

CULTIC NUANCES IN THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN AND ITS CONTEXT (Lk 10: 25-37)

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Abstract: The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10: 30-35 provides the reader with a fundamental paradigm of indiscriminating love of neighbour rooted in the Hebrew Scripture itself (Dt 6: 5 and Lev 19: 18b). Its previous and ensuing contexts (10: 21-24, Jesus rejoicing over his disciples; 10: 38-42, Martha and Mary; 11: 1-4, the Lord's Prayer), together with its immediate context (10: 25-29, the question by the lawyer about inheriting eternal life; 10: 36-37, the application of the parable by Jesus) open a further window into the deeper message of the parable, namely its cultic slant.

Keywords: *neighbour, πλησίον, ַר, worship, prayer.*

Introduction

In Chapter Two, ##56-86 of the Encyclical Letter „*Fratelli Tutti*” (*Brothers, all of us*), signed on 3 October 2020 at Assisi, Pope Francis focuses on the Parable of the Good Samaritan as a launching pad for his meditation on the indispensable value of brotherhood. Our particular interest in this article is to

highlight the cultic nuances in this pericope in order for one to better appreciate the constituent elements that make up the exhortation, or rather command, by Jesus to the lawyer.

It is immediately apparent that in this pericope we are invited to distinguish two aspects of ‘neighbour’: one, neighbour as the recipient of love; the other, neighbour as the subject of love one shares with others. The question – having its departure point in the religious mold of the pericope – comes naturally: how is love of neighbour integral to worship of God?

1. The Context

A fundamental and foundational adage in biblical studies reigns supreme: *a text without a context is a mere pretext!* What, therefore, is the context of the text of Luke 10: 25-37 and its focus on the parable of the Good Samaritan (vv. 30-35)?

1.1. Jesus rejoices in the Spirit for the disciples

Jesus had just encouraged his disciples – privately, individually, by themselves (κατ’ ἑαυτὸν – v. 23) – with the words: “For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it” (v. 24)¹. What is the content of the ‘seeing,’ and the ‘hearing’? The answer has already been hinted at in v. 20: “that your names are written in heaven”; that God knows the disciples personally, that God loves them as they need to be loved, that God loves them individually, like writing their personal name in his special book for special people!².

¹ Texts from Scriptures are taken from *The New Revised Standard Version*.

² Gérard Rossé, *Il vangelo di Luca. Commento esegetico e teologico* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1995), 390-391.

Jesus' congratulatory, or rather macaristic (v. 23)³, comment to his disciples followed his praise of and rejoicing in God in the Spirit for revealing himself to the disciples: "At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (ἡγαλλιάσατο [ἐν] τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ) and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will'" (Lk 10: 21). The cultic mold of this verse can be verified in both verbs ἀγαλλιάω and ἑξομολογέω, where the verb "adopts especially the cultic use in divine worship"⁴. The context immediately preceding the parable of the Good Samaritan points to a cultic framework: God is given praise by Jesus for his revelatory actions within the disciples.

1.2. The episode of Martha and Mary

Following the pericope under analysis comes the episode of Jesus at Martha's and Mary's house (Lk 10: 38-42). Martha's request to Jesus to ask her sister Mary to help her with her πολλήν διακονίαν (v. 40), seeing how she left her διακονεῖν is met with Jesus' ἐνὸς δέ ἐστιν χρεία (v. 42). Martha had been worrying and distracted by many things (μεριμνᾶς καὶ θορυβάζῃ περὶ πολλά, v. 41), while Mary just sat at his feet, listening to his word (v. 39). And yet, what Mary did was the one thing necessary: listening to the Lord's word.

³ „Blessed (Μακάριοι) are the eyes that see what you are seeing”.

⁴ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, “ἀγαλλιάομαι, ἀγαλλίασις”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. I (Grand Rapids/MI, Eerdmans, 1964), 20-21; Otto Michel, “ὁμολογέω, ἑξομολογέω, κτλ.,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, vol. V (Grand Rapids/MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 213-215.

Listening to the word of God (ἤκουεν τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ) in Luke 10: 39 cross-references Luke 8: 15: they are the good soil, “the ones who, when they hear the word (ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον), hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance”. They are the ones who generate him in others: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God (εἰσιν οἱ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούοντες) and do it” (Lk 8: 21).

