

THE CONCEPT OF MERCY IN LUKE-ACT AS A CHALLENGE TO DISCIPLESHIP

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Abstract

The Catholic Church officially declares Dec. 8, 2015 to Nov. 20, 2016 as Holy Year of Mercy otherwise known as a Jubilee of Mercy. By this singular act the Church calls on Christ faithful, and reminds them of the demand "to be merciful to all as their heavenly Father" (Lk. 6:36), thus the Jubilee motto: "Merciful Like the Father," The call serves as a free and open invitation to follow the merciful example of the Father. The concern of the study, however, is the challenges and responsibilities that the motto of the Jubilee of Mercy imposes on members of Christ faithful as children of God. The study traces the motto back to the Sermon on the Plain as recorded by Luke, hence the concept of "mercy" in Luke-Acts. It examines the various lexemes associated with mercy in Luke-Acts, and hermeneutically draws out some of their possible implications. The study adopts word-study exegetical method. The study argues that the notion of "merciful Father" connotes moral and ethical qualities that aptly summarises God's relationship with human in salvation history. Consequently, the Church's invitation to members of Christ faithful, and the human race in general, is understood as a call to retrace the history of salvation and follow the path of the Father in human dealings with fellow human, and with the environment

Keyword: Jubilee, mercy, holy year, father, salvation, Luke-Acts

1.0 Introduction

The Catholic Church officially declares Dec. 8, 2015 to Nov. 20, 2016 as Holy Year of Mercy otherwise known as a Jubilee of Mercy. By this singular act the Church calls on Christ faithful, and reminds them of the demand "to be merciful to all as their heavenly Father" (Lk. 6:36), thus the Jubilee motto: "Merciful Like the Father," The call serves as a free and open invitation to follow the merciful example of the Father. The concern of the study, however, is the challenges and responsibilities that the motto of the Jubilee of Mercy imposes on members of Christ faithful as children of God. The study traces the motto back to the Sermon on the Plain as recorded by Luke, hence the concept of "mercy" in Luke-Acts. Incidentally, the Gospel of Luke is traditionally thought as "the Gospel of Mercy." God's merciful love binds the whole book together, thus its "leitmotif." The gospel also contains a cluster of parables in chapter 15 which are unique to it, and which further highlight the merciful love of God. The gospel equally places special emphasis on the universal scope of the divine mercy, thereby presenting its content as a distinctive characteristic of the Kingdom of God dawning upon the world through Jesus (Stackpole, 2015, Sept. 28). Nevertheless, the study observes that the choice of a passage in Luke as the motto for the Jubilee Year of

Mercy is not exclusively based on the above elements. There is something in the choice of the gospel of Luke, and above all, in identifying the Jubilee motto with Luke 6:36.

The study adopts a qualitative research method with secondary resources mainly that consist mainly of reference materials. It uses word study approach and reflects on some of the materials as provided in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament⁷ (TDNT) and in the Exegetical Dictionary of New Testament (EDNT). It examines the various lexemes associated with mercy in Luke-Acts, first linking them with the pre-Christian usage, especially in the OT, and hermeneutically draws out some of their possible implications. The uniqueness of the term used in Luke 6:36 to express the adjective “merciful” and the image of the Father as found in the text are the primary areas of interest.

2.0 The Concept of Mercy in the Pre-Christian Literature

The concept of mercy in classic Greek is closely associated with the word group ἐλεέω. It has a kind of relationship with πάθος (suffering, misfortune) and φόβος (terror, fear/ awe, reverence, respect). It shares a closer affinity with φθονο (envy, jealousy), for they all are concerned with the welfare of the other. But none of the linguistic elements is identical with ἔλεος or ἐλεεῖν. Rudolf Bultmann (1989) draws attention to the broader field ἔλεος/ἐλεεῖν as encompassing mercy, sympathy and awe/reverence/respect (αἰδώς). Hence ἔλεος/ἐλεεῖν can be used with both αἰδεῖσθαι and οἰκτεῖρεν (sympathy, pity, compassion).

2.1 Ἐλεος in the Old Testament Writings

The Hebrew $\sim x; r'$ (to have compassion), $!n x$ (to show favour, to be gracious), $ds x$ (mercy/steadfast love), $lm x$ (to spare, to have compassion), $\sim wx$ (to pity, to look upon with compassion), $hlm x$ (mercy) and their respective Hebrew cognates are among the words that convey the idea of mercy. However, the first three dominate the discussion in the Old Testament. The concept is captured in the LXX as ἐλεέω (to have mercy on), οἰκτεῖρω (to pity, to have compassion on), σπλάγχνον (entrails, compassion) and συμπαθέω (to sympathise) and/or χάρις (grace). The dominance of ἐλεέω makes it expedient for the study to pay more attention to the word group, and still without overlooking the close relationship between the word and other terms associated with the concept of mercy.

