

# An Alternative Biblical Reading on Luke 13:1-9<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The issue of nationalism is an important postcolonial concern and as such it is strongly linked to imperialism. The most significant questions posed by postcolonial discourse are: How should we consider the colonial history (which is influenced by imperialism), and how should we reread and reconstruct our past histories, cultures and texts? In this regard, I would like to investigate the issue of nationalism by means of postcolonial discourse. The term 'nationalism' is intimately connected to the terms 'identity', 'belonging' and 'solidarity.' Nationalism is part of national identity and is a cultural and political discourse which works differently in each society. There is no general and universal meaning of nationalism for whole nations. We need to point out that the term 'nationalism' contains ambiguous aspects.<sup>2</sup> As we analyse the issue of nationalism, we need to consider it within a specific context. It is necessary to point out that the term 'nationalism' implies faces of both liberation and oppression.

The oppressive aspect of nationalism is strongly linked to imperialism, on the one hand; and the liberative aspect of it is intimately connected with anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements, on the other hand. According to where nationalism exists, who it speaks to, and what political system it has, nationalism as a discourse consists of the subjectivity of the nation whether as 'the voices of resistance' or as 'the voices of dominance'. I would like to draw attention to the emancipative characteristic of nationalism. We need to point out that the resistant nationalism struggles against western colonialism for liberation and decolonisation.

While we recognise the emancipative characteristic of nationalism, we also need to criticise the oppressive aspect of it in order to go beyond the nationalist discourse. It is important to note that the nationalist discourse is a first step for liberation and decolonisation rather than a final aim. Edward W. Said writes,

Within the nationalist revival ... there were two distinct political moments. ... The first was a pronounced awareness of European and Western culture *as* imperialism. ... The second more openly liberationist moment occurred during the dramatically prolonged Western imperial mission after World War Two in various colonial regions, ... conventional nationalism was revealed to be both insufficient and crucial, but only as a first step.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a part of my doctoral thesis which was submitted to The University of Birmingham, UK, December 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Alter, *Nationalism* (London: Arnold, 1994), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), 270-271.

Even though nationalism contains an important element of decolonisation from western imperial effects, we should emphasise that it contains an oppressive aspect which tends to silence the voices of the marginalised within a nation-state or community. Postcolonial discourse approves the importance of anti-colonial nationalism and, at the same time, critically looks at its oppressive and negative aspect. It also proposes postnationalism as an alternative way. In order to practise the postnationalist discourse, we need to review the “contrapuntal reading” advocated by Edward Said as a postcolonial reading practice. We should criticise imperialism and nationalism simultaneously through this reading strategy. It is important to note that the most significant strategy of this reading is to represent peripheral voices, which are neglected by grand discourses and Ethnocentrism.

What I suggest for a postcolonial interpretation is to attempt to pull back the veil of imperial effects on Luke’s Gospel, and to criticise the interpretation and criticism, which represents only Eurocentric and imperialist perspectives. To produce an alternative postcolonial reading, we need to analyse the position of the author. Said writes,

It was impossible to write of liberation and nationalism, however allusively, without also declaring oneself for or against them. They were correct, I believe, in presuming that in so globalizing a world-view as that of imperialism, there could be no neutrality: one either was on the side of Empire or against it, and, since they themselves had lived the empire (as native or as white), there was no getting away from it.<sup>4</sup>

In the light of postcolonial discourse, we need to look at the relationship between imperialism and nationalism contrapuntally. At the same time, we should point out the important role of the interpreters. It is now appropriate to investigate both the liberative and oppressive aspects of nationalism in connection with the texts of Luke’s Gospel. I shall also consider the position of Luke connected to the issue of nationalism and imperialism.

## The Reality of the Roman Empire in Luke’s Gospel

The author of Luke’s Gospel obviously has experience of the presence of the Roman Empire. He introduces the shadow of the Roman Empire into the detail of his writings (Luke 2:1-2; 3:1; 7:2-10; 13:1-3; 19:41-44; 20:20-26; 21:20-24; 23:1-7, 13-25, 47). Even though ancient empires differ considerably from modern imperialism, we recognise that their primary feature was to conquer other nations or states, to oppress their people, and to expropriate the invaded from wealth and resources. I will look at the descriptions of the presence of the Roman Empire in order to examine Luke’s theological stance in relation to the Roman Empire. At the same time, I will deal with Lucan interpreters’ representations

---

<sup>4</sup> Said, 337.

regarding the Roman Empire. In doing so, I would like to interpret the presence of the Roman Empire in Luke's Gospel in terms of a postcolonial perspective.

