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# God Is Not Like That Judge (Lk 18:1-8)

Matteo Crimella

## 1 A Problematic Parable

In the Gospel according to St. Luke, in the section known as *The Travel Narrative* (9:51-19:44)<sup>1</sup>, the passages regarding the reign of God no longer assert that this is currently in act through the saving actions of Jesus<sup>2</sup> as announced in the programmatic episode in the synagogue of Nazareth (4:16-30). Attention now seems to be focused on the future. Instead of being imminent, the Reign appears to be moving further away<sup>3</sup>. Jesus exhorts his listeners not to fear persecution (12:1-12) and encourages them to trust in divine providence (12:22-23). They should be vigilant (12:35-48) and not to delay conversion (13:1-9) in order to enter by the narrow gate (13:22-30) where the invitation to the Banquet should be readily accepted (14:15-24). They are called to keep watch on their daily lives (17:20-37) in order that the gifts bestowed on them may bring forth fruit (19:11-17). Here the Kingdom of God is perceived as already present but not yet in its definite form. Despite this urging on the part of Jesus, the early enthusiasm of the community may well have waned, and its members may no longer be galvanised into working towards the coming of the Reign.

In this context, the parable of the Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow (18:1-8), which is part of Luke's *Sondergut*, takes on a particular significance. Commentators tend to underline a certain discrepancy between the outline of the event (vv. 1.6-8) and its unfolding (vv. 2-5), and put forward

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<sup>1</sup> Recent publications on the *Travel Narrative* include BEAUBŒUF, *La montée à Jérusalem*; CRIMELLA, *Verso Gerusalemme*, 237-254.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. NOËL, *The Travel Narrative*, 55-58.

<sup>3</sup> CONZELMANN, *Die Mitte der Zeit*, 100-101, states: "Auch bei Lukas ist die Naherwartung eliminiert. Die Dringlichkeit des Aufrufs ist nicht durch die Nähe, sondern wieder durch das Faktum eines plötzlichen, unberechenbaren Schlusses zu unbekanntem Zeitpunkt motiviert."

varying explanations for this<sup>4</sup>. For some commentators, it appears obvious that Luke has revised a parable traditionally applied to the importance of perseverance in prayer and developing it so as to embrace the question of faith. The implication here is that we may be looking at an earlier traditional section represented by the fictitious story, and a more recent redactional section, comprised of the introduction and the summary<sup>5</sup>, within which the story is set. Yet others, albeit accepting both this division and Luke's use of it in this redactional context, speculate as to what the original sense of the parable was<sup>6</sup>.

## 2 Philological Problems

Prior to considering the relationship between the framework and the fictitious story, and before advancing a narrative analysis of the fictitious story, we should take into account a series of philological questions which arise. Verse 7 presents considerable difficulties as to interpretation. The second question here is often translated as "Will he keep putting them off?", but the sense of this is highly debatable. It should be noted that Luke uses neither the verb *μακροθυμέω* nor the noun *μακροθυμία* ("patience") elsewhere in his Gospel, but chooses the adverb *μακροθύμως* ("patiently") only in Acts 26:3. Although the interpretations of this passage are numerous<sup>7</sup>, there are three main problems to be faced. Firstly, the verb is declined in the indicative tense, not the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. BOVON, *Apocalyptic Traditions*, 383-391.

<sup>5</sup> JÜLICHER, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 276-290, had previously attributed this parable to Jesus and the comment made to the Early Church.

<sup>6</sup> CURKPATRICK, *Dissonance*, 107, states: "A persistent quest to establish a unity in reading Luke 18:1-8 has also met with a consistent recognition of incorrigible dissonance." HAUDEBERT, *Lc 18,1-8*, 213, also follows this line of thinking: "Lc 18,1-8 ne s'inscrit pas nécessairement comme parabole jumelle de Lc 11,5-6, laquelle, dans un ensemble consacré à la prière jusqu'à l'impudence. Elle ne présente pas non plus de lien avec la parabole qui la suit immédiatement (Lc 18,9-14), bien que toutes les deux parlent de «prière». Reste donc à montrer que cette parabole traite d'autre chose et plus précisément de jugement."

