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Thesis submitted in the Department of Theology in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Durham

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ERRATA

(position in text indicated by a † in the margin)

page 27, note 111 should read:
See Nietzsche's statement that *truth* is a 'mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms': "Truth", 180, cited in Soskice, *Metaphor*, 78; Jakobson, "Aphasia", on the deep linguistic distinction between metonymy as the power to combine and metaphor as the power to substitute (cited e.g. in Scott, *Hear*, 29); Soskice, *Metaphor*, 74f. on conclusions drawn from the ubiquity of metaphor concerning the nature of thought and consciousness; Burke, *Permanence*, 95f., and TeSelle, *Speaking*, 59, on metaphor in science; White, *Metahistory* and *Tropics*, on the functioning of tropes within the discourses of historiography and the other human sciences; Armstrong, *Presence* 55-79, Fernandez, *Persuasions*, and Fernandez, ed., *Theory* (discussed in Paine, "Review") on tropes in anthropology.

page 91, note 54, last sentence should read:
Auch eine Vergleichung der Einzelzüge hat gar keinen Sinn; denn wenn man den Pharisäer als Bild aller Hochmütigen bezeichnet, kann man im Ernst alle Hochmütigen mit einem Hochmütigen, also die Gattung mit dem ihr zugehörigen Individuum vergleichen?': I, 112.

page 168, note 54, first sentence should read:
Heininger sees in the parables Luke's use of a kind of rhetorical 'Figurenlehre', the classical device of *sermocinatio* or character portrayal: *Metaphorik*, 79.

page 220, insert:
Downing, F. Gerald. "**Theophilus**'s First Reading of Luke-Acts". In *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays*, edited by C.M. Tuckett, 91-109. JSNT Supplement Series 116. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

The Voice of Jesus in Six Parables and their Interpreters

A Study in Insight, Influence and Intention

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Abstract

'Figures of speech' provide a suggestive key for approaching the question of Jesus' individual tone of voice. Apprehending a figure implies insight *into* an intention, and *beyond* intention to discern unconscious influences upon the speaker. This is the conceptual framework for a study of the 'voice of Jesus' in six parables peculiar to Luke (10:25-37; 15:11-32; 16:1-9; 16:19-31; 18:1-8; 18:9-14) and in commentaries upon them.

In the premodern era commentators approached the parables with an immediacy of insight, seeking the *divine* intention behind the texts. Nevertheless we may hear the voice of Jesus echoing in their commentaries in morally specific tones.

In the work of Jülicher 'insight', though repudiated, is still important, as he seeks the intention of Jesus through the figure of simile. Jülicher offers insight into Jesus as a passionate communicator, but goes beyond Jesus' intention in making him a propounder of generalities.

More recently a concern with the intention of Jesus is replaced by a concern with how his voice was heard. The necessity of insight remains apparent in B.B. Scott's use of metaphor as an interpretative key. An impression is given of Jesus as a provocative subversive.

In their context in Luke-Acts, the parables function as metonymies of the gospel, and yield an impression of the voice of Jesus as suggestively concerned with the life of this world.

In the ministry of Jesus the parables function as synecdoches, offering hearers a realistic and hopeful 'part' of the world from which they must fashion a 'whole'.

Against the background of Scripture the parables display a deep continuity with older forms of discourse, but also important tokens of newness.

A stream of influence can be traced from the Old Testament, through Jesus and Luke, and on through their interpreters, though recently its course has been somewhat diverted.

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people for their help and support in the writing of this thesis. I express first my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor James Dunn, for being so consistently encouraging of my work and for the rich store of wisdom he has shared with me over the last three years. Without that encouragement I would have doubted my instincts at many points; without that wisdom I would have made many a blunder and missed many an important avenue. I only hope that he will be encouraged by the outcome; blunders that remain are of course my responsibility alone!

The academic community in Durham has been a source of great support and stimulation. In the Department of Theology Dr Stephen Barton has read some of my work and I have benefitted greatly from discussing it with him. I am grateful to him and to Dr Loren Stuckenbruck for their friendship and help. The collegiality of the Postgraduate New Testament Seminar has been enriching and its sessions have contributed indirectly in many ways to my own work. I am thankful for many warm and fruitful exchanges with fellow-members. In the Department of English Dr Seán Burke has generously given time at various stages to read and comment on my work. He has guided me gently back into the field of literary theory after I had more or less abandoned it for sixteen years or more, and pointed me in directions which have been most significant for the course of the thesis. I have been grateful also for stimulating conversations with Dr Ruth Etchells, former Principal of St John's College, and the Reverend Theo Harman, one of my former schoolteachers, whom it was a pleasure to meet again at Hatfield College. He also kindly lent me his M.A. thesis. No endeavour such as this could happen without the support of staff in offices and libraries, and I am grateful for help of many such, notably Mrs Margaret Parkinson, Postgraduate Secretary in the Department of Theology. My thanks are also due to Mrs Jean Kirkwood for kindly helping with the proof-reading.

It was at a meeting in the University of Tübingen just over four years ago that the seeds of this thesis were sown. Professor Gerd Jeremias assured me that there was work still to be done on the parables, the labours of his esteemed father and others notwithstanding! It was Professor Hermann Lichtenberger who suggested that the *Lukanische Sondergut* would be a fruitful area for study, and he also who most generously lent my family his house for three marvellous weeks in August 1996. That turned out not only to be a quick plunge into German scholarship, as intended, but an exhilarating dip into Latin as well, when I serendipitously discovered an exquisite sixteenth-century edition of Bonaventure's commentary on Luke.

Others further back in time have played their part and should be mentioned. I imagine that Dr Robert Young, in the late 1970's at Exeter College, Oxford, would be rather surprised to learn that his unsuccessful attempts to help me understand the work

of Harold Bloom had borne fruit (if indeed they have!), even so late in the day. I am grateful to him for his introduction to this fascinating writer. The Reverend John Sweet, then Dean of Selwyn College, Cambridge, introduced me to New Testament study in 1983-5 with memorable enthusiasm and warmth.

The British Academy have provided funding for this project, for which I am truly thankful. The support of the Bishop of Carlisle, The Right Reverend Ian Harland, was deeply valued as I made the transition from full-time curate to full-time student. It was through the help of the Bishop of Jarrow, The Right Reverend Alan Smithson, that accommodation in Durham was provided, and I am grateful to him and to my colleague The Reverend Gillian Pocock for their support and for the working arrangement that has allowed us to live here.

My brother, Dr Tom Wright, Dean of Lichfield, has long encouraged me to academic endeavours, and probably feels I have been dilatory in heeding his advice. Be that as it may, it was he who encouraged me to study full-time for a Ph.D and who has in many ways been a scholarly model for me. I express my gratitude for his stimulation and the example of his enthusiasm and vision. He also kindly made time to read and comment on an early draft of Chapter Four.

Finally I mention another group of people whose support is on a different plane altogether. My children have been understanding and interested throughout the three years, and it is a tribute to them that I have been able to work at home through most of that time; I am especially grateful for their patience in the final stages of revision, which have eaten into most of their summer holiday. But it is my wife who has borne the burden with me from start to finish: who helped me believe that I could and should do it, and has been with me to spur me on through every day. To all those mentioned I am grateful, but to her most of all.

Declaration

I confirm that no part of the material offered had previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or any other University. Material from the work of others has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitably indicated.

Preliminary Note

Biblical quotations in English of a clause or longer are taken from the Revised Standard Version. Translations of shorter segments of text are my own. Translations of other works are my own unless the work is indicated as a translation in the bibliography.

References are given by short titles throughout the thesis. The part of the title used in the references is indicated in bold type in the bibliography.

Introduction

CHAPTER ONE
Voices and Figures

The Purpose and Basis of the Investigation

Individuality must be intuited.
Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, 64[1]

There is no method other than yourself.
Harold Bloom, *Poetics of Influence*, 415

1. Boundaries

This thesis is a literary enquiry into the voice of Jesus in six parables attributed to him by Luke the Evangelist. I am not concerned here with the theological, philosophical or metaphysical questions of how a person believed to have risen from the dead and to transcend space and time may be understood as speaking through written texts[2]; nor with reconstructing Jesus' original Aramaic[3] or Hebrew[4]; nor with the technical discussion of orality and literacy[5] - though my study may be found to have a bearing on these fields, and could itself be enriched through interaction with them. My concern is with the *tone* of Jesus, with his 'voice' as a metaphor for stance, attitude, individuality, personal stamp.[6] 'Voice' in this sense has become a significant term in the armoury of New Testament scholarship: whereas Adolf Jülicher differentiated the 'voice of Jesus' from the 'voice of the Evangelists'[7] merely to argue the necessity of source-criticism, and Joachim Jeremias's hope of returning to 'the actual living voice of Jesus'[8] was a longing of Lutheran piety to be fulfilled through the tools of form-criticism, recent scholarship has been more attuned to the elusiveness of the object and the sophistication required to

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[1] Cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 224.

[2] These are closely related to questions about how *God* may be understood as speaking through written texts, an issue taken up by Wolterstorff in *Discourse*.

[3] Cf. Jeremias, *Parables*, 25f.

[4] Cf. Young, *Parables*.

[5] Cf. Kelber, *Gospel*.

[6] Note the metaphorical character of these words themselves, notably the substitution of the aural for the spatial in the exchange of 'voice' for 'stance'.

[7] '[O]hne besonnene Prüfung kann man nirgends die Stimme Jesu mit den Stimmen der Evangelisten identifizieren': *Gleichnisreden* I, 11.

[8] *Parables*, 114.

approach it. Opening the 'Jesus Seminar', Robert W. Funk acknowledged the plurality of voices in the texts and the difficulty of isolating the voice of Jesus.[9]

The idea of the 'voice' of the *parables* is prominent in the work of a member of the Seminar, Bernard Brandon Scott.[10] He connects this with the parables' 'originating structure'[11], and he seeks not only telltale signs of the formal adaptation of an original parable during its transmission, but a certain unconventional *tone* as indicating an authentic core. He describes this tone as 'a tendency to play in minor keys'[12], and says that we need to recognize the way in which the distinctive voice plays against 'common wisdom'[13]. Such an interest is also seen in Charles W. Hedrick's examination of the 'creative voice' of Jesus.[14] Attention to different voices which may be heard in the text of a single Gospel is exemplified by James Dawsey's *The Lucan Voice.*

This development in sensitivity to voices is an advance: *general* tone and tenor are more important than *specific* words. But it also exposes pitfalls for scholarship. How can tone be recognized?

2. Means

Two possibilities present themselves from recent parable studies. One might look, with Scott, for the marks of unconventionality as indications of Jesus' individual voice. Though he acknowledges that 'parables that reflect common wisdom' *may* come from Jesus[15], the burden of Scott's book is that we can tell what is authentic to Jesus by the presence of an *un*common tone. The limitations of such a 'criterion of dissimilarity' as a tool by which the voice of Jesus may be distinguished from other voices to be heard through the texts are now, however, clearly perceived.[16] Particularly trenchant are the comments of E.P. Sanders: 'The test rules out too much...The material which remains after the test is applied is biased towards uniqueness'[17]. Alternatively, one might recognize with John Drury the disabling fact that we *have no* undisputed, *positive*

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[9] 'We are in quest of [Jesus'] *voice*, insofar as it can be distinguished from many other voices also preserved in the tradition': "Issue", 7, quoted in Borg, *Jesus*, 161.

[10] *Hear*, 65.

[11] Ibid., 64.

[12] Ibid., 66.

[13] Ibid., 65-68.

[14] *Parables.*

[15] *Hear*, 65.

[16] See, e.g., Hooker, "Tool"; Sanders, *Jesus*, 16f.; Fowl, "Reconstructing". Scott himself recognizes that 'by excluding common wisdom we risk presenting an eccentric portrait of the Jesus material': *Hear*, 65.

[17] Sanders, *Jesus*, 16.

criterion for determining that a saying or parable comes from Jesus[18], and therefore, like Drury, confine discussion of the parables to the Evangelists' usage.

I suggest, however, that a fruitful middle way can be adopted, which concentrates on the nature of the parables as *figurative language*. Figures are tokens of the individuality that points us to a particular 'voice'. This is not a way to 'assured historical results', but neither is it an excuse for suppressing the historical character of the texts[19].

In 1830 Pierre Fontanier defined figures as the 'more or less remarkable forms, features or turns, varyingly successful, through which discourse, as expression of ideas, thoughts or feelings, makes itself more or less different from what would have been the simple or common expression'[20]. This definition captures well the loose and conventional way in which 'figure of speech' is used. One can immediately notice the questions it begs. Who is to decide what is remarkable expression, and what is common - and on what grounds? Cannot all language be seen as in some sense 'figurative'? May there be figures that are recognizable as such to a speaker or writer, but not to the hearer or reader, and *vice versa*? If a figure becomes simply a part of the common currency of language, so that it is universally recognized and understood, does it thereby cease to be a figure, having lost the air of deviancy?[21] What difference might *writtenness* make to a figure of *speech*?[22] But these questions are largely projected on to the notion by a scientific desire for rigour and precision. In a sense, the *point* of the concept 'figure' is its ad hoc nature, its indefinability. At the moment we need to grasp one working observation: *as a linguistic signal a figure of speech is not simply translatable into*

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[18] *Parables*, 40.

[19] A character affirmed in Dunn, "Historical Text".

[20] *Figures*, 64, 179, cited in Ricoeur, *Rule*, 52.

[21] Fontanier believed that any 'deviation' that was 'forced', imposed by the language, rather than 'free', no longer deserved the name of figure: Ricoeur, *Rule*, 53.

[22] Barthes exposes the problems with the very notion of 'figures of speech'. 'Every structure of "figures" is based on the notion that there exist two languages, one proper and one feigned, and that consequently Rhetoric, in its elocutionary part, is a table of *deviations* of language': *Challenge*, 88. This fact bequeaths its oddities: '[T]here is a relation of *strangeness* between the 'commonplace words' each of us uses (but who is this 'we'?), and the 'unaccustomed words' alien to everyday use: 'barbarisms' (words of foreign peoples), neologisms, metaphors, etc....From *national/foreign* and *normal/strange*, the opposition has gradually shifted to *proper/figured*. What is the proper meaning? "It is the first signification of the word" (Dumarsais): "When the word signifies that for which it was originally established." Yet the proper meaning cannot be the earliest meaning (archaism is alienating), but the meaning *immediately anterior to the creation of the figured*: the proper, the true is, once again, the *foregoing* (the Father). In classical Rhetoric, the *foregoing* has been *naturalized*. Whence the paradox: how can the proper meaning be the 'natural' meaning and the figured meaning be the 'original' meaning?': ibid., 88f. Barthes' last sentence here perhaps needs a little unpacking. Figuration implies, precisely, 'originality', yet it is also understood as *deviation* from an 'original'. 'Proper' has associations of ownership, yet the 'proper' meaning is understood precisely as that which is *not* owned by an individual, but is natural or common.

'normal' language, for an essential aspect of its 'meaning' is to draw attention to itself and thus indirectly to its maker.

Almost universally the parables have been treated as figures of speech[23], for two main reasons. For most of Christian history they have been read as part of a highly significative sacred text[24]. In this period, therefore, they were regarded as no more or less 'figurative' than other parts of Scripture. Like the surrounding text, they were seen as richly suggestive and uniquely shaped by one person (God) for his purposes. Since the rise of historical criticism[25] the parables have been regarded as figures in a narrower sense. Read in the context of the Gospels, they possess a *prima facie* peculiarity or uniqueness not even possessed by the surrounding texts; they are like peaks soaring above an already impressive landscape. It has been a natural instinct of scholars to see them as 'figures' that point to the mind of an individual creator, distinct from the Evangelists, and to identify that creator with Jesus. Queries about the authenticity of this or that parable or part of a parable have not altered this overwhelming verdict of modern scholarship.[26] Drury's work[27], however, exposes the fact that this argument is not watertight. Do the parables rise *so* high above the landscape that it is impossible simply to read them as pointing to the individual artistry *of a writer such as Luke*, rather than to the mind of Jesus?

So although there may be general agreement that a certain segment of text constitutes a figure, a more or less striking linguistic token of individuality, that does not tell us *whose* individuality. We may posit two extreme possibilities. Jesus may have been consistently individual and 'different' in his use of language, whereas the tradition and the Evangelists tended to assimilate this difference to common wisdom. Or Jesus may have enunciated things in a way that many others had enunciated them and were continuing to enunciate them, but the tradition and especially the Evangelists were very creative, even making their own 'figures' and ascribing them to Jesus. There is a large spectrum between these two extremes, and much seems to depend on personal judgement. How then can the rhetorical category 'figure' possibly advance an investigation into the voice of Jesus? Paul de Man offers what may seem a counsel of despair: 'Far from constituting an objective basis for literary study, rhetoric implies the

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[23] Hedrick, *Parables*, represents a recent attempt to dissociate the parables altogether from figurative language, but is unsuccessful in this because of the close link between the terms 'fiction' (which Hedrick adopts) and 'figure' (which he eschews). Both are derived from *fingere*, 'shape' or 'mould', and both designate a linguistic formation which somehow suggests the one who forms it.

[24] See Chapter Two below.

[25] See Chapter Three below. Jülicher designated the parables as different types of *Redefigur* (figure of speech): *Gleichnisreden* I, 80, 98.

[26] Cf. Stein, "Parables", 568, for a recent reassertion that the parables are the 'bedrock of authentic Jesus tradition'.

[27] *Tradition*; *Parables*; "Luke".

persistent threat of misreading'[28]. In fact, however, we shall see how the category 'figure' clarifies for us the nature of our task and the mode in which it must be approached.

3. Foundations

The slipperiness of rhetoric as a foundation for literary study, exposed by de Man, simply focusses the *de facto* element of human construal involved in comprehending figurative language. De Man belongs to a school that sees the conditioning of humans by language as more fundamental than the conditioning of language by humans.[29] But rather than surrendering to this view and therefore despairing of rhetorical categories, it is possible to celebrate the personal element in the formation of, and response to language, and see rhetoric - above all the notion of 'figure' - as the indicator of an irreducible humanity.

The notion of 'figure' reminds us that we are *not* just dealing with language as a conventionally-shaped entity; and that the discernment of a figure, the detection of a voice, is an *aesthetic* act.[30] Earlier this century the form-critical school denied the necessity for such a response in the case of the NT by characterizing the NT literature as a "sociological result".[31] Since in their view 'the author's personality is of little importance'[32] in these writings, no 'aesthetic judgement of a personal and creative character'[33] needs to be made with respect to it: the field belongs to pure historiography. But these judgements about the NT are themselves aesthetic ones, in the fundamental sense of perceptions[34]. They have been challenged. Stephen Neill, for instance, has written that 'each of the evangelists is an author, and an author of genius, in his own right'[35]. Subsequent studies have celebrated such individual skill in the Evangelists[36].

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[28] *Blindness*, 285.

[29] Ibid., 276.

[30] '[A]t the heart of the historical quest for Jesus is a literary task...Understanding Jesus' teaching requires...the skills to make sense of his metaphors and symbols': Morgan and Barton, *Interpretation*, 240. '[T]he only nonreductivistic [sic] way of coping with the affecting presence is in wholly affecting terms': Armstrong, *Presence*, 75.

[31] Dibelius, *Tradition*, 7.

[32] Ibid., 1.

[33] Ibid., 7.

[34] The word 'aesthetic' comes from the Greek αἰσθητικός, meaning 'capable of perception' or 'perceptive'. I suggest that recollection of the derivation may help to save the word from the burden of its modern history since Kant and Nietzsche. When I write about an 'aesthetic' response or judgement I am not concerned with a decision about 'good taste', nor am I implying at all that the purpose of the literature in question was simply to give pleasure. As Alter points out, 'it is the exception in any culture for literary invention to be a purely aesthetic activity': *World*, 53.

[35] Neill and Wright, *Interpretation*, 258. On contemporary attention to so-called 'literary qualities' in the Bible as a whole see Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 16f.

[36] E.g., on Luke, Drury, *Tradition*; Johnson, *Function*; Dawsey, *Voice*.

Jesus himself has frequently been regarded as an (oral) 'author' of genius.[37] A properly nuanced view of the NT will be open to the possibility of its containing a mixture of conventionally- and personally-shaped material.[38] The central point is that historical data alone will not be able to distinguish between those kinds of material for us. Both the initial *recognition* of the personal - the discernment of the voice - and its characterization, understanding and appraisal, are matters of personal, aesthetic response, with all the implications of uncertainty and ambiguity.[39]

The rigour of historical criticism has not been at ease with this fact. But writing can never fully capture tone. We should still need to make aesthetic judgements, and call to our aid the kind of literary criticism that celebrates and enables them, even if it could be shown beyond doubt (to take an extreme and incredible hypothesis) that Jesus himself had written down his parables, in Greek, in the words and forms attested by our extant manuscripts, or even if it could be shown (another incredible extreme) that the Evangelists' voices are the only ones we must deal with, that Jesus and the Jesus-tradition are simply absent from their work except as pure fictions.[40]

We may locate the problem by referring to Friedrich Schleiermacher, who well understood that historical study and aesthetic response must go hand in hand. Thiselton states Schleiermacher's position thus:

> To 'divine' without comparative philological or critical study is to become a hermeneutical 'nebulist'; to engage in comparative philological questions without a living, intuitive perception of the spirit of the subject-matter and its author is to remain a hermeneutical 'pedant'.[41]

To attend to the figurative nature of texts is simultaneously to engage in both activities that Schleiermacher saw as necessary. Comparative study is required, because only so will individuality come to light; intuition is also required, because otherwise there will always be a tendency to reduce the individual to the conventional, or at least to a readily-analysable form of deviation from the conventional.

I will state the matter in terms of my three sub-themes. Texts that are or may be figurative, and thus conduits for individual voices, invite *insight* (on the part of a reader)

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[37] See e.g. Bailey, *Poet*, 158, citing Smith, *Jesus*, 19, on the parables as 'the mark of Jesus' supreme genius', providing material 'that neither the philosopher nor the theologian can exhaust'; Wilder, *Rhetoric*, 89; Hedrick, *Parables*.

[38] Alter describes the problem we face in recognizing the signs of 'authorship' in Scripture: 'Biblical tradition...went to great lengths to hide the tracks of the individual author...the writer disappears into the tradition, makes its voice his, or vice versa': *World*, 2f.

[39] Cf. Harman, *Parables*, 76-79.

[40] It is therefore not simply a matter of tracing the progression from oral tradition to written Gospel, important as that is, but of detecting *tone* in material that may always have been written, as well as in that which may have come from an oral source.

[41] Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 222, citing Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, 205.

into an *intention* (on the part of an author); but both reader and author are subject to *influence* from other sources, and therefore neither the individuality of the reader's response, nor that of the author's work, should be exaggerated. Further, readers have particular *intentions* when interpreting texts. Each of these key words, and the way that I shall use them, needs some attention.

In the word *insight* I allude particularly to the image which the Venerable Bede borrowed from Bishop Acca, who encouraged him to write his commentary on Luke. Bede mentions in his Prologue to the commentary that in addition to that which he has drawn from his predecessors, there are things which the 'author of light' has opened up to him personally.[42] Jülicher belaboured the Fathers with such a concept (*Scharfsinn*, 'keen perception'): in his view personal insight, compromised by its attendant claim to *divine* revelation, was deeply suspect.[43] In fact, however, insight is a close relative of what Schleiermacher called divination[44], and Jülicher's careful historical work shows the inescapable necessity of divination, as well as historical comparison, if Jesus' individuality is to be characterized.[45] Scott is one of those who has rehabilitated 'insight' in parable studies. He writes that insight 'results from inquiry and is cumulative'; it is 'an intuitive grasp of a whole, and as such is preconceptual'.[46] 'Insight', in short, implies the immediate apprehension that is aesthetic response, a seeing or a hearing[47]; in relation to a text it implies that what is written discloses some reality.

The claim to insight implies that what is 'seen' or 'heard' behind an outward exterior is *really seen or heard*; it is not a chimaera, a mere illusion.[48] But equally, it implies the *personal engagement of the one seeing or hearing*.[49] This is not to say that

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[42] Beda, *In Lucam*, Prol.116, 120.

[43] E.g. *Gleichnisreden* I, 48: see below, 86 n.38.

[44] On Schleiermacher see Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 221-227; Ricoeur, "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics", 185-188.

[45] See below, 103.

[46] *Symbol-Maker*, 17.

[47] The Greek root beneath the word 'aesthetic' is αἴειν, which can mean to hear *or* to see, or indeed to know. It is a pity that English has no word related to the aural faculty corresponding to *insight* - *inhearing*, for instance. In Clement's thought, 'perception' of 'perceptible things' (αἴσθησις αἰσθητῶν) was one aspect of the insight indispensable to interpretation (Torrance, *Meaning*, 174f.); in this thesis I use 'insight' and 'aesthetic response' interchangeably. Harman writes: 'The intuitive perceptions of the heart vital to the artist are also necessary for those who would enjoy and respond to the artist's work': *Parables*, 76f. He uses the helpful analogy of conversation: 'it is like the listener who proposes a meaning by saying, "Is this what you mean?" It is this creative response in listening that enables the listener by sympathy to match in his mind what is in the text' (77). As colours are invisible without light, so 'the text surrenders its meaning by the light of thought we bring to it' (ibid.). Cf. Tolbert, *Perspectives*, 68ff., on interpretation as art.

[48] '[A]n encounter with texts occurs when the reader both "conquer[s] a remoteness" and meets with the other': Ricoeur, *Conflict*, 17, cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 36.

[49] For the purposes of this thesis I do not here mean the engagement of Christian faith, but that 'productive encounter between the text and the reader' enabling a disclosure or an illumination which is

the claim (though strictly unverifiable) is beyond the bounds of being tested; testing can take place on both a historical level (is this supposed 'insight' historically plausible?) and an aesthetic level (do others 'see' it too?). Both poles are important: the claim to see or hear something which is real, and the implication of a personal engagement.

This need for personal engagement is especially evident when we are reading texts not *just* to find out what their authors meant, but what the texts may *disclose*, apart from any intention.[50] I shall show that such attention to non-intentional meaning is important in an enquiry into the 'voice of Jesus'. That voice may be detected in interpretations of the parables in ways the interpreters did not intend, and such (perhaps) unconscious reception of the voice can still give us clues to the intention of its owner.

With respect to one category of figures, the tropes[51], Madeleine Boucher points to the necessity of insight when she states the importance of 'perceiving, or interpreting, the natural as well as the conventional meaning of the words'[52] (by 'natural meaning' she means associations or connotations). Indeed, insight is even more necessary than she suggests, for the user does not necessarily invest her trope with 'natural' connotations, but with new and personal ones; or the word may have connotations for the receiver which it does not have for the user, even if receiver and user are contemporaries. This is why historical investigation of the meanings of words in their ancient contexts will only take us a certain distance in the grasping of their original impact.[53] If an aesthetic response was necessary in the original reception of a figure, how much more is it necessary when that figure is an ancient one, and much that was taken for granted in the original situation is lost to us. Over the centuries, *insight*, as well as historical scholarship, has become *increasingly* necessary for interpreters of the parables.

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possible not only in the case of 'sacred' but of 'secular' texts: Kermode, *Secrecy*, 40. Cf. Jasper, *Literature*, 90, on Schleirmacher's collapsing of the distinction between *hermeneutica sacra* and *hermeneutica profana*, restated by Bultmann; and 92, on Ricoeur's alignment of religious with poetic language in *Rule*, 209.

[50] Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 29. He points out - as I also assume in this thesis - that an act of interpretation is required even when we are confronted with a straightforward proposition; but in manifestation (i.e. non-propositional revelation) 'everything needs interpreting, both sign and signified; we are, as it were, confronted with reality raw'.

[51] For the distinction between figures and tropes, see below, 24.

[52] *Mysterious Parable*, 27. For Scott, 'insight' into the 'symbol' of the kingdom of God is grasped through the parables as metaphors: *Symbol-Maker*, 17.

[53] On the need for insight into the tropical language of Scripture according to Clement of Alexandria, see Torrance, *Meaning*, 169f.; on Athanasius's rejection of tropical exegesis and the aim for careful precision in discerning Scriptural meanings, see ibid., 272-284. If I seem to the reader to be in danger of regressing from a more enlightened Athanasian position to a problematic Clementine one, which as Torrance says 'obstructs straightforward investigation or scientific interpretation' (170), I would plead (a) that I am not arguing on the ground of any supposed 'divine meaning' in Scripture, but on that of the natural ambiguity of language, and (b) that I am not setting up insight in opposition to historical investigation, but as necessarily complementary to it.

The question now arises where insight is to be found, and here I turn to my middle term, *influence*. I give considerable weight in this thesis to parts of *the history of interpretation*, read as a chronicle of insights on which we can draw, and I am very aware of the extent to which 'my' insights are influenced by this tradition. It is important also to seek to discern what other cultural influences apart from this tradition itself are operative upon both present and past interpreters, for influence shapes insight, even if it does not invalidate it. But it is not only influences upon interpreters of which we need to be aware. Influences must have operated upon Jesus himself.

My usage of 'influence' owes much to the work of the major American literary critic Harold Bloom. His theory that an 'anxiety of influence' pervades poetry through the centuries[54] may be (consciously) hyperbolic, and has not been without its critics[55], but is compelling enough at many points to be used to illuminate the dynamics of creativity. His aim is 'to de-idealize our accepted accounts of how one poet helps to form another'[56]. This construal of poetic 'influence' seeks to block not only 'New Critical' assumptions of a poem's self-sufficiency, but also a return to an older kind of approach to inter-poetic relationships limited to a study of the way that a poet has 'used' (by implication consciously) various 'sources'[57]. Bloom shows how both of these modes ignore the far more subtle workings of 'influence'. In his usage the word regains the ancient connotation of a power that works upon the human world from a source in the planets or stars.[58] A writer may not know, often does not know, the way in which she is being 'influenced'. Indeed, Bloom writes, he *may even be 'influenced' by poems he has never read.*[59] 'Influence' is thus a trope to describe the relationship between texts which heightens the human impulses involved, whether conscious or unconscious. Bloom recognizes that the process is not always marked by 'anxiety'[60]. But centrally, he demonstrates the naïveté of ignoring the *agonistic* dynamic of creativity, the striving of

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[54] First formulated, with reference to poetry since Milton and especially the Romantics, in *Anxiety*; recently restated on a broader scale in *Canon*, 4-12. Bloom uses 'poetry' in its ancient and fundamental Greek sense of 'making' (ποιήσις). It is thus not limited to particular forms, either in prose or verse. Dr Seán Burke has pointed out to me that Bloom's theory can be applied beyond literature itself, *mutatis mutandis*, to a whole range of situations in which a person finds himself at the same time drawing on wisdom, fashions, traditions external to himself yet seeking to assert his own individuality.

[55] See the account of Bloom and responses to him in Lentricchia, *After*, 318-346.

[56] *Anxiety*, 5.

[57] 'Poetic influence, in the sense I give to it, has almost nothing to do with the verbal resemblances between one poet and another': *Map*, 19.

[58] *Anxiety*, 95.

[59] Ibid.

[60] He finds, for example, a sense in Dante of *loving*, not anxious, emulation of his precursor Virgil, though Dante's work remains a great sublimation of Virgil's: *Anxiety*, 123.

'strong' poets 'to clear imaginative space for themselves'[61] and not be submerged in the influence of their precursors.[62]

An illuminating aural metaphor associated with the process of 'influence' is *echo*. A *voice* may not have been recorded for us, but it may still echo on in the voices of others: not necessarily in actual repetition of timbre, but in the adoption by speakers of stances or tones reminiscent or imitative of it. 'Echo' is an importantly suggestive word. If we speak of hearing in a text the 'echoes' of a previous textual voice we are sensitive to the fact that the writer may not *deliberately* be quoting or alluding. The later writer may in fact be saying something *in opposition* to the earlier one, but using a telltale turn of phrase that crops up, as it were, unasked - a clue to influence. There may be no *verbal* correspondence at all; it may be purely an echo of tone or attitude that is heard in the text. The metaphor of 'echo' implies that it is the *earlier* writer who has started the process, and that what we hear in the later one may be the product neither of the later writer's settled intention, nor merely of impersonal chance or linguistic convention, but of the ambiguous relationship in which he stands to his precursor. To hear in a later writer an echo of an earlier one is to be alerted to the mysterious process of 'influence', by which writers are formed by their predecessors even as they try to establish their own voice.[63]

For Bloom, the process of influence is deeply bound up with the process of figuration. 'To originate anything in language we must resort to a trope, and that trope must defend us against a prior trope'.[64] To find and comprehend a figure is to find and comprehend a sign of individuality, but how can individuality be measured? We may think we have found such a sign, but if we set it in a large enough context, we frequently find that the figure is a product of earlier influence. The mark of true originality, according to Bloom, is not 'new' formulations, but the ability so to twist, turn, trope the old ones that a personal vision and meaning emerges. Figurative language is slippery: words once shaped into a figure are the more readily *re*shaped into another. Martin Dibelius well recognized the ease with which Jesus' own use of such language could be a spur to his followers not only to do likewise, but to turn (i.e. trope) what he said in their own particular tone, for their own purposes.[65] To be attentive to the presence of

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[61] Bloom, *Anxiety*, 5.

[62] A fellow-critic evaluates Bloom thus: 'Bloom has put forth bold and important ideas which threaten to make the moribund subject of influence the pivot of the most satisfying historicism to appear in modern criticism...No theorist writing in the United States today has succeeded, as Bloom has, in returning poetry to history': Lentricchia, *After*, 325, 342.

[63] I have been influenced by the sensitive exploration of echo in Hays, *Echoes*. Hays uses the work of Bloom's associate Hollander, *Echo*. Bloom's emphasis on the *origins* of influence in precursor texts is however, distinct from that of Hays on echo as something *heard* by Paul's readers, or *intended* by Paul.

[64] *Map*, 69.

[65] *Tradition*, 249, where he comments on 'the possibilities given to preaching by the use of metaphor'.

influence in the reading of figures is thus to be sensitive to the true dimensions and limitations of their originality.

Bloom's quest to recapture the power of texts by linking them in diachronic chains has deep connections with the 'new hermeneutical' approach to NT and especially parable studies, popular in the 1960's. Eta Linnemann, in her book on the parables, emphasises their character as 'language events' but also the fact that language 'is subject to historical change'[66]. The uniqueness of the event means that it 'cannot be transmitted', but 'it can be made intelligible'[67] (implicitly, by historical study). It appears to me that Bloom offers to supply a missing link in the new-hermeneutical argument here. The new hermeneutic privileges Scripture, and especially the parables, as *unique* language events. It thus tends to obscure the element of aesthetic response which is necessary, along with historical work, for the recovery of a 'language event' in a text *of any kind*, a part of which response is the perception of the text's relationship to prior texts. In other words, it idealizes and actually *dehistoricizes* the Scriptural texts by obscuring their membership of the class of human writings.[68] To admit this need entail no surrender of theological testimony to the power or indeed uniqueness of the texts, but would involve an honest admission of the element of aesthetic response in our comprehension of them. Paradoxically, Bloom, who celebrates aesthetic response[69], far from leading us away from history, leads us deep *into* history as the hidden story of human wills. Frank Lentricchia has even written of Bloom's argument 'on behalf of the historicity of literature'[70].

Bloom's way of reading newer texts beside older ones under the sign of 'influence' is therefore *a mode of interpretation which takes seriously the presence of both genuine originality and unconscious dependence.* He stands in the lineage of Schleiermacher, who wrote: 'We must try to become aware of many things of which...[the author] may have been unconscious...So formulated, the task is infinite'[71]; but Bloom's post-Freudian awareness of the infinity of the task leads to a more ironic estimation of the capabilities of the interpreter. Bloom is thus a useful post-Romantic guide, for indeed the Bible, as a text that is 'self-effacing with respect to its origins...has

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[66] *Parables*, 32.

[67] Ibid., 33.

[68] This is so notwithstanding Linnemann's emphasis on the humanity of Jesus and his words (ibid., 34f.), since her model, in which historical discovery of their original context and meaning precedes theological appropriation, leaves no space for aesthetic response.

[69] Cf. recently *Canon*, 10f.

[70] In the Introduction to Bloom, *Breaking*, ix.

[71] *Hermeneutics*, 112, cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 227; cf. Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 301, on the restatement of the principle by Gadamer, and the connection of this position with Via's desire to move beyond the search for intentional meaning in the study of the parables.

proved...a stumbling block to...Romantic hermeneutics'[72]. Bloom preserves a keen awareness of the dynamics of creativity without the illusion that we can scientifically establish the true origins of a text.

The scene is now set for my third term, *intention.* It will be seen from the foregoing that I do not hold any naïve view of the accessibility or necessary relevance of an author's intention.[73] Nor do I propose to enter the debate about the general usefulness of the concept of intention in literary theory.[74] I wish only to signal that for the practical purposes of this investigation, I shall find the concept of authorial intention indispensable and important. To attend to the intention behind texts - whether, in the present context, they be texts of Scripture or texts of Scriptural interpretation - is to imply attentiveness to 'non-intended revelation' also.[75] Here again historical and literary interests meet. Historians, including historians of Jesus, still want to know about human motivation[76]. One of Bloom's chief strengths as a literary critic is that he holds his conviction that intention cannot simply be read off from the writing on the page, *together* with a conviction that the human will matters deeply, and a determination to explore how its complexities are reflected in language. 'Poems are written by women and men, and not by language; poems matter only if we matter'[77].

The central reason for a concern with intention is that the nature of figures requires it. Boucher writes: 'Apprehending the meaning of any trope requires perceiving what the speaker intends'[78]. But we need to go a little beyond Boucher and say that to apprehend the 'meaning' of any figure, whether or not it is a trope, we must not only have insight into the intention of the speaker but *perceive the figure as a figure.* Its unconventionality or individuality is a part of its 'meaning'. If a sentence is understood straightforwardly without the perception of any such unconventionality, no figure is involved as far as the receiver is concerned, whatever may have been the intention of the giver. Conversely, the one who makes a sentence may intend no figure, but the one who receives it may see one, for she is aware of a context of which the giver is unaware.

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[72] Bruns, "Midrash", 627.

[73] Cf. Wimsatt and Beardsley, "Fallacy".

[74] Both sides of the argument are represented in Mitchell ed., *Against Theory.* Cf. Burke ed., *Authorship.*

[75] Cf. above, 17, and n.50. On the importance of intentionality cf. Wilder, *Bible*, 25.

[76] See the opening sentence of Sanders, *Jesus*: 'It is the purpose of the present work to take up two related questions with regard to Jesus: his intention and his relationship to his contemporaries in Judaism' (1). Such questions are in fact the main driving force behind the burgeoning studies of the historical Jesus of the last two decades.

[77] Bloom, *Poetics*, 425.

[78] *Mysterious Parable*, 26. Scott writes that '[t]his is the intentionality of the speaker - to allow the hearer to participate in the original insight': *Symbol-Maker*, 96. In *Hear* Scott retreats from intentionality: see below, Chapter Four.

It is important to stress that grasping a figure means perceiving intention, and seeing *beyond* the intentional to grasp the figure as a figure, because some recent parable scholarship has highlighted the need for an interpretative act (equivalent to what I am calling insight or an aesthetic response) but *not* the fact that such response is necessarily first a construal of *intention*. For instance, John Dominic Crossan writes of the endless renewability of metaphor[79], which is true. But he does not mention the fact that the very 'meaning' of a metaphor as a trope involves, in Boucher's words, 'a crossing of the objective and the subjective'[80], in which the objective is the conventional meaning of the word(s) and the subjective is *not only what the hearer/reader makes of them, but what the speaker/writer intended by them.*[81] To focus only on the response-side is to miss *what the receiver is responding to*. The existence and nature of tropes is indeed one of the strongest arguments for retaining the importance of intentionality in discussion of language generally: as Boucher shows, it is most starkly the case with irony that without a distinction between intentional and conventional meaning, no trope would be possible.[82] Mary Ann Tolbert has stressed that the parables demand interpretation (as against the new-hermeneutical emphasis that the parables interpret *us*)[83], but her understanding of a good interpretation is simply one that corresponds to the 'entire configuration' of the story[84], not one that corresponds to the intention of the parable's speaker: again, this misses the dynamic interplay in a trope between intentional and conventional.

4. Allies

It is important to note that such a concern for the discernment of intonation beyond inscription, the maintenance of some sense of an encounter with the personality of an author figured in a text, is not eccentric today. It continues to be an aspect of the business of secular literary criticism. Bloom's statement of intent is noteworthy:

> What concerns me in a strong poem is...the utterance, within a tradition of uttering, of the image or lie of voice, where "voice" is neither self nor language, but rather spark or *pneuma* as opposed to self, and act made one with word...rather than word referring only to another word...[85]

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[79] *In Parables*, 14.

[80] *Mysterious Parable*, 27.

[81] Ibid., 26.

[82] Ibid. Essentially the same point is made by Wolterstorff when he writes that 'literality and metaphoricity are a matter of *use* rather than *meaning*': *Discourse*, 193.

[83] *Perspectives*, 42, arguing against TeSelle, *Speaking*, 71f.

[84] *Perspectives*, 71.

[85] *Breaking*, 4. Cf. Bloom's proposal to replace Derrida's 'scene of writing' with a 'primal scene of *instruction*', thus restating the primacy of the spoken word (with all its associations of life, flexibility,

This voice is not 'self', for it is notoriously difficult to substantiate any claim to direct encounter with a self through a text. But nor is it merely 'language'.[86] Note how Bloom mixes oral and visual or spatial metaphors ('the image or lie of voice'); this captures the paradox of a voice being *heard* in a *text*. Most importantly, for Bloom the 'voice' of a poem is *utterance within a tradition of uttering*. 'Voice' is thus not only tone, but also 'stance', a metaphor which presupposes the question: stance in relation to what or whom?[87] This important deflation of the idealism which exaggerates the individuality of creative writing is of crucial significance for parable studies, in an era which has exalted not only the authorial skill of the NT writers but also the *originality* of Jesus, sometimes at the cost of properly locating him in history.[88]

But Bloom is not alone in standing against dehumanizing tendencies in literary criticism. Critics such as de Man, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have tried to set aside the necessity for a personal response to the personal in the reading of texts, but this has been shown up as the hyperbolic outworking of particular philosophical predilections. Seán Burke demonstrates how the importance of the author is inescapably implied in the very text of Barthes which proclaimed the author's death, as well as in texts of Derrida and Foucault that have a like anti-authorial burden.[89] Burke shows that the irrelevance of 'author' as a category in literary criticism has not been argued for, but simply asserted by those who proclaimed the death of the divine Author himself. Barthes, seeming to exalt aesthetic response, proclaimed that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author'[90], but Burke shows the deceptive rhetoric at work here, concluding that in fact 'the birth of the reader is not achieved at the cost of the death of the author, but rather at that of showing how the critic *too* becomes an author'[91]. Barthes' outlook implies readerly irresponsibility, but Burke's response implies that the reader only defines and attains his true dignity when he approaches a text as (at least potentially) a personal rather than an impersonal creation. The critic must indeed acknowledge the aspects of 'authorship' (e.g. creativity) in his *own*

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intentionality and ambiguity) over against the written (associated with conventionality, arbitrariness and fixity): *Map*, 29-62.

[86] Bloom thus challenges the subjection of humanity to language implicit in the philosophy of Heidegger and adopted in Biblical studies, with particular modulations, by the 'new hermeneutic': cf. Linnemann's approval of Heidegger's statement 'Man speaks in so far as he conforms to language': *Parables*, 32, citing Heidegger, *Unterwegs*, 33.

[87] I owe this observation to Professor James D.G. Dunn.

[88] Jülicher wrote of Jesus' *hohen Originalität*: *Gleichnisreden* I, 68. Cf. n.38 above; and the 'new hermeneutical' emphasis on the power of Jesus' words as themselves bringing in the kingdom of God: e.g. Jüngel, *Paulus*, 135.

[89] Burke, *Death*.

[90] Ibid., 130.

[91] Ibid., 61.

working; but that entails a responsible construal of the written signals of another mind, not a pretence that such a mind does not exist. Barthes' negative philosophy of literature buys literature's autonomy at the price of its humanity.[92]

5. Definitions

It is necessary to provide some brief definitions of terms used in this study. All 'discourse about discourse' is a matter of convention, as none has shown better than Barthes[93]; there is no 'correct' definition of particular figures. Since my argument is not at all about rhetorical systems with which Luke or Jesus might be presumed to have been familiar, and consciously to have used, but about aspects of (frequently instinctive) language use which our evidence indicates to be well-nigh universal, the issue of anachronism does not arise.[94] I have drawn on a number of works where helpful descriptions and examples are given[95], and present what I consider to be adequate working definitions.

First we must distinguish between a *figure* and a *trope*.[96] Though 'figure' and 'trope' are sometimes used interchangeably, it is helpful to keep 'figure' as the larger category, meaning any deviant or individualized form of speech. A 'trope' (etymologically 'turn') is a figure where the *meaning of an individual word, or short phrase,* is altered or 'turned' from its conventional sense. Thus alliteration and simile, for instance, are figures but not tropes, for the words continue to bear their conventional

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[92] Cf. Alter, *World*, 2. Wolterstorff points out that in contemporary philosophical hermeneutics generally a 'pervasive theme...is that there is something deeply misguided about reading texts to find out what someone might have been saying thereby': *Discourse*, 15. He counters the arguments against 'authorial-discourse interpretation' of Ricoeur (133-152), Derrida (153-170) and Frei (229-236).

[93] *Challenge*, 11-94. Figures of speech were studied by Aristotle under the umbrellas of both rhetoric and poetry: Hawkes, *Metaphor*, 7. In ancient times the subject was conceived in practical terms: one learned about figures in order to be able to *use* them to good effect in speeches or literary works, whereas in the modern era the emphasis has been on the *critical* task of *discerning* figures in works of literature and exploring their effects: ibid., 4.

[94] *Contra* Witherington, who assumes that to use a modern understanding of metaphor in appraising the parables entails anachronism: *Sage*, 149. Coleridge, following Goethe, had an important insight into the nature of symbol: the general truth it represents may be *unconsciously* in the writer's mind, whereas in allegory (according to this nineteenth-century view) all is conscious and contrived: Fletcher, *Allegory*, 15-18. To assume that Jesus' use of language adhered consciously to certain rhetorical forms is to skew the discussion as much as to assume that he did not.

[95] Particularly *SOED*; Hawkes, *Metaphor*; White, *Metahistory*, 31-39; Boucher, *Mysterious Parable*, 11-40; Kjärgaard, *Metaphor*; Caird, *Language*, 131-171; Ricoeur, *Rule*, 44-64; Bullinger, *Figures*; Fletcher, *Allegory*; and many places in Bloom's writings.

[96] The credit for reviving this distinction in modern times goes to Fontanier in his 1830 work: Ricoeur, *Rule*, 52. Fletcher describes the distinction purely in terms of length: a trope is a play 'on single words', a figure 'on whole groups of words, sentences and even paragraphs': *Allegory*, 84, citing Quintilian, *Institutes* VIII.ii.44-47, IX.i.1-28.

literal meaning: Robert Burns' 'My love is like a red, red, rose'[97] contains both alliteration and simile, but not trope, for all the individual words are to be understood literally.

Next we must distinguish between different tropes. Although for some purposes it is possible simply to subsume them all within metaphor[98], I wish to suggest that in the study of the parables it is important to keep them distinct. There is no universal agreement on the number or categorization of tropes. I shall here first define in my own words, in the simplest form, the six tropes regarded as central by Bloom[99], and offer examples from Scripture. I shall then make some remarks about the usage and interpretation of tropes in general.

Irony is using a word in such a way that it means something *opposed* to the literal referent. When Job in frustration bursts out to his 'friends' 'How you have helped him who has no power' (Job 26:2), he means 'how you have *not* helped him who has no power'.

Synecdoche is using a word in such a way that it means the *whole* of which the literal referent would only be a part, or a *part* of which the literal referent would be the whole. When Jesus says that the Son of man came 'to give his life a ransom for many' (Mk.10:45), he means 'to give his life a ransom for *all*'[100]. Conversely, 'the Jews' in John often means not *all* the Jews, but a particular group that was vocally opposed to Jesus (e.g. Jn.8:48,52,57); the narrative makes it quite clear that not all were in fact so opposed (8:31).

Metonymy is using a word so that it stands for something *associated* with the literal referent, e.g. as cause for effect, attribute for thing itself, or vice versa. When the Lord promises to David 'I will...build your *throne* for all generations' (Ps.89:4), he means 'I will give you an everlasting *kingdom*'.

Hyperbole is using a word so that it means something *less* than the literal referent. When the author of Jn.21:25 writes 'I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' were all Jesus' deeds to be recorded, 'world' means simply 'a large space'.

Metaphor is using a word in such a way that it means something *different* from the literal referent, but connected through some similarity. When Jesus says 'Go and tell

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[97] An example given by Caird, *Language*, 150.

[98] As preferred by Hawkes for general literary-critical purposes: *Metaphor*, 4. Ricoeur's concentration is also on metaphor: see *Rule*. Cf. Heininger, *Metaphorik*, 16, subsuming even simile (*Vergleich*) within metaphor: 'die Metapher ein semantisches Basisphänomen darstellt und als Oberbegriff alle sprachlichen Formen des Bildes wie Metonymie, Synekdoche oder Vergleich umschließt'.

[99] *Map*, 94f. For the significance of the order in which Bloom gives them, see below, 204. The conventional number of tropes from the Renaissance onwards was four (omitting hyperbole and metalepsis from the list below): White, *Metahistory*, 32.

[100] According to Semitic idiom: Zerwick and Grosvenor, *Analysis*, 143.

that fox' (Lk.13:32) he means 'Go and tell *Herod*', and implies that Herod is deceitful and/or destructive.[101]

Metalepsis is using a word in such a way that it means *another trope* with which it is associated. When Jesus says 'I am the true vine', 'vine' is not only an illuminating metaphor from nature for what he is, but an evocation of the old trope of Israel as the Lord's vine or vineyard (Ps.80; Is.5:1-7).[102]

It is important to note several things about the usage, recognition and interpretation of tropes. First, tropes are usually not simply stylistic devices[103], but *powerful vehicles of cognition and tone*. We can expound this on the basis of the examples just given. Job's ironic outburst bespeaks the sarcasm of bitterness. Jesus' 'many' means 'all', but the use of the word is not idle; it emphasises, in accordance with Hebrew thinking, the magnitude of God's purposes rather than their totality. John's 'the Jews' does not *mean* 'all the Jews', but the use of the general expression implies a characterization or stereotyping of the race as a whole as opponents of Jesus. 'Throne' vividly and concretely symbolizes 'kingdom'. The hyperbole of Jn.21:25 seems an expression of awe, not only at the numerousness of Jesus' deeds, but perhaps also at their weight of significance, at how much there would be to say about them. To call Herod a 'fox' was to pass a value-judgement upon him. To evoke an old tradition by the use of a word like 'vine' was in its context no mere superficial toying with an image, but to make a powerful claim. This recognition that tropes are more than ornaments, that there can be indeed an exchange of meaning between their two terms ('the vine' illumines Jesus, but Jesus also illumines 'the vine') marks much recent study of metaphor and parable.[104]

Secondly, tropes *need a context* if they are to be recognized and their import apprehended.[105] In the most obvious sense, they need the context of the basic unit of meaning, the sentence.[106] The tropical words considered above, 'helped', 'many', 'the Jews', 'throne', 'world', 'fox', 'vine', owe their tropicality first of all to their presence in the

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[101] Ellis lists these as possible meanings, from the historical evidence; another is 'inconsequential person' (it is not clear to me how this last could have arisen): *Luke*, 190. This is an example with a long pedigree: Leibniz referred to 'certain English fanatics who believed that when Jesus called Herod a fox he was actually turned into one': *Essays*, 499f., cited in Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 238.

[102] Metalepsis operates also in the other 'I am' sayings of Jesus in John.

[103] Hawkes traces the historical developments which led to metaphor and other tropes being regarded in the eighteenth century purely as ornaments: *Metaphor*, 22-33.

[104] See e.g. Westermann, *Parables*; Kjärgaard, *Metaphor*. Martin feels that '[m]etonymy and synecdoche function as oblique reference and as such are primarily ornamental ways of naming', whereas metaphor goes beyond ornament to give new vision: "Metaphor", 58 (cf. Thiselton, "Semantics", 95). But this is a questionable distinction, especially when the tropes are discerned in the larger structures of discourse, not just in individual words: see Chapters Five and Six below.

[105] Cf. Westermann, *Parables*, 173; Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 172f.; Swinburne, "Meaning", cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 36.

[106] The most persuasive modern advocate of this view has been Ricoeur: cf. *Rule*, 44-64.

particular sentence; on their own (as in a list of dictionary entries) they would be taken as literal. Yet a still wider context is often needed. In Job's exclamation, we would not recognize the irony if the sense of deep frustration with his friends had not been building up through the book; the sentence on its own could be taken quite literally, as an outpouring of gratitude that his friends *had* helped him. In an oral context, *tone of voice* enables us to distinguish between sarcasm and praise. With reference to our examples of synecdoche, a Semitic audience/readership, we may imagine, would instinctively have recognized that in Mk.10:45 'many' stood for 'all', because they took the saying in the context of conventional usage. A Calvinist theologian, however (though recognizing that this synecdoche sometimes occurs) can take 'many' here in its literal sense, in the context of other passages of the NT similarly interpreted, as supporting an understanding of the atonement as limited (Christ died for many, but *not* for all)[107]. And we need to read John's Gospel as a whole if we are to see the synecdochic force of 'the Jews' (whole for part) in particular instances. In the case of the metaleptic 'I am the vine', a knowledge of the Old Testament is a prerequisite for grasping the full purport of the saying.

Thirdly, we should not imagine that by using a trope a speaker or writer is exchanging a precise literal meaning for a precise tropical meaning. The distinction between 'literal' and 'tropical' is in any case a conventional one and difficult to ground philosophically.[108] 'Literal' language is often highly suggestive in its context, 'meaning' more than it 'says'. The use of tropes, especially in an extended way as in poetry, is often not designed for specific denotation, but for evocation.

Fourthly, it is generally recognized that though 'trope' refers primarily to the non-literal usage of individual words or short phrases, trope can operate on both a broader and a deeper level. A trope can be extended in linear fashion, for instance into a story: Boucher calls allegory 'an extended metaphor in narratory form'[109]. ('Allegory' is an umbrella term often used to characterize the way that earlier interpreters saw the parables; we shall note in Chapter Two that it is valuable to see how different tropes are employed, though usually not named, as keys in different 'allegorical' readings - particularly metonymy and synecdoche, as well as metaphor.[110]) Or it can be seen as operating in the deeper structures of language, which may in turn be seen as reflecting patterns of social interchange or human understanding.[111]

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[107] Owen, *Death*, 102.

[108] Cf. n.22 above.

[109] *Mysterious Parable*, 20.

[110] On different tropes in allegory see Fletcher, *Allegory*, 75-88.

[111] See Nietzsche's statement that *truth* is a 'mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms': "Truth", 180, cited in Soskice, *Metaphor*, 78; Jakobson, "Aphasia", on the deep linguistic distinction between metonymy as the power to combine and metaphor as the power to substitute (cited e.g. in Scott, *Hear*, 29); Soskice, *Metaphor*, 74f. on conclusions drawn from the ubiquity of metaphor concerning the nature of thought and consciousness; Burke, *Permanence*, 95f., and TeSelle, *Speaking*, 59, on metaphor in science; White, *Metahistory* and *Tropics*, on the functioning of

This breadth and depth in the perception of tropes is especially important for a study of parables.[112]

Fifthly, tropes may be more or less striking and strange depending on how established they have become in the language. The existence of 'dead metaphors'[113] led de Saussure to his statement of the 'arbitrary nature of the sign' and of the generally *conventional* nature of linguistic expression.[114] The scale between the new and striking at one end, and the stale and clichéd on the other, is usefully expounded in the case of metaphor by Kjärgaard, through a distinction between 'present', 'imperfect' and 'perfect' metaphors.[115] The 'present' are living and fresh; the 'imperfect' are becoming familiar, but not yet established; the 'perfect' are so established as to be almost indistinguishable from 'literal' language. For example, Herod as 'fox' was probably an 'imperfect' metaphor at the time of Jesus. It is very possible that others before Jesus had labelled Herod thus; perhaps, indeed, it was on its way to becoming a mere cliché. We should recognize that the 'tense-status' of a trope may be different for speaker and hearer, and for different people within the same society. In a single interchange the speaker may intend to shock, while the hearer remains bored; or the hearer may be shocked by something the speaker thought quite conventional. For some, to call Herod a fox would have been more consciously daring than it would have been for others; for some, to *hear* Herod *called* a fox would have been more surprising than it would have been for others.

All of the above strengthens the claim that the comprehending of figurative language involves an aesthetic, personal judgement by the receiver, a judgement that takes place on an instinctive as well as a conscious level. *She* needs to detect that a figure is in play, in a word or longer unit of discourse, and ask what that token of individuality is saying - not just what its words mean, but what it is saying about its maker. Especially if the figure is a trope, she needs to recognize the tone conveyed by or associated with its turning of language. She needs a context within which to apprehend its purport. She needs to ask whether a precise meaning is intended or if the trope is designed simply to evoke a sensation, a tradition, a mood. She will respond differently to it depending on the degree of familiarity in the figure.

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[112] One of the most influential explorations of what it means to treat *narratives* such as the parables as *metaphors* has been Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics".

[113] Cf. Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 52.

[114] *Course*, 68, cited in Soskice, *Metaphor*, 71f.

[115] *Metaphor*, 101-105.

6. Texts

There is inevitably a certain arbitrariness in the choice of six parables to study. Recognition of this arbitrariness means that I will take care not to over-generalize from them: I am concerned with the the voice of Jesus *in these parables*. My choice is not without method, however. The six parables are these:

- The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)
- The Shrewd Steward (Luke 16:1-9)
- The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)
- The Judge and the Widow (Luke 18:1-8)
- The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer (Luke 18:9-14)

These stories are marked out in several ways. I began with the parables in the central section of Luke's Gospel, the so-called 'Travel Narrative', and then excluded those which had a parallel in any other Gospel, either canonical or apocryphal. I confined myself to full-length narratives, and have not included any shorter parables with an opening formula like 'what man of you...'.[116] As I hope will become apparent, these six that remain have deep similarities in thrust and tone. And, although it is a distinction which I propose eventually to dismantle, it is of interest to note that the group exhibits a frequently-perceived division of structure among the wider parable-corpus. Of the six, three have been described since Jülicher[117] as 'example-stories', *Beispielerzählungen* (the first, fourth and sixth) and the other three as genuine 'parables', *Gleichnizerzählungen* or *Fabeln*. I have kept, for ease of recognition, fairly traditional titles for the parables, and henceforth I will try to avoid repetition by where possible only referring to the parable by its title *or* its chapter and verse reference. When I am referring to the parable, I use capitalization of major words, as above, and without speech marks: The Good Samaritan is the story, the good Samaritan is the man. It will be noticed in the verse-references above that I have included a little context around the parable itself (e.g. the dialogue with the lawyer in 10:25-29). This is because I think the boundaries traditionally drawn

[116] I.e. including those belonging to Jülicher's second and third categories (parable-proper and example-story) and excluding those in his first (similitude).

[117] *Die Gleichnisreden* I, 69-115.

between 'authentic Jesus-material' and 'later tradition', often marked by scholars around parables, are frequently arbitrary, spurious, and beg the very questions I am trying to raise, and we are better served by keeping them thoroughly fluid.[118] My final aim is not to make judgements about what are the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, but to stay with the attempt to recognize and characterize his *voice* as it may be found in the parables. Fixation upon the 'very words' of Jesus is seen in both the colour-coded texts of the radical Jesus Seminar[119] and the red-letter editions of fundamentalists[120]; misguided literalism seems to me to be at work in both cases.

As well as being an experiment in literary criticism using 'secular' insights, this work aims to take its place in study of the Gospel of Luke, study of the parables, and study of the historical Jesus. The literature in all these areas is so vast that to begin to attempt to interact with it all would be to risk being submerged not so much in the anxiety of influence, as its despair; I hope that I have interacted with enough to make my contribution profitable. It will, I hope, be of use to those who wish to pursue research into Luke's special material from other angles. Though there have been studies of this material[121] and of the 'travel-narrative'[122], and of course numerous studies of the individual parables concerned, I am not aware of another detailed study of these six parables in combination.

7. Plan

The body of the thesis is in two parts. In the first, Chapters Two to Four, I offer a revisionary reading of aspects of the history of the interpretation of the parables, with reference to the six chosen parables; in the second, I offer my own reading of the parables as figures, set in three contexts: the Gospel of Luke, the ministry of Jesus and the Old Testament.

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[118] Drury, pointing out that an interpretation in the text which does not quite seem to fit the parable has a precedent in an OT passage such as Ezek.37, rightly comments: 'This is not an indication of a later or extraneous origin for the interpretation, but rather that *in interpretation creative activity goes on, adorning and amplifying the parable as it does so*': *Parables*, 19, his italics.

[119] E.g. Funk et al,, eds., *Parables.*

[120] E.g. *NASB.*

[121] Recently Dorn, *Gleichnisse*; Petzke, *Sondergut*; Pittner, *Sondergut.* The comparative inaccessibility to me of these German works has restricted my interaction with them; I have only been able to consult Petzke.

[122] See e.g. Blomberg, "Chiasmus", and literature cited in Johnson, *Function*, 104.

Chapter Two covers the Patristic, Mediaeval and Reformation periods, which I focus in the work of four commentators. I propose that though these early commentators did not intend to write about the voice of Jesus, the voice of Jesus may nonetheless be heard to echo in their work. I shall argue here that the early interpreters were not concerned with responding to the intention of *Jesus* in his figures, at least until the Reformation. Chapter Three considers the placing of parable scholarship on a new footing of historical thoroughness through the work of Jülicher. Here I argue that despite Jülicher's intention to eschew what he saw as the malign influence of the Fathers, and to provide a historically secure foundation for the discipline, his chief and lasting contribution is on the level of insight not argument. Jülicher sought Jesus' intention, won insight into it, and also 'went beyond', in the sense I have suggested above, to show a greater figurative significance in his words than Jesus would have recognized himself, but wrongly presented this significance as if it were his conscious intention. Chapter Four addresses parable scholarship of the last thirty years, especially in America, focussed in the work of Scott. In this chapter I argue that Scott seeks Jesus' voice but is too wary of his intention, and that the voice he hears is partly an echo from his own world.

The words 'premodern', 'modern' and 'postmodern' appear in the titles of Chapters Two to Four, and are used as convenient shorthand. It would be too much of a diversion from my main purpose to attempt a precise definition of them; their main characteristics as regards parable scholarship will become clear as we proceed. Suffice it to say here that I understand the great watershed of the Enlightenment to have ushered in the 'modern' period following the 'premodern'. This modern period had therefore already been underway for two centuries or so by the time of Jülicher; Jülicher, however, though not a completely isolated figure, can be seen as the first scholar to take with full historical-critical seriousness the study of the parables. By 'postmodern' period I indicate that comparatively recent time of growing unease, in many disciplines, with many aspects of the heritage of the Enlightenment, an unease with which we are only beginning to come to terms. In parable scholarship it was perhaps inaugurated by Dan Otto Via's reaction against the 'severely historical'[123] approach of Jeremias and his proposal that the parables be treated as 'aesthetic objects'.[124]

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[123] *Parables*, 21-24.

[124] Ibid., *passim*.

