
Reading Luke

It has long been recognized that the Gospel of Luke may be divided into three main sections. The first and third of these sections follow the same basic outline as the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, feature similar stories, and indeed put those stories in much the same order. In all three Gospels, the story of Jesus's Galilean ministry is told in a similar fashion up to the climactic event of the transfiguration. In Matthew and Mark, this event leads almost immediately into an account of Jesus's passion and resurrection in Jerusalem. In Luke, however, the transfiguration comes only about one-third of the way through his Gospel (in chapter 9), and it is not until the *final* third (beginning part-way through chapter 19) that Luke links back up with Matthew and Mark to proceed to recount the passion. Between these events, Luke presents a long, rambling string of stories, parables, and teachings of Jesus in a seemingly random and arbitrary order as Jesus slowly makes his way to Jerusalem.

It is this puzzling middle section of Luke that gives this Gospel much of its unique character but also presents some of the thorniest issues of the Synoptic Problem. In many ways, therefore, understanding how we should read this passage may be the key to unlocking not only Luke's own Gospel but also its relationship to the others. Any Synoptic theory that does not give an adequate account of the middle third of Luke ulti-

mately fails to explain how and why the Gospels were written as they were and so cannot really answer the Synoptic Problem. In light of this, the exploration to be carried out here will seek to address afresh the writing of Luke's Gospel by focusing initially on what may be the single most important question regarding Luke in respect to the Synoptic Problem: Why is the middle part of Luke's Gospel organized as it is?

Instead of beginning by comparing Luke's Gospel directly to the others, or by asking what source or sources provided the material Luke used in this section of his Gospel, perhaps we ought to ask first how and why Luke arranged the material in this section as he did regardless of where the stories came from or how the section relates to the other Gospels. Only then will we be able to understand the choices the evangelist made concerning what material to include in his Gospel and, hence, where to pull that material from. Before we can focus on Luke's intentions for the middle section of his Gospel, however, we ought to ask what were his overall intentions for writing his entire Gospel in the first place.

Luke's Prologue

One of the key indicators to Luke's intentions will be found in his own prologue to his Gospel, in which he sets out his understanding of his task. Because the words he used to describe this task are important, specific words in this passage are highlighted below, for which the roots of the original Greek words are then given, followed by the various meanings for these words according to Frederick W. Danker in his revision of Walter Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ending with the page reference for the definition in that *Lexicon*.¹

Luke begins his Gospel in this way (1:1–4):

Since many [πολλοί {*polloi*}, many, a great number, 847]

have undertaken [ἐπιχειρέω {*epicheireō*}, set one's hand to, endeavor, try, 386]

to draw up [ἀνατάσσομαι {*anatassomai*}, arrange in proper order, to organize in a series, draw up, compose, compile, 73]

a narrative [διήγησις {*diēgēsis*}, an orderly description of facts, events, actions, or words; narrative, account, 245]

1. Frederick W. Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); based on Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, and on previous English editions by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich.

of the things that have been accomplished [πληροφορέω {plērophoreō}, fill (completely), fulfill, accomplish, 827]
among us, just as they were entrusted [παραδίδωμι {paradidōmi}, hand over, give (over), deliver, entrust, 761]
to us by those who from the first became eyewitnesses and servants [ὑπηρέτης {hypēretēs}, helper, assistant, 1035]
of the Word, therefore it seemed good also to me, since I myself have carefully [ἀκριβῶς {akribōs}, accurately, carefully, well, 39]
investigated [παρακολουθέω {parakoloutheō}, follow a thing, follow a course of events, take note of, 767]
everything from the beginning, [ἀνωθεν {anōthen}, from the beginning, for a long time, 92]
to write an orderly account [καθεξῆς {kathexēs}, being in sequence in time, space, or logic; in order, one after the other, 490]
for you, Your Excellency, [κράτιστος {kratistos}, most noble, most excellent, 565]
Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty [ἀσφάλεια {asphaleia}, certainty, truth, 147]
of the things about which you have been informed [κατηχέω {katēcheō}, to share a communication that one receives, report, inform, 534].

Several words here especially require more clarification: παραδίδωμι, καθεξῆς, κράτιστος, and κατηχέω. The first two of these will affect our understanding of Luke himself, while the last two will affect our understanding of Luke's audience, specifically the enigmatic Theophilus.

The first word, παραδίδωμι, is sometimes used to refer to traditions being “handed down” from the past, and Luke's use of it here is often understood to mean that he is writing more than a generation after the “eyewitnesses” who had handed these traditions down to younger generations. Yet Luke's own use of παραδίδωμι throughout his Gospel and Acts does not warrant such a conclusion. Luke employs this word often, usually when referring to the “handing over” of a person charged with a crime into the care or authority of another, in particular Jesus himself being “handed over” or “entrusted” or “delivered” into the “hands of sinful men” (23:25; 24:7). Such a “handing over” implies the responsibility of keeping safe that which has been handed over or entrusted.

