Research Article

Diego Fernando Bedoya Bonilla*, Carlos Arboleda Mora

From Persuasion to Acceptance of Closeness: *La Proximidad* as an Essential Attribute of God in Luke 10:25–37

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Abstract: The linguistic method of the New Rhetoric and Argumentation (developed by authors such as Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca) seeks to persuade an audience utilizing logical and practical arguments, in order to achieve adherence to a thesis that wants to be effectively communicated. This method can be applied to biblical texts to convince about an issue and produce a performative (transforming) effect. This article aims to apply some elements of this method to the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. Jesus, with the argumentative force of metaphor, not only answers the question “who is my neighbor?” but also reveals an eventual attribute of God: closeness. In the Samaritan, who is moved with compassion to care for a wounded man, God’s proximity is revealed. In the Samaritan’s mercy, God is manifested as an event of closeness.

Keywords: parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), neighbor, New Rhetoric and Argumentation, event

1 Introduction

The parable of the Good Samaritan¹ has been studied by many since the beginning of Christianity. The Church Fathers, with their allegorical style, made multiple approaches to this text from different perspectives; in particular, the Christological and moral interpretations stand out.²

Some thinkers of Christian antiquity, such as Origen³ and Irenaeus, recognized and transmitted an allegorical interpretation of this parable, which saw in the man attacked by robbers and left by the roadside, an image of humanity fallen because of sin and the Good Samaritan as Christ the Redeemer. This allegorical style opened the horizon of the biblical texts to new and varied interpretations, allowing many Christian

¹ Luke 10:25–37.

² Bovon supports these two readings, stressing the importance of maintaining the Christological hermeneutic of the text against all his opponents. In his view, the Samaritan mimics Christ’s feelings and actions. Therefore, it would not be absurd, according to the patristic and medieval references, to affirm that the Samaritan is a living image of Jesus Christ. Bovon, *El Evangelio según san Lucas II* (Lc 9, 51–14–35), 129.

³ Origen, “Homilies on Luke 34,” in Cantalamessa, *Echad Las Redes*, 230. This note on Origen is brought by Gómez Acebo Duque de Estrada, *Lucas*, 258. Roukema explains the process of allegorizing parables in Christian antiquity in the article “The Good Samaritan in Ancient Christianity,” 54–97. St. Augustine inherited this interpretation and developed it without precedent in *Quaestiones Evangeliorum* 2:19, in Clark, “Reversing the Ethical Perspective,” 300–9.

* Corresponding author: Diego Fernando Bedoya Bonilla, Pontific Bolivarian University, Medellín, Colombia, e-mail: kabod12@hotmail.com

Carlos Arboleda Mora: The Pontific Bolivarian University, Medellín, Colombia, e-mail: carlos.arboleda@upb.edu.co

and non-Christian authors to use this story to promote, on an ethical level, the need to act with mercy at all times.

Accordingly, we seek to explore another way of approaching the Lucan text from the following questions: Where is God in the parable? How does he present himself? How does he reveal himself?

With the help of the New Rhetoric and Argumentation method, which will be described in the following section, we intend to find some answers to the questions raised.

We no longer live off the so-called “eclipse of God” or the “deaths of God”⁴ as it was insinuated in the last century, but off the “resurrections” of God. This requires theology to be a contribution to humanity’s need to reencounter this Mystery, always tremendous and fascinating, called God: immense, but at the same time close and loving.

For Johnson,⁵ what is specifically Christian in apprehending God is to understand him as “an infinite sacred mystery that draws near by giving itself through grace and incarnation. Christianity at its deepest level proclaims a simple message: that we are called to the immediate nearness of God’s being.” Theology, then, as McFague⁶ also affirms, must discern the images (metaphors) from which it has spoken of God, seeking to make the language ever more vigorous, persuasive, illuminating, and in keeping with the times. Therefore, the objective of this article is to find and present the event of God in the text of the Samaritan, showing him close and compassionate. In this way, with the help of the selected method, it will be possible to speak of God as merciful proximity, proposing this closeness as an attribute (revelatory characteristic) of the same divine being and acting. This work translates the category of “proximidad” from Spanish to English as “closeness.” We do not want for the semantic strength that emanates from the parable of the Samaritan, which inspires this proposition to assert that “proximidad” is an attribute of God, to get lost. In Spanish, “proximidad” becomes a noun that describes acting as “neighbor” that we apply to God.

God has always been recognized in the “half-dead” man by the side of the road.⁷ Nevertheless, the interpretation that will be made of the parable will speak of God from the behavior of the Samaritan, starting from the application of some constitutive elements of the New Rhetoric method.

The parable of the Samaritan⁸ has been studied by various methods and exegetical approaches, highlighting the narrative analysis. Prior to the choice of the method used in this work, several narratological studies of the parable were considered which can be consulted.⁹ In particular, we have followed Wénin’s proposals, for whom the basis of narrative analysis is the difference between the story told (the informative content) and the precise story that is made of it, that is, the narration. When a story is told, it is always narrated in a particular way. This is what narrative analysis is interested in achieving: observing how the story is told and what means are used; in the history that is made of it to reach the addressee and guide him/her to the understanding of the message to be communicated, in the effects on the person who

⁴ In Estrada, *Las Imágenes de Dios*.

⁵ Johnson, *La Búsqueda del Dios Vivo*, 68.

⁶ McFague, *Modelos de Dios*, 74.

⁷ Luke 10:30.

⁸ Meier, *Nueva Visión del Jesús Histórico*, 196, regarding the origin of the parable, affirms: “In short, then, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, taken together with its introduction, is thoroughly Lucan on every conceivable level: the macrostructure of Luke-Acts; the macrostructure of the narrative of the great journey; the characteristically Lucan structure of introductory anecdote plus parable; the Lucan theology, which permeates the two components of the bipartite pericope; the typically Lucan vocabulary and grammar; and, naturally, the unique enhancement given by Luke to the figure of the Samaritan, developed in a midrashic manner from a narrative of the OT. When one examines all the Lucan elements that make up this literary-theological ensemble, one wonders why every critic feels the compelling need to discover some underlying parable that Luke would have reworked. Even if we suspected the existence of such a substratum, how could we ever know what it was like? If we eliminate every theological, structural, literary, and philological Lucan feature of 10: 25–37, what hypothetical original remnant do we have left?”

⁹ For narrative studies of the parable see: Barrios, “Texto, Narrador y Lector en Lc 10, 25–37,” 327–51; Aletti, *Il Racconto Come Teologia*, 71–102. Narrative analysis texts can also be consulted to the study of the parable: Ska, “L’analisi Narrative,” 139–70; Beck, “The Narrative Function of Anonymity in Fourth Gospel Characterization,” 143–58; and Marguerat, “L’exégèse Biblique à L’heure du Lecteur,” 13–40.

reads or listens, in the feelings provoked, in the concrete reactions.¹⁰ These same points are those that the New Rhetoric develops according to its style, but with all the emphasis on the ethical transformation of the reader or listener. What is new, then, is not the constitutive elements of the chosen method (which can be found in rhetorical and narrative methods), but the fact that it has not yet been applied to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37).

