
The Samaritans' Refusal of Hospitality (9:51-56)

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And it happened that the days for him to be taken up^a were approaching, and he set his face^b to go to Jerusalem. 52/ And he sent messengers before his face. Having set out on their way, they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53/ but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54/ When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did?^c” 55/ But he turned and rebuked them. 56/ Then they went on to another village.

^a The Greek word ἀνάληψις (v. 51, “to be taken up”) is difficult to translate; it can mean either “taking up” or “ascension” or “death,” depending on the context.

^b I have used “face” three times, in vv. 51, 52 and 53, even though it produces a rather cumbersome translation in v. 52.

^c Finally, I follow the longer reading in v. 54 (“even as Elijah did” [ὡς καὶ Ἠλίας ἐποίησεν]), but I prefer the shorter reading in vv. 55-56.

We have now arrived at the beginning of the second part of the Gospel. Up to this point Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, has been healing and preaching in Galilee. He has revealed himself as physician, Savior, and king, the Son of God. Now he is en route to Jerusalem. We have learned from the passion predictions (9:22, 44) as well as from the account of the transfiguration (9:28-36) that the outcome of this travel will be the suffering and martyrdom of this Messiah, who is destined to become the suffering Messiah (Acts 26:23). After a solemn introduction (v. 51), the travel narrative (9:51—19:27) opens with an unusual story that is summarized more than it is recounted, and which, in parable-like fashion, signals the new and tragic orientation of this destiny.

This episode may be compared with Matt 10:5b, where Jesus forbids the evangelization of Samaria, literally the entering of a Samaritan town.¹ Luke 9:51-56 and Matt 10:5b are witnesses to the existence of a Samaritan problem. The question could also be asked of the account of Luke, but wrongfully, if its purpose was not to justify or moderate the intransigence of the Matthean Christ. It is better, however, to make a clear distinction between the Matthean and Lukan communities. The Lukan church was unaware of the ban transmitted by Matthew. It was, on the contrary, favorable to a mission

in Samaria (cf. Acts 1:8; 8:4-8; 9:31), but it sometimes came up against a certain opposition in that region (cf. Acts 8:9-25). The story reflects the Samaritans’ different attitudes in the face of the Christian mission. One village did not welcome Jesus (v. 53), whereas another one, which was probably also in Samaria, seems not to have rejected him (v. 56). So the Samaritan problem does not explain the story, although it does provide a life setting for it. The story we read here has an archaic nucleus; it is not simply a post-Easter projection back into the life of Jesus.

The Traditional Shape of the Story

In the tradition, the story had as its function to render the disciples sensitive to the risks of their profession and to instill in them a proper missionary attitude. It is possible to ascertain the traditional shape of the story that Luke has reworked. Verse 51 did not belong to it; this verse is redactional, as is shown by its syntax, vocabulary, and theology.² The story originally began with v. 52.³ It continued with v. 53a (v. 53b, which is what deals with Jesus’ intention, on the other hand, belongs to Luke’s redaction) and v. 54, which, except for the vocative “Lord” (κύριε), does not betray any signs of redactional activity (the proper names are certainly anchored in the

1 See Lehmann, *Quellenanalyse*, 143–45; Heinz Schürmann, *Lukas-Evangelium*, vol. 2.1: *Kommentar zu Kapitel 9:51—11:54* (2d ed.; HThKNT 3.2; Freiburg im B.: Herder, 1994) 31–32.

2 Syntax: ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ plus the infinitive; καὶ αὐτός, the object before the verb. Vocabulary: συμπληροῦσθαι πορεύεσθαι. Theology: the fulfillment; the journey to Jerusalem; the elevation.

3 The participle πορευθέντες (“having gone”) following a conjugated verb as well as the specification of certain locality are non-Lukan elements.

tradition). The content of v. 55 is likewise traditional, even though Luke may have rewritten it in his own way. Verse 56 is redactional in its wording, but tradition could not have ended with Jesus' criticism but must have concluded with their setting off to another destination. In short, if readers were to skip vv. 51 and 53b and not pay too much attention to the Lukan expressions, they would be dealing with the story as found in the tradition.⁴

The Lukan Composition of the Story

Luke was not inimical to the orientation of the story in the tradition. By inserting it into the beginning of the travel narrative, however, he has modified its perspective: although the reader's attention was first directed to the disciples, it is henceforth directed to Jesus. Balancing the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth (4:29-30) is the opposition encountered in Samaria, which in turn anticipates the fatal outcome of the journey to Jerusalem. It is in this way that the Gospel writer has emphasized God's plan and its being carried out in the destiny of the suffering Messiah.

In its redactional form, the unit can be subdivided as follows:

V. 51: *Jesus' principal plan*

V. 52a: *Jesus' command*

V. 52b: *an attempt at carrying it out by the disciples who have been sent*

V. 53: *opposition from anonymous Samaritans*

V. 54: *wish expressed by two named disciples*

V. 55: *Jesus' veto*

V. 56: *The beginning of the carrying out of Jesus' plan*

This unit can thus be understood both in a dynamic way, as a series of reactions, and in a static way, as a chiasmus. To my way of thinking, the two ways of reading

the text are complementary and both are required. The story's structure is similar to a balanced photograph; its movement, to the projection of a film.

The State of the Greek Text

In addition to the inevitable differences of detail in the readings of the manuscripts,⁵ we have two principal textual variants: (1) Following numerous ancient manuscripts, should we read the indication "even as Elijah did" at the end of v. 54? I would be less inclined to eliminate it as a gloss than modern editors are. Orthodox scribes may have struck it out because of an anti-Marcionite tendency (see Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.23) (see below, p. 00). (2) Should we include also, between v. 55 and v. 56, the following variant: "and he said, 'You do not know of what spirit you are. The Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives of human beings but to save them'"?⁶ This passage is less well attested than the longer text in v. 54. Moreover, the saying about the Son of Man (v. 56a) is a "floating" saying that shows up elsewhere in the Synoptic tradition and is found in different contexts and in various wordings: Luke 19:10; Matt 18:11; cf. Luke 5:32 parr. So this saying could be a gloss here. As for the words "and he said, 'You do not know of what spirit you are'" (v. 55b), they have the advantage of forming a saying by Jesus at the end of an apophthegm. But the very lack of a conclusion for the apophthegm could have occasioned successive extensions that were felt to be necessary: first at the end of v. 55, then at the beginning of v. 56. Furthermore, since the exclamation "You do not know of what spirit you are" (v. 55b) is not Lukan, I opt here for the shorter reading.⁷

4 My analysis corresponds roughly to that of Miyoshi, *Anfang*, 6–15. According to Helmut Flender (*Heil und Geschichte*, 35–36), Luke has employed an ancient tradition (vv. 51b, 52b, 53–56) that speaks of Jesus in terms of Elijah *redivivus* and so deprives him of the political component.

