The Hospitality of God

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A Reading of Luke's Gospel

Revised Edition

Brendan Byrne, SJ

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Preface to the Revised Edition

It is now a decade and a half since the publication of *The Hospitality of God*. While the book has done well in terms of popularity and sales, one's understanding necessarily moves on—as does also, of course, scholarship on the Gospel of Luke. The time is ripe, therefore, to bring out a new edition incorporating fresh insights, attending to areas of neglect, and taking note of some developments in scholarly study of the gospel.

The principal new element that has been introduced is a separate introductory chapter entitled "Features of Luke's Gospel." Here I have incorporated material on the theme of "hospitality" that appeared in the introduction in the original edition, followed by a series of paragraphs devoted to themes and features that are particularly characteristic of Luke. Locating these together at the start should enrich the reading of the commentary to follow. Despite this addition and perhaps at the risk of some duplication, I have retained, in somewhat expanded form, the thesis-type conclusion from the original edition, which students and many readers in general have found helpful.

Areas where the actual commentary has been more notably expanded or altered include treatment of Mary's *Magnificat*, the Beatitudes, the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the figure of Peter at the Last Supper. Apart from these sections, quite a number of the smaller episodes (or pericopes) of the gospel that were barely touched upon in the first edition have now received comment. Not a few of these represent more "difficult" sayings of Jesus that it was not helpful to pass over.

Though this new edition is somewhat expanded and a little more acknowledging of debt to scholarly literature, I hope it will retain the approachability of the original for the student, the teacher, and the general reader.

Brendan Byrne, SJ
Parkville, Australia
January 3, 2015

Introduction

This book has its origins in a series of workshops on Luke's gospel given to various audiences over a number of years. Approaching Luke under the rubric of "the hospitality of God" has proved helpful and congenial for people. It is also, as I hope will appear, faithful to the design and purpose of the gospel.

In the workshop situation, constraints of time normally meant treating in detail only those scenes in the gospel where the idea of "hospitality" seemed particularly prominent. So, after some remarks upon the story of Jesus' infancy (Luke 1–2), I would deal with the inauguration of Jesus' mission at Nazareth (4:16-30), the episode in the house of Simon where an unnamed woman anoints Jesus' feet (7:36-50), Jesus' visit to the tax collector Zacchaeus (19:1-10), the institution of the Eucharist (22:14-20), and the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the way to Emmaus (24:13-35).

When, at the urging of many who took part in these workshops, I set about putting the material in written form, my first intention was to adhere basically to this scheme. However, the closer attention to the gospel that writing required soon made me realize that something more was needed. In the first place, the gospel appeared to contain many other episodes featuring "hospitality" in one form or another. Secondly, it seemed one-sided to pick out all the "nice" passages of Luke and leave readers (and preachers) to deal with the more difficult areas as best they could. The poet Dante famously gave Luke the title *scriba mansuetudinis Christi*—not an easy phrase to translate but perhaps "narrator of the winning gentleness of Christ" might catch the sense. However, there are several passages in the gospel (notably around chapters 12–14) where neither Jesus nor his message is mild. To bypass the challenge posed by these areas seemed unfaithful to the gospel and unhelpful to readers, who would of course inevitably stumble upon them and wonder what to make of them.

So I found myself writing a longer book—one that takes account of the whole gospel and provides a total interpretation. The original plan remains in the sense that I have tended to linger over scenes like those listed above where "hospitality" seems particularly prominent. But I

have commented, at least briefly, on every episode and tried to set everything within a total, unified interpretation.

Unlike standard commentaries, this work does not present and assess a wide range of scholarly viewpoints on particular points or upon the gospel as a whole. I write from a personal point of view—one I find to be attractive and helpful for making the gospel speak to people today. A biblical text is open to interpretation in various ways and on several levels.[1] I am not proposing this reading of Luke as the only reading possible, nor even as the most obvious. I do believe it to be a valid interpretation, well-founded in the text of the gospel. However, I do not constantly seek to argue for it, trusting that a developing inner logic of its own will do most to commend it. The notes discuss technical details and disputed points that require further comment.

To keep the book within reasonable size and expense, I have not, save in very few places, set out the text of the gospel in English translation. The translation to which I adhere most closely is that of the New Revised Standard Version. I urge readers to have this by them as they consult or work their way through the book. Of great assistance to more serious students will be a synopsis of the three Synoptic Gospels, such as Burton H. Throckmorton's *Gospel Parallels*, the most recent edition of which uses the NRSV.[2] But, of course, the first and most essential resource is the Old or First Testament, the body of literature that Luke saw simply as "the Scriptures," containing the promise and models for all he described.

I hope that the book will be accessible for the general reader as well as useful for the student. While the tone is not overtly devotional, this interpretation of Luke stems from a commitment to the Christian faith and a conviction that the gospel's essential purpose is to bring home to people a sense of the extravagance of God's love in their regard. There are so many passages in Luke where that message is abundantly clear. There are others, as I noted above, where Jesus seems to speak in less encouraging, more threatening tones. Without watering down the challenge of the gospel, I have tried to integrate these into what I believe to be Luke's total perspective, one where acceptance and salvation prevail over judgment and sin.

[1] This is accepted and well explained in the well-received document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (Rome), *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Boston, MA: St. Paul Books and Media, 1993); see esp. pp. 83–84.

[2] *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels*, 5th ed. (Nashville: Nelson, 1992).

