



Article

Moved from His Inward Parts: Jesus's Human and Divine Compassion in the Gospel of Luke

by Gerald E. Nora¹

In the Raising of the Widow's Son at Nain (Lk 7:11-17), the Evangelist describes Jesus as moved by compassion when he sees a widow mourning the loss of her only son. This is an unusual description of Jesus's emotions in Luke's Gospel. Of the twenty-one signs and miracles in Luke's Gospel, it is the only instance when we are told Jesus's feelings. This article proposes that the Evangelist intended Jesus's emotion at Nain to signal an important prophetic fulfillment as well as to introduce an important literary motif for Luke's theology of love. A story that is rarely included in the Church's Sunday readings, the miracle at Nain was written to unite three prominent liturgical readings from Luke's Gospel: the Benedictus, the Good Samaritan, and the Prodigal Son. If its meaning and context are recovered, Jesus's compassion at Nain will amplify our understanding of these prominent passages and enable a more effective evangelization from Luke's Gospel.

The Evangelist's² word for Jesus's feeling of compassion was a common verb in his time, but he employs it in a manner to signify a special meaning in his Gospel. Luke uses the verb *splagchnizomai* (*splagchnisomai*), meaning "to feel from one's inward parts," or, literally, "from one's bowels."³ The verb is a cognate of the noun *splagchnon* (*σπλαγχνον*) that, depending on context, means either "compassion" or "entrails."⁴ The visceral tenor of these words reminds us of the root meaning of our own word "compassion," which was to suffer with another. In New Testament Greek, compassion is likened to the vulnerability and anxiety of loosened bowels, but in common usage it probably worked as comfortably and non-literally as our casual usage of metaphors such as "heartbroken" and "gut-wrenching."

The Greek word is bracketed next to its English translation in the following *New American Bible* rendition of the Raising of the Widow's Son:

11 Soon afterward he journeyed to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd accompanied him. 12 As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the

1 A permanent deacon with the Archdiocese of Chicago, Gerald E. Nora is pursuing a research degree in New Testament Theology. He received a B.A. (Philosophy) and J.D. from Georgetown University and an M.L.A. from The University of Chicago. A former trial lawyer, Deacon Nora currently works in hospital chaplaincy and spiritual direction. He is assigned to St. Mary of Vernon Parish in Indian Creek, IL. Gerald and his wife Patricia have four children and seven grandchildren.

2 Because this article is concerned with passages unique to Luke's Gospel (and typically ascribed to a writer called "L"), this article uses "Evangelist" and "Luke" interchangeably to describe the passages' author. Careful exegetes distinguish between this Gospel's ultimate redactor or Evangelist, and the apparent sources for its various parts, such as "Mark," "Q," and "L."

3 The Lockman Foundation, *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, definition 4697 (1998), <http://www.lockman.org>.

4 *Greek Dictionary*, definition 4698.

only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, he *was moved with pity* [εσπλαγχνισθη] for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” 14 He stepped forward and touched the coffin; at this the bearers halted, and he said, “Young man, I tell you, arise!” 15 The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, exclaiming, “A great prophet has arisen in our midst,” and “God has visited his people.” 17 This report about him spread through the whole of Judea and in all the surrounding region. (Lk 7:11-1)

Before considering my argument that Luke intends this story to be related to the other Gospel passages, it is important to contemplate some of the dramatic and emotional depth that Luke has packed into this very short account. Two aspects of the story show that he intended it to have singularly compelling force. First is Luke’s decision to use this particular miracle, not the other twenty, to dramatize Jesus’s emotions. The miracle has special force because it encapsulates elements of Jesus’s entire life, his death and resurrection, and also Luke’s unique emphasis on the story of Jesus’s mother Mary. Implicitly, it offers greater depth of meaning than any other, even the raising of Jairus’s dead daughter.

