Biblical Revisionism

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THE SUBJECT OF BIBLICAL REVISIONISM, of revisionist reading within the Bible itself, might take its epigraph from a passage in the Talmud about a related form of rereading the past: repentance. The Talmud tells us that repentance is one of the things created before the Creation,[1] and revisionism likewise seems to be there all along. If Man could not be conceived without the capacity for his repentance and return, neither could the Word have been pronounced without the capacity for revisionist interpretation, and perhaps the revision itself, having been conceived before the old tales and old theology could be represented as "original." Translated into a piece of New Testament myth-making, this qualification about revision is familiar enough: "Before Abraham was, I am," John's Jesus proclaims (8:58), and the very idea of a messiah seems to imply a scheme of revision laid out before there is a man to fall.[2] What is astonishing, however, is how early and how persistently versions of a "new testament" are encoded in an old. The more we try to historicize certain narrative or theological revisions, particularizing what makes them belated adaptations to changed historical circumstances, the more we are surprised by the discovery that what we had taken to be primitive may be a belated construction suppressing an earlier fullness of knowledge or ironing out an earlier wrinkle of dissent.

The Talmudic paradigm of an original cry of "return!" is based on an interpretive maneuver familiar to many readers through a stunning application by Milton. When Milton wishes to rival the priority of scriptural creation, he imagines a voice preceding "Let there be light!", a voice that first clears the way: "Silence ye troubl'd waves, and thou Deep, peace!"[3] Milton borrows Jesus' words to the Sea of Galilee (Mk 4:39) and, on the principle that "In the beginning was the Word," Milton applies Jesus' words to an earlier beginning, an address to the archetypal waters of chaos. He simultaneously corrects what he sees as a theological error (creation ex nihilo) and promotes a theory of imagination and inspiration involved with research, revision, and realignment. The Talmud similarly seizes a moment elsewhere in scripture and accords it a newfound priority. The proof text is Psalm 90: "It is written, 'before the mountains were brought forth [. . .]' and it is written, 'Thou

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turnest man to contrition, and sayest, "Repent ye children of men."'" The first snippet is taken from the psalm's second verse, where in context it forms the subordinate clause and temporal indicator for the main clause, "Thou art God." But by forgetting about God, as it were, and forgetting as well that the third verse is speaking of God's power to return man to dust, so that the plain sense is "return to the *earth*, children of men!" the Talmud pastes together the temporal indicator from verse two and the injunction from verse three and comes out with a heavenly voice that decrees, before the foundations of the earth, "return [in the new sense of 'repent'], children of man!" Given the moral magnificence of a repentance that precedes creation and the niggardly literal-mindedness of the objection, "But that's not what the text means!"—or at least "But that's not what the text meant!"—one might be tempted to extend the rereading of *tishuvah* or return to include revisionary rereading itself. We can sum this up in a little myth of archetypal revisionism: Millennia before "Let there be light!" a voice went out and decreed, "Revise, reread, children of men!"

Though founded on a kind of "speed reading" of Psalm 90:2–3, the revisionist cry that not only rivals but precedes a cry for "plain sense!" or "scripture itself!" may be, ironically, a way of hearing a voice of God in the voice of scripture. Like Marxist revisionism or Freudian revisionism, biblical revisionism depends on a spirited challenge to plenary inspiration. Yes, the whole is sacred—in the (revised) sense that it is worth combing through; but some moments are more authentic than others. Like William Collins, in "Ode on the Poetical Character," the student of biblical revisionism might imagine God "Himself in some diviner mood, / Retiring" from the work of the world to indulge some more primal creative urge.[4] All God's acts are divine, but some are "diviner" than those we call, with resignation, acts of God. It may be that only a small percentage of passages that cry out to be loci of revisionist interest share with Collins a revision in the temporal sequence of biblical narrative, a recovery of what happened or what was thought before a more "normative" account replaced the diviner original; but in some way all questions about biblical revisionism pose challenges to an old notion of priority, whether that priority is one of time or of importance.[5]

The Bible itself repeatedly warns us to beware of confusing temporal and spiritual priorities—and to beware especially of assuming any story, covenant, or law is beyond the reach of revision or revisionist understanding. I do not mean to ignore that in legal matters, certain decrees are presented as *chok olam*, eternal law, or that certain relationships are presented as irrevocable choices on the part of God or man. But together with instances in which "irrevocable" laws (such as the prohibition of secular slaughter in Leviticus 17) are later revoked (Deuteronomy

12), there are countless narrative and prophetic announcements that joy in the possibility of revision or that threaten the revocability of God's favor. The simplest and most paradigmatic stories encoding the difficult competition between predetermined and revisionary choice may be the Genesis tales of Adam's children and the patriarchs in which the chosenness of the first-born son has to be rethought—or has already, preveniently been rethought. (I would add to this list the nasty tale of Dinah, in which, I believe, the "chosenness" of Levi for privileged status in the religious establishment is being seriously rethought.[6]) More problematically, a voice that cries to Abraham a second time from heaven (Gn 22:15) does not seem to do much by way of revision of the first revisionary command (22:11); but this nonrevision may itself be intended to obscure—or perhaps (by casting itself in the shadowland of doleful, pious compulsion to repeat) to highlight—just how much of a revision of an earlier notion of blind obedience the new command must be understood to be. If we turn from thematic revisionism (God does not want sacrifice) to the revisionist stance of this story's narrator, we might hypothesize, with Harold Bloom, that in an original J account of the Binding of Isaac, an arbitrary Yahweh made a fierce and hideous demand that a pious redactor mollified by adding "God put Abraham to the test."[7] Bloom argues that such an original story would have featured a rescue by no angel but by Yahweh himself, and "that would eliminate the awkward blemish of the second angelic outcry from heaven, and would restore the direct relationship between Yahweh and Abram" (206). Suppose, on the other hand, that we see the story of Abraham and Isaac as the crowning achievement of an E writer, ordinarily firmly opposed to any direct contact between his transcendent Elohim and his pious patriarch, but willing to imagine an intervention by an angel of Elohim—or even by Elohim himself just this one. We can then hypothesize that a later redactor, someone knowing neither the ironic intimacy of J's Yahweh nor the magisterial ironies of the E writer capable of indicting "Elohim will show us the ram for slaughter, my son" (22:8), substituted the "angel of Yahweh" and the bathetic insistence on reward that the double appearance entails. Intended or not as a cancellation of the sublimity of the E story, the double appearance of the angel of Yahweh protests too much that there is no revision, no revision, in the return to a God who explains, "this was only a test; and you will be rewarded mightily anyway." If nothing else, noting how far from either Bloom's J or the sublime E the angel of Yahweh is can serve as a symbolic reminder that not all revisions are for the best.

