

The Justification of Wisdom (Matt 11.19b/Luke 7.35)

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This article challenges the conventional translation and interpretation of the perplexing aphorism in Matt 11.19/Luke 7.35. Linguistic evidence in particular indicates that the phrase should not be interpreted as defiant ('but Wisdom is justified by her deeds/children'). The initial καί should be read as a simple connective rather than an adversative. The ἐδικαιώθη . . . ἀπό refers to the *separation* or *dissociation* of Wisdom from the ministries of John and Jesus according to this generation. Jesus' statement is a bitter complaint, then, of the lack of response by his contemporaries to the message of the kingdom. Matthew's version should be rendered: 'And Wisdom has been absolved of her deeds.' Luke 7.35, similarly, can be translated: 'And Wisdom has been dissociated from her children.'

καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς. (Matt 11.19b)

καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς. (Luke 7.35)

Introduction¹

Scholars have for some time expressed perplexity at Matt 11.16–19/Luke 7.31–5, and, in particular, at the concluding wisdom saying (Matt 11.19b/Luke 7.35).² Allen described this concluding aphorism as 'obscure' and 'full of diffi-

1 I am extremely grateful to Professors P. M. Casey and F. B. Watson for their comments on an earlier draft of this study.

2 For some of the most important literature, see, in addition to treatments in the commentaries and the standard works on the parables and on Q, R. Leivestad, 'An Interpretation of Matt 11 19', *JBL* 71 (1952) 179–81; J. R. Donahue, 'Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification', *CBQ* 33 (1971) 39–61; O. Böcher, 'Ass Johannes der Täufer kein Brot (Luk. vii. 33)?', *NTS* 18 (1971–2) 90–2; W. J. Cotter, 'The Parable of the Children in the Market-Place', *NovT* 29 (1987) 289–304; O. Linton, 'The Parable of the Children's Game: Baptist and Son of Man (Matt. XI. 16–19 = Luke VII. 31–35): A Synoptic Text-Critical, Structural and Exegetical Investigation', *NTS* 22 (1976) 159–79; F. Mussner, 'Der nicht erkannte Kairos (Mt 11,16–19 = Lk 7,31–35)', *Bib* 40 (1959) 599–612; D. Zeller, 'Die Bildlogik des Gleichnisses Mt 11 16f./Lk 7 31f.', *ZNW* 68 (1977) 252–7; M. Völkel, "'Freund der Zöllner und Sünder'", *ZNW* 69 (1978) 1–10;

culty', and modern commentators continue to agree with him.³ Ernst calls it 'ein auf ersten Blick rätselhaftes Wort',⁴ and Beare comments: 'The final sentence appears to be a proverb of some kind. Its meaning is uncertain and it has no clear connection with the parable.'⁵ Because of the lack of clear connection, Bovon, Hagner and Wiefel consider the saying to have originally had an independent existence.⁶ Hill and Harrington both characterise it as 'obscure'.⁷

A reluctant consensus?

Interestingly, despite this perplexity, the range of interpretative options offered for Matt 11.19b/Luke 7.35 has been relatively circumscribed. Perhaps because of the proverbial status that the saying has acquired, something of a consensus has half-heartedly emerged. Leivestad commented in 1952 that 'Modern scholars on the whole agree on the essential import'.⁸ In connection with the Matthean version of the saying, it is consistently held that Wisdom's justification by her deeds refers to the fact that despite all opposition, the works of God 'prove the divine wisdom and purpose to be correct'.⁹ In terms of the Lukan version, scholars tend to understand 'wisdom justified by her children' as the declaration by those who have responded to the message of John and Jesus that God is indeed bringing the kingdom in their midst.¹⁰

H. Sahlin, 'Traditionskritische Bemerkungen zu zwei Evangelienperikopen', *ST* 33 (1979) 69–84 (esp. 77–84); J. J. Kilgallen, 'John the Baptist, the Sinful Woman, and the Pharisee', *JBL* 104 (1985) 675–9; D. Moessner, 'The "Leaven of the Pharisees" and "This Generation": Israel's Rejection of Jesus According to Luke', *JSNT* 10 (1987–8) 21–46. In addition to these articles, the studies of D. Verseput, *The Rejection of the Humble Messianic King: A Study of the Composition of Matthew 11–12* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1986) 104–17 and 352–8; F. Christ, *Jesus Sophia: Die Sophia-Christologie bei den Synoptikern* (ATANT 57; Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1970) 63–80; and P. M. Casey, *An Aramaic Approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002) 129–44, deserve special notice as substantial treatments.

