

**CHAPTER III**  
**SYMPOSIUM CONVENTIONS IN LUKE'S GOSPEL**  
**(APART FROM THE LAST SUPPER)**

He sets before us different symposia; for every symposium can be better understood by comparison and contrast to the others. (Athenaeus,  
*Deipnosophistae*, v. 177)

Luke depicts meal scenes as symposia imbedded in a narrative. He does so to make us view Luke's meal scenes as "similarly structured and conceptually related" both to one another and to the Last Supper scene.<sup>1</sup>

These are not the only features that Luke accentuated in order to connect the other meal scenes of the Gospel to his Last Supper account. Luke also relates the meal scenes conceptually by using a special terminology for describing meals with Jesus. Of the special terminology Luke develops to describe meals, two kinds of terms are especially helpful in connecting the Last Supper to the previous meals. They are (1) parallelism of the verbs "eating - drinking" and of the nouns "bread - wine" as a shorthand for characterizing meals with Jesus,<sup>2</sup> and (2) a variety of expressions for "reclining" to describe the posture of Jesus and his meal companions.<sup>3</sup> Reclining is the characteristic posture which distinguishes the symposium from ordinary meals in Greco-Roman meal conventions.<sup>4</sup> These formulaic phrases in Luke's earlier meal accounts and summary statements (i.e., Lk 7:34 and 13:26) resonate in Luke's Last Supper account.

However, the recurring "symposium frameworks" are the features most central to my analysis of meal symbolism in Luke's Gospel. Luke employs a special literary

scheme: the framework of the banquet with table talk following it, four times before the Last Supper: Lk 5:27-39; 7:36-50; 11:37-54; and 14:1-24.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, I will discuss Luke's meal frameworks (apart from the Last Supper), namely the literary conventions of banquet settings and the stock characters who attend them that make Luke's account of Jesus' table fellowship with Pharisees and others recognizable to his audience as typical *symposia*. Then, in the next chapter, I will discuss how Luke transforms the literary *topoi*, that is, the descriptive features of his symposium settings into prescriptive ones in his composition of the Last Supper.

### Luke's Use Of Symposium Scenes

The common underlying structure of Luke's various meal scenes can be outlined as follows:

1. Narration of meal setting
  - a. Invitation of host
  - b. "*fait divers*"
2. Dialogue (may include encomia, scholastic dispute, Socratic interrogation, stories, riddles, etc.)
3. Narration of conclusion

This structure underlies not only the Last Supper, but also the three meal scenes with Jesus at the home of a Pharisee.

Let us briefly outline how each scene fits this sympotic framework. In each episode, Luke uses events suggested by the meal setting to provoke a

dialogue, usually an *agon sophias*, between Jesus (and/or his supporters) and his rivals. Each meal dialogue accentuates a major point of ideological contention and of group self-differentiation between the first century Jewish "school of Jesus" and "school" of the Pharisees.

*Luke 7:36-50*

1. Narration of meal setting:

a. Invitation of host: "One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal" (7:36a)

a' brief description of setting: "he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined" (7:36b)

b. "*fait divers*" : "Behold a woman, who was a sinner in the city...stood behind him, by his feet weeping. His feet were wet with her tears and she wiped them with her hair and, kissing them and anointing them with the myrrh" (37-38)

b' reaction to the *fait divers*: "when the Pharisee who invited him saw this, he said to himself..." (39)

2. Dialogue: "Answering him Jesus said...little love is shown" (40-47)

3. Narration of conclusion

a. second *fait divers*: Jesus tells her "your sins are forgiven." (48)

a' reaction to *fait divers*: the other guests asked "Who is this, who forgives sins?" (49)

b. Jesus dismisses the woman (50)

c. Jesus leaves : "After this he went journeying..." (8:1)

Luke 7:36-50 is the first meal scene in Luke's Gospel which unambiguously manifests all the elements of the symposium structure, though it is the second in the text.<sup>6</sup> Since the first meal scene in Luke's Gospel, Jesus' banquet at the home of the tax collector Levi (Lk 5:27-39) does not unambiguously set the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees within the meal setting, as do the other examples of this symposium structure, I will discuss this special case later. Lk 7:36-50 begins with the notice that "one of the Pharisees invited [Jesus] to eat with him, and upon entering the Pharisee's home he *reclined*," (7:36). A banquet scene is set. A *fait divers*: the extravagant gesture of the uninvited sinner woman who bursts in, anoints Jesus with myrrh, and immodestly kisses and wipes her tears from Jesus' feet with her hair (7:37-38) - provokes the scholastic dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisee Simon (7:39-47).<sup>7</sup> I call it scholastic because Simon is clearly marked three times as a representative of one school, the Pharisees (7:36 [two times], 39), while Jesus is marked as the proponent of another school insofar as he is addressed by Simon as "teacher." (7:40) This dialogue includes a Socratic interrogation in which Simon is tricked into agreeing with Jesus (7:40-47).<sup>8</sup> By "Socratic interrogation" I mean a question and answer interchange, as in the dialogues of Plato, in which a questioner is portrayed as eliciting from her or his dialogue partner an answer that makes the questioned person contradict her- or himself. The banquet concludes when Jesus usurps the role of host by dismissing the woman (7:50). Thus here, Luke makes two points about Jesus' table fellowship. First, it differs from Pharisaic table fellowship in that Jesus welcomes rather than excludes guests whose sex and doubtful purity made them unacceptable for Pharisaic fellowship. Second, it exemplifies the social role reversal of guest and host which Luke later explicitly ascribes to Christian

table fellowship as opposed to strictly hierarchical Greco-Roman table fellowship (Lk 22:25-27).

*Luke 11:37-54*

1. Narration of meal setting
  - a. Invitation of host: "a Pharisee invited him to a meal" (11:37b)
  - a'. brief description of setting: "and he came in and he reclined" (11:37c)
  - b. reaction to "*fait divers*": "the Pharisee noticed with surprise" (11:38a)
  - b'. *fait divers*: "that he had not begun by washing before the meal (11:38b)
2. Dialogue: "So the Lord said to him...At this one of the lawyers said...so he said..." (39-52)
  - a. *fait divers*: Jesus insults his table fellows (39-44)
    - a.' reaction to *fait divers*: "At this one of the lawyers said, '...you are insulting us, too'" (45)
3. Narration of conclusion: Jesus leaves the house (53)

Likewise, Lk 11:37-54 frames a quarrel between Jesus and the Pharisees in a symposium setting.<sup>9</sup> This account sets the meal scene with the notice that "while [Jesus] was preaching, a Pharisee invited him to have the morning meal at his home" (Lk 11:37a). Luke then says that "upon entering, he reclined [that is, Jesus did nothing else but recline!]. When he saw this, the Pharisee was astonished that he did not first immerse himself before the meal." When the Pharisee host remarks to himself that Jesus does not take a bath before his banquet at his home (Lk 11:37), Luke not only makes the point that Jesus rejected the characteristically Pharisaic requirement that their table fellows take

a ritual bath before they eat a banquet of tithed food, but also uses a *symposium literary convention* to make it. To the school of Pharisees who gathered for common meals precisely to share tithed food with others in a state of purity, Luke portrays Jesus' omission of a customary bath before meal as deliberately provocative. The "scenic motif" of the bath before or after a meal is frequently a *fait divers* in other symposium literature. The Pharisee's astonishment that his guest did not immerse himself before eating the meal, becomes the *fait divers* that provokes Jesus' polemic against the practices of the Pharisaeic school to which he opposed both in word and deed (Lk 11:39-54).

Likewise, the quarrel between proponents of opposing philosophical schools is a characteristic *Situationstopos* of symposium literature. So though Jesus does most of the talking, Luke nevertheless does enough to create the literary effect of a conventional symposium dialogue. Luke makes the Pharisee host open the "discussion" by expressing his astonishment aloud (presumably) to Jesus that he did not bathe.<sup>10</sup> He also interjects a comment made by one of the lawyers: "teacher, by saying these things you are insulting us, too," (Lk 11:45) to sustain the impression of a dialogue rather than a monologue.