Though it may occupy a special place in any reader's assessment of biblical revisionism, the story of the double cry from heaven in the Isaac story is only one of many in which a seeming repetition points curiously

to a profounder revision. On the most local level, there is the word that recurs as a pun, a repetition that, by ostensibly proclaiming "no difference!" points to all the difference. Thus the serpent is *arum* (sly) in Genesis 3:1, as (or rather, not as) man was *arum* (naked) in 2:25; Joseph trips up his brothers with a cup he is said to use to "divine" with (*nachesh yinachesh*, with too much of a repetition of the *nachash*, serpent, of the opening of Genesis). On a larger canvas, the willingness to redeem a pledge that Judah pledges (*ehervenu*, Gn 43:9) repeats the nasty pledge business of the story with Tamar (*eravon*, Gn 38:17). The licensed butchery by the Jews in the Book of Esther (9:5) recalls too closely the license to butcher the Jews. These repetitions seem "revisionary" when they are read as moral critiques of insufficient difference. Thus "Jewish butchery" is still butchery regardless of how the genitive is read—butchery of or by the Jews, just as Isaac's blindness when he blesses Jacob is still blindness when he blesses Esau—whether or not he intends the repeated *mishamnai haaretz* to change its meaning, in repetition, from "from the fat of the land" to "far from the fat of the land" when he repeats the blessing (Gn 27:39). There may be a similar critique of pious repetition encoded in a story ostensibly modeling the godliness of no change: Exodus presents a second set of tablets on which God Himself will write, without revision, what was engraved on the first (34:1); at the same time, it inevitably raises the question of repetition as accommodation to the limits of human nature. And God is willing to represent Himself as changing His will—especially, but not exclusively (for example, Ex 33:14) when the "original" is a wrathful will. By the time we get to the revision of God-as-king into the institution of earthly monarchy in the book of Samuel, we almost expect that the choice of the first king will, paradigmatically, have to be revised. Yet, like revisionary history of the United States that finds the majority of the founding fathers antidemocratic elitists,[8] revisionary history of Samuel, *in* the book of Samuel, questions whether there is not a subtext of dissent encoded in the very passages over which the orthodox historians have dogmatically poured. When Samuel upbraids Saul for offering the sacrifice in Samuel's absence (1 Sm 13:11ff.), there is a fine, two-edged irony in the belated Samuel finally coming round just as Saul finishes the bloody business: Samuel is seven days late, but Saul is still, is tragically, too early. Saul's reluctant assumption of priority of place in offering the sacrifice is no match for the prophet's pious preemption of revisionism in specifications about what commands, what necessities, have priority. Samuel's thunderous pronouncements in a second version of the rejection of Saul, chapter 15, sound like an anticipation of a prophetic cry we hear in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and after in the New Testament: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and

sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sm 15:22). But it remains uncertain whether this is an assertion of God's priority or Samuel's, whether it thunders "obey Him!" or "obey me!" When Jesus says, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Mt 19:30), or when he quiets the bickering of the disciples about priority of place, "but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister" (Mt 20:26), we might be tempted to hear him speaking, preveniently, to Samuel and all usurpers of priority of place in prior religious establishments.

Even from such a cursory and dizzying survey of revision as moral and theological theme everywhere in the Bible's narratives, adages, and laws, two general principles may be extracted:

(1) "The history," as Blake urbanely remarks, "has been adopted [we might clarify 'and adapted'] by both parties."[9] Revisionism is not the prerogative of the New Testament, nor even of a subordinated group of countertraditional voices in the Hebrew Bible. The Yahweh who changes His mind, who repeatedly repents of the evil He had intended to mankind or to Israel, has much in common with a Jesus, for example, who hears and accepts the Syrophenician woman who corrects him: "Yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs" (Mk 7:28). She adds one more correction to the notion, ever-needful of revision, of who the real children are; but more, she corrects the habit of mind that took "as Gospel" a particular saying (here, "let the children first be filled"). She exposes the absurdity of Jesus' saying, its utter confusion about temporal priority and priority of importance. Like the God of the Talmud who is out-argued by the rabbis and proclaims, with a laugh, "My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me,"[10] Jesus, in accepting his lesson from her, reasserts a capacity to be corrected, a capacity to accept, that might be called grace. And if we believe that he is not really corrected, not really caught making a mistake but staging a drama of correction, we might call the acceptance of correction—in a revised sense of the familiar term—prevenient grace. Tangled in a similar muddle about the priority of old Israel, Paul proclaims he is "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16). But it may be that he had just cause to be ashamed of that qualification "to the Jew first," if it means not the temporal priority of the old dispensation but some special status on the queue for the kingdom. It would be more confusing than helpful to dignify all such pronouncements by Paul with the revisionary cloak of a doctrine of "new Israel." Sometimes what looks like an old formula is repeated without revision, without wisdom, without grace.

