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Why do Contexts Matter? The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 27-35) as an Example

Abstract: The presented study uses the Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan (10, 27-35) in order to present the shifts in the meaning depending on the reading contexts. After the basic structure of the original meaning is established, the pragmatic nuances of the parable are illustrated. The research subsequently throws light on the paradigmatic interpretations in both the medieval and the contemporary contexts. It concludes by exemplifying that the polyvalence of meaning is not only dependent upon the genuine literary structure of the parable, but also on the innate ability of the Christian organism (Church) to actualize certain features of the sacred text in the concrete life-settings.

Key words: Samaritan, parable, context, meaning.

1. Introduction

The presented research attempts to focus on the role that contexts play in interpretation of a New Testament text. Reading one passage through a contemporary lens, even with all the help that scholarly methods can give, doesn't always guarantee the assessment of the true meaning of the text. Moreover, the meaning is always susceptible to contexts of the origin or the reception of the text. The parable of the Samaritan (Lk 10, 27-35) serves here as an example for presenting the differences and nuances in the interpretation process. The case of one parable is particularly interesting owing to its metaphorical language. Due to these reasons, the presented study attains the following form. After the first part, which tends to present the original meaning of the story by relying on the factors of the literary and historical context, an overview of the paradigmatic interpretation of the parable in the Christian tradition will follow. Only after this basis has been established, the last and third part of the study will briefly point out to the aspects of the modern understandings of the parable.

2. The original meaning

The fact that the gospels bring more than forty parables, which makes up a third of Jesus' written message, testifies of the role of Jesus' metaphorical tales in earliest Christianity¹

There are two reasons for communicating in parables, of which the first is cultural, and the other is a matter of identity. By placing metaphorical images from everyday reality into a narrative stream, in general, a multifaceted message of special importance is transmitted², while the special character of the Christian revelation is portrayed through narrative twists.³ Therefore, the role of speech in parables consists of a call for acceptance of discipleship – the privileged status of which is emphasized by the special nature of the metaphorical language⁴, that is, the gradual advancement in Christian teaching through the discovery of the mediated plurality of meaning.

Accordingly, parables have the role of specific cultural spaces in which the Christian faith is shaped through the experience of revelation from the earliest times. Their *cultural* position is inseparable from the *revelatory* and therefore incomparably deeper than the pedagogical, because the parables are rooted in the (meta) narrative of salvation – first on the historical and then on the ecclesial level in which the creative memory is realized through the cult. The narrative world of the parable about the Good Samaritan functions according the same principle, which one begins to perceive by reading its text in the literary and historical context.

2.1 The text (Lk 10, 25-37)

¹ In the second half of the twentieth century worldwide biblical studies were dominated by particular interest in the interpretation of the parables in their original life-setting. This interest, however, did not receive a significant reception in (Serbian) Orthodoxy due to many reasons, particularly because of it giving priority to traditional (patristic) interpretations as a proven experience of faith. See: Dodd, C. H., *The Parables of the Kingdom*, New York 1961; Jeremias J., *The Parables of Jesus*, New York 1963; Linnemann, E. *Jesus of the Parables: Introduction and Exposition*, New York 1966; Via, D. O., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*, Philadelphia 1967; Crossan, J. D., *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus*, New York 1980; Funk, R. W., *Parables and Presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition*, Philadelphia 1981; Blomberg, C., *Interpreting the Parables*, Leicester 1992; Zimmermann, R., *Parabeln in der Bibel: Die Sinnwelten der Gleichnisse Jesu entdecken*, Gütersloh 2017.

² Unlike the priorities that the abstract truth in the Greco-Roman world had over its picturesque examples (which is the order of thought in European culture), it was appropriate for a Middle Eastern rabbi to communicate a message in a metaphorical narrative, which through such vividness became capable of transmitting a multifaceted message. The basic parable about the sower and seeds (Mk 4, 3-9) as a picture of the transmission of the word of God, then of the host who leaves the wealth to servants for multiplication (Mt 25, 14-30) or of the father and two sons (Lk 15, n-32) bring together roles with which the auditorium identifies differently. See: Bailey, K. E. „*Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke is*, St. Louis 1992, 21; also by the same author: *Poet & Peasant; Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Grand Rapids 1983; *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, London 2008.

³ The unexpected seed yield, the unpredictable decisions of the host or the unusual moves of a father (see previous note) point to the reality of Gods presence in Jesus Christ, which transforms the listeners of these narratives. See: Rindge, M. S., “Lukes Artistic Parables: Narratives of Subversion, Imagination, and Transformation”, *Int* 68 (2014) 403-415.

