

THE END OF ESCHATOLOGY: DERRIDA'S SPECTERS OF MARX AND THE FUTURES OF LUKE'S CHRIST

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Abstract

This paper argues that recent biblical scholarship focusing on eschatology, particularly Lukan eschatology, is part of the cultural milieu of Late Capitalism. Rather than being subsumed into the binary of imminent vs future hope, this paper rereads so-called “Lukan fulfillment” through the lens of Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*. Focusing primarily on the kingship of Jesus, this paper argues that despite certain eschatological proclamations, Jesus was never king of any people or place. Therefore, reading from a time where hopeful messianic narratives have been subsumed under Capitalist narrativity, now is the moment to consider, as Kotrosits has begun to show, Luke as a narrative layered with empathetic pessimism.

Palabras clave: Lucas, escatología, Derrida, capitalismo, pesimismo.

Resumen

Este artículo argumenta que la reciente investigación bíblica interesada en la escatología, en particular en la escatología del libro de Lucas, forma parte y refuerza el ambiente cultural del capitalismo tardío. En lugar de quedar subsumido en la distinción binaria entre inminencia y esperanza futura, el artículo realiza una relectura del así llamado “cumplimiento lucano” desde la perspectiva del libro *Spectros de Marx* de Jacques Derrida. A partir del enfoque en el parentesco de Jesús, se argumenta que, a pesar de ciertas proclamas escatológicas, Jesús nunca fue rey de ningún pueblo o lugar. Por lo tanto, al leer desde un contexto en el que las esperanzadoras narrativas mesiánicas han sido subsumidas por la narrativa capitalista es conveniente considerar, como lo ha hecho de manera introductoria Kotrosits, que el libro de Lucas es una narrativa cubierta de pesimismo empático.

Keywords: Luke, Eschatology, Derrida, Capitalism, Pessimism.

Capitalism and the Haunting of Lukan History

Just months before the Berlin Wall was torn down, John T. Carroll published his dissertation titled, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke-Acts* (1989). Interestingly, Fukuyama published his political work on the victory of Capitalism shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Much like the relationship between Luke and Acts, the (prophetic) response precedes the kerygmatic (un)fulfillment of the gospel. Situated in all these works, there is the underlying question: when does history end? Carroll explains: "Perhaps the greatest single source of confusion in recent study of Lukan eschatology is the lack of terminological precision. One scholar's "eschatology" is another's "history" (33).

This is on its own terms a theological debate meant for organizing faith communities' logo-centers, foundations of an absolute truth for a given (contextualized) community. Yet, why this dissertation then? And why is the title of Fukuyama's political analysis so similar to Carroll's?

The expansion of "end of the world" narratives during late(r) capitalism has been widely noted, prompting Mark Fisher to repeat "It is easier

to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of Capitalism" (2009)¹. Yet, Lukan eschatology is pronounced in between the failed expectations for the political sovereignty of Israel (Lk. 2:25; Acts 1:6) and the end of the world. In this paper I contend, that end of the world narratives are a feature of late capitalism. Likewise, biblical studies have seen a heightened interest eschatology and apocalypses during what has been named "crisis capitalism." Yet, while Luke narrates prophetic ends of the world or history, eschatologies are a structuralist impositions on the text itself. For, nowhere does Luke tell us that he is going to explain how the world ends (only one of his characters does that). Neither can we say that Lukan eschatological pericopes do more than perform a desire for change within a matrix of Jewish messianic narratives.

