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POSTMORTEM PUNISHMENT  
IN THE PARABLE OF LAZARUS  
AND THE RICH MAN (LUKE 16:19-31):  
BETWEEN COHERENCE AND INDETERMINACY  
OF LUKE'S ESCHATOLOGY

**Kara pośmiertna w przypowieści  
o bogaczu i ubogim Łazarzu (Łk 16:19-31)  
Pomiędzy spójnością a niedookreślonością  
Łukaszowej eschatologii.**

ABSTRACT

Taking as its point of departure the commonly recognized tension between the image of postmortem punishment in Lk 16:19-31 and other Lukan conceptualizations of the afterlife, the article examines the said image against the background of Luke's overall eschatology. In the first step, both Luke's bipolar ideological horizon and the conjunction of eschatology and wealth ethics are brought to light, demonstrating general coherence between the parable and Luke's eschatological perspective. The parable's presentation of the post-mortem punishment as immediate and final is affirmed. In the second

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step, elements of indeterminacy in Luke's eschatological perspective are explored. Through the workings of metalepsis, the rich texture of Luke's narrative is shown to generate additional possibilities for interpreting the rich man's punishment. It follows that the precise nature of the punishment – its final as opposed to intermediate character – cannot be said to be completely unambiguous.

STRESZCZENIE

SŁOWA KLUCZE

Biorąc za punkt wyjścia powszechnie znany brak spójności pomiędzy obrazem kary pośmiertnej zawartym w przypowieści o ubogim Łazarzu (Łk 16,19-31) a innymi Łukaszwymi konceptualizacjami życia pozagrobowego, autor artykułu bada wspomniany obraz w relacji do ogólnego tła Łukaszwowej eschatologii. W pierwszej części zostają wydobyte na światło zarówno dwubiegunowy horyzont ideologiczny Łukasza jak i powiązanie eschatologii z etyką dóbr materialnych. Ujawniona zostaje w ten sposób ogólna spójność pomiędzy przypowieścią a Łukaszwą perspektywą eschatologiczną. Kara pośmiertna zostaje ukazana jako natychmiastowa i ostateczna. W drugiej części zostają wyeksponowane elementy niedookreśloności obecne w Łukaszwowej eschatologii. Ukazane zostaje jak bogata struktura Łukaszwowej narracji pozwala na generowanie dodatkowych możliwości interpretacji pozagrobowych cierpień bogacza. W rezultacie, precyzyjna kwalifikacja kary jako ostatecznej, czyli nie tymczasowej, nie daje się orzec w sposób zupełnie jednoznaczny.

Łukasz 16,19-31,  
kara wieczna,  
eschatologia,  
niedookreśloność  
narracji,  
metalepsa

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, found in Luke 16:19-31, offers one of the more memorable, even if at times dismissed, images of the afterlife.<sup>1</sup> Two men die and find themselves in completely reversed and opposite circumstances. The rich man, accustomed to sumptuous meals while on earth, finds himself in Hades, thirsty and in the midst of flames. The poor man, Lazarus, who while alive lay hungry at the rich man's gate, attended to only by dogs,<sup>2</sup> reclines now at the place of honor at Abraham's heavenly banquet.<sup>3</sup> An unsurpassable abyss separates the two and the possibility of any intercession alleviating the rich man's suf-

- <sup>1</sup> Many commentators dismiss the afterlife imagery considering it a fictional element or merely a reflection of popular beliefs entirely at the service of the story's main rhetorical goal, which is to call people to repentance. They warn against treating the imagery as a window into the Lukan or Jesus' view of the afterlife. See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 623; Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 185; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 255. While it is true that the point of the story is to exhort the audience to repentance, the image of the afterlife is a crucial element of the story's message. Outi Lehtipuu (*The Afterlife Imagery*, 7-8) gives three convincing reasons for treating the afterlife imagery seriously. First, there is nothing in the story itself to suggest that it should not be taken seriously. The two men are depicted in a realistic fashion both before and after death. The afterlife scene does not contain any ironic, or comical features. Second, the afterlife scene coheres well with common features of many Hellenistic eschatological accounts. Third, it is difficult to assume that Luke would include traditions completely foreign to his own thinking.
- <sup>2</sup> That the dogs, against the common opinion of scholars, are actually positive characters in this story, their licking being a healing act, is argued by Strong, „Lazarus and the Dogs”, 178-193.
- <sup>3</sup> The Greek text speaks of Lazarus reclining “at the bosom of Abraham.” This is best understood in light of ancient dining practices. At a meal, where guests recline on couches, one's head would lie on someone's breast (bosom). Lazarus occupies a place of honor reclining next to the host. Cf. John 13:23. For a thorough treatment of this expression, see Somov – Voinov, „Abraham's Bosom”, 624-628. See also Smith, „Table Fellowship”, 625-626.

fering is explicitly denied. The rich man's punishment appears irreversibly fixed.

