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Luke's Canonical Criterion

Arthur A. Just Jr.

Before addressing how Luke-Acts presents itself as “canonical” Scripture, it may be helpful to give a historical sketch of the origin of Luke’s Gospel and the Book of Acts that followed. As Luke the evangelist reported in Acts 19, “Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome’” (Acts 19:21). So it was that during Paul’s third missionary journey he intended to travel to Jerusalem and Rome, and perhaps beyond that to Spain, the final destinations of his apostolic activity before returning to Rome for his martyrdom in AD 65.

I. Luke and Paul in Philippi

Paul’s third missionary journey, as it turned out, was not without controversy, particularly in Ephesus, where, as Luke understated in Acts 19, “there arose no little stir concerning the Way” (Acts 19:23), resulting in a “considerable company of people” becoming enraged and crying out: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians,” thereby filling the city with confusion. The uproar was such that it resulted in Paul’s departure for Macedonia, then to Greece, where he stayed for three months. His intent was to sail from Greece to Syria, and then to Jerusalem, perhaps for the Passover. But some sort of plot against him by the Jews caused him to reconsider. Instead he headed back to Macedonia,¹ which was serendipitous, since he would not have otherwise encountered Luke in Philippi where he celebrated the Pascha with him and the Philippian saints. Sailing away from Philippi with Luke, Paul was finally on his way to Jerusalem in time to celebrate the feast of Pentecost.

¹ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 665, where he notes that “Ramsey suggests that Paul wanted to take a ship on which Jewish pilgrims going to Jerusalem for Passover would have been his fellow travelers, and some of them planned to do him in,” citing William M. Ramsey, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*, 11th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), 287.

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Luke carefully constructed Paul's journey to Jerusalem in order to mirror Jesus' Jerusalem journey in the Gospel (Luke 9:51–19:28).² Perhaps Luke's care in describing Paul's journey to Jerusalem was because he had been an eyewitness, this being the second of three "we" sections in Acts (16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16). But there may be more to this account than a simple attribution to Luke being an eyewitness, for not only did he describe the places where Paul journeyed—Macedonia, Greece, Philippi, Troas, Assos, Mytilene, Chios, Samos, and Miletus (Acts 20:1–16)—but also the delegation that accompanied him along the way: Sopater from Beroea (the son of Pyrrhus), Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, and the Asians Tychichus and Trophimus (Acts 20:4). He also carefully placed these events within the Jewish-Christian calendar of Pascha and Pentecost. We must conclude that Paul's journey to Jerusalem and beyond, to Caesarea Maritima and Rome, is of special significance to Luke. Had Jesus not turned his face to go to Jerusalem, there would have been no atonement. So also with Paul; had he not turned his face to go to the same Holy City, there would have been no Gospel of Luke or Book of Acts, and perhaps no Markan Gospel. Paul may have later given up his life in Rome during the Neronian persecution, but he needed to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, and even more importantly, in Caesarea for consultations with Luke and Mark for the writing of their Gospels.

II. Luke, Mark, and Paul in Caesarea Maritima

So goes the theory of Bo Reicke in *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* that is based on Philemon 23–24, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers" (note that Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke were with Paul in Troas as he made his way to Jerusalem). Reicke argues persuasively that Paul penned Philemon during the two years of his captivity in Caesarea Maritima, AD 58–60, since he writes in Philemon 9, "I, Paul, an ambass-

² Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 5 (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 357: "More significant by far than any other single stage of the journey is the way in which Luke has so obviously structured it [Paul's journey to Jerusalem] to mirror the great journey of the prophet Jesus to his death and triumph in Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–19:44). Paul announces his intention, sends out delegates ahead of him, and then proceeds to move steadily toward a destiny that is ever more clearly enunciated as he approaches the city of Jerusalem. Luke shows through this journey not only that Paul shared the prophetic spirit of Jesus that was demonstrated through the proclamation of the word in boldness, and in the doing of signs and wonders, but also and above all that he replicated the pattern of the prophet who was rejected in Jerusalem."

ador and *now* a prisoner also for Christ Jesus." During his captivity Luke and Mark were with Paul, consulting with him in the writing of their Gospels. This helps to explain the close parallels between the two, especially the sequence of pericopes. As Reicke notes, "the best explanation for the parallelism is the personal contacts between the evangelists in Caesarea which are indicated by the Pauline captivity epistles."³

So what seemed like an unfortunate inconvenience for Paul—not sailing directly to Palestine from Greece, and instead traveling through Greece to Macedonia and beyond that to Troas and Miletus—allowed Paul to reunite with Luke in Philippi, celebrate the Pascha there with him, then travel with Paul to Jerusalem and to Caesarea, from where he wrote his Gospel.