Interestingly, it is Derrida who takes up the call to answer Fukuyama's *The End of History*, which he calls a "Gospel" in *Specters of Marx* (70-71).² It is the theological *telos* with respect

1 This is in fact the title of Chapter 1.

2 Derrida says of Fukuyama's gospel, "Why a gospel? Why would the formula here be neotestamentary? This book claims to bring a 'positive response' to a question whose formation and formulation are never interrogated in themselves. It is the question of whether a 'coherent and directional History of mankind' will eventually lead 'the greater part of humanity,' as Fukuyama calmly, enigmatically, and in a fashion at once modest and impudent calls it, toward 'liberal democracy.'"

to a "Gospel" that Derrida aims to disjoin. As such, one might consider that the repeated attempts to superimpose an eschatology on top of the text of Luke-Acts, the fetish of capitalist *teloi* have had a role to play. In order to counter this fixation for *telos*, this paper will attempt to imagine and show the possibilities of spectrality (*das Gespenst*) in Luke's resurrected Christ (*revenant*) within a Derridean open eschatology whose only *telos* is the end of the narrative. We do this keeping in mind that the end of the narratives of Luke and Acts are admittedly open-ended.

What is a narrative for? Unlike popular biblical inquiries into the structures and histories of original meaning, the indeterminability of this question is crucial to thinking narrative and eschaton together. Clearly, I cannot answer this question once-and-for-all with respect to the third gospel, and I am sure there must be more than one reason for the text of Luke, and other non-reasons (irrationalities) for it as well. But the indeterminacy of this question must haunt all inquiry, and in such a colonial text, a text with a victim of hegemonic state violence, this haunting is equally paralleled by diasporic exclusion and the revenant of the crucified. Hegemonic purpose aims to be clear and precise, although rife with contradictions. But the necessity of diasporic texts is pregnant

with possibility, and with intended unknown possibilities and unintended.³ In short, part of the telling of Luke's Gospel is to see what happens in and *after* its telling.

Eschatology and Lukan Spectrality: Reading Carroll with Derrida

Carroll summarizes for us seven positions on Lukan eschatology, but the first two will suffice. First, he names one of the most popular positions, which he calls "Un-eschatological Luke: The Eschaton Recedes in Time and Significance in Luke-Acts." While Conzelmann's *Die Mitte der Zeit* completely synthesized this argument, Carroll argues it originates with Bultmann, quoting: "The fact that he [Luke] wrote Acts as a sequel to his Gospel completes the confirmation that he has surrendered the original

3 See for further discussion Kotrosits (2015). In her chapter on Acts (108), she writes:

The Way' in Acts manages, then, to be not only an imagination of an ideal route of diasporic togetherness, but also the passage to a kind of 'monstrous family of reluctant belonging,' to quote Jacqueline Rose. In monstrous belonging, togetherness is formed not out of volition or even fondness, but out of the tense, ongoing, and irrevocable entanglements brought into being through violence and its many potent afterlives—a kind of belonging that might knit conflicting groups, victims and perpetrators, and even their king in uncomfortable and unconscious binds. So too in Paul's travels, 'the Way' is defined not only by the unity and faithfulness of its followers, but also by coalitions that are brief and dubious, often formed under strained political, economic, and social circumstances.

kerygmatic sense of the Jesus-tradition...and has historicized it" (3)

In this perspective, Carroll argues "the Spirit, becomes a substitute for imminent eschatological faith, indeed a 'solution of the problem of the Parousia.' From my perspective, this argument is on the right track, however, I would want to crack open this understanding of Spirit as (merely) a metaphysical entity and remove the concept of progress in a move that might opt not to translate *pneuma* to the Hegelian *Geist*. For what is prominent in these interpreters is a negotiation of the meaning and structure of a *Heilsgeschichte* that, for me, is not completely constructed in the Gospel and Acts proper, nor does it claim it as its main purpose.

