

SLAUGHTERING STEWARDS AND INCARCERATING DEBTORS: COERCING CHARITY IN LUKE 12:35-13:9

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Abstract

Scholarly expositions of the sermon in Luke 12:1-13:9 tend to divide the discourse into two thematically distinct sections: Luke 12:1-34 is explicated in terms of wealth ethics, while the eschatological comments of 12:35-13:9 are said to be spiritual in their focus. The present article argues that the two halves of the sermon cannot be separated in this manner, and shows that the eschatological paraenesis of 12:35-13:9 is especially concerned to stimulate the proper use of wealth. To substantiate this reading, the essay proceeds sequentially through the constituent pericopae of 12:35-13:9. Supplementing conventional historico-linguistic exegesis with narrative criticism and occasional attention to patristic interpretation, the article shows how Luke 12:35-13:9 contributes to the wealth-ethical comments which feature so prominently in 12:1-34, and thus underscores how tightly eschatology and ethics are interwoven in Lukan soteriology.

1. Introduction

In the second half of the 20th century, the NT guild developed a renewed interest in social ethics, particularly the themes of riches and poverty, owing in part to German-Christian socialist enthusiasm and in part to the great popularity of liberation theology; perhaps the most prominent expression of this scholarly interest came in the many successive waves of publications on wealth in Luke and Acts.² Most 21st century works on wealth in Luke and Acts deal with the same collection of pericopae as did their predecessors, and of course one of Luke's most important discourses on money occurs in 12:13-34. But all of these scholarly treatments (including the author's own) invariably jump from Luke 12:34 to 14:7, on the assumption that the rest of Luke 12 has nothing to do with wealth ethics.³

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² For a history of research, see Phillips 2003, 231-69.

³ See Degenhardt 1965; Schottroff and Stegemann 1978; Pilgrim 1981; Secombe 1982; Horn 1983; Klauck 1989; Gillman 1991; Petracca 2003; Gradl 2005; Metzger 2007; Hays 2010. For partial exceptions, see footnotes 3 and 6, below.

It is the contention of the present article that the latter half of Jesus' sermon (Luke 12:35-13:9) enriches and reinforces the wealth-ethical teachings introduced first half (Luke 12:1-34). This interpretation may appear idiosyncratic;⁴ after all, the eschatological pericopae that comprise the discourse of Luke 12:35-13:9 are (at least in modern, Western Christianity) typically read in spiritual terms, as endorsing the confession of sins, spiritual 'watchfulness', and faithful ecclesial service. By contrast this article argues that Luke's eschatological paraenesis in these verses is especially oriented towards the right use of wealth.

This thesis will be substantiated through narrative-critical and inter-textual analyses. Attention will first be given to the significance of the structural integrity of the Luke 12:1-13:9 as a whole.⁵ The pericopae of 12:35-13:9 will then be studied in sequence. Considerations specific to the discourse of 12:1-13:9 will be supplemented by examination the broader narrative of the Third Gospel, highlighting the connections with other Lukan texts in which themes like eschatology, money, and family are tied together more explicitly. The analysis will be punctuated by references to patristic interpretation, showing that some of the Church fathers shared this ethical construal of Luke's eschatological texts.

2. Being Prepared: 12:35-40 in Context

Luke introduces his dialogue in 12:1-13:9 by saying that, after Jesus had excoriated the Pharisees and lawyers, the treacherous teachers set themselves plotting against him (11:53-54). In reaction, Jesus addressed the people around him, first warning them against the Pharisees' hypocrisy (12:1-3) and encouraging the disciples to open confession of their fidelity to him (12:4-12).⁶ Jesus' teaching of faithful confession (vv. 1-12) is supplemented by a discussion of the faithful use of money (vv. 13-34). In the first part of this dialogue on wealth, the Parable of the Rich Fool (vv. 13-21) uses personal eschatology to warn against greed and selfishness. This is

⁴ There is to my knowledge but one specialist in Lukan wealth ethics that has seriously interpreted even one of the pericopae in Luke 12:35-13:9 in terms of possessions; see Kim 1998, 135-45 on Luke 12:41-48. Commentators, even those who are sensitive to the broader narrative and theological continuity throughout the sermon (see e.g. Johnson 1991, 203-10; Tannehill 1996, 210), follow this pattern as well. The exception is Joel Green, who has also read the Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards with reference to possessions (Green 1997, 505), and even comments, in this connection, on the challenges "of determining the reach of Jesus' metaphorical arsenal" (Green 1997, 498). As such, the present essay represents a continuation of a reading suggested and begun by Professor Green.

⁵ So März 1993, 178; for a longer treatment of 12:1-13:9 as a unified sermon, see Wuellner 1991, 93-115, as well as Moessner 1989, 111-14, 46-55, 97-98; Tannehill 1996, 201-17.

⁶ Vv. 6-7 serve to comfort the disciples, saying that God will not forget them when they are confronted with temporal judgment; the theme of divine provision links vv. 6-7 to vv. 22-32, assuring the faithful of God's provision for their material needs.

followed by a series of admonitions not to worry about one's physical needs, but instead to seek the kingdom (22-32), particularly through self-divesting generosity (vv. 33-34).

All of this is uncontroversial. Oddly, however, nearly every monograph and article on Lukan wealth ethics stops its analysis here.⁷ When commentaries proceed, as required by the modern genre, to discuss 12:35-40 (on the unexpectedness of the coming of the Son of Man⁸), they tend either to exposit that pericope in exclusively spiritual terms⁹ or to leave undeveloped the nature of the requisite "readiness".¹⁰ This seems problematic, because there is no narrative¹¹ indication of a break between 12:34 and 12:35,¹² not even a "Jesus said to his disciples" like there is in 12:22.¹³ Quite to the contrary, vv. 35-40 follow logically on the previous admonition to seek first the Kingdom, explaining that the disciples must be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 35 and 40). This sentiment is a perfect counterpart for 12:13-21: just as the Rich Fool parable uses the unexpected but inexorable moment of *personal* eschatology to warn against greed, so also 35-40 use the unexpectedness and certainty of *corporate* eschatology to motivate the generosity demanded in 12:33-34. What then does it mean to "have one's loins girt and lamps lit", to be "found alert" and "be ready" at the arrival of "the lord", "the Son of Man"? Context is clear: such readiness consists not of storing up treasures for tomorrow, but of practicing generosity for the poor (and, if we want to reach back to vv. 1-12, we can probably include the faithful confession of Jesus as part of "being alert and ready" for the coming of the Son of Man).

