandable that Jesus, the famous prophet and rabbi, had a group of such followers around himself.

However, the relationship Jesus had with his disciples far transcends that of rabbis and their *talmidim*. The initiative was always from Jesus; not the pupil seeking a master. Moreover, his call to “follow” (*akolouthein*) meant much more than mere physical accompaniment and learning. The Gospel use of this term suggests a self-commitment which breaks all other ties for Jesus and the cause he preaches. In the Lukan writings it takes on a further nuance because of the geographical perspective into which it fits (5:27; 9:23, 49, 57, 59, 61; 18:22,28).<sup>3</sup> According to this journey motif, Christian discipleship entails becoming intimately and personally attached to Jesus as he journeys towards his destiny.

In this section we consider Jesus gathering disciples around himself. Particular attention is given to the themes of discipleship that emerge as Luke re-orders the Markan source available to him and adds his own material.

## 1. The First Disciples

The summoning of Simon and his fishing companions to discipleship comes as the first call story in all the synoptic Gospels. In order to better understand its significance for discipleship, we should view it from the perspective of what Luke has done to the original Markan story.

According to the Lukan account, Jesus first makes a deep impression on the people of Capharnaum by his teaching, exorcisms and many healings (4:31-44). This

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<sup>2</sup> John M. Lozano, Discipleship: Towards an Understanding of Religious Life (Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke I-IX (The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1981), p. 569.

is a reversed order of the events in Mark where Jesus invites the first four disciples to follow him as soon as he steps onto the public arena (Mark 1:16-20) before performing any miracles and teaching with authority (Mark 1:21-34). Luke, however postpones the calling of Simon, James and John until he has first laid the basis that will motivate and explain their leaving everything and following him. In addition, he expands the Markan account, weaving into it the story of the great catch of fish in the presence of crowds listening to Jesus' teaching.<sup>4</sup> This transposition and modification of the tradition is very significant for understanding the Lukan view of discipleship.

Charles Talbert<sup>5</sup> distinguishes two functions of this placing of the call story after a series of miracles and teachings. On the one hand, this transposition indicates that mighty deeds can be the basis for discipleship. The following of Jesus, according to Luke derives from hearing his word and seeing his powerful deeds. The flow of the narrative suggests that Simon had witnessed the healing of his mother-in-law (4:38-39) as well as the many other healings and exorcisms that followed (4:40-41). Furthermore, the authority of Jesus' word already established in 4:31-36 must have influenced Simon's response, "...at your word I shall let down the nets" (5:5-6). Though Luke is aware that miracles can be ambiguous, as even non-believers can perform them, he still reiterates that they can be a catalyst for faith and discipleship.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, this placing of the call of the first disciples after the series of miracles allows so much success in Jesus' ministry (4:37,40,42; 5:1-3) that there

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<sup>4</sup> Luke T. Johnson, The Gospel of Luke (Sacra Pagina 3. Minnesota: Liturgical, 1991), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Charles H. Talbert, Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 58-60.

<sup>6</sup> Denis M. Sweetland, Our Journey with Jesus: Discipleship according to Luke-Acts (The Good News Studies, 23. Minnesota: Liturgical, 1990), p. 22.

arises an obvious need for assistance.<sup>7</sup> This motif is also reflected in Acts (11:19-26) where Barnabas enlists the assistance of Paul because of the great success of ministry in Antioch. The Lukan ordering of events, in contrast to Mark, therefore suggests that Jesus begins to gather followers as helpers in his already overly successful ministry. Similarly, the fact that so much fish is caught at Jesus' command that Simon has to call for assistance of his companions in another boat (5:6-7) further underscores this point and also foreshadows the life of spiritual-material solidarity which comes to be reflected in the primitive community of believers at Jerusalem.

At the sight of the great catch of fish, Simon falls to his knees before Jesus with the confession, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." (5:8). This suggests another aspect of discipleship according to Luke. Far from being an impediment to discipleship, this recognition of one's unworthiness and sinfulness is a prerequisite to it.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, throughout the Gospel we see Jesus associating with those considered to be social outcasts and sinners, a scandal to many first century Jews (5:30), but seen by Luke as a necessary part of the divine plan. In spite of Simon's protests, Jesus still invites him to share in his life and work (5:10).

Such a call of a sinful person is equivalent to a declaration of forgiveness. This becomes clearer in the related story of the call of Levi, the tax collector (5:25-28) where Jesus justifies his association with such people with the declaration, "I did not come to call the righteous people, but sinners to change of mind" (5:32). Such a reply indicates the preferential locus of Jesus as well as the credentials required of his disciples: "The Church is the only fellowship in the world where the one requirement

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<sup>7</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Denis M. Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

for membership is the unworthiness of the candidate.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the social outcasts restored to community are the kind of people Jesus gathered around himself and formed into a community of his followers.

The first call story also teaches us that those Jesus summoned to himself are called to follow. Though Luke omits the command to “Follow me” found in his Markan source (Mark 1:17), his remark that “they left everything and followed (*akolouthein*) him” (5:11) is a sufficient equivalent. The fact that Luke’s first use of *akolouthein* occurs in this story suggests the significance of following for disciples as reflected in the later explicit invitations to “Follow me” (5:27; 9:59; 18:22). According to this journey motif, Christian discipleship entails something more than just physical accompaniment; it involves becoming intimately and personally attached to Jesus as he journeys toward his goal.<sup>10</sup>

This is what we see happening to the disciples gathered by Jesus during his Galilean ministry. They faithfully follow him, listening to his instructions and observing his deeds as he makes his great itinerary to Jerusalem, the place of fulfillment where they will be constituted by the Spirit as a community of witnesses.

## 2. The Call of Levi

The story of Jesus’ invitation of Levi, the tax collector, to follow him reinforces further understanding of the kind of people Jesus summoned to be his disciples, and who eventually become the community of believers and witnesses. Following the order in Mark (1:40-2:12), Luke also narrates the two stories of the

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<sup>9</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Denis M. Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

cure of a leper (5:12-16) and the healing of the paralytic (5:17-25) before the second call narrative. The former presents the Jesus who will call Levi as an authoritative miracle worker who restores social outcasts to community while the latter characterizes him as one who forgives sinners and welcomes them into his fellowship.

When Jesus tells Levi to “follow me” (*akolouthei moi*), he is inviting him into a close personal relationship and to join him on his journey. Levi’s response is therefore very important. Luke carefully expresses it by the use of the aorist participle, *katalipon* followed by the imperfect indicative *ekolouthei* which is literally, translated as “having left behind...he was following.” The two verbs, respectively, stress the disciple’s decisive break with his old life and indicate the continuous and dynamic nature of the life of discipleship.<sup>11</sup> This is in contrast with Mark’s use of the aorist, *ekolouthesen* (Mark 1:14) which refers to an act of following done and completed in the past.

Like the first three disciples, Luke tells us that Levi, too “left everything” when he began following Jesus. Besides intensifying the attitude of the disciples towards possessions, this also shows the awareness of the Lukan community about the danger of wealth vis-à-vis true discipleship. It is also remarkable to note that both Simon who will become one of the Twelve, and Levi who will not, give the same response in their following of Jesus. Robert C. Tannehill interprets this as explaining the fact that not only the Twelve (9:1-6), but also the larger group of disciples (10:1-12) will share in the mission of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Gospel according to Luke*, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 204-205.