Luke uses the word once to refer to “the customs that Moses *delivered* to us” (Acts 6:14 ESV), customs that Stephen is accused of violating, and

this is the only place where a long period of transmission would possibly be indicated. But it certainly need not mean this in Luke's Prologue. Rather, the implication seems to be that Luke (and others) have been entrusted personally by the eyewitnesses with the accounts of Jesus (just as Jesus was entrusted personally into the "care" of those who made sure he was crucified). That entrusting carried with it the responsibility that Luke would be true to those accounts and be faithful in recording them accurately. Regardless of how much time has transpired, therefore, between the events seen by the eyewitnesses and Luke's writing, Luke is clearly claiming to be relating a completely faithful version of what has been entrusted to him personally.

Another important word in this passage is *καθεξῆς*, which has here been translated as an "orderly account." This word is also used by Luke elsewhere, and in each case it refers to something happening in a specific sequence, whether chronologically ("all the prophets from Samuel *in sequence*" [Acts 3:24] and "Peter began and explained everything to them *in precise order*" [Acts 11:4]) or geographically ("Paul departed and traveled *successively* to each place" [Acts 18:23]). In each case there is a specific sequential order that must be maintained, but the type of order depends on the context, whether an order in time, or a sequence of logical steps, or a series of specific places to be visited one at a time. The key word for understanding the implications of *καθεξῆς* is, therefore, *sequence*. What Luke is claiming by using this word, then, is that he has carefully arranged his material in a specific and meaningful sequence.

Luke's Audience

For what audience is he arranging this material? It is often suggested that Theophilus must have been a wealthy or otherwise prominent Christian who was Luke's patron, financing the publication of his Gospel. This would be consistent with the respect Luke shows Theophilus in the Prologue, calling him (as it is often translated) "Most excellent" (*κράτιστος*, a "strongly affirmative honorary form of address").² Ancient authors used this title when dedicating their works to their patrons. Such an understanding of this term would also explain why Luke tells Theophilus that he has written his Gospel (as the ending of his Prologue is often translated) "that you may have certainty con-

2. Danker, *Lexicon*, 565.

cerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4 ESV). The Greek verb commonly translated as “taught” is *κατηχέω* (the fourth of the important words listed above) and its meaning is critical. The word *κατηχέω* is the word from which “catechism” is derived, often used to describe the instruction given to a new Christian. Theophilus is, therefore, often thought to have been a fairly new Christian, eager to learn, for whom Luke wrote his Gospel and later the book of Acts.

Danker gives two slightly different meanings for the verb *κατηχέω*, the second being to “teach” or “instruct.” The first, more general meaning, however, is to “report” or “inform,” “to share a communication that one receives.”³ Therefore, if Luke is using the word in this second sense, we might deduce something quite different about the identity of Theophilus. Luke would be writing “so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have *been informed*.” In this case, there would be no reason to suppose that Theophilus was a Christian receiving instruction; perhaps instead he was a *non-Christian* who had been informed *about* Christianity. How are we to know in what sense Luke is using this word here? Some English translations have chosen the sense of “instruct,” while others have opted for “inform.”

As with the other terms dealt with above, the best way to determine the meaning of the word in this context is to see how the author has used the same word elsewhere. Luke uses the word *κατηχέω* four times in his writings. The first is here in his Prologue to Theophilus. Later, the word appears in Acts 18, when Luke is describing Apollos as “a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had *been instructed* in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:24–26 NIV). But had Apollos actually been *instructed* in the “way of the Lord” (Christianity), or had he simply been *informed* about it, and thus did not understand it adequately? The impression we are given is certainly not one of someone who had received an in-depth education in Christianity, but rather of someone who may have heard certain reports and had drawn his own conclusions about their meaning. Here, then, although either meaning is possible, the context would seem to make much more sense if the word carries the meaning of being “informed” rather

3. *Ibid.*, 534.

than “instructed,” since Apollos’s understanding of Christianity was obviously limited and needed correction.

The other two times Luke puts the word *κατηχέω* to use are both in the same passage, Acts 21. Paul has arrived in Jerusalem and is told that many Jews “have *been informed* that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses” and then Paul is encouraged to go to the temple, so that “everybody will know there is no truth in these *reports* about you” (Acts 21:21, 24 NIV). Here the meaning is clear. The unfounded rumors about Paul could hardly be classified as educational “instructions,” but only as *information* that has been *reported*, and certainly not *taught*. The connotation of Christian instruction would be impossible in this passage. Therefore, it seems logical that, if we have two cases where the meaning is clear, one case where the meaning probably makes more sense when interpreted in this same way, and one case where the meaning is unknown, it is most likely that the word is intended by Luke in all four of these cases to convey the same meaning, that of “being informed.”

So, if Theophilus is not a Christian who has been instructed but is a non-Christian who has received information about Christianity that has come to his attention through some sort of report or communication, Luke might have had a very different motive for composing his Gospel than is sometimes supposed. Do we have any other clues that might help us in establishing Theophilus’s identity to help point our way? Perhaps we do. Theophilus is a Greek name meaning “Friend of God.” Some scholars have suggested that Theophilus was not an actual person at all but simply a literary device used by Luke. Instead of being addressed to a person named Theophilus, his Gospel would simply be addressed generally to “you friend of God,” hence to any Christian.

