

The Parable of the Throne Claimant (Lk 19:11-27)

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The version of Matthew's parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30) in Luke's gospel is often called the parable of the pounds. It would seem that 'the claimant to the throne' is a better title.¹ How does the evangelist Luke understand this parable? The aim of this study is to examine how Luke's view of salvation history corresponds with the placement of the parable in the gospel as well as its rewriting. The first part will be devoted to the state of the question. In the second part I will try to connect the so-called diachronical and synchronical approaches. Some hermeneutical considerations will constitute the content of the third part.

I. TEXT, CONTEXT AND LUKE'S SALVATION HISTORY

For the state of the question regarding Luke's claimant to the throne I summarize here the conclusions of two of my previous studies (1981 and 1985) and of those of the excellent article by F. Fusco (1992).²

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- 1 Compare similar titles "the parable of the pretender to the throne"; "the Lukan kingship parable"; and "the royal parable of the pounds". It is for me a joy to contribute an article in honour of Fr. R. Jesu Raja, S.J., colleague and friend.
 - 2 The first study is part of J. Lambrecht, *Once More Astonished: The Parables of Jesus*, New York, 1981, pp. 167-195: "The Talents and the Pounds". This work is a revised edition of *Parables of Jesus: Insight and Challenge*, Bangalore, 1978, which is a translation from the Dutch *Terwijl Hij tot ons sprak. Parabels van Jezus*, Tielt-Amsterdam, 1976. A newly reworked version is present in *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louv. Theol. & Past. Monogr., 10), Leuven, 1994, pp. 217-244. The quotations are taken from this last publication.

The Text

One could call the analysis of the first study mainly 'diachronical'. A sort of basis text (Q) is reconstructed which has provided the (hypothetical) starting point for the later divergent gospel texts of Matthew and Luke. It is further stated that the Q text does not yet offer the parable as it was spoken by the earthly Jesus; a still earlier version must be distinguished. Only then, after the analytical search, can the original Jesus' parable, its Q version and the two gospel texts be explained one after the other.

Most probably both Matthew and Luke were editorially very active. It would seem that the Q version spoke of pounds, not talents, and of only three servants who received either five pounds, two or one pounds. Their reward is 'to be set over much' because they have been faithful over 'little'. From the servant who has received the one pound and hid it in the ground, that pound is taken and given to the servant who has the ten pounds. Already in Q the wisdom saying "to everyone who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (19:26) was added by Christians at an early stage.

In our opinion Luke himself is responsible for the introductory verse (19:11) and for expanding the Q parable of the pounds with the data about the throne claimant; therefore, also verses 14 and 27 are due to his redaction. The end of verse 13, the second part of verse 15, verse 22a and the whole of verse 25 are equally secondary. We added, however: "it is not necessary to hold, at all cost, to the position that Luke works with the 'bare' parable of the source-text which we think we have been able to reconstruct".³ Nonetheless, the Q parable has been altered in a remarkable way. "Luke's version ... can be described with three terms: it reflects allegorizing, de-eschatologizing, and moralizing."⁴

The second study is J. Lambrecht, "Reading and Rereading Lk 18, 31-22, 6"; it appeared in *A cause de l'évangile*, Melanges offerts à Dom Jacques Dupont (*Lectio divina*, 123), Paris, 1985, pp. 585-612.

The article of V. Fusco is entitled "'Point of View' and 'Implicit Reader': Two Eschatological Texts (Lk 19,11-28; Acts 1,6-8)" and is published in F. Van Segbroeck, C.M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, J. Verheyden (eds.), *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neiryck*, (Bibl. Eph. Theol. Lov., 100B), Leuven, 1992, pp. 1677-1696. For the bibliography we may refer to these studies. More recent commentaries on the gospel of Luke include those by L.T. Johnson, J. Nolland and J.B. Green.

3 Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure*, p. 236.

