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Narrative Seam Antics in Luke's Gospel

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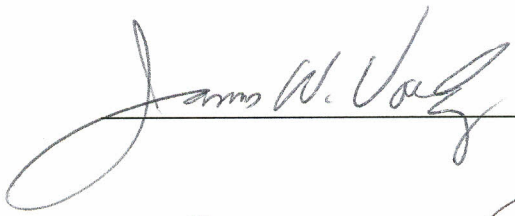
Reading the Magnificat Again for the First Time

by
James Alan Waddell
23 April 1999



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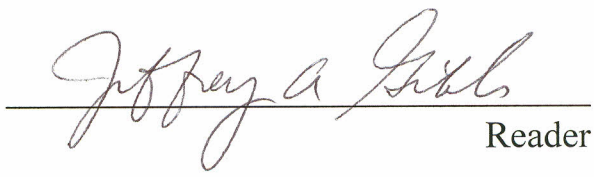

Reader

"To explain a narrative is to grasp this entanglement,
this fleeting structure of interlaced actions." —Paul Ricoeur

Figure-1

[46] Καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ·
Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχή μου τὸν κύριον,
[47] καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμα μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρί μου,
[48] ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ.
ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί,
[49] ὅτι ἐποίησεν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός.
καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,
[50] καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς
τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν.
[51] Ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ,
διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους διανοίᾳ καρδίας αὐτῶν·
[52] καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων
καὶ ὕψωσεν ταπεινούς,
[53] πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν
καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς.
[54] ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ,
μνησθῆναι ἐλέους,
[55] καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν,
τῷ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

Figure-2

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Figure-3

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Figure-5

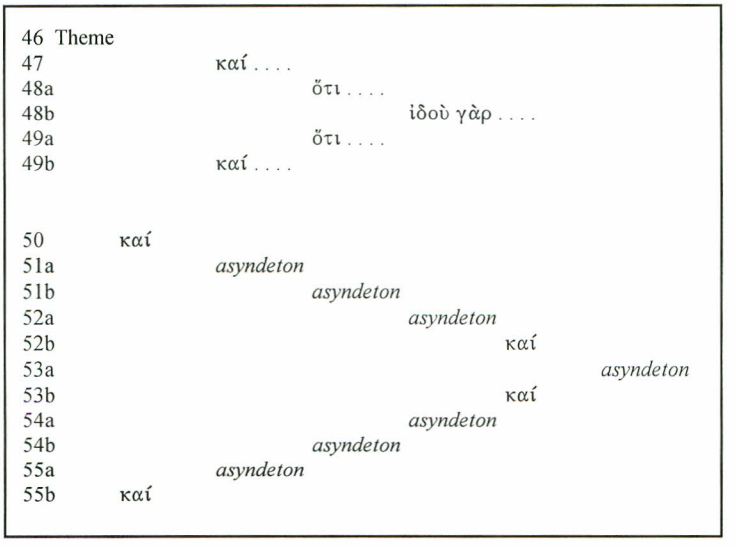

Figure-6

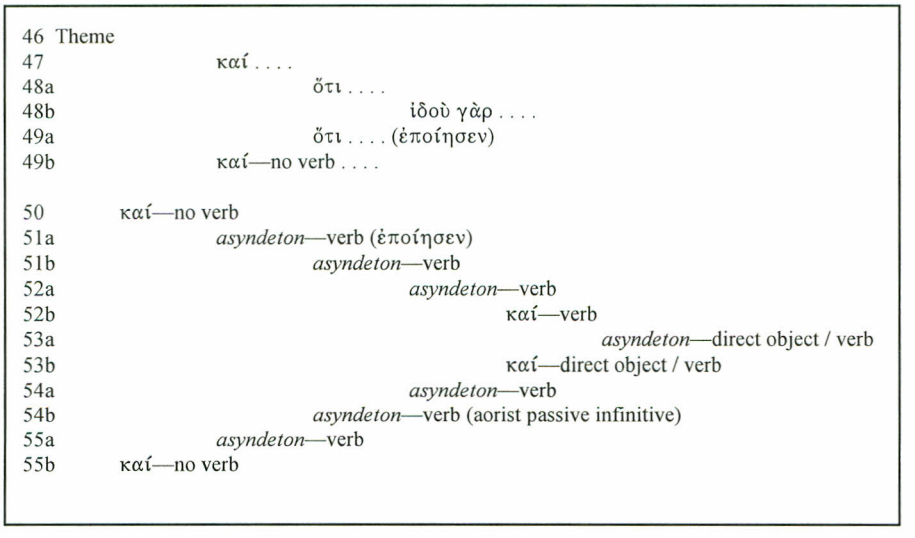

Figure-7

46 Theme
47 καί . . . .
48a ὅτι . . . .
48b ἰδοὺ γὰρ . . . .
49a ὅτι . . . . (ἐποίησεν)
49b καί—no verb . . . .

50 καί—no verb ("from generation to generation")
51a *asyndeton*—verb (aorist indicative: ἐποίησεν) / direct object
51b *asyndeton*—verb (aorist indicative) / direct object
52a *asyndeton*—verb (aorist indicative) / direct object
52b καί—verb (aorist indicative) / direct object
53a *asyndeton*—direct object (present participle) / verb (aorist indicative)
53b καί—direct object (present participle) / verb (aorist indicative)
54a *asyndeton*—verb (aorist indicative) / direct object
54b *asyndeton*—verb (aorist passive infinitive) / direct object
55a *asyndeton*—verb (aorist indicative) / indirect object
55b καί—no verb ("forever")

*

By presenting the above seven text models at the beginning of this study my intention is to recreate a reading experience I once had. You might say, it is intended to recreate the experience of reading the Magnificat again for the first time. As a student a number of years ago in a graduate level seminar on the Gospel according to Luke I was given the assignment of analyzing the καὶ-ἐγένετο structure in Luke's narrative. After scanning the first several chapters of Luke for occurrences of καὶ ἐγένετο, I began work on yet another assignment for the same seminar. The purpose of the latter assignment was to do a poetic analysis of the Magnificat. Naturally, with my eye trained on every καί and every δὲ, I was immediately struck by an apparent pattern of copulas and *asyndetons* (that is, the absence of copulas), as I read the Magnificat. I was intrigued by this. The pattern drew me deeper into the text. In connection with what I will call this καί-*asyndeton* pattern in the Magnificat another pattern began to emerge in the reading. There is a more elaborate syntactical arrangement in the Magnificat which directly corresponds to the simpler καί-*asyndeton* pattern.

Along with the initial excitement of recognizing this syntactical structure in the Magnificat there was a disturbing lack of immediately recognizable correlation between the καί-*asyndeton* pattern and the

simple sense of the words. I was at a loss to make any sense of something so bizarre, initially. Yet, upon reading the Magnificat in its narrative context an idea suggested itself: appearances are not always what they may seem at first glance when God acts in radical reversal of ordinary human expectation.

Reading the Magnificat in Its Nearer Context of Luke's Infancy Narrative

Leaving aside the question of whether the Magnificat should be heard as a liturgical hymn of the church or read as a text,[1] it must be conceded that what we have is, in fact, a written text. We have absolutely nothing which even begins to suggest with any certainty whatsoever how this hymn might have sounded to the early Christian church in its Aramaic form.[2] What we do have is a narrative context: the infancy narrative of Luke's Gospel.[3]

After the introduction to the Gospel (1.1-4), Luke begins the infancy narrative by introducing the characters of Zechariah and Elizabeth (1.5-7). This introduction of characters also includes character development in four areas: vocational (v. 5), family of origin (v. 5), spiritual (v. 6), and personal (v. 7). Zechariah belonged to the priestly order of Abijah (v. 5). His wife, Elizabeth, was a descendant of Aaron

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[1]See Nils Wilhelm Lund's *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina, 1942). Lund's assumption is that chiastic hymns in the New Testament have liturgical origins in the early church. He writes: ". . . the writings of the Old Testament were not only literary; they were also liturgical, brought together for the purpose of serving in public worship in the Jewish community. Many of the problems of these writings solve themselves, when we bear in mind that they were edited for liturgical use. . . . If it can be shown, likewise, that the same forms prevail in the gospels, there should be no reason for refusing the conclusion that the gospels are literary writings and that their peculiar form is due to the fact that they are liturgical documents. They have assumed their present form largely because of the direct influence of the earliest liturgical documents read in the church" (pp. 230f.).

