

Parable Interpretation from Julicher to Ricoeur:
A Critique and Alternative Proposal

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McGill University
Faculty of Religious Studies
Montreal, Quebec



L. E. Siversns
Memorial University of Newfoundland
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All proofs or disproofs that we tender
Of His Existence are returned
Unopened to the sender.

W. H. Auden, "Friday's Child"
("In Memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer"),
in Homage to Cleo (London: Faber &
Faber, 1960), p. 78.

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Abstract

In the first part of this thesis I review the history of the interpretation of the parables of the New Testament from the time of Adolf Jülicher to the present. Various approaches to the parables are delineated, including the historical, existential, metaphoric, and structural. In each case, I suggest, there is a marked tendency to reduce the parable to a single meaning or idea, often a moral, with a concomitant loss of the parable as parable--that is, as a short, dramatic, story that challenges through a disturbing or freeing tension.

The second part of the thesis gathers together some of the reasons why the parable does not lend itself to interpretation. I argue that story is more persuasive than is interpretation and that the parable spoken is a more effective form of communication than is the silent reading of the parable. I then emphasize the usually forgotten fact that we no longer have the original storyteller with us, and therefore the meanings inferred through inflection and tone elude the contemporary hearer.

In the final section, my argument is that the parable cannot be interpreted, but at most it gives rise to an answering imagination that intuitively grasps the meaning and tells its own story. Examples of creative attempts to retell the parables are provided, but none is as effective as the original parable, and most attempt to resolve the original tension through moralizing. We still await a genius to speak afresh these works of Genius.

Resumé

Dans la première partie de cette thèse, nous faisons une revue de l'histoire de l'interprétation des paraboles du Nouveau Testament depuis l'époque d'Adolf Jülicher jusqu'à maintenant. Nous avons déterminé différentes façons d'aborder les paraboles, y compris les démarches historique, existentielle, métaphorique et structurale. Dans chaque cas, nous avons noté qu'il y avait une tendance à réduire la parabole à une seule idée ou à un seul sens, souvent à une morale avec perte concomitante de la parabole en tant que parabole, c'est-à-dire en tant qu'histoire courte, dramatique présentant un défi au moyen d'une tension perturbatrice ou libératrice.

La deuxième partie de cette thèse réunit quelques-unes des raisons pour lesquelles les paraboles ne donnent pas lieu à des interprétations. Nous sommes d'avis que le récit est plus persuasif que l'interprétation et que la narration de la parabole est plus efficace que sa lecture silencieuse. Nous soulignons ensuite le fait généralement oublié que le narrateur original n'est plus parmi nous et que par conséquent les sens suggérés par les inflexions de sa voix échappent à l'auditeur contemporain.

Dans la dernière section, nous émettons l'opinion que la parabole ne peut pas être interprétée, mais qu'au plus, elle soulève une imagination répondante qui saisit intuitivement la signification et qui raconte sa propre histoire. Des exemples de tentatives de raconter à nouveau les paraboles sont donnés mais aucune n'est aussi efficace que la parabole originale et la plupart essaie de résoudre la tension originelle en faisant de la morale. Nous attendons toujours un génie qui jettera des idées fraîches sur ces oeuvres de génie.

Preface

Thanks are due to Professor J. C. Kirby for his patience and help in directing this thesis, to the congregation of Community Church, Deep River, Ontario, for a climate of appreciation and understanding, and to my wife Betty, who not only typed the manuscript but was my extraordinary encouragement.

From one who by vocation is called upon to speak and write as plainly as possible in the contemporary idiom, the discipline of attempting to appear scholarly, let alone be scholarly, is difficult. I have attempted to avoid the personal and the oversimplification of that which is manifestly difficult. Still, I am aware that signs are evident that my discipline has been more like that of a novelist than a poet. It has been as Auden said:

...but he
Must struggle...and learn
How to be plain and awkward, how to be
One after whom none think it worth to turn.