The end of this scene is also a convention in literary banquets.<sup>11</sup> The scene ends when Jesus departs, accompanied by a crowd of scribes and Pharisees still plying him with scholastic questions, more or less prolonging the academic brawl. The motif of wine-drunkeness as the ground for an unphilosophical disruption of the philosophical banquet is noticeably absent. Nevertheless, Luke's metaphor of beasts lying in wait of their prey to describe the Pharisees' and scribes' attitude toward Jesus' teaching at the break-up of the this banquet scene (they are "lying in wait [*enedreuontes*] to hunt [*thereusai*] something to fall from his lip") may be intended to contrast the Pharisees' and

scribes' unphilosophical "beastly" behavior to their philosophical vocation. Similarly, the way Lucian's Stoic Zenothemis and Epicurean Hermon pounce on the plumper piece of poultry and then hit each other with birds hardly befits their dignity as philosophers (*Symp.* 44). Lucian notes the irony of "learned men...gorging themselves and bawling and coming to blows," who seem like "Lapiths and Centaurs, to see tables going over, blood flowing and cups flying"<sup>12</sup>

However, it is important to emphasize that Luke uses the familiar symposium conventions as a means to an end: to clarify the difference between Jesus' table fellowship and the Pharisaic table fellowship. Jesus' group does not use the intensified Jewish norms of the levitical rules of purity to create a hierarchy that both excludes the masses from participation in common table fellowship, and that also oppressively burdens them.<sup>13</sup> He uses the symposium convention of bathing before a meal to make this point, but adapts to it the particular ideological distinction he wishes to make between the Christian and Pharisaic modes of social structure. Thus Luke's use of Hellenistic literary symposium conventions does not indicate ignorance of late first century Jewish practices, but on the contrary, demonstrates his acute awareness of the Pharisaic ethos.

As in the previous meal scene, Luke also makes the point that leaders of the Jewish people ought not to distinguish themselves so clearly as an elite from their followers. Later, in the Last Supper, Luke has Jesus make the accompanying point that leaders within his movement should identify more closely with those who serve them - they should view themselves as servants (Lk 22:27).

*Luke 14:1-24*

1. Narration of meal setting

[a. Invitation of host]

a.' brief description of setting: “One Sabbath he went to have a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees” (14:1a)

2. *fait divers A*

a. *fait divers*: Healing man with dropsy (14:2-4).'

a'. “Dialogue”/reaction to *fait divers*: “Jesus asked (3)...and said...” (5);  
“they said nothing... (4) to this they could find no reply”(6)

3. *fait divers B*

a. *fait divers*: “the guests were trying to secure places of honor”

(7b)

a'. reaction to *fait divers*: “when he noticed...he spoke to them in a parable... (7a,c, 8-11) - addressed to guests

b'. reaction to *fait divers* [this, or original invitation 14:1, never made explicit] - addressed to host (12-14)

4. *fait divers C*

a.*fait divers*: Jesus’ “parable”/meal instructions (8-14)

b.misunderstanding of the parable - “hearing this, one of the company said to him, ‘Happy are those who will sit at the feast in the kingdom of God’” (15)

5. Dialogue: “one of the company”’s remark (15) + Jesus’ parable of the Great Supper (16-24)

4. Narration of conclusion:

- a. dismissal of the invited guests (24)
- b. scene changes without transition [“Once when great crowds were accompanying him...” 25]

Luke 14:1-24 is perhaps the most intricate of Luke's symposium frameworks.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the previous meal scenes, which primarily describe the conflicting ideological relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees, Lk 14:1-24 can be construed as making prescriptions about Christian table fellowship directly to Luke's audience. Luke achieves this effect in two ways. First he includes lists of meal rules quite similar in form to the lists of other Hellenistic eating associations (Lk 14:8-14).<sup>15</sup> Secondly, Luke uses the shifts between the symposium literary setting and the speeches and story framed by it to confuse temporal perspectives. This makes Jesus' words seem to address the audience directly rather than being directed only at his Pharisee eating companions represented in the text.<sup>16</sup> Like many other symposium scenes which represent banquets at the home of prominent people on the occasion of a holiday, this scene begins with a notice that sets the scene at a festive Sabbath banquet at the home of a leader of the Pharisees (Lk 14:1). A succession of faits divers, each coming directly out of the setting of the banquet, prompts teachings of Jesus, and the four teachings, are all framed in a dialogue between Jesus, his host, and one or more of his fellow guests. First, the late entrance of the man (not explicitly invited) sick with dropsy prompts Jesus' teaching that it is appropriate for him to heal on the Sabbath (14:2-6). Secondly, Jesus' observation that the others who were invited were jockeying for the most prestigious seats prompts a parable about the

reversal of status that will come at the end of time (14:7-11). Thirdly, the *fait divers* that Jesus' host invited only those who had the wherewithal to return the favor, which is implied in Jesus' teaching addressed to his host, comprises a third sub-unit (14:12-14). Finally, the exclamation of one of Jesus' "co-recliners" about how blessed it will be to eat bread in the Kingdom of God (14:15) prompts Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet (14:16-24). Luke's technique of closing a meal scene with an ironic punch line is not unlike the way Achilles Tatius ends Melitte and Cleitophon's wedding breakfast (Ach. Tat. 5.14.4). There too, a blessing at meal is the *fait divers* that prompts Melitte's witty saying.<sup>17</sup> Here, Luke has Jesus take the guest's blessing as an occasion to correct the guest's misapprehension that partaking bread in the Kingdom of God is a future event. The Pharisee guest's blessing is the *fait divers* that prompts Jesus' parable.

The conclusion of this last Pharisaic banquet departs from symposium conventions somewhat. The party does not break up because of a fight, or the lateness of the hour, or the departure of prominent guests. Instead, this scene ends simply with Jesus getting the last word (14:24). The voice of the character, "the lord," in Jesus' parable, merges with Jesus' voice in the "I" of the parable's concluding threat, "I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my meal." Then the setting shifts immediately to Jesus on the road again (presumably outside the home of the Pharisee), accompanied by crowds of people (perhaps in explicit contrast to the exclusive elite attending the Pharisaic banquet Jesus just left). Nevertheless, Jesus' eschatological threat itself, that some guests will get nothing to eat at his meal while others will be fed, has a parallel in the literary symposium convention that certain hosts have the bad taste to glut themselves or certain select friends, while other guests must sit and watch with barely a

crumb set before them.<sup>18</sup> However, Luke turns this convention on its head. While the Roman social critics consider this practice to be in bad taste, it is in good taste from Luke's Christian salvation historical perspective. The good host *will* serve different qualities of "dishes" at the messianic banquet at the end of time: some will feast, others will get nothing.

Thus, for Luke, the fundamental difference between so-called Christian inclusivist and Pharisaic exclusivist ethics of table fellowship is based on their varying perceptions of where the dinners are on the time line of salvation history. Luke suggests that radical inclusiveness, rather than exclusion based on the criteria of Levitical qualifications for the Jewish priesthood, is the sign of the presence of God's kingship. Such an inclusivist ethic is diametrically opposed to Pharisaic ideology as currently interpreted by Neusner and those like myself who follow him. The Pharisees envision themselves as priests of Leviticus, eating non-priestly food only if tithed and when they themselves, like the priests, are in a state of ritual purity.<sup>19</sup> Luke's inclusion of the maimed, lame, and blind in the list of people to be invited to banquets (14:13) could be deliberately provocative to Pharisees and their successors, since these are precisely the type of people disqualified for the priesthood upon which the Pharisees modeled their table fellowship groups. In its Lukan context, Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet recognizes the blessedness of God's Kingdom in its *present* manifestation as the radical inclusiveness of even the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the otherwise outcast in Jesus' ministry of table fellowship and healing. Hence, at the banquets even in Jesus' lifetime, when the conditions of radical inclusiveness are in effect, the Kingdom of God is present. Jesus' parable therefore challenges his fellow guests' assumption that an inclusive

"Kingdom of God" is a future utopian dream, rather than present ethical imperative. Daniel Patte has argued that this is *the* fundamental distinction between Pharisaic and Pauline Christian convictions about salvation-historical time. For the Pharisees, God revealed God's ruling presence in the past at Sinai, and will reveal it again in a distant messianic future, but not in the present. According to Paul's apocalyptically colored Christian faith, God is also acting decisively in the present end-time.<sup>20</sup> Luke partly retrojects this decisive present activity of God to the time of Jesus (i.e., Jesus' present, not Luke's) in order to fit it into his three-fold salvation historical scheme, but follows a more Pauline tack by suggesting that the rule of God can be in effect in his, Luke's present, too, when inclusive communities are gathered together according to the model of Jesus' table fellowship. In other words, inclusive Christian table fellowship is itself a manifestation of the Kingdom of God that transcends the particular historical boundaries of Jesus' earthly ministry. The conventional symposium provides Luke again with the opportunity to advocate a Christian version of Greco-Roman table fellowship over a Pharisaic version of it.

