

MEALS AS TYPE-SCENES IN THE THIRD GOSPEL

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Luke includes a reference to food in many chapters of the Third Gospel. It is obvious that meals play an important part in the Lukan presentation of the story of Jesus. The meals of Jesus have profound theological significance, and this significance mounts as each scene is carefully unfolded by the author. This paper is directed towards the establishment of a fixed pattern or type-scene which will serve to identify those scenes that can technically be called meal-scenes.

The Type-Scene Genre

The rationale for paying close attention to repeated type-scene patterns, or micro-structure, is that they help the reader to recognise what is similar and what is dissimilar, what is expected and what is unexpected. Similarity aids one in knowing what turns the story is going to take so that one can be prepared for them ahead of time. The dissimilarities, or breaches in the pattern stand out starkly as points of significance in their deviation from the norm. The paradigm of genre of a type scene, then, consists of fixed situations recounted in conjunction with a set of ordered motifs.¹ These two ideas (fixed situations and a set of ordered motifs) may be further

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1. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books; New York 1981) 50

distilled to mean story and theme. Hence, where story and theme are repeated with close approximation to other scenes, this can be designated as a type-scene.

The very existence of type-scenes suggests repetition of various stock elements and patterns. Repetition, or redundancy, has several key functions to fulfil in a narrative. It facilitates recognition. Susan Wittig notes that repetition promotes the "establishment of psychological anticipation, resulting in a greater efficiency (increased speed and accuracy) of recognition."² Again, repetition creates expectations that similar scenes will be recounted in similar ways. The similarities between episodes are important in their own right. They engage the implied reader's memory and at times emphasized an aspect of characterisation or an element of the plot. Redundancy initiates anticipation in the mind of the reader who is, as it were, looking for familiar literary landmarks. In addition, repetition highlights variation through subverted expectations. Variation contributes to the macro-structure movement of the narrative; the story introduces new elements, and the reader is required to integrate the new elements into the previous patterns.³ With the variation in patterns the author creates deeper meanings so that form interprets and defines content. Repetition of individual scenes in a type-scene complex operates covertly to convey nuances and subtleties, not conveyable through single, isolated scenes.

Furthermore, type-scenes are not used frivolously. They are used with great care because of the import that accumulates around what is repeated and redundant. Robert Alter states, "since biblical narrative characteristically catches its protagonist only at the critical and revealing points in their lives, the biblical type-scene occurs not in the rituals of daily existence but at crucial junctures in the lives of the heroes."⁴ The meal-scenes that Luke records are purposely set at crucial junctures in the narrative.

The defining characteristics of the meals in the Gospel of Luke that constitute them as type-scenes can best be shown by analysing a representative example of an incontestable meal-scene, the meal of Jesus with Simon the Pharisee found in Luke 7, 36-50. The story-line of a meal-scene contains six main ingredients. First, there is the invitation to dinner, such as Simon's invitation in 7, 36. Second, the meal-

2. Susan Wittig, "Formulaic Style and the Problem of Redundancy," *Centrum* 1 (1973) 128.

3. Ibid.

4. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 51

scene is always cast with specific individuals, who are identified either by name, position, or description, e.g., Simon the Pharisee, or the woman of the city who is a sinner. Third, the meal takes place in a house, as it does in Simon's house. Fourth, Jesus does something that initiates a conflict in such a way that he is seen as the catalyst of the disturbance. In the case of Simon's example, Jesus is criticized for allowing the woman to touch him. Fifth, this conflict leads to teaching on the part of Jesus directed at his opponents, as when Jesus addresses the parable of the debtors to Simon. Sixth, the meal type-scene always includes the reaction of the antagonists to what Jesus has said. The dinner guests say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (7, 49). These six elements constitute the meal type-scene, and a convincing majority of these elements must be present.