[2]Syntax Criticism has yielded the result, based on analysis of frequency of particles, that certain hymns in the New Testament are translation Greek based on Aramaic originals. See Raymond A. Martin's *Syntax Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, Vol. 10 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1987). See Martin's *Syntactical Evidence of Semitic Sources in Greek Documents*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies, No. 3, Society of Biblical Literature (Cambridge: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974). See also Martin's "Some Syntactical Criteria of Translation Greek," in *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. X, No. 3, July 1960. Lund commented in *Chiasmus in the New Testament*: "Our Synoptic Gospels . . . are not directly dependent upon an Aramaic source. Their literary peculiarities are better explained by postulating an early Greek translation of the Aramaic source" (pp. 232f.).

[3]See James L Bailey's and Lyle D. Vander Broek's *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). In their analysis of the Magnificat Bailey and Vander Broek write: "In the Gospels, each hymn is placed in the narrative. The interpreter needs to think about this interplay between narrative prose and poetry. What is only hinted at in the narrative is often explicitly expressed in the poetic piece" (p. 165).

(v. 5). "Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly" (v. 6). They were childless. The explanation given for this is twofold: that Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in age (v. 7). At this point the narrative begins to alternate between descriptions of human and divine action.

The first narrative segment of human action comes at 1.8-10. In verse 8 we read that Zechariah engages priestly service in the temple. Verse 9 relates how, according to custom (κατὰ τὸ ἔθος), Zechariah is chosen to serve, after which he enters the temple and offers the incense. Verse 10 describes the action of the worshiping community (πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος ἦν τοῦ λαοῦ προσευχόμενον ἔξω), which has gathered for prayer at the customary location (ἔξω) and time, the hour of the incense offering (τῇ ὥρᾳ τοῦ θυμιάματος). Human action is done according to customary expectation.

The narrative then shifts to the first section of divine action (1.11-20). Ὤφθη immediately announces the appearance of the angel at verse 11, abruptly breaking into the human action. Contrary to customary expectation the angel appears, and he appears at the right side of the incense altar. Zechariah's response (v. 12) is one of inner disturbance (ἐταράχθη) and fear (φόβος ἐπέπεσεν ἐπ' αὐτόν—the assonance and alliteration of this phrase mimics the stammering nervousness of one who is gripped by fear). The angel speaks to Zechariah in verses 13-17. The angel reassures Zechariah and calms his fear. He tells Zechariah that his prayer has been heard, that his wife Elizabeth will bear him a son, and that Zechariah is to give his son the name John (v. 13). The angel then describes what John will be like. He describes John as a Nazarite (v. 15). The result of John's ministry, according to the angel's prediction, is that many people will be turned back to God (v. 16), and that John will be seen as one who comes in the spirit and power of Elijah, preparing the way of the Lord (v. 17). Zechariah naturally responds by questioning the angel's proclamation that he and Elizabeth will have a son (v. 18). One might infer from the use of γνώσομαι that Zechariah is making a more explicit reference to sexual impotence, or is at least punning. Zechariah consequently asks the angel for some kind of proof, the reason for which is

Zechariah's and Elizabeth's old age. Zechariah's prayer (v. 13) was apparently limited by his lesser recognition of God's ability to fulfill his prayer and his greater recognition of what is ordinarily expected according to human experience. One may infer from Zechariah's response to the angel that it was not unusual to treat angels with suspicion. Certainly the angel had not as yet revealed his specific identity, and the laws of ordinary human expectation were, for Zechariah, working against the angel's prediction. Zechariah's response is not only one of puzzlement, but one of doubt and even unbelief (1.20). One might even consider that Zechariah's response mirrors Sarah, who laughed when the angel of the LORD delivered the same promise to Abraham and Sarah (see Genesis 18.10-12). Mark Coleridge has written:

> In v. 55, the figure of Abraham which has lurked in the background since the first episode is mentioned explicitly for the first time. The first episode raised the question of what the faith of Abraham might look like now and offered the figure of Zechariah as one who uses Abraham's words but does not share his faith. The second episode continued to treat the question, offering the figure of Mary as one who does not use the words of Abraham but who does share his faith.[4]

The angel answers Zechariah's reliance on customary expectation by revealing his identity (v.19). He is Gabriel who stands in the presence of God. He was sent, by whom it is not explicitly stated but inferred by what he has already said about standing in the presence of God (see also 1.26). The angel was sent specifically to speak to Zechariah (λαλῆσαι πρὸς σὲ) to tell him "these things as good news" (εὐαγγελίσασθαι σοι ταῦτα). The angel then reveals the sign by which Zechariah will know that what the angel has promised him will come true (v. 20). Zechariah will be silent, unable to speak, until the child is born and is given the name John, all the words of the prophecy coming to fulfillment at their proper time (εἰς τὸν καιρὸν; see also Genesis 18.14, LXX). Here God's timing (τὸν καιρὸν) overrides that which ordinarily runs according to the schedule (τῇ ὥρᾳ, v. 10) of what is customary and according to human expectation (κατὰ τὸ ἔθος, v. 9).

At this point the narrative returns to human action (1.21-25), again focused on ordinary human

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[4]*The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative As Christology in Luke 1—2*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 88 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) pp. 92f.

expectation. The worshiping people wait expectantly for Zechariah. They are curious about his delay in the temple (v. 21), a delay which is not according to custom. When Zechariah finally does come out of the temple (v. 22) he is unable to speak, which is again not according to what is expected. Zechariah signed to the people that he had seen a vision in the temple, something that was not according to their ordinary expectation of the temple service. Yet, in spite of Zechariah's uncustomary experience, he completed his days of service in the temple. Then he went home (v. 23).

Elizabeth once again returns to the narrative. With Zechariah now home from fulfilling his customary duty in the service of the temple, Elizabeth becomes pregnant (v. 24), contrary to what the reader has been set up to believe about Elizabeth's ability to conceive (1.7, 18), contrary to Zechariah's unbelief (vv. 13 & 20), but corresponding to what the angel has extraordinarily predicted (v. 13). Elizabeth lives in seclusion, commenting that it is the Lord who has done this to her and who has taken away her disgrace (v. 25).

The narrative now shifts again from human to divine action (1.26-38). Six months after Elizabeth conceives John (see v. 36), God sends Gabriel to Mary. The sending of Gabriel to Mary is narrated through Nazareth, to Joseph, to Mary (vv. 26f.). It is not insignificant that Joseph is named before Mary, according to the expectation of the implied reader.[5] This is the first and only reference to Joseph in the infancy narrative until the actual birth narrative in chapter 2. It is also noteworthy that Mary's character is named (v. 27) in the same way Elizabeth's character was named (v. 5), both preceded by their husbands. When the angel approached Mary, he greeted her with the appellation "you who are in a state of having received grace" (κεχαριτωμένη, v. 28); "The Lord is with you." Mary responded to the

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[5]See Bruce J. Malina's and Jerome H. Neyrey's study, "Honor and Shame in Luke—Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke—Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) pp. 25-65. Writing of honor and shame in the first century as this has reference to the relationship between male and female, Malina and Neyrey contend: ". . . *the sexual exclusiveness of the female is embedded within the honor of some male*. The male is responsible for the maintenance of this sexual exclusiveness. When the exclusiveness is lost, the female is negatively labelled 'shameless,' indicating a loss of 'shame,' which is female honor. . . . The honorable woman . . . strives to avoid the human contacts which might expose her to dishonor or 'shamelessness.' She cannot be expected to succeed in this endeavor unsupported by male authority and control" (p. 44).

