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Compositional Hypotheses
for the Lucan 'Magnificat'—
Tensions for the Evangelical
by Bruce Grigsby

There are some people who believe that even to probe into the character of biblical passages which appear to the modern, unsophisticated reader to be literal history is to place oneself outside the pale of evangelical orthodoxy. We believe, however, that there must be a forum for honest discussion of such issues in public lest we fail to appreciate what the Holy Spirit purposed in any given passage. Dr. Grigsby is prepared to consider the implications of one particular hypothesis — which he fully recognizes to be only a hypothesis — and to remind us that our doctrine of Scripture must take proper account of what actually happens in Scripture.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, evangelical scholarship has been little bothered by the results of source criticism when applied to Luke's infancy narratives. The four so-called 'hymns' contained therein (Magnificat, Benedictus, Gloria in excelsis, Nunc Dimittis) were deemed to be pre- or non-Lucan, owing to their obvious semitic structure and conspicuous lack of 'Lucanisms'. The implication for the evangelical was obvious. The hymns were originally and spontaneously composed, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, by the speakers themselves. Of course they were non-Lucan. The text says so!

Increasingly, however, a growing consensus of Lucan scholars — led by Raymond Brown and his highly regarded literary critique of the infancy narratives, *The Birth of the Messiah*¹ — regards the Magnificat as not only non-Lucan but non-Marian as well. That is to say, this hymn — allegedly possessing a life-setting in either intertestamental Judaism or

¹ See esp. R. H. Fuller ('a masterly work, every conclusion is argued with the utmost thoroughness') and Myles Bourke ('the book will become a text presupposed in continuing study'), Raymond Brown's *The Birth of the Messiah*, CBQ 40 (1978), 116-24. Brown also receives enthusiastic plaudits from J. McHugh ('A New Approach to the Infancy Narratives', *Marianum* 40 [1978], 277-87), R. Medisch ('Ein neuer Kommentar zu den Kindheitsgeschichten', *Theologie der Gegenwart* 22 [1979] 242-47), and F. J. Maloney ('The Infancy Narratives: Another View of Raymond Brown's *The Birth of the Messiah*', *ClerRev* 64 [1979], 161-66).

Criticism of Brown's pioneering work, largely directed at his apparent indiscriminate use of higher critical tools to erode the historicity of Luke's narrative, has been substantial. The most vociferous critique comes from J. Redford ('The Quest of the Historical Epiphany. Critical Reflections on Raymond Brown's *The Birth of the Messiah*', *ClerRev* 64 [1979] 5-11). See also G. S. Sloan ('Conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the virgin Mary', *Interpretation* 33 [1979], 81-84), R. Laurentin ('Exégèses réductrices des Evangile de l'enfance', *HomPastRev* 81 [1980], 13-23), and M. R. Mulholland ('The Infancy Narrative of Matthew and Luke — of History, Theology, and Literature', *BibArchRev* 7 [1981], 234).

the post-Easter church — was never on the lips of Mary. Rather it was skillfully placed there through the literary insertion of verse 48 by Luke the Evangelist. If it is allowed that Mary had anything to do with the hymn historically, and thus with the composition of verse 48, it was only *later* in a Palestinian church setting; her alleged recital of it *before* Jesus' birth would then be viewed as an anachronistic re-setting of the hymn on the part of Luke.

How might the evangelical, who holds to the authority of Scripture in general and the historicity of the Lucan infancy narratives in particular, respond to this compelling and increasingly popular literary analysis of the composition of Luke's Magnificat? Apart from re-defending the traditional approach, the concerned evangelical might explore new hypotheses for the composition of this canticle. Perhaps a middle ground exists between J. G. Machen and Raymond Brown. The non-critical approach of spontaneous, Spirit-led composition by Mary might be jettisoned for a more satisfying literary approach which, though more 'sophisticated', still preserves the historicity of the account.

160 This study will attempt to consider seriously the recent conclusions drawn by those involved in a critical reading of the Lucan Magnificat from the perspective of a concerned evangelical.² Three compositional hypotheses which epitomize the current trend in studies of the Magnificat will be considered: (1) the two-stage Lucan composition of the infancy narrative, involving the secondary insertion of the four canticles; (2) the Magnificat's original composition in either Hebrew or Aramaic; and (3) the Magnificat's post-Easter *Sitz im Leben* in the Jewish Christian church.

