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INTRODUCTION: HOW TO READ LUKE 14?

And they explained what had happened on the road (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ) and how he became known to them in the breaking of the bread (κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου). (Luke 24.35).

This clause with its references to travel and eating from the coda of Luke's gospel, though infused here with the numinous and liturgical nuances that colour the coda itself,¹ nonetheless accurately echoes the gospel writer's twin devices for advancing the narrative in its lengthy central section and for portraying its principal figure, Jesus, as a travelling benefactor and banqueter.² Typically, it is at these frequent prandial pauses, either explicitly within the socially significant confines of the *klinium* (dining room) or within spatially unspecified dining situations that clearly evoke the *klinium* setting, that Luke shows himself to be a master of narrative evocation of the Greco-Roman social dining scene, of adjusting older Jesus traditions towards his narrative aims, and of characterizing Jesus as a kind of δειπνοσοφιστής (dinner sage), a recognizable and credible figure to first-century Mediterranean readers,³ who expounds for

¹ The event 'on the road' is an encounter with the risen Jesus; κλάσις τοῦ ἄρτου is a central ritual of Luke's paradigmatic Jerusalem church; see Acts 2.42–7; Horn, 1983, pp. 36–49.

² On the travel motif see Acts 10.38 (Luke's summary of Jesus' career as it has been described in the gospel): διήλθεν εὐεργετῶν καὶ ἰώμενος πάντας τοὺς καταδυναστευομένους ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου, 'he wandered about doing good and curing all who were overpowered by the devil'. On Luke's portrayal of Jesus as a 'benefactor' within a benefaction-oriented culture see Danker, 1982, p. 395; 1988, pp. 2–10; cf. ch. 6, pp. 116–20 below. On the 'wandering guest' motif in Luke see especially Grundmann, 1959; and Moessner, 1989, whose view of this motif (a midrashic replication of Deuteronomy) I do not share.

³ The display of sagacity at symposia was a Greek social and literary tradition; hence the 'dinner sage', often an intellectual retainer in wealthy households, was a popular figure who became immortalized in the literary symposia. The late Hellenistic figure of the *deipnosophist* is most aptly illustrated in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*.

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Luke's audience an exemplary commensality – an ideal social dining arrangement – by means of provocative actions and explicating orations.

Among the many dinner stops in Luke's narrative, the one recorded in 14.1–24 stands out in the alignment of its setting (an upper-class dinner party), with Jesus as the featured guest, and a discourse appropriate to the setting in that it consists mostly of *quaestiones convivales*, topics related to banquets and proper dinner behaviour. Why this dinner episode, evidently rather coherent on the face of it, not an obvious unsolved problem in Lukan studies, nor short of studies devoted to it, should receive the lengthy attention I have given it needs a brief explanation.

This study was to be a brief chapter and several scattered footnotes in an analysis of the origin, transmission and literary functions of the parable of the great banquet whose three extant versions are entombed in Luke 14.16–24, Matthew 22.1–14 and *Gospel of Thomas* 64. The need to expand one chapter into a work in its own right was forced upon me by the realization that retold parables 'can be a very tricky thing' (Mack, 1988, p. 150) and, more specifically, that the recovery of the 'parabolic' function of the banquet story in Luke's narrative would be trickier than I had anticipated.

Difficulties lurked on several sides. The first inhered in the notion of 'parable' itself. Luke does not call the dinner story a 'parable' and in 14.7 and elsewhere uses the term to designate material that does not fall into any form-critical category of *Gleichnisrede*. The traditional form-critical supposition that 'forms can tell us much about functions' (Sider, 1981, p. 453) thus would not be very useful. Rather, it would prove to be necessary to go back to Aristotle, the Greek tradition generally, and to a neglected insight in Adolf Jülicher's monumental work on *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (1910), where parables are treated not as formal entities but as 'proofs' (πίστεις) for the production of 'conviction' (πίστις) in argumentation.⁴

Second, though not called a parable, the story is evidently an invented narrative and, as others have noted and I point out later, it

⁴ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.20.1–9; on ancient theories of comparison see McCall, 1969; Jülicher, 1910, vol. I, pp. 96, 105; see also ch. 4. n. 4. Jülicher's point, learnt from Aristotle, that parables are 'Beglaubigungsmittel' was subordinated to his larger argument for the distinction between parable and allegory. Since, moreover, his entire work was driven by his famous polemic against an allegorizing parable hermeneutic, the idea that parables are 'proofs' was not fully developed, much less exegetically worked out, even by him.