Each of these three chapters is organized around the themes of insight, influence and intention, in reverse order. First I consider what we may glean about the *intention* of the various commentators from their work.[125] This is not a matter of pretending to penetrate their psyches, but of elucidating their texts, and especially of protecting them against the reductive misreadings which the earlier ones have sometimes suffered; and it also serves as a foil to the detection of responses to the voice of Jesus which were not intentional, but may nevertheless be revelatory. Next I consider what we know or can detect about the *influences* upon them from their past and present, and about how they deal in their texts with these influences. Finally I consider the *insight* their work may yield into the 'voice' of Jesus in the six parables, and the figure or figures which they use to construe the texts.[126]

In Part Two I confront the parable texts directly. In Chapter Five I treat Luke as the earliest known interpreter of the six parables, and ask what insight he yields into their voice, how he has responded to their intention. I consider what trope or tropes best illuminate the way Luke has incorporated the parables into his Gospel. Chapter Six imagines the way that the parables might have functioned on the lips of Jesus, and asks what kind of a voice he projected and others heard. I consider here what trope or tropes best illuminate the parable's reflection of the society in which Jesus lived. Chapter Seven seeks the signs in the parables of a deep influence on Jesus from Scripture and of how, consciously or unconsciously, he turned or troped that influence to the end of his particular proclamation. Insofar as the contexts in which I set the parables in these three chapters are only three out of many more that one could choose (how do these parables appear as figures beside Rabbinic parables? beside Greek fables? beside other parables of Jesus?) the impression yielded of the voice of Jesus will of necessity be incomplete. Nevertheless, this Part constitutes a simple proposal: that a stream of influence runs from the Old Testament, through Jesus, and shows itself in Luke's text. A voice which was heard in the old Scriptures continues to echo in the new, and can be imagined as echoing in the words of the person who stands between. My concluding chapter completes the picture by connecting this stream of influence with the story told in Part One.

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[125] On the importance of the *intention* of interpretative acts, see Hirsch, *Validity*, 24, cited by Hirsch in Michaels ed., *Against Theory*, 52.

[126] For convenience, the section on Jülicher's insight in Chapter Three is divided into two: a discussion of his use of simile as a key, and a discussion of his interpretation of the individual parables.

Part One

CHAPTER TWO
The Age of Divine Meaning
The Premodern Interpretation of the Parables Revisited

Any normative concept in interpretation implies a choice that is required not by the nature of written texts but rather by the goal that the interpreter sets himself. It is a weakness in many descriptions of the interpretive process that this act of choice is disregarded and the process described as though the object of interpretation were somehow determined by the ontological status of texts themselves.
E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 24[1]

A great age...when influence was generous.
Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 123

INTRODUCTION
A heritage misconstrued

The theme of this chapter is the tradition of parable interpretation from the Fathers to the Reformation. The reaction against this tradition, a reaction established by Jülicher, has continued to influence parable scholarship to this day. Since reaction can lead to amnesia with respect to what has been reacted against, I wish to bring to the fore again some central features of the period. My hope is that in this way suppressed memories may be reawakened, the terms of contemporary discussion clarified, and a more positive expectation re-established concerning what we might learn from this era concerning the voice of Jesus.

I choose as my point of entry into this long tradition the account of it which begins C.H. Dodd's *The Parables of the Kingdom*, the work through which the great reaction begun by Jülicher established itself in the English-speaking world. I do so precisely because Dodd's account well illustrates how a broad statement of what one is reacting against can conceal as much as it reveals. Here is his summary, from the second paragraph of his book:

> In the traditional teaching of the Church for centuries [the parables] were treated as allegories, in which each term stood as a cryptogram for an idea, so that the whole had to be de-coded term by term.[2]

There follows his rendering of Augustine's interpretation of The Good Samaritan, and then this concise dismissal:

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[1] Cited by Hirsch himself in Mitchell, ed., *Against Theory*, 52.

[2] *Parables*, 11.

> This interpretation of the parable in question prevailed down to the time of Archbishop Trench, who follows its main lines with even more ingenious elaboration; and it is still to be heard in sermons. To the ordinary person of intelligence who approaches the Gospels with some sense for literature this mystification must appear quite perverse.[3]

We may note what Dodd's remarks imply concerning the intention of these early interpreters[4], the influences upon them, and their insight into the parables.

Dodd's main claim is that according to the Fathers and their successors, the parables were repositories of secret knowledge, left by Jesus for succeeding generations of disciples to unlock; further, that those who read the parables in such a way were guilty of 'mystifying' what was 'really' plain.[5] I will argue that this fundamentally misreads the parable interpretation of this premodern period. It implies that the *intention* of the interpreters was to uncover the voice and intention of the historical Jesus, that they found a mystifying voice and intention, and ascribed this mistakenly to Jesus. In fact, however, they were treating the text as a sacred document through which *God* had revealed himself. They were interpreting it for the *divine meaning*[6].

When we see this, we see immediately that Dodd's portrayal of their work is seriously misleading. They could not have been misrepresenting Jesus to anything like the extent that Dodd and many others have averred if it was not in fact *Jesus' meaning* that they were writing about.[7] We fail to appreciate the richness, and profit from the insight, offered by earlier Scriptural interpreters when we misread their work as if they were modern historical scholars *manqués*. Their alertness to allegorical significations in

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[3] *Parables*, 12f.

[4] When I use the expression 'early interpreters' or 'early commentators' it is simply a convenient shorthand for those belonging to the periods covered by this chapter.

[5] Jeremias, after Dodd, was to picture 'allegorical interpretation' as the means of 'the distortion and ill-usage which the parables have suffered' over the centuries: *Parables*, 18. More recently Hedrick, though mentioning the moral dimension of premodern parable interpretation, writes that these interpreters read the parables also 'as figures representing some unearthly reality, and as allegorical riddles of the resurrected "Lord of the Church" whose words spoke specifically, if differently, to the early Christian communities of faith': *Parables*, ix. Like Dodd, neither Jeremias nor Hedrick considers the *aim* of the Fathers' interpretative acts.

[6] Hence the title of a recent collection of some of T.F. Torrance's writngs on patristic hermeneutics, *Divine Meaning*. Holladay ("Contemporary Methods", 126ff.) writes of the 'divine oracle paradigm' which has controlled exegesis for the majority of the Christian era. Though Wolterstorff distinguishes the activity of reading Scripture in order to discern God's discourse from reading it to apply it to a contemporary situation, or to discern allegorical or typological patterns (*Discourse*, 202f.), I argue in this chapter (on the basis of four interpreters' accounts of six parables) that the intention to discover the 'divine meaning' itself carries with it both the concern for contemporary application, and the allegorical or typological strategies. Wolterstorff in fact recognizes this when he comments that when Jews and Christians have read the Song of Songs allegorically, they have been ascribing an allegorizing discourse not to a human author, but to the divine one (ibid., 214).

[7] As we shall see, the meaning of *Jesus* becomes a serious consideration at the Reformation, but mainly as a check upon excessively fanciful interpretations, not as a goal to be aimed at with historically rigorous investigation.

the texts is not to be regarded simply as a 'method' which we in the twentieth century see to be mistaken and can therefore replace with another 'method'. It was, rather, a direct function of their view of Scripture, a matter of 'the order and connection of things inherent in the Scriptures themselves'[8]. Moreover, the parables were not set apart from the rest of Scripture. Torrance quotes Irenaeus:

> The parables will agree with what is given in direct, explicit speech, and what is plainly stated will serve to explain the parables, and so through a great variety of expressions one harmonious theme will be heard in praise of the God who created all things.[9]

A similar view continued to obtain in mediaeval times. The 'unity' and 'harmony' of Scripture

> were often affirmed through a metaphor derived from the Psalter. When a cithar is played, strings and wood function together to produce a unified sound by means of its diverse parts.[10]

The Bible was seen as a whole in which God's truth was revealed in a consistent way. The part could be seen in the whole and the whole in the part.[11]

It might be asked why, if this is the case, I do not pass over immediately to the 'modern' period. If the premodern commentators were not aiming to find the historically-situated voice of the *human Jesus*, what place need they have in an inquiry into that voice? This, however, would be to ignore the workings of *influence*: writers may reveal, artlessly and even unconsciously, aspects of the tradition in which they stand. If the parables about which they write go back to Jesus, we might plausibly look at least for some trace of his meaning, some echo of his tone, in these commentaries, even though it was the 'divine meaning' of the texts which they were intent upon expounding.

What, then, does Dodd indicate about the *influence* under which the premodern exegetes worked? In a throwaway remark, he says that the 'allegorical' interpretation 'is still to be heard in sermons'. Though Dodd does not develop the point, it is important to see that that seems to have been precisely the setting where this kind of interpretation *first* arose also. Far from being 'mystifiers' as they are caricatured, the Fathers' impetus was a very practical, *expository* one. They wished to commend the gospel to

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[8] Torrance, *Meaning*, 33, describing how Irenaeus saw this order threatened by Gnostic allegorizing. On Augustine's view of the 'inexhaustible meanings' of Scripture see Finan, "Augustine", 170. Cf. Kermode, *Secrecy*, 36f.

[9] *Adv. haer.* 2.28.3, quoted in *Meaning*, 113.

[10] Minnis, *Theory*, 46.

[11] I am adapting this expression from Minnis's appreciation of a representative mediaeval prologue and commentary, that of Gilbert of Poitiers on the Psalter: ibid., 52.

congregations[12], and to do so involved the demonstration of the coherence of the meanings of Scripture. Their sources of influence therefore were mainly twofold: the Christian tradition in which they stood, consisting of Scripture and its great expositors, and their contemporary situation to which they sought to relate the sacred text. The didactic setting seems to have been one of the chief motivating forces behind the 'allegorical' approach: the aim was to show how the parables illuminated Christian doctrine and contemporary situations. Not only do we need to remind ourselves that insights gained through such practical and highly-motivated *use* of Scripture may well be as valid as those gained in the detached setting of the academy; we need at least to raise the question whether the tradition they knew preserved memories of Jesus' tone which we have subsequently forgotten.

What of the impression Dodd leaves us of the *insight* of earlier interpreters into the parables and the voice behind them? His understanding of their tactics was that they read them under the rubric of the figure of *allegory*, with the parables' different terms as 'cryptograms'. He focusses on the former concentration of interpreters upon the individual elements of the parable - of which Augustine on The Good Samaritan is indeed an excellent example (thieves as the devil and his angels, the innkeeper as the Apostle Paul, and so on). His conclusion is that anyone 'with some sense for literature' must regard this approach as 'quite perverse': in other words, according to Dodd, these interpreters yield no insight into the true nature of the parables or into the voice of Jesus; what they 'see' is, perhaps, just a mirror of their own concerns. Thus it is on *literary* as well as historical grounds that the 'allegorical method' is rejected. But I suggest that if we were respectfully to treat the *great texts of interpretation* as 'literature' themselves, to be appreciated in their own right, and pay attention to what their authors claim and do not claim for their work, we may find in them an insight into the parables that we had not suspected, even perhaps an insight into the voice of Jesus of which the interpreters were hardly aware, concentrating as they were upon the voice of God. This seems preferable to treating the older commentaries merely as texts that are parasitic upon the great Text being expounded, and are therefore dispensable when they can be 'shown' to have 'got it wrong'. I shall show, in fact, that the response of these early commentators to the texts was an unashamedly aesthetic response, of the fragile and fallible kind that continues to be necessary, even though the last century has underplayed the need for it. As I shall exemplify, there are many affinities between their work and the literary-critical sensitivities (in Biblical and secular disciplines) of our present era - most fundamentally in their exploitation of the possibilities inherent *in the text itself.*[13]

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[12] Ambrose's commentary on Luke, for instance, started life as sermons: see below, 37. On the pastoral concern of Origen (the epitome for many, like Jülicher, of the 'allegorical approach') see Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 168. On the friars (such as Bonaventure) as preachers, see Minnis, *Theory*, 136ff. 'Tropological' interpretation meant contemporary, moral application: Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 202f.

[13] Cf. Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 16ff., and see Chapter Four below.

I will now use four commentaries on Luke representative of different periods, illustrating the development but even more the continuity within the tradition, to demonstrate the interpreters' intention, the influences at work in them and the insight into the parable texts they seek and win. I shall then be in a position to assess the nature of the contribution they may still make to an enquiry into the voice of Jesus.

Alfred Plummer lists extant commentaries on Luke.[14] The earliest complete Latin one, that of Ambrose of Milan[15], is my first exemplar. This was completed by 389 but began life as sermons delivered in 377-378.[16] Ambrose is especially important for his influence upon Augustine.[17] My second is the commentary of Bede[18], written at Jarrow between 709 and 715, and described by Plummer as 'an oasis in a desert'[19]. Bede will also give us a taste of Augustine and Gregory the Great, from whom he quotes extensively. My third commentary is not listed by Plummer: it is that of the Franciscan Bonaventure[20], written between 1254 and 1257[21], perhaps when he was lecturing at Paris, or after he had had to cease when the Mendicant orders had their privileges removed.[22] It is noteworthy especially for its preface, characteristic of the Aristotelian revival at the time[23], and is more individually stamped[24] than Aquinas' *Catena aurea in Evangelica*, a collection of quotations from the Patristic age which is Plummer's only listed work on Luke from that significant period. My final example is a Reformation commentary, that of John Calvin written in Geneva in 1553[25].

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[14] *Commentary*, lxxx-lxxxiii. I have unfortunately been unable to consult the detailed survey of mediaeval allegories of the parables by Wailes (*Allegories*): see Miles, "Review".

[15] References (to the Corpus Christianorum edition) will be given by 'book' number in Roman numerals followed by line number in Arabic.

[16] Ambrosius, Praefatio, vii*.

[17] The influence on Augustine of Ambrose's commentary on Luke specifically can be seen by a glance at the references in the 'Index Fontium et Imitationum': Ambrosius, 436.

[18] References (to the Corpus Christianum edition) will be given by section number in Roman numerals followed by line number in Arabic.

[19] Plummer, *Commentary*, lxxxii.

[20] References (to the 1574 Venice edition) will be given by page number with left and right hand sides indicated by 'a' and 'b'.

[21] Minnis, *Theory*, 80.

[22] Cross, ed., *Dictionary*, 184.

[23] Minnis, *Theory*, 80.

[24] Smalley comments on Bonaventure's 'originality and his refusal to be obstructed by current classroom methods' in his works on Ecclesiastes, Luke and John: *Gospels*, 203.

[25] References (to the Saint Andrew Press translation) will be given by volume number in Roman numerals and page number in Arabic. Plummer also lists commentaries on Luke by Erasmas, Bucer and Beza.

THE QUEST FOR DIVINE MEANING

The intention of premodern commentators

I shall nuance the matter of what these interpreters were aiming to do by discussing successively the intention of Ambrose and Bede, the intention of Bonaventure, and the intention of Calvin, as it may be detected variously in their introductions and in the commentaries on the six parables.

1. Ambrose and Bede

The Fathers and Mediaevals were not interpreting for the *divine intention* in any very precise fashion. In the parable expositions of Ambrose and Bede one will not find many explicit turns of phrase indicating a search for the divine meaning, addressing openly such questions as 'what was/is God saying through this verse?' That search is rather the basic premise which alone makes adequate sense of what they are doing. The belief that Scripture was God's written Word, bearing testimony to his living Word, Jesus Christ, was rather a charter of *freedom* in interpreting the texts.[26] This is a freedom to bring texts from different parts of Scripture alongside each other in mutual illumination, to draw out meanings from the text within the broad boundaries of the rule of faith. Certainly this sometimes had the unfortunate consequence that even minor words and expressions were given a weight disproportionate to their natural place in the text, as it were to squeeze out every last drop of meaning.[27] Fearghail sees the legacy of Philo in Ambrose, enabling him 'to plunder the "profound secrets" of the Biblical text, that rich paradise where God walks, that sea full of profound senses and prophetic enigmas where every word is a potential gold-mine'[28].

With regard to the *human* authors of Scripture, Ambrose states the necessity of attention to the *style* of Luke's Gospel. His prologue stresses the importance of treating Luke as a historical work:

> We have said that this book of the gospel has been arranged in historical mode. In short, we see that in comparison with the others [i.e the other Evangelists] more fruitful study has been spent [i.e. by Luke] in describing things rather than expressing precepts.[29]

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[26] Cf. McEvoy, "Hermeneutic".

[27] Cf. this comment on the hermeneutics of the influential Origen: '[T]he fact that each word in the Bible was chosen by the Holy Spirit meant, as Origen saw it, that we must often look further than the obvious meanings of the word, extensive as the range of these meanings might already be': Watson, "Origen", 81.

[28] "Philo", 59.

[29] 'Historico stilo diximus hunc euangelii librum esse digestum. Denique describendis magis rebus quam exprimendis praeceptis studium uberius conparatione aliorum uidemus inpensum': Prologus 110-112.

He turns to the traditional link between the four creatures in Revelation and the four Evangelists, saying that the bull or calf is a fitting symbolic designation of the book:

> And this book of the gospel concords well with a calf, because it began with priests [i.e. in Lk.1:5] and reached its climax in the calf, who, bearing the sins of all, was sacrificed for the life of the world...[30]

But Ambrose does not say here that Luke *intended* to present Christ as a sacrificial offering; he says that Luke's book *reveals* it to us.[31] He thus asserts the importance of recognizing Luke's historical style but does not couch the exposition of the rich significance of his work in terms of a search for his intention. This is a fair statement of what is to be his actual practice in the commentaries on the parables. Not only is there none of the modern concern with an Evangelist's provenance, community, theological tendency and so on; there are scarcely any phrases such as 'he says' or 'he writes' to introduce words or passages to be interpreted. Occasionally we find a word such as 'inducit'[32] ('he brings in') where the subject could be Luke or Jesus or possibly God, but is clearly not the important factor. When writing about words attributed by Luke to Jesus, he displays no doubt about Luke's historical concern, but does not feel himself limited by any supposed 'original' meaning for those words (whether a meaning of Luke or a meaning of Jesus).

Bede, on the other hand, refers in his prologue specifically to the 'intention' of Luke, drawing on Augustine's *De consensu euangelistarum.* He writes of the connection of the bull with Luke, 'whose intention/purpose was concerning the priesthood of Christ'[33]. This intention is further spelled out a little later. Luke's interest in the priesthood of Christ is clearly seen in his selection of stories with a priestly theme:

> For there the tale of the narrator begins with the priest Zacharias...there the sacraments of the first priesthood, fulfilled in the infant Christ, are narrated, and whatever other things may be carefully noted by which it appears that Luke had an intention [sc. of writing] about the person of a priest.[34]

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[30] 'Et bene congruit uitulo hic euangelii liber, quia a sacerdotibus inchoauit et consummauit in uitulo, qui omnium peccata suscipiens pro totius mundi uita est inmolatus...': Prologus 119-121.

[31] The subject of the verbs 'inchoauit' and 'consummauit' in the above quotation is the book, not the author.

[32] See Ambrosius VII, 255f. on Lk.15:23: 'Bene autem...epulantem patrem inducit...' 'And with good reason... he brings in the celebrating father...'

[33] '[C]uius circa sacerdotium Christi erat intentio': Prologus, 167f.

[34] 'Ibi enim a sacerdote Zacharia incipit sermo narrantis,...ibi sacramenta primi sacerdotii in infante Christi impleta narrantur, et quaecumque alia possunt diligenter adverti quibus appareat Lucas intentionem circa personam sacerdotis habuisse': Beda, Prologus 198-203. Note the postmodern-sounding reference to a 'narrator' ('narrantis'), balanced by a healthy concern with Luke himself!

But in the commentary itself, as in Ambrose's, concern with Luke's intention is not much in evidence.

With reference to the question of interest in *the intention of Jesus* we need to draw a distinction between Ambrose and Bede. In Ambrose, it hardly seems to be a concern at all. His emphasis on Luke's historical style shows his belief that what were put forward as words of Jesus truly were such. But the meaning extracted from the texts is in no way a meaning conditioned or limited by what Jesus may have intended to say in the historical setting of his ministry. The power of the words themselves as *divine* words, that can be directly applied in teaching and exhortation of a congregation, carries his exposition along without any need to pause and reflect that these are words of the human Jesus, even a human Jesus who is also Son of God - let alone make any distinction between what he may have said and meant originally and what the Evangelist meant when he included the words in his Gospel.

A good example of this directness of style is found in his exposition of Lk.10:34a. After citing the text, he immediately begins to interpret the Samaritan's medicaments as the word of Christ, with power variously to bind, soothe and sting (VII, 767-772). He also uses apostrophic addresses to the reader. He extols the blessedness of an 'innkeeper':

> Blessed is that innkeeper, who is able to tend the wounds of another, blessed is he to whom Jesus says 'whatever you spend over and above I will repay to you on my return'. Good is the steward, who thus spends over and above. Good is Paul the steward, whose sayings and letters overflow as if with the doctrine of his which he had received...Good, therefore, is that keeper of an inn,...in which the flocks of lambs are shut, lest there be an easy assault upon the little sheep by roaring, rapacious wolves [coming] to the pens.[35]

We note the lively, rhetorical manner in which the exposition is proceeding (it is not simply an expansion on what has already been said; the end of v.35 - 'whatever you spend over and above...' - has not been previously mentioned). Here is no slavish system of one-to-one correspondences. The innkeeper is not only Paul: he is the other apostles, he is any contemporary guardian of Christ's fold. Ambrose is exploring the suggestiveness of the text, not treating it as a code to be mechanically cracked. It is the language of preaching, which then turns into the language of personal devotion[36] as he

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[35] 'Beatus ille stabularius, qui alterius curare uulnera potest, beatus ille cui dicit Iesus: *quodcumque supererogaueris reuertens reddam tibi.* Bonus dispensator, qui etiam supererogat. Bonus dispensator Paulus, cuius sermones et epistulae ueluti ei ratione quam acceperat superfluunt...Bonus ergo stabularius stabuli eius,...in quo greges clauduntur agnorum, ne frementibus ad caulas rapacibus lupis facilis in ovilia sit incursus': Ambrosius VII, 801-805, 808-811.

[36] Cf. Thiselton's comment on the style of Rupert of Deutz (1070-c.1129): he 'allows gentle contemplation to move amidst a kaleidoscope of ever-changing biblical imagery in a way which almost anticipates the post-modernist notion of textual play': *New Horizons*, 142.

goes on to address the departed but returning Christ - seen in the guise of the Samaritan - directly:

> When will you return, Lord, if not on the day of judgement?...You will repay what you owe. Blessed are those to whom you are indebted. Would that we were worthy debtors, would that we are able to discharge that which we have received, and that the office of priesthood or of ministry does not puff us up![37]

This is a heartfelt personal appeal that he and his fellow-stewards be found worthy in the humble discharge of *their* duties so that Christ would repay them at the last day; the thought of debts leads to reflection on the sense in which the servants also are debtors. Such is the tone of the writing as a whole: not theoretical or abstract, but rather engaging directly with the text and allowing it to suggest its 'meanings' in the light of faith.

Bede seems slightly more sensitive to the fact that the parables purport to be words *of Jesus*. In introducing The Good Samaritan he specifically says that *the Lord* not only taught that everyone who showed mercy was a neighbour, but designated himself as son of God.[38] This is the kind of assertion of a covert 'Christological' claim in the mouth of Jesus that scholarship in our century has largely objected to, and is near the heart of what Jülicher and Dodd were opposing in their refutation of the 'allegorical method'. But we should note carefully, again, that the real point at issue is not a 'method', but *the goal of interpretation.* The modern objection, when probed, is not really that the church *saw Christological significance* in the parable, but that *it asserted that Jesus intended such significance.*[39] By highlighting a case where it clearly, though artlessly, did make such an assertion I wish to indicate also those great tracts of commentary where that was not the issue at all.

2. Bonaventure

For **Bonaventure**, 'behind the great diversity and range of the styles found in the Bible, lies the singleness and security of divine authority'[40]. The Prologue to his commentary (1b-5a)[41] beautifully exemplifies the new sophistication introduced to Biblical exegesis by the revival of Aristotelian learning. The different 'causes' behind the Gospel text are

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[37] 'Quando reuerteris, domine, nisi iudicii die?...Reddes ergo quod debes. Beati quibus es debitor. Vtinam nos simus idonei debitores, utinam quod accepimus possimus exsoluere nec nos aut sacerdotii aut ministerii munus extollat!': Ambrosius, VII, 812, 815-818.

[38] '...dominus ita responsum temperauit suum ut et omnem qui misericordiam faceret cuilibet proximum doceret et tamen haec eadem parabola specialiter ipsum Dei filium...designaret': Beda, III, 2202-2206.

[39] Cf. the distinction between 'meaning' and 'significance' developed by Hirsch in *Validity* and discussed in Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 156-160. The objection has really been that the Fathers claimed as Jesus' meaning what they took as divinely significant, but mostly the Fathers did not make this claim.

[40] Minnis, *Theory*, 127.

[41] In this chapter bracketed references within the text will refer to the last-named author in bold type.

carefully laid out so that the reader may approach it with the proper expectation and understanding. The very structure of this layout indicates a significant shift from the patristic period. For the main division is between the 'extrinsic' cause, which is Luke, and the 'intrinsic', which is Christ. The idea of the overarching 'divine meaning' - already in Ambrose and Bede more of an unquestioned assumption than a stated principle of interpretation - has receded further into the shadows[42], while the part of Christ in the causing of the Gospel has come into view.

These two main causes are further subdivided. The 'extrinsic cause', the Evangelist, is viewed from two angles (3a-b). On the one hand there is the 'efficient cause' of the Gospel, which is Holy Spirit coming upon Luke. This 'efficient cause' is itself divided into three: the 'supreme efficient cause', the Spirit himself; the 'intermediate efficient cause', the anointing of Luke by the Spirit; and the 'lowest efficient cause', Luke himself as an especially Spirit-filled person. On the other hand there is the 'final cause' of the Gospel, which is Luke's *purpose* in writing it. This also is threefold: the manifestation of truth, the healing of infirmity, and the reference of eternity[43]. Here Bonaventure writes specifically of Luke's *intention.* The healing purpose of the Gospel is not only, he says, in accordance with the tradition that Luke was a doctor, but is 'according to what was intended by blessed Luke: that thus through the knowledge of the truth we should come to the remedy of infirmity'[44].

The 'intrinsic cause' of the Gospel is Christ himself (4a-b). This cause has two dimensions, 'material' and 'formal'. Christ is the 'material' cause because the Gospel revolves around him as mediator, preacher, redeemer and victor. This in turn leads to his being the fourfold 'formal' cause, both in the necessity that the one Gospel should come to us in four Gospels (each focussing on one of these aspects of Christ's work), and in the necessity that Luke's Gospel should fall into four parts according to these same aspects. The issue of the precise intention of Jesus in *speaking the words* attributed to him by Luke does not arise here. But it is most interesting that Christ is seen as the 'intrinsic cause' of the Gospel. Here we have a harbinger of modern historical enquiries concerning the period between Jesus's life and the writing of the Gospels. But Bonaventure is not quite speaking of *historical* causality: it is more a matter of the *divine necessity* worked out in the coming of Jesus and the writing of the gospels[45]. The Gospel arises not just from the plan of a human author, albeit a Spirit-inspired one; not just from the impact of an astonishing man, albeit the Son of God. There is a greater

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[42] It is by no means absent, as we shall see; it is simply articulated more subtly.

[43] '[M]anifestatio ueritatis...curatio infirmitatis...referatio aeternitatis': Bonaventura, 3a-b. The last is the 'anagogical' reference of the text, whereby it pointed to future glory.

[44] 'Et hoc est secundum intentum a beato Luca: Ut sic per ueritatis cognitionem ueniremus ad infirmitatis medicamentum': Bonaventura, 3b.

[45] Cf. the 'it is necessary' (δεῖ) attributed to Jesus in the Gospels (Mk. 8:31etc.).

intention determining its nature and shape. In the purpose of God himself, it *had* to be so.

Bonaventure's expositions of the parables are distinguished from those of his predecessors mainly by the careful categorizations which typically mark mediaeval exegesis. In many cases there are elaborate subdivisions of the basic division of the material; in the exposition of The Prodigal Son we reach four levels of sub-headings (335a-337a). But he does not follow through in a pedantic manner the points raised in his prologue: that is, he does not examine with each text or passage how it illustrates the purpose of Luke as the 'final cause', or the roles of Christ as the 'material cause'. In fact he states his main points concisely, and much of the commentary on individual parables is devoted to the assembling of allegedly supportive and illuminating Old Testament texts, as well as citations from the Fathers. The presence of the Scriptural quotations gives a strong sense that the meaning of the texts to hand is to be construed as part of a far wider web of meaning - God's revelation as a whole.

Meaning thus still has its locus in the text, seen as part of the great Text, and interpreters of the past act as a check on the exegesis. Bonaventure does not show any intention of detailed inquiry into the intention of the human author(s). Nevertheless, such a concern may at least be emerging in the distinction he draws between a 'literal' and a 'spiritual' reading of The Good Samaritan.[46] Minnis describes the thirteenth-century historical shift, of which Bonaventure was a part, towards the acknowledgement of the human role in producing Scripture. By this period '[t]he literal sense was believed to express the intention of the human *auctor*'[47]. But the two-level nature of the authorship of the parables - Jesus' speaking and Luke's writing - is not explored. Perhaps this is simply because Jesus' divinity was so taken for granted that his 'meaning' on earth was assumed to be identical with the overarching divine meaning.[48] Certainly, when the commentary refers to a human producer of the text, it is to Luke - not only in linking sections where Luke's arrangement of stories and sayings is described[49], but sometimes in actual expositions of parables, where we would expect Jesus (in modern critical parlance it would be 'Luke's Jesus') to be the subject. The introduction to the exposition of The Prodigal Son reads: 'In this parable the evangelist describes four things'[50].

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[46] 'Sic igitur patet secundum sensum literalem doctrina elicita ex parabola. Alia et potest elici secundum sensum spiritualem...': Bonaventura, 231b.

[47] Minnis, *Theory*, 73.

[48] In his comments on The Good Samaritan Bonaventure draws attention to the wisdom of Jesus' *tactics* in dealing with the lawyer ('Ideo dominus sagacissime ex ore ipsius veritatem extorsit...', 231b); but this is not the same as probing *behind* the Evangelist's words for the meaning of Jesus, or even assuming that Jesus' meaning is to be identified with Luke's. Those matters are not addressed.

[49] E.g. on the transition between Lk.15 and 16: 'Post expressionem impietatis Iudaicae, et notificationem pietatis divinae, subintroducit hic *euangelista* commendationem, et persuasionem pietatis humanae': Bonaventura, 341b (my emphasis).

[50] '...in hac parabola quatuor [sic] describit euangelista': ibid., 331a.

Fundamentally, then, the aim of interpretation remains the discovery of *divine* meaning. This is surely the assumption behind the repetitive formula of this commentator, 'because...therefore there follows' ('quia...ideo subdit'). A reason from the (divine) ordering of the world is given, as a way of *introducing* the segment of text in question. Here for instance is the introduction to Lk.15:16b: 'And because man cannot be satisfied with such things: therefore there follows, "And no one gave to him"'[51]. The 'pods' with which the prodigal son desired, but failed, to fill himself have just been interpreted as 'the delights of vices', and the fact that no one gave to him is regarded as divinely-ordained confirmation of the folly of seeking satisfaction in such things. The formula 'ideo subdit' seems in the majority of cases, as here, to have an impersonal subject understood (i.e. 'there follows'), rather than a personal one (i.e. 'he puts next'); if it *is* personal, no emphasis is placed on the personality. Thus the focus is the meaning of the text itself, rather than that of Luke or Jesus; but behind that impersonal 'there follows' lurks the figure of a supreme Author.

3. Calvin

Calvin's commentary marks a further break with the past. Though absolutely at one with his predecessors in reverence for Scripture as the word of God[52], he presents the fruit of greater reflection upon the role of the human authors.[53] The arrangement of the commentary as a 'harmonized' version of the Synoptic Gospels leads him, for example, into discussion about the relationship between the different versions of the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer (Mt.22:34-40; Mk.12:28-34; Lk.10:25-37). Luke's omission of the questioning from the Passover week narrative, where the other Gospels place it, 'seems intentional, because he had related it elsewhere' (III, 34). He goes on:

> It may be that Luke told the incident out of place, or it may be that he omits the second time of asking (considering that the first narrative covered the doctrine well enough). It seemed to me that the lesson was so much the same that I ought to bring the three Evangelists together. (ibid.)

There is here an awareness of the significance of Luke's intention. The bringing-together of the three Evangelists, however, sets severe limits on enquiry into Luke's particular motives and strategy.

Attention to the human writer does, though, lead Calvin to the issue of the setting and purpose of Jesus' words within his own ministry. The matter of whether the

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[51] 'Et quia talibus non potest homo satiari: ideo subdit, et nemo illi dabat': Bonaventura, 333a.

[52] '[A]bove human judgement we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that [Scripture] has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men': *Institutes*, I.vii.5.

[53] On Calvin's concern to understand and expound the *mens auctoris* cf. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 191f.

different accounts reflect different occasions is raised. So is the matter of what Jesus intended in his parable. Calvin contemptuously dismisses the old allegorical interpretation as the device of 'proponents of free-will':

> As if Christ would have intended to speak here about the corruption of human nature, and discuss whether the wound Satan struck on Adam was fatal or curable: as if He had not plainly declared, without any figurative talk, that all are dead unless He quickens them with His voice (John 5.25). (III,39)

Here is an early sign of that obfuscation of the nature of early approaches to the parables' meaning which Dodd was to reinforce so influentially. Calvin artlessly yet pregnantly introduces the question of *the intention of Jesus*, and objects strongly to the attribution of particular intended meanings to him; but the earlier commentators we have considered were not in the habit of making such attributions. Calvin's comments mark this as a new epoch in parable interpretation. The question of *what the human Jesus* - termed 'Christ', to be sure - *could or could not have meant* has begun to be mooted.

THE TRANSMISSION OF DIVINE MEANING
Influence in the premodern commentators

The main source of influence on these early interpreters was the tradition of the church, and it was an influence of which they were not afraid. They did not aim for innovation. There were clear boundaries for the drawing of meanings out of the texts: Scripture as a whole, the rule of faith, the tradition handed down from the earliest days of the gospel.[54] They were certainly aware of the mystery involved in their belief about the nature of Scripture, and the corollary that mistakes could arise[55]. They knew that the insights of the great doctors and of the church as a whole needed to be brought and held together if they were not to fall into serious error. Many of Ambrose's interpretations had probably been current in the Church for generations.[56] Certainly **Bede** expressed to Bishop Acca considerable reluctance to undertake a commentary (Prologus, 5-18), being overawed by the shadow of his great predecessor Ambrose. He was afraid of being told, in the words of an old proverb, that there was no point in putting fish in the sea or water into rivers - that he should indeed pour out 'generous gifts', but 'in needy places'.[57] In the event he

[54] Cf. Torrance, *Meaning*, 115-129 (on the 'hermeneutical principles' of Irenaeus); 172f. (on Clement of Alexandria).

[55] See for instance Augustine's discussion, used by Bede, of the disputed meaning of the goat in Lk.15:29: the sinner or the antichrist? (Beda IV, 2531-2550).

[56] See below, 47 n.65.

[57] '*In mare quid pisces quid aquas in flumina mittas?*

Larga sed indiguis munera funde locis': Beda, Prologus, 17f.

acknowledged his great debt to Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, Jerome and the other Fathers (Prologus, 98-102), quoted extensively from them throughout his work and marked the quotations as such[58], and beseeched anyone who had a mind to copy his commentary to copy these acknowledgements also (Prologus, 111-115). Numerous Patristic references lend authority to the interpretations of Bonaventure also, and protect him from any charge of wanton innovation or departure from Catholic tradition as he adopts an Aristotelian pattern for his commentary. The continuing influence of the tradition on Calvin is seen in his many references to earlier interpreters; it was, as we have seen, in controversy with them that the new focus on what Jesus originally meant came to the fore.

At certain points we can recognize that the influence of Christian tradition was so strong that it caused the interpreters to miss the force of the text. A good example is the way that Bede treats Lk.16:8, in which the steward is praised for his shrewdness, 'for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light'. Instead of grasping the nettle of the master's praise of a 'steward of unrighteousness' he simply warns those who are wise in this age to leave their wisdom and find God's (V, 91-96). This is a concentration upon a phrase at the expense of feeling the thrust of the discourse, which seems aimed at encouraging hearers to *heed* worldly wisdom, not to flee it. **Bonaventure** is also defensive about this verse, stressing the superiority of spiritual to carnal wisdom. But he does penetrate further into the saying than Bede. In a nice instance of the 'natural theology' of his age, he describes how worldly wisdom can point in the direction of spiritual, how even vices can teach us something about virtues (345b,346a).

The other noteworthy source of influence for the early commentators was the situation of their own time. This influence, also, was something of which they were not at all ashamed. They seem to have taken it for granted that the text would have contemporary application, and therefore happily read it through contemporary lenses. **Ambrose** compares the rich man of Lk.16:19-31 with the Arians 'who strive after an alliance with kingly power'[59], have made 'many gospels' and 'several philosophies'[60], and the poor man with the (true) church with its 'sole gospel' and 'one God'[61]. (It is clear that this is proposed not as 'the' intentional, or absolute, meaning of the parable, but as a contemporary application thought to be persuasive: 'Do not [the Arians] seem to you as those lying in a kind of purple and linen, on raised couches?'[62]) **Bede** defends the

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[58] He explains his system in Prologus, 105-111.

[59] '[Q]ui societatem potentiae regalis adfectant': Ambrosius, VIII, 187.

[60] '[E]uangelia multa...philosophia plures': ibid., 197ff.

[61] '[S]olum euangelium...unum deum': ibid., 198f.

[62] '[N]onne tibi uidentur in quadam purpura et bysso exstructis iacentes toris...': ibid, VIII, 188f.

monastic calling, which depended heavily upon the charity of others, when he assures readers that the begging of which the steward would have been ashamed (Lk.16:3) was the 'worst kind of begging' ('pessimo genere mendicandi'), i.e. that which was necessitated by being unprepared, as in the case of the foolish virgins of Mt.25:8 (V, 63-69). **Bonaventure** gives this a different twist. He says that though the steward's words in v.3b make him like one who flees from a monastic order[63], nevertheless he did not say he *despised* begging, which would *not* have been a feature to be tolerated[64]. Both Bede and Bonaventure defend *monasticism* against the charge that begging was shameful, as well as defending the *steward* from being a totally negative example. Readiness to apply a parable against one's enemies is seen in **Calvin**'s comparison of the rich man's fine linen with the 'so-called surplices' of 'the sacrificing papists' (II, 116).

DIVINE MEANING DISCLOSED
Premodern insight into the parables

I turn to the question of the early interpreters' *insight.* Through examining their treatment of each parable I shall draw attention to two things: the ways that they deal with the parables as *figurative language*, and the *tone of voice* which they hear.

1. The Good Samaritan

Ambrose does not explicitly use any term like 'allegory' as a key to The Good Samaritan, but his exposition is 'spiritual', Christological and thus *metaphorical* through and through. The outline of Jesus' story is read much as Augustine was to read it.[65] The victim's descent from Jerusalem to Jericho is understood as the fall of Adam (VII, 735-742)[66], and the robbers as deceptive angels of night (742-748). Hardly anything is made of the significance of the Priest and Levite. The weight of the story falls upon the Samaritan[67], who is one both 'outwardly and inwardly': outwardly, not that he is a

[63] Smalley depicts the background of Bonaventure's teaching in the conflict betwwn the friars and the secular doctors: *Gospels*, 201. Therefore '[p]overty is stressed wherever the text gives occasion for it; the commentaries [on Lk. and Jn.] might be called "treatises on gospel poverty in a lecture framework"' (212).

[64] '[N]on ait mendicare contemno, quia hoc non esset infirmitatis tolerandae, sed impietatis detestandae': Bonaventura, 344a,b.

[65] Such a reading of the parable had reached the West via Jerome's translation of Origen's *Homily* 34, and may well go back to apostolic times: St-Jacques, "Samaritan", 315. Stein mentions that Marcion saw the Samaritan as Jesus, an identification made also by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* III.xvii.3; IV.xxxvi.7): *Parables*, 43f.

[66] Ambrose illustrates the flexibility of patristic reading by interpreting this descent elsewhere as a Christian's shrinking back from a martyr's conflict: *De Poenitentia* I.vii.28, I.xi.51f., cited in Stein, *Parables*, 46.

[67] 'Non mediocris iste Samaritanus, qui eum quem sacerdos, quem leuita despexerat, non etiam ipse despexit': Ambrosius, VII, 752-754. This is Ambrose's only explicit reference to the first two passers-by.

foreigner, but that his designation can be etymologically understood as 'guardian'; inwardly, that his actions display the character of a guardian (755-759). He also 'came down', and his coming alongside the wounded man signifies Christ's becoming our neighbour (759-766). Subsequent parts of the reading have been mentioned above.[68] This is classic 'allegorizing' as readers since Jülicher and Dodd have learned to know it.

However, it is interesting to note the upshot of the story according to Ambrose: it is that we should love Christ as lord and neighbour, and also those who imitate him in showing compassion beyond the bounds of kinship (822-827). For Ambrose the tale has an unmistakeably moral *tone*.

A significant shift is noticeable when we turn to **Bede**'s treatment of this parable. At the outset he says that the Lord taught in it that whoever showed mercy to someone was a neighbour, and also that he himself was God's son who in his humanity became our neighbour (III, 2202-2206). But he warns that 'we ought not to interpret the neighbour (whom we are commanded to love as ourselves) as Christ in such a way that we weaken and divert the moral principles of mutual brotherhood under the rules of allegory'[69]. In his concluding comments, on vv.36f., Bede allows for two distinct ways of reading the parable: 'by the letter' ('iuxta litteram', 2297) and 'with a more sacred understanding' ('Sacratiore...intellectu', 2301). In his section on the 'literal' meaning, he summarizes the point by saying that the foreign Samaritan became more of a neighbour to the wounded man, on account of his pity, than those born and brought up in the same city had been (2297-2301). Under the rubric of the 'more sacred' or figurative meaning, he follows Ambrose's opinion that Christ is the supreme neighbour, so we ought to love him and those who imitate him (2301-2305). But his conclusion reflects his earlier emphasis on the danger of attenuating the moral force of the parable through an allegorical understanding. For in his remarks on v.37b, 'And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise"', though Bede does not specifically say that one's neighbour is *anyone* in need, it is undoubtedly the neighbour in general - not simply Christ and his imitators - and the practical challenge of serving him which is in view: 'that you may show that you are indeed loving your neighbour as yourself, work devotedly according to your power in relieving his necessity, whether bodily or spiritual'[70].

The striking element of **Bonaventure**'s commentary on the parable, as compared to those of Ambrose and Bede, is the relegation of the 'spiritual' reading to a definite

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[68] 40f.

[69] 'Neque enim ita proximum quem sicut nos diligere iubemur super Christo interpretari debemus ut moralia mutuae fraternitatis instituta sub allegoriae regulis extenuare et auferre conemur': Beda, III, 2206-2209.

[70] '...ut uere te proximum sicut te ipsum diligere manifestes quicquid uales in eius uel corporali uel spiritali necessitate subleuanda deuotus operare': Beda, III, 2307-2310.

second place subsequent to the 'literal' interpretation.[71] What for Ambrose had been the 'all' of the parable has become a supplementary option ('Other doctrine *can* be drawn out according to the spiritual sense...'[72]). The main emphasis is upon reading the story as a 'documentum' or 'teaching aid' to help the lawyer understand the precept he has been given (227b). The characters are by no means seen as allegorical figures, but are related to a wider context by much reference to Scripture and by allusion to Bonaventure's own world. They are 'personae' in a drama, and as such reflect certain fates and traits known or conceivable in reality[73]; we could describe them as *metonymies* by which related figures from a single sphere (the human) are brought into connection.[74] Thus the 'person in need through wretchedness' is related, through consideration of the good he has lost, to Job in his state of loneliness (Job 19:13-19), and, through consideration of the evil he has suffered, to proverbial awareness of the plight of the innocent at the hands of robbers (seen in Prov.1:11ff.).[75] The 'person who despises out of harshness' (the two passers-by viewed as one 'character') is related to the Old Testament via various uncomplimentary texts concerning Priests and Levites, and via the command not to turn aside one's face from a poor man in Tob.4:7.[76] The 'person who comes to help out of mercy' is an example of obedience to Old Testament precepts concerning the support of the weak and the relief of the poor from the need to beg. His love is *not* 'like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away' (Hos.6:4).[77] Bonaventure summarizes the parable's teaching thus: 'the name of neighbour extends not only to kinsmen, but also to foreigners'[78].

It should be noted that this climactic point of the exposition is reached *before* Bonaventure proffers, like a loyal afterthought, the 'spiritual' sense.[79] The 'point' of the

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[71] The 'spiritual', i.e. the traditional 'allegorical' reading, in which Bonaventure follows the Fathers, occupies only about an eighth of his commentary on the passage Lk.10:25-37 (231b). This chimes with Huizinga's comment that medieval literature had taken allegory in 'as a waif of decadent Antiquity': *Waning*, 197. It is true, in Stuhlmacher's words, that 'allegory finally came to rest and ossified in the commentaries of scholastic tradition' (*Criticism*, 31), but important to note, as here, the ways in which those commentaries were moving beyond it.

[72] My italics. 'Alia et potest elici secundum sensum spiritualem...': Bonaventura, 231b.

[73] Bonaventure's use of the word 'persona' seems significant here. Originally meaning 'mask', it came to be used metonymically of the actor who wore it. Although a meaning closer to modern English 'person' is attested from classical times, it appears that it is used here with the sense of 'character' in a drama (cf. *dramatis personae*). See Smith, *Dictionary*, 534. The story is being examined with a literary-critical eye for realistic fiction; but see n.80 below.

[74] Cf. White, *Metahistory*, 35.

[75] '[P]ersona indigens ex miseria': Bonaventura, 230a.

[76] '[P]ersona despiciens ex duritia': ibid., 230a,b.

[77] '[P]ersona subueniens ex clementia': ibid., 230b, 231a.

[78] '[P]roximi nomen non solum se extendit ad propinquos, uerumetiam ad extraneos': ibid., 231a,b.

[79] The powerful image of Christ as the Samaritan was tenacious. Évelyne Proust describes a French twelfth-century carved stone capital which makes the identification, though this stands out as rare in the architecture of the period: "Vigeois", 53.

parable, for him, derives not from a metaphorical-allegorical understanding but from a moral realistic[80] reading of its characters as known types, in the context of the Gospel setting, the Old Testament and his own time.

Calvin's reading not only relegates, but rejects the old allegorical treatment completely. The moral point is clear enough for him:

> Therefore the Lord declares all men to be neighbours, that the affinity itself may bring them closer together For anyone to be a neighbour, then, it is enough that he be a man; it is not in our power to deny the common ties of nature...It turns out that our neighbour is the man most foreign to us, for God has bound all men together for mutual aid. (II,38)

But he sees a secondary aim in the parable too:

> It fits in with His purpose to include some criticism of the Jews and priests in particular, for although they boasted that they were the children of the same Father and separated by the privilege of adoption from other races to be the holy heritage of God, nevertheless they held each other in savage, vile contempt, as if there were nothing of importance between them. No doubt Christ is describing their cruel neglect of love, and they knew they were guilty. (38)

Thus the Priest and Levite are accorded synecdochic significance as representatives of their race, but this is subsidiary to the chief lesson of neighbourliness beyond the bounds of kinship.

Calvin appreciates the realism of Jesus' language, using the image of the mirror:

> As in a mirror we can see the brotherhood of man which the scribes with their sophistry had tried to efface. (38)

His rejection of the traditional reading, as well as having a doctrinal impetus, is grounded in caution about treatment of the text:

> ...we should have more reverence for Scripture than to allow ourselves to transfigure its sense so freely. Anyone may see that these speculations have been cooked up by meddlers, quite divorced from the mind of Christ. (39)

The word 'transfigure' pinpoints what has always been the fundamental animus against allegorical parable readings, that their 'figures' are the creation of the hearer or reader

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[80] This is not yet 'realism' in a modern sense, though it is an advance towards it as compared with the Fathers. It is realism in the medieval sense, which, as Huizinga notes, we call nowadays *idealism*. 'People feel an imperious need of always and especially seeing the general sense, the connexion with the absolute, the moral ideality, the ultimate significance of a thing. What is important is the impersonal. The mind is not in search of individual realities, but of models, examples, norms': *Waning*, 207.

and not the intention of the author. But Calvin, while safeguarding (like his predecessors) the general moral thrust of the story, is himself guilty of a kind of figurative reading that is far from benign: that which sees the negative characters, baldly and stereotypically, as representative of a whole race.

2. The Prodigal Son

Whereas we noted a progression in readings of The Good Samaritan from the entirely allegorical, via a mixture of straightforward and allegorical, to an outright rejection of the allegorical, we find in the treatments of The Prodigal Son a consistently allegorical approach differing from one interpreter to the other only in the extent and details of the meaning thus drawn out. The reason for this seems to be that the Fathers, mediaevals and Reformers were essentially pragmatic in their hermeneutics. They were not intent on applying a particular 'method' to interpreting the text whether or not the text itself was amenable to it. There is a naturalness and immediacy in their approach. A moral power that is not dependent on the allegorizing of details was found in The Good Samaritan; but at the same time the attractiveness of that parable to the Fathers as a picture of God's plan of salvation, deeply involved as they were in hammering out the foundations of Christian doctrine, was understandable. In the case of The Prodigal Son the identification of the Father with God and the prodigal with the sinner suggests itself so readily to a Christian mind that even Calvin found it irresistible; and though 'allegorical', the old readings of this parable were by no means always 'unnatural'.

It is needless to go through every detail of the allegorical reading of this parable, with its exuberant delight in the fulness of the story's significance. There are colourful touches to bring a smile to a modern reader's lips. The pigs of vv.15f, connected with those of Mt.8:32 and par., are seen as demons[81], or those into whom the devil enters to their destruction[82]. Ambrose contrasts the goat which the jealous elder brother complains of never having had (v.29) with the lamb of God desired by the innocent for their pardon[83], and adds for good measure a comment about the goat's bad smell[84]. But more imposing than such oddities is the sensibility which discerns rich patterns of meaning, correspondences between the text and the contours of salvation, offering meditative readings which, attuned to the poetic quality of the text, refuse to tie it down under a particular figurative schema.

For example, there is some perspicacious playing upon the imagery of departure and return so central to the parable. **Ambrose** sees the youth as going away from the

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[81] Bonaventura, 333a.

[82] Ambrosius, VII, 2393ff.

[83] 'Inuidus haedum quaerit, innocens agnum pro se desiderat': ibid., VII, 2589f.

[84] Ibid., VII, 2612.

Church, from himself, and from Christ (VII, 2359, 2361, 2364). There is then an appropriateness about his 'coming to himself'; and this moment of self-knowledge and his physical return to his father are read as figures of the same reality:

> Well does he return to himself, who departed from himself. For indeed the one who returns to the Lord returns to himself and the one who departs from Christ disowns himself.[85]

Bede sees the son's departure also in inward terms, substituting the idea of the 'mind/soul' ('animus') for that of the 'self' (the reflexive pronoun 'se') to give a less striking but more psychologically sophisticated presentation:

> He journeyed far by changing not place, but mind. For indeed the more anyone offends in perverse action, the further he recedes from the grace of God.[86]

Bonaventure is characteristically more expansive, reading the distance travelled as that between goodness and iniquity, light and darkness, eternity and nothingness (331b, 332a).

Calvin's discussion is of interest because though his reading is unashamedly tropical, he is sensitive to the dangers of an excessively allegorical understanding. He does not hesitate to see God in the father, or the penitent sinner '[u]nder the person of a prodigal young man' (II, 221)[87]. But having suggested a more precise reading of the younger son as one blessed with great riches, yet desiring freedom from God, he withdraws from this with the caveat that 'this allusion may be too subtle, and therefore I will be content with the literal sense - not that I do not think that under such a figure there is reproved the madness of those who imagine that they will live happily if they have something of their own and are rich apart from their heavenly Father, but because I now keep within the proper limits of an interpreter' (221).

This is odd to a modern eye, for the 'literal sense' that Calvin says he is content with must in fact be the *tropical* sense of the son as any sinner who repents. He calls it 'literal' because the *sensus literalis* had become equated with the original intention.[88] But it is intriguing that it is the 'meaning' which adheres more *precisely* to the son as described in the story - that he is a person *with possessions* who wants his freedom - which Calvin is cautious of, as perhaps too 'subtle' an 'allusion'. There is a tussle here between two instincts: that the meaning of Jesus 'ought' to be as universally-embracing as

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[85] 'Bene in se reuertitur qui a se recessit. Etenim qui ad dominum regreditur se sibi reddit et qui recedit a Christo se sibi abdicat': Ambrosius, VII, 2411-2413.

[86] 'Longe profectus est non locum mutando sed animum. Quanto etenim quisque plus in prauo opere delinquit tanto a Dei gratia longius recedit': Beda, IV, 2301ff.

[87] Note the use of 'person' (see above, n.73).

[88] See above, 43.

possible (which we shall find expressed classically in Jülicher), and that his parables do contain individual elements which have a more specific suggestiveness. The more general reference to 'all sinners who become disgusted at their own madness and return to the grace of God' is not, in our sense, 'literal', nor - very likely - 'intentional' in the sense that that is how Jesus would have thought of it; it is a later doctrinal reading of the younger son as a synecdoche, a part standing for the great whole of fallen humankind. Conversely, the more specific reference to 'anyone who is blessed by God with an abundance of possessions...', far from being non-literal as Calvin implies, may well have spoken, and been intended to speak, to those who were indeed wealthy.[89] Perhaps paradoxically we see here Calvin, desiring to withdraw from too much allegory, withdrawing instead from too specific a moral thrust. If so he would be a herald of modernity and postmodernity.[90]

Of special importance in the interpretation of this parable is the construction put upon the two sons and their relationship to the father. It has always seemed an attractive proposition to see them as figures representing in some way Gentiles and Jews. It is noteworthy that our four interpreters, though playing with the idea, generally eschew stereotyping them thus.

For **Ambrose**, the younger son's separation from the father is a moral one[91]; his race is not an issue. He is contrasted with the Christian as he is now. The prodigal became an exile from his homeland: we, says Ambrose in an allusion to Eph.2:19, are not foreigners and aliens (VII, 2364-2366). But this is to be no cause for complacency. The younger brother reminds 'us' of our own past (2368f.). On v.24 ('this my son was dead...') Ambrose offers several options for interpreting the son (2563-2578): as the live Christian, in contrast with the dead 'peoples' (*gentes*, here understood, like ἔθνη sometimes in the NT[92], as 'non-Christians' rather than 'non-Jews' or 'nations' in general); as humanity, dead in Adam, alive in Christ; as the Gentiles, who 'were not' but now 'are', who were chosen by God 'that he might destroy the people of the Jews'[93]; or as *anybody* doing penance. The plurality of options offered is a mark of humility in the commentator and mollifies the anti-Jewish streak[94].

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[89] See further below, Chapters Five and Six.

[90] See below, Chapters Three and Four.

[91] 'Sed moribus separari...': Ambrosius, VII, 2362.

[92] Already perhaps in Eph.4:17; more clearly in 1 Pet.2:12. In Rev.11:2 the 'Gentiles', to whom the outer court of the temple is given over, presumably stand for the opponents of Christ, just as the 'twelve tribes of Israel' in Rev.7:4-8 presumably stand for his adherents. The Vulgate translates as 'gentes' in all three instances; no doubt this was the standard equivalent of ἔθνη with which Ambrose would have been familiar.

[93] '[U]t destrueret populum Iudaeorum': 2572f.

[94] The reference to God destroying the people of the Jews is an interpretation of 1Cor.1:28: 'God chose...things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are'.

In discussing the elder brother, Ambrose likens his complaining to that of the Jews when Christ feasted with the 'peoples' - a metonymic equation of the 'sinners' of Lk.15:1 with Gentiles.[95] Crucially, he stresses that the father wanted to save this young man too (2632f.). 'You were always with me' is read as a reference to the Jew having the law, or more generally to any just man who participates spiritually in this possession.[96] But he must stop his envy (2634f.). 'And all that I have is yours' is taken to point either to the Jew possessing the sacraments of the Old Testament, or the baptized person possessing those of the New.[97] Thus the potential harshness of the identification of the elder brother with the Jewish race is softened by mention of the father's continuing favour towards him, and by the suggestion that a Christian also should heed the warning that he represents; the moral challenge of the parable also emerges.[98]

Bede says that 'the elder son signifies those who have remained in the worship of the one God, the younger those who have deserted God to the extent of worshipping idols'[99]. Although the classic distinction between the Israelites as worshippers of the Lord and the Gentiles as idolaters is clearly present, the fact that the divison is delineated in terms of actual worshipping behaviour immediately lifts the reading on to a moral rather than a racial plane, and awakens many-toned resonances in the parable. For (as Jesus and his hearers, Luke and his readers, and Bede and *his* readers would all have been aware) Israel had had its own share of idolaters; sensitive listeners to speaker, Evangelist and commentator will thus be warned at the outset against too comfortable an identification of Israel with the son who remained with the father. Jews may be found under the guise of the runaway, too. But this opening move of Bede has a wider suggestiveness. If the possibility is kept open that Israel herself can sometimes be idolatrous, then the prodigal's action indicates that, nevertheless, penitence is open to Israel as well as to the typically-idolatrous Gentiles. Conversely, perhaps a Gentile can be a true Godfearer: but in that case he also will have to heed the warning to faithful Jews contained in the portrait of the elder brother. Bede's statement implies the content of that warning: shunning idolatry is not enough. In the parable, one who (on this reading) has remained in faithful monotheistic observance is nonetheless found wanting.

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[95] 'Quod faciebant Iudaei, cum quererentur quia Christus cum gentibus epularetur...': Ambrosius, VII, 2610f.

[96] '[V]el quasi Iudaeus in lege uel quasi iustus in conmunione': ibid., 2633f. I read the compacted expression 'in conmunione' as expressing the spirit of Rom.2:12-16: there are those outside the domain of the law who nevertheless possess it inwardly.

[97] Ibid., 2635-2637.

[98] In his treatise *De Poenitentia* against the Novatian heresy, Ambrose uses the example of the forgiving father to teach that no true penitent should be denied reconciliation: Siebald and Ryken, "Prodigal Son", 640.

[99] '[M]aior enim filius eos qui in unius Dei permansere cultura, minor eos qui usque ad colenda idola Deum deseruere significat': Beda, IV, 2288-2290.

In his comments on vv.25ff. Bede identifies the elder son (more narrowly than in his opening statement) with Israel, and takes his position in the field as indicating Israel's ambiguous stance towards God (2479-2485). This son's (Israel's) problem is diagnosed as a fixation upon external things to the detriment of keeping the heart of the law. But the note on which his exposition, like the parable itself, ends, is the loving appeal of the father. In an allusion to Rom.11:25f., he sees the father's coming-out as pointing to the time when, once the 'fulness of the Gentiles' have come in, all Israel will be saved (2509-2513). In the final sentence Bede rediscovers the breadth implied in his opening gambit - that one need not limit the reference of the sons to two peoples (viz. Jews and Gentiles) - asserting that what matters is the challenge to adopt a certain attitude (2579-2583).

Bonaventure moves away still further from a rigid identification of the two sons with the Jews and Gentiles. He distances himself from the *Glossa Ordinaria*:

> By the two sons we understand the entirety of the human race, not only as referring to Gentiles and Jews as the Gloss expounds them, but also and generally to the innocent and the penitent, as must be understood from the very application of the parable.[100]

This reading of the parable as the story of *humanity* is pursued throughout Bonaventure's comments. He finds in it, we might say, an encapsulation of the Biblical narrative from Adam onwards, not just from Abraham. The younger son illustrates not Gentile idolatry but general human presumption (331a). His youth is accorded a significance that is moral rather than allegorical: 'that man is called younger, who is vainer, and more intent on the good things of the senses'[101]. Likewise, the elder brother is seen as archetypically 'more mature in behaviour, more conforming and obedient towards the father'[102]. His action in the story reflects that of any righteous man presuming upon his own merits and thus not accepting the justice of God (339b). The celebration from which he excludes himself is the joyful concord of the church (338b). In particular, 'he...who does not receive the overflowing mercy of God, but the sufficiency of his own justice, cannot come in to the love of [i.e. that belongs to] the church's unity'[103]. It is interesting that at this point Bonaventure brings in a reference to the Jews, but they serve as a particular *example* of how the general truth seen in the elder brother may be applied, rather than

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[100] 'Per duos autem filios intelligimus humani generis uniuersitatem, non solum quo ad Gentiles et Iudaeos sicut Glossa exponit, sed et generaliter quo ad innocentes et poenitentes, sicut oportet intelligi ex ipsa applicatione parabolae': Bonaventura, 331a. The mediaevals understood the *applicatio* of a text as its 'interpretation', in the sense of its use as a guide for the present: Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 311. By 'applicatio' here, therefore, Bonaventure presumably means a traditional interpretation.

[101] 'Iste adolescentior dicitur ille, qui uanior est, et ad sensibilia bona magis intentus': ibid., 331a,b.

[102] '...moribus maturior est, patri conformior et obedientior': ibid., 338b.

[103] 'Qui...non acceptat affluentiam misericordiae Dei, sed sufficientiam iustitiae suae, non potest introire ad unitatis ecclesiasticae charitatem': ibid., 339b.

the *basic* reference which may then be widened (339b). He then returns to the plane of universality with a sharply-stated paradox:

> The one who presumes upon justice, and is indignant at mercy held out to a brother, does not walk according to justice, but according to injustice.[104]

Consistent with this reading, the father's going out to the older son is not God's ultimate salvation of the Jews, but his manifestation in the flesh.[105] Like his predecessors, Bonaventure affirms the parable's teaching of a God who is gracious to all humankind. The father's approach to the elder son is seen as the perfect exemplar of Prov.15:1: a soft answer turns away wrath (341a).

I have discussed above[106] **Calvin**'s comments on the younger brother, as illustrating a paradox in his sensitivities about allegory. It remains to note what he writes about the elder:

> Those who think that by 'first-born son' is meant a type of the Jewish people, although there is some reason in it, do not seem to me to be attending sufficiently to the context as a whole. For what gave rise to this parable was the grumbling of the scribes, who could not bear Christ's humanity towards the wretched and men of doubtful lives. He therefore compares the scribes, swollen with their arrogance, to thrifty and canny men who by their honest and careful life have always taken good care of the household. (II, 225)

The grounds of Calvin's caution are interesting. He sees the importance of context to the interpretation of the parable. When read in the light of 15:1f., 15:11-32 naturally suggests to a reader a correspondence between the elder brother and those who grumbled at Jesus' consorting with 'sinners'. Now to note such a correspondence would be called by many an 'allegorical' reading, though so great an advocate of a non-allegorical understanding of the parables as Jeremias was to embrace it.[107] That many from Calvin to Jeremias and beyond have not balked at it is a strong indication that the allegorical/non-allegorical category for parable examination has been a blunt instrument indeed. For the real point Calvin is making is clear: it is not a question of *whether*, in some sense, the elder brother stands for some person or group in the real world, but of

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[104] 'Iste praesumens de iustitia, et indignans de misericordia fratri impensa, non ambulat secundum iustitiam, sed secundum iniustitiam': Bonaventura, 340a.

[105] 'Egressus scilicet iste non est aliud nisi manifestare se exterius in carne': ibid. Bonaventure had seen the father's running to meet the younger son as an example of prevenient and concomitant grace (335b); his interpretation thus does not, from one angle, place great weight on the difference between the two sons. Both are objects of the father's love and purposeful activity.

[106] 52f.

[107] 'The parable was addressed to men who were like the elder brother, men who were offended at the gospel': Jeremias, *Parables*, 131.

who that person or group is. Here again Calvin's more advanced historical sensibility, as compared to his precursors, is evident. A concern for the Gospel context implies a concern for the intention of Jesus, and it is assumed that it would be more natural to read Jesus here as referring to specific interlocutors than to see an allusion to the entire Jewish race. But this historical sense blends easily, indeed imperceptibly, into the awareness that there is nevertheless a far broader application of this figure of the elder brother. He is not only the Scribes and Pharisees, but 'we':

> The sum of it therefore is: if we want to be reckoned the children of God, we must in a brotherly way forgive our brethren their faults which He pardons in a fatherly way. (224f.)

This survey of the older commentators' interpretations of the two brothers shows that all escape the pitfalls of crude stereotyping which is, rightly, regarded as a danger inherent in rigidly allegorical reading (whether it be metaphorical, metonymic or synecdochic). There is a gradual movement away from the view of the brothers as types of Jew and Gentile, though already in Ambrose a possible more universal significance is acknowledged. Most importantly, none evade, indeed all emphasise, the challenge to *Christian* people which the parable represents. 'Allegorical' reading is not used in the cause of self-justification or the pillorying of enemies. It serves the end of bringing out the parable's *moral* thrust.