⁴ Having laid out the basic parable about sower and the seeds (Mk 4, 3-9), Jesus makes the distinction between disciples – those to whom the understanding of the “secret of the Kingdom of God” is given, and those outside – to whom the laid out is “in stories” (4, 10-12), in order to, in the end, interpret this story only to students (4,13-20). This important difference is also indicated by the Gospel writer, symbolically putting the group of Jesus and the disciples into a boat from where a group of people on the coast listens to the parable (4,1-2), but not its interpretation. For more see: Heil, J. P., “Reader-response and the narrative context of the parables about growing seed in Mark 4:1-34”, *CBQ* 54 (1992) 271-285.

The text of the parable is written in Luke's Gospel and is cited here as an integral part of the conversation between Jesus and a teacher of the Law about the inheritance of the eternal life – the quoted text comes from the NRSV translation [remarks, V.T.]:

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27 He 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 your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." 29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" [μου πλησίον]? 30 Jesus replied: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

2.2 Literary Context

In the reconstruction of the original meaning, the role of the literary context is of twofold importance. In a narrow sense, the story loses meaning beyond the conversation of the two rabbis, because it occupies a central place in this duel.⁵ In hopelessness due to confrontation with the evident authority of the Law (see Deut 6, 5; Lev 19, 18)⁶, Jesus' interlocutor draws attention from the unsuccessful temptation or opens the topic that he is primarily concerned with: if love for God is not questionable, who is *my neighbor* (μου πλησίον)? Bearing the eternity in the mind, the question is absolutely important, whereby, from the point of view of one rabbi, it is also very logical: in the spirit of the Jewish Law it is first necessary to define the boundaries of a term so that love will achieve the desired result within them, which corresponds to the Old Testament particularity of a society in which the acceptance of a neighbor (πλησίον) must have been a challenge.⁷ Given as a response to the problem

⁵ To the integrity of the section indicates the separation at the beginning by the words καὶ ἰδοὺ, while to the form of the duel, which will be completed by the lesson in the last verse (10, 37), indicates the use of the verbs ἀνέστη and ἐκπρόβαζον. In ancient Judaism, these verbs correspond to the context of a public debate that has been initiated in order to gain or establish a reputation (honor) in society. See: Bovon, F., *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, EKKIII/2., Ostfildern 2008, 81-87.

⁶ Returning, as a true Jew, the interlocutor to the Law (cf. Mt 7, 12; Lk 6, 31), Jesus praises his paraphrase of verses about love for God and neighbor, but in the reverse order of the canonical as expected: for only the order in which the love of God is a priority can be just to the other and a sure way to salvation. See: Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 287.

⁷ The verse about love for the neighbor (Lev 19,18) limits the notion of πλησίον to the "people," which speaks of its inextricability from physical closeness. A (sacred) place and an origin, did not make the Jews the chosen people, but a covenant with God (cf. Ex 19,5-6). The fact that πλησίον means closeness, connection deeper than physical, shows the use of

posed, the parable touches on the subject of social structure, the extreme of which can render the religious experience and the order based on it pointless. More broadly speaking, it is at the beginning of the central part of the gospel of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9, 51 – 19,27) where his crucifixion and resurrection (22-24) will occur, which is not insignificant.⁸ There is obviously congruence between the parable and Luke's story about Jesus Christ in the motives of the journey, suffering and salvation. This congruence probably maintained the relationship of the parable with the event of salvation in Jesus' sacrifice for the other as it was lived, narrated, and finally recorded in Luke's community (Church).⁹

2.3 The historical context

Since the action of the parable is embedded in the reality of ancient Palestine, its narrative mechanisms rest on the factors of this historical context, of which three are singled out here. The image of the Jericho road occupies the first place: thirty steep and curvilinear kilometers through the stunning rocky desert meant many opportunities for ambush, which meant the importance of this section had to leave a special impression on Jesus' listeners.¹⁰ Secondly, the priests and their Levite assistants formed the structure of the Jewish religion (society) with the sacrifice in the center¹¹. Thirdly, the neighboring people of Samaritans were considered hostile.¹² Although they shared the same roots (see Jn 4,12), there was a rather irreconcilable relationship between the two nations. The Jews considered the Samaritans so unacceptable in religious and social terms that in Matthew's gospel, as the product of the early Christian

of the construction *my neighbor* (μου πλησίον), in order to fulfill its law by its application, and thus gain life eternal. See: Frederik, B., "Parable of the Good Samaritan – an exegesis", on the web address (visited on 6th of April 2018.): <https://episc0pal.wordpress.com/2007/11/16/parable-of-the-good-samaritan-an-exegesis>. this term in cladistics, where it denotes a gene that is not sortable into existing families, and which is missing in similar cases until the formation of a new one. From there, other nations, although they are neighboring, are not neighbors. And from this, the structure of the society by tribal, gender and other categories could further motivate the rabbi – as the embodiment of that structure – to demand a definition