angel's appearance with inner disturbance (διεταράχθη, v. 29), as did Zechariah (ἐταράχθη, v. 12). The substance of the angel's conversation with Mary begins (μὴ φοβοῦ, v. 30) in much the same way as his conversation with Zechariah (μὴ φοβοῦ, v. 13): "Stop being afraid." It is notable that the announcement of the angel to Mary very closely corresponds to his announcement to Zechariah. The angel announced to Zechariah that his prayer had been heard and that his wife would give birth. The angel likewise announces to Mary that she will conceive and bear a son. The angel also gives the name—Jesus (vv. 13, 31). As with the angel's description of John (vv. 14-17), so also the description of Jesus (vv. 32f.). Mary questions the angel's prediction because of her virginity (v. 34). Mary's response to the angel (πῶς . . . ἐπεὶ) is very similar to Zechariah's (κατὰ τί . . . γάρ). "How . . . since . . . ?" Mary's use of γινώσκω even serves to underscore the pun of Zechariah at 1.18. The reversal of what is ordinarily expected is set up for the angel to explain. The angel explains the conception event to Mary, that the Holy Spirit will "come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (v. 35). While it is not explicitly referred to as "a sign," the angel refers to the pregnancy of Elizabeth, Mary's relative, as a demonstration that "nothing is impossible with God" (vv. 36f.). The extraordinary of the divine supplants the ordinary of human expectation. Mary responds in total submission to the will of God, and the angel leaves her (v. 38).

The narrative shifts again from divine to human action. In what follows (1.39-56), the focus shifts onto Mary and her relative Elizabeth. After the angel's departure, Mary traveled to visit Elizabeth (vv. 39f.). Mary's greeting to Elizabeth elicits a dual response, one from the baby in Elizabeth's womb, the other a hymnic response from Elizabeth, who was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 41). The hymnic response of Elizabeth (vv. 42-45) takes on a chiastic structure of its own:

42a **Blessed** are you among women,
42b and blessed is the **fruit of your womb**.
43 And how is it that this should happen to me, that **the mother of my Lord should come to me?**
44a For behold, when **the sound of your greeting came to my ears,**
44b the **baby in my womb** leaped for joy.
45a And **blessed** is she who has believed that there will be a fulfillment for those things spoken to her by the Lord.

While the chiasm makes sense only as it holds loosely to the unifying sense of the words, there are clearly intentional differences in the choice of synonyms. The reference to Mary being blessed (εὐλογημένη) in verse 42 is distinct from she who is blessed (μακαρία; see Lc 11.27f.) in verse 45, the referent of the latter being ambiguous in the sense that this could refer either to Mary or Elizabeth. The child of Mary is ὁ καρπὸς τῆς κοιλίας σου, "the fruit of your womb" (v. 42b), while the baby in Elizabeth's womb is τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ μου (v. 44b). Elizabeth and Mary share a common blessing from God in the gift of a son, yet Elizabeth carefully and reverently makes a distinction between herself and Mary, who is to be the mother of her Lord (v. 43). Elizabeth concludes her hymn of praise with what suggests that she anticipates by faith a divine reversal of what is customary according to ordinary human expectation.

The narrative alternation between human and divine action in Luke's infancy narrative serves to contrast what is ordinary and expected with what is extraordinary and unexpected. The use of the characters, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary, and the angel Gabriel, strongly suggests to the reader a sense of the contrast between human weakness and divine omnipotence. It is reminiscent of the Old Testament narratives of the fulfillment of God's promise to an aged and impotent Abraham and Sarah, the reversal of birthright between Jacob and Esau, the unfolding of the divine plan in the abduction of the favored son, Joseph, and the deceitful scheming of his brothers, the survival and coming to power of the infant Moses over and against Pharaoh as the greatest known world power, the divine annihilation of the Pharaonic army in its confident march against the Israelites passing through a parted Red Sea, the instrument of God's redemption in the bumbling insignificance [according to external appearances] of the Judges, a husbandless woman, Ruth, who seeks and finds the reversal of her misfortunes in her *Go'el*, Boaz, an adolescent David against the giant Goliath, the powerful demonstrations of the prophetic underdogs, Elijah, for example, in the face of multiplied brazen evil. All of this serves to reinforce the underlying assumption that appearances are not always what they may seem at first glance. The context

of the infancy narrative of Luke's Gospel has prepared the reader to read the Magnificat and to receive what the Magnificat is offering the reader: the radical reversal of the divine over ordinary human expectation.

A Virginal Reading of the Magnificat

What is so exhilarating about reading the Magnificat in the context of Luke's infancy narrative is that, as the reader recognizes the complexity of the poem's structure, particularly on the syntactical level,[6] the reader grows in awareness of the relationship between the human and the divine. We are conditioned by the ordinary to expect the ordinary. When the God who saves puts his saving acts into motion, he employs the ordinary to subvert the ordinary (vv. 47-49) in an extraordinary way (vv. 50-55). The result is the reader's recognition not only that appearances are not always what they may seem at first glance, but the further apprehension of what is made possible by the divine radical reversal of human will.

Figure-8

[46] Καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ·
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ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί,
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καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,
[50] καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς
τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν.
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[55] καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν,
τῷ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

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[6]See *Literary Forms in the New Testament* where Bailey and Vander Broek write: "Noting other features such as word order, the subjects and objects of the clauses, and the tense and voice of the verbs could produce further insights" (p. 164). In *Chiasmus in the New Testament* Lund's comments describing chiasm include a description of syntax. Lund writes: "We observe that there are inversions of *identical terms* (cf. Mk. 2:27), but more often of *similar ideas* (cf. Ps. 51:7), and not infrequently the inversion consists in the proper arrangement of *nouns* and *verbs* in couplets (cf. Ps. 20:2-5). It matters little in what manner the inversion is obtained. In this field the only limit is found in the ingenuity and inventiveness of the authors" (p. 32).

We are conditioned to limit our reading of the Magnificat, or any other reading for that matter, by the ordinary, standardized text in front of us. This is highly problematic. The Nestle-Aland text of the Magnificat at Luke 1.46-55 gives a simple, almost sterile, linear arrangement of the hymn. (See **Figure-8**.) This can deter the reader from recognizing the complexity of the hymn's structure. Aland's text of the Magnificat belies the tension between editor and reader. An editor is limited in his choices by the definition of his task. An editor's task is to produce a single text for reading. A reader's task, on the other hand, is to read. A reader's reading of a text is only limited to the extent that his competence as a reader is limited.[7] A reader's reading of a text will correspond to the choices made available to the reader by virtue of the breadth and depth of the reader's competence and ability to work with the language and culture of the text. Aland's text of the Magnificat limits reading in the sense that it presents a kind of classical epic of heroic couplets, a straight stichomathia of linear versification.[8] In fact, *any* editorial presentation of a text limits reading. Even the presentation of **Figures 1-7** above has a limiting effect on reading the Magnificat. This is a real hermeneutical conundrum.

While the editorial presentation of the Nestle-Aland text may limit the possibilities of reading the Magnificat from the outset, the Magnificat itself presents the reader with a far more sophisticated hymnic composition, in what might be characterized as complicated chiastic relationships, complementing, contrasting and highlighting the simple semantic sense of the words. Ulrike Mittmann-Richert writes candidly about the complexity of the hymn and the problem this presents the reader:

> Formal analysis of the Magnificat and Benedictus appears at first glance to be very difficult; that is, with respect to both hymns it is a question of a greater plausibility that they have their origin not in Greek, but in Hebrew poetry, the external structure of which was necessarily something other than what confronts us in the Lucan traditional form. At any rate, lines of Hebrew poetry are dependent on the grammatical uniqueness of Hebrew, which is much more concise than that which corresponds to Greek . . . . Besides, it follows that the only tools we seem to possess for

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[7]This is not, however, to deny the perspicuity of scripture, i.e., the ultimate simplicity of its central message.

[8]This problem is also evident, for example, in Aland's presentation of Philippians 2; cf. the difference between the 25th ed. and the 26th and 27th edd.