3. The Shrewd Steward

Since Ambrose's comments on The Shrewd Steward are confined to a few lines, we begin our sketch of early approaches to this parable with **Bede**, who follows Augustine's *Quaestiones euangeliorum* quite extensively. For Bede the parable's moral purport is clear. He does not turn it into a repository of abstrusely-expressed Christian doctrine. In it the Saviour 'shows that those who have shared their earthly goods and given to the poor are fit to be received by them into the eternal tabernacles'[108]. The problem for interpreters of the parable is that if this truly summarizes its message (in accordance with the conclusion given it in v.9) we have to reckon with the fact that though the steward is put forward as an example, his actual behaviour does not seem wholly exemplary. Commentators have therefore always been cautious to stress that he is not to be imitated in *everything*. So Bede, citing Augustine, says that God is not to be defrauded[109]; and he

[108] '...manifestat eos qui bona terrena disperserint dederintque pauperibus ab his in aeterna tabernacula recipiendos...': Beda, V, 7ff.

[109] '*Non enim...domino nostro facienda est in aliquo fraus ut de ipsa fraude elemosinas faciamus...*': ibid., 38ff. (italics indicating citation).

hedges the praise of the steward in v.8 around with the qualification that those who do *good* works will be praised all the more[110]. The working of the argument of the parable The Judge and the Widow is adduced in support of this 'how much more' interpretation (V, 49-52).

A moral or exemplary reading of a parable does, however, depend upon the drawing of certain figurative correspondences. The most basic is that between the hearer/reader and the character(s) to be imitated, but seeing that correspondence naturally leads to seeing others. So there is in Augustine's and Bede's reading a simple, unstressed assumption (seen for instance in the comment about not defrauding) that the master stands for God. There is also speculation about who more precisely the remitter of debts and the debtors themselves might stand for, and what the act of remission and its consequences might mean. In linking ch.16 with the theme of penitence in ch.15, Bede suggests that the monastic calling (which involved giving away one's worldly goods) is an appropriate expression of the penitent's obedience to Jesus' words (12-16). Augustine had not wanted to read the absolved debtors too crudely as 'debtors of God'. Rather, they are to be seen as the holy and just who have been ministered to in their earthly necessities (38, 40-46). After quoting this passage Bede goes on to indicate that he understands the removal of the man's stewardship as the solemn watershed of death, and offers this interpretation of his reluctance to dig:

> To be sure, once the stewardship is taken away we have no strength to dig; because once this life is finished, in which we are permitted to be so active, we are by no means permitted any further to seek out the reward of good conduct with the mattock of devoted compassion.[111]

The implication is that when death is imminent, and there is no time left for good works, to remit others' debts is all one can do to secure one's future.[112]

Finally, having quoted Augustine's contrast between the steward's generous remissions and the scribes' and Pharisees' tithing, and his comparison of the steward with

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[110] '*[S]i laudari potuit ille a domino cui fraudem faciebat quanto amplius placeant domino Deo qui secundum eius praeceptum illa opera faciunt*': ibid., 47ff.

[111] 'Ablata quippe uilicatione fodere non ualemus quia finita hac uita in qua tantum licet operari nequaquam ultra bonae conversationis fructum ligone deuotae compunctinis licet inquirere': Beda, V, 60-63.

[112] Such a reading was no doubt influenced by (but perhaps originally also an influence upon) the reading of the Vulgate in Lk.16:9b, 'cum defeceritis' - i.e. 'when you die', not 'when the mammon fails'. The verse was clearly a problem from early times. Other Latin variants were 'defecerint' (subject: the forgiven debtors) and 'defecerit' (subject: mammon): Jülicher, *Itala*, 186. Aland et al. ed., *TGNT* and Aland ed., *Synopsis*, give no variant readings for ὅταν ἐκλίπη ('when it fails'); Nolland reports the reading ὅταν ἐκλ(ε)ίπητε ('when you die') found in ℵ W and elsewhere, and says it glosses the sense correctly: *Luke*, 804. The latter reading is also found in Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Basil and Chrysostom: Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1110.

the reformed and open-handed Zacchaeus (78-84), Bede offers respectfully a simpler reading of the steward's action and its intended consequence:

> Unless, perchance, anyone should think that it is simply to be accepted [sc. from Lk.16:5-7] that everyone who alleviates the lack of any poor person among the saints, whether to the extent of a half or at least of a fifth part - as much as twenty or fifty percent - is fit to be presented with a sure reward of his mercy.[113]

This is 'simple' beside Augustine's comments because the reference is made broader: no allusion is found to the scribes and Pharisees and their comparative meanness. The steward simply stands for any generous person. However, it is interesting to note the precision of Bede's application. He does not read the remission of debts as a metaphor for the forgiveness of sins, or any other 'spiritual' reality. The steward's action is seen as an example on a literal, practical, financial level. Bede is not even content with discerning that example in general terms; he spells out in two different ways the proportion of a person's need that Jesus encourages us to alleviate. If in our own day we react against such a reading, we should note carefully why we do so. Is it not that Bede is being too *literal* for our liking - taking the text too much at its plain, face value - rather than that he is being too *allegorical*, wantonly imposing mystification where there is none? The respect in which he *could* be accused of importing some alien signification into the text is the assumption that it is the poor *of the saints* to whom we are here commanded to be generous; but there the question is not literal vs. figurative, but how broad the figurative interpretation of the debtors should be. Is the 'whole' of which they are a part the entirety of the poor, or the entirety of the poor saints?

Bede's interpretation is instructive. It is anchored in the fact that this is a story about what someone does with money. In its application to his own monastic situation Bede implies that the central characters of steward and debtors, and the relationship between them, may be seen from two angles. On the one hand, the steward figures the penitent who - anxious to express his penitence in tangible means - gives to the poor, perhaps to the extent of giving up all and joining a monastic order. These recipients of his generosity are not *any* poor, but the deserving - good Christian folk. On the other hand, the one who has given up all becomes *himself* poor and in need; and it is hard not to see in the reference to the 'holy and just' an allusion to the impoverished monks themselves, and not only to the recipients of their largesse when they entered orders. The steward is then interpreted as anyone who wins great hope of reward by alleviating that particular, monastic poverty.

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[113] 'Nisi forte quis simpliciter accipiendum putet quod ominis qui indigentiam cuiuslibet pauperis sanctorum uel ex dimidia uel certe ex quinta parte quantum uiginti uel quinquaginta ad centum sunt adleuiauerit certa suae misericordiae sit mercede donandus': Beda, V, 84-88.

Bonaventure's treatment is typically more expansive and systematic. His didactic concern is shown in the structuring of his commentary on the parable as a seven-point sermon. In a splendid sequence of gerundives, demonstrating the suitability of Latin for scholastic purposes, he shows how the parable offers us in turn things to be thought over, repelled, dreaded, tolerated, provided for, imitated, and commended.[114]

Sensitive to the problems the parable presents, he asserts that it is to be understood in part as example, in part as parable:

> for if it had not been expressed as an example, it would not be added at the end of the parable that the master praised the steward of iniquity, because he had done foolishly...but again if it had not been spoken in parabolic fashion, a deed of such deception and so much to be detested should by no means have been put forward by the master as an example.[115]

He summarizes the lesson of the steward thus:

> Thus that steward is to be deprecated, because he committed fraud: for which reason he is called a steward of iniquity, and he is to be praised, because he found for himself a remedy against danger.[116]

The point behind the distinction between the 'exemplary' and 'parabolic' senses must be this: what can be taken *prima facie* in accordance with Christian teaching should be taken thus: the steward is commended, and therefore we should enquire in what *sense* he is exemplary. What, on the other hand, seems contrary to such teaching if taken literally should be understood parabolically. Parable is the face-saving category into which the literally unacceptable should fall.[117] We note that this is a moral or doctrinal unacceptability, not a linguistic one: it would make perfectly good *sense* to follow the steward in his shadiness as well as his shrewdness. We note in consequence that there is a tacit assumption about the stance of the author here - not probably so much that of Jesus, as that of the Evangelist as the one who has penned divine words. Something unworthy - and self-contradictory, when brought alongside other passages of Scripture -

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114 '...recogitandum...refutandum...formidandum...tolerandum...providendum...imitandum...commendandum': Bonaventura, 342a. One misses from Bonaventure's 'sermon' a sense of the logic of the story *as a whole*.

115 '[N]isi enim esset exemplum expressum, non subderetur in fine parabolae, quod laudauit dominus uillicum iniquitatis, quia prudenter fecisset...sed rursus nisi esset parabolice dictum, factum tantae fraudis adeo detestandum, in exemplum nullatenus a domino proponi deberet': Bonaventura, 342a.

116 'Sic uillicus iste detestandus est, quia fraudem commisit: ratione cuius uillicus iniquitatis dicitur, et laudandus est, quia prudenter sibi contra periculum, remedium adinvenit': ibid., 345b.

117 Cf. the view of Hugh of St Victor, in the century before Bonaventure, that '[w]hen the obvious or literal sense...is inadequate, seems absurd, or has no obviously clear meaning, then the deeper meaning is to be searched for': Rollinson, *Theories*, 80.

is not to be predicated of him.[118] Parabolic speech is seen here not as the cloak of great mysteries but as a part of the dressing of the story.

A moral intention is brought out clearly by Bonaventure. The steward stands for anyone who has worldly power or wealth to dispense. Such a one is thereby reminded that he holds it in stewardship rather than possession (342b). The steward's wasting of his master's goods is taken as a negative example. Bonaventure's instinctive realism imagines what this squandering would have meant in practice: that the poor were somehow being deprived. Thus the accusers are in the position of the poor of Jas.5:4 whose cry ascends to the Lord (342b, 343a). V.2 ought to resonate with the conscience of *any* person: '[f]or this voice ought to ring in the ear of anyone at all, because without a doubt divine justice will exact a reckoning'[119]. The figurative net, so to speak, is here being cast as wide as possible. The steward's plan, says Bonaventure, shows a right instinct - that his stewardship will be properly discharged 'by the acquiring of friends rather than by the amassing of riches'[120]. What modern readers tend to see as a cynical ploy, Bonaventure (like Lk.16:9) takes as exemplary, for the steward was acting out of love in order to avoid danger (in the spirit of Rev.2:5, where the church at Ephesus is commanded to repent of its lack of love, lest its lampstand be removed). His action is contrasted not with some ideal of selflessness, but with the materialism which puts money above people. Bonaventure remembers that he has been implicitly characterized as one who was feathering his own nest at the expense of the poor, and it thus appears as a genuine act of contrition that at this point he is thinking about turning those same poor into friends, rather than trying to exploit them further. Despite some dabbling in the typological significance of the numbers of vv.6f., it is the *literal*, exemplary force of the steward's 'munificence and mercy' which is emphasised[121].

Calvin understands the parable similarly:

> The sum of this parable is that we must treat our neighbours humanely and kindly, so that when we come before God's judgement seat, we may receive the fruit of our liberality. (II, 111)

Morally his comments are even sharper than those of Bede and Bonaventure, for he broadens the application, sweeping away the unjustified restriction of the objects of charity to the 'saints'.[122] The old interpretation was that the departed righteous welcomed

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[118] This is the point made by Wolterstorff when he argues that a conviction about the *intention of the speaker*, not merely a defectiveness in the utterance *per se*, invites us to take a statement metaphorically: *Discourse*, 195.

[119] 'Haec namque uox in aure cuiuslibet debet resonare, quia absque diuina aequitatis rationem exiget': Bonaventura, 343b.

[120] '[M]agis de acquirendis amicis, quam de congregandis diuitiis': ibid.

[121] '[A]d literam ostenditur liberalitas munificientiae et misericordiae': ibid., 344b.

[122] Seen in Bede (V, 84-88) as well as Bonaventure (346b, 347a).

those who had been generous to them (or at least to their like) into the heavenly mansions, and this was linked to the view that the dead might help the living by their prayers; but:

> ...in this way whatever was bestowed on the unworthy would be lost. But man's depravity does not prevent God from recording in His account book whatever we give to the poor...so that our benefits, even if made to the ungrateful, will be accounted (*respondeat*) to us before God. (112f.)

On the difficulty the parable presents, Calvin's main direction of argument is against over-attention to details:

> Hence we perceive that those who investigate minutely every single part of a parable are poor theologians. For Christ does not here bid us to redeem by gifts the frauds, extortions, squandering and other faults of bad administration; but since God has appointed us stewards of all the good things He bestows on us, a method is prescribed which one day, when the time of rendering account shall come, will lighten us from the extremest strictness. (111)

Calvin's own comments themselves adhere very closely, though, to several details of the story: the calling of the steward, the time of rendering account, the remission of debts as a means of mollifying strict justice (111ff.). The need for an aesthetic judgement about the significance of different elements is thus exposed.

The most striking thing is Calvin's readiness to acknowledge that Jesus is speaking about something that human beings can do to alleviate the rigours of God's judgement. This is remarkable from this great Reformation exponent of humanity's moral bankruptcy and need to depend upon the grace of God alone.[123] It is true that he will not countenance interpreting the steward's actions as a way of freeing oneself from guilt. But they do betoken a method which 'will lighten us from the extremest strictness'; 'our humanity to our brethren may stir up God's mercy to us' (111). In response to the possible misunderstanding that 'eternal life is a recompense for our merits', Calvin replies

> that the context makes it clear that this is spoken in a human sort of way. Just as a flourishing and rich man who makes friends during his prosperity will have them to help him when misfortune strikes, so our kindness will be like a timely refuge in that the Lord acknowledges as bestowed on Himself whatever we give liberally to our neighbour. (113)

The 'human sort of way' in which the story is told - Calvin's equivalent of Bonaventure's awareness of its 'parabolic sense' - means that it is not a serious challenge to Calvin's

[123] Cf. *Institutes* III.xi.16: 'God deigns to embrace the sinner with his pure and freely given goodness, finding nothing in him except his miserable condition to prompt Him to mercy, since he sees man utterly void and bare of good works; and so he seeks in himself the reason to benefit man.'

doctrine, but he will not back down on its moral force. Our kindness is not merely response to God's grace, but a 'timely refuge'. Like his patristic and mediaeval forbears, Calvin finds here not rarified mysteries, but practical exhortation.

4. The Rich Man and Lazarus

Premodern interpreters were all concerned that the *practical* message of The Rich Man and Lazarus concerning poverty and wealth should be communicated.

Ambrose, after some reflection on the five brothers of v.28 as the five senses of the body (VIII, 130ff.)[124], succinctly captures the exhortatory force of the parable as a whole:

> He placed Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, as if in a certain enclosure of quiet and recess of holiness, lest enticed by the pleasure of present things we should remain in vices, or overcome with the weariness of labours we should escape hardships.[125]

He reads it as a moral tale to arouse the sinful and encourage the fainthearted. The question then naturally arises: whom may one see figured in the person of Lazarus - that is, who is the object of encouragement? Ambrose offers a choice. He can be one who is 'poor in the world, but rich towards God'; or the 'apostolic pauper in word, who is rich in faith'; or the more contemporary refuter of heresies, who is likewise an 'apostolic person who holds the true faith, and does not require ornaments of words...'[126] At the end of his exposition he writes of the parable as an 'incentive for showing mercy' ('incentiuum misericordiae') - towards the poor in general, whereas Lk.16:1-9 seemed to envisage specifically the saints as the object of compassion.[127] Lazarus's figurative reference, then, is not to be tightly limited; but to be avoided is the crudity which would see in the parable a sanctifying of *all* poverty or a vilifying of *all* wealth:

> ...for neither is all poverty holy nor riches blameworthy, but as extravagance brings riches into disrepute, so holiness is a recommendation for poverty...[128]

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[124] Cf. Beda, V, 448f. (following Gregory); Bonaventura, 359b.

[125] 'Lazarum...in Abrahae gremio quasi in quodam sinu quietis et sanctitatis recessu locauit, ne inlecti praesentium uoluptate maneamus in uitiis uel taedio uicti laborum dura fugiamus': VIII, 132-135.

[126] '[P]auper in saeculo, sed deo diues...apostolicus...pauper in uerbo, locuples fide...apostolicus qui ueram teneat fidem, uerborum infulas...non requirat': ibid., 135-141. Ambrose is echoing Jas.2:5, as well as Paul's language about apostolic poverty and lack of dependence on fine rhetoric in 1 Cor.1-4, 2 Cor.10-12.

[127] Ibid., 214-218.

[128] '[N]eque enim omnis sancta paupertas aut diuitiae criminosae, sed ut luxuria infamat diuitias, ita paupertatem conmendat sanctitas': ibid., 137ff.

Here Ambrose shows sensitivity to the story's precise figurative tone. The rich man and poor man do not stand in a wooden way for whole classes of people ('the rich go to hell and the poor to heaven'), but simply suggest a warning and an encouragement respectively to members of those classes about the possible danger of riches and the possible compensation of poverty.

It is only *after* this laying of the basic moral groundwork of the parable that Ambrose launches into a baroque and bewildering passage (VIII, 159-185) playing with the meaning of the crumbs, the dogs, the sores, and alluding to various unconnected (to most modern readers) passages of Scripture, such as the story of the Canaanite woman in Mt.15:22-28, and the gaoler washing Paul's wounds in Acts 16:33.

Bede borrows almost his entire interpretation from Gregory's *Homeliae in euangelia.* This reading is clearly divided into two parts, a 'literal' (though that word is not used) and an 'allegorical' (it is Bede who explicitly marks the division, adding the words 'uero iuxta allegoriam' [V, 393]). In the first part the parable's moral force is brought home. Gregory sees in it an instance of the greater strictness of the New Testament's precepts as compared with those of the Old:

> There [in the O.T.] a thing unjustly taken away brings the punishment of fourfold restitution, but here this rich man is reproved not for having taken away another's goods but for not having given his own, and it is not said because he oppressed someone but because he exalted himself in the things which he had received.[129]

A highlighting of the story's contours is found in this comment on the sharp reversal it pictures: 'The one who did not wish to give even the smallest amount from his table, when placed in hell reached the point of asking for the smallest amount'[130].

Gregory seems anxious to explain in realistic, credible terms certain points which might present difficulties for a literal, 'realistic' reading. This contrasts with what we find in a later period, for instance in interpretations of The Shrewd Steward by Bonaventure and Calvin, where difficulties in the story were precisely what pointed the reader *away* from too literal a reading to a 'parabolic' understanding (Bonaventure) or a commonsense recognition of the story's 'humanness' (Calvin). For instance, Gregory finds the need to explain that the rich man's reception of 'good things' in this life showed that there had been *some* (moral) good in him, and conversely that Lazarus' reception of 'bad things' showed that there had been *some* (moral) bad in him (337-341). Divine justice, for

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[129] *'[I]bi res iniuste sublata restitutione quadrupli punitur, hic autem diues iste non abstulisse aliena reprehenditur sed propria non dedisse nec dicitur quia unum quempiam oppressit sed quia in acceptis rebus se extulit'*: Beda, V, 257ff.

[130] *'Qui...mensae suae uel minima dare noluit in inferno positus usque ad minima quaerenda peruenit'*: ibid., 324f.

Gregory, clearly did not allow a *total* disparity between one's behaviour and one's lot on earth.

The final section, in which Gregory treats the parable 'iuxta allegoriam', draws a correspondence between the rich man and the Jews, Lazarus and the Gentiles (393-399). A connection is also made between the licking dogs and preachers administering the curative Word (409-414), a traditional point. But of chief interest to us in this allegorical section (393-461) is its clarity of style. The 'meanings' are set out straightforwardly and sequentially. This contrasts with the suggestive, much more complex, and meditative ethos of Ambrose's commentary where 'moral' and 'spiritual', 'literal' and 'allegorical' are intertwined. The 'allegorical' readings, as they became more fixed in tradition, seem to have lost this vigorous exuberance. Arguably it was that process of ossification[131] which made them appear so unpalatable to Jülicher and his successors. It seems that as commentators became increasingly aware of the possible dangers and eccentricities of allegorical readings, those readings tended to be given in more summary form, as here (out of faithfulness to tradition) to supplement to a more realistic one; and summaries can sound like mechanical listings.[132]

Bonaventure's exposition of The Rich Man and Lazarus need not detain us; in it the moral takes precedence over the allegorical. The description of the rich man first in his luxury and then in his torment makes it, he says, more an example than a parable (353a).

The parable is discussed by **Calvin** with real depth of literary insight. As painters in the early Renaissance discovered the art of perspective, so it seems that commentators of the Reformation had won a new feel for the contours of a text. Calvin is in continuity with the tradition in emphasising the moral thrust of the story. He is concerned with 'the substance of what is taught':

> For Christ interrelated these two things - that the rich man was given up to drunkenness and display, an insatiable whirlpool devouring heaps of food, and yet untouched by Lazarus' poverty and wretchedness but knowingly and willingly letting him waste away of hunger, cold and stinking ulcers. (II, 116)

Again like his predecessors, he is alert to the ironies in the story. The height of the rich man's ungodliness, he says, was 'that he did not learn mercy from the dogs...He would not give even a crumb to this starving man; but the dogs lent him their tongues to heal him' (117). Calvin is as careful as Ambrose to stress that the story is neither a bald condemnation of the rich nor a bald commendation of the poor. He quotes Augustine: 'the pauper Lazarus is carried into the bosom of wealthy Abraham to teach us that the

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[131] Cf. n.71 above.

[132] Cf. Bonaventure's allegorical 'appendix' to his exposition of Lk.10:29-37: 231b.

gate of the Kingdom of heaven is shut against no rich man but lies open for all in common who either have used their riches well or have been patient in poverty' (119). The true message of the story should be clear, and again he uses the image of the mirror: 'the rich man is like a bright mirror in which we can see that temporal felicity is not to be sought for if it ends in eternal destruction' (117).

It is in Calvin's sensitivity about too much concentration on detail that the advance marked by his comments is chiefly seen. He is anxious to guard against misunderstandings that might arise from Jesus' language about an after-life. Significantly, he identifies at least four different figures of speech as used here by Jesus. He wants to emphasise that it was the *soul* of Lazarus which was carried into Abraham's bosom (since according to Christian doctrine the resurrection of the *body* must await the last day), and so he says that 'Lazarus was carried' is a 'synecdoche' in which 'the name of the whole man' is given to his soul, 'his more excellent part' (117). He finds in 'Abraham's bosom' a double *metaphor*. 'It is a metaphor taken from children returning, as it were, to the bosom of their father when they meet at home in the evening after their day's work.' (118) But he especially wants to emphasise that the *Christian* can picture this peaceful scene in a sharper, more up-to-date way; and so, in a lovely glimpse into the forward-looking, provisional nature even of Jesus' language, he adds this:

> So far as the name goes, that quiet haven which opens for believers after the voyage of this present life can be called either Abraham's or Christ's bosom. But because we have gone higher than did the fathers under the law, the distinction becomes clearer if we say that Christ's members are gathered to their Head. And so the metaphor of Abraham's bosom comes to an end, as if the brightness of the risen sun obscured all the stars. (118)

Further, he senses the need to remain reticent about the details of the after-life, and so he comments on v.23f.:

> Although Christ is telling a story, yet He describes spiritual things under figures which He knew were on the level of our understanding. For souls have not been endowed with fingers and eyes, nor are they tormented with thirst, nor do they hold conversation with one another in the way here described of Abraham and the glutton. The Lord is painting a picture which represents the condition of the future life in a way that we can understand. (118f.)

The reader is not to be confused about Abraham's addressing of the rich man as 'Son' (v.25). This word 'seems to have been used *ironically*, so that the sharp reproof might pierce the rich man to the heart, for in his life-time he had falsely boasted of being one of the sons of Abraham' (119, my italics). Finally, when the rich man responds to Abraham in v.30 that one returning from the dead would secure his brothers' repentance, Calvin calls it 'a *prosopopoeia* (personification)...in which is uttered rather the thought of the

living than the anxiety of the dead' (122). The rich man's words typify perverse (living) humanity's desire for a 'sign'. This is a recognition that the sentiments of a dead person may only be imagined by a projection of familiar sentiments from this life. It shows Calvin's imaginative attunement to the human Jesus, who is for him a communicator, not of arcane mysteries, but of profound truth, in a simple way that people can understand.

Thus for Calvin the story gives us a warning example, but it is also parabolic in the sense that it cloaks in accessible language truth which is beyond the powers of human comprehension or expression. In a tradition stretching at least as far back as Origen, he seeks to protect untrained minds against crude literalism by sensitizing them to figurative language. From a modern perspective, we might well deem him to have not gone far enough. In fact he stands roughly midway between his predecessors and his more recent successors. Bonaventure had commented that Christian teachers used the parable as evidence of the status of the damned.[133] Calvin goes to some lengths to hedge around its *evidential* nature with qualifications. Jeremias will write that here 'Jesus does not intend to give teaching about the after-life'[134]: that is, Jesus was simply using an accepted mythological picture.

We might focus Calvin's stance by citing three throwaway lines - two about story, one about authorship. On account of the naming of Lazarus, Calvin believes that Jesus

> is telling a true story. Nevertheless, this is not very important, so long as readers hold the substance of what is taught. (116)

He holds together here an awareness of the realism of the story (or at least of its opening earthly scene) and an instinctive sense that it is *teaching* something beyond itself. Then he seems, in a passage already quoted, to *contrast* story and figurative speech:

> Although Christ is telling a story, yet He describes spiritual things under figures which He knew were on the level of our understanding. (118f.)

The 'although...yet' betokens the tension that later debates were to bring to full expression, between story as realistic description and story as meaningful mode of teaching. Modern writers have driven a wedge between the two[135]; Calvin held them together. Perhaps this was because although he did not depart from inherited belief in the divine authorship and therefore divine meaning of Scripture, he also gave due weight to Christ the human teller of the parable, as this interesting juxtaposition demonstrates:

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[133] Bonaventura, 353a.

[134] Jeremias, *Parables*, 186.

[135] E.g. Hedrick, *Parables*, 35: 'To assume that the stories were designed to take the reader away to a specific point of reference outside the story, treats the story as an allegory and ultimately reduces the narrative to a discardable husk.'

> There is no doubt that those dogs were directed by the secret counsel of God to condemn [the rich man] by their example. Christ brings them here as if to bear witness and reprove the man's accursed hardness. (117)

Parable and world are here seen interwoven. The human author of the parable introduces the dogs, but they are also directed by divine sovereignty. The parable (in its first part, at any rate) is a story reflecting the real world, but also a story pregnant with didactic power, for the Author of both story and world is one.

5. The Judge and the Widow

The essential points concerning these commentators' insights have now been made, and our treatment of their readings of the final two short parables may be briefer. The Lucan introduction to The Judge and the Widow, designating it a lesson in prayer (v.1), is assumed to provide the key to it. Its central thrust is regarded as exhortatory. Bede and Bonaventure (and the tradition generally, as the latter cites it) see a reference to the canonical hours of prayer in the 'always' of v.1, though also to the idea that one's whole life can be regarded as prayer.[136]

Bede and Bonaventure make it clear that it is to be taken as a parable of *dis*similarity; God is not at all like the reluctant judge.[137] This foreshadows later postulations of irony.[138] Bonaventure points out that Jesus 'is not comparing a person to a person, but a thing to a thing'[139] - and thus adumbrates an emphasis of Jülicher.[140] Even these 'things', however, appear in a relationship of contrast; on v.7a, Bonaventure says that 'if persistence in prayer softened the hardest judge and inclined the most unjust to do justice, how much the more surely will it incline [the ear of] the holy and just God'[141]. Calvin agrees with the tenor of the 'how much more' reading, though he wants to press the *likeness* between the two acts of petition in a literal way:

> He uses a parable which is difficult at first sight, but is especially apt for His purpose in teaching them to wait importunately on God the Father until at last they wring from Him what it seemed He was not willing to

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[136] Beda, V, 1051-1060; Bonaventura, 380b.

[137] Beda, V, 1076f.; Bonaventura, 380b.

[138] See below, 170.

[139] '...non comparat personam personae, sed negotium negotio': Bonaventura, 380b.

[140] Jülicher, following Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, stresses that in an extended simile ('Gleichnis') it is not two individual things or people that are compared, but the *relationship* ('Verhältnis') between two elements of a pair that is compared to the relationship between two elements of another pair (*Gleichnisreden* I, 75). When Bonaventure says that Jesus is comparing 'negotium negotio' he presumably means the same: God is not being likened to a harsh judge nor the disciples to a widow, but the *entreaty* of a widow to a judge is being likened to the *entreaty* of the disciples to God.

[141] '...si instantia precis emolluit iudicem durissimum, et inclinauit iniustissimum ad faciendum iudicium, quo multo fortius inclinabit Deum pium et iustum': Bonaventura, 382b,383a.

> give. Not that God is overcome by our prayers and at last unwillingly moved to mercy, but because the actual event does not at once bear witness to the fact that He is favourable to our wishes.[142]

6. The Pharisee and the Customs Officer

Though the early commentators tend to stereotype the Jews as being like the Pharisee in Lk.18:9-14, there is another aspect to their perception. Bede says that 'the Pharisee as a type...is the people of the Jews who extol their merits, whereas the publican is the Gentile who, positioned far from God, confesses his sins...'[143] But in the next paragraph he sees v.14 as pertinent to *any* proud or humble person, and specifically warns that 'we' should be humbled.[144] For him this is not simply a parable for the 'others'. Bonaventure even refers to Rom.11:18ff. to warn that though the proud Jewish people are reproved in the parable, the Gentiles should not fall into the same trap of pride.[145] Calvin makes no reference to the tradition of seeing the Pharisee as a type of the Jews; perhaps this character's similarity to 'papist monks' who 'proclaim works of supererogation, as if they could easily fulfil God's Law'[146] was too overwhelming to his mind for him to think of mentioning the earlier identification. It is of interest, though, that his description of the Pharisee is sophisticated and not crudely blackening:

> [H]is thanksgiving...is not at all a glorying in his own power, as if he had made himself righteous or merited anything by his own industry; rather he ascribes it to the grace of God that he is righteous...Therefore let us realize that although a man may ascribe the praise for good works to God, yet if he imagines that the righteousness of those works is the cause of his salvation, or trusts in it, he is condemned for perverted pride.[147]

Sometimes Calvin, like others before him, hangs a polemical point on what we would regard as the rather flimsy peg of parabolic language (we recall his pillorying of 'Papists', or Ambrose's of 'Arians', via the story of the rich man dressed in his finery). But here is a case where a perceptive grasp of the character as Jesus draws him leads quite naturally to an elucidation of a doctrine (whatever one may believe about the validity of the doctrine itself). To those who might object that he is nevertheless being too literal-minded about the parable, one must pose the alternative: would it be better to leave the Pharisee as a

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[142] Calvin, II, 125.

[143] 'Typice...Pharisaeus Iudaeorum est populus qui ex iustificationibus legis extollit merita sua, publicanus uero gentilis est qui longe a Deo positus confitetur peccata sua...': Beda, V, 1171-1174.

[144] Ibid., 1177-1192.

[145] Bonaventura, 387b.

[146] Calvin, II, 128f.

[147] Calvin, II, 128.

cardboard cut-out, a villain the precise nature of whose villainy can remain largely irrelevant?

7. Summary

The early interpreters' insight into these texts, their handling of them as figures, may be summarized with reference to a passage from Torrance concerning Clement of Alexandria's approach to the words of Jesus. Naturally there were many differences between commentators of this long period in the conceptualization of the hermeneutical task. Nevertheless Clement's approach has deep affinities with the writers we have been considering. Torrance writes:

> [Clement] remarks that in spite of their apparent simplicity the words of Jesus have a measureless range of intention behind them (διὰ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς φρονήσεως ἐν αὐτοῖς ὑπερβολὴν) which calls forth from us more concentration than his obviously enigmatic utterances.[148]

We notice first that the emphasis here is on the *less* enigmatic utterances of Jesus, those which do not appear at first sight so 'parabolic'. This sets our enquiry into early parable readings in its proper context. The old interpreters' quest for the richness of meaning in the parables was not something divorced from their quest for such richness in *all* the words of Jesus, indeed in all Scripture.[149] But what of the 'measureless range of intention' behind Jesus' words? Is this not precisely a way of expressing the belief that they possessed *divine* meaning - that it was not merely a matter of discovering what a human being wished to say in a particular situation? In our survey, it is only with Calvin that such an approach to the human Jesus' intention starts to be taken seriously. It is particularly fascinating to note Clement's use of the words ὑπερβάλλουσαν...ὑπερβολὴν, literally 'exceeding excess'. The link with our word 'hyperbole' suggests the following formulation: the Fathers, mediaevals and (to some extent) the Reformers read the parables, *like the rest of Scripture*, as richly tropical. The one intending this tropical sense was God, who used human words in condescension to human capacity; the trope God used was understatement, litotes, which is simply the mirror-image of hyperbole.[150] In order to expound his words, therefore, interpreters had

[148] *Meaning*, 162, citing Clement, *Quis div. salv.* 5.2-4.

[149] As 'allegorical exegesis' was gradually reined in, the parables and proverbial utterances of Scripture were naturally treated somewhat differently from the rest of Scripture by sensitive commentators, as requiring a special kind of insight. Cf. Athanasius's rejection of Platonic dualism (a dualism regarded by Torrance as the ground of Patristic allegorical exegesis) yet recognition of the particular character of the parables: *Meaning*, 230 and n.3. Yet the parables continued to be linked closely to the surrounding Gospel narratives, as is seen for instance in Ambrose's linking of The Good Samaritan with the following story of Mary and Martha (VII, 830-858) and Bonaventure's orderly analysis of the whole Gospel.

[150] Cf. Caird, *Language*, 133f.

to use language which attempted to reverse the process, to unpack the understated truth. This does not mean that they applied any slavish system of figures to the texts, but that the language of homily and commentary often appears as the language of *overstatement*, standing in a *hyperbolic* relationship to the texts themselves.[151] Yet the sense of the wealth of divine meaning did not entail a diversion of the parables' signification in the direction of other-worldly realities, but rather an intense focus on the pregnant importance of right moral action in specific situations in this world.

CONCLUSIONS

Assessing the commentators' insights

We may evaluate the insight of these commentators with reference to five considerations.

First, their view of the *locus of meaning*. They were not questing for the human author(s) and their meaning, and their belief in the 'divine meaning' of Scripture entailed a *text-centred* approach. They were concerned with exploring the possibilities inherent in the text as God-given, especially when brought into conjunction with other parts of Scripture.[152] It was not limited by the *overt* stance of the text, but was able to discern in it traces of meaning beyond the explicit. Though this permitted, at times, what to modern eyes appear as eccentric flights of fancy[153], at the heart of this mode of interpretation was nevertheless *respect for the basic thrust of the text*. It is clear that in many places the commentators see reflections of their own concerns and circumstances in the text, but it remains *the text* where they look for insight.

Second, the *style of approach* to the texts. This is not one of mechanical decoding, but of devotional and didactic meditation. This was especially evident in Ambrose. The claim is not to have discovered an or 'original' or 'absolute' meaning which could never be challenged. It is rather one of reverential wonder, and of invitation into an insight: 'Can you not see this likeness? this parallel? this wealth of significance?' When in later writers an 'allegorical' interpretation is offered in balder, this-means-this fashion, it is probably because it is being offered as a summary of the traditional understanding, to supplement the exposition of the writer himself.[154]

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[151] Cf. Finan, "Augustine", 180, on Augustine's sense of the interpreter's struggle to express the inexpressible.

[152] 'Allegory presents not just the author's historical meaning, but, in Origens's metaphor, the polyphonic harmony of "God's symphony"': Louth, *Mystery*, 112f., cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 157.

[153] Cf. McEvoy, "Hermeneutic", 17.

[154] Thiselton is therefore one-sided when he writes that 'a parable speaks as a whole which operates at a pre-cognitive level; allegory is didactic and cerebral, and treats the narrative as a series of separate translatable units': *New Horizons*, 170. Ambrose's allegories are certainly didactic, but not 'cerebral' if that implies a lack of passion or immediacy of apprehension and communication; nor does Ambrose

Third, the *figures they found.* The commentators wrestled with increasing sophistication with the problem of how to read Jesus' parabolic language. I suggest that the chief danger they courted could be best described not as 'allegorization', but 'literalism'. We have seen how Calvin objected to the extent to which some of his predecessors fastened on to the smallest details in their hunt for significance. The more nuanced approach, whose outlines have become clearer by the time of Calvin, is to recognize that the parables, as wholes, are figurative speech, but that that does not entail seeking a meaning for every element. As we have seen, Calvin himself could be accused of being over-*literal* at times.

Fourth, the *tone they heard.* The tone detected by the commentators in these parables is a *moral, exhortatory* one. There is a sense of direct applicability to humans and the choices they must make in this world: the neighbour is to be loved, the poor helped and so on. Of the 'four senses' traditionally assigned to Scripture, the moral one was called 'tropological'; the text was 'turned' or 'bent' to make it instructive about human behaviour.[155] The Fathers and mediaevals would readily have acknowledged that the specific *application* they found to situations of their own time did not belong to the *original* sense. It is the more impressive that the moral *power* they ascribed to these parables does not seem wrung forcibly out of them, but inherent in the texts themselves.

Fifth, the *stream in which they stood.* These interpretations do not reflect unbridled speculation by their own authors. The parables are read within the hermeneutical horizon of the Church's doctrine.[156] Their quality as versatile texts, usable in different situations, is brought out not only in their use as vehicles of this doctrine but in their application to the situations of the interpreters' own periods: heresy, monasticism, reform.

We come to the crucial point. Is there, in the artless way they summarize the moral thrust of the parable - what people are being exhorted to do, the sanctions being set forth - the trace of an inherited memory, a clue to the way the words had always been understood? The earlier interpreters did not intend with any precision, and mostly did not intend at all, to reveal anything about the 'voice' of the historical Jesus; they intended to show the divine meaning of Scripture for their day. Nevertheless they may *unintentionally* reveal something about it. Their response to the *texts* may betoken a hearing of the *voice*. Influence may have come not only from a tradition, but a person, whose tones still echo in the interpreters of his words. Quite without meaning it, those interpreters may yield insight into that person for those who will come after.

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treat The Good Samaritan 'as a series of separate translatable units', but as a story expressing the whole sweep of salvation.

[155] Evans, *Earlier Middle Ages*, 109.

[156] Frye argues that patristic and mediaeval hermeneutics reflects not arbitrary polyvalence, but the reading of texts in a series of widening contexts: *Code*, 220-223, cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 144.

CHAPTER THREE

The Age of Historical Quest

The Modern Inquiry after Jesus' Intention in the Parables

A considerable percentage of the questions which appear insoluble today derives from our being burdened with the failures and oversimplifications of earlier generations.
Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation*, 22

The strong poets have followed [Oedipus] by transforming their blindness towards their precursors into the revisionary insights of their own work.
Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 10

INTRODUCTION

Jülicher and historical criticism

Since space forbids consideration of the three centuries after Calvin, we turn to the work of Adolf Jülicher, Professor of Theology at Marburg from 1889 to1923[1]. In 1888-9 the first edition of his great two-volume work on Jesus' 'parable-speech', *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, was published. Ten years later the second edition appeared, and it is in this form that the work is known today, and in which I shall discuss some of its key sections.[2]

Jülicher's name is associated with the beginnings of modern parable scholarship because it was his work that was to prove most influential in bringing historical rigour to bear on the course of parable interpretation. But the lively, sometimes heated interaction with contemporaries and nineteenth-century predecessors in his book shows him as a man very much caught up in central debates of his time. This had been the century in which Biblical scholarship sought to throw off the straitjacket of orthodoxy and escape from submission to ecclesiastical authority. No longer was belief in the divine origin of

[1] Cross ed., *Dictionary*, 753.

[2] References to the work in this section of this chapter will be given by volume number in Roman numerals and page number in Arabic. Jülicher's work has never been translated into English. Translation of the title itself is problematic, since Jülicher deliberately avoided the German *Parabel* because of its associations with riddle or allegory (I, 30f.). His title reflects his emphasis on the essentially *comparative* character of Jesus' parables (*Gleichnis* basically means 'simile').

Scripture to act as a check upon serious critical inquiry into its sources and background.[3] The words of Jesus himself could not evade this 'scientific' scrutiny: indeed, insofar as scholars continued to want to give a place of high esteem to Jesus, such 'higher criticism' was perhaps considered more important with respect to the Gospels than to any other part of the Bible. The stakes were high. Could such criticism 'save' Jesus for modern humanity from the 'mythological' trappings with which he is beset in the Gospels?[4] Or should it not even be seeking to do so - should it seek to free itself from subordination not only to a revered text, but a revered man? In such an atmosphere it is not surprising to find a left and a right wing, a radical *avant-garde* as well as reactionary voices of protest.

It is necessary to structure this chapter in four sections. First we shall consider the *intention* of Jülicher. We shall examine, secondly, the figurative construction he places upon the parables for interpreting them as words of Jesus (in my terminology, for gaining *insight* into them). Only then will we be in a position to consider, thirdly, the *influences* upon Jülicher and his response to them. Fourthly we shall return to *insight* as we examine the meanings Jülicher finds in individual parables.

THE QUEST FOR THE MEANING OF JESUS

The intention of Jülicher

In his opening chapter, *Die Echtheit* ['authenticity'] *der Gleichnisreden Jesu* (I, 1-24), Jülicher stakes out his position between the reactionaries and the radicals. He launches straight into an attack on the reactionary position represented by S. Göbel, who had abjured the new Synoptic criticism because it had not yet shown that it could succeed in distilling an 'original Gospel' (*Urevangelium*) from the canonical Gospels (I,1). Of special interest to us is the fact that Jülicher turns against Göbel a quotation used by him from Calvin: 'nihil amplius quaerendum est quam quod tradere Christi consilium fuit'

[3] Neill characterizes the mindset out of which nineteenth-century criticism was breaking free: 'Traditional Christian reverence held a view of Biblical inspiration which separated it off from every other book;...all awkward questions were supposed to be stilled by the protection of inspiration': *Interpretation,* 33.

[4] The idea of the 'mythopoeic' outlook of the ancient sources goes back to David Friedrich Strauss's epochal *Life of Jesus* (1835): see Neill and Wright, *Interpretation,* 13f.

('nothing more is to be sought than what it was the purpose of Christ to hand on': I,1). The purpose or intention (*consilium*) of Christ was for Jülicher the all-important object of the search in Gospel study. Göbel is criticised because although he believed this too, he did not follow up his belief with historical source-criticism. Thus Jülicher finds the seeds of his own work in a principle enunciated at the Reformation.

To seek the intention of Jesus in the words attributed to him in the Gospels must mean also to take seriously the intention of those who handed them on and wrote them down. Against the reactionaries, Jülicher spells out this necessity and draws attention to the evidence in the Gospels themselves that the words of Jesus were not passed on in perfectly-preserved fashion (I, 2-11). So we must attempt to understand Jesus better than did those who preserved his words (I,11).

When Jülicher turns his fire on the radical position, he is able to call to his aid even the *doyens* of nineteenth-century liberalism, D.F. Strauss and F.C. Baur (I,11). Both had recognized that among the material preserved in the Gospels the parables, or some of them, had a high claim to have originated with Jesus. The Synoptic writers, Jülicher says, betray through their 'strange mixture of dependency and freedom' (*seltsame Mischung von Abhängigkeit und Freiheit*) a basic sense that they were indeed writing *history* of a kind, not pure creative literature (I,16). Recognition of the literary worth of the parables should not lead one to conclude that they are 'late' compared to other less striking examples that have come down to us from the period (I,18). There are wider points to be made against the radical position too. *Tendenzkritik*, the study of the bent of the individual evangelists, is inclined to propagate itself, unhelpfully in Jülicher's view; for it needs to consider the 'tendency' or theological stance of sources as well as Gospels, the choice, arrangement and framing of material as well as the basic impulse to write (I,19f.). Jülicher suspects that the 'results' of such criticism are as much a product of the search as the conclusion of it: 'Wer sucht, der findet' (I, 20). He points out that picture-stories are by nature easier to pass on than abstract theses (I, 22); that we have no evidence (e.g. in Paul) that anybody imitated Jesus's parable-style (I, 22f.); and finally, that the parables that are presented to us as coming from Jesus bear the marks of originality and genius, and are far superior to anything of a comparable genre from the period, for instance in Paul or Hermas (I, 23f.).

So Jülicher ends his first chapter on an optimistic note: we have good grounds for asserting the basic authenticity of Jesus' parables. The stated determination to discover the *consilium Christi* seems capable of fulfilment through source-criticism and a newly methodical handling of the parables.

MAKING OUT THE FIGURES

Jülicher's construal of the parables

The second chapter of Jülicher's book (I, 25-118) constitutes his main proposal. Through clear definitions, eloquent illustrations and forceful repetitions he seeks to establish beyond a doubt that when Jesus spoke in parables, it was a teaching device designed to clarify a point by means of a simile, *not* a veiling of the truth under a cloak of allegory. The chapter's title, *Das Wesen der Gleichnisreden Jesu*, encapsulates the spirit of this powerful argument. Jülicher is in pursuit of the parables' *essential nature*. His great protest against the tradition is that it has not faced up to what the parables *are*. Even the Evangelists' handling of the parables is contrasted with what they are 'in reality', *in Wirklichkeit* (I, 49). Throughout, it is clear that he links 'what the parables are' with 'what Jesus intended by them'. For him, they are not free-standing texts or works of art which can 'be' different things for different individuals or generations. They sufficiently reveal a clear purpose, and that intention is to be determinative for our understanding. What, then, *are* the parables for Jülicher, and how does he think he knows?

The general category under which Jülicher brings the first two of his three main divisions of parable-speech, the *Gleichnis* (similitude) and *Fabel* (story-parable), is that of *Redefigur* (figure of speech) (I, 80,98). He does not use this expression with regard to the third division, *Beispielerzählungen* (example stories), but he would probably not have disputed that these could be placed in the same broad category[5], a category he never defines. Jülicher's discussion of *how* the nature of the parables is to be determined is a model of balanced handling of the pecularities of an individual's speech within a

[5] He acknowledges that they are picture-language (*Bildrede*, I, 113); they are not *uneigentlich* (non-literal), but then nor, for him, are the figures of speech *Gleichnis* and *Fabel*. Jülicher maintains the distinction between figures and tropes, though he does not explicitly expound it; a trope is always *uneigentlich*, a figure need not be.

historical context, and points up the basic challenge which figures of speech peculiarly present[6]: how does one recognize and affirm uniqueness, that which is *sui generis*, within a historical method that depends on the principle of analogy, that is 'the assumption of an intrinsic similarity in all historical occurrence'[7]?

Jülicher operates between two poles. On the one hand he stresses that the Evangelists did not divide Jesus' sayings into rhetorical categories (I, 26), nor did Jesus give training in rhetoric to enable people to understand him (I, 41). Neither speaker nor writers were interested in conceiving or executing precisely-defined forms of communication. The use of the word παραβολή in the Gospels seems fluid and somewhat arbitrary (I, 25-28). We must, then, pay attention to the texts themselves and not be over-controlled by categories which we bring to them. On the other hand he sets the parables, as rhetorical devices, in two broad historical contexts. They are descendants of Old Testament *meshalim*, forms of speech which express a comparison (I, 32-42); they can also profitably be understood in the light of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (especially Jülicher I, 38,52,69ff.,94f.). Between these poles (the texts themselves, and their broad contexts) Jülicher stakes out this position: that the parables were originally, in the mouth of Jesus, plain, readily comprehensible *meshalim*, of the same rhetorical nature as the great *meshalim* of the Old Testament (I, 41); they speak of *one* general truth drawn from ordinary life and applied to the sphere of the Kingdom; the Evangelists, however, portrayed them as *meshalim* in the narrower sense of which the term had become capable in the intertestamental period, i.e. as riddles or enigmas (I, 42). Aristotelian terminology provides Jülicher with a useful clarificatory tool: he is not claiming that Jesus or his Jewish contemporaries would have been familiar with it, only (by implication) that it is better for us to use ancient categories than modern ones (I, 30f.).

Jesus' intention, then, for Jülicher, is to be discovered through holding together a historical awareness of rhetorical forms available to him, and attention to the texts themselves in their particularity, recognizing that they do not suggest *conscious* use of carefully-defined rhetorical devices. At the heart of Jülicher's position is much that

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[6] I am applying here specifically to figures of speech Professor J.D.G. Dunn's description of a challenge facing historians far more generally, a challenge which is however particularly acute when dealing with the history of a person such as Jesus.

[7] Stuhlmacher, *Criticism*, 45, expounding the work of Troeltsch which appeared in 1898.

subsequent generations, down to the present, will almost instinctively affirm. Many recognize, with him, natural, realistic and didactic qualities in Jesus' parables (I, 57,66,101). Many feel the persuasiveness of Jülicher's insistence that they be taken as similitudes (whether in general or story form) in the sense that Aristotle expounded: comparisons not simply between two elements (e.g. 'God is like a shepherd'), but between the *relationship* of two elements from one sphere and that of two elements from another, on the basis of a point of comparison (*tertium comparationis*) (I, 69f.). This seems to fit certain parables very well; for example, Lk.15:1-7 seems based around such a comparison. As a shepherd searches for a lost sheep, so God goes in search of lost people, and the point of comparison is the care of the searcher. Most acknowledge that where a plain sense emerges from this approach, it is somewhat unnatural to assume that the 'real' meaning will be on a deeper level (I, 88). It is easy to assent to the intrinsic improbability of Jesus' propounding elaborately wrought, aesthetically pleasing allegories in the midst of profoundly serious debate and controversy (I, 63,86,100f.).

The century of parable scholarship since the publication of *Die Gleichnisreden* has taken shape largely in response, both developmental and critical, to Jülicher's work; and it would be superfluous to my purpose to describe the twists and turns of a debate which have been chronicled by others.[8] The two major shifts are now well-known. Jülicher regarded 'the kingdom' as the theme of the parables, but his rather vague understanding of it as *die unsichtbare Welt* (I, 105) has been replaced by an awareness of its first-century Jewish overtones of a final, decisive and dramatic act of God in history.[9] And Jülicher's opposition between simile and metaphor[10] has been fundamentally questioned over the last thirty-odd years: it is widely recognized that the parables, by and large, do have metaphorical qualities, provoking new insights as well as, or rather than, appealing to universally-accepted truths, though how to construe that metaphorical operation both in general and in specific cases remains a matter of discussion.[11]

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[8] A summary of positions supportive of, and opposed to, Jülicher's is found in Binder, *Gleichnis*, 61-65. A brief critique of Jülicher is found in Caird, *Language*, 162.

[9] See Dodd, *Parables*, and Jeremias, *Parables*.

[10] For instance, Martin proposes that simile and metaphor should not be distinguished as to cognitive function: "Metaphor", 61. Cf. Kjärgaard, *Metaphor*, 198-216.

[11] See particularly Wilder, *Rhetoric*; Funk, *Language*; Crossan, *In Parables* and *Cliffs*; Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics"; Scott, *Hear*.

To understand and profit from Jülicher's contribution, however, we need to dig deeper than these questions. I have already demonstrated in Chapter Two that - at least in the case of six important parables and four important interpreters - the reaction against the 'allegorical method' by Jülicher, Dodd and their successors has largely been a reaction against a figment of the imagination, *viz.* the idea that the older interpreters *claimed that Jesus spoke in allegories*. What is the significance of this? I do not believe this confusion on the part of Jülicher was due simply to a lack of thought or study, or that it can be explained and answered wholly in similar terms - e.g. '*we now* know how to differentiate what he ignorantly confounded'. We need to address oppositions that lie (perhaps) at a deeper than intentional level in his work.

Underlying the polarity which Jülicher sets up between simile and allegory/metaphor there are three more fundamental polarities, pairs of opposites whose members he seeks to keep as far as possible from each other. Recognition of these will, I suggest, not only serve the historical aim of a better understanding of a great interpreter, but the exegetical aim of a better understanding of the nature of our task in dealing with the parables today.

1. Speaker vs. Writers

I use the terms 'speaker' and 'writers' to refer respectively to Jesus and those through whom his purported words have reached us. Jülicher, and modern Gospel scholars generally, are not of course only concerned with a polarity between Jesus and the *Evangelists*, but with processes of transmission that were undoubtedly oral before being written, and with hypothetical source-documents which the Evangelists used. But these distinctions are of secondary importance by comparison with the basic opposition to which I want to draw attention. We can trace the appearance of this polarity in Jülicher by citing various references to Jesus and the Evangelists (or their sources) respectively from Chapter II of *Die Gleichnisreden.*

Jesus, writes Jülicher, *possessed* wisdom, and therefore 'did not need to seek wisdom in unclarity'[12]; so he probably preferred the classic sense of *mashal* - plain wisdom-saying - to the aspect of 'riddle'. He did not use symbolic speech (or action): 'Jesus had too much Logos in him, to put the clear λόγος behind such obscure

[12] '[Er]...die Weisheit nicht in der Unklarheit zu suchen nötig hatte': I, 41.

gesticulation'[13]. He needed to speak clearly to answer his critics: 'a riddling answer from his side would of necessity have been taken as escape'[14]. He probably did not use allegory, for allegory is an artistic speech-form. '[This] speech-form is simply too difficult to bear the weight of his holy eagerness, of any high pathos at all. Passion, pure as much as impure, makes its expression spontaneously; the thought-out, considered nature of an allegory is no match for its onslaught.'[15] And an 'inspired' (*begeitsterte*) speaker like Jesus would not have been interested in muddled, badly-formed allegories (I, 64). Further, 'it would have been highly astonishing to him, if in his teaching he had provided the dominant influence upon an art-form which is indeed aesthetic, but not didactically effective'[16]. Finally, Jülicher is in no doubt that 'each word of Jesus was effective in training for the kingdom'[17]: therefore, he asserts, it is an *endurable* disappointment that the explanatory half (*Sachhälfte*) of the parables is in many cases lost, for at least we know what the subject was.

The Evangelists and their sources, however, 'confused the παραβολή of Hellenistic scribalism, as we know it from Sirach - the twin sister of αἴνιγμα - with the Mashal of the Scripture in all its breadth and naturalness, which will have been at the same time the Mashal of Jesus'[18]. The Synoptic Evangelists ascribed a 'secrecy' (*Heimlichkeit*) to the parables, regarding them as the 'profound disguising of strangely higher thoughts'[19], and in this respect their view of Jesus' speech was similar to that of John (I, 45). All four Gospel-writers agree that the parables 'required an interpretation

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[13] 'Jesus hatte zu viel Logos in sich, um den klaren λόγος hinter solch dunkler Gestikulation zurückzusetzen': I, 56.

[14] '[E]ine rätselhafte Antwort von seiner Seite hätte als Ausflucht genommen werden müssen': I, 86.

[15] 'Die Redeform ist eben zu schwer, um seinen heiligen Eifer, um überhaupt ein hohes Pathos zu vertragen. Die Leidenschaft, reine wie unreine, schafft sich ihren Ausdruck unwillkürlich; das Bedacht, Ueberlegte einer Allegorie ist ihrem Ansturm nicht gewachsen': I, 63.

[16] 'Es wäre bei ihm höchlich überraschend, wenn er in seiner Lehre eine Kunstform mit dominierendem Einfluss ausgestattet hätte, die wohl ästhetisch, aber nicht didaktisch wirksam ist': I, 64.

[17] '[J]edes Wort Jesu der Erziehung zum Himmelreich galt': I, 104f.

[18] '...die παραβολή der hellenistischen Schriftgelehrsamkeit, wie wir sie aus Sirach kennen, die Zwillingsschwester des αἴνιγμα, mit dem Maschal der Schrift in all seiner Weite und Natürlichkeit, der zugleich der Maschal Jesu gewesen sein wird, verwechselt haben': I, 42.

[19] '[T]iefsinnige Verhüllung absonderlich hoher Gedanken': I, 44. 'Profound disguising' is an odd mixed metaphor in English, but Jülicher's meaning is clear enough: the Evangelists regarded the words of the parables as a 'cloak' (*Verhüllung*, a key and frequent word in Jülicher) which was 'deep-sensed' (*tiefsinnige*), i.e. contained a hidden meaning that could be revealed to the initiated while concealing that meaning from the outsiders.

even for the most initiated'[20]. It was the hand of 'over-eager over-workers'[21] which turned the parables from plain into obscure speech. Those who handed on Jesus' sayings frequently failed to record their context, and it is this, not any intrinsic obscurity in the sayings themselves, which sometimes causes us difficulty in understanding them (I, 90f.). In any case, a written form could not reproduce the freshness of his oral delivery: 'Jesus' parables were calculated to work instantly, children of the moment, deeply immersed in the particularity of the present; the magic of immediacy could not be reproduced in any [written] letters'[22].

This polarity is neatly focussed in a single sentence: 'it is very possible', says Jülicher, 'that these writers [the Evangelists] have brought from their sphere of learning certain preconceptions to the parables, from which Jesus in his high originality was completely free'[23].

2. Text vs. Interpretation

Jülicher was no literalist. He did not take the Gospels as infallible records of Jesus' words. That is implied in his embrace of source-criticism and his attempt to understand Jesus better than the Evangelists (I,11). But there remains an anxious polarity between the text as a perspicacious document, and the idea - anathema to Jülicher - that it needs an interpretation. The reader, for him, has nothing to do but read off the text's plain, literal sense.

With regard to **the text**, Jülicher is submissive to one of the great Reformation tenets:

> Allegories without an accompanying interpretation, according to their nature, can never possess the degree of perspicuity which dogma demands for Holy Scripture.[24]

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[20] '[S]elbst für die Eingeweihtesten einer Auflösung bedurften': I, 46.

[21] '[E]ifriger Ueberarbeiter', I, 49.

[22] 'Jesu Parabeln waren auf sofortige Wirkung berechnet, Kinder des Augenblicks, tief eingetaucht in die Eigenheit der Gegenwart, der Zauber der Unmittelbarkeit liess sich bei ihnen durch keinen Buchstaben fortpflanzen': I, 91.

[23] '[E]s ist sehr möglich, dass jene Schriftsteller aus ihrem Bildungskreise gewisse Vorurteile auch an die Parabeln herangebracht haben, von denen Jesus in seiner hohen Originalität ganz frei war': I, 68.

[24] 'Den Grad von perspicuitas, den das Dogma für die hl. Schrift verlangt, können Allegorien ohne beigefügte Deutung ihrem Wesen nach nie besitzen': I, 62. On Luther's view of the inner and outer

The text, so the argument runs - *this particular text* - *must* be clear: therefore to read allegorical meanings into parables where no hint of such an intention has been left to us in the text is erroneous. There is a reason for this emphasis. To surrender the perspicuity of Scripture would be to open the door to subjectivist claims to personal illumination. In the following passage Jülicher appears as a staunch defender of Lutheran orthodoxy against a pietism which he sees as foreshadowed in the Patristic period:

> Whoever does without an understanding, whoever adheres without a murmur to the thesis that such a grasp of the parables comes, to this very day, to no one but the one to whom the Lord grants it from on high through revelation, that therefore this part of Scriptural exegesis is accessible not to science and methodically taught research, but only to faith and inspiration - for him, indeed, this dilemma [i.e. of the mysteriousness traditionally seen in the parables] entails nothing which suggests another construction of the nature of the parables [i.e. other than an 'allegorical' reading].[25]

For 'to this day nothing is hard and fast for allegorizing parable interpretation,...nothing is impossible'[26]. 'One could indeed object...that each generation and each church party has read in [the parables] what just lay in their [own] heart.'[27]The reader, then, has a straightforward task. She is not to **interpret** at all. Jülicher's repeated insistence that Jesus' parables, as similes, require no *Deutung* (interpretation) may be illustrated from I, 105f. where he spends a lengthy paragraph correcting Bernhard Weiss, whose basic opinion - that the point of the parables is to be sought in a 'general truth' - he is going to adopt, for this sole fault: that he used the word *Deutung*. It is not only that Scripture *must* be clear. Modern readers *do* understand it, it *is in fact* clear to them. Even the 'unskilled' (*Unkundigste*) can understand parables such as The Good Samaritan and The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer 'without an interpretative word'[28]. Jülicher allows that there are some stories where the sense is not so clear, but insists that this is the fault of the tradition, not the speaker (I, 90f.). The straightforward way in which ordinary, uneducated people can feel the power and grasp the message of the *clear* stories is testimony to the *original* plainness of the others. Thus for Jülicher the necessity of

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clarity of Scripture cf. Stuhlmacher, *Criticism*, 34; on the possible implication of this doctrine that hermeneutical endeavour is hardly necessary, cf. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 179.

[25] 'Wer auf ein Verstehen verzichtet, wer ohne Phrase dabei verharrt, dass solche Parabellösung bis heute niemandem gelingt, als wem der Herr von oben her durch Offenbarung die gewähre, dass also dieser Teil der Schriftexegese nicht der Wissenschaft und methodisch gelehrten Forschung, sondern dem Glauben und der Inspiration allein zugänglich ist für den freilich enthält jenes Dilemma nichts, was ihm eine andre Auffassung des Wesens der Parabeln nahelegte': I, 62f. Cf. Stuhlmacher, *Criticism*, 37 on the pietists' aim to revive 'the insight and missionary courage of faith'.

careful historical investigation does not entail the impossibility of the parables' speaking directly across the centuries; on the contrary, it helps *recover* a directness which had been overlaid, or lost completely.

3. Jülicher vs. his Predecessors

I propose that the most deeply-rooted opposition of which we must take account is that between Jülicher himself and those who had interpreted the texts in earlier generations. As noted above[29], Jülicher is a part of the emergent stream of modern Biblical criticism, and that meant, above all, a part of the overthrow of ecclesiastical authority as a check upon research and exegesis. But what was to replace this authority? The light of reason: and that meant, in practice, the reasoning of the individual scholarly mind. Despite the existence of a community of scholarship, study of the Scriptures in this modern period was to become a much lonelier, more individualistic enterprise than it had been.[30] One who chose to take on the giants of the past and the tradition of the church universal might well feel both defensive and aggressive in his quest, and we should not be surprised to find expressions of these stances in Jülicher's work. This polarity cannot be described in the same neat fashion as the two preceding ones, for Jülicher, in the great tradition of modern 'objective' scholarship, does not talk *about* himself. Surely, though, he *reveals* himself in the mighty assault he launches on the allegorical tradition.

We might have expected this assault to be at its most powerful in the weighty account of the history of parable interpretation which forms Chapter VI of *Die Gleichnisreden* I, but in fact it is not so. Here Jülicher's carefulness to distinguish between different movements and strands is notable. He is ready to acknowledge real insight and exegetical skill where he finds it. From the early centuries his hero is Tertullian, who wrote a passage (whose terseness is difficult to translate) that he finds strongly supportive of his own stance:

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[26] '[B]is zu diesem Tage der allegorisierenden Parabelauslegung nichts fest und sicher,...nichts unmöglich ist': I, 63.

[27] 'Man könnte ja einwenden...dass jedes Geschlecht und jede kirchliche Partei in ihnen das gelesen habe, was ihnen gerade am Herzen lag': I, 63.

[28] '[O]hne ein deutendes Wort': I, 62.

[29] 73f.

[30] Cf. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 143.

> Although a figure is in the image of truth, its very image is in truth. It is necessary that it should exist first for itself, whereby it may be configured to another thing. From emptiness a similitude does not work, from nothing a parable does not succeed.[31]

(Despite this apparent support for the realistic and didactic rather than mystical nature of the parables, however, Tertullian later finds himself again 'in the false parable-concept of his contemporaries'[32]). Jülicher also remarks on the positive direction in which the rhetorically-trained Cappadocian Fathers led parable interpretation, treating the parables as a particular class and appreciating their clarificatory purpose (I, 227-230). He appreciates Cyril of Alexandria's emphasis on seeking the thought (νόησιν) which Christ brings to perfection (ἐξυφάινει) in a parable (I, 236). He recognizes the fresh wind of change which blew at the Reformation (I, 252) with the humane sensibility of Erasmus (I, 252-254) and the spurning of scholastic complexity and playfulness by Luther, Bucer and Calvin (I, 256-262).

