

**THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT DINNER
(LUKE 14:15-24)
HISTORICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL,
LITERARY, AND
THEOLOGICAL-INTERPRETATIVE
APPROACHES**

Part A'

BY
ATHANASIOS ANTONOPOULOS

THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT DINNER
(LUKE 14:15-24)
HISTORICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL, LITERARY, AND
THEOLOGICAL-INTERPRETATIVE APPROACHES
Part A'

Athanasios Antonopoulos, Ph.D.

1. Introduction

As the anthropologist M. Sahlins states, “food dealings are a delicate barometer, a ritual statement as it were, of social relations, and food is thus employed instrumentally as a starting, a sustaining mechanism of sociability.”¹ Or, according to one of the pioneering researchers in the field of social relations, M. Douglas, “If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries... Taking of food has a social component, as well as a biological one.”² Moreover, in the ancient Greco-Roman environment it was believed that mealtime afforded an opportunity to nourish the spirit as well as the

1. M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972) 215.

2. M. Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Daedalus* 101 (1972) 61. See also G. Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

body. Meals and especially evening dinners were the most dominant and central element of everyday social life, both in the cities and in the rural areas. People not only shared food, but they, also participated in discussions, they shared common ideas and sometimes received new ideas. During the meals people made new friendship connections, which enhanced social relations.³

In this theoretical framework, the parable of the Great Dinner in Luke 14:15-24 has elicited enormous interest from a significant number of scholars. The aim of this study is to present the relevant scholarship trends on this parable in its historical, sociological, literary, and theological context.

2. Methodologies of Interpretation

With respect to the historical and social function of meals in the ancient Greco-Roman context, a reading of the parable of the Great Dinner led biblical scholars to raise some basic questions such as: a) Why does Luke place this parable almost in the middle of his narrative to emphasize his intention in the parable? b) How does this parable function inside the Lukan text? c) Does Luke use characteristics of the Greco-Roman dinner-symposium, in actual or in literary form to build his parable? d) Is Luke through this parable attempting to address the issue of social status and its function in Greco-Roman society? e) What vision of the social function of community lies behind this parable?

3. Cf. J. H. D'Arms, "Control, Companionship, and Clientia: Some Social Functions of the Roman Communal Meal," *Classical Views* 28 (1984) 327-348. N. Fisher, "Greek Associations, Symposia, and Clubs," in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome*, M. Grant, and R. Kitzinger (eds.), (New York, 1988) 1167-1197. F. Lissarrague, *The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet: Images and Ritual* (Princeton, 1990). O. Murray, *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). W. Slater, *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991). B. Leyerle, "Meals Customs in the Greco-Roman World," in *Passover and Easter: The Symbolical Structuring of a Sacred Season* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). D. Smith, "Meal Customs (Greco-Roman)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D. Freedman (ed.), vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 650-653. E. Gowers, *The Loaded Table: Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

To answer these questions, some scholars use historical, social-scientific or literary methodologies, and sometimes a combination of them. Historical and social-scientific methods are often used when the investigator approaches the text under examination as a product of its world in the specific time period. In particular, this kind of investigation tries to analyze the text by creating a clear picture of the social world that lies behind it. Using a historical and social scientific methodology, they try to analyze the Lukan parable in the context of its historical-social world and the communities that it addresses.

Other scholars also use the literary method and approach the text as a literary product. This method examines the literary functions inside the text such as intertextual connections, similarities and dissimilarities in what it considers fundamental elements of the text, and tries to create a literary model in which text belongs.⁴ In particular, the literary methodology analyzes this parable as a literary form inside the text of the gospel, its connections with other parables, and their similarities and differences.