A second aspect of the story is Luke’s decision to use the third person passive aorist (“εσπλαγχνισθη”) for Jesus’s compassion. He could have used the Greek present indicative to describe Jesus’s emotion as continuous action. (In New Testament Greek, the present indicative is used to describe continuous action that occurred in the past.) Luke could have also used the past perfect to indicate a past action that continued to have lasting effects. Instead, Luke uses the aorist, an aspect that indicates that the action is both past and completed. Without overstating the significance of this verb choice, the choice does underscore a manifest element of Jesus’s action, his courage. Jesus is interrupting the funeral procession leaving a town where Jesus is unknown. When Jesus’s words fail to interrupt the funeral, he physically intervenes, grabbing the coffin and forcing the people to pause. Surely Jesus is risking his life. Luke’s verb choice does not allow us to interpret Jesus’s action as the irrational reaction to overwhelming emotion. Jesus felt the emotion, but Luke does not express it as continuous and therefore something that was causing the escalation of Jesus’s intervention. Jesus felt the compassion, advised the widow, and, when his advice went unheeded, moved into action at substantial risk to his own person.

Jesus’s emotions and actions at Nain appeal to us as being both human in motivation and also for being heroic in action. When we assess the congenial, familiar aspects of this unusual description of Jesus’s emotion, we should not let his very human emotion distract us from the extraordinary human intervention he performs before exercising divine power and raising the widow’s son. Theologian Eben Scheffler has argued that Jesus’s compassion at Nain in Lk 7:13 offers a psychological profile equivalent to human compassion or empathy.⁵ His analysis, however, only notes how Jesus’s action conforms to criteria for defining human empathy such as “an other-oriented response elicited from and congruent with the well-being of someone else” that “leads to concrete action that benefits people who are suffering and...not done for egoistic reasons.”⁶ This does not assess the courage that distinguishes this instance of altruism from most. Indeed, it is important to consider whether Jesus’s bravery goes beyond what human beings consider courage. Courage includes the management of fear. At Nain, Jesus’s only identified feeling is compassion. Luke implies that Jesus has moved beyond fear and acts in complete selflessness.

Although commentators have noted Luke’s description of Jesus’s emotion at Nain, they have not found that it has any special theological meaning in Luke’s Gospel. Noting Jesus’s emotion at Nain, Robert Tannehill simply

5 Scheffler, Eben, “Empathy for the Psychological Underdog: A Positive Psychological Approach to Luke’s Gospel,” *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 70(1) (2014): Art. #2742, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70/1.2742>.

6 Scheffler, “Empathy,” 5-6.

states, “...the narrator seldom indicates the emotions of Jesus.”⁷ Joseph Fitzmyer notes the specific instances of *splanchnizesthai* at Nain and elsewhere in Luke, but, unfortunately, Fitzmyer only considers them when rebutting another commentator’s mistaken observation that Luke frequently describes emotions:

“M.Dibelius sought to ascribe vv. 13 and 15b to Luke...because Luke ‘depicts feelings’ [and for other reasons]...However, this is not entirely evident, since Luke often omits the emotions of Jesus that are in his sources...and the Lucan occurrences of the verb *splanchnizesthai* are all found in “L” passages (here [at Nain], 10:33 [Good Samaritan]; 15:20 [Prodigal Son]).”⁸

Fitzmyer’s comment comprehensively summarizes Luke’s editorial decisions respecting *splanchnizomai*. When Luke imports stories from other Gospels—specifically using Mark’s accounts of Jesus healing the leper (Mk 1:51) and Jesus feeding the five thousand (Mk 6:34) in Lk 5:13 and 9:1—Luke deletes *splanchnizomai*. Luke uses *splanchnizesthai*, however, in passages unique to his Gospel. Fitzmyer does not consider whether this might evidence a serious literary decision.

M.J.J. Menken has discerned a special literary feature when Luke employs the verb *splanchnizesthai*. In each instance, Luke precisely places the verb in the middle of the periscope and employs it as the story’s turning point.⁹ In the Nain pericope, the phrase εσπλαγχνισθη ἐπ’ αὐτῆ (“moved with pity for her”) occupies the middle of verse 13, with five words preceding and five following it. Looking wider, at the pericope’s dramatic action which falls in verses 12-15, thirty-three words precede the phrase and thirty-three words follow it.¹⁰ In the Good Samaritan story,¹¹ the Samaritan’s compassion is the middle word and turning point when he moves to assist the robbery victim. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son,¹² the Father’s compassion is the middle word and turning point when compassion causes him to rush out and welcome the Prodigal Son. As with Nain, in both the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son, Luke renders the verb in the aorist, as εσπλαγχνισθη. Luke clearly is drawing us to a common significance between the parables and Jesus’s compassion.