4 *Ibid.*

The reader of Luke's gospel has to interpret the parable in a radically allegorical way.⁵ The master is no longer God; the man of noble birth is Christ who leaves and disappears. The far country is heaven and the journey is Christ's ascension. There Christ will be enthroned as king, and it is as king that he will return for judgment. His Jewish compatriots who rejected him will be severely punished (= fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.). His servants - all Christians - will have to give an account of what they have done with what has been entrusted to them (= Last Judgment).

In light of the gospel context, and more particularly of the statement in 19:11, this allegory is intended to show that the kingdom will not be manifested at the time of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. A certain misconception on this point must be dispelled. Jesus must first die and ascend to heaven. Only thereafter will he return as king. In the meantime, active service is called for.⁶

The allegory is especially meant for Jesus' disciples. But through the disciples the evangelist also has his contemporaries, his fellow Christians, in mind. Luke thus de-eschatologizes, that is, he explains why the kingdom of God has not yet been manifested. He uses the allegory to combat the enthusiastic expectation of the end, the *Naherwartung*, among his Christian community (or to alleviate their disappointment at the long delay of the parousia).⁷

During the period of absence, the believers must engage themselves in the task of trading with the money entrusted to them. Luke inserts an explicit command into his text (see 19:13). In view of the return of the king and the coming judgment this is now their urgent duty. According to Luke, that judgment is not far off. The fall of Jerusalem in the recent past proves this. So, in a certain sense, for the fellow Christians Luke insists on readiness and watchfulness: "... this generation will not pass away till all has taken place" (21:32)⁸. Just

5 For this and the two following paragraphs see Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure*, pp. 236-240.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

8 This whole sentence is meant as a correction and clarification, of what is written in the preceding paragraph (see also part III of this study).

as with his allegorizing rewriting, the so-called delay character of the parable manifests a parenetic and moralizing intention.

The Context

A threefold 'synchronical' reading of Lk 18:31-22:6 takes into account Luke's use of sources (Mk, Q and his special material) and his compositional skill. The first reading shows how in this gospel section Luke deliberately concentrates and unifies the geography. He emphasizes Jesus' drawing near to Jerusalem; he presents Jesus' final teaching ministry in the same place (the temple) and within one period of time. Luke clarifies the real meaning of Jerusalem, and even more, the exact sequence of the future events. The second reading, therefore, focuses on Luke's eschatology, his view of the longer period of waiting between Jesus' death and return, but also his conviction that with the fall of Jerusalem the end was at hand. The third reading pays special attention to the Jewish people and their authorities. Within this lengthy passage Luke is almost completely absorbed by the guilt of Israel and her leaders, by the fate of the city and its temple, so that the role of the Gentiles remains negative and, for the time being, Luke's universalism seems forgotten.⁹

In 18:31-19:27 it is best to distinguish only three pericopes: the prediction of the passion (18:31-34), the healing of the blind man (18:35-43), and Jesus in the house of Zacchaeus (19:1-27). In the prediction of the passion the Lukan Jesus states: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished" (18:31). The other two pericopes begin with a topographical indication: "As he drew near to Jericho" (18:35) and "He entered Jericho and was passing through" (19:1). 'Jericho' calls for attention. There is no serious reason for making the parable a separate pericope. It is told in the house of Zacchaeus. Those present who have murmured "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner" (19:7) can hear Jesus speaking. Moreover, Luke states that Jesus adds the parable to what he has already said: "As they heard all these things, he proceeded to tell a parable" (19:11). Yet one must concede that the third pericope has become rather long. Therefore, in 19:28 Luke must repeat the travel motif: "And when he (Jesus) had said this, he went on ahead, going up (*anabainōn*, same verb in 18:31) to Jerusalem". From 19:11, the verse which introduces the parable, it is clear that 'Jerusalem' seemingly occupies the mind of the Lukan

