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**THE STRANGE OTHER AWAKENS MY RESPONSIBILITY**

**A Philosophical Reading of the Good Samaritan Narrative**

**in the footsteps of *Fratelli Tutti***

*Roger Burggraeve*

**Introduction**

In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*,1 Pope Francis takes the Gospel parable of the Good Samaritan as the starting point and inspiration for his reflection on „fraternity and social friendship.‟ (cf. chapter 2, FT §§56-86) With this he explicitly addresses “all people of good will, regardless of their religious convictions,” because he is convinced that is a parable “any of us can relate to and find challenging.” (FT §56) We take this „catholic‟ character of his encyclical—literally „*kat' holon*,‟ „for everyone‟—as a challenge to offer a philosophical reading of the parable. Such a philosophical reading assumes that trans-historical and trans-cultural, that is anthropological, ethical and metaphysical insights are stored in the text, which can be made intelligible and communicable for everyone and which, moreover, can make their own contribution to the humanization of human coexistence.2

1 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti, Encyclical letter on fraternity and social friendship* (Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020). Henceforth FT.

2 For further explication of this philosophical reading of Scripture, see: R. Burggraeve, *To Love Otherwise: Essays in Bible Philosophy and Ethics* (Leuven-Paris-Bristol, CT, Peeters, 2020) 7-49 (Chapter I. The Bible Engenders Thought: On the Possibility and the Proper Nature of Bible Philosophy).

3 The cited studies of Levinas in English translation are listed below in alphabetical order. Abbreviations used: **EI**: *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by R.A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985); **GCM**: *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Essays), translated by B. Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); **OB**: *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by A. Lingis (The Hague/Boston/London: Nijhoff, 1981); **IRB**: *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*,

The philosophical reading of the story of the Good Samaritan will put us on the track of the strange other and of our responsibility for that other in its various dimensions: both individual and relational and social. This interpretation echoes Emmanuel Levinas‟ view of the face and redefinition of the self.3 Our philosophical in-depth reading of the parable will also put *Roger Burggraeve* 110

translated by J. Robbins (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2001); **NTR**: *New Talmudic Readings*, translated by R.A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1999); **PN**: *Proper Names* (Essays), translated by M.B. Smith (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1996); **TH**: “Transcendence and Height” (1962), in: *Emmanuel Levinas. Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by A.T. Peperzak, S. Critchley, R. Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1996) 11-31; **TI**: *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by A. Lingis (The Hague/Boston/London: Nijhoff, 1969).

us on the track of „fraternity‟ as he human condition, which in turn is the source of and an appeal to the virtue and practice of universal fraternity. To conclude, we will indicate how the parable should be interpreted as an open and not as a total or final story.

**From the Discussion that „Surrounds‟ the Parable**

The parable Jesus tells does not fall from the sky. It turns up in one of his disputes with a lawyer, who asks him what he must do to attain eternal, namely full, divine life. As is common in the Jewish context, the emphasis is on the „doing‟ of the Torah, in that, it is more important than the „knowing‟ and the „hoping‟ (cf. Kant‟s three questions about the Human). However, Jesus immediately asks a counter-question, “What is written in the Law?” (Lk 10:26a) The Torah is the source. But that literal source needs interpretation, as shown in the second part of Jesus‟ question to the lawyer, “What do you read there?” (Lk 10:26b) According to the Torah, there are 613 commandments and prohibitions. But how are we to understand this multiplicity? What is the underlying unity? This is how the lawyer understands it, for he summarizes the entire Law in the known double commandment of love, namely love of God and love of neighbor. In doing so, he refuses to opt for either school, which either reduces the entire Torah to love of God (school of Simlaï) or to love of neighbor (school of Hillel). The centrality and connection of the two commandments is plainly affirmed by Jesus: “Your answer is right. Do this, and you will live.” (Lk 10:28)