<sup>7</sup> BOCK, *Luke*, 1452-1454, lists no less than twelve interpretations and offers points in their favour. Of particular note the explanation given by HOLLANDER, *μακροθυμία κτλ.*, 938: "Lk 18,7 [...] muß also wahrscheinlich wie folgt wiedergegeben werden: «Wird nicht Gott Recht verschaffen seinen Auserwählten, die Tag und Nacht zu ihm rufen, während er in bezug [*sic!*] auf sie (ihnen gegenüber) *aushält* (also: unbeweglich bleibt)?» Wie der ungerechte Richter, so wird auch Gott infolge des unablässigen Flehens seiner Auserwählten nicht länger unbeweglich bleiben und ihnen Recht verschaffen."



The first proposes taking the meaning as “Will he keep putting them off?” thus underlining that it is God who procrastinates, whereas the second possibility, “And will he be forbearing with them?”, accentuates the patience and goodness of God. We have to ask ourselves just how to resolve this dilemma since from a philological point of view both interpretations are possible. For the moment, we will leave this question pending.

The second problem is not so much a difficulty as a curiosity. Taken literally, the verb ὑπωπιάζω (18:5) means “to slap someone in the face, to give someone a black eye”<sup>11</sup> and is usually used when talking about boxing (1 Cor 9:27). Many commentators prefer to understand the verb figuratively – “to torment”, “to mortify” – but in its proper sense it assumes a nuance which fits in perfectly the parable we are examining: the widow is so insistent that she may even resort to physical violence.

### 3 Narrative Analysis

According to narrative criticism, attention has to be centred on the story itself, trying to understand the effect it generates in the reader<sup>12</sup>; this is

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[the verse is numbered 35:22]). Comparing the Hebrew text (*hithpael* of פָּסַח) with the Greek version of this passage of Ben Sira, ROGLAND, μακροθυμεῖν, 301, concludes: “Had Luke 18:7 actually intended to refer to God’s «slowness to act», it is much more probable that one of the several verbs from the semantic field of «delay» utilized elsewhere in Luke-Acts would have been chosen [...]. Any sense of a temporal delay in the parable, then, is not due to μακροθυμεῖν’s lexical meaning but rather to other contextual features. In light of these factors, it is unnecessary to attribute a sense of «delay» or «tarry» to μακροθυμεῖν in this passage.” If the reasoning presented for the Ben Sira text can be considered convincing, its application *sic et simpliciter* to this passage in Luke leaves considerable room for doubt.

<sup>11</sup> WOLTER, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 589, underlines: “Der Begriff stammt aus der Boxersprache.” However, SCHNEIDER, ὑπωπιάζω, 977, is more precise when he states: “Im eigtl. Sinn Lk 18,5 «damit sie mir nicht ins Gesicht schlägt». Bildlich 1Kor 9,27 ὁ μου τὸ σῶμα «ich quäle meinen Leib» (den Rahmen bildet der Vergleich mit dem Faustkampf, vgl. V. 26).”

<sup>12</sup> MARGUERAT – BOURQUIN, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 12, offer a concise description: “Où situer l’analyse narrative? Non pas sur l’axe de la représentation, mais sur celui de la communication. Sa question: comment l’auteur communique-t-il son message au lecteur? par quelle stratégie l’auteur organise-t-il le déchiffrement du sens par le lecteur?”

necessary because it is not possible to first examine the contents of the parable itself (18:2-5) and then the framework in which it is presented (vv. 1.6-8). The narrator's initial affirmation (v. 1) aims at creating a sense of expectancy in the reader and thus directing his understanding of the fictitious story<sup>13</sup>.