But the title *κράτιστος* (“noblest” or “most powerful” or “most excellent”) speaks against this interpretation. It clearly points to a specific individual whom Luke is addressing with the respect due his position. The key here is to discover what that position is. The usual interpretation that he was a wealthy or prominent Christian now seems unlikely in light of Luke’s use of *κατηχέω*. Just as we considered how Luke used *that* word, therefore, perhaps we can learn something by examining Luke’s usage of the title *κράτιστος* elsewhere. Again, this word appears four times in Luke’s writings, the first being here in his Prologue. Each of the other three times this word appears, it is used in addressing the Roman governor of Caesarea in the book of Acts. The first case is in a letter from the commander of the army informing Felix the gover-

nor that he is sending Paul to him: “Claudius Lysias to his *Excellency* the governor Felix, greetings” (Acts 23:26 NRSV). Then, a few paragraphs later, when Paul first appears before Felix, the lawyer Tertullus presents the case against Paul and begins his initial address by saying, “*Your Excellency*, because of you we have long enjoyed peace” (Acts 24:3 NRSV). Felix is later succeeded by Porcius Festus, and when Paul appears before him and claims that Jesus has been resurrected, Festus exclaims, “You are out of your mind, Paul. . . . Your great learning is driving you insane,” to which Paul responds, “I am not insane, *most excellent Festus*” (Acts 26:24–25 NIV).

In each of these cases, the appellation *κράτιστος* appears to be not merely a general complimentary address to a superior but the specific, proper way in which to address a person in this particular office, an office of governance and the administration of justice. John Mauck confirms that, not only in the New Testament but for Greek and Roman writers in general, the term “‘Most Excellent,’ as a form of address, was used primarily as a title for rulers or government officials.”⁴ Perhaps, then, a better way of rendering this word in English in all these contexts (as it is commonly translated in the letter to Felix) would be to use the phrase “*Your Excellency*.” If we apply all this to Luke’s Prologue, it conveys a somewhat different sense than we are used to hearing when we read it: “It seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, *Your Excellency Theophilus*, so that you may know the certainty of the things that have been reported to you” or “about which you have been informed.” Instead of a dedication to a patron, this Prologue actually sounds like the introduction to a testimony being provided to a high-ranking government official, perhaps even in a *legal* context.

Luke’s Task

So what is Luke telling us in his entire Prologue? First, he is telling us that at least some other Christians (but how many are “many”?) have already written narrative accounts of what Jesus has done (the things he “accomplished” or “fulfilled”). These existing accounts were based on actual eyewitness reports from the original disciples, and these reports were entrusted by the disciples personally to those who wrote these accounts down.

Second, Luke is telling us that this has inspired him also to “have a

4. John W. Mauck, *Paul on Trial: The Book of Acts as a Defense of Christianity* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), vii.

go” at producing such an account himself. But he is not specifically saying that this is because he thinks the earlier attempts were somehow inadequate, although that may be the case. If he does believe them to be somehow lacking, the rest of the Prologue probably gives the reason: They are less accurate or less “well ordered” than his own account.

Third, Luke takes great pains to use words that emphasize his meticulousness in producing his Gospel: He has followed and investigated everything about Jesus’s life carefully and exactly. He has either spent a long time himself carrying out this investigation, or he has investigated everything “from top to bottom” in painstaking detail. And he has now put together his own account in the exact sequence and order. Again, this sounds very much like Luke is preparing to give a precise testimony about the “goings on” of the Christian community, almost as though he were presenting a legal case.

But can we trust Luke in this? Or is he just “talking himself up?” He is most certainly trying to *persuade* Theophilus of the reliability of his account. But is he pulling the wool over Theophilus’s eyes? As indicated earlier, the language Luke uses implies strongly that Theophilus is definitely *not* already a Christian. Rather, Theophilus has heard *reports* about Christianity or has been *informed* about Christians, but he has not been instructed as a Christian himself.

Luke is therefore actively trying to convince Theophilus of the truth of Christianity and is doing so with the conviction of someone giving legal testimony. Now, if we once again take a look elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel and the book of Acts, we will find that, when Luke himself refers to Christians giving testimony in a legal setting, there seem to be two complementary aspects of such testimony. The first is the simple point of arguing the “truth” of the legal case itself (that the one being charged is innocent). The second is a presentation of the “truth” of the gospel as the Gospel, with the goal of possibly convincing the authority before whom one is appearing to become a Christian himself. We see this especially in the exchange between Paul and Agrippa in Acts 26:27–29, where Paul is obviously both trying to plead his own innocence and trying to convert King Agrippa to “become such as I am—except for these chains” (Acts 26:29 NRSV). Indeed, this dual purpose in Christian testimony before non-Christian authorities is implied in Jesus’s own words to his disciples: “You will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify” (Luke 21:12–13 NRSV). Surely, in such circumstances, then, the early Christians would have wanted to be exonerated themselves

and, at the same time, would have sought to “evangelize” the authorities as well.

