

## Luke's Literary Style

### Luke and the Old Testament - A Reflection on the Current State of Lukan Scholarship

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#### A Trend in Commentaries?

As a matter of practical import, I will approach Luke's use of the Old Testament with a view towards applying our findings to Luke's teaching on money. Luke Timothy Johnson and Joel B. Green have written two popular commentaries on Luke and Acts. Johnson, a Roman Catholic, writes for the *Sacra Pagina* commentary series. Green, a Protestant, writes for the NICNT commentary series. Though they come from two very different church traditions, Johnson and Green generally agree on how best to understand Luke. Both scholars see Luke as confronting Hellenistic culture. Hence both commentaries are replete with references to documents about Hellenistic friendship patterns, Hellenistic views of money and the poor, etc.

Recent scholars, including Halvor Moxnes on the social scientific side and Johnson and Green on the literary side, see in Luke's presentation of Jesus an ethic of social justice, almsgiving, and friendship with the poor. They detect in Luke a stylistic literary-rhetorical strategy of portraying the Pharisees to be 'greedy' as a way to woo Hellenistic readers, who considered greed a vice, to Jesus' side. This, they argue, is why Luke calls the Pharisees 'lovers of money' even though they were not historically wealthy as a group *per se*.<sup>1[1]</sup> They argue that Christianity challenged the Roman patronal system of friendship where a lesser protégé served a wealthy patron, a system of relations not unlike that displayed in Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy. Green in particular believes that in Luke's language, Mammon (or Money with a capital M) represents a system of reciprocation where favors now are done in exchange for favors later.<sup>2[2]</sup> Since the poor, the outcast, the low-status sinner, and the weak have much less to offer the more well-to-do in exchange, they were typically ignored and neglected by the rich, the insider, the high-status 'righteous,' and the strong. Mammon as a way of relationship reinforces the division between rich and poor, strong and weak, high status righteous and low status sinner, and therefore, in Green's mind, incurs Jesus' judgment.

This interpretation of Luke is understandably attractive because of the pressing needs of the contemporary world. Christians have been searching for a theological model for the suburban wealthy to assist the rural and urban poor, and for the wealthy nations of the world the struggling ones. Economists suggest that developing nations be forgiven their loans which they took out from first world banks that they cannot repay. Globally, the difference between rich and poor has increased and absolute poverty has spread. The industrialized developed nations are hard pressed to rethink the privilege they have inherited from the colonial period. A new political arrangement, more democratic and participatory, seems in order. Luke's writings are especially timely because of his message of social reversal.

The strength of this view is that there is ample literary and archaeological data from which to draw conclusions. Garnsey and Saller summarize the evidence describing Roman society: 'Three rough categories of exchange relationships can be distinguished for analytical purposes according to the relative social statuses of the men involved (though the dividing lines between them were not clear and were sometimes intentionally obscured by the Romans themselves): patrons and clients, superior and inferior friends (or patrons and protégés), and equal friends.'<sup>3[3]</sup> The Roman philosopher Cicero wrote extensively about friendship in *De Amicitia*. Additionally, Greek works abound detailing the varieties of Hellenistic friendship: equals, friends joined by the common good, friendship between greater and lesser friends, friends who enjoy friendship for its own sake, etc. The Greeks often defined friendship in metaphysical terms like the communion of two souls.<sup>4[4]</sup> This must not be overlooked, but the aspect of economic sharing between friends was also strong. Plato expressed an ideal of sharing between friends

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1 Halvor Moxnes, *Economy of the Kingdom*

2 Joel B. Green, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI), 1997. Green discusses meal etiquette as a social form in Luke 14 (p. 548-563) and 'Kingdom Economics' in Luke 16 (p. 586-610). 'Wealth should be used to welcome another cluster of outsiders, the poor who are incapable of reciprocating with invitations of their own or of helping to advance one's own status.'

3 For references to Roman and Greek forms of relationship, attitudes to the poor, and Luke's interaction with these norms, I am indebted to Gilles Beckaert for his 1996 thesis, *The Literary Unity of Luke 16* (Berkeley, CA) p.17-33. See Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *Roman Empire*, p.148-159; and Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.8. For an example of a patron-client relationship, see Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.55. For an example of a friendship between greater and lesser friends, see Pliny, *Epistles*, 4.17.3 and 9.13.6. For a discussion of the differences between Hellenistic friendship and Jewish friendship, see the article by Gustav Stahlin on *philos* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 9:156-159.

4 Diogenes, Aristotle, and Euripides contended that a friend is 'a single soul dwelling in two bodies.' Diogenes, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers in Ten Books*, 5.20. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.8.1168B. Euripides, *Orestes*, 1046.

through a common statement put into the mouth of Socrates: 'friends have all things in common.'<sup>5</sup>[5] While this statement is found throughout Hellenistic literature predating Plato, Plato was perhaps the first to say that this friendship, if widely practiced, would bring about the highest form of the polity.<sup>6</sup>[6] Though it is unclear how often the Greeks actually did this, sharing all things in common was clearly an ideal. Friendship, while having many components, is certainly fostered by equality.<sup>7</sup>[7] Diogenes said, 'By friendship they mean a common use of all that has to do with life, wherein we treat our friends as we treat ourselves.' Concerning Pythagoras, Diogenes says, 'He was the first to say, 'Friends have all things in common' and 'Friendship is equality'; indeed, his disciples did put all their possessions into one common stock.'<sup>8</sup>[8] And while this probably only meant sharing with people of one's own social rank, this ideal seems to have been strategically appropriated by Luke in his description of the early church sharing all things regardless of social rank.