*Luke 5:27-39*

Another banquet, which takes place at the home of a tax-collector rather than a Pharisee (Lk 5:27-39), also represents conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. It is therefore related to the meal scenes we have just discussed. It is related both thematically to the other meal scenes - all portray Jesus and the Pharisees disputing over table fellowship - and stylistically.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as J. Delobel argues, Luke's symposium framework in 7:36-50 is an imitation of the technique of redaction he practiced earlier in his reworking of Mark's story of Levi's banquet in Lk 5:27-39.<sup>22</sup> According to Delobel,

Luke reworks Mark' meal scene (Mk 2:13-17) into two peculiarly Lukan compositional schemes. First, he turns Mark's depiction of a meal setting into a "veritable symposium," by emphasizing and specifying the conventional roles of host and guest in the verse presenting the setting of the banquet. Luke explicitly mentions Levi the tax collector as the host who gives a great banquet for Jesus (Lk 5:29), while Mark sets the scene merely with the ambiguous remark, "when he [who?] was reclining in his [whose?] house..." (Mk 2:15). Secondly, Luke incorporates the controversy over fasting vs. eating and the parable of the old and new wineskins (Lk 33-39), which Mark treats as a separate controversy (Mk 2:18-22), into the same meal scene. In other words, in Mark, the tax collector banquet is the *fait divers* only for the question of Jesus' eating with tax collectors, and the occasion of John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees fasting (omitted by Luke) is the provocation for the controversy over fasting. In Luke, the tax collector symposium is the *fait divers* for both controversies, i.e., Jesus and his disciples eating with tax collectors and sinners and not fasting. Thus by uniting the two controversies under a single meal theme and setting, and portraying the provocative meal setting itself as a symposium, Luke demonstrates the compositional techniques which he uses to integrate his literary sources in his other meal scenes, as well.<sup>23</sup> Like the meal scenes it precedes (Lk 7:36-50; Lk 11:37-54; and 14:1-24), the banquet at the tax collector's home has a symposium framework and represents a scholastic conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over the particular ideological points that divided them. However, the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees does not fit as neatly and unambiguously into one single symposium setting in Lk 5:27-39 as in the other scenes. On the one hand, Lk 5:27-39 has a unity of time (there is no explicit time change until Lk

6:1) and theme, the table fellowship characteristic of Jesus and his followers, as the other symposium scenes of Jesus and the Pharisees. On the other hand, Luke does not make it clear that meal and the two debates with the Pharisees (Lk 5:30-32 and 5:33-39) following it are in the same place.

What is clear is the extensive evidence of Luke's editorial hand in this account taken from Mark's Gospel. It is generally agreed that Luke brings the two scenes together more tightly than Mark's account does.<sup>24</sup> However, several literary features suggest to me that the text separates the scene of the debate between the Pharisees and Jesus beginning in 5:30 from the tax-collector banquet scene in 5:27-29, even though there is no explicit mention of any change of place. First, new actors: "the Pharisees and their scribes" and "his [Jesus'] disciples," who were not specifically mentioned as being present at Levi's banquet of tax collectors, are introduced suddenly as interlocutors. Secondly, the words which Luke puts in the mouths of the Pharisees and their scribes critical of table fellowship with tax-collectors would not make sense if they themselves were attending the banquet. Finally, the effect of the Pharisees and scribes' words themselves is to distance themselves from the tax collectors and those who practice table fellowship with them. They neither address the tax collectors nor Jesus, who are specified as being guests in Levi's home, but rather talk about the tax collectors in the 3rd person, and direct their criticisms to the disciples of Jesus instead of Jesus himself.

However, there are also ways in which the text does not separate the scene of the banquet from the scene of the debate over table fellowship between the Pharisees and Jesus. First, as we have mentioned before, there is no explicit shift of place in the text. Secondly, even though the Pharisees, their scribes, and the disciples of Jesus are not

included explicitly as guests at the banquet in the home of the tax collector prior to v.5:30, they are not excluded explicitly either. The phrase "and the others who were reclining there with them" (5:29) *could* have included the Pharisees, scribes, and disciples of Jesus. Moreover, the Pharisees and scribes' question to the disciples later does include them among the participants in the tax collectors' banquet: "Why do *you* eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"(5:30).

These apparent problems and contradictions have caused some scholars to accuse Luke of sloppy editing or ignorance of Pharisaic practice.<sup>25</sup> However, I think they can be explained differently. Luke is being intentionally ambiguous here. Later on, Luke makes it clear that he defines space in terms of human relationships - where and with whom one eats at the same table with Jesus - as well as in purely geographic terms. At this early point in the story, "the others who were reclining there with them," (LK 5:30) is a semantic gap which must be filled in by Luke's audience on the basis of their prior assumptions. Those in Luke's audience who know about Pharisaic exclusive table fellowship (like myself) will assume that they were not present at Levi's banquet. However, the text permits the opposite inference. It is only in later meal scenes in Luke's Gospel that it becomes clear that points of view which would exclude some people from sharing the table with Jesus are represented explicitly by Pharisees and contrasted explicitly to the inclusivist point of view of Jesus and his followers. Luke probably was deliberately ambiguous so as not to have Pharisees portrayed as guests in the home of a tax collector. For Luke, the Pharisees could not be at the banquet, because that would undermine their rebuke of Jesus' disciples for eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners.

Nevertheless, Luke uses the strategy characteristic of literary symposia, the particulars of a banquet which provoke a dialogue about what occurred in the meal. In this case, Jesus' attendance at the banquet of a tax collector is the *fait divers* that provokes an argument between him and the Pharisees over his school's eating habits. The Pharisees opposed table-fellowship with Jewish tax collectors on the grounds that their close and frequent association with their Roman gentile imperial authorities made them suspect of ritual uncleanness.<sup>26</sup> Luke's choice of the symposium literary convention of the *fait divers* makes him break the unity of place found in the other symposium frameworks of the Gospel. Thus, these four meal scenes and the Last Supper have in common this symposium literary convention.

Though Luke organizes them with the same basic structure, he varies other symposium commonplaces drawn from the literary tradition in order to stress the sympotic character of Jesus' behavior, regardless of situation. Luke's repetition, sequence, and variation of these inherited conventions further allows him to make the "new" points about Christian table fellowship that distinguish it from Pharisaic and other kinds of Greco-Roman table fellowship.<sup>27</sup>

There are several reasons why Luke chose to depict Jesus at Pharisaic symposia during the first part of his ministry. First, it is characteristic of the symposium literary genre to adapt its particulars to the peculiar ethnic characteristics of its author and/or audience, or with the "local color" of some past historical or exotic cultural context, for verisimilitude.<sup>28</sup> As X. De Meeûs' says, "the topics of which [Luke] makes use are inspired by the *realia* of Jewish life at the time of Jesus, just as those of Plato come from the *realia* of Athenian life at the time of the Academy."<sup>29</sup> Secondly, Luke has Jesus at

symposia with the Pharisees, in order to stage debates between him and his ideological rivals. For Luke, Pharisaic symposium settings accentuated the particular points of difference in the ideological conflict between the school of Jesus and the school of the Pharisees. Likewise, Plato had supporters of the Sophists host and attend his *Symposium*, not only because they are part of fifth century Athenian scenery, but also in order to contrast Socratic to Sophistic philosophy. In Luke's Gospel, "Jesus stands in the place of the 'Socratics,' the Pharisees in the place of the Sophists, if compared with the pagan philosophical symposia."<sup>30</sup>

In the four symposium scenes preceding the Last Supper in the Gospel, Luke uses symposium literary conventions to emphasize two things: the "local color" of the Pharisaic *havurot* of the Second Temple period to whom Jesus first addressed his ministry, and the ideological differences between early Christian and Pharisaic table fellowship.

#### Luke's Use Of The Technique Of The Fait Divers As A Pretext For Table Talk

In each of Jesus' meals with Pharisees, Luke uses the conventional symposium literary strategy of the *fait divers* to provoke a discussion each specific point of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees. This technique serves a dual purpose. First, it calls attention to the peculiar characteristics of the Pharisees' table fellowship. Secondly, it turns the highlighted action into a subject for debate. The specific points of contention are:

1. whether tax collectors are fit for Jewish table fellowship as interpreted by the Pharisees (Lk 5:27-32);
2. whether a sinful woman's extravagant gesture of wiping a male guest's feet with her tears and unbound hair is appropriate for Pharisaic Jewish table fellowship (Lk 7:36-50);
3. whether Pharisaic intensification of the priestly rules of purity and tithing are really hypocritical ways of disdaining or oppressing other people (Lk 11:37-54 and 14:1-24);
4. whether miraculous charismatic healings are appropriate on the Sabbath (14:1-6);<sup>31</sup>
5. whether Pharisaic meal hospitality should maintain or violate social class distinctions (14:7-14); and
6. when and how the eschatological resurrection of the dead will occur and be recognized in the Kingdom of God (14:7-24).