Thus the noun, ἔλεος, as seen in the LXX is generally used for $ds, x, ,$ and less frequently (ca. 6x) for $\sim ym \dot{x}] r; ^{\wedge} Eλεέω$ appears mostly for $!n; x'$ (qal). It is sometimes translated from $\sim h; r'$ (pi), $lm; x'$ (ca. 6x), and $\sim xn$ (ni and pi). On the other hand, ἐλεημοσύνη/nh is mostly a rendition of $h n q' d' c.$, and $e)leh/mwn$ is of $!WN x;$ (cf. Bultmann, 1989; Staudinger, 1990, p.429). But more interesting for the study is the link between ἔλεος and the Hebrew $ds, x, \#$. The latter denotes an attitude of human or God emanating from mutual relationship. It is the very attitude which one expects of the other in a relationship—trust, faithfulness and love. It is a presence that protects, secures and reassures in the mutual dealings (Ps 109:12, 16; Prov 11:17; 14:22; 19:22; 21:21). Expressing the same in a more theological term, one may say, it is covenantal, obligatory and reciprocal. Consequently, the meaning of $ds, x, ,$ for the Hebrew mind, oscillates between faithfulness in covenant obligation and love or grace; hence the translation usually has $e \& leo \$$ or ἐλεημοσύνη (cf. (Gen 47:29; Prov 3:3; 16:6 [LXX: 15:27]).

Another point of interest in the use of $ds, x, ,$ is the emphasis on the perspective of the relationship, bearing in mind that $ds, x, ,$ implies both obligation and favour. As Bultmann (1989) aptly observes:

If in human relationships the element of obligation may yield before that of favour, so on God's side *ds, x*, particularly comes to denote grace. God's *ds, x*, too, rests on the *tyriB*. by which He has freely bound Himself to the people, so that the righteous can appeal to God's *ds, x*, assuming that they for their part have kept their obligations. Those who have made and kept the covenant are the *~ydiy\ x* (pious and righteous ones), and they are called the righteous (Isa 57:1 [*qyDiCh*; ^]), the upright (Mic 7:2; Prov. 2:7f. [*rv' y'*]), and those who fear God (Ps 85:8f)... But the righteous can appeal to their *~ydiy\ x* (righteousness, good deeds); God takes pleasure in such *ds, x*, and the righteous can also boast of God's *ds, x*, (Ps 40:10; 59:10,16; 63:3; 88:11; 136:1ff.; Isa 63:7; Judg. 2:20 (LXX always *ἔλεος*)).

In other words, God's *ds, x*, always means his faithful, merciful help and loving kindness (Ps 40:10; 59:10, 16). It is *ἔλεος*. It is both the promise of God and his faithfulness in fulfilling the promise. Bultmann (1989) warns against presumption and despair: one cannot lay any legitimate claim on the promise (*ds, x*). Yet the faithfulness (*ds, x*) of God to his covenant and promise makes it possible for one to speak about it with certainty. It is also the same faithfulness of God and that makes it possible, even in the face of human unfaithfulness, that God does not retreat from his promise, and not even could he act otherwise. It is in this context that God's *ds, x*, assumes the character of pardoning grace (Ex. 34:6f.; Num. 14:19; Jer. 3:12f.; Lam. 3:22f.). And he keeps to the covenant and promises in spite of human unfaithfulness. This is possible only because of the unfathomable forgiveness of God. It is also from his *ds, x*, that human expects the definitive redemption from every need. This makes the *ds, x*, of God an eschatological reality (Isa. 54:8; 55:3; Mic. 7:20; Ps 85:7; 90:14; 130:7) that forms and modulates the history of salvation (Isa. 54:10; 63:7; Jer. 31:3; Mic. 7:20).

Another area that may draw the attention of the reader is the relationship between *ds, x*, and *~ymix] r*. It can be said with some qualification that both terms may express the same reality. However, *~ymix] r*; originally denotes "emotion," or the "seat of a feeling" which is felt physical (cf. Gen. 43:30; 1 Kgs. 3:26; Prov. 12:10). Yet *~ymix] r*; , like the Greek *ἔλεος*, is neither *πάθος* in the Greek sense, nor *φόβος* nor *εὐελύπη* (suffering). Although it is earlier associated with the human entrails or the female uterus (Cerbelaud, 2005, p.1020), the original sense is oneness with another, especially as found between parents and children or siblings (Amos 1:11; Hos 2:19; Isa 63:15f.). It may seem to be related with "pity" or "sympathy." But it is precisely "love." Thus *~ymix] r*; and *~xr* depict the act or expression of love rather than the emotion. So, as *<ym] & r*^ is often combined with *<y] s* j &*, *<jr*, and */njt* to denote gracious action rather than emotion (Ex 33:19; 2 Kings 13:23; Ps 102:13; cf. Ps 103:8; 116:5). Like *ds, x*, , *~ymix] r*; ^ may also be the grace of the forgiveness (Ps 51:1; 79:8; Dan 9:9) granted to Israel when it repents (Deut 30:3; Isa 55:7). Thus *~ymix] r*; ^ becomes an eschatological hope (Isa 14:1; 49:13; 54:7; Jer 12:15; 33:26; Ezek 39:25; Mic 7:19; Zech 1:16).

