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"Once again, Now, 'Who is my Neighbour?'" : A comment

by Norman H. Young

And Dr. Young himself supplies a comment on Dr. L. Paul Trudinger's paper on the good Samaritan in our July-September issue of last year.

I find Dr. L. Paul Trudinger¹ entirely convincing when he asserts that the shift from "Who is my neighbour?" (v. 29) to "Who was neighbour?" (v. 36) is a characteristic "twist" common to many of the parables and has "potency" within the parable of the Good Samaritan as a whole.² I am led along in agreement, too, when Dr. Trudinger elucidates the point of Jesus' question (v. 36) as forcing the lawyer "to involve himself in the implication of the story"³, and thus to challenge the lawyer's "smugness" and "self-satisfaction". And although falteringly, I follow Dr. Trudinger when he declares that Jesus is the Good Samaritan.⁴

What Dr. Trudinger, however, does not say—and this is not a disagreement but an additional point—is that the characteristic twist between the lawyer's question (v. 29) and Jesus' parabolic answer and concluding query (v. 36) is latent within the lawyer's question itself.

The lawyer did not ask "What is a neighbour?" (*Ti esti plēšion*), so Jeremias is correct in saying that the lawyer is not seeking a definition, but the extent of the conception of "neighbour".⁵ There is no need, though, to appeal to the reciprocal nature of the Aramaic (*rē'ah*),⁶ for the very question 'Who is my neighbour?' is quite easily taken to mean "Who is neighbour towards me?" This is exactly what we usually mean when we ask "Who are my friends?" No doubt the lawyer meant "whom must I treat as a friend", nevertheless, Jesus' answer is not "deficient logic",⁷ because the

1 L. Paul Trudinger, "Once Again, Now, 'Who is My Neighbour?' ", *EQ* xlviii (1976), pp. 160-163.

2 There is more force in Trudinger's point here than in T. W. Manson's that "the question is unanswerable, and ought not to be asked" (See T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* [London, 1949] p. 261.)

3 *EQ* xlviii (1976), p. 161; cf. V. P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (London, 1973), pp. 42 f.

4 John 8: 48 is perhaps instructive here.

5 J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London, 1963) p. 203.

6 *Ibid.*

7 The term is Jülicher's; see E. Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus* (London, 1966), p. 139, note 14.

question can be taken to mean “Who treats me as neighbour?” Therefore, “the one who comes to you in your need”, is a perfectly valid answer to the verbal form of the question.⁸

And this, as Dr. Trudinger observes, involves the lawyer personally; for instead of being given a statement of the limits of his largesse, the lawyer is slapped down beside the Jericho road and told that *his* neighbour (i.e. the one who is neighbour to him) is a Samaritan,⁹ one who stops to help him in his need.

We may add in conclusion the observation that if the joining of the pericope (vv. 29-37) to the discussion of vv. 25-28 is the result of editorial activity,¹⁰ then it is a brilliant piece of redactional insight. The decisive words in the Jesus-lawyer exchange—love your neighbour as yourself—do not mean “love your neighbour as you love yourself”,¹¹ but “love your neighbour as though your neighbour were yourself.”

The parable forces the lawyer to make such an exchange of places and to receive succour by the roadside. He and we are thus confronted, as Trudinger says, with a “punch-line . . . as stabbing now as ever: ‘Go and do the same’ ”¹²

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⁸ The list of scholarly attempts to resolve the so-called discrepancy between vv. 29 and 36 compiled by Miss Linnemann seem rather to have missed the inherent ambiguity of the question (*ibid.*, pp. 139 f.).

⁹ G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London, 1960), pp. 112 f.

¹⁰ So E. Linnemann, *Parables*, pp. 138, 141-142, endorsed by N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1967), p. 123.

¹¹ *Pace* numerous exegetes, even those who see self-love as something to be overcome; see further A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London, 1954), pp. 100 f.; V. P. Furnish, *Love Command*, p. 50; G. Bornkamm, *Jesus*, pp. 113 f.

¹² *EQ* xlvi (1976), p. 163; i.e., Help as you have been helped.