The use of the aforementioned method will have its own limits, which will be made clear from the beginning. Persuasion is the main purpose of the method; however, the development of the writing will go beyond simple conviction through a well-argued discourse. Ultimately, the aim is to achieve a performative effect, leading the listener to accept the Mystery of God as closeness. In this way, the parable will not act only as an ornamental literary resource but will lead to an existential adhesion of the listener to Jesus' proposal, the ultimate goal of this methodical exercise.¹¹

2 The New Rhetoric and Argumentation method as a way of recognizing the closeness of God

2.1 Persuasion: Objective of the New Rhetoric and Argumentation method

Many voices are raised against studying the parable of the Samaritan¹² only to defend a moral principle that can be presented universally. According to Crossan,¹³ the rhetorical purpose of Jesus is neither ethical nor moral, but to show what is unthinkable and incorrect for the Jewish tradition. Crossing these boundaries, according to this Irish author, is the purpose of Jesus in overcoming the presuppositions of the audience in this matter, allowing the abrupt irruption of the Reign of God in their consciences. This is where the purpose of this study is underpinned: in the discovery of God and his closeness in the Samaritan, which is a true rhetorical extravagance¹⁴ to the ears of a pious Jew such as the Expert of the Law who questions Jesus in the text.

To achieve the proposed objective, the general assumptions of the New Rhetoric and Argumentation method, as presented by Perelman and Olbrechts, have been chosen. These authors never sought to propose a method of biblical analysis, but exegesis and biblical theology can take advantage of them¹⁵ since biblical texts are fundamentally literary pieces that admit this type of linguistic study.

¹⁰ Cf. Wénin, "De L'analyse Narrative à la Théologie des Récits Bibliques," 372. Wénin especially focuses on examining First Testament texts. There is an analysis made by Wénin on Gn 3 and its relationship with the so-called "original Sin" from the narrative analysis of the text. The narrative tools Wénin applies can be applied to other texts. Also in "Péché des Origines ou Origine du Péché?," 307–19.

¹¹ Perelman, *El Imperio Retórico*, 17. In the aforementioned book, Perelman refers to the work that he co-authored with Olbrechts-Tyteca, *La Nouvelle Rhetorique*, 229. The American philosopher, Bitzer, argued in the late 1960s that rhetorical discourse is created by the situation. He defined the rhetorical situation as "a set of people, events, objects and relationships that present a real or potential request that can be totally or partially eliminated if the speech, introduced in the situation, can pressure the human decision or action in such a way that produces a significant modification of the requirement," in "The Rhetorical Situation," 3. Similar to what we will understand here by "persuasion."

¹² Luke 10:25–37.

¹³ Crossan, *In Parables*, 61.

¹⁴ In this regard, Castillo, *El Reino de Dios*, 151, says: "Most of the parables tell a story that refers to daily life. One could say, a story of the everyday. But they tell this story in such a way that, in the story itself, there is a break with the normal, the everyday. Moreover, this cut is presented in such a way that, in the story, there is an element of surprise or astonishment, of the extraordinary, which goes beyond the predominant realism and reaches another dimension of reality, the strictly human dimension. It is what Ricoeur calls this kind of extravagance or impertinence." This extravagance is the trigger of the metaphorical process. Castillo quotes Ricoeur's "Biblische Hermeneutik," from the reference made by Harnisch, *Die Neutestamentliche Gleichnisforschung*, 309–10, 324–25.

¹⁵ A reference point of this work is the doctoral thesis of Jaillier, *Las Controversias en Jn 8, 12–59*, 226, where she presents the general state of the art of biblical–theological studies using the method of rhetorical analysis. This writing is proof of the interest in this way of approaching the biblical text, making a contribution to a method that is still in its initial phase.

The New Rhetoric seeks to enter into the heart of language, unleashing all its persuasive and performative possibilities.¹⁶ The conclusions reached by applying some of the configurative elements of the method to Luke's parable will provide a methodological platform for presenting God as closeness.

The impact of transforming communication, to which this method of linguistic study leads, will help to justify why the closeness of God latent in the text becomes evident to the listener as a real event of the divine Mystery offered in the actions of the Samaritan. Jesus himself, in telling the parable, resorted to the persuasive force of the metaphor, seeking with it the adherence of the listener to his proposal. He moves, then, from the presentation of fixed ideas to the parabolic argumentation, so suggestive, lively, and proactive.

Authors such as Toulmin,¹⁷ Perelman, and Olbrechts-Tyteca¹⁸ revive Aristotelian rhetoric with their approaches. Although over time all the emphasis was placed on the eloquence of the discourse and its ornaments, rhetoric aimed to present an internal and external structuring of the discourse, establishing the relationships between the emitter and the receiver, taking into account the contexts in order to achieve a successful communication. This New Rhetoric, therefore, does not disregard the principles of classical rhetoric but wants to enrich them "by paying attention mainly to the argumentation and the audiences or publics whose adhesion to the thesis is sought. In this aspect, it also retakes the value of dialogue and dialectics to achieve a persuasive process."¹⁹ This is persuasion that is not exhausted in the assent of an idea or thesis but produces a change inside people by the reception of a provocative experience that keeps within itself a transforming power.²⁰

However, the use of this method does not necessarily demand entirely avoiding the historical perspective. "Without the historical and cultural knowledge of biblical times, the interpreter is easily in danger of distorting the meaning of the texts, by imposing a perspective alien to themselves."²¹

It is also necessary to take into account that the rhetorical resources that we are going to use do not mean anything in isolation, but rather "use the conformation of texts that are much more than the sum of their parts and form interwoven signs where each element means according to what it does."²² The biblical text is examined as a complete and comprehensive literary work.

The above is confirmed in the text chosen for this article.²³ It all begins with a dialogue-controversy between Jesus and a Jewish lawyer about who the neighbor is and ends in a parable that seeks to persuade and generate a profound change in the interlocutor, welcoming a new proposal of neighbor offered by Jesus. The concept of neighbor is described in the merciful behavior of the Samaritan who in turn reveals an attribute, a way of being of God: closeness.²⁴

¹⁶ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *La Interpretación de la Biblia en la Iglesia*, 28.

¹⁷ Toulmin, *Los Usos de la Argumentación*.

¹⁸ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Tratado de la Argumentación*.

¹⁹ Jaillier Castrillón, *Las Controversias en Jn 8, 12–59*, 59. Concerning the elements that make up classical rhetoric, we can consult Michael Meyer's introduction to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's, *Tratado de la Argumentación*, 28.

²⁰ Transformation not only involves the person but reality, to make it fair. In this sense, Schüssler Fiorenza addresses the difficult question of the role of the Bible in today's society and the radical power of the Word (persuasion) to challenge imperial domination, the humiliation of people, and the use of religion to repress people. In her text *The Power of the Word*, 292. Schüssler Fiorenza develops the "rhetoric of liberation" as a topic where she builds on this idea.

²¹ Levoratti et al., *Comentario Bíblico Internacional*, 19.

²² Levoratti, "La Biblia Como Obra Literaria," 75.

²³ Luke 10:25–37. Regarding the structure of Luke 10:25–37, we follow the proposal of Bovon who considers that Jesus' dialogue with the lawyer is the context of the parable and cannot be separated from it. Bovon, *El Evangelio Según San Lucas II (Lc 9, 51–14–35)*, 111, proposes dividing the text into two parts: the first part would be composed of the scribe's question (v. 25); Jesus' counter-question (v. 26); quote from Scripture as the scribe's response (v. 27); greeting and invitation of Jesus (v. 28). The second part would correspond to the scribe's question (v. 29); narrative account as Jesus' response (vv. 30–35); Jesus' counter-question (v. 36); scribe's response (v. 37a) and invitation of Jesus to act (v. 37b).

²⁴ The category "closeness" is not a creation of this research. It has been used, in a philosophical context, by Laín. All his work, especially *Teoría y Realidad del Otro*, 13–28, explains the category "closeness" from the exegesis and analysis of the parable of the Good Samaritan but in the field of philosophical anthropology; here it will be used to focus on God. We refer to an article by De la Higuera that synthesizes the entire work of Laín, "La Ontología del Amor en Pedro Laín y la Idea de Exterioridad," 207–19.