³ W. C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907) 119.

⁴ J. Ernst, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Regensburger Neues Testament; Regensburg: Pustet, 1977) 253.

⁵ F. W. Beare, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981) 262.

⁶ D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1993) 311.

⁷ D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1972) 202; D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SP; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991) 158.

⁸ Leivestad, 'An Interpretation of Matt 11 19', 179.

⁹ Verseput, *Rejection of the Humble Messianic King*, 116.

¹⁰ A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922) 208–9; Ernst, *Lukas*, 253–4; M. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (JSNTSup; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 1.391. See, however, the slight variations within this position in I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978) 303–4.

There has, however, been the occasional dissenting voice: Wellhausen, Dibelius and Linton take a different line. According to their interpretation, Wisdom is not justified *by* her deeds, or children, but rather *in spite of* them.¹¹ Wellhausen, in 1904, advanced the argument that the *ἀπό* goes back to the Aramaic *קדם מן* and means ‘before’ or ‘over against’: ‘Die Weisheit Gottes, vertreten durch Johannes und Jesus zugleich, wird gerechtfertigt vor oder gegenüber den Juden.’¹² Linton reiterates this point, though perhaps with not quite as much conviction.¹³ Dibelius adopts a variation on this position, arguing that Wisdom is justified ‘fern von ihren Kindern’, independently of, or without reference to, this generation.¹⁴ These interpretations are unconvincing, however, as ‘children of wisdom’ would be a very odd depiction of unfaithful Israel. As Schmithals notes, it is very difficult to drive a wedge between the children of Wisdom and the children of God. Commentators rightly make reference here to Prov 8.32 and in particular Ecclus 4.11: ‘Wisdom exalts her sons and lays hold of them that seek her.’¹⁵

One of the most interesting divergences from the standard view is Maurice Casey’s recent proposal for the Aramaic *Vorlage*. Casey provides a radically different solution to the puzzle of the saying in Matt 11.19b. Taking the Matthean version to be closer to the *ipsissima verba*, he translates the underlying Aramaic of 11.18–19 as follows:

John has come not eating and not drinking and they say, ‘He has a demon’. A son of man comes eating and drinking and they say, ‘Look, a man ‘glutton and drunkard’, an associate of tax-collectors and sinners, and Wisdom is not responsible for his work!’ (וֹכֵחַת חֲכָמָה מִן עוֹבְדֵי הַדָּבָר).¹⁶

Here, the reference to the son of man is a general statement about people: in their lives, they eat and drink, otherwise they die. Jesus is simply a specific example of this. But for our study here, the interesting contribution of Casey’s retroversion into Aramaic is that, in his view, the *מִן ... וֹכֵחַת* does not have the sense of ‘justified by’ her deeds, but rather of ‘being acquitted of’ potential charges. The other distinctive point to observe in Casey’s retranslation is the punctuation: Jesus places this statement about wisdom on the lips of his

11 It is not clear whether these scholars apply their reading to Matthew’s version as well as to the Lukan form.

12 J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Matthaei: Übersetzt und Erklärt* (Berlin: Reimer, 1904) 55.

13 Linton, ‘The Parable of the Children’s Game’, 177–8.

14 M. Dibelius, *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer* (FRLANT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911) 19. I am grateful to J. Hering for help with interpreting Dibelius at this point.

15 J. Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1989) 346; W. Schmithals, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (ZBNT; Zürich: Theologischer, 1980) 97.

