

# **The etho-poietic of the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). The ethics of seeing in a culture of looking the other way**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The etho-poietic of the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37). The ethics of seeing in a culture of looking the other way**

*Within a culture of “Looking the Other way” there are not only empirically ascertainable reasons why help is not given in acute emergency situations, there is also a “Theory of Not-Helping” that attempts to demonstrate argumentatively why it may even be better not to help. According to the article, the parable of the “good Samaritan” invites us, however, to “look closely”. Four invitations of the text are developed, each with an emphasis on ethics: 1) The narrated Samaritan (The appeal structure of ethics); 2) The touched Samaritan (Ethics in the Context of Love); 3) The partisan Samaritan (Universal ethos of helping – or: Ethics of open partisanship); 4) The charitable Samaritan (Social ethics instead of ethics of conscience).*

The ethical impulses are astonishing: questions instead of applications, becoming a subject instead of the fulfilment of duty, universal partisanship and finally the charitable-structural direction of action. The parable, therefore, need not have ethics imposed upon it, instead as a parabolic speech it has always been ethical. The aesthetic structure of the parable is an “aesthetic of existence” and in its poetic style, e.g. poetic arts, targets ethics. The parable embodies an “aesthetic ethics” – thus as Foucault called it, an “ethopoietic”.

## **1 THE SAME OLD STORY – IN A CULTURE OF LOOKING THE OTHER WAY**

“A man was on his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho”. For the past two thousand years almost he has been making his way through the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke, through exegeses,

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commentaries and monographs, through sermons, art and literature<sup>2</sup>. Certainly, there is scarcely a pre-school or school religion class that he has not passed through. And he is still walking – this person, in many different guises, in many languages. Again and again, he falls into the hands of robbers and, just in time, a man approaches, who in tradition has been given the name “good Samaritan”. And usually there is another person present who points to the Samaritan and – just as Jesus did when he first told the story – says, “Go and do as he did!” That is the ideal of Christian ethics.

And immediately we too fall prey to moral demands; we hear the penetrating, exposing question that is posed here: Are you too a Samaritan? Exactly this question appeared recently widely-distributed German magazine (*Chrismon* 04/2004:60) in the form of a “personality test”: “Are you a Samaritan?” The parable of the Good Samaritan seems to point the moral finger; everything that the Bible and theology stand for seem to be condensed here – moral authority, the guilty conscience incarnated... A story all too well-known, a story that we no longer want to hear – “the same old story”<sup>3</sup>? Not that again! The narrative – a banal children’s story, the message all too well-known and over-used but at the same time unclear and outmoded (who knows anything anymore about Levites, Samaritans or robbers in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine?). And why should I have to have this old story on my conscience when the autonomous ethics of reason and utilitarianism are definitive today as motives for action?

Furthermore, in the search, initiated by philosophers such as Sloterdijk (1999), for rules for the “posthumanistic” human zoo, the “ethos of helping” is not only outmoded and irrelevant, but must even be exposed as being “wrong”. Beyond all moralising, we can now descriptively sum up why people do not help – in socio-psychological research (see Bierhoff 2002:187-189) one speaks for example

1. of a *diffusion of responsibility*: for example, where several people are simultaneously present at an emergency or a

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2 On the following see the ideas in Raguse (1995:23-30).

3 The original title of the speech was: “The same old story? Das Samaritergleichnis in Lk 10:25-37”.

specialist such as a doctor, the readiness to help is clearly reduced;

2. Furthermore, the phenomenon of *pluralistic ignorance* has been demonstrated: when an emergency situation (for example a car in the ditch) is judged incorrectly by others or typical reactions such as alarm are suppressed, one's own readiness to help is hindered; one speaks here of "the audience or bystander affect".
3. Finally, willingness to help is also reduced when potential helpers believe that they are not competent or that they will make fools of themselves. In literature this is called *fear of valuation* as a factor in the refusal of help. And are there indeed not forms of help that are counterproductive, because one is not aware of the surrounding context (for example, when one gives an alcoholic beggar money?)

In addition to these empirically ascertainable reasons why help is not given in acute emergency situations, there is also the "Theory of Not-Helping" (1.2) that attempts to demonstrate argumentatively why it may even be better not to help. The theory is formulated from various positions:

4. The (depth) *psychological objection*: the best known objection is presented by depth psychology under the catchword "helper syndrome". Exaggerated altruistic ideals can be traced back to false conditioning from early childhood. Those who help are in truth attempting to fight against their own helplessness. Their own needs are being repressed in this process and sacrificed to the ideals of the super-ego. In the end, the helping only strengthens the identity crisis and leads to burn-out syndrome.
5. Helping is also problematic from the *sociological perspective*. Helping implies an asymmetrical relationship. In order to be able to help, the helper must be superior to the person in need of help. However, by means of the help, this hierarchy and dependence are not overcome, but rather, according to the sociological objection, strengthened. Thus helping is a concealed form of the exertion of power. A significant example for the validity of this argumentation is development aid, which has made poor countries, for example those in Africa, poorer and more dependent.