Memorable image that it is, this picture of the afterlife has been found if not problematic then at least intriguing.<sup>4</sup> The postmortem bliss of Lazarus and the fiery punishment of the rich man come about as a complete reversal of the earthly situation first described: the sumptuous feasting of the rich, and the utter misery of the poor. Is postmortem punishment, then, simply a reversal of this-worldly fortune?<sup>5</sup> As the story unfolds, Abraham's words about Moses and the prophets indicate that it was not just the rich man's wealth but rather his failure to use his wealth in obedience to the precepts of Moses and the prophets that brought about his condemnation.<sup>6</sup> Along the same line, Jesus' sayings about the use of wealth, placed in the immediate context of the parable (Lk 16:9-15), suggest that the rich man should have used his wealth to make Lazarus his friend so as to be welcomed by Lazarus into eternal habitations (cf. Lk 16:9).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Naturally, many aspects of the parable have been found intriguing, the afterlife imagery being just one of them. The studies of Lk 16:19-31, conducted with the help of various methodologies, have questioned the parable's unity and its origin. Scholars have inquired about its principal themes, such as the use of wealth, eschatological reversal, repentance, resurrection, or authority of scripture. See the helpful discussion of the history of modern research on Lk 16:19-31 in Bredenhof, *Failure and Prospect*, 1-30.

<sup>5</sup> So Bauckham, „The Rich Man and Lazarus”, 104. John Dominic Crossan (*In Parables*, 68) calls the rich man's punishment amoral. For Ronald F. Hock („Lazarus and Micyllus”, 452) the reversal of fortunes is “what is most opaque to interpreters of the parable.”

<sup>6</sup> See the thorough narrative analysis in support of this conclusion in Crimella, *Marta, Marta!*, 341-427. See also the criticism of R. Bauckham in Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 604, n. 326.

<sup>7</sup> In addition, as argued by Gowler („At His Gate”, 252-255), since no change of audience is mentioned until 17:1, the parable should be read in light of the narrative's characterization of the Pharisees, who are “full of greed and wickedness” (Lk 11:39), love to exalt themselves (Lk 11:43), and are “lovers of money” (Lk 16:14). Conversely, the

He failed to do so and consequently excluded himself from eternal reward.

If the rationale of the rich man's post-mortem suffering is clear, the nature of his punishment is not. The image of the afterlife as a place of immediate individual retribution seems to be in tension with the idea of the final collective judgment and resurrection expounded in many other parts of Luke.<sup>8</sup> If individual and collective eschatology are to be harmonized, and in particular if much comparative weight is given to such intertestamental texts as *1 Enoch 22* where the dead experience differentiated intermediate fates, then what Lazarus and the rich man experience must be seen as transitional: Lazarus and the rich man must both be awaiting the final judgment, perhaps, in two distinct locations of

Lukan pharisees "serve as paradigms of those who behave as the rich man behaves." *Ibidem*, 254. For Matthew S. Rindge ("The Rhetorical Power", 563-564) the parable can be understood as a negative counterpoint to the Samaritan parable; "in light of the latter story, the rich man in 16:19-31 is condemned for failing to show compassion to a person in need." *Ibidem*, 564. That (im)moral quality needs to be seen in the rich man's use of wealth does not mean that the parable limits itself to moral questions at the expense of economic ones. On how the parable's dynamics of status reversal challenge the dominant values and socio-economic practices of the Roman Empire, see Miller, *Rumors of Resistance*, 197-249.

<sup>8</sup> See references to the general resurrection and judgment in Lk 10:12; 11:31-32; 14:14; 20:27-40; Acts 17:31; 24:15; 24:25. The notion of immediate individual retribution, suggested by the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, is clearly attested to in Jesus' words to the repentant thief in Lk 23:43: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." There are other passages in Luke that can be interpreted as expressive of individual eschatology. Jacques Dupont ("Après-mort", 4-20) argues for the following: the Rich Fool (Lk 12:16-21), the Unjust Steward (16:1-8), the words concerning Judas' fate (Acts 1:25), and Paul's words of encouragement in Antioch (Acts 14:22). Alexey Somov (*Representations of the Afterlife*, 59-62) considers only Lk 16:19-31; 23:43 and Acts 1:25 as undisputed examples of individual eschatology.