is thoroughly linked to a larger textual unit that can be shown to consist of 14.1–24 on literary evidence (ch. 2) and rhetorical sense (ch. 8). Hence the Lukan function of the householder story would need to be explicated contextually – in relation to the point of the dinner episode (14.1–24) as a whole – much more rigorously and specifically than had been done before.⁵

The vast literature⁶ on the banquet parable demonstrates that the dominant tendency has been towards a figurative and allegorical interpretation in which the narrative context as a hermeneutic guide is largely suppressed.⁷ Rather, typically the parable is viewed as half narrative metaphor, standing for the divine realm (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), and ‘half allegory’ (Jülicher, 1910, vol. II, p. 416), to be read either as an eschatological story of divine admission to and exclusion from the βασιλεία (symbolized in the mythic messianic meal), hence disclosing Luke’s ‘ethic of election’ (Sanders, 1974; cf. Bacon, 1922–3), or to be viewed as a coded Lukan retrospective on the history of divine election passing from the aristocratic Jewish custodians of the official religious apparatus (refused first invitation) to marginal Jews (second invitation to urban poor) and Gentiles (supplementary invitation to those outside the city), much like the expanding Christian mission pattern depicted in Acts.⁸

How all this could be embedded in a story so explicitly reliant on the vocabulary of wealth and poverty, and which quite evidently has been located within a narrative context where these issues appear only fuzzily, if at all, turned out to be a question demanding another look at the banquet parable and its point and function within the banquet episode. To be sure, I am not the first to point out the problem of an overly imaginative interpretation of Luke’s banquet story, nor the first to press for an adjusted appraisal of its meaning and use. Others, upon noting that Luke accentuates socio-economic issues in the parable, have suggested that the point of the story has to do with these issues and that its function was to stand as a fictional model for the Lukan community’s orientation towards

⁵ Cf. Frankemölle’s argument for appraising parables embedded in larger texts with reference to their *Sitz in der Literatur* (Frankemölle, 1981–2, pp. 69–70).

⁶ See the entries in Kissinger, 1979; and the ‘bibliografia recente’ (1960–74) in J. Dupont, 1978a, pp. 331–4.

⁷ Dschulnigg, 1989, pp. 335–51, charts the main lines of parable interpretation, using the banquet parable as the illustration; cf. the typology of hermeneutical options by Fabris, 1978, pp. 150–5.

⁸ E.g., Manson, 1949, p. 130. This interpretive model is further discussed and criticized in ch. 5, pp. 84–6.

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wealth and social relations.⁹ These scholars would provide generally compatible company for me in the appraisal of Luke's re-presentation (redaction) of the banquet parable itself, although I would end up stating the socio-economic issues presumed and addressed by the parable more sharply (ch. 5), and identifying its primary point and how it is conveyed more specifically (ch. 6).

Since the parable delivers its message as part of a longer speech in a dinner setting, the point of the parable would need to be tested and clarified with reference to this larger narrative and speech setting. And herein would lie the third and most difficult problem: how to determine what the entire episode was about. Wherein, if anywhere, lay its thematic centre of gravity? Did the unit have an identifiable representational or argumentative function? That is, did it intend to exert a specific influence upon its audience? How could one account for the selection and sequence of all the sub-units of the episode? Most perplexingly, why had the author of the episode elected to introduce a speech, otherwise entirely made up of 'table talk', with a healing scene featuring a person afflicted with dropsy? What, after all, did dropsies have to do with dinners?

Much clarity could be gained on these questions, I thought, if the compositional logic, the design that generated the literary existence of this episode, could be uncovered. In the traditional view, generated by the force of source, form and redaction criticism, the episode consists of thematically related units collected from several pre-Lukan sources which Luke has redactionally adjusted more or less substantially and collated according to a catchword method, using 'banquet' as the catchword. This view is not adequate, however, for it pre-empts a deeper comprehension of the cohesiveness of the dinner episode. It presupposes a highly unliterary author and legitimates an exegetical method, amply reflected in the scholarly commentary traditions, that treats the constituent *pericopae* in isolation from each other. Others have argued that Luke composed the episode along lines suggested by the classical Greek *symposion*, a literary form, popular at least from the time of Plato to the end of antiquity, for depicting philosophers at dinner or drinking party and presenting their opinions and arguments as dinner or drinking talk. But this too would prove to be a hypothesis that either cannot or, in application, does not deal with the combination

⁹ Dormeyer, 1974, pp. 211–16, 219; Fabris, 1978, pp. 154–65; Horn, 1983, pp. 184–6; Moxnes, 1986–7, pp. 162–3; Rohrbach, 1991, pp. 137–47; cf. passing references to 14.16–24 in the same vein in Elliott, 1991a and 1991b.

of questions the dinner episode raises (see ch. 7; Braun, 1992, pp. 73–5).