Menken extends his analysis of *splanchnizesthai* to see if Luke has similarly signified some significance to the verb’s cognate noun *splanchnon* in the Benedictus. Here he finds a more attenuated but consistent instance of “centralism.” Menken notes that Zechariah’s prophetic hymn falls in two parts, the first a benediction (1:68-75) and the second a prophecy (1:76-79).¹³ The prophecy reads:

76 And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
77 to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the [σπλαγχνον] *tender mercy* of our God
by which the daybreak from on high will visit us
79 to shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

7 Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991) (Kindle edition), 135.

8 Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1981), 28

9 M.J.J. Menken, “The Position of ΣΠΛΑΓΧΝΙΕΣΘΑΙ and ΣΠΛΑΓΧΝΑ in the Gospel of Luke,” *Novum Testamentum XXX*, 2 (1988): 107-114.

10 Menken, “The Position,” 110.

11 The Good Samaritan story (10:30-37) is in Appendix I.

12 The Parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11-32) is in Appendix II. Although this Parable is more appropriately called “The Prodigal Father” or even “The Prodigal Son” or “Sons,” I am using the traditional title for ease of discussion.

13 Menken, “The Position,” 112.

In this second part of the Benedictus, the noun *splagchnon* is preceded in the original Greek by twenty-six words, ten substantives, and four verbal forms; it is followed by twenty-six words, ten substantives, and four verbal forms.¹⁴

Menken concludes,

All three times that *εσπλαγχνισθη* occurs in Lk., and the one time that *σπλαγχνον* occurs, Luke organizes his text in such a way that the word stand in the numerical middle of the pericope or of the part of the pericope in which it occurs, according to a count of words or syllables and/or according to account of verbal forms or substantives. These numerical arrangements...confirm that in the passages in question “compassion” is an important element or even the most important element. These arrangements anyhow fit in with the generally accepted view that Luke emphasizes in his gospel God’s love for the needy, the poor, the sinners, which manifests itself in Jesus, and which should also manifest itself in his followers. See...Lk. 1:46-55; 4:18-19; 6:36; 7:36-50; 15:1-10; 18:9-14; 19:1-10.¹⁵

Menken qualifies his analysis that these words are “important” or “even the most important element” in their pericopes and compromises with the observation that “anyhow” they at least corroborate his overall theology on God’s love for the needy. This is because Menken has a misplaced concern that Luke’s omission of the verb from his reiteration of Mk 1:51 (the curing of the leper in Lk 5:13) and Mk 6:34 (the feeding of the five thousand in Lk 9:11) means that the word may not have had special importance for Luke. Rather than see how those editorial decisions invigorate Luke’s deployment of the verb in his original pericopes, Menken tries to rescue his analysis against this perceived problem by arguing that Luke’s omissions reflect a different text with the first “omission” and a more complex editorial decision with the second.

Menken discovered more than he saw. If Luke employs *splagchnizomai* and *splagchnon* only to corroborate the Gospel’s overall theology of love, then we can rest with the analyses by Fitzmyer and Luke Timothy Johnson who treat the words as equivalent with other Lukan words denoting pity and mercy, *οικτιρμον* (6:36) and *ελεος* (1:50).¹⁶ But Luke took special care with the verb and its cognate noun. They signify something special about the aspect of love called compassion or fellow-suffering. When we look at them in the order of their appearance, from God in the Benedictus, to Nain and then to the Samaritan and the Prodigal, we see that Jesus’ compassion at Nain is the hinge that unites Luke’s teaching on divine and human compassion.

In the Benedictus, Zechariah prophesies that because of God’s *σπλαγχνα*, his compassion or “tender mercy,” the “light from on high” will shine on those who now “sit in darkness and death’s dark shadow” and will guide “our feet into the path of peace” (Lk 1:78-79). Approaching Nain, Jesus encounters the funeral procession for the widow’s only son (7:11-12). This group is literally under Zechariah’s “death’s dark shadow.” Jesus experiences God’s compassion and tender mercy for the widow and intrudes, telling the widow, “Do not weep.” (7:13) But the group remains “in darkness” until “daybreak” intrudes still further. The procession continues until Jesus forcibly stops it. (v. 14). Jesus raises the son from the dead and returns him to his mother. (vv. 14-15) Those had been literally processing in the path of death now encounter the “path of peace” prophesied by Zechariah. They are seized with fear as they glorify God and proclaim, ““A great prophet has arisen in our midst,” and “God has visited his people” (v.16). Jesus is the fulfilment of Zechariah’s prophecy. Jesus, the visitor at Nain, is the “light from on high” which, Zechariah prophesied, “will visit us” and shine on those living in the shadow of death.

