

The Oracles of Simeon

Luke 2:28-35

By

William C. Nicholas, Jr.



Term Paper

BI 513 -- The Synoptic Gospels

Professor: Fr. Mike Walsh, C.M.

May 1993

© 1993, 1999, 2016 William C. Nicholas, Jr. All Rights Reserved

Bill Nicholas
 BI 513 -- The Synoptic Gospels
 Fr. Mike Walsh, C.M.
 May 17, 1993

Exegesis: The Oracles of Simeon (Luke 2:28-35)

The specific story on which I am concentrating this exegesis concern the Oracles of Simeon, during the event of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, found in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke. The two specific passages on which I will focus this exegesis will be Luke 2:29-32 and Luke 2:34-35. I will discuss the *Canticle* of Simeon and its relation to the *Prophecy* of Simeon. I will discuss their place in the scene of Christ's Presentation in the Temple, and how the two passages fit into the overall scheme of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

The setting of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem contains two oracles: The Canticle and the Prophecy of Simeon. A compilation of the translations presented by Joseph Fitzmyer (pp. 418, 428-430), Raymond Brown (439-441) and Luke T. Johnson (55-56) -- who present the closest English translations of the original Greek text -- states the Oracles of Simeon as follows:

(Luke 2:28-32)

***“Simeon received him into his bent arms, and praised God, saying:
 ‘Now you are dismissing (releasing) your servant (slave), Lord (Mighty Master) in peace, according to your promise.
 For my eyes have seen your salvation made ready by you in the sight of all peoples.
 A light to give revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.’”***

(Luke 2:34-35)

“Simeon blessed them and said to his mother, Mary, ‘Behold this one is set for the fall and rise of many in Israel, to be a rejected symbol – indeed a sword shall go (pass) through your own soul – in order that the inmost thoughts (calculations) of many hearts will be revealed.’”

In arriving at this translation Brown, Johnson and Fitzmyer divide the passages into sections of a few words each. They concentrate their translation of the passages with a more literal translation from the Greek. The important words of Simeon's Canticle appear to be the words ‘dismiss,’ ‘servant’ (verse 29), ‘salvation’ (verse 30) and ‘peoples’ (verse 32). The words ‘fall,’ ‘rise,’ ‘rejected,’ ‘sword,’ ‘pierce,’ ‘heart,’ ‘thoughts,’ ‘minds’ and ‘laid bare’ (verse 35) appear to be the key words for Simeon's Prophecy.

The Greek word in this passage for ‘*servant*’ is the same word used in Mary's reply to the angel, Gabriel, in the story of the Annunciation.¹ The word, *doulos*, means servant more in terms of a ‘slave.’ However, Brown points out that our present understanding of ‘slave’ is

¹Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel According to Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1981) 428.

different from the understanding of the word in the Greco-Roman world.² As the notion of slave at that time was closer to that of a servant (as opposed to someone who is driven or ill treated) the word ‘servant’ is a more acceptable word. In this passage the Greek word for ‘dismiss’ is *apolyein*, meaning ‘release’ or ‘deliver.’ It is most likely used in this passage as a euphemism for ‘die.’³

The Greek word for ‘salvation’ (*sotirios*) in this text is used five times in the New Testament – three of which are Lucan. Its use refers to the salvation of man coming from God.⁴ The Greek word for ‘peoples’ is *laôn*. This word, although directly translated into ‘peoples,’ is more literally understood in terms of ‘nations.’ However, in verse 32, the people to whom the Lord’s salvation is revealed are divided into two groups: Israel and the Gentiles. As this clarification of ‘nations’ is indicated in the passage itself, the translations of *laôn* to mean ‘peoples’ would appear to be acceptable.⁵

