CHAPTER FOUR

THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Thus far I have examined Luke 16:1-13 in relative isolation (chapter two) and in its immediate and broader literary contexts (chapter three). In this final chapter the discussion will be expanded further by relating the parable to the theology of Luke-Acts, in general, and to two thematic strands of that theology, in particular. Those themes are riches and poverty and the kingdom of God. My goal again is to show how this contextual level brings the meaning of our parable into sharper focus.

I. GENERAL SURVEY OF LUCAN STUDIES

During the latter half of the twentieth century a “revolution in Lucan studies” has taken place in which the theology of Luke-Acts plays the central role. To sketch the general course of these developments and trends will set the background for the present chapter.

As J. Kodell observes, “Luke has always claimed a large share of the exegetes’ attention. For quantity, he is the chief contributor to the NT; and Acts is the only source for much information about the early development of the Church.” Until about 1950, most of that attention was focused on the sources of Luke the historian and the question of his

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1 Space constraints necessitate limiting the discussion of Luke’s theology by and large to the Third Gospel.


reliability in that capacity. This state of affairs in Lucan studies is summarized and typified in the title and substance of C. K. Barrett’s book, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study*. With the advent of redaction criticism in the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, the situation changed. The gospel writers came to be seen as creative theologians “writing with certain definite objectives [closely related to] the problem situation of a particular group of readers.” This fundamental change of perspective, which in the case of Luke-Acts owed much to the earlier stylistic and form-critical work of H. J. Cadbury and Dibelius, shifted the focus of attention from Luke the historian to Luke the theologian. The focus has by and large remained there ever since.

The individual most responsible for this shift in Lucan studies is H. Conzelmann. In his book *Die Mitte der Zeit*, first published in 1954, Conzelmann argued that Luke-Acts is, to use Perrin’s words, “Luke’s response to the central problem of his day, namely, the delay of the parousia and the subsequent necessity for the church to come to grips with its continued existence in the world.” To this end Luke allegedly abandoned the primitive eschatology of tradition in favor of a three-

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8 Other pioneers in Lucan studies during the period under consideration include E. Käsemann, P. Vielhauer, and E. Haenchen. See Kodell (“Theology,” 116-17), Kümmel (“Accusations,” 132-33), and Talbert (“Sands,” 381-83) for bibliographic details and summaries of the influence of these individuals. Talbert (“Sands,” 381) traces the roots of the shift from Luke the historian to Luke the theologian to Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament*.


10 Perrin, *Redaction Criticism*, 32.