Luke seems, therefore, in his Prologue to be trying to persuade Theophilus that regardless of whatever reports he may have heard about Christians, they should be exonerated of any crimes. He is equally trying to persuade Theophilus himself to become a Christian, and so he is telling him (and us) that all his meticulous care in putting together this Gospel is so that Theophilus will know with complete *certainty* that the reports he has heard are true (assuming they were positive reports—if not, then he is surely trying to set the record straight). Yes, Luke is using strong terms to convince Theophilus, but if it were to turn out that his account was not accurate, he would have completely defeated himself in what he was trying to do. Luke is therefore staking everything on the accuracy and veracity of his work and is almost inviting Theophilus to test this out so that he can feel personally assured of Luke’s honesty. With this understanding, then, we certainly should be able to take Luke at his word and assume that his intentions and his research are honest to the best of his ability (which, of course, does not guarantee the accuracy of the things he reports, but it seems clear that he at least believed that his account was as accurate as possible).

And what of those earlier accounts? Luke does not specifically say that he has used all of the “many” accounts mentioned when drawing up his own, but if he has “carefully investigated everything,” it would be logical to assume that he has at least read most of these accounts as part of such a careful investigation. Now, either he would have judged that all of these accounts were completely useless or untrue, or else we can also logically assume that they had some sort of influence on him, whether or not he relied directly on them when writing.

Further, it may well be that he was at least partially dissatisfied with these earlier accounts, since he says that many had “attempted” (with the possible implication that they had not fully succeeded), and that he himself wanted to write an “orderly account,” again with the possible implication that he did not find the other accounts to be ordered to his own taste, or at least not ordered in a way that would be beneficial to Theophilus. In addition, his claim that he had carefully investigated everything may imply that these earlier attempts were not, in his view, completely accurate or reliable. But these are all inferences and may not carry as much weight as they are sometimes believed to do. It may simply be that Luke was inspired by such earlier efforts and like-

wise wanted to try his hand at producing his own Gospel. Regardless, his goal in doing so was certainly to convince Theophilus of the truth as Luke understood it.

We may note at this point that the hypothetical document Q could not have been one of the “many” accounts Luke mentions here. As Q is normally depicted, it is not an “account” or “narrative” at all, and certainly not an account of anything that might be described as having “been fulfilled (or completed or accomplished) among us.” (This does not mean that Luke could not have used such a source, but if he did, that source does not seem to be one of those mentioned here.) Indeed, some of Paul’s letters (such as Galatians) might better qualify as an account of what has “been fulfilled” (in the prophetic sense of that term) than would Q.

Both Matthew and Mark, however, certainly qualify as such accounts. Both provide narratives of what had “been fulfilled,” and both seem likely candidates for containing the traditions that had been “entrusted to us by eyewitnesses.” In addition, the similarities among all three Synoptics suggest strongly that Matthew and Mark could have been used by Luke as direct sources for his own work. Unless there are compelling reasons to think otherwise (such as proof that one or the other was written after Luke), it seems most plausible that both Matthew and Mark were among the “many” accounts Luke refers to, and that they may have been used as sources to which Luke added other material based on his “careful investigations.” Luke’s Prologue therefore suggests that Luke’s was the last of the Synoptic Gospels to be written, and it would require compelling evidence to prove otherwise.

One of the basic foundations of the Q theory, however, is the assertion that Luke did not use Matthew directly as a source. As John Kloppenborg notes, “The case for Q rests on the implausibility of Luke’s direct use of Matthew or Matthew’s direct use of Luke.”⁵ It is precisely this assertion that makes Q itself a necessary element for the theory, in order to explain where material common to Matthew and Luke (but not Mark) has come from. The arguments against Luke’s use of Matthew will therefore need to be taken seriously, as they may indeed provide the “compelling evidence” to reject Matthew as one of Luke’s “many” accounts, which would then require us to look elsewhere (to “proto-

5. John S. Kloppenborg, “On Dispensing with Q? Goodacre on the Relation of Luke to Matthew,” *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003): 210–36, here 211–12.

Gospels,” other lost documents, or perhaps Gnostic Gospels) in order to make up Luke’s “many.”

Luke also says that it “seemed good to me” to write his Gospel, indicating that the initiative was his own, not that he had been asked by Theophilus to write it. It is possible, however, that he was asked by Theophilus to provide him with an account, and Luke found the available alternatives to be unsatisfactory for this purpose. This might also account for his having written his Prologue at all. Why tell Theophilus all this to begin with? The answer could be that he is explaining why he has written such an account afresh, rather than simply giving Theophilus an existing one.