Hades.<sup>9</sup> And yet, the parable in itself suggests the finality of the postmortem states.<sup>10</sup> Should we then conclude that Luke espouses both individual and general eschatology without bringing them into a coherent whole?<sup>11</sup>

In light of the question raised above, the following study of the notion of postmortem punishment in Lk 16:19-31 will focus on the relationship between the parable and Luke's eschatology. In the first place, our analysis will explore the elements of coherence between the parable and Luke's overall eschatological outlook. In the second step,

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Jacob Mattill (*Luke and the Last Things*, 31) argues for an intermediate state with both the rich man and Lazarus in two different compartments of Hades: "Dives and Lazarus experience preliminary blessing and punishment and await the resurrection, when the souls in Hades will be united with their bodies to stand in the last judgment." Similarly, for William R. Herzog (*Parables as Subversive Speech*, 122), "the parable is not yet located on the other side of the great divide when judgment is irrevocable and where separation is eternal." The idea that Luke's afterlife images must be harmonized into uniform representation can be detected behind Robert Maddox's dismissal of afterlife imagery in Lk 16:19-31. Following an influential study of Hugo Gressmann (*Vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus*), R. Maddox treats the afterlife imagery as a borrowing from a pre-Christian folktale and concludes: "This imported story stands isolated over against the references in Luke-Acts to the future resurrection of the just (and the unjust)." Maddox, *Purpose*, 103.

<sup>10</sup> So Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery*, 275; Somov, *Representations of the Afterlife*, 86; Green, "Eschatology", 46.

<sup>11</sup> Recent scholarship on the issue of individual and general eschatology simply accepts incoherence and claims Luke never intended to propose a systematic doctrine of the last things, at least not in the modern sense of the word. See Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery*, 237; Gillner, *Gericht bei Lukas*, 306; Somov, *Representations of the Afterlife*, 224. When it comes to eschatology in general, debates revolve around a number of issues: whether Luke is motivated by the delay of the parousia or upholds a belief in an imminent end, whether he emphasizes the present or future reality of the Kingdom, and whether individual or collective eschatology constitutes the core of his eschatological expectation. For a helpful overview, see Carroll, *Response*, 1-30; Nielsen, *Until It Is Fulfilled*, 6-26.

elements of indeterminacy will be explored with an eye to additional possibilities for reading the rich man's sufferings.

## 1. LUKE'S ESCHATOLOGICAL OUTLOOK

Eschatology is a modern theological term that refers both to the situations that will mark the culmination of history or the end of individual lives (a future oriented eschatology), and to the realization of the expected situations in the present historical moment (a present-oriented eschatology).<sup>12</sup> Both dimensions of eschatology are clearly seen in Luke: Jesus is an eschatological character in that his ministry fulfills the end-time expectations. Secondly, many words and actions of Jesus, the two eschatological discourses (17:20-37 and 21:5-36) included, form expectations regarding the future consummation of the world and the destiny of individuals. Let us briefly consider the way Luke's narrative creates and develops these dimensions.

### 1.1. Jesus' Eschatological Ministry

Right from the beginning of his narrative, Luke makes clear that the divine intervention initiated through the announcements of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus (Lk 1:5-25 and 1:26-38) is final and decisive. Through the intertextual link forged in 1:16-17, Luke relates John the Baptist to the figure of Elijah who, according to Malachi's widely

<sup>12</sup> See Jörg Frey's application („New Testament Eschatology”, 7-8) of this notion of eschatology to biblical studies: “[...] New Testament exegesis [...] has to distinguish between two ‘lines’ of eschatological expressions or ideas in early Christian texts: first the reference to events, situations or circumstances that were traditionally expected in the future or linked with the end of the individual life or the end of time, and second the idea that at least some of those elements of traditional expectation are now made present or fulfilled (in Christ, in the Christian community, or the individual life of the Christian).”

shared prediction,<sup>13</sup> would return before “the great and glorious day of the Lord” (Mal 3:1.22-23 LXX). What Malachi’s prediction also implies is that Elijah’s coming would pave the way for God’s final eradication of evil (Mal 3:19 LXX).<sup>14</sup> Jesus, the son of the Most High designated to fulfill Davidic promises (2 Sam 7; Lk 1:32-33), emerges as the agent of God’s intervention; the “horn of salvation” raised in the house of David (Lk 1:69). Mary’s words in Lk 1:54 underscore the eschatological character of God’s initiative. Echoing Isa 41:8-9, she declares the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel’s fathers “into eternity” (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα).<sup>15</sup> The beginning of the narrative sends a clear message: God’s conclusive redemptive intervention has begun.<sup>16</sup>