3. Historical-Social Analysis of the Parable of the Great Dinner (Luke 14:15-24)

a) *The Meal's Function in the Gospel of Luke*

It is widely accepted that in the Gospel of Luke one of the most interesting topics that someone can immediately recognize is the frequently referred to notion of the meal. Some scholars assert that the meals provide a context "in which a number of Lukan concerns are expressed."⁵ Several others claim that the ministerial work of Jesus, as it is described in the Lukan text functions primarily during the meals⁶. Jesus partici-

4. For a concise analysis of the two methods, see V. Robbins, "Social-Scientific Criticism and Literary Studies, Prospects for Cooperation in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Criticism," in *Modelling Early Christianity, Social-scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, P. Esler (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1995) 274-289.

5. See S. Love, "Women and Men at Hellenistic Symposia Meals in Luke," in *Modelling Early Christianity, Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, P. Esler (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1995) 198.

6. See R. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) 47.

pates in different kinds of meals, which are organized by people of various backgrounds. Thus, in Luke we can see Jesus dining with Pharisees in some instances but also with tax-collectors, disciples, and sinners in others. The main reason for this table-fellowship of a varied character is that Luke wants to portray Jesus as providing “an acted parable of the Kingdom”⁷ or as “reveal[ing] himself as the Lord-Host of the Heavenly Banquet.”⁸

H. Moxnes in his concise study “Meals and the New Community in Luke,”⁹ offers a brief diagram of the different functions of meals’ in Luke. First of all, meals in Luke are the expressions of Jesus’ table-fellowship. As an active member of his community, he participates in every aspect of its social life and of course in the meals which constitute one of its main and basic elements. The unique thinking in Jesus’ social behavior is its inclusive character. He accepts different kinds of invitations from various people. Thus, he dines with the wealthy, with the poor, with people of both higher and social status. Naturally this seems highly controversial in his fellows understanding but for him it is as part of his ministry.

Secondly, according to H. Moxnes’ interpretations, meals in Luke function as indicators of a new social group. Contrary to the practices of Jewish society and especially of the Pharisees and the Scribes, where social boundaries around meals are tightly closed, meals in Luke function as a starting point of a group around Jesus. Participating in different kinds of hospitality –acting, healing and preaching during the meals, breaking social taboos that are connected with meal customs– Jesus gives a new content to the notion of meals. Meals become “a starting mechanism of a new sociability, a starting point of a group with a new character.”¹⁰ Analyzing the parable of the Great Dinner, H. Moxnes claims that this parable “combines an open, boundary-breaking invitation with the

7. Ibid, p. 58.

8. See D. Moessner, *The Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 174.

9. See H. Moxnes, H. “Meals and the New community in Luke-Acts,” *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok* 51-52 (1986-1987) 158-167.

10. See H. Moxnes, H. “Meals and the New community in Luke-Acts,” p. 162.

rejection of the invitation by the “insiders.” And at the table in the Kingdom the former “outsiders” will be seated, whereas “insiders” will be excluded. Thus, it is characteristic for meals that they create a new group around Jesus, within the larger Jewish society [...] It threatens this society by being more open.”¹¹

Third, H. Moxnes says the meals in Luke demonstrate a new social stratification. Breaking the taboos around meals, criticizing meal customs, and trying to open the social boundaries of the community in which meals play a significant role, Jesus attempts to create a group with a totally different internal stratification system, or he turns the social stratification system dominant in his days upside down.¹² Thus, Jesus provides a new meaning to the notion of guests seating according to their social status at dinners.¹³

b) Analysis of the Social Codes in the Parable of the Great Dinner

In their analysis of the social codes in the parable of the Great Dinner, scholars often return to the examination of the key factors of the described dinner. These factors include the host, the dining hall, the invitations, and the guests. The host of the dinner in the parable is described simply as *anthropos tis*. But the additional information that we receive from the text, especially with respect to the prepared dinner (*deipnon mega*), leads us to think that this man is not an ordinary or simple man. He may be one of the distinguished persons of his community, or at least a member of a wealthy circle, possibly as a local aristocrat. The dining hall is not specifically described in the parable. However, two references one in Luke 14:22, “and still there is room,” and the other in Luke 14:24, “my house may be filled,” help us to consider this dining room as a typically large room, which many ancient Greco-Roman houses contained for the dining occasions.

