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Luke and the Foundations of the Church

Peter J. Scaer

I. Luke, the "Pentecostal" Catholic

Matthew has traditionally been known as "the ecclesiastical gospel."¹ Luke Timothy Johnson calls Matthew simply, "the gospel of the church."² Indeed, among the canonical gospels, only Matthew specifically employs the vocabulary of "church." Christ identifies himself as the builder of the ἐκκλησία (Matt 16:18). Built on the rock, it can withstand any storm (Matt 6:24), so that not even the gates of Hades will overcome it (Matt 16:18). The church, for Matthew is more than a concept; it is the place or context in which authority is vested, forgiveness is given or withheld, and disputes are settled (Matt 16:19; 18:17). Matthew further establishes that the church has an apostolic foundation (Matthew 10:28) and that the primary disciple is Peter, who is specifically designated as "first" (πρῶτος) among the apostles (Matt 10:2).

Luke-Acts offers an admittedly more complicated picture, describing the church not only as Jesus envisioned it, but as it began to grow and spread throughout the Roman Empire. The church of Luke-Acts, like life itself, is often messy. Decisions are made as new situations arise. One might say that the church in Acts appears to be both pentecostal and catholic, at once spontaneous and well organized.

For Luke, Pentecost marks the birth of the church. As Luke Timothy Johnson puts it, "Luke obviously considers the Holy Spirit to be the life-principle of the Church."³ The Pentecost Spirit fills not only the apostles, but permeates the entire church. Peter speaks of church as the new age, prophesied by Joel: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. Indeed, I will pour out my spirit in those days upon my men servants and women servants, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18). True to Joel's prophecy, the Book

¹ R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Pater Noster Press, 1989), 242.

² Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 172.

³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 15.

of Acts is a rollercoaster ride, filled with miracles, visions, and angelic appearances. Four unmarried daughters of Philip are said to prophesy (Acts 21:9), and the sick and lame are healed by Peter's shadow and Paul's handkerchief (Acts 5:12-16; 19:11). The church's story, with shipwrecks and snake-handling, is truly epic. No wonder, then, that the Book of Acts has become the inspiration not only for Pentecostalism, but also for countless attempts at church renewal. Acts represents for many a golden age when charisma trumped order, and the Spirit moved as he willed. As Leon Morris wistfully writes, "In the course of time the church did, of course, settle down as an institution. It lost the first fine flush of enthusiastic proclamation of the gospel and the eager expectation of the Lord's return. It became interested in questions of order and sacramental practice, and in general all that makes for the institutional side of Christianity."⁴

Then again, those who think of the church as a type of free-form dance might look again and see in Luke-Acts a church whose movement is thoughtfully choreographed. For all of the twists and turns, the overall story is structured, purposeful, and catholic. While the word "church" does not appear at all in Luke's first volume, it can be found often in his second.⁵ Within Luke-Acts, we have a more fully-developed ecclesiology with Christ, Peter, and the apostles, as well as a movement towards deacons, presbyters, and bishops. For this reason, many have seen in Luke what they call an "early catholicism."⁶ Luke's work not only lays a foundation for the church, but begins to add the second and third story. Even more, Luke demonstrates that the church, like a multi-storied tower, has floors built underground, giving the building structural integrity. For all of its revolutionary quality, Luke's story emphasizes continuity. There is essentially one Israel, the one true church, from the Old Testament prophets to the New Testament ministers, with Christ at the center of it all.

⁴ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 42.

⁵ The term "church" (ἐκκλησία), which appears some 23 times in Acts, is used most often in the singular to refer to the church at large. It can also be used to speak about the church as it appears in several places: "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" (Act 9:31). The term can also refer to a church in one particular place: "the church at Antioch" (Acts 13:1). At least three times, the term appears in the plural to speak about individual congregations (Acts 15:41; 16:4, 5). At the Council of Jerusalem, the decision is made with the approval of apostles, elders, and "the whole church" (Acts 15:22).

⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 23-27.

