

**Cellars, wages and gardens:
Luke's accommodation for
middle-class Christians**

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Abstract

The Gospel of Luke has been described as having 'more material from the tradition on the question of justice for the poor and downtrodden than any other evangelist.' Yet Luke also addresses the situation of the rich and powerful, and not always in a critical fashion. So there is an ambiguity within the gospel, which has not received sufficient attention from the scholarly world. Using redaction criticism, I intend to show that the presentation of Jesus in Luke is no closer to the socio-political situation of Jesus' time than that in Matthew or Mark. Indeed, the purpose of the gospel may be to explain how a message of significance to wealthy Romans came to arise in such unlikely circumstances as rural Palestine.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Luke opens with an august address to 'most excellent Theophilus'. The appellation leads one to believe that the addressee is a member of the ruling elite (see further Fitzmyer 1981:300; Robbins 1991:320-323). Certainly, there is nothing in the opening sentences to suggest a concern for the marginalized members of society, the poor, the women and the despised Samaritans. Yet the gospel is said

to resound with sentiments of concern for these very groups. Kenneth Bailey (1980: 59) writes:

The question of justice for those who cry out seeking it is an important concern of many biblical writers from Amos onward. Luke himself has more material from the tradition on the question of justice for the poor and down-trodden than any other evangelist. Early in Luke Mary expresses joy at the exaltation of those of low degree (Luke 1:52). A number of the parables offer hope for the rich (cf The Great Banquet; Lazarus and the Rich Man). Luke 4:17, along with many other references, may be cited.

The purpose of this article is to question the claim by Bailey (1980:59) that Luke has 'more material from the tradition on the question of justice for the poor and down-trodden than any other evangelist'. By means of a redaction critical study, I will attempt to show that Luke's concern for the poor and oppressed is no greater than that found in the other gospels. Furthermore, what concern he shows is offset by his ideological commitment to Roman rule and government.

2. THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF LUKE

Lucan scholarship has tended to accept one of two scenarios. On the one hand, scholars like Bailey (1980) and Cassidy (1978) present Luke as 'the gospel for the poor', while Matthew is perceived to be 'urban, well-to-do, educated, and...anticharismatic' (Smith 1983:451). On the other hand, a minority of scholars (Karris 1978 and most recently Robbins 1991) have argued that that Luke's presentation has been adapted, either as an apology for Christianity or as a gift for a wealthy patron.

Richard Cassidy (1978, 1987) has devoted a considerable amount of his writing to the social and political concerns of Luke in the gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. He presents a reasonably balanced depiction of Luke in that he speaks both of Luke's concern for the poor and his concern for the rich (Cassidy 1978:24). Indeed, Jesus frequently passes critical comment upon the material desires of the latter (Cassidy 1978:24-33). Thus Cassidy recognises the basic tension which exists within the gospel, with regard to the rich and poor. This tension may indicate that Luke's own social interests are at odds with some of the material which he has inherited from the tradition (so Mealand 1981:16-20).

2.1 The poor

Cassidy divides his consideration of the social stance of Jesus, according to Luke, into a number of subsections, beginning with Jesus' concern for the poor.

- * Mary sings in praise of a God, who has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble (lit oppressed). He has filled the hungry with good things and sent away the rich empty-handed (Lk 1:52f).
- * Jesus, at the beginning of his mission speaks of his task: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favourable year of the Lord' (Lk 4:18).
- * Later Jesus addresses the disciples with the following words: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied...' (Lk 6:20f). 'But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry' (Lk 6:24f).

There is no doubt that the tradition that Luke has inherited voices a concern for the poor but as we move through the chapters of Acts, the poor and oppressed disappear (Cassidy 1987:21-38). Cassidy (1987:24) notes with some surprise that the word πτωχός does not appear once in Acts, although it was used nine times in the gospel.