Not many have questioned what Luke may have been up to between the first "we" section of Acts during Paul's second missionary journey, when Paul received the Macedonian call in AD 51 to come to Europe to preach the gospel, and this serendipitous reunion with Paul at the end of his third missionary journey, as he made his way to Jerusalem in AD 58.

What exactly was Luke doing for those seven years, and was it simply a coincidence that Paul left him in Philippi in AD 51 and then reunited with him in Philippi seven years later? Could it be that Luke was the pastor of Philippi for those seven years? Could Luke have been the "bishop" of Macedonia, overseeing the distribution to the house churches of the few New Testament documents available at that time, especially the Gospel of Matthew, as well as overseeing their eucharistic life? Could Luke's pastoring of Philippi have been the reason why this congregation was the one most beloved by Paul, the most faithful of all the churches he founded, and the most generous? Could Paul's letter to the Philippians have been the last letter he wrote, from Rome while under house arrest, as recorded at the end of Acts—a love letter to them for their fidelity and liberality, as well as his farewell before his unexpected release and subsequent mission to Spain, which was followed by his return to Rome for martyrdom in AD 65?

Remarkably, few commentators wonder what Luke had been up to for those seven years. Typical of such lack of curiosity is Colin Hemer in his monumental book *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, who notes that Luke "first appears at Acts 16:10 at Troas, *is lost to view at*

³ Bo Reicke, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 165–166, 168. W. Arndt, *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 24. Arndt also suggests a Caesarean provenance for Luke's Gospel.

Philippi, and reappears there at 20:5.”⁴ But Philip Carrington, a reliable and infinitely readable historian of the first century, assumes that Luke was the pastor when he asks, after Paul and Luke celebrated the Pascha in Philippi, “Who was put in charge of the church at Philippi when Luke left it?”⁵ C.K. Barrett, a Durham theologian, asks in the introduction to his second volume of his commentary on Acts, “Did he [Luke], when Paul moved on, remain in Philippi? . . . Had the ‘first person’ been in Philippi all this time?”⁶ But it is Bo Reicke, in his book *Re-examining Paul’s Letters: The History of the Pauline Correspondence*, who is the most explicit about Luke’s role in Philippi as he comments on the careful details of the beginning of Paul’s journey to Rome:

By using the we-form, the author apparently wanted to show that he also experienced the events in Macedonia and was explicitly included in the work of spreading the gospel. Moreover, it is striking that the very next we-passage is Paul’s and his companions’ final departure from Philippi, and that both occurrences, though separated by considerable distance in time and events, are recorded with such meticulous detail (Acts 16:10–17; Acts 20:5–6 [“God had called us to preach the gospel. . . .” “But we set sail after the days of unleavened bread,” 16:10 and 20:6]). The precise descriptions in these two passages as well as their association with Philippi imply that the author was active in Macedonia, at least in part, during the time that Paul worked in Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. Thus this coincidence between the first and second we-passages might well be because of the author’s special association with Philippi and the Pauline Macedonian mission. . . . The “we” suggests that Luke was active as a preacher in Philippi and Macedonia, although he wanted to remain anonymous in the company of Paul, Timothy, and Silas.⁷

In summary, the following chart on the “we” sections of Acts suggests that Luke pastored Philippi and other congregations in Macedonia for seven years:

⁴ Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 362 (emphasis added).

⁵ Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church*, vol. 1, *The First Christian Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 152.

⁶ C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), xxvi.

⁷ Bo Reicke, *Re-examining Paul’s Letters: The History of the Pauline Correspondence* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 92 (emphasis added).

"We" Sections in Acts	Proposed Date	Paul's Activity	Luke's Activity
16:10-17 Second Missionary Journey	AD 51	Macedonian Vision Travels through Asia Minor to Philippi.	Travels with Paul to Philippi. (Possibly becomes a pastor for the Philippian church after Paul leaves.)
20:5-21:18 Third Missionary Journey	AD 58	Arrives at Philippi from Macedonia with others. Remains there for the Pascha. Leaves for Troas after it, then to Jerusalem.	Celebrates Pascha in Philippi and goes with Paul to Jerusalem.
27:1-28:16 Journey to Rome	AD 60-61	The Storm at Sea and Shipwreck Safe Harbor in Malta Arrives in Rome, under home arrest	Travels to Rome with Paul.

III. Theophilus

There is yet one more thing to consider about Luke and Paul in Philippi. Could Theophilus have been a catechumen from the church in Philippi, a wealthy man who offered to serve as a literary patron for Luke's Gospel during that celebration of the Pascha of AD 58, and the "most excellent Theophilus" to whom Luke dedicated both the Gospel and Acts?

