

Luke's parables and the purpose of Luke's Gospel¹

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Abstract

Do the parables of Luke hold the key to an understanding of the overall purpose of Luke's Gospel? This question is pursued by Greg W Forbes (2000) in a book entitled The God of Old: The role of the Lukan parables in the purpose of Luke's Gospel. Although the Lukan parables address a variety of subjects of a diverse nature, there is one unifying factor that runs like a golden thread through all the parables: a new vision of God. This vision seems new in-so-far as it presents a challenge to conventional Israelite perceptions regarding God at the time when the parables were written, but in fact, it is not new at all. It is a vision of the God of Old as witnessed in the Hebrew Scriptures. This article presents an overview of Forbes' book.

1. AIM AND METHODOLOGY

This book by Greg W Forbes (2000) makes a valuable contribution to Lukan research. As its subtitle, *The role of the Lukan parables in the purpose of Luke-Acts*, shows, the focus of the book is the Lukan parables and the purpose of Luke's Gospel. Forbes analyses all those parables that are unique to Luke because he is convinced that the

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unique features of these parables are likely to yield clues regarding Luke's overall purpose.

The approach adopted by Forbes is to study each of the *Sondergut* parables of Luke on its own merit. His aim is to assess the role played by and the motive behind the parable in its literary context, that is, its immediate co-text. Forbes is very aware of the risk that a parable can be forced into a preconceived mould, and he is therefore critical of an approach where one moves from the whole to its parts. Only when each parable is analysed on its own merit can the findings be synthesized. The methodology he uses to analyse the parables is primarily that of literary criticism. This implies that his interpretation is characterised by a "revised view" of allegory.

The title *The God of Old* reflects Forbes's main hypothesis, namely that Luke's parables present [or propound] a vision of God which is contiguous [or in harmony] with the portrait of God in the Old Testament, the "God of old". Forbes believes that this "new" vision is necessitated by a distorted vision of God within conventional Israelite wisdom at the time of Luke which in many ways reveals a discontinuity with the vision of Old Testament "God of old". The book is divided into three main parts: Part I: *Introductory issues*, Part II: *Analysis of the Lukan parables*, and Part III: *The theology of the Lukan parables and their contribution to the purpose of Luke's Gospel*.

2. ISSUES RAISED IN FORBES'S INTRODUCTION

The introduction consists of two chapters, "A history of research on the Lukan parables" (pages 16 to 23), and "The parables: Key factors in historical research" (pages 24 to 71). The first chapter does not focus on an overview of parable research in general, but is confined to research on the parables that feature in the Gospel of Luke. This focus proves to be most valuable. Forbes argues that the Lukan parables in particular have received limited attention, which is surprising in the light of the fact that scholars have long noted the unique character of these parables. He proceeds to discuss some of the best-known works on these parables published in recent times. Most of these works consist of an analysis of *individual* Lukan parables. Forbes identifies a number of gaps in Lukan parable research: (1) the entire corpus of the *Sondergutgleichnissen* is seldom analysed, and (2) an attempt needs to be made to link these parables with Luke's overall purpose.

The title of Chapter 2 with its reference to “historical research” is somewhat misleading. The focus is neither the “historical context” nor the “historical Jesus”, but key factors in the history of parable research in general. Like most scholars, Forbes starts with Adolf Jülicher’s criticism of an allegorical interpretation of Jesus’ parables. Forbes regards criticism by literary critics, especially criticism highlighting the metaphorical nature of Jesus’ parables as an *overreaction* to traditional allegorical interpretation. Since the focus has shifted from allegory to metaphor, the definition of a parable has invariably been linked to definitions of *metaphor* and *allegory*. The question raised by Forbes is whether a metaphor is void of allegory. Forbes’s historical overview proceeds with a *defence* of the allegorical nature of parables, whereby allegory is understood as the second level of meaning of a parable. He is especially critical towards a view that contests that any evidence of allegory inevitably reflects the inauthenticity of a “Jesus” parable. Forbes argues that those scholars of the Jesus Seminar who reject allegory outright propound an extreme view, to which the work of Craig L Blomberg forms the opposite pole. Forbes’s short discussion of the main interpretative approaches therefore, falls within the framework set, on the one side, by Jülicher’s attack on the parables as allegories and, on the other side, by the renewed affirmation of Jesus’ parables as allegories in more recent times.