This connection between social ethics and the alert anticipation of the Son of Man is corroborated by another set of eschatological teachings. In Luke 21:25-36, after the disciples are instructed as to the signs of the coming of the Son of Man, they are told to be "alert" (v. 36) and not weighed down by "dissipation and

⁷ One exception is the doctoral thesis of Luke Timothy Johnson, which recognizes the connection to the previous verses at least in part, saying that "the proper attitude is one of alertness, watching, which is made possible by a freedom from possessions" (Johnson 1977, 155). But what does it mean to wait "alertly" for Jesus? When Luke says to be ἑτοιμοί, prepared, in 12:40, it seems likely that the care for the poor encouraged in the previous pericope (12:33) would have been entailed; indeed, this impression seems to be corroborated by the way that the parable of the Faithful Steward in 12:42-48 unfolds a more robust vision of preparation than mere "alertness, watching".

⁸ "Three things come unexpectedly: the Messiah, the discovery of treasure, and the scorpion" (*b. Sanh.* 97a).

⁹ E.g., "Preparation is to be understood as referring to faith in Jesus Christ" (Detering 1979, 89).

¹⁰ E.g., Bock 1994, 1174-77; Evans 2008, 532-36.

¹¹ Source-critically, the texts are distinct; Luke 12:35-38 seems to be derived from independent oral tradition; it is broadly similar to the ten virgins of Matt 25:1-13. But (assuming the Farrer-Goulder-Goodacre hypothesis) Luke 12:22-34 is derived from Matt 6:19-21, 25-34, although Luke evinces increasing redactional freedom as the passage progresses.

¹² Cf. Moessner 1989, 150.

¹³ The imperatives of 12:35 and 40 should be thought to fall in sequence with those of 12:22, 27, 29, 32, and 33.

drunkenness (κραπάλη καὶ μέθη) and the worries of this life (μερίμνας βιωτικᾶς)” since the day of the Son of Man will come unexpectedly (v. 35). The mention of μερίμνας βιωτικᾶς is noteworthy, because it shows that for Luke the concerns and anxieties related to provisioning the present life are in fact distractions from eschatological preparedness. And, lest ch. 21’s linkage of eschatology and this-worldly anxieties appears coincidental, note that Luke has already censured worries in the discourse of ch. 12 (12:22: μὴ μεριμνᾶτε). In 12:22 Jesus urged the disciples not to worry about their physical needs (μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ τί φάγητε, μηδὲ τῷ σώματι τί ἐνδύσῃσθε),¹⁴ and in 12:35-56 he said to be watchful about the end. The explicit juxtaposition of these concerns in Luke 21:34-36 seems then to favor the contention that Luke 12:1-13:9 is a conceptual and narrative unity, not an aggregate of two unrelated textual conglomerations, the former on money and the latter on eschatology. Ethics and eschatology are tightly interwoven in the Lukan economy of salvation.

This essay does not represent the first attempt to read Luke 12:35 in this way. Luke 12:35 is in fact quoted, along Matt 24:42, in *Did.* 16.1, “‘Watch’ over your life: ‘do not let your lamps go out, and do not be unprepared’ (cf. Luke 12:35), but be ready, for you do not know the hour when our Lord is coming (cf. Matt 24:42).” This citation is significant because the previous verse of the *Didache* ends by commanding, “As for your prayers and acts of charity and all your actions, do them all just as you find it in the Gospel of our Lord” (*Did.* 15.4). Thus, Luke 12:35 (or the same oral tradition) was seen by at least one very early interpreter as an imperative to be diligent in prayer and almsgiving.¹⁵

This is of course not to contend that Luke used a sophisticated pattern of oscillation between confession and generosity, or between personal and corporate eschatology, as an assiduous means of establishing that Christian confession cannot be separated from the practice of justice and mercy. The present essay makes no pretense of knowing how carefully Luke outlined his twelfth chapter. It does seem, however, that this oscillation reflects the degree to which the aforementioned topics were inseparable in Luke’s mind. It seems unlikely that Luke could have imagined separating the confession of Jesus and the practice of generosity; both of them are integral expressions of fidelity to the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus, both are crucial in preparation for the certain eschatological judgment (whether one reaches it through the grave or through the second coming).¹⁶

¹⁴ Likewise, 12:25 asks τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύνανται ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ προσθεῖναι πῆχυν?

¹⁵ More generally on the issue of the *Didache*’s potential knowledge of Luke, see Gregory 2003, 117-24.

¹⁶ Joel Green has nicely unpacked the manner in which the Lukan Jesus interrelates soteriology and eschatology through ethics: Jesus’ annunciation of salvation to the “poor” (Luke 4:16-20), his “mission to the marginalized”, entails a missiological obligation for the apostles to imitate him in

3. The Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards (Luke 12:41-48)

Luke clarifies the ethical character of his warning concerning the unexpectedness of the parousia by means of a second parable, that of the Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards.

3.1 *The Dramatic Audience of the Parable*

After hearing the Parable of the Thief in the Night, Peter asks, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?” (12:41) Peter’s question may seem a bit dense at first blush, since v. 22 apparently indicates that vv. 22-40 are directed at the disciples. If, however, one recognizes the cohesion of the entire narrative unit, from 12:1-40,¹⁷ then Peter’s question makes sense, insofar as vv. 13-21 were directed at the crowd,¹⁸ and because the throng of people was pressing into Jesus and the disciples on all sides (12:1).

Perhaps vexingly, Jesus does not give a direct answer to Peter; he chooses instead to spin the Parable of the Faithful Steward. This response has created some confusion about whether or not 12:42-48 are directed at the crowd, or just the disciples.

Some commentators say this is a special instruction for the Twelve as leaders of Israel (and thus being relevant primarily to contemporary leaders of the Church),¹⁹ while others consider it self-evident that the parable applies to all listeners.²⁰ The latter position appears rather more probable, for a few reasons. First, even if this parable were only directed at the “disciples”, it would not follow that it was intended just for “the Twelve”; the former term need not denote the latter, and there is no reference to the Twelve in context.²¹ Moreover, the disciples are addressed in 12:22-34, and nobody limits the relevance of those texts to Church leaders; neither are other thematically-similar Lukan parables directed exclusively

care for the poor, instantiating the Kingdom of God in their community (Luke 17:21) as they await his eschatological return to consummate the work he began (Green 1995, 76-101).

