

RETHINKING NEIGHBOUR LOVE: A CONVERSATION
BETWEEN POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGICAL ETHICS¹

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The parable of the Good Samaritan is not simply a religious text from the Gospel of Luke, but it is one that has entered culture through both art and everyday usage, where someone is described as a ‘good Samaritan’. The entry into culture of this religious image is part of a wider interplay between ‘secular’ culture and theology, which touches on political theology. The notion of political theology suggests not only that religious institutions are political institutions with the concomitant issues of power relations and sovereignty that this implies, but also that theology, especially Christian theology, remains as a trace, or more than a trace, in contemporary politics, particularly in or informed by the West. In his exploration of political theology, Eric Santner brings together two notions that have important biblical resonances: sovereignty and neighbour love.² In this essay, I look at these two notions as they pertain to Lk. 10.25-37, employing what I call an ecological materialist approach.

Political Theology

My interest in political theology is primarily in relation to ecological ethics. I understand the ecojustice principles and the ecological hermeneutics developed by, and under the leadership of, Norman Habel to be projects

1. Versions of this essay were presented as papers at the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar, Brisbane, November 5–6, 2011, Regarding the Earth: Ecological Vision in Word and Image: Fourth Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Literature, Environment and Culture (Australia–New Zealand), RMIT University and Monash University, August 31–September 2, 2012 and Fellowship for Biblical Studies National Conference, Parkville, September 24–25, 2012.

2. Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), esp. pp. 75-80, 206-207. See also Eric L. Santner, ‘Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbor’, in Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 76-133.

in ecological or environmental ethics.³ The principles of intrinsic worth, interconnectedness, voice, purpose, mutual custodianship and resistance open interpreters to a world in which humans are learning, or relearning, that they are part, not the centre or pinnacle, of a much wider Earth community that has its own interests and purposes and can act in its own right.⁴ They are ethical principles in that they shift interpreters toward listening for the ways of Earth, toward hearing Earth's ecological mores as informing human ethical behaviour.

As Lorraine Code reminds us, however, in her work on ecological thinking, Earth and its systems should not be overly romanticized.⁵ Rather, ecological thinking challenges interpreters both to be converted from anthropocentrism, prevailing particularly in Western cultures, and to recognize the ways in which the notions of ecology and ecological thinking are themselves shaped by ideological interests.⁶ Just as Val Plumwood highlights 'mastery' as a key focus for ecophilosophical critique, Code's 'ecological thinking' is oriented toward unsettling the 'mastery' of Western capitalism, in particular.⁷ Oppressive masteries are not unique to Western capitalism. As the turn to explorations of empire and slavery in contemporary biblical studies shows, imperial sovereignty, systems of debt and master-slave relations need to be accounted for when studying ancient biblical texts.⁸ How are

3. I am delighted to be part of this project to honour Norm Habel, whose outstanding leadership in the area of ecological biblical interpretation as an act of attending to the voice of Earth is both inspiring and challenging. For an outline of the ecojustice principles and the ecological hermeneutics of suspicion, identification and retrieval, see Norman C. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (The Earth Bible, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 24; and Norman C. Habel, 'Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics', in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter L. Trudinger; SBL Symposium Series, 46; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), pp. 3-8.

4. See Norman Habel, 'Introducing the Earth Bible', in Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, pp. 25-37.

5. Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 6.

6. Code, *Ecological Thinking*, pp. 28-29.

7. Code's proposing an ecological social imaginary as an alternative to an imaginary of mastery invokes the work of Val Plumwood, particularly her critique of a system of mastery (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* [London: Routledge, 1993]); see Code, *Ecological Thinking*, p. 15. Code's work on ecological thinking also resonates with the direction of Plumwood's *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002).

8. See, for example, Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith, 'Introduction: The Slavery of New Testament Studies', *Semeia* 83/84 (1998), pp. 1-15, and other essays in that joint volume; Elizabeth Dowling, *Taking Away the Pound: Women, Theology and the Parable of the Pounds in the Gospel of Luke* (London: T. & T.

biblical theologies enmeshed with and/or resistant to these masteries? The notion of the βασιλεία of God, a theological concept in debt to, and potentially critical of, political notions of sovereignty provides perhaps the most obvious test case.

In contemporary political life the notion of divine sovereignty, to which the concept of the βασιλεία of God might be understood to refer in its ancient Gospel contexts, re-emerges in the bourgeois individual as sovereign.⁹ This displaced or replaced sovereignty has material effects, not only in the way human corporeality is understood and experienced but also in the ways material things are commodified. Commodification of Earth beings, for example, minerals, women, slaves, DNA, cattle, elephants, forests and fish, is in tension with the principle of intrinsic worth. Moreover, such commodification tends to ignore other principles, by assuming that (or acting as if) other than humans and some humans are properly without voice and agency. There is an interplay between sovereignties, collective and individual (noting, for example, that companies can be deemed persons), so that the individual is not only sovereign over that which is commodified but also commodity, subject to other sovereignties.

