

The Multi-Layered Meaning of “Hypocrisy” in the Gospels

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“Hypocrisy” and “hypocrite” (**ùpokrisij**, **ùpokrithj**)¹ are important words in the New Testament. In the Synoptic Gospels alone, they occur 20 times: 19 times on the lips of Jesus², once under the pen of the evangelist³. In the NT, **ùpokrisij** occurs 3 other times⁴. Including related terms (**anupokritoj**, **ùpokrinomai**, **sunupokrinomai**), the count adds up to 31 NT occurrences⁵. Still, the meaning of **ùpokrisij**, **ùpokrithj**, **anupokritoj**, **ùpokrinomai**, and **sunupokrinomai** is disputed⁶. To understand Jesus and the

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1. Unless otherwise stated, I use the RSV as my English translation.
 2. **ùpokrisij**: Matt 23:28; Luke 12:1; **ùpokrithj**: Matt 6:2.5.16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13.15.23.25.27.29; 24:51; Mark 7:6; Luke 6:42; 12:56; 13:15. Matt 23:14 is textually uncertain.
 3. Mark 12:15. In the Gospel according to John, “hypocrisy” and related terms do not occur; there occurs, however, the related theme of “(vain)glory” (John 5:41.44; 7:18; 8:50.54; 12:43).
 4. Gal 2:13; 1Tim 4:2; 1Pet 2:1.
 5. **anupokritoj**: Rom 12:9; 2Cor 6:6; 1Tim 1:5; 2Tim 1:5; Jas 3:17; 1Pet 1:22; **ùpokrinomai**: Luke 20:20; **sunupokrinomai**: Gal 2:13.
 6. See the fundamental study of U. WILCKENS, **ùpokrinomai kt l.**, *TDNT*, VIII, 559-571. Also D.E. GARLAND, *The Intention of Matthew 23*

seriousness of his ethical and social concern, a close study of the meaning of “hypocrisy” in the Gospels may be useful.

In the Synoptics, hypocrisy is linked with specific categories of people⁷: “scribes and Pharisees” (Matt 23:13.15.23.25.27.29; cf. 23:28), “Pharisees and scribes [...] from Jerusalem” (Matt 15:1.7; Mark 7:1.6); “(disciples of the) Pharisees and Herodians” (Matt 22:16.18; Mark 12:13.15); “the scribes and the chief priests” (Luke 20:19-20); “the Pharisees” (Luke 12:1); “the ruler of the synagogue” (Luke 13:14-15). All these people have one thing in common: they are leaders of one sort or another. “Hypocrisy” has something to do with leadership also in at least three of the other NT occurrences of the concept (Gal 2:13; 1Tim 4:2). In Matt 23, Jesus seems to conceive of hypocrisy as “saying and not doing” (Matt 23:3). “Saying and not doing” is something that easily happens to leaders. They often have to speak in public to encourage others to behave and be good. In their personal life leaders then face the challenge of practising what they preach. This is more easily said than done. Being in my little way also a sort of leader, I would like to go deeper into this.

I shall proceed in two steps. First, I will make a sort of

(SNT 52; Leiden: Brill, 1979), who dedicates a whole chapter (*Ibidem*, 91-123) to the interpretation of the word “hypocrisy”. After a detailed survey of the available evidence, GARLAND, *Intention*, 98, concludes: “There is no simple explanation which comprehends every instance of the use of the word hypocrisy in the New Testament and Post-Apostolic writings”.

7. Only in a few cases is there no such connection: Matt 7:5; 24:51; Luke 6:42; 12:56. The “hypocrites” of Matt 6:2.5.16 have a possible connection with “the scribes and Pharisees” of Matt 5:20.

diagnosis of the problem of “hypocrisy”, relying especially on Jesus’ words in Matt; second, I will consider hypocrisy in Luke and the cure for hypocrisy suggested by Jesus in Luke⁸.

1. Jesus’ Exposure of the Disease in Matt: Hypocrisy as a Covered-up Acceptance of Persons

In this section I will review, first, the meaning of hypocrisy in non-biblical and biblical Greek; second, the meaning of hypocrisy in Matt 23; third, the meaning of hypocrisy in other texts of Matt.

1.1 The Meaning of Hypocrisy in Non-Biblical and Biblical Greek

To begin with, let us study the meaning of the Greek words **ὑποκρισις**, **ὑποκριτής**, and **ὑποκρινομαι** that appear in the Gospels. Surveying the whole of Greek literature and taking the noun **ὑποκριτής** as the point of reference, these Greek terms occur with one or other of the following four meanings:

- 1) one who answers: an interpreter, an expounder;
- 2) one who plays a part on the stage: an actor;
- 3) one who delivers, recites: a declaimer, an orator;
- 4) a pretender, a dissembler, a hypocrite⁹.

8. By Matt, Mark, Luke I mean *the text* of the Gospel according to Matthew, of the Gospel according to Mark, and of the Gospel according to Luke.

9. See H.G. LIDDELL - R. SCOTT *ET AL.*, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940⁹) 1886. The last is the meaning that the word “hypocrite”

The first three sets of meanings are common throughout Greek literature. The fourth set is found especially, though not exclusively, in the LXX and literature influenced by it (NT, Philo, Josephus, etc.)¹⁰. While it is easily understood why words that originally meant “play-acting” should be used to mean “dissembling”, a strange phenomenon in the LXX is that **ὑποκρισις** and **ὑποκριτής** are used to translate Hebrew words for “wickedness” and “wicked”¹¹. Why should the LXX use them in this way?¹²

has in English: “a dissembler, pretender” (W. LITTLE *ET AL.*, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1959³] 945).

10. In the LXX this cluster of words occurs only 11 times (**ὑποκρινομαι** 8, **ὑποκρισις** 1, **ὑποκριτής** 2; the counting is influenced by textual problems); in the NT 24 times (1, 6, 17); in Philo 20 times (1, 16, 3), and in Josephus 35 times (26, 8, 1). Several occurrences in Philo and Josephus have the same sense as in the LXX and in the NT (e.g. Philo, *Jos* 67; *Spec* 4:183). In Philo’s works, practically all the meanings given above are represented. In the LXX **ἀνοκριτός** occurs also twice (6 times in the NT). As for **συνυποκρινομαι**, it occurs only once in the NT.
11. “Wrong-doing”, “perversity”, is the meaning of the Hebrew and Aramaic background of **ὑποκριτής** in Job 34:30 (in the context of leadership) and 36:13, connoting acts of perversion of justice, double-dealing, etc. See P. JOÜON, “**HUPOKRITHS** dans l’Évangile et l’hebreu *Hanéf*”, *RSR* 20 (1930) 312-316. Only in Job 39:32 [40:2] do the LXX^S translate with **ὑποκρινομαι** the Hebrew word for “answer” (where A B S² all have **ἀποκρινομαι**). In Sir 32[35], 12 and 33 [36], 2 **ὑποκρινομαι** is used in legal contexts. In 2 Macc 5:25; 6:21.24 (**ὑποκρινομαι**) and in 2 Macc 6:25 (**ὑποκρισις**), the context shows that these words mean “dissembling”, “pretending”, in the general fourth sense indicated above.
12. The first question is asked by WILCKENS, **ὑποκρινομαι** *ktl.*, 566: “It is still a puzzle, however, why [dissembling] should be described as ‘acting’” (see also p. 565). Throughout his article he also continuously (but implicitly) asks

1.2 The Meaning of Hypocrisy in Matt 23

To understand what Jesus means by hypocrisy, Matt 23 is crucial. Of the eighteen occurrences of the term **ὑποκριθῆ** in the NT, six occur in Matt 23. Moreover, only here do we find the single occurrence of the noun **ὑποκρισῆ** in Matt.

1.2.1 Not All Scribes and Pharisees Are Hypocrites

Before I begin, I must take note of the fact that when in Matt 23 Jesus says “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”, some or perhaps most, but not necessarily all scribes and Pharisees are the target of Jesus’ reproach. Strictly speaking, Jesus’ invective means: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees (who are hypocrites!” or “Woe to you, the hypocrites (among the) scribes and Pharisees”. In fact, it is all too easy to consider “hypocrites” here as an attributive adjective of “scribes and Pharisees”. Instead, **ὑποκριται** is always a noun, which may stand in apposition, and not necessarily in attribution, to the preceding nouns (contrast Luke 16:14)¹³. As the **ἄνθρωποι βασιλεῖς** of Matt 22:2 does not mean that all men are kings, so the **ὑποκριται** of Matt 23 does not

the second question. I think the second question is the more fundamental, but both questions are important. The way one answers these questions decides the answer to other questions, such as whether hypocrisy is an objective or subjective state of falsity, whether it is conscious or unconscious, etc.