¹⁷ Nobody disputes that the Parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21) belongs with the teachings on divine provision and charity (12:22-34).

¹⁸ In fact, 12:1-12 starts as a discourse for the disciples, but Luke makes it clear that Jesus intends also to speak to the crowds, as he says that Jesus “began to speak first to his disciples (ἤρξατο λέγειν πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ πρῶτον)”.

¹⁹ März 1993, 182; Fleddermann 1986, 26; Bock 1994, 1178; Johnson 1977, 166; Johnson 1992, 204; Fitzmyer 1985, 989.

²⁰ Caird 1965, 36; Schottroff and Stegemann 1986, 73; Nolland 1993, 703.

²¹ Kim 1998, 141. Against the notion that καταστήσει bespeaks the formal appointment to the post of apostle, see Kim 1998, 142-43.

to the Twelve.²² In contrast to Matthew and Mark, Luke's distinction between the crowds and disciples is rather porous.²³ So also, the scenario of 12:42-48 makes reference to different types of people with divergent levels of knowledge of the "master's" will; as such, the pericope is not a particularly apt description of the Twelve.

Most importantly, if this parable is limited to the disciples *qua* Christian leaders, then one must assume that 12:35-40 also applies strictly to Christian leaders,²⁴ since Peter's question in 12:41 is about the audience of that previous dialogue. So, if Jesus is answering Peter by means of the Parable of the Stewards, then the group denoted by the parable has to be that in view in the previous parable (of the unexpected return of the master; 12:35-40), and commentators do *not* suggest that 12:35-40 is only relevant to the leaders of the Church.

The question then becomes why Peter would ask if vv. 35-40 were only for the disciples. Why would an exhortation to preparedness conceivably be applicable only to them? The most likely answer seems to be that Peter here reveals his usual temporal expectation regarding the coming of the Son of Man in judgment, as he wonders about when and whether the disciples will have to rally to meet Jesus (as also in 17:20-37²⁵). Jesus' response (as in 17:20-37) is to supplant Peter's temporal preoccupation with an ethical one: since the disciples cannot know when the master will return, they must always behave in such a way that they are ready for his arrival. By this interpretation of 12:35-40, there is no need to limit the audience of 12:42-48 to the disciples.²⁶ On the contrary, Jesus subverts Peter's expectation that the insiders will have to rally to the Son of Man at a particular time the future, averring instead that *anyone* who would be a faithful steward must live righteously in the present.²⁷

Jesus answers Peter's question (12:41) with the Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards, a story about eschatological judgment based on the character of one's "stewardship" (12:42-48); he then supplements that parable with an

²² The Parable of the Unjust Steward is addressed again to the "disciples", not the Twelve (16:1), and the Pharisees listened in on the conversation (16:14; cf. Hays 2010, 150); the Parable of the Minas is directed at a wider crowd than just the disciples (19:11).

²³ See van Aarde 2005, 190-91; Dupont 1973, 22-25; Kim 1998, 16-17, 142; cf. Nolland 1993, 677. See also Wuellner 1991, 102-05 on the way in which Luke blends the disciples and the crowds as groups and pulls the reader into that composite audience.

²⁴ But in 12:35-38, numerous servants are told to await the return of their master, which makes a reference to the entire Christian community even more likely (Jeremias 1972, 43).

²⁵ Jeremias recognizes Luke 17:26-32 to be the closest parallel to 12:39-40 (Jeremias 1972, 39).

²⁶ David Moessner offers an alternative understanding of this question which is even more congenial to my material reading of Luke 12.35-48. Since he and the other disciples had already left all their possessions to follow him, it would stand to reason (in Peter's mind, at least) that they are already prepared for the coming of the Kingdom (Moessner 1989, 152); accordingly, Jesus' response serves, at least in part, to emphasize the disciples' need to persist in their faithful service.

²⁷ Similarly Seccombe 1982, 193, n. 257.

explicit reiteration of the certainty of the final eschatological judgment, which event would result in the division of families (that is, a division of Israel; 12:49-53). And so Jesus' under-determined response to Peter's query leaves the audience of the parable intentionally ambiguous; he allows all listeners (and readers) to locate themselves in the parable, to decide which type of servant best matches their own behavior.

3.2 *Types of Servants*

So, what sorts of servants does Jesus introduce? The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards (12:42-48) in fact describes four different types of servants of the κύριος:²⁸

1. The ideal servant, also called the faithful steward, who apportions the appointed rations (σιτομέτριον)²⁹ to the other servants under his care,³⁰ he in turn receives authority over all the master's possessions (12:42-44).³¹

2. The wicked servant who gluts himself on the master's food and drink, and abuses the other servants; he is dismembered (διχοτομήσει³² αὐτόν) and eschatologically damned, having his destiny joined to the unfaithful³³ (τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀπίστων θήσει).³⁴

²⁸ Cf. Bock 1994, 1180. Peter and Luke refer to Jesus as κύριος in 12:41-42, and then the character in the parable is also a κύριος (36-37; 42-43, 45-47) (cf. Dowling 2008, 64). This implies that the master of the parable represents Jesus in his future capacity as doling out rewards and punishments (which adds an ironic hue to Luke 12:14); this also highlights the interconnectedness between the role of Jesus and God's role as eschatological judge (cf. Luke 12:8-9).

²⁹ Evans plausibly suggests that the figure of Joseph may lie behind this faithful steward, on the grounds that σιτομέτριον only occurs in the LXX in Gen 47:12-14, and insofar as Joseph was himself set in charge of the household of Pharaoh (Evans 2008, 536).

³⁰ The term *θηραπαείας* denotes a retinue of servants (Gen 45:16; Esth 5:2; Polybius 4.87.5; LSJ *ad loc.*; BDAG 453).

³¹ Compare Herm. *Sim.* 5; Luke 16:10-12.

