

BAKHTIN AND LUKAN POLITICS: A CARNIVALESQUE READING OF THE  
LAST SUPPER IN THE THIRD GOSPEL\*

Nathan Eubank

Duke University, Durham, NC

1. *Introduction*

The idea that the third Gospel promises vindication for the downtrodden at the expense of the affluent and powerful, the so-called Lukan ‘reversal of values’, has become something of a truism. Through teaching and table fellowship Luke portrays Jesus transgressing social barriers, fulfilling the role set out for him in the Magnificat: ‘He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy’ (1.52-54).<sup>1</sup> Luke’s emphasis on the lowly continues through the Last Supper with the teaching about greatness (22.24-28), and the promise of future vindication for the disciples (22.28-30). Yet, an interesting paradox arises in this passage as Jesus, who has been hailed as the king (19.38), alludes to his coming death and describes himself as a table servant. All of this raises a question: in what sense does the humiliation and death of a Galilean peasant constitute a reversal of fortunes? Acts 2 declares that God has vindicated Jesus, making him ‘both Lord and Messiah’, but throughout Acts, Jesus’ followers never actually experience a reversal. If anything, the lot of the disciples worsens as they continually suffer for Jesus’ sake.

Given the apparent lack of an actual reversal in Luke–Acts, it seems that reversal can be an accurate description of Lukan politics only if Jesus is cast as either a failed insurrectionist who never really achieved the revolution that he hoped for, or as a savior who preferred to reverse

\* I would like to thank Professor Richard B. Hays for making invaluable comments on an earlier version of this article.

1. All Scripture citations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

fortunes simply by saving souls, eschewing the ‘narrow-minded hopes’ of his people, as one scholar recently put it.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is not clear how the solution—the death and resurrection of Jesus—fits the problem. The text of Luke–Acts demands a new hermeneutic, one that accounts for Luke’s concern for the concrete hopes of Israel and its paradoxical relationship with a messiah who describes himself as a table servant. This paper will seek to offer such a hermeneutic by reading the Last Supper through the lens of the literary phenomenon that Mikhail Bakhtin called the *carnavalesque*. To be more precise, this paper will employ Bakhtin’s concept of the carnival to argue that the Lukan Last Supper narrative rewrites the meaning of Jesus’ messianic status, poetically juxtaposing death with political victory, and that this dialogical definition of Jesus’ identity is the proper framework through which to view Lukan politics as a whole.

## 2. *Carnavalesque*

Mikhail Bakhtin coined the term *carnavalesque* to describe all literature that has been ‘influenced—directly and without mediation or indirectly ...by one or another variant of carnivalistic folklore (ancient or

2. C.C. Caragounis, ‘Kingdom of God/Heaven’, in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 429. Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 133, argues that Luke mutes Mark’s apocalyptic fervor, admonishing readers to persevere in patient endurance rather than standing ‘looking up toward heaven’ (Acts 1.11). The lack of an actual Lukan reversal, then, could be explained as a tension that will not be resolved until the parousia. Yet, as Hays himself points out, Luke declares that the eschatological ‘year of the Lord’s favor’ has already arrived and that the Spirit is releasing captives and setting the oppressed free, as evidenced by the many passages in which Luke shows a preference for the lowly over the powerful. Hays writes, ‘Where such signs and wonders are breaking loose, the community of believers can live in the present with joy, without undue anxiety about when the final hour of judgment will arrive.’ These signs and wonders, however, are accompanied by even greater suffering; the political fortunes of the lowly do not change and those who wish to follow Jesus are advised to take up their crosses daily (9.23). This paper will argue that, rather than heralding a present or future reversal of fortunes that overturns power structures, Luke challenges preconceptions about the meaning of power itself.

medieval)'.<sup>3</sup> Carnival itself is not a literary phenomenon, but a sort of 'syncretic pageantry' that manifests itself in various ways across different epochs and cultures, and is characterized by a suspension of cultural norms.<sup>4</sup> All the usual hierarchies and etiquettes are overturned and replaced with a different set of rules that are applicable only during the carnival. Historical examples in the ancient world include the widely observed festival of Saturnalia, which heralded the return of Saturn and featured a temporary king chosen by lot who reigned over the feast, giving mock orders,<sup>5</sup> or the Sacian feast of the Persians, in which a prisoner who is condemned to death is dressed in regalia and permitted to drink and carouse before he is 'dethroned' and killed. Dio Chrysostom narrates an exchange between Diogenes and Alexander in which Diogenes explains that the Sacian festival demonstrates the ephemeral nature of power, and that Alexander should attain wisdom before becoming a king lest he suffer the same fate as the carnival king of the Persians.<sup>6</sup> As we shall see, carnival's propensity for suspending cultural norms is vital for understanding Lukan politics.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin articulates the basic characteristics of the carnival as they pertain to his study of the carnival's influence on literature.<sup>7</sup> First, carnival dissolves every distinction between performer and spectator, making the carnival a 'pageant without footlights'. Rather than *performing* carnivalistic actions, participants *live* them according to the unique laws of the carnival. Secondly, there is 'free and familiar contact among people' as individuals from both sides of 'impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free contact on the carnival square'. Thirdly, there is a

new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life. The behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property)...and thus from the vantage point of non-carnival life become eccentric and inappropriate.

3. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 107.

4. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 122.

5. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.15.2.

6. Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 4.66-69.

7. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 107.

The fourth category is that of carnivalistic *mésalliances* or syncrises, which occur often in banquet settings.<sup>8</sup> Bakhtin writes, ‘all things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another...are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations. Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid.’ A related category is that of profanation, ‘carnivalistic debasings and bringings down to earth...[including] carnivalistic parodies on sacred texts and sayings’.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, Bakhtin argues that, despite the jocularity associated with the carnival, it can be deadly serious:

To understand correctly the problem of carnivalization, one must dispense with the oversimplified understanding of carnival found in the *masquerade* line of modern times, and even more with a vulgar bohemian understanding of carnival...There is not a grain of nihilism in it, not a grain of empty frivolity or vulgar bohemian individualism.<sup>10</sup>

8. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (trans. Helene Iswolsky; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 278-302.