The reality of the Roman Empire in Luke's Gospel is introduced clearly in Luke's infancy narratives (Luke 1-2). While Luke describes Roman and Jewish political leaders, (which may or may not be accurate), we should consider that he firmly introduces the reality of the Roman Empire in his Gospel. It is a fact that the reality of the Roman Empire has a close connection with ideas about nationalism. It is important to analyse the relationship between nationalism and the Roman Empire in Luke-Acts. The governing authorities most commonly found in Luke's Gospel are Jewish and Roman.<sup>5</sup> These authorities sometimes plot together, and sometimes go their own way as portrayed in Luke's Gospel. In Luke's time, nevertheless, the authority of domination and oppression is Roman authority. Luke therefore needs to deal with the Roman authority more seriously than the Jewish authority. According to Robert F. O'Toole, "Luke generally treats Jewish officials negatively. ... [However], Roman authorities deal favourably with Jesus and the Christians. Frequently, to protect themselves from opponents, Jewish or other, the Christians appeal to the Romans."<sup>6</sup> Luke seems to imply that there are no conflicts between the Christian community and the Roman authority. Here, we recognise Luke's position in connection with the Roman Empire. He seems to have a pro-Roman tendency rather than one which is pro-Jewish.

If we overlook the context of the Jewish community in Luke's Gospel under the dominance and oppression of the Roman Empire, we cannot discover the hidden voices in Luke's Gospel in relation to the reality of the Roman Empire. We need to consider the shadow of the Roman Empire which dominates and oppresses the Jewish society and people. Richard A. Horsley writes,

As Roman imperialism broke down subject people's indigenous culture and social forms and imposed forms of 'civilisation', the form of imperial power relations shifted from application of military violence to socio-economic networks of patronage and the religious festivals, shrines, and images of the imperial cult.<sup>7</sup>

The Roman imperial power and authority dominates the subjugated through oppression and discrimination in the social, economic, and political spheres. We consider that the Roman Empire was the centre of politics, economy, culture, and religion in Luke's time. We need to pay attention to Dube's caution against "overlooking a very important factor: the presence of the empire"<sup>8</sup> in the Bible. We recognise that the texts of Luke's Gospel intimately connect with the Roman Empire, and Luke describes

---

<sup>5</sup> Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivation of Lucan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 29; S. J. Robert F. O'Toole, "Luke's Position on Politics and Society in Luke-Acts," in *Politics Issues in Luke-Acts*, ed. Richard J. Cassidy & Philip J. Scharper (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 5.

<sup>6</sup> O'Toole, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Richard A. Horsley, "Submerged Biblical Histories and Imperial Biblical Studies," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 171.

<sup>8</sup> Musa W. Dube, "Savior of the World but not of This World: A Postcolonial Reading of Spatial Construction in John," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 128.

the shadow of the Roman Empire. In connection with the presence of the Roman Empire, we need to recognise some resistant movement against the Empire in Luke's Gospel. We cannot deny that there are some nationalist resistant movements against Roman imperial dominance. Therefore, the issue of nationalism in connection with the presence of the Roman Empire is one of the important postcolonial concerns.