In the same connection, let me be frank concerning the perspective from which I write. I am a white male citizen of a first-world country, a Roman Catholic priest principally involved in academic teaching, though not without pastoral involvement. I comment upon Luke with, I hope, sensitivity to feminist concerns, though this is in no sense a feminist commentary and women readers may find it disappointing in places. While female characters are more prominent in Luke's gospel than in any of the other three, the attitude of the evangelist to women is ambiguous and very controversial. Is Luke the great champion of women, or does he patronize them and subtly but firmly put them in what he believed ought to be their place? The very prominence of women in some episodes of the gospel makes their absence in others all the more glaring. Resolving this issue is not a major concern of this commentary.[3] At times it can distract from the central point being made. But I do hope that my interpretation will further rather than inhibit the liberation of women from oppressive and disadvantaging structures in church and society.

In recent years many have also looked to Luke as a powerful champion of liberation from oppressive economic and social structures. A fresh appreciation of the radicalism of Mary's *Magnificat* canticle (1:46-55), the Beatitudes and Woes (6:20-26), and Luke's general privileging of the poor and marginalized at the expense of the wealthy and secure has led to liberatory readings of this particular gospel—and of the life and message of Jesus himself "through" the lens it provides. Again, I have to admit that I am not writing out of the socially and economically disadvantaged condition that is the lot of two-thirds of the people on this planet. I would hope, however, that the interpretation given does display some sensitivity to the situation in which the majority of the global community finds itself at the start of the new millennium. Some exposure to poverty, displacement of peoples, and ecological breakdown during stays in Africa and Asia have sharpened my perspective on "salvation" in Luke and made it a little more realistic. In some of the workshops that gave rise to this book, there were present as copresenters leading figures from Koori (Australian indigenous) communities. Their responses to what I was presenting were a challenge and stimulus to think more concretely and contextually about the liberation promised in the gospel.

[3] For a balanced and comprehensive survey of this topic in Luke, see Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

No interpreter of the New Testament can ignore the extent to which the Christian gospels are open to anti-Jewish or even anti-Semitic readings. The appalling sufferings inflicted upon Jewish people in the last century have finally brought home how dangerous the gospels can be when the tensions they appear to portray between Jesus and Jewish groups of his time are seen as offering paradigms for Christian attitudes to Jews and Judaism through the ages. Friendship with people of Jewish faith and frequent participation in more formal sessions of dialogue, such as those set up by the Council of Christians and Jews, have led me to be ever more sensitive in this area. I do not believe any other issue presses so urgently upon interpretation of the Christian gospels, and I would, again, hope that the reading of Luke offered here serves in many respects to address it.

Some Presuppositions

In developing this approach to Luke's gospel, I would like to make clear certain things I am presupposing without further justification.

First, I take the gospel in its final canonical form, paying little attention to issues concerning its likely sources or what might have been the process of its composition. Along with most scholars, I take it to be written by a third-generation Christian in the closing decades of the first century CE, sometime after the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman armies in the year 70. In line with tradition, I shall refer to its author as "Luke" without intending to foreclose one way or the other the issue as to whether the "Luke" in question was the companion of Paul mentioned in several letters (Phlm 24; Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11).

Again, along with the majority of scholars, I accept the "Two-Source" theory of the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels. According to this theory both Luke and Matthew, in addition to private sources of their own, drew independently upon Mark's gospel and also upon a Sayings Source that scholars reconstruct and call "Q." It seems necessary to postulate such a Sayings Source in order to account for the large amount of material Luke and Matthew have in common but that is not represented in Mark (though occasionally there are Markan parallels in rather different form[4]). At times, though chiefly in the notes, in the light

[4] This gives rise to what scholars call "doublets," that is, traditions that appear in the Synoptic tradition in two forms, one from Mark and one, apparently, from "Q." Examples are the parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt 13:31-32;

of this theory I shall point out places where Luke, for his own purposes, has notably embellished his Markan source or departed from its order.

The author of the Gospel of Luke is almost certainly the author of the sequel traditionally known as the Acts of the Apostles. In many respects the project of Luke is essentially incomplete at the close of the gospel, and to some extent I am doing the evangelist a disservice by not carrying this commentary on into his second volume. Desirable as that may be, it is not feasible to do so within the limits of this present project. I shall nonetheless from time to time point out episodes in Acts that carry forward and reinforce significant themes of the gospel.

The place of composition of the gospel and the situation of its original intended readers are matters that are hard to determine and, in any case, seem to be secondary to interpretation of the text itself. Students who may wish to pursue these and other issues at greater depth may do so in the more standard commentaries. My principal concern is with the text of the gospel as an independent narrative whole. Clearly, the more informed we are about the history, language, and customs of the world from which it sprang, the better will be our interpretation. Such knowledge often sheds light on details and allusions that would otherwise remain obscure or open to misinterpretation. In this area I am greatly indebted to major commentaries such as that of Joseph Fitzmyer.[5] However, unlike that classic commentary of the historical-critical tradition, my approach is primarily literary rather than historical. In this respect, too, I have debts to acknowledge: principally to Luke Timothy Johnson, Robert Tannehill, and my colleague and friend Mark Coleridge.[6]

Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19), the Beelzebul controversy (Matt 12:25-32; Mark 3:23-30; Luke 11:17-23; 12:10), and the saying about divorce (Matt 5:31-32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18).