5 See *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (ed. American and British Committees of the International Greek New Testament Project; 2 vols; The New Testament in Greek 3; Oxford: Clarendon, 1984–87) 1:212–15.

6 Codex D contains only the first part of this reading; it does not attest the statement about the Son of Man. F. Crawford Burkitt has shown that the Old Latin version of Luke and the Latin version of the

Diatessaron originally contained the longer text of v. 54 and of vv. 55–56, whereas some important witnesses to the Vulgate have the shorter text (for Burkitt, this shorter text was the primitive Latin text edited by Jerome; see Burkitt, "St Luke 9, 54–56 and the Western 'Diatessaron,'" 48–53). J. M. Ross believes that the longer text of vv. 55–56 corresponds to the primitive text, but he wavers with regard to the text of v. 54 ("The Rejected Words in Luke 9, 54–56," 85–88).

7 The term *ὄλος* is not found elsewhere in Luke–Acts, and the expression "being of such a spirit" is foreign to Luke and can moreover be understood in two ways: (a) "You have the Spirit of God, so

Commentary

■ 51 Jerusalem, which was mentioned in the story of the transfiguration (9:31), appears here as the final destination of Jesus' ministry, literally "travel" or "journey" (the capital could be reached in three days, starting from Galilee and cutting across Samaria). In order to emphasize this perspective, Luke uses solemn, biblical expressions: "days were approaching," "he set his face,"⁸ and so on. Moreover, the emphatic "and he," as well as the triple mention of his "face" (vv. 51-53), establish Jesus' identity and his authority as the Messiah. Luke furnished a counterpart to this opening in Acts 19:21,⁹ where Paul also announced his intention of going up to Jerusalem before visiting Rome. This means that history repeated itself, albeit with progression. It was inspired by God but carried out by his envoys, who accepted the divine plan.¹⁰ The thread of events and the unfolding of the life of a

Christian are pictured as a journey.¹¹ Luke 13:22, 33; 17:11; and 19:28 remind us that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus' decision was a firm one: the expression "set his face" indicates determination and suggests that Jesus was to face up to his destiny, even to the point of accepting the unjustified suffering that was a part of it (cf. Isa 50:6-7).

Along with the concrete vocabulary concerning the journey, Luke also made parallel use of a term that was rare, abstract,¹² and ambiguous,¹³ namely, the word *ἀνάληψις*, which referred not only to Jesus' final "being taken up" in the ascension,¹⁴ but also to his passion, and perhaps to his long journey up to Jerusalem as well.¹⁵ This fuzzy and broad semantic field of the word is confirmed by the plural "the days"¹⁶ and by the present infinitive *συμπληροῦσθαι* ("were approaching"), which carries a durative sense.

behave accordingly," or (b) "Your intentions are condemnable; you have the spirit of Satan!" See Frédéric Louis Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke* (trans. E. W. Shalders and M. D. Cusin; 4th Eng. ed.; 2 vols.; Clark's Foreign Theological Library 45-46; Edinburgh: Clark, 1881, 1890) 2:12. Must one see this as a Marcionite expansion? From a formal point of view, one can compare it with the exclamation of Jesus "You do not know . . ." in Luke 2:49b; 12:56b; 13:27a; 22:60a; 23:34a; as well as in Matt 20:22a; John 8:14c; 11:49b; 2 Clem. 10.4.

8 The Old Testament uses the expression "to set one's face" in two ways: (a) in the sense of "having the intention to" (in the LXX never translated with *στηρίζω*), and (b) in the sense of "being opposed to someone" (in the LXX translated with *στηρίζω*; Jer 21:10; Ezek 6:2; 13:17; etc.). See Starcky, "Obfirmavit," 197-202, who also refers to Isa 50:7. See also Miyoshi, *Anfang*, 9.

9 See Radl, *Paulus und Jesus im lukanischen Doppelwerk*, 103-21.

10 Here and there one finds the idea of fulfillment. Moreover, Acts 19:21 states that Paul was pressed "by the Spirit" and that his visit to Rome was mandatory (theological *δέλι*).

11 See the use of *περιπατέω* ("to walk") in the epistles (e.g., Rom 6:4). On the use of *πορεύομαι* ("to go") in Luke, see Miyoshi, *Anfang*, 9-10.

12 See the same use of an abstract term for a public office (this time for an inauguration): *ἀνάδειξις* ("installation") in Luke 1:80. In contrast to

v. 51, v. 31 of this same chapter speaks of *ἔξοδος* ("departure").

13 See François Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives* (trans. Jane Haapiseva-Hunter; PTMS 36; Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1995) 102.

14 Luke uses the verb *ἀναλαμβάνω* ("to take up") for this purpose in an almost technical sense in Acts 1:2, 11, 22. The noun occurs in *T. Levi* 18:3; *Ps. Sol.* 4:18, and *Kergma Petrou*, cited by Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 6.15, 128. See Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1896; reprinted 5th ed.; New York: Scribner's Sons; Edinburgh: Clark, 1902) 262. See also BDAG, s.v.; and Gerhard Delling, "λαμβάνω, κτλ.," *TDNT* 4 (1967) 7-9.

15 See Starcky, "Obfirmavit," 197-202; Miyoshi, *Anfang*, 8-9; Gerhard Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu*, 212-17; Gerhard Voss, *Die Christologie der lukanischen Schriften in Grundzügen* (Studia neotestamentica 2; Bruges/Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965) 141; and Bovon, *Theologian*, 196, 183-84 n. 52. On the other hand, Gerhard Friedrich ("Lk 9,51 und die Entrückungschristologie des Lukas," 48-77) sees only an allusion to the death of Jesus.

16 Cf. the similar construction with the singular *τὴν ἡμέραν* in Acts 2:1 (although a part of the manuscript tradition attests the plural).

■ **52-53** The disciples were sent on ahead to prepare the Lord's way,¹⁷ like new John the Baptists (cf. "prepare" [ἐτοιμάσατε] in 3:4, quoting Isa 40:3). They were to run into opposition just as the forerunner John the Baptist had (cf. 3:19-20). Somewhat clumsily, Luke points out that they were not welcomed, because of what Jesus had in mind to do (v. 53b). The hostility between Samaritans and Jews¹⁸ in this passage is an expression, in a quasi-Johannine manner, of the lack of openness on the part of human beings to God's plan. Luke's repetition of Jesus' firm plan, which corresponded to God's will, goes along with the idea of a Christology of the suffering Messiah.