Could this Theophilus have been like many Gentiles who had been yearning for a Gospel to be written for them? Assuming Matthean priority, could Theophilus, a Gentile, have been listening to Luke preach on Matthew for seven years, and was now willing to fund a Gospel in his own "language," so to speak, a Gospel for him, a Gentile, a Roman citizen, in order to hear the Jesus story from a Hellenistic point of view? Matthew's Gospel was reliable and certain, but Theophilus desired a Gospel for people like him, one that was Pauline, written after Paul's three missionary journeys for the churches that he had founded among the Gentiles in both Asia Minor and Europe.

The danger of a “new” Gospel is that it would have been measured against the “certainty” of Matthew’s Gospel, with all its Jewish and Jerusalem gravitas. Could Luke measure up? Could Theophilus and the Gentiles in Philippi be “certain” that Luke’s Gospel could serve as catechesis for Gentiles, just as Matthew’s Gospel had served as catechesis for Jews? Would the church in Jerusalem approve?⁸ Could the Jesus story actually be told from another point of view—a Hellenistic one—and could it have a Pauline perspective?

What Theophilus may have wondered as he read Luke’s “Gospel” was whether it was “canonical” just as Matthew’s Gospel was “canonical,” in the sense of authoritative Scripture in line with the authority of the Scriptures of Israel (i.e., what we know as the Old Testament). Could the purpose of Luke’s prologue to his Gospel, addressed to “most excellent Theophilus,” have been to affirm that his Gospel was as reliable as Matthew’s, and that the oral and written traditions that Luke used to compile his Gospel were as faithful and true to the Gospel story as Matthew’s? Could the prologue’s final word, ἀσφάλεια (“certainty,” “reliability,” “truth”), be a criterion for canonicity? That in fact is how Luke ended his prologue, a periodic sentence ending with this purpose clause: ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν (“in order that you come to recognize completely the certainty of the story through which you have been catechized,” Luke 1:4).

IV. Ἀσφάλεια in the Lukan Prologue

Whether or not Theophilus was a catechumen from the Philippian congregation is not crucial to a consideration of ἀσφάλεια as a criterion for canonicity. What Theophilus was *not* is some archetypal “lover of God,”⁹ even though such a designation was made by Origen, and later by Ambrose, who used Origen’s commentary on Luke for his own commentary.¹⁰

⁸ Perhaps this is the reason why Cleopas was named as one of the Emmaus disciples. Tradition affirms that Cleopas is Joseph’s brother and Jesus’ uncle. The other unnamed disciple was Simeon, Cleopas’ son, the second bishop of Jerusalem. Simeon would have been presiding over Jerusalem when Luke’s Gospel began circulating in the churches. As the Gospel of Paul, Luke’s Gospel may not have been as well received in Jerusalem as it was in other places. But what better way to receive approbation than to have the bishop of Jerusalem give his episcopal imprimatur as one of the Emmaus disciples, a level of “certainty” that would not go unnoticed by the Jerusalem church.

⁹ On some levels, we are all like Theophilus, “lovers of God.”

¹⁰ Origen writes, “Someone might think that Luke addressed the Gospel to a specific man named Theophilus. But, if you are the sort of people God can love, then all of you who hear us speaking are ‘Theophiluses,’ and the Gospel is addressed to you.

Theophilus was a real person in the first century, a literary patron and a God-fearer, who had been catechized by Jewish materials (Matthew) but then encouraged Luke to write a Gospel for the catechesis of the Gentiles, which would have been carried out by Jewish Christians. Living in the historical context of the first century, he was a Gentile seeking certainty (*ἀσφάλεια*) in a Gentile way from Luke and Paul. Speculation about the identity of Theophilus makes for fascinating reading, but it is probably impossible to determine who he was, although he appears to have been a catechumen, since the word *κατηχήθης* is used in the prologue,¹¹ perhaps even from Philippi?¹²

Anyone who is a Theophilus is both 'excellent' and 'very strong.' This is what the Greek word *Θεοφιλος* [Theophilus] actually means," quoted in *Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just Jr., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 4. Or Ambrose, "So the Gospel was written to Theophilus, that is, to him whom God loves. If you love God, it was written to you. If it was written to you . . .," quoted in *Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just Jr., 3:4.

