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**Sliced Bread: The Four Gospels, Acts and Revelation: Their Literary Structures**, 1988

## The Prologues to the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles:

In his prologue to the Gospel, Lk. 1.1-4, Luke promises 'order'. He does so by direct statement and by his very structuring of his opening paragraph. Literally, it might read:

- 1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to draw up a narrative
  - 2 concerning the matters accomplished among us
  - 3 as the eye-witnesses and attendants of the word from the beginning delivered to us,
- 
- 1 it seemed good to me also having investigated all things from their source
  - 2 to write to you carefully in order most excellent Theophilus
  - 3 that you might have the certainty of the things in which you were instructed disclosed to you.

It can be described as a 'threefold protasis balanced by a threefold apodosis (see C.H. Talbert, 'Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts', *Soc.Bibl. Lit./Scholars Press* 1974, pp.85,87) or as 'one long periodic sentence, each of whose two parts contain three matching phrases', (I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC, Eerdmans, 1978, p.40).

The emphasis to M.D. Goulder ('The Chiasmic Structure of the Lucan Journey', *Texte Untersuchungen Vol. 87*, 1963, p.195) falls on the word *kathexes* meaning 'in order'. 'Carefully in order' is proposed [by myself at the time, as I wrote in 1987]. Most commentators and translators take the word *akribos* meaning 'carefully' (or 'accurately', or 'exactly') to qualify Luke's investigation of 'all things from their source'. But the two words, *akribos* and *kathexes* are in juxtaposition in the text and they can be read together. The discovery of Luke's consistent application of structural principles would seem to warrant this. It is argued below that the 'order' to which Luke writes is neither chronological, nor geographical, nor primarily theological, nor primarily liturgical (for lectionary purposes): each of these ideas has been entertained already but without lasting support. Rather, the 'order' to which Luke writes, the evidence seems to suggest, is primarily that of 'literary order'.

But why should Luke seek to impose new order upon an already existing narrative (or narrative collection, see Lk. 1.1), especially when he seems to infer no disparagement of such earlier works (see Lk. 1.2)? The answer would appear to lie in the last line of the Prologue. But, here another translation difficulty is encountered, in establishing the force of Luke's meaning: *epignos* is variously translated in the Gospels and Acts by 'see', 'ascertain', 'find out', 'identify', 'grasp', and 'understand'. The common denominator and principle of all these translations is that of 'disclosure'. We use the verb with the indirect object in this way, 'it is disclosed to me': hence, my translation above. It would seem, therefore, that Luke's reason for structuring the 'good news' is to make clear its truths.

When we speak of 'order' we speak of the absence of 'chaos'. Clarity, we say, aids understanding and appreciation: it aids disclosure. Further, Luke contrasts his purpose with what he understands to have been the purpose of the earlier writers: in the Prologue we read that their work was to 'draw up a narrative', his work was to write 'carefully in order' to disclose the truths. It would seem that Luke's intention was not to correct earlier stories about Jesus, but was to disclose, by his careful application of order, the theological, or Christological, depths of the truths. It is in the penultimate clause of the Prologue that the

(likely) patron of the work is first addressed, and it is in the final clause that the purpose in respect to him appears to be fully and clearly described. In this way the sense of the Gospel's prologue would seem to be established.

What is raised by this line of approach is the question of which narratives were available to Luke. Most scholars would agree, for a variety of reasons that Luke knew Mark's Gospel, but was he aware of Mark's structure? Few scholars would agree that Luke knew Matthew's Gospel, but the presentation below suggests that he did. It would seem highly likely that he knew Matthew's basic structure of an eleven-section chiasm and copied it himself in his own writings: but was he aware of its numerical listings of parts? Luke's own distinction between his own work purpose and that of his predecessors would seem to suggest the possibility that all but the major sectional divisions of these two books had dissolved into copy prior to his possessing them. It may be though that the differentiation to be made between 'narrative' and 'careful ordering' is in danger of being exaggerated.

One further detail incorporated within the concluding piece of the Prologue is also worthy of discussion. Theophilus has already been 'informed' about the 'good news'. The Greek word is *katecheo* which can also mean 'report'; it is the word from which is derived the English word 'catechism'. In its technical sense of formal instruction in the church, Robert Maddox (*The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1982, p.12) argues that it does not make its appearance until the second century (2 Clements 17.1) but that it is foreshadowed in Paul's usage (Gal. 6.6, 1Cor. 14.19 and Ro. 2.18) and in one of four usages in Luke-Acts (Acts 18.25). Given Luke's likely Pauline discipleship and his likely literary purpose, we might consider too that his whole work (of two books) foreshadows the church's use of catechism. The Prologue to the Gospel would seem to promise carefully ordered instruction, to disclose the depths of the truths about the things that have been happening: the Gospel itself would appear to fulfil this purpose.

The Prologue to the Acts of the Apostles, 1.1-5, expresses continuity on Luke's purposes. There is to be a change of emphasis, however, Jesus is now to be represented by his apostles. It is they who are going to take centre stage, though it is Jesus who is still to command the attention. The two prologues demand comparison. The two books are written for the same reader [patron?] and the two prologues attempt to state clearly the purposes attached to the books, but the first is clearly differentiated from the rest of the text, whereas the second appears integral with it. [This point I have revisited and have come to another judgement.] The first is short and well-balanced: the second is clearly longer and less obviously balanced. It may be, however, that it breaks down structurally in the following (and therefore similar) fashion:

- 1 The first account I made concerning all things, O Theophilus,
  - 2 which Jesus began both to do and to teach
  - 3 until the day on which, having given commands to the apostles whom he chose through the Holy Spirit, he was taken up,
- 
- 1 to whom also he presented himself living after he suffered
  - 2 by many sure proofs through forty days being seen by them and speaking the things concerning the Kingdom of God
  - 3 and meeting with them he charged them, 'Do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father which you heard from me, for John baptised in water, but you will be baptised in Holy Spirit after not many days.'

Notably, the Nestle-Greek Text of the New Testament presents one continuous sentence. The Nestle-Aland Text, however, does not: the first and the second three pieces are separate sentences. As with the Gospel's Prologue so also here the final piece discloses the greater force of emphasis. There are not a few of us who would like to re-title the book it introduces, 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit'.