

Esa J. Autero, *Reading the Bible across Contexts: Luke's Gospel, Socio-Economic Marginality, and Latin-American Biblical Hermeneutics*. Biblical Interpretation Series 145 (Boston, MA: Brill, 2016). xiv + 418 pp. \$194.00 cloth.

Biblical scholars want to conquer the text, and though we crave clear understanding and application of every biblical passage or book, we celebrate the appearance of innovative methods and readings. Esa Autero fulfills such a mandate with his outstanding and timely study for reading and interpreting Luke's Gospel in Latin American contexts. Autero observes two small Bolivian Pentecostal churches. He describes the first as an upper middle-class church of roughly one hundred regular attendees who meet in a rented space blocks from a five-star hotel in Santa Cruz. He identifies the second as a church of some thirty members in a poor and marginalized part of the city. Autero commissions both communities to study and apply various Lukan poverty texts in order that he might discern their respective hermeneutical processes and conclusions (4). He discovers that, although the two communities are "located only a few kilometers from each other ... the realities in which each community lived seemed to be light years apart" (368).

Autero tests three broad questions. First, how do ordinary Bolivian readers interpret the Bible? Second, how does the socioeconomic location of these Bolivian believers affect their specific application of the Third Gospel? Finally, is it possible for Bolivian readers, particularly the poor and uneducated (i.e., informal learners), to teach scholars on the art of interpretation and application?

For his study, Autero utilizes empirical hermeneutics; he creates thirteen data-collecting categories that are best described in clusters. First, he observes attention given by readers to the biblical text, its historical background, and its interpretative tradition. Second, he traces applicational probabilities—specifically the gap between reading and experience, the role of imagination, character identification, and appropriation tactics. Finally, Autero seeks praxeological results, heuristic keys, and attitudes during and upon reading (e.g., dogmatic, pietistic, or emancipatory impulses). In this cluster, he also evaluates readers' self-awareness of immediate

context(s), chiefly their capacity to steer or distort readings (e.g., political ideologies and powers) and group dynamics (100–1; 32–36).

Autero gathers and arranges a remarkable buffet of “exegetical insights” and applications—many worthy of consideration by any student of Scripture. He then ascertains numerous common threads. For example, though both communities reflected longer on stories—the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10)—than prescriptive texts (Luke 6:20–26; 12:22–34; 14:12–14), they paid little attention to genre (e.g., *makarisms*, parables) or literary architecture. Both groups followed *lectura creyente* (literally, “believing reading”), “an attitude that holds the Bible in high esteem and regards it as the Word of God ... this kind of reading attitude is a-critical, and is open to receive a message from God through the Bible at any moment and through any passage” (333–334). And though pastors wielded significant authority in both communities, leaders generally tended not to exploit their positions or readings.

From the litany of interpretative contrasts, perhaps no conclusion proves more obvious concerning application than the social location of readers. Not surprisingly, various poor congregants saw in Zacchaeus a corrupt immigration official and local politician (328). On the other hand, certain affluent readers felt the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus had little to do with riches. Though “the devil had deceived many people into thinking this way” (333–4), the story scrutinizes a man who calls not on God, but Abraham to bargain his way out of Hades. On another occasion, when the pastor of the less-affluent congregation wonders if he might one day rise to Autero’s social-economic status, Autero offers a gentle and hesitant affirmation, prompting the pastor to quietly say to his congregation: “it will surely take a long time” (368). According to Autero, since “the rich kept feasting and the poor remained in misery in Bolivia” (332), the influence of their respective socioeconomic dynamics may indeed advance new perspectives on ancient concepts of wealth, poverty, and salvation as heard by first-century listeners.

Autero’s results should prove sobering. His data and conclusions interrogate both certain affluent faith communities and various scholars. On the one hand, Autero demonstrates that less

educated readers from the margins live a specific kind of story and naturally find answers to their struggles in the biblical text. On the other hand, affluent readers surely “benefit” from the skills of the academy and hermeneutical tools (whether by way of preacher and/or educated lay readers), yet at times seem not to be reading the same text. And to modern scholars, Autero invites attention not only to the social location of Luke’s original readers, but to the state of current readers. How might scholarly exegesis of Lukan poverty texts (or any other text) be brought into critical dialogue with the churches at hand? How might the social location of Bolivian Pentecostal believers impact views on social justice, liberation theology, and prosperity theology? What might these readers teach scholars about the relationship between actions and consequences? How should salvation, whether realized or futuristic, relate to reciprocation or retribution? Finally, how might the person in a perilous economic situation imagine Pentecostal experience and belief in God’s miraculous intervention?

Possibilities for duplication of Autero’s methodology appear limitless; future students and scholars will surely want to apply his method to churches across social strata, traditions, locations, and more. For Canadians, I already imagine analyses in various social locations, from Victoria to St. John’s and in-between, whether readings by urban Calgarians alongside rural communities in Saskatchewan or an array of potential theses that include words like Pentecostalism(s), (im)migrant, (un)educated, rich or poor, and more. I suspect that if Gerard Manley Hopkins observes correctly that “Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places” and Autero’s model offers paradigmatic opportunities, we should not be surprised to learn further of the diverse “biblical” interpretations expressed by communities not only across the globe, but often across our streets.

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