The challenge thus would be to develop a comprehensive, coherent and historically plausible proposal – i.e., a proposal appropriate to a first-century author and audience – for the interpretation of Luke 14.1–24. The proposal would need to account for the narrative setting (dinner party), the selection, literary characteristics and sequence of all the episode’s constituent periods (including the scene of healing a person with dropsy, an apparently odd formal and thematic ‘wild card’ in the dinner episode), as well as the *dramatis personae* and the contrasted characterization on which the episode depends so heavily. This multi-dimensional challenge, encountered in the pursuit of the point and function of the banquet parable in Luke, would become the central preoccupation in this work.

After outlining several standard assumptions on Luke as an author and providing an initial reading of 14.1–24 (ch. 2), the response to the challenge consists of two major related components. The first, mostly located in chapters 3–6, consists of the demonstration that an historical understanding of the issues upon which the episode focuses depends heavily on appreciating central cultural values, common social and economic realities and popular moral views and traditions by which first-century Mediterranean people ordered and estimated their lives. A milieu analysis¹⁰ reveals that the text takes for granted the audience’s familiarity with the values of honour and shame as the controlling and motivating forces in virtually every domain of social interaction; it not only presumes, but, by the selection of its vocabulary and manipulation of the topic of contrast for the purpose of characterization and argumentation, it exaggerates a social system marked by enforced boundaries between rich and poor, noble and ignoble, the élite and the lowly classes; more specifically, it implies a high degree of familiarity with the élite Greco-Roman symposia and dinner-party scene and the symbolic value attached to dining room gatherings. A milieu analysis also indicates that Luke not only relied upon a great deal of traditional and social knowledge on the part of his first-century readers; he also took a critical stance towards conventional values and social patterns that were reflected in and symbolically celebra-

¹⁰ The term is derived from Pax, 1975, although I do not accept his restriction of milieu to the Palestinian Jewish social world. Cf. Hock’s objections to so narrow a conception of an interpretive milieu and his argument for casting ‘the comparative net’ widely into the Greco-Roman world (Hock, 1987, pp. 455–6).

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ted in the ancient élite symposia, a stance that can be clarified against the back-drop of the Cynic ‘anti-sympotic’ *repas ridicule* tradition which came to particularly clear expression in the writings of Lucian of Samosata. It is in fact within this tradition that I found the hitherto missing key for specifying the value of dropsy and the aptness of locating and healing a dropsical figure within an élite dinner party whose underlying values and governing rules Luke uses as a negative foil against which to promote an alternative dining ethic.

While this analysis generates a consistent general picture of what the point of the entire episode is, a second component, most sharply articulated in chapters 8 and 9, focuses on the manner in which the point is delivered. Here the analysis turns more explicitly to the question of the composition of the episode. My proposal will be that Luke 14.1–24 consists of a narrative argument that resembles a pattern of argumentation worked out by ancient rhetoricians and widely used in the Greco-Roman educational system as an exercise in literary criticism and rhetorical training, namely the exercise of ‘working out’ (ἐργασία) a brief attributed saying or action known as a *chreia* (χρεία). Using the *chreia* elaboration exercise described by Hermogenes of Tarsus and other ancient teachers of rhetoric as an analytic guide brings into view a narrative episode in which all its individual sub-units can be shown to contribute thematically and argumentatively to a specific issue addressed by the episode as a whole.

It should be noted, in all fairness, that whatever success or persuasion inheres in this bifocal analysis – if pressed to name it I would call it ‘socio-rhetorical’, a term Vernon Robbins used to describe his study of the gospel of Mark¹¹ – as a way of meeting the interpretive challenge presented by Luke 14.1–24 is due to lights switched on for me by several key works of other scholars. Ronald Hock’s article on Luke 16.19–31 (Hock, 1987) helped me to understand the similar language of social and economic polarity and reversal in Luke 14 and, insofar as that article steered me towards Cynic or Cynic-influenced sources in my search for analogies that could clarify the use of banquet traditions in Luke 14, Hock deserves acknowledgement for helping me to stumble upon the

¹¹ In general, a socio-rhetorical analysis links the reconstruction of the cultural norms and pattern implied in and presumed by a text and the analysis of how these cultural items come to literary expression which, too, is governed by conventions (see Robbins, 1984, pp. 1–6).

metaphorical dropsy which, as it turns out, is the pivotal figure in the dinner episode. Richard Rohrbaugh's study of the ancient urban social and economic realities presupposed in Luke 14.16–24 (Rohrbaugh, 1991) appeared after I had begun my own attempt to reinterpret the banquet parable with reference to the rules governing the elite dinner party scene and to ancient views on the rich and the poor and the values and norms that governed their interaction. His article confirmed my investigative direction and helped in the articulation of my hunches. Readers should also recognize in my argument that the banquet parable is a story about the 'conversion' of a wealthy urban householder-host, rather than a story primarily about guests (ch. 6), the conceptual and lectional influence of John Kloppenborg's analogous analysis of Luke 16.1–8a (Kloppenborg, 1989). Finally, I doubt that the final section (ch. 8), containing the 'hard core' of my claims, would have been written without the aid of Burton Mack's and Vernon Robbins's *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (1989), an exemplary 'grammar' of *chreia* composition in the synoptic gospels.

