ABSTRACT
This essay explores the relationship between justice and love in the Gospel of Luke, in the context of Luke 21 and a Lukan understanding of divine hospitality evident as φιλία and compassion. Contemporary ecological concern, which manifests in calls for ecojustice and earth love, forms a framework for this exploration. Working from an ecomaterialist perspective, I use the sense of sight as an interpretive key. Both justice and love need to be understood within the limits of creaturely life, limits which in Luke become conditions of possibility for reception of, and participation in, the hospitality of God.

ECOLOGICAL THINKING OFTEN CONCERNS WAYS IN WHICH WE MIGHT re-imagine the relationships between humans and the earth and cosmic communities and systems of which we, as humans, are part. This reimagining is oriented both toward acting better, or more ethically, and finding ways to respond in ourselves, and in our kinship groups (understood broadly to include religious as well as familial households and local communities) to the ecological and social damage brought about largely by human action. In ecological philosophy and hermeneutics there are two important ways of focusing this reimagining, namely justice and love. For example, the Earth Bible project and NGOs such as Oxfam will speak in terms of ecojustice, rightly linking social justice for those humans most adversely affected by ecological destruction with the claims of other than human individuals, species, sites and systems being harmed or destroyed, largely as a result of human activity. Other ecological thinkers, such as Freya Mathews and Deborah Rose, will argue for a

1 The Presidential Address delivered to the Fellowship for Biblical Studies in Melbourne, 3 November 2011.
change in “affect,” desire or love, that turns us toward the more than human (including human) others whose lives and/or being are harmed in what has become known as an ecological crisis—an “affect” which might enable us to act justly. A focus on climate change often falls into the discourse of ecojustice, the big picture of environmental refugees and species extinction; a focus on bioregionalism, conservation and care for local places is called forth by a kind of earth love. These are not necessarily at odds but the different foci do indicate a tension between what Suzanne Smith argues, in a recent article on religious pluralism, is the impartial character of justice compared with the partiality of love. Smith suggests that if love and justice are not to be simply equated, so as to lose their distinctiveness, the only kind of love that may be simultaneously partial and impartially universal may be an eschatological one, where each experiences “the shock of becoming a beloved soul” simultaneously. A problem with loving “affect” is that it is usually focused on our “nearest and dearest,” our friends and kin. Justice, as Smith notes, usually pertains to the other or the stranger who one may not love, and is especially pertinent where one does not love. Much as ecological thinkers have argued with respect to the others of our earth (both other humans and those of different species or kind, not only animals but plants, rocks, forests, atmosphere), Smith suggests that the claims of justice for those who differ from us may be best served by the partiality of loving affect rather than the strict impartially of justice. Ecological thinkers, including theologians such as Sallie McFague, argue for an extension of our understanding of ourselves, so that our sense of “nearest and dearest,” of kinship, shifts so that we are earthkind. But the problem of love for our “nearest and dearest” remains, if extended, to more than human others within the range of our affect. Smith makes an interesting leap when she suggests that there are eschatological aspects to a question of the difference between justice and love.

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5 Smith, “Partial Transcendence” 30.

6 Smith, “Partial Transcendence” 27.

7 Smith, “Partial Transcendence” 28.

8 See, for example, Sallie McFague, Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 102–3.
that seems to resist resolution in imminent human experience, but the resolution of which is desirable and “feels” somehow resolvable nonetheless.\(^9\)

In this essay I consider the relationship between love and justice in the Gospel of Luke, in relation to the eschatological discourse of Luke 21. A Lukan understanding of divine hospitality evident as ἀφίλαξ and compassion, especially as this relates to the idea of the neighbour, suggests that justice and love may not be characterised as respectively impartial and partial in quite the way outlined above. Contemporary ecological concern, which is manifest in calls for ecojustice and earth love, forms a framework for my exploration of love and justice in Luke.

AN ECOMATERIALIST APPROACH

I take an ecomaterialist approach to the text. In conversation with a new materialism in the humanities, an ecological materialism emphasises not only the materiality and material effects of the political, economic, cultural, religious and social structures in which human activity occurs as an interactivity with its material conditions, but also the more than human material (the earthly and cosmic) basis of all life, experience and agency.\(^10\) Thus an ecological materialist approach asks how the materiality of a writing and the interplay between human readers and their material environments can inform their interpretation of texts. The senses are a privileged mode of engagement with the material environment of writers and readers and offer one interpretive key for reading a text from an ecomaterialist perspective.\(^11\) In this essay I focus on the sense of sight in the Gospel of Luke especially as it links the eschatological discourse of Luke 21 with a wider framework of ἀφίλαξ and compassion in the Lukan narrative. In this context an ecological materialism situated in a twenty-first