W. H. Auden "The Novelist"
Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957,
London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1972,
p. 125.

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I

The majority of men in every generation, even those who, as it is described, devote themselves to thinking... live and die under the impression that life is simply a matter of understanding more and more, and that, if it were granted to them to live longer, life would continue to be one of continuous growth in understanding. How many of them ever experience the maturity of discovering that there comes a critical moment where everything is reversed, after which the point becomes to understand more and more that there is something which cannot be understood.

Soren A. Kierkegaard, The Journals of,
trans. by Alexander Dru, (London: Collins
Clear-Type Press, 1960), p. 172.

Before the message there must be the vision,
before the sermon the hymn,
before the prose the poem.

Amos N. Wilder,
Grace Confounding: Poems,
Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972,
p. ix.

Introduction

Why am I writing about the parables? There has been so much written already that my chances of adding anything new are slim indeed! Still, in reading and rereading old and new books and articles about the parables I have grown increasingly dissatisfied with an important presumption of parable interpreters, viz: The meaning of the parable is recoverable. That enough is known or knowable to state with some certainty what a given parable means. And especially that the parable can be transferred to other words.

While spending several long days in Harvard's Andover-Harvard Library, it occurred to me that in the dozens of books that I read on the parables (books in several languages and in date over many centuries) I was actually no closer to the parable when I read books about the parables than when I read poetic re-voicings of, or re-flections on the parables. Could it be that the critical tendency to reduction and specificity is not as close to the parable as the poetic or metaphoric evoking of response? Could it be that the tendency to strip the parable of its symbolic "form" leads to explanations about the parable that are not as legitimate a hermeneutic as language that excites and images and establishes a model that does not replace but sits alongside the parable? Could it

be that the parable resists attempts to wrestle it into submission, but whispers some of its secret to those who listen and dance and sing and tell stories?

My thesis, simply stated, is that the parables of Jesus cannot, as some have claimed, be given one specific meaning. Communication is cantankerous. The parables mean what they say; they do not lend themselves to explanation. To the extent that they can be expressed, it is by those approximations and modifiers of meaning - repetition, paraphrase, and counterparable including transfer to other modes of experience, such as poetry and song. Such repetition and paraphrase cannot explain, but has as its goal a parallel, or better parabolic, experience that permits or encourages a return to the original parable.

Especially since Julicher's late nineteenth century critique of those who tackled the parables before him, interpreters have attempted to explain the meaning of the parables. Since that time, study of the parables has often meant the death and dismemberment of the parable as living communication and a thorough but sometimes unimaginative study of the bits and pieces of its components. Parable study sometimes seems akin to attempts to study the meaning and purpose of man from the viewpoint of anatomy.

The attempt to explain, interpret or translate is understand-

able, some would say necessary and perhaps urgent, but the past, even as aesthetic object, is not easily mediated. The gap between the original author, his auditors, and the text as we have it is so wide that even the most careful expression of what the parable meant will be an expression of what it now means for the interpreter. Although it is a matter outside of the primary interest of this thesis, it will be evident that I am somewhat more sympathetic to the allegorists than are those critics who suppose that an explainable meaning can be found and articulated. Of course the allegorists often went to extremes, but the idea of stating a supposed single meaning of the parable was foreign to them. Their approach was creative and using the parable as text (and sometimes pretext) they told their own story. Perhaps it is better to tell one's own story than to claim a historical objectivity that is impossible to obtain. The relationship of parable and allegory is a question that will be raised, though a full treatment cannot be here presented. Suffice it to suggest that, veiled or clear, any attempt at interpretation is allegorical.