16 Casey, *Aramaic Approach to Q*, 129–44.

opponents who are trying to absolve Lady Wisdom of any connection with Jesus and John the Baptist.

However, as we shall see below, the main contention here in respect of Casey's work does not concern the Aramaic as much as the fact that what Casey has argued for the Aramaic *Vorlage* can also in large measure be argued for the Greek translation. It is time, then, to turn to the exegesis of the two versions of the saying, and their literary settings.

The immediate context of the saying

The introductory formula has been much studied in another context, that of the parables of the kingdom. As Bock comments on the τίτι ὁμοιώσω formula, 'It is interesting that the comparison tends to appear when the Kingdom of God or the plan of God is described'.¹⁷ This may simply be formulaic, especially if it is right to regard it as closely related to the similar Rabbinic expressions.¹⁸ However, there may also be a certain irony in the fact that Jesus uses a motif which elsewhere he reserves for his statements about the kingdom. This may be reinforced by the contention here that the conclusion to Matt 11.16–19/Luke 7.31–5 is shot through with irony. But we should clearly not place too much emphasis here at this point.

The basic setting of the parable is children playing in the street, complaining that other people (or perhaps other children) are not joining in. Jesus draws a parallel with his contemporaries in 'this generation'. Scholars have often seen problems in the parable here, although as Casey has recently observed, this has largely been unnecessary.¹⁹ Rather than being a complaint that despite the inbreaking of the kingdom this generation is indulging in silly games (Jeremias), the point is rather that whether God sends an ascetic hermit or a gregarious party-goer, their contemporaries will not respond to either. Clearly, 'this generation' wanted John the Baptist to be rather less of a spoilsport (We played the flute for him and he did not dance; cf. Mark 11.30–2). Jesus, on the other hand, was far too worldly for comfort (We sang lamentations and he did not mourn; cf. Matt 9.11, 14.)²⁰

Jesus next describes the behaviour of both himself and John in Matt

17 D. Bock, *Luke. Volume 1: 1.1–9.50* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994) 679.

18 See, for example, J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1972) 100.

19 Also Beare, *Matthew*, 261: 'The general point of the parable is clear. The same people who criticize John for his austere manner of life are now criticizing Jesus for his lack of austerity.' For a longer description of the setting, see Casey, *Aramaic Approach to Q*, 129–32, and Mussner, 'Nicht erkannte Kairos', 599–600. For the technical details of the games, see Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 160–2.

20 In contrast to the view of Versepunt, *Rejection of the Humble Messianic King*, 114, here, the preservation of the sequence in each case seems more probable than a chiasm. Versepunt also exaggerates the difference between the goals of John's and Jesus' ministries here.

11.18–19a/Luke 7.33–4. As Harnack noted long ago, the emphasis is not here on the missions or advents of John and Jesus, but in each case on the *modus vivendi*.²¹ Following this description of John the Baptist, Jesus then says, according to most translators and commentators, ‘But Wisdom will be justified by her deeds/children’ (Matt 11.19b/Luke 7.35). That is, despite the disapproval of this generation, it is inevitable that God in his wisdom will be shown to be right after all.

A new proposal

However, it is the standard interpretation of this final saying of Jesus that will be contested in the discussion below. This applies in particular to the Matthean version; our interpretation will be argued more tentatively for the Lukan context. It should be noted that there is no knock-down argument for the position argued here; rather, the case is cumulative, and will be a matter of weighing probabilities. Our primary concern will be with the Greek text, rather than with any particular Aramaic *Vorlage*, although it is important for the argument here that a crucial element of Casey’s interpretation of his Aramaic *Vorlage* can in fact be applied to the Greek text. What is proposed here is that Matthew’s version should be rendered: ‘And Wisdom has been absolved of her actions’. Luke 7.35, similarly, can be translated: ‘And Wisdom has been dissociated from her children’.