2

ASSUMPTIONS AND PRELIMINARY READING

A detailed analysis of Luke 14.1–24 in later chapters begs for treatment of some preliminary matters. First, it is appropriate to outline several elements of a canopy of assumptions concerning the characteristics of Lukan authorship and manner of composition in whose shade I plan to work.

Second, as a matter of strategy, I use the banquet parable (14.16–24) as a launching point for sketching the most obvious lines along which the parable has been integrated into the larger textual unit of 14.1–24. In part, the use of the parable as the vantage point from which to survey the narrative episode in which it resides is an expedient means of demonstrating the thematic unity of 14.1–24. Additionally, the move from parable to context helps to justify my resistance (see ch. 1) to studying parables *in vacuo*, and to illustrate, rather, what might be gained by assigning procedural priority to the banquet story's *Sitz in der Literatur* as a path towards discovering the particularly Lukan dimensions of the story and the role that it plays in the thematic and argumentative structure of the sabbath dinner episode.¹

The most recent decades have been a productive period of research on the nature of Lukan authorship and the literary and generic characteristics of Luke-Acts. I draw from it the following assumptions whose importance for the study of the banquet story will become apparent.

Luke as Hellenistic author

Among the leading trends in 'a new age of Lucan study' is a shift of comparative vision from the source-redaction method of discerning

¹ This approach follows pointers given by Frankemölle, 1981–2, pp. 69–70. In later chapters I will expand the 'parables in context' approach to include the wider

the thought of the third evangelist to ‘a comparison of Lucan forms and techniques of composition with those of the Mediterranean milieu’.² The results may not be entirely coherent, but they are sufficient to place the author of Luke-Acts firmly within the roster of first-century Greco-Roman *littérateurs*,³ writers of ‘popular’ literature destined for the consumption of a rather literate audience worthy to be called *κράτιστος* (most excellent). This, an item in the formal dedication of the work to a patron, may not by itself accurately disclose the literary sophistication and social standing of Luke’s audience,⁴ but it supports other indicators that have led scholars to envision a reading clientele drawn from the ranks of the cultured and relatively wealthy urban élite.⁵ If we do not demand a rigid, mechanical adherence to generic, formal and stylistic conventions,⁶ but expect to see an authorial *χαρακτήρ ὁ ἴδιος* (style proper to a person),⁷ it is hardly disputable that Luke-Acts is an

Mediterranean literary and social traditions which provide much extra-textual illumination of Luke’s text.

- ² Talbert, 1989, pp. 297–320 (citations p. 309); cf. Bovon, 1979, pp. 161–90; and Downing, 1982, pp. 546–59. Recently Mealand argued ‘that Acts is closer to major Hellenistic historians such as Polybius than has often been granted’ (Mealand, 1991, p. 42).
- ³ Fitzmyer echoes the common opinion when he calls Luke ‘a conscious *littérateur* of the Greco-Roman period’ (Fitzmyer, 1964, p. 92). Cadbury’s *The Making of Luke-Acts* (1927) is still the most lucid and wide-ranging expression of this view.
- ⁴ Alexander (1986, pp. 48–74; 1993, pp. 168–200) makes a convincing case for caution in drawing conclusions about the social position of author and readers on the basis of the Lukan preface and its formal address (*κράτιστε Θεόφιλε*, Luke 1.3). Cf. Cadbury, 1927, p. 194: Luke’s ‘preface is one of the most evident marks of the *littérateur*.’
- ⁵ Most recently, Robbins, 1991b; see also Downing 1982, pp. 557–8, who imagines a ‘sophisticated reader’ or ‘high-minded pagans’, and the hypothetical reconstruction of Luke’s readers (urban merchant class) by Kany, 1986, pp. 75–90. That Luke seems to represent an urban viewpoint was suggested already by Cadbury (1926, p. 309; 1927, pp. 245–53) followed by many others. For a recent analysis of Luke’s knowledge of Mediterranean urban life see Rohrbaugh, 1991.
- ⁶ Although Luke wrote in a time whose literature is stamped by what van Groningen (1965, p. 55) calls ‘veneration for form’, a manifestation of the archaizing, imitative proclivities of the age, some allowance for the flouting of forms should be made. This, too, is characteristic of the popular literature of Luke’s time. On this see, e.g., Pervo, 1987, p. 11; on the subject of imitation (*μίμησις*) see Brodie, 1984, pp. 17–46, and the literature he cites.
- ⁷ Apollonius of Tyana illustrates this concern for balancing authorial integrity with the value of imitation in his letter to Scopelian the sophist, where, after listing five styles of discourse, he advises that ‘despite this orderly array of styles, first in rank is the style that is proper to a person because it is in accordance with his innate capacity or nature, and second in rank is the style that seeks to imitate the best, in cases where a person is lacking natural endowments’ (trans. Penella, 1979, pp. 44–5). Brodie (1984, p. 38) adduces a similar notice from Dionysius of Halicar-