9. All from Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, pp. 122-23. According to a growing number of scholars, Bakhtin's interest in the profanations and *mésalliances* of carnival and his belief in the dialogical nature of truth suggest that he was profoundly influenced by an Eastern Orthodox understanding of the Incarnation and the ‘dialogue’ between the two natures of Christ. Russian scholars have long assumed that Bakhtin was a guardian of pre-revolutionary theological ideas. As Charles Lock, ‘Carnival and Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology’, *Journal of Literature and Theology* 5 (1991), pp. 68-82 (69) notes, however, many westerners have celebrated Bakhtin as ‘a radical, as the Soviet Union's only distinguished indigenous Marxist (however deviant), [or] as a proto-poststructuralist who may yet help to salvage a humanist ideology’. Soviet censorship and Bakhtin's desultory writing style have complicated this issue, but there is increasing reason to believe that the Russians are correct. Alexandar Mihailovic's study, *Corporeal Words: Mikhail Bakhtin's Theology of Discourse* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1997), demonstrates the importance of the Chalcedonian formula *nesliiano i nerazdel'no* (not merged yet undivided) to Bakhtin's work. Also note Alexandar Mihailovic, ‘Mikhail Bakhtin's Conception of Interpenetration: The Theological Sources’, in Caryl Emerson (ed.), *Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin* (New York: Hall, 1999), pp. 300-18; Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino (eds.), *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 2001), and Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998).

10. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, p. 160, emphasis original. Also worthy of note is Peter Stallybrass's influential study on the carnivalesque as

Indeed, as Umberto Eco notes, while carnival can sometimes be a light-hearted and temporary holiday from the usual rules, when it is unexpected it can be revolutionary.<sup>11</sup>

Bakhtin thought that true carnival all but disappeared after the Renaissance, while a ‘carnival sense of the world’ continued to exist in literature as it had for centuries. Bakhtin explains,

Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms—from large and complex mass actions to individual carnivalistic gestures. This language...gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature.<sup>12</sup>

Bakhtin coined the term carnivalesque to describe ancient or modern literature that has been influenced by this carnival sense of the world.<sup>13</sup>

it appears in medieval Robin Hood legends: ‘Drunk with the Cup of Liberty: Robin Hood, the Carnavalesque, and the Rhetoric of Violence in Early Modern England’, *Semiotica* 54 (1985), pp. 113-45 (114). Stallybrass articulates what he calls a ‘tentative morphology’ of the carnivalesque that includes 1) replacement of fast by feast, 2) transgression of spatial barriers, 3) transgression of bodily barriers, 4) inversion of hierarchy, 5) degrading of the sacred, 6) violation of linguistic norms.

11. Umberto Eco, ‘The Frames of Comic Freedom’, in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Carnival!* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1984), p. 6.

12. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 122.

13. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 124. Bakhtin’s discussion of the carnivalesque in *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics* is a part of his attempt to trace the development of what he calls the polyphonic aspect of Dostoyevsky’s novels. He writes, ‘these carnival categories, and above all the category of free familiarization of man and the world, were over thousands of years transposed into literature, particularly into the dialogic line of development in novelistic prose. Familiarization facilitated the destruction of epic and tragic distance...It determined that special familiarity of the author’s position with regard to his characters impossible in the higher genres.’ There seems to be confusion among biblical scholars regarding Bakhtin’s use of the word carnival. For purposes of clarification *carnival* is the cultural phenomenon; *carnivalization* is what happens to literature that is influenced by a carnival sense of the world; *carnavalesque* is a way of describing literature that has been carnivalized; *carnivalistic* describes any literature or event that includes elements of carnival.

Literature does not need to depict quintessentially carnivalesque events such as aristocrats and plebeians feasting together to reflect a carnival sense of the world. While early Christian literature is often, according to Bakhtin, overtly carnivalesque, exhibiting carnivalesque syncretisms, as ‘rulers, rich men, thieves, beggars, heterae come together here on equal terms’,<sup>14</sup> other literature reflects a carnival sense of the world in less obvious ways, such as the Socratic dialogues of Plato or Xenophon, which Bakhtin argues are carnivalesque because of Socrates’ dialogical opposition to ready-made truth.<sup>15</sup> Another example is Fyodor Karamazov’s posturing and mocking of sacred texts in the scandal scene in Father Zossima’s cell from *The Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>16</sup> Both the Socratic dialogues and *The Brothers Karamazov* lack the obvious carnivalesque imagery of, say, the crowning and de-crowning of Jesus as ‘King of the Jews’ in the Gospels, yet they exhibit the dialogic approach to truth, the propensity for social upheaval, and the ‘pathos of shifts and changes’ that characterize the carnivalesque.<sup>17</sup>

Another way the poetic logic of the carnivalesque manifests itself in literature is in playful citations of sacred texts that place revered characters and sayings into new identity-transforming contexts. For example, in the aforementioned scene of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Karamazov shouts to the holy man Father Zossima, ‘Blessed be the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck—the paps especially’.<sup>18</sup> Karamazov’s addition to the text of Lk. 11.27 transforms the citation from a tribute to a crude mockery. By placing a revered text into a new situation its accepted meaning is destabilized and brought down to earth—‘profaned’, to use Bakhtin’s term—by its new context. Yet, Karamazov’s citation maintains a degree of continuity between the original and the new contexts, uncovering hidden potential in Luke 11 rather than simply negating Luke’s meaning.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the effectiveness

14. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 135.

15. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, pp. 109-12.

16. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 146; Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (trans. Constance Garnett; New York: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 52.

17. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 140.

18. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 52.