The second trait of a type-scene is that it has a set motif or theme. In the meal with Simon this theme is christological in orientation. Who is Jesus? It is on the lips of Simon as he reasons to himself that Jesus could not be a prophet. It is on the guests' minds as they question Jesus' authority to forgive sins. The recurring theme of all the meal-scenes is the revelation of who Jesus is, his identity being uniquely discovered in the context of table-fellowship. An ancillary phenomenon is that as the essence of Jesus is illuminated, so also the true nature of his table-companions is brought to light.

In the light of the foregoing criteria for determining what meals are to be included as type-scenes, seven meals have been selected as type-scenes. They are the meals with Levi (5, 27-39), Simon the Pharisee (7, 36-50), another Pharisee (11, 37-52), and the ruler of the Pharisees (14, 1-24). These four meals comprise the first cycle of meal-scenes which will be referred to as the Pre-Jerusalem meals. The second cycle of meals include those meals eaten only with disciples; they are the Last Supper (22, 14-38), the meal with the disciples on the way to Emmaus (24, 13-33) and the meal with disciples in Jerusalem (24, 33-53). These meals will be referred to as the Jerusalem-Emmaus meals.⁵

5. The feeding of the five thousand (Lk 9,10-17) is excluded from the first cycle of meals because the table-companions are not specific characters, named or described, but rather the cast of thousands. Jesus is not the catalyst of a conflict and there is also an absence of his teaching. This feeding is a miracle story involving food, and not a meal-scene. Other cases are the stories of Jesus being received by Mary and Martha (10, 38-42) and Zacchaeus (19, 1-10), which meet some conditions of the type-scene pattern, since the characters are specifically named. But, beyond the vague hints that meals are in mind, they do not come to pass explicitly in the texts.

Pre-Jerusalem Meals

The first cycle of meal-scenes, the Pre-Jerusalem meals, appear at fairly regular intervals through the narrative encompassed within the Galilean ministry and the travel narrative. Two kinds of meals develop in the Pre-Jerusalem cycle, the meals that are eaten with people whom Jesus has called to discipleship, and the meals eaten with Pharisees.

The disciple meal with Levi is striking. One can identify several of the main strands. The meal-scene is preceded by a miraculous healing, the paralytic whose sins are forgiven (5, 18-26). The miracle is followed by a joyful praising of God by the people. As the scene begins Jesus is going somewhere (5, 27). Jesus takes the initiative in calling Levi, who is a tax-collector; the latter responds affirmatively to this call by giving a great banquet. Jesus' eating with tax-collectors gives rise to an objection. The objection in the story is addressed to the disciples by the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus responds with a brief defence, and concludes with an "I have come to..." saying describing his ministry. The meal-scene concludes with Jesus being on the road again, heading towards conflict and the grain fields.

The meal-scene of Levi establishes the start of the Pre-Jerusalem meals. The predominant motifs of Jesus as the one who accepts sinners by eating with them, and his mission to save, sound familiar chords in the Lukan symphony. Then come three meals with Pharisees who will not respond positively to Jesus as did the sinners. The progression that takes place between these scenes betrays the mounting intensity as Jesus approaches Jerusalem.

The second set of meals in the first cycle of type-scenes includes the meal at Simon's house (7, 36-50) and the Sabbath Day meal at the Pharisee's house (14, 1-24). These two meals are characterised by the presence of a foil who elicits a response from Jesus, which in turn generates conflict between him and the Pharisees.