13. See F. BLASS - A. DEBRUNNER - R.W. FUNK, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, A Translation and Revision of the ninth-tenth German edition incorporating supplementary notes of A. Debrunner (Chicago - London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) 140 § 268; A.T. ROBERTSON, *A Grammar of the Greek*

mean that all scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites, even though members of the scribal profession and of the Pharisaic movement are picked out as particularly affected by the problem of hypocrisy¹⁴. In Matt 8:19 there is a scribe who is considered a disciple (cf. 8:21 **e{eroj de.twn maqhtwn**). In the other Gospels there are similar cases (Mark 12:28.32-24; John 3:1; 7:50-51; 19:39-42; cf. Acts 5:34). Hypocrisy is not a plague that threatens only this profession or that movement. It is a plague that threatens humankind as such, particularly in the exercise of leadership.

1.2.2 Jesus' Three Fundamental Reproaches

Analyzing Matt 23 we see that the significance of Jesus' reproaches to some of the scribes and Pharisees is constituted by three basic elements.

The first element is the teaching authority of scribes and Pharisees, expressed in the sentence "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat" (23:2). "Sitting on the chair of someone" is a rabbinic expression for "succeeding someone in the task of teaching"¹⁵. "Sitting" is, though not exclusively, the position of the teacher (cf. Matt 5:1; 13:1-2; 26:55: "Day after day I sat in

New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914) on the topics of "Appositional Use of the Substantive, p. 651, the Vocative, pp. 462-464.

14. See J. NOLLAND, *Luke*, II (WBC 35B; Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1993) 662.

15. See F. ZORELL, *Lexicon Graecum Novi Testamenti* (Cursus Scripturae Sacrae Pars Prior Libri Introductorii 7, Parisiis: Lethielleux 1961³) 633, under **kaqedra**.

the temple teaching”) and of the judge (Matt 19:28; 27:19; cf. 22:44; 23:22). This teaching authority of scribes and Pharisees is implied also in 23:13, where it is presupposed that the keys of the kingdom are in their hands (cf. Matt 16:19). The *ouan* with which v. 3 is linked to v. 2 shows that Jesus recognizes this teaching authority as legitimate and its content as valid: “so practise and observe whatever they tell you” (23:3; see also 23:23: “these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others”)¹⁶.

The second element is contained in these words of Jesus: “[do not do] what they do; for they preach, but do not practise” (23:3). Jesus speaks of “what they do” and also of what they “do not practise”. Jesus denounces both what they “do” and what they “do not do”. From 23:25.28 we can see that here the “doing” means doing things prohibited in the negative commandments of the Law, while from 23:23 we can see that here the “not-doing” means the non-practice of the positive commandments of the Law.

Both the first and the second element (the teaching to be ob-

16. “Common to the woes in Matthew 23 [...] is the tacit assumption that the responsibility for guiding the people had been delegated to the scribes and Pharisees by God” (GARLAND, *Intention*, 116). D.A. HAGNER, *Matthew I-II* (WBC 33A.33B, Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1993) II, 668, draws the same conclusion from verse 23:13. Differently, PJOÛON, *L'Évangile de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ. Traduction et commentaire du texte original grec, compte tenu du substrat sémitique* (VS 5, Paris: Beauchesne, 1930) 139, who says: “En disant ‘se sont assis’, et non ‘sont assis’, Jésus a peut-être voulu insinuer l’intrusion”. However, the aorist is better explained by the simple fact that scribes and Pharisees had taken over Moses’ chair long before (cf. *Pirke Aboth* 1,1).

served and the doing and not-doing to be avoided) are expressed again metaphorically in 23:4: “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger”. The first half of the sentence positively denotes the legitimate teaching authority of scribes and Pharisees. To perceive this, we must remember that the demands of God’s Law have not only a “sweet” aspect (see e.g. Ps 19[18],11b), but also a “heavy” one (see Matt 23:23; Acts 15:10.28). One must also be aware of the fact that, when collecting, for example, firewood, the “binding of burdens that are heavy and hard to bear” and “laying them on the shoulders” is a welcome preliminary to a not-so-uncomfortable carrying of a heavy burden for a long distance. It is a work of love¹⁷ that, out of metaphor, means the explaining and motivating that facilitates

17. M.-J. LAGRANGE, *Évangile selon Saint Luc* (EB, Paris: Gabalda, 1921) 438 notices this positive meaning of the sentence, but then refers it not to the keeping of the Law, but to the observance of Pharisaic casuistry. The metaphor used here by Jesus is the positive equivalent (explaining clearly and wisely the Law) of the more negative metaphor (preventing violations of the Law) used in *Pirke Aboth* 1:1, “make a fence for the Torah”. Though the metaphors are different, in both cases the meaning is positive, that is, helping people observe the Torah. The problem of the Pharisees and scribes who are hypocrites, therefore, does not lie in their teaching the Law to the people, but in their not practising it. That is, they do not practise what they help others to practise. Jesus’ way is very different. He can say: “learn from me”. That is why he can also say: “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:29-30). On all this, see L. SÁNCHEZ NAVARRO, “*Venid a mí*” (Mt 11,28-30). *El discipulado, fundamento de la ética en Mateo* (Studia theologica matritensia 4; Madrid: Publicaciones de la Facultad de Teología “San Dámaso”, 2004) 79-120.134-139.225-238.

the fulfilment of “the weightier [literally, heavier] matters of the law” (Matt 23:23). What Jesus does not approve is that those who thus help others carry the heavy and yet sweet burdens of God’s Law will not themselves bear these burdens, that is, will not practise the Law they teach to others: “they preach, but do not practise”.

A third element of hypocrisy appears in 23:5: “They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men”. This is a third element because it is not classifiable with either the first or the second. In fact, what is expressed here is neither an authoritative teaching, nor straightaway some “doing evil”, nor the omission of some “doing good”. It is a defect in something of itself good, an abuse of a good thing. It is a very special kind of evil, which finds expression again in 23:25.27-28: “you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate [...]”; “ you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful [...]”; “you also outwardly appear righteous to men [...]”. Cleaning the outside of cups and plates, whitewashing tombs, and appearing righteous of themselves are not evil. They become evil when they are abused to hide something: “but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity”; “ but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness”; “but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (23:25.27-28), it is the purpose to which the actions mentioned in 23:5-7 are put that makes them evil. This purpose appears at first to be vainglory (23:5-7: “They do all their deeds

to be seen by men”), but then it is specified¹⁸ as mere “outward appearance” (23:28), as a cover-up for corruption (23:27-28). Jesus is so concerned with the danger of such an abuse that in 23:8-12 he forbids “the crowds and the disciples” to whom he is speaking (23:1) to have anything to do even with the outward manner of scribes and Pharisees.

1.2.3 A Strange Mixture of Good Actions and Bad Actions

Besides these three fundamental elements, two other interesting features emerge in Matt 23. In 23:16-22, Jesus, in tension with his own directive given to the crowds and the disciples in 23:3 to “practise and observe whatever they tell you”, criticizes some teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, who are here described as “blind guides” (23:16), “blind fools” (23:17), “blind men” (23:19), without the title “hypocrites” showing up. Evidently, Jesus’ injunction in 23:3 (“practice and observe whatever they tell you”) does not apply here. This obliges us to distinguish, within the scribal and Pharisaic teachings, two different factors: on the one hand, a general sort of teaching which Jesus acknowledges as legitimate and correct (23:3); on the other hand, certain specific teachings¹⁹ which are criticized by Jesus as outright foolishness and blindness (23:16-22). Another example of such corrupt specific teaching can be found in Matt 15:3-6.

18. In the Semitic paratactic way that prefers not to express the comparative, conditional, concessive, consecutive or final connections between clauses.