I. The Matthean version of the Wisdom saying

The translation of Matt 11.18–19 that will be defended in the discussion below is as follows:

For John has gone about fasting and abstaining from drink, and they say, ‘he has a demon’. The Son of Man has gone about eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at the man: a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners.’ *And Wisdom has been absolved of her actions.*

The concluding statement, then, is a complaint by Jesus that this generation has zealously put Wisdom in the clear by denying that she has any connection with the ministries of John and Jesus. This is in need of some further explanation and commentary, which can be summed up in the following points.

²¹ A. Harnack, ‘“Ich bin gekommen.” Die ausdrücklichen Selbstzeugnisse Jesu über den Zweck seiner Sendung und seines Kommens’, *ZTK* 22 (1912) 1–30 (3 n. 1). In view here is the fact that they ‘went about’ in their respective manners, in line with the usual sense of ἤλθεν + present participle. See e.g. Mark 1.39; Luke 2.16; 24.1; John 9.7. Contrast Versepunt, *Rejection of the Humble Messianic King*, 109, who talks of the ‘theological manner’ of Matthew’s expression in his use of ἤλθεν; similarly Christ, *Jesus Sophia*, 68.

A. Punctuation

This rendering follows the standard view in seeing the imaginary statement by this generation as simply, 'Look at the man: a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners', with an appended response by Jesus himself in conclusion. It differs in this respect from Casey's interpretation of the Aramaic *Vorlage* above, where there is in Matt 11.19/Luke 7.34–5 one continuous criticism of Jesus: 'Look, a man "glutton and drunkard", an associate of tax-collectors and sinners, and Wisdom is not responsible for his work!' (We are of course focusing here on the Greek text, rather than on an Aramaic *Vorlage*.) The principal reason for punctuating the verse differently from Casey lies in the fact that when Jesus engages in dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor, he tends to have the last word himself:

They will not say, 'Look, here it is', or, 'there it is'. For behold, the Kingdom of God is among you. (Luke 17.21)

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'How shall we be clothed?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow: for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. (Matt 6.31–4)

Or how will you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye', when there is a beam in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the beam out of your own eye; and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (Matt 7.4–5)

Other similar examples can be found in Matt 23.16–17; 23.28–9; 23.29–33; 24.23–5; 24.26–8 and Mark 7.11–13. In fact, I have not been able to find another example of a Gospel writer ending a pericope with an imaginary dialogue partner's words. There is some truth in the statement of Nolland that 'without [Luke 7] v 35, vv 31–34 have an entirely negative role and depict a state of affairs which lacks resolution'.²² However, it is not a resolution in general that is required; as Bovon has pointed out, Matt 11.16–19/Luke 7.31–5 is a complaint, and a complaint does not require a resolution.²³ Nevertheless, the standard view which sees Jesus himself rounding off the imaginary discussion fits a familiar pattern which we see elsewhere in the Gospel tradition.²⁴

²² Nolland, *Luke*, 346.

²³ See Bovon's statement that the whole discussion of 'this generation' in 11.16–19 is 'eine prophetische Anklage' (F. Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas. Teilband I: 1,1–9,50* [EKK; Zürich: Benziger, 1989] 381).

²⁴ Casey notes that the Greek translator felt this (*Aramaic Approach to Q*, 143–4). However, this may actually be a problem for Casey's reconstructed Aramaic *Vorlage*, though this is not our concern here.

B. *The meaning of καί*

The standard view very strongly depends on an adversative καί at the beginning of Matt 11.19b.²⁵ This is by no means impossible, but, other things being equal, it is more probable that καί should simply be understood as ‘and’. The interpretation offered above provides a continuous line of thought, rather than a contrast in 11.19b. According to our interpretation, Jesus is explaining the effect of Matt 11.18–19a//Luke 7.33–4: the condemnation of John’s and Jesus’ actions is tantamount to decoupling Wisdom from her own actions. Hence, the concluding statement has an explanatory, rather than a contrastive, function.²⁶