The similarities between these two meal-scenes is extensive. Both are preceded by a teaching scene that makes reference to the Jewish rejection of Jesus. The introductory context for the meal with Simon the Pharisee is the rejection of John, who is accused of having a demon, and Jesus, who is accused of being a glutton (7, 21-35). Directly before Jesus eats with the Pharisee on the Sabbath, Jesus laments over Jerusalem's failure to embrace and accept him (13, 31-35). These stories begin with Jesus entering the house of the Pharisee and immediately, the foil is introduced. Each of these foils, the sinful woman and the man with dropsy, is seen as immoral

by the Pharisees. Howard Marshall cites other sources positing that the woman was likely a prostitute and the man suffered from a disease usually connected with immorality.⁶ Jesus' reaction to these two outcasts sparks off controversy. Allowing the woman to express her affection aroused Simon to conclude who Jesus could not be, i.e. a prophet. Healing the man of his disease on the Sabbath places Jesus and his ministry over against the Sabbath tradition. Jesus responds to the unspoken objections of his table-companions with a story in each case (7, 41-43 and 14, 5-6). Each foil receives grace from Jesus; the woman is forgiven and the man healed, but the Pharisees are closed to Jesus and his gift. The meal-scene is followed by mentioning Jesus' followers. In 8, 1-3 the twelve disciples and some women who supported his ministry are identified in a section summarising his travel and teaching. The same is true in 14, 25-35 with the exception that the followers become more abstract (great multitudes) and the teaching more concrete.

In turning to the variations, an increasing sense of hostility becomes evident. Initially, one notices that there is no specific mention made of an invitation in the second scene. Simon the Pharisee is replaced by the ruler of the Pharisees. Jesus remains unchanged, being omniscient in both stories. The foils are also very similar. The effect is to dramatise the change in the Pharisees, their identity and responses to Jesus. The most radical changes are visible in the plot. Whereas earlier Simon dialogued with Jesus, responded to his questions, now the Pharisees are withdrawn and silent. Their increasing scepticism comes before the introduction of the foil (14, 1-2), while in the earlier scene Simon takes offence at Jesus only after the introduction of the foil (7, 37-39). Likewise, while Jesus appears to be only reactive in the first story, he is blatantly confrontive in the second. The teaching section generated by this healing is much longer and sharper in tone. The discourse is radically different. The story of Simon closes with the blessing of peace upon the woman, while the sequel scene concludes with a parable of judgment (14, 24). The reaction of Simon's guests is one of questioning who Jesus is, but there is no narrated reaction to Jesus in the second meal. They are silent, having already made up their minds about him. The importance of the foregoing divergent points is that the number of Jesus' followers increases proportionally to the measure of hostility exhibited by the Pharisees. The few followers mentioned after the meal with Simon became great multitudes after the more vehement conflict of the second meal.

6. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (The Pater Noster Press; Exeter 1978) 308, 579. See also, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (Doubleday; Garden City 1981) 689.

The fulcrum of the Pre-Jerusalem meals is found in 11, 35-52, Jesus eating with unwashed hands. In this scene the Pharisee cross the Rubicon in their relationship to Jesus. If there was any kind of openness before, there is none after this meal; the hostility between Jesus and the Pharisees reaches its climax.

The characters act in isolation from each other. The Pharisees are completely silent, and the scribes only speak once, allowing Jesus to aim his vitrolitic vituperations at them. Jesus is scathing in his rebuke of these religious leaders. With the absence of foils, the conflict is head-on with nothing to deflect it. The plot follows the established sequence. There is an invitation to dinner which Jesus accepts. He stirs up conflict by eating without first washing his hands. The Pharisees react, setting the stage for Jesus' teaching which spawns a decisive reaction on their part.

Again the variations between this central scene and the scenes that frame it are in terms of intensification. The conflict rises not around what Jesus does, but what he does not do. The normal teaching scene following the inception of the conflict has become a pronouncement of judgment. The scene closes with the Pharisees' plan to trap him (11, 53-54). The discourse is stripped of dialogue. This scene portrays a verbal cleansing of the Temple, driving the money-changers out with a lash.⁷ The christological motif seems to be missing at first glance, but such is not the case. Though it does not appear on the lips of Jesus because of the close-mindedness of the Pharisees, the christological theme is maintained by the narrator's calling Jesus, Lord (11, 39). This is the only time it appears in the Pre-Jerusalem meal-scenes.