Does „neighbor‟ refer to the original meaning of who belongs to one‟s own circle, family, tribe, people and religious community? (FT §59) Or should neighbor be understood more broadly, as it has grown in Israel? Does it also apply to the *nokri*, namely foreigners temporarily residing in the country, such as itinerant travelers and merchants? Or does it apply in *The Strange Other Awakens my Responsibility* 111

particular to the *gerim*, namely people who come from elsewhere and seek refuge in Israel, fleeing famine and inhumane living conditions, violence or war—from the awareness that one has been a stranger in Egypt oneself? (FT §61) Or should „neighbor‟ perhaps even be extended to include the *zarim* or enemies of Israel (as Jesus suggests), namely the Amalekites, Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians,...? Jesus answers the question “Who is my neighbor?” with his well-known parable. What is immediately striking is that all persons in the parable are ethnically, socially, and religiously qualified, except the one who is the object of inflicted suffering. He is designated by the very general „*anthropos tis*‟: „a human being,‟ „just any human person‟: it can be a man but equally a woman, a person of wealth and prestige but equally an ordinary traveler, a Jew but equally a foreigner. If he belonged to a certain social category, one might be inclined to help that person because he belongs to one‟s „own group,‟ based on tribal, national, social, cultural, religious preference.

Not to fall into the trap of „tribal‟ preferential love, Jesus concludes his parable with a final question to the lawyer. This question is a form of narrative stratagem, in the sense that he retakes the initial question while formulating it differently: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the person who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (Lk 10:36a) Specifically, he shifts the focus from the „object‟ to the „subject‟ of love of neighbor, namely from the sociological category to the ethical attitude and practice, this is the choice to be merciful to the other. In this ethical relationship, it is also no longer important to which social classification the merciful person belongs. (FT §102) Jesus thus recalibrates the concept of neighbor from sociological to ethical category: “I should no longer say that I have neighbors to help, but that I must myself be a neighbor to others.” (FT §81) Hence, even the Samaritan is no longer mentioned by name, since the responsibility for the other is now central, not which „genre‟ of people accomplishes that responsibility.

How this responsibility reveals and realizes itself we now want to explore in greater depth through a close (and slow) philosophical reading of the parable itself.

**A Strange Other Interrupts People‟s Existence along the Way**

It is striking how the parable begins not with the self but with the other, namely with the fact that a strange other is a victim of crime. It is with this suffering other that the casual passers-by, namely the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan, are confronted in spite of themselves. These three people *Roger Burggraeve* 112

are travelling, each on their own, according to their own plans and provisions. They did not set out on a journey with the noble intention—“with premeditation”—of helping those in need. They are the realistic image of every human being who tries to realize one‟s own being (PN 71), whether economically and in business (like the Samaritan who trades) or spiritually (like the priest and the Levite, who serve in the temple). We can call it a responsibility in the first person, where the I as freedom and self-development is both the starting point and the goal. It is precisely in this autonomous and meaning creating, self-responsible existence that something unforeseen and unplanned „happens.‟ The „other‟ and „extra-ordinary,‟ literally „out-of-the-ordinary,‟ that breaks in into the „planned-order-of-the-day‟ is, in their case, the wounded other human being as victim of others (and we know that people can be wounded in many different ways). (FT §76) For the three persons who are „on their way,‟ this is a true „experience,‟ a real „event,‟ since this fact runs counter to their existence. The other presents himself as an unforeseeable and surprising fact par excellence and, in this regard, as the source of the purest kind of empiricism or the most radical experience. (TI 196) This is apparent from the text itself where we read that they were “by chance” (*sugkurian*) passing along that road. (Lk 10:31) The last thing these people were pondering was the possibility of such an occurrence, or rather, such a coincidence (literally „co-incidence,‟ that which „falls upon‟ or „incides‟ at the same time). To the contrary, in line with their personal planning, they wished and hoped and prayed before leaving that nothing out of the ordinary as such would „happen.‟ The human person lying by the side of the road despite her- or himself is experienced by the passengers as a „disturbance of their order of being.‟ We can call this the heteronomy of the epiphany of the other, namely his radical otherness and exteriority: “the breach of the immanence of the identity of the I.” (TI 40)

**Affected and Awakened to Responsibility**

When in the gospel narrative the three persons pass by, something „else‟ not only happens, but they are also „affected‟ by this „strange‟ event. With each of the three it is mentioned that they „see‟ the other lying there. (Lk 10:31,32,33) It is clear that what is meant is not some kind of neutral form of „seeing‟ that only registers and reflects data, but rather a non-indifferent awareness, a sense, whereby the three who go on their way are „de-neutralized‟ so that any further aloofness becomes impossible. *The Strange Other Awakens my Responsibility* 113

