

## **The Story of the Samaritan and the Innkeeper (Luke 10:30–35): A Study in Character Rehabilitation**

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### **Abstract**

The aphorism ‘context is everything’ has been a guiding principle in many studies of Jesus’ parabolic sayings. This is true, for instance, of studies attempting to recover a parable’s significance in relation to the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, or in relation to its literary placement and function, or in relation to its polyvalent potential. It is also true of this study, which examines Jesus’ narrative of the Samaritan—usually referred to as the ‘parable of the good Samaritan’. It suggests that, when the Samaritan story is placed within a certain contextual configuration, its narrative features align themselves in ways that have either been conspicuously neglected or consciously avoided in the history of the story’s interpretation. Rather than neglecting or avoiding the significance of these narrative features, this essay seeks to exploit their interpretative significance in a fresh manner, entertaining possibilities of meaning beyond the Lukan interpretative framework. In particular, consideration is given to the relationship between the Samaritan and the innkeeper as representing an exceptional partnership that testifies to the reign of God in making each party vulnerable to loss while promoting goodness towards others.

### **Keywords**

parable, Samaritan, innkeeper, characterisation, empire of God

### **1. The Samaritan Story apart from the Neighbour Matrix**

It is commonly held that the Samaritan story has been imbedded within ‘an inconsistent gospel context’,<sup>1</sup> since the story seems at times to work

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 59. The claim is exaggerated when put in terms of ‘inconsistency’.

in directions larger than or other than the significance given to it in its extant literary context. The use of two terms in the story is especially indicative: ‘neighbour’ and ‘Samaritan’.

The term ‘neighbour’ pulls in two different directions in the course of the Lukan narrative. The term is first introduced in 10:27 as part of Jesus’ exhortation to ‘love God and neighbour’, where neighbour is someone other than one’s self. The lawyer asks for a more precise definition of the ‘neighbour’, and the Samaritan story is Jesus’ answer. But in 10:36 Jesus inverts the meaning of ‘neighbour’: ‘Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ Here the word ‘neighbour’ denotes one who takes action to help others. Within the course of ten verses, then, the motif of neighbour has shifted its meaning. As Tolbert puts it: ‘the *introductory* dialogue emphasizes the beaten and robbed traveller: he is the neighbour we are to love; but the *closing* dialogue stresses the Samaritan: he is the neighbour we are to be.’ So she concludes that the Lukan context of this story ‘confuses the attempt to follow the narrative’s logical movement and [to] clarify its elements’.<sup>2</sup>

It is arguable, of course, that the mind-teasing redefinition of ‘neighbour’ that takes place between the story’s opening and closure is part of the story’s discursive power, tantalizing and entrapping the hearer in a maze of new meanings and mind-altering perceptions. But an intraparabolic shift of meaning is not a hallmark of Jesus’ stories. So the semantic shift first evident in 10:36 might be attributable to the way the Samaritan story is being put to use by the evangelist. And this suspicion is bolstered by the fact that the story does not appear in the Markan and Matthean versions of the same incident (Mark 12:28–31; Matt 22:34–40).<sup>3</sup> The influence of one who passed on Jesus’ Samaritan

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<sup>2</sup> Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, p. 60 (emphasis added). See also John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1992), pp. 56–61.

<sup>3</sup> Some have sought to tease out what the story might have meant in a situation precisely as Luke presents it, without extracting it from its Gospel context. See, for instance, Sylvia Keesmaat, ‘Strange Neighbors and Risky Care (Matt 18:21–35; Luke 14:7–14; Luke 10:25–37)’, in Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 263–285 (276–82); Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 99. Although

story might well be evident in the question posed by Jesus in 10:36 ('Which *one* of these...?'), part of the secondary framing that gives the story a practical application.

The view that the framing of the story is a secondary feature is enhanced further by the fact that the figure of the Samaritan fills the narrative with a surfeit of meaning that spills over beyond its function within the Lukan narrative context. Many have made the point already, perhaps most conclusively articulated by John Dominic Crossan:<sup>4</sup>

If Jesus wanted to teach love of neighbour in distress, it would have sufficed to use the standard folkloric threesome and talk of one person, a second person, and a third person [to make his point]. If he wanted to do this and add in a jibe against the clerical circles of Jerusalem, it would have been quite enough to have mentioned priest, Levite, and let the third person be a Jewish lay-person. Most importantly, if he wanted to inculcate love of one's enemies, it would have been radical enough to have a Jewish person stop and assist a wounded Samaritan.

Since Jesus took none of these narrative options, his rhetorical goals lay elsewhere. Again, Crossan makes the point effectively:

[W]hen the story is read as one told by the Jewish Jesus to a Jewish audience,... this original historical context demands that the 'Samaritan' be intended and heard as the socio-religious outcast which he was... The whole thrust of the story demands that one say what cannot be said, what is a contradiction in terms: Good + Samaritan... [In this way], a world is being challenged and we are faced with polar reversal... [The hearers' world is being] turned upside down and radically questioned in its presuppositions. The metaphorical point is that *just so* does the Kingdom of God break abruptly into human consciousness and demand the

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I am sympathetic to the exercise (not least as an exercise of theological interpretation of the *Lukan* narrative), I remain to be convinced that this is the best solution when considering the story in relation to Jesus' ministry.

<sup>4</sup> The following quotation paragraphs are extracted from Crossan, *In Parables*, pp. 64-66. Cf. J. Ian H. McDonald, 'Alien Grace (Luke 10:30-36)', in V. George Shillington (ed.), *Jesus and His Parables: Interpreting the Parables of Jesus Today* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) pp. 35-51 (44-45). Contrast Hultgren, who makes peripheral what is central: 'By having a Samaritan as the one who helps the man in need, Jesus breaks down the boundaries between Jew and Samaritan, to be sure, but most of all he makes the claim that whoever responds to human need is a true child of God and an example of love for the neighbor' (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 98).

overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgments, and established conclusions.

In brief, the Samaritan story performs functions far beyond those given to it by the Lukan frame, to the extent that the literary context in which the parable currently resides appears to be a secondary feature.