Greek and Roman literature is also replete with attitudes towards the poor. The Greeks felt no obligation towards the poor and viewed their condition as their own fault. Plautus' statement is typical: 'He does the beggar but a bad service who gives him meat and drink, for what he gives is lost, and the life of the poor is but prolonged to their own misery.'<sup>9</sup>[9] Classical Greek originally did not have a term for 'alms' or 'gift to the poor'; a Greek term emerged only as the result of Hellenistic Judaism using the Greek language.<sup>10</sup>[10] Greek and Latin literature of the first three centuries C.E. contains little to suggest that the rich felt obliged to do anything for the poor.<sup>11</sup>[11] The Greek sense of tragedy elicited some pity among the rich towards their fellows who had temporarily fallen into misfortune. 'If a social peer fell on hard times and was being threatened with the need to work, this person was viewed as an appropriate recipient for one's generosity. [But] because the destitute had not experienced a reversal of fortunes, their situation did not evoke the same emotions in the giver.'<sup>12</sup>[12] Plato said, 'The true object of pity is not the man who is hungry or in some similar needy case, but the man who has sobriety of soul or some other virtue, or share in such virtue, and misfortune to boot.'<sup>13</sup>[13] Beggars, in his opinion, had no place in the Republic; they are a sign of 'a defective culture and bad breeding and a wrong constitution of state.'<sup>14</sup>[14] Thus, as Hesiod counseled, 'Give to one who gives, but do not give to one who does not give.'<sup>15</sup>[15] The Greek tendency to separate spirit and body also led to a lack of compassion for the poor: the Epicurean tendency was to indulge the body in selfish licentiousness, while the Stoic tendency was to deny the body and issues of physical importance, like hunger and poverty.

Situating Luke's writings in the social context of the Graeco-Roman world is illuminating. Table fellowship has striking similarities to the Greek symposium, the time of talking and drinking that followed a banquet.<sup>16</sup>[16] In this symposium, a host and guests would recline on couches arranged around the sides of a room. A person's position in the room displayed that person's rank relative to the other guests. The symposium was therefore a social situation in which honor and rank would be played out. Moreover, table fellowship had great significance in the Hebraic world. The eschatological kingdom of God was depicted as a banquet (Isa.55:1-2). Galilean Jews might have absorbed the Hellenistic practice of situating one's guests around a table by social rank because this convention seems to be taken for granted in at least one of Jesus' challenges (Lk.14:7-14) as he also threw open the Pharisees' very eligibility to participate at the eschatological banquet table (14:15-24). Making this particularly ironic is the

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5 Plato, *Lysis*, 207C.

6 Plato, *Laws*, 5.739

7 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 240

8 Diogenes Laertius (412 – 323 BC), *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers in Ten Books*, 7.124; 8.10. Note, however, that Epicurus disagreed with this view, see 10.11, but Epicurus seemed to have been in the minority.

9 Plautus, *Trinummus*, 399.

10 Roman Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p.38.

11 Gildas Hamal, *Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine, First Three Centuries C.E.*, Near Eastern Studies 23 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p.219. See also L. W. Countryman, *The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire: Contradictions and Accommodations* (Edwin Mellen Press: New York, 1980), p.105. Arthur R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1968), p.65. W. Den Boer, *Private Morality in Greece and Rome: Some Historical Aspects* (E. J. Brill: Leiden, Holland, 1979), p.172.

12 Gilles Beckaert, *The Literary Unity of Luke 16* (Berkeley, CA, 1996) p.69.

13 Plato, *Laws*, 11.939B. Cicero and Pliny the Younger maintained this position. See Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.42-50; and Pliny, *Epistles*, 9.30.

14 Plato, *Republic*, 552D-E.

15 Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 342-5, 353-4.

16 Michael Vickers, *Greek Symposia* (Joint Association of Classical Teachers: London, 1978). See also S. Scott Bartchy, 'Table Fellowship' in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1992), p.796. See also D. E. Smith, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 613.

fact that the Pharisees, 'although they did not reject the priesthood or the Temple cult, in light of the priests' and the Temple's vulnerability to impurity, sought to renew Israel by shifting the locus of holiness to their homes. This resulted in a special focus on the purity of one's everyday food and of one's companions at every meal.'<sup>17</sup><sup>[17]</sup> Jacob Neusner observes that this zeal for ritual purity extended so far that the Pharisees viewed the tables on which they ate their meals as representations of God's altar in the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>18</sup><sup>[18]</sup> That Jesus has table fellowship with prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners had tremendous meaning – he was elevating them to his status circle and expressing his solidarity with them. Of great import is Jesus' defense of himself as a 'friend' of such people (Lk.7:34). This scandalized the Pharisees, of course, and meal scenes are always a source of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

If this is the right way to read Luke's text, then we can see quite readily that, combined with Luke's oft-repeated commands regarding money and the poor, the early Christian ideal of universal table fellowship would have posed a serious challenge to Graeco-Roman culture. Luke insists that the poor are not to be ignored. Alms are to be given to the poor without the expectation of a favor in return. Unlike the Graeco-Roman world, the poor in the church do not become indebted to the rich in a new client-patron relationship. Instead, they are elevated to the status of peer, or at least helped in that direction. Hence Luke portrays the church as simultaneously fulfilling the Greek ideal of friends holding all economic goods in common, and challenging it in that the church shares across all types of people (Acts 2:44; 4:32-35).

This interpretation of Luke has direct implications for how we think about Christian money, relationships both within and outside of the church, and other subjects. If it is correct, then we would expect the equalizing nature of table fellowship to impact social relations inside and outside the formal church community. Luke's presentation of Jesus should be allowed to challenge the status hierarchies that develop in work situations in any context, from villages to major corporations. Any relationship, apparently, is open to scrutiny. In addition, serving the poor is undeniably important. So too is caring for the sick, tending the crippled, and perhaps what we today would call providing humanitarian relief.