Interpreting a tradition of ‘German Jewish’ thought, Santner describes a situation in which the human is rendered ‘creaturely’ at this point of subjection ‘where life becomes a matter of politics and politics comes to inform

Clark International, 2007), pp. 11-18; Elizabeth Dowling, ‘Slave Parables in the Gospel of Luke’, *AusBR* 56 (2008), pp. 61-68; Elizabeth Dowling, ‘Luke-Acts: Good News for Slaves?’, *Pacifica* 24 (June 2011), pp. 123-40; J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006); Mitzi J. Smith, ‘Review of J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006)’, *JAAR* 75 (2007), pp. 219-23; Judy Diehl, ‘Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament’, *CBR* 10.1 (2011), pp. 9-52; Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008); David Rhoads, David Esterline and Jae Won Lee (eds.), *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 151; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011); Christina Petterson, *Acts of Empire: The Acts of the Apostles and Imperial Ideology* (Sino-Christian Studies Supplement Series, 4; Chung Li, Taiwan: Chung Yuan Christian University, 2012); and the earlier Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke’s Gospel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978). Moreover, the socio-rhetorical approach that informs much contemporary biblical critical work points to, among other things, the way in which biblical texts in their ancient social, cultural and political contexts are already engaged in a kind of political theology; see, for example, Elaine M. Wainwright, *Women Healing/Healing Women: The Genderization of Healing in Early Christianity* (BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2006), pp. 24-31.

9. Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, pp. 76-80.

the very matter and materiality of life'.¹⁰ Here the notion of sovereignty of divine Creator over creation both informs the problematic political and power relations of contemporary sovereignties and is displaced by a creatureliness marked not by embeddedness in a more-than-human created world but by subjection to a bourgeois individualism. 'Cringed bodies', marking the shamefulness of subjection, become for Santner an 'emblem' of creaturely life.¹¹ Ironically, it is the 'cringe', if I understand where Santner is leading, that allows for an intervention in the destructive nexus of sovereign–subject–commodity relations, because the 'cringed body' of the creature is the point at which neighbour love may open up what he calls 'new possibilities for collective life'.¹²

A Conversation

Because in its narrative context the parable of the Good Samaritan interprets the command to love one's neighbour, a conversation with the parable may be helpful for exploring the kind of relationships between sovereignties and neighbour love suggested by Santner. On face value the parable offers an example of compassionate attention to a stranger in need. The Samaritan attends to the neighbour, even where or especially where the neighbour is a stranger, even an enemy. Some ecological theologians have suggested extending the notion of neighbour to other than humans in need or to the Earth itself.¹³ Two points need to be made at this juncture, one biblical critical and one ecological critical. First, from a biblical studies perspective, interpretation of the parable is not as simple as the everyday usage 'good Samaritan' suggests. Second, from an ecological perspective, there are problems with simply extending the application of the parable to a more-than-human context.¹⁴ These problems relate to the way in which human paradigms need to be rethought ecologically. Extending paradigms of compassionate human relationships (such as neighbour love) to a more-than-human context is insufficient. We need to rethink human relationships in a more-than-human framework of interconnectedness, interdependence and material co-agency.

10. Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, p. 12.

11. Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, pp. 29-30, 130-31. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore Santner's thought in detail, especially as it explores the role of the unconscious in the production of creaturely life.

12. Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, pp. 58, 133.

13. See, for example, James A. Nash, 'Toward the Ecological Reformation of Christianity', *Int* 50.1 (1996), p. 9.

14. The term 'more than human' includes both other than humans and humans as Earth beings.

An Ecological Materialism

At least two materialisms are useful here, the first being the material conditions of human lives understood in terms of just distribution of and access to goods such as food, shelter, clothing and adequate life-giving social networks and culture; the second being the materiality that describes human embeddedness in, interconnectedness and interdependence with, a more-than-human sociality. These two materialisms are not entirely separate, but the first resonates more with Marxist approaches and allows an ecological extension from social justice to environmental or ecological justice. The second is the wider frame that potentially decentres the human and understands the material embeddedness of humankind as one instance of wider more-than-human materialities and material agencies. In this latter setting social justice becomes an instance of ecological justice, notwithstanding the tensions that arise when deciding who or what might benefit and who or what be harmed by a particular action for ecological justice. An ecological materialist approach takes these frameworks seriously and asks questions about relationships between texts, bodies, matter and political conglomerates such as empires.

The Earth Bible principles inform my ecological materialist approach, as do the ecological hermeneutics, of suspicion, identification and retrieval, developed by Habel and his colleagues, as I work not only to question the ways in which biblical texts and interpretations have effaced their material bases, but also to open a space for affirming the co-agency of Earth others in biblical interpretation.¹⁵ Elaine Wainwright describes an interplay between suspicion and reconfiguration in ecologically oriented biblical studies when she writes, ‘Ecological reading will . . . critically evaluate biblical methodologies and interpretations not just to see if they include an ecological focus or attention to the environment but to determine ways in which they might be *reconfigured* to participate in an ecological reading that is a process within ecological thinking.’¹⁶

Ecological materialism has a resonance in the multidimensional approach that Wainwright is developing in which she attends to ecological, postcolonial and feminist concerns and, in a context of ecological thinking developed by Code, looks at the layered textures of the text: material, social,

15. See Anne F. Elvey, *The Matter of the Text: Material Engagements between Luke and the Five Senses* (The Bible in the Modern World, 37; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), esp. pp. 12-14; see also Anne F. Elvey, ‘The Matter of Texts: A Material Intertextuality and Ecocritical Engagements with the Bible’, in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (ed. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby; Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), pp. 181-93.