14 Menken, “The Position,” 112.

15 Menken, “The Position,” 112-113.

16 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 118; Fitzmyer, vol. 28, 95.

Zechariah's prophecy contextualizes the presence of Jesus' *splagchnizomai* at Nain and its absence with Jesus' other miracles. It does this because the Benedictus prophecy qualifies, under Luke Timothy Johnson's constructs, as both a "literary" and as a "programmatically" prophecy. A literary prophecy occurs when "statements of characters *within the narrative* are explicitly shown to find fulfillment."¹⁷ At Nain, Jesus's compassion breaks the shadow of death and the literary prophecy is fulfilled. To repeat Jesus's feeling of compassion in later episodes would redundantly announce what has already been fulfilled. Zechariah's Benedictus is also what Johnson calls a "programmatically prophecy." By characterizing all that will follow the arrival of the "light from on high" as "the path of peace," the prophecy is a means for the reader to interpret all that is meant to follow in the Gospel.¹⁸ We are meant to understand all that follows this miracle as a continuation of the "path of peace" that is the compassion of God and Jesus.

This prophetic context can tempt us to emphasize the divine, high Christology of Jesus's compassion at Nain and to discount the very human Jesus at Nain who sees the sorrow of a mother like his own. The problem is compounded if we fail to see "compassion" as an ongoing programmatically fulfillment throughout all of Jesus's ministry and misinterpret the absence of explicitly identified emotions to be the absence of emotion. When he examines Luke's deletion of emotions from Luke's Markan adoptions without analyzing Luke's independent deployment of emotions, Fitzmyer concludes that the emotions in Mark "depict Jesus in a more human way, perhaps too human for the nobility of character that Luke sought to depict."¹⁹ Luke does portray Jesus with a greater degree of nobility, but this is an addition, not a subtraction. Luke is giving us both the human and the divine at the same time. Luke's Gospel makes this clear in its next instances of *splagchnizomai*.

The fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy moots the continued use of this word in Luke's narration of Jesus's life, but the Gospel develops the concept in Jesus's teaching ministry with the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son parables to include the human's love of neighbor and God's love of sinners.

In the Good Samaritan, Jesus answers the lawyer's question respecting the identity of the "neighbor" God commands one to love. Fitzmyer and Johnson review the multiple provocative elements Jesus imposes upon the Jewish lawyer, questioning him and others who would share his viewpoint. Both Samaritans and Jews considered themselves polluted by contact with a dead person as this victim appeared to be. Jews despised Samaritans as schismatics, and Jesus contrasted the Samaritan's kindness with opposite conduct by members of the Jewish leadership.²⁰ Fitzmyer offers the story as "a practical [!] model for Christian conduct with radical demands and the approval/rejection of certain modes of action."²¹

The Good Samaritan story is so well known, and its "provocative" elements so historical, that it is hard to appreciate "the radical demands" this "practical model" proposes. We use the term "good Samaritan" for any altruism towards strangers. We empathize with the Samaritan's fellow-feeling for the robbery victim but forget his courage. The Samaritan is traveling alone in a hostile territory when he comes upon a robbery victim who is to all appearances dead. Without any witnesses to corroborate his actions, the Samaritan moves to the victim and renders first aid. What would have happened if a group of Jewish men had come upon him? We might imagine an African American, holding money in his purse and moving the body of an apparently dead white man in a white neighborhood, knowing that a police car might roll by. The good Samaritan's feeling of compassion, like

17 Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 16.

18 Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 16.

19 Fitzmyer, vol. 28, 95.

20 Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 174-75; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV :A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 28A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 883-84.

21 Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 28A, 883.

Jesus' at Nain, is expressed in the aorist aspect; it is limited in duration. But like Jesus, the Samaritan persists in his mission, undertaking whatever additional measures are needed to care for the afflicted.