But if Luke was partially dissatisfied with earlier attempts to write Christian narratives, he certainly does not seem to be condemning them outright. It is these other accounts, after all, that he says contain the truth that had been “entrusted to us by eyewitnesses.” He is not saying that they had all made everything up and it was all nonsense. If he is criticizing these earlier attempts, it is either because he considers them to be somewhat less accurate or complete than his own research, or they are not orderly enough for his taste.

Here we reach the crux of the matter. If the key question regarding Luke is “Why is the middle part of Luke’s Gospel organized the way it is?” and Luke is telling us that he has deliberately written an “orderly account” in a logical sequence, then why is it not self-evident to us just how Luke has organized his material?

The Q Approach

The organization of Luke’s material is a particularly interesting aspect of the Synoptic Problem, because it is precisely the perceived *lack* of order in Luke’s Gospel that has prevented many scholars from believing that Luke could have used Matthew as one of his sources. For example, R. H. Fuller says, “Matthew has tidily collected the Q material into great blocks. Luke, we must then suppose, has broken up this tidy arrangement and scattered the Q material without rhyme or reason all over his gospel—a case of unscrambling the egg with a vengeance!”⁶ Similarly, G. M. Styler observes, “If Matthew is Luke’s source, there seems to be no commonsense explanation for his order and procedure.”⁷ (A more measured statement of this view is offered by Kloppenborg, who states that Luke’s use of Matthew would “require one to

6. Reginald H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (London: SCM, 1963), 87.

suppose that Luke rather aggressively dislocated sayings from the context in which he found them in Matthew, often transporting them to contexts in which their function and significance is far less clear than it was in Matthew.”⁸) These evaluations, that this material is arranged in Luke’s Gospel “*without rhyme or reason*” or with “*no commonsense explanation*” are directly in contradiction to Luke’s own stated goal of presenting the material as an “orderly” account!

Indeed, it is this very perception that Luke’s Gospel *lacks* order that leads most Q scholars to the conclusion that the order of this material in Luke is the original order of it in Q as well, and that Luke simply “cut and pasted” it into his Gospel based on whatever order he found it in to begin with. But if Luke is claiming in his Prologue that his own account is even more orderly than others, he is telling us exactly the opposite, that he did not simply leave the material in whatever order he found it but arranged it *deliberately* for his own purposes. How is it possible, then, that Luke and his modern critics have such conflicting ideas about the orderliness of his Gospel? Was Luke simply so stupid that he *thought* that he was doing a good job of arranging his material, when in reality he was making a mess of the whole business?

B. H. Streeter, one of the “founding fathers” of the Q theory, seemed to think so. He states:

If then Luke derived this material from Matthew, he must have gone through both Matthew and Mark so as to discriminate with meticulous precision between Marcan and non-Marcan material; he must then have proceeded with the utmost care to tear every little piece of non-Marcan material he desired to use from the context of Mark in which it appeared in Matthew—in spite of the fact that contexts in Matthew are always exceedingly appropriate—in order to re-insert it into a different context of Mark having no special appropriateness. A theory which would make an author capable of such a proceeding would only be tenable if, on other grounds, we had reason to believe he was a crank.⁹

This same view has been reiterated more recently by Martin Hengel:

Luke’s “Sermon on the Plain” is itself a mere “shadow” of the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore it is utterly improbable that, for example, Luke reshaped a Matthaean original. He would not have torn apart discourses

7. G. M. Styler, “Synoptic Problem,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 726.

8. John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 39.

9. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 183.

which have been worked out so masterfully, but integrated them into his work. One could make a Sermon on the Mount out of the Sermon on the Plain, but not vice versa. Therefore Luke cannot be dependent on Matthew, as is constantly asserted. . . . In no way may he be made the destroyer of such a grandiose work as that of Matthew, by claiming that he copied out Matthew and in so doing—in overweening vanity—destroyed the grandiose architecture of the work along with its impressive theology. Others may attribute that to Luke, I do not.¹⁰

In the view of Streeter and Hengel (as with the others already quoted), the *only* theory that seems to make sense of the (inferior) order of Double Tradition material in Luke's Gospel is that Luke himself did not create that order but simply took it from where he had found it and pasted it into his own work with little or no thought as he went along. Matthew arranged his material carefully, but if Luke actually chose himself to put this material in this order, he is a crank, without common sense, acting without rhyme or reason in overweening vanity!

Yet even those who adhere to the Q theory must face the fact that, even if Luke kept the "Q" material in its original order, he also inserted other material into it in the middle section of his Gospel, adding apparently arbitrary pericopes into arbitrary points of an already arbitrary order. No adequate explanation has ever been offered for why he would have done so, and so Styler's accusation is just as applicable to the Q theory that "there seems to be no commonsense explanation for his order and procedure." After all, the argument that Luke's material is not arranged in an orderly fashion does not only apply if Luke had used Matthew as a source. It cannot be the case that Luke's order makes logical sense if he constructed it from Q, but not if he constructed it from some other source. Either Luke's order makes sense in and of itself, or it does not.¹¹ This, therefore, represents a major failure on the part of the Q theory, since it cannot account adequately for the evidence that Luke considered his Gospel to be well ordered.

10. Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 2000), 176–77.

11. A "Q" response to this might be that Luke would have been content to follow Q's order if this was the only order he had ever known, but once he had been exposed to Matthew's order, he would have immediately recognized its superiority and then would have followed it. But, as has already been noted, such an argument fails to account for why Luke would have inserted his own material at apparently arbitrary points in the Q order instead of (for instance) presenting all of the Q material in a single block, then all of his own new material in another. So the objection stands that the Q theory has simply *never* given an adequate explanation for the order of Luke's Gospel.

The Farrer Approach

Unfortunately, Q critics have not fared much better in understanding Luke than have the Q advocates. Austin Farrer, in his seminal article “On Dispensing with Q,” writes:

It may well be that we shall have to accuse St. Luke of pulling well-arranged Matthaean discourses to pieces and re-arranging them in an order less coherent or at least less perspicuous. St. Luke would not be either the first planner or the last to prefer a plan of his own to a plan of a predecessor’s, and to make a less skilful thing of it. We are not bound to show that what St. Luke did to St. Matthew turned out to be a literary improvement on St. Matthew. All we have to show is that St. Luke’s plan was capable of attracting St. Luke.¹²

In commenting specifically on the middle section of Luke, the Journey to Jerusalem, Farrer even admits that “St. Luke’s teaching section is not so complete a literary success as St. Matthew’s great discourses.”¹³ He goes on to propose that Luke’s plan was to mirror the structure of the Torah (as has often been suggested regarding Matthew), placing the bulk of Jesus’s teaching in the “great Deuteronomic superstructure,”¹⁴ as Farrer calls the Journey to Jerusalem. And why would Luke have chosen to do this? Farrer’s answer is that “we are not bound to find certain answers to such a question, probable answers will do. If there are still more probable answers than those we find, why, so much the better.”¹⁵

Farrer as much as admits here that he does not really have a clue as to why Luke organized his material as he did, only that somehow it must have made sense to Luke, even though it never has to anyone else. Surely this is an extraordinary evaluation of an author whose self-proclaimed *goal* was to produce an “orderly account”! But Farrer also admits that his own theory of Luke’s intentions might be wrong and that “still more probable answers” would be welcome. In the meantime, Farrer’s claim that what is important is to show that his plan “was capable of attracting St. Luke” is epitomized in his term “Luke-pleasiness”¹⁶ to describe what was attractive to Luke.

Farrer’s successor, Michael Goulder, has expanded on Farrer’s

12. Farrer, “On Dispensing with Q,” 65.

13. *Ibid.*, 67.

14. *Ibid.*, 81.

15. *Ibid.*, 77.

16. *Ibid.*, 57.

thought, producing a detailed account of what he believes Luke intended, but Goulder's picture of Luke bears little resemblance to Luke's own description in his Prologue. First, Goulder suggests that Luke used Matthew and Mark as his sources, but *only* Matthew and Mark, using his own imagination and creativity to expound on what he found in these Gospels. Mark Goodacre describes Goulder's theory, "Goulder makes the picture simpler than does Farrer and dispenses not only with Q, M, L and any other lost document but also with 'oral material.'"¹⁷ This leaves no room for the eyewitness reports Luke himself refers to, reducing Luke's Gospel to being simply a commentary on Mark and Matthew, or else a literary fiction (which would hardly have provided Luke with an adequate means of proving to Theophilus that what he was presenting to him was highly accurate).

Second, Goulder takes Farrer's idea that Luke is echoing the structure of the Torah (or more precisely, the "Hexateuch," adding the book of Joshua to the Torah¹⁸) a step further, claiming that Luke's Gospel is structured around yearly lectionary readings for use in the early church. Again, Goodacre summarizes: "Goulder proposes that not only the Passion narratives but also the whole of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are designed to be read as lectionary books, fulfilling, in order, the relevant feasts and fasts in a Jewish-Christian year."¹⁹ Such a plan on Luke's part, however, seems to make his Gospel simply redundant, if Matthew and Mark were already written for this purpose, and gives no plausible reason why Luke would have rearranged so radically what he found in Matthew, which was already fit for such a purpose, all of which reinforces the arguments of the Q advocates. Thus, although many of Goulder's specific criticisms of the Q theory (such as those regarding the Minor Agreements) are effective, he has still failed to offer a satisfactory alternative for understanding Luke's plan.

Other followers of Farrer, such as Mark Goodacre and Mark Matson, have attempted to define further the elusive quality of "Luke-pleasingness," but in doing so they have still not yet effectively addressed the issue of Luke's overall plan. They have looked at specific examples (particularly in comparing Matthew's Sermon on the Mount with Luke's Sermon on the Plain) and demonstrated that within small, isolated portions of Luke, the rearrangement of some of this material does seem to

17. Goodacre, *Goulder and the Gospels*, 18.

18. The idea of the Hexateuch as a grouping of books, however, is a construct of modern scholars, and there is no evidence that such a concept would or could have existed in the mind of Luke or of his audience.