19. “The focus of attention in vv. 16-22, where ‘hypocrite’ does not occur, is the casuistry which attempts to evade the obligation of oaths” (GARLAND, *Intention*, 101). However, Garland, unwarrantedly in my view, does not

The examples in Matt 15 and in Matt 23 have in common their belonging to the field of legal casuistry and the effort to provide escapes from the requirements of the Law. It is to these corrupt teachings that Jesus refers in his “leaven” saying in Matt 16:5-12²⁰. Such corrupt legal teachings are instances of the second basic element of hypocrisy described above, that is, bad actions, doing evil, personal corruption.

In the rest of Matt 23, in the behaviour of scribes and Pharisees chastised by Jesus’ Woes we have a strange mixture of good actions and bad actions. Some of these actions are clearly good, some are clearly evil, and some it is not clear whether they are seen by Jesus as good or as evil.

Some of the actions are clearly good, since they are subscribed to by Jesus (e.g. about the “you tithe mint and dill and cummin” of 23:23 Jesus says: “these you ought to have done”; same in Luke 11:42).

Other actions are in themselves good, but can be put to bad use for evil purposes. These include not only the metaphorical straining out of a gnat, the cleaning of the outside of cups and dishes, and the whitewashing of tombs²¹ of 23:24.25.27, but also

think that hypocrisy consists mainly in this.

20. This I think explains the exegetical crux of the relationship between Matt 16:11-12 and Matt 23:2-3 better than other suggestions. Cf. U. LUZ, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, II (EKKNT I/2, Zürich: Benzinger / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990) 449-450; HAGNER, *Matthew*, II, 460.

21. The cover-up function of the behaviour signified by this metaphor is even

the appearing righteous of 23:28 (it is bad only if it is meant to cover up the lack of reality under this appearing)²², the building of “the tombs of the prophets” and the adorning of “the monuments of the righteous” of 23:29. This last item is something bad only if abused as the cover-up for the actual killing of contemporary prophets²³. That these praiseworthy actions were so abused by some scribes and Pharisees seems to be implied by Jesus in 23:30-32, who in 23:24 also prophesies that they would eventually kill NT prophets and wise men and scribes.

Some of the actions mentioned by Jesus in Matt 23 are clearly bad. Jesus points to these, addressing the scribes and Pharisees in the second person: “you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in” (23:13); “you make [the single proselyte you have found] twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” (23:15); “[you] have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith”; (23:23); “[you] swallow a camel!” (23:24); “within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (23:28). Jesus speaks of such evil actions also in third-person metaphorical address: “inside they [the cup and the dish] are full of extortion and rapacity” (23:25); “they [the tombs] are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (23:27).

On the other hand, it is not clear whether the following actions of which Jesus speaks are meant by him in a positive or a

clearer in Luke 11:44.

22. Of course, if we have to choose between being and appearing, it is better to be, than to appear, righteous.

23. In Luke 11:47-48 the building itself seems to be viewed as negative.

negative sense: “you shut the kingdom of heaven against men” (23:13); “you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte” (23:15). The first may refer to the exercise of legitimate authority which is acknowledged by Jesus in 23:2-3, and it would not be evil in itself, just as “binding” is not to be seen as bad in comparison with “loosing” (see Matt 16:19; 18:18). The second is an example of missionary zeal which only by the mention of the final result is shown to be a negative form of proselytism.

How to explain this mixture of good and evil actions ascribed by Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees who are hypocrites? The answer to this question lies in the three basic elements analyzed above: the abuse of legitimate authority and respectable behaviour to hide personal corruption. In Matt 23 Jesus denounces and attacks precisely this abuse; that is why he continually switches from good actions to bad actions²⁴. What Jesus uncovers, therefore, is the malicious triangular connection between the first, the second, and the third elements outlined above.

1.2.4 The Hypocritical Triangle

To summarize in contemporary language the analysis made, these three elements could be presented as follows. The ingredi-

24. It is the insight of P.S. Minear that “the definition [of hypocrisy by Jesus in Matt 23] contained a double reference to a good feature and to a bad feature. The good feature cloaked the bad and disclosed the duplicitous nature of hypocrisy” (GARLAND, *Intention*, 103 note 38). I think this insight is the key to an adequate understanding of Matt 23 and of biblical hypocrisy in general. In particular, the interpretation of verses 23:15.23.24.25.27.28.29 should fall under the light of this insight.

ents of the phenomenon “hypocrisy” are:

- 1) the God-given mission of scribes and Pharisees to act as legitimate authorities in Israel (an authority acknowledged by Jesus [23:2]);
- 2) the hidden corrupt exercise of this legitimate authority, both in teaching and in practice, in pursuance of dishonest private ends (this corruption is uncovered, denounced, and attacked by Jesus [15:3-9; 23:4b.16-22]);
- 3) the open exercise of this mission by a) correct legitimate authoritative teaching (also acknowledged by Jesus [23:3-4a]), and b) ostentatious public displays of piety, asceticism and philanthropy, coupled with constant search of people’s respect, used as a cover-up²⁵ for their corruption (this is also uncovered, denounced, and attacked by Jesus [6:1-4.5-8.16-18; 23:5-7.25a.28a.30a]).

The cover-up function of the third element deserves some elaboration. The text of Mark 12:40 (=Luke 20:47, =the textually uncertain Matt 23:14, attested only in *f*¹³, Vg, etc.), without using the terms hypocrisy or hypocrite, concentrates all Jesus’ reproaches against the scribes into this sentence: “(They) devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers”. “Cover-up”, rather than “pretense”, is a more precise translation²⁶. The scribes’ long prayers function as “a display of piety to secure

25. This is the implication of **profasij** in Mark 12:40=Luke 20:47 and of the phrase **proj to qeaqhhai toij anqrwpoij** in Matt 23:5 (cf. 6:2.5.16.18).

26. This is the meaning of **profasij** at least here (perhaps also elsewhere in the

confidence in them”²⁷. The cover-up was facilitated for the Pharisees by their “exclusive sociability”, a characteristic (indicated by their very name) which they shared with the rich (cf. Matt 11:8; also Luke 16:19-31, with reference to Luke 16:14-15).

In the three elements just outlined we have a description of the reality denoted by the epithet “hypocrite” in Matt 23. It is essential that these three elements be taken together to see through the reality of hypocrisy, which emerges from the conjunction of these three elements. This conjunction shows that the third element, relying on the first, acts as a cover-up for the second. By taking the three elements together we can see that *the third element can successfully cover up the second only because of the*

NT). See ZORELL, *Lexicon Graecum*, 1154: “specie” and the meaning he gives for the **profasei** of Phil 1:18: “praetextus, quo alium finem obtegunt” and for the **en profasei pleonexiaj** of 1 Thess 2: “simulata bene agendi ratio, in qua subest avaritia”. The Hong Kong Studium Biblicum O.F.M. Catholic Chinese translation (1968) renders well the meaning of the term, clarifying the meaning of the whole clause: 「而以長久的祈禱作掩飾」. Similarly, the Protestant Lu Chen-Chung Version (Revised, 1970). See UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES, ed., *The Parallel New Testament* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Bible Society 1997) 139.

27. BDAG (= F.W. BAUER - W.F. ARNDT - F.W. GINGRICH - F.W. DANKER, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. Third Edition / revised and edited by Frederick William Danker / based on Walter Bauer’s *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann / and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker [Chicago - London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000³]) 889.

presence of the first. So the first is the ground of the third, while the second is the goal of the third. If the final cause is the main cause, then the essence of hypocrisy consists in the second element: what Jesus calls the non-observance of God's Law (23:23), the doing of "iniquity" (**anomia**, 23:28)²⁸.

Is it possible to be more specific about this non-fulfilling of God's Law? Matt 23:26 and 23:28 offer qualitative specifications of this evil doing. Matt 23:26 has the two words **arpagh**, and **akrasia**, while 23:28 has the two words **upokrisij** and **anomia**, respectively translated by the RSV "extortion and rapacity", and "hypocrisy and iniquity". Together, these four terms tell us what is behind the righteous facade of some scribes and Pharisees. The first term hints at social-economic and legal corruption²⁹, the second points to the inner compulsion of covetousness³⁰, the third ("hypocrisy") points to the dissembling and double-dealing involved, the whole being summed up in the fourth general term "iniquity". What **upokrisij** adds to **anomia** is all the complexity of the triangular connection analyzed above, while the second term (covetousness) exposes the motivating drive behind the whole hypocritical set up. We join here, as we are going to see, Luke's analysis of the root of hypocrisy.