19. Bakhtin calls this characteristic of the dialogic nature of texts ‘re-accentuation’ in ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; trans. Michael Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 409-10.

of Karamazov's citation stems from its continuity with Luke 11; Father Zossima is clearly worthy of being compared with Jesus, which makes Karamazov's crude twist all the more horrible. This sort of profaning intertextuality, with its destabilizing juxtaposition of the lofty and the low, is an important aspect of the carnivalesque Last Supper.<sup>20</sup>

Robert L. Brawley has offered a carnivalesque reading of the Lukan Passion narrative in which he argues that Jesus' antagonists attempt to mock and degrade him by 'carnivalizing' him, an effort that is resisted by allusions to scripture that indicate that God is on Jesus' side and will vindicate him.<sup>21</sup> This paper will argue that a carnivalesque confusion of established mores does in fact pose a challenge to Jesus' identity, but this challenge is actually sanctioned by the narrative and is introduced most often by Jesus himself. Through self-defacing symbolic action and ironic scriptural allusion Jesus profanes his own messianic status, thereby creating a new paradigm of power that holds death and political victory, self-sacrifice and revolution, in dialogic tension. I will begin by exploring the carnivalesque elements of Luke's banquet motif as they relate to the symbolism and teaching at the Last Supper before discussing an allusion to Daniel 7 that increases the carnivalesque ambiguity in the passage.

### 3. *Literary Unity of Luke 22.14-38*

In order to clear the way for a literary reading of 22.14-38, a text often subjected to the knife, a word must be said about its fundamental unity. Much of the scholarly work done on Lk. 22.14-38 has concentrated on untangling the complex assortment of traditions that Luke has strung together (e.g. 22.24-27, 28-30), troubling textual variants (e.g. 22.19b-20), and historical issues. Many commentaries that purport to give a literary analysis of Luke deal with 22.24-27 as if it were a free-floating piece of tradition that was only accidentally set at the Last Supper, or

20. Another example of such intertextual profanation is Jimi Hendrix's version of the *Star Spangled Banner*. By playing the well-known melody through over-driven amplifiers at Woodstock, the familiar jingoistic theme of the song is transformed from a tribute to the courage and resilience of Americans to an incisive anti-war statement. The juxtaposition of the lofty image of 'the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air' with the squalor of Woodstock reveals the anthem to be murderous rather than noble.

21. Robert L. Brawley, 'Resistance to Carnivalization of Jesus: Scripture in the Lukan Passion Narrative', *Semeia* 69-70 (1995), pp. 33-60.

worse, as a mere replay of 9.46-48.<sup>22</sup> There are a number of reasons, however, to read 22.14-38, including 24-30, as a single literary unit comprised of several pericopes. First, all of the five disputes about greatness in the Synoptic Gospels follow immediately after a Passion prediction, which suggests that the tradition may have arisen, not as a generic teaching, but as an attempt to wrestle with the scandal of the cross.<sup>23</sup> That is, despite the fact that they are framed as hortatory teachings, the greatness disputes may be responding to the implicit but vital question of how Jesus, who did not appear to be ‘great’, could possibly be the messiah of Israel. This would suggest an organic, albeit uniquely Lukan, relationship between vv. 24-30 and the dramatic tension incurred by the prediction of Jesus’ coming suffering (22.15), and betrayal (22.21, 34) at the Last Supper. Secondly, as William Kurz notes, 22.14-38 comprises a farewell discourse that appears to imitate Old Testament farewell discourses as well as their Greco-Roman counterparts, such as Plato’s *Phaedo*.<sup>24</sup> Verses 24-30 are an integral part of Luke’s delicately woven narrative, contributing vital elements to the overall flow of the farewell, including the obligatory final teaching of the departing leader, and the promise of future reward. Thirdly, much conjecture has been offered to explain why Luke changed Mk 10.45 ‘for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ to ‘for who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves’ (22.27). Disregarding the contested issue of whether Luke thought Jesus’ death had atoning efficacy, the most obvious reason for the change from λύτρον (ransom) to διακονῶν (one who serves at the table) is the fact that, in the Lukan version, Jesus is serving at a table.<sup>25</sup> By converting Mark’s λύτρον to a

22. E.g. E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (NCB Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 257. Ellis’s commentary skips 22.24-28 and suggests the reader go back and read 9.46-50 and 12.37. Cf. Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) and Darrell Bock, *Luke* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

23. Mk 9.33-35; 10.41-45; Mt. 20.24-28; Lk. 9.48.

24. William S. Kurz, ‘Luke 22.14-38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses’, *JBL* 104 (1985), pp. 251-68.

25. Contributing to the discussion of Luke’s theology of the cross is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the literary explanation for the absence of λύτρον offered here does weaken the arguments of those who find great theological significance in its absence.



convivial metaphor that is more appropriate to the setting of the Last Supper, Luke invites us to read 22.14-38 as a literary unit.

#### 4. *The Carnavalesque Table*

There are a number of aspects of the banquet motif stretching throughout Luke–Acts that suggest a carnival influence that should be considered when examining the Last Supper. Bakhtin claims that the carnivalesque banquet is characterized by the upending of hierarchical norms and prohibitions, freely blending ‘the profane and the sacred, the lower and the higher, the spiritual and the material’.<sup>26</sup> Many scholars have noted that Luke uses banquets as a catalyst for the dissolution of hierarchies and social boundaries. These Lukan banquets frequently feature a symposium style combination of eating and ‘philosophical’ conversation, moving from Jesus’ scandalous behavior to carnivalesque teachings that further undermine established notions of authority.<sup>27</sup>

For example, an episode unique to Luke portrays a sinful woman of the city intruding upon a meal at a Pharisee’s house and demonstrating the ‘free and familiar contact’ of the carnival by wetting Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and anointing them with ointment (7.36-50).<sup>28</sup> The Pharisee’s indignant reaction to Jesus allowing a sinful woman to touch him in such an intimate fashion leads Jesus to proclaim that those who have been forgiven much (i.e. the sinful), have more love for God than those who have been forgiven little, thereby suggesting that the *mésalliance* of Jesus and a sinful woman is emblematic of a displacement of the religious establishment by those who are considered sinful. Similarly, in 11.37-52, a Pharisee who has invited Jesus to dine with him is astonished when he neglects to wash before eating. Jesus responds with an acerbic critique of those who ‘clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside...are full of greed and wickedness’ (11.39), and then proceeds into a series of woes. Again, the Pharisee’s understandable reaction to a breach of etiquette

26. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 285.

27. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 120, argues that the symposium itself possesses a ‘certain license, ease and familiarity...eccentricity and ambivalence ... [that make it] by nature a purely carnivalistic genre’.

28. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 128 on whether this episode was unique to Luke.

becomes the impetus for a blistering critique: 'But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others' (11.42). At both of these meals Jesus' scathing response to the indignation of his hosts suggests that his habit of overstepping cultural boundaries gestures towards a larger censure of the current authorities in favor of the lowly.

Another uniquely Lukan tradition in ch. 14 portrays Jesus dining at the house of a Pharisee and transgressing halachic boundaries by healing a man with dropsy on the Sabbath before relating the following episode:

When [Jesus] noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted' (14.7-11).

While Jesus' words echo Prov. 25.6-7, his unique interpretation inverts the common-sense etiquette of that passage, as his advice to sit at the lowest place is based, not just on the prudence of avoiding a potentially embarrassing situation as it is in Proverbs, but on Jesus' own audacious claim that 'those who humble themselves will be exalted'.<sup>29</sup> Given the unlawful healing of the man with dropsy and the following injunction to invite 'the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind' to banquets rather than rich neighbors (14.12-14), this parable transforms the proverb's implicit support of the social hierarchy into a challenge. Yet, this challenge is based, not on a reversal in which the lowly seize the best seats for themselves, but by questioning, or one might even say mocking, the hierarchy that makes the seating arrangement intelligible.<sup>30</sup>

29. 'Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, "Come up here", than to be put lower in the presence of a noble' (Prov. 25.6-7).

30. Cf. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 285.

All three of these passages (7.36-50; 11.37-52; 14.1-24) portray Jesus carnivalistically profaning a meal by neglecting custom and hierarchical distinctions and then responding to his host's understandable indignation by attacking the status quo. Yet, even as Jesus identifies with sinners and the dregs of society, there is no hint that he seeks merely to replace the current establishment with a new one. Rather, the lowly are exalted as the lowly. The sinful have a greater love for God precisely because they are sinful and have been forgiven much. Thus, by the time we reach the Last Supper, Luke has described Jesus as one who 'has come eating and drinking...a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (7.34),<sup>31</sup> a figure who uses meals as an opportunity to reorient social expectations by engaging in the *mésalliances* that characterize the carnivalesque banquet. Interestingly, the Last Supper contains this same progression from carnivalistic misbehavior to subversive discourse.

While Mark and Matthew remain ambiguous as to whether Jesus acted as the host of the meal or as the one who serves the food, Luke's inclusion of verses 24-27 makes it clear that Jesus takes his own advice to 'sit at the lowest place' by taking the lowest place of all—that of ὁ διακονῶν. The absurdity of the King who comes in the name of the Lord (19.38) playing the role of servant is amplified when he refers to the food as his own flesh and blood, which, apart from subsequent ontological speculation, would have been abhorrent to any Jew. This imagery is double-edged, as, on one hand, it continues the emphasis on the table as the milieu for the suspension of 'all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions', while revealing another, more baffling detail: the death and betrayal of Jesus as signified by a symbolic enactment of his coming sacrifice.<sup>32</sup>

31. Lk. 7.34 is, of course, Jesus' rendition of his enemies' description of him which includes 'a glutton and a drunkard'. The following pericope (7.36-50) makes it clear that Luke did not intend to repudiate the accusation completely.

32. Obviously, this argument employs the longer textual variant in Lk. 22.19b-20. While there is insufficient space to launch a full defense of following the longer variant, note that a) the longer reading is supported by a more diverse array of text types; b) proponents of the shorter reading often rely on circular arguments based on what Luke could have said, often referring to the absence of the Markan λύτρον, which, as noted above, is translated into the similar Lukan metaphor of the διακονῶν who 'serves' his life; e.g. Bart D. Ehrman, 'The Cup, the Bread, and the Salvific Effect of Jesus' Death in Luke-Acts', *SBLASP* 30 (1991), pp. 576-91. Cf. Joseph Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), pp. 1386-95.

Luke's double-layered imagery of Jesus as both the one who serves the food and who is the food itself evokes a second characteristic of the carnivalesque banquet; in addition to the destabilization of hierarchies, the carnivalesque banquet celebrates the act of eating as victory over a hostile world because the boundaries between humans and the world are blurred to humans' advantage. Bakhtin writes, 'in the act of eating, as we have said, the confines between the body and the world are overstepped by the body; it triumphs over the world, over its enemy, celebrates its victory, grows at the world's expense...Bread and wine (the world defeated through work and struggle) disperse fear and liberate.'<sup>33</sup> Two factors in the text suggest a similar dynamic is at work at the Last Supper. First, aside from all Eucharistic debates and the question of whether Luke had an atonement theology, when Jesus declares the bread and wine to be given ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, the most basic sense of the sentence is that the disciples consume him to their own advantage. Secondly, by describing himself as food to be consumed, Jesus prefigures his imminent and ignominious death. The carnivalesque elements highlight the fact that Jesus has assumed a thoroughly un-messianic position of utter degradation, foreshadowing a death that will somehow benefit the disciples.

Thus, the Last Supper is united with Luke's ongoing trope of the carnivalesque meal by a common inappropriateness and social subversion.<sup>34</sup> The revolutionary potential of drinking blood and eating flesh or of a sinful woman wiping a man's feet with her hair is not from the threat of armed revolt, but from the festive debasement of established

33. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, pp. 282-83. Charles Lock, 'Carnival and Incarnation', pp. 74, 79-80, argues that Bakhtin's belief in the triumphant nature of eating stems from an Orthodox celebration of hunger as an 'affirmation of the body's connection, through orifices and apertures, with the cosmos' as opposed to a Neo-Platonic (i.e. Western Christian) understanding of hunger as 'a humiliating reminder of the body's lack of self-sufficiency'. Lock also claims that Bakhtin presupposes, not just the crude biological details of eating, but a Eucharistic ingestion of the divine. Although Bakhtin's understanding of eating may have been influenced, via Eastern Orthodox thought, by texts such as Luke 22, the present study is concerned with Luke's depiction of Jesus' symbolic self-degradation, not subsequent Eucharistic theology.