### 3. Other Disciples

The synoptic tradition presents to us explicitly only how Simon with his fishing partners, Andrew, James and John,<sup>13</sup> and Levi, the tax collector, became disciples. The two stories must have been intended to be examples among many other such instances of Jesus summoning individuals to follow him, for immediately after the call of Levi the narrative begins to assume an increased number of disciples.

Already in verse 30 of chapter 5, we hear the Pharisees and Scribes complain “to his disciples,” a group of indeterminate size.<sup>14</sup> In the controversy that follows, the Pharisees criticize Jesus and his disciples, a group which again must have included other disciples called by Jesus in a somewhat similar way as the first four. It is obviously from such “a large crowd of his disciples” (6:17) that Jesus is able to select the Twelve (6:13) and later appoint seventy (two)<sup>15</sup> others for a special mission.

Among those called by Jesus to be his followers should also be mentioned the women, whose role as disciples the Lukan community knows very well and appreciates deeply. Luke-Acts counts the women among the significant followers of Jesus closely associated with the apostles and the Galilean disciples who accompanied him to Jerusalem and became witnesses to the events that took place there.

Like many other disciples in the Third Gospel, the women disciples, such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna wife of Chusa and Susanna, are presented as having had experience of Jesus’ healing miracles prior to their following him (8:1-3). Furthermore, rather than give up all their possessions, they used them to provide for

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<sup>13</sup> Luke mentions only Simon and the sons of Zebedee, James and John. Mark (1:16) and Mathew (4:18) mentions also Andrew as the brother of Simon.

<sup>14</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>15</sup> The number may be seventy or seventy-two. Robert C. Tannehill, (*op. cit.*, pp. 232-233) clarifies this textual problem.

the needs of the itinerant community of Jesus and the Twelve, a picture which foreshadows the life of the Galilean community of believers at Jerusalem (Acts 1:13-14; 2:42-47).<sup>16</sup>

These women are truly disciples, though not necessarily called to the apostolate of the Twelve. Besides accompanying Jesus in his ministry and providing for his needs and the apostles', they are also present at Jesus' death (23:49), assist at his burial (23:55) and are the first to witness and proclaim his resurrection (24:1-11). Moreover, we also see them present in the upper room together with the other disciples, awaiting the promised Spirit of the risen Christ (Acts 1:13-14).

#### 4. Selection of the Twelve

Jesus' selection of the Twelve from his larger group of disciples marks the climax of his gathering of followers according to the Gospel narrative. Luke has maintained the Markan order of events that immediately precede this choice; the call of Levi and the criticisms that followed (5:27-6:11; Mark 2:13-3:6). However, he postpones the summary of Jesus' healings (Mark 3:7-12) so that the appointment of the Twelve appears as a direct response to the increasing hostility of the Jewish leadership.<sup>17</sup> ✓

The significance of this choice is underlined when Luke presents Jesus at prayer the whole night before he "called his disciples to him and chose twelve from them, whom he also named apostles" (6:12-13). It is a particular Lukan characteristic to present Jesus at prayer before all important new developments or crises. At this

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<sup>16</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

point in the narrative, he obviously wants us to understand that this is an important stage in the development of the community of disciples around Jesus. The Twelve are the ones who will play the particularly important symbolic role as the foundation and leadership of the restored Israel.

While the parallel passage in Mark (3:14-15) provides a summary of the future mission of the Twelve, Luke does not. The newly chosen must first learn from Jesus through his teaching and by being with him as he engages in his mission. It suffices to name them simply as “apostles” (*apostoloi*) at this point, for indeed their future role will consist in being “sent out,” not only during his ministry (9:1-2), but also through the Spirit after his resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:2, 26; 2:37, 42-43; 4:32-37; 6:2-6). These companions of Jesus early in his ministry are “primarily witnesses who guarantee the historical continuity and authenticity of the Church’s message (Acts 1:21-22).<sup>18</sup>

With the people present who will guarantee continuity of the teaching (Acts 2:42), the stage is set for delivering the great sermon to the disciples (6:20) and to those who hear (6:27) which inaugurates the preparation of the disciples.

### ***B. Jesus Prepares the Disciples***

Luke-Acts was a timely work for a predominantly Gentile community in need of full confidence (*asphaleia*) concerning the reliability of the words by which it was being catechized and the faith it was professing (Luke 1:1-4). By going back to the very beginning and writing an orderly account (*kathexes*) of all events, Luke discloses the solidity of the early community’s catechetical instructions and offers assurance

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<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

that what the disciples were teaching was rooted in the very teaching of Jesus himself. Thus he also clarifies the reversed state of affairs whereby the disciples then have become teachers now, and the teacher or proclaimer then becomes the proclaimed now.<sup>19</sup>

This is the reason why the instruction of the disciples assumes great significance in the Lukan narrative, especially during the great journey to Jerusalem. Those disciples gathered in Galilee are significant for Luke's theological purpose of providing assurance that the teaching was indeed rooted in, and a continuation of that of Jesus himself (8:1-8; 9:51, 53,56-57; 10:1; Acts 1:8, 21-22; 10:39-42).

### **1. Instruction**

Immediately after the selection of the Twelve Luke inserts the great sermon of Jesus on the plain (6:20-49). This important speech, known also to Matthew as the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29), is so placed by Luke that it becomes the first body of Jesus' teaching to the disciples (6:20) and to the would-be disciples (6:27). He defines the life of the disciple in essential aspects and provides certain norms that will become distinctive identity marks of the community of disciples.

By voluntarily "leaving everything" to follow him, they have demonstrated a non-grasping attitude towards material possessions and Jesus commends the kingdom of God to them. He also enlightens them on persecution which they have already begun to experience and will experience even more severely. The closing of the Sermon introduces the significance of hearing as well as doing what the word says.

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Luke the Theologian: Aspects of his Teaching (New York: Paulist, 1989), pp. 128-129.

The importance of this theme for discipleship can be seen in its recurrence as a subject of instruction in the explanation of the parable of the Sower (8:9-15) and in Jesus' response when his mother and brothers came to look for him (8:21). More than merely describing his physical mother and brothers as the hearers and doers of the word, and therefore models of discipleship,<sup>20</sup> Jesus is here referring to an indefinite group of disciples. The Lukan construction of "my mother and brothers," followed by a resumptive "these" (*outoi*), found neither in Mark nor in Matthew, is meant to be understood in the light of the interpretation of the parable of the Sower (8:14-15) after which it is patterned.<sup>21</sup> This inclusive interpretation is further supported by Jesus' response to the woman from the crowd who praises his mother (11:27-28); a response which does not refer exclusively to Mary, but challenges the crowd that surrounds him to discipleship. ✓

The Galilean disciples increasingly begin to emerge as hearers of the word when Jesus "sets his face to Jerusalem" (9:51) and journeys with them to the place of fulfillment. It is, indeed, within the travel narrative, which occupies the whole central portion of the Third Gospel (9:51-19:44) that we find a concentrated bulk of instructions given to the disciples. Luke makes a constant alternation of the addressees of Jesus' teaching between the disciples, the crowd and the hostile Pharisees and Scribes. However, particular focus of the sayings onto the disciples is obvious from the recurrence of the term *mathetes* in this section and the explicit expression, "Jesus said to the disciples..." before a particular body of teaching.<sup>22</sup> In

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<sup>20</sup> Interpretation of such authors as Fitzmyer (Luke I-IX, *op. cit.*, pp. 722-723) and R. Brown, (The Birth of the Messiah, pp. 317-318).