6. The *(socio-)biological objection*: altruistic behaviour is regarded from the perspective of socio-biology as “dysfunctional anti-selection”. Helping interferes unnaturally in the competition among social systems and societies. Thus, starvation and epidemics have partially been caused by the interference in the natural process of adaptation taking place between humans and the environment.
7. The *economic objection (scarcity of resources)*: The economic argument is closely connected to this. If the attempt were made to provide basic medical care to everyone on the earth, it would cause financial systems to collapse. Helping costs money and money is scarce. In addition to the quantitative, there is also a qualitative economic objection – helping does not pay. Help is a one-sided allocation that does not anticipate a service in return. Instead of helping arbitrarily, it is better to employ resources efficiently and target-based.

The concept “helping” is in a “crisis of legitimacy”, as formulated by G Theißen (1998:376–401). Helping is out. Our present society is characterised by a “culture of looking the other way”. Here are a few examples:

A legendary example of the denial of help was the murder of Kitty Genovese, a resident of New York, in 1964. She was attacked and killed in a parking lot in front of 38(!) neighbours and not one of the witnesses intervened or even called the police. This is not an isolated case. Not all that long ago, a 17-year-old young woman was raped in a Hamburg train station in the presence of passive passengers. And there are many more examples. We are clearly living in a “culture of looking the other way” – of going away, of distancing ourselves and of specialisation, of fleetingness as well as of clinical appraisal.

## **2 SAMARITANICAL (RE-)DISCOVERIES OR FOUR INVITATIONS TO LOOK CLOSELY**

The parable of the “good Samaritan” invites us, however, to “look closely”. And that begins with close observation of the text – observation that leads to the discovery, the assimilation and the acceptance of truths. Since ancient times, however, seeing has meant reflected observation, scientific penetration to the observed, theorising, as is expressed in the etymology of the Greek term for “to see”: *θεωρεῖν* My invitation “to look closely” is therefore also an

invitation to practice “theory”, or more precisely “theology”, or “theological exegese”. In the following, four invitations to look closely will be developed, each with an emphasis on ethics.

## 2.1 The narrated Samaritan (The appeal structure of ethics)

The plot of the narrative is made up of three sections. First, the background scenario is developed. A person is attacked by robbers during a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho. The robbers remove his clothes, beat him and rob him (v 30). Everything happens very quickly – this is suggested by the urgent verbal style. At the end of the exposition we see the person who has been robbed lying injured on the ground; he is in critical condition. He is – as the text emphasises at the end of the sentence *ἡμιθανής*. – “half dead”.

The next section portrays the encounters of three people who pass by the victim. The terse narrative style with a strict parallel construction catches our attention here. The travellers arrive separately (a diffusion of responsibility can be excluded right away), each one sees the victim (*ἰδών* anaphorically opens the second part of the verse). The sparing style underlines the brevity of the encounters. The priest and the Levite do indeed see the victim but they pay him no attention. Their unaffected behaviour is described stereotypically with the same words: they go on their way (v. 31b = 32b)<sup>4</sup>. The third meeting also resembles the other two in its basic structure. The Samaritan, like those before him, arrives coincidentally at the accident location; he also see the victim (*ἰδών*). However, differently than the parallel construction would lead us to anticipate, he does not pass by. He allows himself to be inwardly affected; he interrupts his travels and helps.

The third section describes in detail the assistance given by the Samaritan. He does more than is necessary. He does not only carry out ‘first aid at the accident site’ (v 34), but also ensures ‘rehabilitation’ at the inn (v 35). The detailed portrayal of the assistance (v. 34f.: he went up and bandaged his wounds, bathing them with oil and wine. Then he lifted him onto his own beast etc.) again adopts the urgent verbal style of the accident scene<sup>5</sup> and thus

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4 In the Greek text, the object *αὐτόν* is left out in the repetition, which led later re-writers to a completion.

5 V. 30: (robbers) stripped, beat, went off, left him half dead; v 34: (Samaritan) went up, bandaged, bathed, lifted, brought, looked after.

creates a connection to the exposition. In this way, the behaviour of the Samaritan is emphasised with a double contrast. On the one hand, the act of love is in stark contrast to the robbers' act of violence, which is additionally underlined by linguistic contrast pairs (e.g. beat – bandage, they left – he went up, ἀπῆλθον – ἦλθον κατ' αὐτόν). On the other hand, the parallel construction of the meetings emphasises the reaction of the Samaritan in contrast to that of the priest and the Levite.

Thus we have a three-part construction whose sections could be titled dramaturgically “Exposition”, “Crisis” and “Solution”.

*Exposition: The Attack (v. 30)*

v. 30 A man was on his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he fell in with robbers,

b who stripped him, beat him, and went off leaving him half dead.

*Crisis: Three meetings (v. 31-33)*

v. 31a It so happened that a priest was going down by the same road;

b but when he saw him, he went past on the other side.

v. 32a So too a Levite came to the place,

b and when he saw him went past on the other side.

v. 33a But a Samaritan who was making the journey came upon him,

b and when he saw him was moved to pity.

*Solution: The help (v. 34-35)*

v. 34a He went up and bandaged his wounds, bathing them with oil and wine.

b Then he lifted him on to his own beast, brought him to an inn and looked after him there.

v. 35a Next day he produced two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper, and said,

b “Look after him; and if you spend any more, I will repay you on my way back.”

