

# MATHETAI (AUTOU) AND LUKE'S CONCERN FOR THE SOUND OF HIS GOSPEL

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The purpose of this note is to affirm the importance of "sound" to the study of Luke. As is common knowledge, the purely quantitative rhythm of Hellenistic Greek gradually declined after the first century, and was replaced by the Byzantine system of stress and meter similar to our own language rhythm.<sup>1</sup> Because of this change, we have no natural understanding of Hellenistic Greek as it actually sounded, and can only form a mental notion of its recitation. But in practical terms, such a rational reconstruction is only useful in the case of poetic recitation, where the same metric units are regularly repeated<sup>2</sup> – something, by the way, looked upon unfavourably for prose writing by Aristotle.<sup>3</sup>

There are at least two reasons that it is unfortunate that we do not have better insight into the sound of the Gospels. First, the best evidence indicates that the Gospels were not intended for silent reading. If silent reading existed at all, it was not widely practiced, and since relatively few people knew how to read, one perhaps should assume some type of oral, and maybe cultic, presentation for the narratives.<sup>4</sup> And second, Greco-

1. Paul Mass, *Greek Metre*, (trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones) (Clarendon Press; Oxford 1962), 1-5.

2. Perhaps it would be helpful, however, to search for a repeating rhythmic nucleus in the prose of the Gospels as such a nucleus forms the basic pattern of the aeolic verse, which was common in the chorus of Greek drama. Cf. D. S. Raven, *Greek Metre* (Faber and Faber; London 1968), 71-85.

3. *Rhetoric*, III.8.

4. The orality of the Gospels is a subject of much current debate. A few of the significant works on the subject are: T. Boomershine, *Mark, the Storyteller* (Ph.D. dissertation; Union Theological Seminary 1974); Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Fortress; Philadelphia 1983); William O. Walker, Jr., ed. *The Relationships Among the Gospels* (Trinity University Press; San Antonio 1978) 33-192. While most scholars seem to favour some type of cultic setting for the reading of the Gospels [cf. Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns*,

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Roman rhetoric gave much more attention to considerations of proper harmony and rhythm in prose than does education in our age.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it would seem that the evangelists would have been very much concerned with the sound of the Gospels.

Some evidence of this likely concern for proper sound seems to be present in Luke's use of *mathetai*. Forms of *hoi mathetai autou* appear sixteen times in the narration of Luke.<sup>6</sup> A favoured expression is *eipen de pros tous mathetai autou*, which is scanned --u/--u/--/-.<sup>7</sup> One notices, however, that this particularly favoured expression with its well defined meter is entirely lacking from Mark and Matthew.

But what needs to be explained are the instances in the narration of Luke where *hoi mathetai* is not qualified by the personal pronoun. The narrator's tendency is to use the *autou*.<sup>8</sup> Why, then, does he on occasion leave it out?

In one instance, the narrator does not use *autou* following *mathetai* because it would have been redundant, the two disciples involved being immediately described by name (Lk 9,54). Similarly, there are several instances in which the narrator does not attach the personal pronoun, perhaps because he already uses a form of *autos* near *mathetai* (Lk 9,18; 18,15; 22,39; 22,45).<sup>9</sup>

It is also the sound of the phrasing which seems to best explain the unaccompanied appearance of *ton matheton* in Lk 19,29. 37. In Lk 19,29, *kai egeneto hos engisen eis Bethphage kai Bethanian pros to oros to kaloumenon Elaion, apesteilen duo ton matheton legon*, the sound of an added *autou* would have disrupted the repeating "on" of *ton*

*Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press; Missoula 1974) 111; Philip Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the Marcan Gospel*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Text* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge 1952); Aileen Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship: A Study of the Relation of St. John's Gospel to the Ancient Jewish Lectionary System* (The Clarendon Press; Oxford 1960); M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew, The Speaker's Lectures in Biblical Studies 1969-71* (SPCK; London 1974)], there are many instances of private reading in early Christian History (e.g., Augustine's account of Victorinus, *Confessions*, VIII.2).

5. Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (Greenwood Press; Westport, Connecticut 1977) 95.

6. Cf. Lk 5,30; 6,1. 13. 17. 20; 7,11. 18;8,9. 22; 9,14, 43; 11,1; 12,1. 22; 17,1. 20,35.

7. Cf. 9,14; 12,22; 17,1.

8. *hoi mathetai autou* appears approximately thirty times in Matthew, and thirty two times in Mark. Mark, especially seems very hesitant to use the unaccompanied *mathetai*.

9. Lk 9,18.... *auto hoi mathetai (autou), kai eperotesen autous*....; Lk 18,15.... *de auto kai ta brephe hina auton haptetai. Idontes de hoi mathetai (autou) epetimon autois; Lk 22,39.... de auto kai hoi mathetai (autou); Lk 22,45.... pros tous mathetas (autou) heuren koimomenous autous*....