Again, the strength of this view is that, on these particular points, it is possible to reconstruct the social dynamics of the first century Mediterranean world. It is also relatively easy to suggest the kind of challenge Luke was making in the name of Christianity. The objection can be raised that this interpretation of Luke makes Jesus' practices of table fellowship and friendship with sinners out to be more a product of Luke's mind and not Jesus'. We do not believe it can be strongly sustained, however, for the reason that Hellenistic culture had seeped into Israel since the time of Alexander the Great two and a half centuries prior to Jesus' day, especially in the Galilee region. It is not unreasonable to assume that Jesus himself spoke Greek and was well acquainted with Hellenistic and Roman thoughts and practices. Thus, we cannot just assume that Luke developed these ideas as part of his own strategy. We can be reasonably confident that Jesus himself was conscious of them and deliberate enough in his actions that a later biographer like Luke could simply weave them together for emphasis.

The presence of ample evidence from Hellenistic and Roman sources alone, however, does not mean that this was Luke's only intention in composing his narratives. Nor does it mean that this is the starting point for deducing how Luke's ethical vision would apply to us today. The ethical combination of table fellowship, redemptive almsgiving, and striving towards the Hellenistic ideal of friendship seems a particularly powerful one, but as I will show below, it does not sufficiently describe Luke's theological concerns. Although this current trend in Lukan scholarship is quite significant as a literary consideration for how Luke challenged his Hellenistic audience, and while Green's definition of Money as a patronal system of reciprocity challenged by Jesus seems especially attractive from a psycho-social point of view, I do not think these scholars root their analysis on solid historical, or for that matter, literary, ground. While I wish to express my admiration for the work of these scholars, we will attempt to demonstrate how one must root Luke's criticism of the Pharisees (and Luke's Gospel as a whole) in the historical dialogue between Jesus and Israel, in their conflict over Israel's sacred texts, and also in Israel's ancient dialogue with other nations. I will then show that table fellowship, friendship, and almsgiving take an important but not absolute place in this framework.

In analyzing Luke this way, we are not surrendering to the terms of the old debate over whether Luke's intended audience was either Hellenistic or Hebraic. Many scholars have said that Bultmann's polarization of those categories and its subsequent adoption by the German histories of religions school has outlasted its usefulness. One may certainly interpret Jesus in a way that addresses and challenges both, especially if Jesus' native environment had both influences. But, as I will demonstrate below, this is most accurately done with a particular methodology.

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17 S. Scott Bartchy, 'Table Fellowship,' p.796.

18 Jacob Neusner, 'Two Pictures of the Pharisees: Philosophical Circle or Eating Club?' *Anglican Theological Review* 64 (1982): 525-38.

Luke must first be read as challenging *Israel's* beliefs and practices by accurately portraying Jesus' challenge to Israel. Only from that point can Luke be used to address and challenge the beliefs and practices of other nations. A critique of the practices of Graeco-Roman culture, and thus of contemporary cultures, must be rooted in Luke's presentation of Jesus' engagement with Israel's theological traditions, which are both literary and historic. This, I believe, is where we must root the ethical application of Luke's writings.

For instance, why Luke (and Jesus) saw the Pharisees as 'lovers of money' even though they may not have been relatively wealthy is not hard to explain in a Hebraic framework. One does not have to be wealthy in order to love money, and while the Pharisees may not have had the most wealth (the Sadducees were the wealthiest party in Israel), they nevertheless looked forward to a Solomonic golden age where the true Son of David would sit on the throne of a prosperous Israel restored to its land. In other words, they wanted God's kingdom inaugurated in a physical and material sense. They expected a literal fulfillment of passages like this:

He who takes refuge in Me shall inherit the land,  
And shall possess My holy mountain. (Isa.57:13)  
It will no longer be said to you, 'Forsaken,'  
Nor to your land will it any longer be said, 'Desolate'  
But you will be called, 'My delight is in her,' and your land, 'Married'  
For the LORD delights in you, and to Him your land will be married...  
The LORD has sworn by His right hand and by His strong arm,  
'I will never again give your grain as food for your enemies,  
Nor will foreigners drink your new wine, for which you have labored.'  
But those who garner it will eat it, and praise the LORD.  
And those who gather it will drink it in the courts of My sanctuary. (Isa.62:4, 8-9)

Serious analysis of Luke must address how Jesus differed from the Pharisees in his interpretation of major 'restoration from exile' passages like this one, especially when Israel's central texts encouraged the belief that God's true people will dwell abundantly on God's good land. How did Jesus interpret and apply passages like the one given above? What does that mean for how we develop ethical vision and narrative inspiration for the church today?

Luke himself suggests that the contest for Israel's Scriptures is no trivial issue. He closes his Gospel with the bold claim that Jesus and his followers have the correct interpretation of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Lk.24:25-27, 44-47), since after his resurrection, Jesus appears to disciples on the Emmaus Road and in the Upper Room and interprets Israel's Scriptures for them. This claim is a logically necessary one, not only for Jesus but for the church, since the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament had to be put forward over against competing Jewish ones. Although Luke provides us with few examples of Jesus' hermeneutics, it is reasonable to assume that Luke is referring us to how the Old Testament is referred to and quoted all throughout his own writings. We will explore some of those passages below.