The narrator accentuates two particular aspects. On the one hand, he calls to mind the need (δεῖν) to pray (προσεύχασθαι). Luke's choice of wording is anything but casual in that there is a definite christological connotation here. In his Gospel, he has already shown us Jesus in an attitude of intimacy with God: firstly at his Baptism (3:21), then in deserted places (5:16) or on mountain heights (6:12) as on the occasion of his Transfiguration (9:28.29). But Luke's Jesus can also be found praying with his disciples (11:1). It was indeed Jesus, the Master of prayer, who disclosed to them its importance and encouraged them to pray (6:28), teaching them how to address themselves to God (11:2-4), so it comes as no surprise to the reader when reference is made to the prayer of the disciples. Indeed, it evokes a memory of words already heard in this Gospel (11:5-8)<sup>14</sup>. The novelty of Lk 18:1 consists of the emphasis on the necessity of pray. The verb δεῖν alludes to God's divine plan to which Jesus chooses to obey<sup>15</sup>: these are the concerns (as too the house) of his Father referred to by the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple (2:49)<sup>16</sup>. The good news of the Kingdom has to be proclaimed in other cities (4:43), it is an anticipation of the passion (9:22; 17:25) and it is necessary, too, that the decision be taken to walk to Jerusalem (13:33). And not unsurprisingly, the disciples too are subject to this sense of necessity: they are called to conform to the divine will which is manifested to the full in the life of Jesus. And how to understand this divine will if not through prayer? A second emphasis is placed on how to pray. Prayer

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L'étude porte ici sur la structuration qui permet au message d'atteindre l'effet recherché par l'émetteur."

<sup>13</sup> As regards the question of "first impressions", PERRY, *Literary Dynamics*, presents a fundamental theoretic study. He illustrates how the linearity of the linguistic medium has a fundamental role in determining the process of materialization by which a text is received. "Its verbal elements appear one after another, and its semantic complexes (e.g. scenes, ideas, characters, plot, value-judgments) build up «cumulatively», through «adjustments and readjustments»" (p. 35).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. GEORGE, *La prière*, 395-427; NYGAARD, *Prayer*, 107-169.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. COSGROVE, *The Divine δεῖν*, 168-190.

<sup>16</sup> As regards this problematic expression (ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου) I would address you to CRIMELLA, «Perché mi cercavate»?», 409-413.

should be “assiduous”, “continuous”, it should be part of “every moment of the day” and “for every need” (this is the sense of πάντοτε). And again, the prayer that Jesus exhorts to maintain must never “fall into discouragement”, nor “relaxation”, it must never “let the rope go”, but rather continue the tussle<sup>17</sup>. Here we have the strong negation of all that is contrary to persistence, audacity, courageous. One could almost say that this perseverance takes the form of obstinacy in trusting in God.

In this way, Luke introduces the fictional story which Jesus proposes to his listeners (18:2-5): the story of Jesus the storyteller is, in due turn, narrated by Luke. The two protagonists, the judge and the widow, are presented with a certain vein of sensationalism. They appear more similar to types (stereotyped characters) rather than to real-life people, but this is a characteristic of the literary style adopted in the parables<sup>18</sup>. The first character we meet is a judge (18:2) whom the narrator himself describes as the very antithesis of the just man. He is presented to us by means of *telling*, which inevitably influences our perception and our opinion of him<sup>19</sup>. His lack of reverential awe of the Lord God, linked with his lack of respect for others, sets this man worlds apart from the figure of man free to worship God without fear, “holy and righteous in his sight” celebrated in song by Zechariah (1:75)<sup>20</sup>. His sinning against the two

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<sup>17</sup> The etymological sense of the verb ἐγκακέω is “to behave badly”, but in a figurative sense it can also imply “not to give up”. SPICQ, *Lexique théologique*, 409-410, points out: “Le meilleur équivalent est : «non segnescere» (Bengel) et mieux encore «not to slacken, ne pas relâcher, détendre, mollir, donner du mou à un cordage». Il ne s’agit pas tant d’omission que de relâchement dans la poursuite d’un effort, de perdre cœur au milieu des difficultés, de lâcher prise et d’interrompre une persévérance avant d’avoir atteint le but; on abandonne au lieu de continuer la lutte. Donc, un plan moral: vaincre l’assoupissement, l’ennui, la durée, voire l’angoisse dans les tribulations.”

<sup>18</sup> VIGNOLO, *Personaggi*, 25, offers a valid approach to the question: “Lo studio del personaggio sembra tuttavia meglio orientato nella misura in cui si cerca di stabilire il grado piuttosto che il tipo di caratterizzazione, secondo una continuità più o meno pretratta. Così si potrà ipotizzare una criteriologia a tre livelli in senso ascendente: 1) l’*agente*, di cui non si sa null’altro se non quanto è strettamente necessario per l’intreccio; [...] 2) il *tipo*, che ha una limitata e stereotipata serie di tratti e che rappresenta un’intera classe di persone definibili con tali tratti; 3) il *personaggio*, che possiede una più ampia serie di tratti” (emphasis in original).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. MARGUERAT – BOURQUIN, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 98, offer the following definition: “Mode d’exposition consistant pour un narrateur à dire plutôt qu’à monter, et pour les paroles, à user du style indirect.”