16. Elaine M. Wainwright, ‘Images, Words, Stories: Exploring their Transformative Power in Reading Biblical Texts Ecologically’, *BibInt* 20 (2012), p. 289 [emphasis in original].

embodied, ecological and their embeddedness in their multiple habitats.¹⁷ The multidimensionality of reading becomes an instance of the multidimensionality of readers and texts as materially embedded in the multiplicity of Earth; the complexity of habitat (which is more than context) offers a way of accessing this material embeddedness.¹⁸ Earth is encountered in the text, not only as a construct of writers and readers but more particularly as its haptic and inspired self (tangible; breathing; in the materialities of medium, voice and language).¹⁹

In my reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan, I focus on two aspects of an ecological materialism. First, when I come to a text, which is a writing in a specific material artefact, my senses are engaged as mediators of both materiality and meaning.²⁰ A focus on the senses offers a point of entry into the layers of materiality and material agency mediated in the story world of the text in its ancient context. In my reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan, I focus on the sense of sight. For Jean-Louis Chrétien, seeing involves a givenness to the possibility that something will be, or become, visible.²¹ In a two-way movement between the gaze and the thing that appears, the visible calls.²² This interplay between word and gaze implies what might be called a hermeneutics of sight, which destabilizes the notion of a proper sensible (an eye that sees; an ear that ears) with the possibility of an eye that listens.²³ For Chrétien, the eye listens to both beauty and suffering: ‘To see the suffering and beauty of the visible in the form of a voice is to be dedicated to providing it forever with the asylum of our own voice. When the eye listens, we must answer what we hear and answer for what we will hear.’²⁴ To borrow Jean-Luc Nancy’s term, one is ‘sounded’ by

17. See Wainwright, ‘Images, Words, Stories’; see also Wainwright, *Women Healing/Healing Women*, pp. 11-23.

18. Wainwright, ‘Images, Words, Stories’, esp. p. 286 and p. 294 n. 43.

19. On the materialities of textual medium, voice and language, see further Elvey, *The Matter of the Text*.

20. See Elvey, *The Matter of the Text*, esp. p. 189.

21. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response* (trans. Anne A. Davenport; New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 33.

22. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, p. 33.

23. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, pp. 33-34, 37, 43. The focus on sight in my essay is not specifically in relation to the text as a visible, readable thing, although it includes this. The focus is on the sense of sight as *one* mode of material (and corporeal) engagement of humans (and other animals) that can be applied to what the characters in the narrative ‘see’ and how they engage materially with and in their material contexts. At another level, the text, ‘seen’ by a contemporary reader, was more likely heard by its early audiences as oral performance. I engage with the crossing between seeing and hearing in the act of reading in Elvey, *The Matter of the Text*, Chapters 6 and 7.

24. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, p. 43.

the visible.²⁵ Through this sounding, the one sounded proffers, and provides the conditions for, hospitality. The parable of the Good Samaritan, I suggest, offers an instance of such a sounding by the visible.

Second, the materiality mediated in the story world of the text in its ancient context, particularly as it concerns the political, can be examined in relation to the material spaces of the text. Categories of public and private as they pertain to space, action and speech have political implications and can inform an understanding of the political-theological impact of a text. The category of habitat encompasses, but is broader than, these notions of public and private space, and offers a frame from which to examine and unsettle these constructions of space that are potentially socially divisive.²⁶ The parable of the Good Samaritan in its narrative context offers an example of a complex interplay of public and private agendas and agencies that needs to be accounted for in its relation to the multiple sovereignties that appear in the Lukan Gospel.

Lukan Sovereignties

Politically, the Gospel of Luke is both produced and set in, and under, the sovereignty of the Roman Empire; there is in effect no outside to this empire, so that even where mention of the empire is not explicit, it is assumed and engaged in every chapter.²⁷ Luke makes this evident with reference, for example, to a decree (concerning a census) that is obeyed (2.1-5); imperial

25. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening* (trans. Charlotte Mandell; New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 12.

26. For a nuanced consideration of the categories of public and private in relation to Luke and its political, social and cultural contexts, see Bart B. Bruehler, *A Public and Political Christ: The Social-Spatial Characteristics of Luke 18:35–19:43 and the Gospel as a Whole in its Ancient Context* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 157; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), pp. 31-134. It is beyond the scope of this essay to survey the scholarship on notions of public and private in first-century CE Greek and Roman contexts. One helpful study is Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford Studies in Classical Literature and Gender Theory; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

27. Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), p. 1; Diehl, 'Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament', p. 23. Karl Galinsky, arguing for a nuanced approach to the religious plurality of the Roman Empire, comments that within the comprehensiveness of the empire there was an 'elastic order of things', under which many flourished; see Karl Galinsky, 'The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?', in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series, 5; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), p. 7. It is likely, nonetheless, that the flourishing of Greek cities under Rome did not extend to the poor and indebted within and outside their walls.