*“Why... do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”*

Levi's banquet of tax collectors is the *fait divers* that provokes the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees over table ethics in Lk 5:27-39. This Pharisaic objection accords with the Pharisaic tradition preserved in *m. Tohar*. 7:6, that tax collectors are presumed to be transmitters of uncleanness. Luke's staging of the Pharisees' rebuke apart from the banquet in the home of the tax collector Levi is consistent the views of traditions about the Pharisees preserved in the Mishnah, i.e., *m. Tohar*. 7:6, that tax collectors are presumed to be transmitters of uncleanness. According to S. Lieberman, tax collectors

were explicitly excluded from table fellowship with members of Pharisaic *havurot* in an early rabbinic tradition preserved int. *Dem* 3:4.<sup>32</sup> I disagree then with those who claim that Luke was ignorant of Pharisaic rules, and that his depiction of the Pharisees at table with Jesus proves this.<sup>33</sup> Luke is careful to restrict his portrayal of Jesus at table with Pharisees to settings *in the homes of Pharisees*. Therefore, even if Jesus were viewed as unreliable regarding ritual purity and setting aside tithes (an *am ha'aretz* in terms of the Mishnah), he would still be acceptable as a guest in the home of a *haver* (that is, a Pharisee) under certain conditions, according to the rule preserved in *m. Dem.* 2:3. In any case, it is unlikely that Jesus' hospitality in the home of Pharisees would have been historically implausible to Luke's readers.<sup>34</sup>

*Behold a woman known to be a sinner...took her place at his feet*

Luke uses the symposium motif of the late guest to emphasize distinctively Pharisaic biases against certain kinds of people or activities. A "sinful woman's" unexpected arrival and her extravagant anointing of Jesus with myrrh oil and her own tears initiates the Socratic dialogue between Jesus and Simon over whose style of hospitality is more gracious and loving: Pharisaic hospitality restrained by the fear of potentially unclean guests, or Jesus' welcome of such people in Lk 7:36-50. In Lk 14:1-6, the man with dropsy enters late to allow the Pharisees to express their characteristic suspicion of charismatic miraculous healings, particularly of chronic conditions, for which there is no need to violate Sabbath prohibitions. Unless, of course, Luke wants Jesus to flout Pharisaic ritual norms. In the use of the late guest convention, Luke, as many of his contemporaries, follows Plato's precedent. He uses the disruptive entrance of late guests (as Plato used Alcibiades' entrance) to challenge the social order implied in

the symposium frameworks.<sup>35</sup> The behavior of the uninvited guests vis à vis Jesus in Luke's Gospel is either itself contrasted to the Pharisees' (the sinful woman who lavishly anoints Jesus), or provides Jesus an opportunity to behave in a way ideologically opposed to the Pharisees. Jesus, unlike Simon the Pharisee, considers the sinful woman a legitimate banquet guest. Jesus implicitly demonstrates that he likewise considers the man sick with dropsy a legitimate guest when he charismatically heals him on the Sabbath. The late guests provide an occasion for opposing social orders: the one advocated by Jesus and the one advocated by the Pharisees. Luke and Plato's use of the late guest convention differ however, in that Luke advocates the subversion of the social order disrupted by the late guests, while Plato advocates the temperate, philosophical social order that his late guest Alcibiades disrupts. Moreover, Luke opposes the social order represented by the late guests' relationship with Jesus only to one social order, that advocated by the Pharisees. The Pharisaic symposia are framed by a narrative that represents them as but one of several types of table fellowship. The behavior of the late guest Alcibiades, on the other hand, is opposed to the normative prescriptive social order (indicated by the fact that the symposium framework for the whole drama proposes no other social order).<sup>36</sup>

*The Pharisee wondered why he had not washed before the meal*

Another *fait divers*, Jesus' omission of a pre-prandial dip in the *mikveh*, spurs Jesus' charge that Pharisaic rules of purity and tithing were really just a hypocritical guise for oppressing other people in 11:37-54. Luke portrays Jesus' omission of a customary bath before the meal as deliberately provocative to the school of Pharisees, who gathered

for common meals precisely to share tithed food with others in a state of purity. However, Luke caricatures this as a pretext for a sort of materialistic elitism in contrast to Jesus' more humanistic concern for justice, charity, and the love of God (i.e., Lk 11: 41-42).

*Is it permitted to heal people on the Sabbath or not?*

Similarly, Jesus' interrogation of his fellow guests in a controversy on Sabbath observance in Lk 14:1-6 superficially clothes Luke's real issue with the Pharisees throughout the whole banquet scene. According to Luke, the Pharisees' commitment to material things interferes with their ability to treat other people fairly. Hence, the Pharisees, according to Luke, would more gladly rescue their ox than their own child if it fell into a pit on the Sabbath (14:5). The Pharisaic host prefers to invite his socio-economic peers who can give him a feast in return, than to invite the poor, the maimed, lame, or blind who cannot. (14:12-13) Finally, the reluctant guests of the parable, who in the context of Luke's Pharisaic banquet setting stand allegorically for the Pharisees, prefer to check out their newly acquired possessions: a new field, a new yoke of oxen, a new wife than to drop everything and attend the generous, inclusive banquet of the householder.

Hence, Luke uses one motif of parodical symposia, that the philosophers really prefer material comforts to their abstract ideas. For example, in Lucian's *Convivium*, the Stoic Zenothemis, who according to his philosophy should be indifferent to external circumstances and material things, is insulted because he was not originally given the most honored seat (Lucian, *Symp.* 9). He also tries to pack away surreptitiously in his

cloak the delicacies served at the banquet in order to take them home (Lucian, *Symp.* 11). Similarly, it is a running joke in Petronius' *Satyricon* that the scholarly rhetor-teacher heroes (Encolpius, Ascyltus, Giton, and Agamemnon) are especially adept at getting themselves invited to free meals (e.g., Petron. *Sat.* 3.3; 10.2). And throughout Trimalchio's banquet in *Satyricon*, the nouveau riche host intersperses the serving of his grossly extravagant dinner with pretentious and hopelessly pathetic displays of his "learning," which the sycophantic scholars praise lavishly to insure for themselves future invitations (Petron., *Sat.* 52.7).

*When he noticed that the guests were trying to secure the places of honor*

In order to raise the issue with Jesus' co-recliners whether Pharisaic meal hospitality should maintain or transgress social class distinctions, Luke employs another symposium *topos*: guests' jockeying for the most honored places and the host's invitation of only his wealthy relatives, close friends, and neighbors are the events at the meal in Lk 14:1-24. Jesus' alternative sympotic rules are described as a "parable" to his fellow guests (14:7). Obviously Jesus' suggested rules apply to the guests' present designs to secure the best couch for themselves might be reversed by their host's future designs. The possibility that their host might displace them humiliatingly (*meta aischunes*) to a less-honored couch in order to seat a more favored person in the place of honor (14:9) is contrasted with the possibility that their host might move them up from the least to a more honored place (14:10) in a public bestowal of honor (*doxa enopion pantow sunanakeimenon*). However, that is not why Luke refers to the rules as a parable. Luke labels the table instructions as a "parable" (Lk 14:7) to hint that they refer to more than etiquette for the

present moment. Rather, here Luke applies the conventional sympotic seating rules and the situation of the Pharisaic meal parabolically to Jesus' idea of an imminent eschatology. In other words, the Pharisees think their present performance of meals according to their "exclusivist" priest-like rules realizes the kingdom of God here and now. Luke's Jesus thinks that the kingdom of God has not yet been realized, but will occur in the future in a dramatic reversal of the Pharisees' "elitist" meal rules. Hence Luke warrants the rules with an apocalyptic Q tradition that stresses that this will occur in the future: "Whoever exalts himself *will be humbled*, whoever humbles himself *will be exalted*" (Lk 14:11, par Mt 23:12). The realization of the kingdom of God will occur in banquets in the indefinite *future*, not now in the Pharisees' characteristic table fellowship. The parable of the sympotic rules in Lk 14:7-14 distinguishes the different views Jesus and the Pharisees held about when and how the kingdom of God would be realized. Indeed, Luke uses the somewhat ambiguous parable of Jesus' sympotic rules to imply that the Pharisees fundamentally misunderstand the correct (i.e., *Jesus'*) conception of the kingdom of God. Luke sharpens this difference of opinion about the kingdom the next part when he has Jesus counter the Pharisee lawyer's exclamation in 14:15 with the parable of the Great Banquet.