³² From *διχοτομέω*, etymologically meaning "to cut in two". *διχοτομέω* can be a mathematic term ("bisect"), but in a non-mathematical context generally means something along the lines of "dismember" (Exod 29:17), "cut in half" (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.31; Plutarch, *Pyrrh.* 24.3; for other examples of the same punishment, see Sus 55; Heb 11:37 and further *TDNT* 2:225-226); Origen's *Letter to Africanus* 7 clearly reads the text along these lines, as seen by the fact that the fate of the faithless servant is likened to that of the lascivious elders in Sus 55. A specific background in Jer 34:18-20 (cf. Gen 15:10, 17) has been suggested by Friedrichsen 2005, 261-64. Although some (see e.g. Betz 1995, 285, n. 687) have appealed to *IQS* II 16-17 to support a softer reading of *διχοτομέω* *qua* excommunication, this strategy has been decisively rebutted by Weber 1995, 657-63; cf. Friedrichsen 2001, 261. The context of 12:47-48a also supports this more literal and graphic rendering; the abusive steward is ostensibly more culpable than the negligent slave mentioned in the next verse, who himself receives many beatings (so also Dowling 2008, 63).

³³ Evans asserts that *ἀπίστων* "is not the opposite of *faithful* (v. 42) but is the word for 'unbeliever', and appears to be a Christian creation" (Evans 2008, 537). This is simply untrue; the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* turns up dozens of occurrences of the term antedating the New Testament. The

3. The servant who neglects the responsibilities he understood full-well, though never behaving cruelly towards his fellow servants; he receives a beating, but is not punished as harshly as the second servant (12:47).

4. The final servant who neglects his responsibilities, as does the third servant, but was unaware of what was expected of him; this servant receives only a light beating (12:48a).

3.3 Defining Faithful and Unfaithful Service: Intertextual Considerations

For our purposes, the neuralgic question has to do with the type of behavior to which these four types of servants are intended to stimulate the audience. Are they to quicken some sort of spiritual ministry?³⁵ Or might they be oriented towards ethical conduct with material goods?³⁶

First and briefly, the structural argument: it bears noting, even at the risk of redundancy, that this parable follows on a long sequence of teachings about proper wealth ethics, motivated by the certainty of one's own death and the coming judgment (cf. Green 1997, 498). As such, it seems that there are good reasons to inquire into whether the actions described in the parable might in fact bear some similitude to the sort of behavior which the illocutionary force of the parable censures or endorses.

In the second place, intertextual sensitivity aids interpretation of this text; one learns a great deal though attention to the way in which Luke's images and phraseology evoke other passages from the Third Gospel, passages in which wealth ethics are also in view. If it can be shown that this imagery is, for Luke, bound up with money, it would corroborate the likelihood that wealth ethics are also in view in the parable of the Faithful Steward.

lexeme's typical meaning is indeed "unfaithful, disloyal" and only comes to denote "unbelievers" in the New Testament, if LSJ (*ad loc*) is to be believed. Indeed, in this context, it makes far more sense to translate ἀπίστων as "the faithless/disloyal" (*pace* Kim 1998, 139; Bock 1994, 1182), in contrast to the "faithful/loyal steward" (for nobody quibbles with that rendering of ὁ πιστὸς οἰκονόμος).

³⁴ On the understanding of τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀπίστων θήσει as "will join his destiny with the unfaithful", see Weber 1995, 662-63. For the reader of Acts, the reference to τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ evokes Acts 1.25 and the fate of Judas more generally; cf. Johnson 1977, 166; Hays 2010, 245.

³⁵ Most scholars opt for this line; see e.g. Evans 2008, 536; Bock 1994, 1177-79. Still, I am not the first to think such an approach to be problematic (so also Seccombe 1982, 193, ft. 257).

³⁶ The only scholar of Lukan wealth ethics to give any real attention to this text is Kyoung-Jin Kim, who reads the parable "as a guide as to how a disciple of Jesus has to manage possessions entrusted to his care"; Kim 1998, 136, cf. 36-45. I want to endorse Kim's perspective, but hope to argue for a case which (it seems to me that) Kim simply assumes without acknowledging that most interpreters favor a more spiritual approach.

Beginning in v. 42, Luke's decision to introduce, not a faithful δοῦλος, as did Matthew (24:45), but a πιστός καὶ φρόνιμος οἰκονόμος (a faithful and shrewd steward), should call to mind the only other place in the Gospels³⁷ where οἰκονόμος occurs: Luke 16:1-8, the Parable of the Unjust Οἰκονόμος, whom the master commended for acting φρονίμως, shrewdly. Naturally, the steward of ch. 16 acted shrewdly by giving away his master's goods, an action which is intended to stimulate giving to the poor.³⁸ Just as the steward of ch. 12 is described as faithful, πιστός, 16:10-12 interprets the Parable of the Unjust Steward as an exhortation to be "faithful" with money. Similarly, 12:44 promises that the "faithful steward" will be set in charge of all the master's possessions, and 16:10-12 tells us that those who are not "faithful" with "what belongs to another" (earthly goods) will not be given "what belongs to them" (eternal treasure).³⁹ Finally, it bears mentioning that the κύριος of both texts is a figure for Jesus,⁴⁰ and that in 16:13 the divine κύριος is set opposite the idolatrous κύριος of Mammon.⁴¹ This fits only too well with the deeper symbolic world of Luke and Acts, in which the use of possessions Luke is symptomatic of a disciple's response to Jesus himself.⁴²

Thus, for Luke (whether in ch. 12 or ch. 16), being faithful as steward means caring for the vulnerable with what one has in this life so as to receive heavenly reward in the next life.⁴³

But if I may be permitted a practical-theological aside, it is worth contrasting Luke's descriptions of faithful stewards with popular Anglophone-evangelical parlance about stewardship, which *is justified by appeal to Luke*. The conception of "stewardship" that dominates in popular discourse emphasizes that fact that, in conventional household economics, a steward's job is to preserve and increase wealth for the master. By this token, "stewardship" becomes a watch-word *against* those who would "too eagerly" quote Jesus on the dangers of wealth (Luke 16:19-31), the importance of charity (Luke 11:41), the value of divestiture (Luke 12:33;

³⁷ The term also appears in Tit 1:7, where the overseer is also called God's οἰκονόμος, and required to be, *inter alia*, hospitable and not greedy for gain (Tit 1:7-8). This is the only text where the term is used to refer to the financial entailments of Christian discipleship. The term οἰκονόμος functions in an exclusively spiritual way in 1 Cor 4:1-2 and 1 Pet 4:10, and is used in a non-figurative way in Rom 16:23 and Gal 4:2. For a more comprehensive discussion of οἰκονόμος and cognates, see TDNT 5:149-153.

³⁸ Hays 2010, 144-46.