34. Dennis E. Smith, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke', *JBL* 106 (1987), pp. 613-28 (628), argues that 'the Last Supper of Jesus does not function as an isolated reference in Luke but as a final, and perhaps archetypical, example of a motif that has been developed throughout the Gospel'.

mores. Yet, while Luke sometimes directs this carnivalesque subversion at the Pharisees, it is most often a degradation of Jesus, as Lukan meals frequently place Jesus in positions that compromise his messianic status, describing him as a degraded servant or simply as one who identifies with outcasts.

### 5. A New Mode of Interrelationships ‘Among You’

As is the case for a number of Lukan meals, the Last Supper progresses from a breach of etiquette to teaching that illumines the subversive nature of the preceding faux pas. As noted above, all five of the disputes about greatness in the Synoptic Gospels, despite their varying narrative settings, follow immediately after a Passion prediction, which suggests that the tradition functions as an attempt to respond to the scandal of the cross. In this case vv. 24-30 function as an articulation of the implicit politic declared by Jesus’ prophetic self-effacement in vv. 18-23. That is, in 22.24-30, Jesus articulates the meaning of greatness in his kingdom in a way that corresponds to the preceding image of a messiah who gives up his life.

Jesus’ response to the disciples’ quarreling in v. 25 is commonly interpreted as a censure of heathen authority, a sentiment which is reflected by the prevailing translation of v. 25 ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over (κυριεύουσιν) them’ (NRSV, NIV).<sup>35</sup> However, the verb κυριεύω, which Liddell and Scott define simply as ‘to be lord or master of people or of a country’, lacks the negative connotations of κατακυριεύω which is used in the Markan parallel, suggesting that the usual translation connotes a censure of ruthlessness or corruption that is lexically unwarranted.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the fact that 22.25a should read

35. Bock, *Luke*, p. 351, remarks, ‘in the world leadership involves the bald exercise of authority—people *lord it over* others’. Emphasis original.

36. BDAG defines κυριεύω as ‘to exercise authority or have control, rule’. Also see Kenneth W. Clark, ‘The Meaning of [kata]kurieuien,’ in J.K. Elliot (ed.), *Studies in New Testament Language and Text: Essays in Honour of George D. Kilpatrick on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday* (NovTSup, 44; Leiden: Brill, 1976), p. 104, who argues that [κατα]κυριεύω was commonly translated as ‘lord over’ in the eighteenth century, a phrase that had neutral connotations at the time. Gradually, however, the English phrase ‘lord over’ came to mean ‘domineer’ but the translation was maintained in English Bibles. Cf. also David J. Lull, ‘The Servant–Benefactor as a Model of Greatness’, *NovT* 28.4 (1986) pp. 289-305. Paul uses the word with a positive connotation in Rom. 14.9, ‘For this reason Christ both

‘the kings of the Gentiles *are lords of them*’ commends the passive translation of εὐεργέται καλοῦνται (are called benefactors) rather than the middle (call themselves benefactors), in which case both clauses would be simply stating an obvious truth.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Luke gives no hint that the Gentiles should not have lords, or that these lords should not be referred to as benefactors. Rather, Jesus responds to the disciples’ quarreling by stating the established concept of power: ‘the kings of the Gentiles *are lords of them* and those in authority are called benefactors’ (22.25).

Then how are we to understand Jesus’ following statement in v. 26 ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως? Jesus’ words become less enigmatic if viewed through the lens of the carnivalesque. Jesus follows ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως with a series of quintessentially carnivalesque syncrises, as the greatest is commanded to be like the youngest and the one who leads like the one who serves.<sup>38</sup> Bakhtin claims that, within the carnival, ‘the behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (*rank, age*) defining them totally in non-carnival life, and thus from the vantage point of non-carnival life become eccentric and inappropriate’.<sup>39</sup> Jesus states the way of things among the Gentiles, not because Gentile kings deviate from the established norm and need to be rebuked, but because their way *is* the established norm. He then proceeds to declare a carnival, a ‘new mode of interrelationship between individuals’ that subverts the existing paradigm of greatness. The category of reversal is inadequate to explain this revolutionary change to the meaning of authority; as vv. 28-30 make clear, Jesus does not simply reverse the accepted use of authority by instructing the disciples to repudiate lordship altogether, nor does he proclaim a reversal of fortunes wherein the disciples may lord it over the Gentiles. Rather, the carnivalesque syncrasis of leader *as* servant destabilizes the meaning of both words, prompting a metaphorical exchange that results in a new type of authority that moves beyond the logic of reversal that demands that the disciples must be either leaders

lived and died and was raised: so that he might be lord (κυριεύση) over the dead and the living’ (author’s trans.).

37. Contra Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, p. 1415.

38. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 123.

39. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 123.

or servants.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Jesus defines the politics of this kingdom over against the ‘kings of the Gentiles’ (22.25) not because Gentiles are particularly evil or corrupt by the usual standards, but because Jesus is declaring a different paradigm of power.

### 6. Socratic Dialogue

The carnivalesque aspects of vv. 24-27 are amplified by a narrative form of reasoning that closely resembles Socratic dialogue, a genre that, according to Bakhtin, arose ‘out of a folk-carnivalistic base and is thoroughly saturated with a carnival sense of the world’.<sup>41</sup> This carnival influence manifests itself in the Socratic notion that truth is found in dialogical interaction rather than in ‘official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth’.<sup>42</sup> Although he claimed the New Testament and Socratic dialogue are both carnivalistic antecedents to the novel, Bakhtin does not suggest that they have a direct historical relationship. Interestingly, however, as noted above, Luke’s Last Supper mimics Greco-Roman and biblical farewell addresses. While it may be over-zealous to claim that the questioning in 22.27 consciously mimics the Socratic dialogue in a work such as Plato’s *Apology* or the *Phaedo*, Luke’s knowledge of such works represents another point of connection between Luke’s cultural encyclopedia and the carnivalesque.<sup>43</sup>

40. The potency of the syncretism is not necessarily weakened by the presence of ὄσις. Regarding the potential of similes, Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 58, remarks ‘[the inferiority of similes] stands only if one takes as examples uninspiring similes such as “the sun is like a golden ball” or “these biscuits are like cement,” where the comparison is narrow and insipid...Metaphors with the same content would be no better; viz. “these biscuits are made of cement”.’

41. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 109. Bakhtin distinguishes between Socratic dialogue in its earliest stages and subsequent dialogues that lost all connection with a carnival sense of the world, being employed to expound pre-packaged ideas, despite maintaining the Socratic form.

42. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 110.

43. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 111. Furthermore, according to Bakhtin, Socratic dialogue occurs most often in extreme situations which he calls dialogue ‘on the threshold’, such as the final moments before death, as such situations ‘force a person to reveal the deepest layers of his personality and thought’.

Jesus follows the syncrises of v. 26 with three sentences that are absent from the parallels in Mark and Matthew, 'For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.' While Luke frequently portrays Jesus asking incisive questions that force his interlocutors to reexamine their positions, rarely, if ever, has it been suggested that Jesus engaged in Socratic dialogue. This may stem from the fact that Jesus' questions are often thought to resemble diatribal or rabbinic forms of reasoning while Socratic dialogue generally takes the form of a volley of questions and answers.<sup>44</sup> Bakhtin argues, however, that Socratic dialogue is not so much a particular form of question and answer as it is a vehicle for discovering truth dialogically.<sup>45</sup> In Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates is sometimes portrayed teasing out ideas from his interlocutors in the usual question and answer format. But on other occasions Socrates creates a 'dialogue' by injecting the opinions of others or generally agreed-upon ideas into a monologue. For example, while discussing the body's inability to perceive truth, Socrates says,

But will you perceive any such thing with the body? (I speak concerning all such things, such as greatness, health, strength, and, in a word, any one of the whole of the things which exist, which are underlying everything). Can their true nature be beheld by the body?

Is it not [true] that the one of us who very carefully prepares himself to understand the things which he examines, this one will be the nearest to knowledge of each of these things? [author's translation]<sup>46</sup>

Here Socrates 'questions' himself by providing the answer that Simmias would have given, thereby creating a quasi-dialogue. Interestingly, the form of Jesus' questioning in v. 26 is very similar.

Immediately after proclaiming an upside down carnival world that is counterposed to the established truth of the Gentiles (22.26), Jesus refers back to that established truth: 'Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?' Rather than answering in a manner that is commensurate with what he taught in v. 26, 'let the greatest

44. Cf. Johnson, *Luke*, p. 308.

45. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, p. 111. Cf. also Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (ed. Leon S. Roudiez; trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 67, who remarks, 'for Bakhtin, dialogue can be monological, and what is called monologue can be dialogical'.

46. Plato, *Phaedo* 65d.



among you become as the youngest’, Jesus allows for a sort of dialogue by giving the answer the disciples presumably would have given: ‘Is it not the one at the table?’ As with his comment about Gentile lordship, Jesus does not question the validity or morality of the idea that the one who sits is greater. Indeed, the disciples themselves are promised seats for eating and drinking in Jesus’ kingdom in v. 30. Yet, while the self-evident greatness of those who sit is not disputed, Jesus places his own identity in dialogical counterpoint to the disciples’ concept of greatness: ‘But I am among you as one who serves’. One can imagine a dramatic pause as this dialogically constructed truth hangs in the air, challenging the disciples (and the reader) to redefine their notions of power. Again, however, Luke offers no neat reversal, no claim that the one who serves is in fact greater. Thus, Jesus’ claim to be ὁ διακονῶν undermines existing concepts of power by using the poetic logic of the carnival; rather than offering an abstract condemnation of the disciples’ presuppositions, Jesus juxtaposes his own identity with the way of the Gentiles. The dialogical juxtaposition hinges on two points of reference (Jesus’ identity and the standard definition of greatness) that destabilize and relativize each other, forcing the reader either to create a new definition of greatness or to reject the claims of a messiah who ‘sits at the lowest place’.

### *7. The Profanation of Daniel 7*

As noted above, one reason why the carnivalesque can pose a threat to linguistic and societal norms is its reinterpretation or ‘profanation’ of sacred texts. Such parodic reinterpretations are, according to Kristeva, a factor in the carnivalesque’s ability to transcend the one to one ratio between signifier and signified that is inherent in Indo-European languages in favor of a ‘poetic logic’ that transcends a simple relationship between signifier and signified with ‘an infinity of pairings and combinations’.<sup>47</sup> As Fyodor Karamazov’s profanation of Lk. 11.27 demonstrates, carnivalistic profanations take a lofty or revered text and bring it down to earth by placing it in a carnivalistic context, inevitably

47. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, pp. 69-70. While Kristeva’s rather extreme claim that the carnival is the only discourse that truly achieves this poetic logic seems to neglect the metaphorical nature of all language, this paper relies on her general and more plausible claim that the figures germane to carnivalesque literature have a particular proclivity for dialogical destabilization of meaning.

changing its meaning. Yet the original meaning of the text alluded to is not completely negated, as the potency of such allusions comes from the tension between the original meaning and its new context. For example, Jesus' aforementioned allusion to Prov. 25.6-7 in Lk. 14.7-11 maintains a degree of continuity by offering an identical teaching: do not presume to sit in the best seats. Yet, the proverb is based on assumptions that underwrite the social hierarchy, and Jesus 'profanes' these assumptions by basing his teaching on the subversive claim that the lowly will be exalted. I turn now to discuss the profanation of Daniel 7 at Luke's Last Supper.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in the sort of source-critical and redaction-based arguments that often characterize studies of the New Testament's use of the Old.<sup>48</sup> Thus, I will simply note that both Mk 10.35-45, which is parallel to Lk. 22.24-27, and Mt. 19.27-29, which is parallel to Lk. 22.28-30, are widely thought to interpret the Son of Man and the 'holy ones' in Daniel 7 in light of Jesus and his disciples.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, Luke appears to have forged a unique combination of two apparently unrelated traditions that presuppose very similar interpretations of Daniel 7 vis-à-vis Jesus and his closest followers. More importantly, however, one can imagine a first-century reader who, reading Lk. 22.14-38 as a single narrative rather than as a patchwork of discrete sayings, hears the echoes of Daniel 7 LXX, a text that often functioned as an articulation of Israel's political dreams: the great