<sup>20</sup> Cf. BOVON, *L’évangile selon saint Luc*, 168-169.

divine imperatives – love of God and love of one’s neighbour – as quoted by the Doctor of Law when questioned by Jesus (10:27) – marks him as both irresponsible and dangerous<sup>21</sup>, a thoroughly negative person. The characterization which Luke gives of this judge brings to mind the opinion expressed by Josephus Flavius regarding Jehoahaz: “He had come to have a wicked and perverse nature; he was neither obedient to God nor kind with man” (μήτε πρὸς θεὸν ὄσιος μήτε πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἐπιεικής; *Antiquitates judaicae* 10:83)<sup>22</sup>. It appears that such behaviour was by no means exceptional but rather the rule in the society of that time, where magistrates did all in their powers to increase their prestige, more often than not by illicit means<sup>23</sup>. For the presentation of the first character in our story we only have Luke’s word for it. The man himself has yet to make a move.

The second character is a widow (18:3). Luke, while introducing the woman, asks for the cooperation of the reader, counting on the so-called “reader’s personal encyclopaedia”<sup>24</sup>. With the death of her husband, the widow has been deprived of both his protection and his economical support, finding herself not only poor but in a highly vulnerable situation. Here the commentators call to mind numerous passages of the Old Testament where the widow, together with the orphan and the foreigner, represents the very figure of social fragility and for this reason Judaic law insisted that the rights of such people be safeguarded (Exod 22:21-23; Deut 24:17; 27:19). But at this point, however, the narrator modifies his style of writing and substitutes his *telling* with the technique known as *showing*<sup>25</sup>, by which the reader comes to know of

<sup>21</sup> Cf. FITZMYER, *Luke*, 1178.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. FITZMYER, *Luke*, 1178.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. COTTER, *The Parable*, 331-332. As FÖRSTER, *Das gemeinschaftliche Gebet*, 276, points out: “Aus jüdischer Sicht war wohl in erster Linie die fehlende Gottesfurcht des Richters zu tadeln, denn die Gottesfurcht bildete nach ausdrücklicher Überzeugung verschiedener biblischer Autoren die Basis jeder funktionierenden Rechtsprechung. Nur wer Gott fürchtet, wird das Richteramt gerecht und vor allem unparteiisch ausüben (Lev 25,17; vgl. auch Lev 19,14).”

<sup>24</sup> The concept of the reader’s “personal encyclopaedia” was introduced by ECO, *Lector in fabula*, 37-40, and corresponds to the linguistic, historical, and cultural knowledge which the narrator presumes the implied reader possesses.

<sup>25</sup> MARGUERAT – BOURQUIN, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 98, give the following definition: “Mode d’exposition consistant pour un narrateur à montrer les événements plutôt qu’à les qualifier, ou à donner une retranscription directe des paroles.”

the actions the widow takes (this is done by putting the verbs into the imperfect tense, ἦν and ἦρχετο, to underline both continuity and repetition), and by using direct speech. The focus is placed on the widow's continuous and recurring visits paid to the judge, who thereby enters into the magistrate's existential sphere with a demand for justice. From historical documents that have come down to us we know that in that period a woman's place was in the home, certainly not in the public domain of the law courts<sup>26</sup>. And the same must be said for the attitude and the words of this widow: one only needs to glance at any legal papyrus of the time to note how they resound with deferential language and high-flying titles in presenting their petitions. Flowery language peppered with deferential expressions and accolades was considered a convenient means of expressing the docility and submission a woman should show before a magistrate. Be that as it may, the widow in the parable is so very direct in her approach to the magistrate that the reader begins to fear that she will never succeed in her intent, if only for a lack of respect for the rules. Moreover, in asking for "justice" in this manner, the widow gives the impression that it is more a question of "seeking revenge" on her enemy (ἀντίδικος); the verb used, ἐκδικέω, can well be used to express either situation. The reader yet again finds himself facing a case of mere inference because Jesus, in his teachings, exhorts his followers to come to an understanding with their adversaries (ἀντίδικος), in order not to find themselves standing in front of the magistrates and possibly being cast into prison (12:58). The situation is now very clear to the reader of the parable: the woman has disposed an indictment against her adversary, yet the judge has not found sufficient grounds in her argument that permit him to pursue the case in her favor, and therefore refuses to proceed. It is a paradoxical situation. Here we have a woman who refuses to respect the social norms which require her to be silent and invisible, and who instead presses for action by the judge in her favour: is it an illusion on her behalf?