Whereas a literary-rhetorical analysis assuming a Hellenistic audience might suggest that Luke made a psycho-social or even a somewhat fictive criticism of the Pharisees to align his Hellenistic audience's sympathies with Jesus, a literary-historical analysis must also assume a Jewish audience and requires a real conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over the issue of material wealth and a very live ideological conflict over the interpretation of key texts from Moses and the Prophets about Israel's material wealth. To suggest that just because Luke addressed the Hellenistic world he did not address the Hebraic is misguided. Luke addressed the Hellenistic world precisely because Jesus addressed the Hebraic. I will demonstrate this in our key example text: Luke 16. And while I agree that Jesus in Luke's Gospel must be allowed to again address issues of social inequality and serving the poor, especially in relation to Christian ethics, I will demonstrate from within Luke's writings why social justice and the poor can in fact be erroneously overemphasized as well by being separated from Jesus' evangelistic mission.

### **Analysis: The Theme of Table Fellowship**

Eating in God's presence is an Israelite ideal that refers back to the creational paradise. In the garden, God told Adam that he may eat of all the trees in the garden, save one (Gen.2:16). The sense of abundance cannot be missed. This begins an intertwined motif of God's true humanity enjoying God's provision, within a covenantal relationship. At Sinai, when 'Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, they saw the God of Israel, and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank' (Ex.24:9-11). For Israel, eating in God's presence in this way denoted the enjoyment of God's covenant, now

formally extended to Israel as a nation. David said that experiencing God's shepherding is like being fed in a luxuriant pasture: 'Thou dost prepare a table before me' (Ps.23:5). And Isaiah foresaw the restoration from exile and the renewed covenant with Israel in terms of abundant banqueting in God's presence: 'And the LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain...(Isa.25:6)...Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend your money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance' (Isa.55:1-2).

For Jesus to eat with people, then, was his way of symbolically enacting the restoration to the new creation paradise he was accomplishing by his Cross and Resurrection. I count ten such meal scenes in Luke's Gospel.

(1) Jesus celebrates with Levi a great feast, inviting other tax collectors into his fellowship, teaching about the new covenant he is inaugurating (Lk.5:27-39). This meal scene is invitational: Jesus is 'fishing' for people, which he had recently discussed with Simon (5:1-11), inviting other tax-collectors, along with Levi, into his new community. This episode lays the groundwork for why the Pharisees accuse Jesus of regularly eating with 'sinners and tax-collectors' (e.g. 15:1-2). At this, the first such meal scene, the Pharisees and scribes ask two openly hostile questions: 'Why do you eat with sinners?' (5:30) and 'Why do your disciples not fast?' (5:33) Previously they had kept their critical reasoning to themselves (5:21-22). Now, however, they voice their hostility.

(2) Soon enough, a Pharisee named Simon asks Jesus to dine with him (7:36-50). Simon is the host, with Jesus as the supposedly honored guest. During this meal, an unnamed sinful woman enters the scene and begins to weep and wipe Jesus' feet with her tears and hair. In fact, she plays the role of host, and truly honors Jesus as a guest. In this meal scene, we see a Pharisee think private thoughts that Jesus knows supernaturally and confronts brilliantly. Since Simon doubts that Jesus is a prophet, Jesus shows him precisely what kind of prophetic stuff out of which he is made. He reads his thoughts and delivers a telling parable about two people who are forgiven to different degrees. Jesus then elevates the unnamed sinful woman over Simon the Pharisee, calling attention to the woman's attitude and posture of faith. Though he does not use these words, Jesus implies that she is the true host of the meal, and Jesus has now reoriented his attention to the party happening between him and the woman. Jesus pronounces on her his *shalom* (7:50), the (new) creational blessing.

Jesus' table fellowship with prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners had tremendous meaning – he was elevating them to his status circle and expressing his solidarity with them. Of great import is Jesus' defense of himself as a 'friend' of such people (Lk.7:34). This scandalized the Pharisees, of course, and meal scenes are always a source of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Making this particularly ironic is the fact that the Pharisees, 'although they did not reject the priesthood or the Temple cult, in light of the priests' and the Temple's vulnerability to impurity, sought to renew Israel by shifting the locus of holiness to their homes. This resulted in a special focus on the purity of one's everyday food and of one's companions at every meal.'<sup>19</sup> Jacob Neusner observes that this zeal for ritual purity extended so far that the Pharisees viewed the tables on which they ate their meals as representations of God's altar in the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>20</sup> Although Luke mentions more than once that the early Christians had table fellowship with each other, we should not assume that this practice was for Christians only. It can be said with some confidence that table fellowship was one of the early Christians' outreach vehicles, as it was for Jesus. When we come across statements like, 'And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved' immediately after mention of the believers taking their meals together regularly (Acts 2:26-27), we should probably see the early Christians as continuing the practice of Jesus, extending table fellowship to 'tax collectors and sinners.' This suggestion will be confirmed by 14:1-24 and 15:1-32.

(3) Jesus supernaturally provides an abundant meal of bread and fish in the wilderness (9:10-17), giving his disciples a lesson on how he himself will provide for his own community through the apostles. This seems to be an important episode for the apostles, who have just returned from their short-term missions trip to Israel. By sending them out with authority to preach backed by spiritual authority over demons and disease, Jesus seems to be indicating that he is distributing his teaching and/or something of himself through the twelve. Just as they have distributed Jesus' teaching and healing power and return filled with joy, so they distribute bread to the five thousand and return, each with his own basket filled. Far from being depleted and spent, they are nourished by Jesus in ministry.

(4) After recruiting, sending, and debriefing the seventy, Jesus has a meal with Mary and Martha (10:38-42). The placement of this story seems strategic to defining what 'loving God' means. Luke has just positioned this material after the 'good Samaritan' parable, which is about 'loving your neighbor.' The two stories seem to be a

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19 S. Scott Bartchy, 'Table Fellowship,' p.796.