11. Ibid, pp. 162-163.

12. Ibid, p. 163.

13. Ibid, p. 163.

The invitations for the dinner¹⁴ were “extended in advance either in informal oral form or in formal,¹⁵ written form.”¹⁶ They were carried by messengers, usually servants, and read in front of the people being invited,¹⁷ announcing that a host was preparing a dinner for his friends and associates.¹⁸ A. Bell points out that “securing an invitation to dinner was a prime objective for anyone with any social pretensions. Wealthy men invited to their dinners large numbers of friends, clients, usually from their level, and [...] they also expected their guests to reciprocate.”¹⁹ The notion of invitations for participation in the dinner-symposium clearly marks the idea of friendship connections (links) between the host and the guests. For instance, Lucian points out that “Nobody invites an enemy or unknown person to dinner; not even a slight acquaintance. A man must first, I take it, become a friend in order to share another’s bowl and board (*trapeza*). I have often heard people say: “How much of a friend is he, when he has neither eaten or drunk with us?”²⁰

14. Typical examples of these invitations such as, the following: a) “Dioscoros invites you to dine at the wedding of his son” b) “Diogenes invites you to dinner for the first birthday of his daughter in the Serapeum tomorrow.” cf. D. Smith, *Many Tables* (Philadelphia, Trinity Press, 1990) 24. c) “Chaeremon invites you to dine at a banquet of the lord Serapis in the Serapeum tomorrow, that is, the 15th, from the 9th hour,” survived in fragments in Egyptian papyri, and have analyzed by C. H. Kim in his article “The Papyrus Invitation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975) 391-402.

15. See Plato, *Symposium*, 174A.

16. See D. Smith, “Meal Customs (Greco-Roman),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D. Freedman (ed.), vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 651.

17. The Gospel of Thomas contains some invitations that are delivered by the servants: “My Master invites you,” and “My master has invited you.” *Gospel of Thomas* 92: 14, 19, 22. (quoted in C. H. Kim, “The Papyrus Invitation,” p. 397).

18. For his discoveries of the invitations that are found in the papyri, C. Kim sketches the typical content of the dinner invitation, which contains eight structural elements: “a) Invitation-verb: *erotan* or *kalein*. b) The invited guest. c) The identity of the host: usually the name of the host in the third person, and his title (eg. his professional title) after his name. d) The purpose of the invitation: *deipneisai*. e) The occasion of the dinner: many instances (wedding feast, birthday celebrations, religious celebrations, etc.). f) The place of the dinner: name of the house. g) The date of the dinner. h) The time of the dinner.” Of course, according to Kim, not all of the invitations follow this sequence or exhibit all of these items; in some invitations one or two of the items are missing and sometimes the order is changed.” See C. H. Kim, “The Papyrus Invitation,” pp. 391-392.

19. A. Bell, *A Guide to the New Testament World*, p. 203.

20. Lucian, *Parasite* 22. See also P. Gooch, *Dangerous Food. 1 Corinthians 8-10 in its Context* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993) 44.

As we have mentioned, invitations had already been sent to the guests of the dinner in the parable when the servant is sent “to say to those who had been invited.”²¹ This is clear indication that this invitation is the second. Double invitations were a custom at that time in the Mediterranean world as it is shown by some references in papyri.²² Analyzing the meaning of the double invitations, R. Rohrbaugh asserts that this type of invitations has many purposes, such as assuring reciprocity. But to him the notion of time is really important. Thus the time “between invitations would allow opportunity for the potential guest to find out what the festive occasion might be, who is coming, and whether all had been done appropriately in arranging the dinner.”²³

Another important element is that the invitations for the dinner in our parable, as in the Greco-Roman dinners, are denoted by the same verb, *kaleo* (*ekalesen*)²⁴ Also, the custom of the servant carrying the invitation provides us in the parable with a connection to the customs of the Greco-Roman dinner-symposium, where the invitations came either in informal oral form or in formal, written form and were carried by messengers, usually servants, and read in front of the guests. Moreover, from the content of the excuses for refusing to attend, these invitations have been given to potential guests who are definitely in the same social status as the host. Of course the host of the dinner expects that his guests accept his invitation.