The preceding context is integrally related to what follows in the teaching section. Luke's literary similarities make it clear that Jesus's speech in 11, 29-34 is to inform the reader of the teaching section that follows the meal. In 11, 29.31.32.51.52, judgment is pronounced on "this generation". They will be judged because of their blindness, which surpasses even that of the Ninevites who recognised who Jonah was and the truth of his preaching. Still, God's people, Israel, are blind to God's messenger. The discourse in 11, 33-36 corresponds to that in 11, 42-44, which castigates the Pharisees for their hypocrisy.

Luke always maintains an equivalence between the hostility of Pharisees and Jesus' popularity among the ordinary people. The Pre-Jerusalem meals, therefore, contrast the rancour of the Pharisees with ranks of excited followers, the close-

7. See also, Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian* (Paulist Press; New York 1985) 49-51.

mindedness of the Pharisees with the openness of sinners, the blindness of the insiders with the sightedness of the outcasts.

Jerusalem-Emmaus Meals

The second cycle of meal-scenes in the Third Gospel is the Jerusalem-Emmaus Meals. The three meals include the Last Supper, the meal with the travellers on the road to Emmaus, and the farewell meal with the disciples back in Jerusalem.⁸ Thus, a geographical pattern is seen in that the first and last meal-scenes take place in Jerusalem, while the middle scene takes place in Emmaus.

These meal-scenes conform to the type-scene pattern established in the Pre-Jerusalem meals; the characters are specific (Jesus and the disciples); there is a christological conflict involving Jesus and the disciples; this leads to a teaching section which is concluded by the reaction of the disciples. So, the Jerusalem-Emmaus meals are closely related to the Pre-Jerusalem meals in form and content. The first cycle of meal-scenes anticipate the second cycle of meals, and the latter recalls the former. The implied reader reads each episode in the light of the other, in prospect and retrospect.⁹ Specifically for Luke, the Pre-Jerusalem meals set-up the implied reader with presupposed expectations for how the Jerusalem-Emmaus meals ought to proceed. The two kinds of meals, disciple meal-scene and Pharisee meal-scene, established in the first cycle of meals are present in the second cycle, but the Jerusalem-Emmaus meals move ironically and in unexpected directions.

As Jesus gathers in the upper room with his disciples, immediately one begins to conclude that the Last Supper will be reminiscent of the preceding disciple meal (Levi). Those who are called in the first cycle recognise who Jesus is and respond to his call obediently and joyfully. Even as the previous disciple meal, the Last Supper is preceded by a directive of Jesus who instructs Peter and John about making Passover preparations. They find everything just like he has said. At this juncture

8. On the inclusion of *ichthuos meros* as one of the meals of Jesus, see further, G.W.H. Lampe, "Luke", in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, (eds. Matthew Black and H.H., Rowley) (Van Nostrand Reinhold; Berkshire 1982) 842; I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Eerdmans; Grand Rapids 1980) 124-125; and cf. Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 1577.

9. Cf., R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981) 6.

in the story everything points to a disciple meal, in which Jesus is portrayed eating with those who know him and love him. This notion crumbles as the disciples are shown to be equally blind.

As with the first cycle, blindness to Jesus is demonstrated in conflict. Directly following on the Eucharistic words of Jesus comes the announcement that a betrayer is at the table with Jesus. The implied reader quickly flashes back to Judas' meeting with the religious leaders to find an opportune time to betray Jesus. The plot against Jesus that is initiated after the climatic meal in the Pharisee's house (11, 53-54) begins to be set in motion by the scheming of one of his own disciples. Yet the other disciples are as blind as his opponents. Jesus' teaching after the meal reiterates particular motifs from the earlier Pharisee meals. The dispute about greatness reflects Jesus' words to the Pharisees in 11, 43 and 14, 7-14. Jesus' remarks concerning the kingdom are inversely paralleled in the parable of the great banquet (14, 15-24). Jesus' discourse with Simon Peter echoes the scene at Simon the Pharisee's house where Jesus teaches about forgiveness and repentance (7, 41-43). Finally, Jesus warns the disciples about coming persecution which has been foreshadowed in 11, 47-51.