⁸ In biblical studies it is often talked about the structure of the so-called "travel narrative" (9, 51 – 19, 27) and the theological message of positioning the parable of the Samaritan at its beginning. See: Denaux, A., "The Delineation of the Lukan Travel Narrative within the Overall Structure of the Gospel of Luke", in: Focant, C., (ed.), *The Synoptic Gospels. Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism*, BETL no, Leuven 1993, 359-392; Busse, U., "A Study of Luke 10 in Context", *HTS* 61 (2005) 81-91; Blajer, P., *The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37): Its Function and Purpose within the Lukan Journey Section*, Washington 2012.

⁹ See: Barr, L. D., *New Testament Story: An Introduction*, Belmont 1987; Blowers, P. M., "The regula fidei and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith", *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997) 199-228; Tatalović, V., "Die Berührungspunkte der traditionellen und narrativen Exegese des Johannesevangeliums", *Philotheos* 15 (2015) 83-92, esp. 83-85.

¹⁰ Also: Josephus Flavius (*De bello*, IV 452-453); Strabo (*Geographica*, XVI 2, 41).

¹¹ In addition to the priests and Levites, the laymen served in the temple cult whom the parable deliberately did not mention in order to introduce the figure of Samaritan in the action (see further). According to sources, a considerable part of the priesthood lived in Jericho, wherefrom they went to Jerusalem for a two-week ministry. See: Strack, H. L. – Billerbeck, P., *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, II, München *1983, 66,180.

¹² The Samaritans came to be by the intermixing of Jewish indigenous people and immigrants from Assyria during the Babylonian slavery (see 2 Kings 17). Their revolt against Jerusalem and the development of a special religious practice at Gerizim was initiated by the favors of the Jerusalem cult by the Persian emperor, after which the conflict was deepened by a series of historical circumstances that led to armed conflicts. According to the New Testament testimonies, Jews and Samaritans not only did not communicate in the time of Jesus (Jn 4, 9), but the word Samaritan was used as a terrible expression for someone who was considered foul (Jn 8, 48). See more: Crown, A. D. (ed.), *The Samaritans*, Tubingen 1989.

community closest to the Jewish religion, the apostles would be advised to avoid the Samaritan cities (10, 5) during the missionary activity, even though it was intended for all peoples (28, 20)¹³

2.4 Plot (character) analysis

By linking the factors of the literary and historical context, one attains the basis for a correct analysis of the parable the action of which, according to most literary theorists, is built by events and characters¹⁴. In relation, however, to the usual interpretation from the perspective of the narrated events (robbery, reaction of the passers-by), here it is more profitable to approach the narrative through the skill of performing characters¹⁵, because the role of the story is to answer the question about the neighbor through the contours of an ideal. Other than the character of the robbers, whom the narrator was obviously not interested in, the following thing applies to the figures.

At the center of the story is the character of *a man* about whom the narrator gives scarce information, thus achieving an important universality of his appearance. The victim of the crime was the victim of an attack that could have affected anyone, and being disfigured, stripped naked, and nearly dead he avoids any attempt at social classification. The narrator thus not only transmits the difficult condition of the wounded, but also the real inability of the passer-by in determining his national, religious and class affiliation. Since he does not seek help (offering a counter-service), nor does he have the opportunity to give thanks, this man with his voiceless appearance is a call to the general examination of humanity. In every sense, the scant view of *someone* is an image of every human being¹⁶. One after another, the priest and the Levite do the same: upon seeing the victim, they go around him and continue on. Their reasons aren't given because there is an expectation for the connection to be made with the nature of the cult which shapes both characters: the risk of the profaning touch of a corpse

¹³ It is nevertheless a testimony of the initial hesitation, since the Gospel message soon arrived in the regions of Samaria (Acts 8, 4-15). According to John, with the appearance of Jesus Christ the controversial question of where to pray ceases to be relevant – whether at Gerizim or in Jerusalem (Jn 4, 10). “God is a spirit, and whoever prays should pray in spirit and truth” (4,14).