THE TWO-STAGE LUCAN COMPOSITION OF THE INFANCY NARRATIVE

There appears to be substantial literary evidence for regarding the Lucan infancy narrative as a document composed in two stages. According to such a redactional hypothesis, the first stage of composition would have produced the infancy narrative as we now possess it less the four canticles and the boyhood episode of Jesus teaching in the temple (2:41-51). The second stage would then have involved the insertion³ of the four canticles

² It is intriguing to speculate that the original ascription of the Magnificat was to Elizabeth and not Mary (vs. 46). However, the consensus of scholarly opinion today is decidedly in favour of retaining the traditional ascription to Mary. Not only does the textual support bear enormous weight, but impressive internal evidence can be marshalled as well.

³ It is assumed that this was a Lucan insertion, the dating of which is uncertain. Suffice it to say that the infancy narratives were composed and redacted after the gospel proper and certainly after the composition of so-called proto-Luke ('Q' plus 'L' material).

and the temple episode into appropriate contexts within an already completed document. Such a compositional scheme, if accepted, naturally tends to place the Lucan Magnificat in historical isolation. Thus the possibility is raised that the *Sitz im Leben* of this canticle differs from that of the surrounding narrative — a possibility to be considered in the final section of this study.

Support for the foregoing proposal can be readily seen by removing the four canticles and the temple episode from the first two chapters of Luke. Without the Magnificat, verse 45 smoothly flows into verse 56;⁴ the Benedictus is hardly missed when reading verse 80 after verse 66; the Gloria in Excelsis is easily removed, allowing 2:15 to follow 2:12; the Nunc Dimittis is somewhat cumbersome stylistically, providing a second oracle for Simeon and disrupting a smooth transition from verse 27 to verse 34;⁵ and finally, the conclusion to the infancy narrative in 2:52 merely restates a similar summary statement in 2:40 — suggesting, of course, that the temple episode was not part of the original infancy narrative.⁶

Of course, it is the very nature of poetic material *not* to advance or modify the narrative precisely because of the poetic genre. Nevertheless, it seems remarkable that the Lucan infancy narrative, if indeed woven together by Luke as a unified literary fabric, contains no material in the post-canticle contexts which relies upon material in the foregoing canticle as a contextually necessary antecedent.

Additional support for the foregoing proposal can be seen in the literary structure of Luke's narrative. Stripped of the canticles and the concluding temple episode, the narrative comprises a symmetrical

161

⁴ Accepting the traditional ascription of the Magnificat to Mary many commentators have puzzled over the somewhat redundant reiteration of Mary's name in verse 56 — she having already been established as the speaker and subject of the narrative in verse 46. If verse 56 originally followed verse 45, this datum is easily explained because Luke is changing subjects from Elizabeth to Mary. In addition, the personal pronoun αὐτῆ in verse 56 claims its antecedent, Elizabeth, in verse 41 — only five verses removed if the Magnificat is bypassed, but a very distant fifteen verses removed if the Magnificat is retained.

⁵ If Luke inserted 28-33 into an original narrative in which 27 was followed by 34, as Brown argues (*Birth of Messiah*, 455), the only adjustments would have been to provide an initial καὶ in verse 34.

⁶ Brown observes the 'intrusive' character of 2:41-52: 'The first Lucan stage of composition was marked off by a perfect inclusion: it began with Zechariah who had come into the Temple to burn incense, but was struck mute and was unable to bless the people; it ended with Simeon who was led into the Temple by the Spirit and enabled to bless the parents and the child. In each case the principal male figure is associated with a woman (Elizabeth and Anna) whose age, tribal derivation, and piety are mentioned' (*Birth of Messiah*, 252, n. 48).

literary unit. John the Baptist and Jesus are artistically compared and contrasted in two parallel diptychs:

- I. Diptych 1
 - A. Annunciation of birth of John the Baptist (1:5-25)
 - B. Annunciation of birth of Jesus (1:26-45, 56)
- II. Diptych 2
 - A. Birth, circumcision, naming, predictions of greatness for John the Baptist (1:57-66, 80)
 - B. Birth, circumcision, naming, predictions of greatness for Jesus (2:1-12; 15-27; 34-40)

The first diptych (1:5-45, 56) contains the two annunciations, each 21 verses in length. The second diptych (1:57-2:40, excluding final three canticles) contains the parallel accounts of their respective births, circumcisions, naming, and predictions of future greatness. This literary balance is then 'upset' by the insertion of the four canticles and the temple episode. As Raymond Brown analyses, 'the second stage of Lucan composition added valuable material, but at the same time unbalanced the neat pattern of diptychs; the canticles are beautiful but structurally awkward'.⁷