*Blessed is one who has eaten bread in the kingdom of God!*

Luke uses a Pharisaic guest's exclamation in Lk 14:15 about eating bread in the Kingdom of God to provoke Jesus' parable about how and when the resurrection of the dead will occur and be recognized. The Pharisees and Jesus have radically different views about when, where, and for whom it will occur. Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees in

14:7-24 turns upon the early Christian and Pharisaic opposing views regarding the "resurrection of the just." (14:14) For the "school" of the early Christians, represented by the teaching of Jesus in this passage, the resurrection of the just signifies an imminent eschatological age, ushered in by Jesus' radically inclusive table fellowship, miraculous healings, and his own personal resurrection appearances to his followers. For the school of the Pharisees, in contrast to the school of the Sadducees, who believe in no resurrection of the dead at all (as we learn from Josephus [*Ant.* 13.171-173]), the resurrection of the just refers to what happens to souls after people die. The good and bad who were not rewarded or punished in their lifetime can be rewarded or punished after death. Similarly, Luke presumes and contrasts Christian and Pharisaic ideologies of the resurrection of the dead in the (Pharisee) guest's response (Lk 14:15) to Jesus' teaching of eschatologically-conditioned table ethics (Lk 14:7-14), and Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet in reply to the guest.

Luke artfully reveals the imminent eschatological implications of Jesus' table ethics only gradually. In Jesus' instructions to the guests and host on how to behave properly in table fellowship, Luke contrasts the Pharisees' presumed concern for present this-worldly rewards with Jesus' view of imminent eschatological rewards and punishment for their present table fellowship practices. In what Jesus says to his host (Lk 14:12-14), the imminent eschatology of his table ethics is much more explicit than his instructions to the guests. The host's choice of guests is based on their ability reciprocate the invitation and give back something in return in this world (Lk 14:12). Luke has Jesus contrast this with a choice of guests based both on *their* present inability to return the favor (*ouk echousin antapodounai*) and a returned favor coming from elsewhere in the

future time of the "resurrection of the just" (Lk 14:14; *antapodothesetai...en te anastasei ton dikaiou*).

In the co-recliner's exclamation in response to Jesus' imminent eschatological table ethics for banquet hosts (Lk 14:15), Luke opposes a view he attributes to the Pharisees about who will enjoy the messianic banquet of the kingdom of God (i.e., be "blessed" in it) with Jesus' view of who will be blessed in it. According to Jesus, the host who has invited those unfit to reciprocate a banquet invitation and who will be reciprocated in the future resurrection of the just *will be* "blessed." In contrast, to his Pharisaic co-recliner, the one "blessed" is one who eats bread in the Kingdom of God. For the Pharisee in this context of Pharisaic table fellowship, eating bread in the Kingdom of God probably means eating bread in accordance with God's rule. That is, the Pharisees tried to concretize God's rules in the priestly system of laws, by eating only tithed unsanctified food in a state of ritual purity with other who observed the same intensification of priestly norms. In any case, the Pharisee misses the temporal element of Jesus' blessing of inclusive hosts, that is, the imminent eschatological dimension, and seems to refer the "kingdom of God" to the current situation of the Pharisaic banquet.

In all of these meal symptotic meal scenes, Luke concretizes the different Pharisaic and early Christian styles of table fellowship as competing ideological approaches. And Luke knows exactly which issues "pushed the Pharisees' buttons." Therefore, it seems unlikely that Luke was ignorant of Pharisaic practices.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, Luke adapts the literary strategy of the *fait divers* for a dual role. On the one hand, by using an event in a meal to provoke a teaching about meals, Luke demonstrates that Jesus practices what he preaches. On the other hand, by using the same

events in the meal to provoke an opposite response from the Pharisee hosts and guests, or by contrasting their provocative actions toward Jesus with those of various "late guests," Luke demonstrates that the Pharisees' actions contradict their speech. Accordingly Luke stacks the deck against the Simon the Pharisee by having Jesus force him to incriminate himself in Lk 7:43 and by representing the Pharisees as having nothing to say to Jesus' defense of his miraculous healing of the man with dropsy in Lk 14:1-6.

Luke advocates a preferred "Christian" school of thought by denigrating the proponents of an opposing philosophical school of thought, "Pharisaism." Luke "demonstrates" Pharisaic "hypocrisy" by contrasting their words and deeds, which he stages in the narrative framework of the dialogue. Since Luke so conditions his critique of the Pharisees' table fellowship with the stock characters, meal frameworks, and provocative events of the Hellenistic literary symposium tradition, it would be wrong to accept solely at its face value Luke's interpretation of the Pharisees' exclusive table fellowship as hypocritical materialism. Rather, we should look at Luke's portrayal of Jesus' banquets with Pharisees as a rhetorical strategy within a dramatic dialogue, to demonstrate the symposium commonplace that "our" philosophers practice what they preach, while "theirs" do not.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, I urge caution against assuming with Luke that indiscriminate inclusivism is good and exclusivism is bad. As a Jew I intuitively agree with the Christian scholar Marcus Borg' sensitive assessment of the New Testament traditions of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees:

[A] close examination of the tradition demonstrates that the conflict was real, though not fundamentally about whether Pharisaic piety was genuine or sham, subjectively considered. Rather, the conflict had a pointed historical reference to the issues facing the nation: the validity of the quest for holiness as the task of Israel -- whether that quest was to dominate both the internal reform of Judaism and her relation to the Gentile world.

In his practice of table fellowship and in his spoken defense of this practice, Jesus answered with an unmistakable 'no' ... In the same manner, the enmity of the Pharisees was not because they were 'evil men,' resentful that the teacher from Nazareth exposed their 'hypocrisy' and 'mendacity.' Rather, they perceived the program of Jesus as a threat to the symbols and institutions which provided the cohesiveness necessary for the continued existence of the people of God in a world in which the winds of change threatened that existence. Their intent was altogether noble and admirable: to preserve a people who would worship and serve Yahweh. They understandably viewed the teaching of Jesus as 'the breaking down of the fence around the garden, instead of the bursting of the shell for the release of living power' ... Ultimately the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was a hermeneutical battle between mercy and holiness, a struggle concerning the correct interpretation of Torah.<sup>39</sup>

While the conflict was real, one does not necessarily have to comply with the negative value judgment of Jewish ritualization of Torah implicit in Luke's Christian anti-Pharisaic

rhetoric. For some of us heirs of the Pharisees, "building a fence around the Torah" is a rich and deeply meaningful way of life.

### Luke's Use of Conventional Symposium Characters

Within these symposium settings that would be familiar to his audience as representations of contemporary Greco-Roman banquets, Luke casts Jesus, his followers, and the Pharisees according to the set of conventional symposium characters: host, guests, doctor, late guest, the contentious guest, etc. By representing these conventional symposium characters of hosts and guests *in conflict* with one another and expressing opposed rationales for their behavior at table, Luke distinguishes a Christian table fellowship ethos from Pharisaic ethics, just as other Greco-Roman literary symposia use quarrels of characters representing different philosophical schools or social classes.

First, let us review examples of the stock characters host and guest in Luke's Gospel. Hosts and guests can represent either Pharisaic or non-Pharisaic points of view. First, there are the Pharisaic hosts and others who represent their point of view. Thus, in Lk 7:36, 11:37, and 14:1, a Pharisee is the host who invites Jesus to his home for a meal and in each case is represented as having an ideologically Pharisaic response to something that takes place in the course of the meal. In 7:39, the Pharisee host Simon questions the propriety of Jesus' contact at his banquet with a sinful woman whose observance of the menstrual purity laws would be suspect. In 11:37, the Pharisee host marvels at the impropriety of Jesus' failure to immerse himself before the meal so as to attend it in a state of ritual purity. In 14:12-13, Jesus implies that his Pharisaic host

prefers exclusive to inclusive table fellowship. The ideological conflict personified in the Pharisee and non-Pharisee hosts and guests convey the new points about the social order of Christian table fellowship which Luke wants to make.

Non-hosts who represent a Pharisaic point of view are the Pharisees and "their scribes" outside of the tax collector Levi's banquet who grumble at Jesus' disciples' table fellowship with tax collectors (Lk 5:30); the fellow recliners who question among themselves Jesus' charismatic presumption of the hereditary priesthood's prerogative to forgive sins (Lk 7:49); the other guests at the morning meal who are accused of being more concerned about external purity and tithes than compassion for other people (Lk 11:39-44); the lawyers at the same banquet accused, in addition to the already mentioned "crimes," of being hostile to charismatic prophetic critics of Israel and of being exclusivistic (Lk 11:45-52); and the lawyers and Pharisaic fellow recliners at the last Pharisaic banquet who seem to object to a charismatic miraculous healing on the Sabbath (Lk 14:6) and who jockey for the best seat at the table (Lk 14:7-11), and the single fellow guest whose view of reward at the time of the eschatological resurrection of the just (Lk 14:15) seems to be corrected by Jesus with his parable of the Great Banquet (Lk 14:16-24). The concerns of these hosts and guests are characteristically Pharisaic.

Two hosts represent non-Pharisaic points of view. Levi the tax collector, whom the Pharisees deemed possibly unclean, hosts a banquet for tax-collectors (Lk 5:27). Such a banquet is diametrically opposed to the Pharisaic ideal of table fellowship. And Jesus himself usurps the role of host in the first and last Pharisaic banquet (Lk 7:36-50; 14:1-24).