C. *The meaning of ἡ σοφία*

The sense of ‘Wisdom’ assumed here is much the same as in the accounts of other scholars: σοφία is a personification of the purpose of God.²⁷ This is in contrast to Leivestad, who argues that Jesus was making reference to an existing Jewish proverb, and that σοφία here is not divine wisdom, but ‘that self-wise, self-sufficient neutrality, which is always ready to find a plausible excuse for not repenting’.²⁸ Leivestad’s reading is rather confusing and ambiguous. Furthermore, as Versepunt notes, Leivestad’s view of the saying as a traditional Jewish proverb is far from proven.²⁹ Finally, why should the traditional Jewish proverb (equivalent to ‘the tree is known by its fruit’) be a challenge or threat to this generation, when on their own terms at least, it is precisely the principle of this proverb that they have been applying to John and Jesus?

Also arising in connection with σοφία is the question of to what extent Wisdom can be seen as a ‘quasi-personal hypostasis’.³⁰ This is beyond the scope of this study here, although it is safer to see her as a personification, rather than as an actual person. Here she is specifically present as the one who sends her envoys (cf. Luke 11.49), or as the personification of God’s purpose, in the execution of which he sends his prophets.

D. *Wisdom’s deeds (τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς)*

The ‘deeds’ here are not, as in the Wisdom–christological interpretation of

25 See, for example, Marshall, *Luke*, 303; Bock, *Luke*, 684; Mussner, ‘Nicht erkannte Kairos’, 611 n. 1. For an extensive list of scholars taking this view, see Versepunt, *Rejection of the Humble Messianic King*, 357 n. 201.

26 While not identical, our understanding of the connective ‘and’ here is close to Casey’s understanding of it in his reconstruction of the Aramaic original.

27 The speculative suggestion of Maddox that σοφία is a scribal error for Σόδομα is highly unlikely. R. Maddox, ‘The Function of the Son of Man according to the Synoptic Gospels’, *NTS* 15 (1968–9) 45–74 (65–6).

28 Leivestad, ‘An Interpretation of Matt 11 19’, 180.

29 Versepunt, *Rejection of the Humble Messianic King*, 357 n. 202.

30 The phrase used by Marshall in his *Luke*, 303.

is similar: δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ has the sense of ‘set free from’, or ‘released from’. Similarly, one could offer Ecclus 26.29 as an example from the LXX: μόλις ἐξελεῖται ἔμπορος ἀπὸ πλημμελείας καὶ οὐ δικαιωθήσεται κάπηλος ἀπὸ ἁμαρτίας.³⁴ 1 Esdras 4.39 and *Hermas* 17.1 are also possible parallels.³⁵ While it must be admitted that the meaning ‘justified *by*’ is still possible for Matt 11.19,³⁶ these other examples from the NT in particular should have a bearing on the interpretation of the statement under examination here. δικαιοῶ here has the sense, then, of ‘release’ or ‘acquit’. In fact, Blass/Debrunner/Rehkopf give these two examples from Acts and Romans under the category of ‘ἀπό zur Beziehung der Trennung, Abwendung’: δικαιοῦσθαι is followed by ἀπό with the sense of separation, as is also the case with λύειν, θεραπεύειν, λούειν and others.³⁷

In Matt 11.18–19, Jesus is summarising and explaining the criticisms of this generation, and, in the concluding aphorism, he is continuing his complaint in something of an ironic tone. Neither John nor Jesus is acceptable, and so their contemporaries have felt the need to dissociate Lady Wisdom from their actions. Jesus’ statement is not one of defiance, as in the conventional understanding. Rather, he is complaining bitterly (and with a hint of sarcasm) that this generation’s misguided zeal has led them to decouple wisdom’s *actions* from Lady Wisdom herself, that is to say, to dissociate Jesus and John from the God who sent them. The tone is perhaps similar to that of Mark 7.9: ‘You have a fine way of setting aside the command of God to establish your tradition.’ The best translation of Matt 11.19 then would be something like: ‘And so Wisdom has been absolved of her deeds’.