While we can see a certain presence of a developing *Heilsgeschichte* structure in early Jewish attempts at naming a Kingdom-of-God, what Luke invariably does is to show how this has changed in the presence and coming presence of Jesus, a Jesus who never becomes king in the narrative. This is evidence of what Derrida shows as dis-jointed time, moments out-of-joint in the so-called progress of history.⁴ We could accept Luke in a va-

cuum and claim his narrative kerygma as dogma, as Luke's own truth claim, which we are not required to do. For in doing so, we would be claiming that Luke has no concept of history outside his own moment. Rather, if Luke understands himself as a continuation of a certain Jewish tradition, this history is out-of-joint, and Luke in a certain way understands this.⁵ Thus, this gives us a chance to consider Derrida's concept of messianic time by considering the openness of Luke's *Heilsgeschichte* to something similar to Derrida's "messianism-to-come" or "the promise of justice," a justice which we must not know what it looks like.

the other, yet critics repeatedly try to conjoin Benjamin and Derrida, as if the former holds the key to understanding the latter and by conjuring Benjamin's spirit, we may dispel the complexity of Derrida's work, or vice versa... Since Benjamin's main critique in his "Theses" of the idea of "progress," we can understand why he distances himself from any notion of the future, directing his dialectical concern to the past instead. Derrida, likewise, is concerned with the past and with our present debt to the past. Like Benjamin, he deconstructs the notion of a future-present, for as the oxymoronic name suggests, this notion is an attempt to give self-presence to the unanticipated future-to-come. But instead of turning away from the future all together, Derrida wishes to affirm the very heterogeneity of the future-to-come, and he does so through the concept of the promise. The very structure of a promise is futurity (i.e., it is impossible to promise anything that does not relate to the future); so, by affirming the promise itself, we indirectly affirm the future, thereby approaching (without appropriating) the future as other (113-114).

5 For example, a crucified messiah is neither part of the Jewish tradition, nor does it "make sense" in any previous Jewish discourse.

4 See Ware (2004). Ware says:

It is interesting that Derrida's *Specters of Marx* is an entire essay on the importance of disjointed time, heterogeneity, singularity, and respect for

The next major formation of eschatology within Lukan scholarship is what Carroll names as "Consistent Imminent Eschatology." The famous "the Kingdom of God is among/within you" is exemplary passage for this understanding of Lukan eschatology. It takes the Pentecost passage in Acts 2 as its major pericope and assumes a new history is begun with the ascension of Christ and the inauguration of the global spirit. That which is arriving has now arrived, a *revenant* or *arrivant* for Derrida.

But Derrida questions this messianic imminence in the form of Hamlet's father's ghost:

The one who says "I am thy Fathers Spirit can only be taken at his word. And essentially blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin: this is a first obedience to the injunction. It will condition all the others. It may always be a case of still someone else. Another can always lie, he can disguise himself as a ghost, another ghost may also be passing himself off for this one (6).

I do not doubt that Luke has intended to link Jesus of Nazareth to the resurrected Christ to the Spirit of Pentecost. Yet, if we are to take each of these at their word, as real phenomena in the early believers, Luke's work to connect these three betrays his own uncertainty in his attempt to "prove" continuity. While the Emmaus walkers do have

their eyes opened to the identity of the resurrected to Jesus, to the revenant, their inability to recognize him makes Luke's certainty suspect. I have no desire to question the ontological facticity of Luke's claims, but rather situate myself with Derrida and admit that Luke's work to connect Jesus, Christ, and Spirit looks like the work of mourning. After all, the Emmaus walkers admit to their own mourning (Lk 24:17).

First of all, mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else. It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead (*Specters of Marx*, 9)

But beyond this, and as I will discuss more below, what returns is changed. The resurrected Christ is something new, in spite of Lukan attempts at continuity. The spirit is in Jesus throughout the gospel, but never in the disciples. Its movement in and through the apostles is something new. The need for Luke to demonstrate its continuity is contingent precisely on the change, the transformation, that it resurrects.

Imminence, as Derrida points out, contains a "desire for resurrection" (44). Yet, if the continually returning imminence is a point of change, then what of this imminence? If it lacks continuity, it is evidence of time-out-of-joint, and Luke's attempts at continuity are

attempts to put history back into joint. Thus to consider imminence as a static form is on its own terms a fetish for origins and a structuralist (foreign) imposition on the text. The necessary change that occurs at each point of re-imminence (*revenance* for Derrida) is the promise of justice. It follows then that the resurrected Christ and the Spirit are the future. Or in Derrida's words: "At bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back" (48).