It is apparent that the disturbing harshness, with which the naked face of the other penetrates my existence, is of an ethical nature. By means of his suffering, the other is a being that touches me, not in the indicative but in the imperative. The epiphany of the other reveals an ethical appeal. The alterity of the other displays an ethical character on the basis of its actual misery and essential vulnerability. By the fact that the other comes „from elsewhere,‟ he falls completely outside of my familiar world, so much so that the other appears to me as a „stranger.‟ In this sense, the other is foreign par excellence—not foreign in the sense of being impenetrable or inaccessible, but „foreign-as-poverty.‟ (EI 86) We can hardly deny that the most eminent and at the same time most painful human misery is mortality, of which one‟s being in need of help and especially physical suffering signifies a frightening anticipation. In his afflicted body, the other person in the narrative is exposed by the criminals, direct and defenseless to the threat of death. (Lk 10:30)

This ethical fact of being affected by the “strangeness-destitution” of the other (TI 75) reveals the heteronomous responsibility-by-and-for-other. Its origins do not lie in the initiative of the passengers, but precedes their free choice: “responsibility prior to freedom.” (OB 119) It‟s literally an “an-archical” or „pre-original‟ responsibility (OB 9-10), namely, a responsibility that does not spring from the self as „archè‟ or „origin‟ of thought and action. We can call it a responsibility in the second person, or rather from the second person. Through the heteronomous fact of the suffering other, the passengers are held responsible—without having been consulted or asked in advance. The epiphany of the suffering other literally calls them, despite themselves, to responsibility: “awakening of the self by the other, of me by the stranger.” (PN 6)

**The Temptation to and the Prohibition of Indifference**

That the passers-by experience the other not as a neutral event but as an ethical appeal is evident from their reaction, for they “passed by on the other side.” (Lk 10:31b) They clearly experience the suffering other as a disturbing reality that throws their existence upside down. Hence—based on the concern for their own existence and all the plans and projects, because of which they are traveling—they prefer not to have to deal with it. In human coexistence we know all kinds of forms of this “nervous indifference” (FT §73), which are moreover often camouflaged: „to look the other way,‟ „to ignore the other,‟ “to pass by at a safe distance.” (FT §73) We know the „civilized‟ forms of „contempt‟ (FT §§64, 73), up to *Roger Burggraeve* 114

and including ignoring the other by not wasting time on the other‟s problems (FT §65), within the slipstream all kinds of social apathy or inertia. (FT §§71, 78) On top of this, the priest and Levite have another important religious-institutional argument, for they must keep their hands clean for the service in the temple, which implies that they must not touch the person along the way who may be dead. (FT §74) After all, touching a dead person makes one unclean and disrupts the order of meaning and value. (NTR 116)

However, it is not because the temptation to indifference is understandable that it is ethically irrelevant or acceptable. The priest and the Levite *do* make the choice to avoid the other. You can only pretend not to have seen the other person lying down if you have actually seen the other person lying down! By passing by the other, the priest and the Levite become accomplices to the crime of the robbers. (FT §75) Hence, the appeal that emanates from the face of the other-in-suffering implies the prohibition against leaving the other to his own devices: „You shall not kill,‟ in Biblical terms, realizing that there are so many ways of crushing and killing the other. (IRB 53) The temptation to kill begins in the often almost unnoticeable indifference. At the same time, this temptation reveals the prohibition of indifference as the prohibition to kill. (EI 87) This means that responsibility for the other does not begin with doing something but with not doing something, namely handing the other over to his suffering and death. And this is a fundamental choice, which does not happen without inner struggle (FT §69), but which also determines all of our further ethical relationship to the other. (FT §67)

**“*Esplagchnistè*” (Touched to his Guts): Reveals Ethical Fraternity as Human Condition**

In contrast to the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan does not pass by on the other side but *does* take responsibility for the other-in-misery.