28. The **anomia** of Matt is the equivalent of Luke's **adikia** (cf. Matt 7:23 and Luke 13:27 where, for the same logion, Matt uses **anomia** and Luke uses **adikia**). We begin to see why the LXX often render with "hypocrisy" an original Hebrew "wickedness".

29. As we saw, Matt 15:3-6 and 23:16-22 are examples of corrupt legal interpretation.

30. But perhaps **akrasia** means "licentiousness", "incontinence" (see ZORELL,

1.3 The Meaning of Hypocrisy in Other Passages in Matt

After studying Matt 23, the chapter with the highest concentration of the term “hypocrite”, we give a look at other passages in Matt that speak about hypocrisy.

1.3.1 Matt 22:16-18: Hypocrisy and Acceptance of Persons

Matt 22:16-18 (=Mark 12:14-15=Luke 20:20-23) is a crucial synoptic passage where, while Jesus’ adversaries hypocritically praise him as being totally devoid of **proswpolh(m)ya** “acceptance of persons”³¹ (i.e. “acceptance of persons”), Jesus and the evangelists do not mince words to uncover their hypocrisy, calling it by name. Now it is interesting to note that “acceptance of persons” is precisely the way the Syriac translation Peshitta regularly translates **upokrisij**³². The three evangelists use several terms and expressions to express the “acceptance of persons”, the “hypocrisy”, and the underlying “evil-doing”: Matt 22:16

Lexicon Graecum, 55; BDAG, 38), in which case this word would point to the use the ill-gotten gains are put to.

31. This is the translation of the Rheims Bible (1582; cf. Vg “*acceptio personarum*”). The King James Version (1611.1873) translates as “respect of persons”, the RSV (1946.1960) as “partiality”. Cf. BDAG, 887: “*partiality* named as a sin”.

32. See J. PAYNE SMITH MARGOLIOUTH, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary. Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press / Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1903) 341-342, under **bsn**. The Peshitta consistently translates “hypocrite” as “accepter of persons”, and “hypocrisy” as “acceptance of persons”(the latter e.g. in luke 12:1). For example, this is how the Peshitta translates Luke 12:1. The only two exceptions over about twenty occurrences are

blepein proswpon; 22:18 **ponhria** and **upokrithj**; Mark 12:14-15 **blepein proswpon** and **upokrisij**; Luke 20:20 **upokrinomai**, 20:21 **lanbanein proswpon**, and 20:23 **panourgia**³³. In Matt 22:18, Jesus' use of **upokrithj** is explained by the evangelist as arising from Jesus' being aware of their "malice" (**ponhria**). Instead, in Mark 12:15 it is not Jesus who uses the epithet **upokrithj**, but Mark who says that Jesus perceives their **upokrisij**. In Luke 20:23, Jesus is said to perceive their "craftiness" (**panourgia**), as his adversaries "pretended to be sincere" (**upokrinomenouj eautouj dikaiouj einaï**).

We have here a cluster of concepts that can further illumine the reality of hypocrisy. What does "acceptance of persons" mean? In Semitic languages "acceptance of persons" and related Semitic expressions are all connected with (to use the Greek term) **proswpon** (face): **lanbanein proswpon**, **blepein proswpon**, **qaumazein proswpon**³⁴, **epiginwskein proswpon**³⁵, **upostellein proswpon**³⁶. These expressions often³⁷ mean corrupt administration of justice (e.g. Lev 19:15; Deut 1:17; 16:19; Ps 82[81], 2;

Mark 12:15 and 1 Tim 4:2, translated by the Peshitta with words meaning "craft" and "fashion", respectively.

33. A noun derived from the adjective **panourgj** which means "callidus, astutus, vafer", itself deriving from **pan ergw**, "omnia, vel pessima quaeque, facere paratus"; thus ZORELL, *Lexicon Graecum*, 978; BDAG, 754: "lit[erally], 'readiness to do anything'".

34. See e.g. Lev 19:15; Jud 16.

35. See e.g. Deut 1:17; 16:19.

36. See e.g. Deut 1:17; Wis 6:7.

37. These phrases can be used also in a good sense (e.g. Gen 19:21; 2Kgs 3:14; Job 42:8; Lam 4:16; Mal 1:8.9). ZORELL, *Lexicon Graecum*, 1152 defines

Sir 35:13).

While the connotation of **ὑποκρισις** and related words in the NT would seem to be still the “dissembling” or “pretending” that can also be found in non-Biblical Greek (this is certainly the meaning of the **ὑποκρινομαι** in Luke 20:20³⁸, and, possibly, **ὑποκρισις** in Mark 12:15), the denotation in several OT and NT places would seem to be the same as that of **προσπολη(μ)υια** and related words³⁹. The same denotation as “acceptance of persons”, moreover, fits well also the other two related LXX and NT terms **ἀνυποκριτοί** and **συνυποκρινομαι**. The meaning “non-accepter of persons” makes good sense of **ἀνυποκριτοί**⁴⁰ in all its LXX and NT occurrences, and “join in the acceptance of persons” of **συνυποκρινομαι**⁴¹ in Gal 2:13. Such an understand-

the negative sense thus: “al[i]c[u]i injuste favere seu obsequi, partibus alic[u]j[s] studere”; cf. BDAG, 888: “*show partiality or favoritism*”.

38. Here **ὑποκρινομαι** has the possible ordinary Greek fourth meaning of “dissembling”, “pretending”, the same meaning that it has in 2 Macc. See below. The Peshitta translates with a verb that means “to compare”, “to liken to”.
39. Rom 2:1; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; Jas 2:1. The adjective occurs in Acts 10:34, the verb in Jas 2:9. **Λαμβανειν προσπον** occurs also in Gal 2:6.
40. This is certainly the sense of the only two LXX occurrences (Wis 5, 18, translated “impartial” by the RSV, and Wis 18:16, translated “authentic” [“impartial” would have been better also here]). Rom 12:9 and 2 Cor 6:6 attribute this adjective to charity; 1 Tim 1:5 and 2 Tim 1:5 attribute it to faith; Jas 3:17 attributes it to wisdom, and 1 Pet 1:22 to brotherly love.
41. And “acceptance of persons” of **ὑποκρισις** in Gal 2:13. Gal 1-2 seems to be dominated by the polemical theme of “non-acceptance of persons” with the key assertion in Gal 2:6: “God shows no partiality” (RSV) or, in the terminology of other translations “God is no accepter of persons” (Rheims),

ing of **ὑπόκρισις** and related words would reduce the variety of meanings in the NT to this single one (acceptance of persons)⁴². The difference between **ὑπόκρισις** and **προσπολιμία** is that the latter only denotes the simple fact of the legal injustice, while the former adds the connotation of “dissembling” or “pretending”, that is, the cover-up connotation. Naturally, the cover-up normally goes together with the acceptance of persons, so that the two words are often used as full synonyms. A case of undisguised and out-spoken acceptance of persons like that represented by the judge “who neither feared God nor regarded man” of Luke 18:2.4b is more common in story than in reality. In Luke 18:2-8 such a judge is the narrative foil of the energetic widow’s insistence.

If our analysis is correct, a frequent, and perhaps prevalent, biblical meaning of “hypocrisy” is, then, the combination of the general Greek meaning “dissembling” with the specific Jewish meaning “legal injustice”. The former meaning is in function of the latter. The latter is the main semantic content of the term in the LXX and the NT. So seriously damaging a meaning, implying

“God is no respecter of persons” (King James), i.e. God is a judge who judges justly, he is not a corrupt judge who can be bribed.

42. Unnecessary would then seem to be the meticulous distinction made by ZORELL, *Lexicon Graecum*, 1374 gives at least three different meanings: “vitium hypocrisis, quo se quis, cum sit malus, bonum esse simulat”, “defectus eius cuius sensa, dicta, facta inter se pugnant”, “[vitium eius] qui histrionum more spectari vult, dum bonus opus peragit”; instead, BDAG, 1038 practically gives only one: “to create a public impression that is at odds with one’s real purposes or motivations”.

that the hypocrites do not practise the Law of God, but habitually and grievously violate it⁴³, seems to fit all the occurrences of the noun “hypocrite” we have not yet considered in Matt, contributing possible legal and social dimensions of meaning which are otherwise easily overlooked.