Similarly, the identity of Jülicher's main antagonists is clear in this chapter; and the reason for his antagonism is interesting. It was the Alexandrians, Clement and, especially, Origen who *par excellence*, as part of their emphasis on the different senses of Scripture, treated the parables as enigmas to be deciphered (I, 220-225). Jülicher summarizes what he sees as the nadir of the early period as it finds expression in Origen:

> Every thought of the unity of the parable is given up; word for word their terms are turned into figures, without any glance back at the context.[33]

The really baneful consequence of this, for Jülicher, is the *uncertainty* and *subjectivity* thrown into the process of interpretation. He seems unappreciative of Origen's modesty in leaving open the possibility of different interpretations, in averring 'that he does not trust himself to have fathomed all the depths of the parable-sense, but a little is better than nothing'[34]. He finds nothing to commend this stance:

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[31] '[E]tsi figmentum veritatis in imagine est, imago ipsa in veritate est sui. Necesse est esse prius sibi, quo alii configuretur. De vacuo similitudo non competit, de nullo parabola non convenit': Tertullian, *De Resurrectione* 30, cited in I, 216f.

[32] '[I]n dem falschen Parabel-begriff seiner Zeitgenossen': I, 217.

[33] '[J]eder Gedanke an die Einheitlichkeit der Parabel ist aufgegeben; Wort für Wort werden ihre Begriffen ohne alle Rücksicht auf Zusammenhang übertragen': I, 224f.

[34] '[D]ass er sich nicht zutraue, alle Tiefen des Parabelsinnes ergründet zu haben, aber weniges sei besser denn nichts': I, 223.

> The uncertainty of all parable-exegesis is principally established by this; only the one whom Jesus wishes to enlighten with the light of insight may speak about them - who is to tell, whether the so-called inner enlightenment is not an illusion?[35]

When Jülicher says 'all' parable-exegesis he means all exegesis that has been coloured by this idea of the parables' mysterious quality - which, in his view, has been the dominant model throughout the Christian centuries. It is the aim of his own work to replace this constant uncertainty with at least the possibility of certainty. The untenability of the Origenist view is clearly seen, for Jülicher, in the logical consequence drawn from it by Jerome, that authoritative doctrine could never be based on the uncertain understanding which was all a parable could offer (I, 242).

But missing from this great chapter is a sense of the all-encompassing divine meaning within which the earlier Scriptural exegetes lived and breathed. Correspondingly, the real nature of the break with tradition which Jülicher is seeking to make is also largely concealed. Notwithstanding comments along the way about those who have made an effort to discover the intention of Jesus, the fact that this is indeed the main fault-line is not made clear. Probably it was *not* clear to Jülicher himself; we have the advantage of a historical perspective on his work. The modern era of parable interpretation, of which Jülicher stands as the greatest representative, has left behind the entire framework of divine meaning, and has done so as silently as if it were simply shedding a soft garment on the ground. There were no rites of passing.[36] The new era which Jülicher decisively - if not totally without precursors - ushers in is the era of seeking the intention of the man Jesus in the parables. But this is largely hidden under the powerful rhetoric of Jülicher's opposition between plain simile and obscure allegory.[37] The debate is seen as being between two different constructions of figurative speech. It

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[35] 'Die Unsicherheit aller Parabelexegese ist hiermit prinzipiell anerkannt; nur der darf über sie mitreden, den Jesus mit dem Licht der Erkenntnis erleuchten will - wer stellt fest, ob die angebliche innere Erleuchtung nicht eine Illusion ist?': I, 223.

[36] If Jülicher still holds to some notion that divine meaning is to be found in Scripture, I have found no instance where he discusses this as an issue in his reception of older interpreters. He may, for example, have been influenced by the view of Lessing that 'the revelation of God is given immanently in the history of religion' or of Herder that 'the more fully the truly human character of Scripture is discerned, the more fully the living divine spirit may be recognized' (Welch, *Protestant Thought* I, 51 and 54). But this is not expressed.

[37] Bruns makes a similar point when he writes that the dismissal of allegory as pseudo-exegesis 'maps onto allegory the structure of romantic hermeneutics in which a subject deploys itself analytically against an object': "Midrash", 640.

is in passages from his crucial second chapter which I shall now cite that the *agon* between Jülicher and his precursors comes most clearly to expression, and that we discover the full extent of his misreading of the heritage I sketched in my previous chapter.

The first main summary of the ancient stance comes on I, 48:

> The pre-reformation Church....almost unanimously held fast to the Evangelists' concept and struggled to fathom with ever new perception the real, full meaning of all these multisignificant riddle-sayings, always with greatest success in the cases where [the meaning] was inconsistent enough to allow itself to be determined in the exegesis by a healthy sense of tact, instead of by the parable-concept.[38]

Jülicher seems to mean that the older interpreters appeared to retreat into a plainer style of exegesis when 'allegorizing' gave rise to gross inconsistencies, but this is the opposite of what we have found in Chapter Two. Each interpreter whom I considered there had a basic feel for the natural, moral impetus of the text; allegorical readings were supplementary to that, and where they were given greatest weight, in Ambrose, there is no embarrassment about 'inconsistencies'. To us, Ambrose seems to tie himself in knots when he expounds the sores of Lazarus, the dogs who licked them, and the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table[39]; to himself, no doubt, he seemed simply to be exploring the wealth of interconnected significances which Scripture suggests. The movement that we can in fact notice, increasingly, in interpreters up to and including the Reformation is in the opposite direction from that which Jülicher suggests. It was when a more *straightforward* sense seemed to be problematic that interpreters espoused a sense that was '*parabolic*' (in Jülicher's terms, 'allegorical'). The shrewd steward could not (it was thought) simply be taken as an exemplary character: therefore the parable as a whole was indeed a 'parable', i.e. the words betokened a sense beyond the literal. (Jülicher goes on to say that since the Reformation no great improvement in parable studies has been seen, despite attempts at classifying the parables; but it would be beyond my scope to enter into his readings of his more recent predecessors.)

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[38] 'Die vorreformatorische Kirche hat denn auch ziemlich einstimmig den Begriff der Evangelisten festgehalten und sich abgemüht mit immer neuem Scharfsinn die eigentliche, volle Bedeutung all dieser vieldeutigen Rätselreden zu ergründen, am glücklichsten immer, wenn sie inkonsequent genug war in der Exegese statt von dem Parabelbegriff sich von einem gesunden Taktgefühl leiten zu lassen.'

[39] See above, 64.

Later Jülicher has a detailed discussion of the nature of allegory. He writes that an allegory must hang together as a comprehensible piece of discourse before the transition is made to its deeper meaning.[40] He pictures it as a plane (*Ebene*) from which the reader is to draw equidistant lines to discover another plane above. Or rather, when just one line has been drawn, the whole of the upper plane ought to come into view:

> Of course each point of the given plane must be set at the same distance from the one sought. The ideal of allegory is to report something which corresponds in such an excellent way with what is truly meant, that whoever has recognized what is meant at one point of the report, could also immediately carry out the transposition of the whole into the higher situation.[41]

The unspoken corollary of this presentation of allegory would be that the Fathers not only read Jesus' parables as allegories, but often as *bad* allegories: Ambrose on The Rich Man and Lazarus would again be an excellent example. Jülicher's omitting to make this point may be significant. He wants so to identify the older hermeneutic with 'reading the texts as allegories' that any admission that often this seemed to be 'reading the texts as *poor* allegories' would undermine his case, and weaken his fierce polarization between metaphor-allegory and simile-similitude.

On I, 61 Jülicher makes an admission which is indeed his Achilles' heel:

> Neither Mark nor Matthew nor Luke himself carried through consistently their principle of parable-interpretation in the case of all the examples of parables of Jesus which they set down.[42]

Our concern here, however, is with the point which he links to this. The Fathers are set against the Evangelists:

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[40] There seems to be some inconsistency in Jülicher's view on this point. On I, 59 he writes that the outward form of the allegory should ideally be 'complete' (*vollkommen*) in itself, offering pleasure (*Wohlgefallen*) even to those who do not perceive that there is an inner meaning. But on I, 65 he writes that an allegory always points beyond itself because 'its wording does not satisfy' ('ihr Wortlaut nicht befriedigt').

[41] '[N]atürlich muss jeder Punkt der gegebenen Ebene gleich weit von der gesuchten entfernt sein. Das Ideal von Allegorie ist hiernach, etwas zu berichten, was dem eigentlich Gemeinten so ausgezeichnet entspricht, dass, wer an einem Punkte des Berichtes das Gemeinte erkannt hat, nun auch sofort die transposition des Ganzen in die höhere Lage vornehmen könnte': I, 58.

[42] '[W]eder Mc noch Mt noch Lc selber ihr Prinzip der Parabeldeutung konsequent bei allen Exemplaren von Parabeln Jesu, die sie besassen, durchgeführt haben.'

> With their naïve arbitrariness [the Evangelists], anyhow, treated the parables in this respect far better than the Church Fathers, who, filled with enthusiasm for allegorizing, did not now tolerate any single literal jot in these sayings.[43]

The hyperbole of the last part of this statement hardly needs further comment after our survey in the previous chapter. But Jülicher's struggle must continue. He proceeds to cast a slur upon the way that the Fathers treated their own predecessors in the Church:

> Insofar as they...assert, by the ridiculing of their predecessors, that these things mean that and that and not something else, so may we, with a glance at Mk.4:34, ask: who then has explained all this to you κατ' ἰδίαν [in private]?[44]

It is true that the Fathers were not above using strong words about each other on occasion. Jerome, in the prologue to his Latin translation of Origen's homilies on Luke, said that the recent commentator Ambrose 'plays in words, is drowsy in meanings'[45]. But the impression given by Jülicher that they were always ridiculing each other's interpretations of specific texts is grossly unfair. We have already seen the reverence of Bede for his precursors, indeed his reluctance to undertake a commentary of his own. We have seen the strong sense of a *tradition of interpretation* which pervades the early commentators' writings. There was frequent quotation of, and allusion to, earlier works. There was preservation of ancient readings (e.g. the allegorical reading of The Good Samaritan summarized in Bonaventure) even when they seem to have appeared somewhat archaic beside the main interpretation being offered[46]; there was no embarrassment about conflicting interpretations, 'the inexhaustibility of the text being greater than the authority even of Augustine'[47]. The closest thing to ridicule (*Bespöttelung*) of predecessors that we discovered in Chapter Two was Calvin's

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[43] '[M]it ihrer naiven Willkür haben sie die Parabeln da immerhin weit besser behandelt als die Kirchenväter, die für die Allegorese begeistert in diesen Reden nun kein eigentliches Jota mehr duldeten': I, 61.

[44] '[S]owie sie unter Bespöttelung ihrer Vorgänger aber versichern, diese Dinge bedeuten das und das und nichts andres, so dürfen wir im Blick auf Mc 4 34 fragen: Wer hat Euch denn dies alles κατ' ἰδίαν aufgelöst?': I, 62.

[45] '[I]n verbis ludit, in sententiis dormitat': cited in Plummer, *Commentary*, lxxxi.

[46] See above, 49f.

[47] Kermode, *Secrecy*, 36. In Aquinas's *Catena Aurea in Evangelica* differing exegetical opinions are unashamedly put side by side: Stein, *Parables*, 48.

comments about the Fathers' allegorical readings.[48] But that was a scorning not of individual interpretations, but of a particular interpretative style - a forerunner, indeed, of the scorning of the same style by Jülicher himself, and a faint foreshadowing of Jülicher's own vehement ridiculing of his heritage. Of the interpreters we surveyed, Calvin came closest in stance to Jülicher himself. Calvin, like Jülicher, had his own conscious and perhaps unconscious reasons for standing out at times so strongly against the tradition. One is tempted to venture that in this passage Jülicher is projecting his own acerbic tendency on to the Fathers.

It seems as if in his characterizing - or caricaturing - of the Fathers Jülicher had one particular target in mind, to whom he assimilated a full fifteen centuries-worth of interpreters. On I, 77 he argues against some contemporaries thus:

> One who allows himself to indicate the ὅμοιον ['like thing', i.e. the point of likeness] of some simile from quite foreign writers...or anyway from quite a different context, has sunk back to the standpoint of Origen.[49]

Jülicher wants to affirm that the meaning of a simile should be determined by its own immediate context alone, without seeking (as Origen did) a kind of comprehensive Biblical tropology whereby all words in Scripture should be interpreted with reference to other occurrences of the word elsewhere within it.[50] But when he writes

> What a gross error it is then, to ascribe at all costs to individual ideas within a parable the metaphorical meaning which they have in other places in holy Scripture[51]

he is countering an excess the danger of which the great majority of the old interpreters seem to have sufficiently recognized. In the history of interpretation Origen looks eccentric. Certainly, the early commentators we have studied - Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, Bede - did not venture far down this path. It was indeed as a part of the developing sense of realism which Aristotelian scholasticism brought to the study of

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[48] See above, 50.

[49] 'Wer sich das ὅμοιον irgend eines Vergleiches von ganz fremden Schriftstellern...oder doch aus ganz anderm Zusammenhange zeigen lässt, der ist auf den Standpunkt des Origenes zurückgesunken.'

[50] More recently a movement with some affinities to Origen, the 'Biblical theology' movement that was prominent in the 1950's, received a critique that is, roughly speaking, a more sophisticated development of Jülicher's position against Origenism, in Barr, *Semantics*.

[51] 'Welch ein grober Fehler ist es dann, einzelnen Begriffen innerhalb einer Parabel à tout prix die metaphorische Bedeutung zuzuschreiben, die sie an andern Stellen der heiligen Schrift haben': I, 77.

Scripture that Bonaventure so carefully distinguished the *different* senses which the same word may bear in different parts of Scripture: he is quite clear that we are *not* to interpret a word in one place blindly according to the sense it bears elsewhere.[52]

On I, 101 we find a further misrepresentation of the tenor of ancient parable-interpretation:

> The parable-author [according to the older view] would often himself announce his gold as small change; he would let his story fall immediately like shells of no worth, so that he could reach the kernel, the application; it would be indeed much, if in the case of a parable one did not notice right at the beginning where it was heading, if the cold soaking of the application came upon us completely unforeseen and astonishing.[53]

Note the eloquence of this rhetoric: the gold of the story despised as worthless; the shells shed to reach the kernel; the punchline designed to hit us like a torrential shower-bath (*Sturzbad*). It is powerful, but as a generalization it does not well fit the view of the Fathers or the mediaevals concerning Jesus. Even if one were to take Ambrose's highly 'allegorical' reading of The Good Samaritan as an instance of the kind of approach Jülicher is attacking, it would not fit. The story is not despised as a mere outer husk (and still less is Jesus, the parable-author, portrayed as despising it thus!). Without the story and its entire pattern, there could be no glimpse for Ambrose of Christ coming to the rescue of the fallen human race; that was not a mere interpretation of the individual elements (*einzelnen Züge*, ibid.) but precisely a construal of the whole movement of the tale, from start to finish. Yet the climax of the interpretation, as we saw, beyond this suggestive portrayal of salvation-history, was the plain injunction to love. That was not a 'kernel' that required a lot of shell-cracking, nor a particularly rude awakening for the hearers. It is not in fact very different, in its moral thrust, from Jülicher's own reading of the parable (II, 596-598). I do not wish to overstate my case; there may indeed have been earlier interpretations which Jülicher's description fits better. But Jülicher seems

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[52] E.g. his distinction between different senses of 'bosom' in Scripture, with reference to Lk.16:22: Bonaventura, 355b, 356a.

[53] 'Der Parabeldichter erkläre oft selber sein Gold für Rechenpfennige; er lasse seine Erzählung als die Schale ohne Wert sofort fallen, sowie er an den Kern, an die Anwendung gelange; es sei schon viel, wenn man einer Parabel nicht gleich zu Beginn anmerke, wo sie hinaus wolle, wenn das kalte Sturzbad der Anwendung recht unversehens und überraschend über uns komme.' The subjunctives here indicate that Jülicher is talking about the impression the Fathers *give* of the *Parabeldichter*.

greatly to overstate *his* case, and to skew our view of a whole epoch of Biblical exposition.

When he discusses the category 'example-story' (*Beispielerzählung*) Jülicher sees a further opportunity to pillory his 'allegorical' predecessors. In these cases, he says, the futility of their method was truly shown up:

> On these rocks the method of allegorical parable-interpretation always pitifully founders; it had no success in making out the foolish rich man to be something other than a foolish rich man; here indeed is "interpretation" [the bogey-word *Deuten*] too difficult an undertaking. Also, a comparison of the individual elements has no sense at all; since if one describes the Pharisee as a picture of all the haughty, can one seriously compare all the haughty with one haughty person, and thus the category with the individual belonging to it?[54]

The older interpreters did show restraint in allegorical readings of the example-stories (see the interpretations of Lk.18:1-8[55] and 18:9-14[56], though contrast Ambrose on Lk.10:29-37[57] and 16:19-31[58]). But why? Not, surely (in Jülicher's metaphor) because the brave ship of allegorization finally meets its doom in the treacherous waters of example-story. But simply in the fact that the stories offered a more straightforward meaning. There never was any universal agenda of unremitting allegorization. There is not the slightest sense of embarrassment among the Fathers or mediaevals we have considered that a story like The Pharisee and the Tax Collector does not admit of easy 'spiritualization'. That does not mean, however, that figures or tropes are absent. Jülicher himself, perhaps without realizing, acknowledges this when he makes the customs-officer 'a poor sinner'. He is indeed not just a customs-officer, but a synecdoche, an individual standing for a class. It is partly Jülicher's preoccupation with the ideas of *comparison* and *simile* which makes it difficult for him to admit this *tropical* character of an individual element. He makes the idea of a *comparison* between a

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[54] 'An diesen Klippen ist die Methode der allegorischen Parabelauslegung immer kläglich gescheitert; den thörichten Reichen für etwas andres als einen thörichten Reichen und den Zöllner für mehr als einen armen Sünder auszugeben glückte ihr nicht; hier ist das Deuten doch gar zu schwer gemacht. † Auch eine Vergleichung der Einzelzüge hat gar keinen Sinn; denn wenn man den Pharisäer als Bild aller Hochmütigen, also die Gattung mit dem ihr zugehörigen Individuum verglichen?': I, 112.

[55] Above, 68f.

[56] Above, 69f.

[57] Above, 47f.

[58] Above, 64.

category and one of its members sound ridiculous, in the case of the Pharisee; but to admit the presence of *synecdoche* makes figuration here quite natural. Speaker, hearer and reader *do* make a link between the portrayal, in story, of an individual haughty person, and the haughty in general. This is not the mysterious allegorical encoding which Jülicher and Dodd loved to hate. But, as should be more than apparent by now, that kind of encoding is largely a straw man.

Our final example must be the magnificent purple passage with which the chapter ends:

> No means did [Jesus] leave untried, no medium of language, in order to bring the word of his God to and into the hearts of his hearers - only allegory, which does not proclaim, but conceals, which does not reveal, but shuts up, which does not join, but divides, which does not persuade, but repels: this speech-form the clearest, the most powerful, the plainest of all speakers could not use for his purposes.[59]

Yes: but who ever said that he did? Allowing for a touch of hyperbole on my own part, that might well stand for a summary response to Jülicher's position. Whence, then, this aggressive animus against allegory? I suggest that for all his detailed examination, much of Jülicher's second chapter is not actually *about the nature of the parables.* To expound this further we need to move to our next section.

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Influences upon Jülicher

The deep polarities just discussed can, I believe, best be interpreted through a consideration of the influences at work in Jülicher. Such a consideration will, in turn, give us a clearer picture of the reasons for Jülicher's opposition between simile and allegory as keys for reading the parables as expressions of the meaning of Jesus. I shall sketch first two possible sources of contemporaneous influence, then two indisputable sources of influence from the past.

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[59] 'Kein Mittel hat er unversucht gelassen, kein Mittel des Wortes, um das Wort seines Gottes an und in die Herzen seiner Hörer zu bringen, nur die Allegorie, die nicht verkündigt, sondern verhüllt, die nicht offenbart, sondern verschliesst, die nicht verbindet, sondern trennt, die nicht überredet, sondern zurückweist, diese Redeform konnte der klarste, der gewaltigste, der schlichteste aller Redner für seine Zwecke nicht gebrauchen': I, 118.

1. The Romantic Idea of the Poet

Here I can only make brief and tentative observations. Claude Welch lists five central features of Romanticism.[60] Of these, the second and third are especially germane to our subject. Welch writes of the Romantics' 'near worship at times of originality and genius', quoting Schlegel:

> It is precisely individuality that is the original and eternal thing in men...The cultivation and development of this individuality, as one's highest vocation, would be a divine egoism.[61]

It is hard not to see this exaltation of originality in Jülicher's presentation of Jesus. For him, Jesus is indeed the *truly* original individual, the one who drew his sparkling figures of speech direct from nature, not from some conventional code that was familiar to some, a closed book to others. As such he is contrasted with *all* his interpreters. Welch then writes that following Rousseau, Romanticism 'exalted the immediacy of feeling - in the self, for humanity and for the world', and that in Novalis' formulation even philosophy 'is originally feeling, dreaming'[62]. German Romanticism owed much to the *Sturm und Drang* movement[63] upon which Herder had been influential[64]. Herder's emphasis on poetry as 'the expression of the indwelling *Kraft* (energy, power) of the poet'[65] and 'as the product of...intense emotion'[66] has distinct affinities with Jülicher's portrayal of Jesus' speech. Jülicher refers to Jesus' 'holy eagerness' (*heiligen Eifer*), and to the 'high pathos' (*hohes Pathos*) whose weight allegory was not fitted to bear (I, 63). However, he would not have wanted to give the impression that Jesus was a 'poet' in the basically aesthetic mode in which his own century, like the preceding ones, had understood 'poetry'. Jesus, for him, had another aim entirely from that of giving pleasure.[67]

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[60] Welch, *Protestant Thought* I, 52-55.

[61] Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum* 3:15, cited in Welch, *Protestant Thought* I, 52.

[62] Welch, *Protestant Thought* I, 53.

[63] Ibid., 52.

[64] Thorlby, ed., *PCL*, 362.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 363. Cf. Wordsworth's statement that 'all good Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings': *Ballads*, 157f.

[67] Contrast Wordsworth, *Ballads*, 167, on the necessity of the poet's giving pleasure, with Jülicher's view of the unlikelihood of Jesus' using a form of speech that was aesthetic but not didactic (I, 64).

2. The Romantic Attitude to Figures of Speech

Terence Hawkes describes how Romantic poetry reacted against the strong tendency in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to separate content from form, to drive a wedge between plain logic and ornamental figures, to privilege the supposed fixity of written words with their dictionary definitions over the ambiguities of living speech.[68] This tendency had given figures of speech a bad name in some quarters: eighteenth-century metaphors 'are at their worst pre-packaged, pre-digested, finished products, unloaded strategically in the poem when triggered by taste'[69]. For the Romantic, metaphor in its ideal form is fresh, alive, the opposite of merely conventional; a means of communication, but not instantly transparent; it demands imaginative work of its hearer. Goethe's *Maximen und Reflexionen*[70] (contrasting symbol and allegory) and Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*[71] are *loci classici* repudiating mere ornamentation in favour of more natural expression. A significant influence upon the Romantics was Vico, who held that metaphor was 'not fanciful "embroidery" of the facts' but 'a way of *experiencing* the facts'[72].

The Romantic view that 'the highest aim of all art ought to be the representation of the general by the specific (rather than the substitution of one specific for another as in allegory)'[73] is rightly linked by Craig L. Blomberg with Jülicher's approach to the parables. Jülicher's famous rule of thumb, which he took over from Weiss, is found on I, 105:

> The interpretation of the parable can only lie in a general truth, which results from the carrying-over of the rule set forth to the sphere of the explicitly religious life, to the arrangements of the kingdom of God.[74]

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[68] *Metaphor*, 23-27, 34-56.

[69] Ibid., 33.

[70] Critically discussed in Hayes, "Symbol".

[71] Especially 156f.

[72] Hawkes, *Metaphor*, 39.

[73] *Interpreting*, 50, referring to Hayes, "Symbol", 276. Blomberg also notes here that by stressing the parables' specific *Sitz im Leben*, Dodd and Jeremias moved back in the direction of allegory.

[74] "'Die Deutung der Parabel kann nur in einer allgemeinen Wahrheit liegen, die aus der Uebertragung der dargestellten Regel auf das Gebiet des religiös-sittlichen Lebens, auf die Ordnungen des Gottesreiches sich ergiebt.'"

Yet Jülicher's relationship to the Romantic stance remains ambiguous. His description of allegory as an aesthetic art-form and his privileging of a more direct form of communication parallels the Romantics' reaction against the ornamental artificiality of preceding generations' literary output. But he does not share their esteem for metaphor understood as language coming alive.[75] Metaphor is indeed not solely ornamental for Jülicher, it prompts and enriches (I, 57); nevertheless it remains on the same side of his great divide as allegory, as an artificial device rather than a fundamental of language. Jülicher does not envisage that the great 'passion' of Jesus might find expression in metaphor, which is too indirect a mode; only simile will do.

3. Scripture

The fact that Jülicher belongs to an age that was discovering emancipation from the *dogmatic* Christ does not preclude his holding a 'high' view of Jesus. Indeed, one might hazard that Christian theologians who were experiencing this emancipation *needed* to maintain that esteem for Jesus and therefore, consciously or otherwise, sought different grounds from the dogmatic on which to base it. Jülicher was a pastor.[76] There was no question of throwing all veneration for Jesus to the winds until assumptionless historical research could establish what sort of person he really was. This is seen first in the assumptions about Jesus which Jülicher brings from Scripture to his work .[77] He clearly accepts John's witness to Jesus as the λόγος, and the Synoptic Gospels' emphasis on the Kingdom as the dominant subject of Jesus' teaching. But we note the accent on human qualities. Jesus' *originality* as a person is stressed, not his divine Sonship. His *possession of wisdom*[78], not his 'being' divine Wisdom as in traditional Christological formulations, is emphasised in such a way as to place him alongside other humans who had possessed it, and this will be a feature of his humanness that will re-emerge with peculiar clarity in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

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[75] It will be left to twentieth-century writers to explore this Romantic construal of metaphor in relation to the parables: see especially Crossan, *In Parables*, 11-13: metaphor is 'irreplaceable and irreducible' (11).

[76] Cross, ed., *Dictionary*, 753. Drury notes the religious interest which made the approach to the parables adopted by Jülicher and his heirs 'attractive and satisfactory to them': *Parables*, 2.

[77] Cf. my summary of these assumptions on 79f. Schleiermacher wrote: 'The more we learn about an author, the better equipped we are for interpretation' (*Hermeneutics*, 113, cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 221), and Jülicher depends on a good deal of 'knowledge' of Jesus in order to interpret the parables he authored.

[78] Jesus was 'im Besitze der Weisheit': I, 41.

4. Christian Tradition

I have reserved until last the source of influence which is most paradoxical, yet surely most powerful: the very tradition of interpretation against which Jülicher rebels. The strength of the rebellion seems to be in direct proportion to the anxiety this influence induced. To adapt Bloom's use of a Freudian metaphor[79], Jülicher, Oedipus-like, must (even though blindly) slay the Fathers if he is to win their inspiration for himself. My contention is that in the passages just cited from Jülicher's second chapter[80], which seem quite dramatically to misread the tradition, what is clearly revealed is, rather, *Jülicher's struggle to find his own voice.*

Jülicher finds himself in a historical bind. On the one hand he is committed to the 'objective' standards of historical scholarship. On the other hand, now that he is loosed from a whole tradition of interpretation, he must make his own construction of the ancient text. The anxiety generated by this situation shows itself in Jülicher's antagonism to the whole idea of the *interpretation* of the parables. Even the Evangelists, in his view, to a greater or lesser extent misread the parables, and are thus contrasted with Jesus' sparkling freshness. The Church misread them still more, and thus the need is to return to the plain text itself beyond the claims to inspiration of particular 'interpreters'.

The crushing irony in *Die Gleichnisreden* is that Jülicher himself is offering his own interpretation. He admits as much, quite freely, when he recognizes ruefully the impossibility of attaining a goal such as every scholar in the tradition of the Enlightenment aspires to:

> Our real wish would be so to tell the history of parable-understanding, that *our interpretation* would emerge as the result, as the single possibility still remaining after many failed attempts...this goal is placed too high, already because judgements about 'failed' and 'possible' are too different...[81]

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[79] See the quotation at the head of this chapter, 73.

[80] See above, 86-91.

[81] My italics. '[G]erne würden wir die Geschichte des Parabelverständnisses so erzählen, dass unsre Auffassung als das Resultat herausspränge, als die einzige nach vielen missglückten Versuchen noch übrig bleibende Möglichkeit...dies Ziel zu hoch gesteckt ist, schon weil die Urteile über "missglückt" und "möglich" zu verschieden sind': I, 203.

But he seems not to feel the force of his own words. *His* reading is not (he thinks) a *Deutung*, but it is nevertheless an *Auffassung*, an interpretation, an attempt to grasp, just as all previous readings have been. Indeed, it is an even more intense attempt than earlier readings, precisely because Jülicher *is* seeking to 'catch' the meaning and tone of Jesus, not just meditating on the resonances of the text.

Jülicher seems afraid of the uncertainty that an acknowledgement of this truth might open up. So he asserts strongly the essential clarity of Jesus' words and projects himself as its champion against obscurantist interpreters of every generation. Others have offered a *Deutung*; *he* simply attends to the natural force of the text. The essential points of The Good Samaritan 'offer themselves unmediated out of the story to the hearer, they fall into our lap'[82]. We should not miss the startling nature of this claim. Jülicher pretends to an immediate access to the mind of Jesus in a far bolder way than the Fathers, mediaevals or Reformers ever contemplated. Of course he presents it as the response of 'everyman', and in the opposition he draws between the plain text and the individual interpreter with his dangerous pietistic claim to inspiration he aligns himself very firmly with the text itself. But this surely cannot blind us to what is going on. He has not only aimed to understand Jesus better than the Evangelists themselves; he concludes that he has done so. But does he succeed? Is the Jesus he presents to us simply a child of the nineteenth century rather than of the first, a complex mixture of Scriptural, Enlightenment and Romantic ideals, the direct opposite of a (false) conception of how earlier interpreters viewed him? An answer must await a brief survey of the insights offered by Jülicher into specific parables.

GENERAL TRUTHS
Jülicher's insight into the parables

1. The Good Samaritan

This for Jülicher is the 'point' (*Pointe*) of The Good Samaritan:

> The gladly-offered exercise of love earns the highest worth in the eyes of God and men, no advantage of office or birth can replace it. The

[82] '[Sie] ergeben sich unmittelbar aus der Erzählung für den Hörer, sie fallen uns in den Schoss': II, 596.

> compassionate person, even if he be a Samaritan, deserves blessing more than the Jewish temple-officer who indulges in self-seeking.[83]

Note the careful nuancing. The 'point' is by no means reduced to a simple lesson in neighbour-love. The contrast between the Samaritan and the Priest and Levite is carefully brought out, not so as to make it into a crudely anti-Jewish statement, but so as to highlight the subversive quality of the story. Jülicher remarks that it would have sounded pretty 'dull' (*matt*) and 'tasteless' (*geschmacklos*) if 'Priest' and 'Levite' had been replaced by 'one Jew' and 'another Jew' (II, 598). Against a tendency to read too heavy an intentionality behind Priest and Levite - and thus ascribe that intentionality, as some of his contemporaries did, to someone other than Jesus - Jülicher imagines for us Jesus' lightness of touch, the natural colouring of the story, yet without losing the significance of the identity of the two passers-by altogether.

Jülicher's exposition displays not only his literary, but his historical sensibility. In keeping with his quest for the *consilium Christi*, he is very restrained about 'translating' the story into contemporary terms. He does not try to 'update' the Samaritan and the Jewish dignitaries. Yet the general, universal principle is allowed to emerge. But we may ask whether the Biblical exegete's work is quite completed, as Jülicher gives the impression that he has finished his, when he writes of the direct, unmediated (*unmittelbar*) way that the thoughts of the parable 'fall into our lap' (*fallen uns in den Schoss*) (II, 596). For the way in which the parable made its full *original* impact surely depended upon the way that hearers or readers placed themselves in the story and related it to their own world. For those hearers who were not actually Samaritans, priests or Levites, there would have been already a task of translation to perform, perhaps indeed an instinctive one, in order to place themselves in the parable's world. It might seem as if Jülicher were offering, already in the late nineteenth century, what Paul Ricoeur called a 'second naïveté' which 'bears the stigmata of a post-critical age'[84], through his stressing of the obviousness and accessibility of the parables. But we are bound to question whether in his reaction against the 'mystifying' approach he has paradoxically continued the Patristic and mediaeval tradition of bringing the parables immediately into his own time:

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[83] 'Die opferfreudige Liebesübung verschafft in Gottes und der Menschen Augen den höchsten Wert, kein Vorzug des Amtes und der Geburt kann sie ersetzen. Der Barmherzige verdient, auch wenn er ein Samariter ist, die Seligkeit eher als der jüdische Tempelbeamte, der der Selbstsucht fröhnt': II, 596.

[84] "Biblical Hermeneutics", 131.

not now with their blatant and unashamed transposition into (for instance) encouragements to monasticism, but by the more sophisticated move of claiming that in their pristine naturalness their meaning is as plain for us (once proper historical investigation has been carried out) as it would have been for the first hearers. We see also how Jülicher privileges one aspect of 'voice' over the other: he stresses the deliberateness of Jesus' *intention*, but not the ambiguities of his possible *reception*. This will be reversed in our postmodern times.[85]

2. The Prodigal Son

Jülicher wants to get behind the Lucan setting of The Prodigal Son. This is how he reads the interpretation Luke offers:

> In the example of a father, who greets with warm love the guilt-laden but penitently homecoming son and justifies his joy over against the wrath of the elder son who always stayed faithful, Jesus, who welcomes the customs-officers and sinners, although the Pharisees and Scribes grumble about it, is supposed to be justified.[86]

For Jülicher, though, the thought of Jesus' original parable is this:

> As a father of two sons, from whom the one goes away, in order to squander property and honour, nearly also life, greets this one as soon as he returns in contrition, with gladness, indeed with an ardour of love that is almost on fire after a single glance, without injustice being done in the process to the other son, who always did his duty, and without him feeling that he was less blessed with the love of his father, so the way to the father-heart of God stands always open, even to the most rotten sinner, if he will only enter in, and re-adoption to the status of child is certain for him, without this ever meaning a neglect of justice, or that it would somehow cut it [i.e. justice] off from the love of God.[87]

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[85] See below, Chapter Four.

[86] '[I]n dem Beispiel eines Vaters, der den mit Schuld beladenen aber reuig heim gekehrten Sohn liebewarm empfängt und seine Freude auch dem Zorn des älteren, immer treu gebliebenen, Sohnes gegenüber rechtfertigt, soll Jesus gerechtfertigt werden, der die Zöllner und Sünder annimmt, obwohl die Pharisäer und Schriftgelehrten darüber murren': II, 359.

[87] 'Wie ein Vater zweier Söhne, dem der eine davongeht, um Gut und Ehre, fast auch das Leben zu verschleudern, diesen, sobald er reuig wiederkehrt, mit Herzlichkeit, ja nun mit einer nach langem Glimmen fast lodernden Liebesglut empfängt, ohne dass dem andern Sohn, der allewege seine Pflicht gethan, dadurch ein Unrecht geschähe und er sich der Liebe seines Vaters minder teilhaftig fühlen dürfte, so steht der Weg zu Gottes Vaterherzen auch dem verrottetsten Sünder, wenn er nur Zugang dahin haben will, immer offen, und ist die Wieder aufnahme an Kindes Statt ihm gewiss, ohne dass dies

Jülicher assumes that the appeal of the father to the elder son was successful. This contrasts with more recent readings which have stressed the openness of the ending.[88] The attractiveness of Jülicher's position is his grasp (before the days of 'reader-response' language!) of the way that the story involves the emotions of the hearer/reader, who *wants* the elder brother to join the party, as the natural though unspoken conclusion to the story.

There are two drawbacks in Jülicher's construal. First, the parable does not actually *use* the simile form that he gives it ('as a father...so God...'). From the start, therefore, Jülicher is twisting or troping the text. It *might* originally have had such a simile form in the mouth of Jesus, but we have already exposed the suspiciousness of Jülicher's opposition between simile and metaphor and his alignment of Jesus with simile. The turning of the parable into a simile serves well Jülicher's purpose of making it an expression of a general truth. But this is the second drawback: the attractiveness of the 'general truth' theory for Jülicher seems to have been that it allowed him to say (in essence) that it did not *matter* that the *original context* of Jesus' words had been lost, for his parables were addressing questions that transcended all contexts. This seems like a convenient escape from the potential black hole of our historical ignorance. Of course, as soon as one admits that Jesus' parables may have arisen in very specific situations, and been addressed to particular needs of the moment, one begins to allow the possibility that individual elements of the parable would correspond to individual elements in the situation, and this Jülicher cannot countenance. Thus the parable

> is not so much a defence of Jesus as a friend of sinners against attacks from super-pious folk, as - and this heightens its value - an exalted revelation about a fundamental question of religion, namely this: can the God of righteousness receive sinners in mercy?[89]

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je eine Zurücksetzung des Gerechten bedeutete, und den von Gottes Liebe irgendwie ausschlösse': II, 362.

[88] E.g. Jeremias, *Parables*, 132; Scott, *Hear*, 122.

[89] '...ist nicht sowohl eine Verteidigung des sünderfreundlichen Jesus gegen Angriffe dünkelhafter Superfrommen, als - und das erhöbt ihren Wert - eine erhabene Offenbarung über eine Grundfrage der Religion; nämlich die: darf der Gott der Gerechtigkeit die Sünder in Gnaden aufnehmen?': II, 363. Linnemann comments that '[t]his view of the proclamation of Jesus, which makes of him a systematic theologian, can hardly be right': *Parables*, 154.

This is ironic, for Jülicher seems to be admitting by the back door what he has dismissed from the front, namely a doctrinal thrust for the parable.[90] Jülicher's justification for this, though, is that it is consistent with the Scriptural view (expressed in Jn.10:30, 'I and the Father are one') of Jesus' relationship to his Father. Here we have a good illustration of Jülicher's attempt to penetrate into the mind of Jesus, even to hazard at the process of creation behind the parable:

> In the consciousness of recognizing aright the Father's heart in his own heart, he paints for humans the Father's picture: because he, Jesus, without having to accuse himself of any lack in esteem for righteousness, nevertheless feels himself drawn so much more towards - has joy in - those who need him, for whom he can be of some help, who without him would belong to hell, and must also feel his Father to be like this, he boldly *proclaims God as the pure father of sinners.*[91]

Jülicher writes that it was a natural story to tell among hearers whom Jesus had already taught to feel in respect to God as children with respect to a father (*sich gegenüber Gott wie Kinder gegenüber dem Vater zu fühlen*).

As well as noting that even this reading involves Jesus in the use of tropes (father as metaphor for God, son as synecdoche for sinners), we may draw attention to Jülicher's reconstruction of the creative process. Jesus, despite his own piety, felt drawn to sinners; he felt that his heavenly Father must feel likewise drawn; so he teaches sinners to regard God as a loving, welcoming Father. Jülicher has not imagined an alternative *social/historical setting* for the parable to the one put forward by Luke. He has instead imagined (in Romantic fashion) an *internal train of thought or feeling* in Jesus. I do not believe this is an invalid enterprise; but it is arbitrary to choose to imagine what is going on in Jesus' mind *instead* of what is going on in the social interactions of his life.

One further point about Jülicher's commentary on this parable is of interest. Jesus' originality, he says, did not consist in his being divorced from his Jewish heritage, or in a message with a new content:

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[90] Cf. his protest against the dogmatic usage of the parable in support of justification by faith: II, 334.

[91] '[I]n dem Bewusstsein, an seinem Herzen seines Vaters Herz recht zu erkennen, malt er den Menschen des Vaters Bild: weil er, Jesus, ohne sich mangel an Wetschätzung der Gerechten vorwerfen zu müssen, doch so viel mehr sich hingezogen zu denen fühlt, Freude zu denen hat, die ihn nötig haben, für die er etwas leisten kann, die ohne ihn der Hölle gehören würden, muss auch sein Vater so empfinden, kühnlich *proklamiert er Gott als den echten Sündervater*': II, 363.

> In Jesus' terms, God has thus already forgiven, welcomed back, rejoiced, even before Jesus; he would have done it thus gladly for each depraved person since the beginning of the world: the new era of the Gospel arises with Jesus not because his atoning death first made an act of mercy towards sinners possible for God, but because for the first time he, through his life and preaching, unveiled this God for people, brought him near, created for them confidence, that is faith, in God's mercy, and made them courageous to hope in God.[92]

What Jesus is said to *reveal* with fresh clarity is already-existing, indeed eternal, truth. Here his insight into the human Jesus is convincing. Jesus is not seen as 'radical' in the way depicted by more recent scholars[93]; he is in deep continuity with the tradition behind him. What Jülicher sees, rather, is Jesus *the man of insight*, the passionate communicator of eternal truth about the forgiving love of God.

3. The Shrewd Steward

For Jülicher, the message of The Shrewd Steward in the text up to v.8 - and as crystallized in v.8 - can be expressed like this:

> In that way [i.e. according to v.8] the steward would be presented as a model of wisdom for the believers, and the parable would continue current in the tradition as a recommendation of wisdom.[94]

V.9 ('...make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon') is then read as the beginning of later allegorical interpretation, in which not merely 'wisdom' but specific *actions* are commended on the basis of the parable's details. But though he rejects interpretations that take their starting point from v.9, Jülicher is not satisfied with seeing the parable as a mere injunction to wisdom, as v.8 implies; Jesus would hardly have needed to tell such a story for that simple purpose (II, 510). This is how he construes the story's message:

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[92] 'Nach Jesus Begriffen hat Gott so vergeben, wiederaufgenommen, sich gefreut auch schon vor Jesus; er hätte es seit Anfang der Welt an jedem Verworfenen so gern gethan: die neue Aera des Evangeliums hebt mit Jesus nicht an, weil erst sein Sühnetod eine Begnadigung der Sünder für Gott möglich machte, sondern weil erst er durch sein Leben und seine Verkündigung diesen Gott den Menschen enthüllte, nahe brachte, ihnen das Vertrauen auf Gottes Gnade, d.h. den Glauben schuf, und sie mutig machte auf Gott zu hoffen': II, 365.

[93] See Chapter Four below.

[94] 'Damit würde der Haushalter als ein Vorbild der Klugheit für die Glaübigen hingestellt, und auf Empfehlung der Klugheit liefe die Parabel hinaus': II, 509.

> I see it made clear in the parable, much rather, how everyone seizes the means suitable to reach his goal, how he still rescues himself from an apparently hopeless situation of need all the same, because he considers and acts, so long as both can still be of use to him, so long as he still has means in his hands.[95]
>
> Not the right employment of wealth, but the decisive use of the present as a precondition for a joyful future should be imprinted on the story of the steward, which depending on the occasion which called it forth, could have a more seriously warning character: be on guard against being too late, since if once the new age has broken in, one cannot do anything more for it... so long as it is still 'today', there is a means to make tomorrow favourable for you.[96]

The question of the morality of the steward's actions should not, says Jülicher, be an issue; it is enough that we should go along with Jesus' judgement on the story in v.8, highlighting the steward's shrewdness, and apply it 'in our religious life' (*in unserm religiösen Leben*, II, 511).

We note that Jülicher, again, is careful not to offer too reductive an interpretation. The contours of the parable are to be respected; it is not just an exhortation to wisdom, any more than The Good Samaritan is just an injunction to love. Yet the ethos of the 'general truth' remains in control. No specific reference concerning the use of money is allowed; we must remain on the widest plane, covering the greatest number of possible situations.

Interpreters through the centuries, as we saw, had recognized the moral difficulty of this parable, and Jülicher's diagnosis is not essentially different from that of a Bonaventure or a Calvin, who had dealt with the problem by seeking to draw out, respectively, the distinction between that which was 'parabolic' and that which was 'exemplary', or that between the basic thrust and the mere colouring of the story. Jülicher, however, celebrates what the earlier writers appeared to find something of an

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[95] 'Ich sehe in der Parabel vielmehr veranschaulicht, wie jemand rechtzeitig die geeigneten Mittel ergreift, um seinen Zweck zu erreichen, wie er aus scheinbar hoffnungsloser Notlage sich doch noch rettet, weil er überlegt und handelt, solange ihm beides noch nützen kann, so lange er noch Mittel in Händen hat': II, 510f.

[96] 'Nicht die rechte Verwendung des Reichtums, sondern die entschlossene Ausnützung der Gegenwart als Vorbedingung für eine erfreuliche Zukunft sollte an der Geschichte des Haushalters eingeprägt werden, die je nach dem Anlass, der sie hervorrief, mehr ernst warnenden Charakter haben konnte: hütet Euch vor dem Zuspät, denn wenn erst die neue Zeit angebrochen ist, kann man nichts mehr für sie thun... so lang es noch heute heisst, giebt es Mittel das Morgen günstig für Euch zu gestalten': II, 511.

embarrassment. In response to Pietistic qualms about the story, he points to its earthy realism:

> Jesus relates what has, first, happened to him, and what happens to him is what he experiences; he speaks, in order to work directly on his fellow-countryfolk, not concerned about the taste of modern Bible-readers.[97]

This sentence illustrates both Jülicher's strength and his vulnerability: he wants to lead us into the situation of Jesus, and take us out of the prejudices of our own, away from the desire to be comfortable with the text; yet as we have seen, he cannot escape his own sense of religious and literary taste.

His final remarks on the parable are an instance of his decisive tendency to move away from the specific moral reference and challenge, that we found to be a hallmark of earlier readings, towards an apparently more lofty or 'spiritual' reading. It is a tendency full of irony, given his desire to move *away* from the style of so-called 'spiritual' readings: as we have seen, 'spiritualization' would in fact be a gross misnomer for the aim of the older commentators, who were acutely aware of the parables' practical moral challenge. Here Jülicher says that given the verbal link between Lk.16:3 and Mk.10:17 (τί ποιήσω...), it is not surprising that someone has added to the parable, in Lk.16:9, an answer (make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness) which corresponds to the answer Jesus gives to the rich man in Mk.10:21 (sell your possessions...and you will have treasure in heaven). But, he says, Jesus in both passages 'thought of something more than almsgiving'[98]. In fact, Jülicher has already stated that in the parable Jesus was not intending to teach about almsgiving at all. It sounds as if, though he cannot deny that the story of the rich man has *something* to do with giving wealth away, he wants to lift it above the level of mere practicality to a higher plane, the injunction to commitment of heart or soul. The danger (one might suppose) of thus generalizing or spiritualizing the injunction of Mk.10:21 is twofold: it seems to remove Jesus from his concrete historical context, and while making his words applicable to a far wider setting it may weaken their original, stinging force. We see here that it is not only via the parables that Jülicher wishes to present Jesus as the purveyor of elevated general truths, and we need

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[97] 'Jesus erzählt, was ihm zuerst eingefallen ist, und ihm fällt ein, was er erlebt; er sprach, um unmittelbar auf seine Landsleute zu wirken, um den Geschmack moderner Bibelleser unbekümmert': II, 512.

[98] '...an etwas mehr als an Almosengeben gedacht hat': II, 514.

to ask whether in fact this is closer to Jesus than the down-to-earth picture suggested by the commentators of premodernity.

4. The Rich Man and Lazarus

'The worst misjudgement', Jülicher says, which The Rich Man and Lazarus could suffer, 'was the illusion that it was composed in order to proclaim new revelation about the conditions in the other world'[99]. That 'illusion' was a standard mediaeval position, mentioned by Bonaventure, and from which Calvin, as we saw, had already moved some distance[100]. Jülicher believes that though 16:19-26 could have come from the mouth of any Israelite, it could well go back to Jesus, but that vv.27-31 are an addition by a later hand (II, 638). These latter verses, if authentic, would have implied (he thinks) an identification of the rich man with unbelieving Jews, and of Lazarus with Jewish Christians or Gentiles; the story of vv.19-26 would appear quite overdrawn for the simple message that unbelievers will go to hell, and indeed would caricature the Jews unworthily, a road from which one could only escape by 'determined allegorizing' (*entschlossene Allegorese*) (II, 640) - i.e. by treating the story as a mere husk which did not have anything to do with the people of 'Moses and the prophets' (v.29). The authentic story is simply meant to induce 'joy in a life of suffering, fear of a life of indulgence'[101].

Jülicher here falls short of the literary sensitivity that was shown by the earlier interpreters and especially by Calvin. They managed very well to read the story as a whole without degenerating into crass codebreaking (e.g. they never saw the rich man's fate as indicating the fate of the rich - or the Jews - *en masse*). They knew that the story could be a warning to the rich (and to the Jews) without implying their blanket condemnation. They saw no great incongruity between the beginning of a story speaking of a rich man and a poor man, and the end of the same story associating the rich with the inheritors of the Law and the Prophets. They found no crass equations; simply allusion, breathing the atmosphere of a mutual knowingness between Jesus and his hearers. It is

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[99] '[D]ie ärgste Verkennung...war der Wahn, sie sei gedichtet, um neue Offenbarungen über die Zustände in der andern Welt zu proklamieren': II, 623.

[100] See above, 67.

[101] 'Freude an einem Leben im Leiden, Furcht vor dem Genussleben': II, 638.

of course precisely that mutual knowingness that Jülicher wants strenuously to deny.[102] The real enemy of reasonable interpretation here, again, is the stark either/or of Jülicher's argumentation. We do not *need* to choose between a plain, simple 'picture from life' and an allegory in which the mere words are curiously empty. We can have *resonant* realism, *suggestive* communication.

5. The Judge and the Widow

Jülicher believes that Lk.18:2-5 is a lesson concerning prayer, aptly summarized by Luke in 18:1 (II, 283f.); and that 18:6-8 is an interpretative addition 'which originally was not intended'[103]. He thinks that Luke's source saw in the widow a picture of the Church crying for vindication, and that the words καὶ μακροθυμεῖ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς (v.7) have been added in reminiscence of Sirach 35:18 (II, 289). He ridicules the readings of Hippolytus (the judge as the antichrist, the adversary as the son of God, the widow as [unbelieving] Jerusalem, bereft of her heavenly bridegroom) and Cyril (the judge as God, the widow as a soul let loose by the devil, the adversary as the devil) (ibid.). He also distances himself from the intepreters of his own time who believe that in the parable Jesus is comparing the disciples' situation after his departure to that of a bereft widow (II, 289f.).

Jülicher's repudiation of the the idea that Jesus might have intended an allegorical correspondence between the widow and the disciples, the judge and God, is too easily bolstered by ridicule of Patristic readings which naturally sound quaint to a historical age intent on discovering the intention of Jesus. We may ask: was not 'the elect' a Jewish notion before it was a Christian one?[104] And if Luke's source could have introduced an allusion to Sirach, could not Jesus himself have made such an allusion with equal probability? Indeed, does not the whole tradition of Israel's 'humble poor' crying out to God stand behind Jesus' parable? Such considerations do not, of course, prove that 18:6-8 go back to Jesus, nor is it my aim to try to prove that. I simply wish to expose the untenability of Jülicher's connection here between the presence of allegory, and lateness or inauthenticity - a connection which will be vigorously restated by

[102] See I, 56: unlike simile which enlightens the reader's understanding, metaphor 'presupposes an existing understanding, it suggests briefly, instead of showing' ('setzt bei ihm schon Verständnis voraus, sie deutet kurz an, statt zu zeigen').

[103] '...die ursprünglich nicht intendiert war': II, 284.

[104] Fitzmyer cites Is.42:1; 43:20; 65:9; 15:23; Ps.105:6,43; Sir.47:22: *Luke*, 1180.

Jeremias.[105] 'Allegory' may well be the wrong word; allusion or echo a better one. On what sure 'objective' grounds it can be denied that the widow has some resonance with the people of God, not only for the later Church but also in the mind of Jesus? It does not preclude the proposition that her story is essentially a practical lesson of some kind. Again, Jülicher's desire to find general truths in the mouth of Jesus tends to divorce Jesus from his historical setting.

6. The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer

In The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer, writes Jülicher, 'Jesus wanted to teach that in all circumstances humility is more pleasing to God than self-righteousness'[106]. He regards continuing fondness for allegorical readings such as Pharisee/Judaism, customs-officer/Gentile world, or Pharisee/empirical Israel, customs-officer/ideal Israel, as erroneous but harmless (II, 609). But we have already noted that, despite protestations against the interpretation of individual elements, Jülicher reads the Pharisee as a synecdoche for the proud, and the Customs-Office as a synecdoche for the humble sinner.[107] This becomes clearer when we see the link which Jülicher draws between this parable and The Good Samaritan:

> As a Samaritan, who exercises love, is more worthy of the highest honour in the eyes of God and human beings than pitiless Priests and Levites, so the customs-officer, who in penitent humility pleads for mercy, is nearer the kingdom than a puffed-up Pharisee: God looks on the heart alone...[108]

Jülicher sees the importance of the contrasted characters in both parables: they are not merely examples of love or indifference, humility or pride respectively. It is the characters' social identity which gives the tales their particular pointedness. But if we are to capture that pointedness we need to ask whom, more precisely, Jesus *intended* to sting by them, and who would have *in fact* been 'stung' by them, with offence or

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[105] *Parables*, especially 66-89.

[106] 'Jesus wollte lehren, dass unter allen Umständen die Demut Gotte willkommener ist als die Selbstgerechtigkeit': II, 609.

[107] See above, 91.

[108] 'Wie ein Samariter, der Liebe übt, der höchsten Ehren bei Gott und Menschen würdiger ist als unbarmherzige Priester und Levit, so ist der Zöllner, der in bussfertiger Demut um Gnade fleht, dem Himmelreich näher als ein aufgeblasener Pharisäer: Gott siehet allein das Herz an...': II, 609.

challenge, encouragement or joy. To convert these parables into statements of universal truth is to blunt their sharp suggestiveness.

7. Summary

I characterized the readings of the earlier commentators as *hyperbolic*, going beyond the human meaning of the texts to grasp at the infinity of divine intention.[109] They did not dissemble and were not embarrassed concerning this hermeneutical aim. I suggest that Jülicher's readings are also hyperbolic: he sees in the parables universal truths which go beyond what the speaker intended to say. The difference between Jülicher and his predecessors, however, is that Jülicher presents his hyperbolic insights as if they represent the intention of the man Jesus.

CONCLUSIONS

Assessing Jülicher's insights

It is time to return to the question left hanging before the last section: do our proposals concerning the *influences* upon Jülicher and his response to them invalidate the *insights* he offers into the parables?

First we should note that the streams of Romantic thought, detected above as flowing into his work, seem to influence him at a less than conscious level, and that he certainly does not embrace the Romantic view of the poet or of figurative language in an unambiguous fashion. There is an independence in Jülicher's voice, rising above these particular currents of his age.

Secondly, I suggest that Jülicher's wrestling with the influence of Christian tradition, although it should be read as the struggle to find his own voice, is a *creative* wrestling that yields real insight. Jülicher's work is not ultimately just self-referential, a projection of his own struggles. Though he was wrong to portray his precursors as falsifying the intention of Jesus (since that was not the subject of their discourse), he was right to emphasise that discernible in Luke's parable-texts is the portrait of a passionate, clear communicator. It should again be stressed that this truly is *insight* won through creative wrestling with his precursors and not *scientific conclusion* established on the

[109] See above, 70f.

basis of historical argument. To say this is not to deny the historical value of the mass of material Jülicher (and successors such as Jeremias) bring forward concerning the parables - their background, the meanings of their words and so on, nor its significance within their overall theses. It is simply to observe that when all possible historical work has been done, the figure of speech brings us, as it were, face to face with the speaker/writer to ask: what did *(s)he* mean in this case? And more: what does this say *about him/her*? Jülicher's answer to the first question is not entirely convincing, for his reading of Jesus' 'meanings' wears too many of the colours of nineteenth-century liberal theology. But his answer to the second must be reckoned with. He has seen, in Jesus' longing to communicate, something vital about the parable's human speaker.

Thirdly, when we compare the voice heard by Jülicher in the parables with that which echoes in the work of his precursors who lacked his intense historical focus, we find that there is a fundamental connection. He, and they, highlight the *moral force* of the parables. The divergence lies in the principle Jülicher adopted from Weiss, that one should expect the parables to teach a *general* truth. His predecessors, operating without this dogma, made the thrust of the parables more specific. Jülicher was attracted to the 'general truth' as an escape route from what he saw as the enslavement of different generations to interpretations reflecting their own concerns. He did not want to find that the parables addressed heretics, monks or popes, and therefore he did not find that they addressed specific situations or people in the ministry of Jesus. Yet in Jülicher the mighty stream of influence continues - though its course begins to be diverted, and some reverberations of echo begin to be muffled.

CHAPTER FOUR
The Age of the Reader
The Flirtation of Parable Scholarship with Postmodernism

What we *know* are the metaphors or projections of the self, the worlds it creates.
Sallie TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables*, 147

The strong reader...is...placed in the dilemmas of the revisionist, who wishes to find his own original relation to truth.
Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 3f.

INTRODUCTION
Modulations in the historical quest

The scene for the main discussion of this chapter, which concerns one work on the parables published exactly a century after Jülicher's *Die Gleichnisreden*, must first be set with reference to some important works of the intervening years, which may be regarded as spanning the transition from 'modern' to 'postmodern'.[1]

Jeremias's *Parables* is the work through which many students today encounter the massive shift in parable interpretation established by Jülicher. I have already noted Jeremias's emphasis (of a still-optimistic, modernist kind) on returning to the voice of Jesus.[2] Though his focus on the urgent situation of the kingdom's arrival, much sharper than in Jülicher, is of great importance, for our purposes the most significant aspect of his work is that he approaches the parables with Jülicher's literary eyes. Everywhere it is evident that Jeremias is not seeking to deny the insight of Jülicher into the parables as clear teaching, but follow it through further. For him, the hallmark of all the parables is their expression of the good news, an urgent summons relating to the new situation that his broken in upon the world with the coming of Jesus. Of particular interest is the fact that though he distances himself from Jülicher's 'general truth' readings, he introduces his own kind of generality. The application of the parables to the gospel of the kingdom distances them from application to *specific* ethical issues faced by Jesus and his hearers. This can be illustrated from his treatment of The Shrewd Steward and The Rich Man and Lazarus. The steward 'recognized the critical nature of the situation...he acted...boldly, resolutely and prudently, with the purpose of making a new life for himself' (182). In making the parable turn entirely on Jesus' commendation (as he reads it) in v.8a, Jeremias makes its message curiously vague. The parable is seen to yield no specific instruction on *what to do*. Curiously, through his *withholding* of real significance from many of the

[1] Page-references incorporated in the main text of this chapter will refer to the work under discussion by the last-named author in bold type. Where it is necessary to distinguish between two different works by the same author (Crossan), the titles will also be given in bold.

[2] See above, 10.

details of the parable, it becomes in Jeremias's hands almost an 'allegory' of something unexpressed - faith in the kingdom's arrival.[3] The Rich Man and Lazarus is read as a warning that '[i]n the face of this challenge of the hour, evasion is impossible' (182). Again this warning is to be construed in the most general terms: 'Jesus does not want to comment on a social problem' (186). In these interpretations Jeremias seems to have taken a retrograde step from Jülicher's position. He has heightened the parables' atmosphere of urgency by stressing the context of the arriving kingdom, but at the cost of further relegating the significance of individual figures and elements ('Lazarus is only a secondary figure introduced by way of contrast', 186) and blunting their moral and social force.

The parables were central texts for the 'New Hermeneutic': its practitioners, theologically-motivated, intended to demonstrate that Jesus not only *spoke* about, but *brought* about, the kingdom, through powerful speech-acts.[4] However, the literary assumption (mediated by the influence of existentialist philosophy) is that Jesus' message was directed to the deepest and therefore most general level; so the continuity with Jülicher remains. This can be seen in the work of **Linnemann**[5]. 'Jesus, by compelling his listeners to a decision through telling a parable, gives them the possibility of making a change of existence, of understanding themselves anew from the depths up, of achieving a "new life"' (31). Note the general, indeed universal import ascribed to The Pharisee and The Customs-Officer: 'Every man who has been bowed down by the burden of guilt knows for sure that here not just *something* but *everything*, in fact he himself, has been called in question...here the whole of his existence is exposed to a radical challenge...' (61).

The potential of the parables for transcending their own time and culture was further explored by **Via**[6] through his proposal to treat them as 'aesthetic objects'. His work sounded the retreat from too intense a search for the *intention of Jesus*. He was clearly under the influence of the (secular) 'New Criticism'. Since written texts are in the public domain (so the argument runs), loosed from their moorings in the authorial mind, the intention of the critic should be to seek the 'meanings' created by the configuration of the work itself. It is one of the strongest supports for Via's case that the parables of Jesus have much in common with the *mashal*, which can be used in a variety of different circumstances.[7] The history of the parables' usage demonstrates both their versatility,

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[3] Thus illustrating the truth of Blomberg's comment that 'almost all commentators who actually expound a selection of the parables wind up with some allegorical interpretations, as the anti-Jülicher tradition defines them, regardless of what they may say about their method': *Interpreting*, 47.

[4] '*Die Basileia kommt im Gleichnis als Gleichnis zur Sprache*': Jüngel, *Paulus*, 135. Cf. Funk, *Language*.

[5] *Parables*.

[6] *Parables*.

[7] See below, 199.

and the fact that their usefulness does not depend entirely on knowledge of the precise original circumstances of their speaking, or the particular intention of the speaker in those circumstances. But it does not follow from Via's contention that the parables are 'aesthetic objects' that one should not ask questions about what an original speaker may have meant by them. Further, it is an 'essentialist' fallacy to define a text as an 'aesthetic object' *to the exclusion* of its being another kind of object. Parables may be described, from different angles, as aesthetic, historical, sociological, or theological objects - or in still other ways. Hence my preference for speaking, rather, of the necessity for an aesthetic *response to* such texts.[8]

Via is not ahistorical in a thoroughgoing way. He writes: '...[A]s aesthetic objects [the parables] have a *relative* autonomy and detach themselves from [Jesus'] history in a way that his other sayings do not...the parables belong *not only* to the history of the covenant people but to the artistic tradition as well' (204). Nor does he deny that in them we may find 'a clue to Jesus' understanding of his own existence' (193). The fact that he insists, nevertheless, on the parables' nature as 'aesthetic objects' can be explained in part by the continuing powerful influence of Jülicher: he wants to make Jülicher's protection of the parables against the danger of allegorization more impregnable still. He is not saying that there is *no* 'outside' meaning, only that the meaning must not be sought in simple one-to-one correspondences between elements of the parable and some external reality. Paradoxically, however, Via's proposal leaves the door open to a view of Jesus that Jülicher would strenuously have denied, viz. that he was the maker of finely-honed works of art.[9] Via opened up real possibilities for insight into the parables through his use of the ancient categories of tragedy and comedy (110-176), but the message they are found to yield remains one of existential generality (on Lk.16:1-8: 'The parable in itself says that the present is a crisis because the future is threatening': 161).

Two volumes on the parables by **Crossan**, a member with Via of the Parables Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature[10], display the same kind of philosophical move as that undergone a little earlier in the literary criticism of continental Europe. From a 'structuralist' approach which he sought to tie in with a still intense concern to uncover the true message of Jesus (in *In Parables*) he shifted (in ***Cliffs***) to a mood of

[8] Cf. 14f. above. Bruns points out that to analyze texts as 'formal or aesthetic objects' is to keep them at a distance, a distance which is overcome in the practice of midrash: "Midrash", 629.

[9] Cf. Parker, *Painfully Clear*, 20.

[10] Perrin, *Jesus*, ch.III, discusses the output of this Seminar in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

'post-structuralist' uncertainty[11] in which the controlling paradigm or 'megametaphor' for all textual study is 'play' (73)[12].