Listening to his word is proffered by Jesus as something that goes beyond love of one’s neighbour, seeing that the episode of Martha and Mary comes on the heels of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Martha’s διακονία is not repudiated by Jesus, but he stresses that its elaborate thrust may be misplaced. “A διακονία that bypasses the word is one that will never have a lasting character; whereas listening to Jesus’ word is the lasting “good” that will not be taken away from the listener”⁵.

Jesus gives the reason why he would not tell Mary to help Martha with her many tasks (περὶ πολλήν διακονίαν) in Lk 10: 40: she was being distracted about much serving. The implication is that Martha too would gladly have listened to his instruction, but allowed herself to be drawn away (in different directions) by her elaborate plans of providing for Jesus’ meal.

Διακονία and διακονεῖν in v. 40 open up another religious element. The LXX translates the Hebrew verb שָׂרַת (šrt) in a few instances as διακονεῖν and cognates, with the meaning “to serve, often having the more specific sense ‘to

⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)* (The Anchor Bible 29A; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 892.

do cultic service”⁶. Jesus’ comment to Martha casts light on what he will say in Lk 12: 37 and in Lk 22: 27: he has not come to be served, but to serve. This service is, to be sure, welcome in principle, even indispensable, as witnessed to by the help furnished by Peter’s mother-in-law (Lk 4: 39) or by those women who accompanied Jesus (Lk 8: 1-3). “Nevertheless, this ministry must not be separated from faith. It would be without moorings if it no longer drew its nourishment from the word of the Lord”⁷.

Jesus’ exhortation to Martha not to μεριμνᾶν does not rule out the legitimacy of human preoccupations. The whys and wherefores of human concerns and striving are given a new orientation away from excessive, often futile striving, and towards the notion that God guarantees the fulfilment of all our striving.

In so far as humans must concern themselves with the means of life, they must restrict this care to the bare minimum in order that the ἀγαθὴ μερίς (v. 42) may not be lost. They must confront all worldly ties at the distinctive distance of the genuine believer, who no longer belongs to this world⁸.

⁶ Claus Westermann, “שרת *šrt* pi. to serve,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni – Claus Westermann, vol. III, (Peabody/MA: Hendrickson, 1977), 1406; see also Karen Engelken, “שרת *šrt*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck – Helmer Ringgren – Heinz-Josef Fabry, tr. David E. Green, vol. XV (Grand Rapids/MI: Eerdmans), 513. Also: Takamitsu Muraoka, “שרת *šrt* pi.,” in *A Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Two-way Index to the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), 28; 375.

⁷ See François Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9: 51 - 19: 27*; ed. Helmut Koester; trans. Donald S. Deer (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 74.

⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, “μεριμνάω κτλ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. IV, (Grand Rapids/MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 591-592.

The ἀγαθὴ μερίς of being in the presence of the Lord, listening to what he has to say, reminds us of the part that God himself represents for those who, like the Levites (the same caste as the element of comparison in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Lk 10: 32), do not receive their share in the form of the land⁹. Of particular interest in this context is Psalm 73 (LXX 72): 26. 28: “God is the strength of my heart and my portion (ἡ μερίς μου) forever... But for me it is good (ἀγαθόν ἐστίν) to be near God”. It is termed “good (ἀγαθός)”, since it corresponds to God’s will and derives its nature from him¹⁰. By means of the phrase ἀγαθὴ μερίς stress is put on the exclusive listening to the word of Jesus. The word μερίς is used in the LXX for a portion of food (Gen 43: 34; Dt 18: 8; 1 Sal 1: 4), but also for ‘portion’ in a higher sense (see Psalms 16: 5; 119: 57 – the Lord is my portion).

1.3. Teaching the ‘Our Father’ to the disciples

The pericope following the Martha and Mary episode heightens the cultic nuances of this larger unit: one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them to pray (Lk 11: 1-4). The tradition is most probably taken from the Sayings Source Q¹¹, but having two different ecclesial existential situations¹². Luke inserts this episode in a very different prayer context, transforming it into a catechetical unit, unlike Matthew, who makes it form part of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6: 7-15). The rest of the unit is in the context of teaching about prayer in verses 5-13. The section is intended to bring out the

⁹ See: Numbers 18: 24; Joshua 14: 4; 18: 7.

¹⁰ Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9: 51 - 19: 27, 72-73*.

¹¹ Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9: 51 - 19: 27, 81-83*.