Jülicher’s work is characterized both by a rejection of the parables as allegories and his restriction of the meaning of a parable to a single point, the *tertium comparationis*. The *tertium comparationis* is usually defined in terms of a general moral truth. According to Forbes, this tendency was later liberalised, especially by C H Dodd and J Jeremias, who asserted that the parables of Jesus need to be understood within an eschatological framework. Redaction criticism in its turn has drawn attention to the distinctive theology of a parable and also demonstrated how a parable functions within the wider context of the Gospel structure.

New Hermeneutics began to challenge the notion that parables convey propositional truths, which helped pave the way amongst literary scholars to an understanding of parables as metaphors. A metaphor is regarded as more than just a sign – it becomes a bearer of the reality it refers to. It is a “revelatory” image that creates new meaning. The main purpose of a metaphor is not simply to instruct, but rather to challenge. The

challenge is provided, while using everyday language, by juxtaposing two conflicting views on reality so as to provide new insight.

Structuralism was the next major shift in parable interpretation. It proceeded to investigate the deep structures of language, which lie below the surface of narrative fiction and which operate in the author's mind at a subconscious level. Reader-response criticism then highlighted the involvement of the reader in the interpretation process. According to Forbes, the value of reader-response criticism lies in its ability, amongst other things, to negate the fallacy that a text has an obvious meaning apart from the stance and expectations of the interpreter. More recently, important insights have been provided by analyses of the sociological and cultural background of the parables of Jesus in the first century Mediterranean world.

As already noted, Forbes's main criticism is levelled at the interpretation of parables as pure metaphors. He remains critical of any assertion that parables are totally devoid of allegory, and that the challenge of the parable forms an inherent part of the parable itself, which once conveyed in propositional language invariably leads to a loss of meaning. Forbes holds similar views to those held by Craig Blomberg, but, in Forbes's own analysis of the Lukan parables, he does not follow Blomberg, who advocates that each parable makes one point per main character, resulting in "three-point", "two-point" and "one-point" parables. Forbes's interpretation consists of a "multitude of points", often a compilation of the interpretations given to parables by modern scholars. For Forbes, however, the "vision of God" constituting the unifying factor among the multitude of points made by the parables. In order to observe this vision of God, cognisance should be taken not only of the parables themselves, but also of the literary and interpretative framework in which these parables have been set by the Gospel writers. Forbes makes a strong plea, that just because the literary and interpretative framework of certain parables can be traced back to the Gospel writers, the authenticity of the parables should not be discounted. Indeed, Forbes argues for authenticity based on the hypothesis that the interpretation attached to the parables of Jesus by the Gospel writers is firmly rooted both in Old Testament and in the cultural milieu within which the Gospels were written.

Forbes based his study on the following assumptions: (1) parables do contain allegory and thus point to referents beyond the stories themselves ; (2) parables can be legitimately interpreted and may make more than one point; and (3) the literary framework of the parables is crucial in any attempt to show how the Evangelists (in this case, Luke) and the early church understood the parable(s) concerned.

3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE LUKAN PARABLES

Forbes analyses and interprets the following ten parables, which are all unique to Luke:

- The Good Samaritan (10:25-37)
- The Friend at Midnight (11:5-8)
- The Rich Fool (12:13-21)
- The Barren Fig Tree (13:6-9)
- The Great Feast (14:15-24)
- The Parables of the Lost (15:1-32)
- The Dishonest Manager (16:1-13)
- The Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31)
- The Judge and the Widow (18:1-8)
- The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14)

Forbes's discussions of the Lukan parables are broken up into three steps: (1) Introduction, (2) Analysis, and (3) Interpretation. In the introduction to each discussion, he gives a short overview on the opinions of scholars who examined the parable before him and he then proceeds to an analysis of the setting of the parable in the literary context of Luke, that is, the immediate co-text of the parable. At this stage he does not pay specific attention to the overall purpose of Luke's narrative. The analysis itself is a verse by verse (or unit by unit) exposition of the parable. The many references to other scholars and recent studies on the parables of Luke are particularly helpful. This analysis is then followed by the interpretation. Based on the hypothesis that the parables have a "multitude of points", Forbes's interpretation is a compilation of a number of theological themes, which all feature directly or indirectly in the parable.