2.2 Non-Jews in the ministry of Jesus

Secondly Cassidy (1978:20-33) draws attention to the extension of Jesus' ministry into the domain of the Samaritans (Lk 17:11-19) and the gentiles (Lk 7:1-10; 8:26-33). What is interesting is the fact that Luke leaves out the story of Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30; see Cassidy 1978:142f n17). Fitzmyer (1981: 190) undermines Cassidy's point when he argues that there is nevertheless 'no full-fledged mission of Jesus into gentile territory as in Mark or Matthew'. Did such a mission complicate Luke's presentation or was it simply missing from his version of Mark? Very little of Mark chapters six and seven occur in Luke, so the latter may be the correct answer, but otherwise the silence is ominous.

2.3 Women in the ministry of Jesus

Cassidy (1978:24) also refers to Luke's emphasis on the role of women in the ministry of Jesus. From the birth narratives to the mention of the wealthy women who support Jesus' mission (Lk 8:3), Luke lays the basis for the role that women like Priscilla (Ac 18) and Lydia (Ac 16), will play in the growth of the church.

Once again, a note of warning should be sounded here. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:402) writes: 'Luke does not know of any appearances of the risen Jesus to women. His androcentric redaction attempts in a subtle way to disqualify the women as resurrection witnesses.'

How curious indeed that Luke, who apparently elevates women to a position of equality in the church, leaves out this important detail. Once again one might suggest that his sources did not contain this item of information (cf Mk 16:8). So we need to be careful not to build too much on an argument from silence. But Fiorenza's caution should not be dismissed too easily. She has expressed her dissatisfaction with the traditional interpretation of Luke as pro-women. Perhaps instead of speaking of Luke's concern with women generally, we should speak of his desire to promote the role of women as potential supporters and benefactors of the Christian gospel.

2.4 The two horizons of Luke

The tradition inherited by Luke certainly depicted Jesus' concern with the poor, women and probably the gentiles. But Luke's use of this tradition is ambiguous, as we have already seen. We sense that there are two worlds coming together in the gospel. First there is the world of Galilee, and the peasants who followed Jesus. But beyond that world, we encounter the shadow of another world where Luke's own social interests intrude upon the gospel. A world in which oppression is no threat, where hunger is an unlikely possibility and in which homes with gardens, cellars, banquets and guest lists are common. Wealth is an asset to the gospel, rather than an hindrance, and concern for the poor is expressed in monetary terms, rather than in countering oppression. We shall now attempt to sketch something of the textual basis for our understanding of this 'hidden' world of Luke.

3. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LUKE'S SOCIAL CONCERN

To what extent is Luke's presentation of Jesus a faithful rendition of his sources? This is a question posed by Cassidy (1978:86) at the conclusion of his book, and this will dominate our own study of the gospel.

Popular belief has it that Matthew has softened the concern of Jesus for the poor and oppressed, and so made his gospel more acceptable to middle class Christians. In particular, his rendering of the blessing of Jesus on the poor as 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (Mt 5:3), has encouraged this view. In comparison with Luke's rather blunt 'Blessed are the poor' (Lk 6:20), followed by 'Woe to you who are rich' (Lk 6:24), Matthew appears to be catering for an audience other than the literal poor. Indeed Robert Smith (1983:447) describes Matthew's community as 'affluent Christian Jews who probably belonged to upper-class society'.

My own work on Matthew (Domeris 1987) and his portrayal of Jesus' social concern, has led me to a very different position. Indeed, I think there is evidence to show that the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel is as concerned for the marginalized people of his time as the Jesus of Luke's Gospel. Moreover, I have found that on several occasions Matthew renders the social, political and economic implications of Jesus' teaching more clearly than does Luke. For this reason I have decided to focus on the differences between Matthew and Luke, using Mark and the Gospel of Thomas as reference points along the way. We commence with a study of the enemies of Jesus as depicted by Matthew and Luke.

3.1 Jesus' historical enemies

Matthew not only preserves Mark's references to the Sadducees and Pharisees as the enemies of Jesus (e.g. Mt 22:23 following Mk 12:18) but he also refers to these same groups when he uses his own material (Mt 16:1-12). In Luke, the antagonism is not as obvious, until just before the trial of Jesus (Lk 20:27). So Luke has 'the multitudes' (Lk 3:7; cf Mt 3:7) or 'a certain lawyer' (Lk 10:25) or 'lawyers' (νομικοί; cf Lk 11:45-52) and the sense of conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, specifically the Pharisees and Sadducees, is less than that found in Matthew and Mark. The following examples illustrate something of the trends found in the two gospels.

