

TO EACH ITS OWN LOOPHOLE: LOOPHOLE DIALOGUES IN LUKE 10

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper illuminates salient aspects of Luke 10:25-42 using the Bakhtinian concepts of loophole, surplus, and dialogue.¹ I call attention to the thoroughly loopholed nature of this pericope—the loophole in the law, the Samaritan’s loophole, the lawyer’s loophole, and Jesus’ loophole—as well as to the manner in which those loopholes generate, and are linked to, each other. I explicate how these loopholes enable the corresponding characters to attenuate others’ ability to define them in finalizing terms.

Although this paper deals extensively with 10:25-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan in particular, attention is given also to the subsequent pericope, the story of Martha and Mary (10:38-42), and to the interconnectedness between the two. While some scholars see no link between the two pericopae,² others pay little attention to the issue.³ A few interpret the link in terms of either the Lukan juxtaposition of related episodes⁴ or inverse fulfillment of the two-fold commandment (10:27).⁵ I argue that the two pericopae are linked dialogically and that the dialogue—a key Bakhtinian concept—stems both from Luke’s juxtaposition of two pericopae with disparate emphases and from the Lukan Jesus’ decision to exercise his loophole in order to attenuate others’ ability to define him in finalizing terms. In this instance, Jesus’ loophole allows him also to equiponderate “doing the word” and “hearing the word”—two prominent themes in Luke. What do these loopholes, Jesus’ included, look like, and how do they enable the various characters to remain unfinalizable? How does Jesus’ loophole place 10:25-37 in dialogue with

10:38-42? These are the key questions considered in this paper. I will begin by highlighting the numerous loopholes in 10:25-37.

II. LOOPHOLES EXPLICATED

In their interpretation of Luke 10:25-37 some scholars contrast the compassionate response of the Samaritan with the indifferent and callous attitude of the priest and the Levite.⁶ Others highlight the manner in which the Samaritan subverted the expectations of Jesus' immediate audience and Luke's readers by showing compassion, which earned him the oxymoronic title "Good Samaritan."⁷ These interpretations explicate important aspects of the parable of the Good Samaritan, but they have not touched upon, let alone explicated, a key aspect running through this pericope. The Bakhtinian concept of "loophole" is especially helpful for explicating that aspect.⁸ I argue that several characters and entities within and outside the parable have loopholes that allow them to resist others' attempts to define them in finalizing term. First, though, a working definition of the term "loophole" is in order.

"Loophole" defined

Contrary to the common perception of "loophole" as something that undermines the integrity of its host component—be it a thing, word, or person—Bakhtin defines and employs the term in a positive sense. In the Bakhtinian oeuvre, loophole is an aspect of a person, thing, or word that grants them an element of elusiveness, which attenuates others' ability to define them in finalizing terms.

A loophole is the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words. If a word retains such a loophole this must inevitably be reflected in its structure. This potential other meaning, that is, the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow. Judged by its meaning alone, the word with a loophole should be an ultimate word and does present

itself as such, but in fact it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final period.⁹

The concept of loophole can be described better in the context of one trying to understand and define another. Although whatever can be defined has a potential loophole, Bakhtin uses the term primarily, but never exclusively, with reference to people. A loophole offers the means or the escape route through which one can escape another person's attempt to define her in finalizing terms. Thus, rather than weakening a person, the presence of a loophole allows one to remain ambiguous and elusive.

According to Barbara Green,

Loopholes are precisely the ways in which we avoid finalizing judgments of others on ourselves.¹⁰

Bakhtin uses "loophole" somewhat interchangeably, but not synonymously, with "unfinalizability," another key term in his writings. There is, however, a subtle difference between these two terms. To describe the difference succinctly (and somewhat inadequately), the former refers to an aspect of a person, but the latter refers to the nature of that person, or to a state of things. A sentence such as, "A person's loophole makes her or him unfinalizable to others" should illustrate the subtle difference between the two terms. With this working definition of terms on the table, I will proceed to illuminate the presence of various loopholes in the pericope under consideration.

Loophole in the Law

Jesus responds to the lawyer's second question, "Who is my neighbor?," (10:29) by narrating a parable that juxtaposes the disparate responses of three individuals to the plight of an anonymous wounded man. By positioning the indefinite particle $\tau\upsilon\varsigma$ before

the noun *ανθρωπος*, the Lukan Jesus appears to be shifting the focus of the parable away from the identity of the wounded man, and toward the responses of the three individuals passing by the road. Although there is a slight variation between the responses of the priest and the Levite,¹¹ they are quite similar—both are characterized by indifference and lack of compassion—and are in stark contrast to the Samaritan’s response. In their attempts to explain the responses of the priest and the Levite, several interpreters have argued that those responses were entirely consistent with first-century Jewish purity laws, which curtailed the freedom of religious figures in potentially polluting circumstances. Therefore, it is important to examine the merits of those arguments.