When in the course of the narrative Jesus becomes the main interpreter of his own person and mission,<sup>17</sup> he presents his own ministry as nothing else but fulfillment of the prophecies. His inaugural sermon in Nazareth (Lk 4:18-19) announces the fulfillment of the Isaianic prophecy (Isa 62:2 and 58:6) “today” (Lk 4:21). A cluster of Isaianic references through which Jesus describes his ministry in Lk 7:22, invites the reader to conclude that God’s eschatological visitation, prophesized by Zechariah in 1:78 and acknowledged by the public in 7:16, is taking place.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See Sir 48:10; *Liv. Pro.* 21.3 (Epiphani Recensio Altera); 4 *Ezra* 6.26; *Sib. Or.* 2.187-189; cf. Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Elijah’s return is connected with the fiery punishment of the wicked in *Sib. Or.* 2.285-310 and with the obliteration of evil in 4 *Ezra* 6.27-28.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wolter, „Eschatology”, 98.

<sup>16</sup> For the discussion of the eschatological character of the Infancy Narrative, see Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple*, 49-56.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Coleridge (*The Birth of the Lukan Narrative*, 187-213) demonstrates how this effect is first realized in Lk 2:41-52, where the twelve-year-old Jesus appears as an interpreter of his own person. See a similar conclusion in Aletti, *Le Jésus de Luc*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Wolter, „Eschatology”, 99. On the eschatological connotations in the language of God’s “visitation” (Lk 1:68.78; 7:16; 19:44), see Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End*, 181-182.

As the kingdom of God comes near in and through Jesus' ministry (Lk 10:1.9; 11:20; 17:21), it reaches its climax in his resurrection and ascension, that is, in his eschatological enthronement and everlasting reign (cf. Acts 2:33; Lk 1:33). In Luke's scheme of things, Jesus' heavenly reign does not push his earthly ministry into the realm of bygone history; it rather makes perpetually present its ongoing eschatological relevance.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2. Eschatological Consequences of Jesus' Eschatological Ministry

If the ministry of Jesus embodies God's eschatological saving act, reactions to this ministry amount to eschatological stances on the part of those who either accept it or reject it. Luke's narration establishes it in a very careful way.

First, while Luke's emphasis on God's redemptive mercy manifested in Jesus' ministry to the poor and the sinners is readily visible, the very light with which Luke illuminates the characters such as Zacchaeus, the good thief, or the prodigal son makes all the more evident the tragic fate of

<sup>19</sup> Against Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit*, who has Luke separate the time of the Church from the earthly time of Jesus in the alleged attempt to respond to the delay of the parousia, and in full agreement with Michael Wolter („Eschatology”, 102): “Jesus' earthly ministry in Israel, and his present reign over the house of Jacob, belong inextricably together. As the past of Jesus' earthly ministry had eschatological significance, so does the present of Jesus' heavenly reign. It was the resurrection of Jesus that brought about the presuppositions to extend the eschatological character of his ministry beyond his death into the present of Israel's history.” Corresponding to this reading of Luke is the idea that the Spirit in Acts is not a substitute for the eschaton but rather its foretaste. See the section “Pneumatologie *kontra* Eschatologie?” in Haacker, „Der Geist und das Reich”, 331-345. See also Scott Hahn („Kingdom and Church in Luke-Acts”) who exposes strong conceptual links between the Davidic Christology of the Gospel and the kingdom ecclesiology of Acts, highlighting the ongoing eschatological activity of the enthroned Christ in and through the Church.

such personages as the older brother, the grumbling crowd, or the unrepentant thief. Luke's story is not so much a story of Jesus' ministry as it is a story of its acceptance and rejection (cf. Lk 2:34). Secondly, to accept or to reject Jesus, the eschatological agent of God, is to receive eschatological status now and at the consummation of history at the final judgment.<sup>20</sup> For Luke, there is no neutral ground. One either accepts Jesus' gracious offer or excludes oneself from eschatological reward. In this sense, the ministry of Jesus forms a bipolar ideological horizon reflective of apocalyptic dualism. This is seen in particular in the warnings of punishment announced by Jesus.