It would not be out of character for the Lukan evangelist (or a pre-Lukan handler) to have dealt with the Samaritan story in ways that limit its function to highlight a certain moral tenet. Similar applications are evident elsewhere in the Lukan handling of Jesus' narratives,<sup>5</sup> and in other texts from the early Christian movement.<sup>6</sup> And the truncation of meaning suspected in the extant assemblage of the Samaritan story of Luke 10 is best understood as the consequence of applying Jesus' words far beyond their original context in Galilee and Judaea into contexts of predominately gentile constituents.<sup>7</sup> In those predominately non-Jewish environments into which the Christian movement spread,

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<sup>5</sup> The story of the 'shrewd steward' in Luke 16:1-13 demonstrates, for instance, the manner in which a series of independent interpretations (16:9-13) are appended in secondary fashion to the story itself (16:1-8), each interpretation serving to apply the story in one direction or another. In 16:9 the steward is a positive example modelling generosity; in 16:10-12 he is a negative example modelling the opposite of faithfulness; in 16:13 an independent saying (cf. Matt 6:24) gives the story the effect of denouncing the love of money. If the parable was likely to have originally lauded resoluteness in the face of impending eschatological accountability, it is being used in the Lukan Gospel primarily to exhort audiences to make proper use of their material resources. The two are not unrelated, but the interpretative applications are derivative of and secondary to the broader story that they amplify. Another parable in which the same is suspected is the story of the widow and the judge in Luke 18:1-8. On this see, Stephen Curkpatrick, 'A Parable Frame-Up and Its Audacious Reframing', *NTS* 48 (2003), pp. 22-38. And more broadly, William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> This is clear from Phil. 2:6-11, a pseudo-narrative with a rich theological and soteriological agenda that is put to the particular service of enhancing the corporate life of Philippian Christian communities.

<sup>7</sup> The point is sometimes made that Luke's 'acceptance of many of Jesus' reversal parables as actual examples of good and/or bad ethical action has probably preserved them for us where otherwise they might well have been lost to us forever' (Crossan, *In Parables*, p. 55), since the parable stories would otherwise have been rendered unintelligible in the Graeco-Roman world at large.

the word 'Samaritan' would have lost the socio-religious connotations and pointedness known to Jesus' original hearers, thereby denuding the narrative of its shocking scandal.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the Samaritan story became 'an example of love for the neighbour'<sup>9</sup> in a secondary context in which the fuller poignancy of the story became truncated by means of the story's secondary framing. However the story's history of transmission might be reconstructed, the context in which the Samaritan narrative currently resides has a diminishing effect on the explosive DNA inherent within that narrative. In its extant literary context, the aftermath of the initial parabolic blast, which had the potential to tear apart entrenched worldviews, has been reduced to a spark of moral reasoning. Such is the rhetorical effect that the secondary 'neighbourly' frame of Luke 10:29 and 10:36-37 has on the Samaritan story, moralizing the story which, in its primary form, served a far more pronounced purpose in relation to the foundations of an entrenched epistemic worldview.<sup>10</sup>

This understanding of the Samaritan story is well represented in scholarly discourse. Of particular interest to this essay, however, is whether this truncation in the story's interpretative significance has caused a consequent marginalisation of a neglected figure within the story: that is, the innkeeper. Although the extant framing of the story tends to concentrate attention on the Samaritan (10:36-37), the innkeeper himself might well have played a significant role in the story's

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<sup>8</sup>) It is also possible, however, that Jesus himself told the Samaritan story in the context that Luke recounts, having already delivered the story previously in another context where its full dynamics were in play. In this scenario, Jesus' own reapplication of the parable in a second (and secondary?) theological context has caused the diminution in the meaning of the Samaritan story.

<sup>9</sup>) Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 98.

<sup>10</sup>) Crossan suspects the frame to include only 10:37 (*In Parables*, pp. 56-61). Others think the frame includes 10:36-37; Rudolf Bultmann, *History of Synoptic Tradition* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 178; Jan Lambrecht, *Once More Astonished* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 67-68; R.W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 170-71. I take this view. Both 10:36 and 10:37 play a part in the truncation of the story's point and purpose. Moreover, although not conclusive in itself, the ληστής phrase in 10:36 (τοῦ ἐμπροσθέντος εἰς τοὺς ληστὰς—ἐμπιπῶ and εἰς plus accusative) is constructed differently from the ληστής phrase in 10:30 (λησταῖς περιέπεσεν—περιπιπῶ and dative).

original configuration and interlock of meaning. Perhaps the literary framing of the Samaritan story has itself facilitated an under-appreciation of this character's contribution to the story's narrative dynamics. Before making that case, it will serve our purposes to note three general interpretative tendencies with regard to the innkeeper.

## **2. The Innkeeper Interpreted (or Otherwise)**

In the history of interpretation, three basic attitudes to the innkeeper can be evidenced: (1) he is not a figure of interpretative significance, and can simply be passively overlooked; (2) he is a figure of interpretative significance, but only by means of allegorical interpretation; (3) he is a figure to be actively eliminated altogether.<sup>11</sup> Only one interpreter puts any real interpretative weight on the figure of the innkeeper in a non-allegorical fashion but, as will be shown, he does so in a problematic fashion.

It is not difficult to illustrate the first conviction—that the innkeeper can be overlooked since he is of no interpretative significance. One need only to consult discussion of the story by contemporary interpreters to see that the innkeeper has played virtually no role in the history of interpreting the Samaritan story. His role is usually considered to be wholly parasitic to that of the Samaritan. That is, he appears in the story simply to permit the generosity of the Samaritan to come to fullest light; the Samaritan needs to pay money to someone for the care of the injured man, so the story requires a figure to accept the money. In this way, the innkeeper usually makes no real contribution to the interpretation of the Samaritan narrative.

A second attitude to the innkeeper's interpretative potential is evident in allegorical interpretations of the story, such as the one made famous by Augustine (354–430 CE). In Augustine's handling of the story, almost all of its features are given allegorical significance. Augustine's well-known allegorical twists include the following: the man represents Adam, Jerusalem represents the heavenly city, Jericho

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<sup>11</sup> The difference between the first and the third is that the first involves the 'innocent' neglect of the innkeeper while the third involves the wilful exclusion of him.

represents human mortality, the Samaritan represents Jesus Christ, the inn represents the church, the innkeeper is Paul. In this allegorization, the innkeeper plays an important interpretative role, albeit only through a highly synthetic means.

So, for instance, the inn and innkeeper take on a prominent role in Augustine's *Tractates on John* (Tractate 41 §13, dated at 407 CE):

Let us be carried into the inn to be healed. For it is He who promises salvation, who pitied the man left half-alive on the road by robbers. He poured in oil and wine, He healed the wounds, He put him on his beast, He took him to the inn, He commended him to the innkeeper's care. To what innkeeper? Perhaps to him who said, 'We are ambassadors for Christ.' He [Jesus Christ] gave also two pence to pay for the healing of the wounded man. And perhaps these are the two commandments, on which hang all the law and the prophets. Therefore, brethren, is the Church also, wherein the wounded is healed meanwhile, the traveller's inn.