To begin with, since the verb *κατεβαινεν* in v. 31 indicates that the priest was returning from, rather than going to, Jerusalem, it is possible to hear Jesus as implying that purity concerns were not instrumental in his decision not to assist the wounded man. Jeremias is probably on the mark in suggesting that factors other than ritual considerations influenced the actions of the priest and the Levite.¹² At the same time, however, Talbert’s argument that any first-century Jew faithful to the scriptures would have taken purity factors seriously in such a situation, even when not en route to Jerusalem, merits consideration.¹³ According to him the choice made by the two religious figures, who generally would have adhered to purity laws more stringently than most ordinary Jews, not to risk defiling themselves through contact with a dying man is understandable. Citing Caird, Talbert suggests that Jesus’ hearers would have sympathized with the concerns of the priest and the Levite. So Talbert comments:

When, therefore, Jesus’ hearers were told the priest and Levite avoided any contact with the man who was half-dead (v. 30), they would know these religious figures did exactly as they were required to do by scripture.¹⁴

His argument is intriguing, but it stems from a failure to realize that first-century Jewish laws regarding what a priest or a Levite could or could not have done in such a situation were probably not as monolithic as he characterizes them. Duncan Derrett calls attention to the disparate views in the first-century Jewish context on the question of whether touching a dying man would have defiled a priest.¹⁵ His analysis is especially effective in illuminating the complexity of the laws dealing with this subject and the plethora of conditional clauses that anticipate and address various potential scenarios. He highlights the fact that the instructions, which emphasize ritual purity to the extent of curtailing one's ability to assist others in potentially defiling circumstances, are balanced by commandments that emphasize one's obligations to his or her neighbor in the same situations. There is, then, a creative tension between an emphasis on ritual purity, on the one hand, and an emphasis on obligations to one's neighbor, on the other. To describe this in slightly different terms, if one were to call the purity laws the vertical aspect and obligations to one's neighbor the horizontal aspect, it can be said that the same Law that stresses the vertical aspect, stresses the horizontal aspect too.

The divergent instructions prescribing limitations as well as obligations are, on the one hand, a testament to the equal emphasis the Law places on both vertical and horizontal aspects. On the other hand, they highlight a certain level of ambiguity within the Law itself. As Derrett suggests, such ambiguity (my word, not his) must have meant that the priest's decision to pass by, perhaps to avoid defilement, was not without justification. The priest was thus entitled to pass on. There is no anti-clerical sarcasm here.¹⁶ Conversely, however, if he desired, he could have found justification (within the Law) to assist the dying man. So Derrett observes,

Justification for a priest's defiling himself, however, should he wish to do so, was not wanting. To save life he might do so, that is, he must have the intention of saving the life of a living person. Some might take the view that he could take the risk. The Babylonian Talmud in the Gemara to Mishnah Pes. VIII.6 (rescuing one who might turn out to be dead, or to have been when one commenced the rescue work) and Yoma VIII. 6-7 touches on the ritual commandments and the duty to save life. Doubt there operates in favor of life...Even if it is doubtful whether he is an Israelite or a heathen [which will include a Samaritan for our purposes].¹⁷

In Bakhtinian terms, given the unfinalizable nature of the Law, it was entirely possible for the priest to explore (and exploit) a loophole in the Law in order to assist the dying man. The implication of this line of argument is that in choosing not to explore a loophole in the Law for the purpose of assisting the dying man, the priest (and the Levite)¹⁸ failed either to recognize, or acknowledge, the unfinalizable nature of the Law. Therefore, one can argue that the response of the priest and the Levite stemmed not from their inability to help the dying man but from their decision to observe purity laws to the extent of, and at the expense of, disregarding neighborly aspect of the Law specified in Lev 19:18. To describe it in slightly different terms, it is about their preference for one aspect of the Law over another aspect. Again, as Derrett suggests, "Much depends upon the inclination with which one approaches such a dilemma."¹⁹ The importance priest and Levite attached to the vertical aspect of the Law and their correlating decision not to explore a loophole for the purpose of helping a neighbor become strikingly clear when one contrasts their responses with that of the Samaritan.

It has been suggested often that the Samaritan's compassionate response was possible since the purity laws that likely prevented the two religious figures from helping the dying man did not necessarily apply to the Samaritan community.²⁰ Therefore, it is pertinent to examine whether the Samaritan was operating under a different set of rules than did the priest and the Levite. Derrett has contested the notion that the purity laws did not limit freedom of the Samaritan. Based on his study of the Samaritan purity laws, he

argues that the same ritual constraints that applied to the other two would have applied to the Samaritan as well.

Indeed the Samaritans, who were also sons of the commandments, feared defilement from the dead. But the Samaritan was moved by compassion and this obviated fears about his own or his animal's or wares' contamination.²¹

Sharon Ringe seems to agree when she says,

He too would have been affected by the same regulations concerning touching a corpse that the priest and the Levite would have recognized, as well as the commandment to love.²²

If the Samaritan community had similar, though not identical, purity laws, then those three that were passing by the road were operating under similar circumstances. What distinguishes the Samaritan from the other two is the fact that he chose to honor the horizontal aspect of the Law at the risk of defiling himself and undermining the vertical aspect. A point to which I alluded earlier—that the Samaritan's ability to assist the dying man is linked to the choice he made to explore a loophole in the purity laws—needs elaboration here. One aspect of that link pertains to the manner in which the loophole he explored enabled him to fulfill his neighborly responsibility. Another aspect pertains to the manner in which the Samaritan explored (and exploited) exceptions in purity laws in order to fulfill an(other) important aspect of the Law found in Lev 19:18. It emerges that he risked the vertical aspect of the Law in order to fulfill its horizontal aspect. In what might amount to a contradiction in terms, I suggest that he risked (one aspect of) the Law in order to fulfill (another aspect of) the Law.