As Lucan biblical scholars interpret the infancy narratives (Luke 1-2), they argue that Luke intends to link the birth of Jesus with Roman imperial history, and he insists that the Messianic event related to the birth of Jesus begins with the history of the world.<sup>9</sup> These scholars not only treat relations between the Roman Empire and the birth of Jesus in a positive manner, but also interpret Joseph and Mary (the parents of Jesus), as obeying the rule and dominance of the Roman Empire. According to Luke J. Johnson, "they [Joseph and Mary] are simple people who are obedient to authority. The command of the empire does not stir them to join revolt; rather they obey the decree, in contrast to Luke's mention of Judas the Galilean who revolted 'at the time of the census' (Acts 5: 37)."<sup>10</sup> I. Howard Marshall also claims, "Joseph is portrayed as a law-abiding citizen – perhaps in deliberate contrast to the Zealots and other rebels against Rome – who in response to the imperial edict makes his way up from the comparatively low-lying countryside of Galilee to the hill-country of Judaea."<sup>11</sup> They depict Joseph and Mary, Jesus' parents, as people obedient to the Roman authority and the emperor's decree, and specifically set them apart from movements resisting the Roman power and authority. Nevertheless, they do not explain why Luke portrays Joseph and Mary in the infancy narratives (Luke 1-2) as pro-Roman people. Rather, they consider Jesus' parents to act in a way that contrasts with the Galileans, who protested against the Roman Empire, in order to eliminate the implied signs of conflict between the presence of the Roman authority and Christians in Luke's Gospel. Here, we recognise that Johnson and Marshall have Eurocentric interpretative perspectives so that they interpret the nationalistic resistance movement against the Roman Empire as 'revolt' or 'rebels'. For Roman imperial power, the Jewish nationalistic movement against the Roman Empire is revolt. However, it is a struggle for liberation and independence from the perspective of the Jewish people who are subjugated by the Roman Empire. I consider that Johnson and Marshall stand for Eurocentric interpretative perspectives. It is an important fact that postcolonial biblical reading tries to uncover these western-centred interpretations of the Bible.

We should therefore ask some questions about the position of Luke in relation to Roman authority. Why does Luke introduce the idea of a positive attitude towards the Roman Empire in his infancy narratives? What does Luke intend to convey by mentioning that Joseph and Mary are law-abiding and obedient to

---

<sup>9</sup> See E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*. The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 80; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina Series. Vol.3 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 51-52; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*. The New Testament Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), 96-98; David L. Tiede, "'Glory to Thy People Israel': Luke-Acts and the Jews", in *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People: Eight Critical Perspectives*, ed. Joseph B. Tyson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 24.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall, 104.

the emperor's decree? Is there any Jewish nationalism connected to the infant narratives in Luke 1-2? We should consider what position Luke holds regarding the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Christian community. We can presume that Luke has a pro-Roman strategy to protect the community in Luke-Acts. According to O'Toole, "Luke advocates taking full advantage of the Roman polity. His principle would be: Christians should use every available legal means to protect themselves".<sup>12</sup> I consider that Luke seems to establish the amicable and positive relationship between the Roman Empire and the Christian community, and to exclude the obstacle of the implication of nationalist resistance in Luke-Acts in order to protect the community under Roman domination. Now, we should go back to the question of Luke 1-2 in the above. Why does Luke have a pro-Roman attitude? What strategy does Luke have in dealing with the Roman authorities? Philip Francis Esler states,

Luke presents Christianity and the Roman Empire as interacting on a number of distinct, although related, levels. The first level consists of the synchronisms which Luke ... establishes between dates in imperial history and significant events in the beginnings of the Gospel. Thus, the birth of Jesus occurs during the world-wide census ordered by Augustus (Lk 2:1-7), and John the Baptist begins his ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea (Lk 3:1-3). These synchronisms are not merely an aspect of Luke's historiographical technique; they suggest that among his intended audience were readers interested in the position of Christianity in the context of Roman history. To such readers, moreover, that the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem occurs as a direct result of Joseph's unquestioning obedience to an imperial decree must have seemed a revealing example of the possibility that Roman politics were not necessarily inconsistent with the divine purpose.<sup>13</sup>

Philip Francis Esler claims that Luke suggests a consistent divine purpose between the imperial history and the history of Christianity. Furthermore, He seems to agree with Luke's position that Joseph and Mary did not protest against the Roman authorities, and moreover did not have an antipathy towards Roman imperial domination. However, Esler fails to criticise Luke's pro-Roman slant. Here we have an image and portrayal of Jesus which acknowledges, on the one hand, the Romans' imperial domination and oppression, and supports, on the other hand, the western interpretation of imperial history and tradition. We need to deal with the texts of Luke-Acts and their relation to the Roman Empire and the nationalist resistant movement, in the light of a postcolonial discourse. We should bring the voices of the subjugated that protest against the Roman Empire to the fore of the interpretation of Luke-Acts. Clearly, we need to reread the texts of Luke-Acts from the perspective of the voiceless and those oppressed by Roman imperial power.