48. In other words, authorial intent and sources are not as important to a Bakhtinian study as the clash of images between Luke 22 and Daniel 7 in their present form. For a more traditional argument for a Danielic background to Lk. 22.24-30, see Craig A. Evans, 'The Twelve Thrones of Israel: Scripture and Politics in Luke 22.24-30', in Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (eds.), *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), pp. 154-70.

49. E.g. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-29* (WBC 33b; Dallas: Word Books, 1995), p. 523; Evans 'The Twelve Thrones of Israel', p. 166; Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), p. 390. In light of the lack of scholarly consensus regarding the meaning and origin of the phrase 'the son of man', a brief historical caveat is in order: the arguments presented here do not depend on any particular origin of 'the son of man', nor is the 'original meaning' of Dan. 7 relevant. N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 514, is instructive in this regard: 'What matters here...is the whole narrative sequence of Dan. (especially ch. 7), and the ways in which that narrative could be invoked, echoed or otherwise appropriated among Jesus' near-contemporaries.'

Gentile kings (μείζων Lk. 22.24, 26; Dan. 7.3),<sup>50</sup> holy ones who persist throughout trial and to whom kingship (βασιλεία Lk. 22.29-30; Dan. 7.17, 22) and thrones (θρόνοι Lk. 22.30; Dan. 7.9) are bestowed where they sit (κάθηναι Lk. 22.30; Dan. 7.26) in judgment (κρίνω Lk. 22.30; Dan. 7.10).

Regardless of whether these verbal parallels were heard as faint echoes or as blaring metalepsis, the screeching dissonance between the Son of Man who serves (Lk. 22.22) and the Son of Man who is served by all nations and tribes (Dan. 7.14, 27) would have turned up the volume considerably. Indeed, anyone who believed that Daniel 7 spoke of the messiah who would lead Israel against her oppressors, as Rabbi Aqiba believed in the second century,<sup>51</sup> could hardly have heard Jesus' reinterpretation of Daniel as anything other than a disturbing mockery—a profanation. The dissonance between Luke's description of Jesus as one who serves his own body and blood with Daniel 7's narrative of the triumphant Son of Man creates a thematic incoherence that greatly amplifies the presence of the Danielic allusion. Thus, while Daniel 7 may seem wholly incompatible with a figure who gives himself to be 'consumed' by his disciples, it is the violent juxtaposition of images that actually demonstrates the continuity of the allusion to Daniel and the carnivalesque imagery throughout the passage: the profanation of Daniel 7 ratchets up the tension of Luke's carnivalesque banquet by reminding the reader of the great difference between Jesus and what a messiah ought to be.

There are two potential objections to the proposal that Luke 'profanes' Daniel 7. First, modern readers for whom Daniel 7 functions in the New Testament solely as a description of the second coming will tend to be deaf to the dissonance between Daniel 7 and Jesus the διακονῶν. N.T. Wright, however, argues convincingly that (a) the description of the Son of Man riding on the clouds of heaven (7.13), like the four beasts who rise out of the water, was read as apocalyptic metaphor rather than as a literal prediction;<sup>52</sup> (b) messianic (i.e. earthly and military) interpretations of Daniel 7's depiction of victory over Gentile kings were quite common;<sup>53</sup> (c) thus, according to first-century

50. Pitre, *Jesus*, p. 390.

51. *b. Hag.* 14a.

52. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 297.

53. Wright, *Jesus*, pp. 514, 629.

Jews, Daniel 7 referred, not to the collapse of the space-time universe, but to a concrete political event—God's vindication of Israel against her enemies.<sup>54</sup> This is precisely the reading offered by Rabbi Aqiba, who interpreted the plural 'thrones' in Daniel 7 to mean one throne for God and one for 'David', that is, Bar Kokhba, whom he hailed as the Davidic messiah.<sup>55</sup> Thus, even if one should cling to a literal interpretation of Jesus 'coming with the clouds of heaven', first- and second-century interpretations of Daniel 7 serve as a stern reminder that the New Testament writers did not share our neat separation between political and spiritual reality. To avoid gross anachronism it is necessary to realize that, whatever Luke (or Jesus) meant when he alluded to the apocalyptic imagery of Daniel 7, it had something to do with Jesus' identity as Israel's king and the political fate of Israel. Thus, even if Jesus' allusion to Daniel in Lk. 22.24-30 does refer to the second coming, at that point in the narrative one can hardly imagine how Jesus could attain such a victory. By describing himself as a moribund servant who does not wield power as the Gentiles do, Jesus seems to cut off the possibility of establishing a messianic kingdom (within or without the current space-time continuum) in which Gentile kings will be defeated and he will be 'given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him' (Dan. 7.14).

A second barrier to recognizing Luke's profanation of Daniel 7 is the idea that Daniel already contains a narrative of vindicated suffering that Luke and other early Christians simply applied to Jesus' death and resurrection. Daniel 7 does indeed mention the horn making 'war with the holy ones' and 'prevailing over them' (7.21; cf. 7.25). Two things can be said in response to this potential objection. First, it is highly doubtful that most first-century interpreters of Daniel would have accepted the crucifixion of the messiah as an appropriate fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of vindicated suffering. The difficulty that many Jews and Gentiles had accepting the cross demonstrates the fact that ignominious death followed by resurrection was not an established or uncontroversial method of political efficacy. Secondly, according to Bakhtin, carnivalesque profanations do not negate or silence the text that is being profaned, and therefore some degree of continuity between the old and new 'meanings' of the text being profaned is to be expected. By placing a 'lofty' text in a 'low' context, potential meanings are

54. Wright, *Jesus*, p. 513.

55. *b. Hag.* 14a.

accentuated and brought to the fore, even while the text's original or accepted meaning is destabilized, sometimes with revolutionary implications.

