

# Reflection on Luke 10:25-37

*In Luke 10: 25-37, Jesus reaffirms the teaching “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,” and, “you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”*

## **The centrality of love in Christian life**

Love is the ‘DNA’ of Christian faith. God is Love and “the love of Christ has gathered us into one”.<sup>3</sup> We find our common identity in the experience of God’s love (cf. Jn 3:16) and reveal that identity to the world by how we love one another (Jn 13:35). In the passage selected for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024 (Lk 10:25-37), Jesus reaffirmed the traditional Jewish teaching from Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might”; and Leviticus 19:18b, “you shall love your neighbour as yourself”.

The lawyer in the gospel passage immediately asks Jesus, “and who is my neighbour?” The question of how far the biblical obligation to love should reach was a disputed one among doctors of the law. Traditionally, this obligation was believed to extend to fellow Israelites and resident aliens. Later, with the impact of invasions by foreign powers, the commandment came to be understood as not applying to foreigners from occupying forces. In time, as Judaism itself fragmented, it was sometimes understood to apply only to one’s own particular faction. The question asked of Jesus by the lawyer is therefore a provocative one. Jesus responds to the question with a parable illustrating love extending far beyond the limits expected by the lawyer.

Many early Christian writers such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom and Augustine saw the trajectory of God’s plan for the salvation of the world in this parable. They saw the man coming down from Jerusalem as an image of Adam – ie all humanity – coming down from paradise to this world, with all its dangers and brokenness, and the robbers as an image of the hostile earthly powers that assail us. They saw Christ himself as the one who, moved by compassion, came to the aid of the half-dead man, treated his wounds and brought him to the safety of an inn, which they saw as an image of the Church. The Samaritan’s promise to return was seen as foreshadowing the Lord’s promise to come again.

Christians are called to act like Christ in loving like the Good Samaritan, showing mercy and compassion to those in need, regardless of their religious, ethnic or social identity. It is not shared identities that should prompt us to come to the aid of the other, but love of our 'neighbour'. However, the vision of love of neighbour that Jesus puts before us is under strain in the world. Wars in many regions, imbalances in international relations and inequalities generated by structural adjustments imposed by western powers or other external agencies all inhibit our capacity to love like Christ. It is by learning to love one another regardless of our differences that Christians can become neighbours like the Samaritan in the Gospel.

### **The Way of Ecumenism**

Jesus prayed that his followers would all be one (cf. Jn 17:21), and so Christians cannot lose hope or stop praying and working for unity. They are united by their love of God in Christ and by the experience of knowing God's love for them. They recognise this faith experience in one another when they pray, worship and serve God together. However, in inter-church relations, including in Burkina Faso, this remains a challenge. Lack of mutual knowledge between churches and suspicion of one another can weaken commitment to the way of ecumenism. Some can be anxious that ecumenism may lead to a loss of denominational identity and prevent church 'growth'. Such rivalry between churches is counter to the prayer of Jesus. Like the priest and the Levite in the gospel passage, Christians often miss the opportunity to connect with brothers and sisters because of fear. During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we ask the Lord to come to our assistance, to tend our wounds and so enable us to walk the way of ecumenism with confidence and hope.

### **Christian unity in the service of wider peace and reconciliation**

The specific context of Burkina Faso reflects the need to place love at the centre of the quest for peace and reconciliation. This search has often been undermined by the loss of values and of a shared sense of humanity and by a diminished concern for the common good, probity, integrity and patriotism. The search for reconciliation has also been weakened by spiritual impoverishment and by the pursuit of easy gains. Faced with these realities, the imperative to witness to the love of God is all the more pressing.