In investigating the ethical impulse of this narrative style, our attention is directed to the genre of the text. The pericope is categorised into the so-called ‘example narratives’, a genre of parable, differentiated from ‘similitude’ and ‘parable’, into which A. Jülicher merged four narratives from Luke<sup>6</sup>. Without going into the

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6 Jülicher (1910:114f., 585-641) understands this type of figurative speech to be “narratives that demonstrate a general set of religious-moral character in the clothes of a particularly impressively designed isolated case” and “that confirm the general truth through the evidence of the action”.

intra-exegetic discussion on the justification of this genre sui generis or into the possible references to example classification<sup>7</sup> of ancient rhetoric, here is an innate criticism: Is the definition, postulated by Jülicher of the “example narrative” really valid for this pericope? Does the story play on the same ground as the theological meaning without metaphorical transfer (Jülicher 1910:112)? Is it only an example for the theological message? Then what is this “general composition of religious-moral character” that is supposed to be demonstrated through an impressive isolated case? “One should fulfil one’s duties to others through poor, helpless people” wrote Jülicher (1910:585). “One should help those who are injured and in need” – is that the lapidary “moral of the story”? The clarity is deceiving, for it levels down the dynamic construction as well as the narrative structure of the text. (On the following questions see Harnisch 1995:284f). If the story is meant to be an example of *the love of one’s neighbour*, its constellation of characters remains incomprehensible. How could the Samaritan in particular be used as a motivational role model for the first exclusively Jewish hearers? However, if *an anti-authoritarian or anti-clerical effect* was meant to be created, it would have sufficed if a Jewish lay-person had entered the story after the priest and the Levite. If however, the *love of one’s enemy* is meant to be demonstrated here, the Samaritan should have been the one to fall among robbers.

The narrative is anything but unambiguous. It provokes, it questions, it offers alternative actions. The listeners are prompted to enter into various roles, to experience mixed emotions (see Dormeyer 1998:107). These are all criteria that identify the narrative as a parable, which is not less appellative and action-oriented than the narrative example but denies a simple ethical application. The implicit ethics of the parable are – this much is now clear – more than the application of an example, a general rule of action. It becomes a challenge.

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7 In ancient rhetoric, the example is primarily understood as “factual” and not as “fictional narrative”. That means that in the differentiation adopted here from Gerard Genette, the example refers to a historical event (see Quint. Inst V 11:19-21). The Gospel of Luke leaves however no doubt that this is a fictional story, that is freely invented by Jesus. On the parable in ancient rhetoric, see Zimmermann (2007).

The narrated Samaritan is a provocation; it is a break with what is anticipated; it effects a counter-determination. These inter-actional and metaphorical references can only be produced by observing the narrative in its context, which is what I shall do in the second step.

## 2.2 The touched Samaritan (Ethics in the context of love)

The good deed of the Samaritan is often characterised as an “act of love”. However, in the parable itself, there is no mention of love. Only the embedded deeper context brings the motif of love into play. Jesus is speaking here with a Jewish lawyer, who provokes him with a question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v 25). A lengthy dialogue made up of questions, counter-questions, and appeals for action unfolds. In its literary version in the Gospel of Luke it reveals a parallel double structure<sup>8</sup> in which the parable is closely woven into this context<sup>9</sup>.

1st Part	2nd Part
V 25: Lawyer’s question	V 29: Lawyer’s question <b>V 30-35: Jesus’ parable</b>
V 26: Jesus’ counter-question	V 36: Jesus’ counter-question
V 27: Lawyer’s answer (as quote)	V 37a: Lawyer’s answer
V 28: Jesus’ appeal for action	V 37b: Jesus’ appeal for action

Fig. 1: Parallel double structure of the teaching conversation, Luke 10:25-37.

8 It is practically impossible to determine from the present form of the tradition/version whether the parable originally existed in this context or was perhaps transferred without this argumentative conversation. With Bovon (1996:82f.), similarly Schürmann (1994:129-150). Bovon refers justifiably to certain incongruencies – the first answer of the lawyer is a combined written quotation and furthermore, no more praise precedes the Jesus’ second appeal for action (v. 37). The most striking breaking of the parallelization certainly lies in the parable itself, although it remains closely woven into the context. The framing verses 29 and 36-37 are in their function primary linked to the body of the narration v 30-35. V 29 on the other hand is editorially independent of v. 25-28. Similarly Wiefel (1988:206f.).

9 The often remarked upon “inconcinnity of the series of statements” in which the question in v. 29 is in tension to the counter-question in v 36 (see Harnisch 1995:272), is not a sufficient argument for a literary division, as it can also be regarded as a rhetoric point of the section of text.



It is of secondary importance whether the literary rendering should be interpreted as an *halakid* argument or in the Hellenistic tradition as a *chreia*, a teaching anecdote. Both forms are typical forms of discussion both of the Judaic and of the Hellenistic tradition. One speaks, argues and wrestles with the truth. In the context of Judaism this is the correct action and is inseparable from the fulfilment of the Torah laws.