[5] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, AB 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981); *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV*, AB 28A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985). In this revised edition I include debt to I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978, repr. 1987); François Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Hermeneia, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002–13).

[6] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991); Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation: Volume One: The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1-2*. (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1993).

Encounter with the Living Lord

Last but by no means least, readers have to be aware that the interpretation offered here proceeds entirely from a distinct view of what the gospels are and what they are not. First, what they are not. Though cast in the form that follows the pattern of Jesus' life, they are in no way biographies in the modern sense. They certainly record memories about Jesus and give us a fair indication of the basic pattern and shape of his life. But their primary purpose is not to pass on accurate historical information concerning things Jesus of Nazareth said and did in his historical life. As the next section of this work will show, this is true just as much of Luke's gospel as of the other three, even if at first sight the prologue to the gospel (1:1-4) might seem to suggest otherwise. Luke wishes to set his account of Jesus within the context of world history, but that does not mean that everything in it is "history" in the modern understanding of that term.

Luke's account of Jesus, no less than those of Mark, Matthew, and John, is shot through with a vision of faith. The essential core of what Christians believe about Jesus—that his death upon the cross under Pontius Pilate was followed by his resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God—colors the entire account from beginning to end. It forms a thick "lens" through which any details of his historical life have to be discerned. It determined what details were remembered and how such memories were embellished and extended as they were passed on through the decades in a context of faith and worship. Very influential in this process, as we shall see, was the understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of hopes and promises embedded in the Scriptures of Israel (for Christians the Old Testament). A scriptural aura in this sense hovers around the stories about Jesus, contributing color, detail, and language. In Luke's gospel traditions about the prophet Elijah have been particularly influential in this way.

Thus the Jesus portrayed in the gospels is the risen Lord active in the community today. The whole aim of the narrative is to engage the reader in the drama in such a way as to effectively communicate the sense of being a participant, not a spectator, in what is going on. *I* am Peter overcome with confusion in the boat (Luke 5:1-11); *I* am the widow whose son Jesus raised (Luke 7:11-17); *I* am the woman who touched the fringe of his cloak (8:43-48); *I* am the leper who returned to say thanks (17:11-19). This is not make-believe. Behind it lies the reality for the believer, that Jesus really is alive and that those whom his Spirit touches undergo an experience of salvation that is just as immediate and real for

them as it was for those who saw him, heard him, and felt his touch in Galilee and Judea.

So the gospel may appear to be a story about "back there." But it is not really about "back there" at all. I shall on occasion comment upon the extent to which a particular tradition in the Gospel of Luke may or may not reflect what Jesus said or did in his historical life. But my concern is not to take the reader "back" to this Jesus—something not really possible save in a very speculative and limited degree. Some readers may find this lack of concern for history disappointing or even disturbing. I can only ask them to enter upon the journey for a while. What they have lost of "history" will, I hope, be more than compensated for by the sense of being grasped by the power of the risen Lord that the Lukan narrative with great artistry conveys.

We would not read the Gospel of Luke at all if we did not recognize that it is in some sense "our story" too. The hopes and longings for liberation voiced by characters in the gospel remain our hopes today. Like them, we stand between promise and fulfillment. The "day" of salvation is "far spent," but it is by no means fully achieved. My hope for this book is that it might help present-day readers discover what "salvation" might mean for themselves, for the communities in which they live, and perhaps even for our world as a whole in these early decades of a new millennium. My aim is to help people read and hear the gospel as "our story" today—to help them become the "Theophilus" for whom Luke says he is writing (1:3).

Features of Luke's Gospel

Before we begin our journey through Luke's gospel in detail, it will help to take note of some of the features that make it stand out from its fellow gospels—not only John, but Mark and Matthew as well. Taking note of such features beforehand will help the reader to recognize them as they occur and so enrich the reading. Let me begin by explaining why "hospitality" is a particularly fruitful way to approach the Gospel of Luke.

The Hospitality of God

"Hospitality" conjures up the context of guests, visitors, putting on meals for them, providing board and lodging, making the stranger feel "at home" in our home—enlarging our home to make that wider "at homeness" possible. Even a casual reading of Luke makes clear how often in this gospel significant events and exchanges take place in the context of meals and the offering (or non-offering) of hospitality in general. Hospitality, in a variety of expressions, forms a notable frame of reference for the ministry of Jesus.