9 Cf. The conclusion in Lambrecht, *Reading and Rereading*, p. 162.

Jesus. The reason why Jesus tells the parable is that he is near Jerusalem. Just as the prediction of the passion informs the readers as to the real meaning of Jerusalem, so the parable of the throne claimant explains which events will be connected with the city. Jerusalem is not only the place of suffering and resurrection but also of Jesus' departure and temporary absence; only later will Jesus return, installed as king and only later will the kingdom of God be manifested.¹⁰

In 18:33 Luke notes that the twelve have not understood the prediction of the passion: "this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said." One can regard 19:11 as an illustration of this lack of understanding. The twelve, too, suppose that the arrival at Jerusalem will mean the glorious appearance of the kingdom of God. Luke probably himself expands the parable by adding the story about the nobleman who wants to receive a kingdom. By such a conflation the parable becomes a rather complicated narrative. There are hostile compatriots who, by sending an embassy after the throne-pretender, try to prevent his becoming a king. As in the original parable, however, there are also servants. According to Luke, during the absence of their lord they must trade with the money they receive. At his return the king wants to know what his servants have done with the money; then comes the punishment of those who refused his rule. Luke thus reworks the parable into a moralizing allegory with which he discusses a period of Church history. Jesus must first die and go into a far country, i.e., heaven. Only then will he come back, installed as king. In the meantime his disciples have to trade with their pounds. The Jews who do not recognize Jesus as Messiah should not think that he will remain powerless and inactive forever. He will return as a mighty king and he will judge them severely.¹¹

Four times, in Lk 17:20; 19:11; 21:7 and Acts 1:6, a question is asked about the end events. It would seem that the Lukan Jesus has to correct false time conceptions. The Son of Man must first suffer and be rejected by this generation (17:25); the kingdom of God will not 'appear' immediately after Jesus' arrival at Jerusalem (19:12-27). The kingdom will not be 'restored' immediately after the resurrection (Acts 1:7-11). Neither will the kingdom 'come' at the moment of

10 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 590-591.

11 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 600-601.

Jerusalem's fall, before the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Lk 21:20-28). Yet, as far as the destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of the temple are concerned, it should be emphasized that Luke situates this catastrophe within the period leading up to the end. No doubt he himself already looks back at that destruction, but this by no means implies that for him the coming of the Son of Man lies in a far-off, distant future. Luke, like Mark, still lives in a sphere of *Naherwartung*; he eagerly expects a fast-approaching end to this world. That is why he exhorts his fellow-Christians to watchfulness (Lk 21) and diligent activity (Lk 19) with such insistence. He supports his admonition by means of the consideration that the end time is near and that the 'day' will come upon all suddenly (cf. 21:34-36). This period of waiting should be spent and utilized in a responsible way.¹²

Lukan Salvation History

At the beginning of his study, V. Fusco refers to the same four Lukan texts. For Luke there is a close link between the messianic kingdom and Jerusalem. No doubt the Messiah is identified with Jesus himself. The coming of the kingdom is not different from the coming of the Son of Man at his parousia. Fusco claims that the Lukan Jesus in no way corrects an earthly or nationalistic conception. Even the chronological questions are not refused nor blamed. In the four texts,

the hope of a prompt coming at that moment is rejected: not only in a negative way, reassessing the unpredictability of the End (17, 20-37; 21, 34-36; Acts 1, 7); but also in a more positive way, explaining that the delay is due to certain events which should have occurred before. And it is very interesting to notice what these events are and how they follow one another: first of all the passion (Lk 17, 25), then a time of absence of the Lord after his ascension (Lk 19, 11-28); during this time, the destruction of Jerusalem followed by the 'times of the Gentiles' (Lk 21, 24b), and the witness to the end of the earth (Acts 1, 8).¹³

Hermeneutical considerations form part of this study. Fusco deals with 'the point of view' in the eschatological texts of Luke. One must distinguish between the point of view within the narration (the Lukan Jesus predicts future events) and the real setting of Luke and

12 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 598-600 and 602-605.