2.2 *La proximidad* (closeness) as one of God's traits from the persuasive language of the parable

The category “closeness” is not a creation of this research. It has been used, in a philosophical context, by Laín. All his work, especially “Teoría y realidad del otro,” 13–28, explains the category “closeness” from the exegesis and analysis of the parable of the Good Samaritan but in the field of philosophical anthropology; here it will be used to focus on God.

The word “closeness” rarely appears in theological literature. Pope Francis has used it on a few occasions, always in the context of the commentary on the parable of the Samaritan. One of the most relevant references is this: “We have to give our walk the healing rhythm of closeness, with a respectful and compassionate gaze that at the same time heals, liberates and encourages us to mature in the Christian life” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 169). Currently, Josep María Esquirol develops the so-called “philosophy of proximity.” In his text, “The Intimate Resistance,” he develops the thought of Lévinas where proximity is understood as intimacy, sensitivity, and touch.²⁵

When speaking of God as a neighbor, Jesus does not present his arguments with discursive language, but by means of parabolic language whose images are taken from real life; in this way a crisis is generated in the listener who will be led to a real transformation in their life. The aim is to adhere not to an idea but the experience of the proximity of God as lived and expressed by Jesus in the parable. Consequently, the persuasion that characterizes the development of the chosen method will succeed in convincing the Lawyer (and with him all the readers of the text) of the exemplarity of the Samaritan's conduct and, from here, a higher stage is reached: the recognition of God's event in the lifestyle of the one who attended to the wounded man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Convinced by the persuasive force of Jesus' narrative argumentation in the parable, he will be able to adhere to the image of God that is evident in the Samaritan's closeness. In synthesis, it would be the passage from simple persuasion to the acceptance of the closeness of God, whose event in the interior of the person moves them to act as a neighbor to all human beings. In this sense, Monsalve²⁶ considers:

The general theory of persuasive discourse, which seeks to influence one or many people, including the universal audience, orienting their thinking, directing their action, exciting or appeasing their emotions, includes as a particular case dialectics, understood as a technique of controversy.

What begins as an illustration of Jesus' idea of neighbor, will become a revelation of the closeness of God as a characteristic of his identity.

3 The New Rhetoric and Argumentation method applied to the parable of the merciful Samaritan

3.1 Literary context of the parable of the Samaritan

Before applying the New Rhetoric method to Luke's narrative, the following literary annotations are necessary to understand the text as a whole.

Although it is not our objective to make a complete exegetical comment on the text of Luke 10: 25–37,²⁷ we cannot lose sight of the fact that the parable of the Samaritan is inserted in the Lucan work where Jesus makes

²⁵ Esquirol, *La Resistencia Íntima*, 155. Zoja works on the topic of closeness, as a lost matter. He affirms that the second death, after that of God, is that of the neighbor. In *La Muerte del Próximo*, 23. Another text to be consulted is *Ética de la Compasión* by Mélich, 174. The author argues that what makes us human beings is not obedience to a universal and absolute code, but rather the recognition of the radical vulnerability of our condition and the fact of not being able to avoid the demand of others' pain, like the Samaritan in the parable.

²⁶ Monsalve, *Teoría de la Argumentación*, 47.

²⁷ To carry out a complete study of the parable, it is necessary to consult some classic texts of obligatory reference: Bovon, *El Evangelio Según San Lucas II (Lc 9, 51-14-35)*, 106–30; Fitzmyer, *El Evangelio Según Lucas*, 276–91; and Pervo, *The Gospel of Luke*, 221.

the Reign of God present above all to the poor, abandoned, sick, sinners, and excluded; in this case, the Samaritans, in whom the evangelist has a great interest, fall into this category of persons special recipients of the ministry of Jesus.²⁸ Thus, the message of the parable does not present an isolated theme in the Gospel, but is a transversal issue that implies the intentions of the Evangelist in the presentation of the Mystery of the Lord.²⁹

Another element that we must highlight is the first part of the text: the dialogue of Jesus with the Legist, in whose context the parable is inscribed.³⁰

The Lawyer's question ("Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?") serves as the introduction and *raison d'être* of the parable under study. We will refer to it as literarily linked by Luke with the parable. Whether this is an artificial linkage or whether the two parts are linked from the beginning is open to academic discussion.³¹ What is certain is that the text appears as a literary and theological unit, canonically unbreakable, and as such it will be analyzed.

A lawyer, Expert in the Law, proposes to Jesus a question: what to do to inherit eternal life. According to Luke, the Lawyer's intention is to put Jesus in trouble. Nonetheless, it is essential to remember that the Old Testament also presents an ethical proposal that is at the base of the Gospel; one cannot forget that the God of the New Testament is the God of the Old one. On this, Carroll has written several texts that can serve as a reference.³²

Jesus invites the Expert in the Law to respond with his own arguments. The scribe's answer corresponds to what God revealed in the Scriptures and to the teachings of Jesus himself: love of God and neighbor as a summary of the Law and the prophets.³³ But Jesus, nodding at the answer given by the Lawyer (correct from the point of view of the Jewish religion, but perhaps abstract), invites him to put into practice what he reads. If at the beginning the question was formulated with "to do," Jesus will use this same way to invite the Expert in the Law to do what is theoretically clear to him: to love God and his neighbor, as it is said in Lev. 19:18 and Deut. 6:5. Eternal life is only obtained by "doing" something; this doing is what will be described in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The dialogue should have ended here. However, the Lawyer seeks to deepen a question that remained hanging over his head, the one about the neighbor. Luke makes a note: "willing to justify himself,"³⁴ the Expert in the Law asks Jesus for a clarification, keeping in mind the limits of the plural Jewish tradition, since the meaning of neighbor is clearly restrictive.³⁵ Jesus, then, will answer the Lawyer's question by going to the field of facts, by means of a parable.³⁶ He will not give a conceptual explanation, but will narrate some events by metaphorical means to illustrate the scope of the meaning of neighbor requested by his interlocutor. In addition to this, he will make the revelation of God's closeness through the careful description of the compassionate behavior of the Samaritan.

Having said this, the basic elements of the chosen method (speaker, audience, and arguments)³⁷ will be applied to the parable according to the assumptions of Perelman.³⁸ The method may perhaps be accused of

28 Mora and Levoratti, "Evangelio Según San Lucas," 475.

29 Luke 4:18–19.

30 Luke 10:25–28.

31 In the opinion of Gómez Acebo Duque de Estrada, *Lucas*, 349, this dialogue of Jesus with the Lawyer serves as an introduction not only to the parable of the Samaritan but also to the story at the home of Martha and Mary.

32 Carroll and Daniel, "Ethics and Old Testament Interpretation," 204–27.

33 Matt. 22:39–40; and Mark 12:28–31.

34 Luke 10:29.

35 "For him (the lawyer), as for many Jews, the proximity between men was based on the affinity of kinship, race and religion, and could be restricted still further, in the sense of applying exclusively to members of one's family or clan, or only to children, or including friends," in Fuentes, *Comentario al Evangelio de San Lucas*, 231.

36 Carrillo Alday, *El Evangelio Según San Lucas*, 223.

37 These elements can be confronted with some narrative methods that present similar aspects, taking into account that this is not a narrative method. Casas and Alberto, in his master's thesis *Aproximación Narrativa a "Los Primeros Días" del Cuarto Evangelio*, 145–7, makes a synthesis of the main narrative analyses proposed by Jean-Louis Ska, Daniel Marguerat, and Yvan Bourquin.

38 Perelman, *El Imperio Retórico*, 23.

not offering novelty, of being only an extension or an offshoot of classical rhetoric.³⁹ However, we will explain the emphases and their hermeneutic contribution to the thesis defended, as a methodological basis that allows the substantiation of the conclusions. This method does not necessarily present a cumulative and progressive interrelation as is clear in other methods, but it offers an approach to elements that compose the story and which allow us to see in the text the divine closeness.