There are references to God's vengeance in Lk 21:22 and in the parable in 18:1-8. John the Baptist warns against the coming punishment in 3:7-9, 16-17, and Jesus predicts the destructive fire of Sodom coming on the day of the Son of Man (Lk 17:29). Unrepentant cities will be brought down to Hades (Lk 10:15), and the disciples are to fear the one who has the power to cast into Gehenna (Lk 12:5). Weeping and gnashing of teeth (Lk 13:28) – a form of suffering distinct but not contradictory to the sufferings of the rich man in Hades (Lk 16:23-24) – are said to await the unconverted.<sup>21</sup> That in the Nazareth pericope Luke omits the Isaianic reference to the "Day of Vengeance" (Isa 61:2), an otherwise important component of the Jewish eschatological expectations (cf. Deut 32:35; Isa 34:8; 63:4; Jer 46:10), does not mean that the idea of retribution is rejected. The "year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:19), the second chance given the fig tree (Lk 13:6-9), do not annul but rather assume the inevitability of punishment for the unconverted, thus highlighting the

<sup>20</sup> Disciples are blessed now in Lk 6:20; 10:23-24. For the future blessings promised to the disciples, see Lk 12:8, 32-34, 37, 43-44; 14:14; 18:29-30; 21:28; 22:28-30.

<sup>21</sup> On the destruction of sinners in the final judgment see also *I En.* 1.1; 38.1; 81.7-8; *T. Ab. A* 12-13; *Sib. Or.* 3.669-701.

current period of grace.<sup>22</sup> There is a gradation in punishment (Lk 12:47-48), and some punishment, like the destruction of the temple (Lk 21:6, 20-24), happens before the final judgment. Still, the consequences of either acceptance or rejection of Jesus' ministry are inevitable and real. In the Lukan world, one is not a passive recipient of forgiveness, but rather accepts it in a life-changing way.<sup>23</sup> Similarly life changing is the rejection of Jesus' eschatological offer of salvation; it amounts to self-exclusion from promised reward.

One of the most striking images in this regard, with many parallels to the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, is offered in Lk 13:23-28. There will be those left outside the closed doors, who, despite their acquaintance with the Lord – “We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets” (Lk 13:26) – will not be allowed to enter the heavenly banquet.<sup>24</sup> They will stand outside knocking and trying to enter, but it will be too late. Like the rich man, whose request for alleviation of his pain is rejected, those left outside have their request denied.<sup>25</sup> Like the rich man, they will see Abraham but also other patriarchs and prophets eating in the kingdom of God (Lk 13:28-29) and themselves thrown

<sup>22</sup> See the warning – “unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did” – in Lk 13:3 and 13:5, that is, in the immediate context of the Parable of the Fig Tree.

<sup>23</sup> In the two scenes where Jesus explicitly declares forgiveness of sins (5:17-26; 7:36-50), those forgiven are not simply released from a moral debt. They enter into a renewed relationship with God who forgives through Jesus. The forgiven and healed paralytic glorifies God (5:25), while the woman shows great love (7:47). The modern notion of unilateral forgiveness is foreign to Luke.

<sup>24</sup> A certain similarity with the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus can be detected here. In the afterlife the rich man recognizes and addresses Abraham as “father” (Lk 16:24.27.30) suggesting some acquaintance with the Jewish religious tradition and the revered patriarch. This acquaintance is insufficient to secure salvation. Cf. Lk 3:8.

<sup>25</sup> There seems to be a sense of surprise both on the part of the rich man and those left outside. Apparently, they did not expect to find themselves excluded.

out. They are condemned for being workers of injustice (Lk 13:27). They must have failed, not unlike the rich man, to hear Moses and the prophets (Lk 16:29.31). In accord with the logic of Luke's narrative, they failed to listen to Jesus, to whom the law and the prophets testify (Lk 9:28-36; 24:44-46).<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the distinguishing mark of those on the correct side of the bipolar ideological horizon is their proper use of wealth.<sup>27</sup> While the poor enter heaven in virtue of their poverty, the rich escape death (in both a this-worldly and eschatological sense) by practicing charity.<sup>28</sup> This idea, with deep roots in Second Temple Judaism (Sir 29:11-12; Tob 4:8-10; 12:8-9; 14:9-11; Prov 10:2; 11:4; Ps 41:1-3),<sup>29</sup> is discernable in a number of passages in Luke-Acts. In Lk 7:1-10, the Roman centurion's slave is saved from death. The centurion,

<sup>26</sup> In Luke's thought-world, listening to Moses and the prophets and listening to Jesus are not opposed to each other. Joshua Stigall („They have Moses”, 552-554) shows how the parable in Lk 16:19-31 illustrates the significance of obedience to the demands of the law and thus functions as a proof of propositions presented by Jesus in Lk 16:14-18. Verse 31 – “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” – by alluding to the one who actually rose from the dead (cf. Lk 24:44-46), indicates that to reject the Law and the Prophets is ultimately to reject Jesus. That, in general, Luke had a consistently conservative approach to the law is argued by Jacob Jervell („The Law in Luke-Acts”). For a more nuanced study of Luke's view of the law, pointing ultimately to Luke's inconsistency in thinking about the law, see Wilson, *Luke and the Law*.