3.1.1 The brood of vipers

In Matthew 3:7 Pharisees and Scribes come to John the Baptist to be baptized and are met with a stinging rebuke: 'You brood of vipers!' In contrast, Luke has the impersonal 'multitudes' coming to be met with the same rebuke. Which is the original Q reading? Marshall (1978:139) argues in favour of the Lucan version, on the basis of the general nature of the verses that follow (Lk 3:10-14).

Fitzmyer (1981:467) begins by suggesting that it is almost impossible to decide between the two versions, but on the basis of the form of address 'brood of vipers' it

is 'easier to see the Matthean audience as the more original'. Certainly such a polemic, if removed from the oppressive structures of the Sanhedrin and the temple hierarchy (see Pixley 1983:381-382), hardly makes sense. The judgement uttered by John the Baptist (Mt 3:10; Lk 3:9) is surely against the Jewish leaders and not the people as a whole. Presumably the day of wrath (Mt 3:7) is the destruction of the temple in 70 A D. The imagery of fire is drawn from Malachi 4:1, which was directed in part against the priesthood of Jerusalem (cf Mt 3:1-4).

Luke's use of the singular ὄχλος (crowd or multitude) and the plural ὄχλοι is 'baffling' (Fitzmyer 1981:467), because there appears to be no logic in his use or disuse of the term. Most often, however, it designates simply 'the anonymous audience that witnesses the ministry of both John and Jesus...the Lucan use of the word suits his general stress on the popular, universal reaction to the ministry of both John and Jesus' (Fitzmyer 1981:467). In Luke 12:56, the crowds are accused of hypocrisy, while in the Matthean parallel, it is the Pharisees and Sadducees that come to test Jesus who are rebuked (Mt 16:1-4). The two versions are not verbally so close that one may conclude that the same source was in use (Fitzmyer 1985:999), but the tendency of the two evangelists is still noticeable.

3.1.2 The woes

Matthew devotes a considerable section (Mt 23) to a scathing attack on the Scribes and Pharisees. The material obviously comes from Q (Fitzmyer 1985:943), for Luke has parallels to five of the seven woes. But when we examine the content of the Lucan woes, we find that they are all much shorter than the Matthean parallels (Lk 11:37-52; cf Mt 23:1-39). Luke divides his attack between the Pharisees (Mt 23:37-44) and the lawyers (Mt 23:45-52), with three woes addressed to each. This 2x3 pattern should be ascribed to Luke's redaction (Fitzmyer 1985:943). What is particularly striking is the Lucan setting found in Luke 11:37. Jesus is invited by a Pharisee to share a meal, and the controversy arises out of Jesus's failure to wash before the meal. Marshall (1978:491) argues that this is the original Q setting and that Matthew has used a Marcan setting (Mk 12:38-40). Fitzmyer (1985:944), on the other hand, thinks it unlikely that Jesus would have attacked his host on the occasion of a dinner.

The differences between Matthew and Luke, and the contrasting interpretations of scholars like Marshall and Fitzmyer, indicate the extreme difficulty of using the Q source as a guide to the Lucan redaction. However certain trends have emerged. All in all, Luke does not pay much attention to the friction between Jesus and the leaders of his time. Matthew, on the other hand, is much more specific than either

Luke or Mark about the intrigues of the Scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees (cf Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-37). This does not, on its own, mean that Matthew's version is more authentic. Indeed the focus on the Pharisees, found also in John's gospel, may reflect the situation at the end of the first century, when Pharisaism was dominant (Pixley 1983:391). We should first examine the trial of Jesus before we move towards any conclusion.

3.2 The trial of Jesus

The prophecy concerning the death of the Son of Man in Matthew and Mark reads 'the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the gentiles...' (Mt 20:18b, 19a; Mk 10:33b). Luke leaves out the reference to the Jewish leaders and has only, 'he will be delivered to the gentiles' (Lk 18:32a). The absence of the reference to the Jewish trial is not accidental, as we shall see, but is a deliberate part of the Lucan redaction (see the detailed discussion by Walaskay 1983:38-49). The Jewish leaders may have rejected Jesus (Lk 9:22; cf Mk 8:31), but they did not condemn him to death.