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9 Smith, “Partial Transcendence” 30.
10 Ecological materialism in conversation with the new materialism in the humanities affirms that matter or materiality can be understood “in a relational, emergent sense,” as contingent yet forming structures or systems, sometimes biological ones, of finite duration, that in turn affect their emergence and endurance. Human activities—political, economic, social, cultural and religious, including the activities of speaking and hearing, writing and reading—are undertaken by humans in relation not only to other humans but as “material individuals” having “biological needs for survival yet inhabiting a world of natural and artificial objects, well-honed micro-powers of governmentality, and the more anonymous but no less compelling effects of international economic structures.” In the new materialism, human agents, ideas and values are situated “within the fields of material forces and power relations that reproduce and circumscribe their existence and coexistence.” Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics (ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost; Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 28–29.
century CE context of ecological concern asks questions of a first century CE gospel narrative that already speaks to the material environments of Judaism, the Jesus movement and early Christian communities, and/under the Roman Empire.

ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

Adela Yarbro Collins distinguishes between historical (or prophetic) and apocalyptic eschatology; the former focuses on “the expectation of decisive turning points in history,” the latter on “the heavenly world, personal afterlife, and a new cosmic creation.”12 Both kinds of eschatology can be found in the synoptic gospels. In relation to the gospels, G. K. Beale argues that eschatology refers to “the end times” not only as a period coming at the end of history, but also as having its beginnings “with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”13 In his investigation of Mark’s apocalyptic eschatology, Keith Dyer points to the materiality, the “this-worldly-ness,” of the anticipated “other” or “new” world.14 Dyer writes: “biblical and other early texts portray heaven and Earth as interactive parallel universes, where heavenly messengers and humans in dreams and visions may cross the boundaries and ‘time zones’ on an every-day basis.”15 He speaks of “the interconnectedness of Earth and heaven.”16 For Dyer, in Mark 13 what we have labelled apocalyptic, but which Mark’s early hearers may have understood as prophetic and literal, pertains first to the new community of Mark’s hearers and the political and social world in which the demands of discipleship must be met.17 Secondly, where Mark’s apocalyptic eschatology describes cosmic ends, which Dyer insists does not necessarily equate to a de-creation of the cosmos, “it is not so much ‘the end’ that is inevitable and imminent, as those ends we encounter on the road of discipleship and testing.”18 Further, he writes: “The logic of Mark’s narrative insists that any cosmic eschatology motivates, not paralysis, but existential alertness and faithful action.”19

15 Dyer, “When is the End” 49.
16 Dyer, “When is the End” 50.
17 Dyer, “When is the End” 52–53.
18 Dyer, “When is the End” 54.
19 Dyer, “When is the End” 54.
Luke is not Mark; Yarbro Collins comments that while “Luke has preserved much of the eschatological material in Mark and added more to it,” he “places more emphasis on the presence of the risen Lord with the Christian communities than does Mark.” Nonetheless, the qualities of expectation and warning associated with both prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology are important, especially in Luke 21, a section which offers an ingress for thinking about the framework of justice in Luke and its relation to the wider Lukan theme of hospitality or visitation.

LUKE 21 AND THE JUSTICE FRAMEWORK OF LUKE

The setting for the eschatological discourse of 21:5–36 is the Temple. In Luke 21:5 an unidentified “some” speak about the beauty of the Temple and its stones. The comments become a prompt for the Lukan Jesus to predict the Temple’s destruction: “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down” (21:6), a prediction that resonates with 19:41–44 where the siege and destruction of Jerusalem are understood as consequent on a failure of the city, standing in for its religious [and political] leaders, to recognise (know) the visitation [of God].

Howard Marshall suggests that in chapter 21, Luke is trying to both distinguish and harmonise the historical “ends” of Jerusalem and Temple and the re-

22 See, similarly, the description of the beauty of the Temple and its stones in the Baba Batra (b. Bat. 1).
23 See, for example, Charles H. Talbert, Reading Luke-Acts in Its Mediterranean Milieu (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 108–9; he notes too, that this claim about the “unbelieving Jews” became “a standard Christian argument” (109 n. 9), with I would add damaging effects in the course of Jewish-Christian relations. On another point, while it is reasonable to infer that γενέσθαι πιστεύσεις (19:44b) refers to a divine visitation, especially with 1:78 in mind, in the context of the siege of Jerusalem described in 19:43–44a, there may be room for some ambiguity. The visitation might also suggest the visitation of the Roman armies. That it does not refer to these alone, however, is likely because for Luke the visitation of these armies is given meaning within the wider ambit of a divine purpose, which includes an ongoing hope for Israel. On this hope, see for example, Robert C. Tannehill, “Israel in Luke-Acts: A Tragic Story,” JBL 104:1 (1985) 69–85; John T. Carroll, Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke-Acts (SBL Dissertation Series 92; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 38.
ceived memory of Jesus’ eschatological teaching and related sayings about the coming of the Son of Man (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ άνθρώπου; 21:25–28, 36). For Marshall, the two events (the destruction of Jerusalem and Temple and the coming of the Son of Man) are separate, but “both are the fulfilment of prophecy and take place in the last days.” What does Luke 21 add to 13:35–48 and 17:20–37? Marshall answers,

