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According to Luke: A New Exposition of the Third Gospel

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According to Luke: A New Exposition of the Third Gospel

David Gooding

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987

362 pp.

Some books are useful only through a specific application. Occasionally, this application is not intended by the author and would even meet with her or his disapproval. Such is the case with *According to Luke*, a work entirely failing in its aims and yet offering positive contributions to biblical research.

David Gooding's book is a pious exposition of Luke's Gospel, dedicated to analyzing the structure and, to a greater extent, explaining the content of this New Testament writing. His primary intention is to render the Gospel understandable and meaningful to the average believer, enabling that believer more faithfully and fully to make use of this holy writing in her or his religious life. To this end, Gooding, in addition to a bulk of basic explanatory material, introduces each of his chapters with hypotheses regarding the ordering of pericopes and the structure of that section of the Gospel with which he is dealing. Thus, for example, in Luke 3:1-4:44 he sees the second "stage" of the Gospel, containing four "movements" (3:1-20; 3:21-4:13; 4:16-30; 4:31-43), arranged symmetrically, so that the first movement contains a sequence parallel to the third, and the second to the fourth. Such arrangements are noted throughout Luke, and are used to clarify the basic themes Luke wishes to address in each section of the Gospel. Throughout, a series of charts illustrates Gooding's structural theories.

If anything justifies subtitling this book a "new" exposition, it is certainly the attention paid to Lucan structure. Gooding's analysis of Luke's ordering is insightful and, for the most part, convincing. The symmetries he finds are fairly even in length, inclusive, supported by Luke's own summary statements and use of vocabulary, and yet are not so uniform as to seem artificial. A great amount of work and an obvious intimacy with the Lucan text stand behind this scholarship. A critical and careful reading of *According to Luke* would be valuable for anyone having a special interest—especially for redaction- or source-critical purposes—in Luke's structure.

Unfortunately, this gold must be extracted from an abundance of ore. The bulk of Gooding's expository material is often simply a rehash of 1800 years of the Christian exegetical tradition. In a devotional work it may sometimes be appropriate to assume temporarily, for the sake of edification, the historicity of biblical traditions. But in a book which has critical aspirations, Gooding's virulent insistence on the absolute accuracy of the Gospel's story is anachronistic and unacceptable. Throughout, worn "refutations" of critical observations abound (e.g., p. 329). The result of this

anti-critical approach is that Gooding cannot distinguish between Luke's intentions, the intentions of his sources, and the intentions of the historical Jesus, and hence fails to acknowledge, for example, the theological creativity underlying the composition of Luke or any of the other gospels. Worse still, Gooding identifies the earthly Jesus with the risen Christ at work in the church, so that Luke is found to be a proponent of Chalcedonian orthodoxy and is interpreted on that basis. Thus the infancy narrative becomes the story of the incarnation (pp. 27, 31). Other New Testament texts are used to exegete Lucan passages (e.g., p. 117). Difficult passages are toned down drastically to fit into a coherent theological system—Jesus' teeth are pulled, reducing the radical challenge of the Gospel to a commonplace cultural morality and banal theology (e.g., p. 194, where Christ's refusal to allow a would-be follower is explained in terms of the father's not yet being dead!). Even a book whose primary task is religious rather than historical instruction *must*, if we are to take *sola scriptura* at all seriously, seek first the authentic intention of the text and only then apply to it the creeds and confessions of the church. Gooding does the reverse, and his own words (p. 116) are thus a judgement against himself: "The religious mind... is interested in keeping rules; particularly the rules which spring from its own cherished interpretations of Scripture or tradition; and to these interpretations it will attribute the inflexible authority of God himself."

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