2.2 *ds, x*, and *~ymix] r*; in the Rabbis

In the language of later Judaism *ds, x*, and *~ymix] r*; can no longer or hardly be distinguished, just as *ἔλεος* and *οἰκτιρμοί*, which are now used interchangeably. Both terms

can be employed for human kindness and pity (Ecclus 28:4; 2 Macc 4:37; 4 Macc 9:4; Jos. Bell., 1, 352, 560 etc). But the Rabbis see more in $\delta\varsigma, \kappa\alpha$, as the act of love (Ab., 1, 2), popularly associated with $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$, and used especially for the mercy of God (cf. Wisdom 9:1) and his “faithfulness” in keeping to his promise (Ecclus 47:22). $\sim\gamma\mu\iota\kappa\lambda\iota$ is therefore LXX $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ or $\omicron\iota\kappa\tau\iota\rho\mu\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ (cf. Ecclus. 5:6; Wisdom 6:6; 11:9; 12:22; 2 Macc 6:16; 8:5). God acts according to his mercy ($\kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha}$ $\tau\acute{\omicron}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ =, cf. Tob 8:16; Ecclus 50:22; 51:3; 1 Macc 13:46; Ps. Sol. 2:40) and his $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ is gracious action (Tob 7:11). In line with the LXX (Isa. 45:8), various terms, also eschatological, are used to describe the $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ of God, which is shown to his chosen ones ($\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\lambda\epsilon\kappa\tau\omicron\iota$ cf. Wis. 3:9; 4:15). And the age of salvation is the age of $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ (2 Macc 2:7; 7:29).

In considering the above understanding, the Rabbis draw the essential ethical consequence of $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ as gracious action of God, and transfer to the human domain. Thus the argument: if the vocation of human is to imitate God, human must develop the quality of mercy within human self. It is on this strength that the Talmud states: “Since God is gentle and merciful, be you also gentle and merciful” (*TB Shab*, 133 b). And “He who shows himself merciful towards others will be treated by the Heavens with mercy, whereas he who shows no pity for his fellow man will have no right to the pity of the Heavens.” Similarly, the whole Jewish people was urged, as indicated by another text in the Talmud, to be “merciful and modest, and to practice acts of kindness” (*TB, Yev*. 79a).

3.0 The Concept of Mercy in Luke-Acts

3.1 The New Testament Background of $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\epsilon}\omega$

Some of the terms employed in the NT to convey the idea of ‘mercy’ may include the verb $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\epsilon}\omega$, “to have mercy on,” with its nominal and adjective forms $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ (mercy) and $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\eta}\mu\omega\nu$, “merciful” respectively. Others are $\omicron\iota\kappa\tau\epsilon\acute{\iota}\rho\omega$, “to pity,” “to have compassion on,” with its noun, $\omicron\iota\kappa\tau\iota\rho\mu\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$, and the adjective, $\omicron\iota\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\rho\omega\nu$; $\sigma\pi\lambda\alpha\gamma\chi\nu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$, with its noun $\sigma\pi\lambda\acute{\alpha}\gamma\chi\nu\omicron\nu$ (Lk. 1:78), which bears on “being moved with compassion;” and $\sigma\upsilon\mu\pi\alpha\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ (Heb. 4:15; 10:34: *to be affected with the same feeling as another, to sympathize with, to feel for, have compassion on*), and the adjective $\sigma\upsilon\mu\pi\alpha\theta\acute{\eta}\varsigma$ (1 Pet. 3:8: *sympathetic*). In all the usage, however, the frequency of the family word supersedes other terms in the NT.

It is important to note that the use of the term in NT is overtly derived from the OT thoughts and Rabbinic influences. Secondly that the only addition attributed to the NT is the association of the concept to the person of Jesus, his life, his works and teachings, and above all his sacrificial death on the cross. They are the revelation of the merciful love of the Father for humanity (Stackpole, 2015, Sept. 21). In short, Jesus is the Son of God overflowing with merciful love of the Father. And one of the prominent terms that portrays the act is located within the word group of $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\epsilon}\omega$.

There are about thirty two instances of the verb ($\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\epsilon}\omega$) in the New Testament (including the three appearances of $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\omega$ cf. Rom. 9:16; Jude 22, 23), twenty seven of the noun (excluding the controversial Titus 1:4, cf. Staudinger, 1990, p.429), but only two cases of the adjective. $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\theta\eta\mu\omicron\sigma\upsilon\acute{\nu}\eta$, as act of giving or charitable, appears in thirteen places, and the substantive adjective $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\eta}\mu\omega\nu$ in two place (cf. Morgenthaler, 1958, p.94). Remarkable in the entire outlay is the fact that the NT just as the LXX deploy the terms to express kindness, or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, and/or a desire to relieve them from their misery (Thayer, 2000).