At the core of the Samaritan's decision to exploit a loophole in the Law is his realization that the Law was ambiguous and open-ended. To interpret this in Bakhtinian terms, the Samaritan treated the Law as an unfinalizable and loopholed entity, one that retains for itself the possibility of altering the meaning of its own words and has yet to

utter its final word.²³ Such an attitude toward, and respect for, the Law allowed him to refrain from imitating the priest and the Levite when they chose to define the Law in finalizing terms.

Dialogue in 10:25-37

Contrasting the responses of the priest and the Levite with the response of the Samaritan highlights the tension between vertical and horizontal aspects of the Law and facilitates a dialogue between the two. On a different level, there is a dialogue between the lawyer's knowing/hearing the Law and the Samaritan's doing it. Jesus encounters a lawyer who has heard/read the Law and mastered it as evidenced in his ability to recite the two-fold commandment.²⁴ However, since his knowledge of the Law has not been matched by his willingness to fulfill/do the prescriptions of the Law, Jesus instructs him to "do." Although there is tension between hearing and doing, the pericope places far greater emphasis on "doing." To begin with, the lawyer sought to hear from Jesus what he needed to "do" to inherit eternal life. Jesus exhorted the lawyer to "do" in accordance with the two-fold commandment (10:28). His final instructions for the lawyer were to "go and do like" the Samaritan, who is posited as the model worthy of emulation. It appears that in this pericope the Lukan Jesus repeatedly stresses the importance of doing.²⁵

This pericope contains another dialogue, one that pertains to uniqueness of this pericope vis-à-vis its synoptic counterparts. Whereas Matthew and Mark link two originally unconnected aspects of the Law—Deut 6:5, which focuses on vertical aspect and Leviticus 19:18, which highlights horizontal obligations—in a manner that implies a hierarchical relationship between the two, Luke coalesces them into a two-fold, but single, commandment. The nonhierarchical manner in which Luke presents the two

foregrounds the equal emphasis he places on vertical and horizontal aspects and the dialogic tension between those two aspects.

There are at least two other dialogues in Luke 10:25-42: 1) a dialogue between Mary's choice and Martha's choice; and 2) a dialogue between Jesus and Jesus.²⁶ I will explicate those dialogues at a later point. But first, I call attention to how the Samaritan's recognition of the unfinalizable nature of the Law offered him a loophole, one that allows him to attenuate others' attempts to define him in finalizing terms.

The Samaritan's Loophole

Several interpreters have noted how the compassionate response of the Samaritan, a member of a despised community, brings into focus the apathy of the priest and the Levite, who represented epitome of established religion. These interpreters have argued that a motif of reversal defines this parable. Charles Talbert, among others, observes,

The parable makes the despised Samaritan the hero and the Bible-believing-and-obeying priest and Levite the villains.²⁷

In a similar vein, other interpreters such as Stephen Moore have argued that the key emphasis of the parable is a contrast between the blindness of the religious leaders and the insight of the Samaritan.

In the parable of the good Samaritan (10:30-36), the blindness of those who "pass by" ("a priest was going down....and when he saw [*horao*] him, he passed by....Likewise a Levite, when he....saw [*horao*] him, passed by") contrasts with the (in)sight of the Samaritan, who sees the victim for the neighbor that he is: "And when he saw [*horao*] him, he had compassion [*splagchnizomai*] (compare 7:13).²⁸

While such observations are intriguing and insightful, they miss a key aspect of the parable, one that illuminates the presence of another loophole in this parable. Marshall might be correct in suggesting that Jesus' audience, familiar with the triadic pattern of

popular Jewish stories, would have expected an Israelite layman to be next in line after the priest and the Levite.²⁹ Consistent with his subversive style, however, the Lukan Jesus surprises his audience and Luke's readers by bringing a Samaritan onto the scene. So Tannehill remarks,

The Samaritan is a surprise because there is a jump in categories—priest, Levite, and Samaritan do not make a logical sequence....³⁰

There is another surprise in the works. As Jesus continued to narrate the parable, and as the Samaritan entered the narrative world of the parable, Jesus' audience (and Luke's readers) must have expected the Samaritan to show even less compassion toward the dying man than did the priest and the Levite. Any such expectations on their part would have historical and narrative bases. In the first-century Palestinian context, Jewish perceptions of, mistrust toward, and stereotypes about the Samaritans stemming from the history of animosity between the two communities would have engendered negative expectations on the part of Jesus' audience.³¹ Again, as Tannehill states,

Hatred between Jews and Samaritans would not lead a Jew to expect a Samaritan to show compassion. Priest, Levite, and lay Israelite would make a logical sequence and would confirm the expectations of some Jewish hearers, suggesting that priests and Levites lack compassion, while the lay Israelite truly fulfills the law. The surprise of the Samaritan gives the story a different and disturbing impact.³²

Within the context of Luke's narrative, the treatment recently meted out to Jesus and his disciples in the Samaritan village (9:52-56) would also have engendered the negative expectations of Luke's readers. To explicate this point further, having already read how a Samaritan village has shown hostility toward the entourage of Jesus, a Jewish teacher, readers would be inclined to anticipate that this Samaritan would act likewise and not show compassion to the dying man, who was very likely Jewish.³³ Any such move, on

the part of either Jesus' audience or Luke's readers, would amount to using their knowledge about the Samaritans in order to predict the actions of *this* Samaritan.