All of this works together to create an ironic scene in which the disciples are blind to Jesus. Their blindness is demonstrated in their misunderstanding of the significance of Jesus' final warning about persecution. Charles Talbert adds, "Failing to grasp the point, the disciples take Jesus' words literally and produce two swords. Frustrated, Jesus breaks off the conversation: 'Enough of this'."¹⁰ The tragic irony of this meal is brought to a head in the concluding context. In the first cycle the level of hostility is balanced by the number of followers recounted at the end of the scene. The context subsequent to the Last Supper in which the hostility is most intense finds Jesus praying alone, not teaching, with the eleven sleeping disciples near by. This tragic failure of the disciples grows through the trial and crucifixion scenes, and reaches its epitome in the disciple's disbelief of the women's witness to the empty tomb (24, 11).

The other Jerusalem-Emmaus meals are the twin meals with the Resurrected Lord. The meal with the Emmaus travellers (24, 13-33) and the one with the disciples in Jerusalem (24, 34-53) are tightly structured as single units and as a composite

10. Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (Crossroad; New York 1982) 211.

unit. As single units each shares a pattern. Each begins with some disciples travelling, away from Jerusalem (24, 13) and towards Jerusalem (24, 33). There follows a conversation about Christ and events related to him. Jesus, then, comes to them, introduced by a temporal clause, lining his coming with their discussion. Soon after Jesus draws near, the narrator tells the reader that they do not recognise him (24, 16. 37). Each scene presents a meal-scene during which Jesus teaches from Moses and the prophets (and the psalms, 24, 44).

As a composite, the variations between the meals clarify Luke's message. The discussion between the disciples changes from disappointment over the death of Jesus (24, 14-17) to excitement over the resurrection appearances (24, 34-35). It is also worth noting that the blindness of the disciples takes different forms. They simply do not recognise him, but in the second story they think he is a spirit. Even as in the climatic meal of the first cycle, so now in the farewell meal-scene Jesus asks a question, but no response is given (24, 38. 41). He dominates the scene while the disciples are silent.

A significant omission occurs at this point. In the Emmaus meal the disciples recognise who Jesus is when the blessing is spoken. Their christological blindness is transformed into sightedness. But in this final meal there is no clear statement that the disciples recognise Jesus. It is possible that the phraseology, "he opened their minds" (24, 45) serves this purpose. A more plausible solution is that it is intentionally omitted so that the implied reader must struggle with the question personally: "Do I recognise who Jesus is?" In this way Luke brings the reader to a point of decision. Thus, this twin meal complex functions through variation to confront the implied reader with the moment of decision, the moment of recognition of who Jesus is, which has been the theme of each meal-scene.

The relationship between this complex of meals and the Last Supper is a reversal of ironic tragedy into ironic relief. The prior blindness of the disciples warns the reader not to expect too much from these disciples who continue to be closed to Jesus and the new possibilities he has initiated (24, 11). The conflict is not hostility but ignorance. The reader is prepared for a Pharisee style meal, eaten in christological darkness. But, the reader who concludes this has missed a clue. As the earlier disciple meals are introduced by a miracle, so also these last two meals are introduced by the greatest of all the miracles, the Resurrection. As each scene unfolds, the disciples, through the grace of Christ who is present with them in teaching and fellowship, have their sight restored. Not only do they now see, but also they are commissioned to be witnesses of what they have seen.

Conclusion

Throughout Luke's presentation of the meal-scenes, they are first and foremost revelations of who Jesus is. They are revelations of salvation and judgment. So in the meals, those who are open, ready to receive, become more open; but those who are closed, unwilling to accept, become more closed. For the disciples of Jesus, table-fellowship with the Risen Lord is a time when blind eyes are opened and sinners find grace.

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