Jesus had spoken about the desolation of the temple (13:35) and the destruction of Jerusalem (19:42–44), but he had not related these to the coming of the Son of man. ... Was the End linked chronologically with the fall of Jerusalem? The present discourse [Luke 21:5–38] takes up this point, and it shows that the two sets of events are chronologically separate.26

The way Luke connects and distinguishes these “events” is evident in the progress or structure of the discourse:

The destruction of the Temple (21:5–6)

Signs (21:7–11)

“the time is near”;

Suffering of the community; endurance (21:12–19)

The destruction of Jerusalem; the times of the Gentiles (21:20–24)

Signs (21:25–33)

the coming of the Son of Man;

“your redemption is drawing near”;

Warning to the community; preparedness to stand before the Son of Man (21: 34–36)

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24 I have retained the usual translation of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ άνθρώπου as “the Son of Man.” While I prefer to use more inclusive language, it is difficult to find an inclusive alternative that picks up the range of meaning, especially its eschatological content, and the sense of person, relation, uniqueness and authority conveyed in the title in its Lukan contexts. For a brief, helpful discussion of the usage of the title in the Gospel of Luke, see Judith Lieu, The Gospel of Luke (Epworth Commentaries; Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1997) 42–43; on the sense of singularity or uniqueness the title conveys in Luke, see Joel B. Green, The Gospel of Luke (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 242.


In the discourse both prophetic (or historical) and apocalyptic eschatology are in play. Luke interweaves the destruction of Temple and Jerusalem with the question of whether these events are/were signs of an imminent “end”; his answer is no and yes. Marshall comments:

Luke ... tries to show that various events, which might be regarded as signs of the End, were not in fact such signs. Even the fall of Jerusalem would not be followed immediately by the End. But the fact that Jesus had spoken of signs could not be edited away, and there is a certain tension in the discourse between the recognition that there will be signs of the End and the fact that the End will be sudden and unexpected. 27

Luke retains the cosmic signs associated with the coming of the Son of Man (21:25–27). Into the interwoven historical events of destruction (told with reference to the exile narratives; 21:6, 20–24; esp. v. 24) and cosmic “signs,” he weaves a third thread concerning the experience and response of the disciples as characters, the community, and perhaps also later hearers, recommending endurance in the face of suffering and persecution, and preparedness for judgment (21:12–19, 28, 34). As Marshall comments: “Luke has underlined the fact that the disciples will face persecution and temptation to give up their faith, and he stresses the encouragements given to them by Jesus to hold fast to the end.” 28

Luke Timothy Johnson, who argues for a prophetic structure to Luke-Acts, notes that the suffering predicted of Jesus’ followers in 21:12–19 is fulfilled in Acts. 29 As Judith Lieu writes, the Lukan Jesus “speaks more of the slow but certain pattern which they must first live through, and his concern is not with providing a timetable but with encouraging the disciples in their faithfulness during all that is to come.” 30

The narrative context for Luke 21:5–36 is important for understanding the place of the eschatological discourse in the Gospel of Luke as a whole. The foreshadowing in Luke 21:36 of a scene of eschatological judgment moves immediately into Jesus’ everyday activity of teaching in the Temple: Ἡν δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ διδάσκων (21:37a). 31 The pericope in 21:1–4 that precedes the discourse of 21:5–36 gives further content to this “everyday” context for eschatological judgment. In contrast to the religious leaders, a poor widow gives her living, the little she had to sustain life. As Marshall argues,