■ **54-55** At this point James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, reacted inappropriately. Luke did not doubt that God was able to give the apostles the same destructive energy that he had conferred on his prophets in former days. What is more, he put on their lips one of Elijah's expressions (2 Kgs [4 Kgdms] 1:10, 12).¹⁹ James's and John's attitude was due to their zeal for YHWH, a zeal that would resort to the use of any and all means.²⁰ In the ministries of not only Jesus but also his apostles and the church, however, God's plan is to be carried out not violently but through weakness, that is to say, through the acceptance of defeat, suffering, and finiteness. In the end, this submission turns out to be a strength, since it corresponds to God's will. That is the strength that Jesus drew on to counter his disciples' tempting proposal.²¹

The appearance of proper names is not so surprising in view of the fact that they were important for Luke's special source, L (material peculiar to Luke's Gospel alone). Should we see in their use more than an anecdotal interest? Maybe so, if we consider the fact that another tradition attributed to the same persons visions of grandeur (being seated on the left hand and the right hand of Christ, Mark 10:35-40 par. Matt 20:20-23).

■ **56** Jesus' reproof of his disciples reestablished the unity of the group, as is seen in the fact that Jesus was no

longer traveling alone (note the singular in v. 51); now the disciples were accompanying him (note the plural in v. 56). Luke says nothing about what welcome the other village might have given them. Did it open up to the message of the gospel? Luke's silence regarding this matter leaves the question open and draws our attention to Jesus' peregrinations toward his martyrdom in Jerusalem and to the procession of disciples who were soon to be called to a missionary task (10:1-20).

History of Interpretation

These verses got caught up in the controversy that Tertullian carried on against Marcion (*Adv. Marc.* 4.23.8). It appears that Marcion used the present pericope to set the merciful Christ over against the vengeful God of the Hebrew Scriptures. Tertullian replied that a distinction must be made between retribution and revenge. Not just the God of the patriarchs but also Christ are known to punish on some occasions but show tenderness on others. God acted as judge when he caused fire to come down from heaven (2 Kgs [4 Kgdms] 1:9-12). In the present pericope we see Jesus sparing the Samaritans, but at the same time vigorously rebuking his disciples.

Ambrose of Milan cast his interpretation of this passage in the context of a contrast between the potential disciples that Jesus turned away and those that he called (*Exp. Luc.* 7.22-30). As a consequence, he meditated on the virtues of simplicity, fidelity, charity, and the like. In his opinion, what Christ preferred was pedagogical clemency. What he planned to do, then, was not to call the Samaritans to follow the gospel, but to follow through on his destiny by going up to Jerusalem. The Samaritans would come around to the faith in their own time at a later date. Ambrose makes an elegant distinction between the disciples' desire to be welcomed in Samaria, to be recognized—and, one might add, to be loved—and

17 On the use of ὡς with an infinitive in a final sense, see BDAG, s.v., 9b, which refers to Acts 20:24. Some manuscripts read ὥστε.

18 See Josephus *Ant.* 20.6 §118: the massacre of the Galileans who passed through Samaria and the vengeance that ensued with the help of the Jews.

19 It does not involve, however, an exact quotation from the LXX (2 Kgs [4 Kgdms] 1:10, 12), where one twice finds the verb "devour" and not "consume."

20 The *Acts of Philip* takes up and develops this motif. During his martyrdom, Philip calls for fire from heaven to fall on his enemies and the earth to engulf them (*Acts Phil.* 132-33).

21 This theme recalls that of the temptation (4:1-13) and especially the refusal of angelic help, Matt 26:51-53; cf. Luke 23:35, 39.

the will of Christ, who aligned himself with God's plan, consequently accepting rejection and suffering. According to Ambrose, the disciples did not sin, since they stuck to the law. But Christ demonstrated perfect virtue in combining charity with the absence of revenge.

Cyril of Alexandria begins his discussion of the passage with an interpretation of Jesus' being "taken away" as an ascension into heaven of which the road of the passion was a part (*Hom. in Luc.* 56).²² To his way of thinking, the setting of his face stood for the Son's determination as a part of the plan (in the sense of the plan of salvation). He understood the episode concerning the Samaritans as a test that Jesus put his disciples to in order better to train them. It was in the first instance an exercise that was preparatory to the passion. When their Master was martyred, the apostles would have to imitate God and his Son, both of whom knew how to endure injustice, rather than follow the human reflex that would give in to the desire to show anger. It was, moreover, a lesson to be learned in view of the evangelization they were to carry on later. The disciples were indeed to be preachers rather than torturers. As stewards of what was divine, they needed to be ministers whose lives were stamped with tenderness. Cyril subtly reflected in this way on the potential abuses of ecclesiastical power.²³

Conclusion

The travel narrative begins with a conflict involving different wills. Placed at the beginning of it is, first of all, Jesus' determination, shown in his setting off on the road to Jerusalem, that is, on the road leading to his passion. The Master combined courage with perseverance and clearly demonstrated these traits. Whatever that might cost him, his plan was a willing acceptance of fitting into God's plan, for which God needed this human mediator. Then we have the Samaritans' negative will and finally

the vindictive will of the disciples, who were doubtless angry and frustrated. Both the Samaritans and the disciples were clear witnesses of the human tendency to catch on slowly, and so they did not understand either what God intended or how tortuous a route God's plan takes to be carried out. The Samaritans and the disciples operated on the level of violence and revenge; the Father and the Son, on one of persuasion and suffering, dialogue and forgiveness. Confronted by the strategy of God, the king who renounces the option of killing his enemies, human maneuvering counted on drawing on divine power, which is precisely what the Son of God was in the process of renouncing. The divine strategy, for its part, was to prevail with the passage of time, since Jesus' stance was to serve as an example. The disciples would indeed understand it, and eventually adopt it. So the gospel, when it was proclaimed, did produce disciples and give rise to communities of faith. But this very success of love, weakness, and the giving of oneself would also provoke a negative reaction on the part of those who never succeeded in becoming engaged in the process of reconciliation. During the period of the church, persecution was to be the companion of communion. In narrative fashion, vv. 52-56 tell how God's envoy turned his back on the easy way and thereby gave his disciples a lesson. The Christian mission, he told them, must submit to the same requirements. The beginning of the travel narrative thus retells the message of the end of the ministry in Galilee (9:43b-50) and foreshadows the mission that the disciples were entrusted with shortly after (10:1-20). One must be prepared to be rejected. Facing up to it is tantamount to not succumbing to either revenge or discouragement. The gospel's being rejected does not necessarily imply the annihilation of the persons who are witnesses to it. There is a certain distance between the gospel and those who proclaim it.