13 Cf. " 'Point of view' and 'Implicit Reader'," pp. 1679-80.

his readers (the evangelist probably wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem).¹⁴ Why then does Luke mention events which for him certainly belong to the past? Fusco's answer contains a number of not exclusive possibilities:

... there might have been the need to interpret all these events theologically, to solve problems they had left unsolved; if those experiences had left behind them a sequel of dangerous misunderstanding and disappointment, this had to be eliminated. Besides, the more one recalled Jesus' prophecies that had already come true, the stronger became the certainty that all the other prophecies would certainly be fulfilled in due time. Since the ultimate fulfilment could not take place without all the previous stages, reminding them becomes quite necessary in order to keep the expectation alive. Still more: assessing that they are *all* fulfilled, might, even mean ... that the goal is almost reached.¹⁵

Fusco very much emphasizes that for Luke's readers the destruction of Jerusalem is not fully 'de-eschatologized'. The connection of this past event and the still future parousia is not broken. Of course, the Christians experienced a delay, but a short-term expectation coexisted.

For the first Christian generations perhaps there never was an expectation which was not an imminent expectation, although this does not necessarily mean that it either reached a feverish intensity or became the center of faith.¹⁶

By the mention of the opinion concerning the appearance of the kingdom in 19:11 Luke specifies the function of the ensuing parable at this juncture of his gospel. The entry in Jerusalem will not coincide with the appearance of the kingdom. The return of the king, i.e., Jesus' parousia, will be the Last Judgment. The punishment of the rebels (19:27) points to the catastrophe of 70 A.D., the destruction of Jerusalem. One must not see too great a difficulty in the fact that the

14 See *ibid.*, pp. 1682-85. There is also 'the literary point of view chosen by the narrator' (cf. p. 1683). For this Fusco points to the time of Paul's imprisonment narrated in Acts 28:30-32. However, in Luke's case, "it is not necessary to separate the real from the literary setting" (p. 1684); the readers must have known that the evangelist has written after the destruction of Jerusalem.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 1684-85.

16 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 1685-85. Fusco here employs the terminology of 'implicit' reader.

parable suggests that the return of the king, the reward of the servants, and the punishment of the enemies are simultaneous. Fusco maintains:

... the only possibility of bringing both the punishment together with the events of 70 A.D. and the reward of servants together with the parousia is to admit that for the evangelist the span between the two events is short enough to take them as a whole.

According to Fusco the parable does not weaken "the hypothesis of an imminent expectation still persistent in Luke-Acts." In no way should one interpret the departure 'into a far country' (19:12) as referring to an endless delay of the parousia.¹⁷

II. DISCUSSION

This retrospective overview of three studies cannot but lead to a reflection. Should one oppose the two approaches, the diachronical and the synchronical, and manifest a preference for one of them? And, after all, how is Luke's view of salvation history to be related to his eschatological conviction? In this second part no effort is given to a further analysis of the detailed exegesis in the previous studies. The sole aim is a more precise insight into the area of methodology and a better grasp of the Lukan convictions.

Two Complementary Approaches

It would seem that a diachronical investigation as well as a synchronical analysis are useful and that both approaches appear to be complementary.

The diachronical approach compares Luke's parable with the Talents of Matthew and reconstructs a source-text. Next to the possibility of a better understanding of what the more original parable

17 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 1687-93; quoted texts on p. 1689. The parable also possesses an apologetical-christological interest ("... although Jesus' entry into Jerusalem did have something triumphal about it responsibility fell on Jerusalem itself . . .", p. 1191) and a parenetical note ("for unbelievers ... a threat, for Christians an encouragement and an appeal . . .", *ibid.*).

On pp. 1688-89 Fusco critically deals with the studies of T.L. Johnson, "The Lukan Kingship Parable (Lk 19, 11-27)" in *NT 24* (1982) 139-159 and I. de la Potterie, "La parabole du prétendant à la royauté (Lc 19, 11-28)" in *A cause de l'évangile*, FS. J. Dupont (*Lectio divina*, 123), Paris, 1985, pp. 613-641. Be it in partly differing ways, these two authors refuse to see a reference to the parousia in this parable.