Elsewhere, Augustine heightens the innkeeper's allegorical role by attributing to the innkeeper the function of caring for the man, in imitation and extension of the Samaritan's initial actions. So in Augustine's work *On the Psalms* (Psalm 126. §11; dated to 397 CE), the innkeeper is shown to be in league with the Samaritan, spending the money of them both to benefit the man (below, italics are added for emphasis).

The Samaritan as He passed by slighted us not: He healed us, He raised us upon His beast, upon His flesh; He led us to the inn, that is, the Church; He entrusted us to the host, that is, to the Apostle; He gave two pence, whereby we might be healed, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. *The Apostle spent more; for, though it was allowed unto all the Apostles to receive, as Christ's soldiers, pay from Christ's subjects, that Apostle, nevertheless, toiled with his own hands, and excused the subjects the maintenance owing to him.*

Here Paul's self-portrait as one who toiled instead of receiving compensation for his efforts as a Christian missionary (i.e., 1 Cor 9; cf. Acts 20:33-35) has been wedded with Augustine's portrait of the innkeeper.

Augustine makes the same emphasis in his *Of the Work of Monks* §6 (dated to 400 CE): 'For it had been said to the innkeeper to whom that

wounded man was brought, “Whatever thou layest out more, at my coming again I will repay thee”. The Apostle Paul, then, did “lay out more”.

In this way, Augustine consistently places interpretative weight on the figure of the innkeeper, and positively so, depicting him as a figure of integrity who plays a key role in the narrative as one who ‘toiled with his own hands’ and who ‘spent’ or ‘laid out more’. But Augustine manages this interpretation of the innkeeper only by way of extreme allegorization that requires the innkeeper to be identified with the apostle Paul, who himself gave of his own resources instead of burdening his own Christian communities. In its details, then, Augustine’s interpretation reveals more about the allegorizer and his interpretative context than it does about the Lukan story (although we will have occasion to qualify this point below).<sup>12</sup>

A different interpretative tendency is represented by John Chrysostom (347–407 CE). Since Chrysostom opposed sustained modes of allegorization, his interpretative strategy in relation to the Samaritan story ran in different directions to that of Augustine. Chrysostom’s approach is marked out not by a general neglect of the innkeeper, nor by an allegorization of his significance, but by an outright elimination of the innkeeper from the story. For Chrysostom, the innkeeper’s place within the story is altogether expunged. In complete contrast to Augustine a decade or so later, Chrysostom gives evidence of distrusting the innkeeper to be a responsible party involved in restoring the man to health. So in his retelling of the story (*Homilies on Matthew* 15, §14, dated c. 390 CE), Chrysostom replaces the innkeeper with a physician:

The Samaritan, seeing a wounded man, unknown, and not at all appertaining to him, both stayed and set him on a beast, and brought him home to the inn, and hired a physician, and gave some money, and promised more.

Chrysostom does not just make the innkeeper peripheral to the story’s meaning, as in most non-allegorical interpretations; he eliminates the

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<sup>12</sup> The same allegorizing weight was placed on the figure of the innkeeper by Origen (185–254 C.E.) in his *Homilies in Luke* 34, with the innkeeper representing not Paul exclusively but the apostles collectively.



innkeeper altogether, replacing him with a trustworthy physician who becomes employed by the Samaritan.<sup>13</sup>

It is not obvious why Chrysostom has done this. It is difficult to see how it might relate to his aversion to allegorical interpretations like those of Augustine and, before him, Origen.<sup>14</sup> It is more likely that his failure to mention the innkeeper is explained by a cultural mistrust of innkeepers as despicable characters. As John Donahoe notes, the keeping of inns was 'a profession that had a bad reputation in antiquity for dishonesty and violence'.<sup>15</sup>

The evidence illustrating common attitudes to innkeepers in the ancient world is not abundant,<sup>16</sup> but neither is it negligible. Moreover, it is virtually unswerving in depicting innkeepers as widely known to be morally dubious and not to be trusted. In his *Laws* 918-19, for instance, Plato sets up a discussion between two men, the more learned of whom instructs the other that only a small part of humanity is able to control itself and to be happy with moderation. This is in complete contrast to the majority of humanity, of whom it is said: 'their desires are unbounded, and when they might gain in moderation, they prefer gains without limit; wherefore all that relates to retail trade, and merchandise, and the keeping of taverns, is denounced and numbered

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<sup>13</sup> There is no basis for imagining that the physician was part of the innkeeper's establishment. Inns were not known for providing physicians among their staff. They are absent from Lionel Casson's exhaustive study of 'inns and restaurants' in the ancient world (chapter 12 of his *Travel in the Ancient World* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974], pp. 197-218).

<sup>14</sup> So, Chrysostom writes (*The Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 64.3): 'The saying is a parable, wherefore neither is it right to inquire curiously into all things in parables word by word, but when we have learnt the object for which it was composed, to reap this, and not to busy one's self about anything further.' The point was forcefully repeated by Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2 vols. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1899).

<sup>15</sup> John R. Donahoe, S.J. *The Gospel in Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> In reconstructing the 'cultural information' necessary for interpreting this story, K. Snodgrass is able to table data on Jewish-Samaritan relations for almost two full pages, but deals with the issue of 'inns' in three short sentences, with no discussion of innkeepers themselves; see his *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2008), pp. 345-47.

among dishonourable things'. The point is made that these professions in and of themselves are not dishonourable; only that those professions are not populated by honourable people. So he gives an example of someone whose house of resting (not unlike an inn) is overtaken by concerns for profit driven by the retail trade, and who thereby reveals a character engaged in 'foul evils' perpetrated against 'strangers who are in need'.<sup>17</sup> He writes:

But now that a man goes to desert places and builds houses which can only be reached by long journeys, for the sake of retail trade, and receives strangers who are in need at the welcome resting-place, and gives them peace and calm when they are tossed by the storm, or cool shade in the heat; and then instead of behaving to them as friends, and showing the duties of hospitality to his guests, treats them as enemies and captives who are at his mercy, and will not release them until they have paid the most unjust, abominable, and extortionate ransom—these are the sort of practices, and foul evils they are, which cast a reproach upon the succour of adversity.