22 See Robert Payne Smith, *A Commentary upon the Gospel according to S. Luke, by Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, Now First Translated into English from an Ancient Syriac Version* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859) 1:253-57. There also exist four Greek fragments of this homily; see Joseph Reuss, *Lukas-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche: Aus Katenenhandschriften gesammelt und Herausgegeben* (TU 130; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984) 101-2.

23 In the Middle Ages, the church of the Occident knew of our pericope only in its expanded version with the following variant added to vv. 55-56: "You do not know what kind of spirit you are, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."

**Following Jesus in One's Life
(9:57-62)**

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57/ **And as they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58/ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59/ Then to another he said, "Follow me!" He said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60/ But he said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and spread the news about the kingdom of God." 61/ And still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62/ But Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."**

The preceding pericope (9:51-56) as well as all of the travel narrative associate Christology with ecclesiology. The present pericope (9:57-62) places the person of Jesus at the heart of the attitude of believers. But whereas the theme of *sending* (the disciples who go on ahead) was dominant in the previous verses, in these verses the center of focus is *following* (the disciples who follow). In short, the Gospel writer has given us three sayings of Jesus on the status of being a Christian in the context of three different encounters with potential disciples.

Although the verb "follow" (ἀκολουθέω) suffices to define what it means to be a Christian, since it reduces the definition to what is essential, the readers of the Gospel still have to go into what that means in the scheme of the Gospel, all the while being wary of their precon-

ceived ideas. Following someone can, as a matter of fact, denote adopting a servile attitude, a blind allegiance, a childish dependence, or an imitation that causes one to be estranged. But following also brings to mind the idea of wanting to accompany someone, to be trained, and to foster collaboration. So becoming someone's disciple or student is not necessarily a bad thing. Everything depends on who and what the teacher is, and on the student.

Analysis

In this passage Luke does not seem to be following either the Gospel of Mark or L. He must have picked up again on Q, as suggested by a comparison with the parallel in

Matt 8:18-21.¹ But while the author of the First Gospel places these verses in the context of a series of miracles, Luke puts them at the beginning of the journey, the importance of which he brings out by mentioning “going along” and “the road” in v. 57.

Matthew seems to be acquainted with only the first two of the three dialogues that Luke transmits. Following a rule of the Synoptic tradition, the third one was probably put together by Luke on the model of the first two,² with its nucleus being an isolated saying of Jesus (v. 62) that Paul would also appear to have known (see Phil 3:13).³ The basis for the excuse (v. 61), when compared with the seriousness of the expression of enthusiasm reported in v. 57 or the situation depicted in v. 59, confirms the artificial nature of the third case.

When the Synoptic tradition brought together examples of people being called, it was responding not to a historical requirement but to a catechetical necessity, which Luke also observed by adding a third case. It is instructive to compare these examples with other call narratives, e.g., Mark 1:16-20 or Luke 5:27-28. In these latter texts, the men are called by Jesus and we know their names; moreover, they put up no resistance and immediately follow their new master. Here, by contrast, those would-be disciples mentioned in vv. 57 and 61 remain anonymous and on their own think of committing themselves to serving Christ.⁴ All of them leave us guessing as to what their final decision was, while Jesus in turn lays awesome conditions on them. So the Synoptic tradition is acquainted with two types of call narratives,⁵ each with its own theological orientation. The triple tradition (Mark 1:16-20 parr.) recounts the irresistible call that the apostles, the known founding figures, received from the Lord; the double tradition (Luke 9:57-62 parr.)

stresses the permanent requirements of the Christian life. By leaving in the shadow the disciples’ names and what resulted from their being called, this tradition, followed by Luke, confronts readers with a decision to make about their faith.

It is not difficult to determine which parts of the accounts are due to the redactional work of the Gospel writers, especially Luke. As is often the case, the Gospel writer is responsible for the introduction (v. 57a).⁶ Then, except for the vocative “Master” found in Matt 8:19, the commitment the first disciple risks making (v. 57b) is identical in Matthew and Luke, because they have both drawn on the same Greek version of Q. Jesus’ answer (v. 58), also identical in Matthew and Luke, confirms this analysis.⁷

The respective wordings of the second case in Matthew and Luke differ in their beginning; in this case, Matthew must have the original version, since he follows the rule in this genre and has the disciple speak first (Matt 8:21). Luke, shocked by the “first,” which presupposes a call, has corrected the original, thus drawing on Jesus’ later answer for “follow me” (Matt 8:22), out of which he makes an initial call (v. 59a), which he has forgone using later (v. 59b). Aside from this one difference, what Jesus says (v. 59b) is the same in the accounts of the two Gospel writers.

Is it possible to go back further than Q? Yes, if we admit that the Synoptic tradition attempted to pour into a single mold two episodes whose development was originally different. What the second disciple says, “Let me first . . .,” presupposes a previous contact with Jesus, probably a call. Luke, who sensed this anomaly, perhaps recovered the original shape of the episode but developed it in a secondary way.

1 This opinion is almost unanimous. See, e.g., Schmid, *Matthäus und Lukas*, 256–57; and Miyoshi, *Anfang*, 34.

2 Note that the words “another,” “I will follow you,” “said,” and “first” (v. 61) are borrowed from the first two examples (v. 57 and v. 59).

3 These two motifs in Phil 3:13 (forgetting what is behind and focusing on the goal) are explained by the presence of Jesus’ statement (Luke 9:62) in the spirit of the apostle Paul. While I attribute the third case to Luke, Petzke (*Sondergut*, 104, 106–7) attributes it to Luke’s sources.

4 The parallel in Matt 8:21 suggests that in that tradition it is the would-be disciple who takes the initiative in the second case, just as in the first.

5 See the commentary on 5:27–28 (1:188–89). Note that Luke is fond of *πορεύομαι* (“to go”) and *ὁδός* (“way”), particularly in the account of the journey. Compared with the dative of Matthew, *πρὸς αὐτόν* (“to him”) must also be Lukan.

7 Compared with the present *λέγει* (“he says”) of Matthew, the historicizing *εἶπεν* (“he said”) of Luke is redactional.