Crossan is deeply influenced by Bultmann and Heidegger. In ***In Parables***, he uses Heidegger's understanding of *time* as a key to unlock the meaning of Jesus' announcement of the kingdom. Crossan discerns in the speech of Jesus not language about past, present and future but 'a deeper and more ontological simultaneity of three modes in advent-reversal-action' (32). Texts do reflect and express deeply-rooted patterns of thought: to accuse Crossan of too readily *imposing* patterns on texts would be unfair, and would maintain the illusion of an ideal approach in which personal aesthetic apprehension played no part. But when Crossan confidently claims that those personally-discerned patterns represent the mind of Jesus[13], the fact that this *is* a personal, creative response is apparent, though all his insights are not thereby invalidated.[14] The literary critics who adopted structuralist models from anthropology had no illusions about their ability to recover the mind of the author from texts by these means; that would have been to return to the 'intentional fallacy'. But by trying to combine a structural approach to the texts with the quest of the historical Jesus, Crossan falls prey to the fallacy himself.

Nevertheless, though historically flawed, *In Parables* marked a significant step in parable studies, for it sought to keep pace with secular criticism through the adoption of a structuralist approach, as Via's *Parables* had done in the adoption of New Critical insights. Above all, though, the influence of Jülicher keeps flowing. The 'Jesus' discerned in *In Parables* seems to be an example of a universal principle, a figure who acts as the gathering-point for certain philosophical ideals. But the book points in the direction of a true sensitivity to the voice of Jesus, insofar as its literary structuralism directs attention away from *outward* forms (the focus of the New Criticism, seen in Via) towards a more adequate grasp of the *esse* of the text in question.

In ***Cliffs***, Crossan shows his awareness of the limitations of his earlier work. His stance has become more radical, though he does not directly confront the question of

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[11] Although Crossan says in this work (67) that he is seeking to move his view of language 'more resolutely into a structuralist viewpoint' away from the 'primarily romanticist' view of *In Parables*, the move does seem to me to be better described as being from romantically-tinged structuralism to post-structuralism.

[12] It could be argued that Crossan's introduction of the category 'play' has given Via's serious category 'aesthetic objects' an unnecessarily bad name, as when Gerhardsson combines the two and denies that the narrative parables are 'playful, literary products, *aesthetic objects*': "Frames", 330f.

[13] This attempt at penetrating the mind of Jesus seems to be primarily what is in Crossan's mind when he writes (*Cliffs*, 67) of the 'primarily romanticist view of language' within which he had operated in *In Parables*.

[14] Drury's comment, directed particularly at Crossan, is therefore partially but not wholly fair: 'The Jesus whose parables could not be certainly isolated from the Christian Gospels or his Jewish milieu, by being isolated from them nevertheless, became the receptacle of the wishes of the exegetes': "Parable", 510.

how the changing perceptions in secular literary criticism can help in the *historical* quest. As Stephen D. Moore indicates, Crossan's posture, asserting the ultimate playfulness of language and its lack of reference to anything 'real', does not sit easily with historical-critical methods[15]. There is incongruity in Crossan's affirmation of plurivocity of meaning in the parables, alongside his insistence on his own interpretation.

Central to *Cliffs* is the perception that *all* language is metaphorical (1-12).[16] Crossan draws here especially on the work of Ricoeur[17], though it is a perception with a long pedigree.[18] When language is viewed thus, structuralism with its codes and oppositions looks decidedly too rigid an ethos: texts are seen to take on instead a slippery, elusive quality, where nothing can be pinned down, and there is an endless playful interplay of signs. By showing the self-referential quality of The Sower as a parable about parabling (25-64), Crossan opens up the parables as a quintessential example of the ludic character of language.

I go in one respect further than Crossan, in affirming not only the *metaphorical*, but the *tropical* structure of language generally.[19] But unlike Crossan, who under Derrida's influence tends to assimilate all 'world' to 'text', I see no need to link this view of language with a non-realist philosophy, or with a literary criticism which foregoes all claim to the detection of real human voices other than one's own.[20] The recognition of the presence of tropes deep in the structure of discourse implies to me a recognition of the presence of real human agency in constant interaction with the real, conventional world of signs.

The work on which I will now focus for the remainder of this chapter is heavily influenced by Crossan. It is the detailed survey of all Jesus' parables by Crossan's fellow-American Scott.[21] This is convenient as an example of parable scholarship's flirtation with postmodernism, both for its comprehensive coverage and for its exhibition of the

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[15] *Criticism*, 137-151. Moore notes the incongruity in ch.2 of *Cliffs*, where a standard historical-critical treatment of The Sower is followed by Crossan's 'playful' reading.

[16] In *In Parables*, 10-16, Crossan had simply highlighted the power and renewability of metaphor, and Jesus is seen implicitly as a Romantic poet.

[17] Particularly *Rule*.

[18] Cf. Soskice, *Metaphor*, 74f.

[19] See above, 27.

[20] Crossan discusses the distinction made by Rosemond Tuve between mimetic and ludic allegory. 'In mimetic allegory one is enjoying layers of divinely caused structural order mirroring the divine mind or will. One is viewing with great pleasure, as Tuve says, the "nature of the world" placed there by God to be discovered by ourselves. But *in ludic allegory one is enjoying the playful human imagination creating isomorphic plot as an act of supreme play*...I find mimetic allegory closed to me forever and I find in ludic allegory the way I must reread the past, interpret the present and propose the future. At least for now.': *Cliffs*, 98f. I do not find mimetic allegory closed to me; I still believe in the possibility of discerning the real, though I would agree with Crossan that 'play' lies deep in human motivation, whether we think we are doing history, literary criticism, or anything else.

[21] *Hear*.

influence of powerful critical currents. Again I shall consider the critic's intention, the influences upon him, and the insights he offers.

DETECTING THE MINOR KEY

The intention of Scott

Scott is interested in the parables *of Jesus*, and the *Jesus of* the parables, as his subtitle (*A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*) makes plain. It soon becomes clear that a sophisticated 'historical' procedure will be applied to determine first which of the *soi-disant* parables of Jesus can truly be attributed to him, and then how much of the extant text represents the 'structure' of Jesus' parable (40) and how much is editing, gloss and so forth. Scott unequivocally adopts the methods of source-, form- and redaction-criticism which have characterized historical study of the Gospels over this century. The Gospel context is seen as an aid to our understanding of the parables but also as a distortion of them (55)[22]; criteria are laid out for assessing the 'authenticity' of particular tales (63-68). Central to this quest, for Scott, is attunement to the originating 'voice' of the parables (65), a voice which he believes has 'a tendency to play in minor keys' (66). The reader is thus invited to listen carefully for the accents of the parables' speaker. It might seem as if this were a straightforward scholarly attempt to get back to *Jesus' intention*, 'what he really meant', by blazing a trail through the thicket of ecclesiastical interpretations.[23] That, after all, is surely more important than discovering his actual *words*, which are irretrievably lost to us (40).

But Scott's enterprise turns out to be more ambiguous than this. The words of the parables in the Gospel texts are contrasted not with their original *intention*, but with their original *structure* (40): that is the entity regarded as both potentially accessible, and of interest. This distances the investigation from a direct involvement with the personality of the speaker and *his* meaning. Then, as soon as Scott has announced his plan to look for the 'voice' of the parables - a notion implying, as he acknowledges, 'a distinctive, creative presence' (65) - he disclaims any hope of a direct encounter with that presence, stating that

> this is not the historical Jesus in the sense of Jesus as author of the parables. Rather, it is a reconstruction of the implied speaker/author of the corpus of parables. (65)

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[22] Cf. Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 106.

[23] This might seem to be the implication of Scott's comparison of his task with the restoration of old paintings (19).

Such a reconstruction is possible on the basis of the parables' mutual consistency, but Scott is adamant that '[t]he implied author is not to be identified with the real author' (65). Here Scott's literary sophistication is coming into view[24], as well as a contemporary sense of the necessary mediating role of language[25], of the impossibility of an *im*mediate encounter with one's self or an other.

This careful distancing of the reader from any sense that we are going to meet the real Jesus, the original author of the parables, continues when we move from the introductory chapters to the expositions themselves. Scott takes his readers through each parable line by line, inviting us to imagine how an original audience would have heard it, the expectations it might have aroused, the resonances of tradition it would have evoked. This hearer/reader-centred approach has the effect of pushing to the background the matter of what the *speaker intended* (even if we mean by that only the 'implied speaker'). The concern is with 'the effect on the hearer' (148) and the subject of the sentence in these readings is never the speaker, or Jesus, but frequently the text or some attribute or analogue of it: 'line 1 outlines the general possibilities open to the story...' (133), '[t]he initial scene presents a hearer with a tragic situation...' (193), 'the parable is remarkably restrained in what it says about the Priest and Levite...' (195), and so on.

Yet the speaker remains a presence, though a shadowy one, in Scott's text. He appears with particular force, but still not in unveiled fashion, when Scott delineates the threads which bind the parables together with each other and other Gospel texts, as he often does at the end of a chapter. Thus The Good Samaritan and The Pharisee and The Customs-Officer are connected through the theme that '[t]he kingdom does not separate insiders and outsiders on the basis of religious categories' (202). Such bonds of coherence do indeed imply a common author, as Scott himself argues (65). He even relates The Shrewd Steward to what is known of Jesus' activity: with its equation of 'justice and vulnerability' it 'coheres with Jesus' association with the outcast, as well as, e.g., his use of leaven in the parable The Leaven' (266). But he holds back from a direct exposition of Jesus' outlook or aim as speaker/author; it is characteristic of his conclusions to keep the text as the subject of the sentence: for instance, '[t]he three parables...test that part of the social and religious map where boundaries indicate who is inside and who outside' (187).

It is a surprise, therefore, when we reach the Epilogue, to find Scott making bold, unambiguous statements about Jesus. After the sensitive ebbing of confidence, the drawing back from listening for the voice of Jesus to listening for the *implied* speaker of the parables, from asserting the intention of the author to asserting the response of the

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[24] He is eschewing the Romantic hermeneutics of divination, on which cf. Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 183.

[25] On this role as seen by Ricoeur cf. Fodor, *Hermeneutics*, 143f.

hearer, from affirming the one mind behind the parables to affirming the coherence of a group of texts, we do not expect to find this: 'Jesus was both antiwisdom and antiapocalyptic, although ironically the tradition confessed him as both rabbi and messiah' (423). After the mood of hesitancy which has pervaded his work, one senses that the foundation has not been laid for this assertion[26]: the burden of the book is not that *Jesus was like this*, but that this was the impression we can imagine him to have made on others. What of the possibility that even if the careful reconstruction of the likely reception of his words is right, his hearers were sometimes mistaken about his *intention*? This is surely the possibility implied by Scott's reluctance in the body of the volume to entertain the issue of *what Jesus meant.*[27] This 'Jesus' of Scott's epilogue is a *trope* for the 'implied Jesus' of his commentary, behind which lie the intention and motivation to reach out and make contact despite the painful awareness of the limitations of historical research. It is like a Romantic moment of vision - sudden sublime encounter or supreme self-delusion, depending on your point of view. By the same token, the 'implied Jesus' through the book, the one heard by the ideal hearer whose impressions Scott vividly conjures up, is now seen, in retrospect, as a trope for the real Jesus of the epilogue, the one Scott really wants to write about.

There is a skill and beauty in the deployment of this device of the implied speaker. From one angle it presents itself as sadly necessary understatement, inducing a sense of the near-unknowability of the *real* speaker. Yet this reticence about the shadowy author-figure behind the parables evokes a sense both of reverence towards and curiosity about him. If this reticence is thrown to the winds in the Epilogue, it is but an interesting modulation of the ancient dialectic between silent awe before the God whom no one has ever seen and the compulsion to speak of what one *has* seen and heard.

It is not only the tactic of distancing his exposition from the question of Jesus' intention which (intentionally or not) gives the figure of Jesus a kind of mystical aura that draws the reader towards him, despite all the emphasis on text and hearer. Scott (we can dispense with the niceties of calling him the 'implied author') is clearly in deep sympathy

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[26] It is not that a movement from the 'implied' to the 'real' speaker or author is necessarily impossible. Powell has noted the possibility (in relation to the Gospel narratives) of making a small hermeneutical 'leap' entailing 'acceptance of the unprovable premise that the authors of our Gospels succeeded in creating narratives that would have the effects they wanted them to have': *Criticism*, 97. Scott has made such a leap from the Jesus *implied* by the parables, and the way we can imagine that they were heard, to the *real* Jesus, on the assumption that Jesus succeeded in creating parables that had the effect he desired. The fact that Scott jumps from 'implied speaker' to 'real speaker' without making the workings of the 'leap' explicit betokens an anxiety about the whole process, a tension between doubt and desire.

[27] On at least one occasion, though, Scott betrays the quite unwarranted presuppositions that Jesus' audience must immediately have understood him, that they understood his intention aright, and that he *intended* such immediate understanding. He writes, with reference to The Wicked Tenants: 'If the son is Jesus, it is impossible to understand how the parable can go back to Jesus. Who, after all, in the original audience would have understood the allusion?' (65). This implies that the response of the hearers must necessarily have mirrored the intention of the speaker.

with the common thrust he finds in the parables, and is therefore not only exponent but also advocate of this thrust to his readers. One senses the excitement of discovery and personal commitment in his discernment, in Jesus' sayings, of (for example) 'the radical identification of God's kingdom with community and the demand to provide for the needs of others' (140). But this unmistakable, though often veiled, exaltation of the speaker of the parables comes at a price: the denigration of their writers[28].

No reverence is evinced for Luke, the other Evangelists and their sources such as is evinced for Jesus. Until the daring move of the epilogue, the issue of the intention of Jesus is not even broached. The intention of the Evangelists, however, is regarded as plain for all to see: 'The problem with allegory in the parables is not allegory per se, but the ideological reading of the parables with an ideology that is *manifestly* later' (44, my italics). Luke's particular 'ideology' is seen as embracing a schema of salvation history which 'relies on the rejection of the Jews in favour of the Gentiles' (104). The 'additions' to The Shrewd Steward in Lk.16:8f. are regarded as an 'attempt to impose sense (consistency) on the parable by diverting attention from the story's roguish character' (265). Luke is credited with considerable literary skill, seen in the fictional setting he has given to the parables in ch.15, but it is a skill that leads to The Prodigal Son being 'miscued' (105). His application to The Judge and the Widow 'has weakened, not eliminated, the parable's scandal' (187). Worst of all, his framing of The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer has helped turn it 'into an anti-Pharisaic and anti-Semitic story' which has bequeathed a 'harsh history' (93). Scott has little doubt about the intention of the *writers*, and little sympathy with it or them. He ignores the possibility that Luke's discourse may be presentational rather than authorial[29]: that is, that Luke may genuinely be trying to *represent* the parables as told by Jesus, rather than to invest them with his own weighty purposes.

If the intention of Jesus is kept at arm's length, and that of his early interpreters is dismissed, where for Scott is the locus of meaning in the parables? In common with highly influential movements in linguistics, literary criticism and philosophy, he gives the *text* a place of considerable esteem[30]; we have already noted its frequent appearance, in various guises, as the subject of sentences. Though considerable attention is given to the *hearer*, that must throw an interpreter back upon the text itself, which is our only basis for reconstructing a hearer's responses. In his Epilogue Scott writes:

> Instead of accenting what the parable means, I have chosen to describe how it creates meaning...To underscore further the polyvalence of

[28] On my use of 'speaker' and 'writers' cf. 79 above.

[29] Cf. Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 55.

[30] This constitutes a strong link between the premodern and postmodern periods of interpretation: see above, 36ff., 44, 71f., and Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 16ff. The crucial difference between these periods is that in the earlier, the text was seen as transparent upon divine meaning.

> parables, I have paid close attention to how each parable functions in its extant contexts in the various Gospels. But these versions are only performances of the parable, layings-beside, in an effort to create new meaning. (420)

Here again the parable, not the speaker, is subject; and in the distinction between 'meaning' and 'creating meaning' Scott further distances himself from the quest for the speaker's intention. There is perhaps a tacit recognition that to have accented 'what the parable means' would inevitably have involved embarking on that quest.[31] But the idea of the parable 'creating meaning' is scarcely less fictional and figurative than that of the parable 'meaning': the word 'creating' gives the game away with its suggestion of a personal presence.[32]

The advantage of Scott's position is that he can stress the 'polyvalence' of the parables, and thus their contemporary accessibility. Following Via[33], he has earlier affirmed the character of parables as 'aesthetic objects' which 'have a freedom or independence vis-à-vis their contextualization' (41f.). As will be clarified further below, the interpretations he offers exemplify this stated openness of the parables to different contexts, including our modern one. To privilege 'text' above 'speaker' naturally fosters such a sense of the parables' openness. Moreover, in the above quotation, Scott brings into play not only the text of the parables but the text of the surrounding Gospels, which 'perform' the parables 'in an effort to create new meaning', something which itself reinforces the parables' 'polyvalence'. Again, though 'performing' may well be read as implying an actor, Scott wishes to concentrate on the *text* as subject. So, at this point, writers as well as speaker remain in the background: the spotlight is on the text.

Such avowed respect for the *text* might well be commended as guarding against the 'intentional fallacy'. It sits uneasily, however, with the tenor of the book as a whole. The integrity of the text is the first casualty of the stark gulf between reverence for the speaker and disdain for the writers just noted. Some parables are eliminated from

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[31] Wolterstorff offers a good critique of the kind of 'performance interpretation' that Scott believes was practised on the parables by the early church (and, by implication, should continue to be practised today): ibid., 171-182. '[W]hat performance interpretation ignores, by its very nature, is the actual acts of discourse' - promise, testimony and so on (181). Scott projects a postmodern style of reading on to the Evangelists, who, I suggest, would have been precisely concerned with Jesus' *acts of discourse*, not simply with 'performing' the parables, whether or not they preserved his *words* with literal accuracy.

[32] Scott exemplifies here the post-modern ethos, with its origins in the work of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, who created 'a mediate *science* of meaning, irreducible to the immediate *consciousness* of meaning': Ricoeur, *Freud*, 34.

[33] *Parables.*

consideration at the outset (68-72); most of those treated are printed, at the beginning of their respective chapters, without those parts which, he argues, are accretions of the early church. More fundamentally, the text is divided into those parts which are 'manifestly' the work of others than Jesus, with a clear intention and aim - ideological, generalizing, moralizing and so on - and those which appear to Scott as faithfully representing the speech of Jesus, but whose original 'intention' must not be delved into. A further rupture along the same fault-line is between the obviously (to Scott) pragmatic use of the parables by the early church, dictated by its particular historical context, and the universally available 'polyvalence' of Jesus' parables themselves. The meaning of the writers is accessible but dismissable; the meaning of the speaker is inaccessible, but the 'texts' he bequeathed have endlessly renewable meaning.

There is nothing strange about assuming that we can reach the final shapers of a text more easily than its earlier or original 'sources'. But what is the motivation behind this sharp polarity? Scott stands firmly in the historical-critical tradition and all good historical hypotheses require some clear drawing of lines. He acknowledges that there is 'an unavoidable circularity' in the argument (65), involving *a priori* assumptions about the kind of 'voice' Jesus might be presumed to have spoken in. I do not challenge the validity of such hypothetical arguments *per se*. But a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'[35] applied to Scott's work must raise an eyebrow at the neatness of the way that speaker is privileged against writer, that the universally applicable text is associated with the former and the dispensable, historically restricted text is associated with the latter.

At root it appears that the ambivalence of Scott's work lies in the uncertainty over whether the object of the search is a historical figure, whom writer and readers want to understand as well as they can, no matter how sympathetic or otherwise they find him to be, or a voice that speaks with a contemporary resonance. Shortly after writing of the parables' freedom with regard to their contextualization, Scott writes that the 'cultural context' of first-century Judaism is nevertheless 'critical for the parables' interpretation' (42): it is only (he says) the search for a specific *Sitz im Leben* in the ministry of Jesus which is misguided. Yet it seems that it is precisely *not* the feel of a particular cultural strangeness but the tones of a universal, culture-transcending voice which provides, for Scott, the test of whether one is hearing the words of Jesus.

SOCIOLOGICAL AND LITERARY CURRENTS

Influences on Scott

[35] Cf. Ricoeur, *Freud*, 32-36.

Enough has already been said to indicate the extent of the influence on Scott of parable-scholarship from Jülicher onwards, above all in his (ambiguous) quest for the voice of Jesus and his discovery of that voice's universal resonance. Two further sources of influence need now to be mentioned, from the study of social science and that of literature.

Scott draws from social-scientific studies the notion of 'common' or 'conventional' wisdom. His central criterion for determining authentic parable-material is that it should 'play against the expectations of common wisdom' (67). This notion is expounded as follows by Marcus J. Borg:

> [Conventional wisdom] is an exceedingly useful notion, illuminating our own lives and illuminating the Christian message, important for our self-understanding and as a hermeneutical tool. Conventional wisdom is the heart or core of every culture. It consists of a culture's taken-for-granted understandings about how things are...Though its specific content varies from culture to culture, conventional wisdom has a number of general features in common across cultures...embodies the central values of a culture...is intrinsically based on rewards and punishments...creates a world of hierarchies and social boundaries...When the notion of God is integrated into a system of conventional wisdom, God is imaged primarily as lawgiver and judge...this way of being [i.e. conventional wisdom] is not unusual...it is normal adult consciousness, both in Jesus' time and in our own time.[36]

Here Borg lets the cat out of the bag. When such a (supposedly) universally applicable grid is placed over the ancient texts, it is hardly surprising that a (supposedly) universally applicable meaning or message readily emerges: Jesus' teaching simply reverses the conventional wisdom. Whatever traces we have in the Gospel texts of words spoken against universal common wisdom as twentieth-century social science understands it, become the definitive hallmarks of Scott's Jesus. Scott acknowledges that reconstructing the common wisdom of a period, and discerning an individual voice that stands out from it, is not a straightforward matter, and that the imagination must come into play (67f.). He declares his intention to adopt a *literary* method primarily, since 'the social context is subsumed into the literary, fictional world of the parable' (74). Nevertheless, his readers need to be aware of the part that social-scientific constructs play in his work.

The other source of influence to be noted, which gives Scott his primary method, is reader-response criticism. It marks a significant advance in the study of the parables that so much attention is devoted to how they would have been *heard.* There must, indeed, be such a focus, as complementary to the intention of Jesus, in any attempt to recapture his *voice.* I shall remark below, however, on ways in which this influence may overreach itself in Scott. An emphasis on the parables' reception may obscure both the

[36] *Jesus,* 149f.

presence of intention, and the fact that figures of speech necessarily invite the receiver to construe an intentional shaping of conventional language.[37] Further, Scott slides too easily between 'how the parable was heard' and 'how it can be heard today'. There is a sense, not fully articulated, that reader-response methodology *in itself* ought to give us privileged access to the historical situation of Jesus, though Scott's marshalling of historical data itself belie this. The conviction that the parables speak to the present, as obvious in Jülicher as it was in the Fathers, proves to be as tenacious as ever; the voice of Jesus in its strangeness, though still echoing, continues to be muffled by the voices of today. We shall see these strands of influence in Scott's writing about individual parables.

HANDLES ON THE KINGDOM

Scott's insight into the parables

For Scott, the parables of Jesus are *all* to be interpreted as being 'about' the kingdom of God, not only those closely associated in the Gospels with overt references to the kingdom. Alluding to Rabbinic texts which refer to Solomon's parables or proverbs as 'handles' on the Torah, enabling it to be understood, he writes of parables in the Jesus tradition as being 'handles on the symbol of the kingdom of God' (61; and see 53, quoting *Midrash Rabbah* on the Song of Songs 1.1.8 and *m. Erub.* 21b).

There is, however, a more powerful literary key at work than the comparison with the Rabbis. Jülicher used *simile* as the key to insight into the parables. Scott can well represent for us the popular contemporary use of *metaphor* for the same purpose. If for him the parables are handles on the kingdom, then metaphor is the handle on the parables. Indeed, he uses not only this trope itself but also significant *insights into the trope*, which we may summarize.

He overturns Jülicher's understanding of allegory as extended metaphor, saying that the parable as a genre may 'be allegorical, metaphorical, or mixed' (44, implying that these are *alternatives*). He points out that we should not fall into the trap opposite to Jülicher's, by Romantically *privileging* metaphor as 'creative of meaning' over against allegory as identified with the descriptive and artificial (46). However, Romanticism's 'perception of the centrality of the metaphorical process to language is critical' (47).

Since metaphor is transference, the real issue for Scott is the 'direction of transference': 'is parable an ornament or does it have cognitive value?' (47). That is, does a parable as a metaphor merely illustrate a known truth, or yield a new insight? Scott follows Ricoeur in regarding narrative as 'a model for redescribing reality' (48). Thus

[37] See above, 21.

'[a]s fictional redescriptions, parables demand that the primary direction of transference be from parable to referent, because the redescription exposes something new, not simply copying the already known' (48). Although in many cases 'a referent is left unspecified' in Jesus' parables, 'the assumption is that the parables at a second level of reference are about the kingdom of God' (48). Given that the direction of transference is from parable to referent, we need to pay careful attention to the literal sense of the parables so that we can discern what is being said about the kingdom. Scott points out the normal ignoring of this literal sense in the parable of the leaven: although 'leaven in all known examples from the ancient world stands for moral corruption', commentators agree that 'in this parable it cannot signify that because this is a parable about the kingdom (i.e., something good)' (49). The parables of Jesus evoke the everyday human world, and we need to feel the force of Jesus' use of this world to speak of God and his kingdom.

Two features of metaphor are found especially suggestive. The first is the existence of *metaphorical networks* to which terms or things belong: Scott gives as an example the way in which many different elements of the language of war are used with reference to (merely verbal) arguments, and even affect experience and behaviour.[38] 'The metaphorical network structures the experience, behavior, and understanding of that other reality it stands for.' (50) The other is metaphor's exposure of dissimilarity as well as similarity, its power to hide some aspects of the referent even while it reveals others. 'Similarity can block remembrance of what metaphor hides; dissimilarity highlights what previously was hidden.' (51) Thus, '[i]n narratives where there is strong dissimilarity to the expected values of the referent, as there frequently is in Jesus' parables, dissimilarity may well be a way of redefining and subverting a hearer's vision of the referent so as to redescribe reality' (51). In his expositions of individual parables Scott is especially attuned to elements of subversiveness.[39]

Scott's treatment of the parables as metaphors highlights again the necessity for the interpreter to make her own aesthetic choices when dealing with figures. He states that a parable 'provides no explicit instructions for its hearer/reader to employ in relating narrative to referent' (49). So not only in assuming that the parables' referent is the kingdom, but also in staking his interpretation on the prior proposition that *metaphor* is the best model for understanding the way in which narrative is related to referent, Scott's own aesthetic choice is apparent. That he is uneasy with this freedom may be indicated by a strange inconsistency. Pointing out that reading the parables as metaphors precludes there being only *one* point of comparison, as stated by Jülicher, he writes that

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[38] Citing Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 4,110,112.

[39] The notion of the parables as metaphors has been recently influential in Europe too: see Weder, *Gleichnisse*; Kjärgaard, *Metaphor*; Hermans, *Gleichnisse* (discussed in Harnisch, *Beiträge*, 380f.); Heininger, *Metaphorik*.

'[T]o select only one out of all the possibilities suggested by the metaphor/parable is manipulative of reality, ideology in its negative sense' (50), yet he himself has made exactly such a selection in referring the parables, construed as metaphors of the particular kind he has described, to the kingdom of God.[40]

I will now indicate how Scott's approach is worked out in the case of the six parables, and what the voice in the minor key sounds like. Characteristically he finds that Jesus was redescribing the kingdom - understood previously by his hearers in some kind of apocalyptic or nationalistic sense, or perhaps just as 'a cipher for obedience to the law' (59)[41] - as a universal, boundary-breaking, category-cracking reality.

1. The Good Samaritan

The Good Samaritan, says Scott, 'subverts the effort to order reality into the known hierarchy of priest, Levite and Israelite' (201) - a lay Israelite being the expected third member of the story's triad. The cognitive value of the parable turns out to be this: 'Utterly rejected is any notion that the kingdom can be marked off as religious: the map no longer has boundaries. The kingdom does not separate insiders and outsiders on the basis of religious categories', just as the temple in Lk.18:9-14 'no longer divides the world into religious and nonreligious' (201f.). We need to show how, for Scott, the parable is a metaphor for such a kingdom.

In the introductory section of his book Scott cites the work of Funk[42] as being significant in exposing the *literal* importance of the Samaritan in the story. Funk challenged the traditional designation of the parable as an 'example story' on the grounds that a Samaritan would have been an unacceptable example of neighbourliness for a Jewish audience. As Scott rightly summarizes, 'the literalness of the *Samaritan* turns the *story* into a metaphor' (29, my emphasis). The *shock* of the Samaritan's appearance points to the parable's being something other than a simple tale of loving behaviour that is to be imitated. For Funk, the parable proposes that 'one become the victim in the ditch who was helped by an enemy' and that '[i]n the kingdom mercy is always a surprise'[43].

Scott's reading, however, implicitly assigns tropical significance not only to the story as a whole, but to the figures of the Samaritan, who seems to stand for the

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[40] Near the end of the book he shows awareness of the inconsistency: 'After writing a commentary on all the parables, I am faced with a curious contradiction: much more remains to be written about the parables, and I have written too much...The parable as employed by Jesus is an open genre...The parable does not seek closure, regardless of how often during its transmission various interpreters have sought closure. For precisely this reason the parabolic narrative is always primary and can never be replaced by its supposed meaning' (419).

[41] Citing *Sifra* on Lev.18:1.

[42] *Language*, 213; *Parables*, 29-34.

[43] *Parables*, 34, cited in Hedrick, *Parables*, 98.

'outsider' or 'nonreligious', and the Priest and Levite, who seem to stand for the 'insider' or 'religious'. This allows Scott to differentiate his tropical reading from that of Luke, who (he thinks) has used the parable as a simple example story for his Gentile readership (200) and was the originator of the kind of sorry stereotypical contrast between 'the unloving Jews and the loving Samaritan' made by Bultmann.[44] Scott believes that on the lips of Jesus the story was more radical and subversive.

But the tropical reference Scott assigns to the characters owes more to social science than to the parable. In the opening sentence of his exposition he sets the story in a universal socio-cultural context: 'All cultures, modern and ancient, draw boundaries between themselves and others' (189). The parable-characters are then read as types for the insider and the outsider. But why should we imagine that their significance to the ears of Jesus' audience - or in the mind of Jesus - would have been so wide? (There is an anomaly in Scott's conclusion. He has already drawn attention to the fact that the Samaritan *cannot* be compared to the Priest and Levite in purely 'religious', 'political' or similar categories [198]. If the Samaritan does not appear as either religious or nonreligious, how does his appearance imply that 'the kingdom does not separate insiders and outsiders on the basis of religious categories' [202]?[45])

Scott's detailed reading (193-200) concentrates on how the story would originally have been heard, exploring for instance the issue of sympathies aroused. But he makes an ambiguous transition from this reading to his final section entitled 'From Story to Kingdom' (200).[46] That is, we are left unsure as to whether he is saying that *the hearers* would have drawn the conclusions about the kingdom which *he* is drawing, or simply that, on reflection, this is what the text of the parable is pointing to (whether or not the hearers got the point, at first or subsequently). It is in fact hard to see how, on the basis of the parable text alone (even when Scott has abstracted it from its Gospel context), the hearers would have drawn the conclusions that (a) Jesus was speaking about the kingdom, and therefore that (b) that he was saying that the kingdom cannot 'be marked off as religious' (202), and so on. Relationship of the story to the kingdom can only be the product of mature, secondary reflection on the part of those who were, or are, familiar with the teaching of Jesus as a whole. Scott's case would have been stronger if he had argued that Jesus had *intended* the story to be a metaphorical redescription of the kingdom, instead of arguing that the story was *heard* that way. The ghost of Jülicher, of course, forbids any such imputation of semi-mysterious speech to Jesus. But Scott's conclusions imply, nonetheless, that the parable requires a *knowing* audience, well-tutored in twentieth-century social science.

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[44] *History*, 178.

[45] I owe to Dr Tom Wright the point that it is anachronistic to suppose that *any* distinction between 'religious' and 'non-religious' applied in first-century Palestine.

[46] Hedrick (*Parables*, 98f.) also notes this feature in Scott's readings, as well as in Crossan's.

2. The Prodigal Son

In The Prodigal Son, Scott writes, '[t]he metaphor for the kingdom is the father's coming out, both for the younger son and for the elder' (125). Scott's literary analysis has highlighted the parallelism between the two sections of the story. The father 'comes out' to both sons (120). Scott highlights what most traditional readings (including, in his view, Luke's) have played down or even obliterated: the father's affirmation of, and love for, the *elder* son: 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours' (Lk.15:31) (121f.,125).

Scott's reading contains important insights into the ways that the parable may have resonated with its hearers, and draws attention to features that are often overlooked. The problems again revolve around his belief that the parable is a metaphor for the kingdom, a kingdom understood in twentieth-century categories.

Scott believes that Luke has woven the parables of ch.15 into his narrative in such a way that his readers, like Jesus' 'fictional audience' of scribes and Pharisees, will identify the younger son with the 'tax-collectors and sinners' of v.1, and the elder son with the 'Pharisees and scribes' of v.2 (103). He believes that Luke's readers will *themselves* identify 'with the call to rejoice at the repentance of those lost' and 'condemn those who do not so rejoice' (103). He further reads the Lucan setting as implying the 'rejection' of the elder son, and contrasts this with the parable narrative itself, where 'there is no rejection: he inherits all' (103). He notes, however, that 'the parable is a less than perfect example of Lukan soteriology'; the elder son's fate 'does not correspond to the eventual rejection of Judaism envisioned by Lukan ideology'[47] (105). That is, Luke has allowed to stand a parable of Jesus which does not seem (to Scott) to fit with Luke's overall framework, though Luke does 'draw attention away from the nonrejection of the elder son...by repeating the conclusion of the episode of the younger as the conclusion for the episode of the elder son' (105). Within Luke's narrative,

> In the parable's second part, Jesus hopes to move the Pharisees to accept the gospel. But why should they if they indeed are always with the father and have inherited all? Now we see the power of Luke's fiction and likewise its ultimate inability to account for the parable itself. The identification of Pharisees with the elder brother, suggested not by the parable but by the primary Gospel narrative, has miscued the parable. (105)

Having thus sought to unmask the misreading which he believes the parable's Gospel context has bequeathed to us, Scott proceeds, in his detailed reading, to describe

[47] In passing, I do not accept that Luke has such an 'ideology', agreeing with Johnson in his careful assembling of evidence. He writes that 'Luke describes not a total or definitive rejection by all the Jews, but a division in the Jewish people': *Function*, 122.

how Jesus' original hearers would have responded to the parable. His key assertion is that the hearers would *not* have identified with the elder son, as he thinks Luke wants us to believe, but with the younger son.[48] This is because the OT contains a number of stories involving a pair of brothers, and the younger ones 'frequently leave the house of their father to find their wealth; there is something slightly scandalous or off-color in their stories; and they are the favorites' (112)[49]. Knowing that such initially dubious characters in the tradition usually end up on top, an audience is prepared for the same thing to happen in the parable. They are, as it were, rooting for the younger son despite his misdemeanours. Especially significant is the use of this 'mytheme' in Scripture to explain 'why God has continually chosen his people even when they have apparently wandered from his way' (123). Scott gives Mal.1:2f. as an example of a text where '[T]he story of Jacob and Esau is called on to indicate that God loves (chooses) freely' (123). The subversion of this ancient mytheme, the shock to the parable's hearers, comes with the end of the parable, in which the elder is *not* rejected: 'both are chosen' (125).

By this reading of the brothers as metaleptically allusive to a whole tradition, Scott well breaks down the woodenness with which it has been customary to read it in black-and-white terms, the younger son being the blackguard who is wonderfully changed, the elder being the self-righteous prig who excludes himself from the party, and shows that the actual play of expectation and surprise would have been much richer. Nevertheless, his reading is vulnerable.

First, when Scott writes that the fictional audience of scribes and Pharisees 'see themselves' in the role of the elder brother (103), it would be more convincing to write in terms of the *intention* of (the implied) Jesus than the response of (the fictional) audience. The response of the hearers is left open by Luke. It is true that Luke tells us that on one occasion the scribes and the chief priests perceived that Jesus had told a parable against them (20:19), but there is no similar indication here. Luke does not clearly imply that the scribes and Pharisees *drew* the correspondence between themselves and the elder brother, but he *does* surely imply *that Jesus intended* that correspondence. By focussing on the hearers' putative response rather than Jesus' putative intention Scott softens somewhat his own claim that Luke misread and even falsified Jesus, but he cannot really veil it.

Secondly, does the text indicate the nature of the intended readership to the extent that Scott thinks? Does Luke expect his readers to be 'repentant sons' who will see the prodigal as 'one of them'? Might this chapter not equally imply (if we *were* to

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[48] This is stated unambiguously on 104. On 113 Scott is more nuanced: 'On the one hand, the younger son's request for his share of the property, especially the right of disposition, effectively announces his father's death...On the other hand, the mytheme of elder-and-younger-brother stories encourages an audience to expect the younger to be something of a rogue and the favorite'.

[49] Scott also gives an example of this tradition from the *Midrash* on Ps.9:1.

read a strong Lucan purpose into it, which is open to question) that Luke wished to address, and reach out to, equivalents of the scribes and Pharisees in his own context (within or on the edges of the church)? Might we not ascribe to Luke the same openness to such 'scribes and Pharisees' as that which is implied by the open ending of the parable? Why should we think that Luke wished, rather, to reinforce the prejudices of a Christian community whose penitence had already hardened into exclusivism?

The question of the 'identifications' made by Luke's readers or Jesus' hearers is a complex one. Luke may imply a *readership* containing some who would see themselves as the younger son before his about-turn; some who would see themselves as the younger son after his about-turn; some who would see themselves as the elder son still refusing to come in; some who would see themselves as an 'elder son' who *had* earlier refused to come in but had now had a change of heart; some who steadfastly refused to see themselves reflected in any character in any parable, but for whom parable might seem the only means of conversion. Likewise, the '*fictional audience*' of scribes and Pharisees seem *intended* by Jesus to identify with the elder son, with the aim that they should be stung by the portrayal of him and 'join the celebrations'. But perhaps Luke's Jesus implies that after this initial identification their heart *should* be so changed as to 'identify' with the younger too - in the sense not only of sharing in his joy, but also of seeing clearly their *past* selves in the elder son's refusal to rejoice. Or maybe the hope of Luke's Jesus is that his audience will *immediately want* to 'identify' with the younger son, not just because of the two-sons mytheme but because the sense of joy at his return to the father will be sufficient to overcome their reluctance to place themselves in the category of rebels. Maybe the parable was heard by as many 'sinners' as Pharisees: what would *they* have made of it? Wolterstorff makes the point for us: 'by way of a single locutionary act one may say different things to different addressees'[50]. Scott tries to reduce the range of possible original responses, both to Jesus' words and to Luke's text, but he would be better allowing a realistic variety in that range. Luke's context naturally implies a particular application of the parable, but that does not mean that he closes off its applicability to different groups among his readers or Jesus' hearers.

Thirdly, Scott's referral of the parable to the kingdom gives it a *general* conclusion which distances it from the territory (perceived as dangerous?) of what specific identifications Jesus might have intended, and his hearers might have made, between figures in the story and figures in their experience. For Scott it yields a radical, universal message about the breakdown of the distinction between chosen and rejected: 'the kingdom is not something that decides between but something that unifies'. Without denying the universal *implications* readily seen in the story, we note that again Scott passes too swiftly from how Jesus was understood to how we can appropriate his

[50] *Discourse*, 55.

teaching today. How credible is the dichotomy which Scott repeatedly presents between Luke's specificity, with connotations of stereotype and other malign rhetoric, and Jesus' generality, with his wonderfully broad and subversive vision? A historically credible Jesus might surely, sometimes, have stereotyped groups like the Pharisees, warned them in pungent terms. A historically credible Luke might surely, sometimes, have wanted to give his readers a general perspective on the ministry of Jesus and all the possibilities, challenges and new means of self-identification that it opened up.

What if we do propose that Jesus might have had specific groups in mind when he told the story? Are we then just swallowing Luke's line? And are we dismissing the two-sons mytheme as background to the parable? Scott believes that the parable 'radically rejects Israel's self-understanding of itself as the favored, younger son' (125). But the parable focusses not only on the father's attitude to the two sons, but on their behaviour. It is not just self-understanding that is at stake, but how to live. The clear implication is that even the favoured (the younger son, according to the mytheme) must return to the father, and that the unfavoured (the elder) have the opportunity to join in the celebration when that happens. On this view Israel's *self-understanding* is not basically challenged: they are still the 'younger son', but their *behaviour* is mirrored in his rebelliousness. Moreover, the emphasis on behaviour inevitably brings the parable close to the real situation and invites more specific comparisons. Who are those who *are, now,* turning back to the father? Who are those who *need* to? Who are those who have the opportunity to rejoice with the penitent, and are not taking it? Who exactly is Jesus talking about, and getting at?

3. The Shrewd Steward

The remaining parables may be dealt with more briefly; we simply illustrate how Scott's dependence on the social-scientific framework, and reader-response methodology, weakens his readings. He sees the relationship of The Shrewd Steward to the kingdom in 'the sense of justice normally implied in the symbol of the kingdom of God'; the parable 'implements the metaphorical network of the kingdom as an accounting' (265). In keeping with his readings of other parables, he sees it as overthrowing hearers' expectations. The master does not settle matters with the steward. Although the steward as a 'comic' character has won an audience's sympathy, the mention of the master's praise in v.8a *both* gives the storyteller's verdict that the steward was 'unjust' *and* removes any hostility towards the master. This leads to the conclusion:

> [T]he parable's ending deconstructs its own metaphorical structure...The hearer now has no way to navigate in the world; its solid moorings have been lost. Are masters cruel or not? Are victims right in striking back? By a powerful questioning and juxtaposition of images, the parable breaks the bond between power and justice. Instead it equates justice and vulnerability. The hearer in the world of the kingdom must establish

> new coordinates for power, justice and vulnerability. The kingdom is for the vulnerable, for masters and stewards who do not get even. (265f.)

In order to reach his conclusion Scott has to assume that the patron-client world evoked in the parable metaphorically refers to the kingdom. But would the hearers have made such a connection? And is the 'equation' of 'justice and vulnerability' a suspiciously general, and contemporarily-applicable theme to draw from the story, which may dull our ears to the sharp resonances of the individual characters?

4. The Rich Man and Lazarus

In The Rich Man and Lazarus it is the *village setting*, according to Scott, which reflects the kingdom. The kingdom, however, 'replicates the village...in reverse' (158). The parable exposes the rich man's failure by the kingdom's standards. Scott brings out well the importance of the linked imagery of the gate and the gulf:

> In the parable, the kingdom provides a gate to the neighbour; if God must help ("Lazarus"[51]), then the gate disappears. Grace is the gate. The parable subverts the complacency that categorizes reality into rich and poor or any other division. The standard is not moral behavior as individual, isolated acts but the ability to go through the gate, metaphorically, to the other side, solidarity. (159)

We then find one of the clearest instances of Scott's reading of the parables as expressions of universal truth:

> The gate is not just an entrance to the house but the passageway to the other. In any given interpersonal or social relationship there is a gate that discloses the ultimate depths of human existence. Those who miss that gate may, like the rich man, find themselves crying in vain for a drop of cooling water. (159)

Scott's first step towards this conclusion is to remove vv.27-31, concerning the rich man's brothers, as having been 'appended to relate the parable to Jewish disbelief in Jesus' messiahship' (146). We note the element of circularity in the argument: 'Once Abraham pronounces the chasm, the great dividing line, the story has reached its conclusion, for as we shall see in an analysis of the narrative proper, the story is about boundaries and connections' (146). We see what is excluded if the ending is relegated to secondary status: the references to Moses and the prophets, to repentance, and to resurrection. This allows Scott to focus more on social constructs ('boundaries and connections') than on Biblical background.

He then explores the issue of hearers' sympathies during the imagined narration of the story in vv.19-26 by Jesus. The rich man, whose wealth is enormous, probably

[51] Scott has already noted the significance of Lazarus's name, 'he whom God helps' (149).

seemed to them a very distant character socially (149), but would still be expected to 'become the poor man's patron' (151). Natural sympathy for the poor man is perhaps countered by the fact that since he is not actually said even to beg, 'he has broken society's unspoken code', providing no 'occasion for almsgiving' (151). Scott further comments that the condemnation of the rich man 'without evidence of evident wrongdoing' 'would have provoked a Jewish audience' (155). He makes the point that in contrast to other ancient tales that have been adduced as parallels, in this parable 'there is no objective third person for the reader to identify with', someone who puts the question about the relationship of 'God's justice...to the here and now', and that therefore 'the hearer is forced to confront both Lazarus and the rich man as images of the hearer' (158). What he does not make explicit is that therefore the rich man is an *example* to avoid.

The story is described as 'a metaphor for the unnoticed menace that Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God places on ordinary life' (159). That may accurately represent our contemporary understanding; it might conceivably represent the intention of Jesus. But I doubt if the revelation that '[i]n any given interpersonal or social relationship there is a gate that discloses the ultimate depths of human existence' (159) would have flooded unmediated upon a Galilean or Judean peasant or Pharisee.

5. The Judge and the Widow

Scott believes that The Judge and the Widow, rather than being a lesson in prayer as Luke presents it, confounds expectation by ignoring 'the justice associated with the kingdom' (187). The story as a whole 'is an anti-metaphor' (175), and this, it turns out, depends on the discernment of a significant figurative connotation in one of the characters: not the judge, for he, being unjust, 'is neither a metaphor nor a metonymy for God' (186). Instead attention is directed to 'the widow's continual coming', her 'shamelessness':

> The kingdom keeps coming, keeps battering down regardless of honor or justice. It may even come under the guise of shamelessness (lack of honor)...A hearer of the parable discovers the kingdom under the guise not of a just judge but of a pestering widow who exposes her own shamelessness in continually pressing her cause on a dishonorable judge. (187)

But though *we* may be able to relate the widow's persistence to other elements of Jesus' teaching which suggest that the kingdom may be discerned in surprising ways, and though reflective listeners in Jesus' own time may gradually have seen such connections, this is surely a somewhat distant aspect of signification in the parable. The consequence of making the parable, and especially the widow's action, a metaphor for the kingdom is that the subversive dimension of the story is privileged over the exemplary. Again

collector, the tax-collector from God. But if we are to use the social terminology, they are *both insiders.*

Secondly, although the symbolisms of temple and kingdom no doubt fertilized each other at many points, Scott is again misleading when he implies that the parable's hearers would have made this connection. Why should they have thought that Jesus was speaking *here* about the kingdom of God? It almost begins to look like the kind of obscure allegory, 'discovered' by later generations, on which twentieth-century parable scholarship has turned its back. Combined with the previous criticism, this makes the above quotation from 97 look quite bizarre. 'In the parable the holy is outside the kingdom and the unholy is inside the kingdom': but in the parable the two men are *both inside* the temple, and *both* then go home. If the temple *were* somehow transparent upon the kingdom, they would *both* end up *outside* of the kingdom. The acceptance of one and not the other has nothing to do with their physical locations in the story. But 'maps' and 'boundaries', not first-century Judaism, are controlling the understanding of both temple and kingdom here, and forcing them into an unnatural alliance.

Scott's conclusion concerning this parable well illustrates his whole approach:

> There is no lesson to learn! The hearer cannot imitate the behavior of one or the other. The parable's message is simpler. The map has been abandoned...(97)

No 'lesson', but a 'message'. The uneasiness of this distinction betrays the fragility of a strategy which stresses the subversiveness of the parables at the expense of their persuasiveness towards a particular way of living.

7. Summary

The theme of *hyperbole* turns out to be as suitable a summary for Scott's striving for insight as it was in the case of the early interpreters and of Jülicher. He reaches *beyond* the parable texts to grasp meaning, and so his interpretations look hyperbolic beside the texts themselves. Jülicher and Scott both find a universal meaning in the parables: Jülicher ascribes it to Jesus, Scott to Jesus' hearers. The hyperbolic spirit of the Fathers lives on, though not only divine intention, but intention itself, have been left by the wayside.

CONCLUSIONS

Assessing Scott's insights

The Jesus of Scott's reconstructions speaks with a *metaphorical* voice that is *subversive* of the entire world-view of his hearers. How are we to measure the validity of this insight?

Scott's quest for the voice of Jesus is one-sided : he is concerned with *how Jesus was heard*, not with *what he meant.* I have tried to show how it is difficult for Scott to exclude this matter of Jesus' own meaning. This difficulty is due to the fact that he is discussing *tropical* language, which implies an individual's shaping of conventional signals, but also to his *desire* to speak about Jesus himself. Nevertheless, may the echoing voice still be resounding in *Hear then the Parable*?

The claim is that Jesus would have been heard in these parables as subversive of his contemporaries' ideas of the kingdom. I have suggested that the parables as metaphors for the kingdom would have been too obscure to be received as such by Jesus' hearers. Since I continue to find Jülicher's insight into Jesus the clear communicator convincing, I propose that the *picture of Jesus himself* as a speaker of rather obscure metaphors which Scott indirectly, indeed involuntarily draws, is flawed.

But might Jesus have been *clearly* subversive, rather than obscurely so? We have noted the strong influence on Scott of social-scientific categories, supposedly applicable universally, and also the slippery way in which a reconstruction of the original hearers' responses seems to slide into the response of the interpreter today. We need seriously to ask how much the subversive voice he hears in the texts is simply an echo of this twentieth-century voice. Yet Scott, through his adoption of the key of metaphor, does seem to apprehend a feature of the texts which Jülicher, reading them as similes, misses. Both Jülicher and Scott focus on a *general* meaning of the story, rather than a specific one. But Scott (like many others over the last thirty years) highlights in the parables that sharpness of dissonance with contemporary wisdom which prevents these tales being read (as Jülicher tried to) as *illustrations* of generally-accepted truths. This insight, though compromised by Scott's methodological baggage, is not invalidated by it.

The moral voice which echoed through the early centuries, and whose sharpness was toned down by Jülicher's generalities, is now more muted still. But other tones are awakened whose origin may be equally ancient. It is our task now to see whether careful attention to different ancient contexts for understanding the parables as figures can provide us with windows of insight which will allow a simultaneous vision of the communicative and the mysterious, the didactic and the subversive, the specific and the general aspects of the stance of Jesus, earpieces through which the different tones of his voice can sound in harmony.

Part Two

CHAPTER FIVE
Parables and Proclamation

The Parables in the Context of Luke-Acts

> Far from being objective conduits of received tradition, the tradents, authors, and redactors of the New Testament effected a massive construal of the material.... At the heart of the process lay a dialectical move in which the tradents of the developing New Testament were themselves being shaped by the content of the material which they in turn were transmitting, selecting, and forming into a scriptural norm.[1]
>
> Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, 22

> Despite all the careful hedges that we plant around texts, meaning has a way of leaping over, like sparks. Texts are not inert; they burn and throw fragments of flame on their rising heat.
>
> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes*, 33

We have considered the impression interpreters of different periods give of the voice of Jesus, as a question intimately connected with how they have treated the six parables as figures. It is time to ask the same questions concerning Luke. How did he treat the parables, and what impression does he give of the voice of Jesus in them?

The six parables (and many others) appear in Luke's text as 'figures' because they are striking units within the narrative. 'Figures are to discourse what contours, characteristics, and exterior form are to the body'[2]. With respect to these parables we may agree with the statement of Dawsey: 'There is a sense in which the author backed off from what he told and allowed his characters to speak...and so to come alive in the story'[3]. Luke certainly lets Jesus the parabolist, as well as the characters in the parables, come alive for us; the device of interior monologue (used in 15:17ff.; 16:3f.; 18:4f.) is an important tactic, for it enables Luke 'to characterize his hero with specially sharp and penetrating insight, as glimpsed in his masterful storytelling'[4]. My proposal is that the six parables work not only as striking figures but also as *tropes* in the context of Luke-Acts: that each mini-story can be read as substituting for, and thus in turn shedding light on, the larger story.[5]

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[1] Cited in Swartley, *Scripture*, 24.

[2] Ricoeur, *Rule*, 53, alluding to Fontanier, *Figures*, 63.

[3] *Voice*, 3.

[4] Sellew, "Monologue", 253.

[5] As implied by Drury: the parables 'refer to the greater story unfolding around them': "Luke", 434.

To assert that the Lucan parables reflect in miniature the story and message of the Gospel as a whole is nothing new.[6] Indeed I take as foundational the statement of Donahue:

> Jesus proclaimed the parables in the context of the kingdom: God's entry into history with an offer of forgiveness to the 'sick' and the marginal. And the church proclaimed the parables in the context of 'gospel': the narrative of Jesus' life as a testimony to this gift and a sign of its power[7].

What *kind* of trope is operating when the parables are thus read as encapsulating the proclamation of Jesus? I will seek an answer to this question through an examination of some linguistic connections between the parables and the rest of the Gospel and Acts, which I believe will give us important clues.

In keeping with my earlier chapters, I am concerned with the *intention* of Luke in writing his two-part treatise, and the *influences* that were at work upon him. I claim that Luke (not just a narrator or an implied author) *intended* this tropical exchange between the larger story and the smaller ones, and that (in accordance with Lk.1:1-4) he *intended* to portray the historical events concerning Jesus and their meaning. At the same time I do not assert that he intended with equal deliberateness all the linguistic connections that I shall point to. We should not, though, underestimate the power of individual words to trigger memories and associations within a text, a power of which ancient authors were not ignorant.[8] I do not propose a new outline for the central section of the Gospel, or challenge those drawn by others[9], but seek to be attentive to the mutual suggestiveness of words. If, as seems plausible, the Gospel was meant for reading aloud[10], such attentiveness is important. Before our modern era, in which literacy has taken precedence over orality, communication was 'richly sonorous rather than merely "clear" for it was the echo of a cognitive world experienced as if filled with sound and voices and speaking persons'[11]. Further, I take for granted the importance of the historical conditioning of the meaning and associations of words - for example

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[6] I have found particularly useful the studies of Bailey (*Poet*, 79-85), Drury (*Parables*, 112-154), Donahue (*Gospel*, especially 126-193) and Johnson (*Function*, 127-171) on the parables in their Gospel contexts.

[7] *Gospel*, 17.

[8] 'Ancient literary art...rejoices in integration of narrative by very minute historical particulars': Drury, *Parables*, 51, alluding to Alter, *Art*.

[9] See above, 30 and n.122.

[10] See Downing, "Theophilus"; Witherington, *Sage*, 153f.

[11] Ong, *Ramus*, 212, cited in Hawkes, *Metaphor*, 27.

'Samaritan'[12] - but it is the function of words *as Luke has used them* which concerns me here.

There will have been a number of significant *influences* upon Luke, including especially Mark, other oral or written sources, the Septuagint[13] and the contemporary concerns of his church or churches[14]. We should not think that we can descry precisely the boundary-line between language used deliberately and language used in unconscious or semi-conscious echo of other sources. My specific purpose does not allow space for examination of these possible sources. Nor is it relevant to note all occasions where Luke's language is parallelled in the other Gospels or the Septuagint. I am concerned simply with the impression Luke gives, intentionally and perhaps partly unintentionally, of the voice of Jesus in these parables. The question to which I am driving, and which cannot receive a reasonable answer until the end of Chapter Six, is in what sense we can reasonably say that in the midst of all the other influences upon him, Luke was *influenced by Jesus*, preserving echoes of his tone.

My demonstration of how the six 'smaller stories' are tropes will be an act of interpretation in which I seek to allow the smaller and larger stories to interpret each other by examining thematic connections built around key words.[15] I am indebted particularly to the work of Robert C. Tannehill in drawing attention to the importance of resonances between one part of the text and another.[16] My hope is contribute further insight into a rich play of intersignification not only between the parables and Luke-Acts, but among the parables themselves.[17]

STORIES STANDING FOR A STORY
Intratextual significations

I divide this section thematically, dealing first with some parable characters, then with social relationships (wealth and poverty, celebration and friendship), then with moral

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[12] Cf. Dunn, "Historical Text".

[13] See especially Drury, *Tradition*.

[14] On the character of the church which handed on the material special to Luke, see Klein, *Barmherzigkeit*, 122-129, summarized in Lindemann, "Literatur", 260.

[15] I omit treatment of some words and phrases whose place in Lk.-Acts is well dealt with elsewhere. On Moses and the prophets (Lk.16:29,31) cf. Johnson, *Function*, especially 70-126; on repentance (Lk.16:30) cf. Donahue, *Gospel*, 207; on prayer (Lk.18:1,10f.), cf. ibid., 180-193. Some further verbal links *between* the parables are dealt with in Chapter Six (163).

[16] *Unity*, I: see 3f. on interconnections in the overall narrative, 109f. on connections between the parables and the wider story.

[17] On the importance of the parables' intersignifications cf. Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics", 101.

issues (compassion and mercy, righteousness and unrighteousness), and finally with goals or ends (life and death, exaltation and humiliation).

1. Characters

The presence of certain designated persons in the parables and the wider story serves to link the parables firmly to Luke's narrative world, and invites us to let the greater story and the smaller stories interpret each other.

The priest (ἱερεύς, 10:31) passes by the wounded man. But in the larger story, priests are presented in a positive as well as negative light. Though Luke, like the other Evangelists, places great emphasis on the part played by the *high* priests in the downfall of Jesus, and though priests arrested Peter and John (Acts 4:1[18]), a 'crowd' of them were later 'obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7), and the first character to be introduced in the Gospel is a good priest, Zacharias (1:5f.). So although a parable told by Luke's Jesus presents a priest as a heartless character, Luke's overall portrayal of priests means that this is not part of a stereotypical presenation by Luke.

Something similar can be said about the Samaritan (Σαμαρίτης, 10:33). Outside the parable, we find that the one leper out of ten who turned back to give thanks to Jesus for his cure was a Samaritan (17:16), and that Samaritans are among those who receive the gospel (Acts 8:12-25). But there are negative portrayals of Samaritans too: a Samaritan village is unwilling to receive Jesus (Lk.9:52f.), and Samaria is the scene of enthusiastic response to the activity of Simon the magician (Acts 8: 9-11). So for a Samaritan to appear as a hero does not simply fit with a neat Lukan schema, as is implied by Scott when he writes that only from a Gentile perspective (i.e. a perspective of sympathy with Samaritans) can the story be read as an example.[19] Luke has not created a new stereotype, the 'compassionate Samaritan'. Within his greater story a distinctive voice is preserved in the parable.

Widows, such as the one in 18:3 (χήρα), are seen in the overall story as the victims of oppression (Mk.12:40, Lk.20:47), in need of special help from the community of believers (Acts 6:1). Two individual widows are held up as examples: prayerful Anna in Lk.2:36ff., and the generous donor in Lk.21:2f. But another slant is given to Luke's presentation of widows in 4:25f., where Jesus reminds the Nazarenes that Elijah was sent not to one of the many widows of Israel, but to a foreigner (4:25f.). This story adumbrates Jesus' own ministry to the poor, of whom widows were a section, and thus casts the parable of 18:1-8 (in which a widow receives justice) in the light of an announcement of the Gospel. But it also disallows a simple stereotyping of widows by the distinction made between the widows of Israel and the widow of Sidon. No person

[18] A few manuscripts, including B, have 'high priests'.

[19] *Hear*, 200.

from any sector of society can, according to Luke, rest complacent in the knowledge of favour. The widow in the parable must, indeed, persist in her asking.

The Pharisee (Φαρισαῖος) in 18:10,11 is a negative character, but it is wrong of Scott to say that in Luke's hands this has become an 'anti-Pharisaic' story, as if Luke simply used it to harden an already hostile impression of Pharisees.[20] In fact Luke's introduction in 18:9 generalizes the application of the parable so that it applies to a whole class defined morally ('some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others'). Elsewhere hospitality is extended to Jesus by Pharisees (7:36; 11:37; 14:1). This implies the readiness of Jesus to appeal to them[21] and strengthens the sense that certain parables, especially 18:9-14 and 15:11-32, far from condemning the Pharisees in some way, are aimed at winning them over. 7:30 states that God had a purpose for the Pharisees and lawyers, but that they rejected it.

The appearance in a parable of a customs-officer (τελῶνης, 18:10,11,13) connects with the charge made against Jesus that he is a 'friend of customs-officers and sinners' (7:34), the call of one such to follow him (5:27), and his conviviality with a large number of them (5:29). They draw near to hear Jesus (15:1). The justification of the customs-officer in the parable is therefore of a piece with the affirmation his kind receive from Jesus in the Gospel. But Luke does not suggest that they are a class so favoured that repentance is not required of them. In 3:12f. customs-officers come to be baptized by John and ask, and are told, how they should show their repentance. Zacchaeus, a 'chief customs-officer' (ἀρχιτελώνης, 19:2), shows repentance in action. The lack of a specific mention of practical repentance on the part of the customs-officer in the parable is seen by some as significant[22], indicating that it was originally a parable of free grace that has become overlaid with moralism. But in the terse vividness of the story, the posture and prayer of the customs-officer is more than adequate to evoke the sense of his change of heart. Luke should not be made out as presenting, through the mouth of Jesus in the parable, a different message from that which he gives in the larger narrative; it is reasonable, rather, to assume that he expects that larger narrative to interpret the parables, whose vivid realism has no need for pedantic spelling-out of lessons. Further, Zacchaeus well illustrates that the Pharisee/customs-officer contrast in the parable cuts right across the rich/poor contrast which is found in Luke-Acts. Customs-officers *and* Pharisees are shown as failing in their attitude to money (as are *both* brothers in The Prodigal Son).

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[20] *Hear*, 93.

[21] He was willing to go to their 'houses', just as he went to that of the tax-collector Zacchaeus (19:1-10); so in principle, presumably, he could have said in any one of *them* 'salvation has come to this house today' (19:9). On the favourable presentation of Pharisees in Luke, as compared with the other Evangelists, cf. Donahue, *Gospel*, 172, citing also Lk.13:31, Acts 5:34; 23:6, and Ziesler, "Pharisees".

[22] E.g. Scott, *Hear*, 97; Hedrick, *Parables*, 226f.

This survey of the presentation of five parable characters within the overarching story shows that they do not form a part of any simple stereotyping of favoured or unfavoured groups by Luke, just as there is no exclusion of any from the demand of repentance. It is appropriate to deal here with two further designations, which will crystallize this point for us.

Abraham (Ἀβραάμ), an important figure in The Rich Man and Lazarus (16:22f, 25, 29f.), has a special prominence in Luke's writings. Israel is seen as heir to the promises made to Abraham, now being fulfilled (Lk.1:55,73; Acts 3:13,25; 13:26). John the Baptist warned against presumption upon descent from Abraham, and told his hearers that God was well able to raise up new 'children' for the patriarch even from stones (Lk.3:8, cf.Mt.3:9). Abraham, along with the other patriarchs and prophets, are in the kingdom, but Jesus warns his fellow-Israelites of the danger of being excluded themselves (Lk.13:28, cf. Mt.8:11). Jesus calls a woman with a spirit of infirmity, whom he heals, a 'daughter of Abraham' (Lk.13:16), and Zacchaeus a 'son of Abraham' (19:9). This last reference especially, together with the warning in 13:28, suggests that Jesus wishes to remind those with a narrower outlook, such as the Pharisees, that Jews of all classes are children and heirs of Abraham, and that therefore no 'sinner' among them is beyond redemption; but equally that they should all be careful lest they reject the promised gift of the kingdom when it comes to them. In this light Abraham's position in the parable in ch.16 is especially poignant. The rich man calls him 'Father' (vv.24,27,30) and Abraham uses the familiar term τέκνον, 'child' (v.25). The rich man is still presuming upon his ancestry, and Abraham is not repudiating him, but the gulf forbids the child's return to the father's bosom.[23]

The word meaning 'sinner' (ἁμαρτωλῷ, 18:13) is more frequent in Luke than in the other Gospels. 'Sinners' are closely associated with 'customs-officers' (5:30; 7:34; 15:1f.; 19:2,7). But in interpreting the parable in 18:9-14 it is especially interesting to note what other company the customs-officer keeps as a 'sinner'. Simon Peter described himself thus (5:8). A woman, probably a prostitute, is called a 'sinner' in both Luke's narrating and Simon the Pharisee's speech (7:37,39). The angel reminded the women at the empty tomb how Jesus had said that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful people (24:7). So in Luke's context the customs-officer, in confessing that he is a sinner, is not acknowledging membership of a particular narrow class, but putting himself alongside weak and powerful, men and women, murderers and prostitutes, one whose name would be famous through history and many whose names would never be recorded at all.