¹² Santi Grasso, *Luca. Traduzione e commento* (Roma: Edizioni Borla, 1999), 327.

characteristics of disciples in their relationship to God in prayer¹³. The specific context in Luke is a deeply existential one: “He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished” praying, the disciple asks him to teach them just as John (the baptiser) had taught his own disciples (καθώς καὶ Ἰωάννης ἐδίδαξεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ, v.1), thus pushing back the prayer context and attitude to a situation prior to Jesus himself, namely John the precursor’s. The disciple addresses Jesus as κύριος, an appellation that “continues the sense of the title already being used in the early Christian community, which in some sense regarded Jesus as on a level with Yahweh... it speaks at least of his otherness, his transcendent character”¹⁴.

The prayer itself that Jesus teaches his disciples highlights the holiness of the Father’s name and the yearning that it be enhanced (ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου, v. 2), and that his kingdom come (ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου). The cultic context here is unmistakable. Teaching the disciples the ‘Our Father’ after their having perceived Jesus’ own attitude while he prayed, Jesus inserts his disciples in a direct manner into his relationship with God. The articles of the prayer itself show that Jesus brings them together also into a community that has the Kingdom of God as their mission and *raison d’être*¹⁵.

The language of worship and cult in the New Testament finds expression in prayers, doxologies, hymns,

¹³ See Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids/MI: Paternoster – Eerdmans, 1978), 454-455.

¹⁴ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, 203. See also Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1: 1 - 9: 50*, 170.

¹⁵ Rossé, *Il vangelo di Luca*, 418-419.

and other forms¹⁶, forms that are encountered in the parable of the Good Samaritan but also in its immediate context.

1.4. *The lawyer's question*

On his way to Jerusalem, the Prophet Jesus interacts with three groups: the amorphous crowds, the eager disciples and the watchful and increasingly hostile adversaries. He goes from addressing his disciples with a blessing (Lk 10: 21-24) to being confronted in a hostile manner (ἀνέστη ἐκπειράζων αὐτὸν) by a lawyer (10: 25). In Lk 7: 29-30, Jesus had already instructed his disciples to recognise in the 'teachers of the law' (οἱ νομικοί) those who reject prophets and reject God's will for them (τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θεοῦ ἠθέτησαν), failing to justify God (ἐδικαίωσαν τὸν θεὸν). No wonder that now another lawyer tests him by asking him how to inherit eternal life¹⁷.

That word of blessing from Jesus – "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it" (Lk 10: 23-24) – must have niggled the lawyer (νομικός > νόμος - expert of the Law)¹⁸. Most naturally, he asked Jesus the most important question a rabbi could pose: "Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus: 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit

¹⁶ David E. Aune, „*Worship, Early Christian*“, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. VI, ed. David N. Freedman (New York – London: Doubleday, 1992), 980-983.

¹⁷ See Luke T. Johnson, „*The Gospel of Luke*“, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, (Sacra Pagina, 3; Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier – Liturgical Press, 1991), 174.

¹⁸ See Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 3rd edition, (London: SCM, 1972), 202.

(κληρονομήσω) eternal life?"". The lawyer seemed to be implying that eternal life is a legacy. One inherits eternal life. Thus, the question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The *doing* was the fundamental matter of the Law, according to this expert. Later on, Jesus will show him that it is the *being* – "who is my neighbour"; "who *was* neighbour to the one who fell into the hands of robbers" (vv. 29. 36).

1.5. Jesus' reply

Jesus' reply to the testing question by the lawyer, "What is *written in the law?*", implies asking him to quote the Law to him, he being the expert of the Law, a νομικός. But then, asking the lawyer to say "What do *you read* there?", was tantamount to challenging him to interpret to him the Law that he was about to quote, he being the νομικός¹⁹. The first question introduces the quotation from Scripture; the second, the parable.

The Law was considered by the Jews as the concrete expression of God's mind and heart for his People. The commandments are the specific expression of the Law, of God's mind and heart. So, the Law was good, beneficial; Jesus himself came not to abolish it but to bring it to perfection! (Mt 5: 17).

The lawyer answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE *the Lord your God* with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and [YOU SHALL LOVE] *your neighbour* (אָהַבְתָּ; LXX πλησίον) as yourself" (v. 27).

¹⁹ Cf. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 442-443; See Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9: 51 - 19: 27*, 54; Rossé, *Il vangelo di Luca*, 404; Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 202.