³⁹ Cf. Herm. *Sim.* 1.6-8: "Instead of fields buy souls that are in distress, as anyone is able, and visit widows and orphans, and do not neglect them; and spend your wealth and all your possessions, which you received from God, on fields and houses of this kind."

⁴⁰ On 16:8, see Schellenberg 2008, 263-88.

⁴¹ See Hays 2010, 146.

⁴² As demonstrated in L.T. Johnson's seminal monograph, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Johnson 1977, 170-71).

⁴³ David Moessner has pointed out the elegance of the schema by which Jesus, who himself acted as host to the needy, used the image of faithful servant-hood in 12:42 to summon his disciples to behave as benevolent hosts as well (Moessner 1989, 151-52; cf. Tannehill 1996, 212-13).

21:1-4), and the necessity of renunciation (Luke 14:33). According to this modern reconstrual of stewardship, the Christian “steward’s” primary job becomes, not generosity, but saving and preservation.⁴⁴ This has grave practical consequences, as such a perspective seriously undermines the imperative to Christian charity. As H. Paul Santmire aptly points out,

The theory is that everything is God’s. The practice is that everything I own—or at least 90 percent of it—is my property to use as I see fit. Which is it to be then, God or mammon? The term “stewardship” seems to encompass both allegiances, in practice, if not in theory. In this respect, the church’s public discourse on stewardship at the present seems to have very little, if any, countercultural substance. On the contrary, more often than not the church’s discourse appears to reinforce popular cultural values.⁴⁵

Contemporary Christian discourse about stewardship does not emphasize charity, and often creates an implicit justification for preserving the goods entrusted to one by the Master. Quite to the contrary, however, Luke always refers to stewards in their capacities as *giving away* the goods of the Master (whether licitly or not).⁴⁶

Let us continue our thematic analysis in 12:43. The makarism “Blessed is that slave whom his master will find so doing when he comes” (μακάριος ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος, ὃν ἔλθων ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ εὕρησει ποιοῦντα οὕτως) calls to mind the macarisms of the Sermon on the Plain. Whereas the Beatitudes pronounce the poor blessed and speak woes against the rich (6:20, 24), in Luke 12:43 those who imitate the Faithful Steward by caring for the vulnerable are blessed *if* they discharge their office well. This is the same principle that we find articulated in the

⁴⁴ H. Paul Santmire makes a similar point in an article more generally critiquing the way that “stewardship” language has been utilized in ecological discourses: “...stewardship’s default meaning is how best to manage the wealth that you do have, presumable for the good, not whether that wealth might have been ill-gotten, or whether it might somehow otherwise be a danger to you now that you’ve got it” (Santmire 2010, 335).

⁴⁵ Santmire 2010, 337.

⁴⁶ This popular use of “stewardship” language may derive from a mistaken assumption that the slaves depicted in Luke 19:11-27 are stewards. From an historical perspective, this is an inaccurate construal of the story, for these slaves have been given what the Romans called a *peculium* (for the pertinent Talmudic evidence, see Derrett 1965, 184-95), a particular quantity of money which they were to manage on the master’s behalf. (On the *concessio peculii*, the practice of entrusting sums to slaves for the purposes of investment, see Gülzow 1974, 106 and especially Buckland 1908, 187-238.) From a narrative critical perspective, it would also be a mistake to woodenly interpret the slaves’ investment of the *peculium* as an imperative to accumulate wealth; as I have argued elsewhere (Hays 2010, 164-65), the parable teaches that disciples should faithfully serve the “Lord” in his absence, and in the context of the Lukan narrative, such service is best understood in terms of (*inter alia*) giving generously, and certainly *not* in terms of accumulating wealth for oneself (cf. Luke 12:15-21, 33-34; 18:22-30).

macarism of Luke 14:14: you are blessed, μακάριος, if you invite the poor and handicapped to a banquet, because you will be repaid by God at the resurrection of the righteous.⁴⁷ While there are of course other macarisms in Luke (10:23; 11:28; 12:27-28),⁴⁸ it is salient to note that care for the needy is elsewhere in Luke an important criteria for eschatological blessedness (cf. Luke 14:15-24; 16:19-31; 18:19-31; 19:1-10).

What about v. 44, “Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions” (ἀληθῶς λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν αὐτοῦ καταστήσει αὐτόν)?

The reference to πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν αὐτοῦ (all his possessions) is essentially identical to Luke 14:33 “Nobody can be my disciple who does not renounce all of his possessions” (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν). Given that the present author understands Synoptic relations along the lines suggested by the Farrer-Goulder-Goodacre hypothesis, it seems probable that Luke’s phraseology in 12:44 is derived from his Matthean *Vorlage* (Matt 24:47); still, one might speculate that Luke has perhaps phrased Luke 14:33 (which is SLk material) in relation to 12:44. The effect of this interrelation between 12:44 and 14:33 is to show that, because the disciple renounces his or her possessions in order to be a faithful steward of those possessions, he or she will in turn be entrusted with the Lord’s possessions,⁴⁹ heavenly treasure.

The connections between the behavior of the wicked steward and the earlier stages of Luke 12 are obvious. Just as the wicked steward, as a result of his master’s delay in returning,⁵⁰ begins to beat his fellow servants⁵¹ “and to eat and drink and get drunk (ἔσθιεν τε καὶ πίνειν καὶ μεθύσκεσθαι)” (12:45), so also the Rich Fool, because of his lack of attention to the hour of his own death, plans “to eat and drink and be merry (φάγε, πίε, εὐφραίνου)” (12:19).⁵² By contrast, 12:29

⁴⁷ Another relevant Lukan macarism occurs in 7:23, in which people are blessed if they are not scandalized by Jesus’ identity as the Messiah who preaches good news to the poor (7:22).

⁴⁸ The meaning of which (I have already stated) should be understood in light of 12:33 and the present pericope.

⁴⁹ 19:11-27 has similar dynamics of a ruler who leaves his house and then returns, punishing those who failed to use their resources to prepare for his return, and rewarding those who invested them well.

⁵⁰ On the delay of judgment/punishment as emboldening wrongdoing, see also Plutarch, *Cohib. ira*. 2.

⁵¹ There are also significant inter-textual relations to be signaled here. 20:10-11 describes the beating of the messengers of the master by the tenants, resulting in their punishment; 12:45-46 describes the beating of the servants by the steward, with the same result as described in 20:16. Both parables evoke the abuse of God’s vulnerable people by those to whom they were entrusted, with the result of eschatological punishment.