However, the three guests refuse the invitation and give various excuses,²⁵ which show that they belong to the social or economic elite of their community. Clearly the first and the second guests have the finan-

21. See Lk 14:17.

22. See for instance C. H. Kim, “The Papyrus Invitation,” pp. 391-402.

23. See R. Rohrbaugh, “The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relations,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, J. Neyrey (ed.), (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 141.

24. As R. Tannehill indicates, “this verb is frequent in Luke-Acts, but it is usually employed to introduce a name or title (“he will be called”). Apart from Luke 14: 7-24, *kaleo* refers in Luke-Acts to an invitation o dinner or other social occasion only in Luke 5:32 and 7:39.” See “The Lukan Discourse on Invitations (Luke 14:7-24),” in *The Four Gospels*, F. Segbroeck (ed.), vol. 2 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 1604-1605.

25. See P. Ballard, “Reasons For Refusing the Great Supper Lk 14:14-24,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972) 341-350.

cial ability to buy land properties and expensive animals. And the excuse is also found in of the third one the book of Deuteronomy, especially in 24:5 which says that every newly married man has the right to excuse himself “from both business and military obligations for one year.”²⁶ So the third guest had a high social rank too.²⁷ The guests who come after receiving the final two invitations are the non-elite people, who have a different social status than the host. These guests are described as living in the streets and the squares of the city. They are poor, maimed, blind and lame. They live in the roads and lanes of the country side. In the context of social analysis, the host tries to convince people who have lower social status to enter his house and with this command the host brakes down social boundaries and challenges the strong rules of the meal customs. He transforms the character of the dinner from being exclusive to being inclusive.

4. Literary Analysis of the Parable of the Great Dinner

The parable is found in the text of the Gospel of Luke. Parables are found in a variety of forms and difficult to interpret and understand, thus prompting biblical scholars to approach them with different methodologies. But scholars agree that parables are short, brief, concise, unified stories embedded in the larger gospel narrative. They are characterized by brief and sharp presentations and their stories contain realistic examples of the daily life. Their placement inside the text is important because it implies the strategy of their author to catch the attention of the reader and to focus it on his particular message. In recent years, scholars involved in parable research are usually divided into two main groups: a) scholars who consider the parables as the parables of Jesus, and b) scholars who consider the parables as fundamental parts of the text of the gospels. The direction of their concentration defines the content of their

26. See R. Rohrbaugh, “The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relations,” p. 143.

27. See H. Palmer, “Just Married, Cannot Come,” *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1976) 241-257. See also G. Kilpatrick, “The Aorist of *Gamein* in the New Testament,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (1967) 139-40.

research. The first category of scholars emphasizes the historical Jesus, while the second one focuses on the historical setting of the New Testament "by attempting to reach behind the present gospel texts the traditions that led to their production."²⁸

The consideration of the parables as the parables of Jesus is rooted in the research on the quest for the historical Jesus during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The leading scholar in this kind of research is J. Jeremias whose work on the parables of Jesus became a reference in this field.²⁹ Through exhaustive research on the texts of the parables, comparing all of their parallel versions in the gospels, and, searching for their most original form, Jeremias tried to select all the possible, primitive, reliable and authentic information, concerning Jesus as an historical person and his message. Due to the studies of later scholars, such as D. Via,³⁰ a transition was made from the strict historical methodology to a more literary perspective.