2. Wealth and Poverty

[23] He is like those who 'rejected the purpose of God for themselves' (Lk.7:30).

Riches, possessions, and poverty form a major theme in the six parables, as they do in Luke-Acts as a whole. Johnson has argued that in Luke, 'possessions' have a symbolic function in addition to their literal signification. 'The poor' represent not only the economically poor but the outcast in general, portrayed as accepting Jesus, the new Prophet; 'the rich' represent not only the well-off but the powerful, portrayed as rejecting Jesus.[24] Johnson rightly stresses, though, that the significance of possessions for Luke is not 'exhausted by their symbolic function': Luke 'takes with great seriousness both the literal problem and opportunity presented by men's actual use of and attitude towards possessions. He grasps the literal power possessions exert in centering and dominating men's lives'[25]. Without denying the symbolic dimension, it is the literal force of wealth-language that I wish to highlight as we consider the connection of the six parables with the wider story as seen in linguistic usages concerned with this theme.

We begin with the designations 'rich' and 'poor'. The unquestionably literal force of these designations in Luke-Acts as a whole gives a powerful *literal* resonance to their occurrence in the parables. Our two parables in ch.16 both involve a 'rich man' (πλούσιος, 16:1,19,21,22). A survey of other uses of the word in Luke is instructive. Jesus pronounces a woe upon the rich in 6:24. A rich man appears in a parable in 12:16, and is portrayed in a similarly unflattering way to the rich man of 16:19-31. In 14:12 a host is told not to invite his rich neighbours who would be able to repay him. In 18:23,25 the difficulty, though not impossibility, of the rich entering the kingdom of God, illustrated by the departure of a rich ruler from Jesus, is stated. The story of Zacchaeus, showing that it *is* possible, follows soon after, in 19:2-8. In 21:1-4 the rich are implicitly accused of hypocrisy, for they give much, yet sacrifice little. A related verb (πλουτεῖν) is used in 1:53, where Mary proclaims that God has 'sent the rich away empty', and 12:21, where a warning is drawn from The Rich Fool for those who are not 'rich towards God'.

The rich man of 16:19-31 obviously fits into the pattern of Luke's negative portrayal of the rich, though Zacchaeus stands as a sign that the rich are not *beyond* repentance: the man in the parable simply leaves it too late. These other texts also shed light on the master in 16:1. His opening designation as 'rich', in the context of the Gospel, makes him a negative character, but his commendation of his steward's action in remitting a part of the debts owed to him shows that he is one of those who awake to a right and just use of wealth.[26] He is like Zacchaeus and the prodigal, but unlike the rich ruler of 18:18-23, the rich fool of 12:16-20 and the rich man of 16:19-31. In the Lucan context, therefore, *his* repentance is an important element of the parable.

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[24] *Function*, 132-140, with summary on 140.

[25] Ibid., 159.

[26] Cf. Tannehill, *Unity*, 131, on the exemplary nature of the steward's action.

Lazarus is poor (πτωχός,16:20; cf. πτωχόν, 16:22). In the Nazareth synagogue Jesus announces that the prophetic word which declared 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor' has been fulfilled (4:18,21), and later he assures John in prison that this preaching is happening (7:22). The first beatitude is pronounced on 'you poor' (6:20). Jesus tells one of his hosts that he should invite the poor to his feasts (14:12-14) and in The Great Banquet the host tells his servants, when the originally invited guests have declined, to go and bring in the poor (14:21). The rich ruler is told to give the proceeds of the sale of his goods to the poor (18:22), and the reformed Zacchaeus gives away half his goods to the poor (19:8). A poor widow's offering is said to be 'more' than the gifts of the rich (21:3). These verses leave us in no doubt that Luke is reporting a concern of Jesus with literal poverty; in whatever other senses 'poor' might be understood, it cannot mean *less* than this in the Gospel. The story of Lazarus's destiny becomes a proclamation of the good news for the poor.

We turn to other words pertaining to the theme of wealth. βίον (15:12,30), meaning 'life' or 'living', has a financial connotation. In The Prodigal Son the narrator relates the dividing of the father's 'living' or 'estate', v.12, and the elder brother complains that the younger has devoured the 'living' with harlots, v.30. In 8:43 (a passage with a number of textual variants, including omission) a woman with a flow of blood is said to have spent all her 'living' on doctors; and in 21:4 a widow is said by Jesus to have put her 'whole living' into the treasury. In 8:14, in Luke's version of the interpretation of The Sower, the word occurs in the phrase 'the cares and riches and pleasures *of life* (τοῦ βίου)'; its occurrence here in Luke, and its absence in the parallels, suggest that here too it has the special connotation of 'material things'. We are thus alerted to the importance of wealth in The Prodigal Son.[27] It is not simply 'sin' in a general sense, but *abuse of the family fortune*, which is depicted in the behaviour of the younger son.[28]

The rich man, like his equivalent in 12:18f., received in life 'good things' (ἀγαθά, 16:25). Mary has sung in 1:53 that God has filled the hungry with 'good things'. The Rich Man and Lazarus thus announces the same truth as the programmatic Magnificat. The hungry *are* to be filled, and the rich sent empty away. The parable suggests that even if it does not happen in this life, it will happen with awesome finality beyond death.

When Abraham tells the rich man 'you received (ἀπέλαβες) your good things' (16:25), he uses a verb with two suggestive parallels in Luke. In 6:34 Jesus asks what good it will be if people lend only to those from whom they hope to 'receive'. This fits with the emphasis on gratuitous generosity which we shall note in The Prodigal Son,

[27] Cf. Johnson, *Function*, 159-161.

[28] Cf. the description of him as 'squandering' his inheritance (διεσκόρπισεν, 15:13), the same word as is used of the steward accused of 'wasting' his master's possessions (16:1). Cf. Donahue, *Gospel*, 167.

and accentuates the rich man's selfishness; he has received much, but given little. In 18:30[29] Jesus promises his hearers that no one who has left property or family for his sake will not '*receive* manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life'. Retrospectively this heightens the rich man's folly; generosity would have led not to deprivation, but rather to blessing.

The prodigal son recalls that his father's hired servants 'have more than enough' (περισσεύονται, 15:17). This verb is found also in 12:15, where Jesus teaches that a person's life does not consist in the 'abundance' of possessions. The two instances are mutually interpretative. The occurrence in The Prodigal Son ensures that we do not see 'abundance' as a bad thing in itself. It is precisely the thought of the plenty enjoyed even by his father's hired servants that motivates the son, and his return to this haven of bounty is seen in the parable as a wise move. It is not *possession* of wealth but its *use* which comes under Jesus' searing critique in Luke. In 21:4 (cf. Mk.12:44) the rich give to the treasury out of their 'abundance', but it is the meanness of their giving when compared to that of the widow which Jesus points up.

The older son says that his brother has 'devoured' the father's living (καταφαγών, 15:30). In Lk.20:47 the disciples are warned to beware of the scribes 'who devour widows' houses'. In his older brother's eyes, the younger had 'devoured' his father's estate. The younger son's behaviour is linked through this parallel with that of the scribes and Pharisees, who are portrayed as greedy and oppressive (cf. Lk.16:14). This is an interesting reversal of identification from that suggested by the *immediate* context of the parable in ch.15, where it is the *older* brother's behaviour that seems to reflect the Pharisees', and reminds us of the folly of tying down figurative reference in an absolute way. It is a pointer to the fact that Jesus is portrayed as making a real appeal to the greedy and oppressive.[30] If *they* are willing to see themselves in the guise of a wayward son, they may also see the possibility of a return.

Luke is especially fond of the word for 'possessions' or 'goods' used in Lk.16:1, ὑπάρχοντα. He recounts Jesus' warning that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (12:21) and his exhortation to the disciples to sell their possessions (12:33). In another parable about stewardship, to be set over all the master's possessions is the reward for faithfulness (12:44); 12:42-44 should be read in the Lucan context not just as an allegory about 'spiritual' responsibility, but as an appeal, on the basis of a situation in the everyday world, for the right use of money in that world.[31]

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[29] B and D have λάβῃ, as in Mk.10:30, instead of ἀπολάβῃ.

[30] *Contra* those who see Luke as crudely anti-Pharisaic, e.g. Scott, *Hear*, 93f., 103ff.

[31] It is interesting that in the putative chiastic parable-source postulated by Blomberg as discernible in Luke's central section, 12:42-44 and 16:1-8 balance each other, and should therefore perhaps interpret each other: "Chiasm", 241f.

This verse, taken as a reflection of a situation that might actually arise in master-steward relationships, sheds light on the boldness of the steward in 16:4-7: there the steward had *already* been given a high degree of responsibility over all his master's goods[32], and was therefore acting completely within his rights in reducing the debts. Renunciation of all one's goods is a condition of discipleship (14:33). Zacchaeus declared that he was giving half his goods to the poor (19:8). The early Christians renounced ownership of goods (Acts 4:32). In the light of these references the charge that the steward was wasting his master's goods sets that parable on a serious moral track, and permits us to expect a lesson about use of possessions as its outcome.

In The Shrewd Steward is found a noun meaning 'debtors' (χρεοφειλετῶν,16:5), and its root verb meaning 'owe' (ὀφείλεις, 16:5,7). A glance at parallel occurrences suggests an interplay in the Gospel between literal, financial debt, and debt as a metaphor for what is owed to God. In 7:41 both words occur: Jesus tells a short parable about a creditor with two debtors, to teach his host a lesson about forgiveness and love. The verb also appears in 11:4 and 17:10. In the former, the Lord's Prayer, we find a particularly significant parallel. The first two clauses of the verse read 'And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone *who is indebted* (ὀφείλοντι) to us'. In the equivalent Matthaean verse (Mt.6:12) a noun related to ὀφείλειν, ὀφείλημα, is used in both clauses: 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors'.[33] I suggest that in Matthew 'debts' is used as a familiar figuration for what we owe to God[34], and that a desire for literary neatness has led to the use of the same word to denote both what we owe to God and what others owe to us. Luke, however, has preserved the distinction between literal indebtedness and the greater sense in which we fall short of God's requirements, for which 'debt' will inevitably be an inadequate metaphor.[35] Set beside the Lord's Prayer, The Shrewd Steward's usage of debt-language, unquestionably literal in the realism of the story, should not be dismissed as insignificant

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[32] Cf. Herzog, *Parables*, 243; Daube, "Nuances", citing papyrus evidence and Mt.25:14ff./Lk.19:12ff.

[33] I am grateful to Dr John Squires of the Uniting Theological College, Sydney, for pointing out to me the curiosity of the difference between Matthew and Luke here. Hill (*Matthew*, 138) writes that ὀφείλημα 'means a literal "debt" in the LXX and NT, except at Mt.6:12'; no doubt, therefore, even in this verse 'what is owed' would have financial as well as spiritual overtones, and this strengthens the case for seeing ὀφείλοντι in Luke as having literal significance, distinguished as it is from the general word for 'sins' (ἁμαρτίας, Lk.11:4a).

[34] Hill notes that this figuration is already present in the Aramaic of the Targums: ibid.

[35] In Lk.13:4 the noun ὀφειλέτης, 'debtor', is used in the more general sense of 'sinner'; nevertheless, the distinction between 'debt' and 'sin' in 11:4 still seems to me significant.

colouring beyond which we must move to get to the 'point'. According to Luke, Jesus seems to have encouraged the literal forgiveness of debts.[36]

3. Celebration and Friendship

The verb meaning 'make merry', εὐφραίνεσθαι, is a key word in The Prodigal Son. The father says 'let us make merry' (15:23) on his son's return, and they begin to do so (v.24). The elder brother complains that his father has never given him a kid that he might 'make merry' with his friends (v.29), and his father seeks to persuade him that it was fitting 'to make merry' when his brother came back (v.32). The rich man of 16:19 also 'makes merry' daily. This occurrence, together with the only other one in the Gospel, 12:19, where the rich fool in Jesus' story determines to tell his soul 'eat, drink, be merry', point to the fact that sometimes it is *not* fitting to make merry. In 12:19 and 16:19, merrymaking is a hallmark of carelessness about the future and, implicitly, callousness towards others. These instances imply a reason why the father in The Prodigal Son had never given his older son the kind of merrymaking opportunity that he laid on for the younger. The older son suggests that he might have wanted to make merry with his *friends*[37], though we may well detect in his reaction the dynamic of jealousy - perhaps he had never thought of the possibility until he saw what his father was doing for his brother. Be that as it may, the reason he now gives is essentially selfish. He has no cause for celebrating, but only thinks of having a good time with his cronies. Like the case of the rich men of 12:19 and 16:19, such would have been an unfitting merrymaking. The father's throwing of a party for the younger son, by contrast, is an act of complete *unselfishness*. It is *fitting* precisely in proportion to the *selfishness* of the lad in squandering the family fortune, for it symbolizes not cliquish self-indulgence but the reaching-out of love in gratuitous forgiveness and generosity. These two kinds of merrymaking are reflected in the two usages of the verb in Acts: 2:26, where Peter cites Ps.16:9 [LXX 15:9] as fulfilled in Jesus ('my heart *was glad*'), and 7:41, where Stephen recalls the Israelites' idolatrous 'merrymaking' before the golden calf.

The prodigal's father says that it was fitting 'to rejoice' (χαρῆναι, 15:32) at his return. This verb, along with the related noun χαρά, is found frequently throughout the Gospels and Acts. We may especially remark on some other instances in Luke. Joy is said to have accompanied the births of John and Jesus (1:14, 2:10), the shepherd's discovery of the lost sheep (15:5), Zacchaeus' welcome of Jesus (19:6), the disciples' meeting with the risen Jesus (24:41) and their return to Jerusalem after his ascension

[36] On the theme of remission of debts and jubilee release in Luke, see Sanders, "Sin". Sanders writes, with reference to Lk.11:4/Mt.6:12, that Luke 're-signifies debts to God as "sins"' (91), but I am suggesting that at least equally significant is the fact that Luke *preserves* debts to others as debts.

[37] See below, 145f.

(24:52). Joy is said to have characterized the crowd's reaction to Jesus (13:17, 19:37), and to mark the heavenly reaction to the penitence of a sinner (15:7,10). Jesus encourages his disciples to rejoice when opposition comes (6:23)[38], not merely when they experience great triumph (10:20), for the true cause of joy is that their names are written in heaven (10:20). They are warned against receiving the word with joy, but then falling away (8:13). The rejoicing in the parable, tinged with incompleteness still by the self-exclusion of the older brother, is thus an echo of the rejoicing that is recorded as marking Jesus' appearance on the scene and its divine meaning for human beings: that rejoicing, too, is incomplete insofar as some remain 'outside', 'lost', or superficial and unpersevering.

φίλος, 'friend', is found frequently in Luke's writings.[39] We may draw out the significance of its occurrence in 15:29, already hinted at in the above discussion of the use of the verb εὐφραίνειν, by contrasting 15:29 with 16:9. The older brother complains that he was never given the wherewithal to make merry with his 'friends'. In 16:9 hearers/readers are encouraged to *make* 'friends' by means of the 'mammon of unrighteousness'. Making friends was the steward's aim. A contrast with the older brother puts the steward's activity in a good light. Unlike the older brother, who simply wanted a party with his existing friends, the steward wanted to *make new* friends. This involved a mutually beneficial transaction. We have already seen how Bonaventure emphasised the steward's putting of friendship above mere material gain.[40] A contrast between the steward and the older brother implies a *comparison* between the steward and the younger: the steward may have had his hands dirtied with money, like the prodigal, but both respond to their point of crisis by taking up a new attitude to money. The younger son comes home prepared to forego the privileges of sonship and work for his living. The steward discovers care for the poor when dismissed from his post.

Other Lukan usages of φίλος are most instructive. Jesus is said to have been accused of being a 'friend of tax-collectors and sinners' (7:34), and to have addressed the crowds as 'friends' (12:4). The steward, and those who follow his example as enjoined in 16:9, are seen in this light as friend-makers *after the pattern of Jesus.*[41] Jesus tells one of his hosts that he should not invite his *friends* when giving a banquet (14:12), lest they invite him in return, but rather to invite the poor, i.e. make new friends. The shepherd of

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[38] Another link between this verse and The Prodigal Son, though not a precise verbal parallel, is noted by Jeremias: persecuted disciples are to 'skip' (σκιρτήσατε, 6:23) and the father's feast included 'dancing' (χορῶν, 15:25): *Parables*, 130n.82.

[39] See the discussion of friendship as a Hellenistic *topos* used in Acts, in Johnson, *Function*, 2ff. On Lk.16:9 in the light of this *topos* see Tannehill, *Unity*, 134.

[40] See above, 61.

[41] In the Lucan context Jesus' words in 16:9 therefore do not sound absurd and ironic, as claimed by Trueblood, *Humour*, 102 (cited in Dawsey, *Voice*, 153) and Porter, "Irony", 149.

15:6 and the woman of 15:9 who call their friends together have *a reason to celebrate.* A lost coin may not be as valuable as a lost son, but the woman's festivities are not the aimless partying of the older brother. Just as merrymaking can be either fitting or selfish, so can friendship.

Friendship's limitations or negative possibilities are seen elsewhere too. In the parable of 11:5-8 friendship is seen as tested severely by a 'friend' who knocks at midnight. In 21:16 'friends' are among those identified as future betrayers of the disciples, and in 23:12 Herod and Pilate become 'friends' through their co-operation in Jesus' downfall. Friendship as a socially-established bond of camaraderie or cliquishness is not enough in Luke's perspective. Friends must be made and kept through generosity.

The steward hopes that his master's debtors will 'receive' him into their homes (δέξωνται,16:4), and the same verb is used in 16:9: 'make friends...so that...they may receive you...' The interest of this verb is its regular use, in the Synoptics and Acts, of the welcome accorded (or not) to Jesus and his disciples. From Luke we may note 9:5, 10:8,10 (what to do when 'received', or not); 9:48 (receiving a child in Jesus' name, and thereby also Jesus and the one who sent him); 9:53 (a Samaritan village not receiving Jesus). The word is also used for receiving the λόγος, in the interpretation of The Sower (8:13; a different word is used in the parallels) and three times in Acts: 8:14, 11:1 and 17:11. The significance of the occurrences in The Shrewd Steward seems to be that the steward's hope to be 'welcomed' into people's homes is a reflection of the disciples' hope to be 'received' as they went out on the mission of Jesus. The steward's action hints at the practical, monetary aspect of the disciples' mission (forgiveness of debts)[42], while their mission in Jesus' name enables us to interpret the parable (the steward's action towards the debtors is not roguish, as frequently assumed, but compassionate and just). Mission is seen as the earnest outworking of true repentance, as the wasting of goods is transformed into their use for the poor. Further, since the steward acted in his own interest, mission is seen also as an activity that will benefit the disciples themselves: as in 18:29f., they may leave much for the sake of the kingdom of God, but they will gain far more. The application in 16:9 simply draws out this lesson present in the parable. The disciples are to make friends by means of the disposal of goods, the forgiveness of debts; the 'tabernacles of the age to come' into which they should aim to be received are not other-worldly dwellings but the welcoming homes of the recipients of the Gospel.[43]

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[42] Loader ("Rogue", 521-30) made the suggestion that Jesus portrays in the parable his own programme of the cancellation of debt (cited in Herzog, *Parables*, 236).

[43] σκηνή, the word for 'tabernacle' used in this verse, is also the word used for the 'booths' which Peter proposed making for Jesus, Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration scene (Lk.9:33 and par.'s). In the background of both this scene and the parable seems to be the Feast of Tabernacles with its theme of celebrating God's act of liberation (Lev.23:39-43; cf. Ringe, "Luke 9:28-36", 90-96, cited in Swartley,

The steward hoped to be received into the debtors' 'houses' (οἶκους, 16:4). The rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's 'house' (16:24), and the customs-officer, not the Pharisee, went to his 'house' justified (18:14). All the Synoptic Evangelists but especially Luke write of 'houses' in a literal or a figurative sense. Home is important as the place of security, the basis for the living of life. Houses are a significant setting for the gospel mission. 'Peace to this house' is to be the greeting of the disciples (10:5). Jesus invited himself into Zacchaeus's house and declared that salvation had come to it (19:5,9). Jesus dines at the house of a Pharisee (14:1). The man who gave the banquet in the parable wanted his house to be filled (14:23).[44] But 'house', like merrymaking and friendship, has two sides in Luke-Acts. Jesus says that Jerusalem's 'house' (the city as household, or the temple specifically?) is forsaken (13:35). He foresees a time when in one house five will be divided, three against two (12:52). There is no mention of division in the house the rich man has left behind (16:27), but by implication this dwelling, like Jerusalem's house, is a house under condemnation. In this light one aspect of The Shrewd Steward's message in the context of Luke is that true security will not be found in the household of unrepentant Israel, but only through the generous and practical sharing of the Gospel. But it is a hopeful parable; the assumption is that there are many friends waiting to be made, many houses waiting to open their doors.

4. Compassion and Mercy

The Samaritan *had compassion* (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, Lk.10:33) on the wounded man. Exactly the same word is used of the father's compassion towards his returning son in Lk.15:20. The lawyer refers to the Samaritan as the one who showed 'mercy' (ἔλεος, Lk.10:37). The rich man in Hades cries 'have mercy' (ἐλέησόν, Lk.16:24). Both these roots for 'compassion' and 'mercy' have resonances in the wider story.

Jesus' own compassion is designated by the same verb as the Samaritan's and the father's, in the story of his encounter with the widow of Nain (Lk.7:13). The related noun σπλάχνα is found at Lk.1:78, in the song of Zacharias, followed by ἐλέους to make a phrase indicating the 'tender mercy' of God (RSV). A string of verses in ch.1 (vv.50,54,58,72,78) proclaim God's 'mercy' to Mary and to Israel. Lepers and a blind man cry to Jesus for mercy in 17:13 and 18:38f. The compassion and mercy which the

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Scripture, 127f.). The idea that 16:9 is holding out an *other-worldly hope* is tenacious in the history of interpretation (recently cf. Nolland, *Luke*, 806,808), but I believe mistaken.

[44] Donahue notes that the younger son in 15:11-32 also hopes for acceptance into a household: *Gospel*, 167.

Samaritan and the father bestowed, and the rich man craved too late, are thus suggestive of the love which God himself has demonstrated in Jesus.[45]

5. Righteousness and Unrighteousness

Luke's introduction to The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer implicitly puts the Pharisee among those who 'trust in themselves that they are righteous' (δίκαιοι, 18:9). The outcome of the story suggests that the Pharisee's trust is misplaced.[46] Luke attests the genuine righteousness of a number of individuals in both the Gospel and Acts: Zacharias and Elisabeth (Lk.1:6), Simeon (Lk.2:25), Joseph of Arimathea (Lk.23:50), Cornelius (Acts 10:22). When Jesus says his mission is not to the righteous (Lk.5:32), and that heaven rejoices more over a penitent sinner than the righteous, who need no repentance (Lk.15:7), it does not mean in the Lucan context that he has no time for the *self*-righteous (many of his appeals appear particularly directed to them, e.g. Lk.15:11-32, 18:9-14), simply that those already righteous do not need his attention in the way that 'sinners' do.[47] His words reflect a belief that there will be a resurrection of the righteous, when they will be rewarded (Lk.14:14). The problem is not with righteousness but with the *pretence* of righteousness. In a passage about the plot against Jesus, Luke describes the spies sent to Jesus as 'pretending to be righteous' (δικαίους) (Lk.20:20). The Pharisee in the parable is presented in a worse light still, for he deceives not only others, but even *himself* that he is righteous. He is contrasted with Jesus, who to the world's eyes is condemned as a criminal, but who is recognized as righteous by a Roman centurion (Lk.23:47) and proclaimed the Righteous One by the early Christians (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14). Luke, then, sets up self-attested righteousness as something readers ought to be suspicious of, while readily naming as righteous those (above all Jesus) for whom the description is appropriate.

This becomes still clearer when we examine the Pharisee's self-description. Each of the terms he uses is found elsewhere in the Gospel, in such a way that his parading of his virtues is revealed as flawed.

First, he thanks God that he is not like others who are 'extortioners' (ἅρπαγες, 18:11). But in the one other place where a similar word is used in Luke (a part of the noun ἁρπαγή, 'extortion', in 11:39), Jesus accuses the Pharisees of precisely this - however upright they seem outwardly.

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[45] Donahue notes a further link: in 7:13, 10:33 and 15:20, 'seeing' precedes compassion: *Gospel*, 132. He also notes that the rich man in 16:19-31 'is blinded by his wealth: he does not see Lazarus': ibid., 176.

[46] Cf. Tannehill, *Unity*, 186.

[47] The *irony* in Jesus' words in Lk.5:32 and 15:7 lies in the fact that those addressed by Jesus who think they are righteous are shown up in the Gospel as unrighteous.

The anatomy of the Pharisee's self-deception becomes a little clearer when we consider his next claim, that he is not 'unrighteous' (ἄδικοι,18:11) like others, a claim which again the Gospel throws into question. For in 16:10 Jesus has said 'he who is unrighteous [RSV 'dishonest'] in a very little is unrighteous also in much', and in 16:11 he encourages faithfulness even in 'the unrighteous mammon'. In 16:14 the Pharisees are described as 'lovers of money'[48], and are said to have scoffed at Jesus' words. Jesus responds in 16:15 that they are those who 'justify themselves before people'. The clear implication is that the Pharisees were brushing aside words which had all too pertinent an application to their own hearts. Maybe the reference to the 'unrighteous mammon' in 16:11 reflects a Pharisaic attitude to money: they thought of it as unclean and overcame this by dealing with it in what they considered upright ways (e.g. tithing) but this had become a substitute for, rather than an aid towards, true faithfulness in its usage. This would fit also with the reference in 16:9 to using the 'mammon of unrighteousness (ἀδικίας)'. That verse would then be an exhortation to put the 'unclean money' to use in more thoroughgoing, radical, creative and practical ways than the Pharisaic customs permitted.[49] The 'steward of unrighteousness' (16:8), someone caught up in monetary affairs in a way that to Pharisaic eyes dirtied his hands[50], is put forward as an example of such *right* use of money.[51] The 'judge of unrighteousness' (18:6) is also a surprising and challenging example: he may indeed have been someone beyond the bounds of Pharisaic piety[52], but he did the right thing. 'Unrighteousness' is seen in Luke as a quality of the *Pharisees*, but *they* project it on to characters like the steward[53] and the judge, and it is

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[48] Moxnes argues that this is a literary formulation of Luke, in which a money-loving attitude is taken as a symbol of being a false teacher: *Economy*, 8, cited in Lindemann, "Literatur", 262. The Lucan emphasis on wealth suggests to me that the Pharisees' attitude to money was as important to him as the question of their teaching, although, as Johnson shows, their attitude to Jesus was more important to him than either: *Function*, 103-161.

[49] Cf. Donahue, *Gospel*, 168: 'the children of light can be as shrewd as the children of this world; they are not to flee engagement with "unrighteous mammon" but to remain faithful in its midst'.

[50] Jeremias reads 'mammon of unrighteousness', with reference to an Aramaic equivalent, as 'money gained by unjust means, tainted money': *Parables*, 46.

[51] The connection between 16:1-9 and the following verses may thus be closer than normally assumed, and Linnemann's verdict that the 'six different applications - all of them attempts to overcome by interpretation the difficulties this parable gave rise to when its original meaning was no longer understood' (*Parables*, 18) is reversible: it is *scholars such as Linnemann* who are attempting to overcome by interpretation the difficulties the parable gave rise to when its practical force, remembered by Luke, the Fathers, mediaevals and Reformers, was forgotten through the spiritualizing of Jülicher and Jeremias.

[52] Cf. Hedrick, *Parables*, 195.

[53] This seems to me the real locus of irony in Lk.16:1-9, *contra* Fletcher ("Riddle", 29) who sees irony in the entire exhortation to imitate the steward, implicit in v.8 and explicit in v.9; he believes that Jesus' point (understood by Luke, as demonstrated in vv.10-13) is that the steward is *not* to be imitated. But Luke, I believe, means the steward to be a genuine example; the phrase τῆς ἀδικίας is used of him because that was how the Pharisees viewed him.

the Pharisees' use of the word which Luke's Jesus adopts when communicating with them.

The third cause for the Pharisee's thanksgiving is that he is not among the adulterers (μοιχοί, 18:11). This claim too is made dubious by the Gospel context. The related verb μοιχεύειν occurs in Lk.16:18, 18:20. The saying in 16:18, in which Jesus declares remarriage after divorce to be adultery, though linked to vv.16f. concerning the law, looks at first sight oddly out of context, coming after sayings about money and before the parable The Rich Man and Lazarus. But in fact it highlights another Pharisaic failing, another self-deception. They considered themselves innocent of adultery, but only because of their acceptance of divorce and remarriage.[54] The reference in 18:20 is instructively contrasting. The rich ruler claims to have kept the commandments mentioned by Jesus, including 'Do not commit adultery'. Jesus does not try to expose this as a sham, but simply tells him what he still lacks (v.22). Again the Gospel artlessly warns us against too easy a stereotyping of different classes. Not all the wealthy and influential are adulterers. But one's genuine obedience to certain commandments must not be allowed to obscure one's failure in other respects.

When the Pharisee turns to his positive acts of piety, he mentions first that he fasts (νηστεύω, 18:12). The only other use of this verb in Luke is at 5:33-35. There the the fasting practised by the disciples of John and of the Pharisees is contrasted with the apparently indulgent lifestyle of Jesus' disciples. Jesus' answer to this - that there is a time to feast, and a time to fast - illuminates the prayer of the Pharisee in the parable, for it shows up fasting as a means not an end, an activity that may or may not be appropriate depending on circumstances. The observance of the practice by no means guarantees that one is 'righteous'. The impression Luke gives is not that fasting is wrong - godly Anna worshipped with fastings (νηστείαις, 2:37), and sometimes the early church felt it fitting to fast (Acts 13:2f., 14:23) - but that it is not *necessarily* right, and that one's practice of it can lead to self-delusion.

The other practice for which the Pharisee is thankful is his tithing (ἀποδεκατῶ,18:12). We may link this with the only other occurrence of the word in the Gospel at 11:42, where Jesus says that the Pharisees do tithe, and rightly, but neglect justice and the love of God. Again the true condition of the Pharisee in the parable appears more sharply. His active piety is not wrong, but conceals massive sins of omission.[55]

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[54] A further link between 16:18 and its context is noted by Donahue: divorce was an economic issue, 'and often the woman suffered deprivation': *Gospel*, 174. The polemic against Pharisaic greed is thus closely connected with the implication of their lax attitude to marriage.

[55] Cf. Herzog, *Parables*, 191: 'The Pharisee's prayer...masks the fact that he and the toll-collector belong to parallel streams of tributary exaction' (referring to the Pharisees' part in the economic oppressiveness of the Temple, just as the customs-officer was caught up in the oppressiveness of Rome).

Correspondingly, the parable shows not that '[t]he justice of God accepts the unjust and the ungodly and judges the virtuous'[56], or that 'justification depends on the mercy of God to the penitent rather than upon works which might be thought to earn God's favour'[57] but that God vindicates the *righteous*. The *shock* of the parable is that the *righteous* man (as attested by his penitence) turns out to be the customs-officer and not the Pharisee.

The theme of righteousness and unrighteousness in our parables and in Luke-Acts can be well epitomized in the use of the verb 'justify', 'declare to be right'. The customs-officer went home justified (δεδικαιωμένος, 18:14) - by God, though implicitly also by Jesus the teller of the small story and Luke the teller of the larger one. Why? 7:29 gives the clue. There, customs-officers were among those who 'justified God' as they received Jesus' affirmation of John's ministry; that affirmation, as it were, deepened their assurance that God was righteous (7:29). They were therefore 'wisdom's children', for 'wisdom [here nearly a periphrasis for God?] is *justified* [declared righteous] by all her children' (7:35). Though John and Jesus had different modes of ministry (vv.32ff.), the customs-officers and others recognized God's wisdom at work in each, and declared that wisdom to be a *righteous* wisdom. The reason for the justification of the customs-officer in the story, the nature of his righteousness, is thus suggested: he justified God, not himself, and therefore God justified him. For Luke he is also an exemplary forerunner of those who accept the good news after Pentecost - the message proclaimed by Paul that in Jesus *everyone* may be justified, despite much that would stand in the way of such justification under the law of Moses (Acts 13:38f.). In contrast, a lawyer wishes to justify *himself* (10:29) and Pharisees justify *themselves* (16:15) - but Jesus, the Gospel narrator and the reader all know the heart, as does God (16:15). We may also remark on the widow's cry 'vindicate me' (ἐκδίκησον με, 18:3), and the 'vindication' (ἐκδίκησιν, 18:7) which, Jesus says, God will bring about for his elect. There is no suggestion that she is asking to be vindicated *despite guilt*; her hope is based on the fact that she is in the right.

6. Life and Death

The lawyer asks how he may inherit eternal 'life' (ζωήν, 10:25); Abraham tells the rich man that in his 'lifetime' (ζωῇ,16:25) he has received many good things. There is a bridge between these two usages in the warning of Lk.12:15 that a person's 'life' does not consist in the abundance of possessions. (We may compare, as Ellis does[58], the usage of

[56] Donahue, *Gospel*, 190.

[57] Marshall, *Luke*, 681.

[58] *Luke*, 178.

the equivalent verb in 4:4, where Jesus tells the devil that 'man shall not *live* by bread alone'). 'Life', then, is not an *other*worldly reality in Luke, but nor ought life to be seen in purely material terms. The breadth of usage is reflected in Acts. In 17:25 God is said to have given 'life' to *all* people, but elsewhere 'life' is seen as the possession of the believer. The gospel is described as 'the words of this life' (5:20), God is said to have granted the Gentiles 'repentance to life' (11:18), Paul is reported as telling the Jews of Pisidian Antioch that they were judging themselves 'unworthy of eternal life' (13:46), whereas those 'ordained to eternal life' believed (13:48). Jesus is called 'the author of life' (3:15). Luke presents the object of the lawyer's quest as the object of the Christians' discovery. It is noteworthy also in these cases in Acts that what is sometimes described as 'eternal life' is sometimes simply designated 'life'. Something similar is seen in Jesus' dialogue with the lawyer: the lawyer asks about 'eternal life', but Jesus in Lk.10:28 says simply 'do this and you will *live*'. The idea of the 'life of the age to come' is here blended with the idea of 'life' itself as the consequence of obedience (Dt.30:15-20, etc.).

We note also the verb meaning 'inherit' used by the lawyer in his question to Jesus (κληρονομήσω,10:25). At 18:18 the same question ('what must I do to inherit eternal life'?) is repeated by a rich ruler.[59] The significance of this parallel is seen in the answer Jesus gives to the ruler: the severely practical measure of selling up, giving to the poor and following Jesus is the one thing he lacks if he would have eternal life (18:22). This suggests that the lawyer, too, is being shown in Jesus' story that definite practical action of a certain kind is the way to life - *contra* those commentators who see The Good Samaritan as a means of exposing human failure and therefore teaching (in a roundabout way, it has to be said) justification by faith.[60] With Donahue I find in Jesus' acceptance of the lawyer's question 'Luke's...positive estimation of Judaism and its institutions and his understanding that the law was to bring the fulness of life'[61].

When the servant in The Prodigal Son reports that the father has received his younger son back 'safe and sound' (15:27), he uses the participle ὑγαίνοντα. This is also found, referring to those who do not need a doctor, in the proverbial saying of Lk.5:31, and referring to the slave healed by Jesus in Lk.7:10. The related adjective ὑγιής is used in Acts 4:10 of the cripple healed at the Beautiful Gate. The use of ὑγαίνοντα to describe the younger son in the parable after his return thus stresses

[59] On the link between the two passages cf. Tannehill, *Unity*, 171.

[60] E.g. Linnemann, *Parables*, 56: 'As soon as we let ourselves be called out of the shell we have made of the world into the unprotected life of real encounter, we shall unquestionably make the discovery that we are exposed to the possibility of failing in life, in fact are always doing so already. Then the question about our life makes us realize that we can no longer ourselves provide the answer to it. It is no longer this or that fault for which we need forgiveness; our whole life needs justification.' A similar stance is taken by Bailey: *Peasant Eyes*, 55. The tradition of finding justification by faith in the parables goes back, predictably, to Luther: Stein, *Parables*, 49.

[61] *Gospel*, 129.

physical as well as spiritual well-being, and links this fictional character with those who are the objects of Jesus' attention in his ministry (those who need to be made whole, Lk.5:31) and of actual healing carried out by Jesus and in his name (Lk.7:10, Acts 4:10).

The younger son declares that he is 'perishing' with hunger (ἀπόλλυμαι, 15:17), and the father later rejoices that though his son was 'lost' (ἀπολωλώς, 15:24,32), he is now found. Apart from two occurrences in the closely-related parable The Lost Sheep (Lk.15:4,6), significant parallel usages of this verb are found in 13:3,5, where Jesus draws a warning lesson from disasters ('unless you repent you will all likewise perish'), and 19:10, concluding the story of Zacchaeus ('the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost'). The prodigal's fate (or near-fate) is thus connected with that of the impenitent of Jesus' day, which injects an extra urgency into the parable: it is seen as not merely a hypothetical or extreme case, but the representation of the kind of situation that was occurring at the period, a situation to which people must respond. The fictional young man also mirrors the wealthy real-life tax collector, who was 'lost' but then 'found'.

7. Humiliation and Exaltation

The parables and the larger narrative show intertwining patterns of humiliation and exaltation. These are evident in the movement of the stories as wholes, but may be focussed in the study of a few words.

The saying about exalting oneself and humbling oneself (ὑψῶν... ταπεινωθήσεται... ταπεινῶν... ὑψωθήσεται), which concludes Luke's rendering of The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer (18:14), also appears in Lk.14:11. The instruction of Jesus about choosing the lowest place at feasts in 14:7-10, and the parable in 18:9-14a, may thus be mutually interpretative. An ultimate sanction is added to the warning to social climbers (they may not only be asked to take a lower seat by their hosts, but fail to be justified by God). The concern of the Pharisee in the parable with social standing and public appearance is heightened. Moreover, it is not only Pharisees who dangerously *exalt* themselves: the whole city of Capernaum is charged with this, and warned of its consequent downfall (Lk.10:15). As justifying *oneself* is not the way to be justified, so exalting *oneself* is not the way to be exalted. The Gospel proclamation is of *God's* exaltation of the humble and meek (Lk.1:52)[62]; conversely, what is high is brought low (Lk.3:5). God 'exalted' Israel in Egypt (Acts 13:17), but the supreme example of one exalted by God is Jesus himself (Acts 2:33; 5:31).

At 18:9 Luke uses the word ἐξουθενοῦντας, 'those who despise or treat with contempt', to characterize those to whom The Pharisee and The Customs-Officer is directed. It also occurs in Lk.23:11 to describe the contempt of Herod and his soldiers for Jesus, and in Acts 4:11 for the 'rejection' of the stone by the builders, in Peter's

[62] Cf. Johnson, *Function*, 137f.

application of Ps.118:22 to Jesus[63]. Thus the word in 18:9, taken in the whole Lucan context, implies the identification of Jesus with the like of the customs-officer, as one despised by the like of the Pharisee. The customs-officer is like Jesus in his being held in contempt *and* in his being raised up.

The connection between the parables and the humiliation of Jesus' followers, as well as that of Jesus himself, is suggested by a parallel between The Good Samaritan and the story of Paul and Silas in Philippi. The robbers on the Jerusalem-Jericho road left their victim half-dead, 'having inflicted blows' on him (πληγὰς ἐπιθέντες, 10:30). Exactly the same expression is found in Acts 16:23 of the treatment meted out to Paul and Silas by the magistrates. Their wounds (πληγὰς, 16:33) are tended by the gaoler. Just as an outsider, a Samaritan, was the means of the victim's healing in the parable, so a pagan Roman ministers to the missionaries' injuries; as a Samaritan was revealed in the parable as one who might truly keep the law, so the Roman gaoler is revealed in his actions towards God's servants as one who has truly responded to the word of the Lord (cf. Acts 16:32).

The prodigal son was humiliated when he 'joined himself' (ἐκολλήθη, 15:15) to one of the citizens of the far country where he had gone. Of interest is the appearance of the same word in Acts 10:28, where Peter reminds those gathered in Cornelius's house that a Jew could not lawfully 'associate' with one of another nation. Through resonance with this verse the defilement of the prodigal by contact with a foreigner is further emphasised. Jesus exalts this young man, not the stay-at-home elder brother, in the narrative. Luke 'exalts' Peter in a similar way in the narrative of Acts, for table-fellowship with Gentiles becomes accepted (15:7-31)[64]. In this theme, indeed, all six parables are connected. In The Good Samaritan, the Priest and Levite seem reluctant to help the victim for fear of defilement[65], but the 'unclean' outsider ends up as the hero. In The Prodigal Son, the action expected of the older brother is that he should humble himself to accept his defiled brother home again. The steward's hands are tainted with unrighteous mammon, but he is exemplary, as even his master recognizes. The rich man kept his distance from Lazarus, but defilement by contact with him would have been better than Hades. The judge, like the steward, is 'unrighteous' and unclean by Pharisaic estimation, but he executes justice; the widow is not abashed, on account of his impiety or her gender[66], about regular contact with him, and both characters are 'exalted' by Luke (18:1: the disciples are to follow the widow's example; 18:6: 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says'). The Pharisee keeps his distance from the customs-officer,

[63] The LXX of Ps.118[117]:22 uses a different word for 'rejected', ἀπεδοκίμασαν.

[64] On further connections between Lk.15 and Acts 15 see Wright, *Jesus*, 128.

[65] Cf. Bailey, *Peasant Eyes*, 44ff.

[66] On Jewish evidence for women's appearance in court being a sign of immodesty, cf. ibid., 134.

implicitly because of his impurity[67], but it is the 'unclean' person, not the 'clean', who is exalted.

8. Summary

I present this survey of linguistic connections between six smaller stories and the larger story of Luke-Acts as suggestive, not exhaustive. Over-detailed word counts, statistical analyses and synoptic comparisons endanger our fragile sense of the *life* of a text, our attunement to its resonances in their echoing multivalence and ambiguity. Nevertheless, three points concerning the voice of Jesus in these parables as Luke presents them emerge with reasonable clarity.

First, Luke's Jesus speaks with a concern for the same world with which Luke himself is concerned, the material world of life and death. Characters from Luke's larger story appear in Jesus' smaller ones. The same issues of riches and poverty, celebration and friendship, life and death, appear in the story *about* Jesus and his followers as appear in the stories told *by* Jesus.

Second, the voice of Luke's Jesus is a *suggestive* voice that does not deal in codified language and one-to-one correspondences, but in connotation and allusion. The linguistic links to which I have drawn attention suggest interplays of meaning too subtle and varied to be brought under the rubric of 'allegory'. We have noted that the presentation of different parable characters in the context of the whole work is not controlled by some Lucan stereotype. We have also seen that a character in a parable can have resonances with *different* individuals or groups who may be contrasted elsewhere with each other. From one angle the prodigal is aligned with the customs-officer who humbled himself. From another angle he is aligned with the Pharisees who loved and misused money. Yet Pharisee and customs-officer are *contrasted* in another parable. Tolbert's view that 'the gospel contexts, far from providing one normative view of the parables, as often as not confuse and obscure any attempt to understand them'[68] is misguided. Luke in fact offers the very type of suggestive and polyvalent parable that she seems to value[69].

Third, Luke's Jesus proclaims the gracious invitation and commands of the gospel. This proclamation as heard in the six parables *and* in the whole story can be well summarized with reference to a programmatic passage, the song of Mary in Lk.1:46-55, and especially the section vv.51-53.[70] This gospel announcement is of God acting in

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[67] Ibid., 148.

[68] *Perspectives*, 61: she has adduced all six parables that I am discussing among her examples.

[69] [illegible], 62-66.

[70] Cf. Johnson's discussion of this passage with reference to the theme of rich and poor in Luke: *Function*, 136ff.

strength - scattering the proud, dethroning the mighty, dismissing the rich, exalting the humble, filling the hungry: but the Gospel story emphasises also the requirement of obedient co-operation with what God is doing, of righteous living as the way to life - epitomized in Mary's trusting response to God in Lk.1:38. The parables dramatize these great reversals and enjoin this obedient response.[71] In The Good Samaritan a half-dead victim is uplifted, a half-caste is made a hero, and the comfortable, establishment figures pass on their way, heedless of the needy and humiliated by the narrative. The hearer is left in no doubt whom to imitate. In The Prodigal Son hunger is fed and humility rewarded, while self-satisfaction cannot see anything to be gained from the outpouring of generosity: never could there be a better illustration of the rich being sent empty away than the picture of the older brother - nor a better demonstration that if the rich do depart empty, they have only themselves to blame. In The Shrewd Steward the poor are cared for, a rich master discovers generosity and a worldly-wise employee is held up as an example. In The Rich Man and Lazarus a wealthy man who has sent the poor away empty throughout his life is ultimately sent away empty himself.[72] In The Judge and the Widow the poor woman gets redress and a man of the world is held up as a model to the pious. Whatever their motivations, *both* characters are exemplary of a response to the good news. The widow in her trusting persistence, the judge in his eventual right action, both breathe the atmosphere of a world invaded by the Gospel in which there is nothing to lose and everything to gain by trust and obedience. In The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer the great reversal is at its starkest: the story dethrones the powerful, the one who thinks he is righteous, and lifts up the meek, the one who knows he has not been. Moreover, the exemplary characters[73], as we have seen, are linked to Jesus himself, the embodiment of the gospel within Luke's story - the compassionate one, the righteous one, the friend of the poor and sinners - and to the disciples who are taught to go his way.

[71] *Contra* Gerhardsson who writes that 'if the evangelists regard the narrative meshalim as the primary and dominating element in Jesus' preaching...then we must notice that they present him as a legalistic wisdom teacher rather than as one who proclaims a gracious and generous gospel': "Frames", 329. Luke surely means us to interpret Jesus' voice in the parables in the light of other parts of his Gospel; it is precisely passages like 1:46-55 which ensure that the picture he gives of Jesus' teaching in the parables is *not* simply that of 'a legalistic wisdom teacher'.

[72] Cf. Johnson, *Function*, 142.

[73] Donahue notes the importance of teaching by *example* in Hellenistic education, and that Luke's parables reflect this: *Gospel*, 206f.

METONYMIES OF THE GOSPEL
The good news in miniature

How may we characterize the tropical operation of the parables on the lips of the Jesus of Luke-Acts? I suggest that the best designation is *metonymies of the gospel.* This is not to exclude the operation of the other tropes. Certainly there is *irony*, in the surprising nature of the characters shown to be exemplary: righteousness is commended in the Gospel, yet its exemplars include a 'steward of unrighteousness' and a 'judge of unrighteousness'.[74] There is also *metalepsis*, for the echoing interconnections that I have pointed to certainly have the character of 'far-fetching'[75], though not (I hope) as being imposed *upon* the texts entirely by the far-fetchedness of the interpreter's imagination.

But three other tropes might be misleading if applied as keys to the relationship between the stories and the story. *Metaphor* implies a transference between two different spheres. The parables have frequently been taken as teaching about 'spiritual' or other-worldly matters, and if read thus they contrast with Luke's interest in historical events. But we have seen that Luke's overall story *and* these examples in parable of how the good news works in practice are *both* concerned alike with what our post-Enlightenment era divides into the 'material' and the 'spiritual'.[76] In the larger story, for instance, use of possessions is symbolic as well as literal, but in the smaller stories, it is literal as well as symbolic. Nor does Luke present the parables as *hyperboles* or *synecdoches* of the Gospel story; that would imply either that they presented occurrences which intensified or exaggerated the dynamics of the gospel itself, or that they presented only a *part* of the gospel out of which the readers were meant to imagine the whole, neither of which appears to be the case.

I propose, then, that it is most clarificatory to see these vivid tableaux within Luke-Acts as *metonymies*, representing aspects of what God was doing, according to the proclamation of Jesus. 'By Metonymy...one can simultaneously distinguish between two phenomena and reduce one to the status of a manifestation of the other'[77]. By focussing on one aspect of the operation of the gospel, each parable manifests the gospel itself. Thus Luke in a sense *reduces* the parables, telling them as reflections of his overall gospel narrative, but in another sense he *enlarges* them, for he opens them on to a wider interpretative context than would have been available to Jesus' hearers. Put another way, a preacher could use any one of them to expound the whole gospel without doing violence to the text; *but she would have to expound them within the Lucan context.*

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[74] Cf. above, 149.

[75] An earlier English name for metalepsis: cf. Bloom, *Map*, 143.

[76] Cf. Donahue, *Gospel*, 193.

[77] White, *Metahistory*, 35.

They are not offered by Luke as isolated stories without explanation, with the expectation either that they will be transparent in themselves or that a group 'in the know' will be able to decode them. They are offered within a larger narrative within which they make sense, not as allegories to be deciphered but as suggestive, tropical stories. As with all the tropes, a mutual enlightenment takes place between the substituting and substituted entities.[78] The parables illuminate the workings of the gospel in specific situations[79], while the gospel story illuminates the working of the parable stories; further, the gospel *causes* the parables, while the parables bring the gospel to expression[80]. The parables are about the real world invaded by the gospel, and conversely the real world of Jesus' ministry, depicted in the Gospels, is parabolic.[81]

[78] See above, 26.

[79] In a wider sense, too, the 'microcosm' of the stories may be seen as reflecting the 'macrocosm' of Luke's view of history: Drury, "Luke", 426f.

[80] Metonymic substitution can be seen in terms of the interplay of cause and effect: cf. Fletcher, *Allegory*, 86.

[81] Cf. Donahue, *Gospel*, 134-138, 159.

CHAPTER SIX
Parables and Persuasion
The Parables in the Ministry of Jesus

> [T]he tone of his message had a sharper edge than a witty mocking of convention. The kind of passion one hears in Jesus' social critique suggests more of the social prophet...Jesus was not simply concerned with the individual's freedom from the prison of convention, but with a comprehensive vision of life that embraced the social order.
> Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 116

> It is not reasonable historical explanation to say that Jesus believed in a whole list of non-controversial and pleasant abstractions (love, mercy, and grace) and that his opponents denied them.
> E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 339

My aim in this chapter is to imagine how the six parables might have functioned as figures of speech on the lips of Jesus. The chapter thus focusses on the 'far side' of the text, the last one having focussed on the 'near side'[1]; we have considered how the parables reflect the gospel expressed in Luke's narrative, and turn now to enquire how they reflect the world of Jesus' day. The context within which I shall set his figurative language in this chapter is not a *text*, but the living context of Jesus' ministry as we may imaginatively reconstruct it. I am exploring whether attention to tropes as used in a putative oral context may give us *insight* into his *intention*. At the same time, our only access to these parables is through Luke. I shall continue to pay close attention to the *language* in which Luke recounts them, as well as to their structure, not through any naïve assumption that he exactly translates and represents the language of Jesus, but because it constitutes the best clue we may be able to find to the voice of Jesus in these parables.

Anyone approaching any aspect of the historical study of Jesus today has a wealth of very recent scholarly material on which to draw, and an array of 'portraits of Jesus' from which to choose.[2] For my purposes it is impossible to enter into detailed interaction with different possibilities concerning the overall aims of Jesus and the shape of his career. It will be sufficient to set the discussion in the context of two affirmations about Jesus' work which command wide assent.

First, Jesus was not divorced from the *social realities* of Palestinian life; his ministry was rooted in them. It is helpful to bear in mind Borg's analysis of these realities as dominated by peasantry, purity and patriarchy.[3] I shall draw upon various studies of the social background of individual parables as the chapter proceeds[4]; I aim to clarify

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[1] See Drury, *Parables*, 2.

[2] See the catalogue of 'portraits' in Borg, *Jesus*, 19-34.

[3] Ibid., 101-112.

[4] I depend for this purpose centrally on Jeremias, *Parables*; Bailey, *Poet* and *Peasant Eyes*; Scott, *Hear*; Hedrick, *Parables*.

how the six parables work against this background, rather than advance new details or theories about the background itself.

Secondly, I assume that Jesus was deeply immersed in the *thought-world* of contemporary Judaism.[5] One aspect of this thought-world, which Sanders, especially, has highlighted, was 'covenantal nomism'.[6] Contrary to earlier views of Pharisaism, or of Judaism in general, as seeking to 'earn salvation' (views which seem to derive from reading Paul through Lutheran eyes), it is now widely held that the intense focus of some groups of Jews on observance of the law was intended not as a means of *winning* God's approval, but as a public form of *expression* of belonging to God's covenant people, and the way to true life within that people. Such an expression was especially important in first-century Palestine, where many Jews felt their very identity to be under threat from the domination of Rome. The idea of obedience to the law as an *expression* of belonging to the covenant, as the means of life, and as a response to God's grace, is fully consonant with the Old Testament[7], and it seems thoroughly plausible as the underlying basis for the thought of the Pharisees and of the Jews in general in the time of Jesus. (Paul's polemic can thus be read as directed not so much against the impossibility of 'earning' salvation by one's works [that impossibility is simply taken for granted], but against the over-strict *self-demarcation* of Judaism by means of the law, and her dependence on possession of the law, in such a way as to exclude herself from divine critque and to exclude Gentiles from potential access to the covenant privileges.[8]) Again, I shall seek to clarify Jesus' stance in the parables in relation to this framework of 'covenantal nomism'.[9]

I shall consider first the working of the parables as narratives. Here I tend to the side of those who place the parables in the category of rhetoric[10], against those who prefer to see them as poetry[11], though I am mindful of the wise observation of John W. Sider that 'only purely technical terms can avoid connotation, and only a very peculiar poetic language even tries to escape denotation'[12], and that therefore we should not attempt to draw the boundary too precisely. I shall then be in a position to construe

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[5] I thus align myself broadly with Sanders, *Jesus*; Wright, *Jesus*.

[6] See Sanders, *Jesus*, 335ff.

[7] See, most clearly perhaps, Dt.7:6-16. Cf. Dunn, *Justice*, 14-16.

[8] I am aware that this is an all-too-simplified summary of the debate about Paul. Cf. Wright, "Messiah", 85-92; Dunn, *Justice*, 27f.

[9] Some contemporary parable interpreters still seem to adopt an older view of Pharisaic legalism as the background to the parables: see Baumann, "Paraboles"; Bindemann, "Ungerechte"; Harnisch, "Beiträge", 366.

[10] E.g. Boucher and Corbin, "Parable", 581: the parables are 'heterotelic', with a purpose beyond themselves, not 'autotelic', designed like works of art to be appreciated for their own sake.

[11] E.g. Harnisch, "Possible", adducing the poetic character of *fable* with which the genre parable is connected (47).

[12] "Analogy", 7.

them as figures of speech, in the echoing world of Jesus' oral exchanges, and draw conclusions about the way that the *voice* of Jesus, in this imaginary reconstruction, may be characterized.

MORAL APPEALS
The rhetoric of the narratives

1. The Object of the Appeal

Each of the six parables exhibits, either within itself or in its surrounding context, a concern that one or more people (in the story, or among Jesus' hearers) take action that is *both* right, *and* in their own best interests.[13] Moreover, each are quite specific about the sort of action that needs to be taken.

In responding to a teacher of the law on the subject of who his neighbour is, Jesus is helping him with the answer to his prior question: what must he do to inherit the life of the age to come (10:25)? The Samaritan is given as his example. In the context of that first question, it is clear that the passage invokes *self-interest* (the incentive of inheriting eternal life is mooted by the lawyer, and implicitly accepted as a valid incentive by Jesus), yet the action implicitly enjoined involves *self-giving*.

The Prodigal Son also involves an encouragement to obedience with the incentive of self-interest. It concludes with the scene of the father's invitation to the elder son to come and join the party. It will be *good* for him to do so; out in the field he is the picture of miserable self-exclusion. Yet it is clear that to come in would be an act of obedient love. The dynamics of self-preservation are seen in the younger son's story too. 'His stomach induced his return'[14]; truly he came to 'life' (15:24,32). Scott is right to remark that in 'coming to himself' the lad 'begins to overcome his self-destructive pattern of behaviour'[15], but is wrong to drive a wedge between this self-interested motivation and the idea of repentance. Whether or not Jeremias was right to say that 'to come to oneself' (15:17) represents an Aramaic idiom *meaning* 'to repent'[16], the thrust of the younger son's story is surely that *he did the right thing, even while he was seeking his own safety.*[17]

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[13] Cf. Drury on the link between Lk.15:11-32 and 16:1-8: both concern 'the same doctrine of repentance in the interests of self-preservation': *Tradition*, 78. Daube discusses 11:5-8, 16:1-8 and 18:1-6 as linked by the presence of 'behaviour externally meritorious, yet flowing from a contaminated source' ("Nuances", 2329ff.), and draws attention to the debate in Judaism about the motivation for actions.

[14] Scott, *Hear*, 116.

[15] Ibid., 115f.

[16] "Gleichnis", 229, cited in ibid., 115f.

[17] I therefore dissent from Linnemann, who de-emphasises the fact that the son did what was *right* in returning, reading the story rather as a challenge to those who 'had put in question the unconditional nature of God's forgiveness by the demands which they attached to repentance': *Parables*, 152.

The shrewd steward is plainly concerned for his own future, yet he is not condemned for his actions, but rather praised (16:8). Indeed, what he did is seen as exemplary (v.9)[18]. The master's praise in v.8a is in *his* interests too, for in sanctioning the remission of debts he will win popularity[19] and a new sense of indebtedness in his clients[20].

The Rich Man and Lazarus is a tale of fearful warning. The rich man ends up in torment not because he was too self-interested, but *because he was not self-interested enough to find his way to bliss - which would have been the way of sharing his bounty.* It might be objected that lack of generosity is nowhere mentioned as the reason for his punishment.[21] But the stark picture of contrast drawn in 16:19f. is enough in itself. The storyteller does not describe the rich man's wickedness, but he shows us the ugly reality of injustice.[22] The rich man wants his brothers to be warned, and urged to repent (16:27f.,30); but the great incentive he wishes to be held out to them is not highminded remorse for sin against God, or compassion for the poor, but this sole overwhelming motive, uttered from the agonies of Hades: 'lest they also come into this place of torment' (16:28).

In 18:1-8, the judge only wants to stop being nagged[23]; yet this motivation impels him to a just decision.[24] The widow sought redress for her *own* cause, and obtained it;

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[18] Drury catches the self-regarding mood that characterizes the steward, but does not give weight to the benefit that accrued to the debtors as a result of his action. He writes that the parable 'commends shrewdness and cunning, favourite qualities of the earthy or realistic wisdom tradition of the Old Testament as opposed to the apocalyptic. Moral principles take a back seat. The art of coping is supreme': *Parables*, 148.

[19] Bailey, *Poet*, 101f.

[20] Herzog, *Parables*, 257.

[21] Scott believes that the rich man's condemnation 'without evidence of evident wrongdoing' would have provoked a Jewish audience: *Hear*, 155.

[22] 'Wealth [in a peasant society] was not the result of being an ambitious hard-working individual striving to advance in the world, but the product of being part of an oppressive social class that extracted its wealth from peasants': Borg, *Jesus*, 104.

[23] Or perhaps threatened, if we take ὑπωπιαζή με in v.5 literally as 'gives me a black eye': e.g. Hedrick, *Parables*, 200.

[24] I do not believe that Hedrick's emphasis on the meaning of ἐκδίκησον (v.3) as *avenge* rather than simply *execute justice for* (ibid., 198f.) undermines the argument that the widow's cause was just. As he himself states, the normal procedure would have been for trial and judgement to precede punishment; so the story should not be taken to imply that in satisfying the widow's thirst for revenge (if we are to read ἐκδίκησον so strongly) the judge had not also done the *just* thing. As to the widow, it is entirely credible that she should be spoken of as crying out for vengeance without making a nice distinction between 'give me a fair hearing' and 'avenge me'. Hedrick remarks that 'had the widow wanted to be declared "right" or "just" in court she should have used δικαιοῦν (as Luke does at 10:29 and 16:15)': ibid. This betrays pedantry on Hedrick's part. Why *should* a poor widow, even (or especially?) in a deliberately crafted story, have used the 'right' Greek (or even Aramaic!) word? Hedrick wants to read the story as 'burlesque' (ibid., 203) and this involves making the widow's demeaning of herself, her upsetting 'the stereotype of vulnerability that led to her protected status in Israel and Judaism' (ibid., 201), more important than the basic fact of her cry for justice. If she wanted rather *more* than justice, she would be only human; but there is no suggestion that she wanted *less*.

simultaneously she sought *justice*. The same dynamic is reflected in the 'application': the elect will gain that for which they cry - vindication for themselves (vv.7f.), but the crying is not mere selfishness: it is precisely the faith for which the son of man will be looking (v.8).

Our final parable, 18:9-14, holds out two possible ends: being justified, or not justified. The *incentive* is offered. Behave in the right way and you will be justified. Do not be over-confident in your acts of piety; humbly confess your sin; and it will be *well with you.*

The appeal of the six parables can be seen more lucidly still if we highlight some of the words and concepts linking them together in the description of motivations or goals. The lawyer desired *life* (ζωήν, 10:25), and it was *life* to which The Prodigal Son had returned (ἀνέζησεν, 15:23; ἔζησεν, 15:32). It was the life *of the age to come* (αἰώνιον, 10:25) which the lawyer sought, and it is the tabernacles *of the age to come* (αἰωνίους, 16:9) which disciples are exhorted to seek. The prodigal yearned to be filled (ἐπεθύμει χορτασθῆναι, 15:16); so did Lazarus (ἐπιθυμῶν χορτασθῆναι, 16:21).[25] The widow cries *vindicate me* (ἐκδίκησον με, 18:3), and it is *vindication* (ἐκδίκησιν, 18:7) which God will bring about for his elect; the customs-officer is *justified* (δεδικαιωμένος, 18:14).

This view of these parables as rhetorically persuasive speech, holding out incentives for morally right behaviour, contrasts with contemporary perceptions[26] which exalt the provocative in Jesus' parables at the expense of the argumentative. It appears that these parables have a powerful didactic appeal to the individual's strongest instincts for security, in the standard Jewish framework of expectation (the hope for life, the age to come, justification), as they enjoin right living to be expressed in specific, practical ways: love, forgiveness, use of money, the bestowal of and search for justice, penitent humility.

2. The Medium of the Appeal

I propose that we should see this rhetorical appeal as being mediated through *realistic* narrative. Jülicher wrote of the parables' 'natural colouring'[27], and he has had weighty supporters.[28] Dodd went so far as to claim that the parables could be used as source-

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[25] Cf. Donahue, *Gospel*, 170.

[26] E.g. Scott, *Hear*; Hedrick, *Parables*. Cf. Baumann, "Paraboles", 199: '[L]a parabole n'enseigne rien, elle crée une mise en mouvement de son auditeur vers des comportements et des compréhensions qui échappent à la pesanteur religieuse. En ce sens, elle n'a pas de message; elle est une procédure de langage dont la principale caractéristique est d'être éphémère'. Harnisch believes that Jesus was seeking to blow apart the old theological frameworks altogether, through a *reductio ad absurdum* of the opposition between sinners and righteous: "Beiträge", 366, countering Rau, *Reden*.

[27] 'Naturfarbe': *Gleichnisreden* I, 66.

[28] Notably Dodd, *Parables*; Jeremias, *Parables*; recently Herzog, *Parables*. Cf. Quick, *Realism*.

material for first-century Palestinian life: they give, he writes, 'probably a more complete picture of petit-bourgeois and peasant life than we possess for any other province of the Roman Empire except Egypt, where papyri come to our aid'[29]. This is an interesting instance of an aesthetic judgement: Dodd did not wait to bring forward evidence from other sources of practices reflected in the parables before he made the claim that they were realistic. There has, however, been a steady stream of scholars who point to features in the parables that disrupt otherwise realistic tales.[30] From the latter perspective the parables can be seen as embodying a dissonance between a real world and a possible world, and thus as 'metaphorical'[31].