20 Jacob Neusner, 'Two Pictures of the Pharisees: Philosophical Circle or Eating Club?' *Anglican Theological Review* 64 (1982): 525-38.

way of answering the question being debated by Jesus and the lawyer about the two greatest commandments. Conceptually, the stories follow a chiasmic form:

- a. Love God definition sought
- b. Love neighbor definition sought
- b'. Love neighbor redefined
- a'. Love God redefined

When placed in its cultural context, the episode becomes powerfully suggestive. Whereas the typical Jewish portrait of loving neighbor would have been a Jew loving a fellow Jew, Luke's portrait is that of a Samaritan loving a Jew, crossing a vast national and ethnic boundary. Similarly, whereas the typical Jewish portrait of loving God would be a Jewish man sitting in the Temple reading Moses, Luke's portrait is that of a woman sitting at Jesus' feet listening to his word.

The two lessons Jesus gives to the twelve and the seventy will recur after the resurrection. By feeding the five thousand, Jesus provides an early link to his meal with the Emmaus disciples after his resurrection (24:13-34). Luke makes the verbal links between the two episodes strong. Tannehill notes, 'The description of the Emmaus meal is closer to the feeding of the multitude than to the Last Supper in some details. According to 24:30 and 9:16 Jesus 'blessed' the bread...In describing both the feeding of the multitude and the Emmaus meal, the day is said to 'decline'...The same verb for 'reclining to eat' is used in these two passages... However, the most striking point of contact between 9:10-17 and the Emmaus meal is in the description of Jesus' initiation of the meal through a series of four actions...Jesus takes bread, blesses, breaks it, and gives it to his companions.' By doing this, Jesus anticipates the development in Acts where the Christian community shares meals together and is nourished by the exalted Jesus through the apostles' teaching. The early physical picture of that experience is painted here in the wilderness. Also, the motif of listening to Jesus' word that was prominent in the Mary and Martha episode will recur at the resurrection, both when the Emmaus Road disciples listen with hearts burning to Jesus unfold Moses and the Prophets, and also when the eleven disciples are gathered and Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. By saying that listening to Jesus' word is an important aspect of sharing table fellowship with him, Luke lays an explicit foundation for the teaching that is to occur at Jesus' table. The disciples will later exposit his teaching and his interpretation of the Old Testament over these community meals. What was implicit about the importance of Jesus' word at his table becomes explicit here in 10:38-42, and held up widely as a model later.

In two polemical situations at the table with the Pharisees (11:37-54 and 14:1-24), Jesus lays out his requirements for inward purity and social ethics, both of which the Pharisees do not meet. (5) The growing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees takes a new turn when one Pharisee asks to have lunch with Jesus (11:37). The Pharisee makes a private observation about Jesus not washing ceremonially before the meal. Jesus in turn launches into a devastating verbal rebuke of the Pharisees' internal uncleanness. Lest we interpret internal uncleanness narrowly to mean a bad motive for good behavior, we note that Jesus gives a much broader definition. He says, 'You disregard justice and the love of God' (11:42). They have both bad motive and bad behavior. The Pharisees are amiss regarding both horizontal and vertical relations. One of the lawyers pipes up at this point and claims to be insulted. That does not stop Jesus, however, who goes on to rebuke these lawyers who interpret the Law of Moses for getting it all wrong. They, in Jesus' opinion, have greater blame than the Pharisees, for they make the interpretations that the Pharisees then implement. The scene closes with rebuke lingering in the air.

(6) The next meal scene surprises us merely by the fact of its existence: Jesus still gets invited to these Pharisees' meals! To make matters more amusing, Luke tells us it is the Sabbath, so the stage is set for twice the usual conflict. True to form, Jesus wastes no time healing a man, pushing the limits of the Pharisees' interpretation of the Sabbath again. In addition, Jesus comments in some detail on the roles the Pharisees were playing at these meals: guests, hosts, and invitees. Speaking about being *guests*, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for focusing these meals and parties on themselves, whereas if they had really understood how table fellowship functioned as a symbol of the kingdom banquet, they would have understood these events as occurrences of a wedding feast (14:8). The focus should properly be on the married couple (in fact, in Middle Eastern culture, on the groom), not on the guests. The Pharisees fundamentally misunderstand the kingdom banquet; it is a wedding feast honoring the groom, not a time to honor themselves. What kind of person would go to a wedding feast as a guest and call attention to himself? The same kind of person who thinks Jesus' kingdom is not about Jesus but himself.

Next, Jesus turns to his host and delivers a challenge about being a *host* for the kingdom: 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be

repaid at the resurrection of the righteous' (14:12-14). Since the host has fallen far short of this, there was probably an awkward silence until one person courageously tries to break in with a bland, neutral statement he thinks everyone can agree on: 'Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' To which Jesus effectively says, 'And you're not going to be among them because of your poor excuses' (14:15-24). Being an *invitee* to the kingdom feast doesn't make one a participant: You still need to show up to the feast. Jesus has just laid an ethical foundation about being guests and hosts for the kingdom that we will see the early Christians follow. Their meals would embody these teachings. Luke follows this section, significantly, with Jesus warning the multitude that a real disciple hates his own mother and father, etc. and even all his material possessions (14:33). This is a serious warning, but it makes sense in the context of Jesus' disciples needing to be hosts who display the inclusive, generous and sacrificial ethic of their master's kingdom banquet. Throwing parties for people who cannot pay you back will surely challenge your concept of community and drain your wallet. Yet this became the practice of Jesus' disciples.