3.2 A persuasive contrast: The conflict between Jews and Samaritans

We cannot fail to comment on the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans, because in this contrast and tension lies the persuasive force of the parable. It would not have the same impact on the listener or reader of the narrative if this cultural and religious enmity, so marked in Jesus' time, were not implicit in the parable. The Samaritans

were enemies of the Jews (Sir. 50:25–26; John 4:9; 8:48; Matt. 10:5, etc.). In 2 Kgs 17:24–41 the origin of the Samaritans is explained by the forced migration of five pagan groups, who settled in Samaria and contaminated it with their pagan customs. The Samaritans worshipped God on the top of Mount Garizim, while the Israelites worshipped in Jerusalem. As the word of God they accepted only the Pentateuch.⁴⁰

The adjective “Samaritan” originally had only geographical connotations (inhabitants of Samaria), capital of the Northern Kingdom founded by King Omri around 870 BC. Over time, it became an ethno-religious designation, referring to the inhabitants of the east of the Jordan, the region between Galilee and Judea. The origin of the division between Jews and Samaritans is still unclear. It has often been linked to the destruction of Samaria (722 BC) by the Assyrians. Its inhabitants were deported and replaced by settlers from Babylon (2 Kgs 17:24). After the exile of the Southern Kingdom, when the Jews wanted to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, they encountered violent opposition from certain groups that threatened the stability of their works (Ezra 4:2,24; Neh. 2:19; 4:2–9). This opposition has been explained as coming from Samaritan settlers. With all the historical problems that this may have, what is certain is that, from the Hellenistic period onward, the differences between the Jewish and Samaritan populations are fully proven, from the historical point of view.⁴¹

In the work of Luke, some Samaritans occupy privileged places and are presented in contrast with characters of Jewish culture and race (Luke 9:51–56; 17:11–19; Acts 8:25). The narrator not only presents the contrast, but also approves the attitudes of the Samaritans (see 9:51–56; 17:11–19).

The antagonism, rather the opposition, rivalry and historical enmity between Jews and Samaritans is not unknown to the Lucan reader. For the Jewish world, the Samaritans are the “dogs” (see Mark 7:28; Matt. 15:27), the historic usurpers of the lands of their northern brothers. Likewise, the Samaritans have not lacked historical, religious and social motives for rejecting and refusing to welcome their Jewish oppressors (see Luke 9: 51–53).⁴²

It is precisely this point that makes more shocking the fact that Jesus proposes a foreigner as an example of God's closeness. As will be seen below, it is not only the attitudes of compassion that cause admiration in the legist (and in the readers and listeners) of the parable, but the very being of the Samaritan who in this case embodies the centuries-old cultural and racial quarrels between Jews and Samaritans.

We must also recognize that the way in which the encounter between the Good Samaritan and the wounded traveler is presented (assuming that the latter is Jewish) opens the door to an intercultural

³⁹ The American philosopher Bitzer makes a contribution in “The Rhetorical Situation,” 1–14.

⁴⁰ Mora and Levoratti, “Evangelio Según San Lucas,” 544.

⁴¹ Fitzmyer, *El Evangelio Según Lucas*, 187.

⁴² Barrios, “Texto, Narrador y Lector en Lc 10, 25–37,” 347.

dialogue that suggests attitudes such as respect, openness, curiosity, and encounter; knowledge of cultures that meet; and skills such as listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating.⁴³

Later on, what we have discussed here will find its value and importance.

3.3 Application of some elements of the New Rhetoric method to the parable of the Samaritan

No method is absolute. They all have limits and are permanently open to precision and adjustments. As for the method of the New Rhetoric, we insist that we have chosen it because it allows the finding of the persuasive character of the parable. Furthermore, this method has not been applied to the text of the Good Samaritan. However, Schüssler Fiorenza's contribution on rhetorical resources is very timely. She affirms that, today, biblical scholarship is understood as communicative praxis. Rhetoric is not seen as a stylistic ornament, technical skill, or linguistic manipulation, but rather as epistemic, which seeks effective communication that involves interests, values, and visions, as we have already made it clear previously.⁴⁴

The same author criticizes the rhetorical positions of positivism in biblical scholarship that proposes political detachment, objective literalism, and scientific neutrality. She proposes a rhetorical hermeneutic that does not understand biblical study only as a window to objective historical data and evidence, but she sees historical sources as carriers of symbolic universes. These symbolic worlds do not interpret texts by reducing their meaning to correct or incorrect, but rather articulate interpretive strategies, ethical criteria, theoretical frameworks, discussions, religious assumptions, and socio-political locations. In this way, the rhetoric is not a preconceived and formal structure, but a dynamic approach to the text to find a world of multiple meanings. The question is not only "what does the text signify?" but "what kind of readings can do justice to the text in its historical contexts?" This confirms that the number of interpretations that a text can give is unlimited. Rhetoric ceases to be static and becomes a dynamic exercise that explores a multitude of legitimate meanings and the assimilation of the biblical text to our own experience and interests. Historical-critical analysis is certainly necessary, but it must be enriched with a rhetorical study, in the sense already stated, that finds the ethical-political dimensions of the biblical text: "Such ethics of historical reading allows us not only to relativize through contextualization the values and claims of authority of the biblical text, but also to evaluate and critically evaluate them,"⁴⁵ not allowing ideologies protected by a biblical interpretation without ethics and public responsibility. In conclusion, the rhetorical strategies of Biblical study must offer an ethical contribution, so that the literary resources discovered in biblical scholarship do not remain locked in static paradigms of the past, but rather open to their public contributions in the present, which we will turn to next.

We present, then, some elements of the method of the New Rhetoric applied to the parable of the Good Samaritan.

3.3.1 The speaker

If the core of the text under study is the parable of the Good Samaritan, the one who appears as the speaker is undoubtedly Jesus. And, in the manner of the best teachers of the Law of his time, he carries on the controversy with the Lawyer who stands up to put him to the test.⁴⁶

Jesus knows how to set the pace of the dialogue. At the beginning, he leads the conversation along the path traced by the Lawyer with his trick question: the way of the commandments in order to have eternal

⁴³ Sabdono et al., "Teaching Intercultural Competence," 1.

⁴⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation," 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11–4.

⁴⁶ Luke 10:25.

life. Later, however, it is Jesus who reorients the entire dialogue, leading the Lawyer to an unsuspected ethical scenario; even more, to a theological scenario of divine revelation. The adaptation of the language and the arguments given by Jesus to his interlocutor is obvious since his words are completely familiar to him because of his expertise in the Jewish Scriptures; this facilitates the adhesion that is the purpose of this method.⁴⁷ There is adherence to the new understanding of neighbor offered by Jesus, but also a new grasp of the Mystery of God. In this way, Jesus will lead the dialogue toward awareness or, at least, an interpellation that is impossible to avoid. This element is called convincement (conviction).⁴⁸ This is where the text becomes a creator of meaning: in what the speaker produces within the listeners or readers.

3.3.2 The audience

The audience,⁴⁹ from the beginning, is a single interlocutor: the Expert in the Law who approaches Jesus with a question. From beginning to end, the questions and answers do not open the range to other people. But, because of the agreement and organization of the discourse, the recognition of a universal audience also applies to those who make compassion a categorical imperative. One cannot fail to recognize that the parable is inserted in the section known in Luke as the “ascension of Jesus to Jerusalem,”⁵⁰ which implicitly functions in this Gospel as a prolonged occasion for the instruction of the disciples. Thus, the text is not addressed exclusively to the lawyer, but can embrace all the disciples of Jesus and every person consciously open to the impulse of mercy. Adherence would not be something abstract, but a concrete loving action not limited only to the moral field but inspired by the perception of the closeness of God.