1.3.2 Matt 24:51: The Punishment of the Hypocrites

Matt 24:51 refers to a punishment reserved to the “hypocrites”. The behaviour of the reckless servant deserving of such a punishment reveals all three elements of the hypocritical triangle: he is invested with authority by his master, he acts wickedly, and he foolishly relies on the master’s absence as a cover-up. The same punishment is probably referred to in Matt 23:33, “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell (Gehenna)?” The context is that of the murder of the prophets.

1.3.3 Matt 6:2.5.16 and 7:5: Hypocrisy, Not Only Spiritual, But Also Legal

In Matt 6:2.5.16 and 7:5 the epithet “hypocrite” seems to relate only to the third element of our analysis of Matt 23. However, the lack of relation to the first and second elements may be

⁴³ Cf. U. LUZ, *Matthew 1-7. A Commentary*, tr. W. C. Linss (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990) 269-270, who comments thus Matt 5:20: “The comparative *perisseuein* ... *pleiōn* is curious; *malon* would be more commonly used. *Pleiōn* suggests a quantitative interpretation: Unless your righteousness is present to a measurably higher degree than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”. See also page 357 note 33. These

only apparent. Behind the sentence: “Truly, I say to you, they have their reward” (6:2.5.16) there may be implied the fact that, for all their ostentatious almsgiving, praying, and fasting, these people are evildoers. To perceive this it is necessary to attend to the rabbinical doctrine of “God’s balancing justice”⁴⁴: “some, chiefly Gentiles and evildoers, are paid the reward for good deeds on earth, and then in heaven [i.e. in the afterlife] the punishment will take place, while the just often suffer on earth and will gain their reward in heaven for it”. Such an understanding allows for a social-legal background for these sayings which are usually understood mainly in the context of spirituality. For example, in Matt 6:2.5.16 the people meant are perhaps corrupt leaders who, like the evildoers they are, get the reward already here on earth, and so no reward in the afterlife. Similarly in Matt 7:5 the log is perhaps the corrupt exercise of justice by the judge; the speck is the wrong-doing of the defendant in court.

1.3.4 Matt 15:7: Hypocrisy That Nullifies the Demands of God’s Law

A last occurrence of “hypocrite” is in Matt 15:7, where the hypocritical triangle is clearly in view: first, the authority that makes Pharisees and scribes challenge the behaviour of Jesus’

are more perceptive, in my view, than note 31 on the same page, where U. Luz does not exploit the insight offered by 5:20, saying: “**uporithj** is not simply ‘evildoer’”. It should be stressed, instead, that evildoing, in particular legal corruption, is the main semantic content of hypocrisy. Similar to U. Luz is also GARLAND, *Intention*, 105 note 44.

44. Pointed out by U. LUZ, *Matthew*, 357.

disciples (15:2); second, corrupt interpretation of the Law (15:3-6.9); third, cover-up “with their lips” (15:8), but with a stress on the dishonest casuistry that attempts to pre-empt the demands of God’s Law, as mentioned above in 1.2.3: “for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word [the law] of God” (15:7); “teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (15:9).

1.4 Hypocrisy as Godlessness and Iniquity

Now I think I am in a position to answer the questions asked at the beginning. Hypocrisy translates the Hebrew terms for “godlessness” and “iniquity”⁴⁵, because it means the worst kind of godlessness and iniquity: corrupt administration of justice (which is done in the name of God!)⁴⁶. True, the essence of biblical hypocrisy is, on the one hand, “pretending” or “dissembling”, that is, the fourth meaning of “hypocrisy” in ordinary Greek⁴⁷. This is the connotation of the term. But, on the other hand, the denotation of this term in the Bible is often rather restricted, so that it means: “dissembling by an authority”, “successfully corrupt exercise of legitimate authority”, the suc-

45. Thus in the only two occurrences of **upokrithj** in the LXX (Job 34:30; 36:13; it translates Hebrew אָדָרָה). In the three occurrences of **upokrinomai** in Sir 1:29; 32[35], 15; 33[36], 2 the context supports the meaning of corrupt administration of justice.

46. In Israel justice is administered in the name of God (see e.g. Ps 72[71] or Ps 50[49], where the word hypocrisy does not occur, but the hypocritical triangle is fully present). Cf. JÜUON, “**HUPOKRITHS**”, 312-316.

47. This meaning is present in the LXX only in 2 Macc 5:25; 6:21.24 (**upokrinomai**; cf. 4 Macc 6:15) and 2 Macc 6:25 (**upokrisij**).

cess being made possible by conspicuous (but insincere) shows of mercy, piety, and asceticism (Matt 6:1-4.5-8.16-18; cf. 5:20). These shows, insofar as performed by legitimate authorities, are readily considered as genuine by ordinary people.

That is also why the LXX translate “godlessness” or “iniquity” with terms that in ordinary Greek usually denote play-acting: the biblical hypocrites (public figures who act like private persons for private interests) are the exact reverse of the stage actors, who, though in themselves only private persons, act on the stage as if they were public authorities (judges, kings, etc.). Of course, there may be other reasons for the way of translating adopted by the LXX. For example, the fact that there is a lexical relationship between **ἰαμβανειν προσῳπον** and the meaning of **προσῳπον** as a theatrical mask. Anyway, it must be recognized that authority without justice is a theatrical mask. Philo, who here uses the word in the sense I have explained, says: “hypocrisy acts with authority as if in a theatre”⁴⁸. Hypocrisy is a deadly combination of elements that is highly destructive of society in its basic dimensions (religious, moral, legal). No wonder it makes Philo exclaim: “death is a lesser evil for me than hypocrisy”⁴⁹.

1.5 Jesus’ Reaction to Hypocrisy

48. *QG* 69 (as in LCL *Philo* Supplement I, 348).

49. *Jos* 68 (my translation). In their commentaries on Matt, A. Schlatter and W. Grundmann come closest to this understanding of hypocrisy, unlike most other commentators. See GARLAND, *Intention*, 99, note 25. U. Wilckens’ fine article on hypocrisy in the *TDNT* is weakened by the neglect of the crucial role played by the legal field in Israelite life.

The severity of Jesus’ language in Matt 23, as well as the whole understanding outlined above, are a sign that hypocrisy is an objective (and so not merely subjective) and consciously sustained (and so maliciously subjective) contradiction between what one appears to be/do and what one really is/does. Consequently, in hypocrisy we are dealing with conscious evil-doing, corruption, sin⁵⁰. At the root of hypocrisy there is a dark denial or refusal. See the **ouvqelēin** of Matt 23:4 and 23:37. The latter is contrasted with the **qelēin** of Jesus. Hypocrisy is a question of bad will.

Wide off the mark is, then, the widespread view of the Pharisees as “strict observers of the Law” and of Jesus’ criticism of them as being motivated by their attachment to the letter of the Law. This view is based on not taking seriously what Jesus in Matt actually says about the Pharisees and the scribes. What Jesus criticizes is their non-practice of the Law of God and their reliance on party traditions to make void the demands of the Law. In Matt 15:3 Jesus asks the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem: “And why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” and in 15:6 concludes: “So for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word [or

50. Thus, among several, WILCKENS, **upokrinomai ktI**, 568 and JÜUON, *Évangile*, 154. GARLAND, *Intention*, 102, after acknowledging so much, unwarrantedly deduces the lack of consciousness from the fact that Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees “blind” in Matt 15:14 and in 23:16.17.19.24.26. In the Gospels it is clear that Jesus by blindness means conscious “hardness of heart” (Matt 13:10-15; cf. John 9:39-41; 12:39-41).

law, MS κ^*] of God”.

If hypocrisy is conscious and wilful, then it is a sin. Is it a sin capable of repentance? The **ouvqelw** of the younger son in Matt 21:29⁵¹ is made good by his repenting and going into the vineyard. But his **ouvqelw** is not covered up by a “saying yes” as is that of his elder brother. Of course, Jesus tells his parables and utters his woes both with a judicial and a medicinal purpose. But the tragedy of hypocrisy lies just here: it is too close to “hardness of heart” (represented by blindness in Matt 23:16.17.19.24.26 and Matt 13:10-15; cf. John 9:39-41; 12:39-41). Even though the hypocrites see other people converting, it is as if they did not see this, so that Jesus must, sorrowfully, tell them: “and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him” (21:32).