---

<sup>12</sup> O'Toole, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Esler, 201-202.

## Reading on Luke 13:1-9

It is important to note that Luke 13:1-9 is unique narrative which simultaneously contains both political and religious issues within it. We shall investigate how the political issues are gradually eclipsed within the text and the interpretations as a result of Luke and Lucan interpreters attempt to spell out the religious issues of the pericope. Furthermore, although the narrative implicates the Jewish nationalist movement against the Roman Empire, we need to scrutinise it as connected to the issue of nationalism as a postcolonial concern. One of the important aspects of postcolonial biblical interpretation is a reading practice, which strives to bring peripheral voices to the fore of the discourse, and to represent the hidden voices under the burden of Euro-American interpretative perspective. As we deal with the pericope in Luke 13:1-9 in the light of postcolonial biblical interpretation, we shall draw attention to the political and ideological issues which most Lucan interpreters tend to turn aside. It is important to state that according to the position of readers and interpreters, there are diversely different interpretations and representations. For this reason, we need to suggest multiple reading practices rather than a lopsided interpretative standard. Unlike Euro-American interpretative perspectives, postcolonial biblical reading practice not only implies the presence of diverse voices in the text, but also discovers the hidden voices which are silenced by universalising and 'objective' interpretative reading practices. I would like to reread the narrative in Luke 13:1-9 which contains various issues within the text, in the light of a postcolonial reading. In doing so, we need to investigate how Euro-American Lucan interpreters comment on the pericope. Furthermore, we need to look at the position of Luke connected to the narrative in Luke 13:1-9. To begin with, we need to indicate the literary structure of the narrative in Luke 13:1-9, which consists of two incidents (13:1-5) and one parable (13:6-9). The narrative contains both the political and religious issues. According to Kenneth E. Bailey, "in these verses we are dealing with two units of tradition (vv. 1-5, 6-9). Each unit discusses politics and repentance, and thus it is appropriate to examine them together."<sup>14</sup> I consider that Bailey appropriately analyses the narrative. As we properly interpret the text, we need to investigate the social, political and religious context of the text. Most Lucan scholars' interpretations of the narrative seem to comment on the text by means of the religious point of view. In spite of recognising the presence of the Roman Empire, they do not positively evaluate the political situation of the text and the implication of the liberation struggle, but emphasise the religious lessons of the narrative. In doing so, they seem to under-estimate the Jewish nationalist resistance movement in the process of highlighting the religious instruction of the text. By investigating Lucan scholars' interpretative perspectives, we need to point out their assumptions which overlook and neglect aspects of the narrative in Luke 13:1-9. Most Lucan commentators tend to interpret the text Luke 13:1-9 in the light of the religious issues connected to the need for repentance.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Most Lucan interpreters argue that the pericope in Luke 13: 1-9 is strongly linked to the issue of repentance. See G.

Lucan interpreters seem to agree that the narrative is not an actual historical report. We can assume that the narrative contains tradition regarding the resistance movement against the Roman Empire in Jesus' time or Luke's day in Galilee or Judea. Sharon H. Ringe illuminates the difficulty of the historical approach to the narrative. According to her, "Josephus and others mention several episodes in which representatives of Rome took harsh action against Jews. None of those episodes sounds exactly like the incident referred to here, however, so it is impossible to connect this to any specific historical event."<sup>16</sup> Although there is no exact historical record corresponding to the narrative in Luke 13:1-5, the political and social significance implied in the narrative should not be overlooked. Rather, by reading the between the lines of the narrative, we can read the presence of those who are oppressed by the dominance and exploitation of Roman imperial power. Why does Luke introduce the narrative of Luke 13:1-9, which contains both political and religious issues? Paul W. Walaskay says,

It is clear that in Luke 13:1 the Evangelist has something of importance to say about Jewish-Roman relations during Jesus' ministry. Those scholars intent in finding direct links between Jesus and the Zealots point to this passage as evidence of Jesus' anti-Roman attitude. However, when the passage is taken in its wider context it becomes apparent that Pilate is not the subject of discussion; rather, it is the Jews with whom Jesus is concerned.<sup>17</sup>