II. The Church as the Doubly-Inspired Israel

Though the most Jewish of writings, Matthew's gospel is largely about breaking with the past. The first evangelist aims, as R.T. France puts it, at "the formation of a new body which at the same time is and yet is distinct from Israel."⁷ With his subversive Abrahamic genealogy, Matthew demonstrates that Jesus is not only the fulfillment of Israel, but in many ways, its end. Jesus reveals "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matt 6:9), and by doing so, negates the need for further genealogies. Even more radically, Matthew depicts a Jesus who appears at times not only to fulfill the Old Testament, but to make it obsolete. In Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, Jesus frequently introduces new topics with the formula, "You have heard it said (5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43), followed by the unsettling, "But now I say to you." For Torah lovers everywhere, the words still sound shocking. There is a sense in which Moses and Elijah must fade, as Christians are told to "Listen to Him" (Matt 17:5). Matthew's task is, in many ways, groundbreaking. God's people, no longer led by priests whose job descriptions were written by Moses, would be shepherded by apostolic ministers who take their directions from Christ himself. Matthew's gospel drives a wedge between "their synagogue" and "my church" (Matt 16:18), as he radically points forward to a time when the gospel will be preached to all nations. Surely, this was not an easy task, and the effect is often jarring.

Luke's story, on the other hand, has more to do with continuity. If Marcion liked Luke's gospel, that was only because he misunderstood or distorted it. Writing to God-fearers and Gentiles, Luke aims to demonstrate that the church brings Israel not to its end, but its completion. The Spirit of the Old Testament flows like a river into the New. This sense of continuity is encapsulated beautifully in Luke's infancy narrative. At the birth of Jesus, Matthew tells us, "Herod was disturbed, and all of Jerusalem with him" (Matt 2:3). The Christ-child's only worshipers are foreigners who follow an eastern star (Matt 2:1-2). Luke's infancy narrative, on the other hand, features the faithful remnant. Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna are Jerusalem temple-dwellers who recognize that Christ is truly the "Glory of Israel" (Luke 2:32).

John the Baptist plays the part of the Old Testament prophet, pointing to Christ by his life and his words. John's miraculous birth, accompanied by an angelic visitation, a song of praise, and a report of continued growth,

⁷ R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 242.

paves the way for the story of Jesus, whose birth repeats these same elements, but takes them to a new and higher level.⁸ Luke believes in parallelism, not only as a literary form, but as a theological truth. Elijah's greatness is only enhanced by Elisha's coming. So also, Israel's honor is magnified by the coming of Christ, who brings Israel to her fulfillment and glory.

The Book of Acts pictures Pentecost as the dramatic birth of a new and wonderful age. But just how new is this new age? Luke would have us know that the Spirit of Pentecost is the very same Spirit who inhabited the Old Testament and announced his presence with fire and flame (Exod 19:18; 24:17; 1 Kings 18:38; 19:11-13). If the Pentecost Spirit resulted in the prophesying of Philip's daughters, they were in fact following in the line of Anna, the temple-dwelling prophetess (Luke 2:36-39). At Mary's greeting, Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41). Zechariah, a son of Abijah and a temple priest, is said to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:67). Gabriel tells Zechariah that his son also will be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15). Simeon likewise is described as a man who was "moved by the Spirit" (Luke 2:27), having received revelation from the "Holy Spirit" (Luke 2:26), for "the Holy Spirit was upon him" (Luke 2:25). In the light of the Infancy Narrative, Pentecost appears radical hardly at all. The Spirit who is poured out at Pentecost had long ago made his home in Israel.

If you had only the gospel of Matthew, you would think of Israel as history. In Matthew, the risen Christ is eager to move on. When he appears to the women, he says, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (Matt 28:10). The Great Commission then is given at Galilee, and Jesus sets the apostles' sights on the nations, leaving Jerusalem as it were in the rear-view mirror (Matt 28:16-20). Luke, on the other hand, ends his gospel where he began. After the ascension, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). And, indeed, Jerusalem would become the center and foundation for the church, its first growth-ring.

III. The Twelve Apostles and the Twelve Tribes of Israel

Though our Lord had many followers, Luke tells us, "He summoned his disciples, and chose from among them twelve, whom he named apostles' (6:13). As Francois Bovon recognizes, they are "the representatives of the twelve tribes of the renewed Israel."⁹ They represent both the

⁸ For a discussion of Luke's use of step-parallelism, see Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 313-314.