In this discourse, legislation is shown to be the only way to protect a population against such devious characters as innkeepers, with their 'habits of unbridled shamelessness and meanness'.

If Plato's popular *Laws* characterises innkeepers as willing to entertain strategies for self-advancement at the expense of their clientele, the same impression is given by Josephus. In *Antiquities* 3.276, Josephus says that priests are prescribed a double degree of purity and for that reason are not to marry harlots, slaves, captives or anyone who earned their living by the cheating trades or by keeping inns (τὰς ἐκ καπηλείας καὶ τοῦ πανδοκεῖν πεπορισμένους τὸν βίον).<sup>18</sup> And so too in the Mishnah (Abodah Zarah 2:1), we read:

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<sup>17</sup> It is the case that Plato's text pertains to those who have built such houses of false hospitality in far away places, but that might simply be a particular instance of a more general profession noted earlier in the discussion, in which the 'keeping of taverns' is listed as being a profession populated by men of ignoble character. On charges against innkeepers for watering down their wine and feeding their customers with human instead of animal flesh, see Casson, *Travel*, pp. 214–15.

<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Josephus describes Rahab as an innkeeper instead of a harlot (*Antiq* 5.5). So too Targum Jonathan regularly translates 'prostitute' as a 'woman who keeps an inn' (cf. Josh 2:1; Judg 16:1; 1 Kings 3:16). Similarly, in *Testament of Judah* 12:1, Tamar sits

Cattle may not be left in the inns of the gentiles since they are suspected of bestiality; nor may a woman remain alone with them since they are suspected of lewdness; nor may a man remain alone with them since they are suspected of shedding blood.

The view that innkeepers will stoop to immoral levels for personal satisfaction and gain, at the expense of their clientele, is embedded in the common criticism that innkeepers water down the wine that they serve their guests, while saving the best wine for themselves. One irate customer at an inn in Pompeii put his frustrations into what Lionel Casson calls ‘quite respectable verse’, as follows:

May you soon, swindling innkeeper,  
 Feel the anger divine,  
 You who sell people water  
 And yourself drink pure wine.<sup>19</sup>

But as with wine, so too with meat. So, for instance, the second-century physician Galen (129–99 CE) says that he ‘knows of many innkeepers... who have been caught selling human flesh as pork’.<sup>20</sup> Innkeepers of the ancient world were not the respectable proprietors of modern day hotel chains (one hopes); instead, they were distrusted as morally dubious figures who were thought to take advantage of their clientele in any way possible in order to advance their own prospects.

It is likely that this general distrust of innkeepers has motivated Chrysostom to eliminate the presence of the innkeeper from his retelling of the story. For Chrysostom, replacing the immoral innkeeper with a respectable doctor preserves Jesus’ story from unnecessary oddity. That is, the substitution keeps the focus on the singular Samaritan who is

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in the gate ‘of the inn’ (according to one manuscript). The connection between Rahab and inns is likely explained by the fact that inns could be the place where prostitution was practiced. In the light of all this, it is possible to postulate a difference between a *πανδοχεῖον* or inn on the one hand, as in Luke 10:34, and a *κατάλυμα* or guest room, as in Luke 2:7, with Mary and Joseph inhabiting the stable of a guest house but not an inn. The idea was helpfully made to me by Csilla Szechy of Durham University.

<sup>19</sup> Cited by Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, p. 214, with other examples on p. 215.

<sup>20</sup> Cited by Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, p. 215.

not only good but also exercises *wisdom* by enlisting a doctor with the work of caring for the half-dead man, rather than someone like a dubious innkeeper.

This negative view of innkeepers has currency in modern parable studies too. Most notably, Donahue builds his interpretation of the story explicitly on this view about the ignoble reputation of innkeepers in the ancient world in order to heighten his positive portrait of the Samaritan. So he writes:

According to the law of the time, a person with an unpaid debt could be enslaved until the debt was paid (cf. Matt. 18:23–35). Since the injured man was robbed and stripped—deprived of all resources—[and if his debts were left unpaid] he could have been at the mercy of the innkeeper, a profession that had a bad reputation in antiquity for dishonesty and violence.<sup>21</sup>

Because of this, Donahue propounds that the Samaritan enters into a contract with the innkeeper in 10:35, and in this goes beyond even his initial act of restoring the ‘half-dead’ man to life in 10:33–34. The Samaritan does not just prevent the man’s death; he goes further, forging a second phase of care by protecting the man from the ravages of disreputable people, such as innkeepers, who could easily have taken advantage of the man during his recovery. Interpreting the Samaritan’s actions of 10:35 against the backdrop of the supposed immoral character of innkeepers, Donahue is able to incorporate the innkeeper into his interpretation more than most interpreters do, using him as a foil to highlight the goodness of the main character, the Samaritan.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, then, apart from allegorical treatments and Donahue’s use of the innkeeper as a foil to the goodness of the Samaritan, the innkeeper generally does not factor into the interpretation of the Samaritan story. Chrysostom saw fit to remove him from the story

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<sup>21</sup>) Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, p. 133.

<sup>22</sup>) Similarly David McCracken writes: ‘The Samaritan lives in a world that includes robbers, victims, uncompassionate priests and Levites, and *untrustworthy innkeepers* [emphasis added], and he negotiates his world successfully, but not because he is part of the normal, established world. Instead, he lives because he radically enacts the love of God and the love of neighbor’ (*The Scandal of the Gospels: Jesus, Story, and Offense* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], p. 138).

altogether. Like Chrysostom, more recent interpreters hold the view (explicit or implicit) that the innkeeper, unlike the Samaritan, has no redeeming qualities of his own on which to build any interpretative significance (except perhaps as a foil). Whether through neglect or suspicion, the innkeeper is usually pushed out of the frame of positive interpretative significance.

While such treatments of the innkeeper cohere well with the extant interpretative frame of Luke 10:36–37, with its focus on a *single* figure of ‘neighbourliness’ (i.e., ‘Which *one* of these...?’), an alternative interpretation of the innkeeper suggests itself once the interpretative frame of Luke 10:36–37 is removed. Instead of seeing the innkeeper as irrelevant to the narrative’s meaning or, at best, as a foil to the ‘good’ Samaritan, the proposal here is that the innkeeper may, in fact, play a positive role alongside the ‘good’ Samaritan.