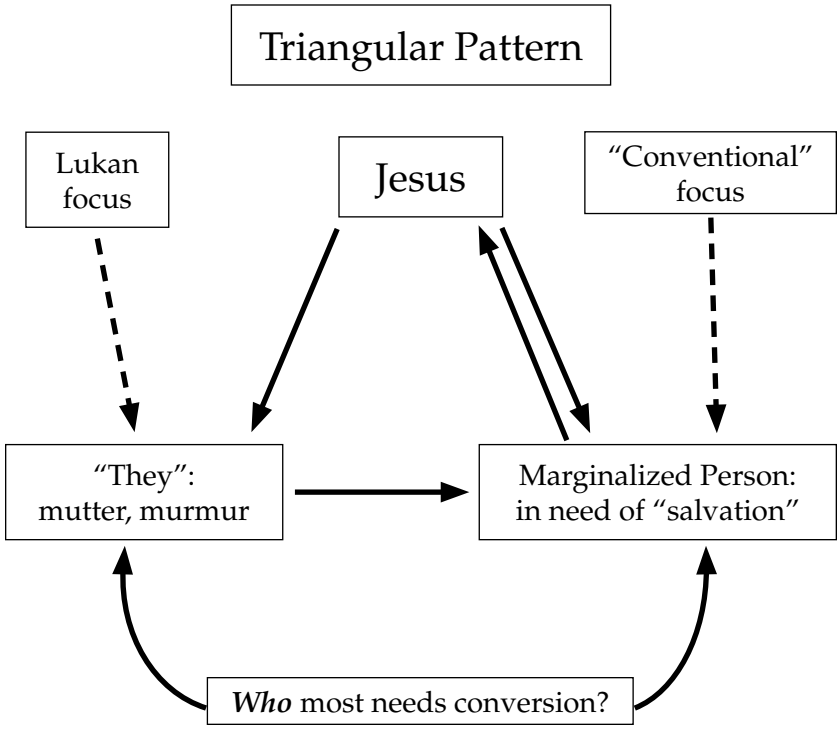
But there is more to it than that. Luke sees the whole life and ministry of Jesus as a *visitation* on God's part to Israel and the world. From the start this raises the question, how will this guest, this visitor, be *received*? The crucial point is that those who do receive him find that he brings them into a much wider sphere of hospitality: the "hospitality of God." The One who comes as visitor and guest in fact becomes *host* and offers a hospitality in which human beings and, potentially, the entire world can become truly human, be at home, *know* salvation in the depths of their hearts.

There is one episode in Luke's gospel that provides a paradigm of all this in a notably clear way. Toward the end of his long journey to Jerusalem, Jesus passes through the city of Jericho and finds lodging at the house of a tax collector named Zacchaeus (19:1-10). Ostracized from the community because of his trade, Zacchaeus, to his surprise and delight, finds himself giving hospitality to Jesus. When people mutter and

complain because he has gone in to be the guest of a sinner (v. 7), Jesus speaks up in defense of Zacchaeus (v. 9): "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham" (that is, a full member of the community). The marginalized one who has given hospitality to Jesus finds himself drawn into a much wider hospitality, the hospitality of God.

Human Response: The Lukan "Triangle"

It is easy in scenes like this to focus simply upon the interaction between Jesus and the character (here Zacchaeus) who is the principal object of his concern. But, again and again in Luke, we have what I would call a "triangular" situation. Alongside Jesus and the other principal character, there is a third party: a "they" who observe and comment. This third group invariably has difficulty with what is going on. They reject the exchange of hospitality, they mutter and murmur. The resistance of such people to what Jesus is offering highlights, by way of contrast, the joy and transformation of those who, like Zacchaeus, respond positively. We can set out the pattern in diagram form as follows:



Luke is thus very interested in human response. It is not enough to describe the coming of salvation in an objective way. Again and again the gospel grapples with the problem of why some people and groups respond positively to Jesus and why others do not, why some enjoy the fruits of salvation while others bar themselves against it. Acceptance and rejection—human and divine—is, then, a key trajectory running through the narrative.

Human Transformation: Removing the "Label"

One particular aspect of human response that evidently interests Luke concerns what I would dub "the label" that human beings are so prone to impose upon others whom they regard as disturbing, alien, or threatening. Again the Zacchaeus episode mentioned above provides a classic example. The murmuring, muttering crowd impose upon the tax collector the label "sinner": "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner" (19:7). Precisely the same label is imposed by Simon the Pharisee upon the woman who gate-crashes his dinner and anoints Jesus in extravagant mode (7:39; see also v. 37). A key aspect of the salvation that Jesus brings in such episodes concerns the removal of the label: compelling the judgmental "they" to see the person in a new light, removing the social stigma of the label from the person in question. The same procedure is integral to the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), as I will show.

Luke, then, is very interested in human transformation. The gospel shows how people appropriate salvation, how they resist it, and the effects that reception or rejection, as the case may be, has in human lives. "Salvation" is not some kind of religious "goodie" that drops down from heaven to be appropriated along with other advantages in life. Nor—though Luke retains the transcendent dimension—is it simply a state or destiny awaiting individuals when they die. "Salvation" concerns the whole of life and begins here and now. When Jesus says with respect to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house," he indicates that what has happened to Zacchaeus—and to the community to which he has been restored—is a model or paradigm of what his whole mission is about ("For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" [19:10]). The episode "defines" in action what Luke means by salvation.

The "Great Story" of Salvation

Luke is by general agreement the paramount storyteller among the gospel writers. This is true not only on the level of particular episodes—

for example, the Emmaus story—but in the scope and conception of the Luke–Acts project as a whole. Luke draws us into one "great story" of salvation that has its beginnings in the story of Israel told in the Old Testament, especially the promises of salvation contained therein. For Luke this biblical story comes to a climax in the mission, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, and then continues to find fulfillment in the life and Spirit-empowered mission of the church. Knowing where one sits within the "story" of one's family or community is, by general agreement, a key forger and preserver of human identity. With believers from the extra-Jewish "Gentile" world primarily in view, Luke writes to communicate to them where they fit within the great story that hitherto seemed focused upon Israel alone.