Let us enter a little more deeply into this argument about the laws that Jesus refers to directly with his first counter-question: “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” The lawyer then quotes two laws from the Torah: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind”. This is almost literally quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4. The second part “and your neighbour as yourself” is a shortened rendering from Leviticus 19: 18. Love of God and love of your neighbour is the sum of the entire Torah, which is to be lived by. A consensus on this basic conviction can be easily reached; however, as so often, the problems arise out of the details. In order to truly act, the lawyer must question more closely: Who is then my neighbour? (V 29: *τίς ἐστίν μου πλησίον;*). With the help of the parable, Jesus wants to answer exactly this question. Looking more closely, we notice that the argument about the laws is implicitly continued within the narrative. We hear about a priest who was “going down” from Jerusalem (*καταβαί νω V 31*). Maybe he has completed his week’s work at the temple. Perhaps he is also carrying out sacrifices in Jericho that were possible outside of the temple<sup>10</sup>. In any case, his cultic function is not unimportant for an understanding of this behaviour. Even if the text does not give us an exact reason, every Jewish listener knows that a priest is subject to special Torah regulations. Thus, for example, according to the purity laws in Leviticus 21:1-3<sup>11</sup>, priests were forbidden to touch a dead body<sup>12</sup>. The description of the state of the victim with the unusual adjective

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10 Dormeyer (1998:108), drawing on Lk 2:24, considers sacrifices of purity or thinks of other priestly tasks such as the giving of the priest’s blessing in the synagogue. For Bovon (1996:89) the priest has “indubitably completed his work and is returning home”.

11 Other references are Lev 5:2-3; Num 5:2; 6,6-8; 19:1-22; Ez 44:25-27.

12 Derrett (1970:208-227) has indicated this; more recently also Bauckham, (1998:477); Esler (2000:339).

‘half dead’ could indicate such purity regulations. Thus, within the example narrative, Jesus leads the priest into a conflict as he must weigh the law of loving one’s fellow man against the law of cultic purity. The priest decides to be on the safe side by avoiding conflict and goes by on the other side<sup>13</sup>.

However, is Jesus truly interested, in the parable, in a discussion of the norms of various Torah laws? Is the decisive issue here, as can be read in many interpretations, the law of purity versus the law of loving one’s fellow man? Is the intention here really the obligation to cultic purity and to one’s neighbour. Or to put it more precisely, God’s laws and man’s laws – should they be played off against each other?

Even combining the laws of love into one so-called “double law of love”<sup>14</sup>, in my opinion denies this front-line position. The relationship to God and the relationship to humans belong together and should not be separated to each other.

However, the parable opens up a completely new scope of questions. All of the participants are familiar with the laws. The priest and Levite certainly are, and the five books of Moses are also binding for the Samaritan. However, the parable shows no interest in the discussion of laws. Reasons for refusal of help are not given. And the fulfilment of the laws of love clearly play no direct role for the action of helping. What is decisive rather, is the act of being touched, an internal empathy, that is expressed in the Greek text with the graphic verb *σπλαγχνίζομαι*, which literally means “to touch the entrails” (*τὰ σπλάγχνα*, cf Apg 1:18)<sup>15</sup>. The suffering of others is not only reflected, but furthermore it touches the innermost places; it is experienced completely; it is suffered; it is ‘suffering-with’ in the deepest sense of the word. In this way, the ability to empathise

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13 Bauckham (1998:477) indicated that for ancient-Judaic concepts, impurity transmits itself in space (e.g. through shadow): “corpse-impurity travels vertically through the air”. See also MacCane (1992:378-383).

14 As already demonstrated this links Mk 12:28-34 with two Old Testament quotes on love of God (Dt 6:5) and charity (Lev 19:18), see also Thyen (1998:263-296); Theißen (2003:57-72).

15 For an analysis of the verb see Bovon (1996:362) on Lk 7:13. In Luke the verb *splagchnizomai* is also used in Lk 7:13 in order to express Jesus’ emotion at the death of the son at Nain. In Lk 15:20 it describes the emotional state of the father who sees the return of his “lost son”.

finally becomes the decisive key in understanding one's neighbour as much as the interpretation of the law itself. This becomes visible in Jesus' reformulation of the counter-question.

The lawyer asked: "And who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10: 29). Jesus then turns this question surprisingly around at the end of the parable. "Which of these three do you think was the neighbour<sup>16</sup> to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Lk 10: 26). The question of the neighbour falls back to me. The category 'neighbour' does not designate the 'neighbour' as the addressee nor the object of my endeavours of love, but rather I, and then my empathy become a neighbour. I myself am the needed subject of the action. At least among theologians, this subtle reinterpretation of the question has become recognised as the conscious point of the parable. For example by G Theißen, interpreted sociologically: "the helper and the one to be helped (are equally) addressed as "neighbour". Based on the same linguistic "labelling", both have the same status" (Theißen 1998:386). The sociological obligation to help as a "concealed power game" can be invalidated from this standpoint.

I would like to go a step further in my search for "implicit ethics". In my opinion, what we have here is a change of perspective from the one needing help to the subject of the helper. There is a categorical leap in the ethical system. The formulation is actually: *τίς ... πλησίον ... γεγονέναι* (inf. Perfect) and the translations "was the neighbour" (Luther/uniform translation) are actually imprecise: *γίνομαι* means "to reach a state of being, to become something". Thus, "who has become the neighbour?" I understand this formulation in such a way that it is less the description of status or the course of action of a "neighbour subject", it is rather the process itself of "becoming a neighbour". The difference is decisive. The question is thus, should we observe the discussion of law under the aspect of the – in modern language – freedom of action of an ethical subject? Is the point here to demonstrate how one should act, how I should fulfil my duty to my neighbour?

At this exact point the parable should take over. It wishes to demonstrate that even the lawyer asks the question falsely at its core.

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16 In Lk 10:36 no article is used. Thus one could translate Lk 10,36 adjectively: "Who has come near to him?"