19. Goodacre, *Goulder and the Gospels*, 298.

make good sense, but the best overall solution so far seems to be that, in order to tell his story effectively, Luke tends to prefer shorter discourses to longer ones and so breaks up longer speeches, whether they come from Mark or from Matthew.²⁰ Goodacre writes, “Luke’s narrative is constructed on the principle of creating a plausible, biographical account in which special attention is paid to movement and sequence. There would be little place in such a narrative for the kind of excessively long monologue that is Matthew’s speciality.”²¹

Francis Watson also has made a start in examining the redactional procedures required by Luke according to the Q theory compared to the Farrer theory in certain specific cases (again with a focus on how Luke may have dealt with the Sermon on the Mount).²² But none of these efforts has yet addressed the larger and more fundamental issue of why Luke arranged his whole Gospel as he did. This still remains a mystery.

In this regard, the work of the Farrer school may be described as analogous to a description of how the heart and circulatory system work to move blood around the body. Such a description is absolutely vital in understanding animal life, but it does not address the issue of why blood *needs* to be circulated in the first place. To say that it is “body-pleasing” to have blood circulating is not sufficient. We need an understanding of how that blood feeds and warms the body, removes wastes, fights off disease, and so on. Without a holistic understanding of how the body is alive, the circulation of blood remains something of a mystery. This is not to diminish the work the Farrer school has done, however. The understanding of how blood circulates may be a vital step in understanding how the body is alive as a single, whole, integrated being, but it is not in itself sufficient for such an understanding. So the steps already taken in explaining how certain aspects of Matthew’s material might prove to be “Luke-pleasing” provide an indispensable aid for coming to understand Luke’s overall intentions, but more work needs to be done as well.

Regardless, therefore, of whether such material came from Matthew, from Q, from some other source, or from Luke’s own imagination, Luke obviously believed that he was producing an orderly account, and possibly one even more orderly than had been produced before. No Syn-

20. Goodacre, *Case against Q*, 92–93.

21. Mark Goodacre, “A Monopoly on Marcan Priority? Fallacies at the Heart of Q,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers, 2000* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 538–622.

22. Francis Watson, “Q as Hypothesis: A Study in Methodology,” *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009): 397–415.

optic theory can be considered adequate unless and until it comes to terms with this. Until a theory is able to say, “this is why Luke considered his Gospel to be well ordered” (or else explains how Luke, who in other ways is recognized as meticulous and careful, could be such an inept bungler when it came to organizing his material), it cannot legitimately claim to have a proper understanding of what Luke’s sources might have been and why he chose to use them in the way he did. This is why the most critical question regarding Luke when approaching the Synoptic Problem is to understand why Luke’s Gospel, and specifically its middle section, is organized the way it is.

A Holistic Approach

Why, then, have past attempts to understand Luke been so inadequate? There are a number of interrelated factors that have contributed to a lack of understanding, and these factors seem to be closely related to the philosophical approach that has dominated biblical scholarship in modern times, based largely on the Enlightenment philosophy of religion and a belief in the gradual development of the Gospel traditions.

One of the basic assumptions of this approach is that each of the Gospels (or at least the traditions behind them) developed over time in its relatively isolated Christian community. The Synoptics (Matthew and Luke especially) are seen as encapsulating these developing traditions and so are viewed as having been written in virtually the same way and for the same purpose as each other, their differences reflecting simply the differences between their communities’ perspectives and traditions.

In this view, the common purpose of the authors of Matthew and Luke might be described as giving expression to their communities’ beliefs and providing handbooks for Christian instruction. The second aspect of this is reinforced in Matthew’s Gospel by its arrangement of Jesus’s teachings topically into five major discourses, each of which provides a good reference point for instruction on one particular aspect of Christian faith and life. The same aspect would appear to be reinforced in Luke’s Gospel by Luke’s use of the word *κατηχέω* in his Prologue, which has typically been read as confirming that Luke’s motive was to promote catechesis (Christian instruction) within his community.

This theme has been reinforced by the church’s own use of the Gospels liturgically for two thousand years. The Gospels have always

been read in churches in small bits, short individual pericopes that each have something to say to the church. It is therefore assumed that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are both best approached as collections or compendia of small pericopes placed for convenience within the basic framework of a history of Jesus's life. Thus, any attempts to understand (particularly the middle section of) Luke imply that we should break it down into such short pericopes and treat each as a short topical sketch.