Gospel of Thomas 86 was acquainted with Jesus' first saying, the one about the foxes.⁸ On the other hand, sufficient attention has not been paid to the fact that saying 87 of this same Gospel must have been an interpretive rereading of Jesus' second saying, the one about burying the dead: "Jesus said: 'Wretched is the body that is dependent upon a body, and wretched is the soul that is dependent on these two.'"⁹ When added to the absence in the *Gospel of Thomas* of any parallel to Jesus' third saying (the one about the plow), this observation confirms the coupling of the first two examples in the tradition. The fact that the *Gospel of Thomas* transmits only Jesus' words and not the entire apophthegms, is certainly due to the literary genre of this document. It is possible, however, that this apocryphal Gospel may have preserved the memory of the secondary character, in Q, of the dialogical structure. Jesus' sayings (on the foxes and the dead) are, in fact, not necessarily answers and do not explicitly suggest following him. In that case Q's catechetical effort would have been all the more remarkable; Q would have made up, from scratch, on the basis of some sayings of Jesus, a dialogical teaching on the radical commitment expected of disciples.

Commentary

■ **57-58** In his introduction, Luke stresses the itinerant existence of the master and his disciples¹⁰ and thus

prepares for Jesus' saying about the foxes. The future follower, who makes a statement of lasting commitment,¹¹ elicits a reply from Jesus that defines such a person as one who is perhaps unaware of the deprivations that his proposed line of action involves.¹² The text, as it develops, does not imply an opposition to following Jesus on a long-term basis. On the contrary, the status of permanent disciple is a Christian innovation (pupils followed their rabbis only for a limited period of time, the time necessary for them to be trained up to the point of getting set up on their own).¹³ The stakes in the dialogue are related to another point, namely, the existential repercussions of becoming a follower. Christian readers are reminded of Peter himself, who dared make a similar promise (22:33) without being able in the end to make good on it (22:34, 54-62).¹⁴

"Along the road": This expression, although seemingly banal, is decisively important for Luke. It refers not only to the Messiah's historical itinerary leading up to the passion (19:36; 24:32) but also to the Way that leads to life (Acts 2:28), the Christian life in its fullness, involving obedience¹⁵ and suffering, the Christian message in its concrete expression of truth (Acts 9:2).¹⁶

Jesus' warning, expressed as a maxim about the Son of Man,¹⁷ calls our attention to the fact that the Christian life implies a break with emotional ties. The Son of Man is a man on the move (13:33), a homeless person. His fate is less certain than that of agile and mobile ani-

8 This text, which in part must be reconstructed, is almost identical to that of Q. The single feature worth noting (unquestionably an interpolation by the author of the *Gospel of Thomas*) is the expression at the end of the sentence: "(and) to rest." See Schrage, *Thomas-Evangelium*, 168-70; August Strobel, "Textgeschichtliches zum Thomas-Logion 86," VC 17 (1963) 211-24; Steinhauser, *Doppelbildworte*, 117-21.

9 The play on words "body . . . body" (= corpse) represents an interpretative reiteration of the expression "the dead . . . the dead." One should keep in mind that *σῶμα* signifies primarily a dead body, a cadaver (e.g., Homer *Il.* 7.79). But it can often refer to a living body, whereas *πτῶμα* is especially reserved for a cadaver.

10 The words "in the way" can be construed with the verb "traveling" as well as with the verb "said" (see Plummer, 265). Perhaps, as is his custom, Luke deliberately allows the ambiguity to remain.

11 See Anselm Schulz, *Nachfolgen und Nachahmen: Studien über das Verhältnis der neutestamentlichen Jüngerschaft zur urchristlichen Vorbildethik* (SANT 6; Munich: Kösel, 1962) 105. On the verb ἀκολουθέω ("to follow"), see the commentary on 5:27-28 (1:188).

12 See Godet, 2:13; Plummer, 265. Matthew 8:19 specifies that it was a scribe.

13 See Schluz, *Nachfolgen*, 106.

14 On the Hellenistic usage of ἐάν ("if") for ἄν, especially after relative pronouns, see BDF §108.1 n. 3. With ἐάν, the sense is "wherever you go."

15 In the sense of living in accordance with God's will (Deut 26:17; Isa 30:21; Prov 15:10). On ὁδός ("way") in Luke, see Bovon, *Theologian*, 321-23 (a survey of the principal works).

16 Among the variants in v. 57, the most interesting is the presence of the vocative "Lord" at the end of the prospective disciple's promise. On both external and internal evidence, however, I prefer the shorter text.

mals.¹⁸ Even the humblest animals have their shelters and lairs, while the Son of Man, who is nonetheless powerful and lordly, has nowhere to lay his head. He is assuredly not deprived of security, but his security resides not in a material or human protection but in God's love and authority.

Luke implies that Christians share this uncertain destiny, which reminds us of Wisdom's fate among human beings. Following Christ with perseverance is tantamount to losing any sanctuary, the security of a nest, or maternal protection. Becoming a persevering follower of Christ means leaving the reassuring context of one's childhood and moving on as an adult in an inhospitable world such as the one suggested by the previous episode (9:51-56).¹⁹ Following a biblical and Eastern tradition, Jesus expressed himself in a figurative and exaggerated way when he recommended making these breaks with one's emotional ties. He did not expect us to deny the vital importance of either maternal love or a protective bed for a small child. What he had in mind was rather a substitution in which counting on Christ's protection and finding one's shelter in God would replace earthly and human securities. Be that as it may, the Gospel does not say everything at once. What it affirms here is that, for this substitution to work, one must accept making some breaks and sacrifices that touch on the most sensitive parts of one's existence. There will be other passages in which fellowship and protection are promised. For the moment, however, it is advisable to reflect on what is involved in passing from one reality to another, namely,

substituting God's interests for one's own advantages. The enthusiastic candidates who promise the whole world have not yet undergone the shock of destabilization that is necessarily involved.

■ 59-60 The second dialogue takes place in three phases. After an invitation, a request is made, which in turn is turned down and replaced by a sending. In this case becoming a follower involves a departure (*ἀπελθών*) that unfolds as a missionary enterprise.²⁰ The *διά-* ("through") in *διαγγέλλω* ("spread the news") indicates that a diffusion of the message in all directions is required.²¹ The content of the proclamation that has been retained by Luke—for v. 60b is entirely redactional—is the kingdom of God. There we have gathered together, in any case, in both specific and general terms, the heart of the gospel: its principal features are a concentration on God, links with Jesus (suffering Messiah and risen Lord), and a perspective that is eschatological in the long term and ecclesial in the short term.²²

In the midst of the dialogue—the traditional part—there is the apparently legitimate request to "first" go and bury one's father. Already here, as it will again be the case in v. 61, there is perhaps a reference to the prophet Elisha's request to go and say good-bye to his father and mother before following his new master, the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs [3 Kgdms] 19:19-21). The reader, whether Jew or Gentile, is aware of the imperative character of burials and how parents always want their children to accompany them right up to their final resting place.²³

17 In Q and in Luke, the conversation is about Jesus and not about people in general. On the concept of the Son of Man in Luke, see the commentary on 5:21-24 (1:182-83, esp. n. 31) and Bovon, *Theologian*, 181.