⁹ Francois Bovon, *Luke 1*, trans. Christine Thomas (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 210.

restoration of Israel and the church in embryonic form. To these specific twelve he gave "power and authority" (9:1). As the Twelve would be the guarantors and witnesses of Jesus' words and life, they spent their lives "with him" (Luke 8:1). At the Lord's Supper, and only in Luke's gospel, Jesus blesses the apostles in a manner reminiscent of Jacob's benediction: "And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30).

Because of Luke's emphasis on the apostles as the kings and judges of Israel, Judas' betrayal takes on added significance, and become a special crisis. Judas was not only an intimate associate and disciple of Jesus, but had been "numbered" among the apostles. As Luke describes Judas' betrayal, he writes that "Satan entered into Judas, the one called Iscariot, who was of the *number of the twelve* (Luke 22:3). Only Luke includes this additional reference to number. Again, upon the act of betrayal, Luke describes Judas as *one of the twelve* (Luke 22:47). Matthew seems not to recognize any numerical crisis. His work comes to its grand climax when Jesus gives his great commission to the eleven (Matt 28:16). For Luke, a foundation of eleven would not stand.

Luke, therefore, takes great pain to restore the number twelve. As the early church gathered, it was idyllic in almost every way. The presence of Mary and Jesus' brothers witnessed to the continuity between Jesus' ministry and the founding of his church. Yet, something was missing. Luke writes, "It happened in those days that Peter stood rose in the midst of his brothers and spoke," adding parenthetically, "There was a crowd of about 120 names." This approximation of 120 is no accident. As Luke Timothy Johnson writes, "The number 120 has significance because of the twelve apostles, and, through them, the twelve tribes of the restored Israel."¹⁰ The congregation of 120 begs for the apostleship of the 12. Peter presents the problem in this way, "He [Judas] was *numbered* among us, and had a share of our ministry" (Acts 1:17). With the addition of Matthias by the casting of lots, the form is properly set, and the church's foundation can be then be poured.¹¹

¹⁰ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 34.

¹¹ That this number twelve remains significant we find, incidentally much later, in Paul's defense before Agrippa. There Paul says, "It is now because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night" (Acts 26:6-7). The true Israel, consisting of twelve tribes, hopes for the Messiah.

IV. Peter, the Church's Spokesman and Leader

For Luke, the twelve apostles play a crucial role in the foundation of the church. Peter, however, is clearly the first among equals. He is, as Martin Hengel calls him, the "Apostolic Foundational Figure of the Church."¹² Matthew establishes this fact after Peter's great confession, where Christ says, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." (Matt 16:18) Strikingly, though, Luke omits this dominical blessing.¹³ Does this mean, perhaps, that Luke wishes to downplay the significance of Peter? That case would be hard to make, at least when one considers the time and attention which Luke lavishes on the primary apostle.¹⁴

Peter's position in the early church is foretold by Jesus, who on the night of his betrayal said, "But I have prayed for you Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Indeed, the story of Acts begins as answer to Jesus' prayer, as Peter emerges as the unquestioned leader and spokesmen for the early church. Remarkably, of the twelve apostles listed in Acts, only Peter has any speaking part whatsoever. When it was time to choose the twelfth apostle, Peter takes the lead (Acts 1:15). On the day of Pentecost, all of the apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit, but it is Peter who offers up the first sermon (Acts 2:14-39). It is Peter who heals the crippled beggar (3:1-10), Peter who speaks at Solomon's Colonnade (3:11-26), Peter who speaks before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22). Though Luke does not record the giving of the keys, Peter clearly exercises this office in a most dramatic way in his dealing with Annanias and Sapphira. (Acts 5:1-10). For all of his bravado in the gospel, the early-church Peter boldly takes the lead when threatened, speaking on the apostles' behalf, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

So, was the church built on Peter or his confession? Reading Luke, the question makes little sense. To say that Peter was the rock upon whom the church was built might be analogous to saying that George Washington was the Father of our nation. It is simply a statement of historical fact. He is Peter, and upon Peter—his words, actions, miracles, boldness, presence—Christ built his church.

¹² Martin Hengel, *Saint Peter: The Underestimated Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 28.

¹³ He alludes to Matthew 16 in his list of the apostles, where Luke refers to the first apostle as "Simon, whom he named Peter" (Luke 6:14).

¹⁴ In Luke 9:50, John has a speaking part, and is credited with trying to stop others from driving out demons. For this our Lord rebukes him.