¹⁴ At this place, the research relies on the results of intensive collaboration between the biblical studies and literary theories over the last decades. See: Powell, M. A., *What is Narrative Criticism*, Minneapolis 1990; same, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism. A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography*, Westport 1991; Zumstein, J., “Narrative Analyse und neutestamentliche Exegese in der frankophonen Welt”, *VuF* 41 (1996), 5-17; Marguerat, D. – Bourquin, Y., *How to Read Bible Stories. An Introduction to Narrative Criticism*, London 1999; Brooke, G. J. – Kaesdi, J. D., *Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts*, BETL 149, Leuven 2000; Resseguie, J. L., *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament. An Introduction*, Grand Rapids 2005; Marguerat, D. – Bourquin, Y. – Clerc, F., *Pour lire les récits bibliques: initiation à l'analyse narrative*, Paris 2009; Finnern, S., *Narratologie und biblische Exegese. Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28*, WUNTII/Z85, Tübingen 2010.

¹⁵ Aristotle writes about the rules of characterization (Poet 1454a) and it undoubtedly has a pragmatic role in Luke's Gospel. See the following edition, in which there is no special analysis of the characters of the researched parable: Dicken, F. – Snyder, J. A., *Characters and Characterization in Luke-Acts*, London 2016.

¹⁶ The narrow context of the parable nevertheless suggests a Jewish affiliation of a *certain man*. Being in danger when moving away from the Holy city, in addition to the factually risky road to Jericho, can be understood as an expression of the ancient Jewish understanding (cf. Mt 4, 5-6). After all, the parable, in the conversation between two *Jewish* rabbies, wants to produce a certain effect.

(Num 19) and other dangers make *the priest* and *the Levite* – *cross to the other side* (ἀντιπαρήλθεν). Thus, the parable skillfully plays with the motif of closeness: in the moment when the sight of the victim gains on the account of having to pass him by, the crossing over to the other side shows how preserving every sense of security remains faithful to the conformist stance of the Law. On the other hand, the narrator accomplishes an important effect through successively portraying the two figures, first of a high, then of a low rank, both behaving the same way. Demonstrating that the ritual conditionality of their reaction is not accidental¹⁷, the plot calls for an expectation of some figure whose interest in a fatally wounded man will not be restricted by strict religious norms. Although both the usual contrast in the New Testament narratives as well as the average of Jesus' listeners, who, as ordinary people, might have been favored at the expense of religious officials, steeped into formalism (compare Lk 6, 20-26), suggest that such an actor should be a member of the basic social layer in the Jewish society, the real surprise and the main effect of the story comes with the appearance of the member of the neighboring enemy.

Similar to the previous figures, the character of *a certain Samaritan* is distinguished by a high degree of universality, but his behavior differs essentially from the reaction of cult representatives: *coming over* (προσελθών), he sacrifices time, effort, money and himself to save the sufferer. Here too, the focus is the motive of proximity which disappears with the acceptance of the other as the equal: by exposing oneself to the risk that has brought *another person* to a near-death state, the Samaritan heals the man's wounds as his own, and afterwards in taking care of him uses personal means (time, effort, donkey, money) and adjusts his future to the condition of the wounded. By achieving multiple connections with the sufferer, the Samaritan overcomes existing distances and becomes his neighbor, with the stranger's initial move consciously represented by the verb *to have pity* (σπλαγχνίζομαι)¹⁸ By the fact that the ritual root of this verb does not separate the act of personal sacrifice from the emotional response to what has been seen on the way to Jericho – the response similar to the plucking of the (sacrificed) innards, it turns out that the actions of an outsider, *selfless* and originating from the *inside*, are radically different from those which belong to official *insiders*, but which are systematically directed by the *sacrificial cult*.

The analysis carried out shows how religious structuralism as an obstacle to the real meaning of sacrifice and other matters of faith was criticized through a parable: an order which survives solely through concern about itself is not interested in the fate of a man. The parable thus responds to the initial

¹⁷ Two details are given: the adverb *by chance* (κατά συγκυρίαν) only in the description of the first passer-by and the fact that the Levite acts the same as the priest, although the reference section of the law on ritual purity (Num 19) and the prohibition of coming into contact with the corpse does not directly address the Levites. Jesus obviously wants to show the attitude of the spiritual elite of his time, and not the behavior of certain individuals.