(2) In the Bible, it is hard to distinguish the topics of authorial

revision (an author's self-correction) from historical revisionism (the will to reinterpret the past). And both these modes of rereading or redoing "the text" can be hard to distinguish from the moral or theological theme of self-correction. It is, for example, sometimes impossible to separate definitively acts of revision performed by God or His representative within the Bible from acts of revision performed by one visionary on what he takes to be a prevenient text. Exodus lists among the attributes of God his quality of "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*" (34:7, where the King James's italics acknowledge that "the guilty" is the assumed but missing object of *nakeh*, God's activity of clearing or cleaning the slate). Yet who can tell whether this list of attributes "goes back to Moses"—whether, that is, it has an authenticity that predates muddled theological revisionists' attempts to cope with the reality that judgment on the wicked, at least on the individually wicked, does not seem to be performed on this earth? Was there a prevenient version that announced simply a God of grace—to which a later, qualifying voice added, "but will by no means clear the guilty"?[11] Or is the whole list of attributes itself a coherent piece of text, but one added by a belated wisdom writer the way "under God" was inserted in the McCarthy era into our Pledge of Allegiance, to become, alas, indelibly part of the pledge in the minds of subsequent generations? The Jewish prayerbook, citing the traditium from Exodus 34, aborts the list of attributes in mid-phrase, turning *nakeh lo yinakeh* (I translate: and as for "clearing"—no, He does not exactly clear the slate) into plain *nakeh* (translate: He forgives! He cleans! Period). But is the prayerbook really aborting a theological monster or trimming away ugly fat of middle-age accretion to return us to a more youthful vision of a God of muscular power of forgiveness? And what of Jeremiah who has God recite, in first person, the phrase *nakeh lo anakeh*—to mean just the opposite of what it meant in Exodus: not "I will not wipe out sin completely" but "I will not wipe out *you* completely but instead leave a saving remnant" (Jer 30:11). Even if we assume that Jeremiah had knowledge of the Exodus list of attributes—that the list is not a belated addition to the Pentateuch long after Jeremiah—we cannot be certain that his vision revises a text in the process of revising a prophecy of the nation's destiny. Most translations assume that the phrase means what it means in Exodus. King James disregards coherence in this supposed message of comfort and gives: "but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished." Just one more example—a brief New Testament passage where revision *in* the text is so hard to tell from revision *of* the text. Mark's Jesus excuses the woman who anoints him from the obligation of charity; he "reprioritizes," or puts himself before the poor, for "ye have

the poor with you always"—citing and turning on its head Deuteronomy 15:11, where the saying explains the ever-important reason for charity, not the reason to override its claim. He continues: "She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying" (Mk 14:8). Without the last phrase, Jesus' reproof to his disciples is consistent: He commends the woman who has the vision to recognize him as the Christ and to pour out all her savings, all her faith, in that anointing, that act which, at this point, *makes* him the *mashiach*, the Christ, the anointed one. Has some later redactor, perhaps with antifeminist bias, reduced the woman's Christological vision to domestic service, so that "anointing" now means cleansing a body for burial?[12] Has Mark himself had second thoughts about the radical nature of this woman's claim to being the one who is "come aforehand"?[13] The Gospels especially contain moments where a dissonant word may not represent the hand of a pious tinkerer but the hand of the doubting evangelist, backing away from his own best vision. Revision, even self-revision, may not always be for the best. Wordsworth, an obsessive reviser of his own poems, crusaded to have the poet's last thoughts accepted as canonical; and he dismissed out of hand the privilege of what Milton called "unpremeditated verse": "My first expressions I often find detestable; and it is frequently true of second words as of second thoughts, that they are the best."[14] But Wordsworth's own second thoughts were not always his best, and in the biblical as in the poet's canon, we need to approach each problematic instance afresh, aware of the conflicting demands of the received text and what we can imagine to be an earlier, unadulterated one.

In what follows, I would like to brood about one locus of biblical revisionism that has proven particularly recalcitrant to interpretation. I have chosen an example in which moral revision, revision of the self, seems to be the messy subject under review, and in which historical revisionism, the wholesale rereading of the past, may be in question. Combing through dozens of recent articles on my text, I cannot resist the desire to make order, or at least to discover something one might single out as *the* watershed, amid the array of interpretations. My subject, however, remains inner-biblical revisionism, for which revisionism in the critical tradition may be a guide but not a substitute.

Here, in the King James translation, is the parable of the crafty steward and the verses of commentary appended to it:

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. [2] And

he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. [3] Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. [4] I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. [5] So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him,* and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? [6] And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. [7]Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. [8] And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. [9] And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. [10] He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. [11] If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? [12] And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? [13] No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

It is a peculiarity of the parable in Luke 16:1–8 and the maxims following it that one verse or another seems to haunt the would-be interpreter as though to catch his conscience in an act of bad faith. Many an interpreter must feel the force of a reproof in verse 10, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." Each interpreter is a steward in danger of being accused of wasting the goods of the Lukan text; and each must fear that ignoring certain details, or "discounting" certain verses as spurious or mistransmitted—or failing to discount the spurious as such—is an act of bad stewardship in danger of being found out to be faithless "also in much." On the other hand, this parable alerts us to the unsteadiness of the principle that the more details that can be explained, the more likely the explanation: it is possible that a parable is told for startling effect, and that details are added for verisimilitude, details that would seriously mislead the interpreter determined to make vehicle fit tenor on every count. Even the effort to accommodate contradictory signals—verses 8 and 9 on the one hand, which appear to praise the steward, and 10–13 on the other, which appear to damn him—may seem like the attempt to "serve two masters."

Though all interpretations are subject to this danger, some are more subject than others. On the whole, the interpretations that take seriously and straightforwardly the wisdom of the steward seem most in danger of