V. Peter as the Touchstone for Apostolic Identity: Peter and John

As Luke stresses the continuity of the church through time, so also does he emphasize the essential unity of the church. Again and again in Acts, we are told that the church acted in concert, and that they were of "one accord" (1:14; 2:1; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12). One of the ways that Luke illustrates this unity is through Peter, who serves not only as a foundational figure, but also as a kind of touchstone for apostolic identity. Luke seems to indicate that to be in fellowship with Peter is to be in fellowship with the church. (This point is significant, especially in an age where people talk not about Christianity, but of Christianities.) This we see in the relationship between Peter and John.

Now, from what we can gather elsewhere, the relationship between Peter and John was bumpy. John, no shrinking violet, well earned his nickname as a son of thunder. A fireball, John calls for judgment upon the Samaritans who reject Jesus (Luke 9:54). Hardly the ecumenist, John actively aims to try to stop others who cast out demons in Christ's name (Mark 9:38-40). Ever ambitious, he tried to finagle a special seat of honor and power in Christ's kingdom (Matt 20:21; Mark 10:37), a maneuver which caused the other disciples to become indignant (Mark 10:41). Tellingly, Luke would have us know that at the most solemn time of our Lord's self-sacrificial meal, there arose a dispute as to who was the greatest of the disciples (Luke 22:24). Most likely, that dispute was between Peter and John.

This same rivalry may also be seen in the Gospel of John, where Peter's role as the first apostle is arguably taken by the Beloved Disciple, who rests in the bosom of the Lord at the Supper, alone among the disciples stands at the foot of the cross, is the first to reach the empty tomb, and the first to believe.¹⁵ This tension between Peter and John seems to have played out in the early church as well. As David Dungan notes, "There is a long-standing riddle in the field of Gospel studies: Why did it take so long for the Gospel of John to become accepted and used in Rome as well as Asia Minor, the place where most scholars agree that it was written?"¹⁶ Looking at the evidence of the Gospel of John, as well as the writings of Papias, David Dungan concludes, "We have discovered a deep and pervasive

¹⁵ This competition is seen also in the resurrection where John tells us that the other disciple, racing with Peter, reached the tomb "first." Again, the other disciple is said to have reached the tomb "first," and then is credited with faith: "He saw and believed." Again, the Beloved Disciple makes a strange appearance at the end of the gospel, where his relationship with Peter appears strained (John 21:20-24).

¹⁶ David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 23.

pattern of antagonism between John and Peter (more precisely, John toward Peter), their respective followers, and the Gospels later given in their names."¹⁷

Whatever one might think of Dungan's conclusion, Luke takes great pains to show that John stands in good relationship primarily and specifically to Peter. Peter and John appear together regularly and often. In the Book of Acts, Peter appears without John, but John never appears without Peter. Indeed, Peter's name always comes first, as he repeatedly takes the lead, while John stands supportively beside him. When Peter and John meet a crippled beggar by the temple gate, it is Peter who takes the lead, saying, "Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, I give to you" (Acts 3:6). Then, at Solomon's Colonnade, John is present, but it is Peter who offers up a little homily on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets (Acts 3:11-26). Again, when Peter and John were brought before the high priest for questioning, we are told specifically that Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, gave their defense (Acts 4: 8-17). This is a clearly the dynamic duo of Jerusalem, with Peter starring as the Caped Crusader and John as his trusty but silent sidekick.

This pattern of tying together Peter and John is found also in Luke's gospel. In Matthew and Mark, the leading disciples are always Peter, James, and John. Luke, however, changes the order in a number of key places. For instance, at the raising of Jairus' daughter, "Peter, James, and John" becomes, "Peter, John, and James" (Luke 8:51). Likewise, the apostolic triumvirate upon Luke's Mount of Transfiguration is again "Peter, John, and James" (Luke 9:28). For Luke, this reordering serves the two-fold purpose of recognizing John's prominence in the early church, while at the same time tying him closing to Peter.

Luke, in fact, sets the foundation of Peter and John's fellowship in his story of their call (Luke 5:1-11). John's gospel would have us know that Peter was brought to Jesus via his brother Andrew. Luke's spotlight, however, shines squarely on Peter who is specifically and singularly told by Christ to cast his net into the waters, and who is given the dominical promise: "Don't be afraid; from now on you [singular] will be catching people" (Luke 5:10). Though James and John are present, Jesus specifically issues his apostolic call and command to Peter.¹⁸ What is interesting is the way that James and John are then incorporated into the story. For Luke, their

¹⁷ Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem*, 25.