¹¹ The verb *κατηχέω* ("to catechize, instruct, inform") occurs four times in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:4; Acts 18:25; 21:21, 24) and three times in Paul (Rom 2:18; 1 Cor 14:19; Gal 6:6). Acts 18:25 has the same meaning as here: Apollos "had been catechized [*ἦν κατηχημένος*] in the way of the Lord." Other key Lukan themes stand out in Acts 18:25: "the way" (*τὴν ὁδόν*) relates to the journey motif and is a catechetical designation of the Christian faith (see comments on Luke 1:76, 79). As a result of his catechesis, Apollos taught about Jesus *ἀκριβῶς*, "accurately, carefully" (Acts 18:25), even as Luke investigated his sources *ἀκριβῶς*, "carefully, accurately" (Luke 1:4). Paul says that in the Christian assembly, he prefers rational words, not speaking in tongues, so that he may "catechize" (*κατηχήσω*) those present (1 Cor 14:19). In Gal 6:6, Paul uses the verb twice: he refers to one who is "catechized" (*κατηχοῦμενος*) regarding "the Word" (*λόγος*, as in Luke 1:2) by a "catechist" (*κατηχοῦντι*), and the verse implies that such a teacher-student relationship was common among the Christian churches to whom he writes. Cf. Herman Beyer: "Gal. 6:6 points out that those who are taught should support those who teach. It may be that Paul chose this rare word (rather than *διδάσκειν*) so as to stress the distinctive nature of Christian instruction (cf. our present use of the word catechism)." Herman W. Beyer, "*katēchéō*," *The Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 422. Paul also uses *κατηχέω* in the sense of Jewish catechesis in Rom 2:18, concerning a Jew's instruction in Torah, and this catechesis would also enable him to be a "leader . . . instructor . . . teacher" (Rom 2:19–20), as was the Christian Apollos. Jewish catechetical schools led by rabbis were well developed institutions by the New Testament era; the schools of Rabbis Hillel and Shammai, often cited in the Talmud, flourished ca. 30 BC to AD 10 and reportedly had students numbering in the thousands.

¹² Mark Birkholz suggests the following "real people": 1. Theophilus, the brother-in-law of Caiaphas, high priest from AD 37–41; 2. Theophilus, a government official from Athens; 3. Theophilus, a wealthy Christian from Antioch; 4. Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7–12); 5. Lucius Junius Annaeus Gallio (Acts 18:12–17); 6. Titus Flavius Clemens, son of the Emperor Domitian, whose wife was a Christian; 7. Philo; 8. Herod Agrippa II.

But Theophilus and Gentiles like him were not the only ones searching for certainty in the words through which they had been catechized. Jeffrey Kloha, in the final paragraph of his article "Theological Hermeneutics after Meaning," states:

For what we crave is certainty, a clear word that solves all problems, definitively, so that we can put this behind us, and get on to whatever we think "really matters." . . . We live "after meaning," that is, after meaning himself came into the flesh, died, and rose. In his work is certainty, for salvation; our lives, filled with uncertainty, are lived by faith, hearing ever again the voice of the Shepherd and following where he leads.¹³

The need for certainty is a recurrent theme among our students and among our parishioners, and it is one that is worthy of our attention. Kloha's article refers to the incarnation and the work of Christ as the source of our certainty. Unfortunately, because Kloha's statement comes at the conclusion of his essay, we do not see how he might develop this. What he does do is put the issue of "certainty" before us. And as a survey of the literature demonstrates, the problem with "certainty" is the uncertainty of what ἀσφάλεια means.

By concluding his prologue, a periodic sentence with a purpose clause that ends with the word "certainty," τὴν ἀσφάλειαν, in the emphatic position, Luke is telling Theophilus and us that "certainty" matters. Ἀσφάλεια may be translated as truth, reliability, assurance, guarantee, firmness, or confidence. Certainty of faith is the goal of Luke's Gospel, which comes from accurate, systematic instruction in the events and in the narrative that Luke is about to tell. Certainty is in the story of Jesus, or as Kloha puts it, "In his work is certainty, for salvation,"¹⁴ and his work for salvation is told in the Gospel of Luke: a work of preaching and teaching, a work of miracles, and a work of passion, resurrection, and ascension.

By concluding his prologue with ἀσφάλεια, Luke tells us that *faith's* certainty is why he wrote his Gospel, and that his narrative is to be understood as a kerygmatic one, which is what *κατηχήθης* implies in this context, that is, testimony regarding historical facts and the *proclamation* of their doctrinal significance that creates *faith's* certainty.

Mark Birkholz, "Certainty in Luke-Acts: Fulfillment, Transmission, and Order" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2013), 52-53.

¹³ Jeffrey Kloha, "Theological Hermeneutics after Meaning," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 46 (2012): 11.

¹⁴ Kloha, "Theological Hermeneutics after Meaning," 11.

What "certainty" meant for Theophilus in AD 60 is what "certainty" means for us in AD 2015. "Certainty" is not dependent on our human context, even though Theophilus' human context was radically different from our modern/post-modern context. We may "hear" differently, but "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). The goal of our exegesis of Luke's Gospel is to hear faith's certainty as Theophilus heard it. But how do we do that? And what was this certainty that Theophilus sought? Historical/factual certainty? Theological certainty?¹⁵ Eucharistic certainty?

V. What Was the "Certainty" That Theophilus Was Seeking?

H.J. Cadbury suggested in 1921 that *ἀσφάλεια* is apologetic, that is, "to defend Christians against unfavorable reports which had come to the ears of Theophilus."¹⁶ Although most agree that there is an apologetic character to some of Luke's material, as there is with Matthew and Mark (e.g., Matthew's *apologia* for the sealing of the tomb with a court order), most see a more ecclesial purpose for all the Gospels.

Darrell Bock seems to agree, stating forthrightly that *ἀσφάλεια* is "not of a political nature" nor is Luke "writing an apology to a Roman official." He suggests that "assurance [*ἀσφάλεια*] is of a religious, theological nature." But then he seems to accent the historical and apologetical sense of Luke's intentions:

Theophilus's question would seem to be, "Is Christianity what I believed it to be, a religion sent from God?" Perhaps such a doubt resulted from the judgment the church suffered, especially as a result of including Gentiles. Why should a Gentile suffer frustration for joining what was originally a Jewish movement? Is the church suffering God's judgment because it has been too generous with God's salvation? Will the rest of God's promises come to pass? Has most of Israel rejected the promise? . . . Can one really be sure Jesus is the fulfillment

¹⁵ See Birkholz's conclusions after his analysis of Luke's prologue, where he affirms certainty in events and theology: "To summarize, the intended purpose of Luke's writing is to help a certain Theophilus (and presumably others) who have already been instructed, become more sure not only that the events about which they have been taught have actually taken place, but also that they have been correctly taught concerning their significance." Birkholz, "Certainty in Luke-Acts," 59.

¹⁶ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 289, who cites H. J. Cadbury, "The Purpose Expressed in Luke's Preface," *Expositor* 8/21 (1921): 432. Some have even surmised that this resulted from Theophilus's status as a prominent Roman official.

of God's promise and that he brings God's salvation both now and in the future? By the emphasis on fulfillment in Jesus and *the truthful character of the tradition* (1:1), Luke intends to answer these questions with a resounding "yes." The gospel of Jesus is from God and is available for all, Jew and Gentile alike.¹⁷

Here is the question: Did Luke need to give assurance to Theophilus because of the troubles that Christianity caused in many of the places where it was planted? Quite possibly. There are numerous moments in Acts where Luke notes the turmoil that Christianity caused, for example, just before Paul and Luke's reunion in Philippi, there is the incident in Ephesus with Demetrius the silversmith, and Luke notes that "about that time there was no little stir concerning the Way" (Acts 19:23).¹⁸ But again the question: was Theophilus concerned with the legitimacy of Christianity as the fulfillment of God's promise, especially in light of the Jewish rejection of Christianity, and did that involve "the truthful character of the tradition?"

Is Luke's purpose, therefore, to be accurate (*ἀκριβῶς*), as he suggests when he says, "it seems good to me also, after investigating from the beginning every tradition carefully" (*παρηκολουθηκότι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς*)? Is his goal the "truthfulness" about the events, the facts, as Robert Stein suggests:

One major purpose of Luke was to assure his readers of *the truthfulness* of that which they had been taught about Jesus' life and teachings. . . . Since Luke also expected his account would agree with what his readers had been taught, he anticipated that as they read his "orderly account" (1:4) they would come to *a greater assurance of the truthfulness of this material*.¹⁹

The purpose of Luke's prologue depends how one understands *ἀσφάλεια*. Does it mean "truth," "reliability," "assurance," "certainty," or all of the above? To translate it as "reliability," as in my own commentary from 1996, implied "'reliability' in the sense of faith's certainty and assurance, which is the goal of the gospel and the goal of catechesis."²⁰ *Ἀσφάλεια* does mean reliability in the truth of fact-telling, but it implies more than

¹⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 65 (emphasis added).

¹⁸ Compare Luke's expression in Acts 15:2 to describe the debate in Antioch over circumcision, which may have included Barnabas as "no small dissension and debate."

¹⁹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 36 (emphasis added).

²⁰ Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996), 36.

that, including a sense of “certainty” in both the theological significance of the narrative and its “certainty” as a sacred text for preaching.²¹ Certainty, as I would now translate *ἀσφάλεια*, is “the certainty of faith.”²² This is the certainty that Luke’s Gospel is canonical, that is, it is both reliable in its truth-telling of the facts, but even more, it serves the same “purpose” as Matthew’s Gospel, namely, it is reliable and certain for preaching. Does Theophilus have certainty that Luke’s narrative (*διήγησιν*) can be used for preaching in the context of the eucharistic liturgy?