<sup>27</sup> For overviews of the history of research, see Phillips, „Wealth and Poverty”, 231-269; Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 5-25.

<sup>28</sup> One must also keep in mind the example of the Prodigal Son who, having squandered his wealth, converts without any charitable giving to the poor. On the connection and irreducible tension between status reversal and conversion as two theological principles at work in chapters 15 and 16 of Luke, see Roose, „Umkehr und Ausgleich bei Lukas”, 1-21.

<sup>29</sup> See the discussion of these and other passages in Woodington, „Charity and Deliverance from Death”, 634-650; Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 211-217; Anderson, *Charity*, 70-82; Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, 46-55.

we are told, is someone who loves the people and even built a synagogue for them (Lk 7:5). Tabitha, who was “devoted to good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36) is resuscitated, while Cornelius, who gave alms generously (Acts 10:2, 4, 31), receives “repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18).<sup>30</sup> The Gospel speaks of “inheriting eternal life” through works of mercy (Lk 10:25-37; 18:18-23). Jesus’ saying in Lk 12:33 encourages almsgiving for the sake of gaining indestructible treasure in heaven, while his words in Lk 16:9 urge the audience to make for themselves friends with dishonest wealth so as to assure entrance into eternal habitations.<sup>31</sup> The promise of reward to those who give generously resounds in the Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:37-38). Eschatological reward attached to generous giving is made very explicit in Jesus’ instruction to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind so as to be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Lk 14:13-14). Clearly, the rich man in Lk 16:19-31 has failed in this regard.

In the Lukan thought-world, the rich man’s punishment appears fully deserved. Wealth ethics establishes a firm division between those who serve God and those who serve mammon (cf. Lk 16:13). The rich man chose his side of the unsurpassable chasm. He failed to “make friends” with Lazarus when he still had a chance. Now it is too late. His two requests, to have Lazarus ease his pain and to warn his brothers, are denied. He cannot receive mercy, nor can he intercede for others to obtain it. He has excluded himself from eternal reward. He is now left to endure his torment.

<sup>30</sup> J. David Woodington („Charity and Deliverance from Death”, 646) notes that “besides Paul in Acts 24:17, Tabitha and Cornelius are the only two characters in the entire NT to be specifically described as practicing ἐλεημοσύνη.” Anthony Giambrone (*Sacramental Charity*, 225-226), following Dennis J. Horton (*Death and Resurrection*, 74-76) argues for Cornelius’ symbolic death and resurrection in his falling to Peter’s feet and being raised (Acts 10:25-26).

<sup>31</sup> For the interpretation of entire Lk 16 in light of the charity discourse, see Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 209-282.

His condemnation, experienced immediately after death, is final. The reader of Luke, aware of the overall thrust of Luke's eschatology described above, has no problem accepting the logic behind the rich man's punishment. It coheres with the value system promoted by the narrative.

## 2. THE MEANING OF LUKE'S INDETERMINACY

The parable's alignment with Luke's eschatological sensitivities is clear. What is also clear is that not all the questions triggered by Luke's afterlife images find their answers. It remains uncertain, for instance, how the immediate and final destiny of the rich man is to be related to the final judgment at the end of time. It could be, as the scholarship has recently maintained, that Luke simply does not tie up all the loose ends.<sup>32</sup> It is not his intention to produce a systematic presentation of eschatology. The exact timing of eschatological events is not of primary importance to him.<sup>33</sup>

In a similar vein, Luke's uses of the word Hades are not uniform.<sup>34</sup> While Lk 16:23 portrays Hades as a place of

<sup>32</sup> O. Lehtipuu (*The Afterlife Imagery*, 297) observes: "The author of Luke-Acts does not make clear how these different eschatological expectations are related to one another." Similarly Gillner, *Gericht bei Lukas*, 306: "Lukas hat seine Gerichtsvorstellung nicht systematisch entwickelt."

<sup>33</sup> As M. Wolter („Eschatology”, 106) states, eschatology in Luke is “being determined essentially by quality; and only secondarily by time.” See the observation by Steven L. Bridge (*Where the Eagles Are Gathered*, 16): “Emphasis should be placed not on the *timing* of the parousia relative to Luke's history but on the *nature* of the Eschaton relative to Luke's theology – especially in matters of faith, salvation, Christology, and morality.”