Walaskay argues that Luke's Jesus does not seem to promote an anti-Roman tendency, but is concerned with the life and religion of Jews. He rejects the presence of the Jewish nationalist movement in Luke-Acts. In contrast, Bailey points out the probability of the anti-Roman liberation struggle in the narrative. Bailey describes those who tell Jesus Pilate's massacre as "nationalists".<sup>18</sup> Bailey claims that the reason why Luke deals with the narrative in Luke 13:1-9 is to expose the presence of those Jews who are oppressed and subjugated by Roman imperial power. As we have indicated throughout the analysis of the narrative, we recognise that there are diverse interpretations of the narrative among Lucan

---

B. Caird, *Saint Luke*. The Penguin New Testament Commentaries (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 169-170; Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 259; E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke: The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 184-185; C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke: TPI New Testament Commentaries* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 547; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: The Anchor Bible Vol. 28a*. (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1986), 1004-1005; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina Series. Vol.3 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 211-215; Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 17; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), 552-556; Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*. Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 183-185; Willard W. Swartley, "Politics or Peace (*Eirēnē*) in Luke's Gospel," in *Politics Issues in Luke-Acts*, ed. Richard J. Cassidy & Philip J. Scharper (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 21; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation: The Gospel According to Luke*. Vol.1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991), 147-152; David L. Tiede, *Luke*: Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 246-247; Paul W. Walaskay, 'And so we came to Rome': *The Political Perspective of ST Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 24-25.

<sup>16</sup> Ringe, 183.

<sup>17</sup> Walaskay, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Bailey, 60.

interpreters: some of them tend to focus on the religious aspect of the narrative and the others spell out the political factors of the text. In order to understand the narrative appropriately, we need to look at the position of Luke and investigate Lucan scholars' interpretative perspectives.

First of all, I would like to examine the political factors implied within the narrative. By investigating the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Jews, I shall discover the political aspect connected to the issue of nationalism. It is important to note that there is the possibility and potentiality of anti-Roman liberation struggle linked to the presence of those Galileans who are slaughtered by Pilate. Unlike most Lucan interpreters, Bailey indicates the presence of "nationalists" in Luke 13:1-3. They seem to strive to protest against Roman imperial control and oppression for liberation. Surprisingly, Lucan interpreters unfavourably evaluate the presence of "nationalists." We recognise that Ellis uses the term 'revolt' and 'sedition' in order to comment on the anti-Roman liberation movement of Galileans. It is important to note that the position of interpreter is a postcolonial issue. We need to ask what the role of interpreter is. It is important to note that Ellis does not stand for those Galileans who struggle for liberation, but rather he interprets them in terms of 'revolt' and 'sedition' on the side of the Roman Empire. According to E. Earle Ellis, "it is probable that the incident did occur at the time of the Passover 'sacrifices' and in connection with an attempted revolt. The massacre is not reported in other sources. But Galileans were known to be fond of sedition. And the severe reaction is characteristic of Roman rule in Palestine."<sup>19</sup> The liberation struggles of the colonised and the oppressed are obviously 'revolt', and 'rebel' from the perspective of the coloniser and imperialist. In contrast, the struggles for liberation and freedom from the standpoint of the subjugated are strongly linked to the resistant and independent movement. Postcolonial biblical reading tries to expose these interpretations that justify colonial discourses. Furthermore, it tends to bring the peripheral voices to the fore of the discourse. Connected to an example of the Eurocentric interpretation, Walaskay negatively comments on the presence of the Galileans those who are slaughtered by Pilate. According to him, "those unfortunate Galileans are only a portent of what is in store for the nation; those who provoked Pilate's wrath will yet spread their infectious disease of revolution and bring ultimate doom to all other Galileans if the nation does not repent."<sup>20</sup> G. B. Caird similarly interprets that the Jewish liberation struggle against the Roman Empire will lead to catastrophe. Caird writes,

His gospel was not a political manifesto, but it had political implications: as Messiah he had summoned Israel to reconsider the meaning of her vocation as people of God and to repent of the national pride which interpreted that vocation in terms of privilege and worldly greatness. To reject the way of Jesus was to choose the path leading directly to conflict with Rome and subsequent catastrophe.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Ellis, 233.

<sup>20</sup> Walaskay, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Caird, 169.