<sup>21</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>22</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.

addition, while to the crowd he issues warnings and calls to conversion, and to the Pharisees and Scribes who resist his prophetic call he tells parables of rejection, he gives positive instructions on discipleship to those who convert and follow him.

Luke's placing the teaching and general formation of the disciples within the context of a journey fits his understanding of discipleship as dynamic. To be Jesus' disciple is to follow him along the path he takes to his destiny in Jerusalem; his *exodos* to the Father (9:31). Jesus is the *arxegos* (leader or pioneer) whom the disciples must follow after (9:23; 19:28; 23:26-27). Whatever he does or happens to him during his ministry foreshadows what will happen to his disciples.<sup>23</sup> Just as he taught and healed, prayed and reclined at table and faced persecution, so also will the community of his followers.

## 2. Prayer

Whereas in Matthew's Gospel the instruction on prayer (6:5-15) is contained within the Sermon on the Mount, Luke incorporates it in the travel narrative (11:2-13). His additional introductory presentation of Jesus at prayer, followed by the request from one of the disciples (11:2) provides a biographically plausible setting for teaching it.<sup>24</sup> This context further adds to the solemnity of the occasion as Jesus shares with his followers what has been a most intimate aspect of his life. They, too can now begin to acknowledge God as Father and praise him. They will recognize him as their source of material sustenance, forgiveness of sins and freedom from temptation (11:2-4). The parables which immediately follow indicate that prayer must become a habit ✓

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<sup>23</sup> Dominic Izzo, Unpublished Lecture Notes on Luke-Acts (Tangaza, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Luke X-XXIV (The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 896-898.

for the disciple because God is certain to answer (11:5-10; 18:1-8). It is also shown how God's giving transcends our human giving because of his unique knowledge of our needs (11:11-13).

Throughout the Gospel, Luke presents Jesus at prayer at all significant stages of his ministry. This is consistent with the special place given to prayer in his entire theology with the primary interest of showing that it is the instrument by which God has guided the course of holy history, both in the life of his Son and in the development of the Christian Church.<sup>25</sup>

The very first episode in the Gospel after the prologue is in the context of prayer. The infancy narrative of Jesus is also permeated by the theme of prayer and praise of God (1:46-55; 2:13-14, 29-31, 36-38). The striking thing about prayer in the first two chapters of Luke is its Jewish character; an indication of continuity and a source of full confidence (*asphaleia*) for his predominantly Gentile community. ✓

Furthermore, Luke attaches the prayer motif to all the major episodes in the life and ministry of Jesus. Thus, Jesus prays at his baptism (3:21), before selection of the Twelve (6:12), at the question about his identity and the first prediction of his passion (9:18-22). The transfiguration account is placed in the context of prayer (9:28-29), as is the teaching of the Lord's Prayer to the disciples (11:1-4). The prayer theme appears also at the last supper (22:17,19,32), on the Mount of Olives before his arrest (22:40-46), on the cross (23:34) and even at the moment of his death (23:46). Moreover, just as the Gospel opens with an episode of prayer, so also does it close (24:50-53).

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<sup>25</sup> Allison A. Trites, "The Prayer Motif in Luke-Acts." In: Talbert, H. Charles, ed. Perspectives on Luke-Acts (Special Studies Series No.5. Danville: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978), p. 169.

It is, therefore not surprising that when the disciples return to Jerusalem, their life together is characterized by prayer both before (Acts 1:14) and after their reception the Holy Spirit (2:42; 4:31).

### 3. Possessions

Another considerably significant element of Jesus' training of his disciples is the attitude toward material possessions, wealth and money. At the very beginning of his ministry, the Spirit-filled Jesus declares his messianic mission in terms of bringing "good tidings to the poor..." (4:18-21). The first disciples he summons "leave everything" when they begin to follow him (5:11, 28). When he begins the Sermon on the Plain, he looks at his disciples with the declaration that the poor are blessed (6:20) and the rich are doomed (6:24) which recalls the Lukan theme of reversal echoed in Mary's song of praise (1:52-53).

The theme of wealth vis-à-vis the disciple is so crucial to Luke that he preserves the sayings of Jesus on this subject from the Markan and Q sources, and reinforces them with his own additions.<sup>26</sup> While the teaching on possessions is scattered throughout the Third Gospel, the most significant and central themes are inserted within the travel narrative (12:13-34; 16:1-31; 18:18-30).

Joseph A. Fitzmyer distinguishes a twofold attitude toward material possessions in the Lukan narrative; moderate and radical.<sup>27</sup> According to the moderate attitude, disciples are advised to make prudent use of wealth through sharing and almsgiving. This is suggested in the preaching of John the Baptist (3:11), Jesus' own

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<sup>26</sup> Denis M. Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer (*Luke I-IX, op. cit.*), pp. 249-250.

encouragement to “sell your possessions and give alms” (12:32-34) and the parable of the Dishonest Steward (16:1-8a). A radical attitude is suggested in the teaching about lending and expecting nothing in return (6:35) and the advice to “take nothing” for the missionary journey (9:3; 10:4). According to this attitude, the disciple must say bye to everything he/she possesses (14:33; 18:28) and make a definite choice either for God or for wealth (*mammon*) because the two are mutually exclusive (16:13).<sup>28</sup>

It is important also to clarify that although the first disciples are presented as having abandoned all their possessions, they did this voluntarily, not necessarily because Jesus demanded it as an absolute requirement for discipleship. Thus, though Levi apparently left everything, he is still able to host a great banquet in his house for Jesus and many other associates of his (5:29). The women disciples are also said to have provided for Jesus and the apostles “out of their own possessions” (8:3). Zacchaeus, too did not have to give up all his possessions when he encountered Jesus; he freely decided to give half of his possessions to the poor (19:8).

Such is the practice adopted by the community of goods in the primitive Church. Constituted as a community in the Spirit, they freely sold their possessions and distributed them to all according to one’s need and held everything in common (Acts 2:45; 4:34-37; 5:3-4).

#### 4. Table Fellowship

Meals with Jesus are important in all the four Gospels. However, no other Gospel equals Luke’s emphasis on table fellowship. He uses the banquet table as another special locus for preparation of the community of disciples. Beginning with

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<sup>28</sup>Eugene LaVerdiere, *Luke* (The New Testament Message, 5. Minnesota: Liturgical, 1980), p. 207.

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the banquet at Levi's house (5:32-39) through to the final appearance of the risen Lord (24:36-53), the banquet theme is echoed in almost every major section of the Third Gospel.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, this theme also characterizes the beginning of his second work, the Acts (1:4; 2:42,46), and continues to resound with the steady expansion of the Christian mission (9:9, 19, 34; 10:1-11, 18).