Bakhtinian Concept of Surplus

The Bakhtinian concept of surplus of seeing is relevant in this context. My "surplus of seeing" is what I, from my outsideness, know about you that you yourself do not and cannot know. According to Bakhtin, "surplus of seeing" is that which one should not use to define (an)other in finalizing terms by relying on a disproportionate knowledge of the other derived from his/her outsideness vis-à-vis that other.³⁴ Barbara Green captures Bakhtin's thought on this subject quite well:

Bakhtin usefully characterizes surplus of seeing as that which an author can see of a hero who is being drawn but which remains inaccessible to that character, specified in shorthand as the space behind the hero's head. Another way to put the same concept is that when an author works, or when a subject sees and interrelates with an other, the hero (or the other) is part of the author's horizon, whereas the hero sees that same field as an environment in which he or she does not perceive the self.³⁵

Morson and Emerson define "surplus of seeing" in terms of one's ability to "know what the other looks like when that other is unselfconscious of his or her appearance, knowledge forever inaccessible to the other."³⁶ According to them,

In monologic works, authors enjoy an immense surplus of vision with respect to their characters, but the characters do not have the same surplus—indeed, often no surplus at all—with respect to the author.³⁷

They argue that an author's surplus of seeing vis-à-vis his/her characters coupled with the absence of characters' surplus of seeing makes it impossible for the characters and the author to relate to each other as equals and to enter into a meaningful dialogue. Although Morson and Emerson employ the concept of surplus of seeing primarily to describe the relationship between an author and her/his characters, it can be employed loosely to describe a relationship between characters and characters, and between characters and

readers. Just as an author has surplus of seeing in relation to characters and can use that surplus to finalize those characters, readers observing a character from their vantage point of outsidedness have a surplus of seeing in relation to that character. In the case of this parable, then, the readers have a surplus of seeing in relation to the Samaritan, who does not have similar surplus of vision vis-à-vis the readers.

Bakhtin has extensively employed the concept of surplus of seeing, but has not clarified subtle distinctions between different types of surplus. Morson and Emerson divide surplus of seeing into three types:³⁸ 1) essential surplus, knowledge of basic information about a character that is inaccessible to that character, the kind of surplus monologic authors enjoy;³⁹ 2) information-bearing surplus, the type of surplus absolutely necessary for the narrator to move the story forward; and 3) addressive surplus, which takes the form of questions and engaging a character in a meaningful conversation. This type of surplus requires “an active (not duplicating) understanding, a willingness to listen...is never used as an ambush, as a chance to sneak up and attack from behind.”⁴⁰

According to Barbara Green,

This addressive surplus uses outsidedness⁴¹ not to finalize a character but to ask good questions and to invite the other to greater self-knowledge, growth, transformation. It does not stand on its own superiority derived from a higher lookout or broader experience but allows the hero to work with his own awareness, granted it may lead their ‘owner’ along a maddeningly circuitous pathway.⁴²

A polyphonic author like “Dostoevsky never retains any essential ‘surplus’ of *meaning*, but only that indispensable minimum of pragmatic, purely *information-bearing* ‘surplus.’”⁴³ A polyphonic novel requires polyphonic readers who choose addressive surplus rather than essential surplus. Yet just as few authors renounce their essential surplus in order to enter into dialogue with characters as equal partners, few readers renounce their essential surplus that allows them to define characters in finalizing terms.

Will Jesus' hearers and Luke's readers renounce their essential surplus vis-à-vis the Samaritan and make way for addressive surplus? Assuming that the answer is "No" (a "Yes" is certainly possible but not probable) the essential surplus of Jesus' hearers and Luke's readers would finalize the Samaritan, at least from their point of view. However, the Samaritan, who is faced with the threat of being objectified and finalized, does not lack the means to undermine such attempts by Jesus' hearers and Luke's readers. In the Bakhtinian oeuvre "loophole" is often posited as a counterweight to "essential surplus." The former attenuates the latter. So Barbara Green,

A loophole allows one to avoid finalization threatened by anyone who brings essential surplus to bear.⁴⁴

Any reader or Jesus' audience considering using essential surplus to predict the actions of the Samaritan and to define him in finalizing terms will be surprised because he is about to escape through a loophole. The Samaritan's compassionate response toward the dying man, which was the result of his decision to explore (and exploit) a loophole in the Law, generated for him a loophole that serves as a counterweight to the essential surplus others have in relation to him. Much to the surprise of Jesus' audience, the despised Samaritan has done what none of the respected religious have done. He can and has indeed evolved in unexpected ways to become a "Good Samaritan," a contradiction in terms within that cultural context.⁴⁵ His response also moves the focus of this conversation to yet another loophole, which is intrinsically linked to the Samaritan's loophole.

The Lawyer's Loophole

With Luke resuming his role (at the end of the parable) as the narrator (10:37) characters such as the lawyer, who have been external to the world of the parable, return

to Luke's narrative world as characters. Accordingly, the lawyer makes a transition from being a spectator of the drama (in the parable) to becoming a participant in the drama (outside the parable). He no longer has the luxury of observing and evaluating the actions of characters in the parable from his vantage point as an audience. As a character he (again) becomes an object of the gaze of the readers, who will observe him to see how he might respond to the parable.