rulers and local leaders in collaboration with them (3.1-2); Pilate's power to execute a person he deems innocent (23.4, 15, 25); the collaboration with Pilate of local leaders (both Herod and the religious leaders, 23.6-25); the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies (19.43-44; 21.20-24).²⁸ Like many scholars, Seyoon Kim argues that Luke draws an unmistakable contrast between Caesar Augustus and Jesus, claiming implicitly that 'Jesus is the true *kyrios* and *sōtēr*'.²⁹ There has been debate in Lukan studies concerning the force of this contrast and the extent to which the Gospel is an apology to (or for), or resistant to, Roman rule.³⁰ Early on, Richard Cassidy disagreed with Ernst Conzelmann that there is a political apologetic in Luke's Gospel, but implied that Luke deals with the oppressive effects of Roman rule, such as poverty, not by resistance to the structures that create, maintain or exacerbate poverty but by calling forth a different way of living in community.³¹ Bart Bruehler argues that Luke is epideictic rather than apologetic: without ignoring reception by outsiders it is written primarily for insiders. In this epideictic style, two contrasting perspectives are possible: (1) accommodation to (perhaps even support) of the empire; (2) 'a radical new social ethic inaugurated by Jesus and carried out by the disciples that threatens the oppressive political order of the Roman Empire'.³² The ambiguity available to interpreters of Luke's attitude to empire may be indicative of the structures of imperial sovereignty themselves, where rather than being directly confrontational, resistance and strategies of survival in a colonial situation are encoded in texts that may be understood subversively.³³ For example, Warren Carter makes a compelling case for

28. See, for example, Barbara E. Reid, 'Women Prophets of God's Alternative Reign', in *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley* (ed. David Rhoads, David Esterline and Jae Won Lee; Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 151; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), pp. 45-47; Jae Won Lee, 'Pilate and the Crucifixion of Jesus in Luke-Acts', in *Luke-Acts and Empire*, pp. 105-106.

29. Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 79-81. Galinsky points out that terms like *sōtēr* and son of god predate Roman usage ('The Cult of the Roman Emperor', p. 6).

30. It would be hasty to conclude that the opening address to *κράτιστε Θεόφιλε* (most excellent Theophilus, 1.3) indicates that the Gospel of Luke comes to us from an elite context; rather, Luke may be negotiating with power from a position of (relatively privileged) subjection that is not destitution.

31. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics and Society*, esp. pp. 32-33, 128.

32. Bruehler, *A Public and Political Christ*, p. 5.

33. See, for example, Diehl, 'Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament', pp. 21-24; Reid, 'Women Prophets of God's Alternative Reign', pp. 48-49; Gary Gilbert, 'Luke-Acts and the Negotiation of Authority and Identity in the Roman World', in *The Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meanings* (ed. Christine Helmer and Charlene Higbe; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), pp. 83-104 (100,

reading the hymns of the Lukan infancy narratives as songs of protest.³⁴ As Raymond Pickett argues, while Luke–Acts neither ‘overtly’ criticizes the Roman Empire, nor portrays it ‘in a positive light’, ‘it can be said to be counter-imperial inasmuch as it presents a wisdom or strategy for renewal that is set in contrast to key claims of Greco-Roman society’.³⁵

This wisdom or strategy for renewal can be found in the way divine sovereignty and human responsive participation in the βασιλεία of God is depicted through two Lukan tropes: necessity and visitation, the latter having the dual aspects of hospitality (through table fellowship, compassion, and forgiveness or release from debt) and judgment.³⁶ The divine necessity describes Luke’s theological understanding that the destructive effects of Roman power, as exemplified in the death of Jesus (9.22; 17.22-25; 22.36-37; 24.5-7, 25-26) and the destruction of Jerusalem, are subsumed, not without grief (13.31-35; 19.41-44), under the sovereignty of God, which makes another future possible.³⁷ This divine sovereignty and the possibilities it evokes are captured for Luke in the notion of the visitation of God (see especially 1.76-79; 4.18-19; 19.44), a liberating divine hospitality calling forth welcome (see especially 10.1-11). Visitation only becomes judgment as a consequence of a failure to welcome or receive (10.11; 19.41-44)—and through welcoming to participate in—the hospitality of God. This brief

104); Brigitte Kahl, ‘Reading Luke against Luke: Non-uniformity of Text, Hermeneutics of Conspiracy and the “Scriptural Principle” in Luke 1’, in *A Feminist Companion to Luke* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 71-76; Brigitte Kahl, ‘Acts of the Apostles: Pro(to)-Imperial Script and Hidden Transcript’, in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), pp. 149-51.

34. Warren Carter, ‘Singing in the Reign: Performing Luke’s Songs and Negotiating the Roman Empire (Luke 1–2)’, in *Luke–Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley* (ed. David Rhoads, David Esterline and Jae Won Lee; Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 151; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), pp. 23-43; see also, Reid, ‘Women Prophets of God’s Alternative Reign’, p. 44.

35. Raymond Pickett, ‘Luke and Empire: An Introduction’, in *Luke–Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley* (ed. David Rhoads, David Esterline and Jae Won Lee; Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 151; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), pp. 6, 12.

36. Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke’s Gospel* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000); Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 215; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 299.

37. On the Lukan divine necessity, see further, Charles H. Cosgrove, ‘The Divine Δεῖ in Luke–Acts’, *NovT* 26 (1984), pp. 168-90; Mark Reasoner, ‘The Theme of Acts: Institutional History or Divine Necessity in History?’, *JBL* 118 (1999), pp. 635-59; John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke–Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

sketch of an alternative sovereignty, that in the concept of the βασιλεία of God employs the political language of kingdoms and empires, points to the ambiguous negotiation of survival and resistance under empire. An irony is that the use of the language and imagery of empire to describe the visitation of God both reinforces imperial power and at the same time protests its multiple oppressions by offering in the βασιλεία of God a different mode of social inclusion.³⁸ A critically sympathetic hearing and reading of the Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan may contribute to this alternative worldview.