⁵² So also Moessner 1989, 150; Green 1997, 505. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that the self-indulgent ambitions of the Rich Fool are also censured insofar as they bespeak a neglect of the poor (cf. Hays 2010, 127). The same failing is implicitly indicted in Luke 12:42-46, as the wicked steward seems to glut himself on food intended for his fellow servants.

tells people not to be occupied with what they will eat or drink (τί φάγητε καὶ τί πίητε), but instead to focus wholly on the kingdom.

To summarize: the imagery and language of the Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards is typical of the rhetoric of Lukan wealth ethics, and indeed, coheres with and complements Luke's teachings on possessions elsewhere in the Gospel. Thus, this parable encourages the ethical disbursal of money: wealth is to be used to meet the needs of those unable to provide for themselves (perhaps even their daily needs), and not to be squandered on selfish indulgence and excess.⁵³ Luke makes the same points here as in the Banquet Discourses of ch. 14 (feeding those in need; 14:7-24) and the Parable of Dives and Lazarus (not wasting money on one's own luxury; 16:19-31, cf. 12:13-21). Though some might object that this makes Luke rather redundant, repetition is an important narratological device, helping Luke's essential message cut through the various distractions, the "noise", that accost the reader; in the case of the Third Gospel, one of the biggest, noisiest distractions is the very length of the work itself, making redundancy a crucial element in Luke's narrative strategy.⁵⁴

3.4 *Wealth Ethics in 12:47-48?*

What of vv. 47-48a, which describe the relatively attenuated punishment of the negligent servants, according to the diminished gravity of their actions and finitude of the latter's knowledge?⁵⁵ In general terms, of course, these verses warn that punishment comes upon those who know to do the will of the "Lord" and do not do it.⁵⁶ Do they perhaps dilute the argument for an economic reading of this parable? There is no logical reason for such a conclusion; to extend the financial interpretation of the parable, vv. 47-48 warn that neglect of Jesus' commandments about giving to the needy will result in punishment, but that one's punishment will be less severe if one neglects those commandments out of ignorance. Happily, this is the way that Cyprian of Carthage understood the parable.

Our Lord did the will of His Father, and we do not do the will of our Lord; eager about our patrimony and our gain, seeking to satisfy our pride, yielding ourselves wholly to emulation and to strife, careless of simplicity and faith, renouncing the world in words only, and not in deeds, every one of us pleasing himself, and displeasing all others,—therefore we are smitten as we deserve, since it is written:

⁵³ Bock does recognize that the faithfulness of the Christian steward "will be reflected in how one treats others" (Bock 1994, 1170), though he does not define fidelity further.

⁵⁴ So van Aarde 2005, 189-90.

⁵⁵ On differing degrees of punishments depending on an agent's knowledge of his wrongdoing, see Num 15:30; Deut 17:12; Ps 19:13; 1 QS V 12; VII 3; CD VIII 8; X 32; *m. Shabb.* 7:1; *Mak.* 3:7-8; see further Lachs 1987, 294-95; Nolland 1993, 704.

⁵⁶ Horn 1983, 265.

“And that servant, which knoweth his master’s will, and has not obeyed his will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luke 12:47). (Cyprian, *Ep.* 7.1, trans, *ANF*)

Cyprian likens to the parabolic unfaithful servant those Christians who are occupied with gain and protecting their patrimony, providing evidence of a heavily (though not exclusively) wealth-ethical reading of this text in early Christianity.

One might then think that the second half of v. 48 (“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more”⁵⁷) reinforces an economic reading of the text⁵⁸; indeed, read out of context, as much is the most natural reading. The language of “giving” and “entrusting/depositing” indicates that the verse initially drew upon the practice of entrusting funds or responsibilities to a servant,⁵⁹ perhaps indicating that v. 48b was previously an integral part of the dialogue in vv. 42-46. If a bit of speculation might be permitted, Luke may have inserted vv. 47-48a in order to underscore the responsibility of the disciples,⁶⁰ and (compounding speculation) it also seems possible that an earlier form of the text in fact had v. 48b immediately follow v. 46. The insertion of vv. 47-48a would then have altered the referent of v. 48b, from money to knowledge⁶¹; that is, at any rate, the present and final form of the text as we have it. Nonetheless, to say that v. 48b warns that increased knowledge entails increased responsibility is not to remove the economic referent of the text entirely, since what is at stake here is not just about general theological knowledge; rather, the sort of knowledge in question is knowledge of the proper use of one’s financial resources.

4. Fire and Division: 12:49-53

Only a few basic comments are necessary in relation 12:49-53 (in which Jesus warns that he is bringing eschatological judgment⁶² and division on the people of Israel⁶³). It is true that these passages are not specifically oriented towards wealth. The emphasis on division in vv. 49-53 continues a long-standing motif of Luke’s

⁵⁷ The general principle that greater accountability accompanies greater benefits appears in Amos 3:2; Wis 6:6 (Fitzmyer 1985, 993). So also, Luke 8:18 and 19:26 claim that blessing is commensurate with fidelity, similar to the assertion of 12:48b that responsibility is commensurate with blessing.

⁵⁸ This was the conclusion of Kim 1998, 138, 44; cf. Green 1997, 497. Similarly, Heinz Schürmann says this verse is intended to stimulate love of neighbor (Schürmann 1970, 285).

⁵⁹ For the economic and legal background of this, see Derrett 1964, 184-95.

⁶⁰ So März 1993, 182, albeit from the perspective of the Two-Source Hypothesis.

⁶¹ van Aarde 2005, 178, 91; so also Bock 1994, 1185.

⁶² Fire in 12:49 denotes divine judgment (Black 1984, 294; Bock 1994, 1194).

⁶³ Luke takes up Micah 7:6 here (Allison 1999, 291) to depict the eschatological tribulation, as also did *m. Soṭah.* 9:15; *b. Sanh.* 97a (Allison 1999, 293-98).

Gospel (see e.g. 2:34-35⁶⁴), emphasizing the division that Jesus will bring upon Israel.⁶⁵ Indeed, the division motif not only is brought to bear on families (9:59-62; 14:26);⁶⁶ it is operative in the Magnificat (1:51-55), Simeon's speech (2:34-35), the Beatitudes (6:20-26) and all of the texts that deal with in-group/out-group dynamics and status reversal.⁶⁷ Moreover, there are numerous other places where Luke pairs family and wealth as joint obstacles to following Jesus in the Kingdom.⁶⁸ In short, Luke's incorporation of an eschatological-division motif need not mean that he has departed from themes of wealth ethics; for him the two topics fit together hand in glove. As is also the case in the apocalyptic discourse of Luke 17:33-35,⁶⁹ the eschatological division is probably envisioned to occur on the basis of whether or not the disciple used wealth in the manner endorsed in broader the context of the discourse.