It is the odious reality of this triangular connection⁵² of hypocrisy that inspires Jesus to say and do the harshest things in

51. The RSV, following MSS κ^* K W D P etc., gives this as the reply of the elder son. The negative reply is rather to be attributed to the younger son, who then repents, unlike his elder brother. *Pace* B.M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft / U.S.A.: United Bible Societies, 1994²) 44-46, it is MSS B Q^f³ etc. that have got the story in the right sequence. This sequence is demanded by the logic of v. 32, especially by the implication of **idontej**.

52. Exegetes usually stress one or the other of the three elements, but rarely do they highlight the nasty connection linking the three. Usually they stress the relationship between two elements: inner and outer, speaking and doing, appearance and reality, etc. See M.-J. LAGRANGE, *Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (EB, Paris: Gabalda, 1923) 437.448; HAGNER, *Matthew*, II, 668;

the whole Gospel (the Cleansing of the Temple in Matt 21:12-13; the Woes in Matt 23). Besides the Woes, Jesus uses powerful metaphors to unveil the ugly reality of hypocrisy: the “viper” metaphor of Matt 12:34 and 23:33⁵³; the “serpent” metaphor of Matt 23:33 (used in a positive sense in Matt 10:16); the “leaven” metaphor (used in a positive sense in Matt 13:33 and Luke 13:21). The latter, in Matt 16:6.11.12 and Luke 12:1 is used to denote a force of corruption that acts unseen but all-pervasively. “Leaven” is specified as “the teaching” in Matt 12:12, as “hypocrisy” in Luke 12:1.

Jesus acts and speaks so because the combination of the three elements in the triangular connection sacrilegiously attempts to abuse God as a cover-up of wrong-doing, and because these scribes and Pharisees turn a public status (which, in Israel, by definition is a mission from God at the service of all, especially the weak and poor) into something selfishly individual at the service of dishonest private ends (which, also by definition, consist in the covetous self-enrichment of a small group at the expense of the majority that are weak and poor). If this diabolic triangle of hypocrisy is not broken, God is habitually dishonoured and

W.D. DAVIES - D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, I-III (ICC, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-1997) III, 717; U. LUZ, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, III (EKKNT I/3, Zürich: Benzinger / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997) 321.

53. As Isa 59:5 implies, it is easy to be cheated by the attractive shell of the viper egg: “They hatch adders’ eggs, they weave the spider’s web; he who eats their eggs dies, and from one which is crushed, a viper is hatched”. See LAGRANGE, *Matthieu*, 51.

there is no hope for the poor. So what Jesus says and does so forcefully with regard to hypocrisy is, at one and the same time, said and done to defend God's honour, to deliver the victims of hypocrisy from oppression, and to call the unjust oppressors to repentance⁵⁴.

Jesus is supremely suited to do all this. As already noted, even his adversaries acknowledge, however grudgingly, that Jesus is totally devoid of hypocrisy. Without using the word, they deny of him all hypocritical dealings: **Didaskale(oītanen oīi aīhghj ei=kai. thn ođon tou/ qeou/ en aīhqeia| didaskeij(kai. ouv mēlei soi peri. oudenoj\ ouvgar blepeij eij proswpn anqrwpwn** (Matt 22:16; cf. Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21). Jesus is no "accepter of persons". But Jesus' messianic witness against hypocrisy, his uncovering of the hypocritical triangle, together with his witness to his self-consciousness as the Son of God, will cost him his life (Matt 21:45-46; 22:15-16; 26:63-66).

To conclude this section, we may say that in the light of Matt 23, three elements taken together (trusted status of legitimate authority, conscious corruption, and dissembling cover-up by public shows of impeccable piety) constitute the semantic content of "hypocrisy" in the great majority of its occurrences

54. I disagree here with GARLAND, *Intention*, 120, who denies "the possibility of interpreting the woes as having any redemptive intention, at least from Matthew's standpoint, since the addressees are not present!". The addressees are present simply through their being directly addressed. Cf. HAGNER, *Matthew*, II, 668: "The woe is a painful statement of displeasure involving an implied judgment".

in the Bible. While the connotation of the term is supplied by its meaning “dissembling”, the denotation is supplied by the social plague of corrupt administration of justice, in Semitic terms “acceptance of persons”. In ancient Hellenistic culture such a meaning of the word “hypocrisy” (a combination of Israelite and Hellenistic influences) seems to be a unique semantic phenomenon that bears witness to the keen sense of justice of the biblical world⁵⁵.

2. Jesus’ Diagnosis and Cure for the Disease of Hypocrisy in the Gospel according to Luke: Covetousness and Solidarity

In this section, I will review, first, Luke’s peculiarities regarding “hypocrisy”; second, the use of the “hypocrisy” motif in Luke; third, the cure for hypocrisy suggested by Jesus in Luke.

2.1 Luke’s Concern with Hypocrisy

Jesus’ deeds and words, as recorded in the Gospel according to Luke, show the same earnest concern with the human problem of hypocrisy. In Luke they do so, of course, with some peculiar nuances.

Firstly, Luke 12:1, unlike its parallels in Matt and Mark,

55. This uniqueness, which puzzled U. Wilckens, is denied by LUZ, *Matthew*, 357, but precisely because he does not take into account the relationship between the three elements and focuses only on the negative meaning the word “hypocrisy” has, both in Greek and Jewish usage, when used in the field of ethics.

explicitly links “the leaven of the Pharisees”⁵⁶ with hypocrisy. This text thus makes sure that we see the connection between the leaven saying and hypocrisy. Moreover, this text does double duty: on the one hand, it introduces a set of Jesus’ sayings to his disciples on themes related to hypocrisy (12:1b-12); on the other hand, it functions as a rounding up of the series of preceding sayings of Jesus targeting the Pharisees (11:37-44) and the scribes (11:45-52) which is Luke’s equivalent to Matt 23. The epithet “hypocrite” does not appear in Luke 11. But it appears in 12:1. This epithet in Matt “is part and parcel of the woes themselves; in Luke it is the upshot of the scribes and Pharisees’ reaction to the woes”⁵⁷ (cf. 11:53-54). The woes in Luke 11:39 begin with Jesus’ accusation that the Pharisees, inside, are “full of extortion

56. It is the leaven “of the Pharisees and Sadducees” in Matt; the leaven “of the Pharisees and of Herod” in Mark 8:15; the leaven “of the Pharisees” in Luke 12:1. These variations imply that hypocrisy is the problem of Israelite leadership in general, in all its species. There is no contradiction between Matt 16:12 (the leaven is the teaching) and Luke 12:1 (the leaven is hypocrisy). The two words have the same denotation (the corrupt exercise of justice), though somewhat different connotation (the one stressing the theoretical side of the problem, the other the practical). Yet, the coupling of Pharisees and Sadducees under the same *didach*, in Matt may indicate that this word here refers to a practice, “a walking”, rather than to a theory (cf. the reverse semantic phenomenon that has taken place with the word *halakah*). See LAGRANGE, *Matthieu*, 319, and *Luc*, 352, for a similar explanation, but somewhat vitiated, by the incompleteness with which “hypocrisy” in the Gospels is viewed. Like M.-J. Lagrange, DAVIES-ALLISON, *Matthew*, II, 592-593 think that it is only reasonable to understand Matt 16:12 in the light of Matt 23:2.

57. GARLAND, *Intention*, 94.

and wickedness”. Covetousness is thus exposed by Jesus as the root of hypocrisy⁵⁸.

Secondly, Luke stresses the fact that hypocrisy is not a peculiarly Pharisaic problem. Instead, it is a universal human problem. Compare Luke 3:7 (John calls the *multitudes* “broods of vipers”) with Matt 3:7 (John calls thus the Pharisees and Sadducees), and Luke 12:56 (Jesus calls the *multitudes* “hypocrites”) with Matt 16:1 (Jesus addresses the saying to the Pharisees and Sadducees but without calling them “hypocrites”)⁵⁹.