Apparently, Luke felt that their secondary insertion, though spoiling some of the perfect balance of his diptych construction, 'significantly strengthened the theological message of his scene'.⁸ Again, following Brown's reconstruction of the editorial process, Luke allegedly added the canticles to his infancy narrative rather than rewrite the whole narrative to make this addition unnoticeable. In other words, Luke was content to leave rough seams.⁹

Significantly, the linguistic data drawn from the first two chapters of Luke's gospel are sympathetic to the above compositional reconstruction. While the four canticles appear to have been originally composed in either Aramaic or Hebrew and to be largely devoid of Lucan stylistic traits, the remaining infancy stories are permeated with Lucanisms and are thus almost certainly Lucan compositions.¹⁰ An alleged scheme of two

compositional stages — one a highly literary endeavour and the other a largely redactional task of inserting relatively 'untouched' source material — nicely explains the split nature of this linguistic data. Of particular note are the decisive conclusions reached in this direction by both Robert Morgenthaler¹¹ and Paul Minear.¹² The latter, after a painstaking linguistic analysis, notes the 'remarkable presence in the birth stories [excluding canticles] of Lucan elements and an equally remarkable absence of un-Lucan traits'.¹³

THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE OF THE MAGNIFICAT

The Magnificat abounds with Semitisms which suggest that it was originally composed in either Aramaic or Hebrew.

In verse 47b, the phrase *καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου* most naturally translates a waw-consecutive and perfect tense, resulting in the Greek aorist in 47b following the Greek present tense in the first half of the verse. In verse 49b and 50a, Blass/Debrunner suggest that the use of *καὶ* to co-ordinate words of independent clauses is Hebraizing (and slovenly vernacular).¹⁴ As Howard Marshall observes, a native Greek composition would most likely have subordinated both clauses with the relative pronoun *οὗ*, the antecedent being the substantized adjective, *ὁ δυνατός*.¹⁵ Also in verse 50a, the prepositional phrase, *εἰς γενεάς καὶ γενεάς*, and in verse 51a, the clause, *ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ* are certainly not native Greek expressions.¹⁶ Finally, the infinitive construction in verse 54b, *μνησθῆναι ἐλέους*, is in a very loose syntactical relationship with the preceding finite clause. Blass/Debrunner, citing this verse, note that such a loose infinitive construction is often the case when translating the Hebrew infinitive prefixed with the preposition.¹⁷

Despite the foregoing examples of fairly 'transparent' semitisms, the case for the Magnificat's original composition in Greek has been argued well. At the turn of the century von Harnack set forth a vigorous defence

⁷ *Birth of Messiah*, 252.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁰ Within this first stage of composition, Luke apparently stylized not only his narrative sections but also the speeches of his characters — a literary endeavour he did not undertake during the second stage of editing. Contrast for example, the Nunc Dimittis (2:29-33) with the immediately following oracle of Simeon (2:34-35). According to Paul Minear's list of 'Lucanisms' (see below, n.25), the former contains no Lucanisms while the latter, shorter oracle, contains at least three (*ἀντιλέγειν*, *διέρχεσθαι διαλογισμοὶ καρδιῶν*).

¹¹ *Statistik des N. T. Wortschatzes* (Zürich, 1958), 62-63, 187.

¹² 'Luke's Use of the Birth Stories', *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. by L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn (London: SPCK, 1966), 111-31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 114. As well as screening the infancy narratives for Luke's favourite vocabulary words, Minear has applied such stylistic tests as the use of *αὐτός*, the conjunctions, articular infinitive, the prepositions, the article, Latinisms, and word order.

¹⁴ Bl. Debr. §446:2. So Burton (*Moods and Tenses of New Testament Greek*, 152) and Turner (*Grammar of New Testament Greek*, III, 136, both citing Lk. 1:49).

¹⁵ *Gospel of Luke*, 83.

¹⁶ Cf. Brown, *Birth of Messiah*, 337.