¹⁸ The root of this verb is related to the earliest forms of ritualism. In the earliest Greek literature, the noun σπλάγγα signified the sacrificed innards of the animals, and the verb σπλαγγεύω the consummation of the offering; only in Judeo-Christian literature, in conjunction with Jesus and the protagonists of his parables, the verb σπλαγχνίζομαι attains the meaning of pity. See: Koester, "σπλάγγα", TDNT VII (G. Kittel), 548-549.

question about the *neighbor*, to whom the representative of the *neighboring* enemy ironically states that the tendency for systemic resolution should be corrected by personal responsibility, that is, unreserved readiness to accept another man in specific circumstances. In this way, in accordance with the role of Jesus' metaphorical tales, the parable functions as a specific platform on which the listener is strategically brought to the example of a surprising overcoming of distances, so as to notice his zone of comfort and come to change attitudes. In that role, the surprising appearance of the Samaritan is not *real*, nor is the attitude toward this fictive character a subject of Jesus' prime interest – although some facts could have been inspiration for its origin¹⁹, but it is a part of a fiction meant for a pragmatic cause. Since, however, the key experience of this fiction is not the same if one takes into consideration the phenomenon of the Biblical text, that is, the variable position of recipients in its genesis, then it is also important to indicate here the nuance of the original meaning in the hermeneutics of Jesus' oral and Luke's written words.

2.5 The nuances of the original meaning

In the analysis so far, the question of the correspondence of Luke's text with the content of the historical event has not been asked yet. However, it is not a pointless one, since process of writing presupposes a distance to historical reality²⁰. But can a distinction be made between the parable from the time of Jesus and the parable as a literary work in Luke's time from the position of a contemporary reader? Such distinctions in Orthodoxy are not common and are increasingly overcome on other meridians of Christian exegesis. Predicting the hypotheticality and, therefore, the ineffectiveness of this differentiation at the diachronic level, thereby taking into account the real possibility of Luke's authenticity, the nuances of the original meaning are more significantly perceived at the pragmatic level of the story. Unambiguously highlighted by the character of a rabbi that provides the recipient with a place in Jesus' auditorium, this level shows that there is a difference in being a listener and a reader of the parable.

1) By placing the collected factors of the literary and historical context of the parable (2.2-3) in its oral plane, one understands that the position of the listener in dealing with the character of a *religious other* exceeds the category of neutral observer. Two things testify to the fact that the listener was not called to experience the appearance of a *surprising model* from a distance, but precisely from the place

¹⁹ Recently, it is written about the parable as a result of the interpretation of the event described in 2 Dan 28, about which see: Spencer, F. S., "2 Chronicles 28:5-15 and the Parable of the Good Samaritan", *WTJ* 46 (1984) 317-349; Kalimi, I., "Robbers on the Road to Jericho: Luke's Story of the Good Samaritan and Its Origin in Kings/Chronicles", *ETHL* 85 (2009) 47-53; Scheffler, E., "The assaulted (man) on the Jerusalem – Jericho road: Luke's creative interpretation of 2 Chronicles 28:15", *HTS* 69 (2013) 1-8.

²⁰ With the emergence of a text about a historical reality its world also arises, from which this reality cannot be directly reached. See: Ricœur, P., "La fonction herméneutique de la distanciation", in: Bovon, F. – Rouiller, G. (eds.), *Exegesis*, Neuchâtel 1975, 201-215; also: same, *Temps et récit: L'ordre philosophique*, Paris 1983.

of a victim²¹ To the immediate listener, at first, a well-known scene of a risky section must have left an impression, which is why the question, in the end, got the following meaning: If you also experienced this, who would have *been your* neighbor? The ability of a universally represented victim to accept everyone's own character stands in support of this, and so does an important detail of his description: as *half-dead*, this actor functions as a space from which the listener experiences the reactions of the passers-by without the possibility of influencing them. He probably does not like that the priest and the Levite pass him by, although he could understand their reasons; awaiting a resolution in the appearance of his compatriots, he is surprised by the appearance of the Samaritan. Even more than that! Being paralyzed by his injuries, he, in direct confrontation with the actions of his enemy, is forced to live through the "hell" of accepting love from an unexpected source²² A Jew would not allow Samaritan to touch him, let alone serve him. No Jew would have endured such actions unless he was completely helpless²³.

2) Some changes in understanding could come from a recipient who read the parable in the gospel as a literary work. Thus, the most basic level of change comes already with the distance to the narrated location: by not necessarily coming from areas where the risks of traveling through the Jewish desert were close, the reader did not even have to feel the closeness of the situation in which a *certain man* found himself. However, the distance to the victim did not progress only by this distancing, but the change in the reader's focus was also influenced by the way of narrating about Jesus Christ. First of all, one of the main features of the Gospel of Luke is characterization of the protagonist through episodes which favor socially marginalized individuals, and by that, probably certain groups within Luke's community²⁴. In company of a prodigal son (15,11-32), poor Lazarus (16,19-31), despised tax collector (18, 9-14) and similar figures, the Samaritan also gets a certain recognition and autonomy. And secondly, the correspondence of the narrative of the parable with the motives of Jesus' path, calvary and

²¹ To this perspective pointed: Funk, R. W., "The Good Samaritan as Metaphor", *Semeia* 2 (1974) 75-84; McDonald, J. I. H., "The View from the Ditch – and Other Angles: Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan" *SJTh* 49 (1996) 21-37.

²² Although the duration of this state is very short at the level of time of narrative – it only lasts a few sentences, but it is intense. In the imagination of a "half-dead listener" comes the projection of the *narrator's time* which extends the action to the Samaritans arrival in the future, with the level of intolerance being so high that the rabbi in the end avoids pronouncing the word *Samaritan*, but states that *the one who did the deed of mercy* has shown himself to be the neighbor (10, 37).

²³ At this, chronologically oldest level, the parable is not only a critique of religious but also ethnic formalism: the revelation in Jesus Christ is obviously a general surprise in structured Jewry. In this respect, the phenomenon of a religious other overcomes the pragmatism of a *surprising example*, and this figure, although fictitious, takes on the *real* dimensions when met with a direct listener. Moreover, it could be said that the reality of the Samaritan comes from the listener's ability to fully identify with the victim and accept the narrated events as his own. At that level, dealing with a *surprising example* has a much more powerful effect, because the listener *can go and do thus* (10, 37) only if he experiences emancipation in a cathartic real encounter with a radically different one.

²⁴ The parable fits into the general desire of Luke's Gospel to involve representatives of marginalized social groups in the answer to the question of the neighbor: the apostates, the non-Jews, and those who, according to the standards of the Judaism, befit a very long way and the overwhelming goal of socialization. The reality of the community in Jesus Christ has been communicated to them, and this mainly with criticism at the expense of religious practice. The history of biblical interpretation shows that such characters are always the paradigms of certain types of faith, and it is not impossible to play such a role in the original Luke's context. In this regard, see the recent study: Autero, E., *Reading the Bible Across Contexts: Luke's Gospel, Socio-Economic Marginality and Latin American Biblical Hermeneutics*, BIS 145, Leiden 2016.

salvation at the height of the Gospel story leads to the understanding of the stranger's figure as an imitation of Jesus. The protagonists of the parables do as Christ would, they are the representatives of the Christian ideal: of this testifies the title of the parable, acquired with time – *about the merciful Samaritan*.²⁵

The observed nuances of the original meaning are certainly not definitive. Motivated by other examples, Jesus' immediate listeners may have been more interested in identifying with a merciful stranger, while the readers of Luke's Gospel, again, were not prevented from developing an interest for the fate of the victim. Moreover, in the light of the traditional reading of the parable, the figure of the Samaritan may always have a role of some current example, in which is his greatest strength. The essence of nuancing actually has a different goal, which is shown here as being twofold. In the initial intentions, the distinction between the oral and the written level points to the phenomenon of the biblical text. That is to say, it points the fact that the text as such, despite the inherent possibilities, always suggests a certain direction of interpretation. In addition, however, the observed nuances indicate another phenomenon, which is the creative ability of the ecclesiastic organism – which produces and unifies New Testament texts – to knowingly change the focus of understanding when switching from the oral to the written level. Precisely this ability to adapt to the needs of a concrete life reality in Luke's time, through losing its form but not the essence, ought to be understood as *traditional* in a real sense. Noting it provides a good basis for showing paradigmatic meaning of a story in the Christian tradition.

3. The meaning in tradition

Without going into sometimes complex definitions of what tradition is, it is sufficient to point out that the literary tradition in Christianity is made up of works of the acclaimed authors (Church-fathers), with whose help the younger generations find the meaning of Biblical and other events. In the process of the genesis of a traditional interpretation of the parable, one method of interpretation deserves attention. It is allegoresis, which starts with Origen and Irenaeus, and is then worked out by Augustine²⁶ and finally accepted among later writers²⁷ According to it, the entire story of Jesus Christ can be

²⁵ At this level, the original element of diversity seems to be losing its primary importance. If the Samaritan is a model of the Christian ethos and an additional and encouraging representation of one group in the context of early Christian relativization of ethnic and religious origin (see Gal 3, 2,3-29), then the reality of God's presence, which comes through the imitation of this (almost Christian) character indirectly contributes to the relativization of its ethnic and religious otherness. Thus, the perception of the parable at the literary level could differ from the one in the orally-auditory: That which the Samaritan does becomes much more important for *identity* than where he is from, to which the final words of Jesus spur: *Go, and do thus* (10,37).

²⁶ Augustine, *Quaestiones Evangeliorum I*, 19. Regarding the extensive bibliography of Augustinian exegesis see: Young, F. M., *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, Cambridge 1997, 265-284; Teske, R., "St. Augustine on the Good Samaritan" y: Van Fleteren, F. – Schaubelt, J. (eds.), *Augustine the Exegete*, New York 2001, 347-367.

²⁷ Dodd, *Parables*, 11-13. Also: Roukema, R., "The Good Samaritan in Ancient Christianity", *VC* 58 (2004) 56-74; Stavrianos, K., "The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Patristic Thought", *GOTR* 57 (1012) 29-48.

recognized in the parable of the Samaritan²⁸ However, does this replacement of the literary and historical frames of the parable with the plane of the Christian *metanarrative* mean injustice to the biblical text and its interpretation? Is not the correct interpretation precisely suggested by the text? Moreover, how is it possible that this meaning becomes more traditional than the original one? Does this interpretation imply relativization of the key motive of religious and national otherness? Ought we to strive to transform the tradition by returning the original meaning to its center through modern exegetical efforts? The answer to the questions posed is not possible without taking into account the context of Augustine's allegory, in which three closely related reasons are observed.

In principle, the matching of advancing distance to the historical frame of the story by adapting biblical texts to the system of Christian doctrine in Augustine's time had to lead the integration of key factors of the parable (journey, affiliation, hostility) into the theological texture of a culture in expansion. Parables are no longer cultural spaces connected by the Gospel and other narratives, but parts of a global cultural edifice in which they become conformed to the dominant manifestation of Christian metanarrative. However, although such an interpretation seemingly relativizes the basic mechanism of the story – with the motive of otherness in the center, this again is not without *traditional* foundations. On the one hand, medieval readers of Luke do as their predecessors did, because the pragmatics of the book and the interpretations inspired by it lead to the recognition of Jesus in the image of the Samaritan. Such a course had to take a special hold in the fourth century in view of the progress of literacy and the availability of the biblical text, especially in the literary corpus – the codex. On the other hand, so that the metaphorical world of the parable would not be mistaken for a language of some kind of cautionary tale (e.g. Aesopian fable) about distant exotic times, but to preserve its original role of the actualization of revelation, the actual lived narrative of salvation was consciously pointed out in its narrative stream. Augustine's allegoresis, thus, does not overlook the main mechanism of the story, but creatively reshapes it according to the demands of his time, in which it strives to show itself essentially (and not literally) traditional: if, therefore, Jesus' actions in rescuing a man are realistic, then it is possible to treat someone else like that, no matter who it is. At the same time, however, one can not dispute the conceptual intimacy of this interpretation with the monolithic structure of Christian culture in the golden age in whose safe centers religious otherness was not a frequent phenomenon.

²⁸ According to this interpretation, the sufferer represents the first man (Adam) or mankind in general, and the cities are halves of the Christian metanarrative – Jerusalem of the heavens, and Jericho of the mortality. The act of rebellion leads to the half-dead state, in which the role of fallen angels, represented by the robbers, is played. Characterized by the priest and the Levite, Judaism does not have the capacity to help the fallen man, while Christ has it. For the healing of the sinful devastation of mankind, he – like the Samaritan – comes among men, overpowering the insurmountable gap between heaven and earth. But, as Christianity is not just a teaching, but rather a series of events based on incarnation, the wounded is put on a scoop and then handed over to the Church (inn). The next day, or in the new epoch (after the resurrection), two coins are given to the people as symbols of the commands of love (of God and neighbor) or as a sign of two-fold life (earthly and heavenly). The appearance of the innkeeper corresponds to the Apostle Paul, and the strangers return in the future – the second coming of Jesus Christ, with which mankind will eventually be redeemed.

4. The meanings in the contemporary context

By locating the Parable in different contexts, a notion of the legacy of its interpretation is acquired²⁹ Through established exegetical forms in the Church culture (sermons, commentaries, etc.), but also works of academic, especially popular genre, layers of meaning continue to find the way through the organism of the Church. Although the proposed work can not give a systematic cross-section of interpretations in Serbian Orthodoxy, it is not difficult to notice that in most cases, as a rule focused on the importance of mercy, the bridge between the parable and the more important challenges of modern society is missing³⁰ The traditionality of interpretation is largely achieved by meeting the basic religious needs through the repetition of the models of the past, which is somewhat understandable in view of the historical circumstances in which (Serbian) Orthodoxy survived during the last centuries³¹

On the other hand, the narrative and title of the parable are not unknown to a secular society. In relation to the form of *the merciful Samaritan*, represented in narrower religious frames, the term (*good Samaritan*) more broadly refers to a merciful man, and under the expression *Samaritanism* – to mercy towards those in need. In the media sphere, there is almost no use of these expressions outside of readiness for mercy at a given moment³² However, although the public sphere is in direct contact with the challenges of modern society (which it does not have to be aware of), the fact is that by using these terms it does not go further than emphasizing the primordial value of one's deed. And this is, in relation to the located opportunities, understandable: the randomly constructed relationship of contemporary culture with the, in the past century, repressively treated domain of religion has prevented a firmer reliance on heritage that still lacks a more determined connection with the current reality.