> the structural analysis of the Lucan songs are the criteria of form obtained from the Old Testament Psalter, the validity of which for our much later texts of New Testament research are not placed in question. Nevertheless, is it possible for one truly to translate these hymns simply?[9]

Though not intended as an editorial finality, you might say that the presentation of the seven text models in **Figures 1-7** is one example of a *process of reading*[10] which breaks out of the limits imposed by editorial definition.

The process of reading the Magnificat outlined by **Figures 1-7** begins with a pe-disposition for identifying occurrences of καί within limited narrative contexts. **Figure-1** reflects the first stage in this process of reading. The simplest reading reveals that there are seven occurrences of καί between verses 46 and 55. The movement from **Figure-1** to **Figure-2** shows the second reading through the hymn, this time picking up other markers of subordinating conjunctions along the way, which may indicate some sort of pattern. The ὅτι-clauses surrounding the γάρ of verse 48b stands out as some sort of possibility of an intentional, or at least definable, structure. Lining up every καί along the left margin requires the movement of τῷ Ἀβραὰμ onto the end of the colon at 55a. The occurrence of καθὼς gets identified with καί because of their morphological similarity. **Figure-3** shows the next stage in this process of reading the Magnificat. The hunch during the second reading (**Figure-2**) that there might be some

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[9]Ulrike Mittmann-Richert, *Magnifikat und Benediktus: Die ältesten Zeugnisse der judenchristlichen Tradition von der Geburt des Messias* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996) p. 154; my translation.

[10]See James W. Voelz's *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995). In a section titled "The Reading Experience and Reading as Experience," Voelz writes: "**Reading as a process is key to the meaning of a text, ordinarily understood.** During the reading process, the meanings and referents of (groups of) words arises, and thus the overall meaning of the text changes as one reads. Therefore, the meaning of the text changes as one makes progress through it. This is so because the object of perception/interpretation is not a static object but one which 'develops,' as it were, as a reader interacts with it.

"The actual reading experience is itself meaningful, i.e., a conveyer of meaning. More accurately put, **the very experience one has while reading**—which is itself a reaction to the meaning one perceives—**can itself be read as a signifier and interpreted for its meaning.** In this example, the complex, contradictory experience one has with Psalm 7 may itself signify that reality is complex and that God's relationship with humanity is not a transparent one. This, may in turn, be applied to the reader directly, e.g., my own personal relationship with God is a complex one and cannot be taken lightly. Indeed, the experience one has while reading may be the signifier which one reads to discover the so-called 'structure' or patterns of meaning of a text" (pp. 319f.). The "example" Voelz refers to here is Paul R. Raabe's analysis of Psalm 7, which , as it turns out, is really a description of Raabe's process of reading the psalm. See Raabe's "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 110 (1991), pp. 213-227. See also Raabe's *Psalm Structures: A Study of Psalms with Refrains*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 104 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990).

definable structure embedded in the ὅτι-clauses takes shape around the chiasm defined by four καί cola, two ὅτι-clauses and a single γάρ. This observation is made to the exclusion of what follows in verses 51-55.

With **Figure-4** the reading gets much more complicated and it slows down considerably. Making decisions about what constituent elements of the hymn should be brought together in narrative association according to the syntactical structure becomes more challenging. A dialectic occurs between identifying strophic divisions of 46-50 / 51-55 (**Figure-3**) and 46 / 47-49 / 50-55 (**Figure-4**). Initially, the first καί (v. 46) was included in the chiasm surrounding the two ὅτι-clauses and the single γάρ, as is shown in **Figure-3**. But the distribution of καί in verses 50-55 requires the reader to rethink decisions of alignment which were made during the reading reflected in **Figure-3**. If the καί of verse 50 is included in narrative association with verses 46-49, this leaves verses 51-55 unbalanced and in need of another καί at the beginning of this section of the hymn. **Figure-5** shows the simplest structural reading of the hymn according to the καί-*asyndeton* pattern. Because of the chiastic καί-*asyndeton* pattern in verses 50-55, the hymn is decisively divided into two strophes: verses 47-49 and verses 50-55, with verse 46 as thematic introduction to the entire hymn.[11] **Figure-6** illustrates the recognition that, in addition to a simple καί-*asyndeton* pattern, a more complicated structure is beginning to emerge in the reading. The pattern gets complicated by initial-position verbs in the *asyndeton* cola of the second strophe (vv. 50-55). Without making any sense of this, there is the recognition that there is not an initial-position verb in the *asyndeton* colon at verse 53a. The finite verb follows its direct object. This is also true at verse 53b, the verb here probably attracting its position from the order in 53a. The verb at 54b is not a finite verb, but an aorist passive infinitive. The dual occurrence of ἐποίησεν at verses 49a and 51a stands out. There are no verbs at all in the corresponding cola at verses 50 and 55b.

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[11]This separation of verse 46 from the strophic arrangement of vv. 47-49 and vv. 50-55 will be supported by what is argued later about the aspectual relationship between the present stem μεγαλύνει (v. 46) and the eleven aorist stem verbs which follow.

The anomaly of the post-positive verbs in the *asyndeton* colon of 53a and the καί colon of 53b brings the reader into a deeper reading of the text and the recognition of a far more complex system of syntactical-structural relationships of narrative constituents in chiasm (**Figure-7**). Cola 51a, 51b, 52a, 52b all contain finite verbs, all in initial-position, all aorist indicatives, and all followed by their direct objects. This pattern changes at 53a to initial-position direct object followed by a finite verb, aorist indicative. The direct object of 53a is a present participle. This same pattern is followed in 53b: initial position direct object (present participle) followed by finite verb, aorist indicative. Colon 54a resumes the pattern of finite verb, initial-position aorist indicative, followed by direct object. Colon 54b boldly breaks the pattern with the substitution of an aorist passive infinitive, followed by its direct object. Colon 55a might appear to resume the original pattern, but the indirect object following the initial-position aorist indicative will not allow it. No verb at 55b corresponds to no verb at verse 50. There is a simple semantic correspondence between "generation to generation" of verse 50 and "forever" of colon 55b.

This, in essence, recreates the process of reading the Magnificat which yielded **Figures 1-7**. This is without attempting to make any sense of the hymn's construction as it is outlined in this way, other than the sense one gets that there is not a clear and immediately recognizable correspondence between the chiasm produced by the syntactical structure and the simple sense of the words.

Further Rationale for the Above Reading Based on a Closer Look at the Text

The observation that there is a single present stem verb followed by eleven aorist-stem verbs is well documented, especially analysis of the aorist-stem verbs between verses 51 and 53.[12] There is no firm consensus, however, as to what exactly we should make of this. At least two possibilities have been suggested. The first is that this is a series of gnomic aorists, all of which describe the ways in which the

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[12]See Stephen Farris' *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narrative: Their Origin, Meaning and Significance*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 9 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985) pp. 114-116. See also John O. York's comments in *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 46 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) pp. 52f.

saving God characteristically acts. The second suggestion is that it is a series of prophetic aorists, as translations of the Semitic prophetic perfect. Both suggestions have their own unique appeal, yet neither persuades definitively. A third possibility might be that Luke employed the aspectual sense of the Greek verb according to classical usage. It is a settled observation that Luke made use of classical form in his composition of the Gospel. The extent to which Luke used classical form is not entirely clear. C.M.J. Sicking and P. Stork have outlined a number of examples of the use of aspect in Classical Greek verbs, particularly as this relates to the connection between the present and aorist stems in narrative contexts.