*The Parable of the Good Samaritan*³⁹

The parable appears in Luke 10, which begins with an episode concerning welcoming or refusing to welcome the visitation of God in the person of the disciples sent out by the Lukan Jesus (10.1-11). The consequence of reception or rejection of this divine hospitality is either the advent of peace or its lack, each enmeshed with the imminence of the βασιλεία of God (10.5-6, 8-11). For Luke, this is not simply inner peace, or peace in the local community; recognizing the time of divine visitation (as hospitality and judgment) is allied with what makes for peace as opposed to the kind of violence that results in the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman forces (19.41-44).⁴⁰ It is possible to read Luke here, especially in the light of the contrast between the peace announced by the heavenly multitude in 2.14

38. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza makes a strong case concerning the way in which the embeddedness of Second Testament writings in the imperial world in which they were produced contributes to the reinscription of the language of empire, even where they may be resisting empire. This means that rehabilitation of such texts as anti-imperial needs to be matched with an ongoing critique of the kyriarchal imaginary they continue to purvey; see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 5. As Alan Cadwallader has suggested to me, Luke's depiction of the divine visitation, in terms of hospitality and judgment that at one level echo tropes of empire, may provide a comfortable 'read' for its elite addressee, Theophilus.

39. My interpretation is focused on the parable as it appears in the Lukan narrative. I do not address the question of whether or not it can be traced to the historical Jesus. Given the resonances of 10.33 with 7.13 and 15.20, my sense is that if the parable has roots in the earliest layer of tradition, it has been carefully shaped or reshaped by the author of Luke.

40. John Dominic Crossan argues that 'the program of Roman imperial theology incarnated in Caesar was the sequence of religion, war, victory, and peace or, more succinctly, peace through victory'; in contrast, Jesus offers an alternative vision of 'peace through nonviolent justice'; see Crossan, 'Roman Imperial Theology', in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), p. 73. Joseph Grassi argues for a reading of Luke as a Gospel of nonviolence, which may nonetheless suggest a certain

and the peace brought by the order of Rome, as writing an alternative and resistant theopolitics in which receptivity to the divine visitation has material effects in peace on Earth.

The theme of reception or otherwise is carried through in various ways in 10.12-24, both in the pronouncement of judgment on cities (10.12-15) and in the metaphor of sensual receptivity for responsiveness to the divine visitation in Jesus (10.16, 23-24). There is an interplay between public and private discourse; while the crowds are not explicitly mentioned in the settings of chap. 10, the woes on the cities (10.13-15) assume a wide audience, perhaps not identical with the seventy (or seventy-two) disciples sent out (10.1). That the Lukan Jesus turns privately to his disciples at 10.23 suggests that this turning aside to temporarily private space occurs within a wider, more public discourse. This private conversation is, in effect, interrupted by a lawyer when he stands up (in presumably the more public space) ‘to test Jesus’, asking, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ (10.25).

The parable (10.30-35) occurs in response to the ensuing dialogue between the lawyer and the Lukan Jesus, in which the hearer is reminded of the material text in the questions, ‘what is written? how do you read?’ (10.26).⁴¹ The lawyer’s reference to Deuteronomy and Leviticus provides the dual command that links love of God and love of neighbour (10.27). The lawyer quotes two passages from the Hebrew Bible: Deut. 6.4-5—‘Hear O Israel. The Lord is our God, the Lord alone (the Lord is one). You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might’—and Lev. 19.18—‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself’. The second, the command of neighbour love, appears in a wider context of familial, social and communal justice, more-than-human agricultural and social engagement that shows a concern for keeping species boundaries (Lev. 19.15-19). In its Levitical context, it is not simply an isolated inter-human ethic. The dual ethic is, according to early-twentieth-century Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig, indispensable. For Rosenzweig, love of God, God’s love for the soul, is incomplete without love of neighbour. The mystic, for example, he argues, remains closed in, unethical even, without neighbour love. Neighbour love has, for Rosenzweig, both particular and universal aspects that are constitutive of it, aspects that imply its connectedness with the created world.⁴²

Rodney Sadler explores three questions central to interpretation of the Levitical command: ‘What is love?’; ‘What is meant by loving your neigh-

accommodation to Roman rule; Joseph Grassi, *Peace on Earth: Roots and Practices from Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), esp. pp. 92-94.

41. See Elvey, *The Matter of the Text*, p. 161.

42. Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), *The Star of Redemption* (trans. Barbara E. Galli; Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), esp. pp. 221-36.

bour as yourself?'; 'Who is my neighbour?'⁴³ He shows that Luke's Gospel addresses each of these questions through the parable of the Good Samaritan in the context of the wider Lukan narrative. In this wider narrative context, the appeal to love reminds the reader of the earlier admonitions of the Lukan Jesus:

Love your enemies (6.27a).
Do good to/for those who hate you (6.27b, 35a).
Bless those who curse you (6.28).

In Luke 10, Jesus responds to the lawyer's citation of the dual command: 'Rightly you have answered; do this and you will live' (10.28). In other words, the dual commandment of love is resonant with the Hebrew command to 'choose life' (Deut. 30.19). That this might entail 'love of enemies' resonates with a kind of reversal integral to Luke's rhetoric and theology, where, for example, poor are blessed and rich cursed; sight is restored to the blind; the indebted are liberated (1.46-55; 4.18-19; 6.20-26; 7.22; 16.19-31).