We recognise that Walaskay and Caird seem not to be on the side of the subjugated, but on the part of the oppressor, that is, Roman imperial power. These Lucan interpreters overlook the social and political realities of those Jews who are oppressed and exploited by the harsh representatives of the Roman Empire. It is important to point out that their interpretative perspectives consciously or unconsciously imply Eurocentric tendencies connected to legitimising western colonial assumptions. Willard W. Swartley also argues that Luke's Jesus provides the teaching on non-violence connected to the political issue in Luke's Gospel. According to him, "Jesus takes a stand against violence; his teaching encourages nonresistance (6:27-31). While speaking negatively of violence (13:1, 31; 19:25-46), he calls his followers to the way of repentance and forgiveness (17:3-4)."<sup>22</sup> Swartley's interpretation is strongly linked to the colonising of the mind, which the subjugated should spiritlessly submit to colonial and imperial power. Unlike these western-centred Lucan interpreters, we need to discover the resistant voices of those subjugated who protest against the dominance and oppression connected to the narrative in Luke 13:1-3. Furthermore, we need to reread and reconstruct the text of Luke 13:1-3 not from the standpoint of the invader and coloniser, but from the perspective of the invaded and colonised. In doing so, we can discover the hidden voices as a consequence of refocusing on the presence of the Roman Empire and its dominant strategy. Now I would like to look at Lucan scholars' interpretations of Pilate and the Roman Empire in Luke 13:1-9. It is interesting to note that most Lucan commentators negatively evaluate Pilate, the representative of the Roman Empire. They argue that Pilate disregards the Jewish religious custom and tradition. David L. Tiede writes,

All that can be demonstrated from Josephus is that Pilate's cruelty was well known and included attacks on Samaritan pilgrims (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.86-87), introduction of Roman standards into the temple (*Ant.* 18.55-59), and the seizing of temple funds (*Ant.* 18.60-62). Even if this specific slaughter of Galilean pilgrims is otherwise an untold story, it fits with Pilate's reputation of disdain for religious practices (see 23:1-25).<sup>23</sup>

Johnson also identifies Pilate as "a murderer of Galileans."<sup>24</sup> And Christoph W. Stenschke argues that "Luke 13:1 testifies to Pilate's cruelty, moral-ethical failure and his assessment of Judaism."<sup>25</sup> In spite of these negative assessments and reputations of Pilate, it is ironical to note that most Lucan commentators spell out the positive functions of the Roman Empire in Luke-Acts rather than the Jewish nationalist resistant movement. It is undeniable to say that these Lucan scholars' interpretative perspectives are linked to Luke's position. Walaskay writes,

---

<sup>22</sup> Swartley, 21.

<sup>23</sup> David L. Tiede, *Luke*. Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 247.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, 214.

<sup>25</sup> Christoph W. Stenschke, *Luke's Portrait of Gentiles Prior to Their Coming to Faith* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 118.

[W]hatever material in Luke-Acts that is unfavorable to Rome is far from a sustained anti-Roman polemic. ... Rather, in reporting the encounters between representatives of the Christian movement and the Roman empire, Luke has often glossed over the negative perspective regarding the empire contained in his sources while actively promoting a positive representation of Roman rule.<sup>26</sup>

Walaskay correctly analyses the position of Luke connected to the Roman Empire. Luke has a positive and favourable attitude to the Roman Empire and stands for it. However, it is important to note that there are few Lucan interpreters who strive to reread Luke's pro-Roman tendency, and re-evaluate the Jewish nationalist liberation struggles which Luke overlooks. Unlike other Lucan interpreters, Bailey points out an unawareness and ignorance of the Roman Empire connected to Jewish religious practice. According to Bailey, "Pilate's soldiers could have been so insensitive to Jewish religious practices as to attack worshipers in the very act of offering a sacrifice."<sup>27</sup> By indicating the characteristics of the Roman Empire, Bailey analyses the Jewish nationalist movement within the texts of Luke-Acts.