There are many other questions that could be raised but they are of peripheral interest to the writing of this thesis: Can we find or produce an adequate definition of parable? Are the parables works of art? Is art a more primary form of expression than are theological concepts? Why do some people "get

the point" while others need explanation? To what extent is humour an important part of the parable? How do story telling and poetry relate to parable and how much background, if any, is necessary before the parable can be grasped? What does a change of context do to the retelling of the parable? What is the relationship of form and content, and that of subject, speaker, writer-editor, text, expression, reader or listener? Is it necessary to refer to the intent of the author or does the text, or reader, have independence? How does language mediate and what is the role of experience in understanding? What is the relationship of metaphor to intellect and imagination? These are only some of the questions!

The first and longest section of this paper provides a resumé of parable interpretation beginning with the meaning of "parable" in the New Testament, and then considers parable interpretation by Julicher, Dodd and Jeremias, Fuchs, Wilder, Funk, Via, Crossan, Ricoeur and other contemporary interpreters. With each interpreter the nature of the debate about interpretation shifts and the way the parable is viewed is altered. Jeremias, for example sees the parables as scenes from the life of Jesus; G. V. Jones sees them as authoritative stories from Jesus and Via as independent aesthetic objects - but the assumption since Julicher is always that there is a recoverable and restateable meaning; there is an elusive application that will finally explain the parables. Julicher's legacy of a single

parable detail, has been consciously or unconsciously accepted by parable interpreters since his time.

Moving away from the historical critique in the second section I shall then consider, and in a somewhat indirect way, the question as to how parable functions, why what is written eludes our understanding, and why we cannot hear the parables as they were originally stated. In particular, the force of parable as a metaphoric and narrative story, and the problems associated with our no longer having access to the cues explicitly and implicitly present with the story teller are then considered.

As tentative and transitory attempts at understanding, the concluding section suggests a parabolic method of revoicing the parable and illustrates various attempts at transferring the parables to another parable or some other mode of experience - drama, film, novel, poem, etc. This is more of a workshop of possibilities than explanations of how to be parabolic in revoicing the parables. The best interpretation is no interpretation at all. One simply does not explain the "Mona Lisa" or "Guernica" or Beethoven's "9th Symphony". When it comes to encounters with the God of the parables, proofs of existence "are returned unopened to the sender."

II

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant -
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
.
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind -

Emily Dickinson, untitled poem (1129) in
Emily Dickinson, The Laurel Poetry Series
(New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1974),
p. 107

1 "Parable" in the New Testament

The word "parable", in its Hebrew form mashal, and with its root meaning "to be like", appears extensively in the Old Testament. Mashal is a word that identifies a variety of literary forms and various aspects of figurative language, including: enigmatic saying or riddle,¹ scornful or satirical saying,² allegory,³ wisdom sayings, maxims and pithy sayings or proverbs.⁴

Of the nature of a mashal but not so identified ("Here we have the words we do not really have the thing; in the same way where we have the thing we do not find the word.")⁵ we can include the fable⁶ and what is now called a parable - for example David's story to Nathan about the ravished lamb (2 Samuel 12: 1-4), Joab's parable (2 Samuel 14: 6-7), the parable of the Wounded Prophet (1 Kings 20: 39-41), the parable of the Plowman (Isaiah 28: 24-28), and the parable of God's Vineyard (Isaiah 5: 1-6).⁷ The uniting principle that gathers these disparate forms under one word is that although there is always a straightforward or prima facie meaning to the Old Testament meshalim, there is also a deeper or metaphoric meaning that can be apprehended by the discerning.⁸

In the New Testament "parable" appears as the Greek parabole.

Parabole is a technical term that meant "a throwing alongside", or the placing of things side by side for comparison. The Septuagint translated the Hebrew mashal with the Greek parabole, and occasionally paroimia, thus implying that if not identical mashal and parabole were at least related.⁹ In the New Testament parabole is used in reference to similes (Mt 13:33) likeness metaphors (Mt 5:14) figures of speech (Mk 4:33) examples (Lk 12: 5-21) riddles (Mk 7: 15-17) proverbs (Lk 4: 23) and maxims (Lk 14: 7-11).¹⁰ Parabole is not used in John's gospel but paroimia, "figure", a virtual synonym, is used instead, but in John the word means figure of speech with the sense of something hidden, as opposed to plain speaking.¹¹

As can be readily seen, "parable" in both the Old and New Testament does not carry the same rigorous distinction as it does in contemporary use.¹² Although there is a distant relation (through Italian, French and late Latin)¹³ to parole (one's word) parlance (manner of speaking) and parlour (speaking room), for the contemporary New Testament scholar, parable refers to the extended dramatic and metaphoric¹⁴ stories that occur many times in the Synoptic Gospels,¹⁵ and are always credited to Jesus.

The New Testament parables, defined in the narrower contemporary sense, are, if not "something entirely new",¹⁶ at least

are without close Rabbinic parallels,¹⁷ and are "outstanding examples of an established art".¹⁸ Although others, including Socrates and Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and Buddha also spoke parables,¹⁹ it is difficult to name anyone who has as many parables to his credit as Jesus.²⁰ As A. T. Cadoux maintained, no one spoke parables as Jesus did; he stands alone in his achievement.²¹ It is a striking fact that not even in the New Testament are there parables outside of the Synoptic Gospels.²² Parables are the primary form of narrative material in the Synoptic Gospels,²³ and according to Mark, when communicating with the crowds, Jesus used the parable form exclusively.²⁴

Some writers have insisted that when we hear the parables we come close to hearing the very words, the ipsissima verba of Jesus,²⁵ or as one older interpreter expressed it: "Here we quaff of divine truth as of water welling cool and clear from the living rock."²⁶ Jeremias also observed in the opening paragraph of his classic The Parables of Jesus, that:

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. 27

It has even been boldly stated that the parables encompass the total scope of Jesus' message,²⁸ though just what this might mean will have to be left for later discussion.

The problem as to what the parables meant appeared very soon after they were spoken. The particular parable that shows the problem most clearly is the parable of the Sower.²⁹ In Mark's gospel it reads:

'Listen! Imagine a sower going out to sow. Now it happened that, as he sowed, some of the seed fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground where it found little soil and sprang up straightaway, because there was no depth of earth; and when the sun came up it was scorched and, not having any roots, it withered away. Some seed fell into thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it produced no crop. And some seeds fell into rich soil and, growing tall and strong, produced crop; and yielded thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold.'³⁰

When we apply the tools of criticism (source, form and redaction) to the parable we can distinguish, in theory if not in fact, the original parable. So vivid was the parable that it has survived the subsequent retelling by the early church with variations in detail and emphasis.

What is immediately apparent is that the redactors, or gospel editors, saw the understanding or at least Mark's understanding of this parable as a problem and as a key to understanding other parables. Why, they asked, did Jesus speak in parables?³¹ The question apparently occurred to Mark whose own explanation or reiteration of Jesus' words was reworked by Matthew and drastically reworked by Luke.³² In Mark the passage and its immediate context reads:

When he was alone, the Twelve, together with the others who formed his company, asked what the

parables meant. He told them, 'The secret of the Kingdom of God is given to you, but to those who are outside everything comes in parables, so that they may see and see again, but not understand; otherwise they might be converted and be forgiven. 33

What has often been noted is that this passage appears to say that the parables were spoken so that those outside of the circle of disciples could not understand and therefore would be rejected. Certainly this is at least Matthew's (mis)understanding of Mark.³⁴ It has also often been observed that these words were probably not spoken in this context,³⁵ and not necessarily spoken by Jesus; the hand of Mark may here be evident.

By way of a brief overview of interpretation it is helpful to begin with Wrede who regarded the passage as unhistorical and opposed to the purpose and intent of parables. The passage, for Wrede, had its source in the early Church's conviction that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples and concealed himself from the crowds. Mark's concept of the messianic secret, according to Wrede, was the way the early Church accounted for the difference between the unmessianic reception of Jesus in life and the post-Easter worship of Jesus as the Messiah.³⁶

C. H. Dodd traces the passage back to the early Church and the "hardening theory" - the view that the Jews were providen-

tially blinded to the significance of Jesus so that God's purpose might be fulfilled through their rejection.³⁷ For the early Church, according to Dodd, this was an attempt to explain why Jesus and the Church were not well received by the Jews. Dodd is convinced however that Jesus did not in fact intend to conceal his message and therefore did not express it in an unintelligible manner.

Edward Siegman also argues that the passage is the early Church's attempt to account for the distressing question of the Chosen People's refusal to accept the Messiah.³⁸ Others have suggested that the obscurity of the parables is the result of Jesus' not being able to present a clear simple and direct statement because of the difference between his own messianic concept and that of the Jews.³⁹

T. W. Manson tackling the same problem argues that verse 12 refers to the Targum, the Aramaic paraphrase,⁴⁰ of Isaiah 6: 9f, rather than to the Greek of the Septuagint. For Mark's hina (that), the Targum has the Aramaic de which can mean either "that" or "who" - thus Isaiah is not quoted to explain the purpose of the parable but to explain the result of parable-speaking.⁴¹ All of which leads Manson colourfully to conclude:

The true parable,...is not an illustration to help one through a theological discussion; it is rather a mode of religious experience. It belongs to the

same order of things as altar and sacrifice, prayer, the prophetic vision, and the like. It is datum for theology, not a by-product. It is a way in which religious faith is attained and, so far as it can be, transmitted from one person to another. It is not a crutch for limping intellects, but a spur to religious insight: its object is not to provide simple theological instruction, but to produce living religious faith. 42

Joachim Jeremias argues that the context is composite and though this passage originally was spoken by Jesus, it did not originally refer to the parables at all but to Jesus' teaching in general.⁴³ As a saying the passage refers to outsiders for whom the words are obscure because they do not recognize Jesus. Nevertheless, if they repent, God will grant them forgiveness. For Jeremias, Mark did not understand that parable in this passage meant riddle and therefore he placed it erroneously in Mark 4, his parables chapter.

These views are convently summarized by W. Robert Meyers, who concludes: First, some critics, among them Julicher, Bousset, Wrede, J. Weiss, Rawlinson, Bultmann, Lightfoot, Dodd, E. T. D. Smith, Branscomb, W. Manson and Kummel, see the passage as a formulation of the Church, or the evangelist, to deal with a particular problem concerning the reception of Jesus.⁴⁴

Second, some argue that the saying comes from Jesus with the intent as stated by the evangelist. The saying is however removed of offense and an attempt is made to justify Jesus for having said it. Among scholars in this category Meyers includes: Bruce, Wendt, Gould, Oesterley, Swete, Buttrick,

C. W. F. Smith, and Farrer.

Third, are those scholars that Meyers describes as in a mediatory position: Torrey, Otto, A. T. Cadoux, Black, Piper, the later Manson, and Cranfield, all of whom attribute the saying to Jesus but insist that Jesus' intent is not accurately represented by any of the synoptic writers.

Fourth, some scholars are so ambiguous as to not fit into the other three categories. Bacon, for example, argues that Mark 4: 11 may represent a historical claim of Jesus but treats it as the Church's work. Schweitzer calls it one of the "unsolved problems". Grant suggests that behind the Greek hina is an Aramaic de but does not state that Jesus is the source of the saying.

With a somewhat different approach (perhaps I should call it "fifth") E. Schweizer suggests that for Mark something more than language learning was required in order to understand the parables. Failure to grasp the reality figured in Jesus' speech was the result of non-involvement with the speaker as he actualized his understanding of existence.⁴⁵ This existential understanding of the parables raised for Mark (or at least for Schweizer!) the question as to how later generations could become involved with the speaker in such a way that Jesus' understanding of existence could be actualized

and the parable be understood. Recently this view has also been supported and perhaps strengthened by Dan Via.⁴⁶