### 3. Hearing the Whole Story

In her important study of principles for the interpretation of parables, Mary Ann Tolbert argues that parable interpretation has validity when it coincides with three interpretative controls, the first and most important of which is that the integrity of the story’s structure should be preserved in the interpretation. So she writes: ‘[T]he interpretation must “fit” the parable story... [and] must deal with the entire configuration of the story and not just one part of it... [A]ny critical understanding of the text must deal with the totality of the parable’.<sup>23</sup>

This control on parable interpretation leads Tolbert to critique popular interpretations of the parable of the Prodigal Son ‘that discuss only the actions of the prodigal and omit the episode concerning the elder son’; she argues that such readings are ‘inappropriate readings of that parable’.<sup>24</sup> By not attending to the configuration of the whole of the prodigal story, such interpretations are deficient.

Much the same can be said for typical interpretations of the so-called ‘parable of the good Samaritan’. As discussed above, interpretations of this much-loved story uniformly downplay one figure in the narrative’s

<sup>23</sup> Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, pp. 71 and 96.

<sup>24</sup> Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, p. 96.

configuration: the innkeeper of 10:35. Except for the readings of allegorists and of atypical interpreters like Donahue, the Samaritan story could just as well have ended without any mention of the innkeeper. In fact, most interpretations would have been wholly unaffected if the story had ended simply with reference to the Samaritan's compassion for the man, as evident in his concrete actions: 'He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him'. For most commentators, the omission of the account in 10:35 would be of little interpretative consequence. The Samaritan would still be depicted as one willing to compromise his personal agenda in order to help others, unlike the priest and Levite who are thought to pass by on the other side in order to avoid compromising something of themselves. In fact, it might even be argued that the omission of the final verse (10:35) would assist most interpretations of the Samaritan story. To have ended the story at 10:34, with the Samaritan at the inn caring for the man, would have left the time-frame for the Samaritan's involvement indefinite; he might be imagined as having stayed at the inn to care for the man (and to protect him from the ravenous innkeeper?) for a period of a week or two, instead of just a single night.

But the story does not end at 10:34. Instead, in 10:35 the focus of attention is broadened out to include the innkeeper, whose efforts are to be imagined even if they fall beyond the articulated storyline.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the first of Tolbert's interpretative controls would suggest that the details of 10:35 expect substantial interpretative consideration.

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<sup>25</sup>) Crossan misses the point when he, constrained by the interpretative tradition that goes back to the secondary frame of Luke 10:36, credits the whole of 10:33–35 as being about the Samaritan's reputation: '[f]ar more space...is devoted to this description [i.e., of the Samaritan] than to any of the other elements of the story. Why? When the hearer is confronted with the rhetorical question in 10:36 he might negate the entire process by simply denying that *any* Samaritan would so act. So, before the question can be put, the hearer must see, feel, and hear the goodness of the Samaritan for himself. The function of 10:34–35 and its detailed description is so to involve the hearer in the activity that the objection is stifled at birth' (*In Parables*, p. 62). In fact, almost half of the words of 10:33–35 pertain to the Samaritan in league with the innkeeper, suggesting that whatever merits Crossan's point has would need to be rearticulated in relation to that association.

And on this score, Donahue operates along the right lines since, as we have seen, he places significant weight on the action of 10:35: ‘The final action of the Samaritan when he brings the injured man to the inn is more than a narrative epilogue or an added indication of the excess of charity in a person we have come to admire’.<sup>26</sup> In this, Tolbert’s first interpretative control is rightly being observed.

To his credit, Donahue goes further than most in seeking to account for the whole story, offering an explanation of the relational dynamics between the Samaritan and the innkeeper of 10:35. But despite the promise of his interpretation, it is not clear that Donahue offers the most satisfactory explanation of 10:35. Several facets of that verse suggest that the innkeeper is not one that the injured man needs to be protected from, as Donahue postulates; instead, he plays the far more positive role of the Samaritan’s willing accomplice, collaborating with the Samaritan in a mutual effort (initiated by the Samaritan) to restore the health of the injured man.

To demonstrate the point, more needs first to be said about the Samaritan himself, not least in relation to the motif of trust that lies implicit within 10:35, for in many ways this is a story about trust. The Samaritan simply has to trust that, during his absence, his two denarii will be put to good use to benefit the ill man, rather than being squandered in some fashion by the innkeeper. We can easily imagine the innkeeper spending the two denarii for his own personal gain in the Samaritan’s absence and then saying to the Samaritan upon his return, ‘I spent the two denarii caring for the man, but he simply did not recover. I then paid for his body to be buried, so I’ll need to be reimbursed for that now, please’. According to the data assembled above, this is precisely the sort of underhanded scheming expected of innkeepers in antiquity. But the Samaritan’s actions are not rooted in common stereotypes about the moral deficiencies of innkeepers. Instead, he acted on the basis of blind trust in the general goodness of this single man who operated an inn. Caricatures ingrained within cultural codes can often spawn distrust, fear or hatred—any and all of which can reduce one’s perceptions of the range of options available for action. But in this situation, the Samaritan did not permit generalized stereotypes to

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<sup>26</sup> Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, p. 133.

be the basis and context for his own engagement with others. He acted without such restraints. And consequently, he acted on the basis of an uncommon trust.

The benefit of interpreting the parable in this way is, crucially, that it keeps the characterization of the Samaritan stable throughout the whole of the narrative, in his interactions with both the injured man and the innkeeper. The Samaritan enters the story in 10:33-34, where he is shown to act simply on the basis of need, without regard for any other factor. The very fact that the Samaritan stopped to help a wounded man in the first place would itself have been remarkable to the first audiences, who would have considered the Samaritan to be potentially exposing himself to the dreaded evil eye, often thought to be wielded by those in situations like the one afflicting the wounded man, whose health was in peril and who had no resources to fortify his health other than to steal it from others through suprahuman assistance.<sup>27</sup> In the ancient world (as in many societies today), people whose health had been compromised were prime suspects of being evil eye practitioners. Tapping into the powers of suprahuman daimons or deities, one whose health had been jeopardized through infirmity or misfortune could attempt to acquire the health of another and secure it as his own, creating a deficit in the health of the targeted victim. None were more suspect of being wielders of the evil eye than strangers whose health had been compromised, precisely what the suffering man along the roadside would have been to the Samaritan.<sup>28</sup> Cultural codes would have dictated that the Samaritan should do one of several things to protect himself from the prospect of being injured by the evil eye, including various gestures of protection, spitting to keep the injury at bay, or simply avoiding the half-dead man by keeping his distance. This last strategy

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<sup>27</sup> On the evil eye phenomenon in the ancient world (and its relevance to Paul's letter to the Galatians), see Bruce W. Longenecker, "Until Christ is Formed in You": Suprahuman Forces and Moral Character in Galatians', *CBQ* 61 (1999), pp. 92-108.