Here the narrator skilfully introduces a retardation into his tale, and this lends itself to a heightened expectation on the part of the reader: the narrative

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<sup>26</sup> The relative documentation is presented and examined by COTTER, *The Parable*, 334-335.

tension augments<sup>27</sup>. The method employed is still *showing* but implemented by an inner soliloquy – a technique much loved by Luke in the parables (12:17-19.45; 15:17-19; 16:3-4; 18:4-5; 20:13)<sup>28</sup>. In order to evaluate this soliloquy, we need to respect both the perspective of the judge and that of the other characters involved, as also the narrator’s point of view. What stands out here is the repetition, word for word, of what we have already heard from the lips of the narrator regarding both the judge (18:2) and the request of the widow (18:3). This repetition gives rise to three effects. Firstly, the reader gains no additional information, because the judge’s soliloquy merely confirms what we already know. Secondly, by comparing the two sources of information, the reader has a very clear idea as to the judge’s character, not so much from his own words as from the opinion already expressed by the narrator<sup>29</sup>. There is, however, a third effect concerning the characterization of the judge: he once seemed to be what Forster would call a “flat character”, but this monologue shows him to be a “round character”: that is, capable of learning from his experience<sup>30</sup>.

When the judge expresses his intentions, he also states the reasons lying behind his decision, and this sheds yet further light on the female figure in this parable. We have already weighed up the sense of the verb ὑπωπιάζω, which

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<sup>27</sup> BARONI, *La tension narrative*, 18, offers a succinct summary: “La tension [narrative] est le phénomène qui survient lorsque l’interprète d’un récit est encouragé à attendre un dénouement, cette attente étant caractérisée par une anticipation teintée d’incertitude qui confère des traits passionnels à l’acte de réception.”

<sup>28</sup> Cf. SELLEW, *Interior Monologue*, 239-253. This article can claim the merit for having clarified the strategy Luke favours in recounting parables, but it must be said that both the approach and the conclusion are highly questionable. Sellew himself reminds us that the interior monologue allows the reader to participate in the feelings of the characters and to understand their dilemmas; however, to base a conclusion on these seems an oversimplification as it fails to take into consideration those differences which emerge between the viewpoint of the narrator and that of the character.

<sup>29</sup> ALTER, *Biblical Narrative*, 146, affirms: “Now, in reliable third-person narrations, such as in the Bible, there is a scale of means, in ascending order of explicitness and certainty, for conveying information about the motives, the attitudes, the moral nature of characters. Character can be revealed through the report of actions; through appearance, gestures, posture, costume; through one character’s comments on another; through direct speech by the character; through inward speech, either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanations.”

<sup>30</sup> The definitions offered here come from FORSTER, *Aspects of the Novel*, 73-80.

can be applied figuratively as “to torment someone” but also in a highly concrete sense, that of “giving someone a black eye”. Having thus had ample evidence of the lack of social propriety on the part of the widow concerned, it should come as no surprise to the reader were this woman to resort to the use of physical violence: it seems highly possible, indeed, in keeping with her character. Furthermore, it would not be out of place to advance the hypothesis that here we have a case of amphibology, where the two interpretations given are not contradictory but call for the intelligence and competence of the reader. The pragmatic role of polysemy may well have a double aim. At times, such ambiguity is clarified later in the tale, whilst at other times it remains as it is, which adds an effect of tension to the narrative<sup>31</sup>. Were we to accept a less strongly-defined interpretation, we would be able to understand the exasperation felt by the judge; if, on the other hand, we read the text in a more radical manner, we see the figure of a man unable to defend himself from a violent woman if not by resorting to violence himself – and in this manner renouncing the prestige with which his position invests him.