Even though Lucan interpreters analyse the oppression and cruelty of Pilate and the Roman Empire towards Galilee and Judea, Roman colonial territory, they turn the emphasis back to the religious aspect of the narrative in Luke 13:1-9. In spite of recognising the political implication of the narrative connected to Pilate's slaughter, most Lucan interpreters tend to reinforce the religious emphasis of the text. For instance, Caird notes that the Roman Empire is used as God's instrument to punish unrepentant Israel. According to him, "as in the days of Isaiah God had used Assyria as the agent of his judgement upon his people; and only immediate repentance could save them."<sup>28</sup> Luke, writing after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, probably witnesses the oppression and violence of Roman imperial power in Galilee and Judea. However, Luke seems to describe the presence of the Roman Empire positively, and tends to obscure the negative aspects of the Roman Empire. It is important to note that most Lucan interpreters attempt to reinforce Luke's pro-Roman perspective rather than to critically evaluate it. These Lucan commentators' interpretative tendencies strongly link the attempt to shift from the political issue to the religious one. Most Lucan commentators identify the need for repentance in the narrative in Luke 13:1-9, which contains both the political and religious issue. It is appropriate to point out that most Lucan interpreters fail to represent the resistant voices of the narrative as a result of highlighting the religious aspect rather than the political and ideological standpoint.

In order to propose an appropriate interpretation of the narrative, we need to scrutinise Lucan scholars' interpretative perspectives. According to C. F. Evans, "whether or not the incidents had any political background, Jesus treats them from a religious point of view."<sup>29</sup> The attitude of Luke's Jesus is interpreted by Lucan scholars in certain specific ways. Johnson also indicates the position of Luke

---

<sup>26</sup> Walaskay, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Bailey, 75.

<sup>28</sup> Caird, 169.

<sup>29</sup> Evans, 547.

reinforcing the religious issue. According to him, “the point of Luke’s recital is less the history of Pilate’s reign than of the need to repent.”<sup>30</sup> These interpretations of the narrative seem to regard it as appropriate. However, these interpretative perspectives have something to do with Eurocentric reading practices, which attempt to eclipse the political issues as a consequence of stressing the religious aspect. Ellis tends to shift from the political issues to the need for repentance in the light of God’s judgement. According to Ellis, “in every death, whether an accident at ‘Siloam’ or an execution by Pilate, the funeral bell ‘tolls for thee’. Hear its warning and ‘repent’! Just as an unfruitful tree sooner or later is cut out of the orchard, so the judgement of God comes at length upon those who never bring forth the fruit of repentance (cf. 12:13-21).”<sup>31</sup> The emphasis on the religious aspect of the narrative in Luke 13:1-9 seems to connect to Luke’s theological stance, that is: Luke tends to reinterpret the miserable historical incident regarding the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple in the light of the religious lessons. For instance, Robert Maddox implies this interpretative stance. According to him,

It seems to me that in the second half of this cluster of sayings, 13:1-9, there is an unmistakable reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem: unless you repent, you will be butchered by the Romans even within the Temple-court; unless you repent, the towers of Jerusalem will fall on you; unless Judaism becomes a fruitful tree, she is to be chopped down.<sup>32</sup>

Although most Lucan interpreters seem to recognise the political issue of the narrative, they tend to overlook the political aspect and rather emphasise the religious point of view. It is important to note that Lucan commentators tend to suspend critical evaluation of Luke’s excessively pro-Roman attitude and deal positively with Luke’s position connected to the Roman Empire. Joseph A. Fitzmyer indicates that Jesus is a Galilean. Indication of a Galilean Jesus is of crucial significance because Galileans were stigmatised as the rebel or revolvers. However, as Fitzmyer points out, “though a Galilean himself, he does not launch into a chauvinistic criticism of the Roman prefect; instead he uses the incident to call for repentance.”<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Bailey interprets the religious issue of repentance connected to the issue of nationalism. According to him, “this call for repentance is thrown in the face of nationalistic enthusiasts who stand in opposition to Roman oppression.”<sup>34</sup> He does not comment whether Luke’s Jesus, in calling for repentance, displays a pro-Roman or an apolitical attitude. Bailey demonstrates,

Jesus’ speech should not be read simply as a rejection of the nationalistic struggle, nor as a concern for things “spiritual” rather than political. ... He does not tell them to submit to Pilate. He is not acquiescing to Roman

---

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, 211.

<sup>31</sup> Ellis, 185.

<sup>32</sup> Maddox, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Fitzmyer, 1004-1005.

<sup>34</sup> Bailey, 78-79.

oppression. Rather he bravely demonstrates a deep concern for the people in front of him who will destroy themselves and all around them if they do not repent.<sup>35</sup>

Since he spells out not only the political and religious aspects of the narrative in Luke 13:1-9, but also the presence of the nationalist movement, Bailey's analysis contains a progressive interpretation, which goes beyond other Lucan commentators' interpretative perspectives. However, we need to point out that he fails to reinterpret the position of Luke. It is important to note that the position of Luke connected to Luke 13:1-9 apparently implies a pro-Roman attitude. It seems that Luke stands up for the Roman Empire, and tends to diminish the negative and oppressive tendencies of the Roman Empire and its representatives. In contrast, Luke attempts to overlook the presence of the Jewish nationalist resistant movement in Luke 13:1-9. Therefore, we need to reread and reinterpret the nationalistic resistant voices in Luke 13:1-9 that both Luke and Lucan interpreters intend to overlook within the text. In other words, we need to expose these interpretations, which tend to justify western colonial concerns. In doing so, we can bring the silenced and marginalised voices, i.e., the liberative nationalist discourses to the fore of the interpretation. It is a rereading and reinterpreting practice of the narrative in Luke 13:1-9 in the light of postcolonial biblical reading.

## Abstract

Nationalism is an important issue to consider in the study of postcolonialism. It is strongly linked to imperialism. It is necessary to look at nationalism and its implications and to pursue the relationship between nationalism and Luke's Gospel in the light of postcolonial discourse. I shall attempt to deal with three important issues in this paper. First of all, I will look at the issue of nationalism as a postcolonial concern. I would like to investigate the definitions of the term 'nationalism' and the relationship between nationalism and postcolonial discourse. Secondly, I will examine the liberative aspect of nationalism in Luke's Gospel connected to Jewish nationalist struggles against the Roman Empire. Finally, I would like to reread and reinterpret the narrative in Luke 13:1-9, which contains the issue of nationalism, in the light of postcolonial biblical reading.

As we have examined, it is important to note that the issue of nationalism is strongly linked to the issue of imperialism. It seems that the Jewish nationalist movement has strong implications in Luke's Gospel. These Jewish nationalist resistance movements only exist because of the presence of the Roman imperialism. However, Luke does not seem to mention the presence of the Jewish nationalist movement in his writings. Furthermore, most Lucan commentators tend to overlook the political issues connected to Jewish nationalism, and they strive to deny the possibility and potentiality of liberation struggles against

---

<sup>35</sup> Bailey, 79.

Roman imperial power. Therefore, if we reread the texts of Luke's Gospel in the light of postcolonial reading practices, we find that Luke's Gospel does deal with the issue of nationalism. Clearly, Luke does not stand for the Jewish nationalist resistance movement against the Roman Empire. Rather, Luke, a *co-opted* intellectual, seems to take the part of the Roman Empire. Although Luke lives under the domination and oppression of the Roman Empire, he does not promote the Jewish nationalist resistance movement against Roman imperial power. It seems that Luke tacitly approves of Roman imperial dominance and oppression. Some Lucan interpreters, who tend to overlook the political issues in Luke's Gospel, are writing from a Eurocentric interpretative perspective. By ignoring the resistance voices connected to the Jewish liberation struggles in Luke's Gospel, they justify western colonial discourses. In addition, we need to reread the position of Luke and to reinterpret Lucan commentators' interpretation in the light of postcolonial discourses. We can discover hidden voices, i.e., the resistance voices connected to the issue of nationalism, as a result of rereading and reinterpreting the texts of Luke's Gospel by means of postcolonial biblical reading.

#### *Key Words*

Nationalism, postcolonialism, an alternative reading, Luke's Gospel, Roman Empire

#### ※Biographical Introduction

Park Heung-soon earned his Ph.D. from The University of Birmingham, UK. He has been teaching the New Testament Theology as a lecturer at Soongsil University and SungKongHoe University. He is interested in an alternative reading of the Bible from postcolonial perspective. He has published two books, *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation* (Seoul, 2006), *Minority Biblical Interpretation* (Seoul, 2006). Email: jubilee4499@ssu.ac.kr.