The first thing to notice is that Jesus provokes his Jewish listeners by introducing an „uninteresting stranger.‟ Samaritans not only belong to another people, who in ancient Biblical texts were called “the foolish people” (Sir 50:26) and “not even a people” (Sir 50:25), but were also considered „unclean‟ because they allowed themselves to be „contaminated‟ by the pagan rites in their area. (FT §§80, 82)

With regard to the responsibility of the Samaritan, we must not allow ourselves to be seduced into a facile altruistic reading, with all the emphasis on a spontaneous generous commitment to the other. Such a *The Strange Other Awakens my Responsibility* 115

reading does not take into account what precedes the active, recorded responsibility, namely the passivity of being called to responsibility in spite of oneself. The Greek literally says, “*esplagchnistè*.” (Lk 10: 33c) This is a passive form of the verb „*splagchnizomai*.‟ This expresses well how the Samaritan too is traveling on his own business (Lk 10:33a), and how he too would rather not be disturbed in these plans. He is, as much as the priest and the Levite, interrupted and struck despite himself by the other half-dead along the way. He is awakened to responsibility by the epiphany of the other-in-misery. In this sense, “*esplagchnistè*” perfectly expresses the passivity of the heteronomous responsibility that precedes freedom, as we already evoked above and as it only now fully reveals itself in the Samaritan. Note that this is a radical passivity, “a passivity more passive than all the active passivity of making oneself available” (OB 138), “a pre-originary susceptiveness.” (OB 122) In this heteronomous responsibility, the I is no longer in the nominative but in the accusative: it is under the call, the vocation of the naked face of the other. The self is not the initiator, but called to answer: „*Hineni*‟ (*me voici*), in both Hebrew and French a grammatical accusative form without a normative form. (OB 112) The free response is not excluded but responsibility does not begin in the free initiative, although it does call for that response. The heteronomous responsibility, as evoked by „*esplagchnistè*,‟ is literally responsorial and dialogical in nature. (GCM 143)

There is another important aspect evoked by „*esplagchnistè*,‟ namely the corporeal nature of heteronomous responsibility by and for the other. The verbal form „*esplagchnistè*‟ contains the noun „*splagchna*,‟ intestine (guts), viscera (Latin). This means that to be awakened to responsibility by the naked face of the strange other implies that one is touched and affected into one‟s flesh. This is an ethical incarnation (OB 115), which we can also describe as maternity. (OB 108) Here we see subjectivity as pregnancy: “bearing par excellence” (OB 75), “gestation of the other in the same” (OB 105), “having-the-other-in-one‟s-skin” (OB 115), “the psych as maternal body.” (OB 67)

This is only possible thanks to the „sensibility‟ of the subject, this is tangibility and vulnerability. (OB 71) With this we bump into a redefinition of the human subject, which is implied in „*esplagchnistè,*‟ different from the traditional description as „animal rationale‟ or the modern „cogito,‟ i.e. conscious, thinking subject. (IRB 271) A redefinition that already surfaced above and which we now extend and deepen further. That I am touched by the naked face of the other presupposes my touchability, this is my vulnerability, as distinct from my fragility or *Roger Burggraeve* 116

finitude. In order to be touched by the naked face I must be touchable. In order for what is happening to happen, namely the „hetero-affection‟ of the self through the naked face (OB 121), we must presuppose that the self is „affectable.‟ In this respect, we can call the vulnerable body of the human being the „condition of possibility‟ (Kant) of being affected, as we see it occurring in the Samaritan. Being appealed to by the suffering of the strange other presupposes the appealability of the one being appealed.

In this sensibility as touchability and appealability, we discover a connectedness between me and the other, which we can also call “fraternity.” (OB 116) Since this fraternity precedes all fraternal acting, we must understand it as “creaturality” (OB 92), i.e. as creatural condition or creature status. (OB 113) Beyond any gender reduction, we can also describe this fraternity as pre-original, anarchical, creatural solidarity, a “pre-history” (OB 117) that precedes and also inspires the real history of fraternal acting. A dedication-in-spite-of-oneself, prior to any dedication and commitment. We „are‟ each other‟s keepers, before we take care of each other. (OB 117) Or rather, because we are each other‟s keepers and brothers, it is our mission to realize that creatural condition and calling. “I am bound to the other, the other who is the first one on the scene, not signalled, unparalleled; I am bound to the other before any liaison is contracted. Here there is a relation of kinship outside of all biology. (…) The community with the other begins in my obligation to the other. The neighbor is a brother. A fraternity that cannot be abrogated, an unimpeachable assignation, proximity…” (OB 87) Or as Pope Francis puts it: “The Good Samaritan showed that the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others.” (FT §66) The ethical ideal of and growth toward universal fraternity, which is the central focus of *Fratelli Tutti* (FT §§94, 106, 110, 142, 173, 176, 276, 286...), is anchored in “our innate sense of fraternity” (FT §77), this being our human condition and ethical „createdness,‟ i.e. “inspiration” and “animation” in spite of ourselves. (OB 70-71) Last but not least, this implies a reversal of the trite of the French Revolution to „fraternity, equality, freedom,‟ with fraternity being the foundation and inspiration for equality as equivalence and freedom with its rights and responsibilities. (FT §102)