In the Jewish and Near Eastern cultures, inviting someone to a meal was a gesture of honour and respect. Sharing in a typical Jewish ritual meal expressed solidarity, fellowship and reconciliation. It signified a share in one's life and blessings.<sup>30</sup> The presence of Jesus at numerous festive meals (5:32-39; 7:36-50; 9:12-17; 10:38-42; 11:37-44; 14:1-24) brings such ideals to full realization. Such banquets are often historical events in the life of Jesus which Luke interprets as fulfillment of the messianic prophecies (Isaiah 25:6; 34:6; 55:1; 65:1; Zeph. 1:7). Jesus becomes the long awaited Messiah who would inaugurate eschatological happiness among the poor and oppressed and constitute them as his banquet community.<sup>31</sup>

The new Israel, the post-Pentecost community whose daily life is characterized by "the breaking of bread" and joyful sharing of food in their homes (Acts 2:42, 46) is envisaged by Luke to be the realization of this banquet community. This also recalls the many table fellowship stories in the Gospel narrative whose climax lies in the Lord's Supper (22:14-20). The Lukan addition of the command to "do this as my memorial" (v.19b) shows his view of this meal as foundation of the subsequent practice in the early community of "breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42, 46).

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xlii-xliv.

<sup>30</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> John Navone, *Themes on St. Luke* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1970), pp. 11-30.

In the meal Jesus shared with his disciples before his death, he gives an added significance to the already rich gesture of table fellowship. He identifies himself with the bread and wine and creates his disciples into a new community (new covenant) in which his presence will be recognized.<sup>32</sup> This is further reinforced by Luke's account of the Emmaus story (24:13-35) in which two of the disciples come to recognize the stranger they had walked with as the risen Christ when "he reclined at table with them, took the loaf, blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them" (24:30-31).<sup>33</sup> Thus, Luke traces the community's celebration of the Eucharist back to the disciples' experience of table fellowship with Jesus who gave it a new added significance.

### ***Conclusion***

The story of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus sums up the experience of the early followers of Jesus. After more than two years of formation under the guidance of Jesus concerning the principles of Christian discipleship, their hopes seem to have been shattered when they see their master ending up on the cross. However, as two of them walk to Emmaus discussing this sad development, a stranger joins them and brightens up their darkened vision through his exposition of the scriptures, and they recognize him to be the risen Lord through the breaking of bread.<sup>34</sup>

In this pericope Luke is already highlighting the elements that will be at the center of the cultic life of the Spirit-filled community at Jerusalem. In the summary

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<sup>32</sup> Denis M. Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Robert C. Tannehill, (*op. cit.*, p. 219) for the significance of the similarities in the sequence of actions (take-bless-break-give) between the Feeding of the Five Thousand (9:10-17) and the Emmaus stories (24:30-31) in connection with the messianic revelation.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Bernadicou, "Christian Community According to Luke," *Worship*, 44 (4), 1970, p. 215.

descriptions of this community, he stresses its faithfulness to the apostolic teaching and to the *koinonia*, expressed through solidarity in material and spiritual needs, and the table fellowship with its added significance as the medium for meeting the risen Lord.

## Chapter Two

### The Spirit-filled Jerusalem Community

In the Acts of the Apostles Luke continues the story of the now risen Jesus with a particular focus on the work of the Spirit in the community of his disciples. Before his ascension, Jesus had charged them with a promise of “strength from on high” (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:4-5) that would enable them to be “my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the extremity of all the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Thus constituted in hope and already bonded together by their common experience of Jesus, this group of eleven apostles, several women, kinsfolk of Jesus and other companions (Acts 1:12-15) stayed joyfully together in Jerusalem and joined in continuous prayer while looking forward to the coming of the promised Spirit and the eventual return of Jesus in glory.

Indeed, it was in this context of being together, prayer and expectation that the day of Pentecost found them (Acts 2:1). And fittingly so, for as soon as the Spirit is given, a whole series of remarkable things begins to happen within this group, and extend with great effects onto the onlookers (Acts 2:5-13). The immediate effect of this pouring of the Spirit was the formation of a community with distinctive characteristics and self consciousness.

Luke offers us a glimpse into the inner life of this community by means of summaries at the beginning of his second work, the Acts of the Apostles. These are generally short descriptions, which without narrating any specific episode, present the situation in the life of the community in a determined period of the development of

primitive Christianity.<sup>35</sup> There are three such summaries: 2:42-47; 4:32-35 and 5:12-16. Since the characteristic elements of this Spirit-filled community are all outlined in the first summary, particularly in the first verse (v. 42), and all the others are further elaborations, we shall use it as our point of reference in analyzing the other texts vis-à-vis the primitive community.

### **A. Literary Context and Analysis of the First Summary (Acts 2:42-47)**

We begin by viewing this pericope within the wider context of the first two chapters of Acts as a literary unit. It is made up of four passages arranged in a chiasmic alternation between summaries and narratives according to the pattern A B B' A'.

A-(1:12-14) is a transitional summary introducing the narrative which follows.

B-(1:15-26) is a narrative on the election of Matthias.

B'-(2:1-41) is another narrative on the Pentecost event and Peter's speech.

A'-(2:42-47) is a summary describing the common life of the believers.

A characteristic feature reflected in the two summaries is the Lukan theme of Continuity and Unity expressed in both cases as "continuing steadfastly with one mind" (*proskarterountes homothymadon*- 1:14; 2:46). Luke has skillfully inserted the summary of the daily life of the believers between the Pentecost event and the narrative which follows immediately (3:1-26). Thus he allows an impression of some period of time between the two events; a bridge his traditional sources probably never provided for. Furthermore, the shift in the narrative tense from the aorist to the descriptive imperfect (*proskarterountes*, indicating a continuous action of perseverance), shows that the summary is a new literary unit. It is also evident that

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<sup>35</sup> Thaddeus A. Mworira, The Community of Goods in Acts: A Lukan Model of Christian Charity (Rome: Urbaniana, 1986), p. 88.

until this point, the author has been describing past events. Thus begins the Pentecost story: “And when the day of Pentecost was coming to an end ...”(2:1), and ends: “... on that day...”(2:41). The summary, however presents a stable, continuous life- “day by day...” (*kath’emeran*, 2:46) indicating a shift from the event of Pentecost to a life in the spirit of Pentecost.<sup>36</sup>

Structurally, the summary can be divided into two parts: 2:42 and 2:43-47. The first part announces the subject, namely the four elements in the life of the community: Teaching of the apostles, *koinonia*, the breaking of the bread and prayer. The second part is an elaboration of these elements.<sup>37</sup> The believers’ faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles is further explained through the awe provoking wonders and signs worked by the apostles (2:43; 3:1-11; 5:1-12). The *koinonia* is clarified by their being together, holding all things in common, selling their possessions and distributing them according to need (2:44-45; 4:32-37). Devotion to the breaking of the bread and the prayers corresponds to their daily gathering in the temple with one accord, praising God, breaking bread house by house and sharing food with gladness and simplicity of heart, according to 2:46-47. In all these areas the underlying and unifying principle is the Spirit of the risen Christ who empowered them on the day of Pentecost.

The manner in which this community lived all these ideals is expressed by the imperfect participle, *esan proskarterountes* (used also on 1:14; 2:46; 6:4; 8:113; 10:7). This is better translated as “were persevering in” or “were unwavering in”. It

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>37</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5. Minnesota: Liturgical, 1992), p. 61.

refers to continuing and consistent patterns of behaviour.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Luke is stressing that these elements were a kind of identity mark for the primitive community.