F. *The tense of ἐδικαιώθη*

The understanding of the aorist tense of the ἐδικαιώθη has perhaps hitherto been the main area of diversity in the interpretation of the saying.³⁸ There have been at least four interpretations. First, there is the unpopular view of Allen, followed by Albright/Mann, that the aorist refers to the way in which the plan of God, his wisdom, is eternally justified through the course of history.³⁹ Secondly,

34 I am grateful to Howard Marshall for supplying this example.

35 Although according to *TLG* there are no parallels in ‘secular’ sources, this is unsurprising in view of the rarity of δικαιοῶ in Greek outside Jewish and Christian texts; in fact, the punitive meaning more common in classical sources would make the NT sense which we have discussed hard to imagine in such texts.

36 Marshall (*Luke*, 303) offers Isa 45.25 LXX as an example of δικαιωθήσονται ἀπό in the sense of ‘justified *by*’. Ecclus 26.29 and Isa 45.25 are the only examples of the combination in the LXX.

37 F. Blass, A. Debrunner and F. Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976) §211 (pp. 171–2).

38 Leivestad, ‘An Interpretation of Matt 11 19’, 179.

39 Allen, *Matthew*, 119; W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1971) 140.

some scholars see the vindication of Wisdom as something that will take place in the eschatological future despite the rejection of John and Jesus by the present generation. 'Jesus, like Wisdom, is rejected, but Jesus' deeds, like the deeds of Wisdom, are right and good and will ultimately vindicate him'.⁴⁰ However, while it would not be impossible for the aorist tense to refer to a future event (as per Rom 8.30), it is of course much more common for the aorist to refer to a past time. Thirdly, still others read the saying as making the point that Wisdom is being vindicated in the present by the deeds of Jesus (Matt 11.2). Wisdom 'is vindicated (or proved right) by its works, the mighty acts or signs which conclusively demonstrate that the Kingdom has been manifested, that the decisive time has come'.⁴¹ However, this implies a very private vindication, which is out of keeping with the sense of publicity that the idea usually has in the NT. Or again, fourthly, a number of scholars (probably the majority) see the aorist in a gnomic sense: a proverbial, general statement that Wisdom will⁴² invariably (but not necessarily only at the eschaton) be justified by her deeds.⁴³ However, gnomic aorists are rare in NT Greek. There was even some debate among older grammarians as to whether the gnomic aorist was attested in the NT at all. While Winer has been criticised for abolishing it, grammarians only supply two examples of the phenomenon: one is a quotation from Isa 40.7 LXX (in 1 Pet 1.24), and the other is a variation upon that same LXX reference (in Jas 1.11).⁴⁴

According to the interpretation proposed here, the justification of Wisdom to which Jesus refers in 11.19b takes place neither in the effects of the ministries of Jesus or John the Baptist, nor in the eschatological future. Nor is the statement a proverbial expression of the general fact of Wisdom's justification. Rather, the occasion of Wisdom's justification in this pericope is in the pronouncement by this generation that John the Baptist 'has a demon' and that Jesus is a 'glutton and a drunkard' (and thereby, by definition, themselves sinners). The concluding statement in Matt 11.19b, then, is Jesus' mockery of the pronouncement by the authorities that John and Jesus have nothing to do with the plan of God. This generation has placed itself in the position of judge on God's action, and given the verdict that Lady Wisdom is not guilty of acting through the Baptist and the Son of Man.

40 Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 311.

41 Hill, *Matthew*, 202.

42 I use 'will' here in the sense of the English 'gnomic future', used for example in aphorisms such as 'boys will be boys'.

43 See, for example, Plummer, *Luke*, 208; Nolland, *Luke*, 1.346; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.311, and others.

44 W. F. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906) 1.135 supplies these two examples. E. de W. Burton (*Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1894] 21) adds three others (including Luke 7.35), but these are debatable.