This overview of Forbes's work is restricted to the example of one parable, that of the good Samaritan (pages 55-71). In the "Introduction" attention is given primarily to two questions: (a) the *source critical* [???is this subject jargon? it sounds odd???] question of Luke 10:25-28, which constitutes the introduction to the parable itself (10:29-37), and (b) the question of whether the parable was based on a real or fictional incident. The analysis proceeds with Luke 10:25-28. Forbes regards the dialogue as important because it highlights Jesus' understanding of the law and also underlines what Forbes calls "Luke's positive view of Judaism and Jewish piety centered around the observance of the law". For Forbes the emphasis on the law is important, as it demonstrates continuity with the notion of the "God of old." The analysis of the parable itself focuses on the contrast between the priest and the Levite on the one hand, and the Samaritan on the other hand. Ironically, the Samaritan, whom the priest and the Levite regard as unfaithful to the Torah, is shown to be the one who shows obedience to the Torah. This shocking irony paves the way for the reader to look at his/her neighbour, not using an empirical definition, but from a perspective of love/mercy. A neighbour is not someone to be defined, but someone one *becomes*.

Forbes's interpretation of the parable (pages 68-71) is important. He refers to the long history of allegorical interpretation of this parable and notes that many of these readings persist even today. Examples are Bailey (who sees the parable as a picture of salvation illustrating the futility of any attempts of self-justification), Gerhardsson (who regards the parable as a metaphor for Jesus the Good Shepherd, tending to the wounds of God's flock), and Zimmermann (who reads the parable as a reaction to Jesus' compassion for the despised, thereby justifying his own actions). Forbes rejects these interpretations on the grounds that they are anachronistic and that they all treat the parable as a treatise on eternal life. For Forbes the parable is a straightforward lesson on neighbourliness, an example story told from the perspective of the wounded man. Forbes does, however, acknowledge that the parable is also *more* than an example story. He then proceeds to identify a number of echoes that resonate within and with this story. These echoes provide him with the "multitude of points" which he sees as being characteristic of the Lukan parables. The main points are these:

- The parable is an attack on racial prejudice. Jesus is seen as the king who breaks down the barriers between Ephraim and Judah. While identifying this motif, Forbes acknowledges that it would not necessarily have been so evident to those of Luke's readers who did not share the perspective of the original audience. The parable nevertheless "teaches that being a neighbour is a willingness to show mercy to all and receive it from all, regardless of ethnic or social ties" (page 70).
- The parable expresses the concern of God for the despised and marginalised. As such, the parable serves to legitimize the Samaritan mission, whilst also proving teaching regarding "mission praxis".
- The parable makes a statement on priorities when certain aspects of Torah appear to clash. The priority is identified as the overriding demand of the law in Jesus' eyes to fulfil the love commandment. Concern for others is to supersede cultic and religious obligations.
- The parable is also a teaching on the proper use of wealth and possessions. The Samaritan is seen as someone who used his goods by doing charity work. However, charity is shown to be more than almsgiving. It includes the costly involvement of one's self [or one word: oneself].
- The parable reflects the mercy of God. The Samaritan mediates God's concern to bind up the wounds of the afflicted, which is in turn a call on Christians to mirror the concerns and character of God.

As this point, Forbes limits himself to identifying these different themes. He follows the same pattern in his analysis of the other parables unique to Luke.

4. THEOLOGY OF THE LUKAN PARABLES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE PURPOSE OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

Having concluded his analysis of the parables, Forbes proceeds with what he calls a "systematic analysis" (page 224) of his findings. The purpose thereof is to establish a plausible reason for why Luke chose these particular parables.

In Chapter 13 Forbes examines the various themes that emerged from his analyses of the parables. His aim is to look for possible unifying motifs. The chapter is entitled

“The theological themes of the Lukan parables and the question of a unifying motif” (pages 225-260).

On the basis of all the parables analysed, Forbes identifies the following themes that feature both within the parables and Luke's Gospel as a whole:

- *The poor and the marginalized*

Luke's concern for the poor and the marginalized is well documented. Forbes summarises and highlights a number of these concerns in Luke's Gospel. The same theme is expressed in a number of parables, such as the Great Feast (14:15-24), the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31), and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14). Overall, Jesus in his ministry and teaching, including the parables, reflects the heart of God in his concern for the downtrodden in society.

- *Wealth and possession*

This theme is intrinsically related to the concern for the poor and the marginalized. It forms the other side of the coin. In the Gospel Jesus is repeatedly portrayed as warning people against the danger of trusting in material wealth and security. Forbes points out that each parable in the Travel Narrative which features the theme of wealth and possession, such as the Rich Fool (12:13-21), the Great Feast (14:15-23), the Parable of the Dishonest Manager (16:1-13), and the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31), are immediately followed by teaching on the same theme. On the one hand, Luke reflects on the total renunciation of goods as the cost of discipleship, whilst, on the other hand, he also encourages good stewardship of wealth. The latter theme is identified by Forbes as a pastoral concern on the part of Luke in a mixed community consisting of both rich and poor.