3.2.1 Jesus before the Sanhedrin

The chief priests and Pharisees, according Matthew, try to arrest Jesus (Mt 21:46a). In Luke they connive to 'deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor' (Lk 20:20b). Where Matthew and Mark describe the desperate attempts of the Sanhedrin to find false evidence against Jesus (Mt 26:59-68; Mk 14:55-65), Luke passes over the whole incident in silence. Luke even removes the verdict of the Sanhedrin, recorded by both Mark and Matthew, namely that Jesus is deserving of death (Mk 14:64; Mt 26:66). In effect, Luke has changed a Jewish trial into nothing more than a hearing, a prelude to the Roman trial. Finally, for the blindfolding and mockery of Jesus (which Mk 14:65 and Mt 26:67f blame on the Sanhedrin), Luke 22:63-65 blames the guards who hold him, before he enters the Sanhedrin.

3.2.2 Jesus before Pilate and Herod

Luke introduces a series of political accusations on the part of what he calls the council of elders (Lk 23:2), which forms a prelude to Jesus' trial before Pilate. The rest of the chapter contains the twin trials before Herod and Pilate, culminating in accord between the two men (Lk 23:12) and the double verdict of not guilty (Lk 23:

14-15). Pilate's word carries the full weight of the Roman legal system – Jesus is not guilty! The wonder of Pilate recorded in the other gospels (Mt 27:14; Mk 15:5), falls far short of Luke's emphatic pronouncement of Jesus' innocence (Lk 23:14). Later Paul's trial will follow a similar path (Walaskay 1983:50-63), in spite of the strong likelihood that Paul did defy the Jewish law on gentiles in the sacred temple precincts.

3.2.3 The verdict

Luke proceeds to describe how no less than three times Pilate attempts to have Jesus released (Lk 23:16, 20, 22). The reader is left in no doubt as to the mind of Pilate. Still, the voice of the anonymous crowd prevails (Lk 23:23). So in the end, the responsibility for the death of Jesus descends upon a faceless mob or possibly (in our opinion less likely) the Jewish leaders carry the full blame (so Walaskay 1983: 44; Cassidy 1978:70f). Both Matthew and Mark attribute the anger of the crowd to the work of the Jewish leaders (Mt 27:20; Mk 15:11), but Luke is silent about the crowd's motivation. This is consistent with Luke's attempt to remove all power and authority from the Jewish leaders and to present a picture of the wise, mediating authority of the Roman governor (cf Luke 20:20 – 'the rule and authority of the governor'). A similar pattern is discernible throughout the book of Acts. The reader is left with a sense of the irrational attempts of certain Jews to cause trouble, which is met by the responsible efforts of the Romans: '...to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters' (Lk 23:14).

Luke's exonerates Pilate, even to the extent of having Herod's soldiers dress up Jesus (Lk 23:11), rather than Pilate's men (Mt 27:27-31). He leaves us with the sense that Jesus is tried fairly but to no avail. Ultimately, as so often in Acts (e.g. with the death of Stephen and the attempt on Paul's life at Ephesus – Ac 7, 19), the lynch law prevails. This stands in sharp contrast to the carefully planned and executed work of the Jewish leaders revealed in the accounts in Matthew and Mark.

The Jewish leaders emerge in Luke as a group of people who have an irrational hatred for Jesus, but are largely powerless to do anything about it. Pilate and Herod, on the other hand, who have real power prefer not to abuse it. The blame for Jesus' death is borne by an anonymous crowd. Finally, it is left to a Roman soldier to confirm the innocence of Jesus (Lk 23:47).

3.2.4 Luke's political focus: Roman and not Jewish

The conclusion which comes out of this study of the trial of Jesus, is that the real political focus in Luke is in support of the Romans rather than the Jewish authorities. In spite of Cassidy's arguments to the contrary (1978:77-86), Jesus is not portrayed as a threat to the Romans. Rather Jesus and his followers (in Ac) are consistently exonerated of any blame for the trouble which dogs their path, by no less than a progression of eminent Romans.