<sup>28</sup> Note, there is no indication in the story that the half-dead man was unconscious (and therefore unable to wield the evil eye). In fact, the Samaritan's efforts described in Luke 10:34a are more easily imagined in relation to one who was conscious rather than unconscious. And even if he was unconscious, the Samaritan would have known that at any moment the half-dead man could have regained consciousness, at which point the dangers of being 'bewitched' by an evil-eye wielder would have been in full play.



is precisely what the priest and the Levite are said to do, in complete conformity with the cultural codes of evil-eye avoidance.<sup>29</sup>

But the Samaritan did not act out of fear of the evil eye; instead, he exposed himself to danger (or so the first hearers would have imagined) simply because he saw need, without other factors constraining his perception. He acted in a fashion that was out of character to the codes of his culture—testifying to another ‘code of culture’ altogether.<sup>30</sup> And in caring for the injured man in need along the roadside, he also acted without regard to common sense prescriptions in a second way, if he knew the man to be a Jew (as many think is implied in the parable)—this, for the simple reason that ‘Jews have no [positive] dealings with Samaritans’ (John 4:9), and vice versa.<sup>31</sup>

But Donahue would have us believe that the Samaritan reverts to culturally expected form in 10:35, unlike Jesus’ characterization of the Samaritan in 10:33–34. In 10:33–34 we see Jesus (in effect) lauding a Samaritan who sheds stereotypes with regard to Jews and/or potential wielders of the evil eye, but in 10:35 the Samaritan maintains the cultural stereotype with regard to innkeepers—or so Donahue would have us believe. For him, the innkeeper stereotype guides the Samaritan’s course in 10:35, since the Samaritan knows (by virtue of a widespread

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<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the attempt to analyse the (in)action of the priest and the Levite in terms of corpse defilement is probably misguided; after all, the half-dead man is not dead, only wounded and suffering (and likely to have been conscious). Cf. L. Shottroff, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. L.M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 135. See also M. Gourges, ‘The Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan Revisited: A Critical Note on Luke 10:31–35’ (*JBL* 117 [1998], 709–13), where the corpse-defilement interpretation is seen as unsatisfying. The (in)action of the priest and the Levite is wholly explicable, however, against the backdrop of the prospect of evil-eye injury.

<sup>30</sup> In this way, there are notable parallels between the Samaritan of this story and the Galatians described in Gal 4:12–15. When Paul arrived in Galatia, a stranger and one whose health had been compromised, his condition did not pose a ‘threat’ to them; they did not scorn him or ‘spit’ to protect themselves from the evil eye; instead of ‘doing him wrong’, they ‘welcomed him’ to such an extent that they would even have ‘plucked out [their] eyes’ if they could have (see Longenecker, ‘Until Christ is Formed in You’). Their behaviour much resembles that of the Samaritan of this story.

<sup>31</sup> So Kenneth E. Bailey writes: ‘[A] Jewish audience would naturally assume that the traveler is a Jew’ (*Through Peasant Eyes* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], p. 42); cf. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, p. 355. On the tense relations between ancient Jews and Samaritans, see Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, pp. 345–46.

stereotype) that the innkeeper is not to be trusted. In effect, Donahue has the Samaritan step out of the characterisation that Jesus has established for him throughout 10:33-34. This is unnecessary. Instead, the Samaritan's character is to be seen as consistent throughout the story. Jesus' story heralds one who did not allow the terms of social engagement to be dictated by stereotypes of any kind. The point is made in relation to the Samaritan of Luke 10 not only in 10:33-34, where he takes the risk of engaging with the half-dead (and possibly Jewish) man, but also in 10:35, where he takes the risk of engaging with the normally-suspect innkeeper. Donahue's interpretation is feasible only if we imagine Jesus to have incorporated inconsistent characterisation within the Samaritan parable. If, however, it is more likely that Jesus' characterisation of the Samaritan was stable throughout the parable, then Donahue's depiction of the innkeeper's function within the parable is unconvincing. As such, there is reason to suspect that characterising the innkeeper as untrustworthy and despicable runs precisely contrary to the story's intended purposes. Arguably, like the Samaritan, the innkeeper himself is to play a positive role within the story—unexpectedly, and perhaps precisely in response to the Samaritan's own unexpected actions toward him.

In this regard, it first needs to be noted that, although the telling of the story ends at 10:35, the story itself carries on past that point. The story includes a narrative arc that overshoots 10:35. The initiatives of the Samaritan that the story praises are not exhausted by the list of his actions in 10:33-35; like the Markan account of the resurrection (Mark 16:1-8), more of the story falls beyond the discursive termination point. And beyond that termination point stands the figure of the innkeeper. This is the insight on which Donahue built his interpretation when he postulated that the Samaritan's denarii were given to keep at bay a despicable innkeeper who stood front-and-centre within the extended narrative that lies beyond the discursive termination point in 10:35.<sup>32</sup> But if Donahue is right to interpret the relationship between the Samaritan and the innkeeper in light of the narrative that implicitly arises past 10:35, we have seen reason to think that his understanding

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<sup>32</sup>) The same insight motivated Chrysostom's interpretation, and provided the scaffolding for Augustine's allegorisation.

of those relational dynamics are nonetheless skewed. Instead of the Samaritan expecting the innkeeper to operate in despicable ways, as Donahue thinks, other expectations should be attributed to the Samaritan whose actions, as shown in 10:33-34, are not constrained by stereotypical attitudes and expectations.

In this way, it needs to be noted that, as the narrative implies, the innkeeper seems simply to have accepted the responsibility of caring for the ailing man. While we are not accustomed to imagining the point, the story's first hearers would have assumed that the innkeeper had every right to refuse the Samaritan's proposal. But the story implies that he did not refuse the proposal, and so the wounded man continued to recover in the inn even after the Samaritan had left, by agreement with the innkeeper himself.

It might be argued, of course, that the innkeeper accepted the proposal because there was money in it for him, but this is nowhere suggested within the parable. It is true, of course, that the Samaritan gives the innkeeper two denarii to cover expenses, but this is more of a deposit to cover the initial expenses than a slush fund that will benefit the innkeeper. The Samaritan expects that, during his absence, costs beyond two denarii will be paid by the innkeeper, as suggested by his phrase to the innkeeper 'whatever more you spend' (τὸ τι ἂν προσδαπανήσῃς, 10:35).