29 Luke Timothy Johnson, The Gospel of Luke (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 326. Moreover, as Tannehill notes, the fates of Jesus and the disciples are linked; both will be “handed over” (303).
31 Whether δὲ signals continuity, contrast or both, the movement to the everyday is significant for the interpretation of the immediately preceding discourse.
this is not primarily an example story, but a judgment story against the religious leaders: “They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation” (20:47 NRSV). They and their actions are judged by the action of the widow. Marshall comments: “It is no accident that the prophecy of the destruction of the temple follows.” This judgment story, which like 13:34–35 and 19:41–44 has aspects of lament, situates the discourse of 21:5–36 in the context of Luke’s concern for justice or better ἀφέσις, liberation from oppression. The programme of liberation is set out at various stages in the Lukananarrative, beginning in the infancy narratives in particular with the Magnificat (1:47–55), again in the blessing and woes of 6:20–26 and the reversal in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in 16:19–31, and is echoed in 21:28 (ἐγείρετε ἡ ἀπολύτρωσις ὑμῶν; your redemption, liberation or release, is near), appearing programmatically (as so many scholars comment) in 4:18–19:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release (ἀφεσιν) to the captives  
and recovery of sight (ἀναβάλεψιν) to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free (ἴν ἀφεσι),  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour/the Lord’s year of favour, the year acceptable to the Lord [the jubilee year] (ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν).

Luke 4:18–19 (NRSV)

As Chad Hartsock notes, the restoration of sight is a key aspect of this programme of ἀφεσις. His exploration of ancient theories of vision suggests that the sense of sight was understood both as receiving and giving light (and, in its absence through blindness, darkness). The metaphor of the eye as a lamp in Luke 11:33–36, for example, depicts the healthy eye as a conduit for light; an unhealthy, or blind, eye is a channel for darkness. This passage forms an interlude between scenes of condemnation of this generation (11:29–32) and judgment of Pharisees (11:37–52). The response of the scribes and Pharisees Luke sets up earlier as a paradigm of failure to accept God’s purpose

36 Hartsock, Sight and Blindness 144.  
(7:29–30) and the response of “this generation” are similar (11:29–32). 38 Metaphorically, darkness signals a failure to receive the divine visitation that the body illumined by the healthy eye sees and welcomes. 39

This language of sight is important in Luke 21. The Lukan Jesus refers to the Temple and its stones in 21:6: “these things that you see (θεωρήτε).” Reference to sight returns in a warning mode at 21:8, “See (βλέπετε) that you are not led astray,” and in a return to the siege of Jerusalem in 21:20: “When you see (ἰδήτε) Jerusalem surrounded by armies ...” It is repeated in the appeal to the symbol of the fig tree: “Look (ἴδετε) at the fig tree and other trees” (21:29) and “see (βλέποντες) for yourselves” (21:30). These references to sight, echo the opening of chapter 21:

And/but looking up (Ἀναβλέψας δὲ) he saw (εἶδεν)
rich people (πλουσίους)
throwing/putting (βάλλοντας)
their gifts (τὰ δῶρα) into the treasury.
And/but he saw (εἶδεν δὲ)
a certain poor/needy widow (τινὰ χήραν πενιχρὰν)
throwing/putting (βάλλουσαν)
there two copper coins (λεπτὰ δύο)

Luke 21:1–2

The language of sight links the contrasting pairs in this pericope. The contrast between the rich who give of their excess and the widow who gives from, and in, her state of want recalls the contrast elsewhere in Luke between rich and poor that, in 1:46–55, 6:20–26, 16:19–31 and perhaps also 18:18–30, becomes a reversal where a hierarchy of rich over poor is undone in the good news proclaimed in 4:18–19 as ἀφετερία, liberation. This constellation of song, sayings, parables and stories forms the justice framework of Luke’s narrative, for which ἀφετερία and the restoration of sight are key notes.


In 21:1, looking up the Lukan Jesus sees both the πλουσίοι and the χήρα. Using the verb βάλλω (repeated five times in 21:1–4) to connect the actions of the two parties, the episode proceeds by contrast:

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<tr>
<th>οἱ πλουσίοι</th>
<th>ἡ χήρα πενιχρά</th>
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<tr>
<td>τὰ δῶρα</td>
<td>λεπτὰ δύο</td>
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<tr>
<td>εἰς τὰ δῶρα</td>
<td>πλεῖον πάντων</td>
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<td>ἐκ τοῦ περισσεύοντος</td>
<td>ἐκ τοῦ ύστερημάτος αὐτῆς</td>
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<td>πάντα τὸν βίον</td>
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The repetition of words and sounds suggests that this is meant to be heard rather than read. Through hearing the short episode it emerges that while the word δῶρα is used to describe both what the rich put into the treasury (21:1) and the treasury itself (21:3), what the widow puts in is in fact the real gift (δώρων), all the βιός she had. Thus, while the Lukan Jesus laments that the lives of widows like her are devoured by the scribes and while her action is a judgment on their actions, her gift may also be understood in the context of the approaching passion of Jesus as a self-offering like his. Moreover, the resonances in βιός of ‘life’ and ‘living,’ i.e., both her life and all she had to live on, all she had to sustain her, are important. They allow us to situate both the widow’s gift and Jesus’ death in the context of their mortal embeddedness in the wider earth community. Βιός, as physical life and that which sustains it, evokes the limits within which humans, especially those who are in poverty like the widow, but all humans, live—limits both of mortality and the capacity for earth (generally, and the human society that is part of it) to sustain human life/lives. This situation of limit is also evoked in the eschatological discourse which points to the finitude both of human constructions (e.g., 21:20) and the earth and skies themselves (e.g., 21:33). Lieu suggests that figuratively, the eschatological discourse envisages “the end of created existence as we experience it.” But the imagery of cosmic collapse may also figure “desperate political distress.” Within this situation of material limits, both political and