Luke's interest in Roman judicial procedure, evidenced in the Gospel and in Acts and his projection of the fairness of that system, is striking. Indeed one might justly question whether law and not medicine was the occupation of the evangelist. This would account at least partly for the emphases of his writings. His lack of interest in the details of the Jewish system, reveals more than the concerns of a gentile audience. It shows a lack of appreciation for the socio-political focus of Jesus' mission, and an undermining of power of the Jewish authorities. We are left without a sense of the exploitation of the temple hierarchy and therefore of the real enemies of Jesus. The silence is eloquent!

3.3 Rich and poor

What then of Luke's apparent concern with poverty and wealth? Luke's seeming concern for the poor is well documented (e g Karris 1978; Esler 1987:164-200), as also his criticism of the rich. We have already made reference to Luke's version of the beatitude, 'Blessed are the poor' (Lk 6:20) which is then contrasted with Matthew's 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (Lk 5:3 – e g Smith 1983:450). Luke is thus seen to be the one concerned with literal poverty, while Matthew has apparently spiritualized the words of Jesus (Esler 1987:168; Cassidy 1978:23). However, my own studies (Domeris 1987, 1990) do not bear this out.

3.3.1 Poor in spirit or oppressed in spirit

A study of the Hebrew Old Testament's use of the term spirit רִיב in a construct form with various adjectives (e g 1 Sm 1:15 'pained in spirit') shows that invariably it implies a negative sense of anxiety or crisis or conflict (Domeris 1987:57-61). What Matthew 5:3 intends is not the spiritualization of poverty, but the dehumanizing effects of poverty, the loss of self esteem, the lack of self worth. Matthew has therefore extended the sense of poverty to include those people who have been stripped both of their material wealth and of their sense of dignity. He thus shows his appreciation not only of the physical effects of oppression, but also of the psychological ef-

fects. Thus, to be poor in spirit in a culture of honour and shame, is to be stripped of honour and so to be a person shamed.

3.3.2 Meek or poor?

In the same series of blessings (Mt 5:5), Matthew quotes Jesus as saying 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth'. This is a quotation from Psalm 37:11. Literally the verse says 'The poor and the context describes the oppression of the poor at the hand of the rich. The people at Qumran applied the same verse to themselves, as descriptive of their own sense of oppression (4QPs 37:9-11). The promise in Matthew 5:5, if we followed the Hebrew text, would be that the very people who are poor and oppressed will inherit not the earth (which would be ארץ) but ארץ ישראל or the land of Israel. The Greek used by Matthew follows the LXX and uses πραεῖς which can mean either 'meek' or 'those made meek' (Liddell & Scott 1940:1459), and which carries over from the Hebrew the sense of 'those oppressed or poor'. Also in line with the LXX, Matthew uses not κόσμος, as the English would lead one to believe, but γῆ for land. So the oppressed, and not the wealthy Sadducees, will be heirs of the land of Israel, in the time of God's jubilee!

3.3.3 Hungry for righteousness or for justice?

Matthew describes people hungry and thirsty for the sake of righteousness (Mt 5:6). Luke, in contrast, speaks simply of the hungry. Surely here Matthew has undercut the direct economic implications of the words of Jesus? I think that one has to live within sight and sound of oppression to understand Matthew's amplification of Jesus' words. It is only when one encounters people who in their search for freedom from oppression, hunger and thirst for justice, that one realizes the word 'righteousness' is totally inadequate as a means to render the power of the Greek δίκαιος. The burning desire of the starving people is for justice! Indeed justice is the usual rendering of δικαιοσύνη (Liddell & Scott 1940:429). So here and elsewhere Matthew shows himself to be in touch with the reality of the Palestinian situation and the harsh reality of Roman oppression (see Domeris 1990:71-73).