5. Perceiving the Time and Settling Your Debts: 12:54-59

The pericopae beginning in v. 54 are interesting because they mark the first time that Jesus has turned *explicitly* back to the crowd since telling them the Parable of the Rich Fool in 12:16-21. Using examples drawn from meteorological phenomena (see also 21:29-36), Jesus rebukes the crowds for failing to recognize the poignancy of their present (eschatological) moment (12:54-56), though he does imply that they still have a chance to prepare (cf. 12:35-41) for the coming judgment. He challenges them, "Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? (Τί δὲ καὶ ἄφ' ἑαυτῶν οὐ κρίνετε τὸ δίκαιον;)" Then, in what appears a bit of a *non sequitur*, Jesus advises them as if they were debtors being taken to a magistrate for prosecution (12:58-59). The question therefore is: how does this advice on settling debts relate to what Jesus considers to be τὸ δίκαιον?

As was also the case with the Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards, contemporary Western readers have generally understood vv. 57-59 in spiritual terms, "directed towards individuals who are urged to make peace with God (or his agent Jesus) before they die and face permanent judgment".⁷⁰ And perhaps this approach is right-headed. After all, the next verses of the discourse (13:1-5) do

⁶⁴ A text which shifts the pattern of binary division on nationalist lines that existed also in the Magnificat (1:51-55; Hays 2010, 103; so also Johnson 1992, 209). There may be a thematic connection between 2:45-35 and 12:2.

⁶⁵ This seriously undermines the attempt of Brent Kinman to read the Parable of the Debtor (12:57-59) in terms of the need for Israel as a nation to repent, lest the Israelites go into a temporary exile from which they are later to return (Kinman 1999, 416-25).

⁶⁶ Belying Jewish assumptions about possessing an elect status on a strictly nationalist basis.

⁶⁷ See Hays 2010, 104-07 as well as 14:7-24; 18:18-31 in tandem with 19:1-10; 20:45-21:4.

⁶⁸ 9:57-62; 14:25-35; 17:20-35; 18:18-30; Hays 2009, 47-68.

⁶⁹ Hays 2009, 64-66.

⁷⁰ Kinman 1999, 411-12, including various examples.

summon the crowds to repentance in quite explicit terms.⁷¹ But, if repentance alone is solicited in 12:58-59, why does 12:57 say to “judge for yourselves τὸ δίκαιον”? It seems odd to describe repentance as τὸ δίκαιον, “the right/just thing” ... so perhaps there is more to these verses than mere repentance.

One again, this parable appears to be significantly bound up with the right use of money. As much seems likely from a narrative critical point of view, in part because 12:54-59 is directed to the crowds. The last time Jesus explicitly addressed the crowds (12:16-21, the Parable of the Rich Fool), he warned them not to store up wealth in this life, because their death was certain and its timing was unexpected.⁷² This admonition to “judge ἑαυτῶν (for yourselves) what is right” encourages them to make their own decisions, abandoning the perspectives of the Pharisees and lawyers, whose justice was already indicted in 11:41-43⁷³ insofar as their fastidious tithing was not matched by generosity. So also, the plausibility of a financial paraenetic agenda in 12:54-59 is heightened by the fact that money, the payment of debt, is a precipitating feature of the parabolic situation.⁷⁴

Finally, giving attention to redaction-critical factors, it does seem that Luke is a bit keen on the financial nature of the conflict in these verses. In contrast to Matt 5:25, which encourages the listeners to “make friends” with their accuser on the road,⁷⁵ Luke 12:58 instructs the crowds to “make an effort to settle” with the accuser, heightening the element of debt around which the parable turns.⁷⁶ So what is the parable about? Repentance or money?

Perhaps the fact that Luke has used the specific image of debt forgiveness should disincline us from forcing the referent of these verses exclusively into spiritual or financial categories. After all, in the Lord’s Prayer (11:4) and in the Nazareth Synagogue Sermon,⁷⁷ “debts” refer both to sins that need forgiveness and

⁷¹ Cf. Bock 1994, 1198-99.

⁷² It was noted above that, in his discourse directed at the disciples (12:35-53), Jesus supplements the Parable of the Rich Fool’s threat of personal eschatology with the threat of general eschatology. In 12:54-59, Jesus does the same thing, speaking to the crowds. This fits Luke’s typical *modus operandi*. The coming of the Son of Man (corporate eschatology) is used to motivate ethics in 9:22-27 and 17:20-37 (cf. Hays 2009, 58-66). Likewise, personal eschatology is operative as an ethical motivation in 12:15-21; 14:26-35; 16:1-13, 19-31.

⁷³ Moessner 1989, 112-13.

⁷⁴ For a summary account of the *realia* of debt and lending in Hellenistic law, see Kinman 1999, 417-19.

⁷⁵ It makes sense that Matt 5:25 is especially occupied with social reconciliation, considering that it follows on 5:22-24.

⁷⁶ Indeed, these sorts of considerations pushed Christopher Evans to conclude that the saying is simply a “piece of practical wisdom” about the settlement of debts (Evans 2008, 544), but Evans’ reading seems out of step with the immediate eschatological context of the passage. The very image of being on the way to the magistrate underscores the urgency of conciliatory action; indeed, the red thread that runs through 12:35-59 is the fact that “the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (12:40) (Caird 1965, 38).

⁷⁷ 4:16-20; Hays 2010, 111.

the financial burdens that need remission. The fact that the Parable of the Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-42) uses debts as a cipher for sins (see 7:36-50) is balanced by the way in which, in the Parable of the Unjust Steward, the manumission of debts serves as a cipher for giving to give to the poor.⁷⁸ In short, Luke understands “debts” in both spiritual and financial senses, often simultaneously. So on balance and in light of considerations internal to this passage and the thematic features of the book as a whole, I would avoid saying that “settling with one’s accuser”⁷⁹ refers exclusively either to repentance from sin or to caring for the needy, recognizing that for Luke, you could not have one without the other.