Four instances of the 32 appearances of $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ are attributed to Luke (16:24; 17:13; 18:38, 39). They are found in the imperative active aorist ($\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\acute{\eta}\sigma\acute{\omicron}\nu$) of the second person (see also

Matt. 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30, 31; Mk 10:47, 48). They connote the idea of prayer of request (cf. Perschbacher, 1995, p.39) from humans in miserable condition. The afflicted solicits for help, hence the invocation of human mercy towards humans. Theologically, it is about the coming of the divine mercy into the world of human misery (Staudinger, 1990, p.430). Such understanding in contrast to the Greek mind but close to Hebrew's makes *ἔλεος* a moral and divine quality of God, which is required of human in human dealings with fellow human. This will further inform the meaning of the motto for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which argues that the moral and divine quality of God should set the pace in the daily human transactions.

The noun form of the word is sometimes represented in masculine gender, and other times in neuter. The latter form, however, is attested to be more common in Hellenistic writing, and the former in classic Greek (cf. Staudinger, 1990). But what is of more significant for the study is that the representation of the noun form is found only in the Gospel Matthew (3x) and Luke (6x), and in Pauline letters (10x).

3.2' *Ἐλεέω/ ἔλεος/ ἐλεημοσύνη in the Works of Luke*

3.2.1' *Ἐλεος/ἐλεέω in Luke*

The instances of *ἔλεος* in the Gospel of Luke supersedes any other book in the NT (cf. Morgenthaler, 1958, p.94). In the six instances of the noun in the Gospel of Luke, five are located in the first chapter (50, 54, 50, 72, 78), and the only other one in 10:37. *Ἐλεος* in many instances is translated from the OT *ḥs, x*, (cf. Mic 6:8; Hos 12:7; Ps 101:1; Jer 9:23; Zech 7:9; Hos 4:1). It conveys the original OT sense of 'mercy' (cf. Hos. 6:6), which human as such owes his/her neighbour in mutual relationships (cf. Matt 9:13; 12:7; 23:23) or in their daily encounters (Lk. 10:37).

Again, the LXX *ποιεῖν ἔλεος* (lit. to do mercy), which is a direct translation of the Hebrew *ḥs, x*, will influence Luke's understanding in 10:37, referring to the act of the Samaritan. In concrete terms, it denotes the exercise of the virtue of mercy to fellow human irrespective of socio-cultural or religious affiliation. However, Luke will go further than any Synoptic in his understanding of *ἔλεος* (compare Lk. 11:42 and Matt. 23:23: *ἔλεος* in is replaced with *ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ* [love of God]). In other words, Luke does not restrict *ἔλεος* to mercy. He includes as well the sense of love, hence "loving-mercy" or "loving-kindness." The accent in Luke, therefore, is not necessarily on the use of *ἔλεος* to depict mercy. It is on the thought that the divine *ἔλεος* directs and modulates the human *ἔλεος* (Staudinger, 1990, p.430). It is the divine that dictates the rhythm of human relation to fellow humans. The same understanding is obvious in the motto of the Jubilee Year, though translated from the adjective *οἰκτιρῶν* rather than from the word group of *ἔλεος/ἐλεέω*.

' *Ἐλεημοσύνη in Luke-Acts*

Besides the three instances in Matthew, the other nine occurrences in the NT are distributed between the two works of Luke (cf. Morgenthaler, 1958, p.94) in the ratio of 1:4, thus Lk 11:41; 12:33; and Acts 3:2, 3, 10; 9:36; 10:2, 4, 31; 24:17. The noun appears five times in the accusative singular (Lk 11:41; 12:33; Acts 3:2, 3, 10), twice in the nominative (Acts 10:4, 31) and accusative (Acts 10:2; 24:17) plural, and once in the genitive plural (Acts 9:36). It is only in Acts in the entire NT texts that the plural form *οἰκτιρῶν* occurs (9:36; 10:2,4,31; 24:17). It denotes the *act* of sympathy, charitableness, compassion, which is concretely expressed through material gifts. In other words, it is expressed in Luke as benevolent activity toward the poor, a *kind deed, donation, alms/almsgiving, charitable giving* (see also Mt 6:1, 2, 3; cf. Gingrich, 1983, p.62).

The word is unknown in classical Greek. Even though the practice of alms giving is in place, there is no compelling need for the Greeks and the Romans to labour on a term to express the practice of “giving of alms to the poor.” And when and wherever the practice occurs, it is never considered meritorious. It is rather seen as emotional feeling proceeding from human. It is simply human “pity” in its wide sense.