Returning to the parable of the Great Dinner in Luke 14: 15-24, according to these scholars, if we consider this parable as a parable of Jesus, the following themes could be discussed: 1) Jesus uses this parable in order to make his social critique against the dominant groups in society (Pharisees and wealthy people). 2) Jesus uses this parable in the context of his ministry to the poor. 3) Jesus uses his parable against Pharisaic exclusivism (see also (Lk 15: 1-2). Jesus uses the parable to break down social barriers (borders) between Pharisees and wealthy people, on the one side, and marginal people, on the other, for example tax collectors, sinners and, the poor. 4) Jesus uses the parable to refer to the eschatological dinner in the Kingdom of God.

The consideration of parables as parts of the gospels' text is based on the research developed after World War II. The scholars who performed that research are influenced by the study of redaction criticism. They usually examine the parables in relation to the whole context of the same

28. See M. Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables, An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 18. All the material on the parables comes in summarized form from the above book of M. Tolbert.

29. See J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972).

30. See D. O. Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

gospel or their different versions in the other synoptic gospels. Through their search the scholars tried to discover: 1) The literary background of the parables; their literary form and type, the author's ability to handle his material, their position inside the gospel's text. 2) The cultural background of the parables: the cultural world in which they were created, the selection of the important historical information of the Mediterranean world and the communities to which the parables were addressed. Typical examples in this category are the studies of J. D. Kingsbury,³¹ and C. Carlston.³² Thus, according to this approach, if we consider the parable of the great dinner as a parable of the gospel, then the following questions could be raised: 1) What is the social background of this parable? 2) To which kind of community is this parable addressed? 3) What kind of community lies behind this parable? 4) Are there specific problems inside this community that the author of this parable tries to solve through its message?

Additionally, in recent literary scholarship, several scholars have noted that Luke, as a Hellenistic author, composes his text using different literary forms.³³ More particularly, De Meeus and E. Steele note that the *genus litterarium* of the Hellenistic symposium fits many descriptions of dining meals in the Lukan text.³⁴ E. Steele asserts characteristics and elements of this symposium (i.e., Xenophon, *Symposium*, Plato *Symposium*) are used by Luke in the following specific instances: Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24. Careful examination of the Lukan text of the above pericopes and of the Hellenistic symposium show us a similar literary genre: similar structure, similar kind of invitations, similar seating arrangement, similar dialogue in the form of table talk, *fait divers*, and

31. See J. Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969).

32. See C. Carlston, *The Parables of the Triple Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

33. According to E. Steele "it is clear that Luke is familiar with a variety of Hellenistic genres and that he modifies them to suit his purposes." E. Steele, "Luke 11: 37-54, A Modified Hellenistic Symposium?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984) 387.

34. See X. De Meeus, "Composition de Luc., XIV et Centre Symposiaque," *ETL* 37 (1961) 847-870; E. Steele *Jesus Table-Fellowship with Pharisees: An Editorial Analysis of Luke 7: 36-50, 11: 37-54, and 14: 1-24* (Ph.D. Diss. Notre Dame, 1981).

similar discourse; and similar *dramatis personae*: the host, the chief guest, other invited guests.³⁵

D. Smith, however, sees De Meeus's and E. Steele's hypotheses as characterized by serious limitations because their studies "are directed to the use of the symposium genre in isolated pericopes rather than to the table fellowship motif in the Gospel as a whole."³⁶ Contrary to them, Smith expands his argument and considers the notion of table-fellowship in the Lukan text as a larger content notion in which specific characteristics and elements of the symposium *genus litterarium* are included. For D. Smith, Luke is not limited to one kind of literary form or type by copying literary elements. Instead he receives profits from a wide field or portion of popular and philosophical literature and traditions. Thus, when Luke composes his text "he appears to prefer complex rather than simple images, multiple rather than single meanings."³⁷ Taking the example of Jesus, Smith points out that in Luke "sometimes Jesus is presented as host of the meal, sometimes as guest, sometimes as servant. Sometimes he dines with the "righteous" (Pharisees), sometimes with "sinners", sometimes with the "crowd" (Luke 9:16).³⁸