The fictitious story is open-ended: Jesus, the “narrator narrated” does not offer us an explicit conclusion: he refrains from stating whether the judge carried out his resolution or whether the widow obtained justice. But this reticence should not be interpreted as introducing an element of indecision into the parable, nor should it be seen as speculating on its sense of direction. The very opposite is true: this fictional story remains precise and well-defined.

#### 4 The Parable between Story-Telling and Theology

“Parables – writes Fusco – are fictional stories in two stages, used as a strategy for dialogue and discussion. They start by stimulating a certain opinion, based on the fundamental facts of the story, and then they connect this structurally to the situation which the writer of the parable wishes to illustrate”<sup>32</sup>. If we accept this enlightened definition, the story then requires a logical evaluation. As we have seen from the narrative analysis, the role of this parable is first and foremost linked to the contrasting representation of the

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. MARGUERAT – BOURQUIN, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 159.

<sup>32</sup> FUSCO, *Parabola/Parabole*, 1085. Cf. the excellent and unsurpassable classic in this field FUSCO, *Oltre la parabola*.

judge and the fragile position of the widow. In a second moment, it develops the theme of the intemperate behaviour of this woman, thus creating a certain suspense which changes to surprise when we learn of the judge's decision<sup>33</sup>.

As we have already seen, a parable is contained in a frame (18:1.6-8) which enhances the transition from the internal logic of the story to the reality which the writer wishes to make evident<sup>34</sup>. Moving from the initial framework, we must now examine the final framework. In v. 6 it is not Jesus who offers an opinion, it is "the Lord" (ὁ κύριος). The use of this solemn title is not casual: it underlines the authority of the speaker and the importance of the words he utters. In this manner, the opinion of the "narrated narrator", of fundamental importance in the parable, is made known to us. Of importance, too, is the mention in v. 6 of "listen" (ἀκούσατε): it has strong performative implications and directs the attention of both listeners and readers to the words of the judge, defined here with a so-called genitive of quality (literally, "the judge of injustice" [ὁ κριτῆς τῆς ἀδικίας]). Thus, for the third time in a mere three lines, a mention of "justice" resounds. Further emphasis is given to this parable with the introduction of the mystery of God: this is the essential point which the parable-teller wants to underline. His reasoning, although implicit, can be defined *a fortiori*: if a judge, portrayed in such a negative manner, decides to grant the request presented to him by the widow, how much more will God (so totally different from the earthly judge) be ready to listen to the prayers of his people<sup>35</sup>.

This reasoning, once understood and accepted, sheds a new and different light on the second request (18:7b). As stated earlier, from a philological point of view there are two possible solutions here. The first proposes the translation "Will he keep putting them off?", whilst the second

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. the theories presented by STERNBERG, *Expositional Modes*, 65: "[S]uspense derives from a lack of desired information concerning the outcome of a conflict that is take place in the narrative future; [...] curiosity is produced by a lack of information that relates to the narrative past." "For surprise, however, the narrative first unobtrusively gaps or twists its chronology, then unexpectedly discloses to us our misreading and enforces a corrective rereading in late re-cognition" (STERNBERG, *Difference*, 117).

<sup>34</sup> Luke does not reject the strategy of placing a fictitious story within an interpretative framework: one example of this is the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-29,30-35,36-37), the Pharisee and the Publican (18:9,10-13,14).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. JEREMIAS, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 105: "Warum erzählt Jesus die Geschichte? V. 7-8 a antworten: die Hörer sollen den Schluß von dem Richter auf Gott ziehen."

proposes “And will he be forbearing with them?”. In either case, we find ourselves faced with a request to which, on the basis of the logical conclusion of the parable, both listeners and readers can only reply “God is not like that judge”. Whether he procrastinates in intervening, or whether he shows mercy, he has the best interests of mankind at heart. It is again possible that here Luke, by subtly playing on the double sense of this expression, aims at creating an amphibology. The context seen earlier (17:20-37)<sup>36</sup> holds a further key to our comprehension: a period of persecution is a time for calling on the help of God. Despite faith in the coming of the kingdom, moments such as these are characterised by ardent invocations to God that justice may prevail. But no answer is forthcoming. Paradoxically it would appear that God is an unfair, prevaricating, cynical and distant judge. But although the parable seems to express a sense of distance between God and man, this interpretation is repelled by “the Lord” as not being the case: He will listen to the prayer of those who call on Him. The connection with the initial frame of the parable (18:1) now becomes evident: prayer should be persistent and we should be confident that God will intervene to reveal his design of salvation through his son, Jesus. This is an unshakable fact which will come about “before long” (ἐν τάχει, 18:8a).