<sup>34</sup> In Second Temple literature, Hades was conceptualized in various ways. It was viewed as the general dwelling place of the dead; the temporary abode for all the dead as they awaited the general resurrection and judgment; the intermediate dwelling place of the dead awaiting the Final Judgment but with punishments for the wicked and rewards for the righteous already being assessed and anticipated; and as solely the place of punishment for the wicked. See the following studies by R. Bauckham: „

punishment, Acts 2:27.31 depicts it as an abode of all the dead. Lk 10:15 is more difficult to assess.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, given that Luke uses Gehenna only once (12:5), it is difficult to pin down the exact difference, either, between Gehenna and Hades. It is possible that Luke understands Gehenna and Hades in 16:24 as rough equivalents referring to the place where the wicked are punished immediately after death.<sup>36</sup> Certainty, however, cannot be claimed.

These examples are known to scholars and illustrate well the indeterminate nature of some of Luke's eschatological images and concepts. For the purposes of understanding the rich man's punishment, it is sufficient to note that attempts at too tight a harmonization with other details of Luke's eschatological scenario should be avoided, just as the attempt to dismiss the afterlife imagery of Lk 16:19-31 on the grounds of its tension with other eschatological expectations of Luke. A certain indeterminacy regarding the image of the rich man's suffering must simply be accepted.

That said, the meaning of the rich texture of Luke's eschatological discourse is not exhausted by separating the main eschatological hopes from indeterminate details. In the Lukan narrative, the eschatological sayings of Jesus, and in particular his eschatological parables, invite interpretive connections with characters and motifs from other levels of

Hades, Hell", 14-15; „Descents to the Underworld", 9-48; „Early Jewish Visions", 49-80; and „Visiting the Places", 81-96.

<sup>35</sup> See the discussion of the Lukan usages of Hades, Gehenna and related terms in Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery*, 265-275; Somov, *Representations of the Afterlife*, 85-88.

<sup>36</sup> So Somov, *Representations of the Afterlife*, 86; Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery*, 273-274. That the destiny of Judas, described in Acts 1:25b as "his own place," most likely refers to the abode of the wicked is argued by A. Somov (*Representations of the Afterlife*, 87). Finally, that the term "perdition" used in Acts 8:20 in reference to the condemnation of Simon Magus connotes the place of punishment of the wicked is argued by A. Somov (*Representations of the Afterlife*, 87) and O. Lehtipuu (*The Afterlife Imagery*, 273-274).

Luke's complex narration. The transgression of the boundary between narrative levels, whereby the outer story told by Luke penetrates the embedded stories told by Jesus, a procedure known as metalepsis, constitutes one of the main communicative factors at work in the Third Gospel.<sup>37</sup>

One such metaleptic connection that enriches the meaning of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, has to do with the rich man's request to have Lazarus warn the rich man's brothers.<sup>38</sup> If someone from the dead goes to them, reasons the rich man, they will repent (Lk 16:30). Abraham denies this request arguing that those who do not listen to Moses and the Prophets will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead (Lk 16:31). On the level of the parable, Lazarus' mission to the rich man's brothers is disallowed. On the level of the Lukan story of Jesus, however, the essence of the request is fulfilled, not by Lazarus but by Jesus. He is the one who, coming back from the dead, commissions the eyewitnesses of his appearance to preach a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins (Lk 24:47-48).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> As Ryan S. Schellenberg („Which Master?“, 269) has correctly noted, “Luke habitually blurs the boundary between the metadiegetic world of Jesus' stories with his own story of Jesus.” One can recall the very well-known instance of this procedure in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. There, in the story directed to the grumbling pharisees, the character of the older son represents their attitude, not just his own (cf. Lk 15:2, 28-30).

<sup>38</sup> For W.R. Herzog (*Parables as Subversive Speech*, 123-125), in asking for Lazarus' help, the rich man continues to treat Lazarus as a socially inferior servant or an envoy. The rich man is thus said to demonstrate his lack of repentance even in the afterlife. This view, however, needs to be questioned. As Reuben Bredenhof (*Failure and Prospect*, 59) has observed, “though it is true that the rich man disregarded Lazarus in life, the parable provides no grounds for extending that conclusion to his post-mortem requests. In itself, it cannot be termed a dishonor to be sent temporarily from Abraham's presence on an errand of mercy.”