5. Other Lukan Dining Scenes as a Commentary on the Parable of the Great Dinner

If we examine Luke's text for scenes with social status distinctions, the first instance is in chapter five, in particular, in verses 27-32. Here Jesus enters the house of the Levi, the tax collector, and dines with him and also with a "large company of tax collectors, and others sitting at table with

35. See E. Steele, "Luke 11: 37-54, A Modified Hellenistic Symposium?" pp. 380f and 382f.

36. See D. Smith, "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987) 615. See also W. Braun, "Symposium or Anti-Symposium? Reflections on Luke 14: 1-14," *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 8 (1992) 70-84.

37. See D. Smith, "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke," p. 638.

38. *Ibid*, p. 638.

them.”³⁹ Considered as people of a lower social status, the tax collectors do not have the right to sit and eat together with the people of higher status, like the Pharisees and the Scribes. Thus the latter react against Jesus, saying “why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”⁴⁰ After their reaction, Jesus uses the notion of invitation, the notion of calling, to explain to them that he broke, according to their understanding, one of the common rules of the meal, because, according to him “I have come to call not the righteous, but the sinners...”⁴¹

Another scene of social distinctions is in chapter six.⁴² Here, and as well as in the reaction of the Pharisees to the specific act of Jesus' disciples, Jesus tells the story of David and his followers who, when they were hungry, entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which belonged to the priests.⁴³ Jesus again emphasizes the fact that inside the house of God the borders, the barriers of social ranking do not exist. Chapter 7 provides us with the next social distinction scene.⁴⁴ Jesus is invited by a Pharisee, a highly placed member of his community, to dine with him in his house. Jesus again takes the opportunity to give his forgiveness to a sinful, and, of course, lower status woman. His action causes the reaction of the host of the dinner,⁴⁵ who seems to think that the benefits of the table-fellowship, belong only to people of the same status. It is interesting that Jesus in his answer to the Pharisee, reminds him that common dining customs, the wash of the guest's feet, the kiss of friendship by a host to his guest, the anointing of the guest's head with oil, which are appropriate for the people of the social class in which the Pharisee belongs, are ignored by him and practiced by a low status sinful woman.⁴⁶ Moreover, another dining scene comes in chapter 9.⁴⁷ Jesus'

39. Lk 5: 29.

40. Lk 5: 31.

41. Lk 5:32.

42. Lk 6:1-5.

43. Lk Lk 6:4.

44. Lk 7:36-50.

45. See Lk 7:39: “If this man were a prophet, he would have known and what sort of woman that is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.”

46. Lk 7:44-46.

47. Lk 9:10-17.

dining fellowship expands from the daily close circle of his twelve disciples to almost five thousand people. Jesus' action here clearly emphasizes the inclusive character of his ministry. In chapter 11, by making use again of the Pharisee's invitation, Jesus enters his home and participates in the meal. In this meal the other participants are lawyers, another group of people of high status. Jesus takes the opportunity to criticize strongly the inappropriate actions and behavior of this class.⁴⁸ The same story we met in chapter 7 is presented in chapter 14.⁴⁹ Jesus is invited, again by a Pharisee, to dine with him in his house. Jesus again heals a person affected by dropsy, a man of lower social status. But Jesus' action again causes a strong reaction among the dinner fellows. Jesus reacts to their negative feelings by telling them the guest and host parable.⁵⁰

The last dining scene related to status distinctions is in the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples during their Passover dinner.⁵¹ The text informs us that "a dispute arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest."⁵² Jesus takes again the opportunity to remind them that according to his teaching, if one wants to be elevated to a higher position than the one he has, he needs to be the least and if he wants to be a leader, he has to be, at the same time, "one who serves."⁵³