In the Good Samaritan, Jesus clearly teaches that human beings enact the same compassion that he enacted at Nain. By itself, the parable might be taken to simply command us to expand our human compassion past the boundaries that normally limit it, simply calling this another psychological profile, albeit exaggerated, of altruism like Scheffler proposes for Jesus at Nain.²² Closer study suggests that the "low Christology" of Jesus's compassion at Nain and developed by Jesus in the Good Samaritan is a radically "high anthropology." Before it resembles the Samaritan's compassion, human compassion has several thresholds to conquer. Reflecting simply on Luke's text, we are reminded that we depend upon our emotional empathy to maintain our acts of compassion; our compassion typically is not experienced in the "aorist" aspect. Arguing from psychology, theologian Elma Cornelius notes that the Good Samaritan would have us disobey the boundaries necessary to avoid the self-destruction of burnout, imprudent actions, loss of moral autonomy, and loss of self-control.²³ The same biological processes that enable human beings to commit themselves to mutual cooperation also serve to unite them in immoral actions promoting a group's self-interest.²⁴

These observations underscore the Samaritan's easily overlooked heroism, and they point us to the growing significance of the verb *splagchnizomai*. In the Good Samaritan, Jesus defines love of neighbor to include the same compassion Jesus embodies in his ministry. And that compassion is the compassion that is so "other-centered" or altruistic that it risks self-destruction. In short, we are called to emulate Jesus's compassion, and Jesus's compassion does lead to the Passion. The Samaritan must be understood in light of Nain.

The Samaritan's compassion is recognizably human, but his radical denial of self is divine. The Good Samaritan dramatizes what Jesus has already commanded in Luke's Sermon on the Plain. Human beings are to strive to be like God and love even their enemies.

27 But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit [is] that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. 35 But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful. (Lk 6:27-36)

This summarizes the theology of Godly Love that runs throughout Luke's Gospel. Not only are normative boundaries abolished for relations with one's enemies; they are also abolished for one's kith and kind. One relinquishes any possession that another steals and offers the thief even more; if another borrows a possession, one relinquishes it permanently as well, not expecting repayment (vv. 29-30).²⁵

22 Note 3 above and accompanying text.

23 Elma Cornelius, "The Motivation and Limits of Compassion," *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 69 (1) (2013): Art. #1189, 7 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.41012/hts.v69/1.1189>.

24 Shaul Shalvi and Carsten D.W. De Dreu, "Oxytocin Promotes Group-serving Dishonesty." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111:15 (April 15, 2014): 5305-5307.

25 For a concise, detailed treatment of the Love commandment in Luke and its practical application in the violent and peaceful economies of life, I

One might imagine how one might occasionally rise to the occasion and heroically emulate the Good Samaritan's compassion or even forgive one's enemies, but to do it as a way of life as did Jesus is impossible. Like all acts of heroism, Jesus at Nain and the Good Samaritan exceed normal limits of human behavior. When we consider the impossibility of adopting the Good Samaritan's singular adventure as a way of life, we might join Luke's disciples and ask, "Who then can be saved?" (18:26)

In Acts of Apostles, Luke implicitly agrees that human beings cannot match Jesus's compassion as a way of life. Tannehill's major, thoroughly developed thesis is that Acts is the second part of Luke's Gospel wherein the Risen Christ continues to act through the Spirit in the Church. Although the apostles work miracles like Jesus, there they perform no "act" that is like Jesus's compassion. The verb *splagchnizomai* appears nowhere in Acts. Luke does use the noun *splagchnon* in Acts, but in Acts the noun only signifies human "guts," not God's mercy. At the beginning of Acts, however, Peter announces that it is necessary to replace the missing member of the original Twelve.

16 My brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled which the holy Spirit spoke beforehand through the mouth of David, concerning Judas, who was the guide for those who arrested Jesus. 17 He was numbered among us and was allotted a share in this ministry. 18 He bought a parcel of land with the wages of his iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his [σπλαγχνα] *insides* spilled out. (Acts 1:16-18)

That noun that signified the source of Jesus's compassion is reversed to signify the bowels of the apostle who betrayed Jesus. The reversal of the *splagchnizomai* is also seen in the early Church's experience; its first attempts to live in common charity and radical poverty were short-lived (4:32-37; 5:1-11).

This corroborates the dilemma posed by Jesus and the Good Shepherd. If even the saints in Acts fail to actualize, we again have to ask the question the disciples posed to Jesus: "Who then can be saved?" Jesus provides the answer in the parable of the Prodigal Son, a story that dramatizes and expands the answer he has previously given the disciples, that with God all things are possible.