In the Prophecy of Simeon, the Greek word for ‘fall,’ *ptosis*, refers to a failure, or a fall from a high place.⁶ That particular Greek word is used six times in the Bible. Three of these speak of a great fall (Matthew 7:27), a fall and ruin (Baruch 4:33) or the fall of the godly (Sirach 27:29).⁷ So its use in the Prophecy of Simeon most likely refers to the fall of those in Israel who hold high positions; namely the religious leaders who will reject Christ and eventually experience the destruction of Jerusalem. As for the Greek word translated into ‘rise,’ Luke is the only author in the entire Bible to use the word *anastasis* (resurrection). He uses the word twice. The other use is in the Acts of the Apostles 26:23 in which Peter speaks of the Messiah rising from the dead.⁸

The word for ‘rejection’ is the word *antilogomenon* meaning ‘forcefully opposed,’⁹ ‘contradicted’¹⁰ or ‘spoken against.’¹¹ The word for ‘sword,’ *romphaia* describes the sword that will pierce, or pass through the soul of Mary. The Greek word *dierchesthai* is most commonly translated into ‘pierce.’ However, it more accurately means to ‘pass through.’ It must also be noted that the use of the term ‘pass through’ changes the understanding of Simeon’s prophecy to Mary. The ‘passing through’ of the sword seems more to affect her than harm her, as the word ‘pierce’ would infer. This meaning will be discussed later on in this paper.

The Greek word for ‘thoughts,’ *dialogismoï*, refers specifically to thoughts that are evil, critical or antagonizing.¹² Its use is a continuation of Simeon’s prophecy that Christ will be a

²Raymond Brown, S.S., The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977) 439.

³ibid., 439.

⁴Richard E. Whitaker, The Eerdmans Analytical Concordance to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988) 910-911.

⁵Fitzmyer, 428.

⁶ibid., 429.

⁷Whitaker, 350-351.

⁸ibid., 896.

⁹Fitzmyer, 429.

¹⁰Brown, 440.

¹¹Whitaker, 1034.

¹²Fitzmyer, 430.

sign that will be rejected.¹³ For ‘*minds*,’ the word *kardia* can also be translated into ‘hearts.’ Hence, it is a word that takes into account both the intellect and emotions of an individual. Finally, *apokalyptein*, closely related to the word ‘apocalypse,’ is commonly translated in this passage as ‘*laid bare*’ referring to those evil thoughts (*dialogismoi*). It is more closely translated, however, into ‘revealed.’¹⁴ Hence, the final sentence of Simeon’s prophecy indicates that the evil thoughts of those who oppose Jesus as the Messiah will be exposed as part of God’s over-all plan.

II

The **Canticle of Simeon** contains eschatological features which recognize the twofold designation of Christ;¹⁵ namely a ‘light’ to the Gentiles and the ‘glory’ of Israel. It also contains themes, which Brown observes, “constitute almost a pastiche from the Isaian passages.”¹⁶ These themes are underscored by the word ‘seeing.’ The theme of ‘seeing’ coincides with the Greek word mentioned twice in Luke 2:26.¹⁷ Simeon declares that he has ‘seen’ the salvation prepared by God. Simeon “would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.”¹⁸ There is an equivalence presented between ‘seeing Christ’ and ‘seeing death.’ This echoes the ancient conviction whereby one could not see God and live (Exodus 33:20, 23). Laurentin explains that the underlying symbolism of ‘seeing’ in this passage lies in the fact that “as Moses saw the glory of God, from behind (Exodus 33:23), so Simeon sees God’s glory face to face in the humility of the childhood assumed by Christ.”¹⁹ Having seen God’s salvation in Christ Simeon is ready to see death.