¹⁷ Bl. Debr. §391:4.

of this unorthodox thesis, treating alleged Semitisms as the result of Luke's deliberate imitation of Septuagintal Greek style.¹⁸ More recently, Nigel Turner revitalized the position of von Harnack with a vigorous, fresh defence. He and Paul Winter became celebrated linguistic opponents on this question, sparring with one another in the pages of prestigious New Testament journals.¹⁹

Though Turner's contention (and, indeed von Harnack's) is plausible — *i.e.*, that Luke's highly Semitized Greek is the result of consciously imitating Jewish Septuagintal hymns — one wonders why a Lucan composition would fit so awkwardly into the surrounding narrative structure. As noted in the previous section, the canticles spoil some of the literary balance of Luke's diptych construction. Would the Lucan canticles, composed by him as integral parts of a larger infancy narrative, leave such detectable literary seams? More importantly, why would Luke compose a hymn describing Mary's sentiments, place it on her lips in a concrete historical situation, and include but one vague reference (vs.48) in the entire hymn to Mary's actual life situation?

At this point it might do well to wonder why more Lucan stylistic traits do not surface in the Magnificat, notwithstanding the premise that Luke translated this canticle. His treatment of sources elsewhere, especially in translating and adapting semitic source material, suggests that Luke utilized such material with a marked flexibility, allowing ample leeway for his own literary style. Perhaps it is thus 'more probable'²⁰ to regard the Lucan Magnificat as originating in a Semitic language yet coming to Luke in Greek translation. In this way, Luke would have stylized his Greek source to some extent but far less than had he been required to produce a complete Greek translation of the same source.

THE LIFE-SETTING OF THE MAGNIFICAT

Tentative conclusions have now been reached in two areas: (1). the Lucan canticles were secondarily added to an already existing infancy

narrative; (2). the Magnificat in particular, although originally composed in either Hebrew or Aramaic came to Luke in Greek translation. It now remains to venture conclusions in a vitally important third area. What about the historicity of the Magnificat? Did Mary indeed compose the Magnificat? If so, did she compose it extemporaneously? If not, does the Magnificat find its *Sitz im Leben* in a pre- or post-Easter situation? These and similar questions will now be addressed.

Pre-Christian Marian Authorship

A straightforward reading of the Magnificat and its surrounding narrative leaves one with the impression that Mary's reply to Elizabeth was an original, extemporaneous composition. This traditional understanding of the encounter between Elizabeth and Mary is concisely summarized by J. G. Machen: 'Under the immediate impression of her wonderful experience, she may have moulded her store of Scripture imagery, made part of her life from childhood, into this beautiful hymn of praise'.²¹

Increasingly, however, such a straightforward assessment of the composition of the Lucan Magnificat has come to be regarded as 'naïve' by Lucan commentators. Raymond Brown, for example, summarily dismisses such an obsolete view: 'It is obviously unlikely that such finished poetry [Magnificat] could have been composed on the spot by ordinary people, and today there would be no serious scholarly support for such a naïve hypothesis'.²²

How might the evangelical respond to this growing wave of scepticism surrounding the Marian composition of the Magnificat? Do we really want to say that 'the carefully hewn lines of the Magnificat are an on-the-spot poetic utterance'?²³ Do we really want to say that Mary, a young Galilean peasant girl, spontaneously composed such a polished example

¹⁸ 'Das Magnificat der Elisabeth', SAB 27 [1900], 538-66. For a refutation of this thesis, see esp. J. G. Machen (*The Virgin Birth of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930], 75-90; and 'The Hymns of the first Chapter of Luke', *PrThRev* 10 [1912], 1-38). For Machen, the view that Luke composed the Magnificat is 'practically out of the question'.

¹⁹ Winter ('Some Observations on the Language in the Birth and Infancy Stories of the Third Gospel' *NTS* 1 [1954], 111-21; 'On Luke and Lucan Sources' *ZNW* 47 [1956], 217-42).

Turner ('The Relation of Luke I and II to Hebraic Sources and to the Rest of Luke-Acts' *NTS* 2 [1955], 100-09).

²⁰ The conclusion of Machen is thus phrased (*Virgin Birth*, 86). So F. Gryglewicz, 'Die Herkunft der Hymnen des Kindheitsevangeliums des Lucas', *NTS* 21 (1975), 265-73.

²¹ *Virgin Birth*, 95. J. G. Koontz concurs that the Magnificat was 'an original composition uttered extemporaneously under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in reply to Elizabeth' ('Mary's Magnificat' *BibSac* 116 [1959], 337). Plummer writes, '... just as our own poor who know no literature but the Bible, easily fall into Biblical language in times of special joy or sorrow, so Mary would naturally fall back on the familiar expressions of Jewish Scripture in this moment of intense exultation' (*St. Luke*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922⁵], 30).