> I have argued that the contrast between AS [Aorist Stem] and PS [Present Stem] does not serve the purpose of distinguishing between 'une action en course de développement', and 'une action pure et simple', or of contrasting 'completed' actions with actions that are 'not-completed'. Nor is the use of AS or PS bound up with any 'temporal' characteristics, or with the chronology, of the situation(s) referred to. On the contrary, in many instances, one may well substitute PS for AS (or *vice versa*) without having to alter the truth-conditions of what is communicated. One could even delete a considerable number of PS and AS markers in Herodotus' text without giving rise to any uncertainty about the chronology of the narrative or the temporal relationship between the situations involved.
>
> It appears, then, that the 'distribution' of AS and PS cannot be successfully explained if we take it that the speaker's decision to adopt one of the two contrasting forms is motivated by the wish to convey information of any kind regarding the 'facts' that are being described, or evoked. In order to understand the basic content of the contrast between AS and PS as such, we have to leave aside considerations of 'meaning' or reference, and to bring in considerations of discourse organisation. . . .
>
> Aorist indicative verb forms and participles 1) are to be assigned focus function (or: are the 'nucleus') in the clause they are part of, and 2) are the predicate of a self-contained statement.
>
> It is to be noted that, as as [sic] a consequence of this, in narrative contexts, AS Indicatives in main clauses and preposed ἐπεί(τε)-, ἐπειδή- and ὡς-clauses, and preposed AS participles, typically move forward narrative time—except for those cases where an AS verb form is coreferential with another AS form in the preceding context.
>
> By using Imperfect indicatives or Present participles, on the other hand, a speaker (or writer) signals to his audience (or readership) that the verb form at hand is not meant to perform an independent informative function. *Either* the PS verb form indicates that it is not to be taken as the 'nucleus' of its clause, the speaker wanting to focus on some other constituent within the same clause, *or* the statement in which the PS verb form is the predicate, is to be connected with another statement (or other statements) in the immediate or wider context—bearing no focus itself, but being just one item in a series, or otherwise owing its relevance to some other statement.
>
> In those cases where substituting AS for PS would affect the *information* that is communicated, this is not to be ascribed to any semantic value (or 'sense') of AS or PS as such, but is to be considered a side-effect of the pragmatic function of the PS forms: we understand what the speaker intends to communicate by combining the pragmatic function of the constituent

> (or statement) at hand with the characteristics of the action referred to and/or data provided by the context.[13]

A present stem verb is connected in its thought to all the verbs which follow within a limited narrative context. The use of an aorist stem verb allows that verb to stand alone in its own specific sentence with its own ostensibly self-referential meaning. The connection between the present stem verb (μεγαλύνει) and the eleven aorist stem verbs in the context of the Magnificat is that Mary's magnifying praise of God is predicated on all the powerful acts of the God who saves, the pragmatic upshot of which—as this occurs in the process of reading[14]—is the divine subversion of ordinary human will and expectation. Reading the Magnificat within both its own self-contained narrative context and the wider context of the infancy narrative brings the reader to the realization that in the act of singing the hymn the distinction between human action and divine action becomes blurred. While it is indeed Mary who is singing the hymn—what is normally understood as a human act—it is the acts of God which get extolled in the singing of the hymn. As the reader participates in the singing of the hymn through the act of reading, the reader is drawn away from the act of Mary's singing and drawn into the acts of God. As human action recedes into the background, divine action grows large in the perception and experience of the

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[13]*Two Studies in the Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek*, MNEMOSYNE: Bibliotheca Classica Batava (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) pp. 103f. The length of the citation becomes necessary because of the compacted nature of the analysis included in the summary statements. On the basic principles of aspect of the Greek verb see also James W. Voelz's *Fundamental Greek Grammar*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993) pp. 66-68, 112f., 165, 168. See also Voelz's "Present and Aorist Verbal Aspect," *Neotestamentum*, 27 (1993) pp. 153-164.

[14]Voelz comments in *What Does This Mean?*: "The experience of reading as itself a text may then function **pragmatically**. The experience may, first, as a speech act, have an illocutionary force. In the case of Psalm 7, it may be a rebuke: 'O man, what are you that you think so highly of yourself!'It may then, as a speech act, have a perlocutionary aspect to it; it may be a call to repentance and to a different conduct of life" (p. 320). See Paul Ricoeur's discussion of this in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, trans. & ed. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge, 1994) pp. 134f. Ricoeur writes: ". . . the properly syntactic marks constitute a system of inscription which makes possible in principle the fixation by writing of these indications of illocutionary force. It must be conceded that the perlocutionary act, being primarily a characteristic of oral discourse, is the least inscribable element. But the perlocutionary action is also the least discursive aspect of the discourse: it is discourse *qua* stimulus. Here discourse operates, not through the recognition of my intention by the interlocutor, but in an energetic mode, as it were, by direct influence upon the emotions and affective attitudes of the interlocutor."

reader—"My soul magnifies the Lord."[15] If it is in fact true that Luke has employed the aspectual sense of the Classical Greek verb in his translation of the Magnificat, then what we have in front of us is a masterful attempt at a blend of two forms—Semitic thought forms (in chiasm and parallelism) with Greek aspect.

There are two syntactical chiasms (vv. 47-49 and vv. 50-55), both of which expand on the theme (v. 46) in their own ways. The first and smaller is a more personal, subjective praise of the Lord by Mary which has to do with God's acts in relation to Mary. The second is a more objective extolling of the Lord's attributes and acts of salvation, culminating in the Lord's salvation/mercy of his son, Israel, and the connected promise as it was given to the fathers, representatively Abraham, and as it looks forward to salvation and mercy in/to the S/seed forever.

In addition to the two syntactical chiasms there is a complex web of connections within the narrative structure of the Magnificat.[16]

Μεγαλύνει—μεγάλα—κράτος (cf. 1.32)
ταπείνωσιν—ταπεινούς
ἐπέβλεψεν—ἀντελάβετο
τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ—Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ (cf. 1.38)
ἐποίησεν—Ἐποίησεν
ὁ δυνατός—ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ—δυνάστας
τὸ ἔλεος—ἐλέους
πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί—εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς—εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα
τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν—πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, τῷ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ

While the above table is certainly an artificial construction of narrative associations between words, the actual complexity of the associations is much more exciting when there are lines drawn between them, crisscrossing and matrixing in the actual text. What this alerts the reader to is a complex web of poetic

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[15]This observation is even supported by the expansion of this sentence of v. 46b in the synthetic parallelism of v. 47! It finds further support in the word order of the sentence. Μεγαλύνει and τὸν κύριον are in positions of emphasis, while ἡ ψυχή lessens in emphasis and μου is in the least emphatic position of all in the sentence.

[16]In *Literary Forms in the New Testament*, Bailey and Vander Broek write: "Clearly, the repetition in the hymn invites hearers to understand more than the surface and conventional meanings of the words. Repetition offers second and even third opportunities to ponder and make connections" (p. 165).

constituents across the structural boundaries outlined in **Figures 1-7**. Robert C. Tannehill gives a fuller analysis of these narrative associations in the Magnificat, and in the introductory remarks to his study Tannehill writes:

> We shall also note the recurrence of certain words or word roots and the presence of sound patterns in certain verses. These repetitive patterns have various functions. They bring out links or contrasts between particular parts. . . . Repetitive patterns also retard the forward movement of thought, the common tendency to pass on quickly from one thought to another. By doubling back on what has already been said and expressing it in a new way the text gains in intensity and depth. Repetitive pattern may also encourage a feelingful participation in meaning. It invites the hearer to step into the text with his whole self, just as the rhythm of music invites us to join the dance, or at least to tap a foot. Thus repetitive pattern not only makes possible deepening of thought but also savoring of mood, helping the text to address the hearer at those levels where thought and feeling are not separate. We will also discover that these patterns unite contrasting elements or hold together what might seem to be separate. Thus the unity of the text is complex, a unity in tension. This forces us beyond the obvious and commonplace to a deeper meditation on the event being celebrated and awakens a sense of wonder that does not dissolve in being stated.[17]

Tannehill's comments support the process of reading by which the syntactical structure of the Magnificat draws the reader into the thought of the text in such a way that the reader actually *feels* the object of the poem, namely, the divine reversal of natural human expectation.

Another association links the hymn with the prior infancy narrative. At verse 47, ἠγαλλίασεν brings the reader to recall ἀγαλλίασις of 1.14 where the angel tells Zechariah that his son, John, will be a source of rejoicing for him. Verse 50 links by looking back (ἅγιον—ἔλεος) and by looking forward in thought and structure—neither cola have a verb. Verse 48b links with "blessed" of verse 45. "Holy" in verse 49a links with "seed" in 55b and also verse 35. Verse 49b is also linked to verse 50 since "holy" in the Old Testament is primarily an attribute of God with respect to his "mercy." According to Greek aspect, the present participles at 50b, 53a and 53b point to something else in their clause which the writer intended to emphasize.[18] In these three instances it most certainly must be the character and acts of God.

