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Abstract

Of the four canonical gospels of the New Testament, the one most concerned with poverty, wealth, and the ethics of possession is Luke. It contains more economic material and a sharper message than do Mark, Matthew, or John. A centuries-long debate rages over just how revolutionary Luke's message is. This dissertation employs redactional, literary, statistical, historical, and theological methodologies to recover Luke's radical economic message, to place it in its ancient context, and to tease out its prophetic implications for today. It argues that Luke has a radical message of good news for the poor and a call for resistance to wealth. God is shown to favor the poor, championing their struggle for justice while condemning the rich and recommending a sweeping disposal of wealth for the benefit of the poor. This represents a distinct break from the prevailing ethics of the ancient Roman Empire and a profound challenge to the economic systems of the modern world. Generations of interpreters have worked to file down the sharp edges of Luke's message, from scribes copying ancient manuscripts, to authors from the first few centuries of the Christian movement, to contemporary biblical scholars. Such domestication disfigures the gospel, silencing its critique of an economic system whose unremitting drive for profit and economic growth continues to widen the gap between the rich and the poor while

threatening life-altering, environmental change. It is time to reclaim the bracing, prophetic call of Luke's economic message, a message that warns against the destructive power of wealth and insists on justice for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized.