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*The interpretation of the parables of the synoptic gospels: part one: an examination of parable literature in English since Jülicher; part two; an exegesis of representative parables*

Roy Adrian Clements

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

The Interpretation of the Parables of the Synoptic Gospels:

Part One: An examination of parable literature in English  
since Jülicher;

Part Two: An exegesis of representative parables

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The parables of Jesus are unique, standing head and shoulders above other parabolic work and giving us an unparalleled insight into the historical Jesus. After centuries of almost exclusively allegorical interpretation, Adolf Jülicher, towards the turn of this century, set them free from their long bondage. In Part One of this thesis the major English work on parables since Jülicher is reviewed.

Major critics have all taken notice of his work, but there was a considerable period during which English scholars took little or no notice of it. For anything approaching the pursuance of his insights, the English public had to wait until the appearance of the work of A.T. Cadoux in 1931. Thereafter there was considerable development of the eschatological approach to parables, especially in the two most important works of this century - those by C.H. Dodd and J. Jeremias.

Although eschatology has been the main interpretative framework this century, there have been attempts to interpret the parables existentially and Christologically.

In all work, the interpretation of Mark 4:10-12 is fundamental, and there is now little support for the theory that Jesus told parables in order to conceal truth.

The rejection of allegorizing interpretations led to the rejection of allegory in parables altogether, and in recent years there has been a move towards restoring the balance.

Part Two of the thesis attempts, in the light of Part One, exegetical work on representative parables. They are the parables of Growth, the Lost and the End; the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl, the Unjust Steward, the Good Employer, and the Good Samaritan.

ROY ADRIAN CLEMENTS

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THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLES OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Part One: An examination of parable literature  
in English since Jülicher

Part Two: An exegesis of representative parables

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M.A. Thesis, 1975

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+ Notes overleaf

+ Since work on this thesis was completed in 1974, it shows no evidence of more recent volumes published in this country, such as Sallie TeSelle's "Speaking in Parables" (S.C.M. Press 1975) and Frederick H. Borsch's "God's Parable" (S.C.M. Press 1975).

++ Note on style: for ease of reference, the sometimes lengthy reviews are separated from the main text of the chapters by lines of crosses at the beginning and end of each review.

P A R T    O N E  
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AN EXAMINATION  
OF  
PARABLE LITERATURE  
IN ENGLISH SINCE  
JÜLICHER

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

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"Most of them (i.e. the parables) unmistakably declare themselves to be creations of a unique originality, and what makes them of very special importance for us is that almost throughout they bear unmistakable evidence of genuineness, and thus tell us with no uncertain voice that which lay nearest to the very heart of Jesus".<sup>1</sup> Thus wrote Adolf Julicher, the man responsible for much of the new impetus given to modern parable interpretation.

This fact is the one which makes the parables peculiarly interesting to the New Testament scholar and it is one of the main starting-points for those who attempt to deal with them. Thus, Jeremias opens his book with the words "The student of the parables of Jesus, as they have been transmitted to us in the first three Gospels, may be confident that he stands upon a particularly firm historical foundation. The parables are a fragment of the original rock of tradition."<sup>2</sup>

This is coupled together with the fact that in the parables of Jesus we have a body of unique teaching. Although parabolic teaching was common to many teachers, all agree that there is "nothing to be compared with the parables of Jesus."<sup>3</sup>

However we may criticize the texts and find in them certain later accretions, however we may find parallels in other contemporary or Old Testament writings, most would agree that, as handed down to us in the synoptic Gospels, the parables of Jesus are, to a very high degree, authentic and unique.

It is, therefore, a cause for sadness that these important pieces of Jesus' teaching have for so many centuries been buried under a mountain of erroneous interpretative work, and it is a cause for joy that during this century they have been released from their bondage to allegorizing interpretation.

The man who was chiefly responsible for unstopping the bottle was Adolf Jülicher, and it is the purpose of this thesis to examine what has been said about the parables in English works since the revolution which Jülicher brought about. It will examine the different trends in recent parable criticism, and during the course of the chapters, as the need arises, the various authors will be allowed to speak for themselves through the critical reviews of their work which will be used to expand the main course of the argument. The main areas of the debate will thus receive their due weight of consideration through detailed examinations of certain key works, examinations which are intentionally critical (not merely summary) in order to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of these works as contributions to the debate. It will further examine some of the main areas which scholars deal with when studying the parables and will conclude (in Part 2) with exegetical work on representative parables, work which will attempt to collate knowledge from the reviews contained in the main chapters, and which will attempt to show where the meaning of those parables lies.

One thing should be clarified before beginning. The whole literature concerning parables is vast, there being many popular works (particularly) which are beyond the scope of a thesis of this size. Those books treated in detail

here should not be regarded as an exhaustive bibliography of the subject. There are some works which receive passing references, but some which never appear. Similarly, chapters from many general New Testament studies and articles from periodicals are often given no detailed treatment. Space does not allow it.

As to those works chosen for particular treatment, the principle of selection has been that the work be distributed in English in England. Thus continental works translated into English and available in this country (such as E. Linnemann's<sup>4</sup> and J. Jeremias's<sup>5</sup>) are included, as are transatlantic works available here (such as D.O. Via's<sup>6</sup>, but not C.W.F. Smith's<sup>7</sup>). Such material as is used from works distributed overseas will be incidental.

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#### NOTES

1. Encyclopaedia Biblica Volume 3, edited by T.K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black 1902.
2. JEREMIAS, J., The Parables of Jesus, translated by S.H. Hooke, S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1963, p.11.
3. JEREMIAS, J., New Testament Theology Volume 1 S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1971, p.29.
4. LINNEMANN, Eta, Parables of Jesus, translated by John Sturdy, S.P.C.K., 1966.
5. Op cit.
6. VIA, Dan Otto, Jr., The Parables. Their Literary and Existential Dimension, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1967.
7. SMITH, C.W.F., The Jesus of the Parables, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1948.

CHAPTER TWO  
BEFORE AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE WORK OF ADOLF JÜLICHER<sup>1</sup>

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Neither friend nor enemy of Jülicher's approach to parables would deny that his work was the greatest turning point in parable criticism since the parables were originally written down. All major authors since his time have accepted his work as a watershed in the history of parable criticism. To take some major examples:-

A.T. Cadoux realizes that his work starts from Jülicher: "It is more than thirty years since Jülicher showed that the parables of Jesus were not allegories, but I cannot find that he or any other writer has made thorough use of the methods which must thus supersede those of the hitherto usual allegorical interpretation. Hence this book".<sup>2</sup>

C.H. Dodd also starts from Jülicher. "Jülicher and his followers ... have done great service in teaching us how to take the first step towards the understanding of the parables".<sup>3</sup>

J. Jeremias, though following the important works of Cadoux and Dodd, still presses the point that it is to Jülicher that we owe modern advances in criticism: "It is well known that we owe to A. Jülicher the final discarding of the allegorical method of interpretation. It is positively alarming to read in his "History of the Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus" the story of the centuries of distortion and ill-usage which the parables have suffered through allegorical interpretation. Only against such a background is it possible to estimate the extent of the liberation achieved when Jülicher not merely proved incontrovertibly by hundreds of cases that allegorizing leads to error, but also

maintained the fundamental position that it is utterly alien to the parables of Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

That critics in this century have treated Jülicher's work as of seminal importance is an observable fact. Not only do the major authors look to him, so do most of those who comment on parables in theological journals. It is therefore surprising that there was a considerable period of academic silence in this field following the publication of his work. As L.E. Browne said in 1912: "Coming to modern thought we find that until the last two or three years criticism of the parables was at a standstill because men stood spell-bound by the fascination of Jülicher's theory."<sup>5</sup>

Yet to some this delay in coming to terms with Jülicher's work was a cause for surprise. As early as 1900 G.W. Stewart, commenting on the work of Jülicher, said "Long as the book has been before the world, it is questionable if it is so well known to English theologians as it should be; and even at this late date it may not be inopportune to direct attention to a work whose importance, as a contribution to the literature of the subject is beyond all question."<sup>6</sup> Yet, we may also notice that it is not entirely clear what Browne means by "until the last two or three years". Some articles on the subject did indeed appear in theological journals (see below), but not such as to indicate the breaking of the spell. As we shall see later, the English watershed was to come some 19 years later with the work of A.T. Cadoux.

The factors which were holding people spell-bound were chiefly twofold. The main attack made by Jülicher was that which undermined almost all that previous scholars had said about the meaning of the parables. He flatly denied that

parables could be interpreted allegorically, and at the same time declared inauthentic any allegorical elements in the parables of Jesus. The result of this attack was that "Jülicher understood the parables as being designed in each case to teach one thing alone, to register one point with his hearers. The second major departure from previous views on the parables was in the interpretative work which followed from these other points. Jülicher's view was that the "one point" which each parable aimed to communicate was the most general point that could be discovered in it, and this was normally some sort of ethical maxim.

These were the main points at which Jülicher departed from the traditional approach to parables. It is not, however, necessary to assert that Jülicher's work was completely original and entirely unexpected. It may well have been surprising enough to the majority of his readers to leave the theological world "spell-bound" for some years, taking time to digest the heavy meal he had prepared for them, yet history had, even before him, thrown up evidence of disquiet with the traditional approaches. If it were not so, it is unlikely that Jülicher's work would have been read at all. Radical alternatives in any academic field can neither win nor retain credence unless the academic climate is right for their expression.

It is beyond the scope of this study to deal in detail with the literature before Jülicher. Suffice it here to notice that both A.M. Hunter<sup>7</sup> and G.V. Jones<sup>8</sup> have discovered the seeds of liberation in works before Jülicher's. Hunter even traces elements of an anti-allegorical approach from the very early days of the Antiochene Fathers: "To a man the

Antiochene Fathers set their faces against allegorizing ... Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) one famous pupil of the Antioch school, wrote no less than five volumes against the allegorizers."(p.27)

Advancing further through history, Hunter finds that Luther and Calvin, with varying degrees of success, attempted to expunge allegorization from their exegetical work. And coming to the period immediately preceding Jülicher, he notices that of the two major works of the period, that by Archbishop Trench is "Fearful of the new criticism", while that of A.B. Bruce is the "first major book in English to harvest the fruits of the new criticism". He observes that Bruce boldly repudiates allegorizing, and this in a work published six years before Jülicher's. Bruce did not take this theme as far as Jülicher did, and did not cause such a stir, but his work is an indication that the time was ripe for a revolution in this field of study.

We must, therefore, bear in mind that although Jülicher's work is seminal to the modern era of parable criticism, it was a work not entirely out of place in its time.

Having said that, we need to admit that it was some considerable time before works on the parables began to appear in this country taking notice of his work. Indeed the first major work in English to start where Jülicher left off, a book which we shall need to examine later, is that of A.T. Cadoux,<sup>9</sup> which did not appear until 1931.

What happened in the meantime?

Perhaps we should start with one thing which did not happen, and has not happened even now, despite the importance of this work. It was not translated into English.

Consequently the infiltration of his ideas into the English theological scene depended first on those who could read German, second on the few (see below) who reviewed, commented on or summarized what he had to say, and thirdly on a small article of his which appeared in English.<sup>10</sup>

By its very nature, this article was unlikely to make a great impact. It did include the main areas of controversy in which Jülicher was involved, as is indicated by this extract: "If, however, the evangelist's (sic) conception of the end for which the parables of Jesus were used must be given up as unhistorical, so also, along with it, must we abandon their views of the nature of these parables.

If Jesus did not make use of parables with the sole purpose of veiling his meaning, but rather precisely in order to make it clear, elucidating new truth by means of the familiar and commonly known, then the parable does not belong to the same region of things as the allegory ..." (column 3565). However, the article was published in a place where people would only come across it when engaged in deliberate projects on the parables. Consequently, if there were to be any currency given to the views of Jülicher, it would have to come through English reviews of his work.

A certain amount of comment did appear. David Eaton reviewed the second part of Jülicher's work, and comments: "As the result of his many years study of the subject, Professor Jülicher has produced a work of very great value. It is not only a great commentary on the Parables, but also an important contribution to the understanding of the mind of Jesus. It may safely be pronounced one of the best scientific commentaries of recent years on any part of the

New Testament." A surprising feature of this comment and of the whole tone of his review is the complete lack of surprise that the reviewer feels in the face of the work. If it is true that the academic world was held spell-bound by the revolution of Jülicher, it is perhaps odd that such early comments betray no such amazement. Although we may not make too much of this point since the type of comment produced by a reviewer will depend very much on where he himself stands, we can allow ourselves to question whether he really understood what sort of book he was dealing with.

One of the features of this review, and of others, which indicates that there was a need to impart information about Jülicher's approach is the inclusion in them of fairly detailed summaries of sections of Jülicher's work. Thus, in Eaton's review there are detailed sections on the Parable of the Real Defilement and the Parable of the Labourers.

This is again one of the major features of the review by W. Sanday.<sup>12</sup> He certainly had critical comments to make on Jülicher's conclusions, but a large proportion of what he wrote recognized the need to tell his readers what Jülicher had said. The assumption is that even in 1900 they are unlikely to be familiar with his work.

However, for the benefit of those who are already familiar with it, and presumably as a further contribution to the debate, Sanday does offer criticism and provides a useful early start to correcting the balance against the Jülicher viewpoint.

It was also in 1900 that one of the most lengthy English summaries of Jülicher's work appeared in three articles by G.W. Stewart.<sup>13</sup>

That some did take notice of Jülicher is reflected in a Roman Catholic author's reaction against him - Leopold Fonk.<sup>14</sup> Writing in 1903, Fonk reasserted the allegorical approach and, although not produced in English, his work was considered in a review of Jülicher's work by E. Nestle.<sup>15</sup>

And so the story goes on. In most articles and books in this century, Jülicher is the starting point.

In the immediate post-Jülicher period, however, little appeared either to capitalize on or to criticize his work. About the most significant work to appear was that of L.E. Browne.<sup>16</sup> Here was one serious attempt by an English author to come to grips with what Jülicher was saying. In a comment on this work B.H. Streeter indicates that it is perhaps more conspicuous than it might have been because of the absence of other work in the field: "This book in the main consists in an analysis of the nature of parabolic teaching, with illustrations from Jewish sources. It is largely directed against the rather wooden theories of Jülicher, and as a criticism of these is completely successful. So little has been done in English on the subject that this little book must be pronounced a distinct, though not an outstanding, contribution to learning."<sup>17</sup> The work is significant because its author is neither blinded by the blaze of light released by Jülicher nor so reactionary as to dismiss it in the manner of some scholars of the period (e.g. Leopold Fonk). Though critical of him, Browne fully recognizes his debt to Jülicher, as the following criticism of his work indicates:

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Browne's contribution to the 20th century literature on parables is small but is distinguished in that it brings

forward some views on the work of Jülicher and the various arguments his work provoked, and it does so at a time when little else had been said in English on the matter.

There are various points which make the work significant:

(1) Jülicher

Browne discusses Jülicher's contribution to the study of parables, and although he realizes what a great debt is owed to him, he is by no means blinded by the light which Jülicher shed on the parables. Thus, in the Preface, the following sentences are of importance:

"In the investigation of the parables of Jesus the name of Jülicher stands pre-eminent. His work marked the great turning point in their interpretation".

"Disagreement with some of his root principles has led to such a complete restatement of the case, that a casual reader might be led to think that the object of this essay was merely to contradict Jülicher on every side. The reality is far from being so. To no writer do we owe so much as to him....."

(2) Similitude and Allegory

Reserving the word "parable" specifically for the stories of Jesus, Browne attempts to distinguish "similitude" from "allegory" by showing how similitude is developed simile and allegory is a developed metaphor, or rather an interconnected system of metaphors. He shows that in allegory it is actual elements in the story which are compared with reality whereas in similitude the comparison involves the relationships between the elements. He criticizes Jülicher at this point for the view that in similitude only one relationship can be compared. Jülicher would identify as allegory any story in

which more than one relationship was being compared. Browne quarrels with him on this point since it necessitates calling a story an allegory even if it does not attempt to equate any of its elements (rather than relationships) with elements in reality.

He also criticizes Jülicher (giving examples to back up his own view) for the view that similitude and allegory can never be mixed.

Thus, proceeding from the Jülicher standpoint, Browne advances further and arrives at a more balanced position. Commenting on the parables of Jesus at the end of Chapter 1 he says: "...neither the attempt to make them into nothing but allegory, nor the attempt to make them into nothing but similitude, appeals to us as a fair and reasonable treatment of the words." (p.16)

Perhaps the only weakness in this series of arguments is that Browne has to accept as one of his basic premises the comment that allegory is a string of metaphors, and it is this definition which excludes the Jülicher view that a story which compares several relationships is in fact an allegory. While we may commend him for his simplicity and clarity, it may be that here his arguments are too simple.

### (3) The Purpose of Figurative Speech

Browne attempts to get at the root cause of figurative language and identifies its cause as the poverty of language. All figurative language is, he says, an attempt to say what direct, non-figurative language has not the power to say.

He also says that all figurative language needs some sort of key to unlock its meaning. Here again he crosses swords with Jülicher who asserted that although allegory

always requires some explanation to assist interpretation, similitude needs none.

(4) The use of παραβολή and Mashal

In Chapter 1 Browne says: "The uses of the Hebrew and Greek words for a parable do not,.....give us any immediate help, for they include a variety of figures of speech." In Chapter 3 Browne substantiates this statement, one which some later scholars ignore and some support. The important thing about it is that it is made at this particular moment in history, before the major post-Jülicher works on parables.

(5) One Point

Another major contribution Browne makes in Chapter 3 concerns Jülicher's "one-point" theory. While he accepts the general weight of Jülicher's argument, he disagrees on the matter of there being necessarily only one point of comparison in any parable. He says, for example, "In these cases of several relationships there can still be one judgement arising out of the parable, as is better seen in the parable of the Ten Virgins, Matt. xxv. 1-13. The sudden coming of the bridegroom is like the sudden coming of the kingdom. The behaviour of the wise and foolish virgins is like the watchfulness of the true disciple and the carelessness of others. Yet the story all culminates in one judgement, verse 13, Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour." (pp 41-42)

Whatever we might think of Browne's example, and however we might want to criticize the points he makes from it in the light of more recent scholarship, his main point can still stand since it is quite possible that any story may compare several things and only make one major judgement on

the situation.

(6) Similitude/Allegory Mixtures

Chapter 3 also demonstrates, with the aid of examples examined in the light of Browne's own view of similitude and allegory, that it is possible for allegory and similitude not only to have been used by Jesus himself, but even mixed by him as well.

(7) Mark 4: 10-12

It is interesting that in 1912 Browne produced a close analysis of the language of these verses demonstrating that the so-called "Marcan theory" of parables is untenable and that what is commonly assumed to have been Mark's meaning in these verses is not in fact what he intended. A more detailed look at this argument is to be found in chapter five (below, p 239 ).

(8) Higher Criticism

"Higher criticism has ever been too ready with its scissors....."(p.86). Perhaps, in its time a work like this might be expected to be a little suspicious of the freedom with which Biblical critics chop the Gospels about.

It is perhaps a drawback to the book's credibility in the 1970's that it attempts to defend such things as the authenticity of Gospel interpretations of the parables, yet we should not perhaps penalize it too heavily on this count, there being little reason to expect that such tools as Dodd uses, for example, to dismiss the explanation of the parables of the Sower, were to hand then.

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As we have noticed at several points, there are significant contributions in this book which are not now in

themselves of major importance, but which, in their time, were very significant indeed. For the purpose of reviewing 20th century literature on parables, the importance of this work is its place in the canon.

Say what we will about the fact that Jülicher's work was a watershed point in the history of parable criticism, we cannot assert that his ideas penetrated English scholarship so quickly and so deeply that subsequent work always took account of his. Some perhaps agreed with him, some perhaps quarrelled with him, but some seemed quite capable of ignoring him.

It is perhaps surprising that a scholar of the standing of H.B. Swete is an outstanding example of these latter. His work<sup>18</sup> is worthy of detailed consideration for several reasons:-

(a) It shows the sort of problems of self-contradiction into which the allegorizing approach to parables must fall.

(b) Though chronologically a post-Jülicher work, it is effectively a pre-Jülicher work.

(c) Its pre-Jülicher standpoint makes a useful starting point for the consideration of the development of English parable criticism.

XX

#### (1) Introductory Remarks

"These studies.....are simple, and for the most part move along the ordinary paths of interpretation.....

Very little use is made of anything except the text.... Swete gives us his own meditations"<sup>19</sup>

We shall discover these two comments to be at the root of most of what needs saying about Swete's work.

The word "meditations" is of particular interest, because it does seem that, although these thoughts were originally lectures, presumably intended to explore parables academically and thereby to instruct the hearers, they are more meditative in approach than scholastic. Even the method of converting the lectures into the book suggests that this was the intention. Twentysix of the 208 pages are given over to quoting the texts of the parables, but with no verse numbers inserted to help the scholar trace his way through the argument.

There are also many places where the exposition takes on a meditative tone. Passages like the discussion of the Parable of the Tares (p.30) and the moralizing attempted on the Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor (pp.95f) are closer in tone to meditation material than scholarly analysis of the text.

It may also be noted how often we find Swete expounding in terms of "we" and "us" and the way we should view the parables, rather than in terms of what the hearers of Jesus would have made of them.

Yet we may not, of course, accuse Swete of an unscholarly approach. His attention to detail is often meticulous. As examples we may notice his attention to contemporary apocalyptic (p.27), his argument for the Marcan text of the Parable of the Mustard Seed (p.35), his comments on the realism of the Parable of the Hidden Treasure (p.45) and his attention to the textual problem of Matthew 25:1 (p.122). As others have done, we must acknowledge that Swete's critical work is based on a great store of knowledge, but in the course of analysing this work we shall need to notice that it contains

amongst other things, many sweeping generalizations, often with little or no justification to give them substance.

With this in mind, it would be well at this point to set the work in its context. When Swete delivered the lectures in 1908, even though the second edition of Part Two of his book had not been issued Jülicher's work had been widely known by people of Swete's standing for nearly 20 years. That it was known to Swete when he delivered these lectures is not in doubt (p.4). Considering his knowledge of Jülicher, and his overt antagonism to the more critical points in certain commentaries, it is surprising that Swete does not deal with his work in more depth. As it is, Jülicher appears only once, and there we only witness the summary dismissal of one of his views:-

"But there is no substantial ground for this hypothesis; the very unexpectedness of the saying proclaims it original; and I think that we can see that it is also true." (p.4)

We may also note here that Swete occasionally gives similar dismissal to the more liberal of contemporary critics. For example:- "It is quite arbitrary to say, as some do, that these explanations were added by a later generation, and that they embody only the traditional interpretation of the first century; they are ascribed to Jesus as distinctly as the parables themselves, and have an equal claim to be regarded as His." (p.24)

Yet, when it suits his purpose, Swete can make use of the conclusions of contemporary scholarship. For example, he leaves open the possibility that the group of "Galilean" parables may not all have been spoken at one time.(p.60) On pages 159-160 he even seems quite keen to make use of

critical analysis.

The problem with Swete's comments in these areas is not that he draws invalid boundaries around criteria of biblical criticism, but that he doesn't make clear the grounds on which he accepts certain ideas and dismisses others. We can only assume that these omissions and dismissals in the area of Swete's relationship to other critics results from the meditative approach outlined above rather than from any contempt or ignorance on his part.

## (2) Weak Points

Before considering what Swete has to say about individual parables, we might now look profitably at certain weak areas in the book:-

### (i) Mark 4:10-12

Despite the comment that it is "not the explanation which is ordinarily given" (p.3), Swete feels no need to comment on this crucial passage other than to dismiss the views of critical scholars like Julicher as if the falsity of what they say were self-evident (p.4). His view is that Jesus' parables were told to conceal rather than to reveal truth, although, in his discussion of the parable of the Sower, he appears to contradict this standpoint: "As soon as the word penetrated the ears of the hearer it created a new responsibility on his part. So in St. Mark the parable, which began with 'Hearken!' ends (v.9) 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'; let him attend and assimilate what he hears." (p.14).

### (ii) The Allegorizing Approach

Almost without exception, Swete takes up an allegorical approach to the parables, but nowhere feels it necessary to justify this approach or even to comment on it. It does not

seem unreasonable to expect that in the post-Bruce or post-Julicher days, some attention should be paid to this problem, especially in work which so openly takes the opposite view of the parables.

That Swete takes the allegorical approach hardly needs arguing. For obvious support we might turn to the discussion of the Guest without a Wedding Garment (p.80), where preparation for the kingdom in this parable is analysed in terms of Baptism, or to page 188, where the fruit of the allegorical approach is necessarily a belief in a personal devil. Indeed, apart from the detailed discussion of the parables themselves, the products of this approach are identifiable throughout Section III of the book. We see the classification of parables according to their internal subject matter and not according to their function or setting in life, as if the meaning of any parable were to be discovered without relation to the context in which it was delivered.

All this is, of course, completely in accord with Swete's view of Mark 4:10-12, and with his general non-situational approach to parables.

### (iii) Definition of "Parable"

Although Swete touches (briefly) on most of the essential features of this area of discussion, he has, as we have noticed, completely ignored the fundamental problem of the allegorizing method which he adopts. It is as if Julicher had never existed. In his brief opening discussion of the word "parable" he makes no more attempt at definition than what he says is most normally accepted in the Gospels:-

".....the longer comparisons which our Lord draws between the facts of Nature or of our outer life and the things which

concern our spiritual life and the dealings of God with men." (p.2)

However, this is of little use since the way Swete himself deals with parables is not exclusively concerned with "longer comparisons", neither does it help one to sort out the problems concerning those items in the Gospels which are called "parables" but which do not fit this definition.

Going on to the section "Christ's Teaching by Parables" (pp 3ff), we find what can be described either as a mistake or a deliberate (if unjustified) gloss. Swete seems to place considerable store by the point in Jesus' life at which he started to use parables. He claims that Mark 4:1 was the point at which parables became Jesus' method of teaching, and this he does without feeling obliged to comment on sayings such as 2:17, 2:19f, 2:21f, and 3:23ff (where the word "parable" is specifically used!)

#### (iv) Omissions

Swete's lectures deliberately aim at dealing with the "Parables of the Kingdom" (i.e. "those which are expressly said to be such, or which, from their close connexion or affinity with parables that are so described, may properly be classed with them." - p.158) but they suffer from omissions of material which seems from the text, to come under this heading. Cases in point are Matthew 12:24-28 and 13:51. As in other areas, without being exhaustive in his treatment, Swete runs the risk of being accused of making arbitrary distinctions.

#### (3) Galilean Parables

##### (1) The Parable of the Sower

Since this parable itself has no expressed connection

with the Kingdom of Heaven, though the Matthean interpretation suggests a connection Swete tries to justify his inclusion of it by connecting it in terms of its subject matter with the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly:- "...it so clearly belongs to the same class as the next parable in St. Mark and to other parables of sowing and growth which are in so many words stated to be parables of the Kingdom that we are justified in so regarding it." (p.8)

The point here is not that Swete's conclusion is necessarily false, but that the argument he uses to justify it will not stand. Just before the above quotation, Swete acknowledges the possibility of editorial action on the part of the Synoptists:- "Its typical character and great importance are shown by the circumstance that each of the Synoptists gives it, i.e. that both St. Matthew and St. Luke have thought it worthwhile to repeat a parable which they found given fully by St. Mark." (p.8)

He does not however give space to the possibility that his own argument is based on the possible results of that editorial activity. It could be that these two parables are connected because the evangelists themselves thought the subject matter merited the connection, not because Jesus himself connected them.

In his interpretation of the Sower, Swete follows the allegorical approach of the Biblical interpretation, with the attendant concentration on the failures rather than the success.

Oddly enough, by concentrating on the allegorical approach, Swete seems to be open to the criticism of making soil culpable! If we follow Swete's argument and wish at

the same time to maintain the internal consistency of the parable, we have to see the failures in the poor soils as the fault of the soils themselves. "What is the main teaching of this parable? It is, I think, the responsibility of those to whom the word of God comes for its failures to effect what it has come to do...." (p.13) "As soon as the word penetrated the ears of the hearer it created a new responsibility on his part" (p.14)<sup>20</sup>

(ii) The Parable of the Seed Growing Secretly (or of the Automatic Action of the Soil)

"Our Lord's own ministry was....par excellence a sowing time" (p.20). This comment fully accords with Swete's general view that Jesus spoke chiefly of some future ending of things rather than a present, as it were, "realized" ending. As Swete says, "The parable is a key to what we call 'Church History'". (p.19)

Whereas it could have been that Jesus chose the harvest imagery because he thought the harvest-time had come, Swete takes the view that his was a sowing time and that parables such as this one speak of the Ascension-parousia period. In other words, the time-table Swete accepts is that of the Gospels themselves.

(iii) The Parable of the Tares

Here Swete makes himself a difficulty by his allegorical approach. He finds it difficult to understand why Jesus should talk of unworthy Christians so early in his ministry. His answer to his own problem is in terms of Jesus' own foreknowledge of the way things would go and his insight into the ways the human being works.

He decides, without evidence, that the Biblical

interpretation has as much claim to be authentic as the parable.

To Swete the parable foretells an age "when all evil-doers disappear from the Church", but does not consider the possibility that it might have spoken, not of the Church, but of the Jews or of the human race in general.

His allegorical approach has led him into further difficulties, where he says: "Here the kingdom has come to mean nearly what we call the Church". (p.31) If this were true of the parable, we might be forced to the conclusion that not only were there some people in the Kingdom (Church) unredeemed, but that they were unredeemable (since there is never any likelihood of tares becoming wheat, no matter how long the harvest is delayed).

#### (iv) The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Swete sees the point of this parable as resting on the contrast in the sizes of the seed and of the resultant tree, and also in the fact that there was a single seed. This is a natural approach within the framework of Swete's view of parables - as material used for teaching the disciples about themselves and their future rather than as vehicles of argument with opponents. If he had attempted, in the other parables in this section, to deal with the significance of the harvest imagery, we might have expected him here to take more account of the final stage of the parable - the coming to roost of the birds of the air. This point is the more odd in view of the fact that in his commentary on St. Mark's Gospel (1905), he comments on the parable, saying that it "represents it as an imperial power, destined to overshadow the world".

(v) The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

Swete argues: "The parable, if we may press it, suggests that the pearl merchant actually parts with all his other pearls to gain this one. But in the case of the Kingdom of Heaven there is usually no such necessity; the spiritual merchant may well keep all goodly and noble things he already has, if only he subordinates them to the Kingdom; he may become the Christian artist, poet, philosopher, scholar, the Christian hero or philanthropist; all these things are taken up into his Christian life and made a part of it".(pp50f)

Whereas the parable argues that it is the case with the Kingdom of God as it is with this merchant seeking fine pearls, Swete seems to argue that this is not the case. If this is what he intended, plainly he has either not come to terms with what the parable says, or is trying to force the parable to fit his own preconceptions about the Kingdom.

This section concludes with a general survey of the "Galilean" parables, in which Swete attempts to draw them together as if they had been conceived as a body of internally consistent teaching. He sees the teaching as being directed at the Church rather than at the Jews, which is an odd conclusion unless you believe Jesus already, at this early stage, had the idea of the "Church" worked out and to some extent in operation.

(4) Judean Parables

(1) The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard

Here Swete has failed to see an objection to his most fundamental point. He interprets this parable chiefly as an illustration of the saying on the first and last. Without knowing the ways in which modern scholars handle such logia,

Swete could have observed that the point of the saying is chiefly in the inequality of the first and the last, whereas the point of the parable is more closely connected with equality (if indeed we want to establish an interpretation along these lines at all). On Swete's own admission this is the case: "When the day's work is over, and the labourers are called to receive their wage, it will be found to be one and the same for the first and last". (p.102)

He also gives us an example of how those who pursue the allegorical approach may have to admit that a parable contains only half a truth. Swete equates the work done by the labourers with the "service" which we might do in the cause of the Kingdom, and this equation leads him to say: "It illustrates the great principle that service is in God's Kingdom the condition of reward; but it only partially represents the complementary principle that all divine rewards are of grace and not of debt." (p.107) The only way out of such a difficulty is to argue that salvation is by works alone.

#### (ii) The Parable of the Two Sons

We have further evidence here of the potential dangers of allegorizing. Instead of taking the general view that it is the case with the Kingdom as it is with the way these two sons behaved with their father, Swete identifies the two sons too closely. He attempts to see significance here in the concept of sonship: "...its labourers are free men, and if they serve, they serve as sons." (p.111)

If this were a valid approach to the parable, Swete would surely find a logical problem on his hands with the interpretation of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. Surely they would have to be sons too?

(iii) The Parable of the Householder and the Unfaithful Husbandmen

Swete here argues that ἀποδημιέω refers, not to God's absence from the Jews, but to their withdrawal from him. "What is this absence, this ἀποδημία, of God? I have no doubt that it represents the distance which actually existed between the religious leaders of Israel and the God of Israel, a distance which seemed to them to be the result of His withdrawal into the furthest heaven, but which was in truth due to their own withdrawal from him." (p.116) It may be true that the estrangement which was experienced between God and Israel was the result of their apostasy, but this may not be used as an interpretation of this parable. To do so shows clearly that allegorization is at work, and that the allegorization itself has gone wrong. The parable quite categorically states that after the man had established his vineyard, he "went into another country".

(iv) The Parable of the Pounds

Swete makes the assumption that this parable speaks of the parousia rather than of the idea that the Kingdom had already arrived, and judgement was at hand. "...its aim was, that is, to discourage the expectation of an immediate Messianic reign, to push it on to a still distant future - to the Return or Parousia, before which there was much that must happen". (pp136-137)

(5) The Teaching of the Parables of the Kingdom

Swete's third section deals with what the parables of the kingdom teach. He starts by outlining the characteristics of the kingdom, and his second point concerns the "living power and certain triumph" of Divine Sovereignty (p.167). It

cannot be argued that this point derives from the parables. In order for the conclusion to be valid, Swete would need to argue that all seeds in good soil grow, that all leaven performs its leavening function, and even that all pearl merchants would find one magnificent pearl sufficiently inspiring to encourage the total sacrifice of everything they had. Quite apart from this, Swete himself argues that there is human responsibility involved in the achievement of the Kingdom, and that this also derives from the parables. "But while the Parables of the Kingdom magnify the power and the mercy of the Heavenly King, they represent with every variety of imagery the responsibility of man, and the freedom of his will to accept or reject the Divine offer." (pp181f)

#### (6) Conclusions

Because his approach is allegorical, Swete's interpretations are very Church-centred. He hardly sees anything in them as being said for the benefit (or otherwise) of the Jews. The parables are for the edification of the Church, and, in several cases, magical predictions of the way it would turn out in the Church. Swete never attempts to tackle the idea that such predictions were unlikely and that interpretations which are Church-centered might only arise because of the way the evangelists reported them. Swete's standpoint is admirably summarized, therefore, in the following words of his own: "But does not the present visible Church, with its order and its ministries, find a place in the Parables of the Kingdom? Certainly, and in not a few of them. The Catholic Church is to be seen in the world-wide field where wheat and tares grow together to

the harvest; in the net thrown into the sea of life which encloses a great multitude of fishes, good and bad; in the supper-chamber into which men are called; in the vineyard in which they labour. Its work in the world is symbolized by the sowing of the seed, the leavening of the lump, the casting of the net, the calling of the guests, the hiring of the labourers, the doing business with the pounds or talents, the watching of the virgins. The expansion of the Church and its growing importance as a factor in the history of the world is seen quite plainly in the Parable of the Mustard Seed; the rapid growth of unspiritual and evil men within the Church and their intermingling with good and spiritual Christians, a necessary consequence of the Church's progress in the world, is quite obviously described in the Parable of the Tares, the darnel among the wheat. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church and her endowment with spiritual gifts is as evidently depicted in the Talents; while the more secret and personal work of the Spirit is foreshadowed in the silent growth of the seed, in the spreading of the leaven through the lump, in the oil in the vessel ready to feed the lighted torch of the wise virgin soul." (p.179)

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It is unlikely that scholars in recent years would have taken Swete's line, and it would be unfair to criticise him in the light of what they have said; yet there are, as we have seen, a good number of general areas of thought and a substantial number of points of detail where it is possible to detect flaws in his work within his own terms of reference.

It is the view of Harald Riesenfeld that Jülicher over-corrected for the errors of the past: "But as so often happens, the pendulum swung over to the other side, and it is therefore not possible to agree with Jülicher in the result of his interpretation. Would these incomparable parables have made the impression they did on their first hearers and on the many generations of hearers and readers since the time of Jesus, if their message had really only been that formulated by Jülicher in his more than meagre simplifications?"<sup>21</sup> If this is true, it is hardly surprising. Despite the fact that he stood at that point in history when something like his work was almost bound to come, it was still probable that whoever first came up with such ideas would apply them over-zealously. However, perhaps we should only agree with Riesenfeld in the light of what is a very recent development in this field - the attempt to reassess the value and incidence of allegory in the teaching of Jesus. For many years his work may have been considered by some to be in error, but it was not viewed as over-corrective.

The position his work occupies is that of source book for all modern parable criticism. Critics since him have only added one major area to the work - that of attempting to interpret the parables within their original historical setting.

NOTES

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5. BROWNE, L.E., The Parables of the Gospels in the Light of Modern Criticism, Cambridge, 1913, pp.83-84
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14. FONK, Leopold, Die Parabeln des Herrn im Evangelium exegetisch und praktisch erläutert, Innsbruck, 1903.
15. NESTLE, E., "A New Work on the Parables", The Expository Times, Volume 14, 1903, p.473

16. op. cit.
17. STREETER, B.H., review in The Journal of Theological Studies, Volume 16, 1915, p.126
18. SWETE, H.B., The Parables of the Kingdom, MacMillan, 1921 (from lectures delivered in 1908).
19. from an unsigned review in The Church Quarterly Review, Volume 91, 1921, p.161
20. Whether the error be Swete's or the editor's, or the printer's, this section contains the erroneous reading "footpath" for "rock" in the following quotation:  
".....and for the rapid withering of that which fell on the footpath he accounts by saying that it got no moisture" (p.10).
21. RIESENFELD, Harald, The Gospel Tradition, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1970, pp.140-141.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE POST-JÜLICHER DEBATE

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In the last chapter we noted that in 1913 L.E. Browne expressed the thought that until two or three years before that men had been held so spell-bound by the work of Jülicher that they had been able to produce very little by way of contribution to the debate about the parables. Looking back over many more years than Browne, we can see an even longer delay, because despite the books and articles which did appear, including Browne's own book, there was little of major value to appear before the 1930's.

It is the purpose of this chapter to comment on the major successes and failures of the debate in English work this century.

We noticed in chapter two that although Jülicher's work was revolutionary, the time was right for it. The same point may be made of the work of A.T. Cadoux,<sup>1</sup> which marked a similar sort of watershed point in English parable criticism, but which might have been expected to be on the way. Of the indications that such work was coming, one was the appearance of O.C. Quick's work.<sup>2</sup> Though it is a minor work, aimed at helping Sunday School teachers, and though it does not itself always escape the allegorizing approach to parables, it does mark a step forward at that point in the history of parable criticism in that it attempted to avoid the allegorizing, mystifying approach to parables. The major point of Quick's argument is the assertion of some sort of coincidence between the earthly order of things and the divine order, and that the realism of the parables itself illuminates this point.

Quick's book was, however, only a minor contribution. The first work of major significance in this country to deal with the parables in terms of the fruits of Biblical criticism was also the first work to make major advances in seeing them in terms of eschatology. It was that of A.T. Cadoux.<sup>3</sup> His book was, as we have already noticed, something of a watershed in English parable criticism. His Preface betrays his own consciousness of the fact: "It is more than thirty years since Julicher showed that parables of Jesus were not allegories, but I cannot find that he or any other writer has made thorough use of the methods which must thus supersede those of the hitherto usual allegorical interpretation. Hence this book." (p.7) Some years later Jeremias was to confirm Cadoux's position: "The point of view which decisively opened the way to further advance was, if I mistake not, first put forward by A.T. Cadoux, who laid down the principle that parables must be placed in the setting of the life of Jesus."<sup>4</sup> But Jeremias denied Cadoux the glory of complete success: "Unfortunately, the way in which Cadoux attempted to develop this correct perception in his book was open to objections, so that the value of his work was limited to acute comment on details."<sup>5</sup>

Placing Cadoux on some sort of historical pedestal is further validated by his own feelings before the event and his critics' views in later years. His Preface shows that he was aware of treading unfamiliar territory. Certainly all later critics found it necessary to take account of Cadoux's work as of seminal importance for modern parable criticism. His standing in the debate demands detailed criticism:-

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(1) Major Principles Underlying Cadoux's Work

Cadoux's work rests on certain underlying principles, a recognition of which will help us to an understanding of Cadoux's historical importance.

(a) As was hinted in the above quotation from Jeremias, Cadoux was the first major critic to produce a study of the parables based on a use of the form-critical approach. One of the first working principles we might expect to observe in his work is, therefore, the aim to uncover, from the available texts, the original form, content and context of the parables. In subsequent scholarship there has been little retreat from this approach.

In his particular comments on the form of parables, Cadoux examines (in chapter four) how form can be a guide to the recovery of the most authentic version. He demonstrates the profit to be gained from detailed comparison of texts. His examination of the parables of the Great Supper and of the Talents (Pounds) opens the way for further excavations in later chapters. As a working guide he adopts the theory that "The story that is better as a story, more convincing and self-consistent, will probably be nearer to what Jesus actually said." (p.60).

In chapter four, however, there are weaknesses. For example, in the treatment of the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, where Cadoux attempts to use internal inconsistencies to iron out a reasonable working text. He points out that we can sense something is wrong with the parable or its interpretation "when we read of the shut door and the bridegroom's harsh answer" as a result of which, he claims, "our sympathies tend to pass over to the excluded" (p.70).

This argument is hardly tenable in view of the way the story is told and the atmosphere it obviously intends to convey. Far from creating a feeling of sympathy for the excluded, it creates a sense of justice having been done. Had the arousing of sympathies for the excluded been intended, there would surely have been far less emphasis on the foolishness of the excluded virgins, contrasted as it is with the wisdom of the ones who fulfilled their function. Since the foolishness is so much a part of the story, and since the contrast between the prepared and the unprepared is so deliberately elaborated, we cannot but conclude that the sensation of justice is the intended one.

There are other weaknesses in chapter four. Pages 72-74 examine the question on fasting under the introductory remark, "The artistic rights of a parable may also sometimes be useful in determining its meaning". The substance of his next remarks seems thin. The basis of what he says is the idea that Mark 2:20 is so often misunderstood. Cadoux usefully re-interprets it for us, but his comments say nothing about the "artistic rights" of a parable, the very thing he set off to examine. At this point all he effectively says is that any man has the right not to be misunderstood, which in itself is a highly questionable view.

Cadoux also attempts to illustrate how attention to the form of a parable can suggest its occasion. Here he makes several valuable and lucid points about the parable of the Father and Child, to the effect that the occasion for this parable was some powerful argument with the enemies of Jesus, not with the disciples. One of his main points is that scholars are in error in preferring Matthew's "good things" to Luke's "Holy Spirit". Despite Cadoux's comments

it is difficult to see why Jesus should use the words "Holy Spirit" in a heated argument with his adversaries rather than the words "good things". It is not as if Jesus is in the habit of talking about the Holy Spirit, and certainly he doesn't do so in arguments. Of the few occasions when Jesus utters the words "Holy Spirit", only Mark 12:36 could in any way be described as a controversial situation.

Beyond this, we may argue with Cadoux on his own territory in this matter. He himself would claim that the parabolic mode of expression is characteristic of Jesus in situations of heated controversy. He would also maintain that what Jesus sought from controversies in which he delivered parables was the self-condemnation of his opponents as they came to realise truths under their own steam. These are premises from which Cadoux himself works, and they make it far more likely that Jesus would not use the words "Holy Spirit" here. He is more likely to have left them unsaid, so that the parable could do its own work on the "how much more?" principle.

The weaknesses we have noted in chapter four do not undermine the truths at which Cadoux is getting. On occasions he seems to scrape the bottom of the barrel for support for his case, support which perhaps seemed necessary at the time since he was breaking new territory. His examples seem to be, in view of the points he is trying to make in this chapter, poorly chosen, and he might well have done better under this heading to have produced material from other parts of his book (e.g. pp 116ff?).

Despite all this, the point which is well asserted

about the authenticity problem is the general conclusion that parables are more likely to be authentic than other types of material.

(b) The second major working principle to consider is Cadoux's anti-allegorical attitude. In Cadoux's day the reaction against allegorization was still fierce; more recently there has been a mellowing in some critical quarters.<sup>6</sup>

Chapters two and three successfully dethrone the allegorical approach by dealing with:

(i) Mark 4:10-12, rejecting the "Marcan" theory of the purpose of parables, thus eliminating the necessity for an allegorical approach. Who needs to search for hidden meanings when there was never any intention to conceal?

(ii) biblical interpretations, both explicit and implicit. Whereas (i) is a generally acceptable standpoint these days, the idea that Jesus never interpreted his parables provides a hotter debate. Cadoux marches resolutely into battle by going for the most difficult problem - the interpretation of the Sower:-

"It is generally held that if any interpretation has claim to be considered as a genuine utterance of Jesus, it is that of the Sower.....Yet a careful consideration will suggest that if we do not find grave difficulty even here, it is because custom has put observation to sleep". (p.20)

Whereupon Cadoux dismisses any idea that the interpretation of the Sower could be authentic.

(iii) the early Church's (and Evangelists') mis-handling of parables. He attempts to show how the Church was pressured into re-interpreting parables because it had no means of knowing what they had actually meant to

Jesus. He says that it is "a matter rather of expectation than surprise that the early Church, putting its own interpretation upon history, and living in conditions that differed from those of its birth, lost the meaning of many of the parables of Jesus and that the Evangelists thought them for the most part unintelligible". (p.27)

Cadoux's examples in these chapters are more carefully chosen than those we observed in chapter four. There is, no doubt, more elbow room in this field than the other and the number of possible examples much greater.

(c) A more general principle underlying Cadoux's work is contained in his title: "The Parables of Jesus - their Art and their Use". Cadoux attempts to bring out the brilliance of Jesus' parables as an art form, but couples this idea with the function they are given: "The parable is unquestionably a form of art, although not one of its highest forms.....It is not art in the highest form, because it is art harnessed for service and conflict." (p.11) Not art for art's sake, but art for argument's (or communication's) sake. There is room here to argue whether or not this disqualifies parables from being a high art form. It is a fine point, but into the argument would go one of Cadoux's own points - the excellence of Jesus' work in this particular field. The cleverness of Jesus in his use of parables is well brought out on pp117-119 where the intricacies of the argument about what went on between Jesus and his opponents when he delivered the parable of the Two Sons resemble the moves and anticipations of a chess game.

Apart from the astute thinking involved in the

parables of Jesus, which Cadoux observes to make him stand head and shoulders above any other parabolist in history, Cadoux is not unaware of the poetry and imagination which are involved: "In its highest use it shows the imagination and sensitiveness of the poet, the penetration, rapidity and resourcefulness of the protagonist, and the courage that allows such a mind to work unimpeded by the turmoil and danger of mortal combat." (p.13)

(d) Worthy of separate mention, although already seen in quotations above, is the principle that parables are weapons of controversy. The conflicts which produced the parables are always in the front of Cadoux's mind, a fact which is brought out not only in the way he deals with individual parables throughout the book, but also in the classifications into which he has grouped them.

(e) Another matter which needs consideration here is one which makes a difference to any book about parables. That is the way in which the critic defines the word "parable".

In this area Cadoux is deficient, perhaps by design, although he never says so. He never attempts to tackle the question "What is a parable?" and what he thinks of this we need to discover by implication. Under the title "Parables and Sayings" the Index lists the high number of 127 items dealt with in the book. The limits which Cadoux would draw around the word "Parable" are therefore reasonably loose ones. He would not, however, go as far as including all figurative work under this label since he claims that in the New Testament no parables occur anywhere outside the Gospels. (And here we may note that although Cadoux

does produce one example of parable from John, he neither justifies his choice of this and the elimination of other material, nor does he say by what criteria it is to be included in the list - p.168ff) He would therefore obviously exclude the ( not unpersuasive) figures in Pauline writings (The body, runners in a race, building imagery.....)

To help us in this, a comment from the section dealing with the parable/allegory distinction might be valuable: "While allegory only depicts, the parable always persuades", (page 45) and he goes on to outline his agreement with Bultmann that the parable elicits from us a transferable judgement. From this and from the other points we have observed, coupled with a little reading between the lines, we come to a definition of parable which is as close as we can get to what Cadoux might accept; that is, that parabolic material is any figurative material which elicits in one field a judgement which can be transferred to another.

This whole area in Cadoux's book is vague. He neither offers his own ideas directly, nor does he discuss the Old Testament and Rabbinic background to parabolic material. He even points out (p.205), without adequate justification, that the parable of the Rich Fool, explicitly called a parable by Luke, is "not strictly a parable". The meaning, he says, "comes to the surface of the story in God's epithet, demand and question", by which Cadoux implies that this section is not part of the parable proper, a conclusion which we might expect him to develop in the light of his usual form-critical approach. He neither does this nor explains his comment. Such a statement demands the

explanations Cadoux does not give.

(f) Finally in this section we need to take note of chapter five - "Parables of Israel and the Nations".

Cadoux here does a little of the spadework for the distinctive conclusions of Jeremias<sup>7</sup> in the field of discovering how parables spoken by Jesus to opponents were written up as being spoken to the crowd or the disciples; "There was a tendency to look upon certain utterances as having been spoken to his followers, when the utterances themselves indicate that they were spoken to Jews as Jews".

(p.80) In this chapter again we can, therefore, expect to see more of Cadoux's contribution to the form-critical "back to Jesus" campaign.

His main attack is, as we have seen, to try to discover exactly what circumstances were likely to have given rise to any given parable, and here, with a group of close examinations, Cadoux identifies areas of Jewish hypocrisy with which Jesus attempts to deal.

On the whole Cadoux argues a good case in this chapter, but there is one major blind spot. On pp87ff he places considerable emphasis on the idea that Jesus never "instructed his disciples to preach to the Gentiles or even spoke openly of its being done". This forms the basis of much that he has to say here. Unfortunately, in order to maintain this course of argument, Cadoux needs, although he doesn't seem to realise it, to contradict one of his other conclusions - that parables were spoken to be understood. If they were spoken to be understood, and if the parables in this section mean what he says they mean, then it is difficult to see how their meaning could have been ignored or left unrecognized.

"The parable would lose its power unless its hearers could easily recognize its case to be theirs" (p.97) - words from this very chapter.

## (2) Cadoux's Groupings of Parables

We shall now proceed to work through the various groupings of parables, commenting in the main on those points of negative criticism which seem to be necessary.

### (a) Chapter Six - Parables of Conflict

As Cadoux establishes throughout his book, conflict is inseparable from most parables. In some, he notices, conflict is to the fore.

Three points are worth noting:—

(i) The Parable of the Two Sons. (pp.117-119). As we have seen before, Cadoux notices extraordinary complexities in the way this story is likely to have worked. It is interesting that subsequent scholars do not seem to take any notice of his views, which suggests that they neither strongly agree nor vehemently disagree. It is worth asking the question "Is it too far-fetched as an explanation?" Could anyone think as fast and with such composure as Cadoux here demands of Jesus, assuming they were faced with a similar situation? Was even Jesus this cunning?

(ii) The Parable of the Prodigal Son (pp.120-123). Here is an example of Cadoux's tendency to gloss over major points. Of the three brief pages given to the main examination of this parable, two are taken up with the text! This is surprising, but what he says on the remaining one page is vague enough to be more surprising. His conclusions are generalities, and we are expected to accept them as self-evident, with no working being shown

at all.

(iii) The Parable of the Unjust Steward (pp.130-137). Here is an example of the tendency to try to have a cake and eat it: "The question then arises as to whether the author of verse 8 was right in his estimate of Jesus' mind. It is very difficult to think that Jesus commended the sort of wisdom that the steward showed, or told this story of the fraudulent misuse of a monetary trust as an example of the conduct desirable in spiritual matters. And there is evidence that Jesus did not think at all highly of the wisdom of "the children of this world": they were weatherwise, but no more (Luke xii:56): their type was the Prodigal who wasted all or the rich fool who lost all by sinking enjoyment in postponement". (p.133) The ideas of the first half of the paragraph may well be justifiable, but certainly not in terms of the evidence of the second half. The sayings on being weatherwise and the parables of the Prodigal and the Rich Fool were addressed, not, as Cadoux here suggests, to the "children of this world" (who in the terms of v.8 must surely be Gentiles and pagans, in contrast with the Jewish nation), but to the "children of light".

(b) Chapter Seven - Parables of Vindication

Jesus' own conduct and teaching, and that of his disciples, needed, on many occasions, some justification. Certain parables evidently derive from such situations.

Again particular comments are necessary:-

(i) The whole discussion on the secrecy which Jesus found to be necessary produces problems. The sayings on giving holy things to dogs and casting pearls before swine

are represented (p.142) as maxims on which Jesus acted on those occasions when he tried to keep his purposes secret. Against this view it has to be noted that there are many more occasions when he made his meaning patently clear, particularly (on Cadoux's own view of them) when he spoke in parables. Not only this, but there seems to be in Cadoux's work no knowledge or recognition of the debate on the Messianic Secret problem.

The difficulty here is complicated by his rather eccentric view of the Parable of the Treasure in the Field. He is adamant (again without including any justification of his view) that the main point of the parable is the secrecy involved in the operation to acquire the treasure. "No explanation of the parable that does not do justice to this, its outstanding feature, has any right to be considered" (p.143). Yet Cadoux seems to have a blind spot here. As most critics would agree, any reading of the parable which does not do justice to the happiness of the man and the complete dedication to acquiring the treasure has, in fact, no right to be considered. This view is supported by the juxtaposition of this parable with the parable of the Pearl, which has a similar theme of dedication. Cadoux has probably worked on a preconception here and exaggerated a secondary feature of the parable until it makes the parable fit his view.

(ii) The Parable of the Pearl itself (pp.146ff) receives a rather wild treatment, again poorly substantiated. Cadoux argues that since the story is one of a calculated business transaction, concentrating all financial resources to acquire one big prize, the natural application is to the

mission of the disciples - they should concentrate on converting Israel in order to grasp the whole world through the action of the Jews. Once again, Cadoux does not address himself to the primary feature of the parable - the lengths to which a man will go to acquire the greatest prize of all once he has discovered it. Cadoux's view of "concentration for expansion" tends to over-allegorize the elements of the parable. A merchant conducting a business transaction to acquire the best pearl he has ever come across may well consider using the new pearl to acquire other pearls later on. This can hardly be the case with the Kingdom, so we may conclude that too close a focus on the business angle of the parable will lead us off the scent. The primary feature must surely be the complete dedication to acquiring the pearl.

(c) Chapter Eight - Parables of Crisis and Opportunity

This chapter deals with Jesus' own self-revelation to the people of his day and with how this presented them with a crisis and an opportunity, and thereby brought into focus the contrasts between the old and the new. Only minor criticisms arise from this chapter, mainly concerned with Cadoux's arbitrary judgements (as in the case of his unsubstantiated preference for the Lucan text of the sayings about the Patch and the Wineskins).

(d) Chapter Nine - Parables of the Future

This chapter attempts to comment on the parables with a view to eschatology and the future generally, but suffers particularly from the problem we have already observed in Cadoux's work - that of having no clear definition of what a parable is. There are items (e.g. on pp.176, 184, 187,

193, 194) which have dubious claims to be parabolic and even dubious claims to speak figuratively. It would be expected that in the interests of clarity Cadoux would at least at this point have commented on why he includes these items. It could be that he did not intend them all to be considered as parables, but since he quotes their texts in full (which he normally does when he proposes to discuss a parable in detail) the matter is not clear.

Two more particular points are worth comment:-

(i) He argues that the point of the parable of the Budding Fig Tree is to show how certain signs can presage their opposites:- "Just as the tender and fresh green of the first fig leaves presage its opposite - the scorching heat of summer - the two opposites being successive phases of the one process, so Jesus bids his disciples look upon the persecutions that will come as a presage of their opposite - triumph and enlarged opportunity." (p.180) At every point this seems to be wrong. As C.W.F. Smith<sup>8</sup> says, there may be as much connection between this parable (in its original context) and the arrival of the Kingdom as there is between it and the parousia, which is what is suggested by its present context. Smith himself sees it as a possible illustration of Mark 1:15.

Quite apart from this criticism, it is doubtful whether Cadoux has hit the nail on the head when he sees the question of opposites as the main point. For one thing, we can in no way agree that the arrival of leaves and the heat of summer (scorching or not) are opposites. For another, it is part of the rhythm of nature for summer to follow spring and the arrival of leaves - in this there

is nothing surprising or out of place, let alone opposite in any way.

The point of the parable, which Cadoux omits to mention, and which seems worthy of a comment even if Cadoux's view were to be accepted, is the certainty with which the one thing follows the other.

(ii) On pages 181ff Cadoux deals with the Parable of the Unjust Judge. He argues (linguistically) that Jesus here intends to deal with the delay in the parousia. He omits to mention that this demands considerable predictive powers of Jesus, and neglects to observe that the application (at least) of such a parable may be attributable to the Church (p.193), a view generally accepted as a basis for parable criticism. But it is surprising that Cadoux himself does not examine the possible editorial activity of the Church and the Evangelists.

(e) Chapter Ten - Parables of Duty and Personality

No major comments are necessary here beyond the surprise we might feel at the brevity of the treatment of the Good Samaritan, and the intrusion, as elsewhere, of sayings which, to be included under the title "parable", require some justification.

(f) Chapter Eleven - Parables of God and Man

A point arises from the treatment of the parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Prodigal Son. Cadoux says that they "leave us with the impression that the joy of recovery would be lost to him who could surely and exactly foresee the end of evil" (p.228). By this Cadoux implies that the parables have some connection with the joy we might feel if we could foresee the end of evil. This

is not the case. If the parables speak of any joy at recovery at all, it is God's joy.

This leads us to a second point of criticism in the same section. Cadoux suggests that what God is searching for in these parables is man in general, as the only sinning member of creation (p.232). The context of these parables in Luke's text however, suggests that what Jesus had in mind was God's search for those particular human beings who were sinners, as opposed to those who were righteous. The category of sinners may indeed include the whole human race, and perhaps Jesus did draw the distinction with his tongue in his cheek, but this is not part of the implication of the reply Jesus here makes to his opponents.

### (3) Conclusion

Cadoux says: "Any detailed consideration of the parables of Jesus must arrange them in groups, and the practical nature of the parable suggests that the grouping should be by their various uses." (p.116) It is in the grouping exercise that we find the justification of the title's word "Use". We might expect that the primary function of a parable, which Cadoux considers to be its capability in conflict, might come out in the grouping. It does. In almost every case the elements of conflict can be seen, if not commented on explicitly. In particular the conflict between Jesus and the ruling Jewish authorities comes out, together with the major area of that conflict - Jesus' missionary work outside the old areas of mission. Many of Cadoux's own comments, for example, are related to the cleansing of the Temple, which indicated his own particular

area of concern.

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Scholars since Cadoux have admired him for his method and the valuable contribution he made in bringing form-critical approaches to the study of the parables, but they have found him wanting in his detailed studies, where they have discovered at once genuine breakthroughs and gross mistakes. Their criticisms are justified.

In the whole post-Julicher debate there is little doubt that C.H. Dodd and J. Jeremias stand head and shoulders above everyone else. They, following Cadoux, developed the major emphasis of parable criticism this century - their interpretation in terms of eschatology. Although there have been other works developing quite different approaches to the parables (which will be discussed in chapter four), nothing has been published which has had as much influence and commanded as much respect as these two. Chronologically, Dodd's work<sup>9</sup> demands first consideration:

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#### (1) General Introduction

It is difficult to know, when reading this book, which comes first in Dodd's order of priorities. Does he start from the premise of "realized eschatology" (which he attempts to establish on grounds other than the parabolic material) and then move on to try to make the parables conform to this pattern, or does he work the other way round, starting from a view that the parables need interpreting, and going on to look for their most likely meaning? At various points in the book we might find ourselves supporting the former view, but at others we might

wonder whether the latter were not predominant. It is a chicken and egg situation.

The Preface to the 1961 edition seems to hint at support for both views, perhaps because by this time Dodd had, according to some (see below), mellowed in his views on eschatology. Of the former view the Preface hints thus: "My work began by being orientated to the problem as Schweitzer had stated it.....I found myself unconvinced by his own formula of "consequente eschatologie". The clue, it seemed, was still to seek. In any attempt to arrive at a clearer view of the problem it was obviously necessary to take special account of the Gospel parables....." (p.7). After this he speaks of understanding Christian teaching in terms of "what I have called 'realized eschatology'" (p.8). Of the latter view, we might instance the following: ".....the question in which I was primarily interested: what was the original intention of this or that parable in its historical setting?.....It is my submission that the parables, critically treated, become of our most important sources for a knowledge of the historical career of Jesus Christ, especially in respect of the motives behind it and the issues it raised". (p.7)

On the whole the former view seems more acceptable. Despite the book's title, Dodd understands the expression "Parables of the Kingdom" loosely - as we gather from the fact that his book deals with many parables beyond those with explicit applications to the Kingdom and also even rejects one which does have such application (Matthew 18: 23-35).<sup>10</sup> So we can see that Dodd is selective in his dealing with the parables. Although it is arguable that

that parables have lost, and gained, introductions, this sort of selectivity needs at least the justification of making this point.

We may say, then, and more particularly when we consider the whole structure of his book, that what Dodd has here done is first to justify his "realized eschatology" and then to fit such parables to it as he can. That he is selective in the parables he chooses to use in his debate on eschatology is evidenced by some surprising omissions. Even though Dodd's major points are established on the basis of items from his "primary sources" - Mark and "Q" - he by no means excludes matter peculiar to Luke. This being the case, there are at least three major parables peculiar to Luke with which we might expect him to deal. The parable of the Rich man and Lazarus might well have something to say within the context of this study, particularly in the 1961 edition which comes long after the work of Jeremias who saw it as a parable of warning. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, speaking as it does with considerable force to contemporary religious leaders and the like, must surely have something to say about the critical situation in which Dodd argues the Jews found themselves. Perhaps more significant than these is the complete omission of the parable of the Barren Fig Tree. Cadoux had argued,<sup>11</sup> that this parable focused on the idea of Israel being given a second chance. The implication of this theory is that there is some force in a futurist eschatology of some sort. Despite his treatment of Cadoux elsewhere, at this point Dodd ignores him. In view of Dodd's clear desire elsewhere to establish his case for a

realized eschatology and to dispose of the objections with thorough and detailed arguments, the omission of this relevant piece of material leads us to suspect that it is some sort of chink in his armour.

The fact that eschatology takes precedence over parables in the order of Dodd's priorities does not imply any belittling of parables in the book. As we have seen in the quotation above, he sees them as being "of our most important sources for a knowledge of the historical career of Jesus Christ" (p.8), a factor in his work which is underlined not only in chapter one but also in his general concern for a critical treatment of the texts of the parables and for getting at the original form and setting of the parables.

Naturally, with a work as radical as this one, there have been many comments on Dodd's findings, and most critics seem to have come to the conclusion that although Dodd redressed the balance in eschatological thinking, he did overstep the mark. It has been suggested that in subsequent years Dodd came to relinquish much that he had held previously in the matter of realized eschatology. Dan Otto Via Jr. quotes the following example: "James M. Robinson ("The formal structure of Jesus' message", p.97) has stated that Bultmann and C.H. Dodd have moved closer together in recent years, Bultmann relinquishing some of his emphasis on futuristic eschatology in favor of recognizing that Jesus also proclaimed an eschatological present, and Dodd relinquishing some of his emphasis on realized eschatology in favor of an eschatology in the process of realization."<sup>12</sup> However, we should note

that the 1961 edition of Dodd's book contains no retractions on the matter of realized eschatology, beyond the comment in the Preface:-

"If the case is here stated with a somewhat one-sided emphasis, that is in the nature of the argument, and I believe materials for correcting the balance are present for the discerning reader. I do not, of course, claim that this is the only possible interpretation. I offer it as one which appears to me to make sense of the general body of parables and sayings accepted by a reasonable criticism as part of the earliest tradition, to reconcile their apparent contradictions, and to relate them intelligently to the rest of the New Testament." (p.8)

Supporting evidence that in recent years he has stuck to his guns may be deduced from some comments made later in this review about his work on the New English Bible.<sup>13</sup>

(2) Chapter One - The Nature and Purpose of the Gospel Parables

The opening chapter is largely work which was previously published in 1931 as an article in the Bulletin of the John Rylands Library. It is a tone-setting piece. The area in which Dodd is to be classified as a parable-critic is not only easily evident from what he says, but also from the authors he acknowledges in the chapter - "Julicher, Bultmann and Cadoux, and in the later edition Jeremias. If Dodd were less direct and explicit than he is, we would still be in no doubt as to the school of thought to which he would most readily subscribe over matters such as the critical approach to the Gospels, the parable/allegory distinction, the general approach to the parables, and so on.

His cards are on the table from the outset.

The chapter not only answers the questions "What is a parable?" (discussing authenticity, how parable compares with allegory and also what forms parable takes in the Gospels) and "What is a parable for?" (discussing Mark 4: 10-12 and the argumentative function of the parables) but also answers the question "How can we get at their meaning?" (discussing the approach of discovering the original setting of the parables, and, more important perhaps for Dodd's own thesis, that the parables need to accord with the general orientation of the teaching of Jesus).

It is evident from the outset that although Dodd holds particular views in the direction of eschatology, he is not prepared to be led into extreme positions over the matters he discusses in this background chapter. The following are examples of his refusal to be pushed to extremes:-

(a) Definition of "Parable"

Using Bultmann's classifications, Dodd identifies certain types of figurative language in the Gospels, but he does not wish his divisions to be rigid: "It cannot be pretended that the line can be drawn with any precision between these three classes of parable - figurative sayings, similitudes and parables proper" (pp.17-18). Here is somebody who is prepared to identify "parables" only loosely, realizing the problems of close definitions: ".....one class melts into another, and it is clear that in all of them we have nothing but the elaboration of a single comparison, all the details being designed to set the situation or the series of events in the clearest

possible light, so as to catch the imagination" (p.18).

It is interesting that Dodd does not start from an Old Testament background (although he does quote the story of the ewe lamb which Nathan told David), which is an area of discussion which would probably have been useful to a work (preceding Oesterley and B.T.D. Smith) which sought to place the parables within their original setting, attempting to understand the state of mind of and the knowledge available to the hearers. Surely one factor in this situation would have been their current understanding and experience of the parable method? As Dodd says: "The clue must be found.....in such ideas as may be supposed to have been in the minds of the hearers of Jesus during His ministry. Our best guide to such ideas will often be the Old Testament, with which they may be presumed to have been familiar." (p.27)

However the area of this discussion where Dodd scores most points is in his acknowledgement of the realism of the parables and of the fact that they were a quite natural means of expression: "They are the natural expression of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures rather than conceives it in abstractions" (p.16).

The closest Dodd comes to practical definition is: "At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought" (p.16)

(b) One Parable - One Point.

Dodd follows Julicher in thinking that any parable is

designed to communicate one central point, and he sees this as a useful point of contrast with allegory. But he is not foolish enough to go the whole way in devaluing the lesser points of parables: "In making this distinction between the parable and the allegory, we must not be too rigorous. For if the parable is drawn out to any length, it is likely that details will be inserted which are suggested by their special appropriateness to the application intended, and if the application is correctly made by the hearer, he will then see a secondary significance in these details." (p.20). We can see that Dodd takes a balanced view, allowing the "Jülicher" point its place, but not going so far as to be obliged to fall into the trap of "Jülicher himself - the trap of interpreting the parables as illustrations of moral generalities.

### (c) Parable Settings

Dodd's first principles include the attempt to discover the original setting of the parables, but he does not wish to ignore completely the Gospel settings. Whilst employing critical techniques on the Gospels, he does not find it necessary to dismiss all Gospel settings and applications, and indeed finds some of them integral to an understanding of the parable. "It is, however, necessary to ask how far such applications can be regarded as original. The tendency of recent writers from Jülicher to Bultmann is to discount them all heavily. But it would be well not to go too far in this direction. To begin with, parables with applications (no less than parables without applications) occur in all our main four Gospel strata. While therefore any particular application may be the work of this or that

evangelist, the primitive tradition underlying the variously differentiated traditions from which our Gospels are derived, was certainly acquainted with applied parables." (p.24).

His later chapters illustrate and underline these points. Linked with this is:

(d) The Situational Approach to the Parables

That Dodd is prepared to lay down very few rules for parable criticism is an indication of the balanced nature of his initial approach and first principles, even though some would not find his ultimate conclusions so balanced. His approach is situational, as is indicated by his two principles on page 27:

- (i) judging each parable in accordance with what the hearers are likely to have understood.
- (ii) each interpretation must accord with what we know (explicitly) of Jesus' own view of his ministry.

Thus Dodd approaches the parables in a very contextual way, which is also reflected in the final section in the chapter where he states "A preliminary task, therefore, will be to define, so far as we can, the general orientation of the teaching of Jesus" (p.27).

There are however certain points which Dodd holds to be essential:

(a) Parable/Allegory Distinction

Dodd is as decisive as any critic on the matter of separating that which makes an allegory from that which makes a parable. The Preface to the 1961 edition makes it clear how fundamental

his objection to the allegorical approach is: "I had followed Jülicher in rejecting the allegorical method of interpretation which was traditional, without being able to follow him much further." (p.7). He later makes his objection quite explicit: "To the ordinary person of intelligence who approaches the Gospels with some sense for literature this mystification must appear quite perverse." (p.14).

One of the clear distinctions Dodd makes between parable and allegory is one which he acknowledges to have been worked out well by Bultmann and Cadoux before him in 1931. That is, the argument that parables argue a case, allegories merely describe what is already accepted. And it is in the context of this argument that one of his most significant opening points is made - that the basic presupposition of Jesus' parables is the idea that there is an inward affinity between the natural order and the spiritual order: "This sense of the divineness of the natural order is the major premise of all the parables" (p.21). This, he says, accounts for the high degree of realism in the parable stories.

It is tempting to concede this point, but we must not do so without noting that, pushed to its logical conclusion in application to specific parables, we might well find it leads to as severely allegorizing an approach as Dodd himself dismisses.

#### (b) The "Marcan" Theory of Parables

Quite naturally, with (a) there arises the question of the "Marcan" theory of parables, which, Dodd argues, is mistaken. In dealing with Mark 4:10-12 it is interesting

that Dodd does not concern himself with the quotation from Isaiah but produces linguistic evidence to the effect that this section is unlikely to consist of authentic words from Jesus. He backs up his argument with a criticism of the Interpretation of the Parable of the Sower, the passage within which the problematic quotation is set.

He also argues the unlikelihood of the "Marcan" theory on cultural grounds:- "The probability is that the parables could have been taken for allegorical mystifications only in a non-Jewish environment." (p.16).

He concludes the argument by relating verses 11-12 to the Messianic Secret theory, and says finally: ".....that he desired not to be understood by the people in general, and therefore clothed his teaching in unintelligible forms, cannot be made credible on any reasonable reading of the Gospels." (p.15)

So, on biblical/linguistic grounds, on historical/cultural grounds and on the grounds of what would be most characteristic of Jesus, Dodd finds the face-value view of Mark 4:10-12 wanting.

### (3) Chapter Two - The Kingdom of God

Although some might say that Dodd's position on eschatology is an extreme one, there are points here where Dodd's effort to take a well balanced view is evident. For example, given the position Dodd takes up with regard to predictions about the Kingdom, he does give free reign to the idea of Jesus as a prophet who makes attempts at prediction. There is nothing particularly unbridled about his attempt to deal with the futuristic aspect of what is

recorded in the Gospels. To summarize, in Dodd's own words, "It is often plausibly held that forebodings of His own death which are repeatedly attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are of the nature of vaticinia ex eventu. The Church could not believe that their Lord had been ignorant of what lay before Him. It may freely be conceded that the precision of some of these predictions may be due to the Church's subsequent knowledge of the facts, but this admission does not necessarily carry with it the view that all forecasts of coming suffering are unhistorical." (p.45). Thus, in this area, as in other debates in the book, Dodd seems to give fair rein to all the evidence. Our task is only to decide whether or not that which is new about his view is itself an overstatement.

It is on this chapter and the next that Dodd's main argument hangs. In a sense the book is mistitled, for the chapters subsequent to chapter three are merely a means of finding out whether or not the parables which can be connected with the idea of the "Kingdom" can be adequately interpreted in the light of the truth which has already been debated and resolved. The chapters on the parables depend on the point that the Kingdom has already come, and it is in these two chapters that Dodd attempts to establish this point.

The matters of uppermost importance are linguistic points:-

(a) The ἤγγικεν / ἔδουλεν debate

There were repercussions to what Dodd had to say about these words. J.Y. Campbell was sufficiently

successful in his article<sup>14</sup> to persuade Dodd to make a correction in the third edition, although there was no substantial alteration to his main argument. It is worth noting here the gist of Dodd's reply to Campbell.<sup>15</sup> Both men are agreed on the idea that  $\xi\phi\theta\alpha\sigma\epsilon\nu$  means the same as  $\eta\gamma\gamma\iota\kappa\epsilon\nu$  in those critical contexts under debate. The question is only what they mean.

The weight of evidence which Dodd brings against Campbell in the Expository Times invites agreement with him, but we must observe that his argument does not make agreement with him obligatory. It only, if anything, makes it feasible. In his article he says: "I submit that this examination shows that  $\epsilon\gamma\gamma\iota\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$  could be used to translate Hebrew/Aramaic verbs meaning "arrive", without being untrue to their meaning."

He is not, however, convincing to some. Vincent Taylor says: "It is difficult to accept this argument. Of the examples cited the only certain case appears to be Jon. iii 6, "And the tidings reached the King of Nineveh". Moreover, in a number of cases  $\epsilon\gamma\gamma\iota\zeta\omega$  is used to translate qarab "to approach". While, then, the translation "has come" may be possible, it seems more likely that  $\eta\gamma\gamma\iota\kappa\epsilon\nu$  should be rendered "is at hand" or "has drawn near", as in Romans xiii.12, Jas v.8 and (i) Peter iv.7 (cf Mt.xxvi.45f., Lk xxi.8,20). The difference, of course, is not great, since only a negligible interval is meant, and there is clear evidence that Jesus believed the Basileia to be present in Himself and His ministry."<sup>16</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield finds his translation disagreeable on other grounds:- "The

linguistic objections to Dodd's proposal to translate it "has come" are strong. It is better to translate "has come near". But it does not follow that we must therefore understand this in the sense of "is imminent". Fuller notes that of the thirty-five times that  $\xi\gamma\gamma\iota\varsigma\omega$  occurs in the NT (apart from the times it refers to the kingdom of God) it is used twenty-four times in a spatial sense. He then says: "It is the remaining occurrences referring to time which interest us here". But it is unwise to brush aside the majority of the occurrences in this way. In both the other occurrences of the verb in Mk(xi.1, xiv.42) it is strictly spatial; and it is better here too to understand "has come near" in a spatial rather than a temporal sense. The Kingdom of God has come close to men in the person of Jesus, and in his person it actually confronts them. Thus the verb is given its natural meaning, "come near", and at the same time full justice is done to the theological truth which Dodd's translation expresses"<sup>17</sup>

(b) Mark 9:1

Dodd translates Mark 9:1 with similar emphasis: "There are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they have seen that the Kingdom of God has come with power." Again his translation was the source of criticism, and he defends himself again in his article in the Expository Times. Comments from other critics are again relevant:-

(i) Vincent Taylor: "This discussion bears on the question whether Jesus taught a "realized eschatology" (cf i.15). There can be no doubt that he taught that in

Himself and His mighty works the Kingdom was already present (cf Lk xi.20), but to find this meaning in ix.1 is to strain the meaning of the saying. It is much more probable that it means "until they see the Kingdom of God come"; that is to say, the Kingdom is not present at the moment of speaking, except proleptically in the mighty works, but it is imminent; very shortly it will be seen to have come."<sup>18</sup>

(ii) C.E.B. Cranfield: "Dodd understands ἴδωσιν to refer to intellectual perception rather than physical sight, takes ἐληλυθῶσιν and the words that go with it as equivalent to a ὅτι -clause, and insists on the strictly past sense of ἐληλυθῶσιν as indicating an action already complete before the time of their perceiving it. He says: "The meaning appears to be that some of those who heard Jesus speak would before their death awake to the fact that the Kingdom of God had come." But while it is true that the perfect participle ἐληλυθῶσιν must indicate a coming that takes place before the action of the verb ἴδωσιν, the grammar does not require that the coming should have taken place at the time Jesus was speaking, or indeed any considerable time before the action of ἴδωσιν. So Mark ix.1 seems to be a very doubtful support for the view that Jesus taught only a realized eschatology."<sup>19</sup>

(iii) D.E. Nineham: ".....So interpreted the saying fits admirably with Professor Dodd's theory of "realized eschatology", but even those who accept the theory do not all find this particular piece of exegesis in support of it entirely convincing..... The most natural

interpretation then is that, though in a very real sense the Kingdom of God has already drawn near in the words and deeds of Jesus, its manifestation in its full and final form lies still in the future, though according to this verse in the very near future."<sup>20</sup>

It is noticeable that over the years, although some have commented (see Introduction to this review) on the idea that possibly Dodd mellowed in his approach to realized eschatology, Dodd's position has in fact remained basically the same. John Reumann<sup>21</sup> has criticized Dodd for his influence on translations in the New English Bible, for example. He evidences especially this particular verse, which in the New English Bible is translated: "He also said, 'I tell you this: there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they have seen the Kingdom of God already come in power'."

Apart from these major points there are other lesser points arising from the chapter:

(a) The Kingdom

Dodd does the usual unravelling of the territorial ideas of the Kingdom, but does not closely describe his ideas of what the Kingdom consists of and in what sense it can be thought of as having arrived. The best summary of what the book has to say on the matter is in chapter six: "Thus the interpretation of the parables depends upon the view taken of the Kingdom of God. The view taken in this book is that in the few explicit (not parabolic) statements which Jesus made about the coming of the Kingdom, it is neither an evolutionary process nor yet a catastrophic event in the near future, but a present

crisis. It is not that the Kingdom of God will shortly come, but that it is a present fact; and not a present fact in the sense that it is a tendency towards righteousness always present in the world, but in the sense that something has now happened which never happened before." (p.133).

We might at this point usefully question the practical value of Dodd's whole eschatological theory to the man of faith. We may agree with those (e.g. Reumann<sup>22</sup>) who acknowledge that Dodd has rescued eschatology from the future, but we may wonder whether it has any more immediate value to the Christian than an academic one. If Jesus preached that the Kingdom had already arrived, albeit in part only, and if he was right in so doing, we would need to know in what way it could be said to have come before our shift in belief made any practical difference to our ethics. The Kingdom is either a vital matter because it is here or it is a vital matter because it could come at any moment or it is a vital matter because it will come sometime in the future and we will at that time experience judgement. The practical thrust of Dodd's arguments is not felt in this book, although it is understandable that in such a work of biblical exegesis he should restrict himself to purely academic discussion. If we were to apply to Dodd's book as a test of the value of his basic theory the two questions "Is it true?" and "Does it matter?" we could well receive a yes in response to the first question and a no in response to the second.

(b) Insight

Dodd's comments on the nature of Jesus' predictive

statements are valuable in that he rescues them from the damage of ideas of clairvoyance. "It is, however, important to make it clear that this foresight is not of the nature of mere clairvoyance. It is in the first place insight into the actual situation."(p.54). By so doing he adds support to his main arguments because he does not have to depend on ideas that Jesus did not make the statements but depends rather on the conviction that they were statements which were utterly reasonable ones for a sensitive person to make.

(c) Jewish Usage Contemporary with the Gospels

"In Jewish usage contemporary with the Gospels we may distinguish two main ways in which the Kingdom of God is spoken of." (p.30)

It is to be noticed that two of the examples he gives under this introduction can hardly themselves be said to be contemporary with the Gospels. The example of the Assumption of Moses belongs to the period 7 BC - 30 AD and the example from the Apocalypse of Baruch perhaps belongs to a time after 100 AD. However together they provide evidence for a context within which such ideas were possible.

(4) Chapter Three - The Day of the Son of Man

Chapter three is the continuation of chapter two, but in a different area of argument. "So far," Dodd starts, "we have considered predictions which appear to refer to coming events within the historical order. We must now turn to predictions to which it is difficult to give such a reference."(p.62). The connecting link between the two chapters, and perhaps the crux of this

chapter, is the remark: "To apply the term 'The Son of Man' with its 'apocalyptic' and 'eschatological' associations, to a living man, is no doubt a paradox; but it is also a paradox to say that the Kingdom of God, itself an 'eschatological' fact, has come in history."(p.69).

We may notice what we have noticed before and will notice again, - that what Dodd implies is that what he says in chapters two and three may be adequately learned from the parables. His actual *modus operandi*, however, is the reverse of this procedure - first to discover and try to establish his theory of eschatology, then to make the parables fit it. The implications in this direction are best quoted in his final paragraph from this chapter: "We have however so far dealt only with those sayings which are more or less explicit, even though making use of symbolism. But a great deal of the teaching on precisely these themes is contained in parables. The theory which I have enunciated may be regarded as an hypothesis to be tested by applying it to the interpretation of the parables, some of which, as currently interpreted, seem to point to a period, long or short, during which the disciples of Christ are to wait for his second coming, and during which the Kingdom of God "grows" on earth." (p.83).

Another general point about the chapter is the impression we gain that Dodd is not entirely sure of his ground. The impression comes from hints like "If all this is not wholly fantastic....." (p.75 note 23), but is more explicit when Dodd gets to the stage of saying that although this is the way it seems to him there is no ground on which he can make his argument conclusive: "There

is nothing conclusive about such conjectures. They are invited by the obscurity of the actual data. The 'apocalyptic' predictions, unlike those which refer to coming historical events, elude any precise formulation. It seems clear that they have been in a special way subject to re-interpretation in terms of the developing eschatology of the early Church, and to recover their original form, or to determine their original intention, is a matter of extreme difficulty." (pp.76-77). Although on the face of it, Dodd's book divides into two parts - chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-7 - on the basis of establishing his eschatological points in the first and marrying the parables to them in the second, we may in the light of the above suggest that the division is not at all clear. Perhaps the bulk of Dodd's eschatology must rest on chapter two and we must see chapter three as an attempt to make another major eschatological term - "Son of Man" - conform to what has been decided in chapter two.

However, perhaps the weakest link in Dodd's chain in chapter three is to be found on page 79, even though the point he makes is a valid one and a brave one. The point is summed up thus: "We seem to be confronted with two diverse strains in the teaching of Jesus, one of which appears to contemplate the indefinite continuance of human life under historical conditions, while the other appears to suggest a speedy end to these conditions. A drastic criticism might eliminate the one strain or the other, but both are deeply embedded in the earliest form of tradition known to us. It would be better to admit that we do not possess the key to their reconciliation

than to do such violence to our documents." It is as if Dodd ultimately has little ground to rest on, but has to argue from the position that since nobody knows what's what, one theory is as good as another.

#### (5) Chapter Four - The Setting in Life

At this point Dodd begins to shift the emphasis towards the parables, gradually moving towards the conclusion that they support his view of eschatology. This chapter, the laying of the ground for this conclusion, is an exercise in criticism, an attempt to demonstrate what exactly were the effects on the parables of the early ecclesiastical circumstances.

We begin, with this chapter, to deal with a closer examination of individual parables and detailed criticisms emerge:

#### (a) The Hid Treasure and the Costly Pearl

Dodd's comments on the likely setting of these parables are not entirely convincing. He attempts to decide whether the real point lies in the immense value of the thing found or the sacrifice by which it is acquired. He offers two considerations which, he says, decide the issue, but which are themselves as open to question as is his conclusion:

(i) His first point is that Jesus' hearers did not need to be assured of the value of the Kingdom - they were already aware of it. Yet we might equally argue that although they were theoretically aware of the value of the Kingdom, they did not give this awareness the practical expression which Jesus considered it merited, and because of this might be said, in fact, not to be fully aware of

its value. In Jesus' thoughts there may have been the idea that if these people actually knew the great value of the Kingdom, there would be evidence in their lives of the desire to acquire it.

(ii) His second point is connected with the same train of thought - that neither the farmer nor the pearl-merchant were fools - they knew the value of what they were after - "to know when to plunge makes the successful financier" (p.85). Against this we may argue that it still does not prove that the parables' point lay in the area of the sacrifice rather than the value of the property. The parables could equally have been making their point *e contrario*. That is to say, their method of speaking is something like this: "In these situations, these men are sufficiently aware of the values of their respective treasures to shed everything else they have to obtain them, but you are evidently not sufficiently aware of the value of the Kingdom of God since you do not behave in a similar way".

We have no need to establish this as the correct way to interpret these parables, but need only notice here that whereas Dodd believes his two points eliminate the possibility of the great value of the treasure and the Pearl being central to the parables, in fact they do not. Despite his points, we could equally assume the great value to be the essence of their message.

We may also notice that within the terms of Dodd's argument an odd position arises. He would see the parables as an effort to convince people of the necessity of following Jesus, an argument which, set out fully,

should contain the following stages:

- (i) The Kingdom of God is of the utmost importance
- (ii) I am essential to achieving the Kingdom of God
- (iii) Therefore you should follow me.

In Dodd's argument it is necessary not only to "conjecture a situation in which the idea of great sacrifices for a worthy end is prominent" (p.85), but also to assume a situation in which people already believe stage (ii) above. Dodd himself recognizes this problem, but does not see that it raises a fundamental objection to his thesis. If Jesus had already established (ii) in people's minds, then (iii) would automatically follow. In Dodd's scheme of thinking, what is going on in these parables is the making of (ii) dependent upon throwing caution to the winds and doing (iii). The parables then work, not as persuaders (working in a logical fashion, inviting self-committing judgements), but as inspirers to take risks on uncertainties, which is all the more surprising when the parables speak only of certainties. The point of division between Dodd's argument and this objection is contained in his own closing words on the matter: "You agree that the Kingdom of God is the highest good: it is within your power to possess it here and now, if, like the treasure-finder and the pearl-merchant, you will throw caution to the winds: "Follow me!" (p.86).

#### (b) Cursory Treatment

In the first group of parables in this chapter the parables of the tower-builder and the king going to war, the patch and the wineskins, are all included, but are linked to the argument almost as if their connection were

self-evident and there were no need of critical attention.

(c) The Saying on the Sick

Dodd argues that the "moral", "I did not come to call righteous people but sinners" is more relevant to the call of Levi than to the question "why does he eat with publicans and sinners?". This could only be so if there were some objection registered to the call of Levi. We may agree with Dodd on the secondary nature of the saying, but we need to be wary of this looseness of argument in support of the point. The saying is not likely to have an occasion in the call to Levi unless it is to answer an objection.

(d) Parables of the Lost

The making of Dodd's point when dealing with these parables would be facilitated by more detailed handling of them, particularly in the case of the Prodigal Son. As his argument stands, much is taken for granted and we are left feeling he has assumed too much. The Parable of the Prodigal Son, for example, is the occasion of lack of exegetical clarity on Dodd's part. He says on the one hand that its point lies in the contrast of characters (father and elder brother) and on the other hand that it corresponds with the points of the other two parables - concern for the lost. These two possibilities do not entirely coincide and it is not clear in which camp Dodd intends to place his feet. Whichever way he goes, far more detailed argument is required. If he wishes to establish the connecting link between these three parables he might well find it easier to pay attention to the theme of joy at the return of the lost, a theme which he entirely ignores, possibly because it does not speak so well in support of the main thesis of his book.

(e) The Two Sons

Again, a parable receiving only a cursory glance. As far as Dodd is concerned, despite the difficulties experienced by Cadoux, the application of this parable is self-evident. It is "clearly a comment on the rejection of the word of God by the religious leaders." (p.90). Even if we were to accept that it was "clearly" such a comment, we would still need to decide what exactly the comment says.

(f) The Labourers in the Vineyard

Two sentences in Dodd's argument call for comment:

(i) "It is a striking picture of the divine generosity which gives without regard to the measure of strict justice" (p.92). This comment gives rise to the question "What would have been strict justice in that situation if not what was done?". In a sense it is unjust for workers of short standing to be paid an equal amount along with workers of long standing. But again, it may well be considered unjust for people to go without when somebody else has enough and to spare. Justice is elusive in such decisions and probably can only be viewed subjectively. It might be better to talk in terms of generosity only, and to ignore concepts of justice when dealing with this parable.

(ii) "Such is Jesus' retort to the complaints of the legally minded who cavilled at Him as the friend of publicans and sinners" (p.92). The question here is one of setting. Was the occasion for this parable really a complaint against Jesus' association with the outcast? If so, we first need to ignore the evangelist's setting, not only the setting between two renderings of the saying about the first and the last, which is evidently irrelevant to the parable, but

also the setting in which it follows after (and parabolically picks up) the idea that anyone who has made the necessary sacrifices for the sake of Jesus' name "will be repaid many times over, and gain eternal life" (19:29). In a section where Dodd is attempting to demonstrate that parable settings are easily ascertainable, it is surprising that he does not look at this possibility, but goes for the more imaginary setting, however much more attractive to his thesis it may seem.

(g) The Strong Man Despoiled

Here, for the first time in Dodd's exposition of the parables, we find explicit the idea that in the ministry of Jesus the Kingdom of God has actually come.

(h) The Wicked Husbandmen

Dodd rejects not only allegorization as a means of interpreting parables generally, but more specifically in this case, the suggestion of Julicher (et.al.) that this is already an allegory. However, in his own interpretation of the story, Dodd has himself given way to allegorization,<sup>23</sup> particularly in his identification of the vineyard with Israel. Having once made that identification, which is a significant one for the story, the logical procedure would be to see prophets in the various messengers and Jesus in the owner's son, and, of course, God in the owner. We may well agree with Dodd that Jesus' hearers would have been alive to vineyard imagery, but once we grant such a major allegorization, we may as well grant the rest and acknowledge that, as we have it, the story is either an original allegory, or a parable which has since suffered the effects of early Christian allegorizing.

(i) Contemporary References of the Parables

The second half of this chapter is introduced thus:

"In all cases we have so far considered there is no difficulty in seeing that the parables had a contemporary reference, and this reference has been generally recognized in the exegetical tradition." (p.98). We should be aware at this stage of what precisely Dodd has already established from his examples. The implication of the above quotation in its present context of an argument for a realized eschatology may be set out syllogistically:

(i) These parables are about the Kingdom of God

(ii) These parables refer to the present time

(from Jesus' viewpoint)

(iii) Therefore the Kingdom of God is a present reality.

There is, however, a flaw in this syllogism, one which we shall have cause to notice again. Dodd has not in fact established the conclusion (iii), that not being the object of the parables. The object of the parables as he deals with them is to present an immediate challenge to Jesus' contemporaries, regardless of whether the Kingdom is present or yet to come. Neither of the premises (i) and (ii) need be false, but in order to lead to the conclusion (iii), premise (ii) needs rephrasing to include the idea that the Kingdom's present reality is the main point of the parables he has dealt with.

What, therefore, Dodd has already established in the first half of the chapter is in the nature of possibility rather than a conclusion.

He then continues to see how certain parables have

had their original reference overlaid under the pressure of what he calls the "paraenetic" and "eschatological" motives.

(j) The Defendant

Dodd apparantly finds no difficulty with Matthew's use of this parable. He is happy, perhaps even because it is not a point that has much relevance to his arg<sup>u</sup>gement, to call it a "parable" in its Matthean context, but it is difficult to imagine that he was actually content with this application of the term.

The parable indicates the extreme difficulty of deciding whether the Kingdom is to be understood as a present crisis or a future one. We could well say, with Dodd, that the crisis is now because this is the last opportunity for action before it goes beyond our control. Yet on the other hand, we may say that the parable presents two types of crisis, the first present and to some extent within our control (although there is no guarantee that an opponent will settle out of court), and the second future, beyond our control and of far more critical nature for us. With which stage, we may ask, is the Kingdom to be identified? If it is, as Dodd argues, the first stage, then for those who respond, the future stage has no significance, and not even Dodd argues that the Kingdom of God has completely come.

The line dividing present and future in this case is difficult to see, and Dodd might well argue that these objections themselves resort to too much allegorization. Yet, to argue his case convincingly, Dodd must surely be more aware than he appears to be of the fact that the parable speaks not of a courtroom situation, but of a

situation where the litigants are on the way to court.

(k) Salt Saying

Having first compared and rejected the variety of ecclesiastical applications provided by the evangelists, Dodd tries to imagine the most likely situation to give rise to such a parable. "We need not ask whether the salt of the parable is the Jewish people itself, or their religion. The tertium comparationis is simply the lamentable fact of a good and necessary thing irrevocably spoiled and wasted. Applied in this way, the parable falls into line with other sayings of Jesus. It becomes a poignant comment on the whole situation at the moment." (p.105). Whilst being at a loss to suggest a better application than Dodd devised for the parable, we may also express some concern for the use of the word "irrevocably", which, we are forced to admit, is implied by the parable. It is difficult to imagine that Jesus would have spoken to the Jewish community at large (and to the religious leaders in particular) merely in a condemnatory way. What he had to say must have been geared to conversion, the message being "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" Perhaps the parable was used by Jesus hyperbolically, but on this Dodd offers us no comfort.

(6) Chapter Five - Parables of Crisis

Having established his point on shifts in eschatology to his own satisfaction, Dodd moves now to the next logical step, to tackle certain parables with an obvious futuristic eschatology and see if they can be understood within the framework of his own realized eschatology. He looks in some detail at the moralistic exhortations which accompany

his examples and finds them to be the result of the eschatological motive he discovered in his previous chapter.

Detailed criticisms are:

(a) Thief at Night

Unlike the parables of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants and the Waiting Servants which precede this one in this chapter, this parable need not have any future reference. Anybody who wished to counter Dodd's arguments on the former two parables could start from the point that they rely on the idea of a future occurrence, no matter how imminent. With this parable, this objection could not so easily be sustained.

There is, however, an objection to Dodd's argument which may be sustained. He says: "If they had been alert, they would not have collapsed, just as if the householder had known beforehand of the intended burglary, he would have forestalled it." (p.127). A problem arises here over the business of being forewarned. The disciples were supposed to be alert because they were warned to watch and pray, but this situation does not compare with the thief situation very well. In the parable, not only did the householder not receive any advance warning, but he could hardly ever expect to receive such warning. Thieves do not advertise their coming.

(b) Ten Virgins

Dodd's work here is open to objections. He does not adequately deal with the futurity of the story and therefore cannot adequately establish its completely present reference. He presents the arrival of the bridegroom as a parallel with

the return of the master in the parables of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants and the Waiting Servants . In all three of these stories, these events have not yet happened. This is difficult to reconcile with Dodd's ensuing comment: "All the vivid dramatic detail is intended only to emphasize the folly of unpreparedness and the wisdom of preparedness - preparedness, as I take it, for the developments actually in process in the ministry of Jesus." (p.128). If this were the point of the parable we might ask why it is necessary to warn people in a parable to get ready for something which is already under way.

### (c) Conclusions

One of the useful points which Dodd mentions in this and the previous chapter is the tendency of the early church to generalize the application of the parables, so that where a parable was once addressed to specific people in a specific situation, it actually came to be written down with a more general application to a wider public, perhaps even with a universal moralizing application, a point developed in greater detail in later years by Jeremias.

As we have observed already, although Dodd's work on these parables does point up the contemporary reference of these parables, he does not succeed in emptying them of a futuristic quality. The crisis is indeed a present reality, but it is also a future one, and in order to make his point clearly, Dodd would have done better to try to draw the distinction.

### (7) Chapter Six - Parables of Growth

Points of criticism are as follows:

#### (a) Seed Growing Secretly

Dodd outlines the three principal methods of interpreting this parable, but his objection to method (iii) (p.133) is slight. "The weakness of this interpretation is that it can make little of the stages of growth to which attention is drawn in the story itself." The fact that it can make little of the stages of growth ought, in Dodd's view, to be a blessing rather than a curse. Admittedly attention is drawn to them in the story, but to pay too much attention to them would perhaps lead to allegorization and a damaging of the parable's primary point, the harvest. We shall observe that this is the way in which Dodd himself does violence to the parable.

The next paragraph (on p.133) commences: "Thus the interpretation of the parables depends upon the view taken of the Kingdom of God." Dodd's argument here runs something like this: everybody who interprets this parable has done so, one way or another, by trying to make it fit his own preconception of what the Kingdom is; therefore I am justified in doing the same; I propose to ignore other views and see if I can fit the parable to my own view of the Kingdom of God.

His interpretation of the parable is marred by the fact that although he attempts to avoid its consequences by not making actual equations to identify the sowing and the stages of growth, he cannot resist the opportunity of pointing out the likely implications of his interpretation. This could be the thin end of the wedge which Dodd would rush to deny to other people. He runs into danger, for example, by first of all hinting that there is some connection between the prophets and the stages of growth

and then reaffirming that the growth is a "mysterious process independent of the will or act of man".

The point which then follows is a dubious one. Dodd attempts to use Mark 11:30 to demonstrate that Jesus was used to teaching about his antecedents in the prophetic tradition and thereby to bolster his view that in Jesus' ministry the harvest time has come, according to this parable. We must note, however, that in order to establish this point Dodd must first establish that Mark 11:30 is chronologically precedent to this parable. If, as it appears in Mark, this parable does come from an early stage in the ministry, it is not necessarily true to say that people would have been used to hearing Jesus talk of what had gone before him with reference to himself, and it is not therefore certain that when they heard this parable they would have got the message.

(b) The Sower

Dodd first dismisses the Biblical interpretation, saying that: "it is not necessary, after Julicher, to show once again that the interpretation is not consistent with itself, and does not really fit the parable" (p.135). He seems to have forgotten that he performed something of the same function himself on pages 14-15!

On page 136 Dodd registers a degree of approval for the "eschatological" school's stress on the abundant crop, but continues ".....when they proceed to apply it to the sudden breaking-in of the Kingdom of God which they suppose Jesus to have expected in the near future, they do not seem to me to be keeping closely to the data." He does not, however, substantiate this accusation.

(c) The Tares

Dodd here attempts to forestall the objection that the harvest time has not yet arrived. "In order that the intermixture of good and evil in Israel may be vividly illustrated, it is necessary to have a picture of the field with wheat and tares growing side by side, before the harvest begins. It does not seem necessary to suppose that the judgement is treated as a new event in the future." (p.139). But surely it does? Either the Kingdom has arrived at the moment of speaking, or it has not, or it has only partially arrived. If the coming of the Kingdom is necessarily to be equated with the harvest (and the consistency of harvest imagery would seem strongly to support this), then we cannot attempt within the terms of this parable to gloss over the fact that the harvest has not yet come. The only possibility for the success of an attempt on the part of Jesus to use the image in such a way would be to assume he spoke this parable to people with sufficient mental agility and spiritual insight to be able easily to juggle with the concepts involved. Jesus was not in the habit of trying to confuse people. Dodd's own view of Jesus' use of parables prohibits the idea of his using them to bewilder the humble folk he was addressing.

(d) The Mustardseed

The conclusion that Dodd makes about this parable is far from true: "The Kingdom of God is here: the birds are flocking to find shelter in the shade of the tree" (p.143). If, as Dodd suggests, this refers to the way Israel, and perhaps the Gentiles also, are responding to the arrival of the Kingdom, then it is surely manifestly

untrue that "the birds are flocking to find shelter in the shade of the tree". If they had been, there would have been little need for the challenges of Jesus issued to all and sundry, and less evidence of Jesus being in opposition. If Dodd intends, however, that the word "flocking" is merely a term of gregariousness and not an indication of the proportions of the flock, then perhaps this objection is invalid. A proportion, at least, of the people did respond to him, but in what depths we shall probably never determine beyond what we know of the Apostles themselves and of the fact that Jesus was ultimately completely alone.

(e) Leaven

It might be suggested at this point what could equally be said of Dodd's dealing with other parables, that in describing the original application of this parable he has assumed that Jesus had a degree of foreknowledge about his own effect upon society. For him to be able to see his own life, death and resurrection as the coming of the Kingdom and then to be able to describe the all-pervasive effects of this Kingdom in the terms of leaven's effect on dough necessitated a prior knowledge of the results of his ministry.

(f) A General Point

Dodd has been taken to task over this chapter by John Reumann, who says "C.H. Dodd in the 1930's offered an interpretation which carried the process several steps further back. The sowing, he said, was done by the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist; therefore in Jesus' ministry the harvest was already beginning to appear. The Kingdom was there - realized eschatology;

" / One must object that modern categories are being imposed if "growth" in these parables is taken to mean evolution or human achievement. For even in the parable of the Seed at Mark 4:26-29 it is God who causes the growth (the farmer sleeps; the seed grows "of itself", literally "automatically"). Furthermore the real point in these parables is not so much growth but contrast."<sup>24</sup>

Reumann's objection, however, seems itself to be difficult to maintain. It depends upon the assumption that in Dodd's argument the growth is due to the effort of the people rather than the initiative of God. This is not so. But we may join sides with him when he contests with Dodd over the main point of the parables:- "Furthermore the real point in these parables is not so much growth but contrast". Here is a criticism which may do damage to Dodd. He himself says in his comments on the parable of the Sower: "But no farmer despairs because of such inevitable waste of labour and seed: it is to be expected; in spite of all, he may have an excellent harvest" (p.136). We may infer from the connection between the interpretation of this parable and that of the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly that it makes the same implications as that one. Therefore we may argue with Dodd that if this is the area where we are to find the parable's true significance, why is it necessary to assume that the growth stages need apprehending by means of allegorizing? The harvest, we would agree, is the place to search for the significance of these parables - but the question is more involved than that. We need to decide also what aspect of the harvest is intended. Words like crisis, fulfillment and contrast need weighing carefully in this context.

(8) Chapter Seven - Conclusions

Points of criticism are as follows:-

(a) Having "ears to hear"

An interesting problem is raised but not conclusively dealt with on page 146, where Dodd attempts to rescue the parables from being exclusively particular in their field of reference. The sentence which raises the problem in Dodd's argument is the following: "They are works of art, and any serious work of art has significance beyond its original occasion". It is tempting to agree, but one wonders whether Dodd has really worked the point through. We would agree that works of art have significance beyond their original occasion, but that is not the point which will here rescue the parables from complete particularity of reference. What is required is the demonstration that they have significance beyond their original purpose. We may, for the purpose of comparing parables with other works of art, set them beside, say, a symphony and a poem. A symphony is written with the object of musical communication, and may well be occasioned by something of significance in the composer's life. The occasion, however, does not limit its significance to one point in time, since its object stretches beyond that point of time. Thus a seventeenth century symphony can be appreciated in the twentieth century. Likewise a poem is written with the object of verbal communication (no matter what subsidiary motives influence the author), and may well have been occasioned by a particular event or emotion. Again the occasion does not limit the poem's significance. The object of verbal communication may be equally achieved at a later point in

time. The question is, are we able to say this equally of a parable, where occasion and purpose may often, according to the arguments which Dodd (and others) employ, be one and the same, or at least restricted to a reference to one point in time.

It may be true that "those who have 'ears to hear'" will find that parables "speak to their conditions". It may be true that "their teaching may be fruitfully applied and re-applied to all sorts of new situations which were never contemplated at the time when they were spoken" (p.146). But we may question whether Dodd can justifiably line up works of art for comparison with parables in the way he does.

Whatever use we make of the parables for our own guidance, Dodd is surely right when he says "But a just understanding of their original import in relation to a particular situation in the past will put us on the right lines in applying them to our own new situations" (p.146).

#### (b) Dodd's Method of Argument

Something Dodd says on page 147 provokes a question. "For, if the argument of this book is right, the parables represent the interpretation which our Lord offered of His own ministry". This needs to be coupled with the opening remarks of chapter one and especially with "Certainly there is no part of the Gospel record which has for the reader a clearer ring of authenticity" (p.13). If it is true on the one hand that the parables are Jesus' own interpretation of his own ministry and on the other that they are the most authentic material we have, it could be that we have discovered a flaw in Dodd's modus operandi. His whole book works in the following way: he first

outlines a non-parabolically based argument for his particular view of eschatology; then he attempts to make the parables conform to that view. On the basis of the comments juxtaposed above (and perhaps merely on the grounds of the logical way to approach the job), it would seem a more reasonable method to try to discover first the message of the parables and then to see how the other New Testament references to things eschatological illuminate what has been discovered.

It is here a matter of whether Dodd has tackled the problem the right way round, and whether the above comments are inconsistent with his method. It could well be that to criticize his method of approach is too harsh a thing to do, not only because he deliberately sets out to use the most reliable Gospel material, but also because it is difficult to know how, otherwise, anyone would ever discover the meaning of any parables. When there are so many doubts about most of the Gospel applications and interpretations, it does seem that Dodd's method of disregarding the interpretative comments of the evangelists (along with other "framework" material) and trying to imagine the likely setting of the parable is the only way to proceed in the majority of cases.

#### (9) General Conclusions

##### (a) The Kingdom of God has come

Despite the comment in the Preface to the 1961 edition to the effect that Dodd knew he was overstating the case, he has nowhere claimed the complete arrival of the Kingdom, and it is this point which his critics seem to have ignored. Perhaps Dodd does not overstate his case, leaning

deliberately in one direction only, but he makes no categorical statements by way of conclusion that could in any way be said to be outspoken. Indeed, nobody could adequately justify either the complete arrival of the Kingdom or Jesus' preaching to this effect, on purely rational grounds. If we accept what most do accept - that the Kingdom of God = the reign of God, and if we also accept that where God rules, there we find perfection, it then follows that God's Kingdom cannot have arrived completely. There is an all-or-nothing quality about the Kingdom of God, and on any understanding of it we would need to say that when it finally arrives, there will be universal perfection.

The general attitude which Dodd expresses in the book is not therefore a rigidly dogmatic one, but he does have brief moments when he is uncompromising. Pages 37-38, for example, give us the following: "There are other passages in our oldest Gospel sources which help to make it clear that Jesus intended to proclaim the Kingdom of God not as something to come in the near future, but as a matter of present experience." On pages 40-41: "This declaration that the Kingdom of God has already come necessarily dislocates the whole eschatological scheme in which its expected coming closes the long vista of the future. The eschaton has moved from the future to the present, from the sphere of expectation into that of realized experience."

However, even within Dodd's framework, there is no reason to assume that here we have an assertion of a completely realized eschatology. Even here, we have the

assertion that there is in the teaching of Jesus the idea that a crisis is already on, but we do not have the assertion that the crisis is over. We do not have the idea that God's harvest has started, but merely the assertion that it is ready for the labourers to be sent in.

(b) If Realized Eschatology, why the Cross?

Some have criticized the realized eschatology position on the lines of the following words from John Reumann: "There is furthermore a neat trap awaiting us if we make the Kingdom wholly present during Jesus' ministry: why, then, the cross?"<sup>25</sup>

We must admit that Dodd invites this criticism: "In view of this declaration (i.e. that the Kingdom of God has come) it is not permissible, for example, to represent the death of Jesus as in any sense the condition precedent to the coming of the Kingdom of God. We may not say that He died "to bring in the Kingdom"; that his death was the "price" of its coming; or that He died to bring about the repentance without which it could not come. These and similar statements, in one form or another, are often found in modern attempts to explain the matter. But they are all confuted by the fact that Jesus before his death declared that the Kingdom of God had come." (p.58).

However, in defence of Dodd, we may notice a footnote in Dan Otto Via Jr.'s book: "The criticism of Dodd's realized eschatology given by Reginald Fuller, which says that Dodd's view destroys "the cruciality of the cross", seems beside the point..... For Dodd the realized eschatological event was a developing crisis which included Jesus' death and resurrection as well as the destruction of

Jerusalem".<sup>26</sup>

We may also quote Dodd's own words in support of this view: "This is the "mystery of the Kingdom of God"; not only that the eschaton, that which belongs properly to the realm of the "wholly other", is now matter of actual experience, but that it is experienced in the paradoxical form of the suffering and death of God's representative." (p61).

The criticism made by Reuman and others is not a valid objection to Dodd although it is a good warning sign showing the limits to the "realized eschatology" argument. As it stands, as we have already noticed, Dodd's own arguments need not necessarily be seen as having entered the danger zone.

XX

Some words of Jeremias underline the importance of Dodd's work: "In this extraordinarily significant book for the first time a really successful attempt was made to place the parables in the setting of the life of Jesus, thereby introducing a new era in the interpretation of the parables."<sup>27</sup> Of Dodd's method Jeremias said ".....although differences of opinion with regard to some details may exist, yet it is unthinkable that there should ever be any retreat from the essential lines laid down by Dodd for the interpretation of the parables of Jesus."<sup>28</sup>

A.M. Hunter agreed on his importance - "Nevertheless, he (Julicher) had cleared the path for the next revolutionary advance which came thirty-six years later with C.H. Dodd's "Parables of the Kingdom" (1935). This book made exegetical history....."<sup>29</sup>

We may safely agree with them both. No matter what

our view of eschatology, there is little that can undermine the significance of Dodd's work, since, set in its context, it certainly re-asserted the immediacy of the message and demands of Jesus.

We have already noticed his method of working, and at this point need only recall how it left something to be desired in that he tried to pour the parables into a mould rather than to use the parables themselves as the mould. The whole book, in fact, is a thesis, not a conclusion, as Dodd himself was ready to admit. As such, as would be expected in a work from Dodd, it merits an alpha on anybody's marking. The caveat which is essential for the reader to bear in mind is the caution that things set out by Dodd may not be, when all is said and done, as incredible or unorthodox as they seem, or as his reputation may lead us to believe.

For some considerable time, Dodd's work stood alone, distinct in character and stature from all other English contributions to the study of parables. Jeremias's work<sup>30</sup> was published in German in 1947, but was not available in English until 1954.

When it appeared, T.W. Manson said "The importance of this book is out of all proportion to its length."<sup>31</sup> The remark of Manson's has been borne out by the subsequent high regard in which the work has been held. A.M. Hunter said that it was "Beyond question the most important (book) since Dodd's"<sup>32</sup>, but it must surely in the light of history, be seen as a more important work than Dodd's. Whereas Dodd had limited his field by his restricted view of Jesus' eschatology, Jeremias can be accused of no undue bias in

any direction. He has produced an extremely thorough book, taking into account all aspects of Biblical criticism. Perhaps the best short critical summary of the book has been offered by Norman Perrin: "The epoch-making work in this field, and, at one and the same time, both the major contribution and greatest impetus to contemporary research into the teaching of Jesus,"<sup>33</sup>

As we will notice in the review which follows, there are very few major points of criticism which we can lay against Jeremias. Comments on the text ultimately show, not its shortcomings, but the surpassing worth of his work.

XX

Jeremias's book falls into four chapters which call for individual critical treatment:

(1) Chapter One - The Problem

Jeremias here offers the base from which he proceeds.

The following problems arise:-

(a) Mark 4: 1-34

Jeremias first shows that this section is an artificial grouping of material. His first two points are his primary evidence for the join in the text at verse 10. There is a possibility for an objection to Jeremias's arguments here. It could be that we need not relegate vv. 10 ff. to a secondary place on the evidence of his two points. The whole passage could be in its present position, not by means of later addition, but as a piece of contemporary information set here in parenthesis. The pattern of chapter four would then be something like this:

"Jesus said X to the crowds from his boat (although when he was alone he explained X, amongst other things,

to his friends) and then crossed to the other side of the lake."

We must admit that this objection is slight and, against Jeremias's evidence, not worth more than a thought. The connecting *kd* of verse 10 supports his evidence for an artificial connection at this point.

(b) Page 17 note 27

Jeremias argues in great detail and very convincingly that Mark 4: 11f should be translated: "To you has God given the secret of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are without everything is obscure, in order that they (as it is written) may "see and yet not see, may hear and yet not understand, unless they turn and God will forgive them". The footnote offers the reason for making the last clause an active construction rather than a passive one. Jeremias prefers the alternative to the typically Palestinian circumlocution which avoids the divine name. However, in this particular position the active does not necessarily carry the same meaning as the passive. The wording proposed by Jeremias implies that seeing and yet not seeing, hearing yet not understanding continue until such time as people turn and as a result of their turning, God forgives them. To put it in the passive however, could allow a slightly different shade of meaning: that seeing and yet not seeing, hearing yet not to understand continue until such time as people turn and are forgiven. The implication of this is that illumination follows the turning and being forgiven. The passive translation would seem to be simpler in English and, perhaps more logical. This consideration is not conclusive, but it prompts us to

enquire whether Jeremias is certain that in this case, as well as in other similar cases of passive circumlocution, the active is a necessary translation.

(c) Mark 4: 10-12

By a more elaborate treatment of the text than his predecessors Cadoux and Dodd, Jeremias establishes two major points:

- (a) that these verses, and those following them, are artificially placed in their present context.
- (b) that they are likely to be authentic words of Jesus, despite (a).

The conclusion he reaches about these verses is significant:

"But Mark, misled by the catchword παραβολή, which he erroneously understood as 'parable', inserted our logion into the parable-chapter. If, however, Mark 4: 11f. has no reference whatever to the parables of Jesus, then the passage affords no criterion for the interpretation of the parables, nor any warrant for seeking to find in them by means of an allegorical interpretation some secret meaning hidden from the outsiders. On the contrary, Mark 4.11f. asserts that the parables too, like all the words of Jesus, announce no special 'secrets', but only the one 'secret of the Kingdom of God', to wit, the secret of its contemporary irruption in the word and work of Jesus."(p.18)

(d) A "fruitless labour"

One of the significant points of Jeremias's opening comments is: "A distinction was drawn between metaphor, simile, parable, similitude, allegory, illustration, and so forth - a fruitless labour in the end, since the Hebrew masal and the Aramaic mathla embraced all these

categories and many more without distinction."(p.20)  
 Jeremias does not decry the value of studying this background material, but does not see it as being of major importance to the study of the parables. As he says of progress thitherto:- "Indeed no progress was achieved along this line. The fundamentally important insights which we owe to the Form-criticism school have so far received no fruitful application in the field of the study of the parables." (pp.20-21)

(2) Chapter Two - The Return to Jesus from the Primitive Church

The end of Chapter one provides us with the following statement of intent: "Jesus spoke to men of flesh and blood; he addressed himself to the situation of the moment. Each of his parables has a definite historical setting. Hence to recover this is the task before us. What did Jesus intend to say at this or that particular moment? What must have been the effect of his word upon his hearers? These are the questions we must ask in order, so far as may be possible, to recover the original meaning of the parables of Jesus, to hear again his authentic voice." (p.22)

Chapter two is the attempt to find the principles (and to work them out in practice) by which we may hear the authentic voice of Jesus speaking the parables. Various points are worth comment:

(a) Representational Changes

Jeremias argues that parables not only underwent a linguistic translation but a presentational translation in terms of the environment within which they were transmitted. He offers a valuable caution: "Hence non-Palestinian modes

of representation do not always indicate editorial activity or lack of authenticity. We can only reach a judgement with some degree of confidence in those cases where the tradition is divided." (p.27) He is admitting, in other words, that we are here not dealing in an area of certainty, only in an area of probability. This is a caveat which we could perhaps apply to most Biblical criticism and one which we do well to remember with all the estimates made in this chapter. Jeremias fortunately makes us aware of the problem, as we see in the following section on Embellishment: "Hence it by no means follows that a mass rejection of all the uncommon features in the parables of Jesus is called for; on the contrary, occasionally Jesus seems to have allowed the meaning of the parable to influence its text, thus introducing paradoxical elements into an otherwise realistic story." (p.30).

(b) Folk-story themes

We shall have reason to comment elsewhere on Jeremias's use of the Gospel of Thomas, but it is worth noting here that one of his examples of the way the Gospel versions of parables have been influenced by folk tales deals only with the Gospel of Thomas. The story of the Treasure in the Field, he says (p.33), as it is told in the Gospel of Thomas, has been influenced by a similar rabbinic story. This assumes that the rabbinic example antedates the Gospel of Thomas, a point which he does not substantiate. It further assumes, apparently, that the Gospel of Thomas is held in equal standing with the canonical Gospels, a point on which Jeremias does not comment.

In Jeremias's second example in this section, however,

we have a more reasonable use of the Gospel of Thomas since its role in the argument is as supportive evidence to an argument which first stands on other grounds.

(c) The Change of Audience

This area of discussion is one in which Jeremias's work is of great value. He opened up the field originally worked over a little by Dodd, and his final list of evidence (p.42) is conclusive. In order to demonstrate his point he employs two examples:

(i) The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard

Here he does a good deal of detailed excavation in order to show that none of the possible interpretations and contexts suggested in Matthew's Gospel can be original. There is one point in the discussion here where what Jeremias says does not seem to fit the situation described by the parable. He says: "Even if, in the case of the last labourers to be hired, it is their own fault that, in a time when the vineyard needs workers, they sit about in the market-place gossiping till late afternoon; even if their excuse that no one has hired them (v.7) is an idle evasion (like that of the servant in Matt. 25:24f.), a cover for their typical oriental indifference, yet they touch the owner's heart." (p.37) We may agree that it may be their own fault that they were not hired, but not because they were content to sit about the market-place gossiping till late afternoon; as Jeremias says. We must remember that the landowner had already been out to look for labourers on four previous occasions that day, and it is explicitly stated that he went into the market place to do this (Matthew 20:3). If those hired at the end of the day had

been in the market-place on any of those occasions the landowner would either have hired them already (assuming, as seems likely, that there was indeed a shortage of labourers) or would have known they had been there and had no need to enquire why they were standing there idle. We must assume that, true to their characteristic "oriental indifference" (p.37), they had not even troubled to go to the market place to seek employment.

Once Jeremias has disposed of all the unlikely settings with which the reader is confronted, he seems absolutely certain of its proper setting: "The parable is clearly addressed to those who resembled the murmerers, those who criticized and opposed the good news, Pharisees for example. Jesus was minded to show them how unjustified, hateful, loveless and unmerciful was their criticism. Such, said he, is God's goodness, and since God is so good, so too am I. He vindicates the gospel against its critics. Here, clearly, we have recovered the original historical setting." (p.38). Jeremias seems as certain as Dodd that here is the area where we find the true setting of many of the parables. Yet we would do well to remember here that what appears as certainty on the part of Jeremias is more correctly termed certitude. As set out by Jeremias, for example, the argument about the setting of this parable contains a lot of good objective evidence to establish what the setting was not, but only inspired guesswork as to what the setting was. We must admit that this type of estimating is clear, consistent and very convincing, but we must remember that the evidence, in this case, and probably in others, is only circumstantial.

(ii) The Parable of the Lost Sheep

In this case evidence is easier to come by since we have the opportunity of comparing two different Gospel settings. Again the evidence strongly supports Jeremias's case, and he is very certain about his conclusion: "There can be no doubt that Luke has preserved the original situation." (p.40). The implication of this comment in its context is odd. It suggests that the Lucan setting is undoubtedly the true one because the Matthaean setting is evidently to be rejected. This is to assume that one of the two settings must perforce be original, and to avoid this implication we might expect more evidence from Jeremias to back up such a dogmatic statement as the above. His argument concerning the fact that Matthew 18:14 is in fact equivalent to Luke 15:7 (the only further evidence produced) does not support his statement in any constructive way. It merely helps us, as Jeremias says, "accept this view with all the greater confidence." (p.40). We might also notice here that the footnote (no.65) on the Johannine Shepherd also only facilitates the argument - it does not support it. It seems unlikely, but we must allow the possibility that John readdressed his material so that it appeared to have been spoken to opponents. Despite these problems of detail in Jeremias's arguments, there is no need to quarrel with his final conclusion: "Hence we must always ask who were the original hearers, and what a parable would mean if we take it as addressed to opponents or the crowd." (p.42). The weight of his evidence supports the idea not only of questioning the Gospel settings but also of trying to imagine what the

parables might mean if addressed to opponents or the crowd. Jeremias has provided the evidence for one of the fundamental precepts of most of Dodd's work.

(d) The Hortatory use of the Parables by the Church

Once again Jeremias is proceeding further along a line already pursued by Dodd. He offers among his conclusions an interesting point which merits more development than he gives it: "Thus, by the hortatory application the parable is not misinterpreted, but 'actualized'. But it would also be erroneous to conclude that the primitive Church had completely excised the eschatological element from the parable, since it was the eschatological situation of the Church which lent weight to its exhortations. It is not a question of adding or taking away, but a shift of emphasis resulting from a change of audience." (p.48) It is not clear how a parable can have its emphasis shifted without being misinterpreted. But, if we were clear enough on this point, there would be another area in which some comment would be beneficial - the use of parables in preaching today. Would Jeremias really support what he here implies - that it is legitimate to make modern applications for the parables of Jesus?

(e) The Influence of the Church's Situation

(i) The delayed Parousia

The so-called Parousia parables are discussed in considerable detail by Jeremias, and the shifts in emphasis that he discovers are generally very slight. This is probably because, as he says, "the eschatological catastrophe and the Messianic Parousia are simply two aspects of the same event" (p.53). That the shifts of

emphasis are small may be illustrated from Jeremias's summing up on the Parable of the Nocturnal Burglar: "The difference lay simply in the fact that Jesus, addressing the crowd, emphasized the sudden irruption of the tribulation (Be ready, the tribulation will overtake you as unexpectedly as the thief's invasion), while the attention of the early Church was directed to the end of the tribulation (Let there be no relaxation of watchfulness, for the Lord's return will be as unexpected as the breaking-in of the thief)." (p.51)

Jeremias occasionally throws up small but valuable insights into what lies behind a parable, and we have an example in his discussion of the parable of the Nocturnal Burglar. His comments on the topicality of the story Jesus used (p.49) are both convincing and harmonious with the idea of parables as a living mode of expression.

The same discussion also throws up a problem. On grounds which Jeremias later expounds we would agree with him when he says "But the application of the parable to the return of the Son of Man is strange:" (p.49). We would not, however, agree with the argument which follows immediately after this statement: "for if the subject of discourse is a nocturnal burglary, it refers to a disastrous and alarming event, whereas the Parousia, at least for the disciples of Jesus, is the great day of joy." (p.49). It may or may not be true that the Parousia is a great day of joy for the disciples, but we cannot assume that the contrast between the joy of the Parousia and the disaster of a burglary renders the parable inapplicable to

the Parousia. This would be to expect all aspects of a parable to harmonize with reality in an allegorical fashion which Jeremias himself would reject. If his argument here were to stand, we might, in the case of the finder of the hid treasure, be forced to say either that it was inapplicable to the Kingdom or that dishonourable means were in order in the achieving of the Kingdom.

Jeremias recognizes a similar topicality when he deals with the parable of the Ten Virgins. He dismisses the idea of the story originally being a Christological allegory, and concludes the picture must have been prompted by some current matrimonial occasion.

We have already commented on a difficulty in the discussion of the Nocturnal Burglar, and there is a similar case in the discussion on the parable of the Talents. Jeremias says: "But Luke is certainly wrong. For it is hardly conceivable that Jesus would have compared himself, either with a man 'who drew out where he had not paid in, and reaped where he had not sown'." (p.59). But this is not necessarily the case since it may not have been necessary to bother with this particular detail of the comparison.

#### (ii) The Missionary Church

There is an example here of Jeremias's tendency to make categorical statements where they cannot be finally justified. He says: "Since Matthew (22:9f) and the Gospel of Thomas (64) refer to only one invitation to the uninvited, the repetition of the invitation is an expansion of the parable." (p.64) Although we may agree with the conclusion, it does not follow from his argument.

(f) Allegorization

It is usual in the post-Julicher era for parable critics to devote space to the problems of allegorization in parable criticism. One of the dangers of indulging too much in the allegory-hunt is that we tend to see hints of allegory everywhere and perhaps imagine more has happened to the original than has actually taken place. As an example we may take some words from the discussion on the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: "Not so Matthew (21:39) and Luke (20:15): on the contrary, they represent the son as being first cast out of the vineyard, and then slain outside it - a reference to the slaying of Jesus outside the city (John 19:17; Heb. 13:12f.)" (p.73). It is attractive to the allegory hunter to agree with this conclusion, and it may well be correct. But it may equally be true that in this case Matthew and Luke are using a version of the story which is slightly different from the others not through Christological re-interpretation, but through the common path of retelling stories many times. In any case, the vineyard refers to Israel rather than the city.

The discussion of this parable is very detailed and leads to an ultimate affirmation that it was not originally an allegory but has suffered allegorization through the traditions behind the texts.

In the discussion of the parable of the Sower, Jeremias admits that the interpretation given by the Gospels must be the work of the primitive Church, and one of his grounds for saying so is as follows: "The interpretation of 'sowing' as preaching (Mark 4:14) is

not characteristic of Jesus' way of speaking; he prefers to compare preaching with the gathering in of the harvest." (p.78). His footnote (31) lists examples which he says support his comment. It is, however, slightly inaccurate to say that these examples show Jesus comparing the harvest with preaching. None of the examples specifically mentions preaching in connection with harvest. We can only make the connection by implication because it is difficult to imagine what else could be intended. We might be able to see the harvest as connected not with preaching as such, but with the results which preaching brings. The point Jeremias makes is certainly a probability, but it is not conclusive.

Although we would agree with most of what Jeremias says about the parable of the Two Sons, his last comment does not seem very certain: "Since Matthew has inserted the parable in his Gospel in connection with the word  $\tau\omega\delta\upsilon\upsilon\gamma\varsigma$  (21:25/21:32), he probably found the parable already possessing v. 32 as its conclusion." (p.81). We would agree this is a possibility. Yet it is equally a possibility that Matthew, confronted with an unapplied parable, made the application to John himself by guesswork, set it himself in the context of 21:25, and himself appended the application of 21:32.

Jeremias again demonstrates his thoroughness in dealing with the Interpretation of the Parable of the Tares. The volume of his evidence makes indisputable his conclusion: "In view of this impressive number of 37 examples it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the interpretation of the parable of the Tares is the work of Matthew

himself." (pp.84-85).

Yet there is a problem here when Jeremias follows this up with a discussion of the Interpretation of the Parable of the Seine-net, his conclusion being:-

- (i) that it is a "shortened replica of 13:40b -43" (p.85)
- (ii) that it has been transferred to this parable from the parable of the Tares
- (iii) that "we have thus in Matthew 13:36-43 and 49-50 two allegorical interpretations of parables from the hand of Matthew."(p.85).

He thus makes an identification, though a limited one, between the two interpretations, assesses them both to be from the pen of Matthew and at the same time suggests that Matthew made the applications of the interpretations in both cases. There is something unlikely here. It is improbable that Matthew would sit down and write one interpretation and append it to two different parables. What might equally have happened is that Matthew found something like this interpretation already alongside the tradition he received (either with one or both parables) and proceeded to write it up in his own style without altering its setting.

In dealing with Johannine material Jeremias is brief, and necessarily so. If he were to deal <sup>in</sup> detail, he would need to enter more fully into the debate on Johannine parabolic material, and perhaps even need to be more explicit on what he thinks are the ingredients of a parable. The implication of what he does at this point is that parabolic material is, in his view, any Gospel material which works in a figurative way.

In dealing with the Gospel of Thomas, Jeremias has assumed that the expression "He that hath ears (to hear) let him hear" (appended to five parables in the Gospel of Thomas) implies a desire on the part of the compiler of the Gospel to show that parables have a hidden meaning, one which needs to be uncovered by allegorization. This is thin evidence on which to base such a conclusion, especially in the light of what Jeremias himself observes - the lack of any other evidence in the Gospel of a tendency to allegorize. Perhaps a better way to interpret the expression would be to see it not as a comment on understanding what parables mean, but rather as a comment on taking to heart the message they offer. As the modern preacher experiences there is often a vast gap between saying one understands and actually understanding. To understand the preacher properly either leads to agreement, followed by the appropriate action, or to disagreement. What so many preachers experience is the agreement of the listener without any visible change in his life. Maybe the expression we are considering is an appeal to take the message seriously.

The method by which Jeremias has handled the allegorization problem is interesting. He has grouped his examples according to the strata of Gospel material in which they occur and has thus arrived at conclusions not based on observations on allegorizing in general, but based on prior conclusions about the way Gospel writers themselves handled the parables. That other scholars would wish to say what Jeremias concludes "only by discarding these secondary interpretations and features can we once more arrive at an understanding of the original meaning of the parables of

Jesus."(p.89) may be true, but there is no comparable study which amasses as much evidence for this conclusion.

(g) Collection and Conflation of Parables

In this section Jeremias draws few conclusions. It is sufficient to point out that parables have been transmitted in pairs, collected together in groups, or fused together, and to give the relevant examples. The major conclusion is of course that interpreting parables accurately cannot be based on any of these secondary connections.

(3) Chapter Three - The Message of the Parables of Jesus

In the introductory paragraph Jeremias claims: "The parables and similes seem to fall naturally into groups, and it may be suggested that ten groups emerge from our study of them." (p.115) and also "As a whole these groups present a comprehensive conception of the message of Jesus." Both these claims are bold ones, and neither is substantiated in his conclusion. We shall consequently need to consider Jeremias's categories of parables and his exposition of them with a view to discovering whether his claims are justified.

(a) Now is the Day of Salvation

It is in this section that we immediately encounter the similarity between Jeremias and C.H. Dodd. Over the course of Jeremias's parable grouping we shall need to discover how far his view of eschatology corresponds with Dodd's. However, at the outset, Jeremias does state, in no uncertain terms, that a proportion of the teaching of Jesus is certainly given to a "realized eschatology". As well as resting this conclusion on certain explicit texts (particularly the New Testament use of Old Testament

prophetic material with the implication that in Jesus it has been fulfilled), Jeremias relies heavily on the NT use of OT symbolism, and thus emphasizes how essential it is to be fully cognizant of the contemporary value of the images employed by Jesus. On this matter, in these cases, Jeremias is very informative.

That such knowledge of the value of the images employed is necessary is demonstrated when Jeremias deals with the parable of the Fig-tree. Here he makes a point of quoting Joel 2:22 in order to establish the point that not only is the sprouting of leaves on the fig-tree a herald of summer, but that it is also a symbol of a coming blessing rather than a coming curse. Without understanding this we could so easily be left with an Old Testament idea of the Day of Judgement.

This idea, - of knowing the background to the imagery employed by Jesus - is further reinforced by the comments on the imagery used by Jesus concerning his mission, and more especially valuable for the eschatological thread which he finds running through them. This all facilitates the conclusion embodied in the heading of this section.

#### (b) God's Mercy for Sinners

Three important points are made at the outset - that the Gospel does not only announce that God's day of salvation has dawned, but that it is a time of mercy for sinners; that the parables containing this message have a more reliable *sitz im leben* since none of them has been subject to the change of audience which has affected the setting of a lot of parables; that the purpose of these parables is vindication of this unexpected approach, in

such a way as, not only to confound the critics, but to win them over.

In dealing first of all with the parables which show how he directs the attention of the critics of the Gospel to the poor, there is only one point of detail to concern us here, and that is his statement, made in connection with the parable of the two debtors: "Only the poor can fathom the full meaning of God's goodness." (p.127). This cannot be true within the terms of the parable. If "poor" here means those living in poverty, then it might be argued that the rich have more to be forgiven them. If "poor" means "poor in spirit", maybe "sinful", it might have been argued in the terms of Jesus' own attitudes that those in authority had more to be forgiven than those commonly called sinners, since they were guilty of perverting God's people from his way.

There is another point which demands comment, occurring in the discussion on the parables of the Lost. Jeremias translates Luke 15:7 : ὄλιγες οὐ χρείαν ἔχουσι μετανοίας as "who have not committed any gross sin" (p.135). This translation is an apparent shift in emphasis from what the Greek says at face value and what is understood by most translators. It would seem reasonable, however reluctant we in Western Christendom may be to grant the status of "righteous" to anyone, to give full value to the word δίκαιοι in its absolute sense and thus to permit the more usual translation of the above clause. There seems little reason to adapt the translation here since no major point depends upon it.

When dealing with the parable of the Good Employer

Jeremias points out something of which it would be dangerous to take too much notice. He says, in connection with verse 4: " Δίκαιον = 'what is right and fair': they would understand by this that their pay would be a fraction of a denarius." (p.136). If we were tempted to pay too much attention to detail in the story we might start comparing the agreements made between the Employer and the different labourers. This might endanger Jeremias's thesis that the point of the parable rests on the goodness of the Employer, since we might then be able to give more weight to the objection of the first labourers on the grounds of injustice. If they saw an agreement made with the others and then saw it broken in order to give more money to the other labourers, they might have more reason to expect their own arrangement to be similarly broken. There is no objection here to Jeremias's point. We merely need to notice its potential danger. Jeremias is right to make no further point of it.

Another point arises from the same discussion. Jeremias says: "The question in v. 6b, does not express surprise, but reproach. V.7: 'The poor excuse conceals their characteristic oriental indifference.'" (p.136-137). There are two ideas here which are not properly established by Jeremias, although it does seem likely that he is correct. He does not, first of all, say why the question expresses reproach rather than surprise, nor does he consider the idea that it may be merely an enquiry rather than either of these. Secondly, he does not say why the excuse is a poor one. On the face of it the excuse could be entirely valid. The indifference of the oriental is

something which Jeremias introduces at various points in his discussion of parables, and, although it is a valuable point to be aware of, it needs further support in this case. As we have observed before, these latter labourers were probably not in the market place earlier in the day, and it is this rather than their excuse which shows their "characteristic oriental indifference."

In this whole section Jeremias does seem tempted to comment on the Christological significance of the parables he discusses. Thus, here, he says, in conclusion: "That, says Jesus, is what he is like; and because he is like that, so am I; since I am acting under his orders and in his stead." (p.139). It may well be true that this comment is justifiable, perhaps even was made explicit when Jesus told the parable, but it does not follow from the parable as we have it.

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is considered in similar detail. The comments on the verb  $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\upsilon$  are interesting: "Our passage is the only one in the Gospels in which the verb is used in a sense similar to that in which Paul generally uses it. Nevertheless Pauline influence is not to be assumed here, since it is excluded by the un-pauline semitizing construction of  $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\upsilon$  with  $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}$  or  $\gamma\eta$ , which we shall proceed to discuss. Our passage shows, on the other hand, that the Pauline doctrine of justification has its roots in the teaching of Jesus." (p.141).

Jeremias here presents us with a rather one-sided argument. It is based on nothing but a linguistic point and demonstrates the trap into which one may fall if one

is concerned with language to the exclusion of other considerations. It may be true that the Pauline view of justification has its roots in the teaching of Jesus rather than the other way round, but we cannot on the grounds of this parable assert categorically that this is so and that Luke, writing in the knowledge of Pauline views, did not write the idea into the parable. Jeremias's view is certainly the more likely, but his expression of it is too dogmatic.

(c) The Great Assurance

In dealing with the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, Jeremias handles only the idea of the confidence with which people were assured that they could expect the arrival of the Kingdom. He does not here handle what might usefully be handled - the idea of when it is due to arrive and whether what he has said implies a properly realized eschatology.

It is in dealing with the Parable of the Sower that Jeremias says something about the time scale within which these parables speak of the arrival of the Kingdom. His comment on verse 8 is odd: "since we must not consider v.8 as the description of a specially fruitful portion of the field, but as another point of time, namely the whole field at the moment of harvest." (p.150). The implication of what he says here is that the failures which were described were not really failures at all. If we look at the end product, the whole field is subject to the idea of the bumper harvest. This is surely not so. The failures, despite their insignificance beside the harvest, are failures all the same. Jeremias has correctly pointed

out the contrast in points of time made by the parable, but the real contrast is between the failures and the magnificence of the harvest. To make too much of the time scale is to miss the point and demands more attention to the debate on realized eschatology, which is here not discussed by Jeremias. If there is an error in his discussion, it is the introduction in the above sentence of the idea of the time of the harvest, when, for the interpretation of the parable, the idea of the magnificence of the harvest may be all that is required. It is this which gives the "Great Assurance" with which Jeremias is here concerned, not the idea of time. Temporal ideas in this context could only give assurance if on the one hand some idea of when the eschatological moment of fulfillment would arrive were offered, and on the other hand it were set alongside some qualitative statement about that moment.

It is only in the discussion of the parable of the Patient Husbandman that we receive from Jeremias some comment on the arrival of the Kingdom. His summing up contains the first indication of an eschatology "in process of realization": "This unwavering assurance that God's hour approaches is an essential element in the preaching of Jesus. God's hour is coming: nay more, it has already begun. In his beginning the end is already implicit." (p.153).

When he comes to the parable of the Unjust Judge, Jeremias introduces it by the question "on what does this confidence rest?" (p.153). Having confidence and assurance may well result from hearing this parable (as well as the others in this section) but only alongside the

parallel assurance of God's goodness and love. Although we know this to have been an integral part of Jesus' teaching, it is worth noticing here that these parables could not have had the desired effect outside the context of this belief.

(d) The Imminence of Catastrophe

The number of examples in this section serves as good evidence for the point that parables are characteristically used in situations of controversy. That they were all "uttered in a particular concrete situation" (p.169) supports this conclusion.

There is only one point of doubt in the section and that is in connection with what Jeremias says of the parable of the Rich Fool: "Here it is necessary to avoid a too obvious conclusion. We are not to think that Jesus intended to impress upon his audience the ancient maxim, 'Death comes suddenly upon man'. Rather do all the appeals and parables of warning taken together show that Jesus is not thinking of the inevitable death of the individual as the impending danger, but of the approaching eschatological catastrophe, and the coming Judgement." (p.165). It is tempting to agree with Jeremias that this should be grouped with parables concerning the eschatological event which is to come, yet we must also admit that what is said in the text of the parable does not speak of an end other than death and it could as it stands have been interpreted as referring to death. The point here is that Jeremias does not support his statement with evidence.

(e) It May Be Too Late

Although we can acknowledge that it is connected with

this section by the idea of urgency, it is difficult to see how Jeremias is justified in including the parable of the Fig-tree under this heading. On his own admission the parable conveys the idea that there is a stay of execution. On any understanding of the parable, this heading is the wrong one under which to categorize it.

Similarly, this is hardly the exact interpretation of the parable of the Ten Virgins. He sees it as conveying a stern warning, and there is no need of warning where it is already too late. As a "crisis parable" it can be understood as saying "there is going to be a crisis, and there is still time to prepare" or perhaps even "there is a crisis on now, but you've time yet to avoid the fate of the foolish virgins", but it is not possible to interpret it as saying "there is a crisis on now and you may find you can't get through the door". For those who take the right steps, entry is still possible.

We might equally say this of the parable of the Great Supper which was surely told in an atmosphere of warning that the hearers should act urgently rather than an atmosphere of a vindictive sneer: "Ha! You're too late already".

This whole section has been misnamed by Jeremias. It would be better entitled "Beware! Time's running out - you could be too late if you don't seize your chance now."

#### (f) Realized Discipleship

As we shall observe when we come to a detailed examination of the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, Jeremias has in this case magnified a secondary feature of the parable (  $\alpha\pi\delta\epsilon\iota\chi\eta\varsigma$   $\chi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$  )

into its main point. As we shall see, the joy which he finds to be its main point, could not come about without the discovery of the treasure (or pearl), the realization of its worth and the possibility of acquiring it.

In dealing with the parable of the Good Samaritan Jeremias says: "In short, it is difficult to regard the levite as governed by ritual considerations" (p.204). This statement does not follow, as the words "in short" would suggest it does, from the previous argument. He suggests two reasons why this Levite could be travelling alone: first, that he had been delayed and was not therefore with the group with which he would have travelled; second, that he was one of the head Levites who served permanently at the temple. The inference to be drawn from the above quotation is that he was in neither of these two categories. Yet Jeremias takes no steps to support this view. He merely states it.

That Jeremias is willing to fish for parables with a very narrow meshed net is a fact already established in the beginning when he was talking about the various meanings of mashal. This section contains two main subsections whose arguments depend on material most of which would not normally be discussed under the heading "parables", and the whole section is a good example of Jeremias's broad approach and his ability to see the parables as an integral part of the ministry of Jesus as a whole.

(g) The Via Dolorosa and Exaltation of the Son of Man

The foregoing paragraph could be equally applied to these pages. In support of this section Jeremias only

produces examples of brief figurative expressions, no full parable stories.

#### (h) The Consummation

Here the eschatological significance of the parabolic language of Jesus is made very clear. This list of figurative expressions applied to the consummation is vast.

Here and there in Jeremias's work there are clues which show something of his view of eschatology. We know from much that he says of the parables that the crisis of the Kingdom was (according to him) regarded by Jesus as already happening. But that the final arrival of the Kingdom was yet to come is understood in various places, for example: "But that moment has not yet arrived. The last opportunity for repentance has not yet run out (Luke 13:6-9)".(p.226)

#### (i) Parabolic Actions

It is doubtful whether we can legitimately accept the idea of Jesus' fraternization with outcasts as a parabolic action in the same sense as we can accept, say, the symbolism of Palm Sunday or Maundy Thursday. There is something, surely, in the character of parables which is deliberately contrived to produce the desired communication. Jesus surely could not have sought the company of outcasts with the sole purpose of pointing the accusing finger at the religious leaders of Israel. His reason for so doing must have been that it was right in itself to take such action. Otherwise we must accuse Jesus of the dubious intention of using outcasts for his own ends, proceeding from no concern for them whatever. Other symbolic actions can be regarded as enacted purely because Jesus desired to make a certain type of communication. It is unlikely

that this is the case with this example.

#### (4) Chapter Four - Conclusion

In his short concluding note Jeremias states what has already become clear in the course of his criticism - that the eschatology of the parables can best be summed up as an eschatology "that is in process of realization" (p.230). C.H. Dodd's agreement with him<sup>34</sup> makes the position almost incapable of criticism at this stage in the history of Biblical criticism.

#### (5) General Comments

There are good reasons for the high regard which scholars have of Jeremias's work:

(a) Jeremias's minute analysis of details which in isolation seem to carry little weight, but when grouped together with other similar examples reveal patterns of thought and style running through the parables which make them very significant. Examples of important points on which Jeremias bases arguments and which form some of his assertions are:

(i) The significant discovery about the fact that the early church re-addressed many of the parables originally spoken to enemies of Jesus and applied them in new contexts to his friends and followers. As Manson has commented: "It is surely very remarkable that the traffic is all in one direction, and that parables originally spoken to opponents of Jesus or to the general public are transferred to his followers, but that parables originally spoken to the disciples are not readdressed to 'those outside'."<sup>35</sup>

(ii) The concern for giving correct titles to

parables. Precision is a characteristic not only of Jeremias's scholarship, but also of his language and mode of expression. It is to be expected that he would not tolerate inexact titles. Thus for examples, he substitutes "the parable of the Father's Love" for "the parable of the Prodigal Son", "the parable of the Good Employer" for "the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard", "the parable of the Unjust Judge" for "the parable of the Importunate Widow", and "the parable of the Friend who was aroused in the Night by a Request for Help" for "the parable of the Importunate Friend".

(iii) The examples of the use of circumlocutions in the passive to avoid the use of the divine name, a fact which, once recognized, can lend a much sharper cutting edge to many sayings.

(iv) The datival introduction of certain parables, a fact which, once recognized, makes the interpretation of some parables a lot easier because we are not so easily restricted by the language with which the text presents us.

(v) The very pervasive function in the parables of Jesus of the vindication of the Gospel against its critics.

(b) The very convincing groupings of parables, which are, with one exception ("it may be too late") given appropriate headings. It is the system of grouping which is one of the book's strongest points, for it is through this whole complex system that we begin to hear the voice of Jesus himself speaking. Here the declared aim in the Foreword really can be seen to be fulfilled: "It is to be hoped that the reader will perceive that the

aim of the critical analysis contained in the second part of this book is nothing less than a return, as well grounded as possible, to the very words of Jesus himself. Only the Son of Man and his word can invest our message with full authority." (p.9).

On page 202 Jeremias quotes Manson's dictum: "Great teachers constantly repeat themselves", and it is the great benefit of Jeremias's work that we can see in the parables the same major themes coming through again and again. And this is not through a lack of attention to the parables individually - it is rather the result of very detailed attention to individual parables that such common ground can be seen between them. Through Jeremias's analysis, we can see in the parables the whole teaching of Jesus in microcosm, which is just what we might expect from a great teacher.

Of the drawbacks to the book, two may need special mention:-

(1) Jeremias has an occasional tendency, noticed elsewhere in this review, to be unashamedly dogmatic on points which, though they are in the area of probability, are not by any means certain. Such statements as "There can be no doubt that Luke is right" (p.44) appear quite often without substantiation. Similarly, statements like "The passives  $\delta\omicron\theta\eta\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$  /  $\alpha\rho\theta\eta\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$  are circumlocutions for the divine name." (p.62, note 58), tend to provoke questions like "Are they?", "How do we know?".

(2) The book makes extensive use of the Gospel of Thomas. This may or may not be justifiable, but it would

seem necessary at least to pass some comment on the value of the Gospel. As it is, Jeremias makes free use of it without any question mark over it at all, and this provokes a complaint from Robert Leaney: "A very small example of this rather prevalent fault must suffice: of the introductory dialogue to the Rich Fool (Luke 12: 13-15), Jeremias says, "This dialogue.....is preserved in the Gospel of Thomas 72 as an independent fragment; hence it will not originally have belonged to the parable".

He ignores the explanation ready to hand that a Gnostic has worked over a number of short passages in the Gospels with sublime disregard for their context." And later he says: ".....we must disagree with the view that the Gospel of Thomas is of any real value in the task of interpretation."<sup>36</sup>

It does appear that Jeremias gives pride of place in many instances to the material from Thomas. He starts off (p.24) from the view that to the attempt to unearth the original versions of the parables, the Gospel of Thomas is "of great assistance". Yet he seems to use it as of more significance than mere assistance in that he does, in two places, make use of parables peculiar to Thomas. It is at this point that some comment on their value would be useful. We may notice also the peculiarly individual treatment that he gives this material on page 102 where footnote 57 deals with the examples from Thomas in greater detail than the main text deals with the other Gospels' material. Perhaps we can place no special significance on so small a point, but it does make one curious in the light of the prominence Jeremias gives

the Gospel of Thomas.

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There are few drawbacks to this excellent book. In his Foreword Jeremias made the modest claim of attempting merely an excavatory exercise, but few would allow him to get away without his deserved praise for the most significant work on parables and their interpretation since Julicher.

As we shall see in chapter four, the debate has taken other directions than the eschatological one. There have been attempts at Christological and Existential interpretations of the parables, and these, though, as yet, of less value than the major contributions to the eschatological interpretation, are significant stages in the progress of the debate.

Along the way, however, there have been works which for one reason or another have failed to make any significant contribution to the debate. Some have failed to take much notice of the way the debate was going, perhaps because they were not attempting to make an original contribution. There have been attempts at popularizing the parables, attempts at showing that they have a meaning for the average "man in the street" as well as for the scholar. In this category we would place the work of Hugh Martin<sup>37</sup>, which, although it came out after the work of Dodd, makes very little use of his insights, and is of a different character from such major contributions. Instead of working in detail with the material available in the Gospels, the tendency of such works is to embroider on the parable stories in order to

create a picture which appeals to the casual reader. As a contribution to the twentieth century debate on parables, it must therefore be rejected, and this would be no surprise to Martin himself, since he says in his own Preface: "These books (i.e. Dodd's and Oesterley's) show a ripe scholarship which is entirely out of my reach, but their scope and purpose is so different from that of my more humble effort that I hope there may still be room for it". (p.5)

Other works also prove of insufficient value to merit detailed criticisms. Examples are the works of G.A. Buttrick,<sup>38</sup> which shows little of the progress we might expect in a work coming so many years after Julicher (whose name is not even mentioned!), and J.F. McFadyen,<sup>39</sup> which is on the right lines for its time, but makes no progress that had not already been made by Cadoux.

However, although these books and many others have no claim to fame within the history of parable criticism, at least one work (that of W.O.E. Oesterley<sup>40</sup>) may claim fame because it is an attempt at a scholarly approach to the parables which manifestly fails. That it does so requires justification in a detailed examination:

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Since the book is still divided into the lectures as they were originally delivered, we will here look at each in turn and deal with critical points as they arise:

(1) Lecture I

(a) Authenticity

Oesterley makes a statement on the authenticity of

the parables:

".....we affirm, nevertheless, in spite of the contentions of some scholars on the subject, that the parables, so far as their essence is concerned, are, in their present form, substantially the same as when first uttered by our Lord. In his recently published book on the parables Dr. Dodd writes: "They have upon them, taken as a whole, the stamp of a highly individual mind, in spite of the re-handling they have inevitably suffered in the course of transmission..... Certainly there is no part of the Gospel record which has for the reader a clearer ring of authenticity." (p.12)

He is here confusing the authenticity of parables as whole pieces of work, delivered by Jesus himself, with the authenticity of the specific forms in which they have been delivered to us. Dodd's comments (as quoted above) relate to the fact that pictorial language can be expected to be retained in a purer form than ordinary narrative material. Oesterley seems to think that they relate to the idea that what we have is a well-preserved parable tradition with only a few discrepancies between the Gospel accounts and the words of Jesus himself. This cannot be what Dodd intended since he is himself on occasion very critical of the available texts. A comparison of Dodd's and Oesterley's views of the parable of the Sower and its Biblical interpretation will reveal how far they differ from each other on this matter.

(b) Types of Parable in the New Testament

Oesterley divides the New Testament parables into

four categories:

- (a) Simple sayings
- (b) Parables which are not so called
- (c) Allegories
- (d) The "great Gospel parables".

These divisions are too arbitrary to be of any real value. They do not inform us very much on what is essentially different between the classifications. They are divisions of convenience rather than classifications according to the type of construction involved. Categories (a), (b) and (d) are all too loosely defined to be easily separable in many cases.

Further to this, there seems little point in attempting a system of classifying parables unless the rest of the book attempts to effect the classification. Oesterley's own grouping is, with minor exceptions, non-existent.

### (c) What is a Parable?

Despite his divisions of New Testament stories into categories, it is not easy to see what Oesterley means by the word "parable" when he uses it in connection with the New Testament. In fact, there are points in connection with this matter where he contradicts himself. He says ".....it is characteristic of our Lord's parables..... that they concentrate on one particular subject." (p.172) - Yet to look at some of his own interpretations (e.g. on the Sower, with its various types of Jewish people implied by the various soils), you would not think he believed what he says.

(2) Lecture IIThe Kingdom of Heaven

The central discussion of this lecture contains two ideas:

(a) that the Kingdom of Heaven is at once a present (and spiritual) reality and also something yet to come

(b) that the expression "Son of Man", as used in Hebrew history has at once the connotation of humanity (a Messiah born of the line of David) and the connotation of superhumanity.

It is significant that, although he appears elsewhere in the book, C.H. Dodd is not mentioned in this chapter, and this may well be because although Oesterley deals admirably with the background material to the questions raised by the expression "Kingdom of Heaven", he does not, like Dodd, address himself to any real, positive concept of what these words mean.

On page 31, for example, Oesterley discusses, with examples, the use that Jesus makes of the eating and drinking image in connection with the Kingdom. Beyond the comment that Jesus is speaking figuratively on these occasions he does not go. What the figure intends to convey as a truth about the kingdom is not something he attempts to answer, either here or in his later expositions.

(3) Lecture IIIThe Parable of the Sower(a)  $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ 

Oesterley does not seem to make up his mind whether

this parable had an obvious meaning or just a hidden meaning which could only become clear later on. On page 41 we read "But to the inner circle of the disciples.....there could be no doubt that it contained a hidden meaning", and in the next paragraph, in the discussion of the seed which fell by the wayside, we read "The disciples can hardly have failed to recognize who were meant".

The question is not really settled in Oesterley's discussion of Mark 4:10-12 and its parallels, although certain clues are available. Page 54 has words which indicate what he thinks: ".....it seems to have been our Lord's intention that in uttering parables about the Kingdom of Heaven, their deeper meaning should be reserved for that inner circle of His followers who clung faithfully to Him and to His teaching, although they may not themselves at first have grasped its fuller and deeper meaning". This would accord with his somewhat allegorical approach to some parables. But at the same time, Oesterley does not wish to subscribe to the view that parables were told to conceal truth: "it does not set forth something which explained to the disciples.....a fact which had been difficult for them to understand" (p.39)

It is not, however, in this context that Oesterley apparently views the word *μυστήριον*. His book divides off "Parables of the mysteries concerning the Kingdom of Heaven" from "Other Parables concerning the Kingdom of Heaven". The inference we draw from what he says (and what he does not say) is that the word

"mystery" is taken to apply to those parables which feature in Matthew 13 (and are therefore dependent on the reference in 13:11) and in Mark 4 (and therefore dependent on the reference in 4:11). He nowhere attempts to discover exactly what these so-called "mysteries" are.

(b) Fairness to Pharisees

One of the features of this book is typified by the digression on Pharisees on pages 42-43, which is useful as a corrective to the tendency to view all Pharisees as men who opposed Jesus in every detail. It is a corrective which though little to do with the parables, appears in various comments elsewhere in the book.

(c) Interpreting the Parable

Oesterley's view of the parable might be seen as allegorizing with a difference. That is, whereas the usual way of allegorizing is to identify each feature of a parable with something in life in general, Oesterley identifies the features of the parable specifically with areas of contemporary Jewish life. But there are problems arising from what he says.

He explains that the parable is an answer to the problem of why so few respond to Jesus' teaching: "It comes to this: the abuse of free-will. Our parable teaches a similar truth. The free choice was granted to men either of following our Lord's guidance or of going their own way; and the great majority chose the latter." (p.51) But if we hang anything on free-will in this parable, especially after making close identification between the types of soil and certain sections of Jewish

society, we are in for some difficulty, because nobody would want to say that seed has the free-will to fall where it wants, or the soil the will to change its character.

Although Oesterley's identification of the classes of person he thinks to be involved in the parable is interesting, it seems to be more of a guess than a sound judgement. Having said that it is easy to identify the first two categories (which are unlikely to have been so self-evident to the disciples as he thinks - other classes of people may well have been as obviously in opposition to Jesus as well), he then makes the identification of the third category purely on the basis of the idea that Jesus is unlikely to have made two such identifications without continuing the process. So likewise when he gets to the fourth category. For this approach to be convincing, we would expect each category's identification to be independently self-evident, or the purpose of the parable would not itself be at all clear, and the possibilities for being distracted would soon appear. The parable which makes people say "Ah yes!" to one point and "what does he mean?" to a similar point is obviously not achieving its aim.

We may note also that when he is trying to make the identification of the third category, he uses a point which may itself be suspect. He attempts to show that his idea would have been one which sprang easily to the disciples' minds by saying "When therefore, Christ spoke of the "cares" of life, and the "deceitfulness of riches", they must have recalled many an episode

which made clear to them the types to which our Lord was referring, and the melancholy truth of what he said." (p.47). Since Oesterley does not seem to contradict the idea that this parable comes from quite an early part of Jesus' ministry, he can hardly argue that the disciples were bound to have experienced many incidents with him which make this point obvious for them.

#### (d) Rabbinical Evidence

Page 43 has an interesting piece of Rabbinical literature on various types of Pharisee, the comment on which is "This Rabbinical evidence is very significant". It could be true that it is significant, but as is the case with Rabbinical evidence wherever it is quoted, its significance is not self-evident. Wherever such material is set alongside the Gospels, we need to know how the texts relate to each other and what bearing it has on our interpretation of the Gospel passages. It is not sufficient, as Oesterley does on several occasions, merely to notice similar Rabbinical stories, unless it can be shown that the tradition being quoted (and not the general Rabbinical tradition) easily ante-dates the Gospel story, or ante-dates the time when Jesus would have spoken it. (On this see also the section below on the Parable of the Hidden Treasure).

#### (4) Lecture IV

##### (a) The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

##### (i) The Parable/Allegory Distinction

Oesterley sees the parable/allegory distinction to be the same as the "to be like"/"to mean", the "to place

side by side"/"to identify" and the "to compare"/"to indicate" distinctions. And with this other scholars would agree. A difficulty arises, however, because he is prepared to say this particular story is an allegory without seeing the necessity to make certain identifications between the story and its proper interpretation (i.e. not necessarily the Biblical interpretation). The process of identification between the elements of a story and of something in reality needs careful handling, for we may find that we are arbitrarily selective about those parts we choose for identification and those we omit from the process. For example, it is easy enough to identify nouns in the story with nouns in the real situation, without necessarily making the corresponding identification between the relationships which link the nouns. Thus, noun 'A' in a story may be identified with noun 'a' in reality, and noun 'B' in the story with noun 'b' in reality. But the process of identification, if this really be the connection between story and reality, demands that the relationship between 'A' and 'B' be the same as that between 'a' and 'b'.

Oesterley has been reasonably uncritical in his approach to the text, the problem of authenticity, and the problem of the relationship of the Biblical interpretation and the allegory. By accepting what is written to be by and large what is meant, by taking it at its face value, he has fallen into the above trap and involved himself in an untenable position.

If we follow the interpretation (and Oesterley) in identifying wheat with good people and tares with evil people, we must also, in accordance with the above rules, identify what links wheat and tares in the story with what links good people and bad people in reality. The problematic connecting link which cannot be ignored in this argument (whatever other links there may be) is that wheat can never become

tares and tares can never become wheat. The logical conclusion from the argument would be a completely determinist view of the world, and a dualist determinism at that.

Another problem resulting from the acceptance of the interpretation is not noticed. It is the problem that to equate the sower with Jesus is in this parable to imply that before his time there were no evil people, or even that there were no good people. 41

Oesterley tries to redress the balance on the view that consistency of thinking in the Gospel stories is necessary by warning us not to expect logical consistency of the Eastern mind (p.69). But this argument will not stand the weight of criticisms as radical to the meaning of the story as the above. Oesterley's own comments refer only to minor incongruities (as do similar comments on pp.60 and 62). The incongruities we observe are not minor ones if we are dealing with an allegory (where detail matters) rather than a parable (where it matters less).

(ii) In what way does the allegory speak of men?

Another problem arises from the comments above. On Oesterley's view of the allegory's meaning and the purpose for which it was delivered, men in the world can be divided into "sons of the Kingdom" and "sons of the evil one", and, as we have already said, to accept this is to risk a determinist position. Admittedly Oesterley is trying to make sense of the story in its Jewish situation, seeing it in terms, not of what it may teach us, but in terms of what it would have suggested to the disciples. However, he has ignored the fact that he could have been speaking to them not of two types of people, but of two aspects of each human being. This would surely be supported by the evidence, which must have occurred to the disciples, that nobody had attained the high ideals of the morality of the

Kingdom (of which Oesterley admits they were aware), not even those like themselves, who were very close to Jesus.

(iii) Harvest Imagery

Oesterley implies that we should find some degree of consistency of meaning between the various incidences of growth and harvest imagery: "... our Lord, by the repeated metaphor of the seed and its gradual development, evidently intended them to learn that the kingdom is of slow expansion...." (p.69). If it is true that Jesus used these images with any degree of consistency, it would be difficult to deal with any of them without taking notice of the idea of the present arrival of the kingdom (the harvest), which is expressed not only in explicit terms in Matthew 9:37f, but implicitly in the Parable of the Sower, where some (e.g. Dodd) would argue that the reason for emphasising the harvest was that the harvest time had already come.

Oesterley gives no space to the idea that Jesus speaks in these parables of a harvest time rather than a sowing time.

(iv) Other points of detail

1. Page 58 - "Their interest in the Kingdom was thus, in the first instance political, a fact which largely explains why our Lord during the early period of His ministry was so anxious to conceal His Messiahship". No space is given to the view that perhaps Jesus did not conceal his messiahship, but that this type of idea might be the product of the early Church. Although this is consistent with the general uncritical view that Oesterley takes to the texts and their origins, it is surprising in this case since, early as they were, the original lectures post-dated the work of Wrede by many years.

2. Page 70 - in this parable "the main point is that there are both good and bad elements in the Kingdom during its existence on this

earth". Perhaps this point is merely thrown out as a means of contrast, but it does give expression to the problems of Oesterley's views on this parable. Questions we may ask are: Does Oesterley really have a more territorial view of the Kingdom than a spiritual one? Does he see it as existing first in this place, then in that, rather than seeing it as in operation in any place where the will of God is done?

Does he mean to imply that the Kingdom on earth will come to an end? If so, he needs to deal with the petitions of the Lord's Prayer in this context.

Does he mean to imply that it is possible for there to be both good and evil within the scope of the Kingdom? Surely any sure-footed understanding of the concept needs to assert that in the sphere of earthly things within which the Kingdom operates, although there are parallel activities involving evil, they are in no way part of the activity of the Kingdom? What is evil in the world could not by any stretch of the concept of a loving God be the result of the rule of God. The sphere of evil is the very area where the Kingdom is being rejected.

(b) The Parable of the Automatic Action of the Soil

"The parable clearly teaches that the growth and development of the Kingdom is a long process..... only by degrees can it reach perfection." (p.71).

This assertion Oesterley does not justify. He treats it as self-evident, and the following sentence indicates the problem he is then in: "But elsewhere we find the advent of the Kingdom is looked for in the near future" (p.71).

All Oesterley does in this section is to point out the difficulties and then refer us to Dodd's work where, he says, "The whole of this difficult and controversial subject is brilliantly dealt with " (p.72 note 1).

In Dodd we find our eschatology "realized" and parable interpretations in accordance with this view. One questions whether Oesterley really wants to agree with Dodd's position, especially in view of what he has lately been saying with respect to the parable of the wheat and the tares.

Since Oesterley opens up the problem and provides no answer and no real argument to go on, we are left at this point at a loss to know exactly where he stands.

(5) Lecture V

(a) The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven

(i) Jesus in "Retreat"

Oesterley suggests that these parables must be interpreted in the light of the general withdrawal of his early followers and the resultant consternation of the close band of disciples. This is a possible view, but there are two problems about it:

1. To maintain it, Oesterley would do better to comment on the period of Jesus' ministry in which these parables are set. If they are from the Galilean period, and if Matthew 13:1 is a true indication of the size of audience he was getting at the time, then some comment on the fact would seem to be necessary.

2. Oesterley tries to establish the point first of all on the basis of the internal evidence of the parable. He quotes verse 32 as his evidence: "The parable suggests that the gathering of the multitudes who had at first been drawn to Christ had shrunk (verse 32)" (p.74). It is stretching the verse beyond its limits to deduce this from it. The smallness of the seed in no way indicates the diminished size of Jesus' following, and there is no further evidence in the verse to support Oesterley's conclusion.

(ii) The Purpose of the Parables

Oesterley sees these parables as a means of restoring lost confidence to the disciples. If this were the purpose, there would

have been little point in telling it to the crowds, as is suggested in Matthew 13:34. It is difficult to believe that Jesus would have said something in public which was not intended for public hearing, no matter what view we take of the general purpose of parabolic teaching. It would seem more profitable to search for their original meaning, therefore, in terms of what they might have conveyed to the average Jewish mind, rather than by saying merely (as Oesterley does) that to the people they would be incomprehensible.

(iii) C.H. Dodd

The final comment on these parables is an extended quotation from the work of C.H. Dodd in a footnote on page 79f. Oesterley says "We feel compelled to quote here some suggestive words of Dodd...." but it is not clear why he quotes them, since almost all that Dodd says, relying as he does so heavily on the idea that "... the eschaton, the divinely ordained climax of history, is here", contradicts what Oesterley himself has to say. For Dodd the process which follows Jesus' arrival is not sowing and growth, but harvest. Likewise, with these parables, Dodd's emphasis would be on the finality of things, whereas Oesterley's is on the idea that Jesus is starting off the processes of the Kingdom.

(b) The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price

(i) The Law Relating to Treasure Trove

The material quoted on page 81 with regard to the law on treasure trove is very interesting in relation to the parable, but is not particularly valuable as a means of countering the charge that Jesus was acquiescing in fraud. The second argument which Oesterley produces (pp. 81-82) must be his only answer to the charge, for if we are to indulge in taking notice of this particular law, and to imagine that this might have sprung to the minds of the hearers, we ought also to credit them with being aware that, the treasure being automatically the finder's,

there was no particular need to go and buy the field to obtain it. He could have unashamedly carried it home.

(ii) The Use of Late Jewish Writings

Page 82 prompts a question which is of wider application in the field of parable criticism than just Oesterley's book, but certainly it is worth bearing in mind when reading his work. When dealing with the parable of the hid treasure, he makes use of an illustration which, from his own footnote, is likely to date from something like 250 A.D. He continues: "Thus, the idea of sacrificing everything in order to possess something of pre-eminent value was not unfamiliar to Jewish teachers" (p.83). The comment and the illustration are scarcely relevant, since the familiarity of this idea to Jewish teachers may well have grown up after Jesus' time. We do not need to say that Oesterley's conclusion is wrong, but we must observe that the connection of this illustration with what Jesus said is at best tenuous.

Oesterley, of course, only wishes here to make the point that "it may be doubted whether the Jews who listened to our Lord's words had ever heard of the Kingdom of heaven on earth spoken of in this way" (p.83) but he fails to observe that they may not, in fact, on the evidence that he produces, have ever heard anything spoken of in this way.

(c) The Parable of the Draw-Net

"While there is a certain parallelism between this parable and that of the wheat and the tares, they differ in this, that the separating of the bad from the good takes place at once in the former, while in the latter it is not until the "harvest"". (p 85). The suggestion here is that the separation at the "harvest" in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares is somehow different from the time of separation in this parable. This is not so. Both deal with a separation at the time of the harvest. The only difference is that the

parable of the Draw-Net does not speak of the period of growth which precedes it, as does the parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

(6) Lecture VI

(a) The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard

(i) The Independence of God

Oesterley's whole thesis in this section is questionable because he attempts to argue the complete independence of God (which in itself is not in question) from the terms of this parable. He touches on the matter at several points:-

1. "The householder is represented as one in an independent position from the point of view of the labourers; in other words, he does not need their labour in the way that they need their wages. This fact is obvious when one considers the conditions of the time; the relative positions between rich and poor, employer and employed, were utterly different from those of more modern times." (p.107).

2. "The murmuring of the labourers, then, was justified from their point of view; but they are represented as taking no cognizance of the fact of their being employed, and being thus placed in the advantageous position of being able to earn wages, i.e. that their being employed was an act of grace on the part of the householder." (pp. 108-109).

3. "Briefly, what the parable teaches, then, is this; the householder is entirely independent of the labourers; to say that he needed them for the work in his vineyard is true, but it is implied that there were plenty of other labourers available (verse 7); the fact of his seeking them to work in his vineyard was, therefore, so far as they were concerned, an act of grace on his part." (p.109).

4. "The application of the parable will then be somewhat as follows: The fact that God accepts the service of men is an act of grace on his part; for it is wholly for their benefit that men are

received into His service. God does not require them; He is altogether independent of the service of men. Nevertheless, God seeks men to serve Him as an act of grace. But if in return men think that they are justified in claiming a reward for their service - "What then shall we have?" - they are losing sight of the great truth that the capacity for doing Him service is due to an act of grace on His part, and that the reward promised is of grace, not due to merit." (pp. 109-110).

Despite the comments about the rich in 1. (above), more is needed to make a case than this. No landowner is in business for charity purposes, no matter how generous. If he ran a business in order to get rid of his money, he would soon be no longer rich. This is a fact which Oesterley himself acknowledges in 3. (above), but which he attempts to redeem with the comment on verse 7. Unfortunately this attempt is not sufficient to make his case watertight. Verse 7 does not imply a surplus of workers waiting in the market place, nor does it imply he doesn't have need of the men he took on. It may be that the opposite is the case. Perhaps the reason the owner was in the market place so often that day was that there was a shortage of labour (however unlikely this may have been in Palestine at that time) and that, far from not needing them, he required all that he could find. Neither side of this argument can be conclusive, and for that reason alone Oesterley's case must be dismissed since he hangs everything he has to say about the parable on these points.

#### (ii) The Labourers' Claim on God

The Jewish system of belief allowed the righteous man a claim on God for a reward. On page 109, Oesterley argues that the denial of the claim of the labourers in this case results from the points raised above about the independence of God and his acts of grace towards men (rather than anything connected with works). This argument depends rather too

heavily on allegorizing God into the story. Oesterley misses the point that the reason the landowner was not unfair to the early starters was that he had entered into a contract with them.

(iii) Internal Consistency of the Story

"... it must be allowed that in the ordinary conditions of life it is manifestly unfair for the man who has worked all day to receive no better payment than he who has worked for one hour only. But the whole purpose of this parable was to set before men conditions which are just not those of everyday life; for it tells of the relationship between men and God, not that between men and men." (pp. 107-108).

These comments indicate that Oesterley sees a lack of internal consistency in the story, such that he is forced to the conclusion that it can only be interpreted by supplying the idea "God" at some point in the narrative. We may well agree with him that "it tells of the relationship between men and God", but parables generally work in such a way as to place this relationship alongside that between men and men, not instead of it. Oesterley's own point may be valid, but it raises the question of consistency within parable stories, and this is a matter Oesterley does not consider.

(7) Lecture VII

(a) The Parable of the Two Sons

(i) Verse 32

Oesterley says: "The second son must, therefore, correspond with the religious leaders; by their ostensible practice of religion they appeared willing to "work in the vineyard"; but their insincerity, and want of a true religious spirit, showed that in reality they were unwilling to do so" (p.115). But we read, in connection with verse 32 "This would make the religious leaders correspond with neither of the sons of the parable; for according to this verse they neither say that they will "work in the vineyard", nor do they do so" (p.116). Oesterley

intends on these pages to draw a distinction between the sinners, who originally, by their behaviour, refused to go and then, at the preaching of John, repented and went, and the religious leaders who, by their profession of religion and obedience of the letter of the law, said they would go, but in fact, by their ignoring of the spirit of the law, did not go. In his view verse 32 interferes with this reasoning, since the religious leaders did not even say they would follow John's teaching. This comment, however, does not undermine the original point because it was not the following of John that was at stake, it was the following of God. The leaders had promised allegiance to God and it was this that Jesus questioned.

Oesterley goes on to say "Yet, according to Matthew 3:7, where it is said that many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John's baptism, the religious leaders would correspond to the second son, as we have seen, who said he would go, but went not." (p.116). Again there is no real need to see inconsistencies here, since, as Oesterley argues elsewhere (pp. 42, 43, 125) there were certain religious leaders who did in fact see the point of what Jesus was saying and were not antagonistic towards him. If we are to equate the religious leaders with the second son (as Oesterley argues), we are not equating them because they responded to John (even though some apparently did in some form or other), but because they were the ones who claimed to be followers of God rather than the so-called sinners.

(ii) "In the Light of their Jewish Background"

Oesterley's title is sometimes not quite a reflection of the contents of this book. In a review Wilfred Knox wrote "I cannot help feeling that Dr. Oesterley would have written a more valuable work if he had concentrated more on the Jewish background of the parables of our Lord and given less space to his own interpretation of them".<sup>42</sup>

On this and similar occasions Oesterley does spend more time interpreting

the parables than with a consideration of their Jewish background and its effect upon them. On pages 115-117, the only piece of Jewish background material is the Rabbinical parable with which he finishes, and this, although "of interest", says nothing of the way Jesus' parable needs to be interpreted.

In fairness to Oesterley, however, we should notice also those (more numerous) places where he produces good background material on the Jewish way of life. Examples worth quoting are the details of the ways in which debts were collected on page 97, the informative discussion on the Jewish doctrine of works on pages 100ff, and the information on the conducting of Jewish weddings on pages 133ff.

(b) The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

In his effort to interpret this "allegory" (".. or, to be more exact, the allegory" (p.122)), Oesterley finds it necessary to identify the vineyard, and comes up with the answer that the vineyard = the Kingdom. Although he qualifies this by saying that it represents the Kingdom in its early beginnings, he is by this interpretation committed to a view that within the Kingdom of God, evil things are possible.

(c) The Parable of the Wedding Feast

(i) Verses 6 and 7

It is not difficult to see the point of what Oesterley says (p.123) about verse 6, but his comment on verse 7 does not seem to follow from the text. Oesterley implies that the killing of the murderers and the burning of their town was the punishment for not responding to the invitation. The natural meaning of the verse in its present context, however, would be that the retaliation was as harsh as it was precisely because they were murderers. While we may agree with Oesterley that verses 6 and 7 are strange and probably not original, we cannot exclude verse 7 on his grounds. It is more likely to be excluded because it is

the natural consequence of verse 6, which is itself not part of the original parable.

(ii) The Invective of Jesus

Oesterley rightly says (p.127) that Jesus spoke in strong terms against the religious leaders, but in doing so he attempts to draw a distinction between personal bitterness and justified accusation, a distinction which is far from clear. The texts he quotes (Matthew 21:44, 22:13, Luke 20:18) are supposed to be examples of personal bitterness, but Oesterley does not indicate in what way they are of this character as opposed to passages like, for example, Matthew 23:13-39. As some would argue about parables, Jesus' method of working often included a degree of invective, and it could be that Oesterley here makes a point based rather on pre-conceived feelings than on evidence.

(8) Lecture VIII

(a) The Parable of the Ten Virgins

As we have seen elsewhere, Oesterley does often see parables partially in terms of allegory, and this is an example. On page 42 he identifies the bridegroom and the Messiah, the five wise virgins with those who are "looking for the consolation of Israel", and the five foolish virgins with those who are careless and thoughtless in preparing for the *παρουσία*.

Oesterley appears to adopt a middle position with regard to this story, calling it a parable but treating it as an allegory.

(b) The Parable of the Talents

(i) The Significance of the Small Point

It is a by-product of the tendency to allegorize that the mind searches for significance in small points. Oesterley's exposition of this parable affords examples:-

1. The value of the Talents: since the amount of money involved

is so great, Oesterley says: "The truth implied is, of course, that divine grace is something utterly unobtainable by man, it is only granted as a gift of God" (p.145). It is possible that there is force in this argument, but we must beware of the dangers of magnifying the lesser points of parables to a significance beyond the capacity of the images. While we may well agree that "divine grace is something utterly unobtainable by man", we would find it hard to agree that a large sum of money was something utterly unobtainable, even by a slave. There are, surely, conceivable circumstances in which a slave, by fair means or foul, could come by a large sum, if only for a short period. Whereas the divine implications which Oesterley draws from the point are beyond the bounds of possibility, the human situation does not necessarily correspond in this respect.

2. "According to his several ability" (p.145) - Oesterley's interpretation of this point requires a God of some injustice, not because he gives to each person different talents, varying in quality or quantity or both, but because, if we draw this conclusion from the parable, we must also draw the conclusion that even though (in the Lucan version) each of the good workers did their level best, their rewards are not in accordance with their effort and results, but in accordance with the value of the original gifts entrusted. The results of their trading, we must remember, depended directly on the original distribution of money. Money makes money.

We must note also that the implication of the remarks on the profits made by the good workers is that they each had an equal amount of power to "exercise free-will" (Oesterley's expression) - each of them doubled his money.

(ii) An Unjustifiable Assumption

On page 147 Oesterley makes a remark which forces him to step outside the limits of the story in search of explanations. "... the

third servant.... pleads in extenuation of his slothfulness that he knew his lord was a 'hard man'....." but he continues by saying "his lord was not hard, otherwise he would not have given his servant the means of trading, but would have commanded him to do so without help". This point will not stand, since Oesterley has to make a value-judgement on what, in terms of the parable, a "hard man" is. He has assumed, without justification, that for the lord to merit the title "hard" he would have to be hard enough to demand results without providing the means to obtain them. This is not the intention of the remark "I knew that you were a hard man". It quite naturally goes with the subsequent comments on why the slave considered him a hard man. The adjective is a subjective judgement on the part of the slave, not an objective one on the part of the story-teller. Within the framework of Oesterley's own argument, this criticism is especially applicable because he deals with the comments on reaping where he had not sown and gathering where he had not scattered by saying that he doubts "whether they are really capable of application". These are in fact the only words in the parable which could at all support his contention.

(9) Lecture 1X

(a) The Parable of the Good Samaritan

(i) The Parable's Introduction

It is easy to follow Oesterley's attempt to dispose of the introduction to the parable, but any such attempt must leave one unanswered question. That is the relevance of the word "neighbour" to the parable. It would seem that even after disposing of the introduction, we are left with the idea of neighbourliness, and the question then arises - what was the original context of the parable? Oesterley does not attempt an answer.

(ii) Comments on Greek and other words

Oesterley's book is by no means a detailed commentary on the Greek texts, but occasionally he does examine particular Greek words. It is sometimes difficult to tell exactly why he chooses particular words for comment. Pages 161-162 have an example. His comments on  $\text{κατὰ συκυρίων}$ , while interesting, do not seem germane to his argument.

Oesterley's Prefatory Note includes this comment: "These lectures are not intended for experts; technicalities and textual problems are, therefore, with few exceptions, avoided." (p.v). One would expect, therefore that such points as are made are only made where there is an important critical point to hang on them. The present example does not, therefore, seem necessary. One might argue the same in the case of other examples, such as the comment on zarah (= to commit fornication) on page 61, and the  $\text{ἐκλίπη} / \text{ἐκλίπητε}$  distinction on page 200. In contrast we may note the relevance of the comments on pages 169-170.

(b) The Parable of the Rich Fool

Oesterley says: "But our Lord's words are significant also as showing His refusal to deal with mundane matters of this kind; His concern was with things spiritual" (p.169). Two points spring immediately to mind - first that this comment does not follow from the words of Jesus, which do not indicate a refusal to deal with mundane matters; second, that right dealing with mundane matters was surely not only the purpose of what Jesus said on this occasion, but the whole point of the Incarnation.

(10) Lecture X

The three parables which are dealt with in this lecture go together. Oesterley questions first why they are together and whether they were originally together. "Rightly or wrongly" he says, "we find

it difficult to believe that these three parables, which belong so closely together, did not originally form a single chain." (p.175). He deals with the situation which gave rise to the parables and describes their point: "... to hate the sin while loving the sinner was something new". This is the only point at which Oesterley makes any real comment on grouping parables, and this is only to observe the circumstances of a natural grouping.

When dealing with the order of these three parables, Oesterley suggests that they could have been in ascending order of importance "thus showing how from the least to the greatest nothing shall be lost". (p.177). But if they had been in this order, this conclusion would not be possible, even then. All we would learn from them would be that there is joy over the recovery of valuable things of all sorts and at all levels. We cannot assume that the parables have anything to do with the surety of salvation. Oesterley himself says "... but in Luke the same parable has for its purpose to declare the truth that God rejoices over one repentant sinner" (p.177), thus placing the emphasis on the joy of finding the lost.

(11) Lecture XI

(a) The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward

(i) Consistency

Oesterley has a distinctive approach to this parable, seeing its meaning in terms of the consistency of the lives of its characters. They are all servants of mammon from the rich man to the steward to the debtors.. Yet the making of consistency the key to unlocking the parable's meaning seems a little too obscure. The hearer of this story might well think it had something to do with money, or greed, or dishonesty, but he is unlikely to make the immediate mental step required to say "Ah yes! What he's talking about is consistency of living!"

(ii) ὁκονόμος

The discussion of ὀκνόςμος , on page 193 has a strange feature. When trying to show what the meaning of ὀκνόςμος is in the New Testament, Oesterley uses an example (1 Timothy 3:5) in which (as he notices) the word does not even occur!

(b) The Parable of Dives and Lazarus

Page 204 discusses the idea that a man who fares sumptuously every day could not also be working in accordance with the Commandments. Oesterley needs to be very much more explicit on the nature of "faring sumptuously" and of daily labour before he can convince us that the two are mutually exclusive.

(12) Lecture XII

In this chapter Oesterley restricts himself to brief comments, largely on the context of parables. The assumption which he seems to make is that on the parables which are short (comparatively) there is little to say, and this assumption is questionable.

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In connection with the whole matter of the Jewish Background with which Oesterley is primarily concerned, we may ask what Oesterley's main purpose was. Did he intend to produce a work of reference to help people discover such Jewish material as related to their search for the correct interpretation of the parables? If so, he succeeded in opening up the field, even though his work was to be put in some degree of shade by that of B.T.D. Smith a year later. He would, however, in this case, be open to the challenge of Knox (quoted above) that he gave too much space to his own interpretations. Or did he intend to produce a work of criticism, making his own interpretation of the parables with a new Jewish backcloth? If so, and it seems likely from the book's contents that this is the case, he would have done well to take more time over their interpretation, and pay considerably more attention to the critical points and arguments raised by people like Cadoux. Dodd's

book arrived too late for detailed examination by Oesterley, but other work before Oesterley's could reasonably be expected to be reflected.

As we have discovered on several occasions there are some significant gaps and errors in his expositions - problems which, perhaps, had he been at more pains to expand his lectures in the light of what had happened since their delivery, would have been far less serious.

As we have found, although there are problems such as eschatology which are dealt with very vaguely, by far the greatest problem with the work is the large number of small errors of deduction - errors caused by not seeing the logical conclusion of understanding part of a parable one way rather than another.

Oesterley does not quite stand alone as the key failure in the field. A similar, though less significant example, is that of J.A. Findlay.<sup>43</sup> In his very free, kerygmatic fervour, attention to accuracy in detail is often ignored, sweeping generalizations are made and arbitrary judgements are offered with no attendant justifications.

In dealing with certain popularizing works on parables earlier in this chapter we were critical of works such as Martin's, but we must not fall into the trap of concluding that all popularizing work has failed. A.M. Hunter<sup>44</sup> has distinguished himself, not by making any original contribution to the debate, but by reproducing in a readily appreciable form what the major scholars have been saying.

Finally, we must examine the work of two scholars who have offered contributions of a rather different nature from the major ones already considered, but which cannot easily be classified either with them or with the categories of the next chapter. The first of these is the non-interpretative text-book of B.T.D. Smith<sup>45</sup>.

To the man who asks "What does this parable mean?" or even "What did this parable mean?" Smith offers fewer answers than the title "A Critical Study" would seem to imply. The following (almost identical) comments make this point: "..... it is the more to be regretted that he confined himself to the factual details of the parables, and did not deal with their theological interpretation."<sup>46</sup>; "Smith follows Cadoux's suggestion (that the parables must be placed within their setting in Jesus' ministry) cautiously limiting himself to the details of the stories, which he illuminates very well, rather than concerning himself with their message."<sup>47</sup>

This is the chief drawback of the book. There are, however, considerable merits to it. It is the first major English work of this century to cover not only the Old Testament and Rabbinic background to the parables themselves, but also the methods to be employed when handling figurative language in the Bible. On these matters the book is very painstaking and one of the main source works for all subsequent studies.

It is for the reasons outlined above that we find few points of criticism in Part I. However, because of the predominantly factual nature of the work as a whole, the number of adverse criticisms to be made about the commentary section is also limited, and such comments as may be made are of course chiefly derived from his interpretative comments.

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#### (1) The Mashal

The background material on mashal and hidah in the Old Testament is very ably researched and the various incidences of their use are classified clearly. But this type of work is not particularly valuable unless there is an adequate connecting link between the Old Testament background and the New Testament material which is under

scrutiny. This link is well made by Smith. He not only registers the mashal/ παραβολή connection through the LXX use of παραβολή, but develops the history of the words in the New Testament books including the Johannine use of παραβολή. As an indication of the sort of material he will later be using, he develops the history of parabolic material into the Rabbinic literature of the post-New Testament period. "Although the oldest parts of this were not composed before the second half of the second century of the Christian era, it incorporates traditions which go back to the times of the New Testament" (p.14).

One particular value is the way Smith sees the development of παραβολή in the New Testament to take on a variety of connected meanings just as mashal had done in the Old Testament.

## (2) Varieties of Figurative Speech in the Synoptic Gospels

The great advantage of Smith's work over Oesterley's, and to some extent over Cadoux's, though not over Dodd's (those being the three major works preceding his) is that he investigates with some care the differences between similitude and parable, between simile and metaphor and between allegory and parable/similitude, and also the various functions which figurative language can have.

His footnote on page 17 sums up the main terminology problem with which he attempts to deal: "The dual use of the term (i.e. Parable) is confusing, and it is much to be desired that another term could be found for these narrative-parables. "Fable" is unsatisfactory". Because of this confusion, Smith makes his own division between parable and similitude, a division of convenience. His division is, however, theoretical only, because he does not in this commentary classify the items with which he deals according to the views he expresses in this chapter. Thus, after drawing his distinctions he says: "We shall have no hesitation in reckoning the story of the Labourers in the

Vineyard as a parable, the illustration of the slave who returns from work in the field to work in the kitchen as a similitude." (p.17). We note further that as far as the present chapter goes Smith maintains some consistency on this fact, again calling "From Field to Kitchen" a similitude (p.20). Yet on pages 182-184 we not only find the parable he entitles "From Field to Kitchen" under the heading "Parables for Pharisee and Sinner" but also that he persistently describes it as a parable. Likewise, on Smith's view of the word "parable" it would be difficult to include, as he does, under the heading "Various parables" such non-narrative items as the "Salt" sayings and the last three sayings that he deals with (pp. 232-234.).

This is odd, in view of the fact that he does himself trouble to distinguish "Proverbs and Figurative Sayings" (p.19), and there includes one of the sayings (The Vultures and the Corpse) found in his last chapter.

What seems to be a reasonably thorough analysis of the various classes of Gospel sayings and stories seems to be of academic value only, and of no practical value to his commentary.

Two of the values of this chapter are the comments made first on the Jülicher/Fiebig division over allegory (where Smith's attitude is a balanced pro-Jülicher one) and second on the "Marcan" view of parables where (although he does not discuss the text of Mark 4:10-12 and its parallels in sufficient detail) he does at least say that the "Marcan" view of parables is mistaken, if completely understandable.

### (3) The Form and History of the Synoptic Gospels

Chapter three is an interesting and extensive analysis of the forms in which parabolic material occurs in the Synoptic Gospels and an attempt to see the development of the parable as a sort of evolution of the longer story-type of mashal from the shorter proverb-like meshalim. It is tempting to agree that this may have been an

evolutionary process, but it is doubtful whether we can base much on the idea, since we cannot produce much evidence of the fact that one type of parable depended on the other for its development. We can merely notice the similarity and make the assumption that this must have been the way the longer parables developed.

#### (4) The Background of the Parables

Chapter four is a useful exercise in establishing some sort of contemporary context for the parables of Jesus, giving them a backcloth against which to stand, so that, as much of the evidence produced by Oesterley and Smith shows, the parables of Jesus do not stand out as oddities in the teaching work of the times in which Jesus lived. Besides the Rabbinic parables, Smith is at pains to indicate that the Jewish culture is not the only one within which this sort of expression was alive, and indeed, provides instances of popular tales from other cultures to show the parallels between cultures which have by some been argued.

#### (5) The Gospel of the Parables

We shall have cause elsewhere to complain of Smith's handling of the grouping of parables, but we may notice here that although Smith's chapter on the Gospel of the Parables includes some of the important elements of his groups, there is no attempt to achieve consistency with them. We might expect that if it is possible to write a chapter concerning the broader principles expounded in the parables, these would be accurately reflected in the way they were grouped. To go one stage even further, we might expect that such a chapter would itself be dependent on the grouping exercise rather than the reverse.

It would have been of considerable benefit if Smith had not only made some direct correlation between this chapter and his groups, but also offered some sort of introductory or conclusory material with each section of the commentary. In such a paragraph he could

at least indicate the thread on which the beads are strung. As it stands, the chapter headings are insufficient.

(6) Parables of the Times

(a) Introduction

This chapter includes several parables which do have a sense of crisis about them. The difficulty about them is that Smith does not earth his group (or his individual analyses of the parables) in the ministry of Jesus. The basic reason for this is one of the major problems of the book - that for a "Critical Study" there is much less criticism and interpretation than imparting of factual information. In a sense, as we have already indicated, his book is the reverse of Oesterley's a year before him. Whereas Oesterley had written what he claimed was a book on the Jewish background of the parables, on many occasions we witness him giving more space to his own views on what the parables mean; Smith, on the other hand, tends to outstrip Oesterley in places in the amount of Jewish background and related material that he squeezes in, but tends not to deal fully with interpretative problems.

(b) The Fig-Tree in Spring

The opening parable of the section sets the scene with some interesting interpretative comments. Smith dismisses the possibility that "these things" are the usual apocalyptic signs leading up to the end, and continues "If the parable is to be regarded as authentic, "these things" must be events of the present, not of the future, even if the saying in the form in which it has come down to us implies the contrary." (p.91) The signs which Smith speaks of are the signs of the ministry of Jesus.

It should be noted that although we here have supporting arguments for a realized eschatology, in the footnote on page 78, he appears to use the same example as a means of countering the position on eschatology held by C.H. Dodd.

(c) The Strong Man Spoiled

Smith often brings out relevant items of Jewish background material in the parables, and page 93 has an example in the useful discussion on the "strong dualistic tendency" in later Judaism.

In the light of this and the ease with which the parable fits its Gospel context, Smith finds no problems over the context's authenticity. One wonders whether the application of this parable is as self-evident as Smith seems to think. It may be true that if Satan is bound, then God's rule must be operating, and it may be a good use of figurative language to describe in this connection a kingdom divided against itself. But the purist might argue that this particular debate is not an obvious home for this particular figure. Could it not be, for example, that an evil man is quite likely to bind another evil man for his own ends? It is never certain that there is any honour among thieves. We would hardly question the application of the parable since there is no more likely situation in which we could place it if we were to remove it from its present context. We should merely note that the application is heavily dependent on the context, and is only in any way obvious because of it.

(d) The Sons of the Bridechamber

The basis of the argument on page 95 seems shaky, although there is reason for coming to Smith's conclusion. Certainly there seems little reason for Jesus and his followers to fast since, as Smith says, "Men do not fast at festivals; the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" This rather than his previous arguments would seem the reason for excluding verses 19b and 20. He says "Authenticity cannot be claimed for the saying in its present form, for this presupposes the conception of Christ as the heavenly Bridegroom, and the fasts of the Christian Church" (p.95). Smith argues here and on page 104 that the conception

of Jesus as the heavenly bridegroom is a later Christian one - which may well be true, even though Smith produces no evidence to this effect. But this does not necessarily undermine the figure as it stands. What the parable says of the bridegroom is, in terms of Jewish weddings, quite true. Likewise with the arguments about later Christian fasts. The parable does not necessarily presuppose the fasting of the Christian community. This is only likely to be so if you have first understood the word "bridegroom" to indicate Christ. It could be that this is a far too allegorical approach.

However, these points gain a degree of validity, only after we have noticed the point mentioned above - that men do not fast at festivals, and since the kingdom of heaven is at hand, no fasting can be undertaken. Once having granted this point, the others fall into place because in this particular case there is no reason to suspect that the festival should come to an end.

(e) The Thief

The useful feature of Smith's comments here is "The conception of an unexpected breaking-in of the New Age, and the consequent call for preparedness, which are such characteristic features of the teaching of Christ, are met with but seldom outside the New Testament (pp. 96-97) because he brings out the sharp contrast between what Jesus had to say and what orthodox Judaism said."

(f) The Porter

On page 105 Smith produces an interesting Jewish proverb concerning the tendency of slaves to go to sleep and he introduces it in such a way as to imply that it would be in the man's mind when he gave instructions to keep awake. He is unlikely to have had the proverb in mind - rather he would merely have been concerned that a lazy slave should stay awake. Proverbs merely sum up the way things are in the world - they are hardly reminders to act.

(7) Parables of Growth

Whereas the grouping of parables in chapter six was according to the message they were intended to convey, the grouping in chapter seven is according to internal subject matter in the parables. The "of" in the chapter heading in the former case means "concerning", whereas in the latter case it means rather "which are based on the principle of".

(a) The Mustard Seed

Smith introduces evidence to convince us that we should not place too much store by the introductory words on likeness of the kingdom of heaven. One of his criticisms is that to allow the application to the Kingdom of such a widely ranging series of subjects as those contained in the so-called "Parables of the Kingdom" is to open the formula to "inexactitude of reference". He backs the point up with a Rabbinical parallel parable on mustard seed. But the problem with the application of the expression "Kingdom of God" to parables is not the variety of parables to which it is appended but the looseness of the link between the expression and each parable to which it is attached. Other commentators have noticed that when the parable starts with the words "The Kingdom of Heaven <sup>s</sup> is like X", what is actually intended is not a direct "Kingdom"/"X" comparison, but a comparison of the way it happens in the case of "X" with the way it happens with the case of the "Kingdom". Smith is nearer the mark when he says "As we have seen, the formula "The Kingdom of Heaven is like" does not assert anything more than that the topic illustrated by the parable is in some way related to the subject of the rule of God." (p.120).

Smith may well be correct in his assertion "The Kingdom which he preached does not grow - it comes" (p.120), but in order to maintain his point he needs to eliminate one of his "More or less probable

guesses" as to the parable's meaning on page 120. To say "we may connect it with the claim that in the ministry of Jesus the Rule of God was already making itself manifest, insignificant though these manifestations may appear in the eyes of men" surely is to imply that the Kingdom is something which from the small beginnings they were witnessing would expand.

In further criticism of the point about the Kingdom not growing but coming, we may question whether these two ideas are in fact antithetical, as is implied by what Smith says. Could not the Kingdom arrive and then grow to completion? If so, most of what Smith says here is irrelevant.

(b) The Sower

Two points in Smith's argument are worthy of note:

(a) The caution that when we are tempted to view something as being allegorical, we must beware "that the Jew speaks of identity when he means no more than correspondence". (pp. 127-128).

(b) Page 128 contains Smith's own argument against the originality of the Biblical interpretation. "The originality of the interpretation of the parable of the Sower is not denied because it is so phrased as to suggest that the parable is an allegory, but, in the first place, because it represents the story as an illustration of the history of the Christian mission-preaching." This gives another view of the now common opinion that the Gospel interpretation of the parable of the Sower is not original.

Of the other parables in this chapter there is little to say. Again there is a grouping difficulty, suggesting that Smith's groups do not follow a consistent scheme but occur rather as divisions of convenience. Whereas, in the previous chapter, the grouping had been in terms of <sup>what</sup> the parables meant (i.e. in terms of their interpretations), in this chapter the grouping is in terms of what the stories themselves

are about. If a parable is the laying of "A" alongside "B" for the purposes of illuminating "B" in terms of "A", chapter 6 groups by comparing the "B" features of the parables and chapter 7 by comparing the "A" features. It might be objected that although the subject matter of these parables is "Growth", we are intended also to see their meaning in terms of growth. Yet against this we must observe that Smith himself sees the parables of the Sower in terms of the harvest-time, not of the growth period: "... in the parable the stress appears to be laid upon the rich harvest that is reaped from fertile soil" (p.126).

### (8) Parables for Rich and Poor

#### (a) Introduction

In chapter eight there is very little to quarrel with because Smith offers very little of a critical nature. Once again the grouping is an odd one. The chapter's title "Parables for Rich and Poor" is puzzling, again because of the word "for". Does Smith wish to imply here that these parables were told to people who were either rich or poor, or on their behalf? The discussion of the various parables in this chapter does not readily reveal the ground on which Smith does his grouping. Again, the grouping seems to depend merely on the fact that the subject matter of each parable has some connection with either the rich or the poor or both.

#### (b) Divided Service

Smith's closing comment does not ring true. "Christians may attempt the impossible; slaves cannot." (p.134). The point of the parable, if it lies in this area, is that Christians, like slaves in this respect at least, may NOT attempt the impossible. It is impossible to be divided between God and money. It could be that the attempt to see the parable in terms of these "abnormal" situations where a slave belongs to two masters is in fact rather side-tracking. It is simpler to understand it as saying that just as it is impossible

for a one slave/two masters situation to work, so it is impossible for you to owe allegiance to two independent masters, especially such opposing ones - and this last feature might well occur to the mind in the light of the explanatory clauses in the middle of the parable.

(c) The Hid Treasure

On page 144 Smith quotes some interesting stories of parallel situations, but does not relate them very specifically to the parable. One wonders whether the reason for quoting them is not to demonstrate anything to do with their corresponding features but to highlight the points of the parable by contrast.

(d) The Pearl-Merchant

This section gives a short example of what is often the case in Smith's book. He offers a lot of factual background material but assumes the interpretation to be self-evident. His background material is hardly related to the business of interpretation.

(9) Parables for the Hierarchy and the Scribes

Entrusted Wealth

Smith examines the two versions of this parable in great detail, but only in passing (and at a late stage) deals with its interpretation and the reason it is in this particular group "But perhaps a more satisfactory conjecture would be that the parable formed part of a warning addressed to the scribes, the appointed teachers of God's law. If a slave who has let a mina lie idle is blameworthy, how much more those to whom has been entrusted the wealth of the Word and who have failed to put it to profitable use!" (p.168). A question which then arises is the matter of why this parable should be in this group and not in the group of the previous chapter.

(10) Parables for Pharisee and Sinner

Grouping difficulties again arise over the word "for". In what sense are these parables "for" the Pharisee and Sinner? The first

example seems to be directed at the Pharisees, whereas the second is directed at other people, merely using the Pharisees as example material. Again, it is not that the parables in the section lack any connection at all, but that the actual basis on which Smith achieves this grouping is difficult to discover.

(a) The Pharisee and the Publican

Smith's final comment is inaccurate or ill-explained. He says that the final generalizing logion is a misfit because the tax-collector did not humble himself. This is a surprising point to make in view of the capital he has already made of the idea that he was a penitent man: "It should be remembered that the dictum with which the story closes - that it was the sinner who was "adjudged righteous" rather than the other - does not mean that a tax-collector is a better man in the eyes of God than a Pharisee, but that a penitent tax-collector ranks in his sight above a self-satisfied Pharisee" (p.178). Whether Smith understands "humbling oneself" as something other than penitence is not clear. If he had in mind that adequate penitence should involve some act of reparation, then his point quoted above cannot stand.

(b) The Good Samaritan

Smith gives considerable space to countering the Montefiore/Halévy contention that "the Samaritan has here usurped the place occupied by an Israelite in the original parable" (p.181). Although not wishing to differ from Smith's position, we find it difficult to agree with some of the things he says. Smith argues that to change the third character of the story, while not completely ridding the story of its contrast, does rob it of all distinction. Whether or not this is so depends on the audience to which the parable was spoken. If the parable had been spoken to the general Jewish crowds, then perhaps the Jew/Samaritan contrast would have been necessary to establish a real distinction. However, if, as seems to be the case, the parable was delivered to one

of the Jewish hierarchy, a lawyer<sup>48</sup> it could be that to say that the ordinary layman was in the right and the chief representatives of the faith were wrong was quite sufficient to make the listener feel the required pressure of the contrast.

He claims that, as it stands, "the story falls into line with a large group of parables concerned more or less closely with the mission to the outcasts" (p.181). We can see his point, but the mode of expression is unfortunate. The reverse is true, rather, that the parable concerns the mission of the outcast to the Israelite and the lessons which may be learned from it.

#### (c) From Field to Kitchen

It is difficult to understand why this parable has been included in this group. It is not, on the Gospel evidence, addressed either to Pharisee or sinner. The assumption we might make is that Smith believes it to have been addressed to a Pharisee, on the basis of the following: "The parable teaches that man cannot establish a claim upon God for a reward" (p.183).

Yet, another comment of Smith's indicates that this is not likely to have been the case: "The opening suggests that Jesus could assume that there would be among his hearers some at least sufficiently well-to-do to possess a slave" (pp. 182-183). If this is an <sup>21</sup>indication <sub>^</sub> of the area of its relevance, which may also be the implication of the above comment on what the parable teaches, perhaps the parable, as Smith sees it, belongs rather in chapter eight.

#### (d) The Lost Sheep

Page 190 contains a Rabbinic parable dating from about 350 AD. Like Oesterley, Smith makes a good deal of use of Rabbinic parallels, but does not see the need to connect them to his account of Jesus' parables. Often the relevance beyond the mere similarity is unexplained and difficult to see. The very late date of this example surely needs some connecting work.

(e) The Lost Coin

This contains yet another late Rabbinic parallel without explanation. In fact, explanation is in general at a minimum here, presumably because Smith assumes that the connection with the previous parable explains all.

(f) The Prodigal Son

On some occasions Smith deals with many textual points but does not attempt any interpretation beyond saying what is likely. This is an example. He comments on the unity of the parable and the fact that there is no trace of allegory. He comments on various internal difficulties in the story and quotes a Rabbinic parallel. However, he does not venture an opinion on what the parable means.

(g) The Drag-Net

There is a weakness in the following: "According to the final verses, the lesson of the parable is to be found in the ultimate sorting of the fish. The net will then be identified with the Kingdom or Church, now as a result of its missionary activities containing evil members as well as good" (p.201). Admittedly Smith is not here putting his own view, but merely speculating for argument's sake, yet the looseness with which he makes the easy identification of "Kingdom" and "Church" is open to question. There is some reason, according to the text, for equating the net with something to do with the Kingdom, but it is not possible to argue a position for the Church in the interpretation of the parable.

Again the relevance of this parable to a section dealing in particular with parables "for Pharisee and sinner" is not clear. The relevance of the parable to all human beings might be more readily clear, unless it is seen as being addressed either to Pharisees or to sinners as perhaps a comfort or a warning or a challenge. But even if this were the case, to establish it we would need to understand

Pharisees and sinners as opposites, and it is unlikely to have been Jesus' intention to see them thus.

(h) The Two Sons

"Those critics who support the Bezan reading as original must be mistaken: the conventions of the parable form require that those addressed should give the correct reply...." (p.210). This is fair comment but not a conclusive argument for dismissing the alternative reading. We might expect that in 1937 Smith might have taken account of the arguments of Cadoux who finds adequate reason for reversing the reply of the listeners.

(11) Various Parables

An odd assortment. One wonders why some of these parables were not, according to the very loose grouping principles which Smith employs, grouped in other chapters. For example, why could not the Unmerciful Servant have a place in chapter eight, the Salt sayings have a place in chapter nine or chapter ten, and the Vultures and the Corpse in six?

The Wicked Husbandman

All Smith attempts here is a discussion of the text and some of the possible arguments about it. His two pages of discussion are an example once again of a trait already noticed several times - that of not offering positive interpretative comments.

~~XX~~

Smith's book is a mine of information with which little published in English before it can be compared, but the information is left to the reader for the most part for interpretation. There are not many occasions on which Smith strikes the nail on the head so squarely as to make us sit up and declare that new insights have been opened up. But, by the same token, he does not open himself so easily to criticism as does something like the more radically critical approach

of, say, Cadoux.

An aid to study (and a good one) rather than a study in itself.

Much more recently than Smith has come the extremely thorough work of J. Duncan M. Derrett<sup>49</sup>. His work, though of a more interpretative nature than Smith's, bears resemblance to his at least in that it deliberately sets out to excavate in the area of information which should form the background to the interpretation of the parables. It should also be associated in some way with the work of Jeremias<sup>50</sup> in that its general approach and thoroughness show Derrett to be concerned chiefly with what actually was the situation into which a parable was delivered and what was the precise effect it would have had on its hearers. Derrett is especially concerned to show us the mental scaffolding of the time within which Jesus was trying to build with his parabolic bricks. In particular (as the title of his book indicates) Derrett concerns himself with the legal background to the stories.

In examining his work we should not ask of Derrett any consistent approach to parables since that is not his primary concern, neither does he attempt to deal with them all.

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Derrett's approach to the parables is one of a commentator writing in essential footnotes so that what is conjured up in the minds of the original hearers can also be conjured up in ours. He describes the process as such when dealing with the parable of the Great Supper. "The parable is a tale which, contrary to popular opinion, has no implausible elements, and which, as in the case of other parables we have studied, utilises features and words at the story level to call up biblical passages by way of midrashim which themselves reillustrate and document the parable, as it were by

invisible footnotes. As soon as these 'footnotes' are restored the intellectual effort of the author is revealed, the efforts of the evangelists are disclosed for what they are, and the meaning is clarified." (p.127).

That Derrett is not very concerned about the ultimate meaning of any given parable or of parables in general is reflected by the inconspicuousness of the views of other commentators. Parable scholars are mentioned, but only in passing, generally in a brief footnote. This is an indication that Derrett did not set out to answer questions like "to whom was this parable delivered?", "what was this parable's original form?", "what did it mean?".

Derrett himself voices one of the problems which we may well feel about his treatment. He says "Don't make difficulties where none exist! This is how many a friend reacted to my persistent and painful anxieties about the parable." (p.102). Behind this there may lie the difficulty of determining just how much detail is required for an understanding of the parables. It is difficult to decide just how many allusions, innuendos etc. we may attribute to Jesus when he was telling his parable stories. Not that we need to decide whether he made particular allusions deliberately, but that we need to decide which mental associations would have been fundamental to the first century hearer getting the message (remembering that the academic equipment of the average hearer might not have been very extensive). This is a question which seldom is mentioned by Derrett. When he deals with the parable of the Prodigal Son, he assumes that Jewish family law would be at the fingertips of the average Jewish family man. Such information is more likely to be essential to a study of the parable than certain other areas into which he probes. For example, his discussion of the parable of the Great Supper relies heavily on passages from Zephaniah and Deuteronomy 20. While we may

acknowledge, with Derrett, that this might have been the base from which he was working, it would be a mistake to make the assumption that the original hearers of the parable would mentally conjure up that particular backcloth. By his investigations, which are in considerable detail, Derrett makes the tacit assumption that the parables need not be internally consistent, that they need not convey the message on their own merit, and that they possibly require a certain degree of Old Testament and legal background information to make sense of them. With this nobody would necessarily quarrel, but once we have entered this field of study, we must then decide how far to proceed. Jesus need not have intended people to understand everything in a story which came from his own intellectual milieu. He was, after all, a clever man, drawing on a wealth of material which he had available to him. We must not, as the Derrett approach may well do, attribute to his hearers a similar depth of knowledge and understanding.

We can become more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of Derrett's work if we take some of his treatments of the parables and discuss some points arising from them:

(1) The Parable of the Treasure in the Field

Many have been troubled by the apparent immorality of characters Jesus portrays in his parables. Some have attempted to remove the charge of immoral behaviour, and others have claimed that the actions from which such charges stem are irrelevant to the point which the parables intend to communicate and are therefore to be ignored as problems impeding interpretation.

Derrett, however, prefers to take the charge seriously. "The absurdity, of course, lies in the possibility that a seeker after the Kingdom, one who would recognize it immediately and abandon everything else for it, would do wrong in pursuit of the good". (p.2).

Derrett may be right, but he makes an initial mistake in trying to "clarify the point" with an invented "parallel" which is inadequate. The picture he offers as a parallel is "A man left his family and work and all that he had, in order to follow a pretty woman. The kingdom of Heaven is like such a case." (p.2). The error is in the introduction of human suffering as part of the sacrifice which the man is prepared to make for his gain. Although the man in the parable of the Treasure denies the owner some profit (which may or may not be an injurious thing to do), he inflicts no certain suffering. In Derrett's parallel the man leaves his family for the dubious pleasure of a pretty woman. In the parable the man can be reasonably certain that it is a good idea to make the sacrifices he makes to gain his treasure, as well as being desirable. In the case of the man pursuing the pretty woman, he may find her desirable, but how are we to be convinced that it is also a good idea to leave his family and run after her? The situations are not parallel.

Aware of a problem, however, Derrett looks briefly at previously discussed ways of dealing with it and finds them all wanting because they always leave some loose end involving the finder in immoral or illegal behaviour. Derrett's view is that "the upshot of the matter is that the finder was perfectly entitled in morals and in law to do what he did. His behaviour was proper, and indeed inevitable." (p.6).

In the subsequent discussion Derrett makes the following points in detail.

(i) Establishing acquisition involves the act of lifting the treasure.

(ii) If the man in the story had lifted the treasure, it is most likely (considering the various positions he could have been in vis à vis the owner) that he would have lifted only for somebody else, not for himself.

(iii) Even if he had been in a position to lift the treasure and stake a claim for himself, there was still a likelihood of repercussions which would prevent him establishing his ownership.

In the light of the claim of Derrett on page 6 (quoted above), we would expect him at this point to establish that even though he couldn't lift the treasure without first owning the field, the man was legally and (perhaps more important) morally justified in keeping the matter secret from the original owner.

The fact that Derrett does not do this leads us to suspect further what we have already hinted at - that his primary aim is not interpretation but facilitating interpretation.

We find a further difficulty on page 14. In listing the points of contrast between the parables of the Treasure and of the Pearl, Derrett makes much of the extra effort which he supposes the treasure finder put into acquiring his find. "His effort was undoubtedly greater", he says. Yet he completely ignores the fact that the effort of the Pearl Merchant had been a long and sustained one prior to the find. Likewise we may equally suppose that the Pearl Merchant's final effort to obtain the Pearl, once found, was considerable.

As for Derrett's own explanation of the parable, as being Jesus' comment on the joy of God over finding his faithful people, it seems unnecessary, not because it is necessarily wrong, but because the more usual approach (the human search for the Kingdom) is the more readily understood and the more obvious one to draw from a first hearing. Since the parable method depends heavily on the immediate appeal and immediate comprehension, we must say that Derrett's interpretation is unlikely to have been the intention of Jesus.

Besides this, if Derrett's view be accepted and the finder of the treasure be equated with God, we surely have a worse problem to

overcome than before - that the parable implies God is prepared for actions of dubious morality to achieve his ends.

### (2) The Parable of the Talents

In his handling of this parable Derrett attempts no major interpretative statements, but again tries to illuminate the parable by uncovering the likely background to this sort of situation.

Perhaps the major contribution here is in the recognition (p.26) of the credibility of the situation. He sees in the behaviour of the inactive servant the characteristic reaction of the man who is faced with an unprofitable exercise on the one hand and is hampered by what Jeremias would call "oriental indifference" on the other.

### (3) The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

One of the problems of the method of Derrett is that, probably resulting from the legalistic approach, he tends to seek out ways of harmonizing all discordant details in parables. Not that he wishes to allegorize too heavily in the way that many authors have done in the past, but that he likes to think that the story-teller did not say anything in the least bit unlikely or that could be in any way misconstrued. In seeking such precision of fact in the stories, and in attempting to eliminate what has the appearance of being unlikely, Derrett tends to deny the parabolist any licence, literary or otherwise. Indicative of his approach is his statement of the problems in the case of this parable: "The first problem concerns the enormous debt. Is it not impossibly large? Next, what was the point of ordering him and his effects and his family to be sold? Surely they would not be worth anything like the amount of the debt? Next, would a king release such a huge amount so capriciously? Further, why was the minister so violent with his colleague, or why did the others object? But the most serious problem is the behaviour of the king. He acts in anger, and yet this is supposed to depict

the state of affairs as obtaining between man and God. Worse still, he cancels the release which he had solemnly given. For an oriental monarch to rescind a decree was a very serious matter; moreover the field being open for imposing on the minister other pains and penalties, it is not clear why the king should, even in anger, reopen, contrary to justice of the most elementary kind, a state of accounts which was already closed. If this is how God is going to behave, many readers must have thought, they would rather be ruled by anyone than by God." (pp. 34-35).

However, in examining these questions, Derrett does produce some interesting points. The size of the sum of money is an example. He contests that Jeremias does not have a conclusive argument and that the size of the sum is not a factor which puts the story in the realm of fantasy. It is also interesting to note, in connection with the same discussion, Derrett's point that King parables rely on what people know of Kings other than Jewish Kings.

There are, however, difficulties about what Derrett says. One example results from Derrett's concern to tie up loose ends even when they won't be tied. He says: "The magnificent gesture was not impractical. To exact 20,000 talents might have cost the inhabitants much more than they would bear. Migrations and rebellions might result. The king was wiser than his minister: the minister might have foreseen this, but perhaps it exceeded his expectations, for the king could as easily have entered into any of a variety of compromises." (p.40). This is in itself not a very practical suggestion. No country sets up a tax system (however loosely the system is administered and however unjust and dependent upon greed it is) and then merely absolves great sections of the population from paying the taxes. The suggestion here that migrations and rebellions might result from trying to collect such heavy tax arrears will not work. Migrations and rebellions are equally likely to occur as a

direct result of the action the King took. After all, there will be those who have (in other districts) conscientiously (if, perhaps, reluctantly) paid their taxes. They are going to feel harshly treated if a large proportion of the population are let off the payment. Evidently a large number of people are concerned because we are dealing here, says Derrett, with the chief minister, responsible for the largest tax area.

This point raises another.. Derrett makes some assumptions when dealing with the parables, assumptions which are picturesque and attractive, and seem to help in the interpretations of the parables, yet which are not really substantiated. For example, the basis of the point we have just commented on was that this man was the chief minister, and therefore likely to have more responsibility than the others. This we cannot assume merely from the evidence that he was the first to be interviewed and that he had a very large debt. Derrett makes several such assumptions. Another example is: "The reason why the second minister could not pay at that moment was precisely because he was standing, as it were, in the queue of ministers about to present their accounts." (p.41). This is not fact; this is conjecture.

The significant point about Derrett's commentary on this parable is that he finds the Matthaean application appropriate: "Thus my heavenly Father also will do to you, if each of you does not release unto his brother from your hearts." He thus finds it to be a parable with a general moral teaching rather than a specific comment from Jesus on the way things were in his contemporary situation.

It is Derrett's contention that such a conclusion results from his attempt at dealing with every detail of the story and that it is to be preferred to interpretations which make use only of certain highlights in parables. He says: "It is submitted that this method

of exegesis, which utilises every aspect and detail of the parable, is preferable to those methods which select items for emphasis, and which, in any case, have been based upon partial understanding of the legal background to the story." (p.45). It would have been more convincing if he had stated exactly why it is preferable.

#### (4) The Parable of the Unjust Steward

When he comments thus: "In the last moments of authority he gains that approval by doing what the law of God required of him" (p.72), Derrett offers a footnote which says "Riggenbach rightly emphasises that this is the 'point' of the parable, and many others have realized that 'right action while there is time' is a great part of the lesson which it seeks to impart." This seems to be a fairly important comment to make, but it is one which is no further developed in the discussion. In fact, Derrett seems to arrive at a quite different position by the end of his article. On page 76 we read "The message is not exactly, 'Go and do likewise'. After all, the disciples are, if not exactly 'Children of Light', at least candidates for that distinction, and the steward and his master were not. The meaning is that, since worldly people both by training and instinct act, in some crises, upon the assumption that God's standards are the right standards, and deal with worldly property single-mindedly according to their prevailing principles (i.e. mammon-directed with all, or God-directed with all) we may learn a lesson from their reactions both as to the validity of God's standards, respect for which is planted even in them by Nature, and as to the applicability of those standards to every department of life and every sphere of activity." As interpretative statements on this parable these comments are miles apart from each other, the one being an eschatological warning, the other being merely a passing comment on the nature of man. This point reinforces the argument that what Derrett intends to produce

is aids to accurate interpretation rather than interpretation itself. When these chapters were published as articles in journals, they claimed in their titles only to be giving "fresh light" on the parables.

The chapter is, however, a very useful one from the point of view of the background information it offers. The parable is notoriously problematic and Derrett offers us a far more feasible way of dealing with the apparent problems of the parable than many do.

There is, however, a point at which what Derrett says is not convincing. He tries to answer an anticipated objection, and he concludes thus: "When we are generous and give to others, whose property do we give away? It appears to be ours, at our disposal; just so the Steward could have sued for moneys owed to his master, as he was his master's representative and handled his affairs with complete freedom of discretion. But the true owner of everything is God himself. When we give to God we give him what is his; and when we give to the poor we merely redistribute God's wealth. The Steward is not the less charitable for his manipulating his master's rights, and it is quite proper that his master should commend him." (p.74). The problem with this is not that this line of argument is theologically indefensible, but that this is not likely to have been the immediate reaction of the hearers of the parable. To get this far requires a few extra stages of thought, and may well involve the appreciation of this point as of equal importance alongside other points in the parable.

#### (5) The Parable of the Prodigal Son

From this discussion we may notice a feature of Derrett's work - the tendency to produce imaginative embroidery on the text. For example, we read: "The father must have been notified of his son's approach by small boys running from the next village, if not sooner.

He has had ample time to wonder what mischief his son had been embroiled in." (p.112). As an imaginative reconstruction of the situation this is good, but we cannot take these assumptions for facts. We also find an unquestioned assumption in the words: "Though modern exegesis concentrates on the father who 'meets the repentant sinner more than half way' the parable as a whole is concerned with the integrity of a family which the will and intention of the father (with the mother evidently behind him) merely confirms and demonstrates." (p.103). The words "with the mother evidently behind him" have no basis in fact.

On page 103 Derrett also tells us how this parable links what goes before it with what goes after it, merely because it has a resemblance to a parable of warning. The link here is so weak that one wonders whether Derrett seriously intended the point. It is difficult to take him seriously when he says: "The prodigal was warned by his stomach, after all, to return." If there is a link here, it is surely the link of human beings themselves. There were no lost human beings in the preceding parables - here there are, and the introduction of human beings into the situation is the only likely link between the two sets of parables. Luke told two parables which made a point and then attempted to make the same point with human beings employed as illustrations, and here we must assume, if anywhere, is the link Luke intended.

#### (6) The Parable of the Great Supper

It is characteristic of Derrett's treatments of the parables that he generally leaves the text reasonably unscathed. The introduction to this parable, which produces many a critical discussion on the text, includes the following: "The divergencies between Luke xiv.15-24 (cf. Thomas 64) and Matthew xiii.1-14 could be explained on this footing as intentionally differing versions of a single story which could have been told once, or even more than once.

The allegedly separate little parable of the man who came without a wedding garment turns out to be an actual, or at the least an inherent, or potential part of the main parable (a part which Luke did not need, as we shall see), and the maxim 'Many are summoned but few are chosen' belongs to this parable. Indeed, if we exclude the doubtful reading in the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, it could fit hardly anywhere as well as here." (pp. 126-127). It would perhaps be more beneficial to Derrett's technique if he were to be a little more critical of the text, for under such statements there lie untested assumptions of which we need to be aware (or be told of the test which we can apply). In this case, for example, we are left in some doubt about the maxim "Many are summoned but few are chosen". Derrett implies it belongs with this parable because there is no other likely place for it to belong. This is no argument for placing it in this context at all, and the more especially true is this of this type of dictum since we know that such maxims were in their nature very floating pieces of wisdom, liable to be washed up on any available shore.

We may also notice that Derrett raised a hypothetical objection to his own arguments. The objection is in itself ludicrous. It asks the question "Yet what was to happen to the banquet if the intended guests had all accepted? Would the poor have got nothing? Would no lame and blind have been invited?" (p.151). Apart from the allegorizing implications of such a question, we must notice that common sense dictates that any interpretation of the parable, no matter how weird, cannot be countered by such objections. If it could we might start looking at the Prodigal Son and ask what would have happened if he had never been seen at home again, at the Lost Coin and ask what would have happened if she had never found it, or at the Pearl Merchant and ask what would have happened if he had found no marvellous pearls. Such questions are always (not just

in the present case) ridiculous, not merely because they are hypothetical, but because they by implication deny the essential story-telling nature of the parabolist's work. What is told in this case is a story in which there was opportunity for the poor to be invited to the banquet. To try to work out what might have happened in another situation is to allegorize in the extreme and to deny the fictional character of the stories.

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Though we have been critical of Derrett's work, we must not minimise his achievement, because he has done, recently, what most have not done, in researching the precise legal background to the parables, and he has done so with a thoroughness which only a Jeremias could emulate. He has shown what a wealth of undiscovered material there is behind the parables, and although we might question how much of it is necessary for a knowledge of the way a first century Jew may have understood them, we must grant that it is all useful to an understanding of the mind of Jesus himself.

The value of Derrett's work is not so much that of a Jeremias or a Dodd, whose work was distinctively and deliberately interpretative, but rather is it to be measured (in nature, though not in quality) against that of B.T.D. Smith, whose work was distinctively one of reference.

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CHAPTER FOUR  
MODERN APPROACHES TO THE PARABLES

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Of the major recent contributions to the debate on the interpretation of the parables a certain amount of grouping can be done. Certain methods of approach have attracted their respective adherents.

Without a doubt, all the major work in this field in recent times has been dependent on the relationship between parables and eschatology. Whether we prefer the views of Schweitzer or of Dodd or of Jeremias, the main principle remains - that the parables need to be interpreted in the light of eschatology, and that our view of Jesus' ideas on eschatology must be in part shaped by what the parables are understood to be saying.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the main contributions to this chapter should be those which address themselves specifically to the relationship between parables and eschatology. Even those who attempt to see the parables in other lights must admit the closeness of this relationship.

At this point we need simply to refer back to the reviews of the works by Cadoux, of Dodd and of Jeremias in chapter three, in which the substance of all that must be said here concerning this relationship will be found.

As these reviews make plain, the main focus of the eschatological debate is the parables of growth. A significant contribution to this particular area of the debate has been made by N.A. Dahl,<sup>1</sup> a contribution which has been found acceptable by a number of people, probably because it takes some of the heat out of the controversy between those who would follow Dodd and those who would oppose him.

Dahl's presupposition is the idea that the parables of growth can be expected to fall into the general category of the eschatological teaching of Jesus. Given that first idea, the article is an attempt

to steer a mid-course between the Dodd position (the Kingdom is here) and the Jeremias position (the hour of God is coming). Dahl's own introductory remarks declare as much. Where his work differs radically from Jeremias's is not always clear. Certainly his exposition, and his conclusions on eschatology invite the application to his view of Jesus' teaching of the term "eschatology in process of realization".

The factor which particularly commends Dahl's work as a new and original contribution is the way he can see the parables of growth as a whole, grouping them, as it were, under one heading, and in this he does differ from Jeremias.

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Dahl's article is divided into four sections and each requires comment:

(1) Methodological Principles

As a preface to this section Dahl outlines briefly where parable criticism had got to in 1951. Since the standard work of Jülicher, he finds the best works to be those of Dodd and Jeremias, whose differing results he correctly identifies as being the results of different eschatologies. At this stage we are given a statement of his aim: "Parable research today has to face the following questions. Should the interpretation of Dodd or that of Jeremias be given preference? Have we to choose between the two, or are other possibilities better? And if the latter be the case, does that mean that we should abandon the methodological principles which are common to Dodd and Jeremias, or does it mean that we should make a better and more consistent use of them? The intention of the following article is to show that the latter alternative should be chosen." (p.133).

The section of <sup>ny</sup> Methodological Principles is extremely useful not only as a means of assessing where Dahl himself starts his own approach, but also as a résumé of what is fundamental to modern work on the

parables. The three basic principles he identifies are:

- (a) The necessity of higher criticism
- (b) The parables of Jesus are not allegories
- (c) The parables are argumentative in character

These, he says, all derive from the work of Jülicher, but have had to be reshaped in various ways for modern critics. For example, he shows how the argument of Jülicher that the parables have been mutilated by allegorization has been absorbed into a much wider modern approach which says that the parables of Jesus have undergone changes in accordance with the way the early Church saw them as words of the risen Lord to them in their situation.

It is interesting to note that although Dahl says, in connection with (a): "In this article I must presuppose the critical work" (p.135), Eta Linnemann criticizes him on this very point: "Dahl's thesis ... is not established by the passages he quotes ... These passages are for the most part secondary ..."<sup>2</sup>

In connection with (b) Dahl falls into a common trap when he says: "The broadness of the Hebrew word *masal* and the corresponding Greek *παραβολή* warns us not to stress the contrast between "parable" and "allegory" too strongly." (p.136). The point he is trying to make, that "The present texts in the Gospels are sufficient proofs that intermediate forms really exist" (p.136) is a valid one, but it does not follow from the varied uses of *masal* and *παραβολή*. The argument is concerned with a distinction between parable and allegory as Jesus used them rather than as they appear in any random biblical examples. Thus the question we need to ask in connection with any distinction between the two is not "How are the biblical terms used?" but "Do any of Jesus' 'parables' work allegorically?"

A little later there is another occasion at which further elucidation would not only justify his own comment but would also clarify his own position. Dahl leaves the following statement to

stand for itself: "With regard to these parables however neither Dodd nor Jeremias has given an interpretation which is quite consistent with his own methodological principles. On the interpretation of Dodd the relation to the situation of Jesus is clear, but not the argumentative force; on the interpretation of Jeremias the argument becomes clear, but not the specific relation to the situation of Jesus." (p.139).

There is some particularly useful material on page 137 where Dahl achieves a sensitive balance in the "parable argues"/"allegory describes" argument. This he does by showing that we must pay close attention to the traditional metaphors which parables may employ. "At least in principle", he says, "it is also possible that a parable can make use of several traditional metaphors and thus come near to allegory without ceasing to be a "real" parable which is to be "applied", not an allegory which is to be "interpreted" (=deciphered)." (p.137).

## (2) The Idea of Growth

The introduction to this section puts very clearly the reason why Dahl finds it possible to treat the parables of growth as an entity separate from the other parables and separate from the rest of Jesus' teaching. He identifies the fact that the interpretation of the Kingdom of God in liberal protestantism rested heavily on the parables of growth and the fact that the more recent eschatological approaches have found it more difficult to cope with them. It is Dahl's contention that (in words from section (1)) "It is possible, however, to interpret the parables of growth in the light of the contrast between the messianic, eschatological expectations and the actual process of the coming of the Kingdom of God into the present time, without falling back into an immanent-evolution interpretation of the kingdom." (pp. 139-140).

Dahl finds it impossible to accept Dodd's position on eschatology

and, without discussing it, joins Jeremias in considering it "a false "abbreviation" of the eschatology of Jesus" (p.141).

He also dismisses, very convincingly, the argument that organic growth was foreign to Jesus' contemporaries. "In this case the fault is to be found in the lack of differentiation between the idea of growth in itself and the biological-scientific explanation of it." (p.141). The weight of his evidence in support of the idea that "organic growth is neither unknown nor irrelevant" (p.142) is conclusive.

Finally, having established that organic growth was a concept with which Jesus and his contemporaries could conceptualize, Dahl continues to work out the idea that the Biblical view of history contains the idea of periodicity and that Jesus' idea of the coming of the Kingdom contains the idea that certain events must happen before it finally arrives.

At this stage in the article we can see how Dahl's thesis is taking shape. It may be summarized, so far, thus:

(a) The Bible's concept of history involves a periodicity in its development according to God's order.

(b) Jesus' view of the arrival of the Kingdom of God involves a similar idea of development, there being certain things which are necessary to the course of history immediately preceding its coming.

(c) Jesus identified his own ministry as part of these eschatological events.

(d) The parables of growth speak of this eschatological development, but not using growth as the point of comparison. The contrast between insignificant beginnings and the splendour of the end product, being the point of comparison in the parables, identifies the motive behind them - that they answer the criticism that if the beginnings of the Kingdom are here in the ministry of Jesus, they are certainly not very obvious.

There are two problems about this thesis:

(a) In a sense it is self-defeating because it not only rests its case on the idea that people couldn't see in the ministry of Jesus anything like the beginning of the Kingdom, but also rests its case on the idea that Jesus asserted and apparently expected people to recognize that the "signs of the times" were clear. Either they were clear and understood by people or they were not. The objection, however, is less significant than may at first appear since Dahl redeems himself with the following comment: "it is quite possible that it was first spoken with regard to what was already happening in the ministry of Jesus: the signs of the coming of the Kingdom were already to be seen by those who had eyes to see with." (p.145). It is the "those who had eyes to see with" which saves Dahl from a self-contradiction. Without it he would run the risk of saying on the one hand that the parable of the fig tree indicates that the signs of the end are obvious for all to see and that Jesus' ministry was one of these signs and on the other hand that although Jesus' ministry was one of the events leading up to the final eschatological event, the parables of growth show that it was not understood.

(b) In the chain of argument outlined in (a) - (d) above, (c) is the weak link. Dahl does not justify the idea that Jesus included his own ministry in the last series of events leading up to the arrival of the Kingdom, although it is tempting to grant him the probability of his case. In fact he admits that the stories might not be intended by Jesus to include his own ministry: "The stories themselves do not even make it clear that they have the ministry of Jesus in view." (p.158). Eta Linnemann, however, does not: "No sayings of Jesus can be found, in my opinion, which suggest that he understood his work in this way as the beginning of the Kingdom of God, or that it formed a necessary presupposition for it, as the sowing is for the harvest. Jesus' preaching does not bring in the coming of the kingdom of God but

challenges us to believe in it."<sup>3</sup>

### (3) The Exegesis

Before commenting in general on the whole pattern of Dahl's handling of the parables themselves, we will first make such comments as are necessary on his individual expositions:

#### (a) The Parable of the Mustard Seed

In the closing remarks of the preceding section Dahl said "The interest is not concentrated upon the process of growth in itself, but upon two stages in it, which are contrasted with each other" (pp. 146-147). It is upon this point that the bulk of his exegesis rests, and in connection with this parable the point is well justified.

There is, however, one difficulty in the course of his argument. It is in connection with the following: "If this be right, the message of the parable of Jesus is not the greatness of the coming Kingdom; that was described already in the Old Testament. Neither is the message to be found in the certainty that the Kingdom will come; that was fact which no pious Israelite doubted." (pp. 147-148). That the parable is not about the greatness of the coming Kingdom does not follow from the idea that it was already described in the Old Testament. That it is not concerned with the certainty of the coming Kingdom does not follow from the idea that pious Israelites already believed it. To suggest this is to suggest that Jesus would not have re-iterated any old ideas or even repeated himself. This may be the weak link in an otherwise strong chain of argument. But the weakness is not critical. Dahl's own interpretation of the parable is at least as likely as the two he here rejects, and it has the benefit of his other arguments to help in its foundation.

The completion of his exegesis relies on the idea that the contrast seed/tree works because of the "organic unity" between the seed and the tree. Just as the tree is organically dependent on the insignificant seed, so the Kingdom's arrival is dependent upon the

apparently insignificant ministry of Jesus. The borderline between Dahl's view and the view that the contrast expresses the certainty of the coming of the Kingdom is a very faintly defined one. If we attempt to imagine the situation in which Dahl conjectures these parables were delivered, we may be in some difficulty over deciding which way listeners would have understood them. In support of this point we may note that Jeremias apparently sees no real difference between his own approach and that of Dahl. On page 149 of the 1963 English edition of "The Parables of Jesus" he footnotes Dahl's article in connection with his own comment as follows: "If that is right, the occasion of the utterance of the two parables may be taken to be some expression of doubt concerning the mission of Jesus".

(b) The Parable of the Leaven

An addition to the meaning of the previous parable is here noted in the word "soon". In his comments on the parable of the Mustard Seed Dahl noted that the duration of the time before the end was of no interest in the parable. Here, as we can see from his quotation from Dodd and his comment "and yet the thing is present which soon will make the whole dough bubble till it is all leavened." (p.149), it is. But of this point Dahl makes no further use. His main aim again is to demonstrate that the contrast between the insignificant, imperceptible beginnings and the all-pervasive end of things, is the point of the parable, answering critics who doubted whether Jesus was really "the one who is to come".

As a general comment on the section on "Individual Parables" we may say that if we first grant what Linnemann does not grant - that Jesus did recognize in his own ministry one of the events in the series which necessarily preceded the end - then this way of viewing the parables of growth is a very convincing one. It not only makes good sense of them in their own terms, seeing them as internally consistent pictures, but it also explains, in terms other than their subject

matter, why they make such a convenient group of parables and why they come to be found together in the Gospel records. There must have been some reason why the early church grouped them together and the ideas here presented, using the idea of contrast as the main theme, makes as much sense of them as anything does.

#### (4) The Eschatology of Jesus and the Church

In this last section Dahl attempts to harmonize his view of the parables of growth with the eschatological outlook that it implies. It is best summarized in his own words: "Jesus reckoned with a proleptic and hidden as well as with a future and glorious coming of the Kingdom." (p.166), and his "proleptic and hidden" stage includes certain events which he believes Jesus saw as leading up to the final manifestation of the Kingdom. As well as including the ministry of Jesus, his death, and a certain lapse of time before the end, he also sees as part of the series of end-events the formation of the Church, an argument on which he spends a good deal of this section. A significant point in this argument is the idea that "no distinction is made in the words of Jesus between an intermediate period of the church and the coming of age of the Kingdom. This distinction emerged as a result of the events of Easter and Pentecost." (p.166).

At this point it is useful to note the following comments of John Reumann's: "There is no notion of a gradual evolution (or of a calendar according to which its advent can be spelled out)"<sup>4</sup> and "At Matthew 12:28 (par. Luke 11:20) Jesus denies that his healing miracles are works of Satan; they are works of God, and imply that the kingdom-time of salvation has come. But this argument, directed against a specific charge of his enemies, is far from the sort of "signs" or series of events that some asked for to date the coming of the kingdom. Elsewhere Jesus refuses to give signs (Mark 8:12). He refuses to give a calendar."<sup>5</sup> If Reumann's approach is correct,

it threatens Dahl's whole thesis, since it relies very heavily on the idea of Jesus' ministry being one of the signs of the approaching end.

The thread upon which Dahl hangs the pieces of this argument is the idea of what he calls the "implicit and indirect" Christology of the parables of growth and the word to Peter. That the Christology is implicit and indirect is confirmed by the problem which Dahl himself notices - that the "stories themselves do not even make it clear that they have the ministry of Jesus in view." (p.158). His case rests, in fact, on the point that his view of the motive behind the delivery of these parables is more likely than any other. The balance of probability supports him in this.

The section does, however, have some minor problems. For example, Dahl hints at a problem, which for the benefit of his whole argument, he would have done well to deal with more fully. That is, the problem as to whether Jesus used harvest imagery with any consistency. If he did, Dodd could rejoice a little more than Dahl. All Dahl does, however, is to notice the difficulty: "Under given circumstances he could also speak of the present situation not only as a sowing time, but also as a harvest." (p.157).

On the same page he comments for the first and only time on the "Marcan" theory of parables: "It therefore makes sense that the evangelists have set the parables of growth in relation to the words about "the mystery of the kingdom of God", given to the disciples, Mk. 4:11-12 par. The real message of these parables, could, in fact, only be grasped by those who in faith had understood the mystery of the secret presence of the Kingdom. This does not mean that we should accept the parable theory of Mark, with the stress it lays upon the enigmatic form of the parables, which was then interpreted to the disciples. But it is an advantage of the interpretation proposed here, that it does not set the conjectured original meaning of the parables



an answer to the question "How do I tackle a parable to find out what it means?" than to "What do the parables of Jesus mean?". Such a study begs a question she does not tackle - can any parable be legitimately extracted from the context of the whole teaching of Jesus? The implications of Linnemann's approach are greater than she seems to think.

XX

We will subdivide our review of Miss Linnemann's work into three sections:

(1) Part One - The Basic Principles of Parable Interpretation.

Part One of Linnemann's book invites two opposing comments, and the one which will be most appealing will depend on the position in which the individual reader stands. We might well stand in the position of the Biblical theologian and say, with E.J. Tinsley: "Part one, 'The Basic Principles of Parable Interpretation', is described by Professor Fuchs as 'an extremely exciting introduction.' 'Extremely misleading' would come more readily to my mind, because it simply reiterates as self-evident truths all the characterizations of parable which have become accepted orthodoxy in German New Testament criticism since Jülicher".<sup>7</sup> If we adopt the view that this is basically a scholastic work, we are bound to be surprised at certain elements in the first part. Linnemann does, as Tinsley says, treat her comments as self evident truths, offering a minimum of example and justification of her standpoint, though she does rely heavily on the work of other scholars. Her notes show considerable dependence on Jülicher, Bultmann, Jeremias et. al., but although we might expect a certain reliance on them, we might also expect that if there is any need to write this sort of introduction at all, it is caused by some new position which the author intends to justify. In Linnemann's case this does not apply, since, apart from certain places where aspects of modern parable interpretation receive special emphasis, nothing is new.

On the positive side, however, we may consider the second possible view of this introduction. If we stand in the position of the teacher of Religious Knowledge we might rest our judgement on the opening comment of Ernst Fuchs's Introduction: "When Miss Eta Linnemann was asked to write this book, the commission given her was that it should help the teacher of Religious Knowledge." (p. xi). We might go on to say that the scholarship behind the introduction is not necessary to the teacher, particularly if he is not highly trained in theology, but that it is available through the copious notes if he requires it. We would say that, given this standpoint, the whole of part one is very clear and reasonably concise.

Neither of these standpoints is invalid and it is unnecessary to judge between them. The first part of the book can be viewed either as valueless and unnecessary or as a helpful and uncluttered introduction in a readily usable form. This is in the nature of the work and the user of it may as well accept the fact from the outset. From the opening paragraphs we experience bald statements of fact without any justification: "The parable includes several types of 'figurative' speech, each of which has its own characteristics, a knowledge of which is indispensable for the interpretation of the parables. These types are: 1. The similitude. 2. The parable proper. 3. The illustration. 4. The allegory." (p. 3) The reader who wishes to find out how such a statement is established must consult first the notes and then be prepared to follow up the books quoted by Linnemann and even pursue footnotes in them.

That Linnemann does not intend to introduce too much clutter into her work (by way of showing her working) is clear from the way she freely simplifies other people's work when quoting from them. Note 4 on page 131 demonstrates this. "Words in Greek have been translated, and the word fable has been replaced by parable in order not to introduce yet another new idea. This is justifiable because Jülicher

says, 'The majority of the parabolai of Jesus which are in narrative form are fables' (1,p.98), and so himself makes the equation of fable and parable."

Accepting the work as it is offered to us, within the framework of Linnemann's commission, we may make certain critical comments on part one, some positive comments, where Linnemann has scored valuable points, some adverse criticisms. First, the good news:

(a) Clarity

The whole of part one is set out with a clarity with which few could compete. It could be contended that this is achieved at the expense of valuable evidence, but that apart, if we were asked where we could find a brief and accurate summary of where mainstream New Testament criticism now stands vis à vis parable interpretation, we could not do better than recommend this work.

(b) Credibility in Parables

One of the positive attitudes adopted here by Linnemann (and one which is not articulated by others) is: "The listener to a parable is quite content with such 'stage-production' as long as it passes only the bounds of probability and not of possibility. If the story as a whole seems credible, he will not be worried by small divergences from what is customary in real life." (p.10) Thus Linnemann does not subscribe to the view of critics like Oesterley, Derrett and B.T.D. Smith, who would want to find a way of making the facts of a parable story conform with what was likely to have happened in a first century Palestinian situation. She would not agree with those who find it necessary to estimate what was likely and what was unlikely and to find ways of making the unlikely conform.

Who is correct in this area of criticism is anybody's guess. What is Jesus likely to have done in those situations where he produced parables? Surely, he is likely to have attempted to narrate situations

which were as convincing as he could conceive, and in any situations where he could have had chance for premeditation we might expect parables using situations which were entirely plausible. However, when he was responding to a situation off the cuff, which seems the more likely with most parables, we might expect that certain elements in the stories would be a little more contrived since he was forced to work out the story with some speed.

(c) The Chance of Decision

That the parables of Jesus gave the hearers a reasonable chance of reaching a clear decision on the issues they raised is one of the points which receives some emphasis in Linnemann's discussion: "Jesus' parables are not for instruction, still less for learned argument; only in rare and exceptional cases do they give an exhortation, or make it their object to convict the listener of something. Though almost all uttered to opponents, they do not intend to reduce the opponent ~~ad~~ absurdum, but make it their aim to win his agreement. The opponent is not dismissed with superficial arguments, but the depths of the conflict are reached. By this means he is given the chance of a genuine decision, which in controversy dialogues is normally lacking." (p.22). The importance of the part played by the hearer of the parables in their outcome as "events" is noticed by J.D. Kingsbury: "Linnemann's book is perhaps noteworthy for the stress it places on the role the hearer played in those situations in which Jesus narrated his parables".<sup>8</sup> And Linnemann herself makes the idea clear in comments like: "A successful parable is an event that decisively alters the situation. It creates a new possibility that did not exist before, the possibility that the man addressed can come to an understanding with the man addressing him across the opposition that exists between them." (p.30).

In parable criticism during this century there has been considerable emphasis on the idea that parables were used in situations of conflict.

The point which Linnemann is making here is that we should not mistake Jesus' intentions and assume that in the conflict Jesus was just trying to win his point and convict the hearers of error. What he attempted in his parables was to win them to his own viewpoint, to change their lives willingly, coming, through the reasoning of the parables, to new and revealing moments of truth.

But Linnemann is careful to notice the corollary to this - that he who does this with parables is risking everything to win everything, and Jesus failed sufficiently in his purpose to bring about his own death. "A man who risks a parable to bridge over such opposition indeed takes a risk. By his words he compels his hearers to a decision, without having the outcome of this decision in his own hands. He will have to bear the consequences! A direct line leads from the parables of Jesus to his crucifixion." (pp. 40-41).

In this particular area of the discussion Linnemann produces some valuable clarification of what is already implicit, and to some extent explicit, in other critical work.

(d) The Power of the Parables

Linnemann offers two important propositions, the first of which is a vigorous support of the campaign to extract the parables from their Christian setting and the consequent bias in interpretation, and restore them to their original setting in the life of Jesus and his contemporary Jews: "The only thing that could give weight to the words of Jesus was the words themselves." (p.34). Linnemann is at pains to highlight just how powerful the parables of Jesus must have been in their original settings. They had to work on people without the normal Christological context within which we experience them now. Such was their power that they contributed to Jesus' own death!

(e) "The Parables as ....."

Part one consists of attempts at looking at parables from various different angles. It is instructive to notice a feature which is

common to all four of the main approaches discussed here, and we can illustrate it with a quotation from each:-

(i) "It is the firmly established result of the latest era of parable interpretation, characterized by the names of Cadoux, Dodd, and Jeremias, that the parables of Jesus (like the parable of Menenius Agrippa) refer to an historical situation." ((p.22) "The Parable as a Form of Communication")

(ii) "The parables of Jesus have been passed down to us, but the 'language event' that they effected cannot be passed down. It is not effected for us just by our reading or listening to the parables; we do not stand in the same situation as the original listeners." ((p.33) "The Parables a 'Language Event'")

(iii) "The only thing that could give weight to the words of Jesus was the words themselves" (p.34) and "For the original listeners to the parables of Jesus we cannot pre-suppose the belief that he is the Christ" ((p.35) "The Parables as Sayings of Jesus")

(iv) "The parables of Jesus as we read them in the Gospels have all passed through the understanding of primitive Christianity." ((p.42) "The Parables as Passages of the Bible")

It is a common feature of all four sections, and a feature which is reflected in much more material than just these quotations, that Linnemann bases her remarks on an approach to the original setting and meaning of the parable.

#### (f) Eschatology

In the context of 20th Century parable criticism there can be no ignoring the relationship of the parables to the eschatology of Jesus. Linnemann's own view of eschatology is not clear. If anything she offers an existentialist understanding of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. In contrast to the view of John the Baptist, Linnemann says "It is different with Jesus. The coming of the kingdom of God is not for him the frontier of time, which by its pressing nearness gives its

stamp to the present, and qualifies it. The coming of the kingdom of God is itself "Time to ...", just as there is a time to sleep, a time to eat, a time to work; the lost is found, therefore it is time to rejoice together (Luke 15:3-10). Goodness appears and seeks to be understood (Matt.20:1-16). The invitation to the banquet is issued and must be obeyed (Luke 14:15-24). The unique opportunity is there and demands to be seized decisively (Matt. 13:44-46)."

(p.39). This existential rather than temporal approach is emphasized by another paragraph on the same page: "Once Jesus' proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom of God has become meaningful to us, we can better recognize why Jesus inevitably forced open a deep opposition between himself and his listeners with this proclamation.", and also by the extensive note on pages 132-136. Here she criticises the view, which in recent decades has gained more acceptance than most, that Jesus expected the Kingdom of God in the very near future. She continues "An examination of the passages cited in support of the "near expectation" seems to me, however, to show that this assumption has no adequate support in them. In my opinion there is not one saying of Jesus that speaks expressly of the nearness of the kingdom of God the authenticity of which is not at least disputed." (p.132 note 26). She existentializes her interpretation of Jesus' eschatology by accepting the fact that in his pronouncements there is a paradox. She does not deny that Jesus asserted the Kingdom's coming in different tenses. Her view of Jesus' message and what its eschatological meaning was is contained in the following: "Jesus' listeners had their firm ideas of what would happen when the change of the ages came in. For them it was therefore an unheard-of paradox when Jesus announced the arrival of the kingdom of God, for they were able to see little or nothing of all that by their ideas went along with the arrival of the kingdom of God. It was inevitable that they should oppose Jesus' time-announcement.

This opposition was not a dispute about ideas, it was about the question whether the decisive change to salvation had already happened.

" Jesus' listeners regarded it as obvious that this question would be answered by what they could see before their eyes, that it had an "objective" answer which one could as an observer read off from the "object". Jesus' paradoxical time-announcement meant just this, that the question had to be answered by the decision of faith or unbelief, by a "subjective" decision, a decision of the "subject" which itself was decisive for him. Jesus concludes the utterance in which he characterizes the present as the time of salvation by, "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk .. and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt. 11:5), with the words, "Blessed is he who takes no offence at me", or as it should be translated, following the original text more exactly, "Well it is for him who does not trip up over me" (Matt. 11:6). He warns men against refusing belief in regard to the proclaimer of the message." (pp. 39-40).

There are also certain criticisms to be made of part one:-

(a) Mark 4:10-12

In his review E.J. Tinsley says: "Further, a book on parables ought not to pass by Mark 4:10-12 because it is 'burdened with difficult exegetical problems!'"<sup>9</sup> The last, quoted, clause is from the footnote on page 118, the only place where there is any comment on this important text. We must agree with Tinsley that this is a major criticism of Linnemann's work, not merely because these verses are fundamental to a consideration of parables, but rather because of the declared nature of Linnemann's book. If the purpose was to produce a book which offers a viable and easily grasped approach to the parables for the classroom situation, Linnemann here leaves the teacher naked to the attack from observant students. As soon as anyone notices Mark 4:10-12, some answer is required as to what it means and whether it is relevant to the study at all.

(b) Allegory/Parable differences

"Here there is an important difference between allegory and parable. The parable speaks (for preference) to opponents, the allegory to the initiated. The parable is used to reconcile opposition, the allegory presupposes an understanding." (p.7) The dichotomy proposed here by Linnemann is a false one. To suggest that "opponents" are opposites to the "initiated" is not a conclusion which is necessarily true. Those who are initiated (i.e. have the clue by which an allegory may be unravelled) can be friends or enemies. The allegory certainly does "presuppose an understanding", but the understanding need not be confined to friends. The dichotomy which would here make more sense than the opponents/initiated one is the initiated/uninitiated dichotomy. Since we might say that the parable is spoken to those who either have no understanding or have no wish to understand, we may say it speaks to the uninitiated just as the allegory speaks to the initiated. This way of opposing the two methods of teaching allows the parable its persuasive purpose.

The discussion on allegory seems to be the weakest of the introductory sections and finishes by begging a question which Linnemann would have done well to answer: "The only matter for argument now is whether Jesus also composed one or two allegories alongside the similitudes and parables." (p.8).

(c) Realism in the Parables

Linnemann attempts to answer those critics who approach the parables in a severely logical way, finding problems in what seems at first sight to be unlikely behaviour on the part of the characters in the parables. She does not attempt the usual answer of demonstrating that behaviour that looks unlikely is in fact very probable, but minimizes the need to see parables as strictly logical pieces of work. Page 29 gives examples. While we may agree with

her views on the behaviour of the guests in the parable of the Great Supper and of the owner in the parable of Labourers in the Vineyard, the example from the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen is more difficult to accept. She finds the motivation which prompted the owner to send his son acceptable, as she also finds acceptable the motivation which links the murder of the son to the rest of the story. She may be right in thinking that in the process of telling such a story objections which spring to mind later would not necessarily occur. We could, however, do with a full discussion of this parable which deals with the problem which most critics find in this parable - the problem of possible later additions to and re-interpretations of the original parable.

It is a drawback in this work, which would claim that the parables each have their own highly individual original situation, that only certain parables are considered. There is no adequate reason given for this beyond the comment by Fuchs: "The text is the parables of Jesus. Not all of them - that would take too long, and is also quite unnecessary - but a selection." (p.xi). Of Fuchs we would like to know why it is unnecessary, because the reason is by no means self-evident. If there is any generalizing at all to be done from the parables of Jesus, it should certainly be based on a study of them all.

## (2) Part Two - Expositions

### (a) The Story of the Good Samaritan

Linnemann accepts this story at face value as an "illustration", a "well chosen instance" of a particular style of life. She has no time for the more complicated expository attempts such as the one by Jüngel which she deals with in note 15 (p.141). She does, however, have a theory about the history of the text as we have it, and although she finds difficulty over the business of relating the story to its setting, the message of the story itself is clear to her.

She argues, however, that "We should be taking it too superficially if we were to understand it in the light of the demand "go and do likewise"" (p.55). How exactly she sees the message of the parable as reaching beyond this area is not clear. She discusses the risk involved in being "called out of the shell we have made of the world into the unprotected life of real encounter" (p.56) and makes comments on the existential realities of trying to "go and do likewise", but it is not clear how any of these points follow necessarily from the parable. The message is merely "go and do likewise" regardless of the consequences. Obviously there will be more to it than simply picking up a wounded man, but whatever else is required of the listener is implicit in the command.

In note 1 on page 138 Linnemann says "The way v.36 is phrased assumes that the neighbour has already been mentioned." The wording of the verse makes no such assumption. To hold the point Linnemann should justify it.

On page 53 Linnemann says "Priest and Levite go by without bothering about the victim. Attempts are often made to find an excuse for this in some special precept of their order, but they cannot be upheld, and besides are out of keeping with the spirit of the story. For what matters is the contrast between the attitude of these cult officials and that of the Samaritan." She attempts to undermine the arguments of those who would find legitimate excuses for the behaviour of the Priest and the Levite by intimating that they in fact acted in accordance with their own personal code rather than in accordance with the regulations of their profession. The point, though made, is not justified by Linnemann. She gives no good reason why the Priest and Levite should not have been acting from the precepts of their order rather than from their personal code of morality.

(b) The Pharisee and the Tax-Collector

In her dealings with this parable we find once again what was true of the first part of Linnemann's book - that she merely rewrites what others (particularly Jeremias) have already said. Pages 58-60 are particularly given to this; they consist of merely disillusioning the reader about first century regard for tax-collectors and Pharisees. The only interpretative comments which make distinctive progress here are those on page 62 relating to the idea of a final court of appeal, an idea by which Jesus attempts to persuade his hearers into agreement.

Note 12 on page 146 contains a mistake. Although we may agree with the general point being made here - that v. 14b is not original - the following comment cannot be held: "One cannot say that the tax-collector has humbled himself." Such a comment depends on the meaning of the word "humbled". Perhaps the Jewish viewpoint would require just repayment on the part of the tax-collector in all those cases where he had acted dishonestly. But we are not necessarily to be restricted here to a Jewish view of what would have made the man "justified" in order to arrive at a view of the word "humbled". He did, after all, throw himself on the mercy of God, appealing to a final court. Besides this, we might also argue that we are here dealing with Jesus' view of humility which need not necessarily coincide with that of his contemporary Jews.

(c) The Similitudes of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin

Linnemann here does what Jeremias does not do. She brings out in detail the extent to which these similitudes must have been offensive to the Jews. "Repentance for Jesus is not something done by man, but an event coming from God, the arrival of his kingdom. For this reason Jesus can set against the "perhaps" of hope an assertion of certainty." (p.72). "To come to agree with Jesus his listeners had to alter their ideas radically. They had to have faith in Jesus' proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom of God, and leave behind them all that had

hitherto determined their life." (p.73).

This is no doubt a by-product of her view of the point of the parable which lies in the 1=more than 99 contrast, which, she maintains is true only in connection with the emotions which are felt at the loss and at the moment of finding. One of the pieces in her jigsaw to produce this conclusion is doubtful, however. She says: "Now it would not in fact seem to be everyone's practice to leave behind ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness - that is, in the uninhabited desert land in the hill-country - to look for the one that is lost. Some commentators have wished to conclude from this that the sheep will naturally have remained in the protection of a fold or in the keeping of a shepherd, while the owner went on the search. But the similitude says nothing of this; its effectiveness would be lost if this feature were introduced, and the contrast 1:99 would lose its significance." (p.65). We may understand Linnemann's desire to underline the significance of the 1:99 contrast, but this argument does seem unlikely. In a sense it is irrelevant whether Jesus is talking about the typical situation (Linnemann labels this story "Similitude"), and if any capital is to be made from coming down on either side of this fence, we must imagine that no shepherd is likely to be so completely emotionally disturbed by the loss of one sheep as to risk the loss of the rest to find it. The search for the lost does not lose significance when we imagine the 99 in safety; it gains. The very reason the search for the lost is important is that the lost is lost and the 99 are not. The contrast is by no means enhanced, as Linnemann suggests, by the risking of the 99.

(d) The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Linnemann opens her discussion here by taking issue with Jeremias, according to whom "the parable was addressed to men who were like the elder brother, men who were offended at the gospel" (quoted in note 1

on p.150). Linnemann continues in her note: "To take offence at the gospel, his opponents would first have had to see in Jesus its authorized proclaimer." In her introductory argument she says: "The Pharisees do not murmur because they understand the reception of sinners into table fellowship with Jesus as a pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins. Nor do they protest because sinners are forgiven and the grace of God is shared with them. Their protest is for other reasons." (p.74). She then continues to show that the Pharisees object because Jesus crosses the boundaries by which social life is marked, associating with sinners and the like.

It is difficult to understand exactly how Linnemann's position differs from the position she criticizes. We can take the second of the remarks quoted above and argue with her that the Pharisees were in fact offended by the Gospel because they did recognize Jesus as its authorized proclaimer. The difficulty was not in the recognition of Jesus but in the acceptance of Jesus. His gospel, in other words, was not the gospel they had expected to come. His news, his behaviour, his life was offensive.

That she is in fact saying something very similar to the position she criticizes is backed up by these words: "In fact Jesus uses this parable to justify trust in the power of love. But this trust means, in concrete terms, table fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners." (p.154, note 26).

(e) The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard

On page 154 we find, in note 4, something which is a feature of Linnemann's method of handling parables, consistent with her general existentialist approach. She is generally concerned to imagine what would have been in the minds of the original hearers of the parables. Here she says: "For the same reason the translation suggested by Jeremias for v. 8b, "pay them all the (full day's) wages, including

the last" (p.36,cf.p.137), seems to me inappropriate, although it is linguistically possible. The parable would be deprived of its effectiveness if the listener did not share the expectation of the first labourers that they would receive more."

(f) The Great Supper

"Any exposition that does not do justice to this "Now is the acceptable time" (cf. 2 Cor.6:2), has missed the sense of the parable." (p.92). Certainly Linnemann is herself very concerned to do justice to the immediacy which she feels is the focal point of the parable. She rests her main case on the argument that "Since the excuses of the guests are not typical "weak excuses" nor bear the character of a deliberate slight, Jesus' listeners will hardly have understood them as refusals, but as excuses for coming late." (p.89). Her argument is concerned with the idea that since the host was so angry at the rudeness of those who assumed they could come later, he sent invitations out to those who were likely to come so that his banquet could be filled. Those who had assumed they could come later on and still squeeze into the feast with a minimum of embarrassment at being late will find out that they couldn't toy with this host - the opportunity will not remain open. We can agree that her approach is likely to be valid since it is only a consideration of the excuses as delaying tactics rather than refusals that makes it possible to understand the host's motive in so hurriedly filling his banquet with guests rushed in from the streets.

It is in connection with this parable and the notes which Linnemann appends to her exposition that we are very aware of her use of the "picture part"/"reality part" approach which she adopts to the parables. Her approach is governed by the idea that "it is just the unusual features of the parables that go back to the "reality part" (p.161) and it is this approach which prompts so thorough an examination of the unusual

feature of the common refusal by everyone and what exactly it can mean.

It is the strength of Linnemann's approach that it does justice to the urgency which is so much a feature of the whole parable. In atmosphere and tempo it is urgency which it conveys, and it is in this area that Linnemann discovers its meaning. That she has scored significant points in this exposition is perhaps reflected in a comment of her own where we learn not only of Jeremias's view of her exposition but of her own apparent pleasure in his agreement with her: "Jeremias has considerably altered his exposition of the parable - probably under the influence of mine - in his latest edition. He gives the parable a completely new classification. It no longer comes under the heading "God's mercy for sinners", but under the newly created heading "It may be too late". It no longer asks "the critics of the Gospel" : "Where do you get the right to pour scorn and derision on the wretched crowd who sit at my table?", but describes how "it may be too late"." (p.161).

#### (g) The Unique Opportunity

Linnemann finds the point of the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl in the idea of being confronted with a unique opportunity. "The introductory formula of the parable, "The kingdom of Heaven is like", shows us what this "unique opportunity" is. Jesus proclaims that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1.15). The moment has come for which the whole people of Israel was waiting, God is coming out of his hiddenness, and it is becoming obvious that it is he alone who holds sway over the world." (p. 101). But having said that, she runs into difficulty in attempting to interpret them because she cannot locate their original occasion. Although the parables are located with texts suggesting that risking everything is the way to acquire the treasure of the Kingdom, she is forced to the conclusion: "But none of these sayings helps us further than this. They teach us to recognize the

seriousness of the demand, but they do not make clear precisely what is demanded." (p. 103). However, she continues; "Does this mean that we cannot find the meaning of the parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price, because we cannot ascertain in what situation Jesus uttered them? No!" (pp. 103-104), and later on 104: "The key to the meaning of the parables can only be revealed to us by our own actual circumstances. We possess this key when those things which are juxtaposed in the parables, and which produce an effect because they are put together in this way, are present for us too: that is, when we are confronted with the possibility of risking everything, because that which is worth more to us than anything else has come near to us, with all its promise, and demands that we should risk everything."

Once again the challenge "Now is the acceptable time" (2 Cor.6:2) presents itself in Linnemann's expositions. And it is thus existentially that she attempts an interpretation.

In general, however, Linnemann covers very little new ground in her treatment of this parable, dealing in the main only with points which, while necessary to the student, are all available from other authors.

#### (h) The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

This exposition shows well what is also found in other expositions - the tendency to expound in a way suggestive of a devotional address. The final pages of this exposition not only conclude that the parable is concerned with mercy and forgiveness but also proceed to make further investigations into the nature of mercy and forgiveness, and into the ways in which they affect our lives. Typical of her concluding remarks are: "Forgiveness for instance here means something other than "saying no more about it", or as it is so nicely put, "letting the grass grow over it". It means the confidence that for the other man and for me a

common future is possible." (p.113) and "Only experience can show that mercy is the way the world is ordered, and I can get this experience only if I commit myself to it." (p.113). Such comments do not arise directly from the parable although they are interesting and edifying points to make in relation to the discussion which has preceded them.

There is only one point of any significance made in this exposition and that is the identification of the point of the parable as being in the idea that mercy is a "must". With this we may agree in so far as verse 33 does seem to suggest that mercy was incumbent on the unmerciful servant (even though in this case it seems to be dependent on the fact that he had himself received mercy on a very much larger scale). We may not however find it so easy to follow Linnemann as far as she goes in this connection: "To venture on the way of mercy does not mean to erect a law over oneself that demands, "Thou shalt be merciful, thou shalt forgive, etc." It means rather to commit oneself to the belief that reality matches this ordinance, although appearances seem to suggest that the opposite is true. It means to question reality on whether it does not itself point a way for mercy in the place where it is needed, a way that is a way of life for the merciful, not only a list of prohibitions." (p.113). This can in no way be said to arise from the parable, but is an idea imposed on it by Linnemann as a means of conveying to us what Linnemann thinks Jesus might have been getting at.

Apart from these points, the whole of this exposition is devoted, as in the case of other expositions, to outlining facts about its background and interpretative details already available in the works by other authors.

#### (i) The Parable of the Sower and its Interpretation

This exposition is disappointing in all its three sections. "The Framework" deals scantily with the setting of the parable in Mark, "The

Parable" merely re-tells the story with some relevant comment on the detail behind it, and the "The Interpretation" only examines and dismisses what the early church made of the parable. Linnemann in fact not only finds other approaches to the parable unacceptable (note 15 pp. 181ff.) but decides herself that all we can do is admit defeat: "The parable of the sower had already had quite a long history before Mark took it into his Gospel, and however faithfully its actual language has been passed down to us, through a long oral and written tradition, its original meaning has in the process been lost. We can no longer discover on what occasion Jesus uttered it and what he meant to convey by it." (p.117).

Linnemann has done a fair job of collating material from other books and presenting background information for the classroom, but she has not given us an exposition of the parable. As far as interpretative comment goes, we may gather by inference that she agrees with C.W.F. Smith's comment: "Since the parable does not mention this good land till the end, it lays the stress on the success of the sowing, not on its failure." (footnote f, pp. 116-117), but this is a small point and only an inference since she nowhere either states or implies agreement with Smith or disagreement.

The power of Linnemann's work on this parable is to be found more in the notes than in the exposition and is of negative value rather than positive value. Here she expresses her dissatisfaction with many of the major approaches to this parable (note 15, pp. 181f.)

On the positive side, however, there is benefit to be derived from a comment on page 183: "No sayings of Jesus can be found, in my opinion, which suggest that he understood his work in this way as the beginning of the kingdom of God, or that it formed a necessary presupposition for it, as the sowing is for the harvest. Jesus' teaching does not bring in the coming of the kingdom of God but challenges us to believe in it." The final comment betrays what is

noticeable elsewhere in her expositions - that Linnemann's understanding of the parables is less governed by the original situation in which they were delivered than is the case with other modern critics. Her approach is a more existentialist one. She finds the approaches which interpret parables according to differing views of eschatology all wanting.

However, the implications of her criticisms are nowhere worked out. She has the seeds here for an approach to the parables, but it bears no positive fruit. This is perhaps the exposition in which we experience at once the potential of her work and the severe dissatisfaction of not seeing it realized.

(i) The Unjust Judge

We find a similar problem here to the one we found with the exposition of the parable of the sower. What Linnemann says is more negative than positive. We learn that she cannot accept the originality of this parable, even when it is stripped of its applications as they appear in Luke, and most of her comments, when not dealing with factual background material already available from other works, are concerned with this area of discussion and the consequent impossibility of making much of the parable. Her argument, however, hinges very much on the remark in note 14: "The question of the authenticity of the parable is indissolubly connected with the question whether verses 6-8a are original." (p. 187), a remark which itself receives no further comment. It would be helpful if she had stated why she considers the authenticity of the parable as "indissolubly connected" with the originality of these verses.

On the positive side we may notice the comments "This answer does not rest, as it seems to, just on the authority of the Lord; it is borne fully and completely by the parable. It rests on the contrast between the unjust judge, who puts off the case of the defenceless widow unduly long, and God who is just. If persistence can defeat even a godless judge, how much more must an answer be granted it by God." (p. 121).

Linnemann does not adequately demonstrate why this approach could not be a possible message to fall from the lips of Jesus himself, given some re-arrangement of the material presented by Luke. Unless she can adequately justify the integrity of the whole parable (including vv. 6-8a) she cannot eliminate the possibility of an original parable speaking in terms of a God/judge comparison, to be interpreted on the "how much more?" principle.

(k) The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins

Once again Linnemann's judgement is that "The parable of the wise and foolish virgins is certainly a creation of the early Church." (p. 126), and where she is not offering factual details her comments are merely supportive of this assertion.

(3) General Comments

The expositions in Part Two of Linnemann's book present problems. They are, for example, expositions in isolation, unrelated to each other and generally unrelated to the Gospels as a whole. It is as if the parables can be lifted from the Gospels and studied separately, whereas a Dodd or a Jeremias would attempt to study one parable not only in relation to others but also in relation to the whole of Jesus' recorded messages. Linnemann's book attempts no grouping of parables, no correlation of like messages or warnings. Its greatest weakness seems to lie in what Fuchs, as we have noticed before, regards in his Introduction as irrelevant - that Linnemann has been selective in her treatment of parables. It is not at all clear from anything that Fuchs says or that Linnemann says that this is a valid method of approach.

However, this criticism may be invalid in itself if Linnemann's primary purpose is the production of a classroom textbook, making all current research available to students but attempting no major advances herself. And it would appear that this is the case with Part Two, for by far the greatest proportion of space in both expositions and notes is given to supplying information which is already available (as her

copious notes show very well) from other sources.

There is very little attempt to answer the question "What does this parable mean?" in her expositions. She is far more concerned with problems about what other people think the parables mean and with re-telling the parable stories to highlight useful points of background material.

This leaves us with a question which we asked ourselves in connection with Part One. Has she attempted both theological analysis and educational aid in the one volume, or has she only attempted one of these? Whatever her aim, her success is only partial on each of these aspects. The expositions are themselves fairly good classroom material (certainly this is true from the point of view of the way the material is set out) but to get full value from them (and, indeed, to make sense of them sometimes) the notes are necessary. However, when the non-specialist in the English classroom turns to the notes, he is likely to be out of his depth, not only because the notes are often very detailed and involve complex knowledge of what other authors have had to say, but also because a large number of the works quoted are continental works and not readily accessible.

However, viewing Part Two from the theologian's angle is equally restricting. If the theologian comes to Linnemann's work expecting to discover what she has to say about the parables of Jesus, he will be largely disappointed. He will here find, rather, an assessment of where current criticism has got to and what Linnemann thinks of other approaches to the parables. There are, certainly, interpretative and exegetical comments but these are the exceptions rather than the rule.

Where the theologian will derive greater benefit is in the discussion (in all expositions) of the history and framework of the text. Here Linnemann's views are distinctive and well supported by her notes.

All of this suggests that her work may have been better suited to a thesis than to a new contribution to the debate on parables. It is a distillation of current scholarship rather than a major contribution to the scholarship, although it has an authority of its own as a critique of other works.

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Another, far less significant, contribution to the same area of criticism is that of G.V. Jones<sup>10</sup>. A large part of the book is given to surveying the background information to studying parables and examining previous critical work. In the comments below, however, we will confine ourselves to the last part of his work - his attempt at "an essay in existential interpretation".

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Comments in Jones's opening paragraph promise better things than what actually follows. We find ourselves quickly agreeing with such comments as: "The parable...appeals to the imagination" (p. 167), "We are moved by the story and are induced by it to pass judgement on life and on people" (p. 167), "It tells its story and leaves it to the listener of that time and this to frame his own judgement and reach his own conclusion" (p. 167), and a little later: "The parable is great art because no further word is required to enforce its intention" (p. 168). The good start is continued when we find (p. 168) that Jones is apparently concerned with the setting from which the parable comes. Even though his opening remarks on the matter make an untried assumption ("We can assume the continuity of the parable with vv. 1-10" - p. 168), it is promising that an existentialist interpreter starts from the setting of the parable. However, he makes so little of it that the benefit is lost, and we quickly find we are facing the difficulties of his approach.

Having quickly decided that other approaches leave something to be desired, Jones seeks "a wider and more extended interpretation" (p. 173). Problems follow.

He says: "...the contention in this book is that this kind of interpretation is necessary for the kerygmatic as distinguished from the limited and exegetic exposition of the parable..." (p. 173). Statements like this make the assumption that the kerygmatic exposition of the parables is not served by historical investigations. This type of approach to the parables does not attempt to define the meaning of the parables for today in terms of the meaning intended by Jesus for his own generation. The two areas are seen to be exclusive.

On page 173 he also says, again without justification, "... it is equally evident that some of them individually should be read as pictures of the human predicament in its entirety." Further on still, he says, "To interpret it in this way is to enlarge its scope..." but he says this without saying why it is necessary or desirable to enlarge its scope.

Page 174 also has dubious points. Again without saying why it is either necessary or desirable, he says "...and the recognition of this should enable the exponent of the parables to lift them out of the limited historical context to a more general level." Further on, we find him agreeing that "interpretation does not limit itself solely to explicating what the original author meant, but it has to interpret the original meaning in terms which will be relevant to the present age." This seems to conflict with what has gone before in a somewhat radical way. We are left in some doubt as to what exactly he means by including the quotation. Lower on the same page we read "The parable exposes certain universal characteristics of life and describes basic human needs." It is a point we may agree with, but it still does not require agreement from us that these are the fundamental purpose of the telling of the story. The story, whatever it is about, must be about something, and the subject matter has to be (at least mostly) credible. It is hardly surprising therefore if a lot of it rings true with the way human life is. It is certainly

going a bit far to say: "It is a piece of life transfigured and given meaning by vision, and has become an archetypal pattern of human existence." (p. 175). To argue as strongly as this is to say that the parable story so closely adheres to the way human beings behave that it is always the case that human beings, in similar circumstances, behave this way.

From page 175 onwards, there is very little about Jones's comments that is controversial or inaccurate. He makes good and valid points, dealing with the quality of human existence as shown in the parable. This he does by discussing various abstract nouns describing facets of human experience. The problem with the whole section is not that what he says is wrong, but that the assumption underlying it (that this is the message originally intended by Jesus) is wrong. He merely describes the human state of affairs which the parable illustrates, coming closest to justifying his approach on page 184: "Great art, I have maintained, is a symbol of the pattern of life, an individualised instance of general truth." He gives no weight at all to the argument so strongly put by Cadoux, and acknowledged by him elsewhere (p. 114), that the parables were generally (even though an art form) harnessed in the service of controversy. Art may well be applied, but Jones does not give much room to the idea.

We may say that Jones has not succeeded in saying what the parable means. He has succeeded very well in saying in what respects it reflects human life.

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Jones is far more concerned with developing a viable approach to the parables than with actually approaching them himself. His work treats only one parable in detail and can, because of that fact alone, be only described as a pointer to interpretation, not as a thoroughgoing interpretative work.

If Jones were to say that the sort of approach he has taken to the parable of the Prodigal Son was what was in the mind of Jesus when he delivered it, he would be claiming for Jesus a considerable depth of abstract thought, a claim which, in view of the simplicity and spontaneity of the parable stories, would need justification.

It is perhaps very significant that he deals with Mark 4: 10-12 only in an appended note. Since he does not see it as the necessary pre-requisite to his whole thesis, we must assume once again that he is not really concerned with the mind of Jesus at the time.

In summary; we must say of the existentialist approach that it has certain pitfalls. Whereas the writers who have pursued what we might call the eschatological approach have, even if they hadn't intended to do so, been forced to interpret the parables in relation to their original situation and purpose, those who pursue the existentialist interpretation of the parables are forced to do the opposite. They must perforce divorce them from their original setting and assert, somehow, that the parables can have a life of their own, independent of their original setting, and can be understood by any generation as referring to their own situation. No matter how much an existentialist approach attempts to relate the parables to their setting and to give importance to what they originally meant, at some stage this separation becomes necessary, and it is noticeable that those who attempt this separation find themselves on common ground in that they have to attempt it by deliberately going for the literary characteristics of the parables. There is something unhealthy about the attempt to separate the parables from their original setting on the basis of their form rather than of their meaning. Where such interpreters try to examine what a parable originally meant and from that derive an estimate of what Jesus might say to our own situation they score well. Where, however, they pay attention only to the literary merits of parables and observe merely that these make them acceptable (and even intended by

Jesus himself) for any generation, and that without further explanation, they fall down severely.

If there is profit to be derived from this field in the future, it might well be found in an attempt at an existentialist interpretation of the eschatological approaches.

At this point we should mention one further work, which, although an American work, deserves inclusion here, partly because it is now available in this country, and partly because it is to date the best candidate for the award of how not to do an existentialist interpretation of the parables. The work is that of Dan Otto Via Jr.<sup>11</sup>

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"To approach this through an analogy we might say that a novel is the pre-philosophical living-through of an experience within an horizon or the giving of a new configuration to pre-conceptual existential forces". (p. 93).

"In the interpretation of the parables, then, literary criticism and theological-existential exegesis coalesce as the conceptual articulation of the nature of existence in faith or unfaith, which was configured and dramatized in the parables in a pre-conceptual way. Because the parables are window-mirror gestalten within larger gestalten, a comprehensive interpretation of the parables requires an articulation of the relationship of the parables to the larger complexes, that is, the Synoptic Gospels." (p. 95).

The Englishman who has preserved any linguistic sensibility in the face of the onslaughts of trans-Atlantic jargon and misuse of words will be completely alienated by the style of this book. The quotations above are prize examples of a problem which confronts us on every page, and these are from a section entitled "The Literary Criticism of the Parables"! At almost every turn the author's verbosity diminishes not only our understanding of what he says but also our trust that he has anything worth saying.

We might overlook the problem and be prepared to do battle with the style in hope of uncovering worthwhile material were it not for the fact that there seem to be certain basic errors in his use of words. Examples are found in some of the words at the roots of his arguments. One is the word "aesthetic", which he uses throughout to convey the idea that the parables are self-contained and what he describes as "non-referential". He says: "Aesthetic experience is a particular and unique type of experience of a correlative type of object. That is to say, it is the experience of intransitive, non-referential, or rapt attention to an object which is capable of evoking that kind of experience. In non-aesthetic modes of experience attention is transitive; that is, it is referred beyond the object of concern to other objects and meanings." (p. 73). It is true that the word "aesthetic" does have this intransitive quality, referring to things of intrinsic beauty, worthy of contemplation in themselves, but the connection between this and the parables is not made in such a way as to convince us that "aesthetic" is the word Via really requires. Not even Via would wish to assert that the parables never had nor have now an outward reference to matters beyond themselves. If this were the case he would have to argue some new reason for Jesus telling them in the first place. It might be that "artistic" is the word he really seeks, being a word which can refer at once to a thing of intrinsic beauty and something which has a point of outward reference.

We might notice here another lazy use of language. The word in question is "Existential". It is a word which is normally associated with a particular school of philosophy, and one which therefore refers to a particular approach to life. Via, on the other hand, is using the word to denote nothing more than that the parables have something to say about life in general rather than about the particular situation in which they were first uttered. It is to be suspected

that in using this word Via is attempting to say something new but is in fact only re-phrasing what others would want to say. The lazy use of the term is best seen perhaps in examples like the following, where he uses it merely as a synonym for, say, "real": "The servant's breach of trust in failing to do business with his master's goods is grounded in his existential flaw." (p. 119).

It is such considerations which at the outset of this review force us to approach the book with a great deal of caution. What it says must, if it is to be trusted, be carefully sifted. The following sections attempt to do this:

(1) Aims and Techniques

Via declares his aims in his Introduction. "... precisely what is proposed in this book is a move away from a methodology which interprets the parables severely in connection with Jesus' historical situation." (p. ix). "The present work will attempt a more thoroughgoing demonstration that a number of Jesus' parables are in a strict sense literary and that because of this they are not just illustrations of ideas and cannot have the immediate connection with Jesus' historical situation which is customarily attributed to them". (p. x). "The whole effort being made in this book is not meant to suggest that the interpretation of the parables can get along without the rich exegetical contributions made by such scholars as Dodd, Jeremias, Manson, Michaelis, Fuchs and Linnemann. It is being suggested that in the case of certain of the narrative parables the new angle of vision of a more literary approach would enlarge our understanding." (pp. xi-xii).

These quotations highlight some of the fundamental objections to this book. The first and second show Via's suspicion of the historical approaches of other authors, but he not only overstates his case here, but in the subsequent work completely undermines his own position.

He not only avoids interpreting the parables "severely" in connection with Jesus' historical situation, he avoids doing it altogether. His work completely ignores the fact that it was Jesus who uttered the parables and even (the second quotation above) denies that they can have any connection with his historical situation, a denial which is implicit in all his exegetical work. For all the respect that he pays to other scholars in the third quotation above, his own work is in fact, though he does not appear to realize it, a firm negation of what they say.

At the end of the Introduction he seems to try to blunt his own spear, but, as we shall see in the course of this review, he cannot have his cake and eat it as well. What he says demands that he stand firmly in one camp or the other. In fact he stands in neither.

As far as his technique goes, it is of course moulded to his own particular approach to the parables. His grouping of parables is unashamedly different from that of others: "... the parables will not be grouped on the basis of their relationship to some aspect of the Kingdom of God or of eschatology but on the basis of their narrative form". (p. x). The difficulties this involves will become apparent later, but we should notice here that Via makes no attempt to justify this different approach to grouping other than what he says to justify his whole approach to the parables with which he deals.

He is conscious that his approach is a new one. He says: "Even those New Testament scholars, like Fuchs and Linnemann, who have been most concerned to understand the parables as language events have not fully exploited the event character of the parables, for they have not seriously considered how the parables' peculiarly aesthetic function enhances their character as events. This will be one of our concerns in chapter 3." (p. 57).

(2) Part One - Methodological

(a) The Questioning of the One-Point Approach

A view of the parables such as Via's necessitates the criticism of the one point approach to parables, and he makes the attempt to show its deficiencies. As he points out, some who would discount the allegorical approach to parables and assert the one-point approach as a safe-guard against it are themselves occasionally guilty of allegorizing. Further, in a well-reasoned section in chapter one, he points out that a parable need not be said to be an allegory merely on the ground that it makes more than one point: "I would therefore agree that the distinction between parable and allegory is a relative one, but the criterion of difference is not the quantitative one of how many points of comparison there are between the parable and its referent." (p. 15).

It is, in effect a middle course that Via offers between those who shy away at the least indication of allegory and those who would see allegorical points here, there and everywhere. The summary paragraph on page 17 concludes a section which is a useful contribution to the corrective which has been developing to the anti-allegory arguments of much recent scholarship: "This part of the discussion may be concluded very briefly by saying that while the meaning of Jesus' parables cannot be restricted to one central point of comparison, that does not mean that they are allegories. Thus the possession of only one central point is not one of the essential differentiae of a parable. We must seek a non-allegorical approach to the parables other than the one-point approach."

(b) Parable in relation to allegory

Connected with the point above is the view that the anti-allegorical approach has thrown the baby out with the bathwater. He would, as we have seen, prefer a middle course which does justice to the whole parable, a point of common ground with Matthew Black, as he observes: "Matthew

Black rejects the extravagant allegorical interpretations of the pre-critical period in biblical scholarship, but he also rejects as arbitrary the view that Jesus never taught in allegories." (p. 15).

Via, therefore, seeks a view of parable which allows the fullest possible weight to the whole story, allowing the various features to speak to the issue at stake. In this context, perhaps the closest that he comes to his own definition of the way a parable works is: "A parable as a whole dramatizes an ontological possibility - that which is there and possible in principle for man as man - and the two basic ontological (human) possibilities which the parables present are the gain and loss of existence, becoming authentic or inauthentic." (p. 41).

Against this view of parable, we may set his view of allegory and the way it works - and it is very similar to the view taken by other scholars: "Because an allegory is dependent on its meaning or referent, the situation to which it relates, the reader must be familiar with the latter in order to understand the story. Thus an allegory can only pass on hidden information to the initiated." (p. 7). Thus he asserts, as others do, that allegory is the sort of work for which it is necessary to have some key before the whole meaning can be unlocked.

(c) Mark 4 : 11-12

Consequent on the above thought, and its corollary that just as allegory reveals to the initiated it hides from the uninitiated, Via discusses Mark 4: 11-12. He claims that it is entirely understandable that Mark should have come to the conclusion that parables were used to conceal truth rather than reveal it, but that this was not how Jesus himself understood them: "In any case, Jesus could not have agreed with Mark's view of the purpose of parables, for it is clear that Jesus intended that the parables should have positive results ..." (p. 9). His discussion is no more far-reaching than this. To him it is self-evident that even though Mark understood parables in this way,

Jesus could not thus have used them.

(d) An anti-historical approach

"Contemporary interpretations in terms of our own reality must rest on the original meaning." (p. 28). Despite this and other assertions of a similar nature, what Via actually does with parables does not measure up to it. He may well say (p. 21) "While one would not want to argue for a methodology which completely ignored the *Sitz im Leben*, some modification of the present tendency seems called for." However, his own examinations of parables do in fact ignore their original settings. Even though he offers a section in each case entitled "Historico-literary criticism", all that he achieves in them is the summary of the views of other scholars about the texts of the parables and how they arose. He makes no attempt to argue that since a parable meant X in the context of Jesus' ministry, it will probably mean x in our own day. It seems that he has in fact over-corrected for what he calls the "severely historical approach". His is a severely un-historical approach.

Some points he makes in defence of the above statement are themselves open to question. The first point seems to be that since there is so much difficulty in getting at the original context and meaning of a parable, we should not be shy in attempting to find another way of deriving meaning from it. This, however, is to accept, as perhaps Via does, the a priori statement that any parable must have an intrinsic meaning, valid for all time for all the human race. On this argument, one which makes no attempt to assert the primary importance of interpretation rooted in the ministry of Jesus, any of us could write a parable and claim equal weight for it with any of the parables of Jesus. He readily asserts that: "... this does not mean that elements from Jesus' ministry or teaching may be imposed on the parable. We must rather begin with the parable itself." (p. 22), but he does not

give sufficient weight to the point that it is within the context of that ministry that the parable was given and in that context that it was, surely, intended to be understood.

The second point perhaps highlights the fact that this book is over-corrective. He makes the point that is at the heart of his work - that the parables "say something to and about man as man and not just to and about man in a particular historical situation." (p. 22). This is a point which is at the centre of all preaching and all writing on the Gospels, and one which those whom Via would label as "severely historical" tend to ignore. There are plenty of parables dealt with by twentieth century critics without any particular comments on the enduring meaning they carry for generations after that of Jesus. It is the over-correction of Via's work that he does exactly the opposite. He offers the contemporary meaning without rooting it in the meaning that he thinks was originally intended - and without this, the whole interpretation must be invalidated. Jesus' intentions are of paramount importance.

There are other flaws in this anti-historical approach. It is not possible, for example, to say of all the parables that they are non-referential in character. So many of the parables refer directly to the Kingdom of God, for example. If there is anything in Via's argument about the non-referential character of the parables, it should surely either be valid for them all or place upon him the burden of proving that there is an essential difference in character between those that fall within the scope of his work and those that do not. As it stands, Via merely selects some parables which illustrate his point without noticing whether or not the others, if considered, would undermine it.

### (3) Part Two - Interpretive (sic!)

There are difficulties in grouping parables as Via groups them. We should admit at the outset that the parables he deals with do have

the features he claims them to have and do seem capable of comparing with each other on the basis of such similarities. However, it is highly questionable whether this can be considered a valid approach to what the parables mean. It is an interesting and perhaps illuminating exercise to perform such literary acrobatics with them, but it can hardly be claimed to demonstrate any theological or exegetical point until it is linked with Jesus' own historical situation and at least demonstrated that what is claimed to be their meaning was what Jesus himself intended.

Having made this one prior point - a caveat against the whole section - we may now proceed to notice points of detail about his exegetical work:

(a) Several points arise from his section on the parable of the Talents. The paragraph at the foot of the page 118 contains an example of a rather woolly reasoning that occasionally in this book gives us cause to mistrust what the author is saying. He writes: "Therefore, he acted to preserve his safety. Or to be more precise, he acted as little as possible." Via is making the point that acting as little as possible is a more exact way of saying that the man acted to preserve his safety, which may be the case, but is not necessarily the case. The point of the paragraph is therefore put in jeopardy before it is made.

The same paragraph concludes: "In the fear of the one-talent man we see the anxiety of one who will not step into the unknown. He will not risk trying to fulfil his own possibilities; therefore, his existence is circumscribed in the narrowest kind of way. Action is paralyzed by anxiety, and the self of our protagonist is only a shadow of what it potentially is." It is an argument which sounds reasonable until we pause to reflect that unless it is anchored in some specific situation in the ministry of Jesus, the argument must be that in all situations anxious impotence is wrong.

The subsequent paragraph concludes: "Moreover, his verbal expression of fear and his refusal to risk action are an implicit accusation against life itself. They show that he viewed the universe as inimical to the human enterprise and saw self-defensive non-action, therefore, as the appropriate course to take in life." In fact they show nothing of the sort. Via is here guilty of the very error on which he faults other scholars - the error of not treating the parable as a self-contained entity. The parable in fact says nothing at all of the man's view of the universe. This is an outward reference which the author has imposed on the text. What the parable does say is that this is the way the man viewed this particular corner of the universe at this particular moment in history.

If we are to draw any more generally applicable (as Via would say, "existential") lesson from the parable, it would far better be expressed in other words from page 119: "We see the following connected movement: from the refusal to take a risk, through repressed guilt which is projected onto someone else, to the loss of the opportunity for meaningful existence."

In the summary paragraph on page 122, the pattern for this section of the book is set: "When we look at the world through the window of the understanding of existence in The Talents, we will have to say that the man who so understands himself that he seeks to avoid risky action rather than trusting God for the well-being of his existence, though he may live long chronologically, will have no present. His time will be evacuated of content." Certainly Via attempts to make use of the whole story and not just one point in it. Certainly he makes what he describes as an "existentialist" interpretation, drawing from the story some view of an approach to life with God. However, despite the historico-literary criticism on

pages 114-115, his own interpretation is in no way dependent on what Jesus originally meant when he delivered the parable.

(b) The interpretation of the parable of The Ten Maidens might well be said to be a one-point interpretation. What Via effectively says on pages 126-128 is that if you want to know the proper way to wait for the Kingdom (or any other coming event), look at the behaviour of these maidens.

Another point which he makes is open to question within his own arguments: "Thus, in view of the preparations which they had made, even if inadequate, and in view of the festive joy of the occasion, we find their abrupt exclusion shocking. This shock suggests the impingement of the divine dimension upon the everyday, the shattering effect of a crisis which breaks into our easy optimism and finds us without resources." (p. 126). It is a point which crops up elsewhere, for example in his dealing with the parable of the Wedding Garment: "The fact that the host rather called his servants and dramatically ordered them to bind the guest hand and foot and throw him out surprises us somewhat and again suggests the divine action upon human existence." (p. 132). This argument not only destroys the internal consistency of the story and its non-referential character, a point on which much of Via's thesis rests, but it is also a tendency to allegorize the points in question when there is no particular justification for so doing.

(c) In dealing with the parable of the Wedding Garment, Via seems to admit that not all parables can be subjected to the treatment that he proposes for them: "The Wedding Garment is the shortest of the parables that are amenable to the kind of methodology that I have tried to develop." (p. 130). In reference to this particular sentence we should note that an essential feature of his whole argument should be some justification of his selection of parables and a justification which takes account of Jesus' own intentions.

(d) In dealing with the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, Via says: "If we want to use the term 'point', it should be used to refer to the meaning of the total, organically unified structure of form-and-content." (p. 140). His talk of "organically unified structure" seems to presuppose that the parables are perfect within themselves. Thus, he continues, "If critical interpretation can, by the use of propositional language, express that total meaning in one sentence, that is no substitute for the parable itself." The parables' internal perfection seems to be one of Via's assumptions. Yet he never says anything about those unrealistic elements which occur in certain parables, except for those noticed in (b) above.

In the same section, Via falls victim to his own enthusiasm to make his point when he says: "The one who has really experienced forgiveness will forgive." (p. 143). Plainly this is not the experience described in the story.

Again, this parable seems to have been dealt with along a "one-point" line, the one point here being concerned with response to the reception of grace.

(e) Occasionally Via produces errors in the "historico-literary criticism" sections of his work, although generally speaking he merely gives pertinent details discussed already by other scholars. In dealing with the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, he says: "The idea of reversal of rank - the first last, and the last first - does not really get at the meaning of the parable. The connection was made by Matthew simply because the householder told his steward to pay first those who were hired last (20:8b). This latter point is not simply an unimportant detail from the standpoint of the parable as a story, however. The payment of those hired last had to take place in the presence of those who were hired first and who had worked all day in order that the full-day workers might see how much the late comers were

paid. This was necessary in order to elicit the dissatisfaction of those hired first and to set up, thereby, the dramatic conflict between those dissatisfied workers and the householder." (pp. 148-149). Against Via here we may note that if his conclusion about the reference of the saying on the first and the last is true, a far more natural position for it to be inserted would be after verse 8. Its present position indicates far more that Matthew was applying it to the apparent reversal of expectations on the part of the various workers.

In the same exegesis Via uses an idea on which we have commented in (b) above. "His striking action reaches a climax when he pays the last workers a full day's wage for one hour's work. This surprising element woven into a realistic story suggests to us again that the divine dimension may cross our everyday reality to produce a crisis of ultimate importance in the midst of the ordinary." (p. 154). It again is not clear why the striking and surprising suggests the divine.

(f) Via's analysis of the parable of the Unjust Steward begs a question he does not answer. In the literary existential analysis he makes an appeal for an understanding in terms of the picaresque. He does not however deal with the problem of how the original hearers would have understood the parable. Could it have been understood in terms of the picaresque by the hearers, particularly in view of the fact that it is so short and direct a story?

(g) Via is again over-zealous in his interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son. He says: "The Prodigal Son, by suggesting a radical change in the self-understanding of the prodigal, implies that something has come to him from a different dimension. His coming to himself suggests that natural man can be aware of guilt and of the need for the restoration of fellowship with God ..." (p. 173). Within the terms of the story itself this is not so. Via himself destroys the internal consistency of the parable by suggesting that the prodigal felt the need of reconciliation with God - this was not the case.

He sought only reconciliation with his father, or, perhaps, only board and lodging.

(4) Concluding Remarks

(a) Via says: "But the goal of historical and literary criticism is to be able to take any text on its own terms. In the case of the parables this goal is better served by recognizing their aesthetic nature than by first of all deriving their meaning from the historical context or by making them illustrations of ideas." (p. 24). Clearly this is the basis of much of what Via says. It is questionable whether he ever makes a sufficient case for this point.

(b) Via's whole approach seems to be (perhaps has to be) much less scientific than those of his academic opponents. Although he does not use the word, it is an attempt at a more artistic approach than a scientific one. Even so, we might expect more attention to be paid to the scientific study of their setting in Jesus' situation and to the fact that the parables were each a one-off job, probably only aimed at producing one reaction to one point at one moment in history.

(c) It may be that the many words here written only amount to a small amount of material. We may note not only that Via makes his points by reference to a very small and mysteriously selected body of parables, but also that all he asserts in his title is that he is dealing with their literary and existential dimension. He does not assert that we should really be interpreting the parables consistently along these lines.

(d) Via himself admits one of the basic flaws in his whole thesis: "Whether the existential approach is justified will finally depend on the exegetical fruits which it yields, and here we are involved in the circular thinking that always attends the attempt to clarify presuppositions. Asking the existential question enables one to see certain things in the parables, and what is seen will have to be the criteria of whether this is the right question." (p. 43). In a sense

his exegetical work depends on the Methodological section which precedes it and vice versa.

(e) We must notice once more the very important point that what Via seems to be doing is talking about parables rather than about the parables of Jesus. His interpretative work is not sufficiently earthed in the life of Jesus, who delivered the parables.

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The third type of interpretative work on which we should comment in this chapter might be called the Christological approach. Although it is not part of this study to examine American work not distributed in this country we must notice in passing that the work of C.W.F. Smith<sup>12</sup> is of this type. In his preface he says "It is my contention that the clue to the parables can be found only in the dynamic activity of Jesus and against the background of the situation in which he found himself. They then become guides to his teaching and help us to discern what manner of man he was." (p. 11). It is discerning what manner of man he was that Smith sees as one of the fundamental aspects of interpreting the parables, and he places considerable importance on the relationship between the parables and the death of Jesus. As he says, "Jesus used parables and Jesus was put to death. The two facts are related." (p. 17). Evidence of Smith's work in this field is available in English work. His book is mentioned by A.M. Hunter, who says: "As Smith shows, in his parables and especially those he uttered on the way to make his final challenge in Jerusalem, we see Jesus as the central figure, and precipitant of the great crisis which culminated in the cross and all that followed it, ..." <sup>13</sup>

In this country there was expression of the need for a Christological approach to the parables in an article by R.S. Wallace: "An attempt should be made as consistently as possible to interpret the parables Christologically. When Jesus spoke in parables He sought to reveal to His hearers the significance of His own presence in their midst." <sup>14</sup>

The Christological overtones of the parables have not, however, been developed to anything like the extent of the other approaches to the parables. There is little worthy of detailed comment save an article by J.J. Vincent.<sup>15</sup>

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Various points of detail arise:

(1) Opening paragraph

"Investigations into the theological meaning of the parables seem to have reached something of a stalemate" (p. 79). This stalemate is, he says, partly attributable to the confusion over the value of background study revolving around the words mashal and mathla. But it is far more attributable to what Vincent calls three "highly questionable assumptions" (p. 79). They are

- (a) that a parable must be simple
- (b) that a parable cannot be an allegory
- (c) that a parable must clarify rather than mystify.

Just how far Vincent would want to question these assumptions is never made clear because although he touches on these points elsewhere in the paper, he does not deal with them at length and give all the evidence which we must assume he could offer if pressed to do so.

We do well to notice from the start, however, the direction of Vincent's thrust, and especially that he is in no doubt that something of modern parable criticism is to be questioned. Hence the hard-hitting opening paragraph.

(2) Jeremias

In the initial stages of his paper Vincent attacks Jeremias for his view that the teaching of Jesus must have been simple and that the early Church embroidered upon it. He says, of the early Church: "that they should deliberately make what was already perplexing enough a matter more difficult is hard to believe" (p. 79). His criticism of Jeremias is a perverse one. He shows his hand in the use of the

word "deliberately" in the quotation above. It is hard to believe that the Church would deliberately alter the tradition to suit itself (although stranger things than that have happened), but nobody, least of all Jeremias, wishes to suggest such culpable behaviour. What biblical critics attempt to uncover is the way the early Church has veiled the original words of Jesus in an attempt merely to make sense of what were apparently very mystifying words.

### (3) Dodd

Having attacked Jeremias, Vincent turns his weapons on Dodd, whom he attacks for asserting the realism of the parable stories. He says: "Unfortunately this a priori preference tends to preclude the 'element of surprise' which J.A. Findlay regards as 'the essence of the parable'" (p. 80). Again the criticism is perverse because it deliberately regards the Dodd view and the Findlay view (as here represented) as mutually exclusive. To counter it we might say that it is precisely because of the realism of the parable stories that the element of surprise (which arises often as a case of hyperbole) has its effect.

In this context, however, Vincent does make a worthwhile point: "It should never be forgotten that the Semitic mind took great pleasure in drama and exaggeration in the presentation of a truth ... Such use of hyperbole, again, should make us suspicious of attempts to make the parables too simple." (pp. 80-81). The latter point here, however, could do with expansion in view of the fact that it is not clear how hyperbole should warn us off the simplicity of the parables.

### (4) Allegory

"To deny the possibility of allegory is to come to the parables with a prejudiced view" (p. 81). Vincent thus attempts to assert the idea that in modern times has been gaining momentum - that allegory could be a feature of Jesus' parables. Here he makes the radical and reasonable point that "Some kind of allegory is scarcely avoidable in

any kind of comparison" (p. 81). He also comments on the way the use of certain of Jesus' best known figures would have at least worked in an allegorical fashion in the minds of his hearers. He comments on "... the predisposition of the Semitic mind to make identifications, and then to stick to them" (p. 82).

Thus, with Vincent, allegory does not suffer immediate rejection. He sees that there is a potential baby and bathwater danger in the attempts to exorcise the allegorical demon: "The real danger in the hunt-the-allegory type of parable interpretation is that we shall miss the basic purpose of the parables in the activity of our Lord". (p. 82).

#### (5) The Purpose of the Parables

According to Vincent the purpose of the parables is "to describe the activity of God in Jesus" (p. 82). The method by which any self-revelation was to be accomplished on the part of Jesus had to be carefully chosen. He could, says Vincent, hardly have made any blatant declarations about himself. Hence the parables, he says, are a language which Jesus used to deepen the faith of insiders and challenge to decision those who were outside. Mark 4:10-12, he says, implies that parables both hide and reveal, and the fact that they do so underlines the fact that they were a very likely language for Jesus to have used in his situation. However, whether or not Jesus' parables actually hide or reveal the truth, the question remains - was it Jesus' intention to hide or to reveal?

#### (6) Jesus as "Son" in the parables

The chief example in the paper and the test case from which Vincent works is the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. In order to establish his case that the "Son" in the parable refers directly to Jesus, Vincent does his best to destroy the arguments of the anti-allegorizers, and he again chooses Jeremias to criticize. According to Vincent, not only has Jeremias "proposed no clear reason why Jesus should have told such a parable" (p. 85), but he also does not avoid the allegorization he

seeks to root out. "If 'the others' are 'the poor' and the tenants are the leaders of the people, why should not the servants be the prophets and the son Jesus?" (p. 85). Good point.

On the positive side of his argument we may also notice the following good and valid points: "To argue that the story is allegorical does not imply that every aspect of it carries double meaning" (p. 86), "Those who heard would readily have understood the killing of the son: Jesus' opponents already planned it; his disciples had been long prepared for it" (p. 87), "As a parable of self-revelation, the story of the servants and the son is particularly fruitful. Jesus as son repeats in His own body the fate of the prophets, the true Israel of the past. The Jews had always spurned God's messengers ... Now, they do it to Him" (p. 87).

It is true that this parable is particularly fruitful for the sort of exegesis which Vincent is attempting. Yet, we must notice that all his subsequent examples depend upon the validity of this example for their support. In all other cases (whether in this section, where there is only one further example, or in the other sections on Jesus as Saviour and Servant and on the Lord's Sudden Appearing) he gives very few exegetical comments. An agreement with his viewpoint is further complicated by the fact that at no point does he attempt detailed work on the available texts of the parables in order to discover whether the points on which he relies for his arguments are based on the most reliable evidence of what Jesus said.

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We may conclude that this paper is only a slight contribution to a continuing debate. As a paper for a Congress it would have opened up considerable debate and Vincent would have been compelled to produce answers to the many points which here are left unjustified and unfinished. As a written contribution to an area of parable study, it carries less weight. Be that as it may, no matter how lacking the paper may be in

arguing about particular parables, it makes some valuable points of a more general nature concerning the whole field of parable criticism.

To hail either the existentialist or the christological approach to the parables as the emphasis which will succeed the eschatological approach is rather an attempt to jump on the current band-wagon than a well-calculated thrust at the truth. Neither can compare with the eschatological approaches in stature and accuracy. The existentialist approach falls down, as we have seen, by uprooting the parables from their setting, and the Christological approach can only make limited sense of a small number of parables unless it is as broad-based as Smith's approach, which fails ultimately to make any clear comment beyond the fact that the parables were so forceful a way of speaking and so well understood by their hearers as to lead almost inevitably to the crucifixion of Jesus. Neither approach pursues with the same relentlessness as the eschatological approach the truth of what the parables meant to Jesus and his hearers.

Having reviewed the main areas of parable literature in English since Jülicher, we must include chapters collating material found in the various works under review relating to certain specific areas. There are certain topics which parable scholars should not avoid and others which are very commonly discussed, and the next chapters will deal with the most important of them.

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CHAPTER FIVE  
THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES - MARK 4:10-12

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"Any attempt to understand Jesus' use of parable must take account of the saying attributed to him in Mark 4:10-12".<sup>1</sup> With that statement most would agree, although it is surprising that some take remarkably little notice of the problem - notably Linnemann (as we noticed in the last chapter) and Jones (who despite his survey of attempted solutions does not in fact acknowledge that the problem is a severe one - see below).

In this chapter we shall pursue the course that most follow and concentrate on the Marcan version of the saying in question, bringing in information relevant to its parallels whenever necessary. The words "hardening theory" will be used to describe that view of the purpose of the parables which understands them as spoken to conceal the truth. This we do against those who would use the term "Marcan theory" since, as we shall see later, these may not be one and the same.

This chapter will look at the problem first of all from two distinct angles, both surveying the field in a particular way. It will summarize briefly the views of those who have concerned themselves with these verses. Then it will summarize, using material brought to light in the first survey, the main points in the arguments for and against the hardening theory.

The following, then, is a résumé of the main points put forward by those scholars who have examined these verses. It omits those contributions which entirely overlap these (e.g. Hunter's) and also omits those who treat the verses as self-evidently mistaken (e.g. Via's). In the absence of other criteria for their assembly, they are presented in chronological order:

- (1) L.E. Browne<sup>2</sup>

Browne starts by observing the distinction to be drawn between

two areas of meaning of the word  $\gamma\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ . Whereas it may, he says, carry the sense of "do", Browne argues that it may also carry the sense of "becoming" or at least of "Coming to pass". He further argues that there is a distinction to be drawn in the frequent New Testament uses of  $\gamma\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$  between its uses with  $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  and with  $\xi\check{\nu}$ . He concludes that the passage means that for those without "they hear only the story and think nothing of the eternal reality which the story was meant to make clear."

But he goes on to say that this still does not acquit Mark of the charge of maintaining a "blinding hypothesis". Even with his view of the translation of the words used, Mark is still open, he says, to the charge of saying that it was part of God's purpose that some should not be able to understand.

In dealing with the word  $\xi\check{\nu}$  Browne observes that it is used to imply purpose in classical Greek but that in the New Testament its force is weakened and that some would even allow it on occasion a purely ecbatic meaning. For those who do not wish to maintain such a meaning in this case, Browne outlines an alternative which is based on the Matthean substitution of  $\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$  for  $\xi\check{\nu}$ . He concludes "These much debated verses, then, mean just this: that to those who are interested is given the mystery of the Kingdom but the uninterested cannot get beyond the picture, and they have thus condemned themselves, as the prophet had foreseen, to the darkness of ignorance."

(2) J.W. Hunkin<sup>3</sup>

In this article Hunkin comments on the way Jülicher deals with these verses. To Jülicher they are a later Christian addition and must be rejected. But Hunkin does not consider such drastic measures necessary. Hunkin takes the view that the passage may be paraphrased thus - "To you it has been granted by God to know the secret of God's Kingdom (and you shall have it explained to you if need be line by line). But (if you do not understand this simple parable, it is

certain those outside this little company do not understand either this or any other of my parables, and) to those outside, the whole thing comes to be parabolic (i.e. cryptic), in order that - as Isaiah puts it - seeing they may not see ...." (p. 374).

(3) J.M. Creed<sup>4</sup>

Creed notices first that Luke softens the Marcan passage on the purpose of the parables, chiefly by making it refer specifically to the particular parable in question at the time. However the idea of the parable being a riddle to those who hadn't the power to understand is, he says, retained.

The only other valuable point he notices is that to retain these verses in their context in Mark it is necessary to understand παραβολή in two different ways, at Mark 4:11 and 4:33.

(4) R. Bultmann<sup>5</sup>

Bultmann regards verses 10-12 as "quite secondary" (p. 199). This view he repeats: "In my view Mark 4:10-12 is an editorial formulation of Mark concealing the transition which in Mark's source had led on from the similitude of the Sower to its interpretation" (p. 325). Bultmann goes on to observe that the answer to the question of verse 10 is apparently given twice and that probably the original question was something like Luke 8:9 rather than this Marcan version, a question, that is, concerning the particular parable being dealt with.

Beyond this Bultmann does not comment.

(5) A.T. Cadoux<sup>6</sup>

"We cannot think that Jesus spoke in parables in order to obviate the possibility of his hearers' understanding and repentance."<sup>7</sup> Cadoux's view of 1925 is confirmed in the opening pages of his book in 1931 where he argues that the evangelist has here done what is common to all synoptic evangelists and has arranged his material topically rather than historically. His conclusion is therefore that the

"strange meaning given to Mark 4:11,12 by its present setting comes from the evangelist rather than from Jesus. We cannot think that Jesus spoke except to be understood" (p. 16).

Cadoux backs up this conclusion by observing that certain other sayings give the lie to the hardening theory - e.g. Mark 4:9, 7:14, Matthew 18:12, Luke 6:47, Mark 4:30.

The conclusion is well supported by Cadoux's article, in which he argues very forcibly that Jesus did not interpret his own parables, concluding "All considerations make it unlikely that Jesus had to add explanations to his parables. We find that in almost every case the recorded explanations entirely ignore the main point of the story and in some cases they contradict the story .... And we find that to discard these interpretations is to release the high native suggestiveness of the parables, so that we are much richer for the loss of them." (p. 455). If his argument is right, we may conclude that Jesus only told his parables on the assumption that their meaning would be abundantly clear. Were it not so, they would certainly require some explanation to those for whom he intended them.

(6) T.W. Manson<sup>8</sup>

In his discussion (pp. 75 ff), Manson sees the word  $\xi\upsilon\lambda$  as the stumblingblock. He sets off by saying "As the text stands it can only mean that the object, or at any rate the result, of parabolic teaching is to prevent insight, understanding, repentance and forgiveness. On any interpretation of parable this is simply absurd."

Manson's solution depends upon his view, the merits of which we need not debate here, that the parable of the Sower is "a parable about parabolic teaching" (p. 76). This being so, he says, it is easy to see why this saying was interpolated here. The point of sowing is not to prevent growth but to see if anything will grow. Thus the saying speaks of the productive and the unproductive types described in the parable itself.

The second point Manson makes is dependent upon a linguistic argument in which he shows that the word  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  in the Marcan version which we have rests on a misunderstanding of the Aramaic original. His resultant translation of the passage is as follows; "To you is given the secret of the Kingdom of God; but all things come in parables to those outside who

See indeed but do not know

And hear indeed but do not understand

Lest they should repent and receive forgiveness." and he continues to clarify yet further by observing that the last words would seem to mean "For if they did, they would repent and receive forgiveness."

Manson further notes that if the purpose of the quotation were in fact to support the "hardening" theory, it is odd that Mark has given us a version of the Isaiah passage which omits the very words which would best support such an argument.

(7) C.H. Dodd<sup>9</sup>

That this particular passage is responsible for a great deal of the mistaken allegorical approach to the parables is the starting point of C.H. Dodd's comments upon it. He connects it with the following verses containing the explanation of the parable of the Sower, and observes that the whole passage is distinctly unlike other synoptic material in vocabulary. He points to seven words which are particularly noticeable here ( $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ ,  $\acute{\omicron}\iota$   $\xi\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega$ ,  $\pi\rho\omicron\sigma\kappa\alpha\iota\rho\omicron\varsigma$  etc... ) and observes that they are characteristic of Paul. Two of the words are in the two verses in question.

Dodd finds the fact that this is the primitive view of the parables entirely understandable: "This is surely connected with the doctrine of the primitive Church, accepted with modifications by Paul, that the Jewish people to whom Jesus came were by divine providence blinded to the significance of his coming, in order that the mysterious purpose of

God might be fulfilled through their rejection of the Messiah." (p.15).

But Dodd does not therefore swerve from his conclusion, basic as it is to his work - "that he desired not to be understood by the people in general, and therefore clothed his teaching in unintelligible forms, cannot be made credible on any reasonable reading of the Gospels" (p. 15).

(8) J. Jeremias<sup>10</sup>

The discussion of this passage in Jeremias's work starts by establishing the composite nature of the whole passage 4:1-34. He observes the inconsistencies in location and audience and notices the question about the purpose of the parables receives a double answer. He argues that since verse 10 does not ask why he usually spoke in parables, and that since the question probably originated in connection with the meaning of the parable of the Sower, verses 11 and 12 are an "insertion into an older context" (p. 14). He supports this conclusion by pointing out that it is introduced by the typical Marcan link phrase *καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς* . His contention is that Mark connected this saying with this context purely because of the link-word *παραβολή* .

He does, however, assert that vv. 11f is a "very early logion". He produces very detailed linguistic support for the authenticity of the saying, and it is not therefore possible to dismiss the hardening theory of the purpose of the parables merely by showing that these verses do not belong in this context. If they are a reliable comment on the purpose of Jesus' teaching, in whatever form, then they must perforce speak of parables as well.

Here Jeremias does not attempt to make sense of the saying by substituting *ὅτι* for *ὅτι* , but rather proceeds as follows. By using two linguistic points (p. 16) he shows how Jesus observes that the mysteries of the Kingdom are revealed to those within, but to those outside they remain obscure. He then observes that the words

dependent on *ἕνα* should be regarded as a free quotation from Isaiah and therefore seen as the purpose of God rather than the purpose of Jesus. He then goes on to argue that the word *μήποτε* must here be interpreted "unless".

The resultant translation reads "To you has God given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but to those who are without everything is obscure, in order that they (as it is written) may 'see and yet not see, may hear and yet not understand, unless they turn and God will forgive them'".

Jeremias thus argues that the saying in question is applicable to the preaching of Jesus in general and not to the parables in particular. He does not comment on the degree to which this comment on the preaching does affect the parables, as surely it must.

(9) V. Taylor<sup>11</sup>

Verses 10-12 are, according to Taylor, a Marcan construction. He sees signs of compilation in *ἄν τὸς ἰωῆεκα* and *καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς*. He argues that Mark, misled by the word *παρὰβολή*, inserted this passage into its present context. Taylor acknowledges that the many linguistic arguments against maintaining the present meaning of the verses are all possible, but declares that "it may be doubted if they affect Mark's meaning." He asserts, with Black, that "Nothing is more certain than that Mark wrote and intended *ἕνα* ..... *μήποτε*". (p. 257).

As to the origin of the saying, Taylor concludes "Mark has given an unauthentic version of a genuine saying" (p. 257) and goes on to comment that the original saying probably had nothing to do with parables.

(10) C.E.B. Cranfield<sup>12</sup>

In his commentary on Mark's Gospel, Cranfield is in no doubt that verses 1-34 of Mark 4 make up a composite section of the Gospel.

In dealing with this particular passage (vv. 11-12) he finds it best to resist the temptation to soften the εἰς -clause, "For even if we were to get rid of the final clause, we should still be up against the δεδοτα of v.11, which implies a corresponding οὐ δεδοτα (in Matthew 13:11 it is explicit)." (p. 156). In common with other New Testament thinking on this subject, says Cranfield, the fact that the secret of the Kingdom of God remains hidden to many is here shown to be within the purposes of God.

He goes on to say that although this passage does not in its original context refer directly to the parables, it does speak of the fact that the teaching was veiled in some way so that the revelation of God to mankind might not be such as to undermine our freedom to respond or not respond. Thus, although the saying does not directly refer to the parables, they are included in its scope.

This largely follows the line of his article in the Scottish Journal of Theology in 1952. In both works he finds no reason to deny the authenticity of the saying and finds it completely harmonious with his view that the Messianic secret is, properly understood, within the purposes of God and not something which was later read back into history.

(11) G.V. Jones<sup>13</sup>

The burden of Jones's appended note on this passage concerns other people's views of it. After listing some of the chief arguments, however, he makes the following observations:

(a) Too much has been made of it - the problems surrounding the passage make it impossible to build a theory of parables on it and Matthew alone realized the problem and deliberately changed εἰς to εἰς .

(b) One way of explaining the problem away might be (although Jones himself discounts it) to say that the parable of the Sower is of a special type dealing with a "secret", i.e. with an esoteric truth.

(c) It might be contended that some of the Kingdom parables were very far from self-explanatory.

(d) If (c) were so, this argument could not therefore apply to the rest of the parables which could not be described as Kingdom parables.

Jones considers at the end of his note that the passage should not be taken too seriously, but he does so without dealing adequately with those points which scholars have raised about it.

Having briefly summarized the points raised by individual scholars we shall now extract from their work the main points for and against the hardening theory of parables. It would be wise at the outset to say that there is very little to say in support of the hardening theory. The best argued support for some sort of veiledness in the process of divine self-revelation is provided by C.E.B. Cranfield in the article and commentary quoted above. He argues that although the saying in question was not originally in this context, it substantially speaks the truth about the way Jesus revealed himself to those who heard him. Consequently it must in part, at least, refer to the parables themselves.

However, almost all scholars would prefer to take the line that the hardening theory is wrong, but without denying a certain veiledness to the way the parables work. As A.T. Cadoux<sup>14</sup> says, "It is true that a parable often hides the truth until it is too late for the hearer to guard himself against it: it tells men in a story what they will not listen to in plain language, and therefore the incidence must not be clear until the end of the story is reached. But this is for the sake of getting the truth home to the hearer". There is, therefore, a certain veiled quality about the teaching in parables, but only to serve the opposite purpose to that which Mark apparently asserts.

The overwhelming weight of opinion is against the hardening theory, as is evidenced by the following points:

(1) There is what might be called the common sense argument. It is almost impossible to conceive of Jesus deliberately trying to confuse people, for it would be confusion, not merely lack of information, that would result from such a purpose. If Jesus meant to withhold information there was no point in saying anything, so if there is anything in the hardening theory at all we must conclude that he deliberately set out to confuse people. As Cadoux says "We cannot think that Jesus spoke except to be understood".<sup>15</sup> Manson is equally strong in his conviction - "If parables had this object or result, that in itself would be the strongest possible argument against making use of them, and would make it impossible to imagine why Jesus should have employed such a way of delivering his teaching."<sup>16</sup>

(2) The logical inconsistency in the hardening theory, hinted at in (1) above is spelt out by A.T. Cadoux: "... if Jesus really had to explain his parables to the Twelve, he must have known that they were unintelligible to the crowd; and if, as we are told (Mark 4:10, 34), his explanations were all private, it implies that he did not want the crowd to understand. And such a conclusion disproves its premises."<sup>17</sup>

(3) As Cadoux again points out<sup>18</sup> numerous other Gospel passages indicate the very opposite of the hardening theory, and some occur in Mark's Gospel (e.g. 4:9, 7:14, 4:30), perhaps indicating that although Mark felt it important to pursue his Messianic secret idea and eliminate from this parable passage all possibility that Jesus meant to be understood, he was not convinced about the idea himself, not convinced enough, that is, to be thoroughly consistent throughout his Gospel.

(4) Motivated by these considerations scholars have produced several detailed arguments about what should be done with these verses. Excision on the grounds that the vocabulary is untypical of the Gospel as a whole is the argument of C.H. Dodd (see summary above).

(5) It is also argued by Dodd that this sort of theory is what

might be expected in view of the primitive church's view of predestination, particularly in relation to the blinding of the Jewish people to the significance of Jesus' coming.

(6) A further argument from Dodd's work is summed up in his own words - "The probability is that the parables could have been taken for allegorical mystifications only in a non-Jewish environment. Among Jewish teachers the parable was a common and well understood method of illustration ..." (p. 16).

(7) Two opposing views are held as to the authenticity of the verses in question. There are those (e.g. Bultmann) who regard them as secondary, and there are those (e.g. Jeremias) who argue strongly for their authenticity yet at the same time denying them their present context. Both sides of this particular debate conclude that the hardening theory of parables is untenable.

(8) The reinterpretation of the verse involves certain linguistic arguments revolving around two words -  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  and  $\mu\eta\pi\omicron\tau\epsilon$ . Jeremias goes for the latter and makes sense of the verses by understanding as "unless".

(9) Various approaches have been made to the re-interpretation of the way the word  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  works:

(a) Manson argues that a mistake in rendering the Aramaic into Greek has resulted in the use of the word  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  instead of  $\omicron\acute{\iota}$ .

(b) A.H. McNeile<sup>19</sup> says that  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  may be "virtually equivalent to  $\omega\sigma\tau\epsilon$  ; in accordance with a well known Hebraic idiom, the result is ironically described as a purpose".

(c) Hunkin<sup>20</sup> has suggested that the  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  of this passage has in it the suggestion of  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  πληρωθῆναι a point which is supported by McNeile in his commentary.

Whichever of these ideas we prefer, it is evident that although scholars generally recognize that a purposive  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  is what Mark

intended it cannot have been what Jesus intended if, indeed, this passage is to be regarded as authentic.

(10) Finally we must note that these verses may easily be dislodged from their present context on account of the numerous arguments which support the idea that this whole section of Mark's Gospel is a composite one. There seems to be confusion over what took place in public and what in private, whether the words were delivered continuously from the boat on the lake or not, why there are apparently two separate answers to the question asked of Jesus, and so on. There seems to be no doubt in anyone's mind that the whole section has been put together from other sources by Mark.

It seems plain from all our observations that we must reject any theory of the purpose of the parables which sees in them a device for hiding the truth, whether from anyone or only from selected people. There is no doubt that twentieth century scholarship dismisses the "hardening" theory.

It is, however, to the detriment of some people's work on parables that they have designated this theory the "Marcan" theory. It is, we admit, easy to read the verses in question here and conclude that Mark himself adopted a hardening theory. However, this view may only be held if we isolate verses 10-12 and consider them apart from the context into which Mark has placed them.

The comments above readily illustrate that there is general agreement that Mark's fourth chapter is a body of teaching assembled by Mark. It would seem, therefore, logical to expect of Mark some consistency within the chapter if he really wanted to expound a hardening theory of parables. However, he seems to indicate that hiding things is not the purpose of Jesus. The images of 4:21f (again dependent upon  $\cup \vee \lambda$  constructions) force us to doubt the views of those who would attribute to Mark such a theory.

One further point needs consideration. Did Jesus interpret his own parables? The powerful arguments which critics (e.g. Dodd) produce against the interpretation provided in the Gospels of the Parable of the Sower immediately make us suspicious of other Gospel interpretations. Cadoux<sup>10</sup> especially strong in this field and is firmly convinced that Jesus did not interpret his parables.<sup>21</sup> This conclusion, generally supported by critics, is important to the argument over Mark 4:10-12 because if Jesus could be shown to have interpreted his parables regularly there might be some cause to argue that he told them to veil the truth at least from some of the people who heard them.

It is, however, generally accepted that Jesus used his parables not only to convey the truth to his hearers but to convey it so forcefully as to make his hearers defenceless against the truth they enshrined.

APPENDIXIs it necessary to define the word "Parable"?

As is evident from several of the reviews contained in previous chapters, most scholars find it necessary to say at least something about the word "parable" itself. Some deal in great detail with its Old Testament and Septuagint antecedents before coming to its meaning in the New Testament. B.T.D. Smith and W.O.E. Oesterley, for example, carefully examine the uses of the word mashal and observe how the word παραβολή is also employed for what the Hebrew terms hidah, or riddle. Most come to the conclusion that, as Jülicher, in *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, puts it, "Mashal is an elastic word, and will not bear a single rendering".

Others concentrate more on the New Testament uses of the word παραβολή, dividing them somewhat as Hauck does in Kittel's "Theological word book of the bible", where he reduces the New Testament uses of the word to

- (a) a short saying which is combined with a comparison or figure of speech
- (b) a proverbial saying
- (c) a parable

Some attempt to reach for definitions by distinguishing between similitudes, parables, allegories, illustrations and similar terms. Thus, L.E. Browne reserves the word "parable" for any parable of Jesus, and employs the word "similitude" for a developed simile and the word "allegory" for a developed metaphor.<sup>22</sup> B.T.D. Smith, on the other hand, uses the word "similitude" for familiar scenes and relationships, painted in some detail to illustrate a point (typified by the introduction "What man of you ...?"), the word "parable" for illustrations in narrative form, happening only once (typified by the introduction "A certain man ..."), and then has to separate off (as Jülicher does) the

so-called Lucan "example-stories", as fitting neither category.<sup>23</sup>

These examples are sufficient to show the lack of agreed definitions in this field and a study of all the attempted definitions only serves to produce the conclusion that agreed definitions are unlikely to be established.

Although Linnemann disagreed with him over this Jeremias described this whole area of study as a "fruitless labour", a conclusion with which we may well agree.

Instead of searching vainly for answers in this field, we should rather grasp that the essential point is contained in the purpose of the parables. To define what a parable is may be of some slight interest to him who wishes to achieve a tidy definition to his area of study, but it is of little further value. We may readily acknowledge that there are certain items in the Gospels which are called parables and others which, although not so called, have a similar way of communicating. That it is the purpose of these items to communicate truth rather than to conceal it in the manner of riddles has already been argued many times. That this is achieved by the means of some form of metaphorical language (whatever subdivisions of language may appeal to individuals) is also readily acceptable. It is, following those points, much more acceptable to understand the parable in terms such as those used by I.T. Ramsey - "What then makes a story a parable? A story becomes a parable when it elaborates a pattern by which the story-teller intends to generate a cosmic disclosure."<sup>24</sup>

It is matter of little consequence whether we define a parable as working in such and such a way or not. What matters is that if anyone does define the parables thus he should in his own work remain within the bounds he sets himself, and where critics have not done so, the reviews in previous chapters point this out. The only possible

point at which it could become a serious issue to define the word "parable" is that point at which it is found necessary to assert that the parables as a clearly defined body of teaching have a meaning quite separate from the rest of Jesus' teaching. Once it can be demonstrated that parables have content that is common to them and to nothing else, then it becomes necessary to begin to separate them off in terms of their form, and a definition must then be proposed.

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CHAPTER SIX  
PARABLE AND ALLEGORY

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When twentieth century critics have wished to amuse their readers and pour scorn on the allegorizing approach to parable interpretation, all they have had to do is to quote in detail some early exegesis of a parable. Thus, both C.H. Dodd<sup>1</sup> and Matthew Black<sup>2</sup> quote the classic example of Augustine's exposition of the parable of the Good Samaritan. More recently Harald Riesenfeld has used Tertullian's view of the parable of the Prodigal Son,<sup>3</sup> and M.F. Wiles has written a good examination of the (understandable) way in which such exegesis came to be the norm in the primitive Church.<sup>4</sup>

Within the context of this century's work on parables, the error of such attempts at exegesis is self-evident. The devastating effect of Jülicher's work in this field has left us still with an almost instinctive reaction against allegorization of any sort. He not only dismissed the allegorical approach to interpretation, but denied that there were any authentic allegories in the Gospels and even that any of the authentic parables showed (in their original form) any allegorical traits.

What we have used as the starting point of this survey<sup>5</sup> is, though not chronologically, effectively a pre-Jülicher view, taking no notice of the anti-allegorizing work of Jülicher.

However, we may take it as a general rule that since his time the commentators have rejected the approach of total allegorization, and the major critics have pursued a ruthless allegorical witch-hunt. That this is so is already apparent in the various reviews incorporated in previous chapters. We may merely summarize that there has been an overpowering atmosphere which can be summed up in words from the middle of this century's discussion, words of J.F. McFadyen: "...what we are

arguing against is the idea that allegory provides the key to the interpretation of the parables. This idea is destructive of any possibility of finding their real meaning."<sup>6</sup> The line seems rigidly drawn.

What we must notice, however, and what we must examine in more detail in this chapter, is that alongside the commentaries which have thrown out the allegorical baby with the allegorizing bath water there has arisen, perhaps as a result of Jülicher's over-correction of past errors, a new facet of the debate, one which tries to maintain a more balanced approach to allegory.

The point that the line between parable and allegory is not necessarily as clear as Jülicher would wish to maintain was made as early as 1913, when L.E. Browne said: "Jülicher makes a strange assumption, that while allegory needs an explanation, similitude needs none".<sup>7</sup> Browne himself argues that all figurative language needs at least some clue to its understanding and that the line which Jülicher wanted to draw between the two will not so readily be drawn as he thought.

Another early rebel against Jülicher was A.H. McNeile, who says: "the tendency to allegorize every detail often led to strained, and even grotesque, methods of interpretation.... The best modern exegesis avoids it. But the opposite extreme must also be guarded against, i.e. the refusal to admit that more than a single point can be illustrated in a parable ... The principle object in the foreground of a picture is not the only object visible ... Parables differ widely in their nature, and will not come under a single rule."<sup>8</sup>

Similar hints are to be found in Vincent Taylor's comments on the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: "There is no doubt that in part the parable is allegorical... The owner is God, the son is Jesus, the vineyard is Israel, the husbandmen are the Jewish leaders or possibly the people as a whole, and the slaves are apparently the Old Testament

prophets..."<sup>9</sup>

Again, Taylor is even more explicit: "Is it likely that Jesus, to whom the Old Testament background indicated above was familiar, would use the metaphor of the marriage feast, and apply to himself the name 'bridegroom', in a purely general sense? The shade of Jülicher must not affright us from admitting allegory when we see it."<sup>10</sup>

Hints of a similar unease have appeared in other places, chiefly in more recent years. Whereas Dodd and Jeremias follow the line of Jülicher, Linnemann allows a chink in the armour - "The only matter for argument now is whether Jesus also composed one or two allegories alongside the similitudes and parables"<sup>11</sup>.

W.O.E. Oesterley says: "even a parable of the simplest type may contain allegorical or metaphorical elements".<sup>12</sup>

G.E. Ladd says: "Must we assume, with Jeremias, that all allegorization is due to the early church and not to Jesus? Why could not Jesus have combined parables with some allegorical detail?"<sup>13</sup>

Harald Riesenfeld says: "... it may be said that Jülicher's attitude seems somewhat exaggerated"<sup>14</sup> and "... various allegorical features are found in the text of the parables as they stand in our Gospels",<sup>15</sup> and goes on to observe the possibilities for spotting deliberate reference to areas of common experience in the time of Jesus - such as, for example, the possibility that on hearing the parable of the Lost Sheep the hearers may well have mentally conjured up various Old Testament images of shepherds (Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34 e.g.). He concludes "In the actual choice of motif lie allusions and clearly conscious associations which inevitably bring into the pictures and comparisons used metaphorical and allegorical features".<sup>16</sup> We begin now to come onto the firmer territory that such criticism is nowadays treading.

G.V. Jones has on various occasions through his book attempted to

restore some balance to the situation. Here we may quote as an example words from the last section of the book - "... the necessity for some kind and degree of allegorical interpretation of some parables should be conceded, for without it the potential richness of the meaning of parables is in danger of being forfeited."<sup>17</sup>

We should notice also that those who wish to attempt some sort of Christological view of the parables are in need of restoring the lost prestige of the allegory, for without it their arguments are lost. Thus, as we might expect, Vincent says: "To deny the possibility of allegory is to come to the parables with a prejudiced view".<sup>18</sup>

C.F.D. Moule also argues the point: "... criticism ceases to be scientific if (on the basis of examples he produces) it jumps to the conclusion that no allegory can have been dominical",<sup>19</sup> and later he says of the parable of the Sower: "... this particular parable chances to be an unforced allegory: there are good, natural analogies in its details as well as in its broad effect. Is that unthinkable for the original teaching of Jesus?"<sup>20</sup>

So far we have addressed our attention to those who have as it were, in passing, asserted in their work that we cannot entirely reject allegory, either as part of Jesus' teaching or as a means of interpreting it. There have, however, been certain scholars who have directed their attention specifically to this problem.

One such was Matthew Black.<sup>21</sup> He admits the service done to parable criticism by Jülicher and notes that his thought dominates the contemporary discussion of the subject. Having admitted this, he goes on "Differences are of degree, not of kind, and while we must beware of attaching absurd allegorical meanings to details which form no more than the scenic background of a story, we may well be impoverishing our understanding of the parables of Jesus by excluding allegory simply on the basis of the Jülicher canon that the parables are not allegorical".<sup>22</sup>



At certain points in his commentary he attempts to rehabilitate allegory and suggest that it is not impossible that Jesus himself may have spoken allegorically.

The following are his major references to allegory:

(1) Pages 109 - 111

In commenting on Mark 2 : 19 - 20 Cranfield observes that vv.19b-20 allegorize what is said in 19a, but continues to observe that v. 19a may itself not be free of allegory. A criticism of the wording leads him to conclude that Jesus is likely to be adapting a current proverb and to be using it to focus attention on himself. The most significant point about the possible allegory is: "for neither in the O.T. nor in Judaism was the Bridegroom a figure of the Messiah. The O.T. evidence suggests a more august significance (e.g. Hos. passim, Isa. 1:1, liv. 5, lxii, 4f., Jer. ii.2,32f., iii. 1, 14, xxxi. 32, Ezek.xvi. 8); and it is possible that his use of the figure reflects his consciousness of being the Son of God, though no such significance would be suggested to his hearers." (p.110). We may agree that this is a possibility but the suggestion of the last clause is unlikely. It assumes that the knowledge of the hearers about the O.T. was deficient and also that Jesus is likely to have employed the figure for no other reason than his own personal amusement.

(2) Page 138

Here Cranfield is dealing with the parable of the strong man, and he declares "The presence of allegory in this parable cannot be denied". He states that "The ἰσχυρός represents Satan who has taken possession of men and τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ represent the hapless victims of his usurping rule, whom he has kept at <sup>s</sup> his chattels." His case is far less certain than in the first example above. He does not justify these points and does not observe that it is not necessary to assume the presence of allegory in order to understand that it is the case with Satan as it is with the strong man.

(3) Page 159

The parable of the Sower and its interpretation is a place where we might expect to find some comment on allegory. We find, however, only general comments, not specific comments relating to this particular parable. He defends allegory from those who would dismiss it outright: "To maintain a rigid distinction between parable and allegory is quite impossible in dealing with material originating in Hebrew and Aramaic, languages which have only one word to denote both things." The first point is a worthy one, but it is a shame that it is justified in terms of the latter point. In terms of understanding whether or not Jesus used allegory we need to examine how parable and allegory differ in essence, not to examine whether or not there are linguistic differences in terminology in other languages. We are not so much concerned with what Jesus might have called the figures when he used them but in what the essential nature of the figure was.

The comments which follow this, however, are a means to some sort of corrective of the anti-allegorical critics: "It is true too that there was a strong tendency in the early Church toward allegorization (e.g. Mt. xxii. 1-14 compared with Lk. xiv. 16-24); but it is not safe to assume therefore that all allegorizing must be the work of the early Church. The interpretation cannot be pronounced unauthentic simply on this ground."

(4) Pages 366 - 368

Here Cranfield directly attacks Jeremias's argument in connection with the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. The following, it must be admitted, is a powerful argument against those who would stand with Jeremias: "Is it conceivable that Jesus could take up the O.T. figure of God's vineyard and then speak of the owner sending his slaves one after another without thinking of the prophets (cf. Jer. vii. 25f.)?"

Cranfield concludes: "It seems probable that this parable was allegorical from the beginning - though that does not mean that every

detail is allegorical". It is this, along with his other material, which would suggest that Cranfield understands the borderline between parable and allegory as a very ill-defined one.

XX

Cranfield's reaction to the anti-allegorizers was an early and comparatively mild one. Perhaps the most earnest attempt to restore allegory to a position of respect is provided by E.J. Tinsley.<sup>28</sup>

XX

It must be said at the outset that although Tinsley's third paper presents by far the most balanced and agreeable argument of the three, the whole basis of Tinsley's work is open to question on account of its general tone, especially in the first two papers. His tone is generally one of attack, but it is not the taking of an offensive position which denigrates his work. In some places the tone is quite obviously one of attempted ridicule. For example, in the second paper Tinsley launches into Professor A.M. Hunter, and although he may have good points to make, he undermines our confidence in what he has to say by making unnecessary capital at Hunter's expense: "I take as an instance of this Professor A.M. Hunter's "Interpreting the Parables". In Origen's interpretation of 'The Good Samaritan' Hunter can see only absurdity: "What shall we say of this sort of exegesis? C'est pittoresque, mais ce n'est pas l'histoire". One is dying to know what meaning Hunter attaches to this French phrase. I assume that Hunter finds Origen's interpretation so far removed from the intention of the parable as to be no more than a pleasant fable. In which case it is unfortunate that in French a word for fable is histoire!" (p.33). The latter point is unnecessary and reflects what we suspect at various points in Tinsley's papers - that people like Dodd, Bultmann and the host of other major scholars he attacks, are so wrong in their approaches that they need discrediting at every possible point. This is an unfortunate aspect of his papers, but one which, having noticed, we should perhaps try to ignore in sifting out the good and the bad points in his argument.

From these papers several points are worth making. In defence of Tinsley we may observe the following:

(1) Allegory - phobia

One of Tinsley's motivating forces is the opinion that allegory and the allegorizing approach to the New Testament have suffered severe knocks at the hands of New Testament scholars simply because they have, in the light of Jülicher's work and that of those who followed him, over-corrected for the centuries of misunderstanding which preceded Jülicher. An area on which we might well agree with Tinsley is in his contention that although many would want to eliminate allegory from the New Testament scene, they cannot in fact do so, even though they themselves think they have. For example, in the first paper he accuses Dodd of this: "Dodd may here be throwing allegory out of the front door ('This is not allegory'), but he certainly brings it in again through the back." (p.169).

In the third paper he attacks the arguments of Professor Hunter and concludes: "This is a further example of the confusion and contradiction of those who try to maintain that allegory is foreign to the parabolic method of Jesus". (p. 21).

He continues thereafter to discuss the approach of G.V. Jones to the parable of the Prodigal Son, and says: "Jones seeks 'a wider and more extended interpretation' of the parable while avoiding anything that suggests it is an allegory. This is his professed intention but once again confusion about what constitutes allegory results in an extreme form of allegorization without, apparently, the author being aware that this is what is happening." (p. 21).

The inability of scholars to eliminate allegorization from their professedly anti-allegorical approaches is to Tinsley a symptom of the allegory-phobia which has infected New Testament scholarship. Of their attitude he says: "The mind of an allegorist is thought to be one which is not really concerned with the concrete actualities of historical

existence for their own sake and in their objective reality but is too ready to use them as grist for the allegorical mill which turns out edifying fables where the full-blooded, concrete and historical becomes the dessicated, abstract and symbolical." (First paper, p.154).

### (2) Literature and Theology

A very positive contribution to the debate is made by Tinsley's insistence that theologians must make themselves familiar with literary as well as theological criteria of judgement. The seeing of the New Testament through literary as well as theological eyes is an important part of the basis of all Tinsley's argument. It is, for example, at the very point where Dodd introduces the idea of a sensibility for literature that Tinsley launches an attack on him - an attack for not spotting the significance of allegory in literature as a whole.

### (3) Realism in allegory

We shall see later what to make of Tinsley's comments on realism in parables, but it would be well here to notice what is a justifiable criticism of Hunter and most other scholars in this field - that there is a tendency to identify realistic stories as parabolic and any with unrealistic points as most likely allegorical. That this is not necessarily the case is a part of Tinsley's attack on Hunter in the third paper. Of Hunter's comments on the parable of the Prodigal Son he says: "Early in his remarks he makes a comment typical of much in modern criticism of the parables that it is too 'life-like' to be called an allegory. Here once again we note the influence of the tradition that an allegory is by its very nature unrealistic and artificial, whereas the parable is always marked by vivid and accurate details from life. But even on the premises of his own argument Professor Hunter goes on to contradict himself a little later by saying in so many words that the parable of the prodigal son is an allegory!" (pp. 20-21).

Against Tinsley the following points must be made:

(1) Realism in Parables

It is Tinsley's contention that realism in stories is no criterion for distinguishing parables from allegories. As we have already seen he does this by asserting that allegories can be realistic, but he also attempts to demonstrate the other side of this coin - that not all so-called parables are as thoroughly realistic as most scholars would have us believe. Unfortunately his arguments here are far from convincing:

(a) The Sower

Tinsley contends that since a  $7\frac{1}{2}$ -fold yield is the average crop, the suggested crop in the parable is far from realistic. However, to search for accuracy in such details, and to do so in the name of realism is to mistake what is meant by the realism of the parables. All that could be intended by saying the parable was a realistic one is the idea that it was placed in a commonplace setting, speaking of factors of which the audience would be thoroughly familiar. It does not and cannot exclude the possibility of such hyperbolic statements as the one under question. What we may learn from this is not that the story lacked realism, but that since it was so realistic this hyperbole would draw attention to the harvest as the factor in which was the essence of the parable. As he himself says: "They are based on nature but they are not straight transcripts from nature." (first paper, p.173). This is not, however, necessarily to deny the basic realism of the parable story.

From his comments on this parable there arises a further problem. He seems to undermine, not the realism of the story, but its basic internal consistency, whether it be seen allegorically or parabolically. He suggests that it is unrealistic to tell of a farmer who sows seed on obviously unproductive soil. Therefore, he suggests, the path, the rocky ground and the thorns would seem to have a significance of their own, "(i.e. they are allegorical) and are clearly not there to heighten the

realistic actuality of the scene as the one-pointed comparison type of parabolic exegesis continues to suggest." (p.173). If, as Tinsley suggests, these elements in the story are so surely allegorical, it would be impossible to avoid an allegorical interpretation of the sower himself, and we would have to go through the process of reasoning which gives us a picture of an unreasonable and illogical sower (i.e. Father or Jesus) who sows seeds where he knows no fruit can possibly grow. Such deliberate and wanton waste begs unanswerable questions. Far simpler is the approach which others (e.g. Jeremias) favour - to say that this sort of broadcast sowing, preceding the ploughing, was commonplace in Palestine and is a realistic picture of what went on.

(b) The Unmerciful Servant

Tinsley's points about the ludicrous sum of money are debatable. However, even if it were a ludicrous sum in first century Palestinian conditions, are we really to dismiss the parable as a realistic piece of speaking in pictures? It is far better to see it (as we did with the parable of the Sower) as a realistic story expressing its major point in hyperbolic terms.

