

ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN LUKE-ACTS: ANALYZING LUKE'S HELLENISTIC JEWISH CHRIST-BELIEVING THEOLOGY

Patrick Ogbonyomi Alemayo

Advisor: Professor Christopher R. Matthews, Th.D.; Rev. Matthew Monnig, S.J., Ph.D.

Readers: Rev. Matthew Monnig, S.J., Ph.D. and Professor Dieter Roth, Ph.D.

Abstract

Much previous scholarship approaches Luke's narrative of God's salvation in Jesus as either salvation history or practical-apologetic history. Some Lukan scholars, like Robert C. Tannehill, Ernst Haenchen, Ben Witherington III, and Jack T. Sanders, argue that Luke offers an anti-Jewish interpretation of the gospel. They say that the inclusive nature of the gospel of Christ narrated in Luke-Acts implies a discontinuity with the Jewish origins of early Christianity. The problem under view in this study is the neglect in Lukan scholarship of the portrayal of diversity, universality, and inclusion among the Christ-believers in Luke-Acts. The literary approach to studies of Luke-Acts has not given enough attention to Luke's implied audience as an ethnically diverse and inclusive Christ-believing group. This study asks how one navigates the relationship between ethnicity and inclusivity in the Lukan narrative of early Christian groups in Luke-Acts. This work performs a literary analysis of key pericopes—Luke 1:46-56, 67-79; 2:8-14, 29-32; 4:16-30; 7:1-10; and Acts 2:1-13; 10:1-11:18; 15:20, 29; 28:1-31—to discover Luke's theological views regarding an ethnically diverse and inclusive Christ-believing group. My dissertation argues, from a literary perspective, with attention to ethnic reasoning and the Greco-Roman context of the late first and early second centuries CE, that Luke's implied audience offers a good fit with an ethnically diverse and inclusive Christ-believing group that nurtures continuity with the God of Israel's saving plan for all peoples, Jews and non-Jews alike. Luke's narrative theology of God's saving plan for the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God connects with a/the "Jewish" story that is shown in Luke's continuing interest in things "Jewish." In this way, Luke shares a "Jewish" faith in that the God of Israel offers salvation to everyone by giving each a place in Christ as they relate together and fellowship in love. It demonstrates that Luke's Christ-believing theology is a cosmopolitan Jewish "Christian" theology that is inclusive of Jews and Gentiles. It shows that in Luke-Acts, Jesus and the witnesses to his gospel are employed by Luke to build and consolidate a Gentile-inclusive Hellenistic Jewish Christ-believing theology. The rivalries among particular Jews and their fellow Jewish Christ-believers, and between Jewish Christ-believers and people of other ethnicities within the fold of Christ-believers, are expressions of sibling rivalries that reflect different perspectives of the Jewish way of life and other social, cultural, and ethnic differences. This does not create a structural dichotomy between positive early Christ-believers and negative non-Christian ethnic groups. This is important because, through Luke's narrative, my work

demonstrates the interconnection between ethnic diversity and inclusion among Christ-believers in Luke-Acts. In addition, this kind of separation is dubious because this dissertation does not presume a split between Judaism and Christianity at the time of Luke. My contribution shows that Luke's indicators of a universalistic theology of ethnic inclusion do not deny interest in "Jewish" practices throughout Luke-Acts. My main point is that, for Luke, early Christ-believers were ethnically diverse and inclusive. Although some were Jews in the diaspora, they were also Greeks or Romans; they spoke like devout Gentiles who interacted with them. There were also Gentile Christ-believers who upheld and practiced the Jewish faith in Christ and recognized Jesus as the Spirit-anointed Messiah. It is precisely in this that Luke establishes his universalistic and inclusive theology of Hellenistic Jewish "Christian" faith in Jesus, the Lord and Messiah. This study concludes that Luke's universalistic theology is grounded in Jewish ethnicity. Luke portrays in literary terms a form of Jewish Christ-believing ethnicity that constructs access for Gentiles to become part of the "Jewish" people of God. Therefore, Luke's literary portrait of ethnicity can be viewed as broad, constructed, and ever-changing. The issue of Jewish identity in Luke-Acts can be seen from a constructivist perspective that opens up the Jewish ethnicity to include people of other ethnicities. Thus, Luke constructs his Jewish Christ-believing ethnicity universally and inclusively without ascribing negativity to particular ethnic heritages. An attractive hypothesis is that Luke writes in the context of a group that mirrors the mixed believers of the narrative. Contrary to some scholars, this work insists that Luke's stories do not portray an anti-Jewish interpretation of the gospel and its spread. It affirms that a mere narrative analysis of Luke's two books is insufficient to understand Luke's theological narrative and rhetoric in Luke-Acts. Paying attention to the social context and situation portrayed within the narrative, Luke's work shows that his Christ-believing way is participating in some form of "Jewishness." When one considers the social framework of ethnic diversity and inclusion, however, one finds that it is precisely in the inclusion of Gentiles that continuing interest in things "Jewish" is upheld and legitimated. In this way, Luke demonstrates through his narrative a relationship between Christian origins and ethnic diversity. Based on my findings, the idea of a Lukan replacement theology is untenable because Luke's theological narrative and rhetoric of sharing the gospel with Gentiles shows a continuous participation in Jewish life and practice. Furthermore, the scholarly dichotomy between Christian universality and Jewish particularity should be discarded because it is inattentive to the complex process of social belonging and identity construction. Using subtle rhetoric, Luke's universalistic and inclusive perspective is expressed in literary and rhetorical terms without communicating that non-ethnic "Christian" universality is better than ethnic "Jewish" particularity. This implies that scholarly investigation into Jews and Jewish things, as well as other particular ethnicities in Luke-Acts, requires considering Luke's theological narrative, literary and rhetorical interests, and social situation. This study proposes a way of reading Luke-Acts that considers the complexities and social circumstances reflected in the narrative of the two books and their intertextual connection.