In the parable (15:11-32) Jesus responds to protests by the Pharisees and scribes that Jesus welcomes and eats with sinners and tax collectors (15:1-2). Johnson notes that the first frame of the story is "pure gospel – the lost are being found, the dead rising, and sinners are repenting because of the call of the prophet—then the last part...is a sad commentary on the Pharisaic refusal out of envy and resentment to accept this good news extended to the outcast."²⁶ As Fitzmyer notes, in this "two-peaked parable, the central figure is the father...[T]he parable presents the loving father as a symbol of God himself."²⁷

With the Father clearly signifying God, we directly encounter *splagchnizomai* as the mercy of God in Zechariah's hymn as *splagchnon* and actualized by Jesus at Nain. We should note, however, that this identification of the Father with God makes every act of love in this parable equally predicated on God's mercy, or *splagchnon*.

What may be seen as the "low Christology" in Jesus at Nain becomes an intimidating, radical, and impossibly "high anthropology" with the Good Samaritan and is resolved by the radically compassionate Father in the Prodigal Son. God is depicted as giving everything to his children, half to a son who wishes him dead, and the remainder ("everything I have is yours") to a son who resents him. Both his wealth and his love remain undiminished as

depend upon John Piper, *Love Your Enemies* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 1979), 153-170. Piper shows that what might be interpreted to be a commandment for completely altruistic love in Luke is also communicated in Luke to be an exchange whereby the renunciation of earthly competition and wealth is given for an ultimate reward in divine life.

²⁶ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 242.

²⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 28A, 1085.

he steadfastly continues to recover and enrich his sons. He crosses every boundary of patriarchy, distributing his wealth before his death, running out to recover his sons, and forgiving without reservation the imperfectly impenitent. Where Jesus and the Samaritan become endangered, the Father becomes ridiculous. Where Jesus and the Samaritan suffer danger by crossing every boundary in compassion, God the Father's compassion crosses boundaries that yield the ultimate injury possible for a loving Creator, ingratitude and rejection. And again, once undertaken, God's compassionate action never ceases no matter what the result.

The Prodigal Son completes the *splagchnizomai* motif in Luke's Gospel. The motif is announced in Zechariah's Benedictus that predicts that God's compassion will break upon those who dwell in darkness and death like the dawn from on high. The motif is then developed in three stories. The Evangelist carefully deploys the verb to literally break in upon the middle of each pericope, like the dawn breaking the darkness, and establish the story's turning point, thereby beautifully combining form with function. The Nain, Good Samaritan, and Prodigal Son stories teach us that Jesus embodies God's compassionate love, Jesus calls us to emulate that love, and God's constant love will forgive our constant failures to emulate it.

We have failed to recognize Luke's *splagchnizomai* motif. It offers great opportunities for relating each of the stories it modifies to each other and to the whole of Luke's Gospel. Given our reliance upon limited lectionary readings, it will be difficult to bring the motif's full force into traditional homiletics, but the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son stories are so familiar that this exegesis might be accomplished more easily than one would think. Clergy, religious, and others who routinely pray the Liturgy of Hours can reap immediate and continued benefit from this motif when praying the Benedictus at Morning Prayer.

Unfortunately, the motif's hinge event, the Raising of the Widow's Son at Nain, is limited in the Sunday lectionary to the Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year C. Except in those years when Ash Wednesday occurs before February 14, the Ninth Sunday readings are preempted by those for Trinity Sunday or Corpus Christi. The Catholic Church's Sunday readings will not again include the Raising of the Widow's Son at Nain until 2043.

This is all the more reason for the Church to expand its formal evangelization efforts beyond the liturgies. May the recovery of the *splagchnizomai* motif inform and help inspire those efforts.

Appendix I

Story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10

30 Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. 32 Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. 33 But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him [εσπλαγγχισθη] *was moved with compassion* at the sight. 34 He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' 36 Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" 37 He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Appendix II

Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15

11 Then he said, "A man had two sons, 12 and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. 13 After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. 14 When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. 15 So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. 16 And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. 17 Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. 18 I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' 20 So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and [εσπλαγγχισθη] *was filled with compassion*. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' 22 But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. 25 Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. 26 He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. 27 The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' 28 He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. 30 But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' 31 He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. 32 But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'" (15:11-32)