

# STEWARDSHIP AND ALMSGIVING: LUKE'S THEOLOGY OF WEALTH<sup>1</sup>

Kyoung-Jin Kim

This thesis starts with questions concerning Luke's idea of the relationship between wealth and discipleship. I began this thesis in the light of several previous studies in the area of the theme of wealth and poverty in Luke's theology over the last three decades. I found them unsatisfactory in solving the problems we have in Luke-Acts, which are derived from an attempt to relate wealth to discipleship in Luke's theology: (i) Does Luke have in mind two types of disciples? (ii) Is a total surrender of possessions required of all or just the Twelve? What might Luke mean by such a total surrender? (iii) In describing the relationship of wealth and discipleship, is the 'discipleship' motif sufficient, or are there other terms/motifs to help us understand Luke? iv) Does Luke have any specific emphasis in the practical considerations of how wealth is to be employed?

Previous attempts are found to have failed to reconcile the matter of wealth and poverty with the theme of discipleship in Luke's theology. This failure motivates us to investigate a new paradigm, that is, stewardship. The following are the conclusions of our exploration.

With regard to the *Sitz im Leben* of Luke-Acts, it emerges that Luke's community would have been located in an urban setting steeped in Hellenistic culture somewhere in the Roman East around the end of the first century A.D. Its members would have been Gentiles in terms of their ethnic background and, in terms of their socio-economical status, both rich and poor, representing the extremes of the spectrum of contemporary society.

In the third chapter, I investigate the theme of discipleship in Mark's Gospel. Since Mark was a main source for Luke, Mark's view of the disciples and discipleship needs to be compared with that of Luke. My conclusions are that, facing

---

<sup>1</sup>Kyoung-Jin Kim, *Stewardship and Almsgiving: Luke's Theology of Wealth* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow 1993).

a lingering threat of persecution in his community, Mark urged the Christian friends in his community to follow Jesus their Lord even to the point of death. Jesus is portrayed as a prime example of faithful discipleship, while the failure of the disciples is treated as an example to avoid. In accordance with this idea of discipleship, the disciples in Mark are seen as a limited number of followers of Jesus, and to have failed to comprehend Jesus' teaching and instruction in spite of his preferential treatment towards them. In line with this concept of discipleship, in Mark the disciples are required to leave their wealth literally (Mk. 1:18, 20; 2:14; 10:28).

This notion of discipleship perceived by Mark is compared with that of Luke in chapter four in order to reveal Luke's distinctive concept of it. Luke's community was not confronted with persecution such as threatened Mark's community, and the *parousia* is also seen to be delayed in Luke's Gospel so as to highlight a concern with the daily life of Christians. Thus, Luke's concept of discipleship is different from that of Mark: the disciples in the Gospel are identified with those who appear in Acts, who are represented as a large number of people. Luke appears to have tended to portray the disciples in a favourable manner, and to have developed the notion of two types of disciples, such as the itinerant who might be identical to the apostles, and the sedentary who were seen to accept and to follow Jesus' teaching where they were, even though they did not literally follow after Jesus in his journey to Jerusalem.

In this context, what is particularly noteworthy is that despite the strict nature of his commands, i.e. to renounce *all* to follow him, Jesus does not reproach the sedentary disciples who are shown not to have left their possessions and property, but rather appears to accept them as they are, enjoying their entertainment as they invite him and his wandering disciples to meals in their houses. This is a very significant point: Luke's idea of discipleship in view of Jesus' injunction of a total renunciation of wealth is that a small number of the itinerant disciples were required to forsake literally everything, while the sedentary disciples who for Luke were identified with his congregation were asked to renounce the *ownership* of all they possessed.

Having discerned Luke's concept of discipleship, we cannot avoid wondering if the idea of discipleship is after all appropriate to embrace fully his re-oriented concept of wealth. Accordingly, we look at another aspect of Luke's Gospel, distinct from the teacher-pupil relation which constitutes discipleship. On the basis of detailed observations we trace a new motif in Luke which appears to be more pervasive than the teacher-pupil relation, that is, the master-slave relation. In the light of this new dominant motif in Luke it is shown that Luke intended to define the proper relation between God or Jesus and Christians as the master-slave relation, rather than simply the teacher-pupil relation that constitutes a basic element of Markan discipleship.

Now that a new concept of wealth and the master-slave relation have emerged as conspicuous distinctive features in Luke's theology which have not previously been given appropriate attention, we combine these two features peculiar to Luke, and as a result, suggest a new paradigm for Christians, that is, stewardship. After discussing the three stewardship parables, i.e. the Parable of the Faithful and Wise Steward (Lk. 12:42-8), the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Lk. 16:1-13) and the Parable of the Ten Minas (Lk. 19:11-27), we identify the requirements of stewardship Luke had in mind as follows: (i) what a steward owns does not belong to him but to his master; (ii) his stewardship is provisional so he may be summoned to account anytime, hence he must be alert all the time; (iii) there will be judgement over his work; if he turns out to be faithful in his duty, there will be a reward, otherwise a punishment.

From this identification of Luke's particular interest in stewardship, we go on to find out how and in what area Luke intended to apply stewardship to the Christian life. This is not difficult, because it is now commonly acknowledged that there is a strong concern with the theme of the poor and the rich in Luke's writings. Thus in light of the theme of stewardship we examine the wide range of material relating to wealth and poverty in Luke-Acts, and conclude that for Luke a proper way for a Christian as steward to use his wealth is almsgiving in the interest of the poor and needy inside and outside the community.

In addition, we note that this motif of almsgiving continues to be found in Acts, the sequel to the Gospel, so that

Luke's special concern with almsgiving is confirmed in this continuity of the theme in Acts. Also the communal living practised by the Early Christians at Jerusalem whose main purpose is to help the poor is analogous not so much to that of the Qumran Community, as to that of the town-based Essene Communities.

Furthermore, in order to find out if there is any contemporary parallel to Luke's concept of almsgiving based on stewardship at his time, we compare Luke's notion with benefaction systems prevalent in Graeco-Roman society at the time. It becomes clear that his concept of almsgiving can be labelled as radical, confronting the contemporary ethic of reciprocity. Its origin can be traced back to Judaism, the matrix of Christianity.

In the final analysis, having noticed that Luke's concept of almsgiving based on stewardship was unique and radical with no parallel in the circumstances where his community was situated, we would conclude our thesis with the following statement: out of genuine sympathy towards the poor, Luke intended to urge the rich Christians in his community to remember their identity as stewards, and to distribute their wealth to the poor as alms, giving up the ownership of all they possessed.