Some scholars tend to reduce this Lukan characterization of the first believers' way of life to mere idealizations. For instance, Richard Dillon remarks that this expression is a mark of idealizations characteristic of Luke's summaries about the life of the early Christian community.<sup>39</sup> However, these descriptions must have had a profound significance for Luke. Note that he has repeated them several times in his summary references to the primitive community. Besides, in his literary genius he has made use of his contemporary Hellenistic culture, especially the ideals of friendship, and fittingly applies them to his description of the spiritual unity of the community and the material solidarity of all the believers.<sup>40</sup>

We shall, therefore take a closer look at the characteristic elements in the life of the community at Jerusalem as outlined in the first verse of the first summary (2:42) and elaborated in verses 43-47, with further explication in the second summary (4:32-35). This will draw us closer to this community in order that we may know and appreciate the value of what it offers to our Christian witness today.

## ***B. Characteristics of the Jerusalem Community***

### **1. Teaching of the Apostles**

Faithful continuity of the teaching (*didache*) from Jesus to the apostles is one of the principle arguments of Luke-Acts, as the opening verses of each volume (Luke

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Dillon, "Acts." In: R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, and R.E. Murphy, eds., The New Jerome Biblical Commentary (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), p. 734.

<sup>40</sup> Luke T. Johnson, Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), pp. 119-121.

1:1-4; Acts 1:1-8) indicate. The community is aware of the special role of the apostles as witnesses and empowered propagators of Jesus' teaching ministry (Luke 24:45-49); so also, the apostles themselves (Acts 6:4). With this consciousness, the whole community was, therefore unwavering in its attention to the apostles' instructions.

This *didache* must have consisted chiefly of the apostles' personal recollections of Jesus' words and deeds shortly before this took on a comparatively fixed shape.<sup>41</sup> It could also have consisted in the catechetical instructions given by the apostles to complete the spiritual formation of the three thousand newly converted members. It included the redemptive death of Jesus, his burial, resurrection and various appearances before ascension, and as a corollary to this final phase, his life.<sup>42</sup>

A further explication on the teaching of the apostles comes with Luke's observation that "Fear came upon every soul, for many wonders and signs took place through the apostles" (2:43). Structurally this "fear" (*phobos*)<sup>43</sup> in connection with the wonders and signs (*terata kai semeia*)<sup>44</sup> done by the apostles would better fit the later contexts of the healing of the lame man (3:1-10) or the Ananias-Sapphira story (5:1-12). Here, however it fittingly identifies in the apostles that prophetic Spirit (2:19) which was operative in the person of Jesus (2:22). This identification of Jesus with his disciples is in consistency with a thread running through Luke-Acts that whatever happens to or is done by Jesus, will follow his disciples.

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<sup>41</sup> G.H.C. Maggregor and T.H. Ferris, "The Acts of the Apostles." In: Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), p. 50. Paul might be referring to this as the "standard teaching" (Rom. 6:17). This is also a possible source for the *Q material* in Matthew and Luke as re-interpretation of the OT in the light of Jesus.

<sup>42</sup> G. Ricciotti, *The Acts of the Apostles: Text and Commentary* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1958), p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> *Phobos* as a religious awe leading to faith and praise of God- Luke 5:26; 8:37; Acts 5:5, 11.

<sup>44</sup> G.H.C. Maggregor and T.H. Ferris, *op.cit.*, p. 52. "wonders and signs" is a common OT description of miracles. It is recurrent mostly in the first half of Acts where the Aramaic influence is stronger.

Thus, according to the Third Gospel, the act of “following” is always prompted by “seeing” and “hearing”. To this end, Luke’s account of the call of Peter and his companions (Luke 5:1-11) comes after Jesus had already made a deep impression by his “teaching” (4:16-20) and “works” (4:31-44);<sup>45</sup> a reversal of the Markan order where the call precedes the miracles (Mark 1:16-20). Likewise, all the women who provided for their needs on the journey are described as having had prior personal experience of his mighty works (Luke 8:2-3). Similarly, in the case of the apostles, the first mass conversion follows the hearing of the great Pentecost sermon of Peter, and a further increase (Acts 4:4) immediately after the healing of the lame man by Peter (3:1-10) with his subsequent speech (3:11-26). It is such wonders and signs at the hands of the apostles which prompt “fear” (*phobos*) as religious awe, upon everyone, bringing them to conversion and entry into the new Jesus community.

The teaching of the apostles and their witness were so significant to the community that this community took great care to concretize this teaching in its everyday life through *koinonia*, the breaking of bread and prayer.

## **2. Communion (*koinonia*)**

*Koinonia*, the Pauline favourite description of the unity of the believers with each other and with their Lord, is used only here by Luke, obviously with great significance.<sup>46</sup> However, what he really meant to communicate by this term is not immediately clear due to the fact that this obviously wide concept is used in an absolute sense without any word to specify or delimit its meaning. Generally, it

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<sup>45</sup> Denis M. Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Dillon, *op. cit.* p. 735.

signifies participation, sharing, association, partnership.<sup>47</sup> In the immediate context of Acts 2:42 *koinonia* could apply to the spiritual communion of the faithful with the apostles, the material communion effected by their sharing of material goods or the Eucharistic communion uniting the believers with Christ. The particular flavour of the Lukan use here lies in its reference to the practical manner in which the primitive Christian community held all things in common and shared their material possessions. It refers primarily to the practice of fraternal sharing of goods, but not exclusively. The cultic activities of breaking of bread and prayers are also to be understood as expressions of this fellowship. Luke shows in many ways that the community of goods had its roots in the “comm-union” of faith.<sup>48</sup>

Luke sums up the concrete practice of this *koinonia* in two other texts which follow. In Acts 2:44-45 he notes briefly that “all the believers were together, and had all things in common; people even sold their possessions and means of livelihood and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need.” Chapter 4:32 gives a more detailed description. It stresses:

- i) The spiritual unity of the community, as being “... of one heart and soul.”
- ii) The role of the apostles in the practice: the believers “brought the proceeds of what they sold and laid them at the apostles’ feet, who distributed to each as any had need.”
- iii) The success of the whole venture: “there was not a needy person among them.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph Hainz, “*Koinonia*,” In: Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 2 (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), p.303. The term occurs 18 times in the NT: 13 in Paul, 3 in I John, once in Hebrews and in Acts 2:42, and never in the Gospels. In each case the meaning changes according to the context.

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Dupont, The Salvation of the Gentiles (New York: Paulist, 1979), pp. 85-102.

<sup>49</sup> Luke T. Johnson, Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), p. 21.