3.3.3 Arguments for persuasion

The arguments⁵¹ can be broadly classified into two: the scriptural,⁵² to which the Expert in the Law resorts to sustain the dialogue with Jesus, and the metaphorical (the most important of the story), manifested through the use of a parable to describe narratively who the neighbor is. Already at this point in the story, Jesus does not offer any explanation taken from the Scriptures (as would be expected in the rabbinic world of the time) or from any other source of authority but resorts to an everyday narrative mode to mobilize his interlocutor toward an ideal ethical behavior. And since the ethical aspect does not exhaust the meaning of the parable, the method used also makes it possible to persuade the audience of a grasp of God made from the experience of the divine interpreted as proximity. This parable serves as a persuasive argument aimed at awakening in the Lawyer a sensibility capable of accepting the revelation of the truth about the neighbor and, from the neighbor, of proximity as an attribute of God. The Lawyer wanted to know whom to help in case of need and ended up encountering the same God revealed in the Samaritan. The persuasive and performative force of the parable told by Jesus will touch the Lawyer internally; whether or not to accept this revelation is a matter of free decision.

Advancing in the use of the method, in the field of argumentation that we have been applying, the so-called “preferable agreements” appear:⁵³ the points of agreement between Jesus and the Lawyer. The texts of Scripture cited in the controversy are the preferable agreements of this analysis, since both recognize the

⁴⁷ In the event that such adherence does not occur, the difficulty would not be that the premises of the argument are false or imprecise, but rather that the speaker freely decides not to accept the suggestions made by the speaker.

⁴⁸ Perelman, *El Imperio Retórico*, 43–4.

⁴⁹ “All those whom the speaker wants to influence with his argumentation,” in Perelman, *El Imperio Retórico*, 35.

⁵⁰ Luke 9–19.

⁵¹ Arguments do not seek to make the interlocutor draw conclusions from certain premises but to produce or increase adherence to the thesis presented for assent, in Perelman, *El Imperio Retórico*, 29.

⁵² Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 6.

⁵³ These are the points on which two interlocutors can agree (values, hierarchies, common places), in Perelman, *El Imperio Retórico*, 45.

authority of the Law of Moses. In these agreements there is no dispute, at least at the beginning; they only differ in the conception of neighbor, since the Law understands this category in an exclusive and restricted way, while Jesus has a very broad framework of understanding, evident in the parable.

As for the parable, there are no longer preferable agreements, because precisely the case told by Jesus in the narrative breaks all the logics of Judaism. There is no open controversy, but the discrepancy between those in dialogue is tacit. Jesus would never justify the indifferent behavior of the priest and the Levite, something that could be done by the Lawyer who may have some kind of argument in favor of these two who passed by.⁵⁴ And as for the performance of the Samaritan, from whom nothing good can be expected, never would a Jew accept as a model of life a man of this category.

Finally, the number of verbs⁵⁵ deployed by the Gospel to speak of the actions of the Samaritan can be considered an unbearable exaggeration by the interlocutor. The latter is revealing not only of a renewed ethic but also of the attributes of God as Jesus perceives him in his own experience.

From the deepening of the types of arguments used by the text in question, following some of Perelman's annotations in his book "El imperio retórico. Retórica y argumentación," the parable can be considered as an "argument by example"⁵⁶ in which, starting from the behavior of the Samaritan, a universal ethical model can be proposed. The text makes it implicitly clear that the layman has understood Jesus' message, therefore, he has no choice but to act accordingly. The silence at the end of the story, regarding the jurist's actions, is typical of this type of narration, so that the text is continued in the life of the interlocutor or reader. Not everything is said in such a way that the reader and listener become the protagonist of the narrative. Involvement in what is told is fundamental in parables.

Capps,⁵⁷ interpreting Crossan's position on the parable of the Samaritan, considers that Jesus' intention is to put together two impossible and contradictory words: "Samaritan" and "neighbor" (or better, "Samaritan" and "good") forcing us to think of the Samaritan as what he was, a social and religious marginalized person.⁵⁸ As has already been said, this Samaritan is also revealing God, who presents himself in this unique way claiming our attention. It happens where, according to the traditional schemes of the Jewish religion, God could not be. This man with his compassion shows in a ditch on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho⁵⁹ the image of a foreign God, marginalized, excluded, marked as impure, repudiated, and abject. And it is this strangeness that truly shows who God is. This condition of the Samaritan man is, therefore, theophanic. Thus, the social and religious presuppositions of the Lawyer are radically questioned. And it is precisely at this point that the Kingdom of God comes in, overturning the previous values.⁶⁰ Therefore, the persuasive and performative objective that this method brings out in the parable is already achieved.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Luke 10:31–32.

⁵⁵ The vv. 33–35 mention the verbs describing the slow and effective gestures performed by the Samaritan: he went to him; when he saw him, he was moved with compassion; he took pity on him; he bandaged his wounds; he poured oil and wine on them; he put the man on his donkey; he brought him to an inn; he took care of him; he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper.

⁵⁶ The parable has certainly been considered as part of the so-called "exemplary stories." Some argue about the difference between a parable or an exemplary story. Crossan, for example, considers it a parable-metaphor, in Álvarez Quintero, "La Parábola Del 'Buen Samaritano,'" 14.

⁵⁷ Capps, "Pastoral Images," 5–11.

⁵⁸ Capps, commenting on Crossan's interpretation, does not deny in any way that all that the Samaritan does is a good deed worthy of imitation. But already in the First Testament there are examples of behavior just as good, if not better (the case of 2 Chron. 28:9–15 where the people of Samaria treat their beaten attackers with mercy and kindness).

⁵⁹ "Most probably Jesus took advantage of a concrete case for his parable. Raids in the desert of Judah, between Jerusalem and Jericho, used to be frequent. Jerusalem and Jericho are about 20 miles apart. Jerusalem is 740 meters above sea level and Jericho is 350 meters below the level of the Mediterranean. Halfway along the way is located a promontory of red earth which the Israelites called "the rise of blood" (Jos 15:16)," in Carrillo Alday, *El Evangelio Según San Lucas*, 224.

⁶⁰ Capps, "Pastoral Images," 5–11.

⁶¹ Regarding the performative effect, it is appropriate to cite the work *How to do Things with Words*, by Austin. He published a compilation of a series of lectures given in 1955 in Harvard. From this book arises the speech acts theory that gives rise to contemporary pragmatic linguistics and ordinary language philosophy. Austin defines the performative or realizational speech

4 *Proximidad* as an eventual attribute of God

The New Rhetoric method application has made it possible to propose closeness as an attribute (revelatory attribute) of God, who impels the human being to behave as a neighbor to others.

The expression “attributes of God” refers to the way God is conceived from his very being and happening, and this can only be formulated analogically. What is said about God never coincides with his infinite Mystery; moreover, the images used must be corrected and overcome, always inspired by the historical Revelation testified in the Bible.⁶²

In all the discussions on this subject, the relationship between God’s immutable attributes and his way of acting in history is presented in ontological language. Forte states the same thing, but with a closer language (based on Rahner) saying that what God has been for us reveals what God is in himself, in his Trinitarian intimacy.⁶³

Within the renewal of theological language, this issue is raised today in different ways. There is an interesting contribution in the theology of Hans Küng commented by Poggi.⁶⁴ The latter, commenting on Küng’s text “On Being a Christian,” regarding the divine attributes, states:

[...] the Greek categories or attributes for God are surpassed by the Bible. His spirituality is living contemporaneity, not Platonic timelessness. His omnipotence is a reign in space, not spatial extension in the universe. His justice is mercy and based on covenant with man, not an equitable distribution by an idea of eternal order. His spirituality is a force that surpasses reality, not the antithesis of a sinful matter. His immutability is fidelity to Himself within a living mobility, not a rigid natural concept. His incomprehensibility is because he is totally different and unpredictable than what is manifested in human history, not an indeterminable abstract idea.