**Incarnated and Organized Responsibility**

It is time to turn our attention to the various dimensions of committed responsibility, as briefly but realistically suggested in the story of the Samaritan. *The Strange Other Awakens my Responsibility* 117

First, the realization of responsibility for the other-in-misery is utterly earthly and concrete. In short, incarnated. In this sense the responsibility for the other is not only in its foundation but also in its execution thoroughly bodily. It is about concrete deeds that the Samaritan accomplishes for the good of the other. He literally goes to the other and, based on discernment and assessment of the real needs of the other, he personally does what needs to be done first and urgently (without expecting or demanding gratitude or reciprocity as a condition) (FT §79): “he pours oil and wine on his wounds” (Lk 10:34), to disinfect them and ensure that they can heal. This implies that he gives the other his attention and time, “something that in our frenetic world we cling to tightly.” (FT §63) On top of that, he makes use of what he has developed in function of his self-care: he uses “his own animal” (Lk 10:34) to help the wounded person further after the initial care. Thus his self-development acquires a new ethical, particularly altro-centric, significance.

But he does not show himself to be an ethical hero or superman, doing everything for the other. Even though he experiences his responsibility as fundamentally infinite, this as radically „by-and-for-the-other,‟ he realizes it in a modest and achievable way: a prudent, sage responsibility as the shape of the “wisdom of love at the service of love.” (OB 162) Specifically, he calls on an innkeeper and an inn, to which he takes the wounded man. (FT §78) The inn is an economic and social „institution,‟ serving travelers and traders on the road and their animals. The innkeeper is a professional who runs the institution and also makes a living from it. With his money—two denarii (one denarius is the daily wage of a common laborer) (Lk 10:35)—the Samaritan makes possible the organized care of the other-in-misery. (FT §63) Indeed, as a „middle term‟ or „mediation‟ par excellence, money allows goods and services to be detached from the possessor, this is to be generalized and traded, so that people‟s needs are realistically met. (TI 162) Thus, those who claim that the story of the Samaritan is about charitable love overlook an essential facet of responsibility for the other, namely its social, organized, and structural dimension, as explicitly as the interpersonal dimension is addressed in the narrative. (FT §165) Hence, inspired by the parable (FT §§62, 66, 71), Pope Francis‟ emphasis on “social love.” (FT §183)

Yet organized responsibility does not get the last word. After the Samaritan has entrusted the other-in-suffering to the responsible expertise of the innkeeper with his good working institution, and has also generously paid for it, he continues his journey. (cf. Lk 10:35) This too is a form of „wisdom of love.‟ After suspending his responsibility for himself and *Roger Burggraeve* 118

working for the other by the means and possibilities of his self-development, and also by appealing to the organized expertise of others, he reassumes the project of his responsibility in the first person. However, this does not mean an abdication of his responsibility to the stranger-in-distress. Even though he has, with wise confidence and discernment, delegated that responsibility to a professional with his qualified institution, he continues to feel responsible. He expresses this continuing responsibility in a promise, namely, that on his return he will verify if the sum of money donated is sufficient for the expenses incurred. (Lk 10:35)