18 On the fox as a symbol of cunning craftiness and its use sometimes to depict humans (as in 13:32), see BDAG, s.v. *ἀλώπηξ*. One must understand the term in its proper sense, *pace* those few who want to see here a jackal. As for the term *φωλεός*, it signifies a "hole" or a "den." On the birds and their nests, see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978) 410. The term *κατασκήνωσις* is rare and late. Originally it referred to the action of pitching a tent and then, more generally, to taking up residence. Finally it came to signify the "dwelling" itself, the "home"

as it does here: a "refuge," a "shelter," a "nest." On this verse, see Steinhilber, *Doppelbildworte*, 96-121; Casey, "Jackals." Cf. the similar use of two animals in another saying of Jesus, Matt 10:16 (serpents and doves).

19 It is on the cross that Jesus will rest his head as he returns to the Father (John 19:30).

20 See Miyoshi, *Anfang*, 46-49.

21 See Godet, 2:14-15.

22 On the concept of the kingdom of God in Luke, see the commentary on 13:18 below (p. 000) and Bovon, *Theologian*, 69-71. QNI

23 For attitudes in Judaism, see Sir 7:33; 22:11-12; 38:16-23; *b. Ber.* 1a; see also Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*; 8-9; Str-B 4.1:560-61. As for Greek culture, one should recall that in the tragedy of Sophocles, the main concern for Antigone was to bury her brother, even in the face of the tyrant's prohibition.

The radicalism of the gospel is critical of observing the law and tradition. Jesus' saying is surprising also by virtue of the intentional ambiguity between the figurative meaning and the literal meaning of the expression "the dead."²⁴ The Gospel of Luke itself (15:24, 32) provides proof of its use in the figurative sense, in both Judaism and later in Christianity, to refer to sinners and pagans.²⁵

That being the case, Jesus' order contains a double obligation: (a) that of joining him in an immediate and total way that requires, as a necessary concomitant, (b) a break with one's family ties and with the religion of duty (burying one's father was a religious duty, a gesture of submission to the tradition related to fathers²⁶). In Jesus' eyes, it is necessary to leave one's father in order to live, just as it was necessary, according to v. 58, to give up a certain relationship to one's mother. Preferring instead to follow the call of duty, however religious, rather than loving the Lord, is tantamount to keeping company with the dead, to dying. The believer who wishes to live must follow another way, the one put forth by Jesus, namely, going and proclaiming God's reign. By means of a play on words, Jesus' aphorism begins by shutting human reality up inside the phenomenon of death, since here elective mortality is a companion of inescapable mortality. This dramatic situation is not inevitable, however, since

there is, in fact, the call and the possibility extended to "go" elsewhere than to the cemetery (the same verb "to go" [ἀπέρχομαι] is used in both v. 59 and v. 60).²⁷

■ **61-62** The world of parents is not the only one that might keep a future disciple from signing on (vv. 57-60). There is also—as Luke was at pains to add, v. 61 being redactional²⁸—the world of spouses, other family members, and those with whom one has social relationships, "those²⁹ at my home." The text stigmatizes here the man who is torn between wanting at the same time to follow Jesus and to keep up contacts with those who are dearest to him, principally his wife and his children (cf. Luke 14:26).³⁰ If Luke's Jesus does not allow that concession it is because there is a way of taking leave (ἀποτάσσειν) that, far from signifying a break or a death, maintains the relationship, even if only on a nostalgic plane. The request made by the third speaker³² (a request worded in terms that are reminiscent of Elisha's request, 1 Kgs [3 Kgdms] 19:19-21)³³ corresponds to that inner inability to tear oneself away.

Jesus' rejoinder is addressed not only to that man but, over his head, to other persons called in the time of Q and Luke. It is a word of wisdom that we meet up with in a related form in Greek literature.³⁴ The main idea is as follows: those who look back on the work already accom-

See also Philostratus *Vit. Ap.* 1.13 (Apollonius buries his father).

24 See Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 7–8.

25 See Str-B 1:489 (on Matt 8:21) and 3:652 (on 1 Tim 5:6); Rudolf Bultmann, "νεκρός, κτλ.," *TDNT* 4 (1967) 892–93.

26 See n. 23 above on the obligation to bury one's parents. Hengel (*Charismatic Leader*, 11–12) refers to God's command to Ezekiel not to bury his wife as a sign of God's judgment on Israel (Ezek 24:15–24; cf. Jer 16:1–7).

27 Several exegetes take offense at the unbearable harshness of Jesus' command. Black (*Aramaic Approach*, 207–8) proposes that the original statement was "Follow me and let the undecided (החלוצים) bury the dead (המתים)." With Marshall (p. 411), I regard this reconstruction as unnecessary.

28 See Zimmermann, *Methodenlehre*, 121.

29 *Τοῖς* here is masculine. If Luke had wanted to speak of one's possessions (*τοῖς* as a neuter), he would have used *ἐν* with the dative (involving no motion), not *εἰς* with the accusative (see Godet, 2:15).

30 Certainly, even the disciple of a rabbi would leave his family, but this would not entail a final separation; and the parents in such a case were proud of their son (see Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 13–14).

31 Ἀποτάσσειν (middle voice): "to leave one's rank," then "to separate oneself from," "to bid farewell," "to renounce."

32 According to Miyoshi (*Anfang*, 42–43, 52–55), Luke has constructed vv. 61-62 with the help of an old tradition that he used in connection with 17:31. Miyoshi also underscores the connection between vv. 61-62 and 14:25-35. In both passages, the words ἀποτάσσειν and εὐθετος are emphasized.

33 Blair ("Putting One's Hand to the Plough," 342–43) supposes that the parallel with Elisha can be stretched from v. 61 to v. 62. In this case, "putting the hand to the plow" means to take it and destroy it, as Elisha broke and then burned the yokes of his oxen. In my judgment, this hypothesis is improbable. I see v. 62 as merely depicting a ploughman focused on his work.