¹⁸ This is reminiscent of the Lord's command specifically to Peter to feed his lambs in John 21.

status is clearly established in relationship to Peter. That is to say, Luke tells us that James and John are “partners” (μετόχοις) with Peter (Luke 5:7). He then adds that they were “companions” (κοινωνοί) to Simon (Luke 5:10). Now, both of these words can be translated in a generic sense, indicating their business relationship. However, as is so often the case, Luke uses the story for a greater purpose, setting the stage for what is to come.

The words Luke chooses are terms of fellowship. Yes, James and John are partners (μετόχοι) in a business sense, but their partnership will now run deeper. The term μετόχος is used, for instance in 1 Corinthians 10:17, where Paul writes, “For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers [μετόχοι] of that one bread.” Luke then calls James and John κοινωνοί, or companions with Peter. But it is worth noting that this term is closely related to terms used for Eucharistic fellowship. Paul speaks about the κοινωνία of the Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:16. Luke also speaks of the New Testament church as a fellowship. The early Christians were said to devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the κοινωνία or fellowship (Acts 2:42). This resulted in the believers having all things in common (κοινὰ) (Acts 2:44). Again, in Acts 4:32, we are told that the believers held all things in common (κοινά).

So it is, in this story, Peter is called to cast out his net, and to catch men alive. This is the apostolic commission. The important thing for Luke is that James and John, though in another boat, are in fact μέτοχοι, or partakers in the ministry of Peter, and that they are in fact κοινωνοί with Peter, or in fellowship with him.¹⁹ James and John may in fact be working from a separate boat, but nevertheless share the mission given to Peter.

The end of the gospel provides one more indication that our Lord intends John to serve alongside and in fellowship with Peter. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus sent his disciples to prepare the Passover (Matt 26:19). According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus sent two of his disciples to prepare the Passover (Mark 14:13). We know the names of the two disciples only from Luke, who writes, “Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” (Luke 22:8) With these instruction, the triumvirate is boiled down to two, with Peter in the lead, and John in fellowship. Any disputes between them would have to be settled, for they had been called by Christ to work together.

¹⁹ In fact, this same metaphor of fishing fellowship may be found in John’s gospel, where Peter decides to go fishing, and the other apostles join him, saying, “We will go with you” (John 21:3). What follows is a story in which fishing becomes a metaphor for their renewed ministry together.

VI. Peter as the Touchstone for Apostolic Identity: Peter and Paul

While Luke went to some length to show the unity of Peter and John, perhaps his greatest accomplishment is in demonstrating that Paul, though not a companion to the earthly Jesus, was in fact a true apostle. If Luke had not done this, there is a distinct possibility that we would have had two entirely different churches, one Jewish and one Gentile. One way Luke approaches the problem is through the telling of Paul's conversion/commissioning, which he does three times. Even more, Luke stresses the continuity of Paul's ministry with that of the original apostles, and especially Peter

In Luke's infancy narrative step parallelism is employed to establish the connection between John the Baptist and Jesus and between Israel and the church. Luke's theology is one of continuity. This same theology of continuity can be found in Acts. This time, Luke shows that Paul continues and extends the work of Peter. Consider the parallels: Peter heals a crippled man (3:1-10); as does Paul (14:8-11); even as Peter raised Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43); so also Paul raised Eutychus (20:7-12); Peter was threatened (Acts 8:9-13); as was Paul (Acts 19:13-19); Peter was imprisoned and miraculously freed (Acts 12:6-17); as was Paul (Acts 16:25-37); Peter encountered a sorcerer, as did Paul (8:8; 3:16). In fact, both apostles had a numinous quality, such that even Peter's shadow had healing power (Acts 5:12-16), as did handkerchiefs and aprons touched by Paul (Acts 19:11). Though you might not guess it from the Pauline epistles, Paul resembles no one more than Peter.²⁰