However, the meaning of ἔλεημοσύνη as “mercy toward the poor,” “gift to the poor,” or “alms” occurs for the first time in the LXX (cf. Prov. 21:26; Dan 4:27). It becomes the standard translation of *qdc* (righteousness), especially where the OT speaks of the graciousness of God or gracious God in relation to his people, the chosen and the pious ones (Isa 1:27; 59:16; 28:17; Ps. 32:5; 23:5; 102:6, etc.). Almsgiving is then transformed into meritorious, and can even play a significant role in the forgiveness sins (Prov. 11:4; Dan 4:24, etc.). It is then seen as a condition of salvation (Isa 58:6-12).

The word further assumes in the NT a more restricted meaning that signifies the *love for the poor* as a virtue, and the *act of giving to the poor* as a deed. The statement in Lk. 12:33 could have been influenced by the Jewish popular theology of almsgiving (cf. Tob 4:8f; 1 En. 38:2; 2 En. 50:5; SB I, 429-431; see also Matt. 6:19-20) (see Marshall, 1978, p. 531). However, the use of ἔλεημοσύνη in Lk 11:41, which is not without some hermeneutic issues, warns against externalism. In other words, the concern in the section (Lk 11:38-41) is not only with ritual washings. God demands of each person the sincere heart which gives alms (Marshall, 1978). In Acts, ἔλεημοσύνη is directly associated with the verbs of action: ποιέω (9:36; 10:2; 24:17; also Matt 6:2, 3cf. Tob 1:3; 16:4, 7.; Eccles 7:10) and δίδωμι (Luke 11:41; 12:33). It informs the reader of Luke that the principle of ἔλεημοσύνη is built on action. There is also in Act, a significant connection between ἔλεημοσύνη and the temple (3:2, 4, 10), prayers (10:2, 4, 31) offering (24:17) and good work (9:36). It suggestively reveals the belief and practice of the early Church, where *almsgiving* alone does not speak all about Christian belief, hence cannot be parallel to prayer, offering (sacrifice) and good work. It rather complements the other ethical and moral qualities expected from the Christians.

3.3 Σπλαγχνίζομαι/σπλάγχνον in the Two Volumes of Luke

Σπλαγχνίζομαι/σπλάγχνον is another word group that conveys the notion of mercy. Outside Lk. 1:78, the noun (σπλάγχνον) or the adjective (εὐσπλαγχνος) never occurs in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Morgenthaler, p.142). But the verb is restricted to the Synoptics (Koester, 1989). And the lexical family is associated with the Greek understanding of the “seat of the more violent passions” (of anger or love), and the Hebrew “seat of the tenderer affections, especially kindness, benevolence and compassion.”

3.3.1 Σπλαγχνίζομαι in Luke

In the twelve instances of the verb in the NT (Matt. 5x [9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34], Mk. 4x [1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22], Lk 3x [7:13; 10:33; 15:20]), it appears always in a context that depicts Jesus’ unique attitude, and which is expected from Christians. For example, in the parable of the prodigal (Lk 15:11-32), one observes the juxtaposition of σπλαγχνίζομαι (v.20) and ὀργίζομαι (v.28), which describes in the strongest terms the human emotions in order to bring out the totality of mercy or wrath with which God claims the human in his saving act (cf. Hoester, 1989). In another parable in Luke, it is about the Good Samaritan (10:25-37). Hoester argues again that σπλαγχνίζομαι (v.33) is shown to be the basic and decisive attitude in human, hence the Christian acts. Remarkable in both parables is the use of the verb in the absolute sense (10:33; cf. 15:20). It is used in 7:13 with the preposition ἐπί

and the dative of person. It conveys the same meaning of pity and sympathy, and assumes a messianic posture.

3.3.2 *Σπλάγχωνιν Luke-Acts*

In the eleven occurrences of the noun, it is always in plural form. It further appears only in Acts 1:18 (cf. 2 Macc. 9:5f; 4 Macc. 5:29) in the literal sense of bowels or entrails. Else it is always in the figurative sense: the seat of the emotions, that is, the *heart* (Lk 1:78; 2 Cor. 6:12; 7:15 Phil 2:1; Col 3:12; Phlm 7, 20; 1 J 3:17 or *love, affection* (Phil 1:8); or *object of affection, beloved* (Phlm. 12) (cf. Gingrich, 1983, p.184). All the references, with exception of Phil. 1:8 (Christ) and Lk 1:78 (God of Israel), are always in connection with the human person, and expressed either in the absolute, prepositional or predicate object. It is interesting to note that the word never at any point assumes the meaning of “mercy” as understood in NT, and above all in Luke. It depicts at most the inner and tender feeling and disposition of a subject, which may evoke *pity or sympathy*, hence tenderness and compassion. This is clearly demonstrated in the combination of the accusative σπλάγχνα and the genitive ἐλέους understood as ‘tender’ or ‘loving’ mercy (cf. Lk 1:78).⁽¹⁾