A Story in Three Stages: The Time Frame of Salvation

The Gospel of Luke, which is our primary concern, is actually the central act of the three-stage drama that makes up Luke's project as a whole. At first glance the gospel seems to begin with events immediately prior to the birth of Jesus (the annunciations to Zechariah and Mary) and then carry on to tell the story of his life, up to the climax of his death, resurrection, and ascension. This may be so if we attend simply to the run of the story. However, the drama of the gospel presupposes a far earlier beginning: way back with promises of salvation made by God to Israel. As soon as, following the prologue (1:1-4), we enter upon the story of Jesus' infancy (1:5–2:52), we are not entering among characters simply going about their daily business. Particularly in the infancy story, though in fact extending throughout the gospel, we are entering into an aura of expectation—expectation that God who has promised salvation to Israel will very soon make good on that promise by setting Israel free. An essential feature of the infancy stories in Luke is the acknowledgment on the part of leading characters in the drama (Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna) that in the births of John and Jesus the long-awaited salvation has dawned. Put more literally—by Zechariah in his canticle (*Benedictus*)—"God has visited his people" (1:68).

This sense of promise being fulfilled continues as the gospel moves into the adult life and ministry of Jesus. The issue comes to a climax in the events of his death and resurrection. As the two disciples on the way to Emmaus lament to each other (24:19-21), what happened to Jesus on Good Friday ran absolutely counter to the hopes for salvation that they and others had cherished. Luke tells the story of Jesus' risen life in a way

that depicts people gradually coming to see that this is not in fact the case: that God has fulfilled the promise, but done so in a way that quite blows apart conventional expectation of how that promised salvation was to occur. The same sense of promise fulfilled continues in Acts as Peter, in his first speech to the people of Jerusalem (2:14-36), points out that the disciples' experience of the Spirit at Pentecost is the fulfillment of what God had promised for the messianic era through the mouth of the prophet Joel. So the first act of the drama or, more precisely, the first epoch presupposed in the drama is the long period of promise recorded in the Scriptures of Israel.

The infancy story (Luke 1:5–2:52) acts as a kind of bridge between the era of promise and the time of fulfillment. The narrative of fulfillment, beginning with the preaching of the Baptist (3:1-6) and extending to the end of Acts (28:31), presupposes a further demarcation of epochs. There is the "day" ("Today") of Jesus, the time of his public ministry, when, empowered by the Spirit, he makes available to people the free acceptance of God (Luke 4:21). This "day" lasts from the beginning of his public ministry right up to the moment of his death on the cross when he asks forgiveness for those who are effecting his crucifixion (Luke 23:34). But this apparent defeat does not bring the "day" of salvation to an end. The narrative of Acts makes clear from the start that the Spirit that rested upon Jesus is still available in the ministry of the disciples, empowered at Pentecost by the same divine power. Beyond the "day" of Jesus extends the "day" of the church, and this "day" will continue right up to the return of Jesus in glory at the end of time.

Luke hardly envisaged that this latter "day" would last as long as it has. But that is not the main point. His schema of salvation is open-ended and flexible, and that is one reason why it is so attractive. The image of God that emerges from this gospel is a God of the "second chance." Those who fail to respond the first time around (during Jesus' own life) get a second chance in the time of the church. The speeches in the early chapters of Acts (2:14-41; 3:12-26) underline this expressly. To put it more colloquially, the God of Luke is a God who, in the game of salvation, is always moving the goalposts—but doing so to the advantage, not the disadvantage, of weak, laboring humankind.

We can set out the "program" of salvation according to Luke more schematically as follows:

Luke-Acts: Schema of Salvation History

Promises of God

"Redemption" of Israel
"*Pouring out the **Spirit***"

		"TODAY"		.....	"END"
Infancy of Jesus	***Spirit*** upon **Jesus**				
Preaching of **JBap** "*Repent*"	Preaching of **Jesus**: "**Day** of Acceptance" to Israel: "*Repent*"	† /Res./Asc. ***Spirit*** on **Church** (Pentecost)	Preaching of **Church**: "**Day** of acceptance" to Israel: "*Repent*" to Gentiles: "*Repent*"	...	Son of Man" Judgment Kingdom of God

STAGES (Summary)

1. Era of the PROMISES

Interim: Infancy of Jesus/Preaching of JBaptist

2. 'Day' of JESUS: a) Galilee: 3:21–9:50
b) Journey to Jerusalem: 9:51–19:27

Interim: † /Resurrection/Ascension/Pentecost

3. 'Day' of the CHURCH: Acts 2:1–28:31
(Jerusalem, Samaria, 'Ends of the Earth' [Rome])

.....**Time of JUDGMENT**

You will note that in this schema, while the whole dramatic action begins "way back" in the epoch of the promises enshrined in Scripture, it concludes in the indefinite future, the time of Jesus' return as Son of Man to usher in the judgment. This motif of final judgment appears in virtually all the writings of the New Testament. It was part of the worldview that early Christianity inherited from the Jewish matrix in which it was formed. In some New Testament writings the expectation of the "end" or judgment is very intense (Gospel of Mark, 1 Thessalonians, Revelation). In others (Ephesians, Gospel of John), while not abandoned altogether, it has ceased to be a primary focus. The time "in between," the present time between the resurrection of Jesus and his coming in glory, has taken on new significance. This is the case with Luke. The chief focus is firmly upon the "today" of salvation, offered in the ministry of Jesus and continued (to this day) in the ministry of the church. The primary task of the church, according to Luke, is not so much to proclaim judgment as the great "today" of salvation—a "day" that, as Luke's open-ended schema allows, has become a very long "day" indeed.