²² *Birth of the Messiah*, 346. Elsewhere, Brown answers the rhetorical question, 'Did Mary actually compose and speak this poem?' with the opinion, '... today one would be hard-pressed to find any critical Biblical scholar who would answer in the affirmative' (*Mary in the New Testament*, 139).

²³ Thus Brown phrases the question (*Mary in the New Testament*, 140).

of Old Testament poetry?²⁴ In the light of such historical improbabilities, a more responsible approach might entail retaining Marian composition but relinquishing spontaneous utterance. That is to say, Mary might well have composed and memorized such a canticle sometime after the angelic annunciation yet before her meeting with Elizabeth. Quite naturally, then, during a moment of emotional stirring such as occurred in the Elizabeth encounter, this treasured hymn of praise would have come quite easily to Mary's lips.

Pre-Christian, non-Marian Authorship

For those who are persuaded that the Magnificat is neither a Lucan nor Marian composition, fertile ground for a plausible life-setting can be found in the intertestamental literature. Thus the canticle, in its pre-Lucan history, allegedly sets forth the hopes and sentiments of pre-Christian Judaism. The Lucan adaption of such a canticle to the literary needs of his infancy narrative was a relatively simple redactional matter, requiring merely the creation and insertion of verse 48²⁵ so that the canticle appears to be a spontaneous composition of Mary.

166 Paul Winter, citing the martial atmosphere of several of the lines, suggests 1 Maccabees as a possible background for both the Magnificat and Benedictus.²⁶ For Winter the Magnificat is a Maccabean battle hymn, praising God for his recently accomplished — thus the proliferation of aorist tenses — military victories through the leadership of Judas Maccabeus. For Martin Trèves, the Magnificat and Benedictus reflect the hopes of the Jewish nation in the midst of her insurrection against Rome, as documented in the pseudepigraphical works, 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra.²⁷ Still others look to the Qumran material for the pre-Lucan setting of the Magnificat, the War Scroll and Thanksgiving Psalms most often cited as likely sources.

If indeed, however, Luke went so far afield to find an appropriate expression of Mary's sentiments, one searches for an adequate rationale

²⁴ For the Magnificat's sophisticated poetic structure, see R. C. Tannehill, 'The Magnificat as Poem' *JBL* 93 (1974), 263-75, and K. E. Bailey, 'The Song of Mary: Vision of a New Exodus', *NestTheolRev* 2 (1979), 29-35. Bailey analyzes the Magnificat as a two stanza poem, constructed according to inverted parallelism (A B C C' B' A').

²⁵ For such a redactional analysis of verse 48, see below, n.54.

²⁶ 'Magnificat and Benedictus — Maccabean Psalms?' *BJRL* 37 (1954), 328-47.

²⁷ 'Le Magnificat et la Benedictus', *CahCercErnRev* 27 (1979), 105-10. For Trèves, as for most others today, 4 Ezra refers to the pseudepigraphical work rather than the canonical or apocryphal works in the Ezra cycle. It is otherwise known as the Apocalypse of Ezra (extant in Syriac and Latin with some Greek fragments), Esdras 4 (Vg. and 'Great Bible' of 1539 refer to Esdras 1 [Ezra], Esdras 2 [Neh.], Esdras 3 [apocryphal Ezra]), or Esdras II (anchor Bible series). Adding to the confusion, the LXX uses Esdras A to refer to the apocryphal 3 Ezra and Esdras B to refer to canonical Ezra-Nehemiah.

to explain Luke's method. Would not Luke, amenable to the idea of putting others' words on Mary's lips, have availed himself of the wealth of suitable material in the canonical Psalms or even the apocryphal wisdom material? And if he felt the freedom to use a non-Marian source for the Magnificat, would he not have also felt the freedom to edit this source so that it unambiguously applied to Mary's situation? Of course, the larger difficulty looms of imagining Luke, who explicitly claims to value historicity in his treatment of sources (1:1-4), employing such methodology in the first place.

Post-Easter, Jewish Christian Authorship

The thesis that the Magnificat has its original *Sitz im Leben* in the Jewish Christian church has much to commend it. First of all, the proliferation of aorist tenses most naturally suggests that the author was praising God for *past* rather than *future* blessings of salvation and attendant acts of grace.²⁸ Admittedly, the aorists might grammatically possess a future nuance as indiscriminate translations of Semitic prophetic perfects, but verifying such linguistic data is virtually impossible without access to a semitic original. Or the verbs in question, construed as gnomic aorists, might possess a present, timeless nuance. However, most New Testament grammars would regard such a case here as 'improbable'²⁹ — reflecting the widespread scepticism towards legitimate New Testament examples of the gnomic aorist.³⁰ In any event, the aorists are troublesome in this passage. Those who contend that they 'refer to a definite action in the past, namely, the salvation brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus',³¹ are not easily answered.