Not what should we, as ethical subjects, do but rather how do I become the subject of the action?

This scope of the question brings the parable close to the ethics of the Jewish philosopher Emanuel Lévinas, who dealt intensively with the question of the ethical process of becoming the subject. The ethical “ego” is shown neither through the “cogito”, a process of recognition, nor through freedom of action, but only through the experience of the encounter with the other. According to Lévinas, it is the face, the countenance of the other that speaks to me in its pre-linguistic language, in its otherness and more still in its helplessness and need. Only the intentional relationship to the other allows me to become “I”. The “neighbour” – like myself – according to Lévinas (1987:151) – can “develop not through recognition, but only through seeing and touching”. The encounter precedes the ontology (interestingly with regards to our double law), for Lévinas that simultaneously includes an epiphany, an encounter with God. In the other, I become aware of a trace that always moves past, of ‘Godliness’ (*illéite*); the love of God and the love of one’s neighbour converge in the encounter with the other.

The ethical impulse of the Samaritan parable is not aimed in this perspective at the consideration of laws or at the fulfilment of duty. Human self-development is carried out relationally<sup>17</sup>. Only those who allow themselves to be touched, only those who allow others in their need to come close to them will become people capable of action. Only they will become neighbours, who may then discuss laws and duties.

However, the parable tells more than just the story of the individual becoming the subject. Various characters are mentioned, become characterised religiously and ethnically, and related to each other. The idealised constellation of roles clearly intends to invite us to take sides.

### **2.3 The partisan Samaritan (Universal ethos of helping – or: Ethics of open partisanship)**

At least the non-theologians among us may have always wondered why the helper is specifically a “Samaritan”. What is exactly a

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17 Here the depth-psychological tradition of the interpretation of the commandment of love that attempts to separate love of self from love of others must also be contradicted.

“Samaritan” – perhaps a representative of a Palestinian first-aid organization in the first century A.D.? Not even close, of course. Samaritans are the inhabitants of a region in central Palestine. What would appear here to be peacefully united under Roman rule are actually two groups of peoples who originally had common roots in Israel’s northern empire but, over centuries, diverged ethnically and religiously. The Samaritans are not only foreigners, but they are also characterised as non-believers and idolaters because, according to 2 Kings 17:6-41, they, being a Jewish-Assyrian mix, worship Assyrian gods<sup>18</sup>.

Around the turn of century there was open hostility between Jews and Samaritans (Jos Ant 12:156; 13:74-79): The Jewish Hasmonean king, John Hyrcanus, destroyed the temple on Mount Gerizim (128 B.C.); the Samaritans desecrated the temple square by scattering bones – impure material from dead bodies. The hatred on the part of the Jews was so great that the Samaritans were openly cursed in synagogue services and it was demanded that they be excluded from “eternal life”.

In Luke 10 there is also a conscious use of this ethnic-religious conflict through the characterization of the narrative figures into groups and roles. The location (between Jerusalem and Jericho) puts the situation into Jewish territory and we assume that the victim is also a Jew. Then, in the priest and the Levite, two clear representatives of Jewish religious personnel are introduced. According to many ancient texts, ancient Israeli society was divided into three socio-religious classes – priest (kohen), levite (levi) and Israelite (Israel) and therefore the sequencing can be understood as a conscious steering of the expectations of the reader or listener<sup>19</sup>. After the priest and Levite one would normally expect the entrance of the normal Israelite, who is missing in the normal sequence of

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18 Behind this polemic view that Josephus takes up (Jos Ant 9:277-282, 288-291), we today suspect a Jewish family fight, see Zangenberg (2005:47-50).

19 See Esra 2:70; 3:1a = Neh 7:72; Esra 7:7, also Dt 18:1; 27:9; Jos 3:3; 1.Kings 8:4-5; Ez 44:15; Esra 10:5.18-25; also in the writings of Qumran there are such “trinities”, for example in the battle system of the sons of light in “Israel, Levi, Aaron” (1QM II:1; V:6). See also with further references Talmon (2001:152).

three<sup>20</sup>. Thus it is even more surprising that a *Samaritan* enters as the third character. We now know that this was not simply some foreign traveller, as the parable clinically describes him. Because of the continuing religious and cultural differences between Jews and Samaritans, what now approaches is a true anti-Israelite<sup>21</sup>.

Let us try to put ourselves for a moment into the shoes of the first hearer of the parable, who was presumably Jewish. We have heard of the tragic fate of a Jew who has fallen into the hands of robbers. He is seriously injured. We do not know if he can be helped. However, by coincidence, salvation approaches in the form of two prominent representatives of the community of faith. We breathe more easily. Surely they will help him. However, as the narrative continues, this hope is abruptly crushed. Without giving any reasons, both pass by. An incomprehensible scandal. The third person who appears is, of all things, an “ostracised dissident from Samaria” (Harnisch 1995:287) from whom we can expect no help. Strictly speaking, he does not even fall into the category of neighbour, if we interpret this as member of a common people. Now the victim is truly lost. However, equally surprisingly, of all people this man intervenes to help and becomes a saver of life. As Jewish listeners, we must be confused. We are confronted with a world that has been turned upside-down twice. Both actions, that of the non-helpers and that of the Samaritan, provocatively stymie our daily-life expectations and experiences.