The titles given to Christ by Simeon – *Salvation*, *Light* and *Glory* – likewise express significant theological meaning. ‘*Salvation*’ is an abstract form of ‘savior.’ Christ the savior is the ‘salvation’ that God has prepared.²⁰ The last two titles given by Simeon – Light and Glory – parallel the Deutero-Isaiah tradition which Laurentin considers to be Luke’s source for the canticle. ‘*Light*’ is described as an attribute of the divine. The word is found in Isaiah 42:6 and 51:4. The event’s reference to Malachi 3:1, leads to the image of the Presentation being Christ’s eschatological entrance into the Temple.²¹ Finally ‘*Glory*’ is a term that points specifically to God Himself. It refers to the eschatological glory of God shining in His people, as it did in the Ark of the Covenant.²²

Luke’s inclusion of the Gentiles as part of Simeon’s canticle shows what is involved in God’s salvation. Simeon declares that salvation has been prepared in the sight of all the ‘peoples.’ In the final part of his canticle these ‘peoples’ are distinguished by Simeon as the

¹³Brown, 441.

¹⁴Fitzmyer, 430.

¹⁵R. Laurentin, The Truth About Christmas Beyond the Myths: The Gospel of the Infancy of Christ, trans. by Michael J. Wrenn (Peterson, Mass: St. Bede’s Publications, 1986) 78.

¹⁶Brown, 458.

¹⁷Laurentin, 77.

¹⁸Fitzmyer, 418.

¹⁹Laurentin, 77.

²⁰ibid., 77.

²¹ibid., 78.

²²ibid., 78.

Gentiles and the people of Israel.²³ Simeon recognizes Jesus as the light that “pierces the darkness of the Gentile world and reveals to them the God of Israel.”²⁴ In doing so glory is brought to Israel, from which came the Messiah! This proclamation is resumed at the end of the Acts of the Apostles when Paul states that the salvation of God has been sent also to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28).²⁵ Hence, salvation is now announced to all ‘peoples,’ Gentiles as well as Jews.²⁶

Where the Canticle identified Jesus with the glory of God, the **Prophecy of Simeon** proceeds on a more somber note. It indicates that the impending rejection of Jesus will have catastrophic effects on Israel. Where the Canticle is addressed to God, the Prophecy is addressed to Mary. It must first be noted, however, that the reference to Mary’s soul being run through by a sword is an insert that appears to trip up the prophecy. If misread, it has a tendency to incorrectly imply that it is because of the sword that will run through Mary’s soul that the inmost thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. (It is also commonly mis-interpreted to be an oracle that predicts the sorrow that Mary will suffer when her Son is crucified.) This is not the case. Rather, it is the division and opposition of Jesus that will lay bare the inmost thoughts. Mary’s soul will also be affected. Her inmost thoughts will be revealed along with everyone else’s, exposing her personal choice to follow or reject her son. If the prophecy were re-edited with the inclusion of Mary placed elsewhere, the second oracle of Simeon would read differently:

“Behold, this one is set for the fall and rise of many in Israel, to be a rejected symbol, in order that the inmost thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. Indeed a sword shall also go through your own soul.”

This re-focuses the passage, indicates that Mary too will be affected by what Jesus has in store for Israel and the effect He will have on those who hear Him. Family ties will not render her exempt from making a conscious choice to follow or reject Jesus’ teaching, and at least two other passages from the Gospel of Luke reinforce this notion regarding Mary’s place among disciples (Luke 8:19-21, 11:27-28).

Johnson, Fitzmyer, Brown, Laurentin²⁷ and Karris²⁸ all agree that the image of the sword used by Simeon to describe Christ’s effect on Mary is the sword of division which will also affect the people of Israel, thus causing “the fall and rise of many” (Luke 2:34). As mentioned earlier, the focus of the passage must be on the image of the sword *passing through* the soul, as opposed to piercing the heart. Brown sees this prophecy as being in harmony with Luke 12:51b-53. In Matthew 10:34, the passage reads: “*I have not come to bring peace but a sword.*” In Luke: “*I have come for division. From now on, a household of five will be divided....*” Therefore, Brown concludes that the sword that Simeon describes is the sword of division and discrimination. (Its closest reference in Ezekiel 14:17-18.²⁹) The sword will pass through Israel,

²³Brown, 439.

²⁴Vaughan, 15.

²⁵Luke T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 57.

