



Key terms

Kerygma	The initial and essential proclamation of the gospel (and/or Christian) message.
Kenosis	self-emptying, or the voluntary renunciation of Jesus' divine attributes (such as omniscience and omnipotence) in favour of servanthood (humility and obedience).
Substantial presence	The total and complete One Person of God the Son made Man, fully human and fully divine, objectively present in the incarnation.
Redaction criticism	regards the author of the text as editor (redactor) of his or her source materials, adding comment and arranging material for a theological purpose.

Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism examines the creative way in which the Gospel writers have handled their sources at the final stages of composition.

Any saying or narrative in the Gospels may have taken shape originally in three basic 'settings' (Sitz im Leben):

- First in the teaching of the historical Jesus
- Secondly in the life of the early church and
- Thirdly in the thought of the evangelists

In the third setting, the Gospel writers' own understanding and a new and decisive forward movement in the transmission of the Gospel tradition becomes apparent. From the moment the Gospels as such come to birth, the oral period of the Christian tradition fades out, and individual writers (perhaps in the context of a "school" or even church) take over from an otherwise anonymous community. By looking carefully at the individual comments of the evangelists, their editorial links and summaries, and generally at the selection, modification and expansion of the material they use (when Matthew or Luke, for example, is compared with Mark), it is possible to discover how each writer understood and interpreted (as well as edited) the tradition he received. This is redaction criticism.

Redaction Criticism and the Birth Narratives

The birth narratives of Luke and Matthew contain stories arranged (redacted) for a theological purpose. In contrast, the earliest gospel of Mark, written around 70 AD, contains no reference to birth stories at all. The issue arises: how do we find out the author's purpose in writing the gospels? Why did Matthew and Luke insert birth narratives where Mark does not?

Redaction critics start with observation. If we line up the passages in Luke and Matthew against each other, what do we discover?

What do the observations tell us? First of all there is a driving force or essential gist of the narrative. It seems to embody a message in the way it's arranged, and the message of the two gospels is a little different.

Matthew suggests that the 'Scriptures are fulfilled'. These scriptures are the Hebrew bible which foretold of a Messiah who would come – a shepherd to Israel. One such messianic passage is Isaiah 53 which speaks of one who would suffer, and of a flock of sheep gone astray – 'all we like sheep have gone astray but the Lord has laid on him the sin of us all' (Isaiah 53:6).

The gist of Luke is different – the driving force of his narrative seems to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel speaks of an age to come when God will "pour out my spirit upon all flesh" – an age of the Messiah. So the angel tells Mary "the Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Luke 1:35), and Simeon, filled with the Holy Spirit, starts to prophesy (Luke 2:27) of one who will be a "light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel".

The second set of observations we can make involve the echoes with the Old Testament. In the table below, Mary's Magnificat in Luke is compared with Hannah's song of praise in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.



Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55 - NAB)

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
⁴⁷ my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.
⁴⁸ For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
⁴⁹ The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.
⁵¹ He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
⁵² He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.
⁵³ The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Hannah's Song of Praise (1 Sam 2:1-10 - NAB)

¹ And Hannah prayed: "My heart exults in the LORD, my horn is exalted by my God.
I have swallowed up my enemies; I rejoice in your victory.
² There is no Holy One like the LORD; there is no Rock like our God.
³ Speak boastfully no longer, Do not let arrogance issue from your mouths.
For an all-knowing God is the LORD, a God who weighs actions.
⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken, while the tottering gird on strength.
⁵ The well-fed hire themselves out for bread, while the hungry no longer have to toil.
The barren wife bears seven sons, while the mother of many languishes.
⁶ The LORD puts to death and gives life, casts down to Sheol and brings up again.
⁷ The LORD makes poor and makes rich, humbles, and also exalts.
⁸ He raises the needy from the dust; from the ash heap lifts up the poor,
To seat them with nobles and make a glorious throne their heritage.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he has set the world upon them.
⁹ He guards the footsteps of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall perish in the darkness;
for not by strength does one prevail.
¹⁰ The LORD's foes shall be shattered; the Most High in heaven thunders;
the LORD judges the ends of the earth.
May he give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed!"

Source: <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Jesus-Birth.htm>



Notice how similar are the themes of the songs of the two women. Both tell of a mighty and yet merciful God who acts in history to save his people. This is the God of promise and fulfilment: the hungry he fills with good things, says Mary, whilst Hannah praises the God who gives so much that ‘the hungry no longer have to toil’. They speak of a new age of justice and plenty, who abases the proud but lifts up the humble. In this way the writer of Luke’s gospel stresses the links between the former times and the new age of the Messiah.