You, as a reader, are probably less confused. You would not have expected anything else. You, as Christians, who have long departed from the Jewish observation of laws. You, as theologians,

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20 It has been repeatedly considered whether there could have been an original version of the parable in which, instead of the Samaritan, there was an ordinary Israelite. In favour of such an assumption, in addition to the classical sequence of three already mentioned (priest – Levite – Israelite), is the incongruence that appears in the answer of the lawyer, when he no longer speaks of the Samaritan (he says only “the one who showed him kindness”, v. 37a). See Halévy (1982 :249-255) and Talmon (2001 :149-160). However, this interpretative tradition misjudges that the disappointment of the reader’s expectation is a constitutive trait of metaphor and inactual speech that may have been employed consciously here.

21 On the relationship of Jews and Samaritans see Esler (2000:329), and the Samaritans specifically, see Dexinger and Pummer (1992).

who have committed yourselves in any case to the outsider. Even you, as atheists, who have left behind representatives of cult and church – be they Jewish, Christian or whatever religion. Here we see once again the hypocrisy of the pious! And I, as a critical professor with experience in Latin America, I especially know which side to take. It is clear that one can not expect from much from civil servants. Instead, in the Samaritan, the outlaw, the heretic and communist, the fascinating opponent is raised up as an ideal. A wonderful story. It feels good, for from whatever standpoint one holds, we agree on one thing – we represent the world of the Samaritan. And in this belief, we walk into the narrative trap of the parable. The supposed overcoming of cultural and religious borders leads to the building of new borders and indeed exactly then, when the listeners place themselves on the “right side”. The long anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic tradition of interpretation of the parable provides a sad example of this self-righteousness.

The literary-hermeneutic strategy of the parable takes a different direction. In the provocative representation of the inverted world, the narrative brings an experience to light that is often suppressed or overridden in daily life. The grotesque oversubscription of the role clichés takes us back to the ur-human experience. The failure of the priest and Levite is not as unusual as it seems at first: “Their inhumane behaviour is in truth that which is most human” (Biser 1965:98). The parable in its value-neutral narrative style becomes exactly a clinical reflection of human self-righteousness. Are we not often enough also like the priest and Levite? Only with this insight can ethnological, religious and sociological roles be truly broken down. Esler speaks of a process of decategorization<sup>22</sup>.

From the beginning, the parable supports this process of exposure. Although we of course assumed that the man who was robbed was, in this region, a Jew, the parable speaks consciously only of a *person* (ἄνθρωπος). In contrast to the subsequent characters, this passive main character is not qualified in any way as to his profession or ethnicity. On the contrary, by expressly reporting that the robbers take away his clothes (ἐκδύσαντες V 30b), they figuratively remove the last clue to his cultural and social

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22 Esler (2000: 349f) speaks of a process of “Decategorization”.

determination<sup>23</sup>. After they leave him, all that is left lying there is a person in need, naked, alone and mortal. In the subversive double strategy that follows involving Jews and Samaritans, this person calls into question all culturally and religiously-founded resistance to action. What we have is only a person – whom other people can help – and should. The religious motivation of the action is exiled to a secondary plot. The conclusion of Gerd Theißen (2000:22-37) is that the parable itself is about a “universal ethos of helping”, about general human motivations for helping. “The potential addressee of help is universal. The help subject is universal in his motivation. This ethos of helping (..) is also able to be universal” (Theißen 2000:35).

However, is the alternative really religious partisanship versus a universalistic help ethos? Should religious motivations for helping be overcome in favour of general-humanistic ethics of reason?

Here also, I would like to go a step further. Certainly, the parable may break down ethnological and religious clichés to the extent that they lead to blockages of action and threaten elementary life interests. The person in need of help is introduced in this way ‘only’ as a person. The neediness of fellow humans tears down ethnic-religious barriers. However, there is no “universality of the subject of help”. The motivation of helpers can not be formulated generally and universally, but rather always remains deeply particular, ethnically bound, and even mostly religiously-rooted. The Samaritan is not a neutral person. He is – even if, in many cases, we do not care to hear it – a representative of a particular ethnic-religious group. The parable thus confirms the partisanship of the helper. As more recent peace studies have recognised, partisanship is demanded of helpers even in present-day fields of conflict (Schäfer 2007).

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23 Esler (2000:337f) pointed out that Jews and non-Jews were recognizable by their clothing (for example by *tzitzit* or *tefillin*), so that the description of the removal of the clothes is mentioned very consciously in order to increase the problematics: “Jesus’ failure to specify the man’s ethnicity is absolutely essential to the situation he establishes and to what transpires thereafter”, see Zur Diskussion um die Kleidung in Palästina Esler, Intergroup conflict; also Leutzsch, (2005:9-32).



## 2.4 The charitable Samaritan (Social ethics instead of ethics of conscience).

It will not have escaped the meticulous reader or attentive listener that, in addition to the robbers, a total of four people are involved with the victim. There are the two people who pass by the victim and the two who help. The priest and Levite pass him by; the Samaritan and inn-keeper care for him.