The lawyer was not only quoting from the central *Shemà` Yiśrā`ēl*²⁰ but interpreting as well. Choosing those two specific texts is already interpretation. The command in Deuteronomy was rightly regarded as forming the heart of the Jewish religion. It puts at the centre of religion a love for God in an undivided loyalty to him. The concept is central to Deuteronomic theology in which it refers to the sincere loyalty of covenant partners to each other, a behaviour that goes straight to the heart of cult towards God²¹.

However, the lawyer did not only quote from Deuteronomy 6: 5 and from Leviticus 19: 18b. Putting two quotes together is interpreting! He did not even quote the whole verse from Leviticus 19, but only part of it, so as to link it as one to Deuteronomy 6: 5. Choosing, linking is interpreting, and interpreting uncovers and reveals the interpreter's own personal self.

Deuteronomy 6: 5 is an integral part of the most important prayer of the People of Israel, the *Shemà` Yiśrā`ēl*. Before any commandment is given (Deuteronomy 6: 13 onwards), Israel is commanded to listen, and listen with their heart.

²⁰ Jacob Neusner, *Liturgy of Judaism: Content and Theology – The Shema*, in *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism*, eds Jacob Neusner – Alan J. Avery-Peck – William Scott Green, vol. II, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 816-818; Tzvee Zahavy, *Piety in Judaism*, in *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism*, eds Jacob Neusner – Alan J. Avery-Peck – William Scott Green, vol. III, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1062-1069.

²¹ See Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9: 51 - 19: 27*, 54; Grasso, *Luca*, 316. Marshall opines that the prepositional phrases together (ἐξ ὅλης ... καὶ ἐν ὅλη, v.27) indicate the totality of mind and will that must be brought to the worship of God; see Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 444-445.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.

⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

⁶ Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart [*your centre*]

⁷ Recite them to your children [i.e., *your inheritance, the ones you will continue to live in*] and talk about them when you are at home [*daily life, intimacy*] and when you are away [*witnessing*], when you lie down and when you rise [*all the time*].

⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand [*with which you do your work*], fix them as an emblem on your forehead [*witness to them in front of the others*],

⁹ and write them on the doorposts of your house [*family hearth*] and on your gates [*nation's hearth*] (Dt 6: 4-9)

Leviticus 19: 18b “and your neighbour as yourself” is part of the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26): how to be holy just as God is holy (Lev 19: 2). Through the *Shema* Prayer, the absolute and unrenounceable lordship of God is acknowledged in the heart, in the psyche, and in strength and mind, that is, by the whole of the person²². The listing of these domains of the whole person serves more as a way of indicating the whole and global intensity of the commitment. Thus, the lawyer was binding together everyday living with holiness, everyday living with God himself.

One becomes holy like God as they conduct their daily affairs. This double love knows no limits of intensity or extension; the only limit is “as yourself” (ὡς σεαυτόν, v.27).

Leviticus 19: 18: “You shall NOT TAKE VENGEANCE or BEAR A GRUDGE against *any of your people*, but you shall LOVE

²² Grasso, *Luca*, 316; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, 880; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 443-444.

your neighbour (רֵעִי; LXX πλησίον) as yourself: I am the Lord. Your neighbour is any of your people.

1.6. *An additional question*

“Who is my neighbour?” A very common question among the rabbis: in practical terms, it was the question that determined the allegiance of a rabbi to Hillel²³, of the liberal school, or to Shammai²⁴, the more conservative school of thought. Jews considered neighbour anyone who formed part of their people or their religion: a co-national or co-religionist.

In Matthew 5: 43, Jesus expresses, as if quoting from Scripture, what every Jew held to be a fundamental tenet: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy’”. Even though the second part (“hate your enemy”) does not figure out in any text in the Hebrew Bible, yet that was the accepted corollary and deduction of “you shall love your neighbour” of Leviticus 19: 18.

Thus, what the lawyer had in mind with the question “who is my neighbour?” was: who is my neighbour so that I can love *him*. Neighbour is the one who receives my love. Neighbour is the object of my love.

1.7. *The neighbour*

‘Neighbour’, translates in 25 times out of 140 times the Hebrew רֵעִי from the verb רָעַי meaning “to have dealings with,

²³ See Paul Mandel, “Hillel”, in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, eds John J. Collins – Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids/MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010), 742-743.