The final question that is posed – regarding faith – also finds a connection with the initial frame, in that after theological interest, anthropological interest follows. If God’s intervention is a certainty, despite his concept of time not being that of man, then the disciples should turn their attention to the quality of their faith. Judgment will shed light on the true essence of each man and of the faith expressed in his prayer. A parallelism with the parable of the vigilant servants (12:35-38) leads to a similar interpretation, as does the logion on the housemaster and the thief (12:39-40), followed by Peter’s question and Jesus’s relative response (12:41-48). In both of these contexts we find the title “the Lord” (12:42; 18:8) and the title “the Son of Man who will come” (12:40; 18:8). The “Lord” is envisaged as the person who will wield power as “the Son of Man” on Judgment Day<sup>37</sup>. It is he who has revealed the mystery of God so radically different from the judge in the parable; it is he

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<sup>36</sup> A suggestion already proposed in this connection comes from LAGRANGE, *Luc*, 468: “Cette parabole se rattache incontestablement à ce qui précède, c’est-à-dire aux difficultés qu’éprouveront les fidèles, et à la venue du Fils de l’homme.”

<sup>37</sup> Cf. DE LA POTTERIE, *Le titre Κύριος*, 144-145.

who is the Father of Mercy (15:11-32), and it is he who will pronounce the final word on the story of mankind.

The final question in this parable betrays full awareness of how faith falters as time passes<sup>38</sup>. Will the followers of Jesus – and here we are not only referring to the Twelve, but to all his followers – be able to remain fast in the faith in the midst of all the injustices which reign in the world? Or will they cede to discouragement and find themselves unprepared for the event of the coming of the Son of Man? The Early Church soon came to understand that the waiting period would not be short. And it is for this very reason that the parable examined maintains all its relevance both in keeping alive the expectation as regards the day of his return and in calling to mind the merciful bounty of God, the very heart of all hope.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. TANNEHILL, *Luke*, 265.

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### *Zhrnutie*

Podobenstvo o nespravodlivom sudcovi a vdove (Lk 18,1-8) predstavuje dôležité filologické tvrdenia, ktorých interpretácia však so sebou prináša následné ťažkosti. Prvým problémom, s ktorým sa štúdia popasuje, je plný význam slovesa μακροθυμέω. Po ňom, za pomoci naratívnej analýzy, štúdia podrobí skúmaniu samotný fiktívny príbeh. Uvedený prístup čitateľovi umožní uvedomiť si jednotu podobenstva ako príbehu, ktorý je obsiahnutý a sa rozvíja medzi úvodným (v. 1) a záverečným rámcom (vv. 6-8). Keď sa názorne predstaví ako narátor vytvoril svoj príbeh a keď sa dá dôraz na metódu akou vytvoril atmosféru napätia a neočakávaného prekvapenia, stane sa zjavným záver, ktorý je cieľom tejto štúdie: popri rozpoznaní hlavného teologického zámeru, nemožno podobenstvu poprieť antropologický aspekt, tvoriaci jeho podstatu.

*Kľúčové slová:* Lk 18:1-8, μακροθυμέω, naratívna kritika, modlitba, podobenstvo.

### *Summary*

The parable of the unjust judge and the widow (Lk 18:1-8) presents important philological points, with subsequent difficulties as to its interpretation. The first problem to be faced regards the full significance of the verb μακροθυμέω. From there the study then approaches the fictitious story itself by means of narrative analysis. This way of proceeding enables the reader to appreciate the unity of the parable, as the story itself is contained and developed between an initial frame (v. 1) and a final frame (vv. 6-8). By illustrating how the narrator builds up his story and by accentuating his method of creating an atmosphere of suspense

and unforeseen surprise, the conclusion which this study wishes to make becomes apparent: whilst recognizing an eminently theological concern, at the heart of this parable the anthropological aspect is not denied.

*Keywords:* Luke 18:1-8, μακροθυμέω, narrative criticism, prayer, parable.

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