As with any good story, I save the best point for last. There is also an understanding of parable that does justice to what Mark may have been struggling to say and at the same time to our understanding of how parable functions. Why this aspect of communication has not been adequately dealt with by modern interpretation is to me a minor mystery. That understanding sees the "secret" aspect of the parable primarily in the multiple meaning that every metaphor, including the parable, holds. On one hand it is a true story of what sometimes happens when a man sows seed. At the same time the parable as a rhetorical device insists that what happens when a word is spoken is somewhat similar. People hear and respond in different ways - some have fertile ears and some have rocks in their heads or hearts. That some people get the multiple meaning and some do not is apparently a mystery for Mark. It is the very nature of imagination that it cannot be inculcated. It is not self created, to be sure, but it is self-willed. Failure to grasp this parable then, may reveal an inability or unwillingness to grasp any parable, metaphor or symbol.⁴⁷ Theologian-poet S. S. Curry expressed the meaning this way:

"A deep below the deep,
And a height above the height.
Our hearing is not hearing,

And our seeing is not sight." 48

Since literary theory in general and how the parable functions in particular appear to be outside of the interests of the synoptic writers, the same problem is approached from a more philosophical or theological point of view, viz. God is the reason why some hear and understand and some hear without understanding, nonetheless man's responsibility is to listen. Though by no means the same, the literary problem of understanding the parables at both levels and the theological problem of predestination and freewill are here related.

What is evident however, is that the parables were not left to speak for themselves. It may or may not be the case that they were understood clearly by the redactor - we simply do not know, but what is abundantly clear is that the parables were interpreted to suit the particular tone and doctrine of the early church and subsequent writers and redactors. There is no doubt that the parables as we have them in the gospels have been modified by their context in the gospels including the theological views of the redactor. The parables in Mark, for example, have been edited by Matthew to soften Mark's hardening theory of the parables, to emphasize an anti-Jewish and anti-Pharasaic stance, to historicize, spiritualize, apocalypticize and to emphasize a parenetic and ethical concern. Similarly Luke works over the "hardening theory", de-escha-

tologizes, presents a theology of history and has his own particular parenetic concerns.

This modification can be seen, for example, in The Wicked Husbandmen. Matthew (21: 45) and Luke (20: 19) are much sharper in identifying and condemning the Pharisees than is Mark. Matthew (but also Mark) emphasizes the vineyard in such a way that it calls up the vision of the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah (5: 1-7) and thereby further spiritualizes the parable. Matthew (21: 34-36) historicizes the parable by emphasizing the earlier role of the prophets. Matthew (21: 39) and Luke (20: 15) apply a christological interpretation so that the son is cast outside the vineyard and killed there, while Mark (12: 8) represents the son as being killed inside the vineyard. The interesting application of the Christological proof text, "the very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." (Mk 12: 10, Mt 21: 42, Lk 20: 17) is not even found in the version of the parable in the Gospel of Thomas (65). Differences in emphasis and detail are sometimes striking as the various versions of this and other parables are compared.

It should also be noted that the context in which the parables are placed has also influenced the way in which they are heard. Not only is a parable placed in an immediate context in the gospel but it is placed in the gospel, and this, in

turn is placed in the Bible. It is not so much that the parables were consciously interpreted as parables in the early church, but that they were restated by being placed in new and different contexts.⁴⁹

Whatever we think of the meaning of Mark 4: 10-14,⁵⁰ we must conclude that much of the early church found here and with the subsequent interpretation of The Sower, a justification and methodology for the interpretation of the parables,⁵¹ a justification and methodology that were to remain popular until our day.⁵²

James M. Robinson observed that:

It has been the fate of Jesus' parables that they were initially preserved by an unartistic evangelist, who mistook their form for that of allegory.⁵³

With this I would disagree. First, Mark is certainly not an unartistic evangelist as any outline of his gospel plainly shows. Second, there may be a worse fate for the parables than to allegorize them! It does not necessarily mean that the interpreters actually understood the parables as allegory. Perhaps allegory was the only way of preserving or at least of restating the parables, and indeed this may still be the case in our day!

