CHAPTER SIX

THE WAY OF THE LUKAN JESUS:
DIMENSIONS OF LUKAN SPIRITUALITY

The purpose of this paper is to use one facet of Lukan Christology to cast light on the current struggle to find an acceptable form of spirituality for our time. It will begin with historical description and then move to a use of this description as a basis for an evaluation of the current scene.\footnote{The literature on New Testament spirituality is limited and what is available is oftentimes of little use either for accurate description or for assistance in the current theological enterprise. Perhaps the best available is Louis Bouyer, \textit{The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers} (vol. 1 of \textit{A History of Christian Spirituality}; New York: Seabury, 1963).}

The Lukan picture of Jesus, viewed as a whole, corresponds to the pattern that has been called exaltation Christology.\footnote{R. H. Fuller, \textit{The Foundations of New Testament Christology} (New York: Scribner’s, 1965).} Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, the earthly Jesus lives and dies as a benefactor;\footnote{F. W. Danker, ‘The Endangered Benefactor in Luke-Acts,’ in \textit{SBL Seminar Papers, 1981} (SBLSP 20; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 39–48.} is then taken up to live an immortal, exalted existence as heavenly Lord who from time to time intervenes on behalf of his cause and his devotees.\footnote{Charles H. Talbert, ‘The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity,’ \textit{JBL} 94 (1975): 419–36.} In this christological pattern, Jesus’ continuing reign from heaven has as its basis his resurrection from the dead, his ascension, and his exaltation. His remarkable life as benefactor has as its basis his miraculous conception. The miraculous conception says that Jesus’ earthly life is due to God’s act. Like Adam, Jesus is one whose existence resulted from the direct, creative intervention of God. Within this frame of reference, two questions related to this christology must be asked and answered: (1) What kind of life does God’s creative, redemptive act produce? and (2) What is the relevance of such a life for Jesus’ disciples?
What Kind of Life Does God’s Intervention Produce?

A correct understanding of the Lukan Jesus’ earthly life is possible only if one recognizes that the Evangelist depicts it in developmental terms. Three observations prove this to be the case. The first is found in Luke 2:41–51, the story of the twelve year old Jesus in the temple. Enclosed in a frame, verses 40 and 52, it focuses on the youth’s growth and development. Verse 52, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man,” uses the term προοχόπτειν (to increase). In the Greek world this term was used in philosophical circles to depict an individual’s process of moral and spiritual development between beginning and perfection. Epictetus, for example, speaks of “one who is making progress” (ὁ προοχόπτων) because he has learned from the philosopher (Diatr. 1.4.1). He says: “Whatsoever the goal toward which perfection in anything definitely leads, progress (προοχοπή) is an approach thereto” (1.4.4). He asks:

Where, then, is progress? If any man among you, withdrawing from external things, has turned his attention to the question of his own moral purpose, cultivating and perfecting it so as to make it finally harmonious with nature, elevated, free, unhindered, untrammelled, faithful, and honorable …—this is the man who in all truth is making progress (ὁ προοχόπτων). (1.4.18–21, LCL)

Philo uses it the same way. He speaks of three grades of people: ὁ αὐχόμενος, the man who is just beginning his training; ὁ προοχόπτων, the one who is making progress; and ὁ τέλειος, the perfect or mature person (Leg. 3.159). In Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat 51 he uses προοχοπή to speak of moral progress in life. In De posteritate Caini 132 he contrasts προοχόπται (those making progress) with τελείωται (those attaining perfection). In De somniis 2.234–35 he describes the perfect man (τέλειοι) as neither God nor man, but as on the border-line between the uncreated and the perishing form of being. The man who is on the path of progress (προοχόπτοντα) is placed between the living and the dead, between those who have wisdom for their life-mate and those who rejoice in folly. Philo, of course, regards the source of one’s progress not as nature but as God. Later, Greek-speaking Christians made use of this terminology and assumed a similar conceptual world. In Vita Pachomii 2 we hear that the monastic father made progress (πρόχοψας);

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6 For the data in the following paragraph, see G. Stählin, TDNT 6:703–19.