3.3.4 Luke spiritualizes the word of Jesus

The notion that Matthew spiritualizes the words of Jesus, while Luke renders the literal words of his sources, is not borne out by a thoroughgoing comparison of the two gospels. There are occasions when Luke has the more difficult version of Q,

such as in his rendering of Jesus' words on hating one's family (Lk 14:26; cf Mt 10:37; for other examples, see Esler 1987:165-169). But there are several instances of the reverse. For example, where Matthew has, 'I have not come to bring peace but a sword' (Mt 10:34) Luke has 'I have come to bring dissension' (Mt 12:51).

In the Lord's prayer, Matthew 7:11 speaks in economic terms of the forgiveness of debts (Mt 6:12), which Luke renders as 'forgive us our sins' (Mt 11:4). Later Matthew speaks of God giving us 'good things', and Luke of giving 'the Holy Spirit' (11:13). In such examples, the economic and material dimension in Luke falls away, to be replaced by a spiritual interpretation of Jesus' words.

3.3.5 Luke plays down conflict

Further features of Luke's style include simplifying difficult statements of Jesus (Lk 16:16; cf Mt 11:12). He plays down sharp contrasts (Lk 13:20; cf Mk 10:31), and in particular the conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, as we have seen. He does the same for the conflict between Jesus and the disciples. So where Matthew and Mark have Jesus rebuke Peter as 'Satan', Luke omits the incident entirely (Lk 9:20-22; cf Mk 8:33).

To suggest that all these changes are simply the result of Luke's gentile audience, is to miss the point. Luke's audience is not only gentile, it includes those who are also cultered, refined and probably wealthy. Luke himself writes from the position of the artisan class (Robbins 1991:320) and is essentially 'upward looking' in his orientation (Robbins 1991:323; Moxnes 1988:165). We turn now to a consideration of what may be termed the Lucan perspective.

4. THE LUCAN PERSPECTIVE

The comparison of the synoptic gospels and the gospel of Thomas is also valuable for establishing the perspective of Luke. This perspective, we believe, is more consistent with that of a wealthy Greek or Roman than with a poor or middle class Palestinian. Jesus, in Luke, is clothed in the finery of Roman elegance, appearing as refined and genteel and in other ways as an educated philosopher.

4.1 Banquets

Jesus' debates with the Pharisees take place during meals. Indeed, three times Jesus dines at the home of a Pharisee (Lk 7:36; 11:37; 14:1), and a debate ensues. One is reminded of the mealtime conversations reported in the letters of Pliny. The New

American Standard Version renders δειπνον in Luke 14:12 as 'to dine', and there is indeed that very sense of old-world elegance. The term δοχή is used in the New Testament only by Luke (5:29; 14:13). The English equivalent is reception, feast or banquet. The term is used by the LXX in Genesis 21:8, 26:30 and in the book of Esther (Est 1:3; 5:4, 5 passim). Levi, according to Luke, gives a grand reception for Jesus (Lk 5:29). Matthew speak more simply of Jesus 'reclining in the house' (Mt 9:10; cf Mk 2:17). Here lies the divide between the world of Luke, with its elegance, and the world of Matthew and Mark, which is still in touch with the realities of Palestinian rural existence.

4.2 Luke's audience

The purpose behind Luke's presentation of Jesus is shaped by both his own social class and the social class of his audience. The following examples illustrate this point.

4.2.1 The lifestyle of the audience: Cellars not bushels

Luke's audience is indicated in the kind of projects found in the parables. Luke refers to building projects (Lk 14:28-30), going to war (Lk 14:31f), astute stewards who are accustomed to 'throwing a banquet' (δοχή – Lk 14:13) and to seats of honour at weddings (Lk 14:8). Here, as elsewhere, Luke makes the sayings of Jesus appropriate to his audience. The lamp is not to be put under a bushel (so Mt 5:15) or in a cellar or κρύπτη (Lk 11:33). The Gospel of Thomas 33:2 has 'or in a secret place' which accounts in part for Luke's version. κρύπτη does carry this general sense as well as the more specific sense of a cellar (Liddell & Scott 1940:1000). If Luke intended 'cellar' rather than just a secret place, then this would betray his social status.

4.2.2 Blows not slaps

Luke speaks of being struck on the cheek (Lk 6:29; but cf Mt 5:39b), ignoring the implications of the insult implicit in being struck on the right cheek (Lapide 1986: 121f; Domeris 1987:48f). No-one with an experience of the brutality of structural oppression would leave out such a detail.