We must also distinguish between the addition of possible allegorical details in the parables (such as the addition

of "beloved son", quotations from Psalm 110 and Isaiah 5: 1-7, in the Mark 1-11 version of the parable of The Wicked Tenants) and the allegorical interpretation of the parable itself. Clearly we have a kind of allegorical interpretation in the case of the parable of The Sower, The Tares (Mt. 13: 36-43) and The Net (Mt 13: 47-50) but what is often forgotten is that other types of interpretation are evident too. For example, the difficult parable of The Unjust Steward in Luke (16: 1-9) is interpreted by a series of comments that read like sermon notes and suggest that the parable had something to say about ethical conduct. It seems evident however that what the parable had to say about ethical conduct may have been a problem to the redactor. "May" because we have no way of knowing if the parable was actually understood in this way.⁵⁴ The most we can conclude is that the notes are inadequate as an explanation of the parable.

Similarly the placing of the parable of The Good Samaritan in the question and answer form of the wisdom teacher is not allegorizing but may be an attempt to speak the parable meaningfully to a new situation.

If M. D. Goulder is right, it is as easy to argue that though the process of allegorizing may be seen in the New Testament there is at least as good an argument that the process of de-allegorizing may also be seen! Goulder suggests that Jesus'

parables contained a "highish allegory content"⁵⁵ and this is reflected in the Marcan parables. Luke, on the other hand, as can be seen in the way that he handled the Marcan parables, should be termed a de-allegorizer.⁵⁶

Let me pause here to warn that we have little means of distinguishing between parables that have been uttered by Jesus and those that may have arisen in the community - especially with parables that display no Aramaisms and pre-suppose conditions outside of Palestine. This caveat aside, attempts to explain the parables in the New Testament and elsewhere, are at best an inadequate substitution or replacement for the parable itself, and will in fact be more misleading than helpful. The parable "explained" - even if perchance it is well explained - no longer functions as a parable.⁵⁷ This is a subject that I shall turn to below. For now let me only suggest that the New Testament simply does not give us enough clues to understand what the "original" parable meant to Jesus and to his audience.

- 1 Psalm 49: 4.
- 2 Isaiah 14: 4, 1 Kings 9: 7, Deut. 28: 37, Jeremiah 24: 9.
- 3 Ezekiel 17: 2ff., 20: 49. Not explicitly identified as a mashal is Isaiah's allegory of the vineyard (Isaiah 5: 1-7).
- 4 Proverbs 31, throughout Ecclesiasticus and 1 Samuel 10: 12.
- 5 C. W. Emmet, Hastings' Dictionary of the Gospels, quoted by Herbert Lockyer, All the Parables of the Bible, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963). Although I have looked extensively I have not been able to locate this quotation in Hastings.
- 6 Judges 9: 7-15.
- 7 T. W. Manson also includes the following as Old Testament parables although they would not be parables by modern literary convention: The Eagle and the Vine, Ezekiel 17: 3-10; The Lion Whelps, 19: 2-9; The Vine, 19: 10-14; The Forest Fire, 21: 1-5; The Seething Pot, 24: 3-5. The Teaching of Jesus, (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), p. 63.
- 8 W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background, (London: SPCK, 1936), p. 5.
- 9 Maxime Hermaniuk cogently argues that the Greek-type parables that occur in the New Testament were influenced in form, by the rabbinic mediation of the Greek tradition. In content they are descended from the Old Testament tradition of the Kingdom of God. La Parabole Evangélique: Equête Exégétique et Critique, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1947).
- 10 Parabole occurs in Mark 13 times, Matthew 17, Luke 18 times. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 4th ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 617.
- 11 John 10: 6, 16: 25, 29.
- 12 A. George, "Parabole" Dictionnaire de la Bible, (Supplément), Vol. VI, Paris, 1960, 1149-1177, p. 1149.
- 13 Cf. Funk & Wagnalls, Standard Dictionary, 2 Vols. International Edition. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970).
- 14 B. T. D. Smith in The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1937), p. 16 writes: "Simile and Metaphor are the simplest forms of figurative speech. In both one thing is compared with another; but