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40 Barbara E. Reid, Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 196–97; see also the brief discussion of the possible interpretations of this passage in Elizabeth V. Dowling, Taking Away the Pound: Women, Theology and the Parable of the Pounds in the Gospel of Luke (Library of New Testament Studies; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 169–70. As Dowling notes, the woman herself does not speak in the episode; her actions are interpreted in the voice of the male protagonist, i.e., the Lukan Jesus.


cosmic, the gift of the woman is excessive; as such it shares the quality of ex-
cess characteristic of the Lukan divine visitation.

As Brendan Byrne has argued, forgiveness, especially as described in Luke
7:36–50, is an instance, one could say a paradigmatic instance, of the hospital-
ity of God, the divine visitation that presents itself in the Lukan Jesus.¹³ For-
giveness (signalled by the verbs ἀφίημι and ἀπολύω) is associated in Luke
with ἄφεσις and in 7:41–43 with the metaphorical and probable actual release
from debt that parallels the Jubilee release evoked in Luke 4.¹⁴ In 7:36–50, in
contrast to Simon who fails as a host, the woman succeeds (7:46); her loving
action of hospitality toward the Lukan Jesus is prompted by her having experi-
enced the divine hospitality of forgiveness (7:47).¹⁵ Like the poor widow of
21:1–4, the anointing woman is characterised by the excess of her gift and giv-
ing; their gifts signal their understanding and participating in the excess of di-
vine hospitality.¹⁶

In both episodes, the Lukan Jesus sees the character in a particular way, and
the hearer of Jesus’ interpretation of his seeing, both the hearer internal to the
narrative and the later hearer/reader is invited to “see” rightly as the Lukan Je-
sus “sees.” In 7:44, Jesus says to his putative host Simon, “Do you see
(Βλέπεις) this woman?,” inviting a “right” interpretation of her actions.¹⁷
Similarly, the opening of 21:1–4, Ἄνοιξενα λόγια, and the repetition of ἐδει focus
the hearer/reader’s sight/attention on two contrasting characters (the rich
people and the poor widow), “Seeing” in this case prompts the Lukan Jesus to
interpret to his hearers the actions of these characters, and so to allow one to
become the standard against which the other may, or perhaps must, be judged.
The short pericope of the widow’s gift thus provides a context for the many
references to seeing in 21:5–38; the consequent interpretation of action, which

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¹³ Byrne, _The Hospitality of God_ esp. 73.
¹⁴ See Anne Elvey, “Can There Be a Forgiveness That Makes a Difference Ecologi-
cally? An Eco-Materialist Account of Forgiveness as Freedom (Ἀφεσίς) in the Gos-
pel of Luke,” _Pacifica_ 22 (2009) 148–70. I am grateful to Mark Brett for hi-
scholarly advice and encouragement to focus on the motif of ἄφεσις in the Gospel
¹⁵ See, for example, Barbara E. Reid, _Taking up the Cross: New Testament Interpreta-
¹⁶ See Turid Karlsen Seim, _The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke and Acts_
(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) 92. See also Byrne, _The Hospitality of God_, on
the hospitality of the woman (73–74); on the excessive character of the divine visita-
tion in the character of the father in Luke 15:20 (129–30). On the excessive charac-
ter of compassion in the parable of the Good Samaritan, see Sally B. Purvis,
“Mothers, Neighbours and Strangers: Another Look at Agape,” _Journal of Feminist
¹⁷ Barbara E. Reid, “‘Do You See This Woman?’ A Liberative Look at Luke 7.36–50
and Strategies for Reading Other Lukan Stories against the Grain,” in _A Feminist
Companion to Luke_ (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickestaff; London:
is judgment, links Luke’s particular eschatological concerns with key themes in the wider narrative: i) justice (with a particular focus on rich and poor); ii) gift, which is elsewhere expressed in the theme of hospitality; iii) limits (her living, ἐνίατος).

