

The Centre for Jesus and Mary

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Biblical Notes on 'The GOSPEL According to Luke'

The third GOSPEL's (Luke's) distinguishing quality is due to the attractive personality of its author which shines through all his work. Luke is at once a most gifted writer and a man of marked sensibility. He set to work in his own way with his eye to exact information and orderly narrative (Ch1:3), but respect for his sources, together with his method of juxtaposing them, meant that even Luke was not in a position to arrange his traditional material in a more chronological way than Matthew or Mark (*the other two synoptic accounts - GM*).

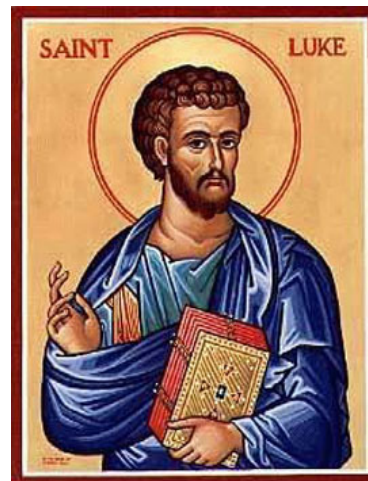
His *plan* follows Mark's outline though some episodes are displaced (3:19-20, 4:16-30, 5:1-11, 6:12-19, 22:31-34, etc.). This he did sometimes in the interest of clarity and logical sequence, sometimes under the influence of other streams of tradition including, it should be noted, a tradition traceable to the fourth Gospel (John's). Other episodes are omitted altogether for various reason: they were not interesting to Luke's non-Jewish readers (Mk 9:11-13) (*Luke wrote primarily for the Greek community - GM*) or they were already to be found in the Supplementary collection (Mk 12:28-34; cf. Lk 10:25-28), or above all (as in the case of Luke's great omission of Mk 6:45-8:26) because it was not in Luke's copy of Mark or because, if it was there, Luke regarded it as unnecessarily repetitive.

Luke's most obvious difference from Mark is his great intercalation (cf. 9:51-18:14) which, as has been seen, combines Logia and Sayings from some Collection with information he had found out for himself.

This central section uses a journey to Jerusalem for its framework (cf. the

reiterated indications, elaborating the datum of Mk 10:1, in Lk 98:51; 13:22; 17:11). But it is not a reminiscence of actual journeys; it is rather a device by which Luke is able to bring out one of his chief theological notions: namely that the Holy City is the predestined stage for the drama of salvation (9:13; 13:33; 18:31; 19:11). Because it is from Jerusalem that the evangelization of the world must begin (24:47; Acts 1:8) his Gospel (account) had to start there (1:5f) and there he will have to bring it to a close (24:52f) – the post-resurrection apparitions and conversations recorded by Luke do not take place in Galilee (cf. 24:13-51 and cf. 24:6 with Mk 16:7; Mt 28:7, 16-20).

Comparing Luke and his two sources, *a*) Mark, the best known, and *b*) the sources behind the Matthew passages which are paralleled in Luke, it becomes apparent that Luke was a craftsman whose concentration never slackened. His changes are very slight - just small omissions and additions - but through them he gives his work a character peculiarly his own.



He avoids or whittles down anything he or his readers found offensive (8:43, cf. Mk 5:26; he omits Mk 9:43-48; 13:32 etc.) or anything they could not be expected to understand (he omits Mt 5:21f, 33f; Mk 15:34; etc.). He omits anything derogatory to the dignity of the apostles (Mk 4:13; 8:23f; 9:28f; 14:50) and makes excuses for them (Lk 9:45; 18:34; 22:45). He explains obscure phrases (6:15) and clears up points of topography (4:31; 19:28f, 37:23:51) etc.

In these innumerable small corrections, and even more especially in the fresh material he found by personal enquiry, it is possible to see what Luke's preferences were and to see the way his mind worked. Or to put it more theologically, the Holy Spirit and Luke as His instrument, to put the Gospel into a completely new shape, packed with doctrine.

The originality of is not in his key ideas (they are identical with those of Mark and Matthew) but in his *religious mentality*, which apart from slight traces of Paul's influence, is overwhelmingly distinctive of Luke's personal temperament.

Luke, in Dante's phrase, is the '*scriba mansuetudinis Christi*', the faithful recorder of Christ's loving/kindness. He is anxious to stress his Master's love of sinners (15:1f, 7,10): to record His acts of forgiveness (7:36-50; 15:11-32; 19:1-10; 23:34, 39-43); and to contrast His tenderness for the lowly and the poor with His severity towards the proud and towards those who abuse their wealth (1:51-53; 6:20-26; 12:13-21; 14:7-11; 16:15, 19-31; 18:9-14).

But in spite of this severity, the wicked deserving of punishment will not be condemned till the period set aside for mercy has come to an end (13:6-9; cf. Mk 11:12-14). The one thing necessary is repentance, abdication of self, and on this the gentle, tolerant Luke takes a firm stand, insisting on unflinching and complete detachment (14:25-34) especially from riches (6:34f; 14:12-14; 16:9-13).

Another group of passages which are also found only in the third Gospel, is on the necessity of prayer (11:5-8; 18:1-8), of which Jesus sets the example (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:28).

Finally, Luke is the only one of the Synoptics to give the Holy Spirit the prominence we find in Paul and in the Acts of the Apostles (Lk 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-27; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 24:49). These qualities combined with that joy in God and that gratitude to Him for His gifts which fill this third Gospel (2:14; 5:26; 10:17; 13:17; 18:43; 19:37; 24:51f), are the ones that go to make Luke's achievement the warm and human thing it is...