Guests who represent a non-Pharisaic point of view (excluding the main guest Jesus) are the sinful woman (Lk 7:36-50) and the "poor, lame, blind, and crippled" (Lk 14:12-14 and 14:21). The woman was not explicitly invited and the poor, lame, blind, and crippled in Lk 14:21 were invited late. Both could be viewed as the symposium stock type of the late guest.<sup>40</sup> That the woman's point of view is non-Pharisaic can be inferred from the fact that her behavior toward Jesus is explicitly contrasted to the Pharisee hosting the banquet (Lk 7:40-47). The parable of the Great Banquet refers allegorically to the Pharisaic banquet that frames it. The refusing guests represent Pharisees, and the householder stands for Jesus, who usurps the role of banquet host. Thus, it can be inferred that the "poor, lame, blind, and crippled" of the parable of the Great Banquet represent a non-Pharisaic point of view. Indeed, Luke makes the allegorical identification of the "the poor, lame, blind, and crippled" as non-Pharisees nearly unavoidable when he contrasts them earlier to the Pharisee host's "*suggeneis*" (i.e., those of his own kind) whom he was most likely to invite to his banquets (Lk 14:12-13).

Luke manipulates the conventional symposium characters in two ways.

1. He contrasts the Pharisaic host's and his main guest Jesus' different reactions to a provocative event that occurs in the meal, often the arrival of a late or socially undesirable guest. For example, in Lk 7:36-50, the main guest (Jesus)'s welcome of the sinful woman's extravagant display of affection towards him is contrasted with his host (Simon, the Pharisee)'s wariness of her behavior. In Lk 11:37-54, the Pharisaic host's astonishment at Jesus' lack of concern for ritual purity is contrasted to Jesus' condemnation of the superficiality and injustice of such purity concerns. In

Lk 14:2-6, the main guest (Jesus)'s defense of his miraculous healing of the man with dropsy is contrasted to the Pharisee host and guests' inability to defend their objection to his healing. Finally, in Lk 14:12-13, the Pharisee host's presumed guest list of his "friends, brothers, relatives, wealthy neighbors" is contrasted with Jesus' guest list of the "poor, lame, blind, and crippled." In short, the symposium setting puts the table fellowship ethics of the Pharisees and of Jesus' "school" in synkrisis: which host is able to adapt better to new circumstances?

2. Luke has Jesus contrast the Pharisee hosts' and guests behavior toward him with the late guests' reception of him. In a kind of role reversal, the late guest is presented as a better host than the Pharisaeic host himself. The late guest's versus the Pharisaeic host's reception of Jesus becomes the criteria for determining "good" hospitality. For example, in Lk 7:41-47, Luke has Jesus contrast the late guest's extravagant display of love for him to the Pharisee host's restrained expression of love for him. In Lk 14:16-24, Luke has Jesus tell a parable to contrast the response of the poor, lame, blind, and crippled guests invited late to the banquet, with that of the Pharisee host and fellow recliners in the setting who are represented allegorically by the first guests in the parable who try to put off the householder's invitation. The parable makes the response to the householder's hospitality equivalent to a response to Jesus' hospitality, when Jesus merges his voice with that of the host in the parable (Lk 14:24).

Luke's Jesus and other non-Pharisaic guests are not only contrasted to their Pharisaic hosts, but in the process assume or usurp the role of host themselves. Luke represents the reversal of the conventional social roles of host and guest established at the start of his banquet scenes as something quite positive and desirable. Luke has Jesus, the main guest, virtually usurp part or all of the prerogatives of the of the Pharisaic hosts of the banquets he attends. Thus, in Lk 7:36-50, Jesus usurps the role of Simon the Pharisee by welcoming the sinful woman who arrived late to the *Pharisee's* home, defending her attendance, and dismissing her as if he himself were the host (Lk 7:50). In Lk 14:1-24, Jesus not only instructs his Pharisee host on how to be a good host (Lk 14:12-14), but in his concluding remark actually speaks as if he were the host of a banquet, "I say to you that none of those men who had been invited shall taste *my* banquet!" (Lk 14:24). Jesus' usurpation of his Pharisee host's role is for Luke an extension of his Christian ideology of radical inclusiveness. Jesus is a better host than the Pharisees because he fills (rather than restricts entrance to) God's "banquet hall." This is probably the connotation of Luke's rather strange phrases "so that my house will be filled [*gemisthe*]" (Lk 14:23) and "until when it is fulfilled [lit., 'filled' *plerotehe*] in the kingdom of God" (Lk 22:16). In other words, the kingly presence of God, God's philanthropy, is felt through extravagant, "filling" expressions of generosity to crowds of people, that is, dinner for a "*full* house."

Luke also has the non-Pharisaic late guests assume the role of host vis-a-vis Jesus. The late guests' welcome of Jesus is not only opposed to Pharisaic exclusiveness, but also sets up role models for more financially and geographically stable supporters of the itinerant charismatic teacher/leaders of Jesus' school. The late guests share some of

the non-Pharisaic attitudes of Jesus, but their position and perspectives are not entirely identical to Jesus'.

Therefore, Jesus as the main guest and the guests who come late to the banquet probably symbolize the different kinds of points of view of the two distinctive types of groups who comprised the earliest stages of the Jesus movement. Gerd Theissen calls these two types the (1) wandering charismatics and the (2) sympathizing communities.<sup>41</sup> John Koenig argues cogently that these categories are appropriate for *Luke's interpretation* of the earliest Christians, too.<sup>42</sup> When Theissen refers to "sympathizing communities," he means the earliest Christian supporters of the wandering charismatics in the time of Jesus and shortly following his death - in Israel. Koenig suggests that Luke puts his own spin on these types of early Christians. Luke recasts the "itinerant charismatic/sympathizing community" relationships in his sources as a sophist-client/patron relationship more suited to the social situation of urban "Pauline" Christianity, i.e., like in Antioch or Corinth. That's one of the effects of Luke's representation of Jesus, his supporters, and opponents in sympotic settings according to sympotic conventions. Luke accentuates the patron/client dimension of the earliest stage of the Jesus movement. Koenig's point is that the implied audience of this rhetoric is the patrons, the wealthier "sympathizers" who need to be encouraged to host and support the teachers and other Christian dependents. Luke's deliberate confusion of the guest and host roles in chapter 14 and in the other meal scenes of his Gospel (the teacher serves [Lk 22:25-27], the guests are the real hosts [Lk 7:44-47], the teacher is really the host [Lk 14:24 "*my* banquet"]) is intended to flatter this implied audience of potential donors. The "residential believers'" contribution to the community is equivalent to the itinerant,

property-less teacher/leaders' – a point Luke makes somewhat differently in the Mary/Martha story. Luke wants his readers to read themselves into the roles of the characters who correctly hosted Jesus, the literary counterpart of Theissen's sociological type – "the sympathizers." Luke intentionally projects the social roles and social tensions of the Jesus movement and its Pharisee opponents at the beginning of the first century, upon his late first century audience's somewhat different but analogous situation, i.e., that of Christian Pharisees and non-Pharisee Christians competing to define and lead the new religious movement (as reflected in Acts 15). Luke (and I) believe *these roles and tensions indeed still did have very much relevance to Luke's readers.* The relationship that both of these scholars posit between wandering charismatic leader groups and sympathizing communities is especially pertinent to the dynamic between hosts and guests, when Luke contrasts an ideal Christian table ethics over against the foil of Pharisaic table ethics. An ethic of inclusive table fellowship and home hospitality was essential for maintaining the relationship between wandering charismatic leaders, who are told by Jesus (according to Luke 10:4) to bring nothing to support themselves on their travels, and the sympathizing communities, upon whose sustenance and hospitality the former had to depend in order to survive. To potential "Christian" sympathizing community hosts, the wandering charismatics would look like the "poor, crippled, lame, and blind" with nothing material to give in return for their hosts' hospitality whom Luke has Jesus recommend to his Pharisaic host to invite in Lk 14:13.

Thus, Jesus can represent the points of view of both the wandering charismatic leaders and the hosting leaders of the sympathizing support communities. Likewise the late guests represent both points of view. Luke blurs the host and guest roles he drew

from the earliest Christian model of community to concretize a later ideal of Christian leadership that combined the roles of table server and host. This intentional blurring of host and guest roles gives the illusion of historical continuity between the earlier and later generations of Christian leaders.