²⁶Fitzmyer, 422.

²⁷Johnson, 57; Fitzmyer, 429, Brown, 464, Laurentin, 79.

²⁸Robert J. Karris, O.F.M., “The Gospel According to Luke,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. R.E. Brown, SS, et al. eds. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 684.

²⁹ibid., 684.

distinguishing or dividing those who accept Christ's teachings and those who reject them.³⁰ The sword will single out some for destruction and others for mercy. It will *divide* Israel according to loyalty, causing some to fall (from high places) and other to rise (from lowly places). "Thus, with the imagery of the sword piercing Mary, Simeon hints at the difficulty she too will have in learning that obedience to the Word of God will transcend even family ties." This coincides with Luke 8:21 ("My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it") and 11:27-28 ("Blest are they who hear the word of God and keep it").³¹

Finally, the *dialogismoi kardion*, 'inmost thoughts,' are to be understood as the thoughts that are hostile to Jesus. Such thoughts are revealed by the act of the sword distinguishing those for or against Jesus with no possible neutrality.³² As a result of those calculating, critical or antagonistic thoughts being revealed, many in Israel will fall (*ptosis*), and many will rise (*anastasis*). For the community to whom Luke was writing, those fallen may have meant the religious leaders who rejected Jesus and witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in the Roman conquest of 70 A.D. Those risen may have meant the lowly who followed and accepted Jesus as the salvation sent by God. It is also described by Fitzmyer as a foreshadowing of the rejection of Christ that led to the scandal of the Cross and to the Resurrection.³³

III

The context in which the Oracles of Simeon are given is the event of the Presentation of Christ, during which He was presented to the Lord and redeemed by His parents. It is suggested that this was also the time of Mary's purification, according to Mosaic Law, following the birth of her son.³⁴ Brown states, "Luke is not interested in the Jewish customs of purification and presentations for their own value."³⁵ Luke is not setting the event here for the sake of merely portraying Jewish custom. Vaughan even suggests that the event of the Presentation and redemption of the first-born was probably a hollow ritual, finding little fulfillment in the life of the average Jewish child.³⁶ The event in Luke, however, serves to move the scene from Bethlehem and the stable to Jerusalem and the Temple. The Presentation of Christ serves as an indication to early Christians that Jesus' manifestation by Simeon is made possible through obedience to the Law of Moses.³⁷ In this context the story of Jesus' Presentation follows a pattern similar to the presentation of Samuel that involves the parents, the child and an elderly figure in the Temple or Holy Sanctuary (1 Sam 1:24-28).³⁸

The dynamic of Luke 2:29-32 and 34-35 is the Lucan infancy narrative as a whole. Throughout the beginning of the Gospel numerous prophecies are presented indicating to the reader that an important time is at hand and that God is about to fulfill His promise of salvation.

³⁰Brown, 464.

³¹Fitzmyer, 430.

³²Curtis Vaughan, "The Simeon Incident: An Interpretation of Luke 2:25-35," in New Testament Studies, R. Summers, ed. (1975), 26.

³³Fitzmyer, 422.

³⁴Vaughan, 15.

³⁵Brown, 451.

³⁶Vaughan, 15.

³⁷Brown, 451.

³⁸ibid., 451.

The angel, Gabriel, utters a prophecy to Mary at the Annunciation (1:32-33). Elizabeth greets Mary as the mother of the Savior (1:42-45) and Mary utters a canticle in praise of God's mercy (1:46-55). At the circumcision of John the Baptist, Zechariah utters a canticle which again praises God and prophesies the role of John (1:68-79). At the birth of Jesus the angel announces Jesus' birth to the shepherds (2:10-12) and the heavenly host utter a brief canticle, giving glory to God (2:14). The Oracles of Simeon follow this pattern in the infancy narratives.