6. The Parable of the Great Dinner as a Commentary on the Larger Context of the Lukan Gospel

Following the examination of the larger literary context of the Gospel of Luke through the study of the parable of the Great Dinner, we now shall examine the specific parable as commentary on the larger context of the Gospel. For this purpose, I will review important findings of recent scholarship. Some scholars consider the text of Luke 14: 15-24 as a part of the larger text of the Gospel, which is located in the middle of Luke's

48. Lk 11:39-54.

49. Lk 14:1-6.

50. Lk 14:7-14.

51. Lk 22:24-30.

52. Lk 22:24.

53. Lk 22:26.

Gospel and which is called the central section or *travel narrative*. This hypothesis is supported by D. P. Moessner particularly in his study *The Lord of the Banquet*.⁵⁴ D. Moessner argues that “Luke’s central section depicts Jesus as a journey guest prophet like Moses, using a literary-theological framework that merges portraits of Moses of Deuteronomy with features of the Deuteronomistic view of history” as W. Braun points out.⁵⁵ Because this hypothesis is based on the redaction critical analysis of the text of the Gospel of Luke and not on Luke’s own rhetorical designs, it is not deemed acceptable by other scholars, such as, for instance, R. Tannehill.⁵⁶

Some other scholars also consider the text of the parable in Luke 14: 15-24 as a part of a larger text, characterized as a discrete literary unit or as a unified episode. One hypothesis is supported by W. Braun, especially is his study on *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14*. His thesis on the text as a unified episode, asserts that inside the text there are a) narrative bridges, b) verbal manipulation of scenario, and c) thematic integration.⁵⁷ Especially for the thematic integration inside the text, he provides the following textual examples: “Lk 14:13 *ptochous*-Lk 14:21 *ptochous*, Lk 14:13 *anapeirous*-Lk 14:21 *anapeirous*, Lk 14:13 *cholous*-Lk 14:21 *tyflous*, Lk 14:13 *tyflous*-Lk 14:21 *cholous*.”⁵⁸

Finally, scholars also consider the text of the parable Luke 14: 15-24 as part of a larger textual unity Luke 14: 1-33. This hypothesis is supported by J. Resseguie, mainly in his article “Point of View in the Central Section of Luke.” He argues that 14: 1-33 belong together, and “should be viewed together as a narrative in which conflicting ideological points of view are juxtaposed and contrasted. One view is exaltation oriented, seeking to gain recognition before others. The other “humilia-

54. See D. P. Moessner, *The Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

55. Cf. W. Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 12.

56. See R. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

57. See W. Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14*, pp. 14-21.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

tion oriented, avoiding the self-promotion of the first outlook.”⁵⁹ In the same direction, R. J. Karris supporting J. Resseguie's hypothesis for the textual unity of Luke 14: 1-33, goes further and points out that “14: 25-33 presses the issues raised in 14: 1-24, making them a matter of discipline for those following Jesus.”⁶⁰

7. The Parable of the Great Dinner as a Commentary on the Other Scenes of the Lukan Gospel

The first instance is found in chapter 13: 1-9. In this pericope some people came to Jesus and made complaints against the Galileans. Jesus reacts to their critique by saying, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”⁶¹ This passage shows us how moral issues create social status distinctions. The second instance derives from chapter 15: 1-2. Here Jesus is in a position to preach to the people. But this group of people contains tax collectors and sinners. Now, either because of their occupation or due to their moral character, these people are considered of lower status. Thus, the other group of respectable people, namely the Pharisees and the Scribes, whispered against Jesus because, once more, he “receives sinners and eats with them.”⁶² Responding to their reaction, Jesus tells them the parable of the Lost Sheep.

How may our parable of the Great Dinner function as a commentary on the instances mentioned above? The last three verses of this parable show us how the host of the dinner invites and accepts in his house and in his dining room people of lower social status. Moreover, in the last

59. See also J. Resseguie, “Point of View in the Central Section of Luke,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (1982) 46. See also R. Rohrbaugh, “The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relations,” p. 137.