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[17]"The Magnificat As Poem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1974) 93:263-275; see esp. p. 264.

[18]*Two Studies in the Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek*, pp. 103f.

Abraham is included in the *asyndeton* of 55a because of the use of the patriarch's name as a synecdoche for the fathers and its backward-looking nature. The καθὼς of 55a maintains the *asyndeton* because it is not an "adding" copula, strictly speaking, but an adverb. This argument regarding the καθὼς of 55a might be considered a problem for the present analysis. Nonetheless, this use of καθὼς may still support the present analysis in the sense that its position in the hymn may be taken as a Semitic use of "change conclusion."[19] This is a literary device wherein an anomaly gets inserted near the end of a narrative segment interrupting the naturally expected sequence, in order to signal the close of the sequence or the conclusion of a limited narrative context.

Note the smaller chiasm between the two καί structures (52b and 53b) surrounding the *asyndeton* at the vertex (53a) of the larger chiasm. This seems to clinch the structure:

52b καί—verb (aorist indicative) / direct object
53a *asyndetic vertex*
53b καί—direct object (present participle) / verb (aorist indicative)

That the direct object of 53b is a present participle and not a noun per se, following all the direct objects of the *asyndetons* so far, is not a problem when one realizes that it probably has attracted its form (and possibly its object/verb order) from the *asyndetic* vertex. The following *asyndetons* then revert to the verb/direct object order.

Verses 51-53 have synthetic parallelism (51a & b), antithetical parallelisms (52a & b and 53a & b) and chiasm (52-53) imbedded in synthetic parallelism (50 and 54-55). Lund has described this:

> Under the discussion of the law of the shift at the centre one may include all those passages which show an artistic and closely knit combination of *chiastic* and *alternating* lines. These systems are of two kinds. One kind begins with chiastic order, shifts to alternating at the centre, then resumes the chiastic order once more, maintaining this order until the end of the system is reached. The other kind, beginning with a series of alternating lines, shifts to chiastic order at the centre; then it resumes the original alternating order after the centre is passed, retaining this order

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[19]See, e.g., Paul's use of this rhetorical device at Ephesians 4.11. Voelz calls this "change conclusion." See Voelz's *What Does This Mean?* pp. 128f. where he uses the example of 1 Corinthians 15.42b-44, and p. 140 where he uses the example of Psalm 29.1f.

till the system is completed.[20]

Here Lund has described the complexity of the relationships between parallelism and chiasm in limited narrative contexts.

Reading the Magnificat draws the reader into a closer relationship with the text. The chiasms contrast with the simple sense of the words, drawing the reader to consider in a fresh way the interpretation of the simple sense. There is no doubt that the syntactical structure exists. The question is, Why did Luke do it this way? Certainly, it is possible that Luke wanted to present the reader with a literary device which would support the simple reading of the text, in spite of its glaringly superficial contradictions. With this texture, Luke unfolds a world in front of the text (Ricoeur).[21] Confronted with such a structure, the reader engages in a closer embrace of the text, so that the reader might actually be formed by what the text is trying to say. Sometimes a text will grab you. Sometimes a text will caress you. Other times it will shake and rattle you until you see what it is it wants you to see—until you understand what it is you see in front of you. In the case of the Magnificat, the texture of the hymn itself draws the reader into this closer embrace, in order to reinforce the sense of the simple words of the text with the syntactical structure, to bring the reader to explicit confrontation with the contradiction between the construct of human will and the radical subversion of human will by the divine. Whether this creates an explicit recognition of the paradoxical correspondence between the simple sense of the words and the hymn's structure, or a more subtle, subconscious appropriation of this, is dependant on any given reader's experience of reading the Magnificat.

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[20]*Chiasmus in the New Testament*, pp. 44f.

[21]See "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 143. See also "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 177f.

The Theoretical Problem: Ricoeur's "Deformations of Communicative Competence," the "Referential Moment," and the Principle of "No Rules for Making Good Guesses"

The complexity of reading the Magnificat must be understood as a derivative of the complexity of its composition as a text. Paul Ricoeur has written: "Text implies texture, that is, complexity of composition. Text also implies work, that is, labour in forming language."[22] Luke's "labour" and "complexity of composition" is evident in the "texture" of the Magnificat. For Ricoeur the process of reading is itself a possible object of interpretation.[23] This is so because a text's form, which is intentionally created by its author, has a particular effect in the reader. Therefore the effect of reading is an interpretable event. This is possible as one is "emancipated" from the constraints of traditionalist presuppositions. "Since hermeneutics can only develop a natural competence, we need a meta-hermeneutics to formulate the theory of the deformations of communicative competence."[24] Ricoeur further argues: "A critique of ideology must think in terms of anticipation where the hermeneutics of tradition thinks in terms of assumed tradition."[25]

An example of Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of tradition" are Lund's "laws of chiastic structures."[26] The above analysis of the Magnificat is at odds with Lund's laws:

> (1) *The centre is always the turning point*. The centre, as we shall see, may consist of one, two, three, or even four lines. (2) At the centre there is often a change in the trend of thought, and an antithetic idea is introduced. After this the original trend is resumed and continued until the system is concluded. For want of a better name, we shall designate this feature *the law of the shift at the centre*. (3) Identical ideas are often distributed in such a fashion that *they occur in the extremes and at the centre* of their respective system, and nowhere else in the system. (4) There are also many instances of ideas, occurring at the centre of one system and recurring in the extremes of a corresponding system, the second system evidently having been constructed to

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[22]"A Response by Paul Ricoeur" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 37.

[23]"Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 122f.

[24]"Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 86.

[25]"Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," p. 86.

[26]*Chiasmus in the New Testament*, pp. 40f.

> match the first. We shall call this feature *the law of shift from centre to the extremes*. (5) there is a definite tendency of certain terms to gravitate toward certain positions within a given system, such as the divine names in the psalms, quotations in central position in a system in the New Testament, or such terms as "body" when denoting the church. (6) Larger units are frequently introduced and concluded by *frame-passages*. (7) There is frequently a mixture of chiastic and alternating lines within one and the same unit.

While Lund had earlier argued for an almost infinite possibility in the use of chiasm by the ancient writer,[27] he actually limited the possibilities of reading by outlining his "laws." Lund further argues according to his observations of Matthew and Luke: ". . . the chiastic forms are best preserved in Matthew, whereas they more often break down in Luke."[28] Lund further argues: "A comparative study of the Common Source, as it is represented in the parallel sections of Matthew and Luke, shows clearly that chiastic forms which are found perfect in Matthew, in brief panels and in longer sections, in many instances are broken up in Luke in conformity to his Greek literary taste."[29] Yet Luke was certainly capable of working a text in order to achieve a more perfect chiasm. Lund gives evidence of this in Luke's narrative treatment of Jesus in the synagogue at 4.16-21a.[30] This raises the question: Which is it? Either Luke masterfully worked the Magnificat in the context of the infancy narrative, or he made a feeble attempt at combining Hebrew and Hellenistic forms.

Ricoeur is certainly open to the possibilities presented by the above reading of the Magnificat represented in **Figures 1-7**:

> For it is the task of understanding to bring to discourse what is initially given as structure. It is necessary to have gone as far as possible along the route of objectification, to the point where structural analysis discloses the *depth semantics* of a text, before one can claim to 'understand' the text in terms of the 'matter' which speaks therefrom. The *matter* of the text is not what a naive reading of the text reveals, but what the formal arrangement of the text mediates. If that is so, then truth and method do not constitute a disjunction but rather a dialectical process.
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> . . . It seems to me that the properly hermeneutical moment arises when the interrogation,

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[27]*Chiasmus in the New Testament*, p. 32.

[28]*Chiasmus in the New Testament*, p. 232.

[29]*Chiasmus in the New Testament*, p. 233.

[30]*Chiasmus in the New Testament*, pp. 236-238.