4.2.3 Materialism not starvation

Matthew speaks about being anxious about food, drink and clothes and a picture of the hand-to-mouth existence of the rural peasant or poor city artisan comes to mind (Mt 6:25). Luke parallels this exactly (Mt 12:22). But when we consider the nature of Luke's parable of the wealthy farmer, which precedes this exhortation (Lk 12:16-21), we realise that his real concern is to warn the rich against the dangers of materialism.

4.2.4 Others but not sinners

According to Matthew 9:10, Jesus dines with 'tax collectors and sinners', or ἁμαρτωλοῖ, implying people of bad character (Liddell & Scott 1940:77). Presumably Matthew means the lower classes including the marginalized members of society, prostitutes and criminals (the ἵεροδουλοὶ of the Pharisees). Luke has 'tax collectors and others' (Lk 5:29).

4.2.5 Wages not rations

Matthew speaks of a labourer deserving his food (τροφή, implying what is his due or rations Mt 10:10b). Luke has a labourer deserving of his wages (μισθός or what is his reward Lk 10:7b). So we have two different economic theories here. The first is that of the payment which a person needs to survive. The second is that of wages which are the regular reward of labour. Such is the difference between survival and comfortable living.

4.2.6 Gardens not fields

In the parable of the mustard seed, where the other gospels have 'field' (Mt 13:31), 'ground' (Mk 4:31) and 'tilled soil' (G Th 20), Luke has 'garden' (Lk 13:19). This typifies Luke's approach, as the fields of rural Palestine become the gardens of the Roman aristocracy.

4.2.7 Masters not servants

In his depiction of the characters in the parables, Luke often comes close to a self-portrait. So we hear the steward protest: 'I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg' (Lk 16:3b). Rich farmers, prodigal heirs, and unrighteous judges

join together in the unique Lucan material, which leans evidently towards the social setting of his audience.

Luke even details the duties of a servant (Lk 17:7-10) as working all day in the fields, preparing a meal and serving his/her master, before partaking of a meal him/herself. All this without even a 'thank you'. Then later to his audience, he says 'Be on your guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation [κραιπάλη] and drunkenness and the worries of life' (Lk 21:34). This sounds more like a scene from a Roman comedy than the words of the Galilean Jesus. One could imagine speaking to a peasant about a Weight-watchers diet.

4.2.8 Prophet but not a revolutionary

We conclude with final differences between Luke and the other two synoptic gospels. Matthew and Mark describe the people crucified with Jesus as being of the order of ληστῆς which carries the sense of revolutionaries (Mt 27:38; Mk 15:27). The same term is used by Josephus in a derogatory fashion to refer to the Jewish revolutionaries of his time (cf Brown 1983:371). Luke prefers the title κακοῦργοι or common thieves (Lk 23:32). Thus Luke distances Jesus from such undesirables as Jewish brigands, like Barabbas (Lk 23:19), for the sake of his Roman audience. Jesus emerges as a wise philosopher and prophet, wrongly accused and acquitted of treason, but a victim in the end of the wrath of a faceless crowd.

5. CONCLUSION

We have seen from our brief study that Luke does alter the picture of the socio-political conflict of Jesus' time. In particular, he takes away much of the sense of economic exploitation and the structural violence exercised by the Jewish leaders, especially the Sadducees. We have reason to think that his concern is less for the poor than for the rich that they should not become prisoners of their material possessions. Indeed, sharing wealth in the promotion of the gospel is the Lucan ideal.

Luke serves the interests of the gospel by making its message relevant to the wealthy Roman elite. In doing so he distances himself and the reader from the Roman oppression of Jesus' time. For that we must read the Gospel of Mark, Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas. Luke is thus something of an enigma. A man familiar with the lifestyle of the Roman aristocracy, yet who sees himself in the line of the Jewish prophets. So he challenges the claims of materialism, like a New Testament Amos. But at the same time he is a prisoner of his own socio-political environment – a captive of an ideology at odds with the liberatory message of Jesus.

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