- and perhaps the earthly Jesus by means of it - intended, such a comparison clearly shows the secondary character of Luke's fusion of two stories, that of the claimant and that of the pounds. By looking at the source-text one finds an explanation for what appears to be a too greatly expanded part of the account (vv. 15-26). Furthermore, the attentive reader senses that Luke was not completely free nor entirely consistent in his editing. A consideration of the ten servants and the fact that only three of them are heard at the return of the king makes this evident. Finally, to a certain degree Luke wants to remain faithful to his source-text: see, e.g., his redactional verse 25 which introduces the strange saying of verse 26 that is retained.

In the Q-material, the parable of the pounds may have followed that of the faithful or wicked servant (cf. Mt 24:45-51 and 25:14-30, thus separated in Matthew only by the *Sondergut* of the parable of the ten virgins, 25:1-13). Luke presents the parable of the faithful or wicked servant in 12:42-46. In 12:47-48 he himself adds:

And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserves a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

It is not impossible, in fact it seems likely, that Luke wrote these verses after reading the parable of the pounds which followed next in his Q-source (on this hypothesis, he did not wish to use the parable of the pounds immediately in ch. 12 but reserved it for his ch. 19). To know God's will and yet not to act according to it deserves severe chastisement. From those to whom much is entrusted more will be demanded. In 12:47-48 Luke is thinking about levels of responsibility and he does so probably under the influence of the parable of the pounds. Then, in ch. 19, when he comes to edit that parable itself, he probably still has the reflection of 12:47-48 in mind.¹⁸

On the other hand the synchronical investigation convincingly shows why the original parable is expanded by the throne claimant and why Luke places it on the way in Jericho, i.e., before Jesus' arrival

¹⁸ Cf. Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure*, pp. 238-239.

in Jerusalem. The allegorization of the parable functions within the broader context: the temporary absence of the claimant (after Jesus' death), his installation as king (ascension), and his return (parousia with judgment). As king Jesus is present in the parable (19:12, 15), but also during the entry (19:38) and during the passion (23:2-3, 37-38). That the harsh punishment of 19:27 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem becomes almost undeniable in the light of parallel texts such as 19:41-44; 21:6, 20-24; and 23:27-31. The delay of the parousia is confirmed by 17:25; 21:8-9 and Acts 1:7-11.

It is evident that the two approaches enrich each other; they control each other and they provide a mutual confirmation of the insight into Luke's salvation historical conception.

De-eschatologizing?

Fusco does not want to assume that Luke describes the Jewish expectations as too earthly and nationalistic nor that Jesus rectifies them: "there is no trace of such reproach or correction."¹⁹ However, the point of view within the narration, obviously different from Luke's own setting, should be taken into account. This distinction is rightly put forward by Fusco himself. Within the gospel narration the twelve are full of misunderstanding with regard to Jesus' going to Jerusalem (see 18:34). The twelve and other people and even the Pharisees are asking questions which betray their expectation of an imminent appearance of the kingdom that presumably is thought of in a worldly form (see 17:20; 19:11; 21:7; Acts 1:6). Jesus has to correct their views over and over again. In this sense, he de-eschatologizes his arrival in Jerusalem as well as his passion, resurrection and ascension.

For the real setting of Luke and his readers the situation is different. What, according to the narration, is corrective prophecy becomes later an assessment *post eventum*. Luke and his readers can look back on Jesus' entry, his death, resurrection and ascension, on initial persecutions of Christians and most probably also on the destruction of Jerusalem. The Lukan Jesus places these events within the salvation history and explains them. He strongly moralizes: in between his departure and his return Christians must 'trade' with the

¹⁹ Fusco, "Point of View," p. 1679.

money they receive; opposition on the part of the enemies will be punished severely. Yet, as far as Luke's actual readers are concerned, no de-eschatologizing is present.

