

14 Luke-Acts. An Unmarried Physician Investigates Jesus' Good News

Luke, one of Paul's companions (Philemon 24), is called "the beloved physician" in the deuterio-Pauline letter to the Colossians (4:14; cf. 2 Timothy 4:11). His two-volume work comprises almost one-fourth of our New Testament (nearly 100 of 400 pages in some editions). Writing ca. 80 AD, Luke utilized Mark as a source but also incorporated much of Jesus' teaching that came from an earlier source (ca. 60 AD) now known as "Q" (from the German "Quelle," source), material common to both Luke and Matthew but not included in Mark. As the only Gentile among the New Testament authors, Luke addresses his work especially toward the more educated sector of the Greco-Roman culture (1:1-4), demonstrating Jesus' significance for all of humanity and especially his solidarity with the poor and oppressed, the vulnerable and physically challenged, women, sexual minorities, and the socially despised. Luke emphasizes the place of prayer in Jesus' life, showing how, in answer to prayer, the Holy Spirit empowers and equips the weak and oppressed to fulfill God's liberating purposes in human history.

1. The Oppressed Poor and Liberating Justice. Lexicological studies easily established Luke's special focus on the beggarly-poor (ptochós, 10 times, plus penichrós, 21:2; but cf. ptochós only five times each in Mark and Matthew; however, the total absence of these words in Acts has raised questions). Of the six uses of ptochós in Luke that do not depend on Mark or Q, five are found in the narrative of the journey to Jerusalem (9:51--19:27; specifically, 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22; 19:8). In addition, 4:18-19 is particular to Luke. After Jesus' baptism Luke gives us this programmatic introduction to Jesus' ministry of liberating justice for the poor and oppressed.¹

“The Spirit of the Liberator is upon me,

because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Liberator’s favor.”

[that is, the Year of Jubilee, Leviticus 25]

Traditional studies presented Luke as the “radical” among the Gospel writers. More recent studies, however, conclude that the source “Q” and Mark reflect the more radical perspective concerning the poor and the oppressed. Few scholars have done justice to Luke’s concern for the “immoral minorities” commonly marginalized by society: prostitutes, tax collectors, etc. (Luke 7:2, 34, 37, 39).

Luke’s strong concentration on the economic dimensions of the gospel is only partly reflected in the results of the lexicological studies of the vocabulary explicitly referring to the poor (cf. Luke 1:51-53; 3:10-14; 6:34-36; 9:58; 11:41; 12:33; 14:12-14, 33). Today this concentration is commonly understood as a response to the situation (in Caesarea/Antioch?) ca. 80 AD of a church relatively poor but faced with an unprecedented influx of more prosperous members and suddenly in danger of succumbing to the “love of money” characteristic of certain Pharisees (16:14).²

Luke addresses a Christian community that is economically upwardly mobile, presenting an extensive account of Jesus’ teachings appropriate for their crisis. Walter Pilgrim analyzed Luke’s teachings concerning riches and poverty, reducing them to three basic categories: (1) total renunciation of riches; (2) warnings against the dangers of riches; and (3) correct use of wealth.³ The example of Zacchaeus (“half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor,” 19:8; cf. 3:10-14) is commonly seen now as Luke’s preferred paradigm for recently converted wealthy

disciples. From Mark's point of view (Mark 10:21, the rich young man of whom Jesus demanded everything) or the perspective of the "Q" source (from itinerant prophets who had left wives, houses, everything), the Zacchaeus paradigm may seem rather lukewarm and shockingly "conservative."

Luke T. Johnson shows how money in Luke frequently has a symbolic function connected with the acceptance or rejection of Jesus himself.⁴ This is logical, since a commitment with Jesus and the poor communities of persecuted disciples many times put all possessions, positions, and human relations at risk. As in the cases of Jews and homosexuals faced with Nazi violence, and that of sexual minorities in many countries today, to publicly reveal yourself can involve risking all that you are and possess.

Luke's Gospel proves particularly helpful in enabling us to discern the relationship between poverty, oppression and God's promised liberating justice. Most recent studies continue to reflect a kind of bondage to elitist Greco-Roman philosophical perspectives and linguistic usage in their efforts to delineate the meaning of justice/"righteousness" in the New Testament.⁵ This classical approach commonly produces only majority propaganda for the "law and order" notion of "righteousness"/justice that seeks to maintain an unjust status quo. However, although the New Testament was written in Greek, the dominant Biblical paradigm of the Exodus suggests that we had best begin with the experience of the oppressed and understand justice as the justice that liberates them from that oppression.