- *Conflict and rejection*

It is well known that Luke's narrative is characterised by examples of conflict and rejection. According to Forbes, this theme is interrelated with the previous two. Conflict arises due to Jesus' concern for the poor and marginalized and his teaching on wealth and possessions. The tension arising from the conflict is apparent in almost every Lukan *Sondergut* parable. The conflict relates to a number of issues, the most important being an understanding of who belongs to the “true” Israel, and

whether Israel has been rejected as a result of its continued rejection of God's Messiah. Forbes proceeds to give a brief overview of the scholarly debate. In his opinion, the parables do not warrant the view that these parables imply an overall rejection of Israel. Instead of serving a condemnatory function, the parables primarily serve an instructive function, resulting in two models for discipleship. Forbes defines these as follows: "In a negative sense, the antagonists embody character traits that Luke wants his readers to avoid. In a positive sense, ...[they] stress[...] Jesus' care for those who oppose him" (pages 241-242).

- *Prayer*

At crucial points in Luke's narrative, the leading characters are pictured in prayer. Prayer highlights Jesus' relationship to God and is in turn depicted as a mark of faithfulness. The parable of the Unjust Judge (18:1-8) serves to encourage persistence in prayer.

- *Repentance*

Repentance is a central theme in Luke's narrative. The primary function of John the Baptist is defined as "turning" Israel back to God, and Jesus' mission is defined as that of calling sinners to repentance. The theme features in parables such as the Barren Fig Tree (13:6-9), the Great Feast (14:15-24), and the Parables of the Lost (15).

- *Reversal*

The theme of reversal runs throughout Luke's narrative, and the tone is already set in the infancy narratives. The contribution of the parables to this theme is seen in the demonstration of the basis upon which the reversal takes place. It varies from not living the love command (the Good Samaritan, Lk 10:25-37), rejecting an invitation (the Great Feast, Lk 14:15-24), not repenting (the Rich Man and Lazarus, Lk 16:27-31), and exhibiting an exclusive attitude (the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Lk 18:9-14).

Forbes poses the question whether the parables have a motif in common. He notes that in all the *Sondergut* parables God appears either directly or indirectly. This is also the case in the parables of Matthew's Gospel. But in contrast to Matthew, where God is primarily presented as a judge (Matthew's focus being on the eschaton), Luke stresses the universal

concern of God, His mercy for all (his focus being more on the present). Forbes argues that Luke gives a more varied presentation of God. He highlights three fundamental aspects of God's character that emerge from the parables:

- *The care and love of God*

The care and love of God feature both within the wider Gospel and in the parables. The parables in particular serve to teach an ethnocentric audience that God's love and care cannot be limited by cultural ideals.

- *God's mercy and grace*

God is portrayed as showing mercy to all, including the wicked, which is seen by Luke as a model for Christian behaviour. The main focus of God's mercy is seen in His forgiveness of human sin.

- *God as sovereign judge*

Although God shows mercy, non-repentance is not without consequence. A number of parables depict accountability to God in the face of eschatological judgement.

Forbes believes that Luke's narrative is clearly a theocentric story. The character of God provides the internal link between the parables. All the themes that feature in the parables reflect the character of God. Forbes postulates that this view is not a "new" view of God, but is firmly rooted in the Old Testament. He goes on to explore this thesis in Chapter 14, "Luke's use of the Old Testament" (pages 261-278).

Forbes's exploration of Luke's use of the Old Testament is based on the Lukan motif of *promise-fulfilment*, which is seen as an alternative to Conzelmann's threefold scheme (Israel/Jesus/church) of salvation history. Forbes explains how he understands Luke's use of the motif. He rejects the traditional view that Luke used the motif for apologetic purposes in order to legitimise his Gospel. Instead, Forbes agrees with D L Bock, asserting that Luke used the motif offensively to proclaim the significance of Jesus. The motif is not proof from prophecy, but *proclamation from prophecy and pattern*. Luke therefore legitimises both Jesus and his followers by showing how their mission derives directly from the hope of Israel as expressed in the Old Testament, in particular via the prophetic tradition. Accordingly Luke's narrative makes extensive use of Old