This last example seems to address the political/social reality of debt, land debt, forfeit of land, imprisonment for debt and forms of debt slavery under Roman rule.⁴⁴ Theology and politics are interconnected when forgiveness of sins, a theological concept, is described in the same words and symbols as release from debt (see particularly 7.40-48). Referring to the shared traditions in Matthew and Luke, Richard Horsley argues that facing the impact of Roman oppression on the social fabric of village life, 'Jesus declares a renewal of covenantal community', as a 'renewal of cooperation and solidarity in local communities' to resist 'the effects of Roman imperial domination that was driving families into debt, loss of land, and reduction to low-paid wage labourers completely dependent on the wealthy'.⁴⁵ The emphasis of the discourse around love of enemies pertained, he claims, primarily to fellow villagers, not to outsiders.⁴⁶ While this may be arguable for the shared tradition, within the context of the Lukan narrative, love of

43. Rodney S. Sadler, Jr, 'Guest Editorial: Who Is My Neighbor? Introductory Explorations', *Int* 62 (April 2008), pp. 115-21.

44. While debt slavery is not unique to Roman rule, but was also part of Hebrew biblical tradition, it is telling that the reality of debt formed one focus of resentment toward the Roman occupiers. Sharon Ringe makes the following important point: 'It is little wonder that when the Zealots entered Jerusalem at the start of the war in 66 CE, the first thing they did was to burn the debt records!' See Sharon Ringe, *Luke* (WBC; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), p. 183.

45. Richard A. Horsley, 'Jesus and Empire', in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), pp. 94-95.

46. Horsley, 'Jesus and Empire', pp. 93-94.

enemies may have a wider application. Joseph Grassi notes that immediately following Luke's sermon on a level place (6.17-49), which includes both blessings and woes, on poor and rich respectively, and the discourse on love of enemies, Jesus encounters a representative of Roman occupation, a centurion (7.1-10), and heals his servant.⁴⁷

Considering 'love of enemies', Alan Kirk explores the problem that the golden rule, 'do to others as you would have them do to you' (6.31), 'introduces a note of reciprocity into Lk. 6.27-35 that seems dissonant with the instruction's inaugural command to "love your enemies"' (6.27).⁴⁸ He notes 'Paul Ricoeur's view' that 'the golden rule follows the "logic of equivalence"', whereas "love your enemies" follows the "logic of superabundance", that is, the "economy of the gift"; and yet the rule, he says, remains 'the supreme principle of moral action'.⁴⁹ But it is 'the juxtaposition of the two commands' that 'creates a dialectic crucial for ethics'.⁵⁰ The dynamics of reciprocity are important, here, as is the way in which the juxtaposed commands are invested in and serve to either inculcate or transform existing social, economic and religious patterns.⁵¹ Considering classical Greek reciprocity ethics, Kirk notes, 'social relations are by definition relations of reciprocity'; he considers general reciprocity ('open-ended exchange of benefits among friends'), balanced reciprocity and negative reciprocity.⁵² Similar ethics of reciprocity apply, he says, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Whereas *χάρις* describes a kind of general reciprocity, the experience with enemies is likely to be a history or expectation of negative reciprocity—enemies are unlikely 'to return favors'; and in this case, reciprocity ought, at the very least, to be abandoned.⁵³ Luke 6.27-29

47. Grassi, *Peace on Earth*, pp. 80-81. It is beyond the scope of this essay to engage with Alan Cadwallader's subtle reading of this episode in the light of Roman occupation, but it seems likely that the adulation of the centurion by the Jewish elders (7.4) is part of a process of collaboration between local leaders and occupying forces. Moreover, the affirmations of Jesus' authority by the centurion (7.8) and the centurion's faith by Jesus (7.9) may need to be read with irony. Most likely, in my opinion, Luke is writing a layered text with the amazement of Jesus (7.9) signalling both a recognition of the action of God in the encounter, and the ongoing bewilderment of the colonized at the short-sightedness of their colonizers. See Alan Cadwallader, 'The Roman Army as a Total Institution and the Implications for Gospel Interpretation', paper given at the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar, Brisbane, November 5-6, 2011.

48. Alan Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies,' The Golden Rule, and Ancient Reciprocity (Luke 6.27-35)", *JBL* 122 (2003), p. 667.

49. Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies'", p. 669.

50. Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies'", p. 670.

51. Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies'", p. 673.

52. Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies'", pp. 674, 675-77, 678.

53. Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies'", pp. 678-79.

gives examples of such negative reciprocity, but the command to love one's enemies and the examples of doing good that accompany this are, writes Kirk, 'stunningly liberal acts of general reciprocity, not abandonment of reciprocity in principle'.⁵⁴ The golden rule, and I suggest its playing out in the love of neighbour in the parable, grounds the exhortation to 'love one's enemies' in reciprocity, connecting 'the programmatic love command to the social realia of human relations'.⁵⁵