²⁴ See Paul Mandel, “Shammai”, in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, eds John J. Collins – Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids/MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010), 1224-1225.

to associate with” someone. In the Old Testament, there is always denoted an actual encounter with people who are members of the covenant, who worship the one God, and who stand under his command. The term denotes fellow-members of the covenant or the community who share in the election and the covenant and the implied duties and rights²⁵. Πλησίον in the New Testament has close material links with the Old Testament since in twelve instances (out of seventeen) there is allusion to Leviticus 19: 18.

If someone wants to know precisely whom they are to love or not love, they are asked about this supposed love that they want to dole out so economically when it should burst forth with irresistible force. By nature, love is not primarily *act* but *being*: being a child of God, being perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect (Mt 5: 45. 48). The love which springs forth from being loved is quite incapable of asking about any limits.

There has been a tendency to translate πλησίον as ‘friend’. Fellow-countryman would be the best rendering in the debate with the νομικός, except that it misses the aspect of fellowship in *cultus* and promise that is implied in πλη (within covenant and consequent duties) and it has a more political and national tang²⁶. Neighbour, originally a spatial term, carries with it the element of *encounter*, bridging that space between persons in a cultic context.

²⁵ See Johannes Fichtner – Heinrich Greeven, “πλησίον”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, vol. V, (Grand Rapids/MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 312-315.

²⁶ Heinrich Greeven, “Πλησίον in the New Testament”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, vol. V, (Grand Rapids/MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 317.

In the context of the parable, then, Jesus underlines the message that *cultus* is given by loving all, just as God blesses all, keeps the covenant with all, and makes a new and everlasting covenant in Jesus with all: “He [took] the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’” (Lk 22: 20). The Apostle Paul, writing some thirty years before Luke, expresses this New Covenant in similar words in 1 Corinthians: “In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (1 Cor 11: 25). Jesus himself underlines this idea when he quotes Hosea 6: 6 in Matthew 9: 13; 12: 7: “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’”.

The story of the Good Samaritan shows that one cannot say in advance who the neighbour is but that the course of life will make this plain enough. Indeed, the lawyer-questioner, who at the end is told to do as the Samaritan did, is the one to whom the parable comes home directly: one cannot define one’s neighbour: one can only be a neighbour.

1.8. Contextual concluding remarks

Worship and cult find expression in prayers, doxologies, hymns, and other forms in the New Testament. Such is the immediate context that Luke redacts for the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

The context immediately preceding the parable of the Good Samaritan, namely the account of the return of the disciples after being sent on a mission by Jesus himself points to a cultic context through various elements: God is given praise by Jesus for his revelatory actions within the disciples. Mission – Jesus’ and the disciples’ – is one way of God being given his due worship.

The pericopes following the Parable of the Good Samaritan continue to heighten the cultic context. The ἀγαθή μερίς in the pericope of Martha and Mary of being in a listening attitude of the word of the Lord in his presence, point to God himself as the portion reserved for those people like the Levites, instead of the land. Psalm 73 (LXX 72): 26, 28, in line with many texts in the LXX, underlines God's presence as the benefit comparable to portions of food or the portion of the land reserved for the tribes of Israel, or even to the portion of higher value that is the Lord himself.

Jesus at prayer as the occasion of the teaching of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer for the sanctification of the Father's name and for the hastening of the Kingdom, make the cultic context of the sequel to the Parable of the Good Samaritan even more unmistakable.

Furthermore, the contents of the two texts from the Torah that the lawyer brings up to Jesus as the means of inheriting eternal life, namely Deuteronomy 6: 5 and Leviticus 19: 18b, especially in the deeper meaning of the terms πλησίον and its corresponding Hebrew noun עֲרֵב, continue to strengthen the idea that the Parable of the Good Samaritan is deeply framed in a cultic context.

2. The Parable

Correspondent to the Hebrew term לַפְתָּיָה, a παραβολή, is a short story, with a subject taken from everyday life, with one, at most two, messages, but which serves as a net or a trap, in which it catches its audience, so that they are challenged to brush away any dust and sediments that have accumulated around the most important tenets of their beliefs²⁷. The

²⁷ See Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Parables Told by Jesus. A Contemporary Approach to the Parables* (New York: Alba House, 1974), 4-7; Claus Westermann,

reaction to a parable entails a self-questioning such as: 'What must I do, faced with this message?' 'Neighbour is any of your people; you are duty-bound to love them; but enemy is not your neighbour; you are to hate your enemy' was, in this case, the dust and sediment and dirt that had accumulated around "You shall love your neighbour".