bad faith. Consider, for example, Francis John Moore, who argues that the steward is a paradigm of charity. Given that the Kingdom is nigh, the best that the rich can do is to use their money to buy a place in heaven: "There was only one thing for the rich to do, therefore, if they were wise: make friends of the poor with their money, while they had time: share their wealth with them; so that when their inevitable day came, the poor whom thy had befriended would be waiting to welcome them to the eternal abodes."[15] But the cost of this fine piece of morality is faithlessness to the text describing debtors owing a hundred baths of oil or a hundred cors of wheat—such debtors are hardly standard figures for the poor! There is also a more troublesome blindness to the difference between debtors' houses and heaven: if, on the literal level, the steward is being forced to accept some second best when he is cast out by the master, to what, on the spiritual level, does this second best correspond? If the poor hold the keys to the kingdom, are they keys to back doors—so that, unable to meet the standard at the main gate, the sinner hopes to purchase his way into heaven through influence over particular recipients of his "charity"? Similarly, Dennis J. Ireland, arguing once again for the steward as a model for the disciples on the wise use of earthly resources, forces us to overlook the nastiness of modeling faith on the faithless, as though the more successful the tycoon proves to be in amassing wealth, the more he is entitled to have his business sense abstracted as a virtue from his social conscience.[16] When Dave L. Mathewson champions a return to what he calls the "traditional view" of the steward's exemplary charity, he is led at one point to a rhetorical question it is hard to imagine asking without irony: "What better test is there of one's loyalty to God and the ability to handle true wealth than one's use of material possessions?"[17] This sounds perilously close to a parody of Calvinist evidence for election, as though the master of the parable were to say, "By all means let me commend your crafty use of mammon! What better test is there of loyalty to God than your possession of His bounty? Use it or lose it!" Most pointedly, when Mathewson sums up his argument by claiming of verses 10–13 that "a natural reading of these verses would suggest that how one uses wealth here on earth is indicative of the ability to handle true, heavenly wealth" (39), one has to wonder if "natural" and "supernatural," or Mammon and God, are not pitted against each other.

A number of interpreters argue that the steward may once in the past have been unscrupulous, but at present is simply rebating commission and not cheating his master. These interpretations purport to examine the parable with greater scrutiny and to purge it of anything that "*presupposes* that the manager's subsequent conduct was dishonest and

corrupt."[18] With Pharisaic scrupulosity, they then separate the shrewdness from the unscrupulousness, and return us to a message for our time, understood to be a desperate time, close to the eschaton, when we need to find sermons in stones and beatitudes in the honor of thieves. If Jesus preaching to the disciples to find a model of behavior in the crafty steward looks as improbable as Mother Teresa commending Pol Pot for his organizational skills, his efficiency in decimating his population—well, the times are indeed desperate. Most peculiar is the way a reading of the parable as focused on the eschaton (an assumption really unsupported by the context in Luke or Luke's general use of parables) gives rise to a moral meaning that relates to practical politics in a world far from its end. "The dishonest manager has become the model for Christians, who are expected to grasp the dramatic situation of the kingdom and crisis that it brings into the lives of men" writes Fitzmyer (37). And playing on that supposed crisis he continues, "It is a situation which calls for a prudent use of one's material wealth" (37). For Joachim Jeremias, likewise, "the challenge of the hour demands prudence."[19] Since, in the implied homily, the "situation" is always now, "prudence" empties Jesus' teaching of any radical element. Act charitably because, in the end, it is a good investment. So the CEOs of major corporations might be counseled before downsizing radically: remember that the immediate positive impact on the balance sheet of firing people has to be graphed against the long-range negative impact of lost productivity through anxiety about being on the firing line; and remember that the "long-range" is not very long. Ignoring any possible irony in the oxymoronic phrase "eternal tabernacles," readers who see the parable as good business sense "make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." Such interpreters may even find a touch of support in a peculiarity of the King James translation, which reads, "that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." With the translation "ye fail" rather than, say, "it fails," the individual is given less, and mammon is given more than its due. Several commentators have even specified that "mammon of unrighteousness" is money as it is usually or otherwise thought of; if used well (and contributions are always welcome) it can buy you an orchestra seat at the Last Judgment—with a bronze plaque and your name on it.

The interpretations I have so far considered I would like to group together under the rubric "churchly," meaning both something homiletic and something historical: They are churchly in the sense that they discover a meaning appropriate for preaching in church, a morality that sits well with a religion that has a limited place in one's life and prods one gently to the kind of good that does not hurt. They are churchly also in the historical sense of corresponding to what the early church, after

Luke, often preached, and in the more speculative but quite possibly "historical" sense of corresponding to what the early church, after Jesus but before Luke, might have made of a parable of the steward.[20] Such readings share a desire to minimize the revisionary nature of Jesus' parables. They could alternatively be labeled "canny" as opposed to "uncanny," where the latter category seeks to highlight the elements of surprise and defamiliarization that attend a confrontation with the divine. They could also be called "conservative" in the double sense that they support the idea that the parable preaches on those benign topics, prudence and charity, and in the sense that they view verses 8–13 as conserving adages or sermon notes on loosely related themes.[21] If there is an irony in the notion that thoughts about the imminence of the end encourage the use of the worldly-wise as paradigms, this irony is of a form so mild, so solemn, so serene that, to borrow a phrase from Shelley, a reader might be "But for such faith with [the parable] reconciled."[22]

In contrast with these readings are those that find a caustic irony in the master's praise for the steward's shrewdness. This takes two forms. First, there is the bitter irony expounded by Stanley Porter, who argues that Jesus' actual meaning is clearly stated in the radical polarization of verse 13: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," which can be paraphrased as the injunction to the critic, "ye cannot derive moral paradigms from mammon's magnates." The ironic endorsement of the steward must be decoded into the kind of radical reversal Luke loves so well and practices in surrounding parables: "Dishonest wealth cannot be expected to produce earthly friendship, as the prodigal [son] realizes, but more than that, this means of ingratiation cannot be used to buy eternal friends, as the rich man [of the Lazarus parable] so painfully learns."[23]

Once the radical irony of Jesus' response in verse 8 is recognized, the problems with discontinuity between the parable and its various commentary verses disappear. The same irony that governs the praise of the steward in verse 8 governs the injunction in verse 9 to make friends by means of dishonest wealth. Then, decoding the irony, Jesus proceeds straightforwardly to proclaim in verse 10 that those faithful in little things (those faithful on the scale of earthly dealings in the parable) will be faithful also in much (spiritual things). This, in turn, is consistent with the singleness and absoluteness of loyalty to God exacted of all His servants: One cannot serve God and Mammon, as the poor steward attempted to do.