In Lk. 10.29, the lawyer asks, 'Who is my neighbour?' In answer, Luke's Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. While the interchange with the lawyer appears to take place in a kind of space of public Jewish discourse, the parable draws the reader into a different relation to space and place. 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 (ἡμιθανῆς, 10.30). The Roman road from Jerusalem to Jericho 'descends from over 2500 feet above sea level (Jerusalem) to 770 feet below it (Jericho)' and takes the traveller through "'desert and rocky" country' over about 'eighteen miles'.⁵⁶ The robbers were possibly 'some of the roving terrorists staging their own form of protest against various types of official and unofficial exploitation of the poor'.⁵⁷ To the extent that the wild country surrounding the road was a habitat for any of the humans in the story world of the parable, it was likely the place that hid, and to a certain extent sustained, these violent and resistant characters. For the religious leaders on the road, and even for the Samaritan carrying wine, oil and coins (10.34-35), this was not a hospitable place. For the characters, other than the 'robbers', who are quickly off-stage, the road, while public space, is potentially isolated enough to carry a sinister kind of privacy, where one might be attacked and left half-dead. Reading between texts, in the person lying half-dead one might see the 'cringed body' of Santner's contemporary subject.

Setting up a contrast between the lawyer's desire for life—what must I do to have life?⁵⁸—and death, the parable displays a pattern in which seeing is the dominant sense. *See* the person lying near death on the way, the para-

54. Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies'", p. 682.

55. Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies'", p. 686. Debt is part of this social reality, and liberation from debt, a key practical and symbolic relation for Luke, is another example of general reciprocity, where the logic of negative reciprocity might be anticipated but is undone.

56. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 886.

57. Ringe, *Luke*, p. 158. For Ringe, however, Luke's city-bound audience may not have picked up this nuance of the parable (p. 159).

58. The lawyer specifies 'eternal life' (10.25); Jesus simply says, 'do this and you will live' (10.28).

ble seems to be saying. The implied command to see becomes more explicit as the story progresses; in succession a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan happen to be going down the same road and each sees:

καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν (and seeing him, passed by on the other side; 10.31)

καὶ ἰδὼν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν (and seeing [him], passed by on the other side; 10.32)

καὶ ἰδὼν ἐσπλαγχνίσθη (and seeing [him] was moved with compassion; 10.33).

The repetition of seeing followed by response highlights the contrast with the first two characters and emphasizes the call of the visible. The visible voice of the one who is half-dead prompts compassion, a movement in the gut, signalled by the verb *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (10.33), which in Luke echoes the gut-felt movement of divine mercy (*σπλάγγνα ἐλέους θεοῦ ἡμῶν*) in the visitation of God (1.78). This pattern occurs twice elsewhere in Luke. 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 gut with compassion, acts in such a way as (through touch) to bring life from death.⁵⁹

At the end of the parable, the original question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ (10.29), shifts to ‘Which of these three acted as neighbour to the person who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ (10.36). For Samuel Roberts, the lawyer’s original question is an important one.⁶⁰ Roberts explores a number of contemporary ethical-philosophical approaches to this question and concludes that the parable of the Good Samaritan resonates best with a virtue-ethics approach, where the emphasis is on the cultivation of virtues that dispose one toward recognizing the neighbour in the one in need, such that one is disposed to act as neighbour. In answer to Jesus’ question, ‘who acted as neighbour?’, 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. In the turning of the question, however, the Lukan Jesus not only extends the understanding of neighbour, calling the lawyer and the hearers of the parable to recognize the neighbour in the one in need, whether of one’s own kinship group or otherwise, but also challenges the lawyer to place himself

59. See further Anne Elvey, ‘Love and Justice in the Gospel of Luke: Ecology, the Neighbour and Hope’, *AusBR* 60 (2012), pp. 14-15, in which elements of this paragraph appear as part of a longer discussion.

60. Samuel K. Roberts, ‘Becoming the Neighbor: Virtue Theory and the Problem of Neighbor Identity’, *Int* (April 2008), pp. 146-55.

in the position of the one left half-dead on the road, as Alan Cadwallader has suggested.⁶¹ It is the half-dead one who receives the compassionate attention of the Samaritan; to see himself as the one neighbored by the Samaritan, who exhibits the compassionate quality of divine hospitality, is to be challenged in turn to receive and respond to that divine visitation.

Toward an Ecological-Materialist Conversation

How might we explore this pattern of compassionate neighbour love in an ecological-materialist framework? First, when we look at the parable, we note that the action of the Samaritan is not a lone action: ‘going to him he bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine (on them), and placing him on his own pack animal, he brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day, taking out two denarii he gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him, and whatever you spend in addition, on my return I will give you”’ (10.34-35). The loving action occurs within a community of agency, in which the material elements of oil and wine, the cloth for bandages, the plants from which this cloth was produced, the animal who bears the wounded person, the environment of the inn, the human labour to extract oil, make wine and weave bandages, and another human, namely, the innkeeper, even the metals of the coins, are all necessary for the Samaritan’s act of mercy, of doing good to another human. From the inhospitable habitat of the wild place surrounding the road, the Samaritan brings the person to the inn, a more-than-human place where the public and the private intersect. This is not an unusual situation; every act for ill or good occurs within a wider network of human and other Earthkind, whose interrelatedness makes no act solo. We usually forget this, but an ecological materialism challenges us to reimagine ourselves, our subjectivity and our agency, our capacity to act, within a framework of material agency in which our individual corporeality is already engaged.