“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” Jesus asked the lawyer toward the end of their conversation and then told him to “go and do likewise” (10:37). How did the lawyer answer Jesus’ question? Did he go and do like the despised Samaritan? Given Luke’s silence about the lawyer’s future, readers observing this story, at least this reader, might be prone to supply their own “finalizing” definitions based on their essential surplus in relation to him. Their essential surplus, in this case, comes from the narrator’s finalizing remark that the lawyer’s initial question—“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”—was meant (only) to test Jesus (10:25). The Greek verb *εκπειραζω* is a variant of the verb in 4:12 that describes the devil’s tempting of Jesus. By using that verb in this instance, the narrator suggests the lawyer’s question was driven by hostility towards Jesus rather than a genuine desire to learn.⁴⁶ A few verses later, the narrator offers another finalizing remark saying that the lawyer’s second question—“And who is my neighbor?”—was designed to justify himself (10:29). Verbal phrase *θελων δικαιωσαι* (“wanting to justify”) implies that his intention was to sidestep Jesus’ instruction “do this and you will live.”

Taken at their face value, the lawyer’s questions themselves do not betray an element of hostility or sarcasm, or an intention to sidestep Jesus’ instruction. There seems to be

little basis for the narrator's finalizing remarks. Wayne Booth describes such judgments as the narrator's illicit entries into the minds of his characters.⁴⁷ Umberto Eco, who is more forgiving of such intrusive narrators, suggests that these remarks require an omniscient narrator, who "speaks with the voice of truth and makes explicit judgments."⁴⁸ From a Bakhtinian point of view, those finalizing remarks are characteristic of monologic works and they stem from the narrator's choice to employ authorial surplus—or rely on essential surplus—rather than use addressive surplus to engage the lawyer dialogically. Faced with the threat of being finalized—both by the narrator and, therefore, in the readers' perceptions—the lawyer needs a loophole that would enable him to remain unfinalizable. It remains to be seen whether such a loophole is at hand and what shape it takes.

Several scholars have noted how the notion of "Good Samaritan" was both a contradiction in terms and a scandal or offense to Jesus' audience. As Talbert observes,

This [parable] demands the hearers say what, for them, cannot be said, what is a contradiction in terms: bad (Samaritan) cannot be good; and good (priest and Levite) cannot be bad. If, as a hearer, one accepts the judgment of the parable, then one's whole world of values is shattered. In this way, the original parable in its setting in Jesus' career aimed not to instruct but rather to challenge, to provoke, to shatter stereotypes.⁴⁹

Further, Crossan suggests,

When good (clerics) and bad (Samaritan) become, respectively, bad and good, a world is being challenged and we are faced with polar reversal.⁵⁰

Given the history of acrimonious relations between the Jews and the Samaritans, and the derision with which the Jews perceived the Samaritans, such "polar reversal" would have been offensive to a Jewish audience, including the lawyer. Jesus must have accentuated that offense or scandal by asking him to imitate ("go and do likewise") the Samaritan. In Bakhtin's view, such scandalous scenes, with their shock element, "free human behavior

from the norms and motivations that predetermine it.”⁵¹ It brings an individual to a chronotope of threshold, a moment of crisis that can prove to be life changing.

To describe it in colloquial terms, when a person is confronted with an offense, it has the potential to make or break her/his life. The shocking or offensive nature of this parable forces the hearers to make important choices. It is especially true of those most likely to be offended by it, including the lawyer in Luke’s narrative. As David McCracken observes,

The Scandal provides an occasion for the lawyer to become like the hated Samaritan, to live in a radically new, and formerly unthinkable, sense.⁵²

“Did the offense posed by the parable prove to be a turning point for the lawyer?” Luke’s readers and some interpreters might ask. The lawyer’s response in 10:37—“the one who showed him mercy”—marks a step in that direction. It indicates his willingness to acknowledge that the despised Samaritan was more compassionate, and hence more righteous, than the two religious figures. His choice of words to refer to the Samaritan—“the one who showed him mercy” rather than “the Samaritan”—offers proof that the lawyer is able to look past ethnic categories and define the Samaritan by his actions rather than by his background. “True, but how did the lawyer respond to Jesus’ final instruction? Did he ‘go and do likewise?’” readers might ask again. The narrator offers no information as to how the lawyer responded to Jesus’ instructions.

10:37 marks a turning point also for the narrator. It is worth noting that, unlike in 10:25 and 10:29, the narrator reports the lawyer’s response to Jesus’ question (10:36-37)—the one who showed him mercy—without adding his finalizing remarks. The absence of finalizing remarks signals the narrator’s willingness to renounce his essential surplus. Similarly, narrator’s refusal to utter a final word as to how the lawyer responded

to Jesus' instruction (to "go and do likewise") reinforces the notion that the narrator no longer operates from authorial surplus. As Green remarks,

To put it slightly differently, an author can renounce the right or habit of exploiting surplus and allow the character some space to articulate his or her consciousness from that character's own angle more fully...In more monologic writing, a reader can count on the reliability of such finalizing explanations. But in polyphonic works (and moves which approach that sort of creation) such certainty diminishes—or can do if we read appropriately. The surplus does not disappear, given Bakhtin's insistence on the pivotal insight that each of us stands in at least a slightly different position from every other; but authorial surplus becomes less the place from which the author or narrator operates.⁵³

It appears that the 10:37 is the space where the narrator renounces essential surplus and the narrator's loophole comes to the fore. The act of renouncing authorial surplus offers the lawyer a loophole enabling him to remain unfinalizable and to have an open-ended future. Such open-endedness signifies an invitation to the readers to join the conversation. It is the narrator's means of urging readers to participate in the drama and to make choices, just like, or instead of, the characters. The role of the readers is important in what Bakhtin calls a "polyphonic work," which he describes in terms of a quarrelsome dialogue between voices in the narrative. He argues that the readers ought to get involved in the dialogue just as bystanders get involved in a quarrel.