Luke's Expectation

It is in the eschatological discourse of ch. 21 that Luke provides a rather detailed overview of the future events. A threefold division of this discourse can be assumed: verses 5-9, 10-28, and 29-36. In verses 5-9, after the prediction of the passion, Jesus is asked when the destruction of the temple will take place and what will be the sign when this is about to occur (cf. v. 7). Verse 9 makes evident that the Lukan Jesus connects all this with the 'end'. In verses 8-9 Jesus issues a warning. One must not follow after the pseudo-messiahs who come in his name and also say: "the time is at hand." Nor should rumors of wars terrify the disciples. 'These things' must take place, but the end will not follow immediately. A time period of wars and pseudo-messiahs lies also before the destruction of the temple.

Luke provides still more explanation in verses 10-28. In verses 10-22 Jesus considers the questions of verse 7 (when and what sign?) in greater detail. The fight of the nations, the catastrophes on earth and the terrifying signs in heaven constitute the answer. All this is the 'sign'. Then (or immediately after all this) the destruction of the temple will take place and the end will follow. But within the passage, in verses 12-19, Jesus again deals with the period which precedes that end, a period in which the disciples will be heavily persecuted. Jesus promises help and, as in verses 8-9, encourages them and exhorts them to persevere in their endurance. In verses 20-28 he again returns to the questions of verse 7 and the answer already given in verses 10-11. Regarding timing, the signs and the distress in verses 25-26 correspond to those in verses 10-11. Verses 20-28 should be regarded as a sort of unit. The whole leads up to the end. Jerusalem's destruction (vv. 20-24) on the one hand and the signs and coming of the Son of man (vv. 25-27) on the other cannot be totally distanced from each other. Moreover, verse 28 links all this to the very end: "Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." To be sure, verse 24 indicates that the dispersion of the Jews and the cruelties of the Gentiles will last a

certain period, namely "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled," but it would be wrong to radically separate verses 20-24 from verses 25-28 as far as time is concerned. For Luke, the destruction of the city is the beginning of the end. By means of "and there will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars . . ." in verse 25 Luke continues speaking of the time period already dealt with in verses 20-24. What might have seemed to be a rather accidental link between the destruction of the temple and the end of ages in verses 5-9 is thus strongly confirmed by the connection present in the composition of verses 20-28.

A time connection is also emphasized in the last pericope, verses 29-38. "When you see these things taking place, know that the kingdom of God is already near" (v. 30). 'These things' (cf. 'all' in v. 32) are most probably the signs and events depicted in verses 10-11 and 25-28; but they also contain - be it separated by a certain period from these signs - the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (vv. 6, 20-24). In the time before the end the disciples must take heed and be watchful (vv. 34-36, a Lukan composition).²⁰

Fusco, too, rightly emphasizes Luke's expectation of Jesus' imminent return, his parousia.²¹ For Luke and his fellow believers, there may have been experiences of delay. But it is Luke's firm hope that the basic content of their eschatological hope, Jesus' parousia, does not vanish into a far-distant and indefinite future.

III. Eschatology Today

The exegetical task is not completed as long as the question of the relevancy of the text for believers today is not answered. Does Luke's salvation historical conception as outlined above retain its significance for this planet that is part of the cosmos, notwithstanding a substantially altered view of history?

Better Insight

Thanks to the double exegetical approach a better insight into the interpretation of events and situations by Luke can no doubt be

²⁰ Cf. Lambrecht, *Reading and Rereading*, pp. 602-604.