Perhaps even more importantly, Peter himself is shown by Luke to be the model for Paul's specifically Gentile ministry. Just as Paul has a vision in which he is made the Lord's chosen instrument to carry the gospel to the Gentiles (9:15), Peter has one of his own, in which the Lord presents Peter with a picnic blanket full of unclean animals and commands him, "Rise, Peter. Kill and eat" (Acts 10:13). The vision results in Peter coming to understand the universal scope of Christ's mission: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34). Just as Paul would have to defend his circumcision-free ministry, Peter then defended himself against the charge of eating with the uncircumcised (Acts 11:1-18). Peter then becomes Paul's primary advocate at the Council of Jerusalem and even declares himself an apostle to the Gentiles: "Brothers, you know that

²⁰ For more on Luke's use of parallels, see Peter J. Scaer, *The Lukan Passion and the Praiseworthy Death* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 8-9.

some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe" (Acts 15:7). Peter, though thought by some to be at odds with Paul, is his greatest advocate. So Peter not only is the touchstone for church fellowship within the twelve, but also becomes the touchstone for the Gentile fellowship, as Paul himself walks in the shoes of the fisherman.

VII. Expanding the Circle: The Place of the Seven and the Seventy

As we have seen, Luke's gospel places a special emphasis on the number twelve. However, Israel was only the church's starting place, and as the mission expanded, so also did the ministry. As such, a new number was needed.

The story of the establishment of the diaconate is telling. Evidently, Hellenized Jews were complaining that their widows were being neglected in the distribution of food. The twelve gathered and responded, saying, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables" (Acts 6:2). In response to the problem, they chose seven men whom they appointed by prayer and the apostolic laying on of hands.

The story of the diaconate is odd on at least a couple of levels. First, the numbers make little sense, at least from an organizational standpoint. The diaconate, as first established, makes for an upside-down pyramid with twelve bosses and seven underlings. Second, though the problem begins with Gentile widows, as the narrative continues, the work of the deacons is not primarily that of food distribution. Instead, Stephen and Philip appear immediately as ministers of the gospel and preachers of the word. Were the deacons then practical helpers or gospel ministers? Luke Timothy Johnson helpfully writes, "The discrepancy disappears when we remember Luke's consistent habit of using authority over material possessions as a symbol for spiritual authority."²¹ That is to say, the ones who distributed the physical bread also distributed the spiritual bread. In the summaries of Acts 2 and 4, the disciples gather together for the breaking of bread and prayers. From this eucharistic activity comes also the sharing of material goods and results in the believers having "all things in common." *κοινωνία* leads to having all things *κοινά*.

Luke's telling of the story of the diaconate is then, at its heart, the intentional establishment of an apostolic ministry to the Gentiles. Just as Luke formally named the twelve apostles, most of whom we never hear from again, so also he offers a formal listing of the seven deacons, giving

²¹ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 111.

us their names: Stephen, Philip, Procurus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas from Antioch (Acts 6:5). Of these seven, only two will play a prominent role in the story. The names are important nevertheless, for seven is a foundational number. Indeed, the apostles, in choosing deacons, seem to follow a pattern set by the Lord in their own commissioning. According to Luke 6, Jesus prayed, and named twelve whom he had chosen (ἐκλεξάμενος) from those he had called. So also, the apostles chose (ἐξελέξαντο) the seven and prayed over them (Acts 6: 1-7).

With the naming of the seven, the ministry begins to expand outward. The sermon of deacon Stephen reminds us that God does not need a temple made with hands, thus setting the stage for a church beyond Israel. His sermon also introduces us to Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. What then follows is the story of how the word goes forth from Jerusalem, Judea, and into Samaria through the preaching of deacon Philip. The Choosing of the Seven serves as a symbolic transition. As the number twelve represents Israel, the number seven represents completion and fullness. Seven harkens back to the seven days of the creation. It also brings us back to the 70 Nations listed in Genesis 10-11. These 70 nations divided at the Tower of Babel will be united by the Spirit of Pentecost.²² The deacons first chosen to minister to the earthly needs of the Hellenistic women, will now begin to minister to the spiritual needs of the nations.