The study equally shows minimal incidences of οἰκτεῖρω (2x) and its cognates (οἰκτιρμός = 5x ; οἰκτίρων = 3x;) in the New Testament in relation to σπλάγχνα (11x), σπλαγγνίζομαι (12x), and εὐσπλαγγνος (2x) (cf. Morgenthal, 1958). This may leave the reader puzzling. The explanation, however, lies in the linguistic shift in the period of latter Jewish writings. According to the submission of Koester (1989), σπλάγχνα, σπλαγγνίζομαι and εὐσπλαγγνος totally replace the LXX words οἰκτιρμοί, οἰκτεῖρω and οἰκτίρων by the time of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. They are employed as a new translation of the Hebrew words $\sim ymix]r; \wedge \#$, $\sim xr$, and $\sim Wxr \wedge$. Then the combination of ds, x , and $\sim ymix]r; \wedge$ which is common in the Hebrew OT (cf. Hos. 2:21) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1 QS 1:22; 2:1) no longer corresponds to ἔλεος and οἰκτιρμοί (cf. Zeb. 7:3; 8:2, 6) but to ἔλεος and σπλάγχνα; hence the genitive phrase σπλάγχνα ἔλεος which is a literal rendering of the Hebrew $\sim ymix]r; \wedge yds .x$; or $ds, x, ymex]r$; Koester (1989), in addition, observes that the translation of $\sim ymix]r;$ by σπλάγχνα retains as well the eschatological element in the Hebrew word, which later becomes the direct presupposition of NT usage.

3.4 *Οἰκτίρων in the setting of Luke*

The Jubilee Motto: “Merciful Like the Father” is a condensation of Lk 6:36: γίνεσθε οὖν οἰκτίρμονες, καθὼς καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν οἰκτίρων ἐστίν (Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful [NRS, NAS). The expression contains the adjective οἰκτίρμονες. It falls within the heart of the paraenetic section of the Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49), and centres on love and mercy. It is about the relationship of Christians to those who reject their witness and persecute them for their adherence to Jesus and his teachings (Culpepper, 2002).

The οἰκτίρων-pericope may be divided into three sections (vv. 27-31, vv. 32-36; vv.36-38). The section contains about thirteen different verbs expressed in seventeen grammatical imperative forms (singular and plural of the second person). The frequency of ἀγαπᾶτε (3x = vv. 27, 32, 35) suggests the *leitmotif* of the passage. And the significance of οἰκτίρων is read not only from its frequency (2x) in the same sentence, but also its link with the imperative γίνεσθε (v.36). While the verse containing οἰκτίρων (v.36) serves in the pericope (vv.27-38) as a ‘bridging text’, it binds love and mercy. The imperatives in the text are equally presented both in positive (14x=vv. 27[2x], 28[2x], 29, 30, 31, 32, 35[3x], 36, 37, 38) and negative forms with the assistance of the negative particle μη (3x=vv.30, 37[2x]).

A conscientious reader of the passage may be struck with the fact that the Jubilee Motto “As Merciful Father” is taken from a passage that contains the ‘strangest’ vocabulary (οἰκτίρων) for mercy in Luke (2). The lexical family of οἰκτίρω occurs only 10x in the entire NT texts: verb (2x), noun (5x) and adjective (3x). It is only in Luke (v.36=2x) and in James (5:11) that the vocabulary is found in the adjective form. It is totally absent in Acts. Therefore, what is surprising and probably revolutionary for the critical mind about the choice of the οἰκτίρων-pericope is that the Church should choose a passage with the “oddest” NT word as a dictum for the Jubilee Year of Mercy such a rare vocabulary when other passages with the more popular ἔλεος/ἐλεέω could have served the same purpose, even if the choice is outside Luke-Acts. That notwithstanding, the Greek use of the word evokes the feeling of sympathy especially in grief or sorrow; and with the willingness to offer some assistance. It is in this latter sense that the word group of οἰκτίρω is related to that of ἐλεέω in its positive usage (cf. Bultmann, 1989).

The word is frequently used in the LXX in its adjective form (οἰκτίρων) for ~wxr and !nx. Thus the meaning of the word remains for the LXX translators “sympathy,” “pity” or “compassion.” Although it may denote human compassion, in most cases it depicts divine compassion (Bultmann, 1989, vol. V). But there is no conscientious effort in the literary tradition of the LXX to make a significant distinction between οἰκτίρω and ἐλεέω, except that οἰκτίρω is rarely used as eschatological term. It is more earthly centred, and more human.

Luke assumes the same understanding of the LXX, which associates οἰκτίρων closely with ~x; r' (“to have compassion,”) and !nx (“to show favour,” “to be gracious”). Yet he comes up with a more profound notion of οἰκτίρων by contextualizing the LXX tradition. That is to say that Luke never reverses the less-eschatological orientation of the LXX tradition, but expands the term to include the divine, hence divine mercy. The Lucan revolutionary thinking recognises the significance of the vocabulary as a kingdom value that controls the earthly values for the disciples. Its meanings will then transverse the human and divine spheres.