34 For example, in Hesiod, *Op.* 441–45: "Together with these, a strong forty-year-old man should follow

plished rather than ahead to what remains to be done, are doing a bad job of plowing. They are not headed straight toward their goal. The saying thus praises those who concentrate on their goal and criticizes those who have any regrets. For a long time already the biblical tradition had been denouncing looking back (Gen 19:17, 26; 1 Kgs [3 Kgdms] 19:20-21), that temptation to believe one can count on what is solid in what one knows (e.g., the “fleshpots” of Egypt), and that lack of confidence and faith in relation to the uncertain goods that are hoped for (Exod 16:3). The only persons fit for and adapted to (εὐθετος)³⁵ the kingdom are those who are like a laborer who has his mind set on one and only one task, one and only one target.³⁶

History of Interpretation

Irenaeus of Lyon’s *Adversus haereses* (1.8.3) allows us to go back to one of the oldest interpretations of the Gospel of Luke, that of the Gnostic Ptolemy, who was the leader of western Valentinianism in the middle of the second century. According to the summary Irenaeus gave of Ptolemy’s Valentinian interpretation, that interpretation used the three cases in Luke 9:57-62 to mark off the three categories of human beings. The first dialogue (vv. 57-58) allowed us to understand the nature of the person who is “hylic,” that is, the material person who is excluded from redemption. The third case (vv. 61-62) symbolized the “psychic” person, an intermediate character, and the second conversation, with its saying about let-

ting the dead bury their dead (vv. 59-60), illustrated the spiritual person, a member of the chosen race. Irenaeus’s text is unfortunately too short to allow us to understand the nuances of this Gnostic exegesis and to know if, in the biblical text used by Ptolemy, the conversations followed a different order from the one in our present Gospel of Luke. And, most important of all, at this place in the text, there is no rejoinder from Irenaeus, with the result that his interpretation remains unfortunately unknown to us.

Tertullian has shed light for us on a few exegetical questions (*Adv. Marc.* 4.23.9–11). He forced Marcion, the great proponent of the idea of the Savior’s tenderness, to admit that Jesus had been able to occupy the role of a judge by exposing the arrogance and hypocrisy of the person who wanted to be a disciple (vv. 57-58). Next he used the precedent of the priests and nazirites (Num 6:6-7) to explain one’s staying away from the funeral rites of one’s closest relatives (vv. 59-60). As for the prohibition of turning back (vv. 61-62), he said that we should compare that with the command given to Lot and his family not to look back (Gen 19:17). It will be seen that Hebrew Bible rules must support Jesus’ dangerous sayings. Like other ecclesiastical writers, Tertullian presupposed that the three persons who spoke to Jesus never became disciples. Far from being potential Christians, they represent instead hopeless cases.

We find a similar appeal to the Hebrew Bible in the Alexandrian church writer Origen, from whom at least three fragments have come down to us.³⁷ But it was

with the plow, after he has breakfasted on a four-piece, eight-part loaf, someone who puts care into his work and will drive a straight furrow, no longer gaping after his age-mates, but keeping his mind on his work” (Loeb 122). See also Pliny the Elder, *Nat. hist.* 18.48–49 §§171–79: “When plowing finish the row and do not halt in the middle while taking breath” (Loeb 5.301). In Epictetus, *Ench.* 7, there is an instance with the same statement: Whoever leaves a ship to get water should fix his eyes on the ship. If the captain calls out, he should leave everything and answer the call. In the same way, it happens in real life, Epictetus concludes. If the captain calls out, a man should leave his wife and child and run to the ship.

35 *Εὐθετος* literally means “well placed,” “usable,” “practical,” “suitable,” “convenient,” “useful.” See Luke 14:35 and Heb 6:7. See also BDAG s.v.

36 In *L’Évangile selon Luc* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1924; reprinted Frankfurt am Main, 1971) 290, Alfred Loisy sees in the first encounter (vv. 57-58) a call to renounce every comfort; in the second (vv. 59-60) a call to separate oneself from everything that is not connected with the kingdom of God; and in the third (vv. 61-62) a call to view the kingdom of God as the only goal worth striving after.

37 Origen *Hom. in Luc.* frgs. 66 (= Rauer 154), 67 (= Rauer 156) and 68 (= Rauer 157). See H. Couzel, F. Fournier, and P. Périchon, eds., *Origène, Homélies sur s. Luc: Texte latin et fragments grecs: Introduction, traduction et notes* (2d ed.; SC 87; Paris: Cerf, 1962) 514–17; Max Rauer, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 9: *Die Homilien zu Lukas in der Übersetzung des Hieronymus und die griechischen Reste der Homilien und Lukas-Kommentars* (2d ed.; GCS 49 [35]; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959) 288–89.

especially the text in the Gospel that Origen sought to understand. In his opinion, v. 58 is a definition not only of the suffering Christ's itinerary but also of the fate of believers who "will have to suffer in the world" (in connection with which he cited John 16:33). An allegorical light was shed on v. 60: coming to the faith corresponds to dying (reference was made to Gal 6:14 and 2 Cor 4:18). The father who died is the devil, and his death was evidently something good in that it allowed the young man no longer to have to take care of him (cf. the prohibition of touching a cadaver in Num 19:16) but instead to be free to listen to the Savior's voice. As for the third case (vv. 61-62), it, too, is to be understood following a spiritual reading: it is one's soul that must be plowed, in order to be rejuvenated and to be allowed to receive the seed of the divine Word (in which connection he quoted Jer 4:3 and Ps 37 [36]:27).

Whereas Ambrose made a striking contrast between the rejected candidate (the first case) and the disciple who was called (the second case) (*Exp. Luc.* 7.22–43), whom he compared directly, Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, focused on the differences in their respective situations (*Hom. in Luc.* 57–59):³⁸ the first one was wrong in wanting to assert himself; the second had the privilege of being spoken to by the Savior. In his first homily, devoted to vv. 57-58, he used Heb 5:4 and the example of Aaron to support his contention that God chooses his ministers. It is not up to any person to offer their collaboration to the great King. If one is not accepted—a wise observation on his part—it is because of not having severed one's links with the world. Cyril gave in to the tendency to allegorize when he claimed to have tracked down dangerous demons behind the foxes and the birds. He was not the only one to do so. In the second homily, devoted to vv. 59-60, Cyril held that, contrary to normal usage, "bury" does not here mean "inter" but rather "take care of someone up to the point that they draw their last breath." Jesus never forbade anyone to participate in the interment of their father. On the contrary, Scripture commands us to honor our parents. What Jesus initiated

was the establishment of a scale of values. In his eyes, the example of Abraham, who was invited to offer his son (Gen 22:1-19), illustrated the priority that must be given to love of God over love of one's family. The third homily, which was an explanation of vv. 61-62, sought to describe the uncertain fate of divided souls, torn between societal ties and the call of the Gospel.