The book does not care for indifferent readers and does not respond to them. The true, engaged work on a book is not a passive appropriation but a living and passionate dialogue with it.⁵⁴

Readers must get involved also because

The dialogic interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively)—and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant...everything in the novel is structured so as to make dialogic opposition inescapable. Not a single element of the work is structured from the point of view of a non-participating 'third person.'"⁵⁵

By inviting the readers to join the conversation, the narrator lets the lawyer off the hook and puts *them* on the spot. In a deft move, instead of reporting whether the shocking parable was shocking enough to convince the lawyer to "go and do like" the Samaritan,

the narrator transfers the shock element to another plane—that of the readers. Just as the transition from Jesus’ narration of the parable to Luke’s narration of the story returned the lawyer to the center of the drama, the lawyer’s exit from this open-ended story puts the readers—ancient and modern—on the spot and forces them to participate in the story that is still being scripted. Those reading the text can no longer be privy to the dialogues or to the drama without actually participating in them. Consequently, what began as the story of the Samaritan (and others) became the story of, and about, the lawyer and is about to become a story about the readers. The dialogues between characters in the novel become dialogues in which the readers participate. The question, then, is not “Did the lawyer go and do likewise?” but “Will the readers go and do likewise?” It appears that the lawyer, not wanting to be defined in finalizing terms, has escaped through a loophole.

Like the Law, the Samaritan, and the lawyer, Jesus too has a loophole, which I will illuminate at a later point. But for now, I will explicate the second of the three dialogues in Luke 10, the dialogue between the disparate aspects Martha and Mary personify (10:38-42).

III. THE MARTHA-MARY DIALOGUE

Akin to 10:25-37, the story of Martha and Mary (10:38-42) too contains a dialogue between “doing” and “hearing” but the excessive emphasis that characterizes the previous pericope is noticeably missing in this pericope. In this pericope the readers are introduced to a character named Martha, who apparently needs little exhortation to “do.” This uniquely Lukan story portrays Martha as being obsessed with “doing,” while her sister Mary sits at Jesus’ feet and listens.⁵⁶ The narrator’s portrayal of Mary is consistent

with Martha's complaint to Jesus that, rather than assisting her in doing the work, Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened.⁵⁷ To the surprise of readers, who might expect Jesus to exhort Mary to "go and do" like Martha—just as he has exhorted the lawyer to do like the Samaritan—he does not underscore the importance of "doing." On the contrary, he affirms Mary's hearing and praises her for choosing "the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

It is somewhat puzzling that the same Jesus who repeatedly stressed the importance of "doing" in the previous pericope not only praises Mary for choosing not to "do" but also chides Martha's emphasis on "doing." It is worth asking whether Jesus is contradicting himself or altering the words he has spoken earlier. Two things merit attention at this juncture: first, Jesus' affirmation of Mary's preference for "hearing" and his critique of Martha's emphasis on "doing" should be seen as an attempt to attenuate Martha's excessive emphasis on "doing."⁵⁸ From Jesus' point of view, her 'mistake' lies not in doing, but in the manner in which she was doing it. As Turid Seim puts it,

Jesus' reply to Martha does not concern her serving, but the way it is done, with fuss and agitation. It can thus be claimed that the fundamental antithesis is not between hearing and serving, but between hearing and agitated toil. What truly causes the problem is that Martha, in her agitated busyness with so many things, demands her sister's assistance. Because of her own need (cf. *chreia* in 10:42) for her help she disregards Mary's choice, and even tries to ensure that Jesus supports this intrusion of hers.⁵⁹

Evidence in the text does not support Seim's choice of words such as "fuss" and "agitation" to describe Martha's attitude, yet it does suggest that Martha is obsessed with "doing."

Second, Jesus' affirmation of Mary's "hearing" and his critique of Martha's "doing" do not negate Martha's "doing" as much as they negate Martha's negation of Mary's "hearing." He chides Martha for disregarding Mary's choice and for implying that serving/doing takes precedence over hearing. Although most scholars translate the Greek

phrase *την αγαθην μεριδα* (10:42b) as a comparative phrase meaning “the better part,” it is grammatically plausible to translate it as an adjectival phrase meaning “the good part.”⁶⁰ And it need not be the only good part in this story. Taken thus, the phrase suggests that Jesus affirms Mary’s hearing not at the expense of, but in addition to, Martha’s doing. By chiding Martha for overemphasizing “doing,” while simultaneously affirming Mary’s choice to hear, Jesus is able to equiponderate “doing” and “hearing.” Such a balancing act allows him to facilitate a dialogue between hearing and doing, akin to the dialogues—between hearing and doing—in the previous pericope.

Since truth is complex, it requires a plurality of unmerged consciousnesses to engage in an ongoing and open-ended dialogue. This dialogic discourse runs counter to “monologization,” which seeks to subordinate one perspective to the other. Jesus chides Martha for her monologic tendencies—for trying to subordinate Mary’s choice to hers. Juxtaposition of disparate views, rather than subordination of one view to the other, is the hallmark of a dialogic text.