Consequently, Luke presents οἰκτίρων in a context of instruction, admonition, directive and command. The call is to show mercy like the merciful Father. In other words, the Christian concept of mercy should and ought to transcend human pity or sympathy. It should follow the pattern of divine mercy, thus the “mercy of the Father.” The idea, “Merciful like the Father” evokes the picture of the ‘Prodigal Merciful Father’ of Luke 15:11-32, whose mercy is prodigious, scandalous and foolish in contemporary minds. Incidentally, that same story told only by Luke explains in clear terms the motto of the Jubilee Year of Mercy: “Merciful as the Father.”

4.0 The Significance of οἰκτίρων for Luke and for the Church

The mood of the ‘Year of Mercy’ summed up in “Merciful like the Father” (v.36) is of instruction, directive and demand. And the content of the biblical passage associated with it is to be taken, and read imperatively as the basic requirements of discipleship for the Christ faithful (cf. Nolland, 1989, p.274). Thus the first part of this passage (vv.27-31) instructs the disciples on what to do to their enemies (those who hate, curse and ill-treat the disciples). The disciples should go beyond the widely circulated ethical teachings and practice of the Greco-Roman and Jewish time of their days which follows the conventional wisdom to do good to one’s friends and harm one’s enemies (vv.32-25). This may even be more pronounced in the religious circle of the Essenes at Qumran where the adherents are strongly instructed to love or hate each person according to his or her share in the Council of God or the Vengeance of God (1QS 1.9-11). It is true that there are hints that some philosophers are already teaching that one should turn one’s enemy into friends (Fitzmyer, 1981, pp.637-638; Thucydides 4.19, 1-4; Diogenes Laertius 8.1, 23). But Jesus’ admonition to the disciples to

love and speak well of, and to bless and do good to those who conventionally should have not deserved their friendly treatment (cf. Matt 5:44; Rom 12:14) reverses the extended blessing of the godly and the cursing of the persons of Belial (cf. 1QS 2.2-17). The disciples should give freely, and demand nothing in return. They should obey the 'golden rule' (vv.27-31). Giving to one who asks may suggest in the context the willing compliance to the requests of one who is more powerful. Nevertheless, the disciples' compliance to give up their rights is not necessarily because of their weakness but their imitation of the footsteps of the merciful Father.

The second part of the pericope(vv.32-36)concludes with an adverbial clause καθὼς [καὶ] ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν οἰκτίρων ἐστίν (as your Father is merciful). It propels the strict adherence to codes of conduct, and guarantees the fulfilment of the aspirations of the disciples as the "children of the Most High" (v.35). It goes back to the conventional axiom of "like child, like parents. The disciples should and ought to dispose themselves to be influenced by the character of God (who is their Father). They should practice the love that is not defined by the response of others but by following the example of God's loving mercy that is characterised by kindness to the ungrateful and the wicked (v.35). For Luke, therefore, the love for enemies is superior to the natural mutual love as practiced by the sinners, and will gain the disciples the true title of God's children(vv.32-36). It is on this vein that Marshall (1978,) observes a kind of development of a thought process from love of enemies to a more general character of relationship. He notes that the three-parallel statement indicates certain forms of behaviour that go no further than the common practice even of sinners, then followed by a threefold *command* to go beyond such minimal actions, so that disciples may have a heavenly reward and become like God.

And consequent upon Luke's understanding of οἰκτίρων within the context of divine mercy, he develops in the third subsection (vv.37-38) the command of non-judgmental (do not to judge, do not condemn) and the positive expressions of forgiveness (v.37b) and giving freely in order to receive freely (v.38a; cf. Acts 20:35) from God (Marshall, 1978, p.257), and probably also from human (cf. Culpepper, 2002). It raises the awareness that 'giving entails sharing'.

Seen again is the theme of love of enemies in vv.36-38, which warns that the disciple who claims to be a disciple and a child of the kingdom should show mercy. For the disciple who shows mercy without being judgmental of others, who gives freely without expecting returns, will receive from God. As if Marshall (1978, p.258) has anticipated this study and joined in the discussion on the significance of οἰκτίρων, when he argues that the teaching in vv. 32-35 is that living purely on the level of normal human 'sinful' relationships does not deserve any reward from God. Rather there is a command to go beyond this kind of behaviour and thus to receive what God has promised in return. This takes the teaching of the beatitudes and woes (vv.20-26) further to a level of logic (vv.36-38) that "those who have nothing in this world because they give freely will have a divine reward, but those who have plenty in this world because they have lived in worldly-wide fashion will find that their lack of *mercy* to others results in the same attitude being shown to them by God."