2.1. *Quotidianity in the Parable*

We have already been referring to everyday life in various aspects of the parable and its contexts: the commandments, so many elements in the *Shemà' Yisrā'ēl*, holiness in everyday life, a parable is a story from everyday life. The parable itself reinforces this quotidianity. Holiness is indeed one fundamental way of giving due worship to God.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we come across quotidianity in myriad forms:

– a journey from Jerusalem (the nation's capital city) to Jericho (a prominent commercial city) was a common affair. Being robbed on the way even more common²⁸;

The Parables of Jesus in the Light of the Old Testament, tr. and ed. Friedmann W. Golka – Alistair H.B. Logan (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 1-4; Mark L. Bailey, "Guidelines for Interpreting Jesus' Parables", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 29-38. Adolf Julicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche, 1963) sought to expose the inadequacies of the allegorical method of interpretation, asserting a single moral truth to each parable. Charles H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1961) and Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, focus on the parables' major referent: the Kingdom of God.

²⁸ See Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9: 51 - 19: 27, 57*; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, 886-887. For a good description of travelling in Palestine, see Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Peabody/MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 42-57.

– passers-by were common. That the priest and Levite see the victim and pass by was a common everyday interpretation of the Law, since touching blood or a dead body rendered one impure (see Lev 5: 3; 21: 1-3; Num 5: 2c; Num 6: 6-8; 19: 11-13; Ezek 44: 25-27);

– the traveller on a beast of burden was a common scene²⁹;

– the oil and wine were an everyday common necessity; serving the Samaritan traveller as provender that he had with him on the journey³⁰;

– the denarius was the daily wage of a manual labourer³¹.

It seems Jesus is hinting at what constitutes holiness, and points it out in quotidianity! Holiness, worship and quotidianity come together in so many ways in this parable.

2.2. The victim and the passers-by by the wayside

The victim, who was going from Jerusalem to Jericho, is left half dead by the wayside (ἀντιπαρῆθεν, so much so that the priest and the levite had to pass by on the other side - vv. 31. 32). So was the Blind Man from Jericho in Luke 18: 35, who used to beg alms by the wayside (ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν). The neighbour is the one who is affirmed by the wayside. Just as the victim of the parable was, because he fell into the hands of robbers; just as the Blind Man of Jericho

²⁹ See Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 235-236; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 449.

³⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, 887-888.

³¹ According to Joachim Jeremias, a day's board cost one twelfth of a denarius; the Samaritan's advance payment was sufficient for several days and bound the inn-keeper to look after the man as long as was necessary: *The Parables of Jesus*, 205; see also Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus. An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 122.

was, who begged for alms at the wayside because he was blind. Being neighbour is affirming others by the wayside, those who are not shoulder to shoulder with you, those who are not in the focus, in the spotlight.

Luke uses the verb ἀντιπαρῆλθεν for the priest and the levite, who passed by (v. 31), from ἀντιπαρέρχομαι, literally meaning “opposite, beside, to pass”, to pass by, but opposite/away from someone!³² Luke uses λησταί for “robbers” in this parable; not so in the crucifixion account, where the other evangelists use λησταί for the two who were crucified with Jesus³³. There Luke uses κακοῦργοι (Lk 23: 32), evil-doers. λησταί has political and subversive connotations³⁴: charity is a heart/love issue, but a nationalistic/ethnic one for the priest and Levite.

2.3. A Priest and a Levite

Jesus picks up only the priestly category as being insensitive to the victim of the parable. Why is it not a priest and a lawyer, or a Levite and a scribe, or a soldier and a publican, a Pharisee, a Sadducee, or a Zealot, a fisherman (going to the Dead Sea area to buy salt to use for preserving fish)³⁵, a dried fruit trader, a date merchant (for which Jericho

³² Walter Bauer – Frederick W. Danker – William F. Arndt – F. Wilbur Gingrich, *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition, (Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 75.

³³ Mt 27: 38. 44; Mk 15: 27.

³⁴ W. Bauer – F. W. Danker – W. Arndt – F. W. Gingrich, *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 473; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 447.