Immediately following (6) is (7), an occasion where the Pharisees criticize Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners (15:1-2). Their critique prompts Jesus to tell the three famed parables of the lost (15:3-32). Jesus says in all of those parables that the best way to describe the rejoicing in the heavenly realms over the return of the lost is a celebratory community banquet. This gives us further insight into Jesus' table fellowship practice: meals are seen by Jesus not only as evangelistic events but as events celebrating a lost person being found. Especially poignant is the fact that the younger brother in the third parable had been eating with the pigs; by coming home, he eats festively with his father and the whole village community. He was celebrating the tax collectors and sinners while the Pharisees were standing at the door, grumbling. Jesus, especially in the parable of the two lost sons, challenges the Pharisees to come into the house and join the celebration. (8) Then Jesus welcomes Zaccheus into fellowship with him at his home, implicitly with a meal (19:1-10). Zaccheus, the man who is 'short in stature' and climbs a tree like a child, is contrasted with the rich ruler, who has appeared just before Zaccheus (18:18-30), who would not become a child to enter the kingdom community (18:15-17). Luke utilizes the theme of sight in the rich ruler – Zaccheus sequence as well, and we will discuss this episode in more depth below.

Of these episodes, the sixth and eighth interact substantially with Luke's theme of wealth, while the seventh does so to a lesser extent. In the three parables of the lost, Jesus portrays material possessions being used in celebration of the lost returning to God through Jesus' ministry. During the sixth meal scene, however, Jesus radically redefines the role of a 'host' in his service to align with his role in opening up the kingdom to all. This inclusiveness necessitates large expenditures on behalf of the poor and others who cannot pay the host back. The 'poor,' etc. are not metaphorical placeholders for others generically. In other words, this teaching is not merely aimed at our motivations (e.g. just invite friends of your same socio-economic circle without expecting anything in return), but our actual practice (e.g. invite people who really cannot pay you back, who might be socially awkward for you to host). Doing this consistently means that entering the kingdom bears a significant real cost (thus, the two warnings about counting the cost in 14:25-33) culminating in the warning that Jesus has come to claim all a person's material possessions (14:33). Jesus teaches that his disciples are to host meals that include people who are marginalized by society. Likewise, during the eighth meal scene, Jesus celebrates a meal with Zaccheus in connection with Zaccheus' public announcement that he will give away half his wealth and pay back by a multiple of four anyone whom he has wronged. Zaccheus, incidentally, probably expects not a short line of claimants outside his door eager to take him up on that offer. After all is said and done, he probably won't be left with much! Thus, Zaccheus is one who is eager to reconcile his strained relationships for the sake of the kingdom; he is eager to generously help the poor; he is one who allows Jesus to claim all his possessions. In these meal scenes, we see the theme of money interacting more and more with the theme of table fellowship. In Acts, we will see a thorough convergence of the two themes.

The ninth and tenth table fellowship scenes bracket the Cross and Resurrection accounts, lending them symbolic depth. (9) In the upper room, Jesus introduces the idea that his disciples will internalize his own body and blood. By doing so, they are entering a 'new covenant.' The resurrected Jesus later clarified this union with himself as actually happening by the Holy Spirit indwelling the believers. What are the effects of this spiritual internalization of the crucified Jesus? On the Cross, Jesus grants to the penitent revolutionary<sup>21</sup> communion with him in 'paradise.' This statement, unique to Luke, is no haphazard pronouncement. It underscores the achievement of Jesus' death and resurrection: restoring rebels to paradise with God.

Associated with the Resurrection, (10) two of Jesus' disciples on the Emmaus Road experience the reversal of the fall in the context of a meal.<sup>22</sup> The gender of Cleopas' companion is unspecified, allowing us to wonder if

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21 not a common thief, see N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p.

22 I am indebted to N. T. Wright for pointing this out in *The Challenge of Jesus*.

this companion was Cleopas' wife, Mary. This reminds us of Adam and Eve walking with God. Rather than losing fellowship with God, however, these two disciples gain it. Rather than failing to believe and live by God's word as Adam and Eve decided, they eventually gain insight into it and believe. In fact, their hearts burn as they internalize God's Word. In the context of eating, they have their eyes opened, in a phrase that deliberately echoes Adam and Eve's eyes being opened by eating in the fall. Only this time, rather than having their eyes opened to a fallen self-awareness, they are opened instead to perceive Jesus; they perceive him as he breaks bread, suggesting how we are to understand not only the communion sacrament and what it points to: the internalization of Jesus himself. Whereas Adam and Eve realized they were naked, the disciples are eventually clothed with power from on high. Whereas Adam and Eve were to spread from Eden over the whole earth to proclaim their rule over it, the disciples of Jesus are commanded to spread from Jerusalem over the whole earth to proclaim Jesus' rule over it. The intertextual links to the Genesis account cannot be missed.

Hence Luke uses meal scenes not only to tie his work together literarily, but also to sound out the main melody of his composition. Jesus has brought about, in some sense, an undoing of the fall. He is making restoration, the paradisaic state of fellowship with God, available, and this not just for Israel, but for all humanity. This achievement occurred at the Cross and Resurrection. By emphasizing a 'new covenant' in the upper room on the night of the Passover, Jesus placed a new interpretation of deliverance on top of the traditional meaning of the Jewish Passover. Was he speaking of deliverance out of the kingdom of darkness, Satan's domain? Very likely that is included in Jesus' meaning, but the most natural contrast to a 'new covenant' is an 'old covenant.' Jesus is speaking of delivering people from the 'old covenant' and into the 'new covenant' in some parallel way to how the Israelites were delivered out of Egypt. So rather than celebrating a physical deliverance from Egypt, Jesus' disciples will henceforth celebrate a spiritual deliverance from the old covenant itself. Hence we have sufficient ground here to link Jesus' upper room statements to Peter's later teaching, 'Through him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses'... 'a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear' (Acts 13:39; 15:10). Jesus eclipsed the memory of the exodus deliverance with his own act of deliverance.