The literary form of the Oracles of Simeon seems to be that of 'revelation.' It is similar in nature to the event of the Magi in Matthew's Gospel, and to the events of the Baptism and Transfiguration of Jesus found in all three Synoptic Gospels. In these events an individual (in the latter case God the Father) or a group of individuals (the astrologers) acknowledge Jesus and His importance to the people of Israel. In the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Simeon proclaims His importance not only to Israel, but to the Gentile nations as well. Unlike Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon is not a relative of Jesus. Here, it is to a total stranger that Jesus' identity is revealed. So verses 29-32 and 34-35 fit the form of 'revelation' – an epiphany or recognition of the Messiah by a stranger.

IV

The Oracles of Simeon are not the first instance of doubling canticles in the Gospel of Luke. However, not all of the canticles in Luke appear to have been a part of the original composition. The redactional assumption with regard to the canticles was that the Proclamation came first. (Elizabeth's greeting and the Angel's proclamation to the Shepherds were a part of the text before Mary's Canticle and the Angel's hymn of praise.) "The doubling was caused when Luke added the canticles at the second stage of composition."³⁹ A similar solution is applicable with the Oracles of Simeon, but the order is reversed. The Canticle of Simeon "has a clear affinity with the preceding canticles" which were also likely to have been added at a second stage. The original oracle, therefore, seems to be the prophecy, with the preceding canticle added at a later stage.⁴⁰

Verse 33 appears to be a redactional insert; "a stereotyped reaction to the divine oracle"⁴¹ which separates one oracle from the other without completely isolating the two as distinct from each other. As would be expected with any parents, the surprise of Mary and Joseph would underscore this revelation in that such a manifestation far exceeds the humble situation of a child. The flow of the passage appears to be: 1) Simeon utters his canticle, 2) Jesus' parents react with surprise and astonishment, 3) Simeon continues with his prophecy. While both oracles are to be seen as one overall manifestation, verse 33 seems to have been added so as to distinguish the two, and isolate the focus of each oracle. It separates the oracles, but does not totally isolate them from each other within the context of the Presentation of Jesus.

All three canticles in Luke's infancy narrative – Mary's, Zechariah's and Simeon's – are introduced by an act of blessing or praising God. The Canticle of the Angel is preceded by the Angel's glad tidings of great joy to the Shepherds. The Prophecy of Simeon, however, following

³⁹ibid., 454.

⁴⁰ibid., 454.

⁴¹ibid., 454.

his canticle is described by Brown as “much rougher poetry.” Its message is not as joyous as the others, but it has the same poetic relation to Simeon’s Canticle as Elizabeth’s proclamation (Luke 1:42b-45) stands in relation to the Magnificat.⁴²

The utterances preceding those of Simeon look to the *past* and to the present in describing God’s glory and the promised events. This sequence follows the canticle of Zechariah, which praises God and prophesies the destiny of John the Baptist. Simeon’s oracle, however, has a much grimmer tone than the utterances of Zechariah and Mary. Simeon’s prophecy looks to the *future* to describe the effect Jesus’ life will have on the people of Israel. Simeon speaks of the fall and rise of people in Israel, and speaks of Jesus as a sign to be opposed and contradicted. This fits into the Lucan theme of division of which Jesus speaks in Luke 12:51-53. The fact that the ‘fall’ precedes the ‘rise’ in Simeon’s prophecy may also be indicative of the Death of Christ, which must occur before His Resurrection and Glorification.⁴³

Apparently not even Mary will be free from the divisive effect Jesus’ life and ministry. The sword that will go through Mary’s heart is the choice she too will have to make to follow or reject Jesus, despite her maternal relation to Him. This coincides with Luke 1:45 where Elizabeth declares Mary blessed for **trusting** that God will fulfill His words. It also builds upon Luke 1:38 when Mary, despite her distress at conceiving before her marriage, nonetheless accepts God’s will. This theme is followed upon in Luke 8:19-21 and Luke 11:27-28 in which Jesus declares that relatives are not blessed simply for being relatives. Rather, the one who follows the will of God is blessed.⁴⁴ Simeon’s prophecy to Mary fits into this recurring Lucan theme of accepting and following God’s word.