2.2 Luke’s Understanding of Hypocrisy

But will not this enlargement of the denotation of “hypocrite” cause a change in the connotation of the word? Is the way Jesus understands hypocrisy in the Gospel according to Luke consistent with that of the Gospel according to Matt? I think the answer should be positive⁶⁰. In Luke (and only in Luke) the hypocrisy motif appears in its three main lexical forms: verbal

58. Covetousness is the subjective state which Jesus in Mark 7:22 and in Luke 12:15 calls **pleonexia**. It is linked with the need to “cover-up” in 1 Thess 2:5. In Luke 11:39 Jesus speaks more objectively of “extortion”; in Matt 23:25 of “extortion”, and, again subjectively, of “rapacity”.

59. See also Luke 13:15. This amplification by Luke does not confirm the observation by JÓUON, “**HUPOKRITHS**”, 313 to the effect that it would not be easy to find again a situation of hypocrisy similar to that of scribes and Pharisees at the time of Jesus. Luke’s text seems to tell us that hypocrisy, like corruption, is a disease (perhaps the most serious disease) of all times and all places.

60. In general, the exegetes I have consulted suppose this. I have found only

(**υποκρινομαι** 20:20), abstract-nominal (**υποκρισις** 12:1), and concrete-nominal (**υποκριθη** 6:42; 12:56; 13:15). As I said above, the **υποκρινομαι** of 20:20 is used with the general Greek fourth meaning of “pretending”. The meaning of the single occurrence Luke shares with Matt (Luke 6:42) is not recognizably different from Matt’s. There are two texts peculiar to Luke (12:56; 13:15). The meaning “accepter of persons” fits well Luke 13:15, since the ruler of the synagogue has no concern for the poor woman. As for Luke 12:56, the meaning of “hypocrites” at first sight seems problematic. It is not clear whether it has the general Greek meaning of “dissembling” or the more Semitic meaning of “accepter of persons”. The following consideration encourages me to see also in this instance the normal combination of both meanings: Jesus, somewhat ironically, calls the multitudes “hypocrites” (=accepters of persons [**προσωπον**])” because they know how to interpret the appearance (**προσωπον**) of earth and

J. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*, I-II (AB 28.28A, New York: Doubleday, 1981-1985) II, 953, considering “strange” the Lucan linking of leaven with hypocrisy, and speaking as if Luke had a special meaning for hypocrisy: “For the Lucan Jesus ‘hypocrisy’ is a dissembling attitude in one’s piety” (*Ibidem*, 954). W. Braun, who, unwarrantedly in my view, has a poor idea of the historicity of Luke’s material, thinks that Luke has only a vague concept of the historical reality of the Pharisees. According to him, Luke’s idea of hypocrisy is “haughty social self-display” (W. BRAUN, *Feasting and social rhetoric in Luke 14*, [SNTSMS 85, Cambridge - New York - Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995] 28). Not so LAGRANGE, *Luc*, 351-352; I.H. MARSHALL, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978) 509; NOLLAND, *Luke*, II, 676-677.

sky and pretend not to have the ability to read the (face of the) present time⁶¹. The legal context of the following verses 57-59 supports this understanding of Luke 12:56.

There are also other reasons to see the full meaning of hypocrisy at play here. Pretending not to know the time seems to be a Pharisaic trait. In Matt 12:38-39 it is the Pharisees and scribes that ask for a sign. And in Matt 16:1-4 it is the Pharisees and the Sadducees who make the same request and get the same answer given by Jesus here in Luke.

Moreover, the **ton kairon de. touton pwj ouk oidate dokimazein**; is preceded by the **en hñera| h| ouvprosdoka| kai. en wfra| h| ouvginwskei** of 12:46, which is about the evil servant who under cover of his master’s absence abuses the authority that has been delegated to him, a typical hypocritical triangle. Note can also be taken that in this verse 12:46, where Luke has **kai. to. neroj autou/ meta. twñ apistwn qhsei**, Matt 24:51 has **kai. to. neroj autou/ meta. twñ upokritwn qhsei**. Unreliability or faithlessness⁶² is the fundamental characteristic of the hypocrite⁶³.

Finally, Luke 12 begins with 12:1 “the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy”. This is followed by a section that

61. For other current efforts to make sense of the use of “hypocrites” here see MARSHALL, *Luke*, 550. Similarly NOLLAND, *Luke*, II, 712.

62. For this passive meaning of **apistoj** see the second meaning of **apistoj** in ZORELL, *Lexicon Graecum*, 142: “*cui fidi non potest, infidelis, perfidus, qui fidem datam fallit: prob[abiliter] L 12⁴⁶*”. This passive meaning is given as the first meaning of **apistoj** in LIDDELL-SCOTT, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 189: “*not to be trusted*”.

63. See JÖUON, “**HUPOKRITHS**”, 314.

confirms our understanding of hypocrisy. This section begins by hitting at the very heart of hypocrisy, announcing the eschatological exposure of the cover-up on which hypocrisy thrives: “Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed” (12:2)⁶⁴. For some exegetes Luke 12:1-12 is peculiar in that it envisages an inverse form of hypocrisy, which could tempt Christians under persecution, that is, to nourish inward faith in Christ, but outwardly profess conformity with the world⁶⁵. Perhaps, this goes some way to explain why the text of Luke generalizes the target of the hypocrisy sayings.

This reversed type of hypocrisy seems different from that which can affect a corrupt judge through covetousness. It is a hypocrisy that can affect the innocent “judged” through fear. In this light, it would seem that not only 12:1-12, but the whole chapter 12 is about hypocrisy. Here Jesus says that the only person to be “accepted” is God. No human person should be “accepted” whether out of fear (12:4-5.8-9) or out of covetousness (cf. 12:13-21.33-34). So, ultimately, hypocrisy is accepting persons at the expense of accepting God. It remains true, however, that the primary form of hypocrisy is that induced by covetousness. When Luke refers to the Pharisees as “lovers of money” (16:14), he at the same time shows us Jesus unmasking their hypocrisy in these words: “You are those who justify yourselves before men,

64. In Luke 12:2-3 the prospect of final judgment uncovers hypocrisy for all time. MARSHALL, *Luke*, 509, comments: “Hypocrisy is ultimately futile, for the secret thoughts of men will one day be revealed”.

65. See comments on this text in MARSHALL, *Luke*, 509; NOLLAND, *Luke*, II, 676-677.

but God knows your hearts; what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God"(Luke 16:15; cf. 1 Tim 6:10: "The love of money is the root of all evils")⁶⁶. In Luke 12 Jesus cures fear with trust in God (12:6-7.11-12.22-32) and covetousness with almsgiving and detachment (12:13-21.33-34). To this last topic I must now proceed.

2.3 The Cure of the Root of Hypocrisy: Solidarity with the Destitute

Does Jesus in Luke offer any cure for the disease of covetousness which is the root of hypocrisy? We have Jesus' metaphorical answer to this question in the Parable of the Great Supper and the Recusant Guests (Luke 14,15-24) and its immediately preceding context (Luke 14,12-14). The parable itself, without using the word, targets hypocrisy, since its plot is built on the fact that the invitees accepted the invitation to supper in the first place, but then did not honour their acceptance of the invitation by dutifully attending: they said Yes and they did No. According to Luke 14,12-24, Jesus judges that it is impossible to have a lasting interior conversion⁶⁷ without to all effects (though not necessarily in the same forms) becoming poor by sharing one's property with the destitute (cf. Luke 18,23-25).

66. Covetousness' radical threat to integral human life is well expressed in the inscription in a temple at Delos, which Aristotle quotes at the very beginning of his *Eudemian Ethics*. It said: "Justice is fairest, and Health is best, But to win one's desire is the pleasantest" (LCL *Aristotle* XX, 198-199).

67. BRAUN, *Feasting*, 127-128 notes that the outer choice of identifying with the poor is a sign of the "Gesinnungswandel" which for Luke is an essential ingredient of true conversion.