*matheton legon*. Furthermore, it would have destroyed the sentence's balanced assonance of *kaloumenon* with *duo ton*, *Elaion* with *matheton* and *apesteilen* with *legon*, where the long syllables tend to emphasize the final "n" sound of the words.<sup>10</sup> In Lk 19,37, *Engizontos de autou ede pros te katabasei tou Orous ton Elaion erxanto hapan to plethos ton matheton chairontes ainein ton theon phone megale peri pason hon eidon dunameon, legontes* the sound of *autou* would have disrupted the ending rhyme of *matheton chairontes* with *dunameon legontes*.<sup>11</sup> One notices also that this section in Luke dealing with Jesus' stay on the Mount of Olives is held together as much by the ending "n" sounds of verses 29 and 37, as it is by a unified content. In this respect, Luke has redacted Mk 11,1f., changing *apostellei* to *apesteilen*, removing the dissonant *autou*, and changing *kai legei autois* to *legon*. He has completely rewritten Mk 11,9, repeating the *Elaion* and the *ton matheton* of Lk 19,29/Mk 11,1, and adding the phrase *peri pason hon eidon dunameon*. Creed, among others, has puzzled over the out-of-place content of this phrase which nevertheless seems clearly to have been introduced by the author's own hand.<sup>12</sup> But in this case, the sound of the passage seems to be significant.

Of greater metrical interest is the non-employment of *autou* after *tois mathetais* in Lk 9,16 and *tous mathetas* in Lk 10,23 and 16,1. In the first instance, it is possible to argue that *autou* is not present in Luke because it was not present in the source, Mk 6,41. One notes, however, that there is a nicely balanced rhythm to the phrasing in Luke which is not taken over from the source.<sup>13</sup> *Kai edidou tois mathetais paratheimai to ochlo* is formed of a chiasmic pattern of long and short syllables, followed by four long syllables:

-uu--u--uu/--/--.

At any rate, it is quite clear that the introduction of *autou* would have disrupted the rhythm of the phrase.

Perhaps it is more clear, however, that metrical considerations were behind the unaccompanied *mathetas* in Lk 10,23 and Lk 16,1, since these sections of the narration are not paralleled by sources. The pattern

10. The lingering "on" of the narrator's prose contrasts nicely with the staccato "hupagate.... heuresete.... agagate" of Jesus' speech (Lk 19,30).

11. The D reading: *peri panton hon eidon ginomenon*, improves the assonance yet further by paralleling *panton* with *hopanto*.

12. J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (St. Martin's Press; New York 1957) 241.

13. Mk 6,41.... *kai kateklasen tous artous kai edidou tois mathetais (autou)*, p<sup>45</sup>, A, D<sup>8r</sup>, K, W, f<sup>1</sup>, f<sup>13</sup>, 28, 565, 700, 1009, 1010, 1071, 1079, 1195, 1216, 1230, 1242, 1253, 1344, 1356, 1546, 1646, 2148, 2174.

of Lk 10,23: *kai strapheis pros tous mathetas kat idian eipen* is of an epitrite dimeter with an attached three short, four long:

-u--/-u--/uuu--.

The pattern of Lk 16,1: *Elegen de kai pros tous mathetas* is a pyrrhic foot followed by the same epitrite dimeter of Lk 10,23:

uu/-u--/-u--.

In either case, the introduction of *autou* would have disrupted the rhythm of the phrasing — as would have the substitution of *eipen* for *elegen*, of *kai* for *de*, or the changing of the word order.<sup>14</sup>

We must always be careful not to read too much into the hidden motives of the authors of the Gospels. Nevertheless, the importance of sound to recited narratives has been greatly overlooked in the study of the Gospels,<sup>15</sup> and might well explain many of the mystifying literary elements in Luke, such as the superfluous *ho pater autou* after *Zacharias* (Lk 1,67) and *ten metera autou* after *Marian* (Lk 2,34);<sup>16</sup> Luke's irregular use of *Hierosoluma* and *Ierousalem*;<sup>17</sup> many instances of redaction of *kai* and *de*; etc. A comprehensive study of the meter, rhyme, assonance, dissonance, alliteration, etc. of the Gospel would be greatly beneficial to Lukan studies. It seems to me that the author's use of the unaccompanied *mathetai* in the narration of the Gospel shows his concern with proper sound in the narrative, and suggests some justification for further study.

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14. Since Jesus' speech begins with *anthropos*, the inclusion of *autou* would have also resulted in a rather extended string of long sounds.

15. Besides elements of sound, there are many other essential techniques of composition for oral narratives that are inappropriate for a document which is to be read in silence [e.g., frequent repetition (cf. Boomershine, *Mark, the Storyteller*, 322)].

16. The formulas have most often been taken as signs that Zacharias' and Simeon's hymns were already part of the Christian tradition when appropriated by Luke. Cf. Heinz Schurmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, vol. 1 (Herder; Freiburg 1969) 81.

17. Luke prefers *Ierousalem*. *Hierosoluma* is used four times however, and three of these seem to be the work of the redactor (Lk 2,22; 13,22; 23,7). Cf. Joachim Jeremias, "IEROUSALEM/HIEROUSOLUMA," *ZNW* 65 (1974) 276.