The second form of ironic reading is the splendid one by Douglas M. Parrott, based on but significantly buttressing the proposal of Charles Cutler Torrey that Luke 16:8a was intended (Parrott means originally intended by the Aramaic-speaking Jesus, but I will modify his proposal

and suggest intended by Luke) to be a question: "And would the master have commended the dishonest steward for his cleverness?"[24] Parrott shows that the concept of an impending eschaton is not characteristic of Luke, let alone the idea that dire straits license taking moral lessons from knaves. What *is* characteristic of Luke is an emphasis on moral regeneration and sharply polarized pictures of the sinner who makes and the one who cannot make the right moral choice. Parrott also shows how characteristic, and how much in the spirit of Luke's love of sudden reversals, is the device of concluding a parable with a question. The parable of the two debtors, told to explain Jesus' privileging of the sinner who washes his feet with ointment, concludes, "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" (Lk 7:42). The parable of the foolish rich man who would build himself bigger barns ends with God himself posing the question: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (12:20). Most telling, I believe, is the Good Samaritan parable, which ends with the eye-opener, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" (10:36). While just as much a rhetorical question, with obvious answer, as the others, this one focuses more on the revisionary nature of the parable itself: The lawyer had asked for clarification about the scope of the command to love one's neighbor: to whom, to how large a constituency, must I be a good neighbor? How far must love of neighbor extend? The parable radicalizes the choice between love of neighbor and love of self by reposing the question in terms of the doer rather than the receivers of acts of love: Who is a good neighbor? Who is *the* Good Neighbor? To read the parable of the unjust steward with a similar sense of the rhetorical question *radicalizing* the option to find something praiseworthy in the steward or to condemn him outright is to restore the moral urgency of Luke and his core belief that the teachings of Jesus are anything but bland prescriptions for the quiet, decent life.

If Parrot is correct about the parable of the unjust steward, then the parable immediately following it may serve as an allegory of reading for its predecessor—and, indeed, all the parables peculiar to Luke. The rich man in Hades suffers eternally for failing, on earth, to recognize the community of fellows that permits no decisive, exclusive gulf between himself and Lazarus. Now the little divide he made between his circle and those excluded from it has become the great divide. Yet when refused his request that Lazarus "dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool [his] tongue," he tries for a second-order request, not unlike what the temporizing interpreters of the unjust steward parable would settle for: "I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my

father's house . . . that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment" (Lk 16:24, 27–28). But Luke is not interested in sermons for brothers back home, any more than he is interested in reading the steward who rebates debtors' records as a paradigm for the almsgiver. The texts for sermons are texts that radicalize the choices set before the sinner. "No servant can serve two masters" and "between us and you there is a great gulf fixed" are the same lesson. So is "no master can commend an unjust steward."

In one crucial way, Parrott's ironic reading seems less satisfactory than Porter's. Porter's more general sense of irony forms an umbrella that shelters all of verse 8 and verse 9 from the acid rain of literalism. Jesus means the exact opposite of what he says when he says "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." For Parrott, however, the rhetorical question of verse 8a, "would the master have commended the dishonest steward for his cleverness?" is the *limit* of Jesus' irony, and someone else, not understanding the irony, has added the unironic explanation about the children of this world. Though it is possible to imagine that this "someone" is a redactor, coming after Luke and bungling his manuscript, it is more likely that a pre-Lukan collection of parables already contained the misinterpretation, or that Luke himself is the bungler. In the words of Ronald Lunt, "it would seem that Luke did not know what the point was, and that he set down a variety of interpretations current in his own day, which are suggested primarily by the word 'mammon.'"[25]

Once we admit the possibility of Luke as misreader, however, a more interesting alternative opens itself to view. Parrott's exemplary work in isolating and characterizing the parables peculiar to Luke leads to the conclusion that for *Luke* the parable of the unjust steward cannot be about preparedness or the wisdom of investing in acts of charity. Yet if Luke finds in the parable a teaching about the need to polarize moral choices and repent absolutely, it is not necessarily true that Luke finds in the parable what Jesus put there. Luke's strong misreading may be based on ignorance about or indifference to a more particular, more parochial meaning that the teller of the parable had in mind.

I propose that, in the parable Jesus told and Luke misunderstood, the roguishness of the steward was a clever representation of the counternormativeness of the religion Jesus preached, the religion of discounting the debts of the Old Law.[26] The "misfitting" of the steward's underhandedness and its theological meaning becomes a way of urging us to confront the misfitting of old and new requirements, old and new values. Though we might not praise a steward who allows fifty to substitute for a hundred in measures of oil, we might feel otherwise if

(as Ronald Lunt puts it) "the goods in which he deals have been largely ritual and legalistic observances" (EP 135). In this case, the discounting is nothing short of spirituality itself.

Of interpretations of the parable that find the steward an allegory of revisionism, there are still two modes. In one, the steward is a figure for Jesus himself, the great discounter. Just as Jesus does not abrogate all law and extend a universal pardon to all cheaters, fornicators, and murderers, so the steward does not remit all debts to the Lord; we debtors have our burden lightened, perhaps specifically as regards ritual and legalistic observances, but not all sin is original sin and not all discounting is equal.[27] Still, the story of *the* forgiver of sins is *the* story, and in this reading Jesus is the ultimate referent for the steward in the same way as he may be regarded as the ultimate referent for the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son. The analogy to the Prodigal Son may be particularly important because the Good Samaritan parable is one that allows ordinary Christians to share in the good deeds that the master of good deeds, the neighbor to all, exemplifies; the Prodigal Son parable, on the other hand, does not encourage Christians to leave older brothers and fathers and wallow while they may in lechery and "riotous living." All three parables gain considerable force by subverting our expectations. The Good Samaritan is better than Priest, Levite, or (by implication) observant Pharisaical Israelite; the Prodigal Son is to be celebrated above the chosen son, the Israelite to whom the Father says, "Son thou art ever with me"; and the steward who remits debt is favored over the one who exacts repayment, pound for pound.