The main element of the parables that seems to disrupt realism is that of *surprise*.[32] Would a father behave like that? Would a master praise such a steward? A convincing answer to this is provided by Hedrick's discussion of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*[33]. Hedrick makes the point that 'realism does not require that the actions of characters be predictable'[34]: that is, realism must not be equated with the presentation of stock behaviour and stereotyped figures. *Surprise* and realism in fact go together. If the *real* world is strange, so will be *realistic* portrayal of it.[35] The sense in which our six parables are indeed realistic, and the significance of the element of surprise they contain, will become clearer as we turn now to consider how they work as figures of speech.

SYNECDOCHES FOR THE WORLD

The narratives as figures of speech

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[29] *Parables*, 21.

[30] Cf. e.g. Linnemann *Parables*, 10, on elements of 'stage-production' (though on 29 she makes the balancing point that the reflective *reader* sometimes sees as obstacles to 'realism' elements which do not so strike the *listener* caught up in the flow of the story); Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics", 99f., 114-118, on 'extravagance'; Harnisch, "Ironie", 426f.; Drury, *Parables*; Heininger, *Metaphorik*, 15f. A good summary of accepted wisdom on both realism and strangeness in the parables is found in Donahue, *Gospel*, 13-17.

[31] Harnisch, "Possible".

[32] Another apparently non-realistic element is that of mythology, especially the *post-mortem* scene in 16:23-31. But here features of the after-life (Abraham's bosom as the place of bliss, punishment as fire) seem simply to have been taken over from conventional beliefs; the story still realistically reflects the *thought-world* of Jesus and his hearers.

[33] *Parables*, 40-43.

[34] Ibid., 42.

[35] Drury has dealt well with the human realism of the parables peculiar to Luke. '[T]he L parables are more human than anything in Matthew in the sense that the characters are far more subtly drawn. Instead of Matthew's black and white contrasts we get the *chiaroscuro* of ambivalent human beings: doing good out of self-interest, calculating profit and loss, finding the way home out of despair, doing no more than their duty or acknowledging their shortcomings...Luke's people have understandable motives, they are something more interesting than sons of light or sons of darkness, and they have the limited but critical freedom of decision which we all exercise': *Parables*, 115f.

It is now a commonplace of parable scholarship to say that the parables are invitations to new insight into the world.[36] This is in fact true of all stories, perhaps realistic ones especially. When a storyteller selects, orders and portrays events, characters, and behaviour, the resulting narrative is more than simply a mirror of the real world. It has become *suggestive*, provocative perhaps. I propose that we can describe this as the *figurative* essence of realistic narrative fiction.[37] Stories have a suggestive penumbra which belies Hedrick's insistence that the parables need not point beyond themselves[38]. One direction in which they surely point is towards their author. A story is a figure, a signal of individuality. Funk put it like this: 'Jesus belongs to the parable, not as a figure in it, but as author of the situation depicted by the parable'[39]; with reference to The Good Samaritan, he wrote that Jesus is in the parable's 'penumbral field...the parable is permission on the part of Jesus to follow him, to launch out into a future that he announces as God's own'[40]. Baumann, who denies a metaphorical character to the parables, admits this figurative essence (though not in so many words) when he writes that 'the surprising effect of the parables cannot but excite the desire to profile the identity of their author'[41]. Figures as figures launch the quest for the 'voice'. But 'figure' remains a broad category. What can be said about the parables under the narrower rubric of 'trope'?

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[36] Funk wrote that parable 'as a paradigm of reality unfolds the "logic" of the everyday world in such a way that it is...brought to the surface, and..shattered', that it '"cracks" the shroud of everydayness lying over mundane reality in order to grant a radically new vision of mundane reality': *Language*, 194f. Borg writes that the longer narrative parables 'invite the hearer to enter and experience the world of the story and then to see something in the light of that story': *Jesus*, 148. Both aphorisms and parables 'address the imagination, which is both that "place" within us where our images live (images of reality, of ourselves, and of life itself) as well as our capacity to imagine things being different. Their appeal is not to the will, not "Do this," but rather, "See it this way." They invite a different way of seeing': ibid. Cf. the slightly different emphasis of Baumann on the parables as 'language of change': the parabolic drama 'n'est pas un faire-valoir...d'une autre réalité ou d'une vérité générale; elle est la structure qui va permettre au déstinataire d'entrer dans la communication': "Paraboles", 201.

[37] Ricoeur ("Biblical Hermeneutics", 75-106) explores the connection between narrative and *metaphor*, but not that between narrative and *figure*.

[38] 'They mean what they say - and maybe more': *Parables*, 35. Hedrick's literary precursors seem to be nineteenth-century realists; they believed that 'the specific, being its own end, should represent nothing beyond itself': Hayes, "Symbol", 275.

[39] *Language*, 196f. Funk is discussing The Great Banquet (Lk.14:15-24) but clearly has his eye on the parables in general. Cf. Jüngel, *Paulus*, 87: 'Die Gleichnisse führen uns...nicht nur in das Zentrum der Verkündigung Jesu, sondern verweisen zugleich auf die Person des Verkündigers, auf das Geheimnis Jesu selbst'.

[40] Language, 216.

[41] '[L]'effet surprenant des paraboles ne peut que susciter la volonté de profiler l'identité de leur auteur': "Paraboles", 201.

When consideration is given to the operation of tropes in a living oral context, it will readily be seen that speech is full of them[42], on both surface and deep-structural levels; and that it is fallacious to assume that tropical words, phrases or longer units of discourse can be categorized under the heading of one trope alone. The popularity of designating Jesus' stories 'metaphors' displays this fondness for over-neat categorization. The narrative parables *are* metaphors when considered as utterances of Jesus, if they are fictitious stories[43]: they say 'this happened', but do not *mean* that it *happened*; they mean 'imagine that this happened'.[44] To say that these stories are metaphorical in this sense need not involve us in saying what the metaphor precisely *means*, tying it down to a referent such as 'the kingdom of God'.[45] Their metaphoricity simply consists in their fictionality. But I suggest now that further insight into rhetorical power of the six parables can be won when we read them as *synecdoches*.[46]

Quintilian 'equate[d] synecdoche with *ellipsis*, which occurs "when something is assumed which has not actually been expressed"'.[47] Noting the connection of such an ellipsis with narrative fiction, Fletcher comments that the 'inferential process' such a figure requires 'is a natural response to any fiction that is elliptical or enigmatic in any way'.[48] A diagram may help us to grasp the working of synecdoche in the parables.

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[42] Cf. 135 above.

[43] Cf. Hedrick, *Parables*, 5. The judgement concerning historicality or fictionality is one of the central *aesthetic* decisions that must be made about any narrative text. A recent writer who believes that the stories Jesus told must have been true is Parker: he writes that that there is a 'natural weight of authenticity' behind actual examples from life, and that '[t]he idea of asking people to model their behaviour on fictitious characters would have struck the evangelists (to say nothing of Jesus) as absurd in the same way that we would find someone who modelled himself or herself on Batman': *Painfully Clear*, 41. Parker misses the distinction between realism and historicality. It is surely sufficient for their exemplary power that the stories be credibly located in the world of Jesus' hearers, not that actual incidents be recounted, though we should not rule out the latter possibility altogether. Even if Jesus' stories are not fictions, they would not cease thereby to be figures, for their *significance* would extend far beyond historical report.

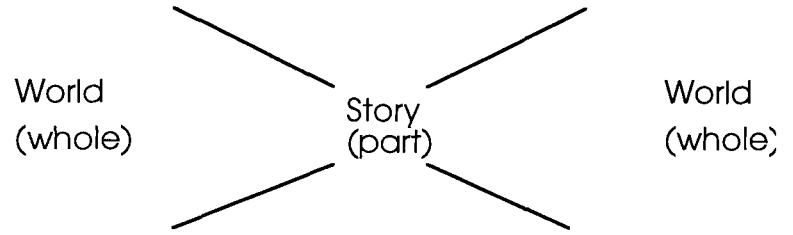
[44] It is thus fallacious to exclude metaphor from the operation of the parables, as Baumann does, on the grounds that they do not speak of another reality concurrent with the everyday world: "Paraboles", 187.

[45] Scholars have recently stressed the polyvalence of the notion 'kingdom of God' - it would have meant different things to different speakers and hearers. See Perrin, *Jesus*, 20-29, an important influence on Scott: *Hear*, 56-61. But even to postulate a *polyvalent* 'kingdom of God' as the referent of parables *where it is not mentioned* is too restrictive. The parables can be connected to the idea of the kingdom without in some way 'meaning' the kingdom.

[46] Herzog recognizes that if the parables are called 'realistic', that implies the necessity of reconstructing 'the social whole of which the fleeting glimpses are a part': *Parables*, 48. He means the necessity *for the modern historian*. I am exploring here the synecdochic process as it would have taken place *between Jesus and his hearers*.

[47] Fletcher, *Allegory*, 85, citing Quintilian, *Institutes*, VIII.6.21.

[48] *Allegory*, 86. It is perhaps noteworthy that Fletcher sees this process as 'the essence of interpretive *allegory*' (my emphasis).



At its simplest synecdoche is seen in a single word, as in the example given in Chapter One, the Hebraism 'many' for 'all', reflected in Mk.10:45[49]. The working of the trope is in two stages. The speaker - probably as a matter of pure linguistic convention, of which he may not even be conscious - substitutes 'many' for 'all'; and the hearer must then make the substitution in reverse. The speaker turns the whole into the part, and the hearer turns the part into the whole again. The entire exchange in its original context probably took place on a completely instinctive, near-instantaneous, unreflective level. My thesis is that the telling of a realistic story encompasses essentially the same process. The storyteller recounts a lifelike occurrence. And as he does so, his *claim* is that *this is not a mere isolated incident among a myriad of unconnected and meaningless events, but somehow focusses or represents 'how things are' in a wider sphere.*[50] The hearer knows that this is the claim (cf. Lk.20:19). Therefore her natural response is to try to discern *of what whole this is a representative part.* However, in the case of an original *story*, that process of discernment is not so instinctive or instantaneous as it usually is with a single *word* used in a synecdochic way. Here Dodd was precisely right to say that the parable leaves the hearer's mind 'in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought', even though he was not precise enough in simply designating the parable as a 'metaphor or simile'.[51] The element of doubt revolves around the dimensions of 'world' in the diagram above. How universally representative does the speaker wish the story to be?

I suggest that in these six stories Jesus was saying to his hearers 'This is how the world is' - not merely presenting a new possibility, as Harnisch thinks.[52] Their realism lies not only in their location in familiar surroundings but in their portrayal of the *kind* of hopeful event that Jesus saw as happening around him. Jesus wished his hearers to see

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[49] See above, 25.

[50] 'In the relationship of *connection* [implied by synecdoche], two objects "form an ensemble, a physical or metaphysical whole, the existence or idea of one being included in the existence or idea of the other"': Ricoeur, *Rule*, 56, citing Fontanier, *Figures*, 87. The 'existence or idea' of the occurrences depicted in the parables includes and implies the 'existence or idea' of such occurrences in the wider sphere of the world itself.

[51] *Parables*, 16.

[52] "Possible".

that the world on a wider scale was a world in which such things take place, and to adapt their lives to this reality.

I turn therefore to examine in more detail the two stages of synecdoche in our parables: the focussing of the 'world' (on the left hand side of the diagram) in the story (the centre) and the 'retranslation' of that part into a whole again (the right hand side).[53]

1. Whole to Part: world into story

The value of reading these parables as synecdoches from the lips of Jesus is clarified with reference to the relative unsuitability of the other tropes for describing the relationship between story and world. We may focus especially on the parables' *characters* as the agents of the stories' momentum, and note what is implied by different tropical designations for the construal of the characters.[54]

The popular designation of the parables as *metaphors*, though yielding real insight, can be misleading. Metaphor implies a transference between two spheres, involving a contrast that is *originally* more or less striking. We think, for instance, of the humour, insult and insight engendered by the bringing-together of human and animal worlds (Herod is a fox; a sailor is an old sea-dog). But we do not find such bringing-together of different spheres in the parables I am considering. Their difference from animal- or plant-fables, in which the bestial or vegetable world in thinly-veiled fashion and sometimes humorously reflects the human, has often been noted.[55] But as stories *reflecting* the world, they do not present a different and contrasting *sphere* from the sphere about which they intend to discourse. They present, rather, a narrowly focussed, in some way representative, part of the *same* sphere. The characters are not *disguises*, mere masked *personae* concealing a true self beneath.

Metonymy, which, we concluded, best expressed the function of the parables in the context of Luke-Acts, does not seem appropriate as a means of characterizing their

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[53] The parables called by Jülicher 'example-stories' are described as 'extended synecdoches' by Boucher: *Mysterious Parable*, 22. Blomberg thinks that Sider's use of the word 'example' to designate these stories fits them better than 'extended synecdoche', 'since exemplary characters in the parables...are not really parts of some larger whole but examples of a particular category of people': *Interpreting*, 46, citing Sider, "Parabole", 460. The appropriateness of any such term is measured by its explanatory and illuminating power; it is not a question of establishing whether the language 'is' this or that rhetorical manoeuvre in an absolute, deliberate or determinative sense. '[O]ur texts are meshalim, not designed on the basis of clear-cut rules from ancient rhetoric or modern literary criticism': Gerhardsson, "Frames", 333. I simply aim to show, *contra* Blomberg, how synecdoche can unlock some doors.

† [54] Heininger sees in the parables Luke's use of a kind of rhetorical 'Figurenlehre', the classical device of *sermocinatio* or character portrayal. I wish to try to avoid the weakness in Bailey (*Poet*), noted by Crossan ("Review of Bailey", 607), of focussing on the characters to the detriment of attention to the action.

[55] See e.g. Jeremias, *Theology*, 29f., also citing Goulder, "Characteristics", 51.

oral operation in Jesus' ministry. This trope is associated with *symbol*[56] and with *static* representation. The realism and dynamism of our parables preclude their working by means of symbols, whether established ones ('the crown' for 'the monarchy', for instance) or newly-invented ones which the hearer/reader is expected to decipher for herself.[57] Put another way, the characters in the parables are not *personifications*, as would be implied if we read them as metonymies in which the person expressing the characteristic substitutes for the characteristic itself, the 'real' subject of the discourse.[58] The Samaritan does not simply personify 'goodness', nor the father 'love', nor the steward 'shrewdness', nor the widow 'persistence', nor the tax-collector 'humility'. The development which takes place in some characters - the prodigal son, the steward and his master, the judge - is not consistent with static symbolism.

Metalepsis, as the trope of trope, involves a peculiar indirection. At first sight, therefore, it seems unsuitable as a way of describing these stories. The parables are not complicated, as Jülicher never tired of saying. They present scenes from life. Their characters do not seem intended to send hearers off on a long search, a kind of treasure-hunt for meaning, implying a mind which has made up the game in the first place. They are not *ciphers*, taking time and skill to *decipher*. Though Jülicher was overstating the case when he wrote that the meaning of a parable just 'falls into our lap'[59], there is a directness about the characters in these six parables which invites us to see them as 'real' human beings.

Nevertheless, this should be qualified by the widespread recognition that Jesus does employ figures (father, master, steward etc.) that have familiar resonances in Israelite tradition as images for God, for Israel or the human race, and which thus metaleptically evoke older texts and traditions.[60] However, we should not draw from this the conclusion that the parables can then simply be decoded according to accepted identifications. We should remember, rather, that metalepsis involves not simply the repetition but the *troping* of tropes, their reshaping for new purposes. By the incorporation of these old tropes into newly-fashioned, realistic *stories* Jesus makes them

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[56] See Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden* I, 56 n.1. Jülicher rejected the presence of symbol in the parables outright, for he took their *comparative* nature to exclude metonymy. The example he gives is of an ox as a symbol of strength. There is no question of a *comparison* between 'ox' and 'strength': 'strength appears manifestly in the ox, is one of its attributes' ('die Kraft erscheint im Stier sinnenfällig, ist eines seiner Attribute'). The nature of *symbols* is a complex one upon which I cannot enter; in Coleridge, symbol is associated with synecdoche: Fletcher, *Allegory*, 17.

[57] For some qualification of this point see on metalepsis below, and on God in the parables (191 ff.).

[58] Caird discusses metonymy and personification in *Language*, 136f. Note especially his insistence that 'to personify is to treat as a person that which is not a person' (137), which means that it would be very misleading to call the figures in the parables 'personifications'. Cf. Fletcher, *Allegory*, 86.

[59] See above, 97.

[60] See recent reassertions of this in Heininger, *Metaphorik*, 26-30 (though Heininger refers to such resonances as metaphorical rather than metaleptic), and Wright, *Jesus*, 175.

into something different. They become a part of the parables' synecdochic reflection of the world. Put another way, they continue to echo with the old resonances, but they are put to a new kind of use, no longer simply connoting by means of a one-to-one correspondence, but playing their part in a narrative that evokes a world. In this sense, therefore, Jesus' synecdoches are also metalepses. I shall return to some implications of this in the final section of this chapter.[61]

Scholars have become increasingly attuned to the possible presence of *irony* in texts, but it seems misguided to find this trope in these parables' reflection of the world. Irony 'ensues from the juxtaposition or clash of incommensurate levels of powerful realities'[62]. The Shrewd Steward is a parable where irony has been suggested as an interpretative tool.[63] But though I have argued that a certain irony is present in the parable when read in the context of Luke-Acts[64], it is not ironic in the context of Jesus' world. Irony in that context would entail *a sense that such things would never happen.* I have the sense, rather, that such things might well have happened: accusations of sharp practice, hasty dismissal, resourceful reaction. Even the master's praise, though surprising, is not ironic, for it bespeaks a kind of credible connivance, a relaxation of stringency which makes him a rounded figure, not a sheer two-dimensional hard man. The hearers, it seems, are to think of the occurrence as a *real possibility*; of such things as actually happening. The same is true of The Judge and the Widow, thought to be ironic by Harnisch[65]. If the characters in these parables, or the others, were ironic representations, they would be *fancies*, either wistful ('if only there were such people!') or complacent ('thank God such people don't exist!'). But in fact, what you see is how things are. The working of irony depends on a mutual knowingness between speaker

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[61] See below, 194ff.

[62] Bloom, *Poetics,* 410.

[63] See Fletcher, "Riddle"; Porter, "Steward". I find Porter's reading most unconvincing. It will not do simply to use irony as a 'key' in such a way as to say that Jesus actually meant the opposite of whatever we find surprising or uncomfortable (in this case, 16:8f.). Porter says that in v.8b 'the sons of this age are unfavourably contrasted with the sons destined for God's kingdom of light' (147f.), but in fact the sons of light are told to *learn* from the sons of this age. Porter's attempts to blacken the steward through parallels with the prodigal of 15:11-32 and the rich man of 16:19-31 are also misguided. The prodigal and steward have surely *not* been 'consistently bad in their judgment' (150 - though the rich man was); at the centre of the stories are thoroughly wise moves. On v.9 Porter writes: 'The irony is found on two planes: dishonest wealth cannot be expected to produce earthly friendship, as the prodigal realizes, but more than that, this means of ingratiation cannot be used to buy eternal friends, as the rich man so painfully learns' (149). I would respond that (a) there is no indication in 16:1-8 that the steward's plan to make friends is not going to be successful, (b) it is a strained parallel to see the prodigal as trying to use 'dishonest wealth' to gain 'earthly friendship', and (c) since the rich man has made no effort to use his money to buy eternal friends, he cannot have learned that it is a useless tactic. Porter writes that steward, prodigal and rich man 'all hope to use the things of this world to secure a place for themselves in the kingdom' (151), but none of them seem in the slightest degree concerned about anything that could be called 'the kingdom', and are certainly not trying to use their worldly goods to get there.

[64] See above, 157; and also below, 205, on the parables' ironic relationship to Scripture.

[65] "Ironie", 430-436.

and hearer. I find here no *wistful* awareness here that notwithstanding their stories, such actions as the Samaritan's compassion, the son's return, the father's forgiveness, the judge's relenting, could not possibly happen. Equally, there is no *complacent* awareness that such dire contrasts as those between the rich man and Lazarus or between the Pharisee and the tax-collector, the situations of social oppression and corruption which can readily be imagined as standing behind all the parables[66], are inconceivable. Even where the designation of the character is surprising (the compassionate man is a *Samaritan*, the unjustified man is a *Pharisee*), that designation is not given ironically. The point is that a Samaritan, or a Pharisee, *might in fact be like that.*

It is necessary to spend a little longer on *hyperbole*. The question concerns the significance of the much-noted element of 'extravagance'[67] in the parables. Does this element make the characters and their actions unbelievable? I do not think so. The Samaritan, for instance, is not too ideal a figure to be realistic, an exaggerated 'parody' or 'caricature' of the late Jewish ideal of righteousness, as Hedrick suggests[68]. The father's welcome of his wayward son is striking, but not incredible. The landowner's praise of his cunning steward is surprising, but not hyperbolic. The rich man's lifestyle is indeed lavish, but that only makes him one of a comparatively small class, not beyond the bounds of any class at all. The widow's persistence and judge's response are remarkable, but believable. The Pharisee and the customs-officer are credible figures. Would a judgement on this question of characters' credibility have to wait until historical evidence turned up actual examples of first-century people from these various classes behaving in such ways? Is this not a case where a twentieth-century response *can* cross two millenia and affirm that here is human nature in its roundedness, ambiguity, and capability of change?

This exclusion of hyperbole means that we cannot see these characters as either *ideals* or *grotesques*. The positive characters are *models*, but the drawing of them is too restrained to make them into implicitly unattainable ones. This point needs to be developed in some detail, since recent parable scholarship has tended to 'discover' ideal, parodic and grotesque elements.[69] The characters in our parable-stories are not so much described, as *discovered* in their musings[70] and behaviour.[71] These parables approximate

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[66] Cf. Herzog, *Parables.*

[67] Cf. n.30 above; and Borsch, *Parables.*

[68] *Parables*, 115f. The possibility of genuine righteousness, on the part of Gentiles as well as Jews, had long been envisaged in Jewish tradition: see for instance the stories of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 7) and the Ninevites' repentance at the preaching of Jonah (Jon.3).

[69] Especially Hedrick; cf. Baumann, who writes of 'grotesquerie' in connection with Lk.16:1-8 ("Paraboles", 198).

[70] Cf. Sellew, "Monologue". Sellew is sceptical that these characters can be taken as exemplary (242); Heininger, however, comments on the power of the monologues to motivate the hearer to follow the character's example: *Metaphorik*, 224f.

closely to Auerbach's famous description of the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22: we find here

> the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized...thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal...remains mysterious and 'fraught with background'.[72]

We may note how this mode dominates in each of the parables.

Nowhere in the text is the Samaritan given so much as the adjective 'good', but the hearer learns in detail about what he *did*: moved with compassion, he attended to the wounded man's immediate and longer-term needs, in a sequence of actions captured in nine main verbs or participles in 10:34f. In Luke's setting the lawyer is then left to make his own judgement on this behaviour and its contrast with that of the passers-by. (The Priest and Levite are also shown graphically, in action - or rather inaction). To be *told* that a character is righteous or exemplary can give him or her an air of ideal unattainability. To be *shown* what such a description might mean in practice, to have character earthed in *behaviour*, can be more persuasive, communicating a sense that imitation might be possible.[73]

Something similar applies to the father in The Prodigal Son. After the single word describing his deep feeling, ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ('he was moved with compassion', 15:20[74] - and note that this is a feeling-word as much as a moral marker), the father's character is then made clear, not abstractly via descriptive statement but concretely in a sequence of actions (including commands), recounted in vv.20 and 22. Actions speak louder than words. The narrative does not *tell* us that the father was overwhelmingly forgiving. It *shows* us that he was, through recounting his feeling and his deeds. This, again, militates against a reading of the parable as hyperbolic. It is *understated*, not overstated. We discover the characters of the two brothers, also, in what they say and do, not in anything the narrator tells us in a general or abstracted way about them.

I noted above[75] that this is also how we should read The Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man's iniquity is not *directly mentioned*, but the appalling injustice of the situation is amply *revealed* in the vivid description of the two men's conditions of life. In

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[71] Cf. Bultmann, *History*, 189; Donahue, *Gospel*, 24.

[72] *Mimesis*, 11f.

[73] Cf. Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, ch.5, on 'showing' and 'telling' (a distinction drawn from Booth, *Fiction*) and other aspects of characterization by narrators.

[74] Cf. 10:33.

[75] 162.

this parable, indeed, more clearly perhaps than in any of the other five, the focus is on the characters as *types*[76]. It is not their *individual* morality which is at issue, but the injustice of the society in which they live.[77] Borg comments that when we read Jesus' sayings in the knowledge that his was a peasant society, '[p]overty and wealth cease to be abstractions or metaphors'; '[t]hey also cease to be primarily qualities of individuals'[78]. Thus the *post-mortem* scene, which suggests that injustice will not for ever rule, can be read as a vindication not so much of Lazarus in his personal behaviour (the moral aspect of which is never mentioned in the story), but as a righting of *society's* inequalities.[79] The skilful restraint of the parables, in which characters and situations are not so much labelled as evoked, contributes considerably to their rhetorical power as realistic stories and contrasts sharply with the rather garish way that commentators have sometimes painted their characters.[80]

This *dramatic* principle of character emerging realistically in action, seen I believe quite clearly in the three parables just mentioned (The Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son and The Rich Man and Lazarus) can give us a better grasp of the other three parables where the issue of character has been more problematic. Nowhere has this problem been felt more acutely than with The Shrewd Steward. We have charted the way that exegetes have sought to deal with this parable, almost always seeking to *defend* it against the impression given by 16:8f. that the steward's behaviour is somehow meant to be exemplary. τὸν οἰκονόμον τῆς ἀδικίας ('the steward of unrighteousness', 16:8) has been taken as a totally blackening designation[81] and therefore controlled the interpretation. However, it is necessary both to understand the nuance of that phrase and to gauge the man's character from the whole story, rather than from one expression.

E. Earle Ellis helps us to capture the right connotations for the word ἀδικίας ('unrighteousness'). He demonstrates that the word (used also in 16:9 and 18:6)

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[76] Cf. Johnson, *Function*, 142.

[77] Cf. the vivid exposition of Herzog, *Parables*, 117-120, 128.

[78] *Jesus*, 104.

[79] Bauckham comes to the same conclusion: 'What is wrong with the situation in this world...is the stark inequality in the living conditions of the two men': "Rich Man", 232.

[80] Cf. Calvin on the rich fool in Lk.12:16-21: 'Christ does not...condemn him precisely for acting as a careful householder in setting aside a store for the future, but for wanting to swallow up and devour many barnfuls in his greedy cupidity like a bottomless pit, and therefore for not understanding the true use of plentiful possessions' (*Harmony* II, 93). Is this really fair to the man as the parable presents him to us? There is an extremism about some kinds of biblical exegesis which projects convictions about the absolute importance of Scriptural subject-matter into colourful, hyperbolic readings of individual texts. But the diminishing of realism diminishes also the moral challenge. This is precisely the weakness (but also, no doubt, the desired effect) of Hedrick's reading of The Good Samaritan.

[81] Cf. the conventional title of the parable, 'The Unjust Steward'.

> does not refer to individual ethics but to the universal character of 'this age'. 'Dishonest steward' and 'unjust judge' (18:6 AV) are both misleading translations; these men are neither better nor worse than other 'sons of this world'. The description...means only that they belong to this age and order their lives according to its principles.[82]

Daube rightly says that the steward is called unrighteous because 'up to now, he has willingly executed a wealthy oppressor's bidding'[83]. He is caught up in an unrighteous system. When we return to read the story from the beginning, we find that the *action* of the story does not present him as a wicked man. He was *falsely accused* (διεβλήθη) of wasting his master's goods (16:1)[84]. Even if we soften the meaning to exclude the notion of calumny, it is still only an unproven charge.[85] If there is any character-blackening by the narrator in vv.1f., it is of the *master*, whose justice seems summary in the extreme.[86] He pronounces the steward's dismissal without any checking of the reports. The steward's resolute action is then recounted. Again, there is no abstract description of him ('he was a wise man'). His cleverness and determination are *revealed* to us through the vivid device of the interior monologue, and through the tale of how he actually carried through his plan. The fact that his tactics are clearly self-regarding seems to have made people assume that his ruse with the debtors was also an act of defiant rebellion against the master, a further instance of the supposed 'squandering' of v.1.[87] But here we need the help of historical imagination to grasp the realistic logic of the story, and none has offered this more richly in this case than William R. Herzog II:

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[82] *Luke*, 199: ἀδικία 'is a Greek equivalent of *'awel*, a term used technically at Qumran for the principle and reality of evil in the end time'.

[83] "Nuances", 2335. Daube draws the parallel with the 'unrighteous judge' in 18:6, where 'the pejorative characterizes his habitual unscrupulousness and not his overdue, proper act'.

[84] Cf. ibid. See Herzog, *Parables*, 243f., for a lengthier exposition of the social background: the steward 'is constantly susceptible to back-stabbing and calumny from disgruntled debtors or tenants. Of course, they would not complain to the master that the steward is too severe; the master would take that as testimony to the steward's thoroughness...Instead, they would accuse the steward...The steward is always caught in a cross fire between the master's greed and excessive demands, on the one hand, and the tenants' or debtors' endless complaints, on the other...The master will always keep a suspicious eye on his steward, and the tenants will continuously envy the steward's power over them'.

[85] A similar ambiguity of characterization marks the beginning of The Prodigal Son. Linnemann (*Parables*, 74f. and 150f.) cites commentators on both sides of the argument as to whether the son's request for his share of the inheritance, and subsequent departure, were reprehensible; she herself thinks that they were not. Scott, however, believes that in 15:12 the father 'has put his family honor in jeopardy' and the son 'has in effect pronounced his father dead': *Hear*, 111.

[86] *Contra* Bailey, who thinks that the master was merciful in only dismissing the steward and not punishing him further: *Poet*, 97.

[87] Herzog hits the nail on the head when he writes that much commentary 'assumes a simple moral code and judges the steward by it. Most of the sins ascribed to him are those that belong properly to a capitalist framework': *Parables*, 245.

> [The steward] is familiar with back-stabbing and has probably survived a few episodes of witch-hunting to reach his present position. Given the master's frame of mind, he can see that it would be useless to fall into the familiar role by protesting his innocence. All that would do is confirm the master's hasty judgment. If he is to survive, he must develop a different strategy and employ different tactics. To the steward, the question of whether he is innocent or guilty is not even a consideration. Guilty of what? Taking too large a cut? Failing to achieve usurious profit margins? Not covering his backside as well as he usually does?[88]

The act of remitting debts was an act which benefitted the poor.[89] This saves the narrative from descending into the hyperbole of surreal madness, as is almost implied by Scott's reading.[90] The parable reflects all too familiar an environment. The hopeful element in the story is that the steward took the initiative to do something that was just and community-minded, and secured his own future into the bargain.[91] The master cannot help but recognize this, and praises the steward, seeing that his generosity to the debtors has put them in a heightened relationship of obligation to the master.[92] The way is open for us to see the steward as a genuine example put forward by Jesus; the story is not merely 'comedy'[93].

As in the case of the steward, the judge in 18:6 is described (after the end of the story) as ὁ κριτὴς τῆς ἀδίκιας ('the judge of unrighteousness'), and in this case too Ellis's explanation of the phrase, given above[94], helps us to see the realism of the character-portrayal. The judge is no worse than other children of the old age. This is seen also in the opening description of v.2. Hedrick attempts to *whiten* his character by making this description refer to lack of religious or human prejudice[95]. This overstates the case, but helps redress an imbalance in conventional readings. Hedrick is right to take the verb ἐντρέπομαι, which appears in vv.2 and 4, as 'to show partiality', on the basis of

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 258; Bindemann, "Ungerechte", 963ff.; Daube, "Nuances", 2335.

[90] Cf. his comment about the parable's ending deconstructing its own metaphorical structure: *Hear*, 265.

[91] Herzog thinks that the security for which the steward is aiming through his remission of the debts is not welcome into the debtors' houses, but another job (*Parables*, 256); but this does not tally with the clear statement of 16:4. Herzog's (to my mind) brilliantly insightful treatment is here vulnerable to Schmeller's critique of some sociological exegesis: 'Vermutungen, die keinerlei Anhaltspunkte im Text haben, in die Analyse aufnehmen, nur weil sie gut passen, wird kein verantwortlicher Exeget sich erlauben': *Brechungen*, 47, cited in Lindemann, "Literatur", 52. But the recognition of commentators such as Herzog and Bindemann of the force of this parable in its social setting must surely stand against the earlier verdict that '[d]ie Parabel beschäftigt sich nicht mit sozialen Problemen' (Jüngel, *Paulus*, 158).

[92] Herzog, Parables, 257.

[93] As it is analysed by Via in *Parables*, 155-162.

[94] 173f.

[95] *Parables*, 194-197.

the LXX passages he cites (Wisdom 6:7; Sirach 4:22; Job 33:21). The judge is his own man and is not going to bow to pressure just on account of a person's poverty; such impartiality is indeed commended, as Hedrick shows, in the OT (Dt.1:17, and I would add especially Lev.19:15, where partiality to the poor is specifically mentioned as something to be avoided, along with favouritism to the rich). But Hedrick is wrong to try to turn 'not fearing the Lord' into a good quality. As he notes, Luke especially uses the phrase in a traditional, positive sense.[96] Instead of making this an exception, saying that Luke has taken over the phrase from a source, and that it retains a different sense from its normal one in his Gospel[97], I suggest that we see in the two character-descriptions together ('neither feared God nor regarded man') the realistic portrayal of a devil-may-care outlook on life. The judge is *not* wholly villainous at the outset; his lack of 'regard' for people preserves an important quality anciently enjoined on administrators of the law. But his failure to fear God puts him beyond the pale for the pious Jew, and means that his strong impartiality is not tempered by a concern for mercy - a concern that was also enjoined in the law and the prophets.[98]

The judge appears to be exceptional[99] in that his character is *described* at the beginning of the story (v.2). However, it is the narrative presentation of his motivation (seen in his interior monologue in vv.4,5) and implied action, not this description, which ultimately controls the reading of his character. Just as he is not totally villainous at the beginning, nor is he converted to total virtue. For a while he ignores the widow's pleading, and then, like the prodigal and steward, he reasons within himself. Though he does not fear God (and therefore feels under no obligation to do justice or mercy), and though he is no respecter of persons (and therefore feels positively justified in not paying the widow particular attention), he will adjudicate for her in order to stop her bothering him.[100] When he decides to turn his mind to her case, it can be dealt with expeditiously; 'I will vindicate her' (v.5) implies that the judge knows very well that she is in the right. He has simply been ignoring her - whether through idleness, pressure of work or sheer callousness is left to the imagination. The judge's final resolve is not a matter of his being 'willing finally to be compromised for the sake of his own comfort'[101]. The absence of any fear of God means that he would have had little sense of being compromised, while his impartiality, though rooted in an important principle, was a convenient escape from demands for mercy. Yet even though his motives were mixed - and continued to be

[96] See 1:50; 12:5 (cf. Mt.10:28, the only occurrence of the phrase in the Gospels outside Luke); 23:40; Acts 10:2; 13:16,26; 22:35.

[97] As Hedrick does in *Parables*, 197.

[98] See famously Mic.6:8.

[99] Cf. Bultmann, *History*, 189.

[100] Cf. n.23 above.

[101] Hedrick, *Parables*, 197.

until he took action[102] - the conclusion of the story is that he did what was just and merciful, like the master in 16:8. I find this complicated human being remarkably credible, not 'hopelessly ridiculous'[103]. The story is not 'burlesque'[104].

The problems that have been raised by scholars recently with reference to characterization in The Pharisee and The Customs-Officer concern Luke's introduction (18:9) and what is regarded as his conclusion (v.14b). We have seen how Scott thinks that Luke prejudices our view of the two characters.[105] We need, again, to see how the story itself presents them in their own words and deeds. I propose that once more it is best to see them as *realistic* portrayals. That is, they are not exaggerated, but believable figures from Jesus' social world. Many have noted that the Pharisee genuinely acknowledges God as the source of his goodness.[106] Our knowledge of similar prayers in the Talmud[107] and Tosephta[108] confirms that the Pharisee in the story would have been a recognizable person to Jesus' hearers. The customs-officer says no more or less than the words of Ps.51:1, which no doubt would have been equally familiar. The presentation of character here by means of showing people in action is highly effective. It is simultaneously understated (there is no direct description of the characters within the tale itself) and vivid, and through its realism draws a hearer or reader in and makes her feel that this truly is her own world, opened up before her. The notes of the two men's posture - the Pharisee standing by himself (18:11)[109], the customs officer standing afar off (v.13) - speak volumes, as does the contrast between the two prayers: especially noteworthy is the Pharisee's awareness of the customs-officer, which does not seem to be reciprocated. There is no need for the speaker to say more in order to crystallize their characters and attitudes.[110] V.14a gives the startling dénouement. As in The Rich Man and Lazarus, we find out enough about the character of the protagonists from the picturing of their state and the announcement of their end; we do not need any explicit

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[102] Cf. the prodigal son.

[103] Hedrick, *Parables*, 203.

[104] Ibid.

[105] See above, 132. Cf. Hedrick, *Parables*, 209ff.

[106] E.g. Jeremias, *Parables*, 143.

[107] b. Ber. 28b, cited in Scott, *Hear*, 95.

[108] t. Ber. 7.18, cited in ibid.

[109] With Scott, I take πρὸς ἑαυτόν with σταθείς: *Hear*, 94.

[110] Linnemann argues against the significance of characterization in the story (*Parables*, 144ff.), for fear of 'transferring the parable on to the level of moralizing' (145). Her point, foreshadowing Scott's emphasis on there being 'no lesson' (*Hear*, 97) is that the paradox of God *declaring the wicked just* is removed if 'justify' is simply taken to mean 'forgive'. I am not arguing that 'justify' here means 'forgive', but I *am* arguing that there is no paradox. God declares as righteous the one who behaves righteously (and implicitly, declares as unrighteous the one who does not): cf. 151 above. The characters are, precisely, examples, and their respective ends are an incentive.

description.[111] (To exclude v.14a from the 'story proper', as Hedrick does on the grounds that the 'I tell you' intrudes on the fictional world of the parable as happens in no other parable[112], is simply to leave the story without an ending, conducive to a portrait of Jesus as a teaser, but unwarranted).

So are Luke's introduction in v.9, and the conclusion in v.14 (whoever may be responsible for it), fair to these two men? They seem to be a reasonable summary of the picture painted in the story itself. The Pharisee, though he thanks God, certainly trusts that he is righteous, and appears to look down on the customs-officer. His 'trusting in himself that he is righteous' is best described as 'self-deception' rather than 'self-righteousness'. This can appropriately be seen as 'exalting oneself' in one's own eyes before God: he has an inflated conception of his own righteousness. The customs-officer, beating on his breast and crying for mercy, surely humbles himself.[113] In any case, Luke in v.9 is writing about those to whom the parable was told; his description of them does not have to be an exact mirror-image of the presentation of the Pharisee in the parable in order for him to convey the pointed effectiveness of Jesus' teaching. Luke's framework does not turn either character into an unbelievable hyperbole for a real person.

We have now isolated certain things which the characters are *not* (disguises, personifications, ciphers, fancies, ideals/grotesques), associated with certain tropes. What then *are* they if the operative trope is *synecdoche*? They are *examples*. The brevity of their presentation naturally does not allow for the development of character which we can find, for instance, in a modern novel.[114] (In the case of The Rich Man and Lazarus, as we have seen, even *personal* character is hardly an issue; the two figures represent the poles of an unequal society.) But this brevity is not a challenge to realism itself. *Jesus focussed the world in realistic stories of characters intended as exemplary.* Three clarifications of this now need to be made.

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[111] In Luke's context, as I have shown (above, 148ff.), the claims of the Pharisee are shown up as flawed. On the lips of Jesus the question of the validity of those claims would have remained hanging in the balance as the story unfolded, and the conclusion would have decided it but not explained it: just *why* was the Pharisee not justified? But we should not exaggerate this understatedness; those who may have heard polemic from Jesus' lips against the Pharisees (e.g. that reflected in Lk.11:42) would not be in any doubt what he intended to say in the parable.

[112] *Parables*, 209ff.

[113] *Contra* Linnemann who writes of 'the lack of correspondence between application and parable', simply stating, without arguing, that 'it is not true either that the tax-collector has "humbled himself" or that the Pharisee has "exalted himself": *Parables*, 18.

[114] Fuchs argued that some parables (e.g. Luke 16:1-8) appealed to a typical situation, while a few (e.g. Lk.15:11-32) presented a situation not typical but already shaped by the hope of the gospel ('alles in ihnen wird durch eine nicht selbstverständliche, dafür aber um so entschiedenere Hoffnung getragen'): "Analogie", 14. My proposal is that both these parables, and the other four in my group, present situations which though unusual were not unknown or unimaginable, situations that Jesus wants to *proclaim* typical, situations such as he sees already occurring in the time of his ministry.

First, how do we incorporate the *surprise* element of the parables into this account of their realism? Most usefully, I suggest, by recalling Kjärgaard's distinction between present, imperfect and perfect metaphors[115], and transferring it to synecdoche.[116] This can give us a language to describe their shock-value more precisely. We could say that the Samaritan is a *present synecdoche*. The association of such a person with the behaviour depicted in the story would surely have been intended as striking: 'a *Samaritan* can typify *compassion*!' The case of the Pharisee in Lk.18:9-14 appears at first somewhat different: for Jesus would have known that the depiction of his *behaviour* would have raised no eyebrows, but his *end* in the story is shocking.[117] But since it is the end of the story which opens our eyes to the man's true nature, he also emerges as a present synecdoche, a startling proposal that *even a Pharisee* could be used as a type of self-trust and disdain towards others. The portrayal of the customs-officer's attitude in prayer, indeed of his very presence in the Temple[118], would probably have been intended as more surprising than the portrayal of the Pharisee.

Other situations seem to be *imperfect synecdoches*. The father and his two sons, the master and the steward, the widow and the judge, are probably not designed to shock by the combination of their designation and their behaviour to the extent that the Samaritan or customs-officer are.[119] One can more easily imagine that others before and besides Jesus might have used a judge or an estate manager as types of a canny self-regard which nevertheless serves others, than one can imagine others using a Samaritan as a type of compassion. The rich man and Lazarus at the start of their story are perhaps already *perfect synecdoches*: Jesus would have known that the kinds of contrasting people they stand for (and the contrast itself) would have been painfully familiar.[120]

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[115] See above, 28.

[116] I would gladly acknowledge that there is not much difference between my proposal here and what Harnisch expounds as the 'metaphorical tension between the real and the possible' which 'drives towards a new insight which overcomes the tension': "Possible", 51f. But my proposal suggests that what the parables stress, more than a tension between real and possible worlds, is the already-existing presence of a new reality, as if he is saying: 'look around and you will see that people are already behaving like this'.

[117] In fact, in the context of first-century Judaism there may even in this respect not be so much of a difference between the two parables I am discussing. The stories posit 'ends' which are closely related to each other: being declared a neighbour (i.e. one who truly fulfils the covenant command of Lev.19:18) and being declared right with God (i.e. one who is within the covenant).

[118] Cf. Herzog, *Parables*, 192.

[119] On the elements of the expected and unexpected in The Prodigal Son, cf. Madsen, *Parabeln*, 166-174. Madsen points to the behaviour of the father towards his younger son as the unusual dimension (170f.); cf. Bailey, *Poet*, 181, on the father's *running* out to greet his son in 15:20. Quick, however, believes that '[t]he father does no more than many human fathers have done for their children': *Realism*, 32. The public and vocal appearance of the widow in 18:3ff. would have been startling: Donahue, *Gospel*, 182. Donahue thinks the persistent widow and the running father would have been as originally shocking as the compassionate Samaritan: ibid., 183.

[120] See the remarks about the stark realities of oppression in a peasant society such as that of Jesus in Borg, *Jesus*, 101-105.

Nevertheless they are not 'dead' as figures, mere clichés; their vividness sees to that; and their respective *ends* would probably have been designed to surprise many.[121] I am not sure of the status of the Priest and Levite on this continuum. I suspect that Jesus would not have intended to shock his audience so much by their *inaction* as by the Samaritan's *action*.[122]

I am not trying to argue here for the precise 'tense-status' on Kjärgaard's scale of any of these figures[123], but simply to show that sensitivity to the question can lead us towards a truer characterization of the impression such figures would originally have made, and away from caricature.

The surprise element in the parables (along with the development which takes place in some characters) means that the characters are not *stereotypes*, nor need they turn into them. As (mainly) *present* or *imperfect* synecdoches they do not *need* to pass eventually into the 'perfection' of literal usage implied by 'stereotype'. The Samaritan of 10:30-37 and the Pharisee of 18:9-14 have *through history* become stereotypical figures, but it is not required by the parables that they should do so. Whether or not Kjärgaard is right to say that *metaphor* has self-abolition as its *inevitable* goal[124], I do not think we can say that *synecdochic* suggestivity, such as is involved in the parables, does. There is no inner necessity of language by which the proposal of a 'part' ('consider a compassionate Samaritan, an complacent Pharisee') *must* turn into a statement of a 'whole' ('all Samaritans are compassionate, all Pharisees are complacent'). The parables can and do remain *suggestive*: 'imagine a world where Samaritans are compassionate, Pharisees are arrogant!' To state this is simply to cast another light on the widely-accepted view of scholars that we shall miss the power of the parables if we do not delve beneath their familiarity and try to reconstruct the original dynamics of their telling.[125]

Secondly, we have focussed on the individual characters and their actions, but the design of the parables as synecdoches will be more fully grasped if we recognize that it is especially in the *relationship* of characters that the suggestive, provocative reflection

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[121] Cf. Herzog, *Parables*, 129, and the surprise of the disciples at Jesus' words about the rich, reported in Mk.10:24,26. Herzog also points (130) to the shock-value of the figure of Abraham, whose legendary wealth and hospitality 'had been reinterpreted [by Jesus' contemporaries] into a form of condescending almsgiving whose purpose only reinforced the distinction between clean (the wealthy) and unclean (the poor)'.

[122] Linnemann *Parables*, 139, cites Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar* IV, 182, and *Testament of Levi* 17, to the effect that Jesus' hearers would not have had a high opinion of the moral status of priests and Levites.

[123] We should not, for instance, fall into the idealism of suggesting that no Jew before Jesus had so much as thought of a compassionate Samaritan or a complacent Pharisee!

[124] *Metaphor*, 218.

[125] Cf. Wink's description of how modern readers, knowing the story so well and identifying with the customs-officer as the positive character, miss the force of Lk.18:9-14, in *Transformation*, 42f., cited in Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 14. Cf. also Dunn, "Historical Text".

of the world takes place. Righteousness in Judaism was bound up with relationship.[126] The parables offer vignettes of relationships made and restored: the Samaritan stopping to help the wounded man, the son returning to the father and the father running out to meet him, the steward making friends with the debtors and the master being reconciled to the steward, the judge vindicating the widow. They offer also vignettes of stark division and alienation: the priest and Levite passing by on the other side, the older brother out in the field, the rich man and Lazarus both before death and after[127], the Pharisee standing apart from the customs-officer. These pictures of human closeness and distance are focussed in Luke's telling of the parables by the use of words meaning 'far off'. The rich man beheld Abraham 'from afar' (μακρόθεν, 16:23); the customs-officer stood 'at a distance' (μακρόθεν, 18:13), presumably from the Pharisee, and perhaps also from the inner court of the temple where sacrifice was being offered[128]. A contrast appears between an enforced and tormenting distance and a self-imposed but ultimately salutary one. Further, the father sees his returning son while he is still 'a long way off' (μακράν, 15:20). This image complements the other two: in the sight of the father distance is overcome. In story, Jesus proclaims that such restoration of relationship is taking place in the world.

Thirdly, insight can be gained through attention to *differences* between the parables. (a) There is a distinction in *the presentation of exemplary characters.* In three parables (The Prodigal Son, The Shrewd Steward and The Judge and the Widow) *two* characters are seen as exemplary: prodigal and father, steward and master, widow and judge. This gives a special power to the new world-picture and the moral challenge offered by the stories, for one character's action is as it were validated by another. The prodigal's decision to return is vindicated by the father's decision to have him back; the steward's decision to remit the debts is vindicated by the master's praise; both parables are thus propositions of the reality of a new social order, and exhortations to be part of it by the adoption of its key attitudes of forgiveness of others' debts (first of all in a literal sense) and the humble readiness to seek that forgiveness for oneself. The widow's cry for justice is vindicated by the judge's granting of it, and the parable is thus also a proposition of such an order, and an exhortation to be part of it by *both* doing justly *and* hopefully seeking justice.

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[126] Cf. Achtmeier, "Righteousness". I am especially grateful to Professor James Dunn for drawing my attention to this point and this reference. It is better to read these parable-relationships in this Jewish context than in terms of modern sociological categories concerning boundaries, as Scott does (*Hear*).

[127] Herzog notes that though the rich man calls Abraham 'father', he has not seen that Lazarus is therefore his brother: *Parables*, 123f. The connection with 15:11-32 is reinforced, for there too the elder son is reluctant to accept his brother as a brother. Note also that the word τέκνον ('dear child') is used both by the father to his elder son (15:31) and by Abraham to the rich man (16:25), emphasising the connection between the two scenes.

[128] Bailey, *Peasant Eyes*, 152f.

In two other parables, however, only one character appears to be exemplary (the Samaritan, and the customs-officer) while in The Rich Man and Lazarus only a negative example is shown. These differences and comparisons are instructive. In The Good Samaritan, the question has been raised of the role of the victim in the story. Funk has argued that Jewish hearers would have identified with this victim, and that the challenge of the story is therefore that they should accept the gospel as this victim accepted help, even from a hated outsider.[129] However, a half-dead man who probably had no idea what was happening to him or who was helping him cannot strictly be seen as an *example*. In his utter inactivity and helplessness the victim in this story is analogous to Lazarus, who is seen purely as a poor man in need of justice and compassion, not as an example of piety or trust.[130] So 10:30-37 and 16:19-31 are related to each other, and contrasted to the three parables just dealt with, in respect of their emphasis on the call to show compassion regardless of any prior trust, worthiness, or even capability of response on the part of the recipient (how was the Samaritan to know if he would be successful in his ministrations and one day receive the victim's gratitude?) It is interesting, though, that the validation of one character's action by another, which we noted in the other three parables, is present obliquely, or in reverse, in these latter three also. Jesus the narrator draws from the lawyer's mouth the declaration that the Samaritan was obedient as a neighbour, and himself declares that the customs-officer went home justified. In a reversal of this, Abraham declares that there is no crossing the gulf for the rich man who, it is implied, had neglected the law and the prophets as his brothers were doing.

(b) The second distinction we can note among these parables is in the presentation of *motivation*. The prodigal, the steward, the judge, the widow, even the customs-officer, have an earthy self-regard in their actions. As we have seen, this leads them nonetheless to do the right thing, and their stories therefore constitute appeals to right action on the basis of an instinctive human desire for life and security.[131] Lazarus is motivated by desperate hunger, but this does not lead to any action whatsoever. These characters are set apart on the one hand from a group who appear to be motivated purely by nobler ends, and on the other hand from a group who are also self-regarding, but whose self-regard leads them in the wrong direction. In the first group, the Samaritan and the prodigal's father appear to be motivated by disinterested compassion, but we ought to reflect that this may simply be the impression given by the brevity of the stories. The word for their compassion is a feeling-word[132] and we ought not to idealize these

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[129] Funk, *Language*, 212f.

[130] Cf. Herzog, *Parables*, 128; *contra* the ancient reading which saw him as someone 'rich in faith' or 'rich toward God': e.g. Ambrosius, VIII, 135-141 (see above, 63).

[131] Therefore though Bultmann is right to say that the motivation of the parable-characters is not *expounded*, he is wrong to say that motivation is 'irrelevant to the point': *History*, 190.

[132] See above, 172.

figures: if the other characters appear in the stories as fallible mixed-up humans, hearers would assume that the Samaritan and the father were like that too. The point is that the stories present their *actions* as being of key importance, whatever their motivations were. In the second group, the Priest and Levite, the older brother, the rich man and the Pharisee are all concerned for their own interests but in a wrong (and in the case of the rich man, finally disastrous) manner. Again this forces us to look away from *motivation* to *action*. A check is placed upon the incentive of self-interest which the parables set before their hearers in their appeal for right living. It is what you *do*, not your motivation, which ultimately counts[133].

Having made these three clarifications, we can make our summary statement more precisely: *Jesus intended to focus the world in realistic but surprising stories of characters and their relationships, which he intended as exemplary.* At this point we are ready to move to a consideration of the second stage of the synecdochic operation, in which the hearer makes a 'whole' out of the 'part' with which the story has presented her (the right hand side of the diagram on 167 above).

2. Part to Whole: story into world

If indeed these stories, their characters and relationships, were synecdoches on the lips of Jesus, they carried with them a claim to stand for the way the world is, as part for the whole. The receiver of the tale senses that she is meant *somehow* to generalize from it: but to what extent? How does one draw out the lines from part to whole? The thought-process can be imagined: if a *Samaritan* can obey the law, who else might be able to? If a *Pharisee* is not justified, who else might be in danger? Would tax-collectors be included in the class suggested by 'a Samaritan', for instance - the different categories of outcast being lumped together? Would priests be included in the class suggested by 'a rich man', or vice versa?[134] For example, many leading priests were (in the context of their society) rich[135], but the question of whether the social and religious categories were so bound up with each other in the common mind that to the poor 'priesthood' and 'wealth' were inevitably associated, even almost interchangeable concepts, must remain more uncertain.[136] Here the issue raised in Chapter Five concerning the mutual suggestiveness of stories *within a text* is transposed into the issue of the mutual suggestiveness of class designations *within society*. We can be sure that the stories of

[133] This represents the kernel of truth in Bultmann's point about motivation's irrelevance, just noted.

[134] Sider approaches the same issue through discussion of *example* as one type of *analogy*. 'Example invites *synthesis*: ostensibly it cites a specimen to represent a species; in effect it puts us on the lookout for other specimens which we may not previously have thought of connecting': "Meaning", 466.

[135] See Bailey, *Peasant Eyes*, 43.

[136] Linnemann cites Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar* IV, 182, to the effect that the reason for Jesus' choice of a priest and a Levite in this parable would have been that theirs was 'in common opinion the leading and privileged profession': *Parables*, 139.

Jesus upset many an easy stereotype: the most obvious case is that the wealthy appear both as heroes and as villains.

Crossan overstates the case, however, when he writes that in the parables Jesus announces God as the one who 'shatters world, this one and any other before or after it'[137]. So does Scott, writing about the social 'map' being 'abandoned' in The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer[138]. (This kind of interpretation bespeaks the heritage of Nietzsche, who recognized 'that probably every linkage was open to destruction by the perspectives of a planned incongruity'[139]: metaphor *is* able to do all kinds of strange things with our perspective of the world, but that does not mean that Jesus, or anyone else, *in fact* destroyed every linkage, by metaphor or any other trope). The grounds on which the people in Lk.18:9-14 are accepted and rejected are quite clear, via the indirect method of character *portrayal* rather than the direct one of character *description*. The world is not shattered; the hearer is not totally disoriented, but invited to stretch conventional categories and imagine new possibilities. Scott sees that the parable is not merely overturning one set of stereotypes by the proposal of another. But the right conclusion to draw from this is not that the world is completely subverted; simply that hearers were likely to be surprised by the choice of examples. I dissent here also from Ricoeur's statement that the parables 'dislocate...our project of making a whole of our lives - a project which St Paul identifies with the act of "self-glorification", or, in short, "salvation by works"'[140]. I am proposing precisely that these parables *invited* hearers to make a whole of their lives, but a *newly conceived* whole.

To envisage the way that the synecdoche is 'completed' as the receiver turns the part into a whole is closely allied to the important enterprise of envisaging where the receiver's sympathies would have lain, explored by Scott. In both cases a sense of historical reality must force us to imagine a range of different responses. But I submit that to conceive this process of response by the receiver in terms of *troping* captures more profoundly the power of the parables than to stay with the question of sympathy. For the real punch of the story comes when a hearer or reader says not just, 'I sympathise with that man' but, 'I *am* the man'. In saying that, he is showing that he has reconverted the part into the whole, that he has grasped the impact of the story on the real world in its concrete particulars - above all on that which is most real to him, his very self.[141] The

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[137] *In Parables*, 27.

[138] *Hear*, 97.

[139] Burke, *Permanence*, 91.

[140] "Biblical Hermeneutics", 125. The continuing persuasiveness of this view is seen in Donahue's approving citation: *Gospel*, 16.

[141] One might even say that the recognition 'I am the man' implies yet a *third* stage of synecdoche. Having turned the part into the whole again, the receiver has focussed the 'whole world' on which the story made its impact on to one 'part' once more, by saying 'I am the man' - as if no one else was

'surprising' designations of characters (Samaritan, Pharisee) open up the possibility of exemplary or non-exemplary behaviour to a wider range of people than conventionally expected, and thus help a wide range of hearers/readers to find themselves in the parables. And as we have seen, the distinction between parables proper and example-stories ultimately does not hold.[142] The father and younger son, the master and steward, the widow and even the judge, are in their way examples just as much as the Samaritan and the customs-officer.

Thus the stories *always* had a wide range of application beyond the original context in which they were spoken. Jesus' present situation must surely have been at the forefront of his mind. But the fact that the synecdochic process *must be completed by the receiver* - even the first time a parable is told! - means that there are no 'proper' limits on the application of the story. To put the point as sharply as possible, if the story was *intended* to be synecdochic, *suggestive and not prescriptive*, we cannot argue for one 'proper' or 'historical' application on the grounds that we believe it to be the 'intentional' one.[143] Even when we have tried to answer the question, 'what scope of application would the hearers have taken from the parable?' in as historically accurate a manner as we can, we have not succeeded in outlining the 'proper' limits of application, because the *parable itself*, like the *mashal*, is a form of speech *designed* to be useful in different contexts. Here is the kernel of truth in Jülicher's statement that the meaning of a parable 'falls into our lap', his sense that it applies so readily to later times. Here also, though, is the falsehood of his belief that no interpretation is necessary. It only falls into our lap because, like the first hearers, we carry out the second stage of the synecdochic process *ourselves* and turn the part into the whole again.

What, though, of the original reception of these parables? We may consider the matter under the headings of the two presuppositions about Jesus set out at the start of the chapter[144]. First, their applicability to the hearers of Jesus in their social setting can be readily imagined. Though Drury is right that the parables of Lk.15 and 16, the climax in Luke of Jesus' prophetic summons of Israel to national repentance, 'are not aimed only or chiefly at private persons'[145], that summons (like those of the OT prophets) seems to have been issued with the social realities of Palestine clearly in view. It is artificial to set aside some parables, such as The Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son, as being less

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implicated. This is the case with the phenomenon sometimes reported in which a member of a large congregation attests that it seemed as if the preacher (or God) were speaking for her benefit alone.

[142] Heininger comments that on the level of Lukan redaction 'ist die Grenze zwischen Parabel und Beispielerzählung praktisch aufgehoben': *Metaphorik*, 223. I argue that the distinction was never there in the first place.

[143] 'There is no literary reason to suppose that Jesus did not have both particular and general intentions': Sider, "Meaning", 465.

[144] Above, 159f.

[145] "Luke", 421. I am making a statement about *Jesus* here which Drury would eschew.

rooted in these realities than the others.[146] We may illustrate the range of possible responses with reference to the three structures of society outlined by Borg: peasantry, purity and patriarchy.[147]

In a peasant culture, the hard facts of wealth and poverty are never far from view. The man on the Jericho road was *robbed*, and the Samaritan gave him not only first aid but financial provision. The father in 15:11-32 had an inheritance to divide and a fatted calf to kill. He is closely connected to the rich master in 16:1[148], but the link is often overlooked through seeing the father as an image of God[149]. Neither father nor master are condemned for their wealth; both are implicitly praised for not being ultimately tight-fisted. This would have been encouragement and challenge for the peasants and landowners of Galilee or Judea[150]. They would have heard the advocacy of a revolutionary use of money, for the purpose of transcending social divisions, not perpetuating them. Those who had already set out on this revolutionary path would have been encouraged as they saw themselves in the Samaritan, the father, the forgiving steward, even the (at first reluctant) judge; those who were resisting would have been warned (if they were prepared to listen) as they saw themselves in the rich man of 16:19-31 or the self-deceptive Pharisee of 18:9-14. Those without hope, at the bottom of the pile, could take heart not only from Lazarus's destiny beyond death, but from this-worldly scenes: the Samaritan's nurturing of the victim into life, the prodigal's return from the jaws of starvation, the steward's dogged and successful determination to avoid utter penury[151], the widow's vigorous tactics and victory, the customs-officer's homecoming in right standing with God. These stories would surely not have been received as mere fancies about a world of which the poor could only dream. People would have recognized their own world in them, and invited to discern the signs of a

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[146] Johnson, *Function* 159ff., notes the importance of possessions as symbolic of relationships in The Prodigal Son, but when he writes 'No one would claim that the story is "about" possessions' (160) he is perpetuating the generalizing of the parables noticeable since Jülicher. This parable, like the others, is "about" repentance, but repentance is a severely practical matter.

[147] *Jesus*, 101-112.

[148] Cf. the use of διασκορπίζω in both 15:13 and 16:1: see above, 141 n.28.

[149] See below, 191ff.

[150] Borg cites the view of Horsley that Jesus' sayings about forgiveness of debts were 'intended as guidelines for ordinary people in local communities': *Jesus*, 29. Herzog greatly illuminates The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer by showing the place of both characters within oppressive social systems: the Pharisee was implicated in the system of temple tithes which kept the poor poor, while the customs-officer was a minor official in the complex system of Roman toll-collection: *Parables*, 180ff.

[151] Herzog brilliantly shows the starkness of the steward's situation. 'To lose his stewardship and join the work force of day laborers is to drop out of the class of retainers into the class of the expendables...His dismissal from the stewardship is a death sentence that has nothing to do with his refusal to accept honest work': *Parables*, 242.

revolution which was already beginning, and which was being given added momentum through the stories themselves.[152]

I have already noted the theme of purity and defilement in the parables.[153] Suffice it to indicate at this point how Jesus' hearers might have converted the specific cases depicted there into a newly-defined world. The reluctance of the priest and Levite to taint themselves by contact with the wounded man is exposed so starkly in its tawdriness against the foil of the Samaritan's compassion that the whole purity system is radically relativized: a piercing stab for those to whom it was so valuable, an open door to relief for those to whom it was so oppressive. This parable also proposes to dismantle in startling fashion the social walls built by the purity system, for not only is the hated Samaritan held up as an example, but it is shown that in this case the victim's only hope was to be defiled himself through his contact with the Samaritan. A world is held forth in which the purity system *must* not stand in the way of life itself. The Prodigal Son and The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer extend hope to those hopelessly 'corrupted' through contact with Gentiles[154] or through failure to pay tithes[155], and warn those who think they are pure; the elder son may join the party, but at the cost of becoming tainted by association with his younger brother. The Shrewd Steward suggests a view of things in which dealing in 'dirty money' may nevertheless be righteous; The Widow and the Judge, one in which scruples about impure magistrates and shameless women are irrelevant beside justice sought and dispensed. The Rich Man and Lazarus shows the eternal and horrific cost of maintaining social separation (Lazarus was not only poor, but unclean[156]).

What of patriarchy? It is a question of great interest and importance whether the dominance of males among the characters of these six parables (the widow of 18:1-8 is the only female mentioned[157]) would have made the stories seem inapplicable, or *less* applicable, to women. Pointedly, could a woman say 'I am the woman' in response to one of the parable's male characters with the same force with which a man might say 'I am the man'? This opens up a huge area in anthropology, sociology, psychology, gender

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[152] '[Jesus'] pedagogy of the oppressed was designed...so that the peasants could name oppression as a prelude to renaming their world': Herzog, *Parables*, 193.

[153] See above, 154f.

[154] Customs-officers may in fact have been despised more for their arbitrariness and dishonesty than for their contact with Gentiles: Herzog, *Parables*, 187.

[155] Cf. ibid., 184f.

[156] Ibid., 118.