Does this reading try to have its cake and eat it to, to perceive spiritual and social summons in this parable? It does indeed, but only because Luke apparently requires as much.⁸⁰ And if there were any question about the dual spiritual and social agenda of these texts, that doubt should be removed by a quick glance at next passage (13:1-9), with which Luke wraps up his discourse. Luke 13:1-5 is a potent summons to repentance, motivated by the certainty and perhaps unexpected timing of one’s own death (just as in the Parable of the Rich Fool; Luke circles back, again and again, to the same motivating motifs). But the summons to repentance should not be conceived as somehow primarily spiritual; rather, in the Parable of the Fig Tree, repentance is characterized in ethical terms, as “bearing fruit” (13:6-9).

In the Parable of the Fig Tree Jesus resumes an Old Testament topos, characterizing Israel as a fruitless tree or vine (Mic 7:1; Jer 8:13; Isa 5:2); it is one of Jesus’ many ways of presaging the forthcoming judgment of Israel. For our purposes, however, it is salient to note that these very Old Testament passages utilize Israel’s fruitlessness as an image for, *inter alia*, her injustice to the poor (Mic 2:2; 3:11; 7:2-4; Jer 5:27-28; 6:13; 7:5-6; 8:10; Isa 5:7-8); it is from this moral barrenness that the nation is called to repentance. As such, within the biblical thematic that associates fruitfulness with repentance, any attempt to characterize repentance as somehow strictly spiritual and internal amounts to a truncation of the prophets’ more holistic conception.

This is not to engage in some sort of thematic “illegitimate totality transfer”, lumping the social themes which attend OT passages on fruitlessness into the Lukan text. Quite the contrary, Luke reflects the same thematic constellation of

⁷⁸ 16:5-8; Hays 2010, 144-46.

⁷⁹ It is often pointed out that Judaism sometimes envisioned sin as a debt owed to God (see e.g. Bock 1994, 1200), but it is not clear to me that as much as in view here, since God, in his capacity as eschatological judge, is more likely to be associated with the magistrate, not the one to whom the debt is owed.

⁸⁰ In a similar vein, Schürmann argues for the integral connection between love of neighbor and eschatology in the teachings of Jesus, using Luke 12:57-59 as his key text. “So muß denn der ‚Widersacher‘ der Bildhälfte sachlich auf den ‚Nächsten‘ gedeutet werden, mit dem noch etwas ins reine zu bringen ist” (Schürmann 1970, 282; cf. Nolland 1993, 714).

fruit-bearing, repentance, and social justice. When Luke first introduces the notion of repentance in ch. 3, with the ministry of John (3:3), the Baptist is depicted as declaring: “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.... Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (3:8-9). And what does John specify as the fruit of repentance? Sharing clothing and food, and refusing to exploit or extort the powerless (3:10-14).

If a case has indeed been made for interpreting 12:58-59 in financial terms, what, exactly, should we make of the parable? What does it mean to “take pains (ὁδὸς ἐργασίαν) to settle (ἀπηλλάχθαι⁸¹) with your accuser”?⁸² If one were to consult Matthew, one might compare his heavenly judgment scene (Matt 25:31-46) and note that people are condemned or acquitted according to whether or not they cared for the poor and vulnerable. Or if one were to examine James, one might decide that hoarded wealth and abuse of the weak are the evidence and testimony according to which one is eternally condemned (Jas 5:3-4). Or, if one were studying *1 Enoch*, one might aver that the way to avoid imminent doom is to divest oneself of wealth *post haste* (*1 En* 101.5, 9).

Perhaps, for Luke, a clue lies in the warning that, if one is imprisoned by the magistrate, one will not be released until one has repaid every red cent that was owed. The reference to τὸ ἔσχατον λεπτὸν (12:59) is strikingly similar to the comment in 21:1-4, that the impoverished widow indeed gave her last lepta, all of her possessions, to the temple. One way or another, the Gospel expresses, people will give God everything. Either one gives it all now, as Luke 14:33 requires and the poor widow exemplifies, or one will be liable for it all in the eschaton, when it is too late to try to “pay up” (so Luke 16:19-31).⁸³ In other words, the image of taking pains to settle one’s debts is a broad exhortation to do *whatever it takes*, to spend whatever one has, to get oneself right with one’s accuser, lest one incur the severest of condemnations.⁸⁴

This socio-ethical reading of Luke 12:57-59 seems to have been shared by Tertullian. In his fourth book against Marcion (*Marc.* 4.29), Tertullian cites Luke

⁸¹ From ἀπαλλάσσω, in the passive this verb can mean “to be set free from” or “be released from” (LSJ *ad loc*); it can also be found in a judicial setting in Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.9.6.

⁸² One might ask whether the plaintiff should be thought to represent one’s fellow humans (so Schürmann 1970, 282-83) or Jesus. From my perspective, however, the question is moot, for if Jesus’ call for repentance is not just a summons to faithful confession of allegiance (as in 12:8-9), but also entails the dimension of ethics *qua* faithful discipleship (as argued above), then the debtor is still being tried on account of his treatment of his neighbor.

⁸³ In principle, this is not unexpected; elsewhere Luke is quite clear that the proper use of money in this life will merit eschatological reward (Luke 6:38; 12:33; 14:7-24; 16:1-12; 19:1-10), while neglect of the poor will result in eschatological punishment (16:19-31; 18:18-25).

⁸⁴ It is true that sometimes debtors’ goods were seized or sold off once they went to prison, such that it was not an interminable sentence (Kinman 1999, 419-21), but the general scholarly trend to see this as an ominous warning about the unlikelihood of escape is probably correct.

12:57 and then defines “what is right” in terms of executing justice and righteousness, as well as aiding the orphan and the widow. He then invokes the imagery of 12:58-59, warning that those who neglect such commands will be incarcerated by the divine Judge, and not be released until they have paid “the very last mite”. Thus, Tertullian also seemed to understand Luke 12:57-59 as a summons to social ethics, not simply to internal contrition.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, this essay has argued for the ethical and theological unity of Jesus’ sermon in Luke 12:1-13:9. Invoking the certainty of one’s own death and the imminence of the last judgment, Luke’s Jesus exhorts the crowds and the disciples to what we would conceive of as both spiritual and social tasks; he calls them to repentance from sins and confession of fidelity to Jesus, on the one hand, and to restrained consumption and generous care of the poor, on the other hand. But for Luke these are not distinct tasks. Faith and faithfulness, confession and charity, are simply two sides of the same coin.

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