Luke also adapts the conventional role of the "pair of lovers" to stress an ideal of teacher/disciple relationships in the community of charismatic leaders and hospitable sympathizers. Luke reverses the convention of the pair of lovers as symbol of the idealized homosexual relationship between teacher and disciple in the story of the sinful woman and Jesus. The sinful *woman's* physical affection toward Jesus is compared with the Pharisee Simon's restraint. Her proper attitude toward their teacher is contrasted with his improper one (Lk 7:36-47). Philosophical table fellowship among Jesus and his disciples is not "for men only" as he represents it among the Pharisees. However, this must be qualified with the point I make later that at the Last Supper, Luke could have specified that women as well as men were present, but he did not. Luke is not consistent on the presence of women at meals. Luke's attitude toward the role of women in the social order of the early Christian community is complex and equivocal. The absence of women from Luke's Last Supper and from most of his other banquet scenes is conspicuous, in view of the literary conventions of his day (contemporary apologetics notwithstanding).<sup>43</sup>

### Luke's Use of Symposium Quarrels to Symbolize Social Tensions

Luke uses the convention of the symposium quarrel not only to contrast

Christian to Pharisaic "philosophies." Luke also uses it to symbolize internal Christian communal tensions. Even the quarrels with opponents over explicit ideological differences convey a more general tension between teacher/clients and those who support them. Luke depicts this in the conflicts Jesus and his followers have with their hosts. Luke represents this tension in at least three different ways. (1) He turns Jesus' enemies into his hosts. Luke, like all the other Gospel authors, represents Jesus in conflict with the Pharisees. By presenting the Pharisees as Jesus' hosts, however, Luke suggests that Jesus *the teacher* is at odds with those who provide him with material support, i.e., meals. (2) Luke represents a conflict among early followers of Jesus between the roles of table serving and teaching, i.e., in the rivalry between Mary and Martha, and in Acts, between the Stephen and the Hellenists (table-servers) and the Jewish law-observing Christians (teachers). Luke resolves the tension he discerned in these two patterns of Christian leadership in the figure of Jesus, who paradigmatically combines the two functions, teaching and table service. This is the point of Jesus' response to the rivalry among his own disciples over leadership in the Last Supper (Lk 22:22-25). (3) Luke represents a third tension between early Christian teachers and their material supporters over whether the teacher/ disciple behaviors characteristic of the past period of Jesus' ministry are still appropriate to the new, current "in-between-time" period (that is, according to Luke's special periodization of salvation history). According to Jesus' final instructions in the table-talk section of the Last Supper, his disciples can no longer depend upon a hospitable environment for their teaching. They must now provide for themselves in a hostile environment, and combine in themselves the role of teacher and host.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Luke's generally positive view of the relationship between itinerant Christian teachers

and the sympathizing communities who support them, i.e., their patrons, must be qualified by the depiction of the patron/client tensions Luke shares with his contemporaries who write for their suppers.

Other scholars have similarly drawn attention to the sociological function of the conflicts Luke represents, but call them chriae rather than symposia. I agree that's a relevant literary form. My outlines of Luke's symposia look a lot like Willi Braun's outlines of Luke's chriae. What I call the *fait divers* is the same thing as the provocation that prompts the response in a chria. However, it is also a symposium literary convention. Indeed, the fact that both forms use the same rhetorical/didactic strategy reinforces the hypothesis that the *Sitz im Leben* of both are schools; their proponents and protagonists are "sophists." I also agree with Jerome Neyrey and B. Malina 's point that questions in chriae are often expressions of rhetorical aggression intended to challenge the honor of the person(s) to whom they're directed. Still, I see no reason why recognizing the chria forms in Luke's meal scenes excludes the relevance of symposium literary conventions for interpreting them, too. The meal scenes are both chriae and symposia. Moreover, while Luke's readers would reasonably understand questions posed by Jesus, the Pharisees, and others in the meal scenes as attacks on honor in "challenge/riposte" interchange, the meal contexts significantly mitigate the hostility of these challenges and also have something to say about 'who started it.' Generally invitations to a meal would be taken as a conferral of honor. At the Pharisaeic symposia in Luke's Gospel, the Pharisees honor Jesus by inviting him to their banquets. Jesus is usually the first to openly pose a hostile question (though Luke often projects an unuttered objection on the Pharisees, e.g. in Lk 7:39; 11:38; 14:1 as if to supply the

"missing" pretext for Jesus' aggressive challenge). So my use of Neyrey and Malina's conflict theory leads me to conclude that Jesus often "rewards" the honor of being invited to a banquet conferred upon him by his Pharisaic hosts with an attack on their honor.

My point is that the literary rhetoric of symposium conventions and chriae per se are the characteristic "cultural codes" of expression of and for depicting Greco-Roman "schools." Symposium controversies would themselves suffice to cue audiences to view them as controversies between competing philosophical schools. And there are socio-economic tensions connected with these school quarrels. Halvor Moxnes' study of meals and patron client-relations in Luke supports my interpretation of Jesus as a client/teacher usurping the prerogatives of his patron/hosts.<sup>45</sup> Both Moxnes and Braun's discussions of Luke's charge that the Pharisees are "lovers of money" (Lk 16:14) also support the connection I make between table fellowship scenes and the socio-economic tensions inherent in the relationship between teacher/clients and their patrons.<sup>46</sup>

The recurrence of the symposium frameworks throughout the Gospel casts all the meals with Jesus in the same mold. This permits its readers to (1) associate the Jesus meals with each other, (2) infer from that association that meals with Jesus were frequent as well as typical of his followers, and (3) that Jesus used meals and their accompanying rituals to teach his followers and his Pharisaic rivals how to behave as a community, just as proponents of different Greco-Roman philosophical schools were portrayed as doing in symposium literature. Thus, on the one hand, Luke uses the symposium frameworks descriptively, to portray what Jesus' ministry was like in the past. For this purpose, he uses conventional terms which he treats as familiar to his audience; i.e., Jesus' first

followers were gathered around him frequently like friends or even philosophical rivals reclining together at a symposium.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, Luke's portrayal of meals with Jesus as an occasion for teaching adds a prescriptive dimension to the symposium frameworks. The symposium settings, individually and as a group of common settings within the narrative as a whole, thus also serve Luke's second, prescriptive, purpose. Individually, the internal structures of the meal settings provide provocative events or particulars (*faits divers*) as occasions for Jesus to prescribe or demonstrate his way of responding to them in contrast to the Pharisees' way. Together, the frequency and sequence of a group of similarly structured meal settings, culminating in the Last Supper and the post-resurrection meal at Emmaus, suggest that Jesus' typical past table fellowship ethos should be viewed also as a precedent for present and future Christian communal behavior, and in contradistinction to the table fellowship ethics represented by the Pharisees. Significantly, the Pharisees drop out as characters in the last two banquet scenes in Luke's Gospel, the Last Supper and the meal on the road to Emmaus. What remains are some of their ideological perspectives, now projected onto Jesus' followers' themselves. This may reflect the presence of a faction of Christian Pharisees among the early Christians, to which both Luke and Paul allude. However, from a purely literary perspective, Luke uses the prior episodes of the Pharisees' bad meal etiquette to color the judgments readers are supposed to make about the disciples' behavior at the Last Supper and on the road to Emmaus. When the disciples jockey for positions at the table, confuse the proper roles of hosts and guests, and misunderstand the salvation historical significance of Jesus' meal practices at the Last Supper or after his resurrection, the implication is pretty clear: Don't think or act like the

Pharisees! Luke doesn't have to mention the Pharisees. He's given enough hints already that we're supposed to read the last meals in light of the prior meal episodes.

Thus, Luke interpolates symposium settings into his longer narrative for two main purposes. First, the accumulation of the symposium frameworks accentuates the conventional features of Greco-Roman banquets. It stylizes them as obviously literary depictions similar to other accounts of scholars at play from the classical symposium literary tradition, which Luke presupposes as familiar to his audience. Luke's Greco-Roman literary contemporaries would easily recognize the stock settings, characters, quarrels, and other situational commonplaces of the symposium literary tradition.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, they would cue Luke's audience to read them as dramatizations of ideological conflicts between rival schools. By parody and synkrisis of the opposing "dinner table philosophies," Luke makes it clear which behaviors and attitudes he'd like his audience to adopt, and which he'd like them to reject.

Secondly, here the accumulation of these typical settings in the sequential development of the story, also transforms these familiar conventional features into a medium for Luke to make the new, less familiar points about Jesus' table fellowship. After all, Luke did not want to exaggerate the discontinuity of the "school of Jesus" from Judaism per se. Early Christian table fellowship in certain ways was not that different from Pharisaic table fellowship. Both were expressions of a similar Jewish perspective that viewed the Kingdom of God metaphorically as a banquet where God's guests reclined to taste bread ("Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" as Jesus' Pharisaic table fellow exclaimed in Lk 14:15). The sequence of meal episodes permitted Luke to show both how Pharisaic attitudes were carried over into the new early

Christian "school of Jesus" *and* which aspects were to be kept, which discarded in the new "in-between-time" after Jesus' death and resurrection.