²¹ Cf. Fusco, "Point of View," e.g., pp. 1682, 1684-85, 1686 and 1695-96.

obtained. One cannot but admire the great compositional daring of the evangelist. By means of the allegorized throne claimant he redefines his eschatology. Christ's passion, resurrection and ascension, the persecutions undergone by the Christians, the punishment and destruction of unfaithful Jerusalem: all this already belongs to the past. Nevertheless, these events of the past, instead of relaxing the expectation of the end, function in Luke's view as a guarantee for the hope of Christ's speedy return. For Luke Christ is the expected King-Judge. The fate of Jerusalem remains a warning for the enemies. For the individual believer a responsible devotion to the task until the parousia is insisted upon. All Christians have to watch at all times and to pray so that they can stand before the coming Son of Man (cf. 21:36). The apostles have received the power of the Holy Spirit to be Christ's witnesses to the end of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). By all means Luke's vision is grandiose.

Critical Evaluation

Notwithstanding the Lukan endeavour and adaptation a double critical reflection cannot be omitted. First of all, it has to be fully recognized that the parousia is delayed. Centuries have passed; the end has not come. No sign indicates that history will not continue for centuries to come.

But there is much more. The dimensions of time and space are, as it were, broken open. There is the almost immeasurable past of the cosmos, the hidden and far away origin of life and humanity. Our view of history is radically different from that of Luke and his contemporaries. And what about the world in that history, our earth in the midst of galaxies? Furthermore, most of India, the whole of China and the rest of Asia, great parts of Africa and the two Americas were unknown in the first century. There was no idea at all of the nearly countless human beings of the past and present times, human beings with their respective religions.²²

²² From 1990 until 1995, I was a witness to how Fr. Raja has been acutely sensitive to this kind of worldwide problem during the meetings of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

So the question cannot be avoided: What is today the lasting value? What was and is for all of us the relevancy of Luke's eschatological message?

Actualization

Luke adapted the original parable of the pounds taking into account those events which for him and his readers already belonged to the past. In his rewriting he was, of course, also conditioned by the then limited knowledge of world and history. In a similar way today's Christians have to adjust Luke's vision. How in the eschaton the Kingdom in its universal and cosmic dimensions will 'appear' remains a mystery. Without giving up their eschatological hope of a final completion in Christ, Christians should certainly avoid all speculations about the date of the end. It simply is not for us to know times and periods that the Father has set by his own authority (cf. Acts 1:6). Although here, too, the term 'de-eschatologizing' proves less appropriate, each form of *Naherwartung*, of a feverish expectation of the imminent end is altogether wrong, especially around the turn of a millenium.

Of course, parabolic or allegorical language should not be interpreted too literally. Departure to a far country and return from it, as well as the installation of a king, are images or metaphors; they must not be understood realistically. Although the harsh words in Lk 19:27 ("But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me") can perhaps be better received when examples in the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Sam 15:33) and everywhere in history are remembered, the image of a vindictive judge disturbs our view of Christ.

Yet a much greater difficulty lies in Luke's identification of the brutal action of the king with the fall of Jerusalem. Can such an intramundane catastrophe be seen as God's punishment because Israel - part of it! - rejected her Messiah? Nowadays, most commentators will hesitate to answer this question positively, and it would seem rightly so.

For Christian life, however, an eschatological spirituality remains fundamentally sound. There is the Christian hope of the coming, appearance and restoration of God's kingdom (Lk 17:20;

19:11; Acts 1:6), of the return of Jesus (Acts 1:11), i.e., the coming of "the Son of Man in a cloud with power and great glory" (Lk 21:27). This will be, perhaps still far away, the eschaton in the strict sense. There is also, however, a nearer eschatological dimension for each of us. Why not say it plainly? Not too many years separate the believers from death, i.e., from their encounter with Christ, their Saviour and Judge. The nobleman of the parable orders his servants to trade with the money he has given them (Lk 19:13); the risen Lord instructs the apostles to bear witness to him in Jerusalem, and all over Judea and Samaria, and away to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Who among us, listening to these commands, cannot fill in his or her own particular vocation? For all of us hope that at that final encounter we hear the approval from Christ: "Well done, you are a good, trustworthy servant" (Lk 19:17).