Secondly, the earliest descriptions of the Jewish Christian community in the book of Acts³² would suggest that their sentiments are clearly

²⁸ Of course, some blessings were already realized in Mary's life at that point, explaining the backward-looking thrust of the Magnificat. But this requires one to 'spiritualize' the meaning of the aorists to apply to Mary's life-situation at that time, which, in Marshall's estimation, is an interpretive option too easily opted for by the majority of exegetes (*Luke*, 83).

²⁹ This the verdict of Marshall (*Ibid.*, 84). Blass-Debrunner do not cite the Magnificat in their brief listing of New Testament instances of a gnomic aorist (§333:1). Robertson equivocates at this point, assessing the possibility of gnomic aorists in this passage with the adverb, 'maybe' (*A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 837). Burton does admit to a smattering of gnomic aorists in the New Testament, but not in the Magnificat (*Moods and Tenses*, 121).

³⁰ For example, Winer states categorically that this category does not occur at all in the New Testament (*A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, 277).

³¹ So Brown, *Birth of Messiah*, 363.

³² Especially Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37.

reflected in the Magnificat. The societal conditions of this community (especially economic and education levels) were relatively dismal:

The poverty and hunger of the oppressed in the Magnificat are primarily spiritual, but we should not forget the physical realities faced by early Christians. The first followers of Jesus were Galileans; and Galilee, victimized by the absentee ownership of estates (*cf.* Luke 20:9), was the spawning ground of first-century revolts against a repressive occupation and the taxation it engendered.³³

They were indeed the 'poor of Yahweh', a religious community of socially and politically deprived individuals. As such, they might fairly be described as Jewish Christian Anawim³⁴ to suggest a certain continuity with the Anawim of pre-Christian Judaism.³⁵ Yahweh has always been concerned with the Anawim and pleased by their form of piety; they, in turn, remain ever hopeful that He will imminently reverse their social and political plight. Brown, impressed by such parallels between the religious expression of the Magnificat and that of the Anawim in the early church, contends that 'the Magnificat is vocalizing literally the sentiments of the Jewish Christian Anawim'.³⁶

168

Implications of Post-Easter Setting for the Canticle's Historicity

If one accepts the thesis that the Magnificat is a Jewish Christian hymn, an approach which has consistently attracted proponents since the turn of the century,³⁷ then a basic question of historicity is naturally raised. If Mary never spoke these words then why the apparent deception? Luke has led his readership, either intentionally or through ignorance of his source's compositional history, to such an erroneous conclusion by prefacing the Magnificat with the straightforward affirmation, καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ.

³³ Brown, *Birth of Messiah*, 363.

³⁴ For treatments of this concept — *i.e.*, the early Jewish Christian church as a continuation of the 'poor of Yahweh' — see M. Dibelius (*The Epistle of James* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976], 36-45) and A. Gelin (*The Poor of Yahweh* [Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1964]).

³⁵ See especially Ps. 149:4; Isa. 49:13; 66:2 for attitude of Yahweh towards the Anawim. See also the Qumran material where the author of the Thanksgiving Psalms identifies himself and his community as the Anawim of Yahweh (1QH ii. 34-35).

³⁶ *Birth of Messiah*, 363.

³⁷ So J. Wilkenson (*A Johannine Document in the First Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel* [n.p. 1902], 14, n.2), and P. Ladeuze ('L'origine du Magnificat' RHE 4 [1903], 638-43). More recently, besides Brown (*Birth of Messiah and Mary in New Testament*), see F. Gryglewicz ('Die Herkunft der Hymnen des Lucas' NTS 21 [1974-5], 268-73), L. Schottroff ('Das Magnificat und die älteste Tradition über Jesus von Nazareth', *EvanTheol* 38 [1978], 298-313), and Fitzmeyer (*Luke*, 361).