It should be noted that with regard to possessions, the disciples are not completely poor to the point of destitution, for Luke tells us, “there was not a needy person among them.” Nor could this sharing have been strictly a form of almsgiving, for this presupposes that one has something of one’s own from which to give. Rather, this *koinonia* entailed a complete pouring of property (they had everything in common) and a relinquishing of private ownership to the extent that “no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own.” The Hellenistic roots of this description of the Jerusalem community as of “one heart and soul” and holding “all things in common”, could not be missed by Luke’s largely Gentile audience. They would easily recall such popular Greek ideals as, “friends are one soul” and “for friends all thing are common.”<sup>50</sup>

The motivation for this Lukan *koinonia* lies in the common desire to eliminate poverty and establish some degree of equality. Thus, observes Thadde Matura, “the poor here are the members of the community who are in need before the well-off divest themselves, but are no longer in need after that takes place...Thus, paradoxically, divestiture of one’s possessions does not lead to poverty, but to community, fulfilling the command in Deuteronomy, ‘Let there be no poor among you’ (15:4).”<sup>51</sup>

It is evident from the Gospel (Luke 5:11; 6:20; 10:4) as well as from the concrete examples of Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37) and the Ananias-Sapphira story (5:1-11) that Luke’s attitude towards property and wealth is far from simplistic. According to the Gospel Christian discipleship requires actual renunciation of one’s property

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119-121 (for roots of such community ideals in the Hellenistic *topos* of friendship).

<sup>51</sup> Thadde Matura, *Gospel Radicalism: The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (New York: Orbis, 1984), p. 145.

(14:33). However, this in practice seems to have been less than absolute. The community interpreted it in terms of a non-grasping attitude toward individual possessiveness. They expressed it in a sincere willingness to part with one's property for the sake of another member's greater need.<sup>52</sup> Thus, more than mere charity this sharing is rooted in the recognition that claims of the community transcend those of the individual, and that the members must have their share not only because they are needy, but because they are brothers and sisters.

*Koinonia*, as the putting of one's possessions at the disposition of a fellow Christian's greater need, was a practical manifestation of the community's profound union in faith. Hence, it was also extended to table fellowship, especially in its spiritual sense as point of meeting with the risen Lord.

### 3. The Breaking of the Bread

The exact Greek expression *te klasei tou artou* found only here and in the Emmaus episode (Luke 24:35) carries, according to Luke, great significance for the meaning of meals in early Christian life. Its use in the context of Acts 2:42, with its elaboration in verse 46, recalls the numerous table fellowship stories in the Gospel (5:29-32; 7:36-50; 9:12-17; 10:38-42; 11:37-44), all focused on the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:14-21) with its command to "do this as my memorial"(v.19b), its practice by the early community and its ultimate accomplishment in the eschatological banquet.<sup>53</sup> The banquet theme, already present in the Gospel as a significant aspect of the disciples' formation, re-appears in Acts.

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<sup>52</sup> Paul Bernadicou, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>53</sup> Denis Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

A number of scholars have observed a general Lukan emphasis on the connection between meals and the presence of the risen Lord to the community. Jacques Dupont, quoted by Paul Bernadicou, has given good reasons to interpret the breaking of the bread in the Emmaus episode and in Acts 2:42,46 as Eucharistic.<sup>54</sup> For Luke T. Johnson also the breaking of bread refers undoubtedly to something beyond ordinary meals.<sup>55</sup>

The Gospel accounts of the Lord's Supper reflect a Jewish ritual meal structure with its characteristic expression of peace, trust and fellowship. However, there are significant differences: Jesus identifies himself with the bread and wine, and invites the establishment of a community (new covenant) in which his presence will be recognized. Furthermore, Luke's addition of the command to repeat the rite shows his view of this meal as the foundation of the subsequent Eucharistic celebrations in the Christian community.

This practice, to a greater extent, identified the disciples as a community distinct from Judaism. While they continued faithfully to take part in the Jewish temple services, their praise of God also consisted in frequent meals together "at home." The use of *kat'oikon* in this context should be understood in the sense of many people in many homes enjoying an informal meal together, in contrast to the formal worship in the temple with strict Jewish regulations.<sup>56</sup> Such close conjunction between the breaking of bread and the common partaking of food shows that, though the former was already an action with a particular religious significance, namely an

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<sup>54</sup> Paul Bernadicou, *op. cit.*, pp. 209, 216.

<sup>55</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Bernadicou, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

encounter with the risen Lord, it was nevertheless, still an integral part of a nourishing meal shared in households along the pattern of a Jewish ritual meal. It was not until much later that a distinction came to be drawn between the celebration of the Eucharist and the common sharing of an ordinary meal.

#### **4. Prayer**

All the elements we have considered so far as constitutive of the life of the Christian disciples at Jerusalem characterize them as a cultic community. It was rightly a community in continuous communion with God; an attitude obviously learnt from Jesus himself whom Luke depicts at prayer more often than any other evangelist. Just as prayer had pride of place in the life and ministry of Jesus, so also does the community of disciples recognize it and make it a fundamental characteristic of their everyday life. Therefore, the prayer theme continues to resound from the very first chapters of Luke's second work; the Acts: 1:14; 2:42; 4:31; 12:12. Its roots in, and continuation from, Jewish worship cannot be missed (3:1; 10: 9,30); an assurance of continuity and authenticity.

Just as prayer is the context of the life and ministry of Jesus, so also it is in the community of his followers (Acts 2:42). From the very beginning, it was an integral part of this Christian movement whose birth was in the context of prayer. In obedience to the Lord's injunction, the disciples remained in Jerusalem united in prayer as they waited to be clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8, 13-14).

Prayer continued to be reflected in all aspects of the life of the community. The choice of replacement for Judas (1:24) was in the context of prayer and their daily life was characterized by oneness in prayer (1:14; 2:24, 46-47). The

appointment of the Seven is to allow the apostles to concentrate on prayer and ministry of the word (6:4,6). Saul's vision of his initiation into the Christian life (9:11; 22:17), the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul (13:3) and their appointment of leaders in every Church (14:23) are all in the context of prayer. Stephen, like Jesus, dies with the prayer on his lips that his assailants be forgiven (7:60). Perhaps the earliest concrete manifestation of the community's devotedness to prayer and its fruitfulness was the advent of persecutions. When Peter and John were arrested, the believers are said to have "raised their voices with one accord to God" in prayer (4:24-30) and its result was a powerful demonstration of the power of God (4:31).

The theme of prayer, therefore plays an important supporting role in Luke's account of redemptive history, for it is by prayer that God has guided his people. In view of the delayed *parousia*, prayer enables the disciples to function effectively in the period of the Church's mission.<sup>57</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The summary presentations of the life of the believers at Jerusalem soon after the Pentecost event play a very significant role in Luke's vision of the Christian community. He attributes their oneness and solidarity to the Spirit they received in fulfillment of Christ's promise (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). The special stress that Luke puts on the role of the Holy Spirit is almost unique in the entire New Testament, particularly in the way he depicts the Spirit's relation to the earthly Jesus, the risen Christ and the community of believers.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Allison A. Trites, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, p. 145.

It is this Spirit of the risen Christ who constitutes them as a community. The same Spirit, actively present at the inception of Jesus' life and ministry (Luke 1:35; 4:1, 18), initiates the new era of salvation history and guides the life and activities of the disciples (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 8:29, 39; 10:19, 44)<sup>59</sup> as well as the steady numerical growth of the community from a handful of Galilean witnesses to thousands (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14). Thus constituted in the Spirit, the first community of believers persevered in the teaching of the apostles, the *koinonia*, the breaking of the bread and the prayers.

This is a kind of identity mark which Luke envisioned for the Church then and now. By means of such summaries which characterize the primitive community (later to be identified as Church- Acts 5:12), Luke proposes a model according to which the subsequent Church and Christian communities, in their particular situations, would be able to verify both their identity and their faithfulness to the kingdom values.