II. The Lukan version of the Wisdom saying

The difference between the Matthean and Lukan versions of the saying is, as is well known, Luke's ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς for Matthew's ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς; while in the Matthean version Jesus is lamenting the attempt of this generation to separate divine Wisdom from her *actions*, in Luke the attempted decoupling is of Wisdom from all those who have responded to her. The πάντων is generally considered by scholars to be Lukan redaction.⁴⁵ Various scholars have attempted to account for the difference between τέκνων and ἔργων, either by recourse to a common origin, or by positing redactional activity.⁴⁶ Whatever is the case with regard to the origin of the τέκνων/ἔργων difference, it is suggested here that Luke's version of the saying may well mean something substantially similar to what has been proposed for the Matthean version above. The meaning to be defended here for the Lukan version of the saying is that Wisdom has, if one supposes for a moment that 'this generation' has won its lawsuit, lost custody of her children.

There is a potential problem, however, which might arouse suspicion as to whether the exegesis of Matt 11.19b above can also work *mutatis mutandis* for Luke 7.35. A number of scholars note that Luke's ἐδικαιώθη in v. 35 picks up on v. 29, where 'the tax collectors justified God' (οἱ τελῶναι ἐδικαίωσαν τὸν θεόν). Wisdom in 7.35, then, is justified by her children, who are people such as these tax collectors. The 'all' (πάντων) in Luke 7.35 could be argued to support the connection with the tax collectors in 7.29, rather than with the immediately preceding references to Jesus and John, who only add up to two.

However, it should be noted that it is not necessary to choose between John and Jesus on the one hand and the tax collectors on the other. Both are likely candidates for being the children of Wisdom: the tax collectors for the reasons noted above, and John and Jesus because they provide the immediate context for the saying. It is no exegetical sleight-of-hand to include both the two individuals and the tax collectors together, since the assumption is that the tax collectors share their master's lifestyle.⁴⁷ That is to say, it is well known that the disciples of Jesus

⁴⁵ See, for example, Cotter, 'Parable of the Children in the Market-Place', 292–3. See, however, Allen (*Matthew*, 119–20) in defence of its authenticity.

⁴⁶ Lagarde's position was to see both as translations of Aramaic ܛܝܢܝܢܝܢ, a view which Casey considers already demolished (*Aramaic Approach to Q*, 142). Jeremias, however, is probably right to say that the process which Lagarde's reading entails is 'conceivable though complicated' (Jeremias, *Parables*, 162 n. 44). In fact, T. Zahn (*Evangelium des Matthäus* [Leipzig: Deichert, 1903] 433 n. 30) considers the common assumption that ܛܝܢܝܢܝܢ would be translated by πᾶσι rather than by τέκνον to be false.

⁴⁷ Similarly, Merklein asks whether 'die "Kinder der Weisheit" Luke 7,35 par nicht die Anhänger Jesu (Q-Gemeinde) sind'. 'Zur Entstehung der urchristlichen Aussage vom präexistenten Sohn Gottes', *Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums* (ed. G. Dautzenberg, H. Merklein and K. Müller; *Quaestiones Disputatae* 87; Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1979) 33–62 (36).

follow him in being hearty eaters and drinkers, just as the disciples of John the Baptist follow John in being more ascetic. The connection between the lifestyles of Jesus and his disciples is evident from the proximity of Luke 5.30 (where we see the accusation that Jesus consorts with tax collectors and sinners) with the question in Luke 5.33: 'How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?' (The two key pericopes are adjacent in Matthew, Mark and Luke.) Luke 7.33–4 is closely related to these two pericopes, since we see in Luke 5.27–32 and 5.33–9 the same contrast between the disciples of John and of Jesus as emerges in the contrast between John and Jesus in Luke 7.33–4.⁴⁸ One can therefore have one's cake and eat it, and identify the children of Wisdom as encompassing John and Jesus as well as the tax collectors.