Second, at a human level, the parable unsettles the notion of neighbour in at least two ways. Instead of the religious figures, a priest and a Levite, who might be expected to act in accord with the command to love the neighbour, it is a Samaritan, one also under Torah but at some enmity with his/her Judean/Jewish neighbours, who acts compassionately, recognizing the wounded person, likely a Judean, as neighbour, and so participating in the directive to ‘love your enemies’. This human extension of the notion of neighbour beyond the immediate kinship or community group, resonant

61. See Alan H. Cadwallader, ‘The Fall, the Samaritan and the Wounded Man: An Example of Multiple Readings of Scripture (Lk. 10:25-37)’, in *Lost in Translation?: Anglicans, Controversy and the Bible* (ed. S. Cowdell and M. Porter; Thornbury, Vic.: Desbooks, 2004), pp. 155-84.

with Jewish teaching especially with regard to treatment of the stranger, has allowed an extension to other Earthkind. James Nash has taken this route, arguing that if ‘God is love’ and ‘creation itself is an act of love’ and Christians are called to care for all that God loves, then,

On these assumptions, the answer to the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ which prompts the parable of the Good Samaritan, is: Our neighbors to be loved are all God’s beloved creatures. The ‘love of nature’ is simply the ‘love of neighbor’ universalized, in recognition of our common origins, mutual dependencies, and shared destiny with the whole creation of the God who is universal love. The task of Christian ecological ethics, then, is to help us define the character and conduct of the good neighbor, the ecological equivalent of the Good Samaritan. This is a monumentally difficult task in the tragic, predatorial biosphere of which we are parts and products. . . .⁶²

In the context of the parable, it is likely that the Samaritan’s compassionate attention to the needs of the one half-dead on the side of the road, was part of a pattern of action that included his attentiveness to the needs of the animal with which he shared his journey.

It is also unsettling to hear the question ‘who acted as neighbour?’ as pointing the lawyer not only to act as neighbour, but also to see himself receiving the attention of the neighbour, that is, to see himself in the one who was set upon by robbers, the one tended by the Samaritan. In terms of Santner’s description of creaturely life, contemporary hearers, asking with the lawyer ‘who is my neighbour?’, may be challenged to recognize in themselves their subjection or their ‘being left half-dead’, in sovereign–subject–commodity relations, and tended by the other. Extending this, we may ask: When are we tended by the neighbour? Where and when have we found ourselves tended not only by human others but by other Earthkind? When has Earth—its soils, seas and atmosphere, places, plants and other animals—acted as neighbour to us?

Third, in Luke, neighbour love is part of a structure of divine visitation, where both hospitality and judgment together characterize divine sovereignty. Lukan hospitality is evident in compassion and forgiveness—the latter is both metaphorically and literally liberation/freedom from debt, a symbol of oppression or subjection. Informed by the directive to love one’s enemies, neighbour love is a sharing in a pattern of divine hospitality; it is also a disruption of destructive patterns of behaviour, such as the system of debt (that destroys links with family and land) and perhaps also the violence brought about by resistance to Roman rule. The one left half-dead may be one privileged enough to be the target of an attack by ‘robbers’ violently resistant to imperial oppressions. To see oneself in this position, is similar

62. Nash, ‘Toward the Ecological Reformation of Christianity’, p. 9.

to knowing oneself as both colonized and colonizer, as both sovereign and commodity. The shifts in the parable can be read as challenges to be loved and to love from this position of uncomfortable (even shameful) ambiguity.

Rosenzweig redefines the neighbour as ‘the one neighboring on me’, that is, the specific one who is proximate, but who is also a ‘place-keeper’ for every other one.⁶³ A key question from an ecological-materialist perspective is: What are the material foundations and effects of compassionate neighbourly/neighbouring action? I have hinted at three aspects: the simplest is that every human action already occurs as a more-than-human action, as a material co-agency. The second is that not only are we matter, complexly organized, but we are neighbored by other matter, always in complex material exchanges with other matter. In some of these exchanges we may find ourselves treated with compassion or something like compassion. The third is more difficult. I have argued elsewhere that the notions of hospitality and sacrifice that are central to the Christian practice and theology of Eucharist are already part of the way a more-than-human Earth community and cosmos engages. Eucharist describes, or focuses, qualities or capacities of material life, where the processes of consumption are necessarily both death-dealing and life-giving.⁶⁴ Does the human value of compassion, expressed in so many cultures particularly in the notion of neighbour love, also like Eucharist express a quality of material being? Is the Earth in its orientation toward sustaining life already enacting a kind of neighbour love to humans and other animals?⁶⁵

This suggests to me two further questions. First, if Santner is correct, and Luke’s narrative seems to affirm his understanding, that neighbour love disrupts oppressive networks of relation, does the Earth’s life-sustaining capacity also disrupt networks of oppressive relation, such as those humans have co-engaged in with fossil fuels, to produce the current climate crisis? Second, does this human co-engagement with fossil fuels, for example, disturb the capacity of Earth to sustain life by straining the conditions of possibility for Earth and its atmosphere to act as neighbour to many species, including humankind?

63. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 234.

64. See further Anne Elvey, ‘Living One for the Other: Eucharistic Hospitality as Ecological Hospitality’, in *Reinterpreting the Eucharist: Explorations in Feminist Theology and Ethics* (ed. Anne Elvey et al.; Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), pp. 186-205.

65. As noted earlier, it is important not to romanticize Earth unduly, but the evolution of the conditions for the production, reproduction and maintenance of plant, animal (including human) and microbial life on Earth suggests that it is not overly romantic to speak of a sustaining Earth.