60. See also R. J. Karris “Poor and Rich: The Lukan Sitz im Leben,” in C. H. Talbert (ed.) *Perspective in Luke-Acts* (Danville: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978) 121. See also R. Rohrbaugh, “The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relations,” p. 138.

61. Lk 13: 2-3.

62. Lk 15:2.

three verses we see the breaking of the social barriers, which formalized the distinctions among people of different social status. Therefore in the kingdom of God, the notion of acceptance of those who are usually un-accepted by the conventional social standards becomes central.

(Part B to follow)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ballard, Paul H. "Reasons For Refusing the Great Supper Lk 14:14-24," *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972) 341-350.
- Bell, A. *A Guide to the New Testament World* (Ontario: Herald Press, 1993).
- Braun, W. "Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14" (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Braun, W. *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Carlston, C. *The Parables of the Triple Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).
- D'Arms, J.H. "Control, Companionship, and Clientia: Some Social Functions of the Roman Communal Meal," *Classical Views* 28 (1984) 327-348.
- De Meeus, X. "Composition de Luc., XIV et Centre Symposiaque," *ETL* 37 (1961) 847-870.
- Douglas, M. "Deciphering a Meal," in M. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London, 1975) 249-275.
- Feeley-Harnik, G. *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).
- Fisher, N. "Greek Associations, Symposia, and Clubs," in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome*, M. Grant, and R. Kitzinger (eds.), (New York, 1988) 1167-1197.
- Gooch, P. *Dangerous Food. 1 Corinthians 8-10 in its Context* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993).
- Karris, R. J. "Poor and Rich: The Lukan Sitz im Leben," in *Perspective in Luke-Acts*, C. H. Talbert (ed.), (Danville: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978) 121.
- Karris, R. *Luke: Artist and Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).
- Kim, C. H. "The Papyrus Invitation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975) 391-402.
- Jeremias, J. *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972).
- Kilpatrick, G. "The Aorist of *Gamein* in the New Testament," *Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (1967) 139-140.
- Kingsbury, J. *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969).
- Leyerle, B. "Meals Customs in the Greco-Roman World," in *Passover and Easter: The Symbolical Structuring of a Sacred Season* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).
- Lissarrague, F. *The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet: Images and Ritual* (Princeton, 1990).

- Love, S. "Women and Men at Hellenistic Symposia Meals in Luke," in *Modelling Early Christianity, Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, P. Esler (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1995) 198-210.
- Moessner, D. P. *The Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).
- Moxnes, H. "Meals and the New Community in Luke-Acts," *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok* 51-52 (1986-1987) 158-167.
- Murray, O. *Symptotica: A Symposium on the Symposium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- Palmer, H. "Just Married, Cannot Come," *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1976) 241-257.
- Resseguie, J. "Point of View in the Central Section of Luke," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (1982) 46.
- Robbins, V. "Social-Scientific Criticism and Literary Studies, Prospects for Cooperation in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Criticism," in *Modelling Early Christianity, Social-scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, P. Esler (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1995) 274-289.
- Rohrbaugh, R. "The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relations," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, J. Neyrey (ed.), (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 125-149.
- Sahlins, M. *Stone Age Economics*, (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972).
- Slater, W. *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
- Smith, D. "Meal Customs (Greco-Roman)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D. Freedman (ed.), vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 650-653.
- Smith, D. "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987) 613-638.
- Steele, E. "Luke 11: 37-54, A Modified Hellenistic Symposium?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984) 379-394.
- Steele, E. *Jesus Table-Fellowship with Pharisees: An Editorial Analysis of Luke 7: 36-50, 11: 37-54, and 14: 1-24* (Ph.D. Diss. Notre Dame, 1981).
- Tannehill, R. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).
- Tannehill, R. "The Lukan Discourse on Invitations (Luke 14: 7-24)," in *The Four Gospels*, F. Segbroeck (ed.), vol. 2 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 1603-1616.
- Tolbert, M. *Perspectives on the Parables, An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).
- Via, D. O. *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).