Further, Luke 11.49 provides evidence of a very similar idea to Luke 7.35 as interpreted here. This saying, uttered by Wisdom, forecasts that her envoys throughout history (the prophets and apostles) will be put to death. Similarly, 11.49 also comes in the context of Jesus pronouncing woes upon his contemporaries, and is thus further an indictment upon 'this generation' (as well as upon previous generations) for their refusal to attribute the embassies of Wisdom to the purposes of God.⁴⁹

Finally, it should be noted that one of the two NT examples of *δικαιοῦσθαι ἀπό* in the sense proposed here for Luke 7.35 is Lukan, in Acts 13.39. In consequence, then, there is no great obstacle to the interpretation proposed here. It is probably not quite so probable as in Matthew that the *ἀπό* is being used in a non-instrumental sense: as noted in the introduction above, the argument here is not being strongly pressed for the Lukan version. Nevertheless, it is quite plausible that the meaning is, again, that this generation is attempting to decouple Wisdom from those who are acting for her. Marshall digests the three possible interpretations of the saying as Wisdom's justification (a) *on account of* her children, (b) *over against* her children, and (c) *by* her children.⁵⁰ Our reading differs from these, but is related to Casey's proposal.⁵¹ *δικαιοῦσθαι ἀπό* means 'to be separated from' or 'to be dissociated from'. Hence, 'And Wisdom has been separated from her children', or to paraphrase, 'Wisdom has lost custody of her children'.

48 The statement that the Son of Man is an eater and drinker has connotations of being dissolute, as well as implying that, unlike John, he does not fast in accordance with tradition.

49 The parallel does not apply to Matthew, because Wisdom is not the sender of the prophets in Matt 23.34.

50 Marshall, *Luke*, 303.

51 Casey notes in his discussion (*Aramaic Approach to Q*, 142–3) that *δικαιοῦμαι* does mean to 'be set free, made pure'.

Conclusion

In both Matthew and Luke, then, we see the ways in which John and Jesus have come under criticism from their opponents. ‘This generation’ has not acknowledged that Wisdom has sent John and Jesus, and that she is thus responsible for each of their distinctive ways of life. The ‘actions’ of Lady Wisdom, then, seem best understood as her sending John and Jesus in their different lifestyles. Her ‘children’ are John, Jesus, and those who have responded to them.⁵² According to both evangelists, Jesus is saying: John fasts and abstains from drink, whereas I go to parties with tax collectors and sinners. This generation does not accept either of us. They are very concerned to protect God’s integrity and reputation, but have gone about it in entirely the wrong way. The result is that in their verdict on God’s wise action, they have acquitted Wisdom of any connection with either of us. God in his wisdom has sent us both, but this generation has refused to accept that Wisdom has sent either an ascetic or a friend of sinners. Hence Jesus’ bitter complaint that Wisdom has been decoupled from her actions and her children. The principal pieces of evidence we adduced for this were (1) the normal meaning of *καί*; (2) the use of *δικαιοῦσθαι ἀπό* elsewhere in the NT; and (3) the aorist tense of *ἐδικαιώθη*.

If this interpretation is correct, then the similarity of the Lukan and Matthean versions is noteworthy. A number of scholars have observed that the variation between the Matthean and Lukan versions is in any case very slight.⁵³ This is reinforced by the reading above, because we should not see in Matthew an identification of the deeds of Wisdom and of Christ. Rather, the deeds of Wisdom should be understood as the ministries of John and Jesus. There is no Wisdom Christology here; still less should one infer a Christology of pre-existence. The point is, in this statement at least, that Jesus and John are both envoys of Wisdom, and that Wisdom’s embassies can equally take ascetic and ebullient forms.⁵⁴ While Jesus undoubtedly transcends prophetic categories elsewhere in the Synoptic Gospels,⁵⁵ Matt 11.19b indicates that John’s and Jesus’ missions are both in fact the work of Lady Wisdom, and Luke 7.35 that they and their disciples alike are all her children.

52 So the emphasis does not lie *specifically* in the salvation-historical character of Jesus’ and John’s comings, contra Mussner (‘Nicht erkannte Kairos’, esp. 602–4, 606), though this is of course never far away.

53 E.g. Leivestad, ‘An Interpretation of Mt 11 19’, 181.

54 Hill, *Matthew*, 202.

55 See, for example, Matt 23.34 for evidence of Jesus as himself sender of prophets.