Continuity and Rupture

As will be clear from the schema just outlined, the Spirit is the vehicle of continuity across the three stages—from promise to fulfillment. This sense of continuity is important for Luke. The acknowledgment in the infancy story that God has begun to fulfill ties the gospel very closely to the era of promise stretching behind it. The early episodes of the gospel present both Jesus and the members of his family as devout and observant Jews. Likewise, just as the narrative of the gospel begins in Jerusalem, so Jerusalem will be the starting point for the mission of the disciples recorded in Acts: the Spirit that empowered Jesus for mission (3:21-22; 4:14) comes down upon the fearful disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), empowering them to carry that same mission "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Along with this strong measure of continuity, however, there is also surprise and rupture. The scope of the salvation brought by Jesus will burst conventional categories of expectation and put on edge the guardians of tradition, especially the scribes, the lawyers, and the Pharisees. At the same time, it will delight those on the margins of the community who never expected that forgiveness, grace, and healing would reach out to them in such unconditional measure (7:29-30). The sense of rupture, along with continuity, will carry on right through Acts as, again

and again, the gospel as proclaimed by the apostles, most notably Paul, finds at best a mixed and limited response amongst Jews but a ready welcome among well-disposed Gentiles ("God-fearers") on the fringe of the synagogue (13:46; 14:27; 18:5-6; 28:28). The interplay and tension between continuity and rupture will be a thread running right through the gospel.

Reversal

Closely connected with this interplay between continuity and rupture in Luke's gospel is the motif of reversal. Reversal can be seen already in Mary's *Magnificat*, where the onset of salvation, which the canticle (in the mode of liturgical texts) sees as already "realized," means that the powerful have been brought down from their thrones and the lowly uplifted, the hungry fed with good things and the rich sent away empty (1:52-53; see also the second oracle of Simeon: 2:34-35). Cast now in the future, the same sense of reversal is central to the Beatitudes and Woes proclaimed by Jesus at the beginning of his great sermon (6:20-26). It features, too, in several of the parables: Choosing Places at Table (14:7-14); the Rogue Manager (16:1-13); the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31); the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14). In general, reversal is a motif to be on the lookout for throughout the gospel. It is all part of the shake-up of established patterns and expectations brought by God's "visitation" of the world in the person of Jesus.

Poverty and Riches

As the Beatitudes in particular indicate, those in whose favor the reversal will work are particularly the poor and dispossessed. In this sense the Beatitudes simply continue the theme of divine predilection for the poor and vulnerable in society that is prominent in the Old Testament, expressed particularly in legislation to protect "the widow, the orphan, and the stranger in the land" (Deut 10:18; 24:19, 21; 27:19), a triad whose claim to protection is insisted upon in prophetic books as well (Jer 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10; see Ps 94:6; 146:9). The same theme of divine favor for the poor and associated warnings about the dangers of wealth are prominent in the Synoptic tradition in general, and clearly go back to the practice and preaching of Jesus. In Luke, however, these twin themes receive an accentuation far beyond what we find in Mark and Matthew. This accentuation is clear both in the quantity of material devoted to these concerns and the radicalism of what the Lukan Jesus

asks of his followers (see especially 14:33!). In particular, Luke seems to have a special sensitivity to the human propensity to be "enslaved" by attachment to wealth and the (false) security that wealth purports to provide. Such attachment not only results in indifference to the plight of the poor but blights a person's readiness to follow Jesus and so obtain the true riches, which are those of the kingdom. We shall encounter both aspects as we move through the gospel.

Inclusive Scope of Salvation

Another theme that goes back to the practice of Jesus himself but is notably accentuated by Luke is the inclusive scope of the salvation brought by Jesus. We have already noted in connection with hospitality that it is chiefly those on the margins of respectable society who give a welcome to Jesus while those in the center tend to be resistant. Very frequently, it is his unconditional reaching out to those deemed to be beyond the pale of acceptance that provokes the resistance. The pattern for this is set very early: in fact, from Jesus' proclamation of the inclusive scope of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth and the (ultimately violent) resistance he experiences from his townsfolk (4:16-30). Jesus' reaching out to the marginalized in society described in the gospel foreshadows the reaching out on a far wider scale when Acts tells how, impelled by the same Spirit, the apostles spread his message beyond Israel, Judea, Samaria, Asia Minor, and Greece, ultimately to "the ends of the earth" (Rome [see 1:8]).

Jesus: The Rejected Prophet

Along with the other evangelists, Luke presents Jesus as Messiah (Christ) and Son of God—with the more transcendent understanding of those titles that specifically Christian faith requires. Distinctive of the Christology of Luke is the presentation of Jesus as a prophet and particularly, in line with a long-standing biblical tradition, as a prophet destined to suffer rejection from his people. The portrayal of Jesus in these terms is foreshadowed already in the infancy story when the elderly Simeon, in his second oracle addressed to Mary, the mother of Jesus, speaks of her child as "destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign of contradiction" (2:34). It has a more formal beginning in the scene just mentioned where Jesus inaugurates his public ministry in the synagogue of his hometown Nazareth (4:16-30). Citing Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus identifies himself with the prophet anointed by the Spirit to

preach a message of good news for the poor and liberation of captives. Though initially the response of his townsfolk is positive, the incident turns ugly when he begins to speak of the wider scope of his mission: beyond Nazareth and indeed beyond the confines of Israel itself. The violent rejection he suffers on this occasion foreshadows the rejection on a far more significant scale that he will later suffer from the leaders of his own people in Jerusalem. Unlike the episode at Nazareth, where he "passes through" the crowd and goes on his way (4:30), rejection in Jerusalem will prove fatal for Jesus. However, in resurrection and ascension Jesus will "pass through" the bonds of death and his mission will expand, on an ever wider scale from Jerusalem "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This pattern, whereby rejection, far from checking the spread of the Gospel, leads in fact to its more widespread propagation, is repeated over and over again in the Acts of the Apostles. It is a key aspect of Lukan Christology playing itself out in the experience of the emissaries of the early church.