Jesus' parable of the "importunate widow" (Luke 18:1-8) gives us a helpful example of this alternative approach. The judge is described subversively as an oppressor (v. 7, 'adikías, unjust), although society would consider his function as part of the "system of justice." The widow, who may have lost her house through common mechanisms of oppression (20:47), repeatedly presents her demand for liberating justice ("vindicate me," ekdikésón me) from her

oppressor (“adversary, antidikou mou), 18:3; cf. vv. 5, 7-8). As in James 5:1-6, the return of the Son of Man is understood as the decisive expression of God’s liberating justice (Luke 18:6-8). God’s liberating justice responds to the need and cries of the oppressed and involves social vindication from the shame of oppression and poverty.

Jesus’ following parable in Luke then contrasts the prayers of the self-righteous Pharisee with the despised and marginalized tax-collector (18:9-14). Shockingly, the “just” Pharisee returns to his home marginalized by the Liberator God, while the “unjust” tax-collector returns to his household “justified” (18:14)--reminding us that justification in the New Testament commonly implies acceptance of the marginalized in the new inclusive community of Jesus’ followers (--> James, Galatians, Romans).

Luke contains the same number of dik-words as Matthew (28) but the additional 25 uses in Acts makes Luke the New Testament author second only to Paul (114 uses + 25 in the deutero-Pauline and pastoral letters). In Luke-Acts, 19 of the 53 uses involve words with the alpha privative, signifying oppression/injustice. However, in Jesus’ programmatic statement of his liberating ministry (Luke 4:18-19), “oppression” is signified by another term: “having been crushed” (tethrausménous). In Acts, particularly, the verb dikaioun is employed to signify “liberation”: “by [Jesus] everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). When we take our methodological linguistic clues from the Exodus paradigm and begin with the experience of the oppressed, we can see that justice properly understood in the Bible is normally “liberating justice” and justification signifies social vindication for the marginalized and their inclusion in the new community.

2. Women. Luke contains much more material concerning women than the other Gospels: 42 passages, of which 23 are unique to Luke. The rest are taken from Mark or Q, the latter in common with Matthew. Consequently, Luke is traditionally considered the Gospel that

supports women in their struggle for liberation and justice. Nevertheless, some now question whether Luke's intentions are so honorable. Jane Schaberg concludes that Luke seeks to portray passive women as models of submission, women who are thankful, dedicated to prayer, and supporting male leadership.⁶ Many of the women in Luke are poor, and he includes more references to widows than the other Gospels (2:37; 4:25-26; 7:12; 18:3, 5; 20:47; 21:2-3; see chapter on 1 Timothy).⁷

Jane Schaberg points out that Luke omits the account in Mark (7:24-30) where a Gentile woman wins an argument with Jesus, nor does he include a narrative like John 4, where the Samaritan woman begins a ministry with Gentiles. Additionally, Jesus' genealogy in Luke (3:23-38) stretches back to Adam, taking in all of humanity, but it does not include women as does the genealogy in Matthew (1:1-16). Luke never refers to women as "disciples" and in fact speaks of "disciples" as those who abandon their wives to proclaim the Gospel (Luke 14:26; 18:29). In the parable of the Great Dinner, only in Luke's version do we read that a man gives the excuse, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come" (14:20). The prosperous women who accompany Jesus help cover the expenses of the male disciples but do not exercise a ministry of their own (8:1-3). And in Acts (see below), where Luke's own perspective is clearer, material on women is much less than in the Gospel.

On the other hand, Luke frequently manifests a certain justice in favor of women with his literary technique of presenting matched narratives that speak of men, followed by accounts that speak of women: a man sows a mustard seed, and a woman uses yeast (13:18-21, source Q); a man looks for the lost sheep, and a woman searches for a lost coin (15:4-10; also see 7:12 with 8:42, 13:10-17 with 14:1-6, 6:12-19 with 8:1-3). Although John describes a less passive Mary and Martha (John 11:1-45; 12:1-8), many have seen in Luke's presentation (Luke 10:38-42) a

Mary, seated and listening at the feet of Jesus, who claims the male privilege of a theological education instead of remaining marginalized with oppressive domestic duties.