The second form of such interpretation brackets the Christological meaning, as one might bracket it with the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son parables, and focuses on the context of responses to Pharisaical Judaism. We can all be good Samaritans, whether we are born Israelites or not, and we can all be stewards who relax the standard of rigor in the interpretation of the law. It may be more difficult for an Israelite Priest to act like a good Samaritan, if he conceives of the ritual law binding him more tightly than his moral obligation to other human beings; but that is his bind, and he can loosen it.[28] Similarly, the stewards of the people—in Lunt's reading "leaders of the people of Israel about to be dispossessed" (EP 135)—are in a unique position to prove their true worth as God's stewards in doing what they can to relax the rigor of the old law while they yet serve. If we are all stewards, in danger of being found to have "wasted his goods" (Lk 16:1), still some bear more responsibility than others. The mind is a terrible thing to waste, as the contemporary cliché goes; but teachers who waste their students' minds upon stocks and stones and indifferent things bear a special burden of responsibility. It may be, then, that the entirety of verse 8 belongs to the

parable itself: "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." If "children of light" is a self-designation for Pharisees, then "the children of this generation" are Jesus and his followers.

It seems so characteristic of Pharisaic Judaism to exact usurious obedience to the bonds of law, that the Talmud itself needs to caution against excessive zeal in adding difficulty upon difficulty, fence around fence. "Rabbi Joshua ben Karha says: In laws of the Torah follow the stricter view, in those of the Soferim follow the more lenient view."[29] Commentators on the parable of the steward who have troubled themselves over whether the debts to the master are of the steward's devising and for the steward's profit may be said to be distinguishing unnecessarily between the laws of Torah and scribes. In the spirit of the parable, one might rewrite the Talmudic principle thus: "In laws of the Torah follow the more lenient view; in those of the Soferim, do not feel an obligation to follow at all." If this is indeed the spirit of Jesus' revisionary stance vis-à-vis Pharisaic Judaism, then we should hear the irony of attributing to him the saying, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail" (Lk 16:17; see Mt 5:18). This may be an authentic saying of Jesus—but a saying he used to characterize the objectionable position of the Pharisees.

Whatever Jesus' attitude toward the law—and it may have been as ambivalent as it seems in the context of Matthew's sermon on the mount—Luke is not interested. Luke has some interest in the idea of Pharisaic opposition to Jesus, as chapter 16 itself documents; but he stands outside of the bind that so disturbs Matthew, the need to account for and accommodate Jewish law. Luke can thus be as indifferent to the law question as the master in the parable of the unjust steward might be said to be to the legal questions involved in the steward's discounting or falsifying of the bonds.

What did Luke hear? Let us entertain, for the moment, the possibility of a pre-Lukan collection of parables that included, with the parable of the unjust steward, the verses that are appended to it. Jesus tells a parable in which the figure representing his own kind of Reform Judaism (as it were) significantly discounts the old law. The lord of the parable, representing the Lord Himself, praises this action, for the children of this world, this new school of thought, are wiser than previous generations of Jewish law scholars, the so-called "Children of Light." And I say unto you, Jesus continues in verse 9, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." That is, take as your truest *yerusha*, your most closely guarded inheritance, this new teaching against the law; make its "unrighteousness," its

antirighteousness, your cause. The law, that dead letter, is sure to fail; and when it does, you will want to find a tabernacle of peace in the antilegalistic religion you have previously embraced. "He that is faithful in that which is least," using every opportunity, however minor, to be faithful to the spirit rather than the law, will be trusted with much. If, for example, you have acted on principle in ignoring the old rabbinic edict about the washing of hands, you will be trusted with true riches, the abrogation of sin. "And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's," interpreting the true faith's opposition to Moses' creed, "who shall give you that which is your own," the new dispensation of grace? The kind of Jewish Christianity that Matthew preaches, then, is impossible: "No man can serve two masters." If one tries to do that he will find he hates the [Jewish] one, and loves the other; or else "he will hold to the one [with *dvakut*, old-style piety] and despise the other, the one that counts. Ye cannot serve God and the old currency of Jewish law.

Is such a reading plausible? Let me be explicit about stating that I do not believe it. That is, though I think this is the sort of reading Jesus (or the pre-Lukan source) might have done with the verses in Luke, I do not regard verses 8–13 as belonging to the sayings of Jesus, at least not to the sayings of Jesus attached to the parable before Luke. I *do* believe that the parable of the unjust steward may originally have had the allegorical meaning of anti-Pharisaic discounting of the law. But it is far more likely that Luke himself, with his interest in repentance rather than rabbinics, gave the parable a strong misreading that focused on a figure of compromised principles, a figure representative of the kind of compromise that makes politics possible and living easy.[30] To do this, Luke had to take the lord's praise of the antinomian steward, praise that was serious in the old parable—praise that belongs both to the lord in the parable and the Lord Himself—and read it ironically, read it as a total and unconditional rejection of such stewarding.

Stanley Porter summarizes the ironic reading by pointing to how completely the parable negates the fundamental teachings of Jesus: "Jesus is commending his followers for using worldly wealth in its most negative sense to secure reward, a clear impossibility for this world, as the prodigal [son also] learned, and for the world beyond, as the rich man [in the Lazarus parable that follows also] regretted" (PU 148–49). If Jesus told a parable whose meaning was intended to be allegorical, there is a double irony in that worldly wealth *can* secure rewards, the rewards of spiritual meaning for which earthly wealth, in the rhetorical sense, is vehicle. But there may be a further irony, one we might call the irony of revisionism itself: a strong misreading, like Luke's cooption of a parable about law into a context of repentance, may be truer to the spirit

of the text, Jesus' text, than the weak misreadings of the moralists so determined to take the world literally wherever they can.

Another master, in a text richly parabolic, is less inclined to commend the wisdom of his steward: When King Lear orders Kent, as Luke's master might have ordered his steward, "Out of my sight!", Kent retorts with a demand for revision—restored to the root sense of seeing again, seeing better—as importunate and ultimate as anything Jesus taught: "*See better*, Lear; and let me still remain / The true blank of thine eye."[31] Something of the awesomely archaic quality of this opening scene of Shakespeare's play might be represented by imagining Luke's parable as a happy revision of it. The master who commends his steward because he had done wisely is a vision of a Lear who could hear Kent and revise his "hideous rashness." Shakespeare's Lear, not yet ready to do that, dismisses his steward:

> Hear me, recreant!
> On thine allegiance, hear me!
> That thou has sought to make us break our vows,
> Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride
> To come betwixt our sentence and our power,
> Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,
> Our potency made good, take thy reward.
>
> (1.1.166–72)[32]

To accuse Kent of seeking to make the king break his vows is to indict him of a "crime" he would gladly confess. It is also to alert us to Kent's "injustice" (*a-dikaiosune*) in that radical, Christian sense in which the alpha privative denies the whole category—in which justice is an Old Law that the true steward seeks, with all his heart and soul, to break. Lear concludes his imprecation with the archetypal stamp of authority: "Away! By Jupiter, / This shall not be revok'd" (1.1.178–79). Biblical revisionism might be represented with the alternative, "Away, by Jesus, / This shall now be revoked." Or better: "This already was revoked with a prevenient voice, millennia before."