³⁵ See Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times*, Society of Biblical Literature, Archaeology and Biblical Studies, 5; ed. Andrew G. Vaughn (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003), 72-73.

was famous)³⁶, that are mentioned? Joseph Fitzmyer notes that the priest had probably been serving in the Jerusalem Temple and was making his way back after the end of his course. Later rabbinic tradition knows of Jericho as a place where some priests lived. The Levite's name originally designated a member of the tribe of Levi, who were not Aaronides, but who were entrusted with minor services related to the Temple cult and rites³⁷. Yet again: Jesus enhances the parable plot with cultic elements, in the priest and the levite, since love of neighbour is one way of giving worship to God.

Jericho was a day's walk from Jerusalem. Travellers took the route of the desert alongside Wadi Qelt, that was always full of water. If they were Galileans, they had to take that road: Jerusalem to Ein-Gedi to Jericho, along the water sources; they would never take the other road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to the Via Maris to Galilee: they would have had to go through Samaria!³⁸;

1) If we pick up v. 21, "Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will'" (Lk 10: 21), we can establish a certain cultic hint to that: Jesus glorifies, thanks, blesses the Father;

³⁶ Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times*, Society of Biblical Literature, Archaeology and Biblical Studies, 5; ed. Andrew G. Vaughn (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003), 70.

³⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, 887. See Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 198-213. See also Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 448.

³⁸ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 887. See Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 886; See Ehud Netzer, "The Roman Jericho," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. III, ed. David N. Freedman (New York – London: Doubleday, 1992), 737-739.

2) the priest and the levite who are returning home to Jericho from the Temple service in Jerusalem³⁹;

3) Jericho being a priestly city⁴⁰. The fertility of the Jericho region as well as its administrative importance apparently attracted a large priestly population to the site rather early during the Second Temple period (597 BC - 70 AD). The priestly population of Jericho grew when the area was further developed by the Hasmoneans who built royal estates there. Talmudic tradition also refers to a large priestly settlement. According to the rabbis, a priestly course would be divided in halves: one half would go up to Jerusalem to officiate in the Temple while the other half of the course would go to Jericho to arrange supplies for their brethren serving in the Temple. The large priestly population of Jericho is also verified by the numerous ritual baths discovered there⁴¹.

These hints taken together continue to give a certain liturgical/cultic slant to the parable found in the immediate context as well. In view of the central message, we can say that love and worship of God are achieved through love of neighbour just as in liturgical services in the Temple.

2.4. Judean and Samaritan

Luke heightens the contrast between the clerical priest and the Levite and the third passer by placing the emphatic position of Σαμαρίτης δέ τις (v. 33) at the beginning of the sentence. Marshall states that "the audience may well have

³⁹ Eduard Lohse, "The Temple Cultus in Jerusalem," in *The New Testament Environment* (London: SCM, 1976), 150-157, especially 153.

⁴⁰ See Netzer, "The Roman Jericho", 737-739.

⁴¹ Lohse, "The Temple Cultus in Jerusalem," 150-157, especially 153; see also Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 204.

expected the third character in the story to be an Israelite layman, thereby giving an anti-clerical point to the story"⁴². Even though the Samaritans lived in a region where pagan rites were practised, there was nothing strange about a Samaritan travelling in Jewish territory, just as Jews also journeyed through Samaria. This can be deduced from the fact that it seems the Samaritan was some kind of merchant who often travelled on that road, a conclusion that can be drawn from his acquaintance with the *πανδοχεύς* (v. 35), and his promise of a speedy return⁴³. Jews considered Samaritans impure, detestable, dangerous. In fact, one ancient Jewish text referring to nations that were hated, speaks of Samaria as "not even a people" (Sir 50: 25); it also refers to "the foolish people that live in Shechem," (50: 26), that lies near Mount Gerizim, where the Samaritan Temple was located in Samaria⁴⁴.

Jews and Samaritans were not separated only on political and nationalistic grounds: *cultus* was yet another, very deep-seated barrier. In the account of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman in John 4: 20-24, Jesus argues with the woman "'Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the

⁴² Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 449; see also Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 204.

⁴³ Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 204-205.

⁴⁴ See Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 162, note on Luke 9: 53.

Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth”⁴⁵.