<sup>1</sup>Bösen, *Jesusmahl*, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>Lk 5:30b, 33b; 7:33,34; 10:7; 12:29,45; 13:26; 17:8,27; and 22:30. According to Bösen, *Jesusmahl*, p. 85-87, just as the "eating -drinking" parallelism of phrases linked the parts of 22:15-38 into a single literary unit, so it also links the different parts of the meal at Levi's house together (Lk 5:29-39). Just as the "bread - wine" parallelism served in Luke's Last Supper account as a metonymy for a typical Jewish festive banquet, so the editing of Q in 7:34 - that is, Luke's addition that Jesus was called a *wine*-bibber and a glutton - alludes to Jesus' extension of Jewish festival table fellowship to marginal people (and not that he engaged in drunken orgies).

<sup>3</sup>As examples of Luke's special diction for "reclining," Bösen (*Jesusmahl*, p. 87), cites *katakeisthai* (Lk 5:29; 7:37b); *kataklinein* (Lk 14:8; 7:36; 9:14,15); and *anapiptein* (Lk 11:37; 14:10; 22:14). To this list I would add the participle *sunanakeimenos* (Lk 7:49; 14:10,15), a word which stresses the lying down at table *together*. See *A Greek-English Lexicon* (eds. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott; rev. and aug. by Henry S. Jones; Oxford: Clarendon, 1940; rpt., 1982, p. 1695, and cf. p. 107). Note both the frequency and the distribution of the terms for reclining. Each appears in two or three of the different symposium frameworks we have mentioned (Lk 5:27-39; 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24; and 22:7-39), so that one meal scene is linked to another in the Gospel by the verbal echoes of these terms for reclining.

<sup>4</sup>See below, Chapter I.

<sup>5</sup>Bösen, *Jesusmahl*, pp. 85, 87.

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<sup>6</sup>DeLobel, "La pêcheresse," pp. 461-462.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Delobel, "La pêcheresse," pp. 462-464.

<sup>8</sup>Delobel ("La pêcheresse," p. 463), calls this interchange "Socratic," on the basis of David Daube's classification and discussion of the literary forms he designates as "Socratic interrogation" and "Public Retort and Private Explanation," (*The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* [London: Athlone, 1956] p. 151).

<sup>9</sup>E. Springs Steele, "Luke 11:37-54--A Modified Hellenistic Symposium?" *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 379-94.

<sup>10</sup>In Lk 11:37, *ethaumasen* followed by indirect discourse could be interpreted to mean that the Pharisee wondered aloud.

<sup>11</sup>Martin, *Symposion*, p. 144.

<sup>12</sup>Lucian *Symp.* 35, 45, trans. A. M. Harmon.

<sup>13</sup>I base this on two assumptions. First, I accept Jacob Neusner and his school's portrayal of the Pharisees as a table fellowship group primarily concerned with eating tithed food in a state of ritual purity as if they were priests. See especially Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (New York: KTAV, 1979) pp. 78-90. Secondly, I believe that Luke is familiar with these first century Pharisaic practices and portrays the Pharisees accordingly. To defend the former assumption is beyond the scope of this work. I defend the latter conclusion above.

<sup>14</sup>De Meeûs, "Le genre symposiaque," p. 859.

<sup>15</sup>See below, Chapter I.

<sup>16</sup>De Meeûs, "Le genre symposiaque," p. 861.

<sup>17</sup> See below, Chapter I.

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<sup>18</sup> E.g., Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 2.6; Martial, *Epigrammata*, 3.60; and Juvenal, *Satura* 5 portray such practices.

<sup>19</sup> Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?" p.?

<sup>20</sup> D. Patte, *Paul's Faith*, pp. 87-121.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Bösen, *Jesusmahl*, pp. 85-87.

<sup>22</sup> J. Delobel, "La pêcheresse," p. 461.

<sup>23</sup> Delobel's interpretation of Luke's redaction of Mark in Lk 5:27-39 must be qualified with observation of many scholars that Luke's editing of sources in this section, though clearly discernable, does not seem very smooth. See the discussion to follow.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, p. 596.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. E. Springs Steele, "Jesus' Table Fellowship with Pharisees: An Editorial Analysis of Luke 7:36-50, 11:37-54, and 14:1-24," Ph. D. diss., Notre Dame 1981, p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> A social-political dimension to the Pharisees' ostracism of Jewish tax collectors can be inferred easily from Gerd Theissen's discussion of competing Roman and Jewish systems of taxation and Jewish "intra-cultural differentiation" (*Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982] pp. 42-45, 85. The Jewish tax collectors represented Roman imperial authority, and were viewed as collaborators with the foreign regime. Though the Pharisees did not advocate open military resistance to the Romans and their Jewish allies as the Zealots did, they nevertheless intended to reinforce Jewish national identity and autonomy through an intensification of Jewish priestly norms. Thus, they extended priestly standards of purity and sanctified eating to non-priests and non-priestly food. Cf. Theissen, *Early Palestinian Christianity*, pp. 82-83. By using these rules to exclude tax collectors from their table fellowship groups, the Pharisees

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acknowledged symbolically their opposition to Roman rule.

<sup>27</sup>Luke later refines the distinctiveness of Christian table ethics by contrasting them to those of other Greco-Roman institutions (besides Pharisaic *havurot*) in the Last Supper scene (Lk 22:25-27). See above, Chapter IV.

<sup>28</sup>X. De Meeûs, "Le genre symposiaque," p. 854.

<sup>29</sup>X. De Meeûs, "Le genre symposiaque," p. 854.

<sup>30</sup> K. Berger ("Hellenistische Gattungen," p. 1313), and similarly X. De Meeûs, "Le genre symposiaque," p. 859.

<sup>31</sup>Not only was Sabbath observance of particular importance to the Pharisees' program (Neusner, *From Politics to Piety*, p. 85.), but also the Pharisaic predecessors of the Tannaim were especially wary of charismatic miracle-working Jewish leaders. See Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) pp. 80-82.

<sup>32</sup>S. Lieberman, "The Discipline of the So-Called Dead Sea Manual of Discipline," *JBL* 71 (1952) p. 199.

<sup>33</sup> Steele, "Jesus' Table Fellowship," p. 132.

<sup>34</sup> As Steele argues, "Jesus' Table Fellowship," p. 132.

<sup>35</sup>See below, Chapter I.

<sup>36</sup>I have exaggerated, but not distorted, for the purposes of contrast the sense in which Plato's literary framework represents the symposium as *the* social order. The dialogue that frames the account of Plato's *Symposium* serves more to pose a gap between what the social order of the symposium appears to have been and what it really was, than to suggest that the symposium represents a bad social order. Indeed, the Athenian stranger

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argues in Plato's *Laws* that symposia can be quite useful social institutions, provided they are controlled by philosophers (*Laws* 1.639d-641d, 645d-648e).

<sup>37</sup>As Steele ("Jesus' Table Fellowship," p. 132) argued.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Luke T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *JBL* 108 (1989) pp. 432-434.

<sup>39</sup>Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 5; New York/Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1984) 141-3.

<sup>40</sup>On the stock character of the late guest, see below, Chapter I.

<sup>41</sup>Theissen, Early Palestinian Christianity, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup>John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Overtures to Biblical Theology 17; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) p. 98.

<sup>43</sup>E.g., Quentin Quesnell, "The Women at Luke's Last Supper," *Political Issues in Luke-Acts* (ed. Richard J. Cassidy and Philip J. Scharper; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983) pp. 59-79. One might object that this rule does not apply to the episode of Mary and Martha's quarrel over whether it is better to serve tables or to learn (Lk 10:38-42). However, this episode is not, strictly speaking, represented as a symposium scene. No explicit notice of a meal frames and prompts the dialogue between Jesus and Martha.

<sup>44</sup>See above, Chapter IV.

<sup>45</sup>Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 158.

<sup>46</sup>Moxnes, *Economy of the Kingdom*, ?; Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, ?.

<sup>47</sup>Luke is not the only late first century writer to portray the Pharisees and their opponents as competing philosophical sects. Josephus portrayed the Pharisees as one of several

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philosophic *haireseis* ("sects") competing among the Jews (*Ant.* 13.171-173; 18.11-17; and 13.288-298; cf. Neusner, *From Politics to Piety*, pp. 55-59). Much attention has been paid to the determination of the kernel of historical truth underlying Josephus' banquet scene which frames the account of John Hyrcanus' break with the Pharisees (*Ant.* 13.288-298) and the parallel account from the Talmud (*b.Kid* 66a, where the Hasmonean king is called Yannai). Much less attention has been paid to the banquet setting itself as a conventional literary means for portraying a dispute between schools (the Pharisees and the Sadducees).

<sup>48</sup>Sandy, "Interpolated Narrative," pp. 471-72.