In the light of what's been said here, the traditional connection of the parable with life challenges would be, above all, respect for *otherness*, but with the aspect of *neighborly hospitality* accompanying it. As it has been shown, Jesus' teaching about the neighbor is given precisely through such circumstances, which are nevertheless not relativized in the domain of interpretation. The Balkan region is not bereft of such circumstances, where the parable, at least from the perspective of Serbian Orthodoxy, could be

²⁹ The proposed paper does not include the domain of visual interpretation of the parable, of which see more in: Hosoda, A., *Darstellungen der Parabel vom barmherzigen Samariter*, Petersberg 2002.

³⁰ Of which see more: Tatalović, V., "Orthodox New Testament Scholarship in Serbia", in: *The Holy Spirit and the Church according to the New Testament. Sixth International East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars, Belgrade, August 28 to 31, 2013*, ed. P. Dragutinovic, K.-W Niebuhr, J. B. Wallace, WUNT I/354, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2015, 39-7Z, esp. 5off.

³¹ This is not always the case – an unsigned essay at the following address (probably the author of the site) gives an exegesis attempt in a contemporary context, although without respecting religious and ethnical otherness as the main mechanisms of the story (visited on 6th of April 2018): <https://upodobljavanje.wordpress.com/2018/04/06/милоствиви-самарјанин/>.

³² See e.g. the news about a passerby being saved from certain death (visited on 6th of April 2018): <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/dobri-samaritanin-policija-pronasla-heroja-koji-je-spasao-mladica-sigurne-smrti/6pw6wdr>. Even the mercy extended to pets is put in the same category (visited on 6th of April 2018): <http://starogradski.com/vesti/dobri-samaritanin-upravom-smislu-reci-ukoliko-ste-izgubili-psa-ovaj-covek-ga-je-pronasao-foto/>

actualized as a story of a merciful Croat, a Bosnian Muslim or another, which is incomparably more important than the reminder of the virtue of mercy³³. Moreover, for such an authentic interpretation, of which the initiative should come from the religious domain, there are not only cultural bases, but sometimes also historical facts, which is why the actualization can lead to a wider cultural reflection³⁴. In this case, the parable almost has that original revelatory power, in which the final command – *Go and do likewise!* (10, 37) – ceases to support the religious moralism and opens towards the well-being of society.

5. Conclusion

The research conducted on the example of one biblical episode, leads one towards a multifaceted conclusion. First, in accordance with the initial demand of the subject, the original structure of Jesus' metaphorical narrative about the Good Samaritan has been recognized. Following that, the things change applying the level of pragmatics: the main point of reader's identification may either be the wounded man or the Samaritan. Furthermore, through this study the specificity of interpretation in tradition is exemplified, as well as the characteristics of parable reception in the contemporary context. In no case is the outcome of the interpretation monolithic. Regarding that, the research points to the inherent ability of the ecclesial organism to produce and conceive a use of the sacred text. This implies a level of self-critique when it comes to interpretation in the contemporary circumstances.

³³ Nenad Ilic, author of a short essay published on the internet address, is thinking in this direction (visited on 6th of April 2018): [https://stanjestvari.com/2014/n/30/1\)aK0H-HeHaA-iiAnh-A06pH-caMapnhaHHH/#m0re-10363](https://stanjestvari.com/2014/n/30/1)aK0H-HeHaA-iiAnh-A06pH-caMapnhaHHH/#m0re-10363).

³⁴ Such is, for example, Serbian melodrama *Circles* (2013), directed by Srđan Golubović. After the January 1993 event in Trebinje – the death of Srdjan Aleksić (1966-1993), a Serb from Herzegovina, in an attempt to defend Alan Glavović from the beatings Serb soldiers were inflicting on the Bosnian Muslim. In the final stages, the film subtly uses images of the Samaritan parable, whose place is taken by Aleksić's father, who rescues and almost adopts an injured young man, the son of one of Srđan's killers, on an inaccessible terrain (road). See more about the film and criticism at the following address (visited on 6th of April 2018): http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1839522/?ref_=fn_al_tt_2.