

Luke's Gospel not only biography but inspiration

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

You and I call the Bible the Word of God, yet it contains very few words God actually spoke. The New Testament calls Jesus the Word of God, yet Jesus didn't write any of it, and much of it is about things done by Paul and Peter.

Even the Gospels, the Good News of Jesus Christ, were composed 30 to 60 years after his death, in Greek — a language which Jesus didn't even speak. Jesus had no secretary walking around with him taking notes, yet some Christians today take everything in the Bible very literally, ignoring how the Bible really got put together and ultimately ignoring God's intent in choosing to do things the way he did.

God did not write a book. What he did was choose a people, make a covenant with them, free them from slavery, give them a Promised Land, judges, kings and prophets and promise to send them a Messiah. Many deeds but nothing written by God. It was all passed down orally among believers for generations before the earliest biblical authors, under God's inspiration, wrote the first words of what we today call the Old Testament.

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There were many stages of composition, and many writers contributed to the final result. God was the author of the events described, which is different from our concept of authorship. He didn't write the text with pen and paper, but he is its source, and he guided its development and so is in that sense the author — the intellectual author of the Bible. It reveals his will and contains his promises, and that's how it should be read.

And as we see in today's Gospel, the same is true for Jesus. He is the author of the events described, but he himself didn't write anything with pen and paper. What he did was establish a New Covenant with humanity, free us from slavery to Satan by his sacrificial death, open for us the gates to the New Promised Land of the kingdom of God, send out apostles and prophets to proclaim the Good News of salvation to all the nations and promise to come again at the end of time, all of which is found in the New Testament. Much of it was handed down in the Church for decades before the earliest New Testament author, under God's inspiration, first put pen to paper. And Luke describes this process very clearly for us in today's Gospel.

Luke begins: "Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us" — meaning Mark for sure, whose Gospel he had in front of him at the time, and others whose writings did not make the New Testament — "just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us" — in oral tradition before even Mark, the earliest Evangelist, wrote them down — "I too have decided" — Luke's Gospel was written at his own initiative — "after investigating everything accurately anew" — Luke did research — "to write it down in an orderly sequence" — meaning that he thought he could present the content more accurately than Mark and the other earlier

Gospels had — “most excellent Theophilus” — a name which means “Lover of God,” probably a literary device, addressing his Gospel in this way to all who are lovers of God — “so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings that you have received.”

Luke wrote his Gospel not strictly speaking as a biography of Jesus or to answer all the questions of life or as an arsenal of proof-texts for use in theological debate, but rather with only one purpose in mind: to edify and inspire the reader — “so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received,” to support and build up the faith of those who already love God and believe in Jesus. And that’s how it should be read.

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor delivered this homily Jan. 23.