Finally, we can identify specific commentary made by the writers of the gospels. When Luke speaks of Simeon ‘moved by the Holy Spirit’ this is authorial comment that has been added to the bare bones of the narrative. When Matthew speaks of the ‘Scriptures being fulfilled’, he is also adding his own gloss on the story. By identifying authorial comment, the redaction critic tries to reconstruct the theology of the author.

Kenosis

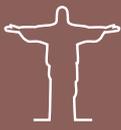
Kenosis means ‘self-emptying’ and the gospel of Luke stresses the humanity and the humility of Jesus. Not only is he born of a woman, but he is also baptised and then presented back to God in the Temple.

Kenosis seeks to explain something Paul mentions in Philippians 2:5-11. St Paul refers to Jesus ‘humbling himself and taking the form of a servant’ and then ‘emptying himself and becoming obedient to death’. This idea of Jesus “emptying himself” is referred to as the Kenotic model.

The question arises as to what exactly Jesus emptied himself of (or poured out). At one time or another just about all possible combinations of what is emptied (or poured out) have been suggested, whilst at the same time trying to maintain that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. The weight of emphasis has swayed through the centuries between the human side of Jesus and the divine side.

The historical discussion has centred much more on Jesus emptying himself of the divine attributes, especially of omnipotence and omniscience whilst retaining the moral attributes (such as righteousness and holiness). However, this raises problems about the attribute of immutability if Jesus no longer had certain divine attributes. One popular way out of the conundrum is to argue for the idea of divine self-limitation - God in Jesus chose to stand alongside humanity in their weakness.

Thomas Aquinas saw this limitation as more of an ethical move by Jesus. If Christ was



“poured out like water” (Ps. 21. 15), this “emptying of Himself whereby the Invisible made Himself visible, was a bending down of mercy, not a fall from power.” (Thomas Aquinas, Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers Vol 1 S5b, Section 1, Part 2). Hence, Christ’s moral perfection is portrayed in this narrative of humility.

Luke’s Gospel and Kenosis

At the start of the gospel it is Mary’s response to the angel’s news that captures the humility and obedience of kenosis. “Here am I the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word.” (1:38).

Secondly, the very message Mary relates to is a kenotic message in which the rich are emptied and the poor filled with good things. It echoes the message Jesus himself is given – that he will give ‘recovery of sight to the blind’ (4:18).

The rich who are full of themselves need to be emptied and those who are empty (in their bellies and in their attitudes) will be filled. So the roles are reversed in much the same way as Jesus, the glorious divine one, chooses to reverse his own role and become the obedient servant.

Matthew and Substantial Presence

The theme of presence in Matthew is a strong one: it appears at the beginning, middle and end of the gospel. Jesus is present with his people and God is somehow present through Jesus.

So at the beginning of the gospel the angel declares; “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us)”. (Matthew 1:23, NIV). Jesus is present with his people as an extension of his very name and his very essence – he is by nature, God-with-us, Immanuel.

Even though he has “emptied himself” by being born in human likeness and taken the form of a servant, he is fully human whilst maintaining substantial presence as fully divine. In the incarnation it is claimed that Jesus as fully human and fully God is an objective reality and not merely personal to the believer.

Roman Catholics in particular argue that Jesus is present in a very special way (“real presence”) when Christians celebrate the Eucharist or Holy Communion. However,



the issue at the heart of a long-standing theological controversy is this: in what form and in what way is Jesus present in the Eucharist itself? Is his form just spiritual or is it substantial (are the bread and wine literally transformed into flesh and blood)?

Conclusions

The synoptic gospels, so called because they share a common source, proclaim a Jesus figure with distinctive traits. The theological message is conveyed by arrangement of source material and by added comment. The picture thus portrayed is similar and yet different – using common sources, but working and crafting them.

Luke sees the divine purpose worked out by empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The spirit comes upon Mary, Zechariah and Simeon in the opening narrative. The message seems to be one of a special one emptying himself in obedience and humility.

Matthew's gospel seems to be set in a Jewish context and lays greater stress on the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy. Some of the great themes of Isaiah, Malachi and Daniel, three great Old Testament prophets, are worked out by the author – of the Holy God coming to dwell among his people as a divine presence. Jesus is Immanuel, God-with-us, and yet also King of the Jews. He has come to shepherd his people. His presence is worked out with miraculous signs and also by the gift of the communion gathering of the new community.

Discussion Quotes

1. “Christ is primarily a divine subject. The man is the vehicle not just of divine action in the world, but of divine substantial and particular presence. He is Emmanuel – God with us. In this sense his acts are God's acts.”

Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Incarnation, Collected Essays in Christology* page 159

2. “That the birth narratives cannot be accepted as historical as they stand would be all but universally conceded”.

David Brown, *the Trinity* page 124