As Theophilus listened to each part of the Gospel narrative, he also knew the end of the story. He knew the facts about Jesus, his teaching, his rejection, and his vindication. He knew them from Matthew’s Gospel, and in hearing the facts of the gospel from Luke, would he be certain that they are true and worthy of preaching as a prelude to his reception of the Eucharist? But Theophilus would also have heard the theological significance of these events as they were interpreted by the evangelist Luke, a catechist who knew their meaning for salvation history and who had been preaching towards the Eucharist for seven years in Philippi.²³ So the

²¹ Richard Dillon seems to sum up the consensus: “Let us bear in mind that the *καθεξής* [orderly] of the main clause is what contributes directly to the realization of the author’s purpose in writing, which is a ‘certainty’ (*ασφάλεια*) for his cultivated patron concerning ‘the words’ he had been taught (*κατηχήθης*). The ‘orderly’ writing is thus related to the reader’s reassurance as action to purpose, hence the way we have conceived the Lucan ‘ordering’ will have much to do with the way we understand the ‘certainty’ being aimed at. Given our analysis of the ‘order,’ we can foresee that the reader’s ‘certainty’ will be about the significance of the reported events as God’s action in history, rather than about the mere factual truth of what is narrated.” Richard J. Dillon, “Previewing Luke’s Project,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981): 224.

²² Karl Ludwig Schmidt writes, “All four words are current in earlier and later Greek in the sense of ‘firmness,’ ‘certainty,’ ‘firm,’ ‘certain,’ ‘to make firm,’ or ‘certain.’ They are used with the same meaning in the LXX and NT. The meaning, then, of *λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν* is ‘the reliability of the words or teachings’ (Luke 1:4). This corresponds to Acts 25:26: *ἀσφαλές τι γράψαι*, and again Acts 21:34; 22:30: *γνῶναι τὸ ἀσφαλές*, ‘to know the truth.’ The reference in Acts 2:36: *ἀσφαλῶς γνωσκέτω πᾶς οἶκος Ἰσραὴλ* is to ‘certain, solid, or reliable knowledge.’” In a footnote, Schmidt notes that “Meyer’s rendering of *ἀσφάλεια* as ‘full certainty of faith’ in *Ursprung*, I, 10 (Lk. 1:4) is perhaps a little exaggerated, but gives the right impression.” Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “*ἀσφάλεια, ἀσφαλής, ἀσφαλῶς, ἀσφαλίζω*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:506.

²³ John Wilkinson records Egeria’s description of the sophisticated catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century: “His subject is God’s Law; during the forty days he goes through the whole Bible, beginning with Genesis, and first relating the literal meaning of each passage, then interpreting its spiritual meaning. He also teaches them at this time all about the resurrection and the faith [a reference to the New

prologue instructs hearers of all times to seek to discover the theological significance of the events that are about to be narrated as they prepare to receive the body and blood of Christ.

VI. Ἀσφάλεια in the Context of Luke's Prologue, Luke's Gospel, and the Book of Acts

What may help us get to the heart of what ἀσφάλεια means is this question: is Luke's Gospel worthy of eucharistic preaching? This suggests that the meaning of ἀσφάλεια cannot be determined without considering it in the context of Luke's prologue, Luke's Gospel, the book of Acts, and in the ecclesial context in which Luke was writing.²⁴ *Certainty* is related to Luke's description of his Gospel as a "narrative" (διήγησις),²⁵ which places it into a literary category that was a familiar genre in the first century, subject to literary analysis—a story that needed to be handed down through catechesis and preaching. Certainty for Theophilus also concerned the words (λόγων) through which he had been catechized, thereby framing Luke's prologue with two different ways of speaking of the genre of his work: narrative (διήγησις) and words (λόγων). This is the source of all preaching and catechesis. It is about events (πραγμάτων) that are now handed down, "traditioned" (παρέδοσαν), through words (λόγων) by "eyewitnesses" who "became ministers of the word" (ὕπηρεται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου), that is, ministers of the Gospel narratives (these are the same people but on either side of the kerygmatic events of crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and post-Pentecost Eucharists). This Gospel narrative is the *viva vox Jesu* embodied in the church's eucharistic liturgy.²⁶ For Luke, then, the Word is

Testament!]. And this is called catechesis." J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Ariel, 1981), 144.

²⁴ This would entail an extended exegesis of all the critical words in the prologue, such as what Luke means by narrative (διήγησιν), tradition (παρέδοσαν), eyewitnesses and ministers of the word (οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρεται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου), recognition (ἐπιγνώσις), words (λόγων), catechesis (κατηχήθης), to mention but a few, and how these are words echoed throughout the Gospel, especially at the end. Some of this analysis is done here, but for more extensive discussion, see various commentaries.

²⁵ Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 173–174: "Luke's use of *diegesis* as the quasi-title of his work gives it not only a literary dimension, but alerts the reader to the historical implications of the story."