The Lost Family of God

Behind the outreaching scope of the gospel lies a particular view of humanity presupposed by Luke: humanity as the "lost family" of God. The paradigm for this understanding of the plight of humanity is the great parable of the Lost Son (the Prodigal Son) in Luke 15. While the older son in the parable would represent Israel, the Jewish people, who have not strayed from the Father's home and, through practice of the law, have kept all the Father's commands, the younger son would represent the remaining nations of the world, who have abandoned the Father's house and are sunk in the kind of debased humanity represented by the plight of the young man when all his inheritance has run out. It is significant in this connection that when Luke gives a list of the ancestry of Jesus (3:23-38), in contrast to Matthew who "descends" from Abraham, Luke, going in the opposite direction, takes the list past Abraham right back to the origins of the human race in Adam, who is called "son of God" (3:38). Adam thus founds a line originally destined to have a filial relationship with God. In the face of human squandering of this relationship in the ensuing generations and the resulting loss of true humanity, Jesus comes to summon human beings back to the hospitality of the Father's home, where alone true humanity can be attained. Like the older brother in the parable, however, the Jewish leadership, conscious of having never left the Father's house and, unlike the nations of the world, having remained

obedient to the Father's will (expressed in the law), resent the "welcome home" offered by Jesus and especially the unconditional generosity of the terms on which it is made.

Eating and Drinking: The Significance of Meals

Luke presents Jesus at meals, celebrating—usually in "bad company" (tax collectors and "sinners")—the acceptance and mercy of God, to a degree well beyond what is the case in the other gospels. Luke amply illustrates the charge thrown against Jesus that he is "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7:34; also Matt 11:19). Again and again, we find that meals are the settings for significant activity or teaching of Jesus—including the Lukan presentation of his risen life. Although not confined to Luke, the tradition of the miraculous feeding of the multitude (9:10-17) anticipates the divine hospitality of the fully arrived kingdom, while the Eucharist is the mode in which the church will celebrate this divine hospitality in the time "between" the departure of Jesus and the definitive celebration of the kingdom. As the invitations to celebratory meals in the three paradigm parables of the Lost (Sheep, Coin, Son) in Luke 15 show, the meals that Jesus celebrates in "bad company" are simply reflections on earth of the celebration going on in heaven over the return of the lost children to the home of the Father.

Joy in the Spirit

As noted above, the Spirit is the chief vehicle of continuity across the three stages of the Lukan narrative drama. It is not surprising, then, that the Spirit features more prominently in Luke than in the remaining gospels. The gift of the Spirit is, of course, especially prominent in the infancy story, where it is closely associated with the joy that attends the experience of the onset of salvation. Following his baptism at the hands of John, the Spirit descends upon Jesus as a token of the Father's love. Luke reminds us that it is as empowered in this way by the Spirit that Jesus begins his mission in the synagogue in Nazareth (4:14) and applies to himself the prophetic text from Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:17-21). Later, in the moment of communion with the Father that both Luke and Matthew allow us to overhear (Matt 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-22), it is Luke who introduces this moment with the words, "At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father . . . '." While not always explicitly associated with the Spirit, the motif of "joy" rings throughout the gospel—and continues in Acts—as a

sure token of the onset of the salvation brought by Jesus and a foretaste of the ultimate joy to be experienced in the home of the Father.

The Extravagance of Grace

Not unconnected with the motif of joy in Luke's gospel is the palpable extravagance that is so often a feature of the human response to the experience of grace. At the visitation, Mary does not simply journey to see her cousin Elizabeth: she goes "with haste" to the hill country of Judea (1:39). Extravagance marks the account of the calling of the first disciples (5:1-11), not only in the size of the miraculous draught of fish but also in the response of Simon (Peter) to the catch (vv. 8-10). Those who are forgiving and generous will have poured into their lap (from God) "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (6:38). The extravagant gestures of the woman who anoints Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee (7:36-50)—washing his feet with her tears, wiping them dry with her hair, anointing them with costly ointment she has brought (7:38)—stand in sharp contrast to the cold failure of Simon in the duties of hospitality to his guest. The Good Samaritan not only provides first aid in good measure to the wounded traveler he comes upon on the road; he takes great pains to ensure that nothing will be wanting in ongoing care (10:33-35). The three parables of the Lost in Luke 15 all feature extravagant celebration of when the lost item (Sheep, Coin, Son) is found; it is in fact the extravagance of the father's response in the latter that so provokes the anger and resentment of the older brother (15:20, 22-24, 28-30). The Samaritan cured of his leprosy by Jesus, when he saw that he was healed, praising God with a loud voice, prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him (17:15-16). Finally, Zacchaeus, who has made the over-the-top gesture of climbing a tree in his eagerness to see Jesus, descends from it in haste and welcomes him into his house with joy (19:3-7). As will be clear from the foregoing survey, the motif of extravagance in Luke can take widely different forms. There is, though, a clear underlying pattern: those who are notably touched by the extravagance of God's grace coming to them in Jesus tend to respond with a matching extravagance in response.