The story also coincides with the importance of the Holy Spirit. This incorporation of the Holy Spirit into the story – especially at this early stage of Jesus’ life (and even before his birth) – appears to be a recurring theme throughout Lucan literature. It later becomes a major theme in the Acts of the Apostles when the Spirit comes upon the Apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-47) and those who are called to receive baptism and preach the Gospel. It is the Spirit who guides the conversion, revelation and proclamation of Jesus and the Good News. Recognition and acceptance of God’s plan of salvation can only be done through the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the infancy narratives of the Gospel of Luke Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit (1:67) and is led to utter his canticle. In the same way, Simeon is led by the Spirit to utter his canticle and prophecy, predicting the future role of Christ and the effect He will have on His people. One prophecy speaks after the birth of John the Baptist. The other speaks after the birth of Jesus.⁴⁵ Both are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Oracles of Simeon appear to be a further manifestation of all that has been said up to this point in the Gospel of Luke. It is a foreshadowing of the reality of Jesus’ mission, the effect He will have on the status quo in Israel and on the role of the Gentiles in salvation. Simeon’s Canticle (2:29-32) sums up what has been said in the canticles and proclamations of varying length up to this point of Luke’s Gospel. Simeon’s Prophecy (2:34-35) foreshadows what lies

⁴²ibid., 455.

⁴³Fitzmyer, 422.

⁴⁴ibid., 430.

⁴⁵Brown, 452.

ahead in the ministry of Jesus and the effect He will have.

V

My conclusion as to the hermeneutic of the Oracles of Simeon is as follows:

The whole tradition of the infancy narratives appears to serve the purpose of setting the stage for Jesus' public ministry as an adult. Beginning with the Annunciation and ending with the Temptation in the desert Luke's 'pre-ministry' narratives appear to serve as early manifestations of how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise, hearkening back to Old Testament prophecy, imagery and tradition. They serve as a prelude to His public ministry. The infancy narratives contain no preaching, teaching or miracles of Jesus. Rather, they are dotted with references to a great promise made by God to send a Savior to Israel born of David's line. They contain a sense, expressed by the characters, that this great event is about to occur, and that it will usher in a new era. This is seen especially in the events of the Annunciation, the Canticles of Mary and Zechariah, and the Oracles of Simeon.

A minor point in the Oracles of Simeon is the object of the oracles themselves; one addresses God, the other Jesus' mother. Simeon "blessed God" and spoke "to Mary his mother." Neither of the oracles address Joseph, who remains in the background of the passage; a secondary role to Simeon, Mary, Jesus and God the Father. Luke's intention may have been to further focus, in a subtle way, on the parents of Jesus and their roles in the salvation that he would bring about through His ministry.

In regard to the message of the oracles: The first is a manifestation of Jesus as the salvation of God. This is what the canticle states. However, Simeon's extension of the declaration and reception of that salvation to the Gentiles gives a more universal air to the great event that is building up in the early stages of Luke's Gospel. In a Jewish-Christian Community familiar with the Old Testament the people would have grown in recognition of and devotion to God through their Jewish roots. These practices would have included worship in the Temple (where the passage is set) and observance of the Law of Moses (which is what the parents of Jesus are observing in the passage). Therefore, for the Jewish Christian, Israel and its heritage is now glorified in and through the extension of God's salvation to all the nations of the world. To a Gentile-Christian Community, Israel is glorified in the passage as the nation chosen by God to reveal His presence and announce His salvation to the world. Simeon's utterance of the oracle, and the mention that he was old and awaiting the fulfillment of God's promise, brings a sense of hunger and eager anticipation to a long awaited event.