Testament patterns, without necessarily quoting extensively from the Old Testament. The Old Testament patterns serve as the basis on which various stories are modelled. An example is the Travel Narrative itself, which is seen to be a parallel to the Deuteronomistic profile of Israel's history. Similarly, the reader of the parables is constantly confronted by the character and the nature of the God of old. Forbes identifies character traits of God in the Old Testament which coincide with those in the parables of Luke, such as "coming to the aid of the oppressed" (Ex 2:23-25; Ps 136:23-35), a physician who "binds the wounds" of the afflicted (Ps 147:3; Jer 30:17), and so on. Forbes notes that God's mercy, compassion and forgiveness, as well as God's concern for the poor and the underprivileged all have their roots in the Exodus. In his opinion, this explains why the parable's teaching regarding the character of God occurs within the Travel Narrative of Luke's Gospel. Indeed, he argues that there is no departure in Luke's narrative from the Old Testament view of God. However, the conflict settings that are given by Luke in his narrative suggest a discrepancy between the Old Testament view of God and that of contemporary Jewish views of God. This proposition is explored in Chapter 15, "The portrayal of God in the Lukan parables in the light of Judaic views of God" (page 279-306).

What was the view of God held by Luke's Jewish contemporaries? Forbes explores this topic by making extensive use of rabbinic/Talmudic literature. He does so in the realisation that the material comes from a later period and that Rabbinic teaching is far from systematic and consistent. The presentation of God within Israel is facilitated with respect to the following areas:

- *Ethnocentricity*

Ethnocentricity is defined as the "attitude that Israel had to other nations, including the Samaritans" (page 285). Forbes recognizes that the Old Testament attitude towards such nations is ambivalent, both promoting ethnocentrism and rejecting it. On the one hand, these nations are the objects of God wrath (see *inter alia* Ps 2:8-9; Is 13-23; Ez 25-32). On the other hand, ethnocentric views are the subject of rebuke (see *inter alia* Is 2:2-4; 42:1-7; Zch 2:11). But from the intertestamental period onwards, especially in the later rabbinic writings, there is a

definite shift to an exclusive attitude to the nations. Forbes claims that it “would be reasonable, on the whole, to conclude that in post-biblical Judaism the Old Testament balance between the judgement and destruction of the nations and their salvation shifted to the former” (page 288). This attitude provides the backdrop for the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Jesus challenges a concept of God that would wrongly lead to an evaluation of the concept of neighbourliness along ethnocentric lines. God’s mercy extends beyond the boundaries set up by Jewish ethno-centricity.

- *The sinner and the outcast*

The Old Testament shows concern for the restoration of the wicked, never delighting in their downfall (see *inter alia* Ezk 1:23, 32). In later Jewish writings, however, God is portrayed almost exclusively as rejoicing over the destruction of the wicked based primarily on the lack of ritual purity. These views are dominant in sectarian literature such as that of Qumran, but also features in Ben Sirach and other rabbinic literature. Forbes rejects the view that the destruction of the wicked was simply an “ideological extreme” within rabbinic Judaism. Although there is some evidence that the rabbis may have granted sinners the right to repent, there is little evidence that they showed active concern for sinners. The Sondergut parables, particularly in Luke 15, portray God as rejoicing over the return of the wicked. Forbes concludes that this portrayal has far more in common with the view of God in the Old Testament than with that found in Jewish literature

- *Election*

The covenant is central to Israel’s election belief. Repentance and atonement are identified as crucial components in maintaining the covenant. Forbes, however, shows that for the rabbis repentance always needed to be tangible, and was as such inseparably connected to restitution. This view is countered both by the parable of the Lost Son (Lk 15:11-31) and the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk 18:9-14). God’s forgiveness is shown to rest solely in God’s character, because He is willing to accept all who return to Him, and not on restitution. Furthermore, the rabbis advocated the thought that punishment for Israelites is always temporal and limited. An Israelite sinner therefore still obtains

the opportunity to repent in hell, whereas a Gentile sinner cannot and is eternally doomed. Again the parables cut directly across this view, in particular the parable of the Great Feast (Lk 14:15-24) and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). One's status as an elect Israelite does not protect one from eternal punishment. The parables therefore correct a distorted view of God whereby the election traditions were viewed as the basis for one's acceptance before God, irrespective of personal response.