This appears to be what is at the heart of the Q scholars' objections to Luke having drawn his material directly from Matthew. Matthew has already organized his material in a logical way for the purpose of topical instruction. But if Luke thinks that he also has done so, he is a crank! The response of the Farrer school has not been to call into question this assumption about Luke's intentions but to accept it just as heartily, yet claiming that Luke *did* think he was arranging his material logically for such instruction. Their attempts to explain what might be a "Luke-pleasing" order have for the most part still focused on breaking Luke down into bite-sized pericopes, each appropriate for liturgical use within the Lukan community's worship. Goulder writes that Luke "regularly likes teaching pericopes of about twelve to twenty verses, which he regards as the amount a congregation (or reader) can assimilate at one time."²³

This tendency to chop Luke's Gospel into bits in order to try to understand it is then reinforced by the nature of the Synoptic Problem itself. Luke, of all the Gospels, is most certainly based on material that has come from more than one source (as Luke himself says nearly outright in his Prologue). The study of the Synoptic Problem has therefore focused so much on what those individual sources are, and how Luke has altered this material, that it has ignored how Luke's Gospel is put together as an integral whole regardless of the possible sources of individual bits.

One additional assumption related to this last point that is made by Q scholars, but *not* by the Farrer school, is that Luke would have used all of his sources in the same way. If his purpose was to create a Christian handbook out of all the diverse material he had at his disposal, it would be logical to assume that, when he found appropriate material in one source, he would incorporate it into his document in a fashion to similar to the way he treated material taken from another source.

23. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 41.

Let us take a look one by one at each of these assumptions:

Did the Gospel traditions develop slowly over time in specific geographical locations? Based on what we know from the New Testament itself, this seems highly unlikely. Paul's letters and the book of Acts abound in references to frequent travel among the centers of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire: Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. Paul is even able in his letter to the Romans to greet by name more than two dozen members of a church he had never personally visited (Rom 16:1–15).²⁴ In such a context it would be surprising if Gospels that were written in one major location remained unknown in others for any amount of time at all.

Michael B. Thompson, in his article “The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation,” analyzes the evidence for frequent and rapid communication within the early church, noting that Roman roads and especially the shipping lanes throughout the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean Seas made travel and communication relatively swift and safe. The time it would take to travel from Rome to Jerusalem (the two farthest poles of the early Christian world) would have been two to three months, with considerably less time required to travel to the other main Christian centers. Then from these centers “many churches were less than a week’s travel from a main hub in the Christian network,”²⁵ so any Christian work of literature could easily have spread throughout the entire Christian community in much less than a year’s time. Thompson therefore concludes that “the burden of proof lies on the shoulders of any who would claim that evangelists wrote *many* years apart *and* in ignorance of their predecessors.”²⁶

24. It has been suggested that Romans 16 was not a part of the original letter but was added by Paul to an additional copy sent not to Rome but to Ephesus, since the last chapter of Romans is missing from some manuscripts of the letter (see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1971], 533–36). This seems extremely unlikely, however, since the situation in the Roman church that Paul is addressing (the division between rival Jewish and gentile factions of the church) would not have been relevant to the Ephesian church, so there seems to be no reason why Paul would have spent a considerable amount of money to send an irrelevant letter to the Ephesian church. E. Randolph Richards estimates that it would have cost Paul the equivalent of over two thousand dollars in early twenty-first-century money to produce and send his letter to the Romans (*Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition, and Collection* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 165). It seems far more likely that later copyists of Romans would have left out the tedious list of greetings in chapter 16, since these would have been unnecessary for later readers of the letter.

25. Michael B. Thompson, “The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 68.

26. *Ibid.*, 69.

But there is an additional factor related to the writing of the Synoptics that also argues against their having “grown up” within specific communities. If there is any possibility that the Mark and Luke mentioned in the New Testament were actually the authors of the Gospels that bear their names (or even that the traditions that developed regarding their authorship had some basis in reality), these two Gospels at least were not the work of authors who were settled members of particular communities but were written by travelers, missionaries who had contact with a large number of diverse Christian communities.

Even if we cannot prove specifically who wrote these Gospels, there is no reason to suppose that they were written by permanent residents of specific geographical communities rather than by itinerant Christian evangelists. Such travelers would have been in a far better position both to collect Christian traditions and then to publish and transmit those traditions to a broad audience. This possibility opens up a dynamic view of how the Gospels came to be written that is very different from what has previously been assumed, but this possibility seems to fit the history and life of the primitive church (and Luke’s own Prologue) very well.

Next, can we safely assume that the motivation and conditions in which Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels were similar? Or is it instead possible that they were actually written for entirely different purposes altogether? While it is possible that Matthew’s Gospel was written largely as a handbook for Christian instruction, the previous examination of Luke’s Prologue seems to point in a different direction for that Gospel. Even if the identity of Theophilus is unknown, it is still the case that Luke’s Gospel is addressed to an individual, not to a community. Luke is clearly concerned with addressing Theophilus’s personal understanding of Christianity. And as we have already explored, that understanding appears to be one of an outsider, a non-Christian, rather than a current member of the Christian community.

Luke’s use of the word *κατηχέω* has likewise already been discussed, but it is worth reemphasizing that Luke never elsewhere uses this word to mean “instruction,” but only information that has been reported to someone. Luke is therefore concerned not with Theophilus’s catechesis but with confirming the truth of the information in the reports that Theophilus has received regarding Christianity. This means that Luke, unlike Matthew, is not addressing a Christian community in order to give instruction but is addressing a non-Christian individual in order