This question can be addressed in various ways. For example, Raymond Brown argues that Luke was simply exercising the freedom of an ancient historian by attributing to his characters not words which they actually spoke but words which, in view of the situation, they might fittingly have spoken.³⁸ In other words, Mary is conceived of as a spokesperson for the Jewish Christian Anawim and a hymn expressing their sentiments is placed on her lips by Luke.³⁹ Or, as Brown himself states it:

[The Magnificat] gives voice to general sentiments that are appropriate for the dramatis personae in the setting in which they are placed. It is not a question of a purely fictional creation, for the dramatis personae are remembered or conceived of as representative of a certain type of piety which the canticles vocalize.⁴⁰

For some, Brown's approach has indeed strained the traditional understanding of Biblical inerrancy.⁴¹ For such conservative evangelicals, if Mary did *not*, in fact, speak the Magnificat, Luke has made a mistake and the Bible contains an error. Brown's following statement, designed to alleviate these tensions by rerouting such an obscurantist approach to inspiration, has done little to resolve the controversy:

... it is now clear in Roman Catholic thought that inspiration of the Scriptures does not guarantee historicity. There is no reason now why a Roman Catholic could not judge the scene to be the product of Luke's creative imagination, so long as he or she did not deny the theological truths contained therein.⁴²

However, before rejecting Brown's approach out of hand, the evangelical would do well to focus *not* on whether Mary spoke the Magnificat but whether Luke *intended* to communicate that she did.⁴³ As in the case of Jude's infamous quote of Enoch (Jude 14-15 — actually a quote from pseudepigraphic 1 Enoch 1:9), Luke's literary intention must be appraised before pronouncing judgement on the credibility of his

169

³⁸ *Birth of Messiah*, 346-48.

³⁹ Two striking Lucanisms occur in vs.48: (1) ἰδοὺ γὰρ (occurs seven times in NT, six of which are in Luke-Acts); (2) ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν (also occurs seven times in NT, six of which are in Luke-Acts).

⁴⁰ *Birth of Messiah*, 347. Brown treats Peter's speeches in Acts in the same manner, regarding him as Luke's literary spokesman for the earliest Christian Kerygma.

⁴¹ See above, note 1, second paragraph.

⁴² *Birth of Messiah*, 245, n.58.

⁴³ Robert Johnston has recently written to this effect: 'Evangelicals are coming to understand that a careful assessment of the author's intention is necessary if they are to break the empiricist tyranny of certain evangelicals who would impose their own narrow view of factuality on the larger evangelical community, not letting the reader see the Bible as it really is, and in its own terms' (*Evangelicals at an Impasse* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979], 41-42).

account.⁴⁴ It could hardly be construed as an 'error' if Luke — using an accepted literary genre of the time — was intending the Magnificat to be the expression of a literary rather than historical figure. With the compositional history thus construed, Luke's introductory καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ, is still 'trustworthy' or better 'infallible'. Admittedly, it is not 'inerrant' in the narrow 'factualized' sense demanded by right-wing apologists such as Harold Lindsell.

Another approach to this question of historicity — perhaps more acceptable for the evangelical — might be to assume that Mary *did* speak the Magnificat, but only in a post-Easter, Christian setting. Consider the following hypothetical reconstruction of events.

As Mary meditated upon this Jewish Christian hymn in a worship setting, she soon applied its general sentiments to those she experienced so long ago when she carried her Saviour for nine emotion-charged months. To make the hymn 'her own' she conceivably could have inserted a specific personal allusion pertaining to her lowly estate and future blessing, now preserved for us in a Lucanized form in verse 48. The Marian association of this Christian hymn along with her addended personalization soon became known and treasured by the Jewish Christian church at large. Thus the tradition of a Marian Magnificat was 'born'. Luke then encountered this Marian hymn in Greek translation (during Paul's Caesarean detention while Luke was in Jerusalem?) and was moved by it to the extent that he secondarily inserted it into his already existing birth narrative. Perhaps what moved him the most was the hymn's emphatic castigation of wealth (especially vs. 51-53), a theme which resonates elsewhere in Luke's gospel (6:24-26; 12:19-20; 16:25; 21:1-4). 'By introducing it as a leitmotiv in the hymns of the infancy narrative, Luke has begun to introduce the offence of the cross into the good news proclaimed by Gabriel⁴⁵ and now by Mary, the first Christian disciple.

Of course, according to this hypothetical and, admittedly, speculative reconstruction, Luke the historian was astute enough about his sources to realize that Mary neither spoke the poem in response to Elizabeth nor did she compose it, even in a later church setting. Presumably most of his

readership would have shared this knowledge of the Magnificat's rather loose 'Marian' ties. What Luke intended and what his readership accepted was that Mary spoke these words to Elizabeth *anachronistically*. In a sense the sentiments of the Magnificat were felt by Mary during the Elizabeth episode. Only later in a church setting did she articulate them with the aid of a popular hymn of praise.