The choice of SCC as the key pastoral priority for the Church in the East African region finds its biblical grounds on this Lukan model. The AMECEA Bishops in an attempt to respond to the challenges of time could only have recourse to this manner of living the Christian discipleship which is at the same time truly African. This "Return to the Lukan Model" is the theme of our next chapter.

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

*Mworia*

## Chapter Three

### **SCC: A Return to the Lukan Model**

The spiritual-material solidarity which characterized the life of the disciples at Jerusalem continued to be the distinctive identity mark as the community steadily expanded beyond the boundaries of Judaism. Indeed, Luke must have intended this to be the model for Christian living everywhere and always when he strikes a clear, veritable line of continuity, socially, temporally and traditionally, between the pre-Easter community and the post-Easter community called Church.<sup>60</sup>

For Luke the community of Jerusalem is not simply one of the local churches present in the world. It is “The Church” filled with the Holy Spirit who ensured continuity and identity of the same truth of salvation.<sup>61</sup> This is the Church Luke proposes as an ideal model for all Christian communities dispersed throughout the world. The Holy Spirit who had guided Jesus in his ministry and constituted the disciples as an authentic community of witnesses would continue to guide and empower the Church in its realization of this ideal.

It is to this continued operation of the Holy Spirit that we must attribute the timely renewal of ecclesiology brought about by the second Vatican Council. Its concrete implementation has led to the recovery of the original model of Christian life, expressed through the formation of SCC in the East African region.

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<sup>60</sup> Thaddeus A. Mworia, op. cit., pp. 216-217.

<sup>61</sup> John Paul II, “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World (*Dominum et Vivificantem*),” Encyclical Letter (Washington DC: USCC Publishing and Promotion Services, 30 May, 1986), nos. 25-26.

## **A. The Foundation of SCC in Eastern Africa**

### **1. General Background**

The re-organization of the Church in terms of basic or smaller communities was not an original child of AMECEA. There were already various on-going attempts at renewal of the Church following the new ecclesiology of Vatican II. Such movements were taking on various facets according to different regions. In Latin America, for instance, there were developing basic ecclesial communities closely associated with the theology of liberation; a direct result of the need to make an oppressed people conscious of its situation and to help that people to overcome it. In Africa, however, the birth of SCC followed an awareness of a renewed theology of the Church in which the aspect of communion seemed to respond more particularly to the African reality, its culture, especially its manner of living in communities of restricted size.<sup>62</sup>

Part of the reason for the foundation of the AMECEA was the need for communal implementation of the teachings of Vatican II.<sup>63</sup> The new ecclesiology placed particular emphasis on the image of the Church as the People of God and this had to be translated and inserted within the African and regional context.

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<sup>62</sup> Eugene Lapointe, An Experience of Pastoral Theology in Southern Africa: Inculturated and Committed Christian Communities (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1986), pp. 168-169.

<sup>63</sup> Originally founded as Inter-territorial Episcopal Board (ITEB) in 1961 for joint action, it was instituted as Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) in 1964 in response to the Vatican II Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church (*Christus Dominus*, 36-37) which encourages joint effort at implementing common programmes.

## 2. Vatican II Ecclesiology: New Wine, New Wine Skins

The new self understanding of the Church, according to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church is that she is The People of God.<sup>64</sup> Church as People of God is not simply another name for the laity. It means that each one of us is a member of God's People by reason of our baptism. Everything else is simply a way of living this out. This places a challenge upon everybody to make the Church really correspond to this vision of a people structured ministerially, rather than a people divided between a few active members and a majority of passive receivers. The Church as People of God is a two-way sharing within the community of communities.<sup>65</sup> The building of SCC was a decisive attempt toward making this communion of God's people a living reality.

In order to make the Church a true community of God's people, there was a necessary need to revise traditional structures. Inasmuch as "new wine calls for new wine skins" so also did the new post Vatican II vision of Church call for new structures.<sup>66</sup> In the AMECEA region the new structures took on the form of SCC in which Christians would be able to develop a true sense of belonging to the community of God's people and participate fully in its life and mission. The Christians would no longer be a nameless people, merely coming to receive services and fulfill certain obligations. In these communities they would feel welcome and integrated into a communion of life with Christ and their brothers and sisters.

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<sup>64</sup> Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*)," 21 November 1964. In: Austin Flannery, ed., Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents (Bombay: Society of St. Paul, 1987), no. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Raphael Ndingi Mwana 'a Nzeki, "Implementing AMECEA's Pastoral Priority," *AFER*, 21 (5), 1979, pp. 291-292.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. "Small Christian Communities 20 Years Later," AMECEA Documentation Service, vol. 10-11 (Nairobi, June-July, 1997).

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## **B. AMECEA's Pastoral Option**

The 1960s saw many significant changes in Africa on both the civil and ecclesiological arena. Most of the African countries attained their political independence, and since most of the missionary enterprises then were closely linked with the respective colonizing powers, there followed a drastic decrease of missionaries on the continent. Another point of concern was the growth and steady penetration of secularization into the African society. On the ecclesiological level, the second Vatican Council brought about significant changes in the understanding of the Church which radically shook the traditional structures. All these developments were signs of the time demanding an urgent need for new pastoral strategies.

In response to such signs of the time, the Bishops of Eastern Africa opted for the establishment of SCC in the region as an ecclesiological aspiration, catechetical orientation and pastoral plan in the years toward the third millennium.<sup>67</sup> The idea was a logical consequence of a whole trend of pastoral thinking, planning and experimentation.

The orientation was conceived at the 1973 Assembly when the Plenary Study Conference took for its theme, "Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s." Convinced that it was time the Church in the region became really local, that is, self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting, the Bishops resolved to establish a local church with a human face concretized in SCC. Thus, in the 1976 Assembly in Nairobi, they proposed and actually adopted the building of SCC as the key pastoral priority in the region.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Laurenti Magesa, "The Church in Eastern Africa: Retrospect and Prospect," *Spearhead*, 126-128, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *AFER*, 18 (5), 1976, p. 250.

### C. The Concept of a SCC

From the very beginning, the Bishops clearly defined their understanding of a SCC. They stressed that “the Christian communities we are trying to build are simply the most local incarnations of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”<sup>69</sup> They were convinced that restructuring the Church on the basis of SCC is

the most appropriate way of expressing the mystery of the Church as a communion of faith, hope and charity, as well as being an excellent means of involving all the members of God’s People in the common task of continuing the reconciling mission of Christ in the world.<sup>70</sup>

Through the SCC the Church is brought down into the daily life and concerns of the people, to the places where they actually live and work, their villages, streets, homes and factories, farms and lands. The Church comes where people are, not only in the Sunday gathering nor in the observation of certain rules about life and worship. It takes the actual reality of the people’s lives more seriously.<sup>71</sup>

At the Plenary Study conference of 1979 in Zomba, Malawi, the purpose of the SCC was further clarified as founded on five pillars:

i) Theological: In the SCC the will of Christ for true unity is realized, the community aspect of Church is concretized and the Church is made present in the daily life of the people. SCC permit the sharing of responsibilities in such a way that every person can be involved in the common tasks. They also help to create Eucharistic communities with Christ truly at the center. In the SCC also lies an effective means of inculturation.