²⁶ Certainty cannot be divorced from the reality that Luke's Gospel is a book of the church, written for the church, to be used by the church in its proclamation of the Gospel to the unbaptized and the baptized. The community that receives Luke's Gospel is a catechetical and eucharistic body. His Gospel prepares the baptized for the Eucharist and catechizes the unbaptized.

living in the flesh of Jesus, who spoke to these eyewitnesses before he ascended and continues to speak through them as ministers of the word in the preaching of the word.

These ministers of the word are as much a part of the kerygma as the events that have come to fulfillment, and they became ministers of the word when, after the resurrection, Christ opened up the Scriptures to them and made the events of his life, death, and resurrection the core of the mission proclamation. As a kerygmatic narrative, Luke's Gospel is a theological presentation of the events of the life of Jesus of Nazareth that brings to "fulfillment" God's plan revealed in the great Hebrew literary work, the Old Testament. Theophilus listened to Luke's Gospel to hear how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament, and he would not be disappointed. This is especially true in the Lukan frame of Jesus' preaching, first in the synagogue of Nazareth where he cited the messianic program of Isaiah 61 and 58 and proclaimed, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:16-30), then at Emmaus where "beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he [the risen Christ] explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:13-35), and finally to the Eleven where he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, namely, "that it is necessary that all the things that have been written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44-49).

This demonstration by Jesus of how to frame the events of his life as fulfillment of the Old Testament is the source of all apostolic preaching (e.g., Peter's temple sermon in Acts 3 and Paul's homily before Agrippa in Acts 26). As Richard Dillon says, "[These] unmistakably declare the risen Lord himself to be the speaker of the mission kerygma."²⁷ If this is Luke's intent, then "certainty" cannot be separated from how the Gospel narrative is embodied in apostolic preaching, a certainty only Luke can give with a two-volume work of dominical teaching and apostolic preaching.²⁸ Again Dillon:

²⁷ Dillon goes on to say: "We are not surprised, therefore, that the continuation of v. 1 in the *καθώς*-clause of v. 2 makes the tradition of the sacred *πραγμάτων* just as much part of the Gospel's subject matter as the great happenings themselves. The evangelical accounts are of the events as mediated by their witnesses, and the recruitment and instruction of witnesses are to be a prominent feature of the story that Luke tells." Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project," 213-214.

²⁸ Again, Dillon: "Luke not only set the kerygma persuasively in its full historical background, as his predecessors had tried to do; he also demonstrated more fully than they how the *historia Jesu* had given birth to the church of the present, through the service of well-schooled followers whom the Easter Christ had made into 'witnesses,'

Obviously, a story which fully told how Jesus' own words of instruction were committed to appointed witnesses (Luke 24:44-48) could effectively instill a catechumen's *ἀσφάλεια λόγων*. But a story which went on to document how those witnesses actually echoed the Master's speech in founding churches could instill it incomparably better. This is already an indication that the concept of Luke's two-volume opus might well be contained within the objective stated by the Gospel's prologue.²⁹

Luke provides programmatic affirmation of this at the beginning of Acts and at the climax of Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:36, the only other significant parallel use of a derivative of *ἀσφάλεια* to Luke's use of this word in the prologue. Once more, Richard Dillon:

The Pentecost sermon of Peter illustrates this point with specific reference to the word *ἀσφάλεια*. At the climax of these inaugural *logoi* of the mission, to which he called all Israel's attention (Acts 2:22), Peter invites a "secure" confession with the adverbial form of the same word: "Let all Israel know with certainty (*ἀσφαλῶς*) that God has made both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you have crucified!" (Acts 2:36). This secure acknowledgement is the expected conclusion to the whole sketch of the *πραγμάτα* of Jesus, beginning with his public ministrations (Acts 2:22) and including his death, resurrection, and exaltation. But these are proclaimed with citation of the scriptural prophecies which declare the divine plan into which they fall. The proclamation thus continues the Easter discourse of the risen Lord, who explained the meaning of this ministry from the prophetic Scriptures (Luke 24:27, 44-45). Peter's words were aimed at a "certainty" of God's action ("God has made . . ." etc.) which would lead, in turn, to the repentance and conversion called for in his peroration (Acts 2:37-38). The *ἀσφάλεια* he induces in his hearers is not the assurance that things really happened as they were told, but that the events as told fall into God's plan of salvation, hence are truly saving events to which each listener must respond.³⁰

just as he even now makes listeners into believers." Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project," 227.

²⁹ Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project," 224-225.

³⁰ Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project," 225-226. This affirms what Kloha stated when he wrote: "In his work is certainty, for salvation; our lives, filled with uncertainty, are lived by faith, hearing ever again the voice of the Shepherd and following where he leads." Kloha, "Theological Hermeneutics after Meaning," 15.