IV. JESUS’ LOOPHOLE AND THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN 10:25-37 AND 10:38-42

I have argued that Jesus’ critique of Martha and his simultaneous affirmation of Mary are dialogical in nature. But I have yet to address the puzzling issue raised earlier—that there is an apparent contradiction between Jesus’ repeated emphasis on doing (10:25-37), on the one hand and his critique of Martha’s excessive emphasis on doing (10:38-42), on the other. Resolving this issue might throw light on the often-debated issue of the link (or lack thereof) between the two pericope.⁶¹

Although on one level the Jesus of 10:38-42 directly contradicts Martha, on another level he contradicts, in a circumlocutory fashion, the Jesus of 10:25-37. That is, in

chiding Martha for her obsession with “doing,” Jesus appears to be negating the excessive emphasis he placed on doing in 10:25-37 where he has repeatedly encouraged the lawyer to “go and do.” There is an aspect of Dostoevsky’s underground man that can aid our understanding of Jesus’ (double-voiced) discourse here. Building upon Bakhtin’s elucidation of this enigmatic and elusive underground man, Morson and Emerson have made insightful observations about him. According to them,

All of the underground man’s speech is actively double-voiced in an astonishing variety of ways. The underground man is always trying to elude the power of the other to define him and always trying to prevent any “finalized” image of himself from fixing. He therefore continually polemicizes with the impressions his words might make, and seems to mock and retract what he said before he finished saying it. He even retracts his own tendency to retractions, and ridicules in advance even his tendency to use preemptive double-voiced discourse. It is as if he understood all possible analyses of himself, including Bakhtin’s, and was trying to disarm them, to stun the analysts before the words were out of their mouths.⁶²

Since Jesus has repeatedly emphasized the importance of doing in 10:25-37, there is a danger that his audience might define him in finalizing terms to suggest that, in Jesus’ view, doing is more important than hearing. He anticipates and seeks to thwart such finalizing definitions by altering his own words from the previous pericope. His act of altering his own words places his current words in dialogue with his previous words. Such an act also functions as his loophole, which allows him to remain unfinalizable and to stress the importance of hearing, not instead of, but in addition to, doing.

Jesus’ loophole enables him not only to accentuate both “hearing” and “doing” but also to attenuate the ability of his audience, and Luke’s readers, to finalize him. Interestingly, Jesus’ loophole comes in the form of a person. Jesus may have chided Martha for being obsessed with “doing” yet on a different level, Martha is not the actual target of Jesus’ critique. Like Martha, Jesus placed excessive emphasis on “doing” in the previous pericope. Martha does in this pericope what Jesus did in 10:25-37. Therefore, in

10:38-42, Jesus affirms Mary's hearing not only vis-à-vis Martha's doing, but also vis-à-vis his excessive emphasis on doing that characterized the previous pericope. In challenging Martha's obsession with doing then, Jesus was, in part and indirectly, qualifying the excessive emphasis he placed on doing in 10:25-37. Luke seems to have created the story of Martha and Mary—especially the Martha character—in order to offer Jesus a way to alter his own words. In rebuking Martha, then, Jesus indirectly rebukes himself for his excessive emphasis on “doing” in the previous pericope. Martha, thus, becomes a loophole for Jesus.

Just as there is a contrast between the clerics and the Samaritan in 10:25-37, and between Martha and Mary in 10:38-42, there is also a contrast between Jesus (10:25-37) and Jesus (10:38-42). The juxtaposition is between Jesus who accentuates doing in 10:25-37 and Jesus who offers to it a counterweight (hearing) in 10:38-42 by exercising his loophole.⁶³ Such a contrast places Jesus in a dialogic relationship to himself.

Of course, this unfinalizability of a man, his noncoincidence with himself, is still rather elementary and embryonic in the menippea, but they are openly there and permit us to look at a person in a new way. This destruction of the wholeness and finalized quality of a man is facilitated by the appearance, in the menippea, of a dialogic relationship to one's own self (fraught with the possibility of split personality).⁶⁴

By retaining for himself the possibility of altering (or adding to) the meaning of his words in 10:25-37, Jesus remains unfinalizable vis-à-vis doing and hearing. As Bakhtin remarks, “The loophole makes the hero ambiguous and elusive even for himself.”⁶⁵ There is a warning to the readers—both ancient and modern, novice as well as jaded. If they are hoping to offer a finalizing and ultimate definition of Jesus using their essential surplus as readers, they must reconsider because Jesus will escape through his loophole and challenge their definitions of him. Jesus' loophole not only places him in a dialogic relationship to himself but also allows him to equiponderate “doing” and “hearing the

word.” It emerges that what places Luke 10:25-37 in dialogue with Luke 10:38-42 is the Lukan Jesus’ decision to exercise his loophole.

V. CONCLUSION

The loopholed and dialogic nature of Luke 10:25-42 easily lends itself to a Bakhtinian reading. The various loopholes in this unit enable the corresponding characters, including Jesus, to attenuate the ability, and undermine the attempts, of others to define them in finalizing terms. The dialogue between 10:25-37 and 10:38-42 stems primarily from the Lukan Jesus’ decision to exercise his loophole in order to equiponderate “doing” and “hearing” the word, rather than from the inverse fulfillment of the two-fold commandment of 10:27 as Marshall and Talbert have argued. Finally, just as there is a dialogic relationship between the two pericopae, there are also numerous dialogues within each pericope, such as the dialogue between Martha and Mary, “hearing” and “doing,” and that between the vertical and horizontal aspects in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

¹ The approach I have employed for this paper is primarily, but not exclusively, literary (Bakhtinian).

² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, AB, # 2 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 891. Barbara Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 148.

³ E.g., Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 185.

⁴ E.g., Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 33.

⁵ E.g., I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978); Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), among others.

⁶ E.g., Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 29; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 449.

⁷ See John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1973), 63-4.

⁸ I use “loophole” and “unfinalizability” somewhat interchangeably. In non-technical terms, “exception” would be a rough equivalent of “loophole.”

⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 233.

¹⁰ Barbara Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 382.

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- ¹¹ The priest simply passes by on the other side; the Levite goes near the wounded man, but does not stop to help him.
- ¹² Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribners, 1963), 203.
- ¹³ Talbert cites Num 19:11-19 in support of his argument. Charles Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 130.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (London: Longman & Todd, 1970), 211-17.
- ¹⁶ Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, 214.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ It is conceivable that similar, though not the same, considerations, restrictions, and exceptions pertaining to the Law would have applied to the Levite as well.
- ¹⁹ Derrett, *Law in the Testament*, 215.
- ²⁰ See, e.g., Talbert, *Luke*
- ²¹ Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, 217.
- ²² Sharon Ringe, *Luke*, 159.
- ²³ Bakhtin talks about this aspect of loophole in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 232-3.
- ²⁴ Unlike in Matthew and Mark, where Jesus recites the two-fold commandment (Matt 22:37-38; Mark 12:29-31), in Luke the lawyer recites the Law; Jesus only affirms that the lawyer has spoken correctly.
- ²⁵ Such emphasis is missing from the parallel versions in Mark and Matthew.
- ²⁶ There is no typo here!
- ²⁷ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 130.
- ²⁸ Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 113.
- ²⁹ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*,
- ³⁰ Tannehill, *Luke*, 183.
- ³¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 13 (9).
- ³² Tannehill, 183.
- ³³ Tannehill's argument that a Jewish audience would assume that the injured man was Jewish makes lot of sense. Tannehill, 184.
- ³⁴ Bakhtin argued that authors must shun those characters that finalize others by using essential surplus.
- ³⁵ Green, Barbara. *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), p. 327.
- ³⁶ Morson and Emerson, Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics, 241.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Morson and Emerson, 241-243.
- ³⁹ Bakhtin discusses this type of surplus in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 72-73.
- ⁴⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 299.
- ⁴¹ "Outsidedness" can be defined as the aesthetical distance which the author or reader have in relation to the other.
- ⁴² Barbara Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen?*, p.329.
- ⁴³ *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 73.
- ⁴⁴ Barbara Green. *How are the Mighty Fallen?: A Dialogical Study of King Saul in I Samuel* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 369.
- ⁴⁵ Bakhtin's views on oxymoronic combinations (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 118) offer promising leads in this context. Space and scope of this project do not permit me to pursue those leads here.
- ⁴⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson correctly observes that Luke identifies the intent of the question as hostile rather than neutral. L. T. Johnson, *Luke. Sacra Pagina*. 172.
- ⁴⁷ Wayne Booth refers to several instances in the Gospel of Mark—but, interestingly, none in Luke—where one finds the narrator making such illicit entries. Wayne Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*.
- ⁴⁸ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, p. 43.
- ⁴⁹ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, p. 131.
- ⁵⁰ Crossan, *In Parables*, p. 64.
- ⁵¹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 117-8.
- ⁵² David McCracken, *The Scandal of the Gospel: Jesus, Story, and Offense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 137.
- ⁵³ *How Are the Might fallen?*, p. 328.

⁵⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 11.

⁵⁵ *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 18.

⁵⁶ This portrayal of Martha and Mary is consistent with John's portrayal of the two sisters with the same names (John 11:1-6). Yet, there are certain key differences such as the circumstances under Jesus traveled to the village of Martha and Mary.

⁵⁷ Some scholars have countered the notion that Mary was passive. Ringe, for instance, suggests that it would have been radical for a first century Jewish woman to sit at the feet of a rabbi and that Mary may well have been actively engaging in a conversation. The second part of her argument requires some reading creative reading between the lines, I suspect.

⁵⁸ The phrase "many tasks" (10:40a) and Martha's compliant (10:40b) concur with Jesus' observation regarding Martha (10:41).

⁵⁹ Turid Seim, *Double Message*, p. 105.

⁶⁰ More often than not Koine Greek uses this phrase to mean "the better part." Occasionally, it does also have the superlative force meaning "the best part." Still, it is grammatically feasible to translate the phrase as "the good part."

⁶¹ Among modern scholars, Fitzmyer, Green, and Marshall offer the most detailed analysis of the link (or lack thereof) between the two pericopae.

⁶² Morson and Emerson, p. 231.

⁶³ This emphasis on "hearing" in 10:38-42 can be found also toward the end of the pericope that precedes 10:25-37. In a way, 10:25-37, which emphasizes "doing," is sandwiched by two pericopae that affirm hearing. The sandwiching pericopae offer a counterweight to the sandwiched pericope and are in a dialogical relationship with it.

⁶⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 128.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*