Christian communion is also tremendously symbolic because of its antecedents in the literature of ancient Israel. In the Joseph story, Joseph is imprisoned and then exalted on high, but while imprisoned is associated with a baker who then is killed (echoing bread being broken) and a cupbearer who goes free (echoing wine being available). This has echoes to the Jesus story, where Jesus is 'imprisoned' in a sense, and later exalted on high, but only after making available bread that is broken and wine that runs free for all. More importantly, we believe, in Christian communion, a new humanity is pictured eating from a new source of life. Communion draws out in symbol the mysterious act of internalizing the crucified and resurrected Jesus, or more precisely, having him within oneself by the Spirit. The act of eating the bread and wine symbolizes internalizing Jesus (by the Spirit) to be free from the Mosaic Law's condemnation, thus reentering paradise with God, which is itself, elegantly enough, symbolized by eating. A Jew 'under the Law' and a Gentile 'in Adam' must both internalize the crucified Jesus and rise with him. The fact that believers in Jesus have internalized Jesus' death and resurrection by the Spirit therefore allows them to see in communion a reminder that they are part of a new humanity, a one body, that enjoys the new covenant blessings with the God of Israel who is also the Creator-Redeemer God of the world.

That the early Christians believed that the exalted Jesus was somehow present with them when they gathered, especially when they observed the Last Supper, is well accepted. However, early Christian meals had theological and social implications above and beyond the liturgical communion practice, which most church traditions have not upheld. Snapshots of early church life shown in Acts revolve around meals. While the phrase 'breaking of bread' probably refers to the specific observance of the Last Supper (e.g. Acts 2:42), in order to express the unity of their community life, observance of the Last Supper itself was probably only part of an actual meal. They took 'their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart' (2:46).

More significantly, these meals appear in the context of sharing and redistribution of economic resources. Luke observes that 'all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need' (2:45-26). The earliest Christians appear to have taken seriously Jesus' call to be a new community. The historic Christian virtue of hospitality seems to be a direct result of this ethic, as do reconciliation (interpersonally and ethnically) and redistribution of wealth. The conceptual basis for redistribution is laid in fairly simple terms: If all believers eat from the same kingdom banquet table, not physically but conceptually, sharing wealth is akin to someone asking another believer across the table to 'please pass the bread.' This unity seems to have made a positive impression on the population, for the community was continually expanding. Probably, as we saw with Jesus, the early Christians used meals as their outreach vehicle as well. The outcome of this inclusive table fellowship is that 'the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.'

Luke shows us that the apostles initially managed the money and table fellowship in the earliest Jerusalem community. Three mentions of this practice are evidenced consecutively. In 4:34-35, 'For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.' In 4:37, Barnabas sold a tract of land, 'brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.' And in 5:1-11, Ananias and Sapphira attest by way of negative example to the sale of property and the distribution of its proceeds. Thus, the earliest Christians practiced the redistribution of resources within the Christian community; the trusted apostolic leadership managed this broad table fellowship because handling the community's money was a serious matter. Judas, the last money-handler, had lacked integrity and been a traitor. Luke says that he had acquired a field (1:18), doing precisely the opposite of Jesus' teaching and practice of separating Israel from its ancestral land. The apostles, by contrast, did not keep any of it for themselves. Earlier, Peter and John claimed, 'I do not have silver and gold' (3:6). The apostles were handling the collection and daily distribution of resources across these few thousand people peppered throughout the city, a formidable task.

What happens when disunity threatens the church's table fellowship? We get a glimpse of this in Acts 6. The ethnic and cultural divisions present in the wider Jerusalem society begin to affect the Christian community. Following the appointment of Stephen, one of the seven, mention is made of a Hellenistic 'Synagogue of the Freedmen' made up of Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicians, and Asians (6:9), an odd peculiarity giving us insight into the context of the early church. Why would a synagogue exist in Jerusalem? Synagogues were formed for Jews who were away from Jerusalem, especially during the exilic time period when the Temple did not exist. Yet according to some scholars, a total of ## synagogues existed in first century Jerusalem while the Temple stood, which is a bit astonishing. Apparently, Hellenistic Jews were not totally embraced by the native Hebrew community and power structures. After a few generations, the influence of Hellenistic culture(s) on Diaspora Jews was probably significant. Perhaps some intermarriage (while enslaved?) had given them different physical characteristics; they surely had different accents, languages, dress, and customs. If Jerusalem dwellers looked down upon Galileans, identifying them by their accents, how much more did they feel similarly towards Hellenistic Jews from beyond the land? Those differences were apparently palpable and relevant in a context where ethnic purity was valued. Any reading of Acts which criticizes the early Jerusalem church for delaying its outreach to the Samaritans and Gentiles needs to do so cautiously and sympathetically, if at all. Judaism was not monolithic, and ministry to the Jews was not without its own ethnic and cultural challenges. Luke himself does not express any criticism of the earliest Christian community for delaying its outreach to the Gentiles, so any such criticism pushes beyond Luke.