Based on this proposal, it is necessary to return to the biblical attributes, captured from the historical action of God. These are attributes that, because of their experiential and existential quality, can only be narrated, as Jesus does in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The fact that the God of biblical revelation has chosen history as the place to happen⁶⁵ makes possible an approach to his attributes from the narrative language of most of the texts of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Moreover, the fact that God has a human face in Jesus demands a narration of his attributes not with the essentialist language of metaphysics, but with the living language that emerges in the biblical texts, especially in the parables where God appears not as an idea but as an event.⁶⁶ Rather than speaking of

acts as “saying something meaningful to someone in order to cause an effect,” in Albarracín Morales, “La Sagrada Escritura en la Celebración Litúrgica.” Within this meaningful saying, there are three dimensions: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. We focus on the illocutionary dimension, which is more interested in effectiveness, in doing something, than in veracity. This dimension has the effect of transforming reality that we argue in this article. One can consult the text “*Les Actes de Langage Dans le Discours, Théorie et Fonctionnement*,” by Kerbrat-Orrechioni. Certainly Austin’s position has been criticized, but it can serve as a reference.

⁶² Osorio Herrera, *Kénosis y Donación*, 86–7, presents an adequate development of the topic of God’s attributes. In his exposition he approaches the topic in the following way: first, he approaches the Apologetic Fathers, then he comments on the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas. Also affirmed by the Fourth Council of Lateran (1215) and adopted in its own way by Vatican I (1870). In this regard we can also confront Bouyer, in the *Dictionary of Theology*, 105–6.

⁶³ Forte, *La Trinidad Como Historia*, 20, comments on Rahner’s famous axiom: “The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity.” Thus, if God reveals himself as closeness in history, it is because he is an event of eternal closeness.

⁶⁴ Poggi, “¿Dios Existe?,” 20.

⁶⁵ For the topic of history as a theological place we can read: Bedoya Bonilla, “Una Migración Necesaria...del Dios del Concepto al Dios del Acontecimiento y de la Experiencia,” 51–9.

⁶⁶ Today there is a massive use of the concept “event”: Derrida, Badiou, Deleuze, Arendt, Marion, Romano. This research will deepen Marion’s proposal of the phenomenology of the gift, of the call. Precisely “the given” in its appearing, is what makes it possible to understand the event. According to the French thinker, the event is one of the “saturated phenomena.” The text “*Le Don, la Donation et le Paradoxe*,” by Romano, will be useful for the deepening. Romano’s eventual hermeneutics will also guide the possibility of recognizing God as an “event” donated in the form of love. Now, God can be considered an event insofar as a Mystery he unexpectedly bursts in, calling us to respond, and therefore to modify our life by reconfiguring our understanding of it and of ourselves in the light of the new meaning he introduces by manifesting himself. Although Romano does not speak of

attributes that make us think of logical descriptors of the divine nature and its action, we suggest contemplating God happening in the concrete life of men, as we showed in the analysis of the parable of the Good Samaritan that we made with the help of the New Rhetoric method.

To say that God is closeness is not to define God by placing him within the narrow confines of certain intellectual categories, nor is it to try to establish an absolute identity between the terms “God” and “neighbor.” It is to resort to human words to express the Mystery of God faithful to the biblical revelation, even if these words are insufficient and improper. It is an indirect elaboration that seeks to offer a reflection as close as possible to the experience of Jesus of Nazareth, considering some qualities, predicates, or divine attributes that appear in this category. It is not the last thing that can be affirmed, nor the only thing.⁶⁷ Of course, there are many metaphors said and to be discovered, which are revealing for this purpose.⁶⁸ Therefore, the lines written here remain open for further discoveries, extensions, adjustments, and corrections.

The parable presents God as a Mystery of free-given love. In this case, we highlight the divine closeness that is qualified by compassion; that is, we speak of compassionate (merciful) closeness. Certainly, love, compassion, mercy, and pity are theological categories that do not mean the same, especially from the Greek; however, in our writing we understand compassion and mercy as synonyms. For the purposes of our work, we give strength to closeness as compassionate. Other academic references develop the term compassion. Bovon comments on the verb used by the evangelist to describe the Good Samaritan’s reaction in this way: “The verb *σπλαγχνίζομαι* “to move the bowels” (it means to be moved so deeply by something that you feel it in your guts), “to be filled with compassion,” used in other places to evoke the complaisance of God and Christ which designates an evangelical conduct (v. 33.35) that the masters of the law will be called to imitate 8v. 36). The Good Samaritan understands the situation, he approaches the wounded man, suffers with him and tries to alleviate his pain.”⁶⁹ In Howe and Sweetser’s words,

The Samaritan breaks the established rhythm when he does not pass by on the other side. Instead, he is moved with compassion, pity: *esplanchnisthē* <*splanchnizomai* – aor. passive; being moved to pity in one’s inward parts – gut (*σπλᾱγχνα/splanchna*).

Here is the pivotal moment – and embodied concept – of the parable and the pericope. It is this gut-level feeling that moves the Samaritan to respond, to move towards the victim rather than away from him. His inward response causes him to act: to draw closer, treat the wounds, lift the man onto his beast of burden, transport him to a shelter, stay with him overnight. When morning comes, he pays the innkeeper, asks him to provide care, and promises to return and pay additional expenses. The Samaritan gets more ink than the priest and Levite do because the Samaritan *does* more. But he does what he does because “when he saw him, he felt compassion.”⁷⁰

When we recognize that “getting closer” is proper to God, we concretely discover the way and the style in which God reveals Himself by giving Himself. In reaching out to us in our painful and dramatic situations, God manifests his being as an event of close love.⁷¹ The most radical approach of God is the incarnation. As John 1:14 states, all the communicative and salvific capacity of God has become humanity in Jesus. This is

event referring to the religious, but to the human being, he recognizes that, at birth, man comes into the world with an access to the sacred, in which the “outside,” can be touched. “Other than myself” is given in the overabundance proper to the religious event, saturation of saturation in Marion’s categories, in Scannone et al., *El Acontecimiento y lo Sagrado*, 17–38.

⁶⁷ McFague, *Modelos de Dios*, 80.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 72, states: “A metaphorical theology is consequently destabilizing: since no way of referring to God is adequate, and all are improper, the new metaphors are not necessarily any less inadequate or improper than the old ones.”

⁶⁹ Bovon, *El Evangelio Según San Lucas II (Lc 9, 51-14-35)*, 120. For further study of the Greek verb *σπλαγχνίζομαι*, please refer to Kittel and Friedrich, *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, 903–3.

⁷⁰ Howe and Sweetser, “Cognitive Linguistic Models for Analyzing Characterization in a Parable,” 485.

⁷¹ Torres Queiruga, *Alguien Así es el Dios en Quien yo Creo*, 45, states that the true God only knows, wants, and can love: “For the biblical experience this ended up becoming so evident that in the end, after the definitive culmination in Jesus of Nazareth, he defines it as love: God is agape (1 Jn 4, 8.16), that is, “God consists in being while loving ... We can dare to say, with all theological rigor, that God “neither knows nor wills nor can do anything else but love,” because that is his most intimate ‘essence.’”

the point that begins and explains the logic of divine closeness. Along these lines Osorio⁷² has developed a new understanding of “kenosis” (very close to this approach), interpreting it not “as a state of concealment or limitation that sees the divine properties, but, on the contrary, as the expression of God’s innermost being, as the manifestation par excellence of the divinity present, in the humanity of Jesus.” God is kenosis, and in Jesus, he presents himself as total self-giving, revealing his total essence. This is how Osorio⁷³ describes it:

In Jesus the divine reality has revealed itself as giving. It is proper to God to give and to offer all of himself. It is proper to the divine nature to give, to be available, to love to the extreme. The capacity to spend, to be detached from oneself, giving, love, are not only predicates or modes of God, as an addition to his identity, they are part of the divine nature. It is not something added to God’s being. It is God himself.