The payoff then for Carroll is in fact the possibility of imminent hope for Luke: "When, from Luke's own vantage point, will the eschaton occur? Scholars who perceive Luke as a historicizer of eschatology tend to deny any imminent hope to Luke; those who see Luke as an eschatologizer of history tend to affirm it" (33).⁶

Eschatological Kingship: Fulfillment or Disruption

One way to see this play out in the Lukan text is in the eschatological

kingship of Jesus, which never reaches fulfillment in the Lukan narrative. There are in fact *possible* references to Jesus kingship, but as I have argued elsewhere, the meaning and function of these symbols are disrupted by Jesus actually never ruling over anything within the narrative. At best, one can say that Jesus is king of wherever he goes after the ascension and his earthly kingship is delayed beyond the eschaton. However, "king" is not the only title for Jesus in the Luke-Acts narrative, but this openness to the possibilities of Jesus aimed towards the future, is posing for the auditor, just what can a Jesus be? If a Christ for sure, then what can a Christ be?

The concluding sentences of Brawley's *Centering on God* contains this statement: "Nevertheless, there are lines of correspondence between Jesus and the Samaritan. Jesus is an unlikely messianic figure.... To see Jesus as Messiah is, therefore, to see messianism turned on its head" (228).

Jesus' identity in Luke may be stabilized as messiah/Christ, but the essence of messiah/Christ is never stable (and the meaning of messiah is most likely destabilized in its translation to *Christ*).

For the structuralist Brawley, the structured messianic expectation-fulfillment remains intact and hinges upon the God-character of the Jewish

6 See also, "To Conzelmann and Grässer, among others, this fact compels the judgment that Luke has transformed eschatology into history. Taking into account the period that followed the time of Jesus, Luke allowed the eschaton to retreat to the distant horizon. However, Borgen and Francis, among others, this phenomenon requires the conclusion that Luke has eschatologized history! In the light of the end-time bestowal of the Spirit (Acts 2:17), the entire period of the church's mission is eschatological in quality."

narrative. For me, however, the disruption of messianic expectation (Tannehill) is evidence of the absence of the God who is never a character in the narrative. Nevertheless, despite our structured starting points, we both may agree that in the posterior proclamation of fulfillment, the tradition is renegotiated. For this analysis, Brawley's narrative teleology will be useful in considering the text. First, however, Brawley gives a brief history of Lukan scholarship's engagement with eschatology and history in *Luke-Acts and the Jews*.

The *heilsgeschichtliche Schule* offered an alternative to the historical reconstruction of the history-of-religions school.... Against the comparative history of religions, the *heilsgeschichtliche Schule* opposed the alleged impact of Hellenism and paganism on the evolution of the church and traced strong continuity between Christianity and the history of Israel. Against the Bultmannians, the *heilsgeschichtliche Schule* controverted the dichotomy between faith and history and claimed an essential core of historical event as necessary for faith.... This theological reading of Luke-Acts resulted in a striking congruity with the *heilsgeschichtliche Schule*. Whereas the *heilsgeschichtliche Schule* had hotly debated the Bultmannian bifurcation of faith and history, Conzelmann's hypothesis of a Lucan *Heilsgeschichte* sidestepped the historical question, with

the exception of the one historical datum of the delay of the Parousia (*Luke-Acts and the Jews*, 2).

Thus, as Brawley summarizes and Conzelmann demonstrates, the problem of eschatology is a problem of history. History does not end, but the Lukan narrative does. Eschatology is narrated in an eschaton-less Gospel. Salvation history is forced to renegotiate the terms of salvation. What salvation comes to Zacchaeus' house (19:10)? How can history end when the messiah is crucified on the cross?

Carroll in *Responses to the End of History* takes up the burden of lack in Lukan eschatology. For Carroll, "the eschaton awaits not the repentance of all Israel but the completion of the 'restoration/fulfillment of all things spoken by God through the prophets'" (163). Yet, this does not include the (political) restoration of Israel.