Other senses, particularly hearing, also ground Luke 21 in the everyday of human embodiment, evoked in 21:4 by the reference to physical life and that which sustains it. The eschatological discourse is framed by this everydayness—the widow’s need for sustenance and Jesus’ teaching in the Temple in the days leading up to his death.\(^{48}\) For Luke, this death and the end which is the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple (as reconstructed under Herod) are linked in the divine necessity (which is also for Luke a visitation—both hospitality and judgment); the visitation for peace becomes a visitation of judgment (19:41–44).\(^{49}\) Both the death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem are interpreted in Luke as the outcome or consequence of the kind of failure to recognise and receive the gift of divine hospitality (7:29–30; 19:41–44) that the oppression of widows signals (20:45–47) and for which the gift of a poor widow (21:1–4), itself a “yes” to this visitation, is also a judgment. The cosmic events described in 21:25–28, moreover, “echo the Old Testament imagery of God’s judgment (Isa. 13.10–13; 24.19–20; 34.4)” and suggest that: “Not only human institutions like cities and governments, but even the earth, sea, and sky will reflect the coming times.”\(^{50}\)

Significant in Luke’s eschatological discourse is the refrain of imminence: “the time is near” (no it’s not) (21:8–9); “your redemption is drawing near” (21:28); the βασιλεία of God is near (ἐγγύς ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ; 21:31). The last echoes the words the seventy disciples are to proclaim as promise and warning in 10:1–12 in response to how they are received: Ἡγικεν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (10:9); Ἡγικεῖν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (10:11). In Luke 10, like the Lukan Jesus who sends them, when they go

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\(^{50}\) Lieu, \textit{The Gospel of Luke} 171; Ringe, \textit{Luke} 253. Ringe suggests further that the redemption announced in 21:28, “spells transformation, healing, and wholeness for all life.” The implications of such redemption (also signalled in Romans 8) remain open to further ecological critique, beyond the scope of this essay.
into the villages, the disciples embody the hospitality of God, which can be received hospitably or otherwise and by which reception their “hosts” come to judgment. In Luke 21 as in Luke 10, eschatological judgment is of a particular kind. The focus is not on judgment; judgment is a consequence. The warning of judgment is not the end of the eschatological story, but the prompt for endurance on the part of the disciples (e.g., 21:19, 36) and the measure of right action on the part of those to whom the disciples are sent (10:8–11).

At the very point where they imagine themselves standing before the Son of Man, καὶ σταμάτησαν ἐμπροσθέν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (21:36), the hearers/readers are returned to the everyday. In 21:28, the exhortation to “stand up (ἀνυπόκταστε) and raise your heads, because your redemption (Ἀπολύτρωσις) is drawing near,” carries an echo of 13:10–17; the woman incapable of standing up straight (ἀνυπόκτασθα, 13:11) is liberated (the Lukan Jesus commands ἀπολέυσαι τῆς ἀδελφής σου, 13:12). In the context of Luke 21, standing before the Son of Man (21:36) shares this resonance of liberation. Read in the light of 21:1–4 and the Lukan motif of good news to the poor, the focus of judgment is on the kinds of action that signal a right reception of the liberating hospitality of God in ἀφεσις. As both the narrative of the widow’s gift and the Lukan understanding of divine purpose signal, such action occurs not in spite of the limits imposed on human life by oppressive human forces and mortal being, but within them.51

LOVE FRAMEWORK IN LUKE

How might this framework of justice, of liberation, and right response to the hospitality of God within the limits of human lives be related in Luke to love?

In Luke, two key words are used for love, ἀγάπη and the related verb ἀγαπάω, and φίλος and φιλέω, the latter relating to friendship; I will focus here on the former pair. The primary texts for considering Luke’s understanding of ἀγάπη come toward the end of Luke 6: “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to/for those who hate you” (καλὸς ποιήτε, 6:27; ἀγαθοποιήτε, 6:35a). Not only does this saying present a difficult task, it sets out for Luke what is meant by love; to love is to do good for some-

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53 In his discussion of research on Lukan eschatology, Bovon refers to Luke’s taking humans seriously in their “corporeality and finitude” (Luke the Theologian 13).
love your enemies;
do good to/for those who hate you (6:27, 35a)
bless those who curse you (6:28)

and so participate in the kindness and mercy of God (6:35b–36), which Luke describes in the Benedictus as gutfelt. “[T]he gutfelt mercies of our God (σπλάγχνα ἐλέους θεοῦ ἡμῶν) in which will visit (ἐπισκέψεται) us the dawn from on high” (1:78), are linked in the previous verse with release (ἐν ἀφεσιν) from sin/debt (1:77). These gutfelt mercies mark the visitation of God, in which the hearers, addressed in 6:27 and following, are called to participate, as the woman in 7:36–50 does, when she “loves much” (7:47) and as the poor widow of 21:1–4 seems also to do. The action of the poor widow in giving her βίος into the treasury, in a Lukan context where certain religious officials oppress widows (20:47), resonates with the reversal exhibited in the admonition to bless those who curse you (6:28).