In an effort to look closely, let us turn to the *inn and the inn-keeper* (see in more detail M. und R. Zimmermann 2003:44-58), which are often overlooked, even in exegetic discussions. The fact that the inn-keeper is generally ignored is incomprehensible alone due to the narrative structure of the parable, as the concluding scene is quite long in relation to the overall brevity of the narrative. This scene describes in detail not only the immediate actions of the Samaritan but also what happens at the inn. Furthermore, it is striking that Luke uses the same verb (*ἐπιμελέομαι* – to look after) in giving the orders to the inn-keeper as is used in v. 34 to describe the exemplary actions of the Samaritan. The inn-keeper should continue doing exactly that which the Samaritan has already done for the needy man. Thus, based on the text, it is not possible to declare that the care that has been delegated will be of lower quality. From a narrative viewpoint, we can even recognise a kind of climax in the scene in the inn, because only here is direct speech introduced into the parable. Furthermore, the delegation of care is formulated in the imperative (*ἐπιμελήθητί* imperative aorist: Look after him!).

However, how is this emphasis on the inn-keeper to be understood; how can we categorise this information about the inn? In Hellenistic-Roman ancient times, there were two different types of inns and different terms were used for them. On the one hand, there were non-commercial inns (*καταλύματα*)<sup>24</sup>, based on the obligation to hospitality<sup>25</sup> that was greatly valued in the tradition of the ancient orient and in Judaism. On the other hand, there were commercial inns (*πανδοχεῖον*), which had bad reputations all over the ancient world because it was considered to be dishonourable to

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24 In this way Lk 2:7 (inn of Christ's birth); Mk 14:14 par. (room for the Passover supper in Jerusalem), see Hiltbrunner (1988:602-626).

25 See for example Gen 18:1-8 (Abraham); 1 Ki 17:8-16 (widow of Sarepta), in detail Hiltbrunner (1972:1061-1123).

take money from a guest<sup>26</sup>. In addition, the clientele of the latter came almost exclusively from the lower social classes and had no hosts of their own, which influenced the standards and manners at these inns. Finally, the commercial inns were also regarded as places of vice because it was generally expected that the female employees would also fulfil the sexual wishes of the guests (see Kleberg 1957:89-91; Kirchhoff 1994:37ff.). Thus, the inn-keeper was one of the most despised professions<sup>27</sup> and was practiced in Palestine almost exclusively by non-Jews<sup>28</sup>. Not until the fourth century A.D., that is after the persecution had ended, does the history of the Christian inns begin with the *xenodochion* or hospices (lat: hospitium) that then soon became facilities for the care of the sick and poor<sup>29</sup>.

The Lukan Jesus makes it clear, alone through the terms *πανδοχειδόν* (V 34b) and *πανδοχεύς* (V 35), that the inn in the parable is a commercial inn. This is then additionally underlined by the emphasis on the payment. The welcoming of the Samaritan and the injured man thus has nothing to do with hospitality – it is purely business. This, however, does not hinder the Samaritan in transferring the responsibility for the care of the injured man to the disreputable inn-keeper. If the exemplariness of the Samaritan's behaviour itself was an impertinence to Jewish ears, the transfer of the care to the inn-keeper must be a very strong provocation. The commercial, and most likely non-Jewish inn-keeper, of all people, becomes involved in the exemplary fulfilment of the Torah law of the love of one's fellow man. Thus, in the character of the helper, we see a progression and escalation from the Samaritan to the inn-keeper.

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26 Plato even demanded a year-long jail sentence for any citizen who debased himself and his family by taking money from a guest, see Plato, Leg. 11: 919e; also Hiltbrunner (1988:607).

27 In a list of the most despised professions, from best to worst, of the poet M. Valerius Martialis (ca 40–120 A.D.) the inn-keeper (*caupo*) is named last (epigr 3:59: Schuster, Walker, Wirt).

28 According to Hiltbrunner (1988:615).

29 Best known is the hospice (*hospitium*) of Fabiola, a Christian in Rome, which was open to pilgrims as well as those in need. References are often made to this early 'hospice' in Rome in attempts to reconstruct the history of the hospice. See Weiß (1999:13).

Within the scope of my topic, the detailed description of the inn-keeper contains interesting ethical impulses. The criticisms, introduced at the beginning, of helping (“helper syndrome”<sup>30</sup> or “burn-out syndrome” [see Pines et al. 2000; Müller 2002]) from the viewpoints of psychoanalysis or the psychology of learning are not applicable to the help described in the parable. As much as the Samaritan allows himself to be touched by the needs of the injured man, he is at little risk of losing himself or burning out in the act of helping. He continues his travels the next day, of course not without making sure that the care will continue. Although the Samaritan himself acted from superior motivations, he does now not expect such selfless willingness to help from others. Rather, he gives the inn-keeper money for the care and thus makes the inn into a ‘charitable service organization’. The delegation of care and even the payment should not be understood pejoratively, for they do not decrease the exemplary character of the charity. On the contrary. Instead of as an exaggerated helping ethos in the sense of ‘self-exploitation’, one can also understand the transfer of the care as a wholly conscious “taking-back” of the helper’s own self<sup>31</sup>. This aspect of the parable does indeed allow for the addition of „as yourself” to the law of love. While the love of God demands absolute devotion, the love of one’s neighbour sets out its dimensions and its limits in “the protection of self-interests”<sup>32</sup>.

From an ethical viewpoint, the parable should not be understood as an appeal to an individual ethics of conscience, as has often been true within the interpretation tradition. If we seriously consider the fact that the helping in the parable is not carried out only by two people, but rather reaches its culmination through delegated, institutionally-insured assistance, then the parable represents an impulse for an ethics of charity that is not to be underestimated.