And this is the God who approaches and becomes our neighbor. Thus, God himself is closeness, in the very fact of his revelation and historical action in our favor.

God happens as closeness. This attribute shall not be called essential, since it is not inscribed in traditional ontotheology,⁷⁴ but rather eventual, according to the thought of Romano.⁷⁵ Moreover, we will speak of a revelatory characteristic to overcome the metaphysical discourse. The essentialist way of speaking of God is neither unknown nor disqualified, but another way of presenting the discovery of his divine characteristics has been chosen. There is another category in feminist theology that goes along this same line: “lo cotidiano” (day-to-day life).⁷⁶ What in this work we call “eventual,” Isasi understands it as “cotidiano” (day-to-day life). This author affirms that the everyday is the epistemological framework of our theological task.⁷⁷

5 From persuasion to acceptance

For everything that has been said so far, closeness will not be considered an attribute of God in the traditional line, but a revelatory attribute of God from the logic of the event that seeks to be narrated as Jesus has done in the parable studied.

Today’s society is witnessing what Casas⁷⁸ calls “the emergence of narrative rationality.” With the crisis of legitimacy of scientific knowledge and the entry and acceptance of new and diverse epistemologies, including that of narrative knowledge, theology is returning to its most original character, which is the sapiential.⁷⁹ An important development in Christian theology during the second half of the twentieth century was precisely what is known as the “narrative turn” by which, from propositions deduced from

⁷² Osorio Herrera, *Kénosis y Donación*, 86.

⁷³ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁴ We will understand ontotheology as Jean-Luc Marion proposes it, as the understanding of theology from the presuppositions of traditional metaphysics, eclipsing all its experiential, sapiential, and narrative freshness. We refer to a text where the way Heidegger, Levinas, and Marion understand ontotheology is specified, making it clear that for Marion ontotheology does not belong to the very structure of thought, but belongs to the choices of thinkers and times, leaving the possibility of overcoming and exploring other alternative paths, in Schrijvers, “Marion, Levinas and Heidegger,” 207–39.

⁷⁵ “While the intra-mundane fact appears devoid of any substrate of univocal optical assignment, the event in the eventual sense is always susceptible of a determined assignment: it comes to myself, and constitutes me, precisely, as he who can come to himself from what comes to him,” in Romano, *Lo Posible y el Acontecimiento*, 20.

⁷⁶ Isasi Díaz, “Lo Cotidiano.”

⁷⁷ Isasi Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 63. This contribution is highlighted by Viñoles in her interesting contribution “La Importancia de lo Cotidiano. Una Aproximación a la Teología Mujerista de Ada María Isasi-Díaz.” Along the same lines, the following can be consulted: León, “Experiencia de Dios en la Vida Cotidiana.”

⁷⁸ Casas and Alberto, “La Narrativa Como Eje Articulador,” 281.

⁷⁹ Ramírez Zuluaga, *Cuestiones de Teología Fundamental*, 191–204, defends the sapiential character of theology, stating that theological knowledge is not logos about lived faith, but living testimony of this faith (narrative aspect).

the data of revelation, one passes to the narrative of faith, which maintains an ambiguous spirit that allows for a plurality of interpretations. Considering that most of the texts of Scripture are narrative, it is necessary to recover the metaphorical character of exegesis and of the consequent theological reflection. In this sense, the contributions of the critical historical method that lead to the world behind the text are not denied,⁸⁰ but starting precisely from this scientific platform, with creativity the world is found in front of the text, where horizons of unpublished meanings open up since the stories by their own language, as Siciliani states, produce meaning and engage the receiver.⁸¹

After approaching the parable from the New Rhetoric method and Argumentation, we conclude, without forcing the text, that the story produces in the reader the grasp of a typical attribute of God, in this case, his proximity. Jesus has succeeded in persuading us that God is merciful closeness and it is now necessary to move from persuasion to acceptance in concrete life.

The “who” God is, which is so developed in classical dogmatic theology, moves toward the “how” God is and “where” God is happening, proper to biblically inspired narrative theology. At this point, it is useful to emphasize that this closeness is not given extrinsically, but from within the person and reality itself. In his posthumous work, the theologian Mardones⁸² would put it this way:

To place God outside of us is another very common image of many believers. God is there, far away, distant, and external to us. This extrinsicism or externalism of the figure of God has serious consequences for the relationship with God. He remains distant and outside of us [...].

Within the Samaritan was God moving him to compassion; in this way, he who finds God within himself as closeness, will do the same as God.

This characteristic, an attribute of God, is precisely inferred from a parable, since this language is an epiphany of Jesus’ experiential understanding of the Mystery of God. The living metaphor, to use an expression of Ricoeur,⁸³ would not only be the image of a text, with all its force and creative power, but Jesus himself, who lives, realizes, and acts the parable. “Jesus of Nazareth is presented to us primarily as a narrated person, but even more often as a narrated narrator.”⁸⁴ Jesus is, then, the closeness of God happening.⁸⁵ Moreover, an analysis of the parable in a pedagogical key leads to the conclusion that Jesus provokes “a new knowledge” of what it means to love one’s neighbor and it is there where God will happen.⁸⁶ Jesus approached his experience of God; he put it into action by getting closer to him. And if Jesus is the incarnation of God,⁸⁷ then what Jesus does, God does. “In Jesus, divinity has become present in our history in a real and definitive way.”⁸⁸ Therefore, Jesus is God getting closer, approaching, lovingly reaching out to us. This is confirmed by these words of Duquoc:⁸⁹ “It is no longer a question of the mystery

⁸⁰ Wisse, “Narrative Theology,” 237–48.

⁸¹ Casas and Alberto, “La Narrativa Como Eje Articulador,” 283.

⁸² Mardones, *Matar a Nuestros Dioses*, 113.

⁸³ Elizabeth Monasterios, commenting on Ricoeur’s contribution to the study of metaphor, affirms: “Metaphor, when it is alive, has the capacity to invent, to say something new about reality. To produce, in short, a gain of meaning,” in Wood et al., *Con Paul Ricoeur*, 36. In this case, Jesus is the living metaphor that narrates something new about God. Jesus will appear as the poet of God with his creative force, not only with a rhetorical resource of images and tropes (according to Ricoeur), but also the creator of a new meaning to express the Mystery of God.

⁸⁴ Wright and Cuervo-Arango, *El Dios Que Actúa*, 213.

⁸⁵ “The conduct of the Samaritan is the best portrait of Jesus,” in Zea, “Un Retrato de Jesús, el Buen Samaritano,” 409. This article expands on this statement.

⁸⁶ There is an analytical approach called “diacognition” that from dialogue generates new knowledge in the interlocutor, positioning, and repositioning the listener. In this case, the interlocutor of the parable would generate new knowledge of God from what is narrated in the parable, in Rule, “The Pedagogy of Jesus,” 1.

⁸⁷ John 1:1–15.

⁸⁸ Osorio Herrera, *Kénosis y Donación*, 90. There are cited texts such as: Pagola, *Jesús*; and Haight, *Jesús, Símbolo de Dios*. We can also add the chapter dedicated to Jesus Christ in the classic text: Rahner, *Curso Fundamental Sobre la fe*, especially the section entitled: “¿Qué Significa “encarnación de Dios” (What does “incarnation of God” mean?),” 253.