The other key text for understanding the “love framework” in Luke is 10:25–37, where a lawyer asks Jesus: “Teacher, what must I do to receive, or gain possession of, eternal life?” The hearer/reader remembering 6:27, 35a might recall that what is required is to “do good to those who hate you.” Jesus responds on this occasion with a question “what is written in the law/Torah? how do you read?” and the lawyer cites Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: “love (Ἀγαπήσεις) the Lord your God out of your whole heart in/with your whole psyche/soul and in/with your whole strength and in/with your whole mind/purpose and your neighbour as yourself,” the latter echoing 6:31 “do to others what you would have them do to you.”

The story is familiar: the Lukan Jesus responds, “Rightly you have answered; do this and you will live” (10:28). And the Lukan narrator tells the hearer/reader that wanting to justify himself, the lawyer pushes the point: “And who is my neighbour?” (10:29), to which Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable displays a pattern in which seeing is the dominant sense (though this leads to life-giving touch, but I will leave that aside for now). A person of unspecified ethnicity, but it would be reasonable to assume the person to be a Judean/Jew, on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is set upon, stripped, beaten and left half dead (10:30). The parable sets up a contrast between the lawyer’s desire for life —what must I do to have life? —

55 See Dowling, Taking Away the Pound 100.
57 The lawyer specifies “eternal life” (10:25), Jesus simply says “do this and you will live” (10:28).
and death. See the person lying near death on the way, the parable seems to be saying. The implied command to see becomes more explicit as the story progresses; in succession a priest then a Levite happen to be going down the same road and each sees:

\[
\text{kai\ \iota\delta\omicron\alpha\upsilon\varepsilon\iota\upsilon\text{\acute{a}nti}\pi\rho\omicron\alpha\gamma\rho\lambda\iota\delta\epsilon\nu} (10:31) \\
\text{kai\ \iota\delta\omicron\alpha\upsilon\text{\acute{a}nti}\pi\rho\omicron\alpha\gamma\rho\lambda\iota\delta\epsilon\nu} (10:32)
\]

The action of seeing prompts a further action of passing by on the other side (\text{\acute{a}nti}\pi\rho\omicron\alpha\gamma\rho\lambda\iota\delta\epsilon\nu). Much has been made of why they might have acted in this way, but this is not the key point of the story. A third person happens along, a Samaritan, who while travelling comes upon the person:

\[
\text{kai\ \iota\delta\omicron\alpha\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\nu\iota\omicron\nu\text{\acute{a}plaxynosth}i} (10:33).
\]

The repetition of seeing followed by response highlights the contrast with the first two characters and emphasises the need to see rightly. Right seeing prompts compassion, a movement in the gut, signalled by the verb \text{splaxynizomai}, which echoes the gut-felt movement of divine mercy (\text{splaxynh\ \epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\omega\upsilon\nu\ \iota\mu\omicron\omega\nu}) in the visitation of God (1:78). This pattern occurs twice elsewhere in Luke, in 7:13 and 15:20:

\[
\text{kai\ \iota\delta\omicron\alpha\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\nu\text{\acute{a}nti}\text{\acute{a}}\theta\omicron\nu\ \text{\acute{a}plaxynosth}i \epsilon\pi'\ \alpha\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\nu} (7:13) \\
\text{e\iota\omicron\nu\ \alpha\upsilon\upsilon\nu\ \text{\acute{a}}\theta\omicron\nu\ \text{\acute{a}}\theta\omicron\nu\ \text{\acute{a}}\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\nu\ \text{\acute{a}}\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\nu} (15:20)
\]

In each case, the protagonist sees—in 7:13 the Lukan Jesus, titled lord, sees the bereaved widow; in 15:20 a father sees his disgraced son returning; in 10:33 the Samaritan sees the wounded person on the road—and each, moved in the guts with compassion, acts in such a way as (through touch) to bring life from death. \[58\]