But there is more, by returning and checking whether everything is all right, he refuses—at least implicitly—to give the last word to organized responsibility, this is to the institutions that structure the care of people. However necessary, through their objectivity and generalization they can never fully meet “the secret tears of the [unique] other.” (TH 23) Moreover, they risk solidifying and rusting in their own objectivity, turning into rigid regimes, which even work their way up to become a definitive (autocratic or totalitarian) “system of salvation.” (IRB 81) Therefore, there is a need for individual consciences, like that of the Samaritan, that question the justice achieved in such a way that a „better justice,‟ or rather „an ever better justice,‟ becomes possible. (IRB 51) Moreover, the Samaritan as a person can do what a system can never accomplish: the goodness of one person to another: a “gratuitous little goodness” (IRB 89), “goodness without regime.” (IRB 81) In all its foolishness, it is at the same time the lever in organized justice to strive for ever better justice based on the rights of the unique, vulnerable other. (IRB 68) This “ethical individualism,” as Levinas calls it (TH 24), does not make the social system superfluous, but transcends it and breaks it open from within to more humanity, always—to infinity! May we perhaps call this the enigmatic subversion of the Infinite in human society?

**To Conclude: An Open Narrative**

Finally, we want to connect this transcendence of the system with an aspect in the story, which is not thematized by the story itself but which we think is nevertheless important. It concerns our ethical „relationship‟ with the robbers, who not only rob another human being but also violate him and leave him half dead. Indifference or “pass by on the other side” (Lk 10:31b) is also out of the question here. Anger and moral indignation are entirely appropriate. (FT §72) Not as a cheap emotion, which abstractly moralizes without doing anything concrete and thus absolves *The Strange Other Awakens my Responsibility* 119

itself. Indifference or “pass by on the other side” (Lk 10:31b) is also out of the question here. Anger and moral indignation are entirely appropriate. (FT §72) Not as a quick and cheap anger, which abstractly moralizes without doing anything concrete and thus exonerates the outraged person. But as an attempt to leave one‟s comfort zone and not to ignore the evil done. (FT §68) Not abandoning the wounded man also means identifying and analyzing the causes, triggers and contexts of his suffering—the violence—, calling those responsible to account and, last but not least, considering how to remedy and, above all, prevent these forms of crime (for example, by „making the roads safer‟ or developing all kinds of prevention).

This „effective indignation‟ is not an alibi for not doing something for the suffering other. But on the other hand, to be concerned about the other-in-misery as a victim of inflicted evil therefore means more than just meeting the naked face of the other. Responsibility for the other also implies the “anger in the belly” (Dorothee Soelle), an expression that again describes in bodily terms the passion for justice. Sometimes we are so concerned with the victim in need that we lose sight of why someone has become a victim. Sometimes the compassion for the suffering other can even weigh so heavily that it involuntarily perverts into a (often paternalistic) power relationship. Sometimes compassion can bring us to the comfort of the cheap, quick promise: „Everything will be alright!‟ Then compassion itself becomes a form of injustice!

On closer inspection, moral indignation has the same source as mercy: you are touched, you are viscerally affected by what happens to the other. And this is an appeal that awakens to a responsibility that both cares for the other and stands up for justice by addressing the evil done. We find nothing of the latter in the story of the Good Samaritan, as the focus is entirely on the responsibility and care for the victim, the stranger. That is why other Bible stories are needed, in which, for example, the „holy anger‟ of God is interpreted by the prophets against injustice done. This implies that the story of the Samaritan cannot be read as a „total story,‟ covering all facets of responsibility for the other. Each narrative has its own perspective, which simultaneously gives it its strength and one-sidedness. Hence the need to read the narrative of the Good Samaritan as an „open narrative,‟ as a narrative that does not pretend to bring an „integral teaching‟ about responsibility for the other. Such a pretension would lead to a „final‟ and „ideological-totalitarian‟ narrative—totally in contradiction with the nature of narrativity. In other words, the parable of the Samaritan challenges us to think beyond the *Roger Burggraeve* 120

boundaries of the narrative. And that is exactly what Pope Francis does in *Fratelli Tutti* by breaking open the parable and thinking through „social and political fraternity‟ in its many facets and angles, inspired and challenged by the parable.

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ABSTRACT

This essay offers a philosophical reading of the Good Samaritan narrative, in the footsteps of the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (chapter 2). This philosophical reading puts on the track of the strange other and responsibility for that other in its various dimensions: individual, relational and social. This interpretation echoes Emmanuel Levinas‟ view of the face and redefinition of the self. The philosophical in-depth reading of the parable also opens the perspective on fraternity as human condition, which in turn is inspiration and appeal to the virtue and practice of universal fraternity. Finally, it will be emphasized how the parable should be interpreted as an open and not as a total or final story.