(c) The Wicked Husbandmen

Here Tinsley is on stronger ground in suggesting the improbabilities of the story. But it is dangerous to his own argument to point out the lack of realism in a story which so readily lends itself to the allegory-hunters. Whether or not the allegorical traits are attributable to the early Church (a factor on which Tinsley passes no comment), to use it as an example of how parables (as against allegories) sometimes lack realism is surely self-defeating.

This section is an attempt at something which begins to look promising just at the point at which he leaves it. Towards the end (p. 174) Tinsley mentions (but does not discuss in detail) the parable of the Great Feast and the parable of the Ten Virgins, and the points he makes in passing are far more promising than the ones he has already

developed in detail. It could be that Tinsley has a valid point to make, but in this brief discussion he hardly manages to make it.

### (2) "Incarnational" Allegory

This term is applied to the midpoint between "naive" allegory (as understood in the interpretations of Augustine et al.) and a completely realistic view of the parables (as typified by C.H. Dodd et al.). The two latter Tinsley would regard as thoroughly over-emphasized views. "Incarnational" allegory is the reasonable mid-point between them where "theme" (which is dominant in "naive" allegory) and "image" (dominant in realistic approaches) "are completely fused and the relation between them is only implicit, never open or enforced" (first paper, p. 175).

Tinsley never makes it plain how we are to identify this "Incarnational" allegory, neither does he explain how the line is to be drawn between the two extremes about which he complains. Both extremes try to search out the theme/image coincidences - where does this middle way stop the search for coincidences? After one point? After two? Or where? If we are limited to just one or two points of coincidence, how does the allegory achieve its distinction from parable? Such unanswered questions are important to Tinsley's papers and they would have benefited from some exegetical examples of the way he would interpret the appropriate passages.

### (3) Defining "Allegory"

"I would suggest that we are in the presence of allegory when the parabolic saying or narrative, in its structure and language, requires coercively an alternative reading alongside the primary one". (Second paper, p. 38). "The allegorical story should, in a magnetic fashion, attract ideas parallel to it. Response to allegory when heard or read takes the form of an urge to transfer meaning." (Third paper, p. 18). "Allegory, the saying of one thing in such a way that it can also mean another". (Third paper, p. 25).

Comments such as these are the closest Tinsley comes to defining



There is little we could identify as being a positive conclusion from these articles. Tinsley has contributed to the growing body of opinion that allegory may not after all be such a dirty word as was thought, and he has limited his assertions to the idea that perhaps the only area of allegory in the parables of Jesus is that which speaks of Jesus himself and thereby comments on Christology and the self-awareness of Jesus. From his literary approach Tinsley would conclude that, if only in a minimal sense, Jesus was inevitably an allegorist and that to make any bold assertions that Jesus told no allegories is going too far.

Although all the work we have looked at in this chapter has been aiming to restore the balance in the face of Jülicher's over-corrective work, so far no systematic study has been produced of this field. The useful blows delivered for common sense by those major works listed above are sufficient for us to agree that we can no longer accept, as his followers did, a rigid Jülicher line. The next step in this debate will, one may hope, be a systematic review of the place of allegory in the interpretation of the parables.

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CHAPTER SEVEN  
CONCLUSION

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The parables are peculiar not merely in their unique way of speaking but also in the power with which they speak. Cecil S. Emsden has said "Our Lord's trenchant manner of speaking was largely attributable to his ardent sense of mission".<sup>1</sup> There is little doubt of this, for anyone who really does want to communicate will search for the most effective (not just the most attractive) way of communicating. It happens that Jesus not only searched for an effective means of communication, but found one. Further, he not only found one, but made extremely talented use of it.

Readers of this century's critics of the parables can hardly fail to agree that Jesus spoke in order to achieve the maximum challenge to his hearers, to achieve the maximum chance of converting his enemies. It might be argued that he singularly failed in that they were not converted but rather were turned away in such a forcible way that they killed him. But it might also be argued that this laid open the way to what has been proved to be the greatest converting incident in history.

It was a teaching method which, as we have seen, he employed in many circumstances for many purposes and although many have attempted to group parables together according to varying principles (e.g. Symbols, chronology, subject, and audience - as outlined by G.J. Jordan<sup>2</sup>), there is ultimately something unique and spontaneous about each individual parable. Although many parables have similarities with others, many have common underlying themes and ideas, although the principles of parable interpretation point to features which are common to many parables, ultimately the question which has to be answered is not "what did this parable mean?" but "what did this parable mean?" The answer to the latter may well be facilitated by answers to the former, but it is still the only sure way to the original meaning. Thus the many attempts to group the parables are pointers rather than solutions in

themselves.

We must end where we began, with the fact that in dealing with the parables of Jesus we are dealing not only with something unique in the gospels but something unique in history.

Their uniqueness lies as much as anything in the fact that after all the interpretative work has been done, the message cannot be said better than the way Jesus put it. In the words of H.A. Williams: "of course generations of commentators have attempted to decode the parables, claiming to interpret their meaning in abstract terms. But in so doing they have either reduced them to false and boring allegories or confined them within the limits of some doctrinal strait - waistcoat claiming that they are all ways of making the same point or announcing the same event. Such attempts at decoding are symptomatic. They indicate the transformation of knowledge as communion with mystery into knowledge as the possession of truths".<sup>3</sup> It is true that without the scholastic tools of critical works we cannot unearth the real nature of the poetry of Jesus' words, but all those tools are ultimately useless unless it is the poetry which finally speaks.

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PART TWO  
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AN EXEGESIS OF  
REPRESENTATIVE  
PARABLES

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

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In part two of this thesis an attempt will be made to use the information, approaches and conclusions of part one in constructive exegesis of representative parables. Whereas part one examined the major authors' works in detail, part two will take certain parables, assemble such material as is necessary to obtain a fairly comprehensive picture of criticism of them so far and attempt to show where the right interpretation is most likely to be found. Certain groupings of parables have been chosen because much can be gleaned about the meaning of parables from the way in which they are juxtaposed - hence the inclusion of the parables of growth, the parables of the lost and parables of the end. Others have been chosen to illustrate further points. The parables of the Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price are chosen to represent paired parables. The parable of the Unjust Steward is chosen because it is particularly contentious and that of the Good Employer for the opposite reason - because it seems to have a fairly obvious meaning. The parable of the Good Samaritan is included because of its highly individual nature within the corpus of parable stories.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE PARABLES OF GROWTH

The title "Parables of Growth" is normally used to describe the parables in the following table:

Parable	C h a p t e r		
	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Seed growing secretly		4	
Tares among the wheat	13		
Yeast	13		13
Mustardseed	13	4	13
Sower	13	4	8

In Matthew and Mark, therefore, we are concerned with parables from one chapter only and we can see that some of the material has been redistributed by Luke. There is no doubt that in the case of Mark's fourth chapter, the material, however it was originally delivered by Jesus, has here been assembled by the evangelist. Most would agree with Cranfield's comment "That this is a composite section is fairly obvious"<sup>1</sup> and with Nineham's "he has used a dramatist's licence and collected together sayings which were not originally uttered on a single occasion."<sup>2</sup> If we assume that the other evangelists at least in part derived their material from Mark, we may make the further assumption that theirs too are composite pieces.

Thus we must at the outset beware of the trap of assuming that parables of growth automatically have some common feature other than the internal features of the stories themselves. We may not make the initial assumption that Jesus intended the image to speak always of the same thing. In order to cope with this danger the better, we will first of all approach the parables individually and then attempt to understand them as a corporate body of teaching, if that proves to be possible. We begin with those parables which appear in one Gospel only.

(1) The parable of the Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4:26-29)

It has been argued<sup>3</sup> that the Parable of the Tares in Matthew is a

re-written version of this parable, but this view seems to commend itself little to other scholars even though they recognize that Matthew's parable bears similarities to it and perhaps therefore betrays his familiarity with the Marcan parable. J.D. Kingsbury<sup>4</sup> has clearly answered the arguments made by those who argue that Matthew has re-written the Marcan parable. We therefore have here a parable with no external point of reference at all to help us discover its interpretation. Interpretation has to be based on the text of the parable itself and the suggestions which have arisen have been various and depend exclusively on how the interpreter values the components of the story.

Cadoux<sup>5</sup> sees the main point of the story in the co-operation of man with nature and observes that the point of contact with the work of Jesus must be in the harvest, this being consistent, as he points out, with Jesus' use elsewhere of harvesting imagery for his work. Thus, says Cadoux, the parable would answer those who opposed his announcement of the imminent arrival of the Kingdom by asking why action was necessary at that point in history.

Dodd<sup>6</sup> makes the point that one's view of this parable will be determined by one's view of the Kingdom. We may be motivated to interpret the parable in terms of the seed, the process of growth or the harvest, and that is basically what has happened in the history of the interpretations of this parable.<sup>7</sup> In strong support of an interpretation in terms of the harvest Dodd argues that it is reasonable to suppose that if Jesus saw the mission which he and his followers were engaged in in terms of a harvest and the labourers involved in that harvest, then he would, if speaking in parables at this point, produce similar imagery in them.

Jeremias<sup>8</sup> makes the point made by others, including Dodd, that the reference in 4:29b to Joel 3:13 indicates the connection between the Advent of the Kingdom and the harvest, not the sowing of the seed. Thus

Jeremias sees the preaching of Jesus as the harvesting point in God's dealings with people.

If we accept the parable as it stands in Mark, agreeing with Dahl<sup>9</sup> that concerning the Old Testament allusion of verse 29 "we have no reason to assume that it is secondary", and if we pay close attention to the contrast which this verse brings to the parable in terms of the difference between the inactivity before the harvest and the activity of the harvest time itself, and, further, if we accept the idea that the very powerful connection between this and the other occasions on which Jesus uses harvest imagery amounts to a weighty comment upon the arrival of the Kingdom, we are likely to have little trouble in accepting a line somewhat akin to the various views of Cadoux, Dodd and Jeremias.

Two problems concerning the text must, however, make us question this conclusion and probably bring us to the point of asserting that the whole case for connecting the parable with the other parables of growth and understanding it as speaking of the arrival, imminent or actual, of the Kingdom, rests on the assumption that Jesus was consistent in his use of the motif of growth. The problems are these:-

(a) Does the original version of the parable have any real connection with the Kingdom of God? This is not a problem which most scholars consider. It seems a fair assumption that it is connected and it would be difficult, within the context of Jesus' teaching as a whole to find a more satisfactory point of reference for it. However, Bultmann has voiced his doubts<sup>10</sup>. He says "It is questionable whether this is original, for (1) it is not easy to relate this similitude to the Kingdom of God, and (2) it gives the impression of being one of the introductory formulae that are frequently added."

By itself this argument carries little weight, but it might carry more weight if the second problematic point were conclusively argued:

(b) Is verse 29 original? The whole argument from harvest imagery (whatever the conclusions of those who understand it in terms of

the harvest) depends upon this verse, and although Rawlinson would argue<sup>11</sup> that "some reference to the harvest is surely essential", there is some criticism to be made of the verse. C.H. Cave<sup>12</sup> has argued a case for viewing verse 29 as an addition to a parable which originally was used as a sermon advocating patience and he goes on to conclude "we suggest that after the Resurrection, when it was realized that the harvest had indeed come, 29 was added to the parable to provide a kind of fulfilment of prophecy".

Such a view is supported by a further point made by Cave when he observes that there must have been some reason why Luke omitted this parable from his Gospel and Matthew either did the same or substituted another parable for it. He concludes, with W.L. Knox, that the parable's original meaning, whatever that had been, was "unintelligible to the changed conditions of the Church of the second generation."<sup>13</sup>

Cranfield lists the ways in which people have attempted to interpret this parable, classifying them "according as they (i) take the parable as an allegory or (ii) direct attention primarily (a) to the seed, (b) to the period of growth, (c) to the harvest, or (d) to the contrast between sowing and harvest."<sup>14</sup> As we have noted in our comments on Dodd's discussion, the view we take may well be determined by the view we wish to take of the Kingdom of God and of its arrival, and it is certain that we could find justification for adopting any of these viewpoints if we have merely the story on which to base our judgements. Cranfield himself prefers (ii) (b) and (ii) (d) as the most likely explanations, but without any external points of reference these cannot be conclusive, and without knowledge of the originality of verse 29 we cannot find the case for (ii) (c) or (ii) (d) proven.

We are forced, therefore, to the point where we may only say that x may be the case if y is true, without ever having a hope of proving y. Certainly the case for associating the story with the idea of harvest is

a strong one, but it, and its attendant ways of determining how the harvest speaks of the Kingdom, depends strongly on the originality of verse 29. Certainly the connection with the other parables of growth would suggest the necessity of the harvest idea, but the connection itself is not conclusive, and we are thrown back onto the doubt cast over verse 29.

We may say, therefore, that our conclusions regarding this parable, if there are to be any, must be determined by what we make of the other parables of growth, for if they can be shown to speak in a particular fashion we could hardly expect this one to contradict their message. What we may not do is to mould our interpretation of the others on the basis of this one, for the evidence will not bear that sort of burden.

(2) The Parable of the Tares among the Wheat (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

That this parable is not found in the other Gospels and that there are certain similarities with the Marcan parable considered above has led some to suppose that Matthew re-wrote the parable for his own purposes. We have already seen that this is doubtful, so we may safely consider this parable separately from Mark's and try to understand it in its own right.

We must also, before looking at the parable itself, isolate it from the interpretation of verses 36ff. The weight of evidence against its authenticity is overwhelming<sup>15</sup>, and whether we consider that the interpretation is the work of Matthew or of some hand before him is immaterial. It is of little import other than for a consideration of the thought of the early Church.

Just as we might easily conclude that the interpretation is an allegorical piece of writing based on a later view of the parable, so we may even attack the parable itself and view it, if only partially, as allegorical. Thus, Manson says, on the basis of his argument that this is Matthew's re-written version of the Marcan parable, "It is an allegory

constructed out of the material supplied by Mark's parable..."<sup>16</sup> Against Manson we may quote Bultmann's bald and emphatic comment "I think this is a pure parable, and not, as Jülicher supposes, an allegory."<sup>17</sup> Somewhere in the middle of this argument stands the comment of J.D. Kingsbury that it is "a fable that is a mixed-form, 'an allegorical parable'".<sup>18</sup> Certainly there is evidence that Matthew has edited whatever material he actually received. We may attribute the introductory formula (in verse 24) and the closing verse (whose language is typically Matthean) to his pen. The circumstances of the latter half of the parable are also possibly from his pen, being harmonious with the conditions of his time. We may also attribute the section of direct speech to Matthew as his way of expanding the narrative which preceded it. Thus, a conclusion could be drawn that Matthew has re-worked for his own ends a parable whose nucleus is now preserved in verses 24b-26. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand that in the way it is presented to us by Matthew, he was probably thinking allegorically (at least in part) when he wrote it.

If we understand the parable as Matthew intended it to be understood - as a message to the Church, we assume - he was presumably addressing himself to the problems of what the Church should do in the rather unexpected delay of the parousia.

However, to attribute as much of the parable as this to the invention of Matthew is possibly to do him an injustice. He is more likely to have re-interpreted something which in the original delivery of Jesus was aimed at another target. Thus, if we were to follow the line discussed above and reject the reference to the harvest as part of the original parable, we would have to say not only that Matthew invented a new meaning for the story, but that he invented more than half the story as well. We may support the originality of the reference to the harvest by observing that if the parable originally finished at verse 26, the story itself was inconclusive and the chance of its being an answer

to any positive questions posed by Jesus' hearers somewhat slim. The telling of the parables of growth naturally leans forward towards the point of harvest, the point of consummation, and at a later point in this discussion we must notice that however the evangelists have re-worked the parables of growth, this particular piece of imagery is integral to their original forms, particularly in view of the traditional use of harvest imagery to speak of the end time.

That the central point of the parable is in the injunction to let both weeds and wheat grow together until the harvest is made by many critics.<sup>19</sup> If we accept that the reference to the harvest is original, it does seem the logical climax of the story. We must then ask what such a point of climax in such a story could have been intended, in the mind of Jesus, to convey to his hearers. Certainly it must have something to do with separation, whether he speaks of separating good from bad in the near or the far future, whether the eschatological moment was thought of as upon them or at some distance from them. The separation, however, may have been an idea which he was trying to get across to his disciples as a means of showing them how to cope with the Church between that moment and the eschatological moment,<sup>20</sup> in which case it was probably a parable intending to curb over-zealous judgmental attitudes and impatience on the part of the disciples, or it may have been an idea which he was trying to convey to his opponents and critics who may have wanted to discredit him for associating with outcasts and sinners by showing that he should be purifying the nation if his ministry was in any way connected with any eschatological happening.<sup>21</sup>

The parable's context in the Gospel is Matthew's own and thus gives us no real clue to the original audience, and so affords us little opportunity of deriving from its setting which interpretation is more likely. The balance of probability, however, must rest with the latter of our suggestions, for the idea that the parable is an attempt by Jesus

to offer the disciples guidance on how to cope with the Church in an interim period does not accord with Jesus' normal use of parabolic teaching - as a weapon in his public ministry (and particularly against opponents), and assumes too much the idea of Jesus having a clearly formulated idea of a future Church rather than a final irruption of the Kingdom.

That the Jeremias line is the more likely argument is further supported by the use of harvest imagery itself, for as a weapon in such an argument with opponents its clear reference to the eschatological moment would be most appropriate to the situation.

### (3) The Parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13:33/Luke 13:20-21)

This parable is often interpreted as a companion parable to that of the Mustardseed but the question whether this is the correct approach must wait until we have considered both of them separately, partly because although both parables appear in Matthew and Luke, that of the Mustardseed appears separately in Mark as well.

Once again it is difficult to derive meaning from context since the context in both Gospels is, we assume, artificial. The most we may discern is that Matthew at least (though Luke does not seem to agree) understood the parable in the same general terms as the accompanying parables of growth in chapter 13.

Most commentators notice the strange element in this parable - that Jesus here makes use of what is commonly an image of evil in the world for completely different ends - to say something about the Kingdom of God. For a right understanding of the way the parable would have worked in its original context we must not lose sight of this factor, for Jesus must surely have been conscious of it when speaking. Likewise we must pay attention to two other significant features of the parable. First, the word  $\epsilon\nu\epsilon\kappa\rho\upsilon\psi\epsilon\nu$  (in Luke  $\epsilon\kappa\rho\upsilon\psi\epsilon\nu$ ), for the use of a word conveying the idea of "hiding" is strange in this context unless it had significance in the context in which it was uttered. Secondly,

there is the size of the baking. Critics disagree over whether a woman was ever likely to have baked such a quantity as the one described all at once, but what is certain is that the quantity which Jesus uses in his illustration is extremely large.

We would agree with Jeremias that this is a parable of contrast<sup>22</sup> and with Kingsbury's comment<sup>23</sup> that the culmination of the parable is in the statement "until the whole is leavened". We would thus find the contrast which is to be established as existing between something earlier in the story and the final state of the dough. Some would find the contrast between the small quantity of the yeast and the large final effects that it had. Thus Caird<sup>24</sup> says "From a small lump of yeast comes a ferment which can permeate a basinful of meal. In the same way, the small triumphs of Jesus' preaching and healing ministry seem insignificant in comparison with the immense and pervasive power of evil; yet in them the Kingdom of God is present in germinal and dynamic form....". Creed, in like manner, says "... the fundamental idea is unmistakable: how great results may come from how small beginnings!"<sup>25</sup> So also Dahl makes the same point, "The point must in any case be sought in the contrast between the little and hidden leaven and the great mass of dough which was leavened by it."<sup>26</sup> However, we may here counter this argument by agreeing with Gerhardsson's comment, "It is not said in this parable that the leaven is little".<sup>27</sup> Although we are entitled to assume that the amount of yeast used was small in comparison with the mass that was to be leavened by it, we may not infer therefrom that this can be the point of the story. If it were, it is reasonable to expect that the yeast would have at least been described as being small in quantity. To ignore the fact that no such comment is passed is easily understood when we remember that it would be pretty well automatic to understand the smallness as the essence of the story if it were in fact delivered at the same time as the parable of the mustardseed, where the possibility that the smallness has something to do with the intended contrast is

much greater.

Having, however, agreed with Gerhardsson on one point, we must disagree with him on another. He suggests that the original meaning of the parable may have been sacrificial in character, taking the point that the yeast must "die" in order to function. We must dismiss this idea on the same grounds that Gerhardsson himself dismissed the idea of the littleness of the yeast - it is not expressed in the story. To understand the parable in this way is not only to supply something not found in the text but to ignore what is already there.

We must begin now to notice the effect of the three strange features we mentioned at the outset. That the word  $\xi\upsilon\kappa\rho\acute{\upsilon}\pi\tau\omega$  should have been used to describe the process of mixing the yeast into the meal perhaps points us to a contrast of a slightly different nature, that between the initial concealment of the essential element in the process and the final completion in all its greatness, a greatness which is firmly underlined by the size of the baking which is described in the story.

We may now ask ourselves to what situation it may have been appropriate for Jesus to respond with a contrast of this nature. The answer must surely be that he was facing Jews who exhibited a complete blindness to the fact that the Kingdom of God either had arrived or was in the process of arriving. It was, as it were, hidden, but was none the less in operation for all that, as the incredible results would show!

It is only an interpretation along these lines which can do justice at once to the hiddenness which is expressed and to the final climax of the story which is so obviously at the core of the parable, a climax which would have been so obviously the point to the oriental mind even though the western mind may prefer to seek meaning in the process of growth. We may note also that the very fact that Jesus recasts an old image in a very new mould would, because of its surprising nature to its hearers, inevitably throw their minds forward to focus on the conclusion of the story. They would be agog to know what Jesus was going to make of an

image in such an unusual context. It could also be, given this area of interpretation, that the Lucan context, which is one of conflict with opponents, is closer to the original situation in which Jesus delivered the parable, although we cannot tell whether it was the actual situation.

(4) The Parable of the Mustardseed (Matthew 13:31-32/Luke 13:18-19 and Mark 4:30-32)

We now come to the first of the parables of growth to be found in all three synoptic Gospels and we immediately strike the problem of which version we should consider closest to the original. Some would agree with Dahl<sup>28</sup> that "we do not need to deal with the variants here". Others would follow Cadoux's line<sup>29</sup> in preferring "Luke's simpler form" on the basis of intrusive elements in the Marcan version which will be mentioned below. That Matthew seems to have conflated the two earlier versions of Mark and Luke (which is generally thought to be closer to the original "Q" version) is a fair way of eliminating his version from consideration. Whether we prefer Mark's or Luke's version will depend largely upon what we make of arguments concerning the apparently intrusive verse in Mark's concerning the smallness of the seed, on which see below.

One main preliminary point to notice is the fact that, as Taylor says, we are dealing with "one of the best attested elements in the teaching of Jesus."<sup>30</sup> A further comment by Dodd on this very issue will be one of the clues to finding its meaning. When he speaks of the reference to the coming of the birds to the tree, he says "since this element belongs to the earliest tradition to which we can hope to have access - that which lies behind the divergent traditions of Mark and "Q" - we shall do well to assume that it is a clue to the application originally intended."<sup>31</sup>

It is fairly obvious that Cranfield is right in asserting that "This is another parable of contrast"<sup>32</sup> for here again a beginning is described and an end results which is very different from the beginning. The question at issue in determining the meaning of the parable is wherein exactly lies the point of contrast.

The most obvious idea is to point to the contrast between the smallness of the beginnings and the enormous results which follow. This contrast suggests itself particularly from the Marcan version which makes great play on the smallness of the original seed, but it is also implicit in each version because the mustardseed was proverbially connected with the idea of smallness. It may also be said that if we consider this parable alongside that of the yeast, as Matthew and Luke obviously understood them, even if they were not originally connected in their source, the two together do at first sight give the impression of aiming at this thought.

This point of contrast has however been attacked by a number of critics. Cadoux<sup>33</sup> and Dodd<sup>34</sup> reject the Marcan emphasis on the smallness of the seed as an intrusion which has disturbed the grammar of the sentence. Moreover, Dodd points out that the mustardseed is not the smallest seed in common use. Gerhardsson<sup>35</sup>, though not hitting the nail squarely on the head, takes us one stage nearer to a solution when he rejects this contrast. He points us away from too much concern with the smallness to a concern with the process of growth and its inevitability. Thus he connects the small beginnings and the great ends and shows how they are organically connected - an argument supported also by Dahl<sup>36</sup>.

The small/great contrast has, on the other hand, been defended. Cranfield<sup>37</sup>, for example, says "But the contrast between the smallness of the seed and the largeness of the plant cannot so easily be pushed aside." He argues that the proverbial nature of the mustardseed image coupled with the hyperbolic use of *δένδρον* in Luke's version is ample support for the contrast. If this argument is to carry the day against opposing arguments, some account would have to be taken of the other features of the story (the process of growth and the nesting birds, for example) in order to assert that here is the major point of contrast.

Manson<sup>38</sup> maintains a position between this one and another, suggesting that "There are two points in the parable". Besides the small/big contrast he argues that the other, and major, point of the parable is to assert that "a process has been started which must go on to its inevitable end." We are here back with the Gerhardsson/Dahl position outlined above, one which Cave<sup>39</sup> agrees with. Concentration on the process of growth, however, hardly seems to do sufficient justice to the sense of contrast which pervades the story. As in the other parable of growth, the natural focus of the story is its climax at the end, and that climax naturally throws the contrast into relief, a contrast which must lie between the beginning and the end rather than between the process of growth and the end.

Here, surely, we find the major point. Jeremias<sup>40</sup> supports this point well by showing that the oriental mind of that time would naturally understand the story in terms of the end contrasted with the beginning, rather than doing what the modern western mind would do with the same story and think of the process which leads to such a mighty conclusion. We may support the idea that the real contrast is between the way things begin and the way they end by observing that as a result of the arguments we have just been through we must obviously prefer the Lucan version of the parable, and his version is the simplest of all three. Here there is hardly any emphasis at all on the process by which the tree grew from the seed. There is some emphasis on the big/small contrast, but the major point is in the contrast between how things started and how they finished. As Jeremias says, "The occasion of the utterance...may be taken to be some expression of doubt concerning the mission of Jesus. How differently the beginnings of the Messianic Age announced by Jesus appeared than was commonly expected!" To see this as the occasion of the parable is to understand the story as a coherent whole, one which rests partially on all three areas of emphasis. It requires the idea of the smallness of the seed because the accusation of the opponents would have referred to

the smallness of Jesus' beginnings. It requires the idea of the process of growth because Jesus would have needed to assert a period of waiting before the final consummation unless he was going to allay their suspicions by bringing in the final moment there and then. But above all it requires a focus on the end and its contrast with the beginning. The natural focus of the story is on the end, not only because it provides the natural climax to the rest of the story, but because it pays particular attention to the quality of the end and is very specific about what that end entails.

It is here that the key is to be found. The end is not to be appreciated as merely bigger and grander than the beginning of things, but it is to be understood as of different quality from what was generally expected. As many have pointed out, with reference to Daniel 4:12, Ezekiel 31:6 and 17:23, the image of the birds coming to shelter in the tree's branches would easily conjure up in the minds of the hearers the idea of subject states accepting political protection from a mother state. Thus the parable may well have spoken not only against the criticism that this was surely not the way the Kingdom was to begin, but also against the criticism that outsiders should be excluded rather than incorporated into the Kingdom. That the idea is integral to the interpretation of the parable is supported not only by the strong possibility that it is authentic but also by the idea that this is not an element which is likely to have been supplied later. The greater emphasis on the process (rather than on the somewhat universalistic conclusion) would have better suited a church waiting for a delayed parousia.

We may thus observe that although it seems the natural thing to connect this parable with the parable of the yeast, and although they do have common elements (particularly in the area of the beginning/end contrast), they do not necessarily speak exactly to the same situation.

This parable does more than answer a criticism that nothing seemed to be happening, it suggests to its hearers that not only was something happening, but that results would show them that it was not exactly what they expected to happen!

(5) The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-8/Matthew 13:3-8/Luke 8:5-8)

That the interpretation of the parable of the Sower has no claim to authenticity is now so well established that it is for those who wish to maintain its authenticity to establish their case rather than the other way round. Even those who attempt to find some balance in the arguments find themselves sitting on the fence<sup>41</sup>. Cranfield<sup>42</sup> has defended the interpretation at some length, attempting to deal with the various points against him in some detail. He has, however, dealt inadequately with the weighty linguistic arguments produced by Jeremias and so the balance of probability still remains on Jeremias's side, even if we went as far as to concede the other points to Cranfield. Gerhardsson<sup>43</sup> has suggested merely that "The parable and the interpretation fit each other as hand fits glove", but his argument is a slender one for the case of the authenticity of the interpretation. Identity between the two is not a reason for saying they come from the same person.

For the purposes of this examination we shall therefore accept the convincing arguments of those who eliminate the interpretation from consideration, and having done so we must further attempt to remove from our minds any memory of the interpretation which might affect our thinking about the parable.

For the purposes of determining the thrust of the parable story there is little to be gained from preferring one version to another. We may merely mention what Taylor<sup>44</sup> says at this point, "A comparison of the synoptic accounts reveals the greater originality of the Markan version. In it the parable has been recorded with great fidelity."

Following this comment Taylor produces a comprehensive summary of

the various approaches that have been made to this parable and eventually prefers the interpretations which relate the parable to the Kingdom of God, even though there is no explicit reference to the Kingdom in the text. As he says, "this was the absorbing theme of the early Galilean ministry and.... other parables of growth illustrate some aspect of the Kingdom." The introductory remark of Dahl<sup>45</sup> supports this, "it is likely.... that it was originally intended as a parable of the Kingdom, like the other parables of growth." As he continues a little later (p. 154), "As the other parables of growth, the parable of the Sower should be interpreted in the light of traditional figurative language. The rich harvest, which the farmer in the story received, serves to call forth the idea of the greatness and glory of the assembly of the saved in the Kingdom of God."

We have here sufficient ideas for an interpretation of the parable. As with the other parables of growth (and here we touch on the area in which we shall conclude when summing up below), there is a specific thrust from the story towards a climax which comes at the end. If, as some suggest, the parable was concerned with the various types of soil, the harvest imagery and its attendant implications would serve only to side-track the listeners into an eschatological interpretation. Given the power of the harvest image to evoke a picture of the eschatological time, we cannot help but conclude that Jesus was talking about the coming of the Kingdom and that the parable itself speaks by contrast between the end time and the beginning time.

From this we can easily conclude that the occasion of the parable was likely to have been once again a criticism from Jesus' opponents that nothing much seemed to be happening if this really was the breaking-in of the Kingdom.

### Conclusions

That the parables of growth are so named and are often considered together suggests that there must be some connection between them, and to

a limited extent (especially in the work of Matthew) the synoptic evangelists have seen a connection between them. We may not, however, make too much of any connection they make because we know that they were seeing them and writing them up from their own ecclesiastical situation many years later. Besides this, to establish what the evangelists saw as the string upon which the parables were threaded we would need to find the connecting link between the parables of growth and other items like the parables of the treasure and of the pearl and the parable of the drag-net (although in the latter case some have found an easy connection through the appended interpretation and its similarity with that appended to the parable of the Tares).

For the Matthean parable chapter Gerhardsson<sup>46</sup> has suggested an elaborate and rather too intricate arrangement whereby the other parables of the chapter all depend upon the various elements of the parable of the Sower.

In order to connect them, we can easily point to the growth image and especially to the harvest motif, which is implied, though obviously not stated as such in the parables of the yeast and of the mustardseed. Another look at the conclusions we have drawn above about the situations into which Jesus delivered the parables may reveal a further string upon which they may be threaded. We may say with some certainty that the situation into which Jesus delivered these parables was one of opposition of some sort or another. Recent critics have established firmly the idea that parables were often used as a weapon of controversy. We may suppose, then, that Jesus was using these parables to speak of the situation in which he found himself vis-à-vis the Jews rather than vis-à-vis the disciples and any future church which might have been based on their work. This much is behind each interpretation we have put forward above. For them to have been interpreted ecclesiologically (however loosely we may understand that term) presupposes that Jesus at that early stage in his

ministry had some fairly clear idea of a future church which would need the encouragement of ideas of the coming Kingdom. It seems more reasonable, however, to think of Jesus at this stage working rather from ideas of a Kingdom which, if not already present, was due very soon.

If, then, we repeat our conclusions formed about each parable (with the exception of the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly, about which we formed no conclusions) in the form of the question to which they are likely to have been Jesus' answer, the results might look like this:

Parable	Opponent's Question/Accusation
Tares	If you are bringing in the Kingdom, why don't you purify the nation as you should?
Yeast	If you are bringing in the Kingdom, where on earth is it, because I can't see it?
Mustardseed	A combination of both the above accusations.
Sower	If you are bringing in the Kingdom, where on earth is it, because I can't see it?

We can see, then, that if we understand the major point of the Galilean ministry as a strong announcement of the arrival (imminent or actual) of the Kingdom, these questions would have been obvious retorts from those who would scorn Jesus and those who were merely suspicious. The parables, as understood above, are strong answers to strong questions.

Finally, although Dodd's thesis may be correct, it is not a necessary conclusion from these parables that Jesus was preaching a "realized eschatology". The above retorts to the above questions could equally well have been made in the belief that the Kingdom had a starting point before Jesus' coming, or even in the belief that, though on its way, it was yet to come. The parables do not necessarily assert that Jesus' arrival is the beginning point, the seed-time.

NOTES.

1. CRANFIELD, C.E.B., "St. Mark 4:1-34, Part Two", Scottish Journal of Theology, Volume 5, 1952, p.49
2. NINEHAM, D.E., Saint Mark, Penguin, 1963, p. 125
3. especially by B.W. BACON in Studies in Matthew, New York, 1930 and by T.W. MANSON in The Teaching of Jesus, Cambridge, 1931, p.222f., and in The Sayings of Jesus, SCM Press, from an earlier work of 1937, p.192f.
4. KINGSBURY, J.D., The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13, S.P.C.K., 1969, pp.64f.
5. CADOUX, A.T., The Parables of Jesus. Their Art and Use, James Clarke, 1931?, ppl62ff.
6. DODD, C.H. The Parables of the Kingdom, Nisbet, 1935, quoted here from the Fontana edition of 1961, pp.135ff.
7. This point is made, one way or another, by most people attempting to interpret this parable.
8. JEREMIAS, J., The Parables of Jesus, S.C.M. Press, 1963, pp.151ff.
9. DAHL, N.A., "The Parables of Growth", Studia Theologica 1951-2, p. 149
10. BULTMANN, R., The History of the Synoptic Tradition, Blackwell, 1963, pp. 172f
11. RAWLINSON, A.E.J., St. Mark, Methuen, 1925, p.56
12. CAVE, C.H., "The Parables and the Scriptures", New Testament Studies, 1964, pp. 383ff
13. KNOX, W.L., The Sources of the Synoptic Gospels, quoted by Cave.
14. CRANFIELD, C.E.B., The Gospel according to St. Mark, Cambridge, 1959, p. 167
15. A representative selection of arguments might include:  
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 CADOUX, A.T., The Parables of Jesus. Their Art and Use, James Clarke, 1931?, pp.29f.

- GERHARDSSON, B., "The Seven Parables in Matthew XIII", New Testament Studies, Volume 19, 1973, pp. 29f
- KINGSBURY, J.D., op.cit., pp. 65f
- JEREMIAS, J., op.cit., pp. 84f
- MANSON, T.W., op.cit., p. 194
- BULTMANN, R., op.cit., p. 187
- FENTON, J.C., The Gospel of St. Matthew, Penguin, 1963, p.225
16. MANSON, T.W., op.cit., p.193
17. BULTMANN, R., op.cit., p.177
18. KINGSBURY, J.D., op.cit., p.75
19. for example:
- DAHL, N.A., op.cit., p. 151
- CADOUX, A.T., op.cit., p. 157
- KINGSBURY, J.D., op.cit., p.75
20. As, for example, in the argument offered in FENTON; J.C., op.cit., p.220
21. As for example, in JEREMIAS, J., op. cit., pp.223f.
22. JEREMIAS, J., op. cit., p. 149
23. KINGSBURY, J.D., op. cit., p. 87
24. CAIRD., G.B., The Gospel of St. Luke, Penguin, 1963, p.171
25. CREED, J.M., The Gospel according to St. Luke, MacMillan, 1930, p. 182
26. DAHL, N.A., op.cit., p.148
27. GERHARDSSON, B., op.cit., p. 22
28. DAHL, N.A., op.cit., p. 147
29. CADOUX, A.T., op.cit., p. 93
30. TAYLOR, V., The Gospel according to St. Mark, MacMillan, 1952, p. 268
31. DODD, C.H., op.cit., p. 142
32. CRANFIELD, C.E.B., op.cit., p. 169
33. CADOUX, A.T., op. cit., p. 93

34. DODD, C.H., op.cit., p.142 (see especially the footnote)
35. GERHARDSSON, B., op.cit., pp.21f.
36. DAHL, N.A., op.cit., p.148
37. GRANFIELD, C.E.B., op. cit., p.169
38. MANSON, T.W., op.cit., p. 123
39. CAVE, C.H., op.cit., p.386
40. JEREMIAS, J., op.cit., p. 149
41. for example, McNEILE, A.H., The Gospel according to St. Matthew, MacMillan, 1915, p. 196
42. in both the article and book quoted before (see notes 1 and 14)
43. GERHARDSSON, B., "The Parable of the Sower and its Interpretation", New Testament Studies, 1967, p.192
44. TAYLOR, V., op.cit., p. 250
45. DAHL, N.A., op.cit., p. 152
46. GERHARDSSON, B., op. cit., passim.

CHAPTER THREE  
PARABLES OF THE LOST

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(1) Do they belong together?

These three parables seem to belong together in that they each speak to the same basic topic. They do not, however, belong together in the way in which they are strung together in Luke's Gospel. On their original intention and meaning we shall comment elsewhere. Here we must confine ourselves to the latter point and consider briefly the difficulties concerning chapter 15 in Luke's Gospel.

That the parables appear together here is not surprising. Luke is particularly interested in this type of material, as Professor B.W. Bacon noticed in 1922: "It is no accident that all the classic examples of penitents forgiven and redeemed, the Penitent Harlot, the Penitent Publican, the Penitent Thief, the Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus, are to be found in Luke and in no other Gospel. ....their inclusion in Luke as against their non-appearance elsewhere shows a selective interest quite distinctive of this evangelist, however small his part in their actual composition."<sup>1</sup>

T.W. Manson calls chapters 15-19 of Luke's Gospel the "Gospel of the Outcast".<sup>2</sup> If, as seems likely, Luke wanted to compose a section of material concerning God's mercy to the lost, it is no cause for surprise that he assembled this particular material together.

However, a number of commentators have noticed factors which indicate that this material may not originally have been together and that Luke, or somebody before him, has assembled it.

There is, first, the obvious point that the parable of the Lost Sheep appears also in Matthew with various divergent features, which will be noticed when we deal with that parable. Because there are two similar versions of this parable in Matthew and Luke, the temptation is to assign the material to Q. The differences in presentation and the absence in Matthew of the other parables of Luke 15 lead us to suspect, however, with Manson, that: "It is more likely that we have here a case of the overlapping

of sources, and that the Matthean version belongs to M and the Lucan to L."<sup>3</sup>

Some, (e.g. Wellhausen) would also wish to criticize the parable of the Prodigal Son in such a way as to destroy its internal unity, disconnecting, for example, the section concerning the elder son. Of this, more later.

Some (e.g. E.E. Ellis) would see the first two parables as forming one identifiable unit, to which Luke has added the third, longer parable: "Probably the stories of the 'lost sheep' and the 'lost coin' formed one unit (1-10). To this the evangelist appended the 'parable of the two sons' to reinforce the theme and bring it to a climax."<sup>4</sup> If this is the case, they are not parables of common origin. That the first two parables are likely to have been twin parables originally seems acceptable. Manson seems positive of their relationship in Jesus' teaching: "Doubtless Luke found them together in his source; and most probably they stood together in the tradition because they were so given by Jesus in the first instance."<sup>5</sup>

Bultmann comments that "the composition of speeches is not wanting in Luke"<sup>6</sup> and gives chapter 15 as an example of such composition. For the general reasons outlined above and for the more detailed reasons which will be drawn out in the comments on the individual parables, we may agree with him that even though these parables belong to the same area of Jesus' thinking, they may not have been together originally.

Before considering the parables of Luke 15 in detail, we should remind ourselves of the speculative nature of this enquiry, particularly in relation to Luke 15:4-10, verses which are singled out by Bultmann under the following emphatic comment: "The original meaning of many similitudes has become irrecoverable in the course of the tradition".<sup>7</sup>

(2) The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7/Matthew 18:12-14)

(a) Which version is original?

In this section dealing with the "Change of Audience" of the parables,

Jeremias insists that Luke has preserved the original context of the parable - a conclusion which (see my review at page .99.) he does not adequately support but which has the balance of probability in its favour. Working on the basis that parables were an instrument of polemical activity rather than of mere instruction to followers, this would seem to be the case.

However, there is general agreement that the Matthean version of the parable is closer to the original than the Lucan. Linnemann notices that the uncertainty of finding the sheep in Matthew ("if he finds it") is more realistic than the certainty in Luke ("when he finds it"). She suggests that the Lucan idea that the shepherd puts the sheep on his shoulders to return to base is a "decorative accretion, in comparison with Matthew's version, and so another sign that the latter is more original."<sup>8</sup> She also points out that Luke appears to have adapted the parable to bear the same point as the twin parable that appears with it in his Gospel. The application here seems to be halfway between that of the Matthean version and the Lucan story of the lost coin.

This view is also expressed by A.T. Cadoux.<sup>9</sup> He also places another severe question mark against the Lucan application by asking "who of Jesus' hearers needed no repentance". He also comments on the fact that the celebrations with the neighbours are more likely to be a realistic feature in the case of the lost coin than in the case of the shepherd, whose work is perforce isolated from the community. Again the parable seems to have attracted features from its twin.

Thus many features of this parable in its two versions have led scholars to assert their preference for the Matthean version.

Having said that, however, we must beware of saying that Matthew's version is what Jesus said, because that is also unlikely. Not only is it unlikely that he said it to the audience Matthew offers us, it is also unlikely that the application offered by Matthew is original. The point

is well put by Bultmann: "... the application in Matthew 18:14 is also secondary, for it narrows down the original meaning in saying that no member of the Christian community will be lost, and gives no expression to the joy over finding the lost, which is nevertheless the essential feature of the similitude."<sup>10</sup> Not only does it narrow the meaning in this way, but it also must be ruled out because it does not follow as a natural conclusion from the parable. Whereas the parable speaks of the positive angle of the joy at the recovery of the lost, the application speaks in a negative way about the fact that it is never the Father's will that people should be lost.

When criticism of the versions offered us have done their worst (or best), we are left to consider a parable about one stray sheep in a hundred and how the owner leaves the 99 in order to recover the lost one and how it gives him more joy to recover that one than to be sure of the other 99, in short, the two verses in Matthew 18:12-13.

(b) What does the parable mean?

There are two possible candidates for the tertium comparationis. It might be said that the main point is in the leaving of the 99 to search for the one, or it might be said that it is in the joy of the return. It takes little effort to eliminate the first. It occurs at the wrong point in the story to compete with the latter as the story's climax. Further, the joy of the return is a more likely candidate since Jesus is concerned in his parables with the state of people after they have experienced the situations described in the stories. The joy therefore is the focus, but not just joy - rather, joy for the particular reason of the return of the lost, of the restoration to a former position.

When the parable is reduced to as simple a statement as that, it lends itself the sort of existentialist approach to interpretation which is implied by a comment of J.M. Creed: "The loss of a possession enhances our sense of its value, and a successful search gives us keener happiness than the possession of similar goods which we have never lost."<sup>11</sup> Thus,

interpretations like those supplied by both Matthew and Luke are possible, though not necessary. The comment of Creed's we know to be true from experience.

The focus on the joy of the return is criticized by Manson - "... the characteristic feature of these two parables is not so much the joy over the repentant sinner as the Divine love that goes out to seek the sinner before he repents."<sup>12</sup> In view of what we have already noticed about the applications provided by the evangelists, we are less likely to understand this to be the real emphasis of the parables, but Manson's comment does serve to remind us of something which should not be forgotten - that the joy at the return of the repentant sinner depends entirely upon the love which exists for him in the first place. The searching love of God and the joy at the return of the lost are two aspects of the same subject, but it remains true that the actual focus of the parable story is more exactly the joy at the return of the lost.

There is a problem, however, in trying to work out what would have been the original meaning of the parable in the context of Jesus' ministry. Perhaps it is true that the meaning is as Bultmann says "irrecoverable". However, it does seem that the most likely setting is one similar to that given to it by Luke. The beginning of the chapter makes it clear that the situation is (according to Luke) the familiar one of the polarization of the two differing attitudes of Jesus and his opponents over the controversial business of welcoming sinners. In the view of Jesus, what his opponents had failed to understand was that the lost were still a cause for concern to God and that their recovery was a cause of great joy to him. As Creed says, the loss of a possession enhances our sense of its value. Thus, Jesus could well have been saying to his opponents, "You have got it wrong. God wants these people whom you class as beyond redemption, and his joy at their repentance is beyond what you might imagine."

(3) The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

(a) Is this a twin parable with the Lost Sheep?

There is cause for doubt that these parables were delivered together if we accept the theory that Luke and Matthew found the parable of the Lost Sheep in the same source. If they did, why did Matthew do nothing about the inclusion of the second parable?

However, if they derived them from separate sources, it seems likely that they were delivered together, even if Luke has, as we have already observed, written them up in a more elaborate form than that in which they originated. The strongest argument that they were originally together is in the fact that they are basically of the same structure, each telling the story of something lost, sought for, found, and, as a result, the cause for joy and celebration. Although it is ultimately only possible to guess whether two parables were originally delivered together, it is perhaps unlikely that such a pattern of thought would have been produced on one occasion and remembered in such detail for re-use on another occasion. It is more likely that the second sprang spontaneously from the first. Jeremias would support this view: "There is ... no reason to divorce the two parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Drachma (Luke 15:4-10), although the first of these has also been preserved independently."<sup>13</sup> We may also quote in support of this view, Bultmann's comment: "... such a doubling is a very old and widespread instrument of the story teller's art."<sup>14</sup>

(b) What does the parable mean?

As part of a pair of parables we would expect this to bear the same meaning as the previous parable. Here, it must be noted, it is strange that the parables as they appear in Luke's Gospel have two separate, though similar applications. As Bultmann says: "... if both similitudes had a common origin we should expect the application to come after both had been told."<sup>15</sup> If that were not the case, we might at least expect that

they might be worded in the same way. This objection need not, however, deter us. It may well be true that even though the parables were delivered together originally, perhaps with a common application (should any have been considered necessary by Jesus), the form in which Luke received them may not have indicated this original twinning. He may have found them separately in his source and have decided to reconnect them in his own work, thus restoring them to their original position, but retaining the applications as he discovered them in his source. This is pure speculation, but speculation which allows us to ignore the conclusion to which Bultmann's comment might lead us - that the parables were not delivered together.

Whatever we may say about the wording and accuracy of the applications appended to the parables, we must admit that they speak of the right thing - the joy of recovery, and they do so to people who would not wish to ascribe such joy, or even such intentions of recovery, to God.

Together with these parables, Luke has placed a parable of a considerably different character, but one which he apparently believes to say the same thing.

#### (4) The parable of the Father's Love (Luke 15:11-32)

This work is one of the longest, most complex parables of the Gospels. Critics have tried to make approach to it simpler by dividing it into its separate chapters - about the Prodigal, the Father, and the Elder Brother. Thus A.T. Cadoux argues, concluding "... though the last chapter has the fighting point, the other two obviously have each their own meaning and yet each contributes to the point of the whole, and calls from us a judgement on the story which becomes our answer to the criticism of scribe and Pharisee."<sup>16</sup> However, Cadoux hardly gets any further with an interpretation, except to notice that "... it is vitally related to its occasion, apart from which we should not understand why the story did not end with the prodigal's return."<sup>17</sup>

Even having said that, there is a possible argument for eliminating

the last section (vv. 25ff) on two grounds. First, the story seems to reach a natural climax at verse 24, ending with the comment that they began to celebrate, echoing thus the joy which was the whole point of the previous two parables. Secondly, after the episode of the elder brother's complaints, the writer seems to find it necessary to return our thoughts to the theme of rejoicing in verse 32.

However, we are on difficult territory if we attempt to assert that the emphasis on the joy of the return is as certain here as it was in the previous two parables. As most would agree, the parable far rather speaks of the incredible goodness of God.

This very point is made by Bultmann, who states that the narrator's purpose is to "make plain the fatherly goodness of God."<sup>18</sup> But he goes on to suggest other grounds for doubting the integrity of the latter part of the parable. He claims that the fatherly goodness of God is already made plain by verse 24. This, however, he does not himself pursue since he finds that the latter part of the story does not destroy the point of the parable, but rather reinforces it by contrast.

T.W. Manson contends that the parable makes two main points. First the care and patience of God toward the sinner and the joy with which the repentant sinner is received. Second, the rebuke to the harsh and censorious attitude taken up by the righteous towards the sinners. Here Manson is at cross purposes with Bultmann in that he identifies two points which the parable seems to be making whereas Bultmann sees the second as another way of saying the first. It seems far tidier to pursue the Bultmann line here and to see the second section as the logical outcome of the first. Certainly the section on the elder brother is a rebuke to the type of people who were hearing the parable, but so, rightly understood, is everything contained in the first section. Anders Nygren, in "Agape and Eros" makes the point very forcefully that there could be nothing more offensive to the Jewish outlook than the idea of God's goodness to and love for sinners. He would go so far as to say that this parable is inexplicable

except in terms of unmotivated love, a concept which he claims to be foreign to the Jewish consciousness.

That this is the area in which the parable works is the conclusion of Jeremias. It is the reason he renames the parable "The Parable of the Father's Love". However, although Jeremias finds the point of the parable to be very simple - "The parable describes with touching simplicity what God is like, his goodness, his grace, his boundless mercy, his abounding love"<sup>19</sup> - he does assert, with Manson, a double application in that the second part seems to be a specific rebuke to those who were listening. He does not question the integrity of verses 24ff, but merely points to a double application for the parable. Neither Jeremias nor Manson have taken adequate account of the point made by Nygren above.

Jeremias is, however, right about the main thrust of the parable. It is a vindication of the Good News to those who were not accepting it. It does its work with amazing artistry, creating, as Jeremias very ably illustrates, an intense atmosphere of forgiveness.

Once this atmosphere has been realized, and once we have acknowledged the consistency of the second part with the first, it becomes an easy matter to accept this parable as a piece of extended and considered polemic, completely different in character from the two preceding parables, which, it might be argued, could have been delivered off the cuff.

Some have attempted to destroy the unity of the parable by pointing to difficulties within the story, such as the matter of why the elder brother still seems to be employed by the father and in no better position than at the beginning even though the property of the family has during the story been divided between them. This objection, however, has been answered by Jeremias, who explains the legal position which made it impossible for the elder son to dispose of what was already allotted to him as his inheritance.

Some would want to ask why, if this parable is really part of a trilogy of parables, we hear about the attitude of the elder brother when

in the companion parables we hear nothing of the remaining sheep and coins. Here we may agree with Dodd, who says "Luke has used a similar setting for the three parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son, of which the first two form a characteristic pair, while the third is related in subject, but different in treatment"<sup>20</sup> and with Manson who says "the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are parables and not fables; and therefore we do not expect to hear about the feelings of the sheep or the coins. Further, there was no reason why Jesus having made two parables on this model should be compelled to make every other on the same pattern."<sup>21</sup>

It seems reasonable merely to take notice of the various arguments for and against the dividing of this parable at verse 24 and to say quite simply that even if we cannot tell whether this is the original form of the parable or not, the point of the parable is the same whether we divide it or not. It still speaks of the goodness of the father, a goodness which was sufficiently well known to the younger son for him to be able to go home and beg forgiveness. It still speaks a word of condemnation to the attitude which the Pharisees and their like were taking, for, as we have observed above, to them there was little more offensive than the idea of God's love of sinners.

All that seems necessary to the argument is to make the point that when we are dealing with the central point of the parable (on which most seem to agree), the second half of the story merely reinforces the first and punches the message home. It is, if we consider the audience to whom the parable was spoken, an exercise in making the cap fit more closely, an attempt to make more explicit what was implicit in the first part - that Jesus was, though not near to allegory, provocatively pointing the accusing finger.

Manson argues "The simplest explanation of the story is that the father represents God, the elder brother those scribes and Pharisees who

criticized Jesus, and the younger brother the publicans and sinners whom Jesus befriended",<sup>22</sup> and although Jeremias would not even go thus far with any identifications - "The parable is not an allegory, but a story drawn from life, as is shown by verses 18, 21, where, in a paraphrastic way, God is named: 'Father I have sinned against heaven (i.e. God) and against thee'. Thus the father is not God, but an earthly father"<sup>23</sup> - the situation in which the parable was delivered makes it easy to see that what Jesus was driving at was the inability of his audience to see and understand that this was how God's attitude was towards men.

What has been given insufficient attention in the commentaries is a point made by Eduard Schweizer: "Historically speaking Luke was probably right in maintaining that Jesus' attitude toward the tax collectors provides the background for this parable. Whether an attack on the part of Jewish theologians was really the immediate cause is more doubtful. In any case, Jesus explains his conduct toward the tax collectors with a parable that tells how the kindness of God operates. With an assurance that must have struck his hearers as unexampled, he equates God's merciful conduct with his own conduct toward the tax-collectors."<sup>24</sup> Not only must we remember, with Nygren, that the idea of God's overwhelming mercy was offensive to Jesus' hearers, but also that the deeper offense would be caused to those who saw that Jesus was claiming that his own conduct was a reflection of the divine attitude. This was as audacious as Jesus could have been. The point articulates the fact that what is (perhaps increasingly so as the centuries separate us from the original situation) on the face of it a gentle and beautiful expression of love and joy was originally not only this but also one of the most radical challenges Jesus delivered to his opponents. As Schweizer goes on to say, "Those who nailed him to the cross because they found blasphemy in his parables - which proclaimed such scandalous conduct on the part of God - understood his parables better than those who saw in them nothing but the obvious message, which should be self-evident to all, of the fatherhood and kindness of God, meant to replace superstitious belief in a God of wrath."<sup>25</sup>

NOTES

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2. MANSON, T.W., The Sayings of Jesus, SCM Press, from an earlier work of 1937, p.282
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4. ELLIS, E.E., The Gospel of Luke, Nelson, 1966, p.197
5. MANSON, T.W., *op. cit.*, p.283
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8. LINNEMANN, E., Parables of Jesus, S.P.C.K., 1966, p.67
9. CADOUX, A.T., "The Interpreted Parables", Congregational Quarterly, October 1925, p.453
10. BULTMANN, R., *op.cit.*, p.171
11. CREED, J.M., The Gospel According to St. Luke, MacMillan, 1930, p.196
12. MANSON, T.W., *op.cit.*, p.284
13. JEREMIAS, J., The Parables of Jesus, S.C.M.Press, 1963, p.91
14. BULTMANN, R., *op.cit.*, p.194
15. *ibid.*, p.171
16. CADOUX, A.T., The Parables of Jesus. Their Art and Use, James Clarke, 1931, p.123
17. *ibid.*, p.121
18. BULTMANN, T.W., *op.cit.*, p.196
19. JEREMIAS, J., *op.cit.*, p.131
20. DODD, C.H., The Parables of the Kingdom, Nisbet, 1935, quoted here from the Fontana edition of 1961, p.89
21. MANSON, T.W., *op.cit.*, p.285
22. *ibid.*, p.286

23. JEREMIAS, J., *op.cit.*, p.128
24. SCHWEIZER, E., Jesus, S.C.M. Press, 1971, p.28
25. *ibid.*, p.29

CHAPTER FOUR  
PARABLES OF THE END

Within the eschatological discourse of Matthew 24 and 25 there are a number of parables which have been assembled with the obvious intention of relating to the topic of eschatology. It will be the purpose of this section to look at the main parables contained in the discourse and to try to decide whether they are appropriate to their present context. We shall deal with five items:

(a) two small images - the parables of the fig tree and the burglar

(b) three major parables - the conscientious steward, the ten virgins, and the talents.