A Gospel of Prayer

Just as Jesus is frequently depicted at meals and banquets in Luke's gospel, so too important things happen when he is at prayer. It was "while he was praying" immediately after his baptism by John that the

heavens were opened and the Spirit came down upon him (3:21-22). It was his custom, we are told (5:16), to withdraw to desert places to pray. The night before he chose twelve disciples to be his apostles, he spent the night on a mountain in prayer to God (6:12). In the account of the transfiguration only Luke tells us that Jesus "went up on the mountain to pray" (9:28). It was while he was praying that the disciples came and asked that he teach them how to pray—following which Jesus teaches them the Lukan version of the Lord's Prayer (11:1-4). Only in Luke do we read Jesus' injunction about the "need to pray always and not to lose heart," a teaching that he illustrates with the parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge (18:1-8). Immediately afterwards he gives instruction about the right disposition for prayer by telling the parable about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, both of whom went up to the temple to pray (18:9-14). Luke notably accentuates the aspect of prayer in his account of Jesus' agony on the Mount of Olives prior to his arrest and eventual execution (22:40-46). In all of this Luke seems to be making the point that prayer is the channel between the human and the heavenly world. It is in and through prayer, on the model provided by Jesus, that human beings align themselves most intentionally in relationship with God and find guidance and strength to live out the requirements of that relationship in love and trust.

Journey to Jerusalem

Luke picks up the Markan motif of Jesus being constantly on the move, "on the way." For Luke, however, what is significant is not so much that Jesus is on a journey but that he is on a journey to Jerusalem. The entire second half of the ministry of Jesus is enclosed within the framework of his deliberately "setting his face" to go to Jerusalem (9:51) and his entry into the city as its messianic king (19:28-44). Again and again, in the course of this journey, we are reminded that he is on his way to Jerusalem (13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28). Only in Luke does Jesus "weep" over Jerusalem at the thought of the destruction destined to come upon it because it did not recognize the time of its "visitation" by God (19:41-44). Jerusalem is the location not only of the passion and death of Jesus but also of his resurrection and ascension, since Luke restricts the appearances of the risen Lord either to the city itself or to a village (Emmaus) less than a day's journey from it. The gospel begins with the annunciation to Zechariah, which takes place while he is performing his priestly duty in the temple in Jerusalem (1:5-25); it concludes with the disciples, after

the ascension of Jesus, "continually in the temple praising God" (24:53). As told in Acts, it is while remaining in Jerusalem that the disciples will be empowered by the Spirit at Pentecost for their worldwide mission (2:1-4). Beginning with the preaching of the leading apostles in Jerusalem (2:14–7:60), the mission gradually fans out in clearly defined geographical stages to arrive eventually at Rome (28:16-31; see 1:8). Jerusalem, then, is both the climactic goal of the personal mission of Jesus and the essential starting point for carrying the fruits of his mission to the world.

Located in and Faced toward the World

Luke is sometimes referred to as the theologian of the "history of salvation."[1] This is an apt description but it should be understood along with the fact that, of all the gospel writers, Luke is the one most concerned to set the story of the salvation brought by Christ firmly within the context of ordinary human history and in close relationship to it. So, Luke is careful to set the story of Jesus' birth in the context of the decree that went out from the Roman emperor Augustus that all should be registered, adding that this was the first registration that was taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria (2:1-2). As the immediate prelude to the adult ministry of Jesus, Luke, at even greater length, sets the proclamation of John the Baptist within the time period of all the relevant rulers of the time (3:1-2). Though the relationship and interaction with the Roman imperium and cultural milieu understandably becomes more prominent in Acts, concern to get this right can already be seen in the way in which in the passion story Luke stresses over and over again recognition of the innocence of Jesus, especially on the part of Pilate the Roman governor. While Rome is not portrayed as overly benign in the Lukan project, there is a sense in which Luke is saying to his audience, "Look, it's not all bad out there. We are going to be around in the world for some indefinite time. We have to relate to that world, find the good in it, while offering it the word of life in view of the coming divine judgment." Of all the New Testament writers, then, Luke is the one who has the most positive attitude to the world. Without Luke the Christian movement may well have become just another unworldly sect in some sort of detachment from Judaism. The evangelist in his two-volume work projected a unified vision that set Christianity on the path to become a worldwide religion.

[1] So especially, Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

Luke's Gospel Today

As readers of the gospel today we are inheritors of that unified vision of a community within the world on a journey to salvation. As the "day" of acceptance continues, we remain in the tension between promise and final fulfillment. We can identify with the characters in the infancy story—recognizing the dawn of salvation and joining them in their canticles of praise. At the same time, in our world and in ourselves we find so much "unfinished business." We are "Advent people," still waiting upon the coming of the Lord.

We are conscious, too, of painful gaps between expectations we had cherished and how things have actually turned out. So often in our inmost thoughts we hear echoes of the wistful "we were hoping" of the Emmaus disciples (24:21) or we minister to those for whom life experience has meant a bitter loss of hope. In our own time we look for the "assurance" that Luke wished readers to derive from his gospel as they came to see painful and conflicting realities held together within a wider purpose of God.