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30 Thus the classical portrayal in Schmidbauer (1995; 1999).

31 In this way also Theißen has an answer to the psychological crisis of legitimacy of helping: “He (the Samaritan) practices limited participation – not the unlimited participation in the fate of the addressee of help that overwhelms the helper” Theißen (1998:384).

32 Thyen (1998:275), taking up a formulation from W. Kamlah.

In the implicit ethics of the parable, the ethos of the individual is protected by social and institutional insurance systems. Accordingly, present-day public facilities or government should not be prematurely relieved of their duties under the excuse of secondary liability<sup>33</sup> and individual help. The structural and institutionalised dimension of the ethical system is preserved precisely in the person of the inn-keeper and his assignment.

### **3 IMAGE AND VISION: AN ETHICS OF LOOKING**

Four invitations to look, visual aids to discover ethical impulses in the well-known parable: questions instead of applications, becoming a subject instead of the fulfilment of duty, universal partisanship and finally the charitable-structural direction of action. But, with all these various aspects, can one really speak of “ethics”?

Ethics in the sense of a *ἠθικὴ θεωρία* (Analyt. Post I:33), a defined system of foundations for norms and actions – that we certainly can not find here. Can a parable text nevertheless be characterised as “ethical”? The story here is freely invented. It is a fictional, constructed text, admittedly with a relationship to reality. It is, as M. Reich-Ranicki (1995) has said, an “invented truth”. The narrative-metaphoric structure and dramatics of a parable aims here at the partisanship of the reader. Parables possess not only a clarity but also an appeal structure. They want to lead not only to insight, but also to action. But they do this in their own way. No ethical demand is constructed here, as in the New Testament letters, through parables, through imperative exhortation. We can not speak of pointing the moral finger!

Instead, ethics appear in the garb of aesthetics<sup>34</sup>. It is not, as Wolfgang Iser proclaimed for the post-modern, an emigration of

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33 This principle is encountered in a conscious formulation first in the encyclical 'Quadragesimo anno' (1931) by Pope Pius XI, contextual analogies are found however in the initial document of catholic social teaching, the encyclical "rerum novarum" (1891) (cf no 10), which was consciously adopted 40 years later. See O. von Nell-Breuning (1990). The principle can be traced idea-historically further back; for example Marc Luyckx 1992:6) worked out the reformatory origin of subsidiary thinking in this way: "Les sources protestantes". See the literature report of Strohm (2001:69); also Maeder (2000).

34 See literature on ethics and aesthetics: Gamm and Kimmerle (1990); Kamper and Wulf (1994); Welsch (1991, 1996); Mieth (2000).

ethics into aesthetics. Instead, the aesthetics of the parable creates or “makes” ethics. The term the “ethopoietic”, introduced by Foucault (1984: 19; 1985:50), appears to be usable for “parabolic ethics”. The aesthetic structure of the parable is an “aesthetic of existence” and in its poetic style, e.g. poetic arts, targets ethics. The parable, therefore, need not have ethics imposed upon it, instead as a parable it has always been ethical, and embodies an “aesthetic ethics” – thus an ethopoietic.

Secondly, this aesthetic ethics is – as in compliance with the wording of aesthetics as the teaching of perception – an ethics of looking. Seeing has to do with vision and memory. Images are drafted as pre-images, but they are simultaneously images of memory and need something known, something remembered in order to be formed. Jean-Pierre van Noppen (1988) described the process of metaphoric-figurative speech thus: We “remember in order to say something new”. Biblical language attempts to make this connection of levels of time and reality. The narrative image in Luke 10, the parable, is constructed out of mosaic tiles of memory, experience, the traditional value system (e.g. law of the love of one’s neighbour); however, it does not remain limited to this. In the arrangement of the text, in the completion of reading it enables the conception and vision of a new theory of action. It wants to be an invitation to look closely, to see. A seeing that challenges, touches, removes barriers and at the same time knows itself to be supported.

However, what can such a literary ethics of looking attain in a culture of looking the other way? The priest and Levite are not blind. They see – and they do not see. In our culture of looking the other way, we have precisely this paradoxical correlation. We see and we do not see. Seeing is more than just an objective sensory process. Hans Blumenberg (1961:115) writes: “Seeing is not always open for everything that is visible; phenomenon must be considered possible before we can see them”. The ethics of looking, therefore, has to do with believing. It is an experience and a gift at the same time. In it we can recognise the sign of God. No one can prescribe this kind of seeing. However, I can point out aspects of seeing to others, open perspectives, and show, as Ricoeur (2004:204f), drawing on

Wittgenstein, describes it<sup>35</sup>, that one can “see something as” something. Exegeses and theology can perform the tasks of the ophthalmologist . Theology can never replace action. But sometimes we need information in order to see more clearly, to perceive and finally to be able to act. And more, we need also to be pointed to old stories. “The same old story?” – the answer is “no” when thinking of the eternal return of yesterday but “yes” in the case of helpful or even contra-factual memories in a culture of looking the other way. The Biblical texts can be such sustainable memories. The old narrative of the Samaritan can help us to develop vision and to act differently: “and when he saw him, he was moved and he went to him” (Lk 10: 33).

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35 Wittgenstein (1984:551): “The term aspect is related to the term ‘imagination’ as the formulation, ‘I see it now as ...’ is related to, ‘I imagine it now’”.

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