<sup>39</sup> A. Giambone (*Sacramental Charity*, 278-279) captures the metaleptic procedure well: “The obvious Christological echo in Luke 16:30-31 hints that the mission of mercy Lazarus leaves undone, Jesus himself will

The outer frame of the parable here invades its inner world and, in a very subtle way, suggests that one of the rich man's wishes is, however partially, fulfilled.<sup>40</sup>

Will Jesus, who in coming back from the dead assumes the role requested of Lazarus, perform the other of requested actions and bring alleviation to the suffering rich man? This question is never answered in the narrative, even if the later Christian tradition does entertain it.<sup>41</sup> There is, however, a passage in the Gospel that points to the possibility of the end of the rich man's torments. In Lk 12:57-59, Jesus warns his audience to settle their accounts with their accuser while they are on the way to the magistrate. If not, they will be thrown into prison until they pay the very last penny. The eschatological tone of this warning, suggested by its context,<sup>42</sup> along with the reality of debt prison found behind this saying of Jesus, present the state of being thrown into prison as an image of post-mortem punishment. But

do. The resurrection of Christ will bridge the uncrossable chasm and bring, even to those who killed the author of life, 'times of refreshment' should they repent (Acts 3:19)."

<sup>40</sup> Naturally, Abraham did not say that the request to have Lazarus warn five brothers was, in principle, impossible to fulfill. Rather, his point was that were it to be fulfilled it would remain unproductive for those who disbelieve scriptures. For that reason, even the resurrection of Jesus would not be found convincing by all. Still, some sense of fulfillment of the rich man's request remains.

<sup>41</sup> See the Greek version of the *Apocalypse of the Virgin*, §29 (in James, *Apocrypha Anecdota*, 109-126) where the petition for mercy for the condemned offered by the Virgin, Saint Michael and the saints is granted. Each year the damned receive a 50-day respite from punishment from Easter till Pentecost. In chapter 44 of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, a similar request is granted. In answer to Paul's petition, God grants the damned a weekly Sunday rest from their torments.

<sup>42</sup> Although some commentators consider the saying in Lk 12:57-59 a piece of mundane wisdom, most see in it reference to divine judgment. See Eubank, „Prison, Penance or Purgatory”, 162-163 and the references to commentators therein. For Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 508, the entire material in Luke 12:49-59 “advances the overarching theme of vigilance in the face of eschatological crisis.”

if the reality of debt prison is taken into account, then, in agreement with many ancient interpreters, one must assume here the idea of post-mortem rehabilitation and the promise of eventual release.<sup>43</sup> If that reading is correct, the rich man failed to pay the debt of charity to Lazarus while the two were still alive. Now he is being punished with severity corresponding to his crime (cf. Lk 12:47-48). Eventually, however, he will have paid his last penny.

The sin as debt metaphor underlies Luke's presentation of Jesus' ministry of forgiveness.<sup>44</sup> It is seen most prominently in Jesus' announcement of eschatological Jubilee in Lk 4:18-19 as well as his characterization as divine creditor in Lk 7:36-50. The same metaphor also informs Jesus' call to generous giving. The heavenly treasury – the conceptual counterpart of sin as debt – is increased by giving to those who cannot repay (cf. Lk 12:33). Economy of salvation based on the metaphor of debts and credits invites the notion of a limit in relation to what one owes and what one must repay. Thus conceived, the notion of a limit cannot be excluded from metaleptic procedures that influence the reading of post-mortem sufferings. To what degree, if any, the notion of a limit should therefore be applied to the fiery sufferings of the rich man remains an open question.

<sup>43</sup> Nathan Eubank („Prison, Penance or Purgatory”, 177) having examined debt prisons as well as ancient interpretations of Matt 5:25-26 and parallels, concludes: “Matt 5.25-6 and its parallels should not be glossed as ‘you will go to hell forever.’ This is not what the words say. This is not how prison in antiquity worked. This is not how anyone read the passage until the Origenist controversy required Augustine and others to oppose any hint that the fires of perdition could be temporary. Interpreters agreed on only one thing for the first 300 years: the debtor eventually goes free.”

<sup>44</sup> On the ubiquitous nature of the sin as debt metaphor in the Second Temple Judaism, see Anderson, *Sin: A History*.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Luke's eschatological expectations do not form a closed system. Even when the main thrust of Luke's vision of the future is clear – apocalyptic dualism determined by one's stance toward Jesus and his wealth ethics – there is no shortage of factors that undermine clarity. Indeterminacies inherent in Luke's afterlife images along with metaleptic procedures invited by the rich texture of Luke's narrative force us to conclude that the precise nature of the fiery punishment of the rich man – its eternal versus temporary character – cannot be unambiguously determined.

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