Now consider carefully the implications for the evangelical if Luke had proceeded according to such a reconstructed compositional scheme. From a literary standpoint, Elizabeth's and Mary's utterances were juxtaposed in a concrete historical situation as Luke skillfully produced what might be called 'dramatic history'.⁴⁶ From a historical standpoint, the respective utterances within the Mary-Elizabeth dialogue were made some 35 to 40 years apart. For Luke, this obstacle did not deter his theological artistry. Writing from a later perspective, such literary license could be safely taken with his readership without impugning the trustworthiness of his account. And the enhanced thematic value for his infancy narrative, derived by skillfully applying such license, apparently outweighed what value might reside in doggedly adhering to a strictly historical genre.

CONCLUSION

Two tentative conclusions have emerged from this study: (1) the four canticles plus the boyhood temple episode were secondarily inserted into the Lucan birth narrative by Luke himself; (2) the Magnificat, although originally composed in a Semitic language, came to Luke in Greek translation. A third conclusion, though still in doubt, stubbornly confronts the evangelical: the original *Sitz im Leben* of the Magnificat is found in the Jewish Christian church.

It is the third conclusion which creates doctrinal tensions. If accepted, we have very little room to 'escape' with our doctrine of inerrancy intact. Our close reading of the Biblical text has led us into a doctrinal Pandora's box. We can only escape, as Robert Gundry has argued, by enlarging the room we give to differences of literary genre and consequently of intended meaning.⁴⁷ In the case of the Magnificat, this would involve allowing Luke the literary freedom to anachronistically place a post-Easter hymn in a pre-Easter historical scene. Whether or not it was a post-

⁴⁴ Almost certainly, Jude is quoting 1 Enoch 1:9 in verses 14-15. A comparison with Matthew Black's Greek edition of Enoch (*Apocalypsis Henochi Graece* [E. J. Brill, 1970], 19) reveals that the respective quotes are virtually identical (Cf. also J. T. Milik's Aramaic reconstruction of the passage from the Qumran fragments; *The Books of Enoch*, [Oxford Press, 1976], 184). Thus Jude, for illustrative purposes, is probably intending to quote the literary figure (*i.e.*, 1 Enoch 1:9) and not the historical figure of Noah's day. Presumably, his readership would have readily grasped this literary device.

⁴⁵ *Birth of Messiah*, 364.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of this term and its implications for historical 'accuracy' as traditionally understood in conservative, evangelical circles, see Robert Gundry's penetrating theological postscript (*Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982], 623-40).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 639.

Easter *Marian* hymn in the sense of a popular church tradition to that effect, remains an interesting yet highly speculative facet of the entire question. In any event, what Luke intended — dramatic history at this point — might still bear the stamp of inspiration, historical deception neither being intended by Luke nor accomplished amongst his readership.

The Lukan Magnificat thus affords an interesting test case for the evangelical. The foregoing conclusion about the post-Easter composition of this canticle, though unsettling, is fast establishing a foothold in research-oriented publications, and we are called upon to respond. It would seem that the most responsible course of action is to seriously consider this conclusion and, if need be, to fine-tune our definition of inerrancy to accommodate the revised understanding of the Biblical text.⁴⁸ For evangelicals to shy away from a serious consideration of such 'unsafe' conclusions, to avoid poking now and again at our doctrine of inerrancy to discover how much, if any, nuancing it might tolerate, must surely jeopardize the integrity of our scholarship. Or as David Hubbard has recently warned:

172

I have a hunch that one explanation accounts for the silence of evangelical *biblical* scholars more than any other; the basic fear that their findings, as they deal with the text of Scripture, will conflict with the popular understanding of what inerrancy entails. Where a rigid system of apologetics becomes the basic definition of orthodoxy, true biblical scholarship becomes difficult if not impossible.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Even Machen, speculating about his view of Biblical infallibility were he to accept a post-Easter *Sitz im Leben* for the Magnificat, allows that certain of the doctrine's premises about historicity could be negotiated to fit the 'facts' (*Virgin Birth*, 93).

⁴⁹ 'The Current Tensions: Is there a Way Out?' *Biblical Authority*, ed. by Jack Rogers (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1977), 176.