There can be little doubt that Matthew would relate each of our parables to the end-time. From the contexts provided by Mark and Luke for those parables they also include, there seems to be considerable support for Matthew's view. The following table attempts to summarize the applications offered by the various evangelists:

PARABLE	GOSPEL	APPLICATIONS	
		EXPLICIT	IMPLICIT
Fig tree	Mt.24:32-33 M. 13:28-29 L. 21:29-31	The parousia - "Know that he is near" (v.33) as in Matthew The Kingdom of God (v.31), but the context implies that this term refers to the end-time, the Day of the Son of Man.	
Burglar	Mt. 24:42-44 L 12:39-40	The parousia ("The Son of Man is Coming"), exhorting preparedness (vv. 42 and 44) as in Matthew (see v.40)	
Conscientious Steward	Mt.24:45-end L.12:42-46	The judgement of the end-time (v.51), following immediately the exhortation to preparedness. The parousia, in answer to Peter's question in v.41	

PARABLE	GOSPEL	APPLICATIONS	
		EXPLICIT	IMPLICIT
Ten Virgins	Mt.25:1-13	The Kingdom of Heaven (v.1), with exhortation to preparedness (v.13).	
Talents (Pounds	Mt.25:14-30 L 19:11-26	The judgement of the end-time (vv.29-30) The idea of preparedness, as an answer to those who thought the Kingdom of God was due there and then).	The Kingdom of God (v.14)

The table shows a very clear pattern in the interpretations of the various evangelists. They consistently apply them to the same area of thought, whether they label the end-time as the "Day of the Son of Man" or as the "Kingdom of God". The label they apply is hardly relevant since they are quite clearly talking, in each case, about a crisis point, an end-time, and trying to point out the action which is appropriate to that end-time.

We shall now look at each of these parables in the order in which they appear in Matthew and endeavour to see whether this context and the supporting contexts given by the other evangelists can be substantiated.

#### (1) The Parable of the Fig Tree

There is little to choose between the three versions of this parable, but one point in Luke's version helps us to prefer the more closely comparable versions of Matthew and Mark. That is the addition in Luke's version of the words "and all the trees". If this expression were part of the original parable, we might well ask why there should be any special mention of the fig tree at all. Despite his surprising omission of the Matthean version, we may agree with Manson's comment in respect of Luke: "It is reasonable to suppose that it has been taken over by Luke from Mark".<sup>1</sup>

Whichever version we choose to look at, we have a very small

illustration to consider, consisting, once stripped of its interpretative material, of one thought only, that the appearance of the fig tree's leaves is a sure sign that summer is near.

The main question at issue is whether this idea was originally attached to a context similar to the one given by the evangelists (i.e. to some words of Jesus concerning the eschatological moment in history, whether he saw that as near or far off), or whether it was attached to some other context, like, for example, the preaching of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. John Reumann, without further comment, assumes that the parable has been reapplied by the evangelists, when he says "In a few cases like Luke 21:29-31 (cf. Mark 13:28-29) one can even see a saying about the nearness of the Kingdom being reapplied to the coming of the Son of Man".<sup>2</sup> That it makes more sense to understand the parable this way is the contention also of Dodd, who says "it is more pointed if Jesus was calling upon men to recognize the significance of the situation in which, at the moment, they stood."<sup>3</sup>

There is a further reason for doubting the authenticity of the context in the consideration given by Jeremias to the image of the fig tree itself. He sees this image as one which speaks of a coming blessing rather than the "horrors of the end of the age".<sup>4</sup> Jeremias would therefore want to set this parable alongside the parables concerned with the harvest and suggest a similar context in the preaching of the arrival of the Kingdom, the arrival of salvation. The argument is persuasive if we first say that this parable is likely to have been delivered at the same time as or in similar circumstances to the parables of growth, but otherwise it is worth little on its own and is merely supportive to the argument. If it were delivered into a different situation from that into which Jesus delivered the parables of growth, there is not sufficient material within the story itself to connect the image with harvest time and its consequent connotations of the arrival of the Kingdom.

To reject the context merely on the grounds that it is inconsistent with what has gone before it, however, will not work. McNeile attempts to do just this.<sup>5</sup> Although he declares the utterance itself to be genuine, he says "it cannot be in its original position since in vv. 29-31 the End has come, but in v. 33 'all these things' are only signs that it is near." This will not stand because the parable and its application in verse 33 can easily be accepted as an illustration which parallels the preceding verses. The signs of verse 29 can be seen as the presage of the events which are described in the following verses, and the parable puts this into picture form. We may agree with Manson that "The parable is an excellent illustration of the piece of teaching just given concerning the end."<sup>6</sup>

We can see, therefore, that although various approaches may be made to the removal of the verses from their present context, we are ultimately left with a decision which must be based on what was the most likely situation to which Jesus could have directed such an image. We can see that the evangelists have not inserted it into a preposterous position, for it can adequately bear the weight they place upon it. It need not, however, be the case that they have the correct original position.

Perrin would argue that this parable is not evidence for an "imminent expectation" in the teaching of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> He argues that since there is some doubt as to whether its reference is to the future or to the present, we may not derive the idea of imminence from it. This may be so, but if we throw ourselves back onto the only question which is likely to yield to us a tolerable understanding of the parable's original meaning - the question of the situation to which Jesus addressed it - we would have to ask Perrin why it should ever have been uttered.

The most likely interpretation of this parable is to be found amongst those who understand it in terms of the essential content of the preaching of Jesus, which is the arrival of the Kingdom of God (past, present or future, no matter which) rather than the prediction of the end and the

eschatological occurrences which accompany it. The latter is more likely to contain adaptations of the early church to suit its recent history than is the preaching of the Kingdom which was Jesus' main task. If we understand the parables of Jesus as being essentially his style of refuting criticisms, answering questions, and challenging all his hearers, then this parable has an obvious context within the plain challenge that the Kingdom of God is near at hand. It would simply be used to ask the hearers, whoever they are, why they did not see what was staring them in the face. The arrival of the Kingdom of God was presaged by signs which obviously spoke of the Kingdom, just as the arrival of summer was heralded by the budding of the fig tree. At one time Jesus answered the ambassadors of John "Go back and tell John what you have heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the Good News is proclaimed to the poor" (Luke 7:22). Perhaps such a situation as this gave rise to the parable. The signs are there for you to read, he said, and in certain cases you can read them, cases like the fig tree, but in others (like the Kingdom) you cannot see what is there in front of you.

## (2) The Parable of the Burglar

".... the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night"

(1 Thess. 5:2)

"Lo, I am coming like a thief" (Revelation 16:15)

"I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you" (Revelation 3:3)

That the early church was quite prepared to make use of the familiar imagery of the preaching of Jesus and remould it to suit its own circumstances is quite clearly illustrated by the above quotations in their relationship to the parable in question. Plainly this was an image which was commonly used in connection with the parousia, and we need not be surprised to find it so applied in the synoptic Gospels. In the delay

before the expected parousia, the message that the church took from the parable was one of watchfulness and preparedness for a second coming the date of which nobody could tell. Whether this can reasonably be said to be its original context must be questioned.

Dodd traces the ancestry of this passage to "as early a stage in the history of the church as it is possible to reach"<sup>8</sup> and this factor might have led us to assert that we are here dealing with an original application rather than one provided by the early church, were not Dodd's subsequent comments equally true - "... the growth of interest in the expectation of the second advent must have begun as soon as even a few years had elapsed since the resurrection without bringing the expected consummation".

Even though we may wish to doubt the present context of the parable, we may not do so on the grounds suggested by Cadoux, who says "It is impossible to take this application as authentic, for in it the disciples are told that, because under certain circumstances the goodman of the house could not watch, they being in like circumstances, ought to watch. The parable cuts the ground from its application."<sup>9</sup> The point of the parable is not that the householder could not watch, but that he made no provision for security.

Jeremias would divide the parable from its context because the parousia would presumably be a cause of great joy to the disciples whereas the coming of a thief is quite the opposite.<sup>10</sup> This, however, is to allegorize the parable too much.

To extract the parable from its context here and place it as firmly in the preaching of the arrival of the Kingdom as does Dodd, however, is to take it too far in support of his theory of "realized eschatology". He says "If the householder had known, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into..... The Kingdom of God has come - unexpectedly, incalculably - and Israel was taken by surprise."<sup>11</sup> This is to hang too

much on the parable, for it demands that Jesus preach to the people that the arrival of the Kingdom is a past event and that nothing can be done about it now.

The context which makes reasonable sense of it is again the arrival of the Kingdom of God, but without any particular need to specify the tense in which that preaching took place. The ideas which are contained in the parable itself are twofold:

- (a) the challenge of insecurity - i.e. a burglar may come
- (b) the ignorance of the time - so you must always be prepared and treat the burglar's coming as imminent.

Taking these two ideas, readily available to us within the story, we can see that they aptly fit the context given by the evangelists in that they speak quite consistently of the coming parousia, but we must remember that they speak equally well of the initial preaching of the arrival of the Kingdom of God, which was Jesus' main preoccupation. Jesus might well have been telling his hearers that the arrival of the Kingdom (whether past, present or future) was a matter which presented a radical challenge to them all, and that even though you don't know the time of its arrival, for such an event preparedness is a constant priority.

### (3) The Parable of the Conscientious Steward

Although I.H. Marshall argues "There is no good reason for denying the possibility that Jesus spoke to his disciples about the future in terms of warning, or that he spoke to them about the parousia by means of parables"<sup>12</sup>, and although in the two previous examples considered we have merely been able to suggest (rather than prove) a better context in the initial preaching of the Kingdom by Jesus, it is more difficult in the case of this parable to avoid the weight of evidence that the early church has worked it over to suit its own situation awaiting the delayed parousia. That the parable suited their cause and that they had a clear motive for interpreting it in these terms is undoubted. However, as Jeremias has ably

demonstrated, the variant versions here illustrate far better than in the previous examples how the tradition has been at work and reinterpreted the parable. If we conduct an exercise in recovery we may see more clearly than before how the "parousia" parables of Matthew 24 and 25 originally were addressed to another situation.

Quite clearly the Matthean and Lucan contexts both set the parable in the context of the awaited parousia and thereby indicate an exhortation to preparedness for the coming of the risen Lord. Matthew's verse 44 and Luke's verse 40 indicate so much. Two factors internal to the parable story, however, indicate a setting in which Jesus speaks in his early ministry to Jews rather than in his later ministry to the disciples concerning his return. If the latter had been the setting there might have been some confusion in the hearers' minds as a result of Jesus' use of the word *κύριος*, for he would thus have obviously been applying the term in the story to himself, and would have been predicting the way they would be talking of him after his resurrection and ascension. This therefore makes the setting more appropriately earlier, when there would have been little to hang on the word other than what was internally required by the story - the *κύριος* was thus merely the master of the house. Secondly, we must recall that even if Jesus had delivered this parable late on in his ministry and intended to speak of his second coming, and even if he had addressed it to his immediate group of followers rather than to the Jews at large and to his opponents in particular, the term "servant" would still have brought to mind the Old Testament mode of speaking of the religious leaders. As Jeremias says, "From the Old Testament they were familiar with the designation of leaders, rulers, prophets, and sacred persons as servants of God".<sup>13</sup> Dodd agrees with this view - "They were familiar with the idea of Israel as the servant of the Lord, and in particular of outstanding figures in the history of Israel, such as leaders, rulers and prophets as in a special sense His servants."<sup>14</sup>

These considerations make the proposition that there has been a shift in interpretation and setting more likely than in the previous examples we have considered, but several other points support it by showing how much the parable has received by way of explanation from the evangelists. Jeremias again points out, for example, how the Lucan version has added to the story verses which are ill-fitting (verses 47-48).<sup>15</sup> Further, although Luke's introductory question (verse 41) indicates that he understood this parable as instruction for the Apostles, there is considerable doubt as to the authenticity of the verse since Matthew has no sign of it. It must either have been supplied by Luke as a transition from the closely linked passage in vv. 35ff or it must have been inserted here by him from a further source of his own. At this point Fenton argues that Luke in fact made use of Matthew's Gospel on the grounds that the language of the parable is distinctively Matthean and is followed almost word for word by Luke. This argument, as well as steering us to the Matthean version as the most original, disposes of the question from Peter even more convincingly.

The Matthean version provides much less accompanying material than the Lucan. Apart from its immediate context which indicates that it was being understood by Matthew in the same way as it was by Luke, the only additional clue provided by Matthew is the characteristically Matthean phrase in v. 51b. There may be some doubt as to the authenticity of verse 51a in view of the fact that to treat somebody as harshly as this in these circumstances is unlikely and militates against the realism of the story, implying rather an eschatological punishment than a punishment given by the master of the household within the terms of the story. However, following Jeremias's arguments,<sup>16</sup> we may perhaps understand the meaning of

διχοτομήσει αὐτοῦ, which is somewhat doubtful in its context, as "give him blows". The latter part of the punishment may, as indicated by Jeremias, be a Matthean addition, ὑποκριτής being a pet word of Matthew's.

Having done such excavatory work we are left with the core of a

parable which we must remove from its context and consider separately. We have the story of a servant with a position of particular trust and responsibility, who, without knowing when his master's return is due, is suddenly put in the position of being tested by his arrival.

If, as we have argued above, the proper context of this parable is in the early preaching of Jesus concerning the arrival of the Kingdom, the likely context and meaning is similar to the one we have suggested for the other parables already considered. Jesus announced the arrival of the Kingdom and with it delivered stern warnings to religious officialdom that any whose past trust was being betrayed would be shown up very clearly and that the arrival of that time was imminent.

#### (4) The Parable of the Ten Virgins

There is some doubt as to whether we are here dealing with a parable which has roots in the original preaching of Jesus or whether it is an allegory teaching preparedness for the parousia invented by the early church. On the one hand there are people like Bultmann saying "This is a Church formulation completely overgrown by allegory"<sup>17</sup>, and Linnemann saying that it "is certainly a creation of the early church"<sup>18</sup>, and on the other hand there are people like Klümmel adopting the opposite position<sup>19</sup>, denying the above assertion of Bultmann, and Jeremias, who asserts that we "should hesitate to see in the parable 'a later product of the Church, interspersed with allegorical features' (Bornkamm)"<sup>20</sup>.

In this consideration of the parable we shall not attempt to decide one way or the other in this particular debate but merely to pose the question of what its original meaning would have been, given that Jesus did compose a parable like it.

The first thing to say is quite obvious - he would not have used it to speak of his parousia. If Jesus had intended any such meaning, the element of delay in the parable (as indeed in the other "parousia" parables) would have been strange. It was not until some time after the resurrection

and ascension that any idea of a delay in the second advent came to be acceptable, so if Jesus had originally spoken, even vaguely, of a delayed parousia, we should find it strange that the Church ever expected a quick return. That the parable does not fit its present context is evident from the added verse 13, an applicatory thought which does not fit the parable at all. The exhortation to watch does not match the point of the story, in which all the virgins fall asleep. It is not even the case that having sufficient oil and a lamp burning is the point of the story, for even the foolish virgins bring these along eventually. The point of the story is that the virgins are expected to produce the desired results at the required moment. They must, in other words, always be ready. It is no good being ready at the wrong time because such tardiness meets only rejection.

The original meaning of the parable is thus unlikely to have been anything to do with the parousia, although it is easy to see how the transition to this context came about and easy to see how well it suits this context. The image of Christ the heavenly bridegroom was one which obviously helped such an interpretation, but the presence of the bridegroom in the story by no means necessitates such an interpretation since Jesus was quite used to describing the new age of the Kingdom in terms of wedding feasts, and any such story might be expected to contain such a character. It would be wrong to make too much of this point.

We may thus ask ourselves what would have been a likely context for the parable if we reject that parousia context. The answer is perhaps that it was a "call for a decision in the face of an event, not which has already happened, but which is impending".<sup>21</sup> Once again the parable makes most sense in the context of the preaching of the arrival of the Kingdom of God, for that was presented by Jesus in terms of a crisis which, if not a present crisis, was certainly an imminent one. It could in that context, have been a clear warning to those who did not heed his call and seemed to rest on their laurels.

(5) The Parable of the Talents

After the points we have made in the above examinations, less need be said in order to set this parable in the same light, for quite obviously it does not have an original context in the teaching of Jesus about this parousia. If it did, it would be much more necessary than it is to interpret the story allegorically, and such allegorical interpretation would demand that the disciples understand Jesus as a hard man, reaping where he had not sown and gathering where he had not scattered. As in the previous cases, this parable has no place in the context Matthew has given it.

An examination of the Matthean version alongside the Lucan version (of the Pounds) reveals similarities and differences. Both stories are elaborate in detail, and although following the same basic pattern, tell the story in two individually styled ways. The point of greatest agreement is at the climax of the story where the unproductive servant meets the reckoning.

A further clue that the parable belongs more readily to another setting is one we have noticed before in our examination of the parable of the Conscientious Steward. If what we have said there about the word "servant" eliciting from Jewish hearers the idea that Jesus meant the religious leaders of the time was true, it is also true here, and points us to the same general context as that to which we assigned the previous parables.

We may also notice that the connecting particle  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  would lead us to suspect that Matthew understood the parable to be linked with the preceding saying on watchfulness, a connection which will plainly not stand. Thus we find little problem in rejecting the Matthean context.

Once again we can see that the likely context, once the parousia context is dismissed, is within the preaching of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Therein it would constitute a powerful warning about the reckoning which the advent of the Kingdom brings to those who had failed

to make use of the great trust God had placed in them. The "servants" in this case may well have been the scribes, as Jeremias<sup>22</sup> and Fenton<sup>23</sup> both indicate.

#### (6) Conclusions

In the case of each of the parables we have looked at we can easily recognize that they fit their present context well, even though it may be an artificial one. There is no doubt that they would have been difficult for later generations of Christians to understand in their new situation and they may well have shifted their emphasis without having even been aware that there may have been another idea than that of the parousia at the back of Jesus' mind. That Jesus spoke of his coming again may well be true, and it is no part of this thesis to argue that particular case. But that he spoke of it in terms like these, though not impossible, is, as the discussion above shows, unlikely. In search of another likely context therefore, we can only, in agreement with a number of critics, suggest the challenging situation in which Jesus saw the Jews and (particularly) their religious leaders to stand. Theirs was, in face of the arrival of the Kingdom, a dangerous plight, and these parables challenge them to face it and act.

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p. 398

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

(1) Do they belong together?

There is general agreement among scholars that these two parables should be considered together. In all important features the stories correspond with each other. There is one character involved; he makes a discovery; it is of surpassing worth to him; he sacrifices everything in order to have it. It is not merely the fact that Matthew has placed the parables together that makes them worthy of being considered together. Their structure and approach lends them to it very convincingly.

Yet, even if they convey the same message in their present context, and even if they did so in their original context, we may not so easily assert that they were originally uttered together, tempting though this may be. Although they have their datival introduction in common, and although the introductory  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\lambda\iota\nu$  of the second parable would seem to link it with the first, there are significant points which would seem to indicate separate origins:

(a)  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\lambda\iota\nu$  is also used to connect the subsequent parable of the drag-net, which is a completely separate parable. It, and the words  $\acute{\omicron}\mu\acute{\omicron}\iota\alpha \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\nu \eta \beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha \tau\acute{\omega}\nu \sigma\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha\nu\acute{\omega}\nu$  are of questionable originality<sup>1</sup> (Bultmann, "History of the Synoptic Tradition", p.173).

(b) "In the two parables of the Treasure in the Field and the Pearl (Matt. 13:44-46) the change of tense raises the question whether they originally belonged together"<sup>2</sup> (Jeremias: "The Parables of Jesus" p.90).

(c) It may (only "may") be that the fact that these parables were preserved independently in the Gospel of Thomas indicates separate origins.<sup>3</sup>

A certain level of doubt we must admit, but although point (a) is anybody's guess, points (b) and (c) are open to criticism themselves. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that two similar stories told at the

same time were told in different tenses. It would depend on the atmosphere of the occasion and the personality of the speaker. Thus, somebody telling stories among a very large crowd or in a situation where he is attempting to impose his personality on a gathering of people, might indeed vary his technique to highlight the point of a second story. As for the point about the Gospel of Thomas, it could be true that Thomas separated two parables which were originally together in the tradition, or even that they became separated in that part of the tradition to which he had access.

There is a good case for arguing that whatever happened to the parables in the tradition, they belonged together in their original context. The remarkable similarity that exists between them is best explained by imagining the speaker doing what most preachers still do - searching for a couple of good illustrations of the point he was making and producing them in approximately the same fashion, one after the other.

It would be unwise to place too much reliance on the point, but it may also be true that the specific examples used in the parables also tie them together. Perhaps there is significance, for example, in the fact that the one man found his treasure by accident while the other found his pearl because he was searching for it. Perhaps it is important that one may be assumed to be a poor labourer while the other is a wealthy pearl merchant. Maybe the two being used together indicates the preacher's intention to convey the universal aspect of his message.

The scales are delicately balanced here. Did Jesus speak them... on the same occasion or not? Jeremias says: "They are closely connected but will have been spoken on different occasions".<sup>4</sup> The balance of probability is against him here.

## (2) The Question of the Morality of the Treasure-Finder

On the face of it, Jesus is here acquiescing in fraud, either because the treasure is apparently rightfully the property of the owner of the field, or because in attempting to buy the field the labourer did

not disclose information which enhanced its value.

Oesterley<sup>5</sup> offered two reasons for disregarding this challenge:

(a) He first attempted to deal with the legal and moral point by the assertion that, in Jewish law and custom, treasure-trove was the property of the finder. Unfortunately this, though dealing with the question of morality and legality, does not help the consistency of the story, since it provides no reason why the finder should attempt to buy the field.

(b) He secondly pointed out what others have agreed with (Jeremias, for example; says "The morality of his action is not under consideration"<sup>6</sup>) - that the Oriental story teller and his audience would not be concerned with the morality or immorality of the finder since the point of the story lay elsewhere.

Point (b) is one with which most scholars would now want to agree since there are other examples of parables where something (generally realism) is sacrificed in the interest of the main point of the parable.

Point (a), though attempting to deal with an apparent problem along the right lines, did not get a thorough examination until J.D.M. Derrett produced his article on this parable. Derrett's main intention was to argue that: "the upshot of the matter is that the finder was perfectly entitled in morals and in law to do what he did. His behaviour was proper, and indeed inevitable."<sup>7</sup>

Derrett points out that it is in "lifting" the treasure that it is acquired as property, so that this particular treasure did not so far belong to the owner of the field. However, the finder could not lift the treasure on his own behalf because of his position as employee. Consequently it was essential for him to buy the field and then to lift it on his own behalf.

We can see, therefore, that we have two strong reasons for feeling completely unembarrassed by the treasure-finder's actions.

(3) What do the parables mean?

(a) What did they mean to Matthew?

From their setting within Matthew 13 little is apparent. T.W. Manson says "These two parables have a direct bearing on the missionary work of the disciples. The thesis of both of them is that once a man sees the Kingdom of God as it really is, he will spare no effort and consider no sacrifice too great to attain it".<sup>8</sup> J.D. Kingsbury says: "The intention with which Matthew employs the two parables is paraenetic: through them Jesus Kyrios calls the members of a Church that was suffering from the turmoil of internal and external conflict to be disciples who are unremittingly dedicated to the doing of God's will."<sup>9</sup> These and other comments may well be true, but they may only be deduced from the parables' context by a somewhat tenuous link with what has gone before and what follows.

It may help us to see this as Matthew's intention if we notice the careful arrangement of the section. J.C. Fenton has noticed that Matthew 13:34-52 contains six paragraphs arranged as a chiasmus. He concludes: "The examination of the structure of the context shows us the two senses in which Matthew understood these parables. He is thinking of the disciples; they have sold what they possess, and they will have treasure in the age to come (cf 19:21). But they have already acquired treasure, in that they have heard the words of Jesus, which fulfil prophecy, and make its meaning clear."<sup>10</sup>

However, despite the fact that Matthew has arranged this material in a section spoken by Jesus to the disciples, we cannot conclude that this was how the material necessarily came into being. We must go on to ask

(b) What did they mean when Jesus uttered them?

First we should consider what alternative avenues have so far been opened up by commentators in the past:-

(i) A.T. Cadoux

Cadoux, for reasons which are detailed in the review of his work in Part One, runs into errors in his interpretation of both parables. The parable of the treasure he sees as an explanation of the hiddenness of Jesus' mission at that stage, and the parable of the pearl he sees as a comment on the way Jesus concentrated on the mission to Israel in order that through that concentration he might win the world. Both interpretations attempt to see the parables as an indication of Jesus' methods of working, which view may be expected from a critic who places so much emphasis on the parables as weapons of controversy, but which founders in each case because it exaggerates a secondary characteristic of the parable: in the case of the treasure, the hiding of the treasure after its discovery; in the case of the pearl, the oneness of the pearl which the merchant bought. If Cadoux had paid attention to the important point that these parables belong together as a pair he would not have fallen into this trap. In an attempt to find an original context for each of them he has lost sight of their essential similarity.

(ii) C.H. Dodd

Dodd also attempts to find for these parables a specific context rather than a general one: "They are not intended to illustrate any general maxim, but to enforce an appeal which Jesus was making for a specific course of action then and there".<sup>11</sup> The summary of his view on page 86 brings his argument closer to the truth than that of Cadoux, although there are as we saw in Part One, certain internal flaws in his argument.

(iii) J. Jeremias

Jeremias does not attempt what Cadoux and Dodd attempt - the application of the parable to the way Jesus conducted his ministry. He sees its application more specifically in terms of the Kingdom of God. He does, however, do what Cadoux does in that he sees the parables wholly in terms of a secondary feature of one of them. He takes the words

ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς

and not only applies them arbitrarily to the

pearl-merchant as well as the treasure-finder ("they are not expressly repeated in the case of the merchant, but they apply to him as well"<sup>12</sup>) but magnifies them from their position as secondary material to the significance of being the main point of both parables. He fails to notice that there are points in the story from which the joy springs, points which clearly place the joy, though important, in a secondary position. The joy could not, for example, come about without

- (a) the discovery of the treasure (pearl)
- (b) the realization of its worth
- (c) the possibility of acquiring it.

The idea of joy is significant, certainly, but not as the main thrust of the parable. Reumann's comment sets it in better perspective: "The fulness of each man's response is the reaction engendered by the joy that comes when the long-sought discovery is made".<sup>13</sup>

(iv) C.W.F. Smith

Smith interprets the parables according to the "how much more" principle. If a shrewd merchant can value a pearl so highly that he does what is described, how much more highly should men value the Kingdom of Heaven and commit everything to securing it. His approach is a fair one, but the "how much more" principle is hardly applicable. Just as commitment to the Kingdom should be total, so the commitment of the characters in the parables to their respective treasures is total. However, that he sees that the point lies somewhere in the area of total commitment and response to the Kingdom of God is a point in Smith's favour.

We could, of course, continue with a long list of comments on what has hitherto been said about these parables. The point in noticing particularly what Cadoux and Dodd have had to say about them is to observe that in their attempts to rediscover their original contexts and to find particular applications for them, they have overlooked the essential simplicity of the stories; and have not apparently attempted to hear the stories being told, to listen to them as if for the first time. Jeremias

too, one feels, is, perhaps in dissatisfaction with previous discussions of the parables, desperately searching for something new which will set them in a new light. It does not quite come off, as is the case with C.W.F. Smith's comments, although he is getting closer to their point.

It is these particular failures on the part of major commentators in the field which throw into relief what is the more likely point of these twin parables. Had we only one of the two to consider, the point would be in much greater doubt. We might then easily debate whether it is the great value of the treasure/pearl which is the point, or whether it is the fact of discovering it, or whether it is the joy which the discovery produces, or whether it is the sacrifice involved in obtaining it. However, if we accept the point that these parables originated together (see "A" above), the message is clear merely from the fact that there is only one primary idea which is common to both. Despite the differences in the Greek expression of it, the idea is contained in both parables that in order to obtain the treasure/pearl the man in question goes to the ultimate lengths. His order of priorities become: first, treasure/pearl; second, everything else, if, that is, there is anything else. In terms of reality, therefore, the parables advocate a clear order of priorities for human beings; first, the Kingdom; second, anything else. Or, perhaps to be clearer, the message could be restated, let everything else in life be brought into the service of the Kingdom, to become a means of entering the Kingdom.

Thus, the common feature of the two parables - the great sacrifice involved in obtaining the treasure/pearl - is the clue to what the parables are trying to say - that the Kingdom is worth everything. We may therefore agree with T.W. Manson when he says: "The thesis of both of them is that once a man sees the Kingdom of God as it really is, he will spare no effort and consider no sacrifice too great to attain it".<sup>14</sup>

We may not however agree as readily with Manson's prior point: "These

two parables have a direct bearing on the missionary work of the disciples".<sup>15</sup> In one sense this is of course true. Their missionary activity is bound to be governed by ideas such as the one enshrined in these parables. If, however, Manson is here attempting to suggest a particular context in which these parables may have originated (i.e. as instruction from Jesus to the disciples on how to conduct their missionary work), then he, along with the other scholars whose work we have already noticed, is attempting more than is possible from the text.

The power of the central point of the parables is diminished by attempts to set them into any particular context, whether it be attempts like Manson's, like Cadoux's or like Dodd's. Any one of them may be true; perhaps they are all false. To establish them however, it is necessary to overstate secondary features at the expense of the powerful central message. To pay adequate attention to the main point, however, is to make such considerations pale into insignificance, for once we recognize that they speak of the surpassing worth of the Kingdom, they become true for all of the suggested contexts, and true for our contemporary human condition as well.

Although his own treatment of these parables does not quite fit the description, Dodd says of them "Among the parables explicitly referred to the Kingdom of God, two of the shortest and simplest are those of the Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl".<sup>16</sup> In the search for particularity in their interpretation, their essential simplicity and powerful generality have usually been overlooked.

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CHAPTER SIX  
THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD

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Few parables have caused wider critical disagreement and confusion. The disagreement and confusion arises, however, over the verses (8-13) which follow the story proper, not over the story (vv 1-7) itself. As to the story, we may merely observe the findings of Donald R. Fletcher who finds "no one who challenges its integrity".<sup>1</sup> Most agree that the story is so unlikely a vehicle for moral teaching that it must be authentic.

The key points made by the main contributors to the debate are:-

(1) A.T. Cadoux

Cadoux places this under the heading "Parables of Conflict".

As he examines the illogicalities of the verses appended to the parable story, Cadoux is driven to the conclusion that the "lord" originally meant Jesus and that it was added by a later narrator to give what he thought was Jesus' opinion. Was he right in his estimate? Cadoux cannot attribute this sort of commendation to the lips of Jesus, neither can he see the parable's point as being concerned with wisdom or prudence or decisiveness. In any case, if vv 8 and 9 are removed, we come to v 10 which seems to condemn his action. Although verse 10 might have a better claim to authenticity than 8 and 9, it would, says Cadoux, result in an interpretation which would hardly do justice to the main point - "the way in which the steward tried to secure his own safety and comfort at the expense of his trust."<sup>2</sup>

Cadoux argues that the one possible occasion of such a parable is the condemnation of the high priests' sell-out to Rome, an occasion which he argues would make sense of verses 11 and 12.

(2) T.W. Manson

Manson recognizes this as part of Luke's "Gospel of the Outcast". It may, he says, almost be regarded as an appendix to the parable of the Prodigal Son.

With regard to verse 8, Manson thinks there is no doubt that Luke

thought of "lord" as the lord of the parable. But whether this is authentic is difficult to ascertain. He points out that if we wish to consider verse 8 as Jesus' own attitude, we need not consider that the "praise" given implies moral approval. The approval is said to be because he acted wisely.

Manson discloses what he thinks to be the real point of the parable when he shows that verse 9 is nothing to do with it: "The point of the parable is that if a bad man will take infinite trouble to get friends for his own selfish interests, the good man will surely take some trouble to make friends in a better way and for better ends".<sup>3</sup>

### (3) C.H. Dodd

Dodd sees all the verses following verse 7 as appended morals. "We can almost see here notes for three separate sermons on the parable as text" he says.<sup>4</sup> He argues that if "Lord" = Jesus, then the parable is a challenge to his audience to act consistently with the crisis in which they are. If, however, "Lord" = the steward's master, then, Dodd argues, the parable may have been aimed at the Sadducaic priesthood, an argument along the lines of Cadoux's.

### (4) J. Jeremias

Jeremias argues, on linguistic grounds, that "Lord" = Jesus and that, as all the appended verses from 8b onwards are secondary attempts at interpretation, "the interpretation of the parable has simply to be developed out of v 8a".<sup>5</sup> Thus the parable finds its way into the chapter entitled "The Challenge of the Hour". Jesus is saying, according to Jeremias, that the hearers are in the same position as the steward and should learn something from his action.

### (5) J.D.M. Derrett

Derrett arrives at a similar conclusion to that of Jeremias, but by a different route. He argues from the legal background to the story that what the steward did was right not only by God and by his hearers, but also by his master, who would reap the reward of being thought more generous and pious than he was. Despite his different route, he still concludes that the

area in which the parable speaks is that of encouraging people to rise to the challenge presented to them.

(6) G.B. Caird

Caird argues, as Derrett does, from the legal aspects of the story. He describes how the Pharisees had managed to circumvent the law on usury and produce what he describes as the "legal fiction" of being able to indulge in lending commodities at a rate of interest only when the borrower already had a quantity of what he was borrowing, the particular commodities here mentioned being those of which even the destitute might have small quantities! He continues: "Thus interpreted the parable is an attack on the niggling methods of scriptural interpretation by which the Pharisees managed to keep their religious principles from interfering with business and an appeal for a whole-hearted service of God. If worldly men like the steward and the landlord can recognise in a crisis that their best interests will be served by keeping the good opinion of their neighbours, religious people ought to be equally astute in keeping the good opinion of God."<sup>6</sup>

(7) Ronald G. Lunt<sup>7</sup>

Lunt allegorizes the parable. He declares that the owner is clearly God and that the situation is one in which all, Pharisee and Publican alike, are debtors to God and should behave accordingly. He then sees verses 14-16 as applicable to the parable whereas the intervening verses are secondary.

From these and many other comments made elsewhere, it is plain that the problems are insoluble at this distance from the original situation. Are we to separate all the verses 8-13 from the original story and leave it, as it were finishing abruptly, apparently incomplete? Are we to say that the Lord is really Jesus or not? Does verse 8b really make the dividing line? Do any of the verses 9-13 have a claim to connections with the original parable? The questions to which there are no final answers are innumerable.

What we can do is observe a balance of probabilities in the light of what the majority of scholars have to say.

As we have seen, most commentators finish up with an exegesis involving, not a moral generality on the use of money, not a comment on trustworthiness, but rather a situation of challenge, challenge delivered to his hearers by Jesus. If this is acceptable, and the fact that different scholars have come to more or less the same conclusion by different routes indicates that it is, then the balance of probability favours the argument that the Lord of verse 8a refers to Jesus and that this is a remark by a later commentator trying to show the use Jesus made of the story. This argument is supported by the fact that there is nothing in the tone of the story to suggest Jesus' disapproval of what the steward did as a result of his dismissal. As many have pointed out, he is called "dishonest" because of something he did to merit dismissal.

If we are to say that the Lord is in fact the steward's master, we either have to find an explanation for his extraordinary conduct in his admiration for the steward's astuteness or in the idea that he had in fact lost nothing by the incident himself. Either way, this understanding is not half as challenging to Jesus' contemporaries as would be the other explanation. For Jesus himself to praise the steward would have produced a more deeply felt reaction from his hearers and it is this which probably tips the scales in favour of this explanation.

If this is the case, it may well be that verse 8b hits the nail squarely on the head. If it is Jesus whom Luke understands as praising the steward, we can not only believe that the comment of 8b is fitting, but have a strong argument for saying that it was originally part of the parable itself and that 8a crept in later by way of additional explanation. It was certainly true that the "children of light" were a little slow in appreciating the crisis of their own situation.

In the light of such an argument we may easily agree with what is

generally accepted - that verses 9-13 have no original connection with the parable. Verses 14-15 do, however, point up the challenge which may have been understood by the hearers, and perhaps they therefore have a claim to an original connection with the story. They, together with 15:1-3 give a very clear indication of the context in which Luke understood these parables concerning the outcast. If the recorded reaction of verses 14-15 is at all accurate, our understanding of the parable as a challenge to the Pharisees to comprehend their own situation of crisis, demanding immediate action, is strengthened.

We must finally notice exactly what it was that Jesus was asking of his hearers. He was not presenting a case for specific action, action that could be likened to that of the unjust steward, no matter how morally correct or incorrect he may have been. That would be merely to assert a lesson about handling money, as the later explanations would have it. The parable is rather a challenge to take whatever action is appropriate to admitting that you are in a crisis. The commendable thing about the unjust steward was that he recognized that he was in a dangerous plight and that he took evasive action. The deplorable fact that Jesus saw and commented on was that the Pharisees were also in a dangerous plight and they did not realize it and did not act to avert it.

If the lesson was not clear, Jesus makes it plain, in Luke's version of the story, at verse 15. The challenge is then a direct and plain one.

NOTES

1. FLETCHER, D.R., "The Riddle of the Unjust Steward: Is Irony the Key?", Journal of Biblical Literature, 1963, p.15
2. CADOUX, A.T., The Parables of Jesus. Their Art and Use, James Clarke, 1931, p. 135
3. MANSON, T.W., The Sayings of Jesus, S.C.M. Press, from an earlier work of 1937, pp. 292-293
4. DODD, C.H., The Parables of the Kingdom, Nisbet, 1935, quoted here from the Fontana edition of 1961, p.26
5. JEREMIAS, J., The Parables of Jesus, S.C.M. Press, 1963, p.47
6. CAIRD, G.B., Saint Luke, Penguin, 1963, p.187
7. LUNT, R.G., "Expounding the Parables - III", Expository Times Volume 77, 1965/6

CHAPTER SEVEN  
THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD EMPLOYER

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We must agree with Bultmann at the outset that the original meaning of this parable is irrecoverable.<sup>1</sup> Despite this and our observation in Part One that Jeremias is still in fact hazarding a guess at the original meaning, we need not feel daunted in this case because once certain problems have been overcome, what is likely to have been the original meaning, or at least the area of its original meaning, is reasonably plain and may fairly safely be guessed. This conclusion is supported by the fact that modern critics almost unanimously arrive at the same result.

Initial problems to dispose of are:-

(a) The idea that the parable was in fact addressed to the disciples. The context is false (see below) and we need to suggest a new context in the light of the parable's most likely meaning.

(b) The context of the saying on the first and last. All scholars agree that this is false, not only because it occurs elsewhere in different contexts (suggesting it was a common catch-phrase), but because the parable manifestly has nothing to do with such sentiments. Equality is the finishing point of the parable, not inequality. J.C. Fenton<sup>2</sup> seems to suggest at one point that this saying refers to the order of paying wages, but this is clearly untenable (since the saying comes nowhere near the paying-out order and there is no suggestion that there was any grumbling about the order of payment!) and Fenton himself pursues the opposite line further down the page.

It is also evidently a false context when it is considered that Matthew inserts the parable into a Marcan passage, apparently deliberately making the connection through the idea of rewards hereafter for those following Jesus.

Once these problems are dealt with and we see the parable without any of its Matthean clutter, there is very little choice but to agree with

all the major critics (e.g. Manson, Jeremias, Dodd, Cadoux, Linnemann) that we have here a parable speaking of the sheer generosity of God, and one which was used originally to combat the criticism from Jesus' opponents that he was unjustifiably fraternizing with sinners.

The merit of considering this particular parable is to see that there are some areas where scholars are in almost complete agreement, perhaps because, once free of its internal problems, the parable even today leaves the hearer very little choice.

Two final points should be noted:

(a) It might be objected that the generosity of God is not immediately obvious from a story which culminates in such apparently mean injustice. Generosity was not the experience of all concerned, even if they were all in fact the object of it. Cadoux says "... a parable does its work badly if it does not, in the sphere of its story, win us to an unreserved judgement...".<sup>3</sup> We might question whether this one does win us to an unreserved judgement.

Two considerations ease the difficulty. First, we must remember that it was addressed to Jesus' enemies, not to us. With the added words about grumblers and the implication that it was the people who had a covenant relationship with the owner who were wrongly complaining, there could have been little doubt in their minds as to the thrust of the parable. Secondly, if we are to search for another meaning, there is nothing which approaches this one for adequacy.

(b) Two commentators have specifically mentioned the fact that this parable has a double edge to it - the idea of the goodness of God and the thrust against the grumbling Pharisees. The first is Jeremias, who observes that the normal pattern with double-edged parables is for the essential point to be the second point, in this case the attack on the grumblers. The second is C.L. Mitton<sup>4</sup> who seems to back up the Jeremias line completely. There is no cause for alarm in this case because the two points are the same in essence. The implication of

saying how good God is is a condemnation of the Pharisaic attitude. The implication of condemning the Pharisaic attitude is a belief in the great goodness of God. The parable certainly makes both points and certainly concludes on the pointing of an accusing finger at the Pharisees, but the point is none-the-less the same.

NOTES

1. BULTMANN, R., The History of the Synoptic Tradition, Blackwell, 1963, p.199
2. FENTON, J.C., Saint Matthew, Penguin, 1963, p.319
3. CADOUX, A.T., The Parables of Jesus. Their Art and Use, James Clarke, 1931, p.101
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CHAPTER EIGHT  
THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

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As the title usually given to this parable suggests, much of the importance of the story hinges on the character of the Samaritan, which is hardly surprising because not only is he a character which most of Jesus' hearers would have been astonished to find in that context but also because the parable follows the good "rule of three" story tradition. There are three people who one after the other encounter the unfortunate victim, and the structure of the story is such as to suggest that the real clue to the story's meaning will be found in the third.

We need not wonder, therefore, that considerable attention has been paid to that character, especially with a view to discovering whether Jesus is likely, in the original story, to have used a Samaritan as an illustration, or whether he would have chosen the more logical character in that situation - the Israelite layman. In dealing, therefore, with three issues concerning the story itself, the first is the question:

(1) Was the third character originally an Israelite or a Samaritan?

Those who argue that the third character was originally an Israelite layman present the following points:-

(a) The logical progression of the story would lead everyone hearing it to expect an Israelite layman as the third character. C.W.F. Smith quotes the French scholar Halévy's note on the incongruity of the Samaritan in the story when he says that the trilogy as presented is rather like narrating a story in which the characters are a priest, a deacon and a Frenchman.

(b) It is argued that a Samaritan travelling that particular road at that particular point in history is unlikely to have been on familiar enough terms with the roadside innkeepers to have done what this Samaritan is recorded to have done.

(c) The cultural context in which the story occurred is unlikely to have been able to cope with the idea of a Samaritan being a neighbour to Israelites. If Jesus actually told the story as it stands in the Gospel

he was in one breath reversing all the nationalistic thinking which led Israelites to think of their own people and people living within their territories as neighbours to the exclusion of foreigners and outcasts.

There are, however, answers to these points:-

(a) Some argue that it is right that the expected progression of argument is shattered by the astounding contrast produced when Jesus introduces the Samaritan. C.W.F. Smith sees the unexpected here as the master-stroke of the exercise. B.T.D. Smith argues that the distinctive contrast here is tolerable in the context of the whole mission of Jesus, which places considerable parabolic emphasis on the mission to the outcast. Jeremias comments ".it is clear that Jesus had intentionally chosen an extreme example".<sup>1</sup>

The point, then, is that the introduction of a Samaritan here makes the point of the story even more forcefully than could have been the case had the character been an Israelite, and that Jesus actually did this in his narration quite deliberately.

(b) Jeremias answers the second argument above by pointing out that the Samaritan was likely to have been a merchant who in that capacity could well have travelled that road regularly, and could thus have come to know the innkeeper well. Manson supports the view that the character was a Samaritan by pointing out that the story is a work of fiction, not of history, and that the point of the parable has nothing to do with whether or not that situation was a likely one - "In any case the point is that mercy and kindness were displayed by the last person from whom one would have looked for these qualities."<sup>2</sup>

(c) The idea that the cultural context of the narration of the story was an unlikely one is an argument which really defeats itself since it was surely this very fact which gave this parable, and indeed many parables of Jesus, the force they had. That Jesus was in the habit of turning the expected on its head and representing life to his hearers is a familiar idea.

For reasons such as these, and because the meaning of the parable seems to depend upon this very fact, it is likely that the original story spoke of a Samaritan rather than an Israelite layman. For those who think this is unrealistic, Manson has suggested a view which, though he does not adhere to it himself, could help to illustrate how an easy shift could be made from the original character to the Samaritan. He says "... if we have to deal with the difficulty of the Samaritan being on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, it is simpler to suppose that originally the third to arrive on the scene was an 'am ha-ares, i.e. a Jew who did not attend with proper strictness to the details of the legal system, a Jew who was not a 'practising' Jew. Such a conjecture would make the change to 'Samaritan' easily conceivable."<sup>3</sup> Along with Manson we should find this view unlikely. Jesus was not frightened of the drastic contrast and we might well be denying the audacity of his approach if we were to attempt to mollify the impact of the story.

There is one final point which, though not of major significance to the argument, does seem to support it - and that is that Jesus apparently (according to Luke) did make another point in connection with Samaritans when he healed the ten lepers. However, Creed points out the view that the motif of the grateful Samaritan seems to have been superimposed on the story, and this area of doubt reduces the support we can claim from the example.

A further, though minor feature of the story itself must now be dealt with, and that is a further question of the realism in the story:

(2) Do the characters behave in a way appropriate to their situations?

We have already discussed the problem of whether a Samaritan is likely to have been in the situation in which this particular Samaritan found himself. There is, however, a further question concerning the other two main characters in the story - the Priest and the Levite. Are they likely to have behaved in the way they are said to have behaved?

The point is made that both priest and Levite saw the injured man before they passed by on the other side. It is evident, therefore, that they must each have made the decision to pass by, and that that decision must have been based upon something. It has been suggested that they are likely to have acted upon religious precepts which prohibited their defilement by contact with a corpse. If this were the case considerable weight needs to be given to the corpse-like appearance of the injured man (as indicated by verse 30). However, a number of people have expressed doubts about the validity of this type of argument, and have concluded that their decisions were based upon very little other than their own callousness and indifference, which may perhaps have been justified in terms of religious observances. Jeremias says after looking at the case in detail "In short, it is difficult to regard the levite as governed by ritual considerations".<sup>4</sup> Thus, the argument also falls down in the case of the priest, for if there is doubt about the religious motives of the levite, there is very little point in making capital from the possible religious motives of the priest. Linnemann also dismisses this line of argument, when she says "Priest and Levite go by without bothering about the victim. Attempts are often made to find an excuse for this in some precept of their order, but they cannot be upheld, and besides are out of keeping with the spirit of the story. For what matters is the contrast between the attitude of these cult officials and that of the Samaritan."<sup>5</sup> Manson does not treat the point in any detail but certainly puts the behaviour of the priest and the levite down to their own callousness. Much of the background information to possible interpretations is sketched by the detailed work of J.D.M. Derrett, but it is to be doubted whether such detailed information actually informs on the purpose for which the story was designed or on the way it actually worked. When dealing, for example, with the Samaritan's behaviour Derrett suggests that the Samaritan behaved as he did largely because Samaritans rejected the spiritual leadership of those at Jerusalem, a suggestion which goes against the main point of the story - that the Samaritan acted purely as

a neighbour whereas those who might be expected to do so didn't. There is no need to offer any complex reasons for the behaviour of the Samaritan because his motive is plain from the way the story is told.

Whatever the motives of the priest and levite, whether they acted from a proper sense of duty, whether they ignored their proper duty, or whether they were confused by the contradictory laws which they might apply to the situation, we may conclude from the way the story is told and from the meaning which it attempts to convey that what Jesus was getting at is far more likely to have been that there was a vast difference between the personal morality and general attitude to life of the two officials of the state religion and the ordinary humanity of the man from whom nobody would expect such behaviour. There is no necessity for strict legal accuracy here. In his commentary, G.B. Caird does not deal in great detail with the legal aspects of the case, but comes close to the point when he says: "Jesus deliberately shocks the lawyer by forcing him to consider the possibility that a semi-pagan foreigner might know more about the love of God than a devout Jew blinded by preoccupation with pettifogging rules."<sup>6</sup> Likewise, in his commentary, E.E. Ellis does the same by stating that considerations as to the possible explanations for their behaviour are irrelevant - "The story stresses one thing: the religious ones, seeing the victim's need, passed by."<sup>7</sup>

One further feature of the story itself needs special consideration:

(3) How should we view the word "neighbour" (πλησίον)?

It is important to remember a point which Jeremias makes clear in a footnote explaining why he uses, in his exposition, the term "friend" rather than the term "neighbour". He says "The import of the story is obscured if πλησίον (=rea') in Luke 10:29 is translated "neighbour". The Christian conception of the 'neighbour' is not the starting point of the story, but that which the story is intended to create."<sup>8</sup> As many commentators have pointed out, the contemporary Jewish conception of 'neighbour' was an exclusive one.

As we shall see below, the context of the parable has been called into question, even though we shall observe that it is (even if false) not an unlikely one. It may well be criticized on the way the word  $\pi\lambda\eta\sigma\tau\omicron\nu$  is used here. At the introduction of the story it is apparently used to ask "Who is the man I ought to love?" but the answer is given in terms which indicate that a neighbour is "he who acts lovingly". Although it might be argued that Jesus is here apparently not answering the question asked of him, we could also argue that he is implicitly calling the question itself into question. He may be saying "you are asking the wrong question but I will answer the right one."

We have so far dealt with areas concerning the story itself and its details. The next step, before attempting to say how we should interpret the parable, is to deal with the other important aspect of the critical debate, its context.

In order to get at the main issues a short summary of the views of some of the critics is here valuable:-

(1) It would seem that T.W. Manson would support the Lucan context, although he does not deal with the issue in great detail. He recognizes the frequently made criticism that the parable is no answer to the question, but says "... this is a shallow criticism. Certainly no definition of 'neighbour' emerges from the parable: and for a very good reason. The question is unanswerable, and ought not to be asked."<sup>9</sup>

Manson does, however, score valuable points in favour of the present context of the parable when he deals with the verses preceding the parable (vv 25-28). Here he attacks the view that this piece of dialogue is the Lucan parallel to Mark 12:28-31(34). "Actually", he says, "the only point of resemblance is the fact that the two great commandments are conjoined in both accounts".<sup>10</sup> Manson continues to argue that not only is the Lucan passage not a re-written version of the Marcan one, but that it is not even a different account of the same incident. Manson's arguments are

convincing and supported by Jeremias who describes his challenge as being based on "weighty grounds".<sup>11</sup>

(2) J.M. Creed, however, though seeing the issue of the parable's context as an uncertain one, sees a closer connection between the Lucan passage and the Marcan. He says it is "either modelled upon that passage or else reproduces some parallel version. That Luke regarded it as a doublet of Mark xii.28f is shown by his omission of that passage at xx.40."<sup>12</sup>

(3) Linnemann sees the Marcan passage as the original form of the Lucan. She argues well for the view that the Lucan introduction to the parable was arrived at through the process of history whereby "it became harder and harder to understand the inquiring scribe as a man of goodwill, and the scholastic dialogue was turned into a controversy dialogue."<sup>13</sup> She further adds that the debate has been modified by Luke to appeal to the Gentile readers for whom he was writing, particularly in view of the insertion of the explanatory words "but he, desiring to justify himself" in verse 29.

(4) A point made by several people is also made by E.E. Ellis. That is that the importance of the issues under debate here was such that we might expect them to occur several times within the ministry of Jesus. Although he acknowledges the possibility that Luke is here narrating the same incident as Mark, he by no means excludes the possibility of its being a wholly separate occasion.

It can be seen that although at first sight the view that the present context of the parable is artificially based upon a separate incident derived from Mark's Gospel, some of the views above throw this debate into confusion again. No clearly acceptable view emerges from those dealing with the parable. It may fairly be said, however, despite the ready admission we may make with Bultmann<sup>14</sup> and Linnemann that this whole passage is a composite one, that the context into which Luke has

written the story is not an unlikely one. The debate situation is not untypical of the incidents recorded about Jesus' ministry; the questions asked are not unlikely questions; and the method which Jesus employs to deal with the questions are what we come to expect of him. This becomes clearer as we consider the question

(3) What does the parable mean?

Although different critics apply different words to the subject, and reason in different ways, most arrive at the same area of interpretation, and it is one which is consistent with the way Jesus spoke in other situations. Some views are these:

(1) "The conversation between Jesus and the lawyer perfectly illustrates the difference between the ethics of law and the ethics of love".<sup>15</sup>

(2) "'Neighbour' is not an object one defines but a relationship into which one enters. The root of the law - love of God and neighbour goes beyond law ..... this parable stands pre-eminent as the Lord's answer to all attempts at self-justification, to all efforts to enter the kingdom through formula obedience, to all legalisms - Jewish or Churchly."<sup>16</sup>

(3) "In this parable Jesus tells his questioner that while the 'friend' is certainly, in the first place, his fellow countryman, yet the meaning of the term is not limited to that ... the law of love called him to be ready at any time to give his life for another's need."<sup>17</sup>

(4) "The lawyer asks what are the limits which God sets to the love he would have man show to man. Jesus answers in the parable that love asks not for limits but for opportunity."<sup>18</sup>

(5) "Love does not begin by defining its objects: it discovers them... The point of the parable is that if a man has love in his heart, it will tell him who his neighbour is; and this is the only possible answer to his neighbour's question."<sup>19</sup>

(6) Linnemann sees the parable in similar light, but sees the issue as deeper than the mere command "go and do likewise" would suggest.

She points out the need for the legal structure to life before suggesting that from that point we may step outside the "shell we have made of the world" into "the unprotected life of real encounter", and she comments on the likely effects of this in our own lives. What she does is to go one step beyond the other views above in suggesting, as we might expect her to, what the psychological effects of this sort of situation are on ourselves as human beings, as well as trying to see what Jesus was saying to the particular person he was dealing with.

That the parable has become in many people's minds, particularly those with very little knowledge of things Christian, the archetypal pattern of Christian behaviour is not surprising, neither is it entirely undesirable. Much of what Jesus seems to have been expressing in his ministry is expressed here. As Jesus saw some urgency in his appeal to repent because the Kingdom was at hand, and as he continually thrust this appeal at people in many ways; as he very carefully attempted to show that the demands of God, though not undermining the law of the Jewish faith, went far beyond them; as he spoke in terms of Gospel and of love, rather than contract and law; so here we see Jesus extending the range of thinking of his listener on the very topic which he (the listener) raised. Although some have argued that the story may not have been fictional, we need not decide this issue to understand it purely as an example story which presents a case for decision. It does not present something analogous to the case in hand, it presents an example of the case in hand, and it is an example which not only fits the Gospel generally but this situation in particular. The man asked a question obviously aimed at definitions and delineations and received a much clearer answer than some would allow. He was firmly told that he was looking in the wrong place, asking the wrong question, seeing it the wrong way. Although the parable is not literally an answer to the question which was asked, it is most certainly an answer to the condition of mind in which the man found himself, but an answer which he didn't necessarily expect to come in such a personally committing

manner, and an answer which is yet another illustration of how Jesus' teaching added fuel to the fire which eventually consumed him. He was yet again pushing the law/love controversy to the limits of people's endurance.

NOTES

1. JEREMIAS, J., The Parables of Jesus, S.C.M. Press, 1963, p.204
2. MANSON, T.W., The Sayings of Jesus, S.C.M. Press, from an earlier work of 1937, p.262
3. *ibid*
4. JEREMIAS, J., *op.cit.*, p.204
5. LINNEMANN, E., Parables of Jesus, S.P.C.K., 1966, p.53
6. CAIRD, G.B., Saint Luke, Penguin, 1963, pp. 148-149
7. ELLIS, E.E., The Gospel of Luke, Nelson, 1966, p.159
8. JEREMIAS, J., *op.cit.*, p.202
9. MANSON, T.W., *op.cit.*, p.261
10. *ibid.*, p.259
11. JEREMIAS, J., *op.cit.*, p.202
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15. CAIRD, G.B., *op.cit.*, p.147
16. ELLIS, E.E., *op.cit.* p.158
17. JEREMIAS, J., *op.cit.*, p.205
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