3. The Marginalized and Sexual Minorities. In fact, our interpretation of Luke's perspective on women must depend largely on texts where the woman represents some sexual minority. Traditional patriarchal "families" are conspicuous by their absence in Luke's Gospel. And even if we accept the traditional interpretation of Jesus' birth as virginal, Mary stands out as a sexual minority, an unwed mother threatened with the death penalty according to Mosaic Law for having a child that did not belong to Joseph.

Only Luke and Matthew narrate Jesus' birth, and traditionally Luke has been read as agreeing with Matthew as affirming Jesus' conception and birth by a Mary who is virgin. Luke's words in 1:35-37, however, are not explicit and the future verbs leave open the possibility that Joseph was the father.⁸ Nevertheless, the exclusion of Joseph as father in 3:23 would seem to confirm Mary's sexual minority status, but without explicitly ruling out other paternity. Even with the traditional doctrine of the Virgin Birth, we are left with a Mary who ends up a kind of "single mom" and a Jesus who is legally illegitimate, a "bastard" in the discriminatory legal categories of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jane Schaberg has argued that Mary was not so much "humble", but "humiliated" (Greek tapeinosis, Luke 1:48), sexually assaulted (raped), perhaps by a soldier in the occupying Roman army.⁹ If Mary had been raped by a Roman soldier that would better explain her militant and prophetic words against the oppressors of her people (Luke 1:51-53). The other women in Luke 1-2 may be more traditional and somewhat passive (Elizabeth, John's mother [1:23-25, 39-45]; Anna, the widow prophet in the temple [2:36-38])--but not Mary, the indignant militant! Such an interpretation of Luke also would fit well with Matthew's words about the sword that

would penetrate Mary's heart (2:35) and with the bloody account in Matthew of the slaughter of the children by Herod's troops (Matthew 2:16-18).

Churches traditionally have interpreted the virginal womb as a parallel with the resurrected Jesus' empty tomb. But a triumph of God's Spirit, extracting a "holy" child rather than an "illegitimate" child, from the experience of rape could be more appropriate in a Gospel that shows us how Jesus' crucifixion ended in his resurrection. One might even argue that an incarnation redemptive for the cosmos, beginning with an imperialist soldier's rape of an innocent virgin, is a greater miracle than the traditional notion of a virgin birth (and more appropriate in a Gospel that concludes with a resurrection preceded by a crucifixion). Such an interpretation would leave only Matthew (1:20-23) narrating a virginal birth. But Matthew especially may include various elements of midrash (edifying, but non-historical homiletical elaborations; --> Matthew).

Luise Shottroff, however, although acknowledging significant insights from Shaberg's studies (for instance, that the Greek term for humiliation in Luke 1:48 may refer to sexual humiliation such as rape), insists that Mary's humiliation rather involves the oppression and poverty of Palestinian Jews under the Roman empire and her oppression as a woman in a patriarchal culture: "Mary trusted that she would bring a child into this [patriarchal] world without the involvement of a man and that this child was to bring God's indestructible reign to the people of Israel (1:33)...[Mary and Elizabeth] beat the drum of God's world revolution....The two women prophetically herald God's world revolution, God's option for the poor, which begins as an option for Mary and for women (1:42, 48)."¹⁰

Understandably, traditional white male scholarship, whether defending or critiquing the traditional doctrine of the Virgin Birth, continues to ignore the significant insights generated in the feminist debate.¹¹ Even evangelical scholars, however, increasingly acknowledge that the

Virgin Birth “probably does not deserve to rank among the top five fundamentals of the faith.”¹²

Whether she was a prostitute is now seriously questioned, but Luke names Mary Magdalene as the first evangelist who communicates the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection to the unfaithful male apostles (24:10). Luke then continues to narrate how Jesus appeared, not to a heterosexual couple, but to a pair of men traveling together to their village of Emmaus (24:13-35). The account of Jesus’ anointing is very explicit. This is carried out by Mary (of Bethany) in the other three Gospels and takes place shortly before the crucifixion (Mark 14:3-9; Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-8). However, in Luke (7:36-50) Jesus’ anointing occurs much earlier in the house of Simon, a Pharisee, and it is done by a prostitute (“sinner”). Luke presents this story as an illustration of Jesus’ practice of being “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (7:34), and then immediately names Mary Magdalene among the wealthy women who helped the ministry economically (8:1-3). Women biblicalists, especially, now commonly indignantly reject the traditional identification of Mary Magdalene (8:2) with the prostitute of 7:36-50. However, we must question whether this dogmatic rejection may not reflect a certain prejudice against sexual minorities.¹³