It is also fine-tuned story-telling on the part of Luke that for the “inn” mentioned in the parable of the Good Samaritan (v. 34), Luke does not use *κατάλυμα*⁴⁶, the place where one unpacks his weight and loosens his burden for the night, but *πανδοχεῖον*⁴⁷. The inn was the place where everyone was welcome, unlike the heart of the Jews, the priest and the levite! In Exodus 15: 13, *κατάλυμα* translates the *הַיְיָ*, the holy abode of God in the desert, or even the Promised Land⁴⁸. In the New Testament it is the Upper Room, where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples (Mk 14: 14; Lk 22: 11). The lemma ‘inn’, in some instances of its occurrences in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as in the New Testament, seems to include both aspects of neighbourliness and cult.

2.5. *The trap*

Where is the trap, the net in the parable? The second question that the lawyer put to Jesus was: “Who is my neighbour?” (v. 29), the one whom I am, by law, duty-bound to help and love? Neighbour, in the lawyer’s perspective and set of values, is the object of his love; he is the subject of love

⁴⁵ Grasso, *Luca*, 318.

⁴⁶ Lk 2: 7, the unwelcoming inn when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

⁴⁷ From *παν*, everything, everyone; *δοχεῖν*, to welcome.

⁴⁸ Takamitsu Muraoka, “*הַיְיָ*,” in *A Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Two-way Index to the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), 64; 273. See also Francis Brown – Samuel R. Driver – Charles A. Briggs, “*הַיְיָ*,” in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English lexicon with an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody/MA, 1979), 627; “*הַיְיָ*,” in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J.A. Clines, vol. V (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 637-640.

towards his neighbour. However, the conclusion that Jesus draws for the lawyer from the parable is completely different; rather the opposite of what the lawyer asked: "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" (v. 36).

Who was neighbour to the victim, whom the others were duty-bound, by love, to help and support? In this take by Jesus, neighbour becomes the subject of the act of love. When on the receiving end, the lawyer would have everyone help him, whether Judean, Samaritan, Pharisee, Sadducee, Gentile. But what happens when the tables are turned, when the Samaritan, the Pharisee, the Sadducee, the Gentile were placed on the receiving end of the lawyer's neighbourliness? Would they have been neighbour anymore to the lawyer?

Conclusion

The fundamental question that should prick the conscience of Jesus' listeners in this case is: does the definition of 'neighbour' change according to who needs to help whom? Why is 'neighbour' not so much of a neighbour when on the receiving end?

The immediate contexts to the parable have shown that worship and cult find expression in Jesus' prayers, in his consideration of what is truly necessary, and in who is the *πλησίον*. The account of the return of the disciples (Lk 10: 21-24) points to a cultic context in Jesus giving praise to the Father for his revelatory actions within the disciples.

The *ἀγαθὴ μερίς* in the pericope of Martha and Mary, on the heels of the parable, points to the listening attitude to the word of the Lord, that in turn points to God himself. That choice portion is brought to a higher value, that is the Lord himself, for those who acknowledge the necessity of that portion.

The disciples wish to share with Jesus his communion with the Father when they see him pray. Their longing occasions the teaching of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer for the sanctification of the Father's name and for the hastening of the Kingdom, a fitting sequel to the Parable of the Good Samaritan that makes the cultic element even more marked.

Furthermore, the contents of the two texts from the Torah, namely Deuteronomy 6: 5 and Leviticus 19: 18b, quoted by the lawyer, highlight the deeper meaning of the terms *πλησίον* and its corresponding Hebrew noun *עֵר*, strengthening the idea that the Parable of the Good Samaritan sits squarely in a cultic context.

The Samaritans were not only political or military enemies of the Jews. They were first and foremost religious enemies, heretics and apostates according to the Jews.

One detail about the passers-by that does stand out is the qualification that they were religious, devoted to the worship of God: a priest and a levite. Crucially, belief in God and the worship of God are not by themselves enough to ensure actually living in a way pleasing to God. The guarantee of an authentic openness to God is a way of practising the faith that helps open one's heart to neighbour, whatever definition is given them. Saint John Chrysostom expressed this pointedly when he challenged his Christian hearers: "Do you wish to honour the body of the Saviour? Do not despise it when it is naked. Do not honour it in church with silk vestments while outside it is naked and numb with cold"⁴⁹. Taken together, all these cultic elements create a most telling character around the concept of neighbour: honouring God through honouring neighbour.

⁴⁹ *Homiliae in Matthæum*, 50: 3-4 (PG 58), 508.