Culpepper (2002) joins in reminding the Christians that the injunction to "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (v. 36) is an adaptation of the OT command to "be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev 19:2), which in the Sermon on the Mount has become "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). Culpepper (2002) further makes a comparison between Luke's "Merciful like the Father" and Matthew's "Perfect as the Heavenly Father" and observes that in Matt 5 the injunction stands at the conclusion of the six antitheses, while in Luke it ceils the section on love for one's enemy by placing the ethical imperative in a theological context. He further observes that the imperative for enemies

can have a range of meanings, depending on its context: Win over your opponent by kindness; take the moral high road; shame your enemy by your superior goodness; deflect hostility or prevent further abuse by offering no resistance; rise above pettiness; or demonstrate a Christ-like character as a Christian witness. These interpretations are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, he argues. Rather they do suggest the range of meanings the imperative can have.

One equally observes the framing of the first two subsections (vv. 27-31, 32-36) with the use of the phrase ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς (vv.27, 35=love your enemies). The connexion established by the deployment of δίδοτε/δίδου (vv.30, 38) is of great significance. It links the first subsection (vv.27-31) to the last (vv.36-38). In all, οἰκτίρων in v.36 remains the hub. All the actions, expressed both in dos and don'ts are the manifestations of being “Merciful (οἰκτίρων) Like the Father.” The οἰκτίρων statement “Merciful Like the Father” is an imperative. It is unitary and unifying in function. The Lucan οἰκτίρων runs through the biological, psychological, intellectual and spiritual domains; the human and the divine It is more profound. It encompasses all the various meanings and dimensions of mercy as found in other Greek words associated with mercy. It is more appealing than ἐλέω/ἔλεος/ἐλεημοσύνη and σπλάγχχνιζομαι/σπλάγχχνον. It is a word that says all, contains all, and speaks about the kingdom values that ought to govern and modulate the values of this world.

5.0 Evaluation and Conclusion

From the above analysis the reader may see that the instruction, directive and command for the disciple, and the dictum for the Church in the Jubilee Year of Mercy (Merciful like the Father) is based purely on the Lucan concept of οἰκτίρων and fatherhood, thus the merciful Father. The disciples, who are non-violent, non-judgmental, merciful, and generous toward others will indeed be treated in the same way both here and hereafter (cf. 18:29-30).

The dictum “Merciful like the Father,” which is found in the paraenetic section (6:27-38) of the Sermon on the Plain, is a dynamic reality that calls attention and action at every moment in life. It informs the disciples that Christianity is a learning process. In other words, it is a programme of life for all Christ faithful. It is a command “directed to anyone willing to listen” to voice of Jesus (cf. Lk 6:27), and capable to dispose oneself for the Word of God. It is in this way that it will be possible to contemplate God's mercy and adopt it as our lifestyle (MV 13). It is in mercy as Francis (MV 14) reminds his audience, that one discovers the proof of how God loves humanity. He gives his entire self always and freely, asking nothing in return. He comes to the aid of humanity whenever he is called upon. Those who listen to his voice and touched by his compassion can become like him, and compassionate towards others

It is also clear from the word analysis that οἰκτίρων cannot be adequately thought of without reference to love, hence there is always consistent appeal to the imperative ἀγαπάτε (3x = vv. 27, 32, 35). It has been argued again and again that the Lucan concept of mercy in its deepest sense is divine mercy; and that the same tone forms the idea of οἰκτίρων. Luke is as well conscious of the human side (biological and psychological) of mercy, hence the understanding of οἰκτίρων is not spiritualised at human experience. Yet οἰκτίρων is for Luke first and foremost σπλάγχχνα ἐλέους θεοῦ (loving mercy of God).

Luke refuses to make οἰκτίρων a theoretical or intellectual object. It is for Luke actions. It is recognisable in the domain of human actions. The context (6:27-38) speaks clearly that the Lucan mercy does not exhaust itself in loving the enemy, giving to the weak and forgiving unconditionally. Mercy means also that the disciples of mercy should guide against being judgmental and condemning the other. Mercy is another name for joyful actions that cancel

all the negativeness of human actions, and make way for positiveness. In other words, the notion of “merciful Father” connotes moral and ethical qualities that aptly summarises God’s relationship with humankind in the history of salvation. It is an invitation to members of Christ faithful, and the human race in general, to retrace the history of salvation and follow the example of the Father in their dealings with one another, and with the world.

Notes and References

- (1) The reading σπλάγχνα ἐλέους in Lk 1:78 appears almost like an excerpt from the Testament of the Twelve. It takes on the eschatological character as strongly expressed in the Testament of the Twelve and in line with the notion of God’s final act of revelation, seen as the outflowing of his heart-felt mercy (cf. Hoester, 1989).
- (2) The vocabulary occurs only twice and in Lk 6:36, followed by one occurrence in Jam. 5:11. The importance of this is more striking when the frequency is compared with the more favoured ἐλεέω/ ἔλεος/ ἐλεημοσύνη (Lk=12x; Acts=8x) or even the less favoured σπλαγχνίζομαι/σπλάγχνον (Lk=4x; Acts=1x) as an expression of the notion of mercy.
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