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NOTES

1 Pesahim 54a. I cite *Seder Mo'Ed*, tr. and ed. I. Epstein, 2:265, in *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein (London, 1938). In *Midrash Tehillim* (90.12), the precedence is specified as that of two thousand years before the Creation (*The Midrash on Psalms*, tr. William G. Braude [New Haven, 1959] 1:94).

2 Translations of biblical texts are my own or from the King James Version, as needed.
3 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* 7.216. Cited from *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (1957; New York, 1993), p. 351.
4 William Collins, "Ode on the Poetical Character," in *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London, 1969), p. 431. Whether or not "thou rich-haired youth of morn" is the sun, as Lonsdale suggests, Collins, from a very different perspective than Milton's, has reimagined the time and circumstances before that "original" conception.
5 On "priority of importance" as a locus of revisionary sentiment, see esp. Ched Myers' handsome discussion of revisionary chosenness, what he calls the "preferential option for the poor" in Mark (Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* [Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988], p. 198). Myers points, for example, to the story of the woman suffering from a hemorrhage, an episode that interrupts and disturbs the priority of the claim of Jairus, a synagogue president, on Jesus' attention: "The primary level of signification in this episode . . . lies in the fact that Jesus accepts the priority of the ('highly inappropriate') importunity of this woman over the ('correct') request of the synagogue leader" (p. 201).
6 Revisionary judgment may govern the butchery of Simeon and Levi in Genesis 34 despite the lengthy, pious moralizings of Meir Sternberg. It is curious that Sternberg is able to imagine that Jacob revises his judgment of Simeon and Levi in his deathbed cursing of these sons: "But Jacob makes this diatribe many years later, in Egypt, when the dangers of the Hivite affair are long past and he can afford to play the moralist" (Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington, Ind., 1985], p. 473). The critic is able to imagine that the character revises his moral stance (at least his willingness to keep silent); but he cannot imagine that the narrator of the original episode is himself a revisionist, telling a gruesome tale to pass revisionary judgment on these leaders in Israel.
7 Harold Bloom, *The Book of J* (New York, 1990), p. 206; hereafter cited in text.
8 For a fine example of revisionist history of this sort, see Richard Rosenfeld, *American Aurora: A Democratic-Republican Returns* (New York, 1997).
9 William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," pl. 5, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, N.Y., 1982), p. 34. For a spirited discussion of Pentateuchal revisionism and party politics, see the discussion of the P source and the Aaronite priesthood in Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York, 1987), esp. pp. 120–28.
10 *Baba Mezi'a*, 59b, in *Seder Nezikin*, tr. and ed. Salis Daiches and H. Freedman, 1:353, in *The Babylonian Talmud*.
11 See the very judicious discussion of this passage in Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 335–50. Fishbane assumes that Exodus 34:6–7 is the oldest form of the divine attributes, and that this list (unlike so many other passages which he breaks into layers of original traditium and exegetical traditio) is of a piece. The idea of a full-text original, later abbreviated in Deuteronomy, is extensively supported by the work of Jacob Milgrom (see the introduction to his *Leviticus I-XVI* [New York, 1991]). On the other hand, a cogent argument for the belatedness of the divine attributes formula is put forth by Robert C. Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," *Vetus Testamentum*, 13 (1963), 34–51.
12 The writing of this woman out of the tradition is a possibility explored by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York, 1990), p. xiiiff.
13 The speculation about Mark as self-reviser might be contrasted with the vision Michael Fishbane develops of Moses as reviser. For example, "Moses took over the

theologoumena of extended grace and punishment *and revised them*" (Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, p. 343). Behind both representations of a single, authorial consciousness respecting but revising a traditium, there may have been, in fact, a series of authorial consciousnesses of different historical periods.

14 William Wordsworth, letter to R. P. Gilles, 22 December 1814, in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, Part 2:1812–20, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. ed. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford, 1970), p. 179.

15 Francis John Moore, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward," *Anglican Theological Review*, 47 (1965), 105.

16 Dennis J. Ireland, *Stewardship and the Kingdom of God: An Historical, Exegetical, and Contextual Study of the Parable of the Unjust Stewart in Luke 16:1–13* (Leiden, 1992). Ireland does not, of course, argue that wealth is itself a sign of godliness; but he prefers the comfortable position that there were wealthy as well as poor disciples and that "faithful use of material possessions is evidence of the genuineness of one's discipleship" (p. 57). The most far-reaching abstraction of something honorable from the den of thieves may be that of W. O. E. Oesterley, who argues that the steward is at least consistent, and "consistency is a virtue; being exercised in a wrong direction does not make it, per se, less a virtue" (W. O. E. Oesterley, "The Parable of the 'Unjust Steward,'" *Expositor*, 7 [1903], 283).

17 Dave L. Mathewson, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–13): A Reexamination of the Traditional View in Light of Recent Challenges," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 38 (1995), 35; hereafter cited in text.

18 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., "The Story of the Dishonest Manager (Lk 16:1–13)," *Theological Studies*, 25 (1964), 32; hereafter cited in text. See also the work of J. D. M. Derrett, "Fresh Light on St. Luke 16," *New Testament Studies*, 7 (1960), 198–219 and 364–80; and J. D. Crossan, "Servant Parables of Jesus," *Semeia*, 1 (1974), 17–62.

