

The Good Samaritan

Love of God and Love of Neighbor

Hear oh Israel: The Lord our God is the Lord. You shall love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Deuteronomy 6: 4-5

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Leviticus 19: 18

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.

Mark 12: 30-31

Introductory Comments

During his lifetime, Jesus taught in parables. Today as we read the Gospels we understand that Jesus was well-acquainted with Mosaic Law as it was taught and understood in his era. According to the Gospels, he often quoted the law to hostile religious authorities who sought to trap him in heresy.¹ In the ancient story I am about to re-tell Jewish religious lawyers of the law (scribes) were those educated men whose training taught them to know the intricacies of Mosaic Law and to apply it to contemporary situations. Priests and Levites were individuals who led the religious community in teaching proper worship. In addition, they enforced the cultic laws. Thus, they too were knowledgeable about the minutia of Mosaic Law and its commandments.

The story begins quite simply. A religious lawyer (scribe) asks Jesus a question. It may have been an honest question or it may have been a malicious question intended to entrap Jesus. We do not really know at this distance, therefore, whether the question was honest and searching or dishonest and malevolent. On its surface, the question was about salvation and eternal life. At a deeper level, however, the question was one of orthodoxy and interpretation. At an even deeper level, the question was about the definition of the word *neighbor*. Just who was the neighbor included in the teachings of Mosaic Law? Which persons were the faithful

required to love in the same way they loved (and in our language, cared for) themselves?

The Greek word for neighbor can be translated as *one who is near or close by*.² Hebrew words can be translated as *someone other than kin with whom you have an association, such as a friend*.³ A second word is derived from the verb meaning to *reside, settle or dwell*.⁴ By virtue of Jewish religious and social customs in that era, therefore, Romans, Samaritans, gentiles, and other foreigners would have been excluded from the orthodox Jewish community's definition of neighbors.

Jesus Parable of the Good Samaritan: Luke 10:28-34

In the Gospel of Luke we find that Jesus taught his disciples and the many religious seekers who trailed after him by means of parables or wisdom stories. He also used some of his parables to discomfort and deflect the cultural-religious critics who sought to entrap him by means of hostile and politically loaded questions. One of his most famous parables is that of the Good Samaritan. It seems, at this distance in history, that it served both as a teaching parable and as a deflecting one. For those who were sincere in their desire to know his teaching, it provided specific information about care of the neighbor and expanded the definition of neighbor. For his critics, the parable critiqued an inflexible and legalistic orthodoxy which did not include the need for religious individuals to serve the human community in acts of healing and restitution.

The **first historical context note** in a culturally understood background of this parable is that while the Samaritan people were genetically related to their Hebrew neighbors, Hebrew citizens in general refused to have anything to do with them. In other stories from Christian scriptures we learn that orthodox Hebrews did not care to speak with Samaritans much less have any other personal contacts with them. The reasons for such inter-group antagonism were likely complex and rooted in a long shared geographic proximity and shared socio-cultural history. What some scholars believe today, however, is that the Samaritan subgroup of this region had intermarried during the Babylonian exile with non-Jews and they kept only the Mosaic Law (in the Torah). Goshen College Professor Paul Keim notes that the Samaritans *would not have followed the plethora of religious regulations that in their view came after the authoritative teaching of the Torah*.⁵ In terms of the orthodox majority, therefore, they were, in our

words, the very distant low-life relatives who were disdained and repudiated as relatives and as neighbors. Keim concludes that Jesus chose the Samaritans for his parable because of *the ambiguity of their status on the line between Jew and non-Jew*. As individuals on the margins of the Hebrew community they could be (and often were) attacked and vilified by the pious majority.

The second context is that several characters, the story's protagonists, represented religious and cultural orthodoxy. These were people who by virtue of their training and education knew Mosaic Law inside and out. They were, by virtue of education and position, the community's enforcers of the law. They and the community as a whole believed that their interpretive and embodied orthodoxy was essential for the community's socio-religious-political survival and represented, therefore, faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant. They mediated, therefore, between God and the community in their guidance of cultic worship rituals and in their enforcement of cultic purity in the daily and ordinary life of the entire community. In our language, they were their community's authoritarian purity patrol. They maintained and patrolled the boundaries between inside and outside; between acceptable and non-acceptable; between pure and impure.

There is a certain sense, therefore, that this parable is a story about the tension between informational, interpretive, and cognitive orthodoxy and a life actively engaged in embodied practices or service to others. This parable raises questions about appropriate behavioral markers or embodied witness to the more abstract concepts of *love of God and love of neighbor*. The parable addresses, therefore, a practical application of the teachings of Mosaic Law regarding love of God and love of neighbor. The story appears to warn its readers that authoritative knowledge of the law and pure cultic practice is insufficient and that the law was organized around lived-life service to others rather than intellectual knowing. Thus embodiment and concrete application of the law, in Jesus' teaching, takes precedence over abstract principles and legalistic hair-splitting. In today's theological language, therefore, orthopraxis takes precedence over orthodoxy.

In Jesus' teaching, therefore, we sense that in real life, following God's law is manifested not by knowledge and intellectual interpretations or opinions but by compassionate action which meets the needs of the other person

who is in proximity to one. In short, when need manifests itself in a human face the proper response is informed, compassionate action rather than a rigidified legalistic cognitive cultic practice. While word and deed must be held in tension inside any religious community, Jesus clearly expresses his opinion that compassionate and loving deeds take precedence over pious words and legalistic orthodoxies.

The Story Unfolds

In the story, as Jesus told it, an un-named individual with an un-announced ethnicity makes his way on a treacherous road between Jerusalem and Jericho. This dangerous stretch of road is known to be the hideout for bandits and thieves of all varieties. As he walks the narrow, winding road, the man is assaulted by thieves who beat him, steal all of his possessions including his clothing, and leave him to die.

By chance, the parable continues, a priest comes by and seeing the man's plight crosses to the other side of the road and continues his journey. A second man, this time a Levite, also came by. He was more curious. He stopped to look at the man and then he too passed him by on the other side of the road. Two pious and religious men, therefore, chose to avoid and, in essence, abandon the man to his suffering and left him to die. We are told absolutely nothing about their personal motivations. All Jesus describes in their behavior.

A Samaritan, culturally despised by Jesus' listeners, subsequently came upon the scene of the crime. Seeing the other man's wounds and inability to help himself the Samaritan stopped and went to the man's side. He took some wine and disinfected the man's wounds. Then he poured oil to assist in physical comfort and bodily healing. After attending to the immediate needs of the man's physical wounds, he loaded the man on his animal transportation (in this part of the world one assumes a donkey) and walked beside the pack animal as together he and the crime victim made their way to a sheltering inn. Here they settled in for the night and the man cared for the victim. In the morning, the Samaritan paid the inn-keeper for the wounded man's continuing stay at the inn and additional healing care. He promised to return and pay any additional costs that were incurred in his absence.

Having told his tale, Jesus asked of his listeners, “who, in my story, was the neighbor?”

A Contemporary Application of Jesus’ Teaching

In today’s world victims of clergy sexual abuse and victims of malevolent institutional clericalism are deeply wounded by both forms of violation (metaphorically they are abandoned and left bleeding by the side of the road and left to die). Raped, sexually harassed, or otherwise victimized by ordained members of the clergy or by other professional leaders of their religious community they face disbelief, blaming by others for their own victimization, judgment, open hostility, shunning, exclusion, isolation, and abandonment. Friends, family, and members of the church’s hierarchy may accuse them of lying. They may be accused of seeking to enrich themselves at the expense of the church. In some cases children and adolescents may be physically beaten or punished in other damaging ways for accusing a minister or priest of raping them or sexually molesting them. In general, the deeply wounded individual must prove his or her credibility before anyone will take accusations of sexual violence seriously. The rights of the perpetrator of sexual violence and the institutions which protect him or her take precedence over the rights of the victim to be heard and believed. When perpetrators are protected from being made fully accountable for their actions and when victims are denied their rights for full accountability from their perpetrators, justice has misfired. In addition, the healing ministries of the church have been aborted.

When officials of today’s church (or any other religious institution) refuse to stop and care for those they have deliberately or ineptly wounded, they become today’s equivalent of the two men who saw the abandoned, dying man but immediately removed themselves from a situation of desperate human need.

In the interior world of the soul, psyche and cognition, victims know first-hand the trauma of violence and the trauma of betrayal. They may experience intense shame. They may experience deep confusion about what has happened to them. This is not unlike the confusion individuals may feel after being beaten and left for dead. They may be overwhelmed by murderous rage. They may accept the blame and accusations from others that somehow or other they are personally responsible for the act of violation. In addition, they may blame themselves for not avoiding their

abuser's violence. Consequently, not only their physical body has been invaded by violence; their inner world of psyche, spirit, and soul has been betrayed, vandalized, plundered, colonized, split apart and "left to die."