Luke 7:1-10 gives us Luke’s version (// Matt. 8:5-13 [// John 5:46-54?]) of the story about a Roman centurion who asked Jesus to heal his “beloved slave” (7:2). In the light of the common practices of Roman soldiers with their slaves, it is best understood as a sexual relationship. Respecting the couple’s privacy, Jesus heals the slave at a distance without inquiring into the relationship or seeking to break it up. The probability that the centurion’s relationship with his slave included a sexual dimension has been pointed out by various scholars, but this probability has been systematically ignored by heterosexist male advocacy scholarship.¹⁴

Archeologists conclude that Peter’s spacious house in Capernaum stood under the very balcony of the synagogue built by this centurion. If this is true, the presence of gay men on the

threshold of the Vatican has an even longer history than previously supposed! The centurion's story also is one of but two miracle stories where Jesus heals from a distance. The "unclean" Gentile centurion's insistence that he is not worthy to have a famous Jewish rabbi enter his home might well remind us of common humorous efforts to "dedyke the house," classically portrayed in both the original French and later Hollywood versions of *La Cage aux Follies*. Finally, the importance of the story to early followers of Jesus is indicated by the fact that Luke places it immediately after his version of the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps a counterpoint to Moses' 10 plagues leading to the Exodus and the 10 commandments (--> Matthew).

4. Anti-Semitism in Luke? Because Luke was the only non-Jewish author in the New Testament, modern studies after the Nazi Holocaust concern themselves a great deal with those texts which through the centuries have lent themselves to encourage violence against Jews. Luke appears to attribute more guilt for the crucifixion to certain Jews and less to Roman authorities (22:54; 23:23-26; 24:20; cf. 11:47-51; 13:34; 19:39-44). At any rate today it is essential that we keep in mind the danger that such texts represent in powerful churches and in cultures with a history of so much violence against Jews. Such dangers concern Jane Schaberg so much that she suggests we read Luke as a "formidable opponent" and not as an ally.¹⁵ David Tiede, however, points out how Luke maintains a future hope for Israel when the "times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).¹⁶ At least a less simplistic and more dialectic reading of Luke is appropriate, since the Jesus portrayed by Paul's "beloved physician" did not come to seal our minds with narrow dogmas but to open them (Luke 24:45).

Outline

Prologue: most excellent Theophilus, 1:1-4

1 Birth and Hidden Life of John the Baptist and of Jesus, 1:5--2:52

- 1.1 Announcement of John the Baptist's birth, 1:5-25
- 1.2 Annunciation of Jesus' conception, 1:26-38
- 1.3 Visitation and Magnificat of Mary, 1:39-56
- 1.4 Birth and circumcision of John the Baptist, 1:57-66
- 1.5 Benedictus; unknown life of John, 1:67-80
- 1.6 Birth of Jesus, 2:1-21
- 1.7 Presentation and circumcision of Jesus in the temple, 2:22-28
- 1.8 Prophecies of Simeon ("Nunc Dimittis") and of Anna, 2:29-38
- 1.9 Jesus: unknown life (Nazareth); among the doctors, 2:39-52

2 Preparation for Jesus' Ministry, 3:1--4:13

- 2.1 John the Baptist's preaching and imprisonment, 3:1-20
 - Mark 1:2-6, 7-8 } Luke 3:2-4, 15-16; [Q = John 3:7-9, 16-17]
- 2.2 Jesus: baptism, Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22
- 2.3 Jesus' three temptations, 4:2-13 = Q, Mark 1:12-13 } Luke 4:1-2

3 Jesus' Ministry in Galilee, 4:14--9:50

- 3.1 Jesus in Galilee and preaches in Nazareth, Mark 6:1-6a } Luke 4:14-30
- 3.2 A busy Sabbath in Capernaum, Mark 1:21-34 } Luke 4:31-41
- 3.3 Departure from Capernaum, Mark 1:35-39 } Luke 4:42-44