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Lwaminda, Peter, “A Theological Analysis of AMECEA Documents on the Local Church with Special Emphasis on the Pastoral Option for SCCs,” *Spearhead*, 140-141, 1970, p. 81.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Hearne, “Small Christian Communities: Let’s Go Ahead,” *AFER*, 26 (5), 1984, p. 267.

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ii) Biblical: SCC are an attempt to recover the New Testament sense of community and fellowship whose fundamental model is found in the Lukan description of the first Christian community at Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35).

iii) Sociological: The “smallness” of the SCC favours the realization of the human need to share and communicate with others at a deep and personal level. It also enforces the sense of belonging to a primary group.

iv) Missionary: Through the SCC the mission dimension of the Church is enhanced at the most local level and the members are enabled to feel that they are truly part of the Church’s evangelization.

v) Social and Human Development: The SCC also help to promote a better human life in all its aspects. By enabling the people to participate in the decisions and actions of the community, they contribute to the liberation of the members from oppression in its various forms.<sup>72</sup>

The SCC are, therefore the basic cells making up the universal Church. Every SCC is a privileged place and visible expression of communion. It is a community with a human face where Christian life in all its dimensions meets the everyday life of the people. It is not a church which meets only on Sunday. It takes part in happy and unhappy events of daily life, interacting with all people regardless of their religious affiliation. Being united with one another by the gift of communion with God, the members cannot be a purely superficial and accidental group; they constitute a truly fraternal community. Consequently, it is only in a SCC, definitely local, that this can effectively be carried out.

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*Meal*




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<sup>72</sup> “Conclusions of the Study Conference of the AMECEA Plenary, 1979,” *AFER*, 21 (5), 1979, p. 265.

In its implementation of this project, the Ndola diocese of Zambia carried out on-going conscientisation workshops and seminars in all parishes on the importance of SCC. It adopted the pastoral option of building SCC as its own. The diocesan guidelines states: "We share in the universal Church's mission... This is achieved through the establishment of active and fully involved SCC."<sup>73</sup>

The subsequent campaigns led to an understanding of a SCC as "a group of convinced and committed Christians who feel related, who together deepen and live their commitment to Jesus Christ and the Christian way of life." This definition, also presented to the 1979 AMECEA Plenary Assembly, went on to highlight the characteristics of such a community as follows:

- i) The cell is *small enough* for people to know each other on a personal level.
- ii) At this local level, brotherhood and *fellowship* are a reality.
- iii) Through the *word of God*, Christ is recognized as the head of the community and all members, through different ministries, ordained and non ordained, are co-workers and co-responsible for living and spreading the gospel message of Christ.
- iv) From the members' love of each other, it is a natural step to reach out in love and *care for the poor*, the sick and the bereaved of the neighbourhood.
- v) The deepening of *prayer* through the sharing of concern for each other.
- vi) As the Christian community is the cell of the body of Christ, it begins to understand *the Eucharist* as the Body of Christ in a new way, as a fulfillment of its whole life and being.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Joseph G. Healey, "Twelve Case Studies of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa," *Spearhead*, 166-128, 1993, p. 74.

<sup>74</sup> James Holmes-Siedle, "Over-view of Small Christian Communities in East Africa," *AFER*, 21 (5), 1979, pp. 273-274.

Such characteristics fit into the essential qualities of a local Church, according to the Vatican Council, which AMECEA extends to the SCC: *Koinonia*, the communion of faith, hope and love; *Kerygma*, the proclamation of, and witness to the teaching of the risen Christ, guaranteed through the Apostolic Tradition, and the *Diakonia* which entails self giving service for the sake of others, going beyond the limits of one's own community.<sup>75</sup>

These in turn recall the characteristic elements by which Luke describes the daily life of the first community of disciples at Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). Indeed, this community has been the inspiring model in the whole project of renewing the Church through formation of SCC. In the final analysis, this whole enterprise must be understood as an attempt at restoring that original Christian identity mark of true solidarity in both spiritual matters as well as material concerns.

### ***Conclusion: Truly African, Authentically Christian***

SCC are a most effective way of making the Gospel message truly relevant to the African cultures and traditions. They came as a timely answer to the growing need among many Africans to re-experience their own values of community solidarity in the context of the Christian faith.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, they are a realization of the popular African traditional saying (often quoted by John Mbiti) which gives a sound basis to the task of building SCC: "I am because we are; we are because I am".<sup>77</sup>

In the light of the African Synod, the SCC most fully realizes the "Family" image for the Church in Africa. In an African extended family, life is brought forth,

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<sup>75</sup> "Conclusions of the Study Conference of the AMECEA Plenary, 1979," *op. cit.*, p. 266.

<sup>76</sup> Brian Hearne, "The Church in Africa," In: Pdraig Flanagan, ed., *A New Missionary Era* (New York: Orbis, 1982), pp. 49-50.

<sup>77</sup> Brian Hearne, "Small Christian Communities: Let's Go Ahead," *op. cit.*, p. 273.

*Amber Smith*

nourished and protected. It is the place of belonging where the sense of sharing and solidarity are at the heart of daily life. The characteristics attached to the SCC from this perspective are very closely connected with the characteristic elements in the life of the first Christian community at Jerusalem. The Bishops describe the SCC as places of self evangelization, prayer, attentiveness to God's word and reflection on different human problems in the light of the Gospel. SCC encourage the members to take on responsibility and to learn to live as Church. Members are to be committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of the natural bonds of clans, ethnic groups or other associations.<sup>78</sup>

A SCC is an effective starting point for inculturation, the task which can be seriously undertaken only where people are free to approach the Gospel, to reflect on it in the situations in which they live and to respond to its demands in their lives. Indeed, through the SCC the cultural values and concrete life situation of the people become points of departure, rather than barriers to an authentic Christianity which is at the same time truly African.

*W. K. A. A.*  
*John*

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<sup>78</sup> John Paul II, "*Ecclesia in Africa*," Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. (Nairobi: Paulines, 1995),, no. 89.

## **General Conclusion**

In the world of increasing impersonality and anonymity, especially in large urban centers, attention is most often drawn to the psychological function of small communities. These basic communities are not purely appendices or simple organs of the universal Church; they are a means of establishing the presence of the one Church in every locality. The option to establish SCC has been a timely response to this need as well as to the socio-political, economic, cultural and religious challenges that this region has been facing especially in the second half of this century.

Our journey with Luke through the formation process of the first community of believers at Jerusalem took us right into its inner life. Constituted by the Spirit of the risen Christ, this community overwhelmed us by its strong solidarity in faith and everyday life. All the believers were of one mind and soul and continued to persevere in their faithfulness to the teaching of the Apostles, the *koinonia*, the Eucharistic celebrations and the prayers. This fourfold perseverance is, as it were, the most original concrete realization of the Gospel principles for Christian discipleship and they have continued to be valid points of reference for the Church's self evaluation 2000 years later.

It is in this light that the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) has proposed and is committed to the formation of SCC as a pastoral priority. This is an attempt to restore, with due regard to the changed times, that original Christian solidarity in the present day's African society on the threshold of the third millennium. The same Spirit that accompanied Jesus in his mission, and initiated, guided and empowered the primitive community in its birth and expansion is operative in the Church in Africa today.

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