When the situation is unpacked further, it is evident that, despite the Samaritan's initial deposit, the arrangement between him and the innkeeper is not ultimately founded on a financial contract but on a mutuality of trust. If the Samaritan has to trust the innkeeper's integrity in the use of the denarii that had been entrusted to him, so too the innkeeper has to trust that the Samaritan's integrity with regard to his assertion that he would return to compensate the innkeeper for the expenses that are not covered by the initial deposit of two denarii. Against all odds, and without all prudence, the trust exhibited by the innkeeper is simply extravagant, having no basis in common sense, just like the Samaritan's own trust in him.

But not enough has yet been said to demonstrate the innkeeper's positive place in the story. He himself, like the Samaritan of 10:33-34, is depicted as taking responsibility for the man in need. This would have involved him in a series of initiatives that he would not normally

have been responsible for. For instance, one can imagine the requirement of dealing with the half-dead man at times when he needed to defecate. Then there would have been the need to remove the sullied bandages, refresh the dressings on the man's wounds, and wrap them with clean bandages. These particular duties, and others like them, remain unmentioned within the story, but are clearly not unimagined. They are precisely the functions that Chrysostom imagines when he replaces the innkeeper with the paid physician (as noted above). Whereas *the Samaritan* seems to have undertaken those duties during the time that *he* resided at the inn (as in 10:34), they are now handed over not to a paid physician, but to the innkeeper (in 10:35), who evidently accepts them as his own responsibilities upon the Samaritan's departure.<sup>33</sup>

This is not, then, a despicable character intent on swooping in on vulnerable prey. Neither is he in the employ of the Samaritan as one who receives a beyond-expenses payment for carrying out of his responsibilities. Instead, the arrangement between the Samaritan and the innkeeper involves a conjoining of different types of care for the injured man. The Samaritan expects to supply the financial resources for the man's care but not the non-financial resources required to restore him to health—the simple tasks of care. Those responsibilities are to be transferred to the innkeeper while the Samaritan is away. Accordingly, the Samaritan and the innkeeper are depicted as entering into a pact to pool their respective resources towards the single goal of effecting the good to benefit another.

It is notable that the pact between the two characters of 10:35 will expose the innkeeper to financial vulnerability that far exceeds the Samaritan's promise to 'repay you whatever more you spend when I come back'. Although the Samaritan genuinely expects to return and reimburse the innkeeper for his additional expenses, there is no guarantee that the Samaritan ever will return. He might encounter any number of set-backs affecting his ability to honour his promise. For instance, he could become laid low by a long-term illness, or by a

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<sup>33</sup>) This point is signalled when the phrase ἐπεμελήθη αὐτοῦ ('he took care of him') describes the Samaritan in 10:34 and the phrase ἐπιμελήθη αὐτοῦ ('take care of him') is applied to the innkeeper in 10:35.

financial calamity that restricts his ability to travel, or simply by death. Perhaps the Samaritan himself will meet his end at the hand of robbers along the way. The innkeeper would be aware of these risks. And the story implies that he agreed to an arrangement in which further financial costs are envisaged without the sure guarantee of reimbursement.

Further still, it is important to notice that the innkeeper simply has nothing to gain from this arrangement. As noted already, the injured man (who was probably unknown to those around him and who had been laid low by misfortune) would have been a prime suspect as a wielder of the evil eye, against which all manner of precautions were prescribed—the most obvious being avoidance. Just as the Samaritan exposed himself to the threat of evil-eye dangers in 10:33-34, so too does the innkeeper in 10:35 and beyond the time frame of that verse.

But not only has the innkeeper put himself at risk (or so the first hearers would have understood), he has also jeopardized his own business, since he could not expect the clientele of his inn to act in the same surprising fashion as he acts. Having a 'half-dead' man inhabiting his inn for a week or two would certainly not enhance the reputation of his inn. Upon hearing that the inn was populated by such a person, travellers along this major thoroughfare could easily have chosen to avoid this inn and to move on to the next one (since we must assume that a main through-road like this one had more than one inn supplying the needs of its numerous travellers).<sup>34</sup> Consequently, like the Samaritan himself, who incurs financial loss through his care of the man, the innkeeper also must expect to incur a kind of loss of his own, not through financial support of the wounded man (that is the task of the Samaritan) but by the (short-term) loss of reputation for his inn and the ensuing decrease in the innkeeper's income stream.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Casson (*Travel*, p. 200): 'Anyone making his way along major routes...had no problem [finding accommodation at an inn]: he could choose where to stop, [and] in places even have a choice of inns'. Note also that the audience is not told which way the Samaritan was travelling. The man was going to Jericho, and so too was the priest, and probably the Levite too. But the direction of the Samaritan's travels is not noted. The inn need not necessarily be thought of as being at the bottom of the Jerusalem-Jericho road; it could just as easily have been at the top, nearing Bethany. Interestingly, the next episode in Luke (10:38-41) seems to occur in Bethany.

In all these ways, then, the story of Luke 10:30–35 is configured in such a way as to imply a positive role for the innkeeper. He is an active participant in restoring the half-dead man to health, taking certain initiatives without remuneration and risking his own well-being. Accordingly, his significance in the Samaritan story has for too long been overlooked—probably due to the secondary framing of story's extant literary context.<sup>35</sup> When the Samaritan story is removed from that secondary frame, far from being an immoral predator, the innkeeper is one who notably steps out of caricature, just as the Samaritan steps out of caricature throughout 10:33–35. As one with 'a bad reputation...for dishonesty and violence' (so Donahue), the innkeeper of the Samaritan story shows himself to be 'good', like the 'good Samaritan' himself.

In this way, Crossan's estimate of the parable needs to be reworked. It is not just the unprecedented combination and contradiction of 'good + Samaritan' that gives the story its 'whole thrust', but that combination and contradiction in relation also to another: 'good + innkeeper'. In this weighty story of Jesus, simplistic worldviews are being exploded in the characterisation of not just one but two leading figures at the end of the Samaritan story.