The Prophecy of Simeon further describes the mission of Jesus. Addressed to Mary, it may have been intended to convey that even the most faithful of Christ's disciples – those who say "let it be done unto me..." – will be affected by the division and disruption that Christ's ministry will bring about. For the early Christian, the fall and rise of many could refer to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. It further points out that those who accept and follow Jesus will be cared for. Mary, however, must likewise make a conscious decision to accept or reject her Son.

The Oracles of Simeon are applicable to the Church today. Where in the time of Christ there was the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, so today there is the tendency to distinguish between Catholics and non-Catholics, Christians and non-Christians. Some fall into the error of declaring that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church or outside of Christianity. This passage, however, is applicable where ecumenism is concerned. Just as Christ was a light for all the nations distinct from Israel, so too is Christ a light for revelation to all non-Christians. Christ's salvation is not meant for Jews or Christians only, but for all humanity.

In addition, the Prophecy of Simeon brings up the issue of conformity to the teaching of Christ so prevalent in the Church today. Christ's ministry and His teaching may be seen to affect the modern Church as it did the early Church. Much division, even within the Church, is caused by its social and moral teachings, which are based on the teachings of Christ. Modern Christians, aware of the principles taught by Christ and the Church must also make a conscious choice to follow or reject Him. Those who are called to serve Him in ministry -- such as priests or religious -- are not exempt from that sword of discrimination. It is a sword that will distinguish those who follow and those who consciously oppose Jesus, even in their inmost thoughts.

APPENDIX

Selected Scripture Passages:

Exodus 33:20 -- *“My face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives.”*

Exodus 33:23 -- *“My face is not to be seen.”*

Sirach 27:29 -- *“The trap seizes those who rejoice in [the fall of the godly], and pain will consume them before they die.”*

Isaiah 42:6 -- *“I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations.”*

Isaiah 51:4 -- *“For law shall go forth from my presence, and my judgment, as the light of the peoples.”*

Ezekiel 14:17-18 -- *“Or if I brought the sword upon this country...and these three men were in it...they alone would be saved.”*

Baruch 4:33 -- *“As that city rejoiced at your collapse, and made merry at your downfall, so shall she grieve over her own desolation.”*

Malachi 3:1 -- *“Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek.”*

Matthew 7:27 -- *“The rains fell, the torrents came, the winds blew and lashed against his house. It collapsed under all this and was completely ruined.”*

Luke 1:32-33 -- *“Great will be his dignity and he will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over the house of Jacob forever and his reign will be without end.”*

Luke 1:43 -- *“Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”*

Luke 1:46-55 -- *“My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord. . .”*

Luke 1:67-79 -- *“Then Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, uttered this prophecy: ‘Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, because he has visited and ransomed is people You, O child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High . . .’”*

Luke 2:11 -- *“This day in David’s city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord.”*

Luke 2:14 -- *“Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests.”*

Luke 8:21 -- *“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it”*

Luke 11:27-28 -- *“Blest are they who hear the word of God and keep it”*

Luke 12:51-53 -- *“Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? I assure you, the contrary is true; I have come for division.”*

Acts 26:23 -- *“...the Messiah must suffer, and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he will proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles.”*

Acts 28:28 -- *“Now you must realize that this salvation of God has been transmitted to the Gentiles -- who will heed it?”*

Works Cited

Brown, Raymond, S.S. The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A., S.J. The Gospel According to Luke. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1981.

Johnson, Luke T. The Gospel of Luke. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991.

Karris, Robert J. O.F.M.. “The Gospel According to Luke,” in The New Jerome Biblical Commentary. R.E. Brown, SS, et al. eds. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990, 675-721.

Laurentin, R. The Truth About Christmas Beyond the Myths: The Gospel of the Infancy of Christ. Trans. by M. J. Wrenn. Peterson, Mass: St. Bede’s Publications, 1986.

Vaughan, Curtis. “The Simeon Incident: An Interpretation of Luke 2:25-35.” In New Testament Studies, R. Summers, ed. (1975) 13-26.

Whitaker, Richard E. The Eerdmans Analytical Concordance to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.