Finally, the burden of Luke's entire narrative works against this understanding of the place of Israel at the eschaton. Luke has told the story of the coronation of Israel's King, of the consolidation of new leadership over the twelve tribes of Israel, of the fulfillment of the covenant-promise to Abraham, and of the realization of Israel's God-given task of bearing light to the Gentiles.... For Luke to add a supplement in which, at the end of time, the temple is rebuilt, Jerusalem and political Israel established, and

the nation brought to repentance and faith, would contradict the force of Luke's whole narrative (163).

What Carroll is arguing is that Israel's fate at the future eschaton is no different than it is within the text of the Gospel and Acts. Israel can choose to follow Christ or not. There is no "third chance." And some of Israel will be judged and severed from the people of God. While I cannot support Carroll's interpretation of Jesus' kingship, his argument for an openness to eschatological questions on the part of Luke is compelling.

Turning back to Brawley, let us consider the pattern of expectation and fulfillment. Brawley refers to the *telos* of the narrative. Still, it is important to recognize that every narrative has a physical *telos*. For example, any written story must end before the page does. Likewise, Luke, in spite of holding an open eschatology, must end his story in the midst of a history which includes the destruction of the Second Temple.

Brawley instructs on teleology and structure:

The coherent whole is a teleological pattern. That is, actions in narratives fit into causal networks out of which the reader constructs a thematic pattern moving toward a goal [...] The teleological goal is

not merely a matter of content but also a matter of structure. Structurally gratifying plots exhibit particular relationships between the beginning and the end (59).

After introducing us to the four types of teleological relationships of Victor Shklovsky, Brawley concludes:

To a significant degree, the retrospectively recovered story in Luke-Acts unfolds from (2) predictions and their fulfillment. A case in point is Luke 1:31-35 where Gabriel makes predictions about Mary's child that the narrative moves to fulfill. It also moves from (4) misunderstanding to rectification. It vindicates Jesus over against his rejection by the people of Nazareth and over against the scandal of his crucifixion, and it exonerates Paul from the accusations that he advocates apostasy from Judaism (59).

In other words, the teleological structure of Luke-Acts moves from a misunderstood prediction to a rectified fulfillment. So according to Brawley and Carroll, we have a Lukan narrative where the eschaton is unknown, but fulfillment of predictions is the Lukan *telos*. From a deconstructive (anti-structuralist) perspective, there is a latent contradiction here, where one's anxiety about the uncertainty of the future drives one to name the inheritance of the future. Of course, this is true for the New Testament

writers, but it is even more the case for post-Enlightenment biblical scholars.

Let us turn to Derrida's *Specters of Marx* for a moment to put some distance between *telos* and *eschaton*.

One does not know if the expectation prepares the coming of the future-to-come or if it recalls the repetition of the same, of the same thing as ghost....⁷ This not knowing is not a lacuna. No progress of knowledge could saturate an opening that must have nothing to do with knowing. Nor therefore with ignorance. The opening must preserve this heterogeneity as the only chance of an affirmed or rather reaffirmed future. It is the future itself, it comes from there. The future is its memory. In the experience of the end, in its instant, always imminently eschatological coming, at the extremity of the extreme today, there would thus be announce the future of what comes. More than ever, for the future-to-come can announce itself as such and in its purity only on the basis of a *past end*: beyond, if *that's possible*, the last extremity. If that's possible, if there is any future, but how can one suspend such a question or deprive oneself of such a reserve without *concluding in advance*, without reducing both the future and its chance? Without totalizing in advance? We must discern between eschatology and teleology, even if the stakes of such a difference

risk constantly being effaced in the most fragile and slight insubstantiality—and will be in a certain way always and necessarily deprived of any insurance against this risk. Is there not a messianic extremity, an *eskhaton* whose ultimate event (immediate rupture, unheard-of interruption, untimeliness of the infinite surprise, heterogeneity without accomplishment) can exceed, at each moment, the final term of a *physis*, such as work, the production, and the *telos* of any history? (44-45).