> transgressing the closure of the text, is carried toward what Gadamer himself calls 'the matter of the text', namely the sort of *world* opened up by it. This can be called the *referential* moment, in allusion to the Fregean distinction between sense and reference. The sense of the work is its internal organisation, whereas the reference is the mode of being unfolded in front of the text.
>
> It may be noted in passing that the most decisive break with Romantic hermeneutics is here; what is sought is no longer an intention hidden behind the text, but a world unfolded in front of it. The power of the text to open a dimension of reality implies in principle a recourse against any given reality and thereby the possibility of a critique of the real. It is in poetic discourse that this subversive power is most alive. The strategy of this discourse involves holding two moments in equilibrium: suspending the reference of ordinary language and releasing a second order reference, which is another name for what we have designated above as the world opened up by the work. In the case of poetry, fiction is the path of redescription; or to speak as Aristotle does in the *Poetics*, the creation of a *mythos*, of a 'fable', is the path of *mimesis*, of creative imitation.[31]

The "poetic discourse" of the Magnificat certainly, powerfully and subversively unfolds a possible world in front of the text to be appropriated by the reader.[32] Ricoeur writes: "To appropriate is to make what was alien become one's own. What is appropriated is indeed the matter of the text. But the matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be. So I exchange the *me*, *master* of itself, for the *self*, *disciple* of the text."[33] But the appropriation of a text is not the sole responsibility of a reader's ability to "disappropriate" oneself. Appropriation is also facilitated by the structure of the narrative.

> . . . appropriation is dialectically linked to the objectification characteristic of the *work*. It is mediated by all the structural objectifications of the text; insofar as appropriation does not respond to the author, it responds to the sense. Perhaps it is at this level that the mediation effected by the text can be best understood. . . . Thus what seems most contrary to subjectivity, and what structural analysis discloses as the texture of the text, is the very *medium* within which we can understand ourselves. Above all, the *vis-à-vis* of appropriation is what Gadamer calls 'the matter of the text' and what I call here 'the world of the work.' Ultimately, what I appropriate is a proposed world. The latter is not *behind* the text, as a hidden intention would be, but *in front of* it, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals. Henceforth, to understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text*.[34]

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[31]Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," pp. 92f.

[32]Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," p. 111.

[33]Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," p. 113.

[34]"The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," p. 143.

There is no question that the Magnificat presents an example of what Ricoeur calls "deformations of communicative competence." This does not suggest that Luke was incompetent in his working of the Magnificat, but that his competence reached beyond conventional models of communicative competence as far as giving the reader to experience the "referential moment," the point at which the "matter" of this text becomes a reality for the reader in the process of reading.[35]

The illocutionary force of the Magnificat is the poetic unfolding of a possible world in front of the text. Appearances are not always what they may seem at first glance. Here the syntactical structure of the Magnificat is closely associated with its "matter." Ricoeur writes:

> . . . narratives, folktales and poems are not without a referent; but this referent is discontinuous with that of everyday language. Through fiction and poetry, new possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up within everyday reality. Fiction and poetry intend being, not under the modality of being-given, but under the modality of power-to-be. Everyday reality is therefore metamorphised by what could be called the imaginative variations which literature carries out on the real.[36]

In the Magnificat, the inherent contradiction that any human being, let alone a virgin, could bear the Son of God is overcome by Ricoeur's poetic "modality of power-to-be."[37] Mary seizes the promise and embraces the contradiction by faith, just as the reader is brought to this same perlocutionary force, the faith to embrace the possible world unfolded in front of the text by the contradictory components of the discourse: the syntactical structure on the one hand and the simple sense of the words on the other.[38]

Nevertheless, having freed himself from the constraints of traditionalist hermeneutics, Ricoeur struggles with the boundaries of his freedom. ". . . there are no rules for making good guesses. But there

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[35]See "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" where Ricoeur writes: ". . . the hermeneutical task is to discern the 'matter' of the text (Gadamer) and not the psychology of the author. The matter of the text is to its structure as, in the proposition, the reference is to the sense (Frege)" (p. 111).

[36]"The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," p. 142.

[37]Tannehill calls this "exceeding the possibilities of ordinary life," in "The Magnificat As Poem," p. 265.

[38]In *Literary Forms in the New Testament*, Bailey and Vander Broek write: ". . . hymns use poetic language of worship. It is not a linguistic world of explanation but one of exaltation; not of practical reason, but of lament and praise. Even an interpreter only remotely aware of the potential of worship will appreciate the use of hymns by the church as a daring act of worship that shatters conventional patterns of viewing the world" (p. 165).

are methods for validating guesses. . . . it is in construing the details that we construe the whole. There is no necessity and no evidence concerning what is important and what is unimportant, what is essential and what is unessential. The judgment of importance is a guess."[39] And yet it seems to me that the traditionalist hermeneutic, as Ricoeur calls it, is dialogically necessary for Ricoeur's principle of "no rules for making good guesses" to work. In order to understand that the syntactical structure moves outside the conventional boundaries of what is traditionally assumed to be chiastic in New Testament literature (Lund), we first need to know what the traditionalist assumptions are. When there is no consensus in the reading of a particular text—when the structure is not so obvious as to yield an incontrovertible meaning—this demonstrates the plausibility of Ricoeur's principle. Which is certainly supported in what now follows of the present study.

Other Readings of the Magnificat

Once the reader reads the Magnificat according to the above analysis, the question becomes What sense can be made of this? There is not a consensus in the literature as to how the Magnificat is to be read or what kind of structure is inherent in its composition. The interlacing relationships of words and phrases is so complex on the level of the simple sense of the words that it is almost a Gordian Knot of poetic texture. Once you think you've figured out a possible structure based on a combination of narrative associations of specific elements, and you begin to draw away from the text to see if it will work, something else reveals itself and forces you to re-engage the process. This almost maddening dialectic moves the reader in and out of the text of the Magnificat, the result being that it is virtually impossible to come to a solid consensus on its structure.

What is immediately apparent is that the chiasm of the καί—*asyndeton* pattern does not

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[39]"The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered As a Text," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 211. Ricoeur then goes on to argue that the procedure for validating our guesses is "closer to a logic of probability than to a logic of empirical verification. . . . It is a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability" (p. 212).

correspond to the simple sense of the words. It might be helpful to illustrate this in translation. (See **Figure-9**.)

Figure-9

46a And Mary said:
46b "My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48a because he has looked upon the lowliness of his maidservant.
48b For behold, from now on all generations shall call me blessed.
49a because the Able One has done great things for me.
49b And holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is from generation to generation for those who fear him.
51a He has done a powerful thing with his right arm;
51b he has scattered the proud in the thought of their heart;
52a he has brought down rulers from thrones,
52b and he has lifted up the lowly.
53a Hungering ones he has filled with good things,
53b and wealth acquirers he has sent away empty.
54a He has helped Israel his son,
54b by remembering his mercies,
55a just as he had spoken to our fathers, to Abraham,
55b and to his seed forever."

Here the observation can easily be made that the simple sense of the words does not correspond to the καί-*asyndeton* pattern (**Figures 4-6**) with its complex syntactical structure (**Figure-7**).

The first indication that there is a lack of correspondence between the simple reading of the text and the syntactical structure comes in the middle of the opening verses of the Magnificat between verses 46 and 47. Here the second καί (v. 47) extends the thought of the opening theme according to the simple sense, but syntactically begins the first strophe *in media res*. There is both synonymous and synthetic parallelism between 46b and 47. The initial verbs, Μεγαλύνει and ἠγαλλίασεν, are essentially synonymous, as are ἡ ψυχή μου and τὸ πνεῦμα μου. Closing out these two cola, ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρί μου extends the meaning of τὸν κύριον in synthetic parallelism. This connection is separated in the structural analysis described above, creating a dissonance in the experience of reading.

While the syntactical analysis of **Figures 1-7** reveals a dual strophic division of narrative components in chiasm, the simple sense of the words corresponds more closely to a linear arrangement of

couplets. (See **Figure-10**.)