Having examined the macabre carnivalesque imagery beginning in v. 15 and culminating in Luke's metaphorical description of Jesus as one who serves his own life, we are in a position to ask what dialogical truth springs forth from the allusion to Daniel. Does Luke imply that the nationalistic hopes reflected in Daniel 7 have been superseded, that followers of Jesus belong to a spiritual kingdom that is not in conflict with the 'great' Gentile lords? There is a sufficient degree of assonance between 22.24-30 and Daniel 7, particularly in the promise of thrones from which to reign on behalf of a reunified Israel, to suggest that Luke is not trying to negate Daniel completely, which complicates Jesus' stance vis-à-vis Daniel 7 so that one cannot say that he rejects the political aspirations reflected in Daniel, or that he simply affirms them, without oversimplification. Indeed, the tension between Lk. 22.27 and 22.28-30 alone suggests that an either/or logic that would force a decision between a Jesus who rejects the political hopes of Israel and a Jesus who represents a simple continuity with them is insufficient.

Bakhtin's categories provide a helpful hermeneutical lens for articulating this intertextual relationship. According to Kristeva, Bakhtin maintained that all words, despite the fact that they are the smallest or most elemental structural units of a text, are not fixed points, but are 'intersections of textual surfaces'.<sup>56</sup> Rather than offering an unchanging denotation of a fixed object, a word's meaning is provided by its context, which is a given sentence, page, and all anterior texts. Furthermore, literature that has been carnivalized tends to overlay words with conflicting signifiers, creating a poetic logic that is particularly geared towards the relativization of established meanings and mores. The word ἠσούς, as it appears in the text of Luke 22, is not a fixed point, but an intersection of texts: the covenant sacrifices of the Old Testament with which he is identified (22.19, 20), the δῆκονῶν which context defines as one who 'serves' his own life for others, the suffering servant of Isa. 53.12 quoted in v. 37, the proclamation of kingship in 22.29 and 19.38, and the triumphant Son of Man in Daniel 7, all converge poetically on one signified object, destabilizing each of the respective signifiers. Scholars have tended to deal with the problem of how to understand Jesus' role as messiah in essentially monologic terms, attempting to

56. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 65.

discover whether Jesus was a ‘political’ *or* a ‘spiritual’ figure. Jesus’ self-description in 22.24-30 illustrates the dangerous ability of carnivalesque literature to destabilize these categories: if we hold the competing images of Jesus’ messiahship, such as king and servant, in dialogic tension rather than picking one over the other, our concept of the messiah is forced to expand to hold them both, and they, in turn, are both expanded to be able to refer to the person of Jesus.<sup>57</sup> Jesus is portrayed evoking the regal imagery of Daniel 7, and indeed he claims a kingship for himself and the disciples (22.29), yet, in typical carnivalesque fashion, he ‘profanes’ this text, forcing listeners (and readers) to make a decision: reject the messianic aspirations of this doomed table servant or enlarge the definition of ‘glory’ and ‘kingship’ to include a man who defines himself by his lowly service. This is what Kristeva calls the ‘poetic logic’ of the carnivalesque, as the profane combination of moribund servant and king smashes the one-to-one correspondence of Jesus and King with the irreconcilably different signifier of the table servant. Thus, Luke not only profanes the messianic hope of Daniel 7, he destroys the very concept of power that readers bring to the passage, creating a new one that is wedded to self-sacrifice.

### 8. *Conclusion*

This paper has suggested that a carnivalesque explanation of Lukan politics simply offers a more adequate account of the data than the over-used metaphor of reversal by allowing the conflicting images of the lifting up of the lowly and the actual career of Jesus to exist in dialogic tension. Additionally, the carnivalesque illuminates the intrinsic connection between the Lukan Jesus’ relatively innocuous social infractions, particularly those committed at the table, and his overall identity and mission. That is, Luke’s portrayal of Jesus as one who overturns customs and assumes the lowest place at the table is indicative of a larger carnivalistic destabilization of political expectations.

Yet, the destabilizing juxtaposition of the conflicting images of death and political victory is not a purely negative deconstruction, as the old definitions of defeat and victory, of servant and king, are replaced with

57. Thus it is best understood in the narrative itself or around the Christ event itself, rather than in abstractions. See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, p. 122.

the poetic logic of the carnivalesque. As Eco notes, for a carnival to be truly revolutionary it must institute its own rules rather than simply wallow in nihilistic confusion.<sup>58</sup> John Howard Yoder encapsulates the positive result of Luke's deconstruction of accepted categories when he writes, 'The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection.'<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the logic of cross and resurrection inundates the dialogic tensions in the Last Supper, if not all of Luke–Acts, elucidating the path from defeat to victory. Peter explains the crucifixion of the messiah accordingly in Acts 2: 'This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses...Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2.32, 36). The path to the Davidic throne came, not by a reversal of fortunes, but by submitting as ὁ δίκωνων.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the lowly are lifted up, not by joining a conquering king, but as a conquering king joins them.

58. Eco, 'The Frames of Comic Freedom', p. 7; cf. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 71.

59. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 232. Cf. Joel Marcus, 'Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation', *JBL* 25 (2006), pp. 73-87.

60. Thus, the carnivalistic humiliation of Jesus in the Passion narrative represents more than just a vicious attempt of Jesus' opponents to 'carnivalize' him, as Brawley maintains. According to the dialogical description of Jesus' identity at the Last Supper, Jesus' lordship is inextricably connected to his debasement. So when Herod's soldiers mockingly dress Jesus in royal apparel (Lk. 23.11) and when on-lookers scoff at Jesus on the cross for purporting to be King of the Jews (23.35-38), they are in a sense truly crowning him King of the Jews. The carnivalistic regalia prefigures Jesus' vindication at the right hand of God (Acts 7.56).