In effect, we have seen reason to think that Augustine's allegorical interpretation of the story was not all that far off-base in its appreciation of the full range of relational dynamics within 10:35. Of course, we might well shy away from his full-bodied allegorical treatment of the passage when considering the story's purpose in Jesus' own ministry; Augustine's allegory was intended only to bolster an appreciation of

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<sup>35</sup> Towards the end of his discussion of the Samaritan story, Donahue considers whether any other creative readings can be derived in polyvalent fashion, going beyond the story's extant literary context. So he writes: 'Though the action of the Samaritan is at the center of the parable, as polyvalent, it invites us to identify with the other characters' (*The Gospel in Parable*, p. 133). One might imagine that Donahue would include in his exploration of polyvalence a consideration of the story in relation to the innkeeper's point of view. Instead, Donahue explores the story's polyvalence in relation to 'the victim in the ditch' (133–34). At no point is the innkeeper considered, perhaps another indication of the way in which, even when polyvalence is to the fore, foremost parable scholars still demonstrate themselves to be under the influence of the non-polyvalent literary frame.

certain tenets of Christian theology in his own day. But nonetheless, Augustine's allegorical interests freed him from the constraints of the story's extant literary context, a context that envelops the story in what appears to be a secondary frame of reference. Exploring the story's meaning in ways unrestricted by the otherwise controlling question of 10:36 ('Which *one* of these...?'), Augustine found space to give full interpretative significance to the innkeeper as a major player in the story's plot and characterisation. Although these interpretative features were part and parcel of Augustine's allegorical framework that served the purposes of Christian theology, they are features easily transferable into a historical-critical framework that serve the purposes of constructing a plausible interpretation of the story's primary meaning in relation to Jesus' ministry.

#### 4. A Narrative of the Reign of God

In this essay I have attempted to apply certain historical data and (like all good interpreters of Jesus' stories) an informed imagination to the Samaritan story in order to amplify what were likely to be the narrative's inherent dynamics for its original hearers, especially when that narrative is extracted from its extant literary frame. In the process, it has been found that the innkeeper is one deserving of interpretative rehabilitation, being one who, like the Samaritan, serves a positive role within the story.

Whereas the story of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1–12 *et par.*) depicts an association of characters whose efforts result in an *evil* outcome, the story of Luke 10:30–35 depicts an association of characters whose efforts result in a *positive* outcome. Rather than having an individualistic focus on a single 'good' figure, the Samaritan story depicts an uncommon *association* of figures, a surprising collective, an unprecedented model of mutual trust and consequent service. In an exceptional partnership, the Samaritan and the innkeeper enter into a relationship involving personal vulnerability and loss on the one hand and mutual trust and cooperation on the other. It is from this risky, fragile and exceptional association that goodness flows to the benefit of the disadvantaged.

When the Samaritan story is read in this light, it takes on a character beyond the one prioritised in its extant literary context regarding the definition of ‘neighbour’. Instead, it is more evidently a story that sketches something of the empire or reign of God.<sup>36</sup> Jesus’ stories of God’s reign engineer a glimpse of an alternative world that stands in contrast to and in judgment over the realities of the world of the hearer.<sup>37</sup> When the story is placed directly in relation to the theme of the reign of God that pervaded Jesus’ words and actions, it has pertinence to Jesus’ portraiture of the reign of God precisely in overturning an entrenched worldview and replacing it with another, primarily through the figure of the Samaritan, but also by means of the innkeeper and the association that transpires between them.

Of these two figures Jesus might have said, ‘the reign of God is in the midst of them’ (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς αὐτῶν ἐστίν, cf. Luke 17:20–21). Or, ‘in such a fashion grows the mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’ In this imagery drawn from Mark 4:30–32, Jesus seems to envisage the reign of God as ‘infectious’, self-augmenting, not unlike the way that the story of Luke 10:30–35 demonstrates a generosity of spirit spilling over from one to another of its characters, in unexpected and unprecedented configurations. Those configurations that might even engulf people who traditionally have been seen as ‘enemies’ (cf. Jesus’ command to ‘love your enemies’; Matt 5:44), or at least, those who have been denounced on the basis of long-established stereotypes.

This laudable relationship between two questionable and dubious characters is offset by the story’s depiction of two mainstream authority figures. The priest and the Levite of the story would no doubt have fashioned themselves as honourable pillars of Temple-based Jewish society (whether or not the audience would have agreed); by contrast, the

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<sup>36</sup> This is the basis on which Jeremias frequently operated. Parables of the kingdom are not always headed as such in their literary context, as in the case of the narrative of the sower (Mark 4:3–8 and parallels).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. V. George Shillington, ‘Engaging with the Parables’, in *Jesus and His Parables*, pp. 1–20 (14–19).



other two active characters in the narrative's extended plotline would have been recognized as including one despicable outsider (i.e., the Samaritan) and one morally dubious character (i.e., the innkeeper). The contrast in the two pairings is clear. In Jesus' Samaritan story, moments of empire-otherness transpire even (and perhaps especially) in coalitions between despised, suspect figures that fall outside the expected channels of honour. In this, there would have been real offence or veritable hope, as the foundations of a prominent second-temple worldview (perhaps itself stereotyped) were being challenged, deconstructed, and refashioned.<sup>38</sup>

In its essence, and when extracted from its secondary frame, the Samaritan story works predominantly in relation to the axis of mutual trust between the two characters in 10:35. That axis of trust is part of the shock of the unexpected within the story. Relationships of trust like this are risky and ill-advised, according to the standard cultural codes of self-preservation. It is precisely for this reason that such exceptional partnerships testify to the reign of God. In the empires of the world, such relationships are unprecedented. In the empire of God, where grace and mercy overflow in abundance, such exceptional partnerships are (to be) the norm. Seen in this light, the story itself mirrors much of what other canonical passages suggest about Jesus' own way of life in relation to tax-collectors, sinners, gluttons, drunkards, harlot women, women in general, the poor, and, indeed, Samaritans.

Consequently, it is not simply 'the despised half-breed' Samaritan that serves as the means of compassion and grace in the story (even if he is the prime instrument through which divine compassion flows); instead, grace flows through the actions of the despised half-breed in association with one who was generally thought to be a decadent scoundrel. And in this way, the story of Luke 10:30-35 might well be recognised not solely as a notable moral tale, but as a story that scandalises entrenched perceptions of reality by making 'a breach in the stable,

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<sup>38</sup>) With respect, then, I demur from Snodgrass (*Stories with Intent*, p. 351), when he writes: 'Is there any reason to think an original version of this parable would enable hearers to see a reversal of values and conclude that *the kingdom* must have such a reversal? I do not see how'.

normal (“seemly”) course of human affairs and events’.<sup>39</sup> Extracted from its secondary Lukan context, Jesus’ parable depicts an exceptional association of dubious characters as the means through which to get a momentary glimpse of the embodied reign of God.

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<sup>39</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 117.

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