⁸⁹ Duquoc, *Cristología*, 95.

of Jesus, but of the mystery of God. Well, the mystery of Jesus consists in the fact that his transcendence is given humanly.” God can only be known in and through Jesus.

This approach confirms that the God revealed in the Samaritan is the stranger,⁹⁰ the foreigner, the unwelcome, the passerby, the one who does not count, the despised, the leftover. In the same way that a Samaritan breaks the established molds of the Jewish religion and its legalistic and ritualistic obsession, the God revealed by Jesus in this parable is the “strange” God who escapes the molds and structures of the traditional ontotheology, both the Jewish of his historical moment, as well as the Christian in two thousand years of theological elaboration.

6 As a conclusion: Who is my neighbor? My neighbor is God

After the analysis that has been carried out on the parable of the Good Samaritan, respecting its original intention, it is concluded that “in Jesus’ message the only criterion that matters to determine the identity of the neighbor is the mercy that provokes the need.”⁹¹ This is the almost unanimous interpretation of the parable in modern studies. However, there are other possibilities that cannot be ruled out.

The Jewish religion affirms the proximity of God, but never a proximity that annuls or relativizes his absolute transcendence, his holiness. God gets closer, moving away;⁹² he gives himself, subtracting himself in his Mystery, not to be manipulated in any way.

With Jesus, God’s proximity does not take care of this. On the contrary, it would seem that the intimate Mystery of God consists in this self-giving without measure, to the point of wanting to be so neighborly to man that he can be grasped with unusual immediacy. This does not cancel his eternal transcendence, but rather it is possible to accept this Mystery because He himself has freely willed to manifest himself to the human being in such a way that the finitude of the person can grasp it, since in his existential anthropological structure this is possible, as a gift of God himself.⁹³ Without ceasing to be God in himself, with the incarnation,⁹⁴ God happens to us in a merciful closeness that leaves us astonished, and this astonishment, makes his presence go unnoticed most of the time, as happened to the priest and the Levite on that dangerous road.

God’s happening consists in this “getting closer” and according to the dynamics of the parable, the scenario of his revelation is the suffering history of human beings. Thus, human tragedies become theological experiences that arouse the appearance of the divine Mystery as loving closeness. Closeness appears not only as an altruistic initiative of the Samaritan, but as a divine dynamism in the person. As Baena⁹⁵ would say, God transcends himself in the creature, making him go out of himself to meet the other. God’s

⁹⁰ “The third is a Samaritan, a person who is one of “our people,” but a despised person, from another heritage. The Samaritans were descended from people of the ancient Northern Kingdom (Israel) along with foreigners brought to that area by Assyria after the conquest and end of that kingdom in 722 BC. They had their own version of the Pentateuch, observed different customs, had their own temple on Mount Gerizim (John 4:9), and were typically “on the level of the Gentiles.” In Luke 17:18 Jesus refers to a Samaritan as a foreigner,” in Hultgren, “Enlarging the Neighborhood,” 74. This is the condition applied to God himself in this article. It highlights, as in all narrative analysis, the value of the characters. Barrientos, in “La Resurrección del Hijo de la Viuda de Naim,” 58, comments that “the narrator delivers to the reader some important clues about the character (narrative modality), but, above all, the reader is an observer and a judge of the characters in the unfolding of their actions.” This author quotes the following text by Jean Pierre Sonnet which is included by Bauks and Nihan, *Manuale de Esegese Dell’ Antico Testamento*, 45.

⁹¹ Clark, “Reversing the Ethical Perspective,” 301.

⁹² So says Isa. 45:15: “Truly you are a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Savior.”

⁹³ Baena, *Fenomenología de la Revelación*, 162, affirms: “The infinitude of God in itself is not grasped in an immediate experience of it, this in itself is impossible and only comes to perceive in a transcendental experience of the limit, that is, when we come to the knowledge of this infinitude, in a negative way, that is, when we consider it as overflowing with finitude, by denying the infinitude of finite objects, since the only thing possible to the immediate experience of man is his own finitude.”

⁹⁴ Robinette, in “A Gift to Theology?,” 86–108, considers Christ, the incarnate logos of God, as the absolutely saturated phenomenon of God. The Christ event is the saturated phenomenon par excellence.

⁹⁵ Baena, *Revelación, Teología, Vida Cristiana*, 31–3.

creative act moves us from within to transcend ourselves in the unconditional service of the other, especially the most unprotected and suffering.

Sobrino,⁹⁶ from his liberationist reading of the biblical texts, commenting on the parable of the Good Samaritan, assures, in consonance with the thesis of this proposal, that

the correct reaction to the suffering world, which is a necessary and ultimate reaction; that without accepting this there can be no understanding of God or of Jesus Christ or of the truth of the human being, nor can there be any realization of God's will or the human essence. Although mercy is not the only thing, it is absolutely necessary in Revelation (and ultimately, see Mt 25, absolutely sufficient).

In the same vein, Pagola⁹⁷ considers the parable of the Good Samaritan as the form used by Jesus to design the dynamics of mercy, which is the true name of God according to the New Testament revelation. Commenting on the text of Luke, he makes this dynamic explicit in three moments: the compassionate gaze, the approach to the one who suffers, and the commitment of gestures. What is striking about this process is that when he describes what the Samaritan does, he is describing the action of God himself. Only mercy as a way of life allows us to fully grasp the Mystery of God, because it prologues his happening in every human gesture that alleviates suffering.⁹⁸ The Samaritan, as we concluded from the analysis of the New Rhetoric method above, became, on Jesus' lips and in his own life, a palpable theophany of the event of God in the world. In such a way that, every time we experience the closeness of a human being moved to compassion, the same divine closeness reaches out to us.

The way we approach the issue of closeness suggests that the categories: nearness, love, mercy, and compassion can be used in an alternative way, as if they meant the same thing. A limit of this article is this assumption, but we understand that each one offers a terminological and semantic richness that, from the understanding of the parable, can be the subject of deepening in another writing. Here, because of the objectives outlined from the beginning, we have substantivized the word "neighbor" to turn it into a divine attribute; at the same time we have adjectivized mercy, love, and compassion to describe what God's closeness is like.

Also, the use of the method of the New Rhetoric and Argumentation leaves the door open for the application of other exegetical methods, approaches, and, above all, contextual readings that approach the parable to continue extracting light for further theological reflections and, in particular, reflections in the field of the humanities. Contextual hermeneutics based on the situation of suffering of the poor, the marginalized, the excluded, the immigrants, in short, the last ones of the society in which we live, would do a lot of good.⁹⁹ These people would have much to tell us about God and to awaken in us the "closeness" which we have recognized as a consequential trait of God. We have not done so sufficiently in this article, but it is a matter for future research. As Isasi would say: "salvation depends on love of neighbor, and because love of neighbor today should be expressed through solidarity, solidarity can and should be considered the sine qua non of salvation."¹⁰⁰ Here, there is an open path for the future.

Conflict of interest: Authors state no conflict of interest.

⁹⁶ Sobrino, *El Principio Misericordia*, 73–4.

⁹⁷ Pagola, *Caminos de Evangelización* (4), 74–7.

⁹⁸ Pagola develops this proposal of mercy in his text: *Recuperar el Proyecto de Jesús* (1), 13–134.

⁹⁹ Among the authors of the so-called "Hispanic Theological Initiative" a text that presents the topic of the neighbor in the form of the Latino immigrants in the United States stands out. This text offers Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist readings on "the neighbor" that can be taken into account in future academic work: *Immigrant Neighbors Among Us*, edited by Carroll and Sánchez, 164.

¹⁰⁰ Isasi Díaz, "Solidarity," 31.

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