19 Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, 1972), p. 182. It is surprising how little difference Jeremias' point makes that the master of verse 8a is Jesus. Though Jeremias argues famously, "It is hard to believe that the *kurios* of v. 8 refers to the lord in the parable; how could he have praised his deceitful steward?" (p. 45), it makes little difference whether the praise for the steward's prudence comes from the master in the parable or from Jesus. Either way, there is an abstraction of the quality of prudence from an otherwise reprehensible figure—an abstraction justified, in the mind of the interpreter, by the exegencies of the supposed crisis of the approaching eschaton.

20 On the double historical meaning of "churchly," see William Loader, "Jesus and the Rogue in Luke 16, 1–8A: The Parable of the Unjust Steward," *Revue Biblique*, 96 (1989), 520.

21 Fitzmyer, "The Story of the Dishonest Manager," brushes aside differences by speaking of "several concluding verses of diverse origin" (26). He believes that Luke (but it might as well not be Luke) has brought these together on the basis of "catchwords" (pp. 29–30). Others refer to sayings or interpretations of the early Church that Luke, if it is Luke, may have simply collected.

22 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mont Blanc," l. 79, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Neville Rogers, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1975), p. 78.

23 Stanley Porter, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–13): Irony *Is* the Key," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, ed. D. J. A. Clines (Sheffield, 1990), p. 149; hereafter cited in text as PU. Porter's fine piece is titled to respond to and expand on the work of D. R. Fletcher, "The Riddle of the Unjust Steward: Is Irony the Key?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 82 (1963), 15–30. On irony, see also P. G. Bretscher, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward—A New Approach to Luke 16:1–9," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 22 (1951), 757–62.

24 Douglas M. Parrott, "The Dishonest Steward (Luke 16.1–8a) and Luke's Special Parable Collection," *New Testament Studies*, 37 (1991), 513.

25 Ronald Lunt, "Expounding the Parables: III. The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–15)," *Expository Times*, 77 (1966), 133; hereafter cited in text as EP. In a masterful essay on Mark, yet unpublished, R. Clifton Spargo presents a more exciting version of the Gospel writer who contradicts himself. In Spargo's reading, it is not just bafflement but self-doubt about having gone too far that makes the Gospel writer retreat from his own, most visionary moments. Mark, at his most inspired, can imagine an unknowing Jesus looking around and inquiring, "Who touched my clothes?" (5:32); in a more conservative moment, Mark goes back and turns the story into a model of faith. On this model, the daring of Luke would be to let irony do the preaching, and the conservative impulse would return him to straightforward, conventional preaching. The Gospel writer might thus resemble a Romantic poet like Coleridge, able to capture his visionary gleams only as gleams, before retreating to something more conventional. Compare, for example, the stanza break in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" between the vision of a secular transcendence, "To walk together to the kirk / With a goodly company!"—and the "churchly" thought that follows: "To walk together to the kirk, / And all together pray" (ll. 601–9; cited from *Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge [Oxford, 1967], p. 208). A more familiar representation of Coleridge unable to sustain an unorthodox thought is "The Eolian Harp." Neil Arditi, for example, comments that "the idea that God and the imagination were one both attracted Coleridge and frightened him"—and the turn from one verse paragraph to another can show the original and conventional aspects of the same mind (Neil Arditi, "Shelley's 'Adonais' and the Literary Canon," *Raritan*, 17 (1997), 132–33).

26 On the religious meaning of "roguishness" (what he calls "the roguery of divine grace"), see Loader, "Jesus and the Rogue in Luke 16, 1–8A," 521, 531; and Dan Otto Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia, 1974), p. 159. See also T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London, 1964), on the steward as "rascal" (p. 292).

27 The fine Christological reading by Loader, "Jesus and the Rogue in Luke 16, 1–8A," deals with Jesus as "free," or seemingly indiscriminate, forgiver of sins, rather than a discriminator between ritual and moral sin. For Loader, the motif of debt reduction and the motif of unauthorized agency combine to point to the figure who repeatedly irks Pharisees by proclaiming "your sins are forgiven." For a Christological reading focused more on the Old Law / New Law distinction, see Charles Paliard, *Lire L'Ecriture, Ecouter la Parole: La Parabole de L'Econome Infidèle* (Paris, 1980), for example, p. 134: "Nous pouvons prendre le personnage du maître comme la figure de la Loi. D'abord Loi Ancienne qui condamne Jésus, elle devient à la fin Loi Nouvelle qui le glorifie."

28 This would make of the parable revisionary Christianity in a sense of "revisionary" like that in which we term Viktor Emil Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York, 1963) revisionary Freudianism: it discounts an old orthodoxy about what is given, what is the individual's personal "given," and claims a new freedom of the will.

29 *Abodah Zarah* 7a, tr. and ed. A. Mishcon and A. Cohen, in *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Nezikin* (London, 1935), 4:31.

30 E. P. Sanders, in *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1985), p. 111, denies that Jesus had an interest in repentance in the parable of the steward because "repentance" is not mentioned. I do not believe the word needs to appear, in the parable or the discussion of it, for it to be a major concern. Sanders is also concerned that the cry for repentance in Luke is not explicitly a call for national repentance; precisely: it revises such a call into something both more personal and more universal.

31 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London, 1963), 1.1.158–59 (my emphasis); hereafter cited in text. If Kent's figure of speech in "the true blank" suggests the center of the target, as Muir proposes, Kent offers to suffer the arrows of outrageous

fortune flung at him by Lear. He will thus be "unrighteous steward" in denying or discounting the supposed justice of the king's plan, and a suffering Christ.

32 The Quarto reading, "our potency made good," may be less persuasive, but the existence of this variant helps focus our attention on the vexed problem of priority of place and temporal priority. I believe Lear is saying "my potency will be made good (reestablished) when you are forced to take your reward." But the elision of "will be made good" into what sounds like a past tense, "made good," reminds us that the king is king by an old law, an established power, which will need to be undone and reestablished when he sees better. Another way: there is a dramatic irony encoded in this condensed phrase like that in the elision of "that thou hast sought" for "seeing that thou hast sought," where sight, moral insight, is more than grammatically elided. The irony is that his potency has priority over his vision; it will have to be "made good" in the moral sense when it is made poor in sovereignty.