VII. Certainty in Recognizing (ἐπιγινῶς) Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread

The project of *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus*³¹ was to demonstrate that teaching and healing, word and meal, and λόγων and πραγμάτων go together, and that these two “structures” form the foundation for apostolic liturgy that has been handed down to us today. What we have dealt with so far is the meaning and content of λόγων as διήγησιν, the Gospel narrative. Together they form the core of what becomes “the liturgy of the catechumens,” and for this there is certainty, ἀσφάλεια.

In almost every analysis of Luke's prologue, every word is dissected and exegeted as to its theological significance, all, that is, except for one word: the verb of the final purpose clause, ἐπιγινῶς, “to recognize completely.” The question the prologue begs is how *did* Theophilus come to recognize completely that the words through which he has been catechized are certain? That recognition is the recognition of faith's certainty. This recognition that Jesus is the crucified and risen Christ first happens for a human being *by sight and by faith* in the final chapter of Luke's Gospel where he uses the same word for recognition in describing what the Emmaus disciples experienced when their eyes were opened “in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:31: αὐτῶν δὲ διηνοίχθησαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν). Remarkably, very few commentators note or comment on Luke's use of the same word in his prologue and in the climax of Luke's Gospel.

In this context, “recognize” (ἐπιγινῶσκω) is one of Luke's many synonyms for faith and its certainty in the reliability of Christian catechesis. The Emmaus disciples may have known the historical facts about Jesus' passion and resurrection (Luke 24:18–24), but they did not understand the meaning of those facts (24:25). The goal of Jesus' catechesis—and of the Emmaus narrative—is for the hearer “to believe in all the things that the prophets spoke” (24:25). At the beginning of the story in 24:16, the disciples' eyes were kept by God (theological passive) from perceiving Jesus; at the end of the story, the veil was taken away. *Faith's certainty (ἀσφάλεια; 1:4) came only when Christ interpreted the passion and resurrection facts and revealed himself in the breaking of the bread.*

Although the meaning of πραγμάτων is clearly the events of Jesus' life, especially the “passion and resurrection facts” as they are described by Jesus in Luke 24, these “events” are also given to believers in “the breaking of the bread,” in body broken and blood poured out. One of the ironies,

³¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993).

and truths, of the Emmaus story is that Jesus' catechesis on the road to Emmaus created burning hearts, but his λόγοι on the way failed to open their eyes. It was only "in the breaking of the bread" that their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

So to return to Theophilus and the question of whether ἀσφάλεια is a criterion for canonicity—as Theophilus attended the first Eucharist in which Luke's Gospel was read and preached upon—would he have come to the table with a burning heart, knowing and believing that he had heard the living voice of Jesus in Luke's Gospel narrative, and that this has prepared him to recognize completely the risen Christ "in the breaking of the bread?"

In this Theophilus and all believers who follow him can be certain that word and miracle, word and meal, and word and event are the means for mission and the source of faith's certainty.³²

³² See Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 124. In full he says: "The word and the bread are the means to mission. Luke wants to show that the presence of the Lord in teaching and eucharistic fellowship empowers the church for participation in Jesus' mission to the lost (cf. Luke 19:10). Verse 32 [24:32] graphically illustrates this point; the disciples' hearts 'burned within' them when Jesus 'opened the Scriptures' in the recognition experience. Mission is the result of this recognition as the disciples rush back to Jerusalem to tell the Eleven about the Risen Christ. Verses 33–35 tell about that triumphant return 'to Jerusalem.' Verse 33 combines both temporal ('at that same hour') and geographical ('to Jerusalem') factors. The result of recognition is mission; both are linked with the resurrection and Jerusalem as the starting point for the church's outreach." Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives*, 124–25. See also R. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24*, AnBib 82 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978): 107, 113, 153, 212, 216–17, and especially 227–296. Dillon chooses the *mission enterprise* as his "focal point for distilling and refining the message of St. Luke that chapter 24 conveys" (267). He also points to the "Lucan blending of christology and ecclesiology, drawing out the *missiological consequence* of the Master's path to glory through passion and death" (278). Dillon also comments: "As risen Lord, present in word and sacrament, he shows himself the *goal and meaning of all the scriptures*, and he imparts to his followers that ministry of the word which continues to unlock the secret otherwise hidden away in the sacred pages. *His voice* is what continues to be heard in that ministry of the word (thus [Dt 18:15, 18] can be invoked by his witnesses, Acts 3:22–23), for it is only *in personal encounter with him*, and from that perspective, that the whole mystery of God's plan of salvation is opened to the eye of faith.—That is, in the final analysis, the teaching of the Emmaus story" (155).