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example of its contemporary Hellenistic literary culture with which it converges at points on the generic plane,⁸ in its use of forms and literary devices,⁹ in its familiarity with the ‘art of rhetoric’, (Kurz, 1980; ch. 8 below) even in its archaizing style and its techniques of characterization.¹⁰

If Luke thus appears to place his work on the popular book shelves in the library of his Greco-Roman contemporaries,¹¹ it naturally suggests that we should look out for common Hellenistic

nassus: ‘each author’s mode of composition is as unique as one’s personal appearance’; cf. Cadbury, 1927, pp. 213–14.

⁸ The debate on the genre of Luke-Acts is not closed, not least because Acts and Luke pull towards different generic affiliations, as is recognized by Barr and Wentling, 1984. This makes for a less than happy placement within the *bios*-literature. Cf. Talbert, 1974, pp. 125–40. Among the genre-studies of the Acts Plümacher (1972; 1974) sees the closest parallels in the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy’s historical writings. Pervo links Acts with the ancient historical novels and suggests that Luke might be characterized as a ‘biographical novel’ (Pervo, 1987, p. 185 n. 5). A reliable summary and evaluation of scholarship on the genre of Luke-Acts is in Thibeaux, 1990, pp. 61–88. The body of genre scholarship makes it clear that Luke-Acts belongs within the matrix of popular Hellenistic writings, which, though they admit of various categories (biographies, histories, novels), nonetheless share many narrative and rhetorical features.

⁹ See the general treatment of Cadbury, 1927, especially pp. 127–54 and 194–209 (on Luke’s *prooemium*).

¹⁰ Remarks on Luke’s LXX-mimesis are commonplace; it perhaps is best explained with reference to the atticistic enthusiasm in the contemporary literary culture (see Cadbury, 1927, pp. 122–3, and Plümacher, 1972, pp. 38–79). On the ‘atticistic fanaticism’ of Hellenistic authors see van Groningen, 1965, p. 49, and the overview of the various manifestations of archaism in the late first to early third centuries CE (the second sophistic) by Bowie, 1970, and C. Baldwin, 1928, pp. 9–23. Similarly, Luke’s fondness for portraying his characters through their speeches is conventional and illustrative of his familiarity with the techniques of *προσωποποιία* and *ἠθοποιία*, standard headings in the *progymnasmata* (Pennndorf, 1911). Little noticed is Luke’s frequent employment of the technique of competitive comparison (σύγκρισις) of narrative *dramatis personae*, reminiscent of the *vitae parallelae* of, say, Plutarch or Sallust; the standard treatment of *synkrisis* is Focke, 1923, but see also Hense, 1893, pp. 4–40; on *synkrisis* in the third gospel see Vielhauer’s comments on Luke’s comparison of Jesus and John (Vielhauer, 1975, p. 372) and Hock, 1987, pp. 456–7; cf. additional comments in chapters 4 and 5 below.

¹¹ In 1899 P. Corssen already emphasized Luke as ‘Hochliteratur’ or ‘belles-lettres’ and wrote: ‘Mit dem Evangelium des Lukas ist das Evangelium aus dem Dunkel der Conventikel auf den Büchermarkt hinausgetreten’ (*Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, 1899, p. 305; cited by Alexander, 1986, p. 48). Corssen’s remark does raise important issues that impinge on the question of the socio-economic position of author and readers of Luke. These concern the cost (research expenses [see Luke 1.1–4], papyrus, copying, etc.), circulation and consumption of books in the first century. Evidently books were expensive to produce and therefore purchased primarily by the wealthy sectors (see Wesseling, 1988, p. 72, and the literature cited there). I leave these questions as *desiderata*.