In addition to the religious leaders of their community, lay members and friends may urge them to forgive and forget as a way of creating community harmony. In this advice, the community releases the perpetrator of violence from responsibility and accountability for his or her actions towards victims and for his betrayal of the entire community and its spiritual teachings about love of God and love of neighbor.

Such socio-religious advice about premature forgiveness and coerced reconciliation often, in its turn, actively re-victimizes the individual. It may, in fact, delay or completely prevent the victimized individual's ability to seek healing. It may exacerbate the victimized individual's shame, rage, inner splitting and dissociative reactions.

When, subsequent to individual incidents of clergy sexual abuse of others, representatives of the institutional church attempt to cover up acts of sexual violence and sexual harassment, these representatives look and see the damage done. However, they do not assume this damage, done by one of their guild, is their responsibility to manage. They do not stop. They do not begin acts of care. They do not tell the victim they are concerned for her or his welfare and healing. They make no effort to begin emergency or crisis care. They look, notice, and then decisively cross by on the other side of the road.⁶

Unfortunately, in some situations, they join the bandits and they re-vandalize and re-plunder the victim's life by assaulting her character or her behavior. They may directly and deliberately lie to her. They may seek to guarantee her silence by money or threats. Most importantly, however, by their abandonment of care for the victim, they protect the individual who violated her by rape or other means of sexual assault.

Jesus' teaching is clear. The application of Mosaic Law which prescribes love of God as the foundation of community is best represented not by a rigid orthodoxy, intellectual beliefs, cultic purity, or even by perfectly enacted cultic ritual acts. What is required is loving, attentive, personal care which is expressed promptly, appropriately, and directly to the specific, individuated needs of the wounded person whom we come across in our

life journey. The wounded man, plundered by bandits and left to die, or the victim of sexual violence, plundered by her assailant and left to fend for himself or herself, is the neighbor. This is the one, Mosaic Law (according to Jesus) teaches us we must love as we love ourselves. We are, therefore, to care for this wounded one as we would care for ourselves.

By means of this parable, the followers of Jesus are taught that the individual we notice to be in trouble is the neighbor we are to help. In short, abstract legalistic and cultic, ceremonial, ritualized love of God and neighbor is to be operationalized towards the wounded one left to die by his or her assailants.

How do we demonstrate our love of the divine? In Jesus' teaching, we do this by offering personalized, situation-appropriate, and compassionate care to those who need to heal the wounds caused by other's acts of violence and violation. We do this in order that the wounded and violated individual can once again be made whole, so that she or he once more is enabled once more to take care of herself or himself. For this to happen the wounds must be recognized and appropriate accountability for the source of the wounds must be assigned. In addition, the individual must be supported in the healing journey by a physical-psychological-emotional-spiritual process that disinfects the wounds of violence and applies a healing balm to the spirit. Violated and victimized people need help to manage their physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual pain while the body/Self recovers.

Personal Reflection Questions

- 1) As you think about Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, which of the story's characters best represents your own position in today's story of religious professional sexual abuse of others? Write a short paragraph that explains your position in as much detail as possible.
- 2) In your opinion does the parable of the Good Samaritan provide any insight into secular news items about clergy or religious professional sexual abuse of other Christians? If you think there are new insights write a short paragraph identify the insights as specifically as you can and explain how they apply. If you do not think the parable presents

any new insights, write a short paragraph explaining your thinking. Are there any other teachings of Jesus which might apply?

- 3) Do you know anyone who has been a victim of religious professional sexual or other kinds of abuse? What wounds do you notice in this individual's life? What is the needed wine and oil of healing? How might you be a Good Samaritan?

¹Endnotes

See Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34

²Electronic correspondence with Professor Paul Keim, Goshen College Bible, Religion and Philosophy Department, July 19, 2011

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ibid.

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ibid.

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ibid.

⁶ For a contemporary discussion of this phenomenon in today's Roman Catholic Church, see Thomas Doyle's August 2, 2014 presentation to SNAP (Chicago, IL). *Where We've Been and Where We're Going: How Survivors Have Changed History*. Retrieve from <http://www.awrsipe.com/Doyle/2014/Where%20We%20Have%20Been%20and%20Where%20We're%20Going%20-%20Aug.%202011,%202014.pdf>; Also available at <http://christiancatholicism.com/how-survivors-have-changed-history-by-thomas-p-doyle-o-p/>

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