[157] She would have been alone at the place of judgement, too: 'In the midst of all the male voices heard at the gate, a domain where men alone are in control, one woman's voice continually cries out for justice': ibid., 229.

studies and no doubt other disciplines besides, which we can but mention.[158] The fact that women are largely absent from the explicit level of the stories can be seen simply as another function of the stories' realism: they do indeed reflect a patriarchal society.[159] So would a woman have felt the *impact* of the stories to the same extent as a man? The aesthetic judgement involved in deciding the question carries more weight coming from a woman than from a man. Jane Schaberg writes that although The Good Samaritan is a story about the world of men, and '[t]he male experience...is presented here as universal human experience', most women can easily imagine themselves as *women* in the ditch.[160] But how would women have related to characters like the Samaritan and the father? Were they so accustomed to living under the shadow of men, with their identity bound up with that of male kin, that they instinctively wrote themselves into the stories as the men's assumed but unmentioned metonymic adjuncts? Alternatively, are the male characters failed, or ideologically compromised synecdoches[161], aiming at including women but in fact setting a gender-boundary round the whole to which they point as parts? Is any startling element of 'presentness' (on Kjärgaard's tense-scale), by which *men* might be brought up short (e.g. the *Samaritan* as an example of compassion) dulled for women, because eclipsed by the overriding, clichéd 'perfection' of *a man standing for the whole race* (the Samaritan as *just another male model*)? In that case, would the most arresting thing about the stories of Jesus, for a woman, have been the *absence* of certain characters? Where is the inkeeper's wife, the prodigal's mother? Where are those praying in the Court of the Women? Where are those with whom *she* might identify?

Scott's reading of The Prodigal Son[162] points to maternal resonances in the portrayal of the father.[163] The hint is that Jesus is overthrowing gender-stereotypes. But

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[158] In Judaism there has been considerable debate about the applicability or otherwise of sections of the Torah to women. I owe to Rabbi Professor Louis Jacobs (seminar in the University of Lancaster, 1991) the information that in the sense of being exempt from certain precepts, women in early Judaism were regarded as being in the same category as minors and slaves.

[159] It is interesting to note, however, the balancing of men and women as protagonists *in Luke's narrative*: Donahue, *Gospel*, 135. Especially see the juxtapositions of The Good Samaritan with the story of Mary and Martha (10:38-42), The Prodigal Son with The Lost Coin (15:8-10), and The Judge and the Widow with The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer.

[160] "Luke", 282. 'Most of the poor in every age are women and the children who are dependent on them': ibid., 277.

[161] A perhaps enlightening parallel is the language which current convention requires to be adopted in a thesis such as this. I have chosen to avoid pedantry by alternating freely between 'he' and 'she' rather than say 'he or she' every time that is what I mean. But if I had stuck to 'he' all the time, contemporary sensitivities, which I respect, would have regarded the pronoun as a failed or compromised synecdoche. However strongly I had *intended* 'he or she', I would have been *heard* as reinforcing a 'sexist' linguistic convention. My synecdochic use of 'she' in the same discourse in which I make synecdochic use of 'he' renders the latter acceptable. But Jesus and Luke did not alternate carefully between male and female characters in the stories they relate.

[162] Entitled 'I Remember Mama': *Hear*, 89-125. Schaberg calls this the parable of 'the missing mother': "Luke", 282.

I suggest that females among the ancient audiences would more probably have accepted the story, consciously or unconsciously, and no doubt with a variety of equanimity-levels, as confirming the *status quo* in gender relationships. The father's expressions of affection may indeed have been striking in the culture, but that may simply have invited people to an enlarged view of what a *man* could be like[164], and not addressed the issue of women's suppression. Returning to the tropes, one might put the question like this: would a man in the story who showed (traditionally) feminine qualities have been heard by women as a synecdoche for 'all fathers' or 'all men' (who *could* be like this!), or for 'all mothers *and* fathers', 'all men *and* women'? My hunch is that women would have received the impression that there *was* an application to them, but that like much else in life it was being mediated to them through a man.[165] Scott's reading tends towards an idealistic lifting of Jesus above the patriarchalism of his day[166]. Moreover, it tends to imply that women (like the poor who may have heard The Rich Man and Lazarus) would have simply received encouragement and affirmation from the parable. It overlooks that there might also have been wayward women who *were* challenged by seeing themselves in the younger son, or unforgiving women who *were* challenged by seeing themselves in the elder - even if that 'seeing' was more indirect than would have been the case with male hearers.

So much for the response of Jesus' hearers in terms of their *social setting*. The second field in which we must imagine their responses is that of the *thought-world* of first-century Judaism. I believe it is clear how Jesus' stance towards 'covenantal nomism' would have been understood by thoughtful listeners. He was challenging neither the premise of the grace of God, nor that of obedience to the law as the way to life within the covenant. But he *was* challenging a hardened attitude which pretended to obedience where there was none, and excluded from the possibility of obedience those outside a rigidly-defined pure race.

3. Summary

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[163] He mentions the father's affectionate kissing (κατεφίλησεν, 15:20) and his address to his elder son, 'dear child' (τέκνον, v.31): *Hear*, 117.

[164] Schneiders sees the parable as 'a radical challenge to patriarchy'; in it '[t]he divine father...is revealed as the one who refuses to own us, demand our submission or punish our rebellion': *Women*, 47, cited in Donahue, *Gospel*, 161. Crossan adds a different twist: 'is the *ambiguity* of the three males [in Lk.15:11-32] more congenial to the female reading than the *reversal* of the three males in the Good Samaritan story?': "Review of Scott", 378.

[165] Donahue has suggested an interesting possible reversal of sexual stereotypes in 18:1-14. The threat from the widow is described by the judge with a metaphor from the boxing ring (ὑπωπιάζῃ, v.5) while the customs-officer beats his breast, a gesture said to be more characteristic of women in ancient Near Eastern culture than of men (v.13): *Gospel*, 190f.

[166] Schaberg says that a reading of Jesus as a revolutionary feminist pitted against Jewish tradition is not supported by research: "Luke", 279.

I have outlined in this section the way I believe the six parables would have worked as synecdoches on the lips of Jesus and in the minds of his hearers. Jesus has given his hearers a provocatively-expressed segment of life which claims to represent a wider reality, and invites them to refashion a whole out of the part they have been given. Within that segment the key elements are the human figures, their characters and fates. Within the new whole that the hearers make they see themselves, their acquaintances, their social situation, with new eyes. Their world is given a new and encouraging shape, and at the same time they are given a new incentive for right living.[167] It is a world in which Samaritans can keep the law, wayward sons are welcomed home, even worldly-wise stewards and judges can do the right thing, the poor are exalted (even if they have to wait till death) and customs-officers are justified. But given the proposal that the world *is* like this, the moral challenge emerges, and the characters appear as examples.[168] Hearers can only become a part of this world by learning from the characters. They must imitate the Samaritan in his costly compassion, the prodigal in his return and the father in his lavish forgiveness, the steward in his remission of debts and the master in his commendation, the judge in his vindication of the widow and the widow in her tenacious trust that she will be vindicated[169], the customs-officer in his humility. They must heed the warning represented by the Priest and Levite, the elder brother and the Pharisee. The parables do not dictate precise identifications.[170] People would have made links, impossible for us now to delineate precisely, between the various characters and individuals, and classes, within their society.[171]

For such synecdoches to 'work' requires a willingness on the part of the hearer to reorient her perspective, to make the connections.[172] Even given that willingness, the adjustment of viewpoint, we may suppose, may take some time; indeed, it may continue for a lifetime. That is the peculiar power of a parable, and these parables in particular. But it is not essentially a *mystifying* process or one that requires arcane knowledge; it is

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[167] Cf. the formulation of Donahue: the parables present 'a *vision of reality which becomes a presupposition to ethics*': *Gospel*, 17. Petzke (*Sondergut*, 217ff.) writes of 'narrative Ethik'.

[168] Donahue catches this well, writing of The Prodigal Son: the parables 'creates an imaginative world which makes *metanoia* possible': *Gospel*, 158.

[169] 'The hearers are confronted with a new vision of reality...where victims will claim their rights and seek justice - often in an unsettling manner': ibid., 184.

[170] It is in this leaving of the hearer free to make the appropriate response that we can best see the *non-allegorical* nature of these parables. 'Allegory does not accept doubt; its enigmas show instead an obsessive battling with doubt': Fletcher, *Allegory*, 323.

[171] 'The realism of Luke's parables shows that the consequences of conversion touch all areas of human life - family life, the use and danger of wealth, legal disputes and banquets, journeys and the management of estates..."every man and every woman" realize that salvation is at stake precisely in the everyday unfolding of human life': Donahue, *Gospel*, 208.

[172] Cf. Harnisch, "Possible", 51f.: the insight offered by the parables 'is realized only when the addressee allows him- or herself to become involved in the movement of the scenic development, and to be carried beyond the conceivable'.

not an intellectual exercise like the cracking of a code. To borrow Andrew Parker's title, they are 'painfully clear': not 'instantly obvious', but shedding a searching light which illuminates the world the more one looks at it through their lenses.[173]

DIVINE FIGURES?

God in the parables

If, as I have argued, the parables in Jesus' speech reflected the real world and invited people to make a new whole out of the part therein portrayed, and if they have a strong link with the material conditions of Jesus' time, is there any place for seeing certain characters in them as figures of God, or their plots as reflecting God's dealings with Israel and the world?[174] Or does that not, as many scholars since Jülicher have argued strongly, militate against their earthy realism?

We should not throw overboard the literary sensitivity of Jülicher and his heirs. These parables are indeed too subtle and sophisticated to be read as rather crude allegories in which individual terms can be simply exchanged for what is 'really meant'. I believe they had a directness of appeal in the practical world which would have been complicated by the sense that a lot of decoding was to be done. Nor do I believe that the parables as rhetoric allow for the construal that Jesus was arguing *from* realistic human situations *to* the divine order.[175] But it would be erroneous to suppose that this concentration of the parables on the world means that the divine dimension is to be overlooked. Rather than overemphasising their 'secularity'[176], we should recall that they come from a milieu where the assumption that the world was God's was taken for granted. They appeal to the wisdom of the Old Covenant: obey, and you will be blessed. They evoke the great tales of sacred history, such as the Joseph saga and the Succession narrative, 'when God worked his purpose out within the twists and turns of history and within the vagaries of ambivalent and ambiguous human characters'[177]. Metaleptic echoes[178] of specific passages can be heard, as when the Samaritan shows mercy, not sacrifice (Hos.6:6), with 'oil and wine' - elements of the daily temple offerings

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[173] Drury cites Old Testament support for the view that parable belongs 'at the same time both to secrecy and revelation, hiddenness and openness': *Parables*, 42.

[174] As proposed, in different ways, by Heininger, *Metaphorik* (161ff., 174, 204f.); Wright, *Jesus*, 125-131.

[175] This is the construal of Quick: *Realism*, 34.

[176] As in Wilder, *Rhetoric*, 82ff.

[177] Drury, *Parables*, 53.

[178] See above, 169.

(Lev.23:13) - and thus becomes an example of true obedience to the law.[179] Above all, the mercy and compassion seen so clearly in the Samaritan and the father are surely nothing other than the חסד of the God of Israel.

The six parables bear a strong resemblance to Aristotelian ποίησις. The poet's function, said Aristotle, is to describe 'the kinds of thing that might happen, that is, that could happen because they are, in the circumstances, either probable or necessary[180]. But what is this 'inner necessity' which drives the outcomes of these parables? It is surely not blind fate, but *the law of God*[181]. Here we need to recall that when in the Old Testament human beings did what was just and wise, God himself was regarded as present and at work in *his* justice and wisdom.[182] In this light, God is seen not only in the father, but in the returning son[183]; not in *either* the judging then praising master *or* the accused and canny steward, but in both, *and* in the looked-for hospitality of the debtors[184]; not in *either* the judge administering justice *or* the widow hopefully seeking it, but in both.[185] This is the converse of asserting that we see *human* folly and frailty in many of these characters too. Not apparently in the Samaritan: he has no prehistory in the story, he undergoes no conversion. But the *father* in The Prodigal Son is initially guilty of folly according to the advice of Sirach (33:19-23) not to divide an inheritance before one's

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[179] Donahue, *Gospel*, 132.

[180] *Poetry*, ch.9.

[181] Harnisch feels that though the parables start with the everyday, suggesting 'a norm according to which one's fate corresponds to one's actions' (e.g. raising the expectation that the prodigal would have starved to death), this norm is overthrown by the strangeness of their outcomes: "Possible", 49f. I am suggesting that in the outcome of the stories, surprising and hopeful though they are, we can still see the connection between character/action and destiny according to an Old Testament pattern.

[182] I owe this insight to Dr R.W.L. Moberly (lecture in the University of Durham, 27th February 1997, entitled "Solomon and Job: Two Wise Men?"), citing for instance Dt.1:9-18, and especially v.17: 'You shall not be partial in judgement...for the judgement is God's'.

[183] Drury's account is therefore a little too neat: 'The father stands for God, the older son is orthodox unreconstructed Judaism, and the prodigal who has put himself beyond the orthodox Jewish pale by his fornicating and swineherding is typical of the sinners and Gentiles who were welcome to Luke's Church': *Parables*, 117. Such a reading is reductive, even in terms of Luke's setting: it does not sufficiently take account of how the parable could be heard differently by different groups or individuals, or of the overall framework of divine order within which it is told. Highly suggestive is Schweizer's exposition of the parable in terms of the suffering of the father (*Jesus*, 66-70), but a sense of the story's resonance in Jesus' own mind as he went to the cross should not be allowed to exclude or obscure the practical challenge to others it seems originally to have represented.

[184] Ball sees in the welcoming friends of Lk.16:4,9 'an alternative way of expressing the solidarity of God with the needy' found in Mt.25: "Steward", 329. The subject of δέξωνται in v.9 would then not be *either* the friends made by the steward, *or* an impersonal periphrasis for God, but *both*: but in both cases it is a welcome in *this* world which is to be sought.

[185] A statement like this of Weder is therefore too limited: 'Zur Identifikation angeboten wird nicht die leitende Figur, sondern die geleitete': *Wahrheit*, 163. As God is seen in the justice and wisdom of the different characters, so each of those characters becomes one to be identified with and imitated.

death.[186] The steward, his master, and the judge, are caught up in systems of human corruption, though they ultimately find themselves executing God's wisdom and justice. These two stories makes sense in the ultimate context of God as judge, vindicating those whom human justice and judges have failed[187]. In The Rich Man and Lazarus, rather than being seen in a character, God is the unseen presence in the story, hiding perhaps behind Abraham, but ultimately set apart from all, because here, for these characters, the time when his justice can be worked out *in this world* is over. In Lk.18:9-14 God is present in the unlikely guise of the breast-beating customs-officer, who has found the way of wisdom, yet also stands apart from and above both characters, declaring one righteous and the other not.

Therefore, though God is scarcely mentioned in the parables, they work by appeal to his character and order. The parables operated *metaleptically* in evoking a whole tradition: not just that 'father' or 'steward' were standard *metaphors* for God or Israel.[188] The latter way of putting it tends to undermine the parable's realism. Rather, the parables encourage certain kinds of behaviour because, ultimately, that is God's appointed way to life.[189] Jesus is not seen here offering a *new* way of wisdom, but the old way. The difference announced by the parables is that people are beginning to take it.

CONCLUSIONS

Parables from Jesus and from Luke

How does this reconstruction of the working of the parables in Jesus' ministry relate to the impression Luke gives of his voice, as discussed in Chapter Five? The essential difference can be put in the words of Kelber:

> [T]he narrative gospel...deprived aphorisms and parables of their oral status by subordinating them, together with a good deal of additional

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[186] The background in Sirach is mentioned by Drury, *Parables*, 145, though without drawing this conclusion.

[187] Drury notes the background to Lk.18:1-8 in Sirach 35:13-18: *Parables*, 153. We might add Ps.82, where God appears as judge of the judges. By evoking this tradition the parable is a reminder that God *will* vindicate the poor, even if human judges do not, but also a sign of hope that vindication is already happening through the action of his appointed judicial representatives.

[188] Erlemann has shown that the parables, if taken together, yield a *picture of God* that is full of contradictions, on account of the varied metaphorical language used: *Bild*, summarized in Harnisch, "Beiträge", 350ff. But as Harnisch comments (352), 'picture of God' seems to be a concept that Erlemann projects on to the texts, not one which arises out of them. I am suggesting that the *order* of God is simply the pervasive ground bass that sounds through all the parables.

[189] Cf. Donahue on 15:13: 'By dissipating the property, the younger son severs the bonds with his father, with his people, and hence with God; he is no longer a son of his father and no longer a son of Abraham': *Gospel*, 154.

> materials, to the literary ordering of narrative...Orality, the voice of the living Jesus, the ground and life of the tradition, and the very gospels of Jesus' proclamation were overruled by the more complex ordering of narrative textuality.[190]

The distinction between the parables as metonymies in Luke and the parables as synecdoches of Jesus is precisely Luke's 'narrative textuality'. In the Gospel the parables have a definite function as expressing and substituting for the gospel message, as metonymic reductions. But in the ministry of Jesus, the parables open out on to the world he and his hearers inhabit, in a relationship that is much harder to pin down. The hearers have to remake the whole from the part themselves.

However, the slide from synecdoche to metonomy is a small one; the tone changes little. As would be expected from the fact of continuing *oral* transmission of the gospel alongside written forms[191], it seems as if the 'living voice of Jesus' - proclaiming good news of relationships transformed, a transformation undergirded by the order of a gracious God, and suggestively yet persuasively inviting people to join the transformation - continued to echo loud and clear in the ears of Luke.

[190] Kelber, "Narrative", 118. The written medium was responsible for transforming Jesus 'from the speaker of kingdom parables into the parable of the kingdom of God': Kelber, *Gospel*, 220, cited in Farrell, "Breakthrough", 41.

[191] Cf. Farrell, "Breakthrough", 38.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Parables and Precursors
The Parables in the Context of Scripture

So many songs of triumph, read close, begin to appear rituals of separation.
Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 110

There are more tropes used in a single day than in the entire *Aeneid*, or in several consecutive sessions of the Academy.
Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du Discours*, 153[1]

We noted that earlier interpreters tended to a 'hyperbolic' reading of the parables which went beyond the intention of Jesus.[2] In my last chapter I strove for a reading which was faithful to that intention. Yet if we are properly to appraise the nature of Jesus' voice in these parables, to assess its historical significance, we need also to 'go beyond'. For it is not just in what he *consciously intended* that that significance is seen, but in patterns of *influence* upon him discernible only from the long perspective of history. So I seek in this chapter to set the parables in the context of Scripture, Jesus' great precursor.[3] I ask how his voice *now sounds* to us when heard against the background of earlier voices.

To consider the parables 'in the context of the OT' could mean a number of different things. My aim is distinct from the three types of scholarly literature on the OT's relationship to the NT outlined by Willard M. Swartley, and also a fourth type represented by Swartley himself. First, there has been study of the use of key OT texts and themes in the NT.[4] Secondly, attempts have been made at understanding more broadly, under the umbrella of some kind of 'Biblical theology', the relationship between the early Christians and their writings to the OT.[5] Thirdly, the Gospels or sections of them have been read in the light of the liturgical use of Scripture, or as structurally modelled on specific parts of it.[6] Swartley's own work proposes that 'key Old Testament

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[1] Cited in Ricoeur, *Rule*, 63.

[2] 70f., 108, 133.

[3] Drury writes that first-century Jews 'gave to their tradition and above all to their holy Scripture, the Old Testament, a dedicated and rapt attention which it requires an effort of historical imagination to recapture': *Parables*, 41. The applicability of this statement to the full social range of first-century Jews, lesser- as well as better-educated, would be disputed (I owe this observation to Dr Loren Stuckenbruck). I think it can be safely assumed, however, that Jesus was well-versed in Scripture. Drury, who doubts whether these stories go back to Jesus, rightly says that even if they do (as I believe), 'it still allows for Jesus himself, whose humanity precluded total creation *ex nihilo*, to have spun them out of ideas known to him as a scripture-learned Jew': *Tradition*, 75.

[4] Swartley, *Scripture*, 10-13, citing especially works by Dodd, Lindars, Juel, Piper, Mauser and Hobbs.

[5] Ibid., 13-16, citing especially works by von Rad, Gese and Dahl.

[6] Ibid., 16-21, citing especially works by Daube, Bowman, Goulder, Evans, Moessner, Derrett and Roth.

theological traditions influenced the structure and theology of the Synoptic Gospels"[7], i.e. that story shaped story.

In distinction from these approaches, I am seeking a language to characterise newness. Westermann[8] and Drury[9] have both written on the relationship of the Gospel parables to the OT. Both writers operate on an implicitly generic model, invoking a 'plausibility structure' of family likeness in the way they demonstrate the continuities between older texts and newer ones. One may acknowledge this similarity fully, as I do, and yet still not have properly appraised what it is that marks off those texts (or parts of them, such as the parables) as different despite their similarities.

To assess the particular quality of newness possessed by a text is first a matter of simple, careful comparison with other texts with which it appears to share some family likeness, whether in language or form or as part of a historical stream. Then a language for describing the relationship is required. Swartley outlines schemata of John Hollander and T.M. Greene.[10] I turn, however, to a model from Bloom. His diachronic understanding of the tropes as twistings of older forms of language[11], arising from a deeper than conscious level, can be a means of insight into the relationship of Jesus to Scripture, the precursor which (as we can recognize with hindsight) he sought both to affirm and to transcend.

Bloom argues that in the study of poetry, the context within which all tropes should be understood is that of the tradition of creative writing in which the poet stands. The trope is the mark of the poet's assertion of his own voice, reflecting a perhaps unconscious repression, sublimation or other such dealing with the influence of his precursors.[12] In this context the foil against which figures stand out, the 'proper' against which they 'deviate', is not some quasi-impersonal construct like 'convention' but the human poetic vision of a precursor or precursors. The names of individual tropes not only describe the way that a writer changes or substitutes one word for another *in the contemporary vocabulary available to him*, but the way that his whole work, and stages within it, seek to change, or substitute for, that of his precursor or precursors. The work can (through its silences as much as its expressions[13]) bespeak an awareness of lesserness

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[7] Swartley, Scripture, 1.

[8] *Parables.*

[9] *Parables.*

[10] Swartley, *Scripture*, 31n.86.

[11] On Bloom's proposal of a 'diachronic' view of rhetoric, i.e. a study of the changes in tropes and figures through literary history, cf. "Breaking", 11f.

[12] 'In poetry, a "place" [i.e. a 'topos'] is *where* something is *known*, a figure or trope is *when* something is willed or desired': Bloom, *Agon*, 69.

[13] 'A strong authentic allusion to another strong poem can be only by and in what the later poem does not say, by what it represses': Bloom, "Breaking", 15.

or loss, maybe, by comparison with the predecessor, or of heightened intensity. Thus an entire poem can stand towards a precursor poem in a relation of irony, hyperbole, metaphor or another kind of trope.[14]

I shall now show how the synecdochic structure of the six parables (in relation to Jesus' contemporary world), discussed in Chapter Six, is found in some of the great forms of OT literature.[15] Then I shall explore how the six tropes when understood in Bloom's 'diachronic' sense as assertions against the influence of a precursor may illuminate the marks of *newness* which the parables exhibit when read beside the OT.

THE STREAM OF INFLUENCE
Scripture and synecdoche

My focus here, as just hinted, is not so much on individual texts, not even on famous Old Testament 'parables' like Jotham's or Nathan's or Ezekiel's[16], but on the great forms and thrusts of the Hebrew Bible: sacred story, law, wisdom, prophecy. How do the six parables look and sound alongside these?

It should be immediately apparent that these parables possess important links with all four of these great Old Testament genres. They are stories with significance, like sacred history. They encourage certain types of behaviour as the way to true life[17], as do Torah and wisdom[18]. They are directed to specific social conditions, like prophecy.[19]

The connection is seen more precisely if we recognize that just as these dimensions are all bound up *together* in the parables, so they are all bound up *together* in the Old Testament. The neat and conventional divisions break down. Stories are told to

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[14] Cf. Bloom, *Map*, 94f.

[15] I will not discuss psalmody or apocalyptic. The difference between many of Jesus' earthy parables and the latter genre is notable, though some like Scott make more of the difference than is warranted, as when the parables *en bloc* are taken as evidence that Jesus was 'antiapocalyptic': *Hear*, 423.

[16] Drury has suggested some plausible OT antecedents for specific parables: e.g. for The Good Samaritan, 2 Chron.28:14f. (*Parables*, 134f.); for The Prodigal Son, Gen.39-45 (144); for The Shrewd Steward, 2 Kings 7 (148); for The Widow and the Judge, Sirach 35:13-18 (153).

[17] Swartley notes the connection between 'inheriting eternal life', the subject of the lawyer's question in 10:25, and 'inheriting the land', the goal towards which Deuteronomy looks: *Scripture*, 132. The concerns of Luke in this section are those of Deuteronomy in its exhortations to a kind of life which will ensure that the land can be truly enjoyed once it is entered. 'The way to inherit eternal life is marked specifically by love for the neighbour, even the enemy, and using wealth for the benefit of the poor': ibid. Such a reading of the lawyer's question and its background is much to be preferred to that of Bailey, who sees it as reflecting a wrong Rabbinic idea that salvation can be earned: *Peasant Eyes*, 35f., 55.

[18] Daube comments that '[t]he difficulty theologians have with the three parables [Lk.11:5-8; 16:1-9; 18:1-8] would be greatly mitigated if the wisdom input were appreciated': "Shame", 366.

[19] '[I]n Jesus, it is as though many ancient tributaries of speech, many styles, merged in him. The discourse of prophet, lawgiver and wise man meet in him. He unites in himself many roles': Wilder, *Rhetoric*, 86. Cf. Witherington, *Sage*, 158f.

encourage obedience to Torah; much of 'Torah' consists of story[20]. The appeal of wisdom is an appeal to fear the LORD[21] (who gave Torah) and so find life[22]; the law itself contains such appeals on the basis of the incentive of 'life'[23]. Wisdom itself implies an overarching story[24], that of a world created by God, a story that emerges from the shadows in the poem of Prov.8:22-31. The vivid imagery which characterizes the *meshalim* of Proverbs is similar to the comparative language with which the prophets make their powerful points.[25] Part of prophecy's rhetoric, in turn, is to remind people of their story[26], and its goal is to recall them to obedience to Torah[27]. 'The Former Prophets' (Joshua-2 Kings) are narrative books. The great dimensions are as intertwined in Scripture as they are in the parables.

By closer attention to both the 'old' and the 'new' texts we can become more precise. I proposed that the working of the parables in question comes into clear focus for us if we read them as synecdoches, focussing the world in a specific fictional event and inviting audiences or readers to 'translate' that event into a 'world' again. Synecdoche is fundamental also to the structure of Old Testament genres, as I shall now show.[28]

1. Synecdoche and Wisdom

For greatest clarity we may begin with wisdom-sayings, for here the similarity with parables is most apparent. Many such sayings imply an original focussing-down of experience into one, typical instance, and invite application of that instance to a range of other circumstances.[29] Prov.15:17 may serve as an example. 'Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox with hatred in it' is a specific and vivid statement which

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[20] The entire Pentateuch is in a narrative framework, and stories occupy nearly all of Genesis and much of Exodus, as well as being sprinkled through Leviticus and Numbers. Deuteronomy opens with Moses' retelling of the story of the wilderness wanderings (ch.1-3).

[21] E.g. Prov.1:7; 8:13.

[22] E.g. Prov.8:35.

[23] E.g. Dt.31:15f.

[24] Cf. Beardslee, "Proverb", 65.

[25] See Drury, *Parables*, 14-20, on the *mashal* as a prophetic oracle; Westermann, *Parables*, 9-12, on the 'comparative sayings' in Proverbs, and 25-112 on such sayings in the prophetic books.

[26] E.g. Ezek.23.

[27] E.g. Mic.6:8, which emphasises that the LORD has *already shown* 'what is good', i.e. in Torah.

[28] Wolterstorff comments that when Scripture is read as divine discourse, 'a relation of *specificity/generality*' often obtains between the injunction, story etc. given by the human author, and what God is presumed to be saying through it: God makes the historically-conditioned human discourse more universally applicable: *Discourse*, 215. My point is slightly but significantly different. I am arguing that these ancient texts possess synecdochic features even as *human* discourse, whether or not one reads them also as products of a divine author.

[29] '[A proverb] is a statement about a particular kind of occurrence or situation, an orderly tract of experience which can be repeated': Beardslee, "Proverb", 65.

intends a wider application concerning riches and poverty. As a 'part' it replaces a wider 'whole', such as 'it is better to be poor than to live in an atmosphere of hatred - if one has to choose'. It is much more effective rhetorically to use a specific instance as the proverb does, than to couch the statement in more 'literal' but general terms. So viewed from the perspective of its *first expression*, the proverb can be seen as a part-for-whole synecdoche. But having thus turned the whole into the part, the saying encourages people to 'complete' the synecdoche by turning it into a 'whole' again, and then applying it to different situations. In the actual *use* of proverbs in the situations in which they arise and through which from repetition they acquire the 'feel' of accepted wisdom, they function as whole-for-part. Thus a proverb like the one just quoted, when *used* on different occasions, would express a *general* truth by way of an interpretative framework for understanding a particular instance. In a period when the proverb was current, one can imagine someone saying it either ruefully at a feast where a family row had erupted, or encouragingly at a homely gathering where rations were short. In either case it links the individual situation to the wider world. This is the way that the parables of Jesus, too, have been used in the illumination of many a specific circumstance. This understanding of the proverb is in fact, unsurprisingly, closely related to general scholarly understanding of the category *mashal*. The Hebrew title of Proverbs is *Meshalim* and the word is used in 1:1. *Mashal* is used of various forms of figurative speech, 'insofar as they originally express something specific, but which then, as a general symbol, is applied to everything of a like kind and to this extent stands as a picture' (Fleischer), 'insofar as [the form] sets forth general truths in sharply contoured miniatures' (Delitzsch).[30] The Vulgate entitled the book of Proverbs *Liber Proverbiorum Salomonis*, but interestingly the word it used for 'proverbs' in 1:1 is *parabolae*. It has been a true insight of scholars to link *Meshalim* and parables.

2. Synecdoche and Story

I suggested just now that even 'wisdom' collections imply a narrative, that of the world created by God. It is a meaningful world in which character is linked to end or goal: fearing the Lord leads to life. The glimpse of that world in a one-verse proverb is necessarily much more compacted than that which is seen in the longer Gospel parables. However, many explicitly narrative sections of the Old Testament can be read as offering the same kind of synecdochic wisdom as both the proverbs and the parables. They tell a story which is pregnant with signification, with possibilities for wide application. Whether or not the 'lessons' are spelled out (usually they are not), characters are

[30] '[I]nsofern sie ursprünglich etwas Besonderes ausdrücken, welches aber dann, als allgemeines Symbol, auf alles andre Gleichartige angewendet wird und insofern bildlich steht', 'insofern [dieser] allgemeine Wahrheiten in scharf umrissenen Kleingemälden darstellt': Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden* I, 34; he is drawing both quotations from Delitzsch, *Proverbia*, 43f.

portrayed with a striking realism, often (as in the parables) revealed more by actions than adjectives. Drury notes the echoes of the Joseph cycle in The Prodigal Son[31], and we can draw the parallel further by noting the *manner* of the older story's telling. Joseph is never *said* to have been 'foolish' or 'conceited' as a youth, but readers see that this was the case, and that his brothers' reaction when he told of his dreams of domination might have been expected (Gen.37:5-11). The brothers are never *said* to have 'cruelly overreacted', but that is what the reader *sees* in the story (Gen.37:18-28). Joseph is never *said* to have learned humility through his experiences, but this is discovered when he reveals himself to his brothers again and speaks words of forgiveness to them (Gen.45:3-15). Likewise, the brothers are never *described* as 'penitent', but the reader discovers it by means of their conversation about their past guilt (Gen.42:21f.) and their attitude of humility before Joseph and his steward (Gen.43:19-22, 26ff.). The manifold suggestiveness of the story is nowhere slavishly spelled out in terms of detailed 'lessons', yet lessons are there aplenty. The real world (whether we think of the story as historical reportage or realistic fiction) is reflected in the story, and the story invites its readers to see and live in the real world differently as a result. The only 'lesson' that is drawn out comes not from the pen of the narrator, but the mouth of a character, Joseph himself (Gen.50:20). And when he tells his brothers in this verse, 'you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good...' it is not an attempt to limit the rich signification of the long chain of events in its various stages, but rather a highly compacted, suggestive interpretation of those events which invites the brothers to recall, and the readers to re-read, and see everything with new eyes. It is so also with the master's praise of his canny steward in Lk.16:8. We have to go back and read the story afresh.[32]

Sometimes the narrator himself draws out the 'message' of the story, the connection between behaviour and consequences, as does the writer of 2 Kings when he explains the reasons for the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom (17:7-18). It is still noteworthy that the implications for his readers (that *they* should take the warning to heart for their own times) are not spelled out, yet are painfully clear. At whatever precise period he was writing, his readers would be left in no doubt of the consequences of idolatry and disobedience.[33]

3. Synecdoche and Law

A law-code also involves synecdoche, for it may specify particular cases but imply a more general application; conversely, when the law is couched in general terms, decisions must be made as to how it is to be applied in specific cases. Debate in Judaism about the application of law, not only in Judaism, might well be seen as revolving round

[31] *Parables*, 144.

[32] Drury comments on the background of The Shrewd Steward in OT narrative wisdom: ibid., 148.

[33] On Biblical narrative as felt by most readers to be making a 'point', cf. Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 214.

these two issues: how to generalize particular laws and how to particularize general ones. The question of the law's application to women is a good instance of the first issue.[34] Does a law clearly addressed to men (e.g. 'you shall not covet your neighbour's wife') apply, as part for whole, to the entire population of each gender? The matter of sabbath observance is a good instance of the second. The law says 'in it you shall do no work', but what is work? The law appears to have been too general for the Pharisees[35]; or rather, they saw the only way of trying to encourage its observance in a hostile environment as being the way of detailed specification[36]. A consequence of observing synecdoche in the operation of law is that like parable, law appears to need 'completion' or insight. 'Law' is not so prescriptive an ethos, nor (consequently) is 'parable' so un-lawlike, as they may appear.[37]

One passage of Torah, Lev.18:1-19:37, may be taken as sufficient indication that the six parables are not 'original' in what they actually require and suggest by means of synecdoche.[38] The fundamental principle of this 'holiness code' is that the people of Israel were to be holy like God (19:1) and thus differentiated from those among whom they had lived and would live (18:3). Care for the poor, so central to the six parables, is enjoined (19:9f.). Oppression, robbery, injustice, an unforgiving spirit, all implicitly or explicitly warned against in our parables, are all forbidden (19:13-18, 35-37). The Israelites were to love their neighbours as themselves (19:18), and the parallelism of that verse shows that 'neighbour' is equivalent to 'a son of their own people', but they are specifically told also to love the strangers who sojourned among them as themselves (19:34). Moreover, those strangers were themselves under an obligation to keep the law

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[34] See above, 188n.158.

[35] See Edersheim, *Life*, II, 56-60.

[36] Cf. Wright, *New Testament*, 187-190.

[37] Weder's bald statement that the parables are not law, but gospel (*Wahrheit*, 166) therefore needs nuancing. Linnemann, also, is wrong to contrast so sharply the 'purely general' demand of the law with the 'authentic demand' of the 'concrete situation', the challenge 'to the movement of authentic living' represented by a parable such as The Good Samaritan: *Parables*, 55. General laws demand specific applications, while the challenge of a parable in a specific situation carries with it more general implications. Conversely, the danger of saying that parables should be preached 'in an open-ended fashion' (Donahue, *Gospel*, 215) is precisely that the *specificity* of Jesus' synecdoches, the power they possess by virtue of representing the world in a concrete situation, may be lost; they empty out again into the moral generalities of Jülicher. Harman has an interesting discussion of the dialogue form of The Good Samaritan, suggesting that it reflects two modes of thought: legal discussion (in Jewish terms, Halakah) and an appeal to the imagination (Haggadah). He points out that in the exchange with the lawyer Jesus affirms *both* modes: *Parables*, 61f.

[38] Herzog finds a contradiction between the parts of Torah that enjoined justice for the poor (the 'debt code') and the parts (the 'purity code') which effectively excluded them (*Parables*, 125) and sees Jesus as affirming the former while rejecting the latter. I suggest here that attention to the Leviticus holiness-code, where purity and care for the poor are bound up together, exposes such a contradiction as too simple. On 184 Herzog puts the matter more luminously: the scribal Pharisees made the debt code subservient to the purity code, whereas the purity code should have been subservient to the debt code.

(18:26), so Jesus was not proposing anything new[39] by his use of a Samaritan as an example of obedience in Lk.10:30-37.

A further link between this Leviticus passage and the parables is found in the motivation held out to the Israelites for loving strangers: 'for you were strangers in the land of Egypt' (19:34). This is an invitation to the people of Israel to identify with the strangers, to put themselves in their shoes, by recalling the humbling they had known through their Egyptian sojourn. That recollection would entail a realization that God's gift of the promised land implied no intrinsic superiority of one race over another. The message is strengthened further in Dt.10:18f.: just as *God* executes justice for the fatherless and widow, *he* also loves the sojourner. Such an invitation to place oneself in others' shoes is just what we have seen in the parables. The lawyer is invited to follow the steps of a Samaritan, and thus not only love the needy but humble himself (and moreover to imitate the just compassion of God). Pharisees are invited to see themselves *not just* as the stand-offish elder brother, but as money-loving wastrels like the younger, and then to return to God. If they would be justified, they must put themselves in the fullest possible sense in the shoes of the customs-officer. As they do so, self-inflation is pricked. They find themselves as parts of the whole of which the parable-characters are also part, just as Israelites would find themselves parts of the same whole as the sojourners, if they but remembered Egypt.

4. Synecdoche and Prophecy

Prophecy was not simply repetitive of Torah, though it did reiterate Torah's commands, incentives and sanctions. It *applied* the law in new situations. Especially, it showed the *extent* of its application in ways that seem designed to have shocked the hearers. In this respect it is similar to the parables (particularly Lk.10:30-37 and 18:9-14) which seem designed to have stretched people's conception of who might be a positive or negative example. Two passages from Amos may illustrate this. 6:4-7 announces a great reversal:

> Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David invent for themselves instruments of music; who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore they shall now be the first of those to go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves shall pass away.

The biting sarcasm of the prophet stuns the hearers into a new outlook: those who now seem most prosperous will be the first to go into exile. The scene and its outcome are not only a part-for-whole 'slice of life' (no doubt Amos intended to 'sting' others besides

[39] *Contra* Oesterley, *Parables*, 166.

those displaying the specific marks of idle luxury that he mentions) but, like some parables, a *present* synecdoche, a *shocking* slice of life (to think that the wealthy and successful might stand as representatives of the wicked!) Then in 9:7f. there is a shock of a different kind:

> 'Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?' says the LORD. 'Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir? Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground; except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,' says the LORD.

This is another sort of vision-stretching. Not only, as in the previous passage, are surprising people to be the first to suffer. Surprising people also are the objects of God's care. Other nations have had their exodus; perhaps other nations might be Torah-keepers, too. It is the same rhetorical dynamic as we have found in The Good Samaritan and The Pharisee and the Customs-Officer.[40] More deeply yet, it is synecdoche that TeSelle (without naming it) links with prophecy when she writes of the prophetic 'double vision, simultaneously keeping in focus the universal implications of a particular present as well as the potential particularization of the universal and eternal'[41].

5. Summary: Jesus and 'Conventional Wisdom'

I will conclude this necessarily brief outline of the parables' structural relationship to different OT forms by setting it alongside Borg's discussion of Jesus' relationship to 'conventional wisdom'.[42] Though the thrust of Jesus' parables would certainly have been 'unconventional' in his time, his message and method were not truly 'original', indeed were deeply traditional. Several of the features of the social-scientific construct 'conventional wisdom' as described by Borg are in fact also features of OT 'wisdom', broadly understood. 'Rewards and punishments', 'God...as lawgiver and judge'[43]: are these not Scriptural features? Conversely, is the 'gracious and generous'[44] God spoken of by Jesus absent from OT thinking? Yet according to Borg, a 'gracious and generous'

[40] I agree with Blomberg that Jesus appears as no more and no less radical than the Old Testament prophets in his denunciation of Israel's leaders: *Interpreting*, 313. On this vision-stretching *within* the Old Testament, the breaking down of stereotypes, e.g. of Israel's enemies, cf. the 'good Samaritans' of 2 Chron 28:14f., noted by Drury (*Parables*, 134), and especially Drury's comment on the two-sons theme which he describes as 'a favourite trope of Old Testament narrative': although Dt.21:15-21 defended the first-born's right of inheritance and commanded death for rebellious sons, '[t]here is a sneaking distrust of older brothers and fondness for the younger, even when less meritorious. It gave the excitement of reversal to many tales - and more scope to God': ibid., 145.

[41] *Speaking*, 137.

[42] See above, 121.

[43] Borg, *Jesus*, 149f.

[44] Ibid., 151.

God is not to be seen as part of the normal inherited way of thinking, for Jesus, who spoke of such a God, is defined as the antithesis of conventional wisdom.[45] A comparison of the structure of these parables with OT genres suggests rather that Jesus was deeply and positively influenced by the Scriptural heritage of law and prophecy, narrative and wisdom: by those texts which could speak on one page of the sanctions of God the lawgiver and on the next of God the forgiving and compassionate, which could indeed *command compassion.* But since the parables have nevertheless struck many a reader as something *new* when placed alongside their precursor the OT, it is necessary now to try to assess more precisely in what that newness consists.

SIX TROPES OF INFLUENCE
The parables as turns of the tradition

Bloom uses tropes in his diachronic sense as a way in to the apprehension of intertextual relationships between Romantic poems[46], and I regard any such use of tropes to describe the intertextual relationship between the parables and the OT as likewise simply a mode of entrance. It is a means of thinking ourselves into the way that new assertions can be made despite an inescapably influenced condition. Even if it offers real insight in the case of Romantic poetry, one would not expect it to apply with equal readiness to ancient literature of a very different kind; I simply offer it as a suggestive way of construing the texts. As will be seen below, Crossan approaches in his chapter "Paradox and Metaphor"[47] questions similar to those I am raising; but he does not fully face the question of the parables in their large diachronic context. Bloom sees his six tropes alternating between tropes of *limitation* and tropes of *representation.*[48] All are tokens of assertion, but the tropes of limitation make that assertion by appearing to say *less* than a precursor, the tropes of representation make it by appearing to say *more.*

1.Irony and normality

The first trope of limitation is *irony.* Bloom finds in 'belated' poetry an ironic awareness of loss, often especially evident at the start of the poem - a sense that it is not what its precursor was. Yet it turns this awareness, as it were, to its own advantage; its very

[45] Funk is wisely more circumspect than Borg on the question of law and parable. Discussing The Good Samaritan, it is the traditional interpretation of the law, not the law itself, that he contrasts with parable: 'Jesus attempted nothing less than to shatter the whole tradition that had obscured the law...Jesus had to interpret the law in parable': *Language*, 222.

[46] Bloom's main exposition of the tropes in this light is in *Map*, ch.4-7. He also links the six tropes with the six 'revisionary ratios' that he had introduced in *Anxiety*, 14-16, and with six psychological defences.

[47] *Cliffs*, 1-24.

[48] *Map*, 94f. Crossan remarks on 'limitation' as a quality in Jesus' parables, citing Ricoeur's formula 'the extraordinary in the ordinary': *Cliffs*, 14.

difference from the precursor is a part of its own statement, its clearing of the ground. Where might we find this ironic sense in the parables? Especially, I think, in the absence of any authorizing word, any 'thus says the Lord'[49]. By such a formula the prophets had claimed a hearing from the people, asserting an authority linked to that of Moses himself, regarded as the greatest of the prophets.[50] No such words introduce the parables, according to the Evangelists. Jesus has something to say, and his challenge (as we saw in the previous section) has a ring similar to that of the prophets, yet it is not *exactly* a prophetic word. This, I believe, is Scott's true insight when he writes that the parable is 'ironically appropriate for the kingdom'[51], and Crossan's when he writes of the parables' 'normalcy'[52]. They *seem* to possess a lesser authority, yet perhaps they possess a greater.

2. Synecdoche and narrativity

The second trope, *synecdoche*, is in its diachronic manifestation a trope of representation. It aims at restating a position of the precursor, but in such a way that the precursor's position is made to look partial while the poet's own position appears as a whole. It 'completes' the precursor. I suggest that the parables do this in relation to the wisdom tradition and to laws. I have noted the parables' structural similarity to short proverbs and laws, and their similar appeal to the incentive of 'life' in the summons to obedience. But there is a fulness in these six parables which is absent in the short proverbs and individual precepts of Torah. They are short, yet they are rounded narratives. They appear as wholes against the miniature, partial vignettes collected in Proverbs, and against commandments stated in summary form. They give us the opportunity to see the principles of wisdom and law at work in a situation with lifelike characters, in a story with beginning, middle and end.

3. Metonymy and brevity

The next trope, one of limitation, is *metonymy*. In Bloom's scheme this is linked to the movement '[k]enosis, or repetition and discontinuity'[53]. Here the poet seems to limit himself by replacing a term of the precursor's with a mere attribute or adjunct of the term, yet in this movement, apparently one of banal repetition, he asserts his discontinuity with the precursor. The parables as stories with lessons seem at first to repeat on a rather trivial scale the great stories of the Old Testament, its histories

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[49] Cf. Witherington, *Sage*, 155.

[50] See Dt.34.

[51] *Hear*, 425.

[52] *In Parables*, 15f.

[53] *Anxiety*, 78. Donahue writes of the *realistic* language of the parables as a 'scandal', and that it is this which is the counterpart to the emptying (kenosis) of Jesus in the incarnation: *Gospel*, 14. But this is to overlook the very realistic language of much of the OT.

pregnant with meaning and with application for the future. They seem in their brevity very self-limiting; rather than the grand saga of a nation, they seem merely to deal with tiny individual incidents. What power can they possess beside those mighty narratives? Crossan notes the significance of the parables' brevity, using Borges' illustration of a coin: 'it is clear that coins are small because they point elsewhere, their true content is always somewhere else'[54]. Yet this very self-limitation is a part of their self-assertion, betokening newness and difference.

4. Hyperbole and humanity

The fourth trope, *hyperbole*, seeks representation again. This is where the poet aims to *go beyond* the precursor, to open himself to something that inspired the precursor but of which the precursor was himself not fully conscious.[55] In what way could the parables be seen as going beyond *their* precursors? Perhaps through the same medium in which we have just seen them as self-limiting metonymies. They do seem small beside the great histories of Israel, *yet their sphere of interest is somehow wider.* As already noted, there are many echoes in the Lukan parables of the stories in the Old Testament that are full of human interest, like the Joseph cycle.[56] But those stories were handed down within the framework of a narrative heavy with theological freight and community function. The parables, by contrast, seem to stand on their own, above even their Gospel contexts; they seem to shake off other agendas and assert that the human *per se* is the sphere of God's interest. Even when we see the many links that they possess with Jesus' own historical situation, highlighted by Drury[57] and explored in some detail in my previous chapter, their language gives them a resonance (surely in their original contexts, as well as today) which forbids their being precisely limited as allegories, even allegories of Jesus' own work. With their cast of natives and foreigners, fathers and sons, masters and stewards, rich and poor, powerful and oppressed, pious and impious, they as it were press back *through* the pageant of such characters in Israel's history, *through* even Moses and Abraham, to Adam and Eve, to the creation of the world, and assert that the world and humanity are of greater importance even than Israel's history.

5. Metaphor and fictionality

The fifth trope, the last limitation, is *metaphor.* It relates to a movement of '[a]skesis' or 'purgation'[58]. The later poet here comes closer to the earlier than ever, and seeks to win his own voice by an act of metaphorical substitution that somehow claims his own vision

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[54] *Cliffs*, 5.

[55] Cf. *Anxiety*, 15, on 'daemonization', the revisionary ration associated with hyperbole in *Map.*

[56] Cf. n.16 above; Drury, *Parables*, 115f.

[57] Ibid., *passim.*

[58] Bloom, *Anxiety*, 15.

as more 'real' than the precursor's. It may look like a yielding-up of the 'real' for the 'merely metaphorical', but in fact it is the proposal of a new 'real'. I believe that it is the parables' *fictionality* which makes them diachronic metaphors. Much, though not all, of Old Testament narrative asks to be read as history[59]. But this central speech-form of Jesus gives out the air of fiction. More precisely, it gives out the air of *not mattering* whether it be fiction or history. It may be that in giving up the discourse of *what really happened* for that of *the kind of thing that has happened and may happen*, in exchanging ἱστορία for ποιήσις, the most fundamental shift has occurred. Here I am dissenting from Hedrick's project of imagining how the parables 'as freely invented fiction narratives' would have been heard 'in the context of the fictional narrative constructs that Palestinian Judaism developed for making sense of its own existence'[60]. Palestinian Judaism certainly told *stories* to make sense of its own existence[61], but the most significant of those stories, gathered in our OT, were cherished as history, not fiction. These parables of Jesus, though, seem to be *fictions* which as such relativize even the importance of history for the defining of Israel's identity.

6. Metalepsis and allusiveness

The final trope of representation is *metalepsis* or transumption, the trope of evocation, or the trope of a trope. Diachronically a metaleptic text 'seeks to end-stop allusiveness by presenting its own formulation as the last word, which insists upon an ellipsis rather than a proliferation of further allusion'[62]. Such a text aims that *it* henceforth will be the one to be reckoned and wrestled with, rather than the precursor texts. '[B]y troping on a trope, you enforce a state of rhetoricity or word-consciousness'[63]. Bloom writes that it was this 'farfetchedness'[64] in Milton's poetry, his rich allusiveness, that 'gave similitudes the status and function of complex arguments'[65]. Metalepsis summarizes the whole operation of a 'strong' poem. Through evocation of the precursors the poet seeks to scale the heights of their attainment while simultaneously speaking his own word. One might say that the precursor is *evoked*, but only in order to be *revoked*. The later text tropes the earlier one in metaleptic fashion by proposing a whole new configuration of old visions, terms, voices. The proof of its success is the desire other, later poets have in

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[59] Cf. Wolterstorff, *Discourse*, 243; like him, I take it that Job and perhaps Jonah are fiction. Naturally the few short parables present in the Old Testament, such as those of Jotham and Nathan, ask to be read as fiction.

[60] *Parables*, 5.

[61] See Wright, *New Testament*, 67, on the importance of stories in first-century Judaism.

[62] Bloom, *Poetics*, 400.

[63] Bloom, *Map*, 138.

[64] See above, 157.

[65] Bloom, *Map*, 143.

turn to stand in the same place, and the difficulty with which they wrestle to find *their* own message in that place.

The quality of the six parables which seems to make them 'strong' in this sense, relating metaleptically to their precursor text, is precisely their rich allusiveness. The multiple echoes of earlier texts which they contain[66], impossible to pin down and cash out in terms of precise intention on Jesus' or Luke's part, brought together in stories so simple yet so hard-hitting, do indeed have the effect of 'end-stopping allusion', at least in the Christian tradition which has preserved them. This is another way of putting what Crossan calls the paradox in the pragmatics of Jesus' parables. He writes that it is almost as if the parables displaced the scriptures as text: 'Authority, situation or setting, and "text" for teaching are all paradoxically different with Jesus'[67]. For Christians they have both superseded as a reference-point the older texts to which they allude, and remain unsurpassed as embodiments of a vision of life. The parables have been endlessly *interpreted*, but they have not been *imitated* with any success.[68]

These parables' power to *generate* interpretations is the mark of their strength. Drury puts this in terms of Luke's achievement:

> Luke's achievement was to make a new sort of parable [less allegorical than earlier ones] by bringing in to the genre the kind of realism, moral ambivalence, excitement and common sense which he learned from Old Testament storytellers. So this was not an unprecedented achievement. But it was a fine one big with consequences for art, literature, drama and theology in Christendom and beyond it - not to mention the exegesis of the gospel parables in the twentieth century.[69]

I suggest that between the Old Testament storytellers and Luke stands Jesus himself. The influence of his parables, and the simultaneous difficulty interpreters have in truly encapsulating their message or imitating their style, may be illustrated with an example from art. A stained-glass window in St John the Baptist's Church in the village of Quebec, near Durham, portrays the story of The Good Samaritan. The figure on whom the picture of the Samaritan is based is the local doctor in whose memory the window was given. It is an instance of insight *and* blindness, of both hearing the parable aright as

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[66] See Drury, *Parables*, especially 139-152. Naturally there are verbal echoes of the LXX in the Greek text of the parables (cf. Drury, *Tradition*), and these would not have sounded in the Aramaic or Hebrew spoken by Jesus; but echo works as much through theme, mood and tone as through words.

[67] *Cliffs*, 17. The weakness of Crossan's treatment is precisely that he does not treat the parables in diachronic context; he does not properly explore the question 'different from what?' As soon as one does start to treat them in that context, and notice their wealth of allusions to the OT, one discovers the true subtlety of their 'difference'.

[68] Cf. the lack in early Christian literature of anything really comparable to the parables ascribed to Jesus, noted at least since Jülicher: *Gleichnisreden* I, 22f.

[69] *Parables*, 155. By his last comment Drury is referring to the tendency seen particularly in Jeremias to make the more realistic parables of Luke the touchstone for authentic Jesus-material (see ibid., 111).

an endlessly renewable *mashal* (*the doctor* was such a man!) and deafness to its shocking tones (where is the exemplary Samaritan's *strangeness*?) The window tropes Jesus, or Luke, but it is what Bloom would call a 'weak misreading'. The original parable remains to be wrestled with.

CONCLUSIONS

Jesus and his precursors

I suggest that such a structural comparison, and such a schema of intertextual tropes, as I have sketched in this chapter, though they are far from being either exhaustive or prescriptive, give us a better insight into the true newness of these six parables than can be gained by mere observation of other texts whose forms or messages bear some superficial similarity to them. Viewing the parables in this way enables us to catch the strange blend of antiquity and newness which they display. Let the reader pick up the lenses and adapt them as necessary so that insight into these texts becomes sharper still.

Conclusion

CHAPTER EIGHT
Parables and Persons

An Echoed and Echoing voice

There is always a dialogue of text and history, in which the one is adapted to new situations and the other (as Augustine says) is shaped by what the text has to say.
Gerald L. Bruns, "Midrash and Allegory", 644

Les mots ont changé, le livre est différent, mais la parole dérangeante, celle qui remet en question notre ordre humain pur rendre l'espoir à celui qui l'avait perdu, cette Parole est là, vivante, actuelle, toujours surprenante. C'est elle qui a défié les siècles et fait encore du Nouveau Testament un livre de notre temps.
Christian-B. Amphoux, "Les Manuscrits du Nouveau Testament", 357

This thesis has had two overarching themes: the voice of Jesus in six parables, and how it may be apprehended. It is time to draw the threads of these themes together.

My survey of the history of the interpretation of these six parables has, I believe, confirmed the truth of my statement in Chapter One that figures of speech require a response from the receiver that is not merely the receiver's own 'meaning' but an attempt to discern the meaning of the speaker.[1] The premodern interpreters wrote about the parables in a way which clearly represents their own response, and the issues of their own times. But this activity was regarded by them not as contemporary 'application' of an older text with an 'original' meaning, but as the discernment of *the divine meaning* of the text. Jülicher, representing the modern historical quest, aimed at discovering the meaning of *Jesus* in the parables. Nevertheless he showed the need for the receiver to make his own construal of a figure in his adoption of *simile* as the lens through which to view the parables. The most recent phase of interpretation, represented by Scott, underplays the need to construe a speaker's intention, embracing instead the hearer's or reader's response, and metaphor as the key to it; yet as it discourses about Jesus it reveals despite itself the need to be concerned with intention.

This history discloses an ironic quirk. It is the Fathers who are known for their complex 'tropologies' to be used in the interpretation of Scripture, yet their readings show an immediacy of engagement with the texts which seems hardly to need, explicitly, the *tools* of 'tropes' or 'figures'. Even the words 'allegoria' and 'parabola' are frequently notable by their absence. It was the interpreter from the early period who approached most nearly modern aims and methods, viz. Calvin, who made most reference to specific tropes, in his reading of The Rich Man and Lazarus.[2] In contrast, it is modern and

[1] See above, 21.

[2] See above, 66f.

postmodern interpreters since Jülicher who have given most weight to the figure or trope as the structural-linguistic key to the parables: first simile, then metaphor. This reflects historical distance from the texts. The response of the early period has a more natural quality; it is we belated readers who need the rhetorical categories as lenses, means of access to the meaning of the originals.

The reason we cannot return to the ethos of premodern interpretation is not that 'the parables are not allegories' or some such essentialist cliché. It is that we are alienated from the overarching framework in which the parables, like all of Scripture, made natural sense to the Fathers, Scholastics and Reformers. Culturally, and in public academic converse, we live in the age when the divine Author has been pronounced, for all practical purposes, dead. We therefore seek to return to the heart of the parables by an examination of their structure, and their relationship to their setting and their precursors, far deeper, but far more artificial, than anything attempted by interpreters before the nineteenth century. My own reading in Chapters Five to Seven aimed, to this end, at self-conscious use of different tropes as keys.

How, though, might my suggested keys, or any of my predecessors', be evaluated? As hinted in Chapter One, such a quest for evaluability, so understandably cherished by the guardians of *wissenschaftlich* rigour and theological orthodoxy, may be doomed to failure when it comes to dealing with figurative texts. Historical research can lead to plausible assertions (e.g. Jesus was keen on communicating) and the ruling-out of implausible ones (e.g. Jesus was trying out on his hearers elaborate poetic forms for eventual inclusion in a volume of *Collected Works*). But if a figure is a token of individuality and a trope is a twisting of an existing form, a parable will always rise above attempts to pin down its meaning or tone on the basis of what we know about its historical period and other texts within it.

Historically, therefore, we may have to speak of 'the best we can do...', but aesthetically I suggest that the recognition of the difficulty of evaluation can be liberating. We interpreters are thereby inescapably identified *as* interpreters, and can give up the pretence of detachment. 'The best we can do' in the case of these six parables - which, I suggest, is an interesting best - is as follows.

All three periods may give us clues to the voice of Jesus. One way of ranking their insights might be to ask which period was most straightforward about what it was doing. I have argued that the prize for this is won by the first period, and would put the second and third roughly equal behind it. The early period's indication of the voice of Jesus is entirely incidental to its main and overt quest for the voice of God. It had no axe to grind regarding a specific model of 'the historical Jesus', and the morally specific quality of voice which can be heard in their writings is the more impressive as a result. The later periods, however, as I argued with reference to Jülicher and Scott, claim more than their arguments will allow them to deliver. They both seem to me right, but hyperbolic: Jesus

was a passionate communicator *and* a provocative subversive, but Jülicher makes his claim on the back of unnecessary denigration of his predecessors, and Scott cloaks his claim under language about 'how Jesus was heard' which slides too easily into 'how he may be read' today. It is the straightforward, artless witness of the early period which has encouraged me to propose an account of the operation of Jesus' parables *as morally specific teaching, deeply related to Scripture yet distinct from it.*

How then may we summarize the character and echoing progress of the voice of Jesus in the six parables? I suggest the following account.

The great moral challenges and invitations of Scripture[3] echoed in the voice of Jesus, which in turn echoed in the text of Luke, which continued to echo through the centuries; but in the scholarly world the echo has largely ceased reverberating, and what we may now 'hear' of the voice of Jesus is as a result of painstaking reconstruction ('echo' is more a metaphor than ever). In the last century scholars have tended to hear echoes of their own voices in the texts, sounding sometimes louder than the echoes of Jesus, whether it be nineteenth-century religious and moral idealism (Jülicher), Pauline-Lutheran piety (Jeremias, Linnemann, Jüngel, Bailey[4]), or American social radicalism (Crossan, Scott), and whether all such personal 'insight' is repudiated directly (Jülicher), or gingerly and perhaps dangerously re-admitted under the guise of reader-response (Scott, Hedrick).

More expansively, in terms of *influence*, we may put it like this. Jesus was very deeply influenced by Scripture, and its voice (which he would have understood as the voice of God) is heard in unmistakable tones if these parables be taken as morally and socially serious appeals drawn from real life, though with some new modulations which I have tried to characterize. Jesus himself, and his words, were a mighty influence on his followers, including those who, even forty or fifty years after his death, committed his story and stories to writing. This included Luke, who did not falsify Jesus or convert marvellously general or subversive parables into mere moral tales or stereotypical denunciations, but treated his parables as they were always meant to be treated, applying them to specific situations, and *preserving* their character as moral challenge and evangelic invitation. The difference between Luke and Jesus is not a sinister one, as if Luke were offering crude or weak misreadings of Jesus, or being heavily defensive of his own standpoint. As an interpreter Luke is of course a tropist, but I have argued that his

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[3] From what influence did these challenges and invitations themselves arise? In my opening paragraph (above, 10) I wrote that I was excluding strictly theological questions from my enquiry. I have discussed texts in terms of human voices and influences. But an eminent literary critic has warned us that ultimately '[t]he separation...between a theological-religious experiencing of Biblical texts and a literary one is radically factitious...the plain question of divine inspiration - of orders of imagination and composition signally different from almost anything we have known since - must be posed...the voice and that which it speaks can never be considered as separate': Steiner, "Review", 97f.

[4] Crossan sees Luther in Bailey: "Review of Bailey", 607.

troping is of the harmless nature of converting synecdoche (as the parables seem to have sounded on the lips of Jesus, presenting surprising slices of life) into metonymy (as the parables appear when gathered together in an overall narrative of Jesus' gospel announcement). This *influence* of Jesus on Luke is a far more important fact than whatever may be discovered by historical methods about what actual *words in the text* may 'go back to Jesus'.[5]

Scripture, of which Luke became a part, was the formative influence on the parable-interpretations of the first eighteen Christian centuries. The parables were not only (increasingly) ancient texts to be interpreted, but were themselves powerful influences in the life of the church, in literature[6], and in the wider world. The commentators of this era display (at least before the Reformation) little 'anxiety of influence' with respect to their predecessors. Content within a tradition, they do not strive for novelty, though they do not turn away new insight when it comes. Naturally, some aspects of the parables' power and meaning were forgotten over the centuries, and a task of reconstruction awaited the historians of modernity.

The latter periods, however, while taking up this task with energy and insight, display a considerable anxiety of influence with respect to the ancient tradition. Interpreters since Jülicher have been shaped by the scholarly individualism of their era, an individualism which still marks a postmodern world seeking to escape from it. This by no means invalidates all their conclusions. It simply means that their work is often characterized by the sadness of alienation, of distance from a world they can no longer inhabit. Their 'songs of triumph, read close, begin to appear rituals of separation'[7].

The final irony will, no doubt, not be lost on the discerning reader. The present work must operate to some extent within that same *malaise*. Any thesis such as this, as it stakes out its own ground, must bear the *stigmata* of modern individualism. Yet at the same time I have tried to employ both a postmodern 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and a premodern 'hermeneutics of trust' which, as Thiselton shows, 'equally recognize, as modernist individualism does not, the importance of the trans-individual frame within which understanding and interpretation operate'[8]. I have practised the 'hermeneutic of suspicion' on Scott, one of its own practioners, and on Jülicher, who in significant ways foreshadowed him[9] - tempered, I hope, with what Ricoeur calls 'the grace of imagination'[10] in order to heighten the genuine insights they yield. On the premodern

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[5] Luke is also, of course, influenced by Scripture, independently of Jesus.

[6] See Boucher and Carnell, "Parable".

[7] *Anxiety*, 110.

[8] Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 146. Cf. Bruns, "Midrash", 630.

[9] E.g. in the polarizing of Jesus and the Evangelists.

[10] *Freud*, 36.

interpreters and on Scripture itself, so suspected in our times, I have practised the 'hermeneutic of trust' characteristic of *their* ethos.[11] I have, then, sought a 'trans-individual frame' in which to understand the parables, and if through this I have communicated insight into the particular quality of Jesus' voice in them, I shall be content. Moreover I shall be happy, like Bede, to attribute the insight either to my predecessors in the great tradition, or to the Author of light himself.

[11] Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 143.

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