On two occasions Gregory the Great quoted v. 60 in the *Moralia in Iob*. In book 4.27–51, he criticized the disciple for his hypocrisy. Unlike the three persons in the Gospels who were raised from death (Jairus's daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus), this disciple was not saved from spiritual death since, although he was a sinner, he persisted in swaggering and hid his true intentions. In book 7.30, 41 Gregory saw in the same disciple a man who was making progress in his spiritual journey. Since the Gospel requires us to leave everything behind, Jesus' saying is justified. Although, for the sake of the Lord, he was forbidden to bury his father out of a carnal tendency, in the name of the same Lord he was commanded to perform similar actions out of religious charity toward strangers.

In connection with this same v. 60, Bonaventure referred to Acts 6:2 (*Comm. in Luc.* 9.108).³⁹ Since the apostles were freed from domestic tasks and from waiting on others so that they could devote themselves to being servants of the Word, it is better to take care of one's soul than one's body and it is understandable that the Lord invites us to proclaim the Gospel rather than practice funeral rites; there are plenty of people who can busy themselves with such things.

As for v. 62, it nourishes spirituality, especially the monastic variety; in the light of the use of the metaphor of plowing, Pope Leo the Great reckoned that Christians, as new beings, could not turn back "to the old situation of instability" (*Tract.* 71 §6).⁴⁰ The Venerable Bede, Thomas Aquinas, and Francis of Assisi all quoted the same verse; the first of them used it in order to describe the hard preparation of the heart for doing good,⁴¹ the

38 Payne Smith, 1:258–71. There also exist several Greek fragments, frgs. 96–99; see Reuss, *Lukas-Kommentare*, 103–5.

39 R. P. Bernardini, ed., *Bonaventure Opera omnia*, vol. 7 (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1882–1902) 250–51.

40 Item alius de passione Domni 6 (CCSL 138A, p. 439).

41 The Venerable Bede, *In Lucae Evangelium expositio* 3.1864–68 (ed. David Hurst; CCSL 120; Turnhout: Brepols, 1960) 213.

second to free monks from appeals from their families,⁴² and the third in order to justify the vow of obedience.⁴³

Conclusion

As 9:51 and 9:52-56 have amply indicated, Jesus and his disciples have set off on their journey. Verse 57 serves as another reminder of that. As with all journeys, there is the departure, the actual journey itself, and the arrival at the destination. The pericope under study here makes us aware of this triple reality that is also characteristic of every life, especially a Christian one. If the journey itself and the arrival at the destination are referred to only in passing (the journey in v. 57 by the verb *πορεύομαι* “going along the road,” and the arrival at the destination in vv. 60 and 62 by the mention of the kingdom of God), the departure, on the other hand, is at the heart of the pericope, along with all the implied breaking off of ties. By this concentration on separation, the text thus shifts from the teacher (9:51) to the pupils, from Jesus to his disciples. While 9:52-56 showed us the disciples at work, detached from their origin to the point that they went on ahead of their master, the verses involved in our present study, vv. 57-62, bring onto the stage other disciples or, to be more precise, those who are potential disciples, postulants, applicants, candidates.

What Jesus said to them is, at first sight, frightening, intolerable, appalling. Do we not sometimes have an urgent need to “lay our head” somewhere? Do we not also have the right to keep watch over our dead ones, especially those closest to us? Do we not have a direct responsibility with respect to our spouses, children, parents, friends, colleagues, employees, or bosses? In my opinion, this text does not answer these questions, at least not at first. It takes up another theme and asks one, and only one, question: How is our relationship with Christ, and therefore with God, established? That is, how should it be established? The three candidates are reported to have been willing. They wanted to live in Jesus’ company, whether that wish was verbalized or not.

That was already something, and yet it was not what fit the bill, for two reasons. First of all, because one’s willingness must move this wish from the stage of wishing to that of carrying it out. In the second place, because one must understand in one’s mind the meaning of this dream of being in the company of Jesus and what it really entails by way of demands made, and what it really promises.

And in that respect the images speak for themselves. These images that are offered to hesitant and well-intentioned candidates, though harsh, are also indications of love. If you want to “go off” with me, said Jesus to the first candidate, you will have to count on an adult Christian life, devoid of the maternal protection that is so desirable. He made it clear to the second candidate that he would have to count on a life of faith, which requires an intellectual and existential break with one’s past, one’s ancestors, one’s roots, and one’s tradition, which is what the father in the story represents. He informed the third candidate that following him would involve saying farewell to all social contacts, ruling out all nostalgia and refusing to have his soul torn in different directions and divided, with one half turned in the direction of the forward thrust of the kingdom, and the other backwards, in the direction of an idealized image of one’s origins, a past experienced as one of advantages.

But why give up all these things? There would not even be any advantage, in the short run. On the contrary, the prospect would involve living a life resembling Jesus’, and its outcome was known. The prospect held out was an itinerant life without rest (v. 58), a harsh job bearing witness (v. 60), and working without distraction (v. 62).

Still, even after considering the required separation, which involves loss, and the journey, which entails difficulties, the promised destination precludes viewing this decision in favor of Christ as a masochistic or stupidly painful act. I maintain that this text resonates with the same *joie de vivre* and with God’s same tenderness as in the Magnificat (1:46-55), or the saying about the little ones (10:21). For the reign of God is not just at the end

42 Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea in quatuor evangelia* ad Luc 9.62 (*Nuova editio Taurinensis*, vol. 2 [ed. Angelico Guarienti; Turin: Marietti, 1953] 140); he specifically cites Bede.

43 Francis of Assisi, *Admonitions* 3.10 and the *Second*

Rule (also called *Regula Bullata*; see idem, *Écrits* [ed. and trans. Théophile Desbonnets et al.; SC 285; Paris: Cerf, 1981; reprinted with additions and corrections, 2003] 96–97, 184–85).

of the furrows that one plows (v. 62) but already in the tone of what we say (v. 60b), and even in the wounds associated with our farewells (vv. 58 and 60a).

Even after we become disciples—which is what this text suggests is involved, in the first instance—we still remain in the world. The Christian life is not to be situated outside life in general. Once we become involved as followers of Jesus, we are led to redefine—and here the text provides indirect help with doing it—our relation-

ship, which has now become a Christian one, with our relatives, our past, and our social, familial, and professional present. This network of relationships is no longer to be determined by unconscious processes, inherited restrictions, or social necessities. Instead we will be on ethical ground, where we will be given a chance to exhibit our liberty, the expression of our love, and our responsibility.