Jesus, however, gives us also an answer in explicitly conceptual terms in a strange saying recorded in Luke 11:39-41⁶⁸. This saying has a parallel in Matt 23:25-26 in the context of the anti-hypocrisy Woes. In this passage, Luke 11:39 corresponds fairly closely to Matt 23:25. Luke 11:40 is proper to Luke. Luke 11:41 reads thus: “You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give for alms those things which are within (**plhn ta. enonta dote elehm̄sunhn**), and behold, everything is clean for you”. Matt 23:26, instead, reads: “You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside may also be clean”.

The difference is evident. It is as if the text of Luke translated for the reader the real life meaning of the metaphor in Matt. What does this rare substantivized participle **ta. enonta** mean? It means: “What is inside, the contents”⁶⁹. The contents of what? The contents of the “inside” mentioned in v. 39 and which Jesus says is “full of extortion and wickedness” (**to. de. eswqen uimh**

68. For a detailed discussion, see LAGRANGE, *Luc*, 342-343. He concludes: “La perversion du sentiment n’en est que plus choquante, s[ic] le Pharisien] pense ainsi être agréable à Dieu, sans se soucier de la justice” (*Ibidem*, 343). Similarly, MARSHALL, *Luke*, 495, and FITZMYER, *Luke*, II, 945; F. BOVON, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, I-... (EKKNT 3, Zürich - Düsseldorf: Benzinger / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989) II, 228-229. NOLLAND, *Luke*, II, 665, says: “Taken literally Luke makes an exaggerated claim for almsgiving”, but then goes on to stress the radical nature of Jesus’ demand. This radical nature is stressed also in MARSHALL, *Luke*, 36; FITZMYER, *Luke*, I, 247-251; BOVON, *Lukas*, I, 25.

69. BDAG, 334. Cf. ZORELL, *Lexicon Graecum*, 439: “‘quae insunt’ in patinis

genei aṛpaghĵ kai. ponhriaĵ). So the “inside” is the personal life of the hypocritical Pharisees. Jesus here speaks of the ill-gotten property these Pharisees have obtained through hypocrisy, i.e. legal double-dealing (cf. Luke 12:1 and the ill-gotten property Zacchaeus obtained through his extortion as a tax collector in 19:1-10).

What should the Pharisees do with their property? It should be given away: **doṭe eṭehmsunhn**. In the Gospels the word **eṭehmsunh** appears only in Matt 6:2-4, here in Luke 11:41, again in Luke 12:33, and eight times in Acts. The translation “alms” is worn-out and weak. It does not render well the pregnant meaning of either the Greek or the Semitic words behind the Greek of the Bible. In Greek the root meaning of the word is “mercy”. The Semitic background word means an act of “justice”. Mercy and justice are the two fundamental prerogatives of royal government (Ps 72[71]) in the image of God (Ps 145[144]). The Dictionary entry for the Syriac term⁷⁰ with which the Peshitta translates **eṭehmsunh** in Luke 11:41 catches well the earnest implications of **eṭehmsunh**: “*alms* as the right or due of God or of our own neighbour”; reference is made, then, to the word from which it

et poculis, i.e. cibum potumque”. This reminds us of the Parable of the Great Supper with all its food and drink ready for consumption. To give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty are the first steps in solidarity. The denotation of the image, however, is not limited to this. It denotes the whole of one’s property. See **ta. uparconta** of 12:33, the riches of the rich man in Luke 18:23-25, and the “living” of the poor widow in Luke 21:1-4.

70. The term **atqḏ** (=dikaiosunh); see *Syriac Bible* of the United Bible Societies (1979).

derives: “that which is right or due; hence a right, law, rule; a righteous act; a due, portion, allowance, appurtenance, tax, tribute, debt”⁷¹. Giving alms with the right intention proceeds both from mercy and justice; it is an act of restitution, something due, not something optional⁷². In Acts, almsgiving is portrayed as a fundamental characteristic of godly people (e.g. Tabitha in 9:36; Cornelius in Acts 10:2.4.31).

The imperative **doṭe** picks up an evangelical leit-motif. The great “giver” is God, the Father, who in Luke 1-2 gives salvation to his people Israel, in 11:3 (the Lord’s Prayer) gives bread to all, in 11:13 gives the Holy Spirit, and in 12:32 gives the kingdom to Jesus’ little flock. Jesus teaches that the giving of the Father is governed by special laws that deal more with being than with having (8:18), but is always prompted by fatherly love (11:5-13). Jesus shares in the “giving” of God through his announcement of the kingdom of God (8:10), through his empowering the disciples for the mission (10:9), through his feeding the multitudes (9:12-17), until the last day when he gives himself to his disciples as “the body given for you” (22:19). It is this giving by the Father and by Jesus that forms the ground of the **doṭe** here. In fact, receiving implies a call to give (12:48). The call of Jesus to give unconditionally was sounded already in the Sermon on the Level Place (Luke 6:30.38), enriched with the promise of overwhelmingly generous returns (6:38). To the disciples faced

71. PAYNE SMITH, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 110.

72. “‘Alms’ is an effective antithesis to the ‘rapacity’ of v. 39” (NOLLAND, *Luke*, II, 664).

by the hungry crowds Jesus says: “You give them something to eat” (9:13).

Here now Jesus gives a very concrete instruction: “give!” Jesus calls on the rich Pharisees to renounce their dishonest riches (the “unrighteous mammon” of Luke 16:9.11). To the Pharisees so concerned with ritual purity (11:38) Jesus says that they must empty their houses of their ill-gotten gains. Only thus will their houses be clean: no restitution, no purification, and so no salvation. The Pharisees are asked to do what Zacchaeus will do on his own initiative in 19:8. They must return to the poor what they have stolen from the poor through “acceptance of persons” in social life. Only thus shall they be freed from the bonds of covetousness. The destitute, too, victims of hypocrisy in the Semitic sense (i.e. legal double-dealing)⁷³, will be freed from their indigence and be able to satisfy their basic needs. And so all will be (though in different ways) poor, but no one will be “needy” (Acts 4:34)⁷⁴. This is the political economy of a society open to the grace of the Reign of God, a society that has defeated covetousness, and so also hypocrisy. Jesus ends his saying with a cry of almost surprised joy: “and behold, everything is clean for you” (11,41b).

The analysis I have made has contributed the following understanding regarding hypocrisy, its root, and its cure.

73. “Corruption is the worst problem for any nation” (Leo Goodstadt, former editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, in an occasional conversation).

74. The well-to-do early Christians had to pay a very high price for their

Hypocrisy is acceptance of persons covered up by astute dissimulation of virtue. In other words, it is the abuse of legitimate authority to corruptly pursue purely private ends, an abuse that is sacrilegiously covered-up with a semblance of piety, justice, and mercy. The root of hypocrisy is covetousness. The cure for covetousness is voluntary and concrete social solidarity with the poorest among the poor.

3. Conclusion

I will conclude with a word of actualization. It is this. Hypocrisy is a threat every human being faces, as Jesus in the Gospel according to Luke underlines. But hypocrisy, as V. Taylor remarked, and as both Matt and Luke imply, is also “the standing peril of religious leaders”⁷⁵. I would add: not only of religious leaders, but of all leaders, because of their very leadership. In fact, hypocrisy is nothing but corrupt leadership. Without a deep concern for social justice and effective care for the destitute poor, the respectability that naturally goes with leadership inevitably becomes hypocritical. Of course, when this perversion of a social good happens in the religious sphere the damage done is the gravest. To deter us from this danger, Jesus warns us that no

solidarity with poorer Christians. This self-abasing sacrifice made by rich Christians explains the high praises Paul sings for them (see Rom 16:3.23; 1 Cor 16:15.19; Col 4:15; 2 Tim 1:16; 4:19; Phlm 1.4; BRAUN, *Feasting*, 110-113).

75. Quoted in GARLAND, *Intention*, 105 note 44, who dissents. See also LAGRANGE, *Luc*, 407, who says: “Peut-être y a-t-il profit pour des religieux et des prêtres à se l’appliquer”.

hypocrites will be admitted to the glorious banquet of the wedding feast of God with humanity (cf. Luke 14,23). This feast, which is taking place in the very mystery of Jesus' person, will be full even without them, unless they, by repenting, say: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matt 23:39; Luke 13:35).

Only a prayer can be the last word here. I pronounce it as the individual I am, and as everyman: "Lord Jesus, physician of my soul, come to cure my deeply rooted avarice and hypocrisy, through the gift of your evangelical poverty". Amen.