Figure-10

[46] Καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ·

Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχή μου τὸν κύριον,
[47] καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμα μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρί μου,

[48] ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ.
ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί,

[49] ὅτι ἐποίησεν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός.
καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,

[50] καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ
εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς
τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν.

[51] Ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ,
διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους διανοίᾳ καρδίας αὐτῶν·

[52] καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων
καὶ ὕψωσεν ταπεινούς,

[53] πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν
καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς.

[54] ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ,
μνησθῆναι ἐλέους,
[55] καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, τῷ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ
εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

The dissonance the reader experiences in the process of reading in the dialectic movement between the simple sense of the words and the syntactical chiasmata is very powerful. There is even a dialectic tension on the level of the simple sense. It is not entirely clear what components should be arranged in narrative association for the purpose of making some structural sense of the hymn. Here it should be noted that there is not a consensus of opinion as to how the Magnificat should be read. Even in light of our possession of Lund's "laws," many different structures are identified, almost all of which are based solely on the simple semantic sense of the words. Mittmann-Richert sees a chiastic structure running through the entire hymn from verse 46 through verse 55:

V.46b.47	Preis Gottes durch Maria als ihres persönlischen Retters
V.48a	Gottes Heilshandeln an der Niedrigen
V.48b.49a	Der Erweis der göttlichen Macht-taten vor den anerkennenden Augen der Welt
V.49b.50	Die Heiligkeit und das den Gottesfürchtigen gegenüber nicht endende Erbarmen Gottes
V.51	Der Erweis der göttlichen Machttaten
V.52f	Gottes Heilshandeln an den Niedrigen seines Volkes
V.54f	Preis Gottes als des Retters Israels[40]

While Mittmann-Richert's analysis is done on the basis of the simple sense of the words, it does not appear to take into full consideration the tightly woven complex of associations and basic inner relationships of the hymn on this same level. To take one example, the dual occurrence of "mercy" at 50a and 54b seems to be ignored in this analysis. The identification of 54f. as praise of God who is Redeemer of Israel should actually extend from 50 to 55. Nonetheless, Mittmann-Richert's analysis is intriguing.

Robert C. Tannehill's treatment of the Magnificat is certainly significant for the present discussion. Tannehill is widely recognized as an important scholar doing narrative analysis of the New Testament. He outlines the text of the Magnificat as follows:

46 μεγαλύνει / ἡ ψυχή μου / τὸν κύριον
47 καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν / τὸ πνεῦμα μου / ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ / τῷ σωτῆρί μου
48 ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν / ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν / τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ
ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν / μακαριοῦσίν με / πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί
49 ὅτι ἐποίησεν μοι / μεγάλα / ὁ δυνατός
καὶ ἅγιον / τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ
50 καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ / εἰς γενεὰς / καὶ γενεὰς / τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν
51 Ἐποίησεν / κράτος / ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ
διεσκόρπισεν / ὑπερηφάνους / διανοίᾳ / καρδίας αὐτῶν
52 καθεῖλεν / δυνάστας / ἀπὸ θρόνων
καὶ ὕψωσεν / ταπεινούς
53 πεινῶντας / ἐνέπλησεν / ἀγαθῶν
καὶ πλουτοῦντας / ἐξαπέστειλεν / κενούς
54 ἀντελάβετο / Ἰσραὴλ / παιδὸς αὐτοῦ

[40]*Magnifikat und Benediktus*, p. 166.

μνησθῆναι / ἐλέους
55 καθὼς ἐλάλησεν / πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν / τῷ ᾽Αβραὰμ /
καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ / εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα

Tannehill sees the possibility for "two correct ways of viewing the structure of the entire poem."[41] The first two lines of the poem may form the "introductory statement of praise," followed by the rest of the poem as stating the *reason* for this praise in the saving acts of God. The second possibility as a correct way of viewing the Magnificat's structure according to Tannehill takes verses 46-50 and 51-55 as a basic division of the poem into two strophes.[42] Tannehill argues: "That vv.49b-50 and 54b-55 were meant to correspond and so mark off the sections of the poem is shown by similarities of form and content."[43] Yet for these very same reasons, what Tannehill sees as verses which mark off the ends of sections can also serve to contain one section, verses 50-55.

Raymond E. Brown gives a full analysis of the Magnificat.[44] Brown identifies a tripartite division of the hymn: introduction, body (with two strophes) and conclusion. According to Brown's analysis, the introduction runs from 46b to 47. The body of the hymn is identified as 48-53, with strophic divisions of verses 48a-50b and 51a-53b. The conclusion comes between verses 54 and 55. Brown's division of the Magnificat follows the *Gattung*, or literary type, of the praise psalm in the Old Testament.

I. Howard Marshall, like Brown, recognizes the form of the Magnificat as Old Testament praise psalm. Yet, because of his source-critical-bound approach to reading the Gospel, Marshall is unable to analyze the poetry of the hymn. So he can write: "As for its character, the hymn falls into the general pattern of Hebrew poetry with *parallelismus membrorum*, but no precise metric form has been

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[41]"The Magnificat As Poem," p. 267.

[42]"The Magnificat As Poem," pp. 267f. See also Tannehill's treatment of the Magnificat in his *The Narrative Unity of Luke—Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, Vol. One: The Gospel According to Luke, Foundations & Facets: New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) pp. 26-32.

[43]"The Magnificat As Poem," p. 268.

[44]*The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977) pp. 355-365.

established."[45]

Arthur A. Just, Jr. identifies two strophes in the Magnificat: 46b-49 and 50-55.

1:46a Introduction: And *Mary* [Μαριάμ] said,

Strophe 1: **Mary's Hymn of Praise**
1:46b-47 "My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
1:48 *because* [ὅτι] he has regarded with favor the low estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed,
1:49 *because* [ὅτι] the Mighty One has done great things to me, and holy is his name.

Strophe 2: **God's Mighty Acts of Salvation for Israel**
1:50 **A** and his *mercy* [ἔλεος] *for generations and generations* is for those who fear him.
1:51 **B** He has done a mighty deed with his arm;
he has scattered the arrogant in the way of thinking of their hearts;
1:52 **C** he has pulled down the *mighty* from their thrones, **a** mighty
and he has exalted the *humble*. **b** humble
1:53 **C′** The *hungry* he has filled with good things **b′** hungry
and the *rich* he has sent away empty. **a′** rich
1:54a **B′** He has come to the aid of Israel his servant,
1:54b **A′** to remember *mercy* [ἐλέους],
1:55 just as spoke *to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever*."

1:56 Conclusion: And *Mary* [Μαριάμ] stayed with her about three months and returned to her home.[46]

Just's analysis of the Magnificat according to the simple sense of the words most closely approximates the analysis based on the syntactical structure. Nevertheless, there are obvious differences between the two.

There clearly is no consensus as to how one should read the Magnificat. The hymn itself does not easily yield its prize. While there are those analyses which closely approximate each other, there are other analyses which radically differ. Certainly Ricoeur's principle of "no rules for making good guesses" applies. And one Ricoeurean guess is as good as another. Whose guess enjoys the support of

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[45]*The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) pp. 78f.

[46]Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 1:1—9:50*, Concordia Commentary, A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996) p. 81.

Ricoeur's "logic of qualitative probability"?

Conclusion

The relationship between semantics and structure of narrative is the subject of much analysis in recent biblical scholarship. The structure of Luke's Magnificat is one example where form does not follow the meaning or the flow of the narrative according to the simple sense of the words. The structure and the simple sense of the words do not correspond. On the other hand, *structure and referent do correspond* when the hymn of the Magnificat is read in the context of the surrounding infancy narrative, the referent of the entire context being the God who saves by radically subverting ordinary human expectation. Likewise, according to the syntactical structure, form follows function. Luke has endowed the Magnificat with a form worthy of its subject. Because the purpose of the hymn is to praise the God who saves, it is only fitting that the form of this praise, even on the syntactical level, reflect the character of the saving God who radically and subversively saves in the context of things, the ordinary appearances of which are not always what they may seem at first glance.

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