- *Wealth*

In the Old Testament there is clearly a dual strand of teaching regarding wealth. The one is that wealth is a blessing from God, the other contains severe warnings against the dangers inherent in wealth. These two strands remain in tension with one another, also in rabbinic literature. Forbes shows that the condemnation of wealth was often directed at wicked opponents, and that amongst the rabbis the belief prevailed that prosperity was a sign of a blessing by God. The Lukan Jesus, however, often portrays the Pharisees as "lovers of money" who will not enter the kingdom of God, which shocked his disciples, because their mindset was that if the rich (those blessed by God) cannot be saved, then who can (cf Lk 18:26)? Parables like the Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-21), the Dishonest Manager (Lk 16:1-8), and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) all confront Jewish prosperity teaching and its associated view of God. Wealth is not necessarily a divine favour; instead, it may undermine concern for the poor and prove to be an obstacle to a believer's following God.

- *Prayer*

Both in the Old Testament and in Jewish literature God is portrayed as being approachable and as answering the requests of his people. However, Forbes highlights two features of prayer missing in the Jewish view of God: (a) God can be approached at any time, not only three times per day, and (b) God is close by, not distant.

Based on his analysis of the Judaic views of God, Forbes argues that Luke's interest in the parables may lie in their view of God in terms of both continuity with the Old

Testament and contrast to the forms of Judaism contemporary with Luke. They all confront a distorted portrait of the God of Old.

Finally, Forbes seeks to determine Luke's rationale for incorporating these parables in his narrative by ascertaining who the audience was to whom Luke wrote, in other words, Luke's community. The audience is explored in Chapter 16, (pages 305-327). Conventional views of the purpose of Luke-Acts are numerous. These include the following: (a) An apology to the Roman state to demonstrate that Christianity is the legitimate fulfilment of Judaism (B S Easton); (b) a defence of Paul (A J Mattill and J Jervell); (c) a defence against Gnosticism (C H Talbert); (d) countering the crises concerning the delay of the parousia (H Conzelmann). Forbes argues that the purpose of the narrative is interrelated with the question of Luke's target audience. Most modern commentators regard the intended recipients of Luke's narrative to be either Gentile or Jewish Christians seeking to clarify their position in relationship to Judaism. In that case the parables perform primarily an *apologetic* function by helping to legitimise Luke's argument that the Christian faith is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises. However, Forbes, with special reference to J Nolland, argues for a Gentile, non-Christian audience. This implies that, as Luke makes extensive use of Old Testament patterns, the audience needed to be acquainted with the Israelite faith. Based primarily on the interest shown in Acts in God-fearers (see Lk 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 17:4, 17: 18:7), in particular the role played by Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch, Forbes argues that "Theophilus" was most probably a God-fearer as well. As a Godfearer he is no stranger to the Israelite faith, nor to the Christian Gospel, but still stands at the crossroads. On the one hand, he is offered Christianity as the fulfilment of Judaism, that is a version of Judaism that embraces him in his Gentile identity. On the other hand, there are his Jewish friends who view Christianity as a dangerous perversion of their heritage. Luke's purpose would then be to invite Theophilus to compare the views of God held by Jesus' opponents with the portrait of God presented by Jesus. In doing so, he hopes that Theophilus will recognise that Jesus truly mirrors the God of the Old Testament, leave the synagogue and convert to the Christian faith. It is here, Forbes asserts, that the parables play a crucial role. Through them Luke hopes to present a contrast to some of the distortions of the contemporary Judaic vision of God. As such both the narrative of

Luke as a whole, and the parables in particular, serve not an apologetic but rather an *evangelistic* function.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Forbes's book makes a valuable contribution to Lukan research. Its value lies not so much in his exposition of the parables, as in his attempt to synthesize the themes that resonate throughout the parables into a unified whole. *The God of Old* which, according to Forbes, constitutes this unified whole, provides a strong challenge to conventional Israelite views on God. It does, however, remain questional, as Forbes advocates, whether one can analyse each parable individually on its own merit without forcing it into a preconceived mould. Invariably the macro-text of Luke's narrative (including its socio-historical context, which is largely ignored by Forbes) provides a framework within which the parables are interpreted. Interpretation is a matter of continuous engagement and interaction between the whole and its parts, and the parts and the whole.

A surprising aspect of Forbes's work is his emphasis on parables as allegory and his rejection of metaphor. Both figures of speech point to realities beyond itself. The added value of metaphor, however, is its aptness to challenge and to subvert fixed views of reality by the juxtaposition of dissimilar entities. Awareness of this could have contributed greatly to Forbes's attempt to show how Luke challenges conventional Israelite perceptions on God.