It can come as no surprise then that the revenant of Luke's Jesus concludes the Gospel with these words:

Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds (διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν) to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:44-49).

Clearly, Brawley is correct that there is an element of fulfillment in

⁷ Here we can think of the post-resurrection Jesus as a revenant.

the Lukan narrative *telos*. But what does this *telos* have to do with the eschaton? It is important to note that the interpretation of the scriptures says nothing of the kingship of Jesus. It does not specify which portions of the Law, Prophets, and Psalms are to be fulfilled. Instead, the revenant "opened their minds" so his audience could understand the scriptures, namely that the Christ would die and return as the very revenant that is speaking. The revenant works to correct messianic expectation. The revenant rectifies the prophetic, in order that the kerygmatic can be proclaimed "to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

In these final words, the narrative *telos* is revealed for the Gospel (the death of Jesus and the appearance of his revenant) and Acts (kerygmatic proclamation to all nations). Through Derrida's lens, Luke's cross is the messianic event which creates the eschatological space for the renegotiation of messianic expectation. The future need not be the fulfillments proclaimed, but the future will be influenced by the appearance and proclamations of the revenant, who gives us the narrative *teloi* of both volumes of the narrative.

In other words, the narratives (of Luke and Acts) must end, and therefore, they have *teloi*, death and resurrection of Christ and kerygmatic proclamation in space respectively. That

future eschaton remains open to surprise, just as Derrida and Carroll suggest. And Luke knows this, in spite of all his fulfillment discourse. Therefore, the (narrative's) present appearance of the revenant aims to express and perform the desires for the future. So often biblical scholarship attempts to interpret fulfillment in (Kristevan) symbolic terms, denoting how the predictions are fulfilled, betraying its bias for metaphysical presence. Rather, in the (Kristevan *semiotic*) space that Luke's cross creates, fulfillment proclamations ought to be interpreted affectively and performatively, unless the fulfillment is symbolized within the physical bounds of the narrative. The narrative space between death and ascension, the space of the revenant, is precisely the ruptured opening in which Luke memorializes the future, or where the past injustice of the crucifixion of Jesus insists upon possible futures.

Futures of a Christ

And that is exactly where we find ourselves, where the Bible and its Christ are loci for political negotiations and postures. For most Christs are opportunities for more *teloi*, removed from their respective narratives. And narrative-less *teloi* become fruitful ground for the fetish for the origins of a Christ (like the Jesus seminar and its responses). Luke's political uncertainty, however, means that the

meaning of its Christ is unsettled, and carries in it apophatic parabling that resists Christological *teloi*. This reading of Luke-Acts even destabilizes liberation hermeneutics' attempts to read liberation as *telos*. To put it short, multiple forms of liberation are easily subsumed into the narratives of capitalism, particularly those that reference teleological fulfillment. And Luke denies the reader a clear, comprehensible liberation, although it affirms those desires.

To name a Christ is to name the end (*telos*) of the world. As such, in theological discourse, it is easier to imagine why Christ died than it is to imagine the end of Capitalism. Therefore, the open eschatology of Derrida is important in our time, and perhaps, in all times—as a way of admitting the indeterminability of history and its futures, not as progress, but as life passed on. It is likely that the generic messianic structure has already been subsumed under capitalist narrativity (i.e. special individuals who save the world). In such a case, rereading the narratives to highlight the relational aspects (the necessity of the disciples or of women, etc.) or the critique of state violence (Roman crucifixion) will have to serve as new hermeneutical lenses. Each epoch of history is invited, and insists upon its readers, to interrogate the text anew. Yet, up until this point in Lukan scholarship, and in public Christian

discourse in general, the choice has been, as Carroll would have it, between an imminent hope and a future one. Nevertheless, the future of Luke's Christ is still undetermined, and in that indeterminability, perhaps a necessary empathetic pessimism lives.

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