Divisions from outside the church become divisions within in Acts 6. Being native Hebrews, the apostles were probably less informed about the Hellenistic widows in the community. In a rapidly growing community, their information network must have simply been 'who they knew.' An oversight was bound to happen. When it does, it falls along the same ethnic and cultural lines that exist in the broader Jewish world. The oversight is unintentional, but it nevertheless replays realities with which people were already very familiar. The apostles acknowledge the validity of the Hellenistic complaint, as opposed to ignoring it, getting defensive, or squelching the ethnic minority's voice by impugning their motives. They then recognize that the management of the church's table fellowship has become larger than what they could handle. The translation, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables' (6:2) is unfortunate. Such wording gives the impression that the apostles took orders and served meals. In reality, it was much more than that. Such wording also gives the impression that the apostles disdained the job in favor of the more 'spiritual' tasks of preaching and praying. Nothing could be further from the truth: The job was a vital one to the whole community, in fact it was the very expression of their community life together, and the apostles were taking it very seriously in delegating it to the seven deacons. The apostles open seven vacancies for the whole community to fill, the criterion being that the seven men must be full of the Spirit, trustworthy to manage the community's money (unlike Judas Iscariot), and good representatives of the community (6:3). These seven were presumably responsible for some teaching at community meals. This move meets with divine approval, as Luke adds, 'The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith' (6:7).

Table fellowship continued to have significant implications for the early church. When God gives Peter the vision to include Cornelius the Gentile in the covenant community, He uses the motif of food and eating, reversing the kosher laws for Peter (Acts 10-11). Nothing could have been clearer as a message to go eat with the Gentiles. Similarly, table fellowship was the hot issue in Galatians 2. It was the expression of the unity of believers, and as such, can probably be taken as the dominant image for the social vision of the New Testament.

As an example of how powerful this theme is in encapsulating multiple values, let me address one basic question being considered by scholars: Does it matter in regards to exegesis and application whether we position

'table fellowship' within the Hebraic theme of eating or the Hellenistic motif of the symposium? Yes, on several levels. First, however strong an awareness Jesus himself may have had of the Hellenistic symposia, he seems to have retained a stronger commitment to the Hebraic theme of eating. In fact, the Hebraic awareness seems to stir the most controversy with the Pharisees. At the same meal setting where Luke mentions the various roles of host, guest, etc. of the symposium (Lk.14), the Hebraic awareness of the meal as a symbol of the eschatological kingdom of God still provides the basic grist for Jesus' challenge to the Pharisees that they are not entering the kingdom.

Second, if we exegetically situate Jesus in a Greek symposium whenever we find him eating with sinners in Israel, we do lose some of the power of the theme for other purposes. If we adhere to the scholarly definition of the Greek symposium as the time of talking and drinking that *followed* a banquet, or perhaps even independent of a banquet,<sup>23</sup> then we lose the *act of eating* with ordinarily unwelcome guests as a symbol of God's kingdom. The Hebraic meal scene symbolically demonstrates at least four actions at once: God invites people to Himself (symbolized by the initiative of the host inviting others to a meal), one enters the kingdom by internalizing Jesus (symbolized by the eating of food), one enjoys lost paradisaic communion with God (also symbolized by the food), and those at the table serve each other (the guests are honored by the host serving them). If the symposium is not actually the meal, then we weaken our own ability to critique social dynamics and evangelize at the same time. This is so because technically, the symposium is only a time of socializing after the meal. A Hellenistic guest, by merely participating in a socially adjusted Greek symposium, would not see a symbol of how to enter the kingdom since the host offering food (which symbolizes God offering Jesus to us) is no longer emphasized. She only sees the symbolic effects of the kingdom (a change in social dynamics at the table), and that only partially (a host with no food is a diminished portrait of the God of Israel). The symposium does not symbolically express *entering* the kingdom by *internalizing Jesus*. The force of Luke's writings is therefore weakened, as would be the evangelistic thrust of the Christian praxis of meals.

Third, the notion that table fellowship exclusively drives Jesus' overall teaching on money and relationships – a claim sometimes made out of a concern for social justice by Joel Green, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Halvor Moxnes – is an overstatement. To be sure, there was social elitism played out in the symposium, so it is true that Luke's writings landing in a Hellenistic environment would have some powerful *social* implications: It would cause Hellenistic Christians to seek out the typically unwelcome and seat them at places of honor. There is no ground, however, for making Luke's theme of table fellowship the driving factor behind the theme of wealth. Jesus' teaching on wealth and the poor also emerges out of an engagement with Israel's historic and literary interaction with their own land traditions. Thus, Jesus is really calling for all to disinherit themselves – whether they are rich or poor – from their traditional sources of material wealth. Correspondingly, we cannot make the reversal of the social hierarchy in meal settings tantamount to Jesus' total teaching on the poor or towards them. Under this subordination, various scholars take Luke's writings to require a reversal of an unfair distribution of wealth, where the rich give to the poor (which I heartily endorse) and the poor *merely receive* (which I do not). One difficulty with this view is that table fellowship was not only an exclusivistic practice among Christians alone. It was a significant and general form of outreach as well, one that required resources even from the less endowed in the church.

However interesting the parallels may be with the Hellenistic symposium, Luke's table fellowship is fundamentally a Hebraic concept. This is not to say that the Hellenistic symposium should not be critiqued for being unjust. It absolutely should, but only as its own situation after Luke's text is properly understood. Just as there are hierarchical social taboos around the meal scene in virtually every culture that should be challenged because of and with Luke's writings, so the Greek symposium is such a one. But saying that behind Luke's theme of table fellowship lays the historic institution of the Greek symposium is simply exegetically inaccurate. It exaggerates the historic impact of Hellenistic culture in Israel, especially upon the mind of Jesus. It drains away the significance of the Jewish Passover as the backdrop to Jesus' upper room meal. It causes us to lose clarity into the meaning of true table fellowship, when we see in the other person's eating a symbolic lesson about internalizing Jesus by the Spirit. And it detours our theological thinking: Social ethics are most firmly derived from foundational truths about Jesus' death and resurrection within Israel, not elsewhere.

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23 Michael Vickers, *Greek Symposia* (Joint Association of Classical Teachers: London, 1978). See also S. Scott Bartchy, 'Table Fellowship' in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1992), p.796. See also D. E. Smith, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 613.