This symbolism, linking food and spiritual authority, is captured already in Matthew and Mark, in their stories of the feedings of the 5000 and 4000. In the feeding of the 5000, the apostles are commanded to feed the crowds, after which twelve baskets of food remain. This datum is taken by most to be a symbol of the church as the new Israel.²³ In the feeding of the 4000, which takes place on the Gentile border, there are seven large baskets of leftover κλασμάτων, the churchly term for the bread leftover from the Lord's Supper (Matt 15:37; Mark 8:8). As Jerome Kodell says of the seven baskets, "Seven is a number symbolic of universalism."²⁴ The seven baskets appear to represent then the expansion and completion of Christ's offering of his bread not simply to the children of Israel, but to the

²² This ideal of seven as fullness can also be seen elsewhere, as in our Lord's commanding Peter to forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven. This can also be seen in the Book of Revelation with its seven churches.

²³ See Jeffrey Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2-20:34* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 752.

²⁴ Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988), 87.

entire world.²⁵ The fact that Luke does not include the feeding of the 4000 makes sense. He has the entire Book of Acts to demonstrate how it is that the Gentiles will come into fellowship and join in the breaking of bread and prayers.

VIII. The Seventy

While the Gospel of Luke does not include the feeding of the 4000 with its seven leftover baskets, he demonstrates the expansion of the ministry in another dramatic way, also having to do with the number seven. Luke writes, "After these things, the Lord appointed 70 [72] others and he sent them two by two before him into every city and place where he himself intended to go" (Luke 10:1).²⁶

What is striking about the verse is its official character. First, the subject of the sentence is not "Jesus," but "Lord" (κύριος) (Luke 10:1). What follows is a solemn command from the Lord himself. Secondly, we are told that the Lord appointed the 70. This is not an informal group sent out to canvass the neighborhood. The 70 are specifically appointed and receive a special status. Thirdly, Luke tells us that the Lord ἀπέστειλεν them. This, of course, is the apostolic word, and the same term Luke employs in telling the story of the sending out of the twelve (9:2). Strikingly, then Luke includes the same command and prayer that appears before the sending out of the twelve in Matthew 9: "Pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers into his field." Luke then repeats for emphasis the apostolic sending of the 70, this time quoting Jesus, "Behold I send (ἀποστέλλω) you as lambs in the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). What we have then is a near duplication of the sending out of the Twelve, only this time with 70.

What makes this even more interesting is that the sending out of the 70 comes directly after a story of three would-be followers. What becomes clear is that Jesus chose not only the twelve, but was in fact running a seminary and that throughout his ministry he continued to recruit. When Jesus tells disciples about the hardships of discipleship—the imperative to let the dead bury their dead, and the importance of putting one's hands to

²⁵ See Donald Hagner, *Matthew* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 451–452. This giving of the children's bread to the world is anticipated in the story of the Canaanite woman, found again in Matthew and Mark, but not Luke.

²⁶ How many disciples were sent out? The manuscript evidence is divided fairly evenly between 70 and 72. Yet, it seems more probable to this writer that 70 is the better solution, for immediately afterwards we are told that the Lord sent out the disciples two by two, and it is easy to see how the mistake could be made.

the plow—he is not talking about the Christian life in general, but about becoming ministers of the gospel, and those who proclaim the kingdom of God (Luke 9:60). Indeed, questions about saying good-bye to one's parents and putting one's hands to the plow are, if anything, reminiscent of the call of Elisha (1 Kings 19:19–21). Again, this is part of Luke's theology of continuity. The Old Testament anticipates the New. John the Baptist anticipates Jesus. The Spirit of the infancy narrative anticipates Pentecost. The apostles anticipate the 70 and then later the seven. There may be some truth in the writing attributed to Hippolytus, who actually lists the names of the 70, calling them the "70 Apostles of Christ," and then designated where each of them served as a bishop (*On the Seventy Apostles*).

At the very least, we can say that Christ himself appointed others besides the apostles whom he sent to carry on the very same tasks as the apostles themselves. To the 70 and to the twelve, the Lord gave the command to preach. To the Matthean twelve, Jesus taught, "Whoever receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me" (Matt 10:40). Christ's instructions to the 70 are similar, with the addition of a negative phrase, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you, rejects me; but he who rejects me, rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16).²⁷

These 70, therefore, point forward to the naming of the Seven, even as they hearken back to the 70 nations of Genesis, and the 70 elders of Moses (Exodus 24:1–15).²⁸ And from this, we might add that the church, in naming elders (14:19–23; 15:2–4; 20:17–21) was doing nothing radical or new, but simply carrying on the practice already found in the Old Testament and hinted at by Jesus in the choosing of the 70.