At the end of the parable, there is a further twist, Jesus answers but does not answer the lawyer’s question. He shifts the original question “Who is my neighbour?” (10:29) to “Which of these three acted as neighbour to the person who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (10:36). And the lawyer does not use the word Samaritan, but responds “the one who showed mercy” (10:37a). Then Jesus says “Go and do likewise” (10:37b), that is, do good, participate in the visitation of divine mercy. The turning of the question not only extends the understanding of neighbour, but challenges the lawyer to place himself in the position of the one left half-dead on the road receiving the compassionate attention of the Samaritan, and thus challenged to receive and respond to the divine visitation. \[59\]

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\[58\] Elvey, \textit{The Matter of the Text} 82–84

\[59\] I owe this observation to Alan Cadwallader, for whose insight and scholarly conversation I am grateful.
CONCLUSION: LOVE AND JUSTICE

In Luke, compassion, forgiveness, liberation and, though not discussed in this essay, table fellowship are all paradigmatic instances of divine visitation. To respond to this visitation, one needs both to be seen and to see, each of which requires a certain proximity.60 This proximity has resonance with the imminence, the coming near, of the ἑσπερία of God. For Luke it is possible in the present to welcome the divine visitation, the proximity of the ἑσπερία of God. The mode of σπλαγχνίζομαι predicated on a right seeing represents Luke’s eschatological moment in the present, the hope of transformative ἀφεσις, liberation, that is also the mode of hospitable action, and this is the measuring rod for the judgment symbolised in the eschatological coming of the Son of Man. It is in a sense both justice and love where the ἑσπερία which is near is indeed near in the response to the near one, who is both the one seen to be in need and the one who sees the need, regardless of their degree of kinship (or nearness in that sense).

For an ecological ethic, not only does this sense of nearness need to be extended to the more than human near one, but also (and more importantly) an ecological ethic of love carries the hope that the eschatological moment occurs in the present through a pattern of seeing rightly and doing good beyond the claims of kinship.61 As the life/death nexus that underscores the pattern suggests, and as the admonition to love one’s enemies augurs, this is not nice, easy or pious. In an ecological setting it throws us back to real time questions, such as that raised by literary critic Rachel Greenwald Smith about the end of humankind. She is reading a rather engaging science fiction trilogy Xenogenesis by Octavia Butler. But what she says of this trilogy could be said of Luke:

eschatology is necessary in order to imagine alternatives to our abuses of the present; and finally, eschatology is necessary because to think ecologically is, in a sense, always to think eschatologically if we are honest with ourselves and are willing to take on the implications of our demands for the future. Replacing the logic of market liberalism [or for Luke we could say empire and the excess of wealth] with a logic of life ... is not to do away with pain, loss, inequality, and vio-

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60 What this proximity might mean needs to be considered further both in relation to first century communications of, for example, need, across distances and the more complex and extensive twenty-first century ones.

61 James Nash is one of several who have suggested extending the notion of neighbour to the other than human. In my opinion this is only a first step in applying the possibilities of neighbour love ecologically. Neighbour love, especially in the Lukan framework of hospitality, liberation and compassion, suggests a broader possibility of intervening in oppressive (inter)relationships than that suggested by a simple extension from the human to the other than human. James A. Nash, “Toward the Ecological Reformation of Christianity,” Interpretation 50:1 (1996) 5–15, esp. 9.
rence. To the contrary: the dynamism of life offers hope for change precisely because it relentlessly destabilizes the elements of the present that support the status quo.  

The historical and cosmic ends that the Lukan eschatological discourse warns of are not only about judgment but about limits. The reference to the widow’s βίος signals the fragility of human life that relies for its sustenance on others. The references both to the ends of Jerusalem and Temple and a cosmic end similarly signal the limits of creation, but not necessarily in a supersessionist sense of a de-creation that must occur in order that a new creation come about. Rather they allow for a recognition that the fragility of creaturely existence and its limits found our resilience, our capacity like the widow to make a gift even where the gift seems impossibly constrained by oppression.

For Luke, it is these oppressive constraints that of necessity shift the impartiality of justice, through the reversal signalled in δικαιοσύνη, toward a partiality for the poor, the blind, the oppressed. While love is partial, insofar as human (or creaturely) love is particular, local and limited, the divine visitation marked by both δικαιοσύνη and compassion invites (or commands) an impartial love, even to love of the oppressor.

In Luke, love that is doing good for the other and justice that is liberation come together as aspects of the one hospitality of God. Both are predicated on a right seeing, a seeing that prompts action and a seeing that judges rightly. Right seeing is an embodied sense that connects us with the other, both the other who attends to our need and the other to whose need we attend. Such attention occurs within the material limits of human life, bodily, social, political and environmental limits that both challenge and sustain our seeing, judging and acting. Within the Lukan framework of divine visitation, these limits become conditions of possibility for reception of, and participation in, the hospitality of God.