- 3.4 Calling of four disciples, Mark 1:16-20 } Luke 5:1-11
- 3.5 Healings: leper, paralytic, Mark 1:45--2:12 } Luke 5:12-26
- FOUR DISPUTES WITH THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES:
- 3.6 Calling of Levi, meal with his sinner-friends, Mark 2:13-17 } Luke 5:27-32
- 3.7 Dispute with Pharisees and scribes over fasting, Mark 2:18-22 } Luke 5:33-39
- 3.8 The wheat plucked on the Sabbath, Mark 2:23-28 } Luke 6:1-5
- 3.9 Healing of the man with the withered hand, Mark 3:1-6 } Luke 6:6-11
- 3.10 Election of 12 men as apostles, Mark 3:13-19 } Luke 6:12-16
- 3.11 The multitudes follow Jesus, 6:17-19
- 3.12 The Sermon “of the Mount” on the plain, 6:20b-49 = Q // Matthew 5--7
- 3.13 Healing of the centurion’s beloved slave, 7:1-10 = Q
- 3.14 Resurrection of the widow’s son in Nain, 7:11-17
- 3.15 The Baptist’s question and Jesus’ testimony, 7:18-35 = Q
- 3.16 Prostitute pardoned in Pharisee’s house, 7:36-50
- 3.17 Women who aided Jesus’ ministry, 8:1-3
- 3.18 Two parables: the sower and the lamp, Mark 4:1-25 } Luke 8:4-18
- 3.19 De/Reconstruction of the concept of family, 8:19-21
- 3.20 Four miracles: a storm, a demoniac, Jairus, a woman, Mark 4:35-43 } Luke 8:22-56
- 3.21 The sending of the 12, Herod’s reaction, Mark 6:7-11 } Luke 9:1-9
- 3.22 Food for 5,000, Mark 6:35-44 } Luke 9:10-17
- 3.23 Peter’s confession, first announcement of the Passion, Mark 8:27-30 } Luke 9:18-27
- 3.24 The transfiguration, healing of an epileptic, Mark 8:38--9:8 } Luke 9:28-43a
- 3.25 Second announcement of the Passion, Mark 9:30-32 } Luke 9:43b-45
- 3.26 Who is the greatest?, use of Jesus’ name, Mark 9:33-39 } Luke 9:46-50

4 Trip en route to Jerusalem: teachings and miracles, 9:51--19:27

- 4.1 Bad reception in a Samaritan village, 9:51-56
- 4.2 Three requirements of the authentic disciple, 9:57-62 = Q
- 4.3 The mission of the 72, redefinition of "sodomy," 10:2-16 = Q
- 4.4 Return of the 72, privilege of the humble, 10:17-24 = Q
- 4.5 Parable of the Good Samaritan, 10:25-37
- 4.6 Jesus in his favorite home (Martha and Mary), 10:38-42
- 4.7 Prayer: The Lord's Prayer (original version), 11:1-13 [11:2-4, 9-13 = Q]

- 4.8 Jesus, Beelzebul, mute demon, 11:14-26 = Q

- 4.9 Three teachings: new family, Jonah, lamp, 11:27-36; 11:29-36 = Q

- 4.10 Six severe warnings, 11:37--13:9
 - Against the Pharisees and scribes, 11:37-54 [39-52 = Q]
 - Confessing or denying Jesus, 12:2-12 = Q
 - Against the accumulation of riches, 12:13-34
 - Parable of the rich fool, 12:13-21
 - Freed to seek the New Just Order, 12:22-34 = Q
 - The urgency of the times, 12:35-48 [39-48 = Q]
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- 4.11 God's New Order: freedom, justice, 13:10--17:37
 - Freedom of a physically-challenged woman, 13:10-17
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(2) A woman searches for her lost coin, 15:8-10

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Divine justice and human greed, 16:1-31

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Original paradigm (Mark): the young rich man,

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5.2 Temple: non-violent expulsion of exploiters, Mark 11:15-18 } Luke 19:45-48

5.3 Three questions by his oppressors, 20:1-40

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2°, Dishonest political question: tribute to Caesar?, Mark 12:13-17 } Luke 20:20-26

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5.4 Pro-active strategy: Jesus asks about David, Mark 12:35-37 } Luke 20:41-44

5.5 Two teachings about widows (poor and oppressed), Mark, 12:38-44 } Luke 20:45--
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5.6 The coming ruin of the oppressive city (70 AD), Mark 13:1-23 } Luke 21:5-24

5.7 The coming of the Son of Man, Mark 13:24-37 } 21:25-38

6 Conspiracy, judicial trials, and Jesus' death, Luke 22--23

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6.2 The Passover meal, Mark 14:12-17, 22-25 } Luke 22:7-23 (24-30)

6.3 Final teachings, 22:21-38

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6.9 Final action: again before Pilate, Mark 15:6-15 } Luke 23:13-25

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7.2 Male apostles do not believe the women, Luke 24:9-11

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7.6 Last instructions, 24:44-49

7.7 The ascension, 24:50-53

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