²⁷ Note that in Luke, to "receive" a messenger is to hear what he has to say. This pattern of receiving and rejecting will be carried out then in Acts, where the rejection of Stephen, for instance, becomes a retelling of the rejection of Christ, and the acceptance of Philip's message becomes salvation for the Ethiopian Eunuch and then the Samaritans.

²⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson notes an allusion to Numbers 12:28–29 in Luke 9:49. See *Luke* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 167. In Numbers, elders are prophesying, and Joshua is rebuked by Moses for trying to prevent this. In Luke, John is rebuked by Jesus for trying to stop others from driving out demons. This allusion argues for Luke's use of the 70 disciples as following in the historic line of the 70 elders of Moses.

IX. A Word about Church Structure: Apostles, Deacons, Bishops, and Elders

Peter and the twelve apostles play a role that is irreplaceable and in some ways unrepeatable. They serve as the foundation of the church, especially in Jerusalem. Things do, however, change. Peter's leadership at Jerusalem is for a time, but that time passes. After a miraculous escape from prison, he seems to pass on the baton to James, the brother of Jesus.²⁹ So also, the significance of the apostles fades a bit as the deacons begin to preach in Samaria. With the calling of Paul, things change still further, as another apostle is added into the mix, without exactly being added to the number of the twelve.

As Luke's story progresses, church offices appear, at least in an embryonic state. In chapter six we learn about how the apostles laid their hands upon deacons, or at least those who will serve diaconally (Acts 6). Later, we will hear about the appointment of elders, accompanied by the laying on of hands (Acts 14:23). Paul will also refer to the leaders of the Ephesian church, specifically as ἐπισκόπους, namely "overseers" or "bishops" (Acts 20:28).

Yet, with all the changes, the growth is organic and anticipated by what has gone before. If the beginning of a church hierarchy appears strange, in another way, it is nothing new at all. The creation of a new order within the ministry might better be seen as an extension of the duties already being carried out by Christ and the apostles.

Take for instance Peter's exhortation at the choosing of Matthias. As Peter recalls Judas, he says of him that he "was numbered among us and had a share of our ministry [διακονίας]" (1:17). He then quotes Psalm 109, saying, "Let another take up the oversight (ἐπισκοπήν) (Acts 1:20). Finally, Matthias was added to the eleven apostles (ἀποστόλων). The apostles, as we see, exercise ministry, oversight, and apostleship all at once. This is not to say that there was not further development in these divisions of duties as the church grew, but it is to say that the essential functions of the office tended to overlap. Before there were bishops, per se, the apostles were already acting in the matter of oversight. Before there were deacons, per se, the apostles were already engaging in a ministry that consisted of service. The church order, from the point of view of the Pentecost, and Luke's writing, therefore, are not an intrusion into the church or an artificial hierarchical layering, but were an organic outgrowth of the apostolic office

²⁹ This move was anticipated by Luke when he tells us that Jesus' family was present at the church's founding.

itself. Thus, once more Luke emphasizes continuity. The Lord who chose the twelve, chose also the 70, who themselves hearken back to the 70 elders who served under Moses. Peter, in establishing the deaconate, was doing nothing other than what the Lord himself had done in furthering the ministry and its scope.

X. Jesus, Founder and Essence of the Church

We save the last, and probably most significant part for last, that is to say, the church comes from Christ. In fact, as we consider Luke-Acts as a two-part work, that also changes the way we think about Jesus. He is not simply Lord and Savior, but also the founder of the church. He stands as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Church and the pattern for the New.

The message of the apostles is the message of Christ. The miracles done by Peter and Paul are done first by Christ. As Paul appointed overseers, Christ appears first as a shepherd. As the apostles appointed deacons, Christ is the one who serves first. As Christ appointed apostles, he himself was sent by the Father (10:16). To receive the twelve, and the 70, and the seven, is to receive Christ, and to reject them is to reject him.

The church, thus, begins with Christ, whose ministry fulfills Old Testament expectations. He is like the Old Testament prophets, yet greater. From him come both the apostles and the ministry. And, if the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Christ, then Christ is himself the true Israel. And, even as he says to Paul on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me," he shows himself to be speaking for the church as if it were his very own body.