whereas in simile this comparison is formally expressed in metaphor it is effected by transferring to the one the designation of the other. As Aristotle says, 'the difference is but small. When the poet says of Achilles "He sprang on them like a lion", this is a simile. When he says "The lion sprang on them", this is a metaphor.'" "The Rhetoric of Aristotle", Jebb III, IV, 1.

- 15 Trench counts 30 parables, Bruce, 33 plus 8 parable gems, Julicher, 53, B. T. D. Smith, 62 and Hunter, 60. For classification of the literary forms of the New Testament see Rudolf Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans., John Marsh, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).
- 16 So Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, Rev. Ed., (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1972), p. 12, p. 138. Thornton Wilder writes: "the great religious teachers have constantly had recourse to the parable as a means of importing their deepest intuitions." in The Modern Theater, ed. Robert W. Corrigan, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1964), p. 1185. One wonders if the two brothers Wilder had occasion to discuss "parable".
- 17 Jeremias, op. cit., p. 12. In an unpublished paper, "Parable Gives Rise to Metaphor", John Dominic Crossan notes (p. 16f.) that Jacob Neusner's definitive work refers to no Pharisaic parables in the early Christian era and indeed criticizes Bultmann for comparing the parables of Jesus with non-existent parables in his period. The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70, 3 Vols., (Leiden: Brill, 1971).
- 18 Smith, op. cit., p. 15. Smith concludes that the Rabbinic meshalim though not composed until the 2nd century, incorporated tradition going back to New Testament times, p. 14. Friedrich Hauck writes: "Both the Rabbis and Jesus take their parables from the same relationships and customs." That is, one need not attempt to prove the reliance of one on the other. In "Parabole", Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol 5, Ed. G. Kittel, trans., G. W. Bromley, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), p. 773.
- 19 Robert E. Hume, The World's Living Religions, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 67, writes: "Some of (Buddha's) parables are similar to those of Jesus, yet are remarkably different, such as the parable of a Sower (Sacred Books of the East, F. Max Muller ed., Oxford, 1879-1910; 10:2. 11-15), of a Prodigal Son, (SBE 21: 99-106), of the Mustard Seed (Ryds Davids, Buddhism, a Sketch, 133-134). A large number of parables are collected in E. W. Burlingame, Ed., Buddhist Parables, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922).
- 20 A. M. Hunter, "Why Jesus Taught in Parables", The Observer, September 1974, p. 18.

- 21 A. T. Cadoux, The Parables of Jesus: Their Art and Use, (London: James Clarke & Co., 1930), p. 11.
- 22 Two words need to be said here however. First, C. H. Dodd, in, eg., Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel, (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), pp. 380-382, passim, maintains that there are also parables in the Fourth Gospel. His examples however stretch the meaning of "parable" too much. Second, Bultmann in History, pp. 203-205, suggests that the early church is responsible for the following parables: The Rich Man and Lazarus, (Lk 16: 19-31), The Wicked Husbandmen (Mk 12: 1-12) and the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Mt 25: 1-13). Linnemann supports Bultmann concerning The Wise and Foolish Virgins and adds The Unjust Judge (Lk 18: 1-8). Jeremias accepts all of these parables as authentic to Jesus.
- 23 According to A. M. Hunter in Interpreting the Parables, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 7, the amount of parabolic material in the Synoptics is: Mk: 16%, Q: 29%, M: 43%, L: 52% for an average of 35%. Also, A. M. Hunter, "The Interpreter and the Parables: The Centrality of the Kingdom" in New Testament Issues, ed. Richard Batey, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 74.
- 24 Mk 4: 34. Cf. Mt 13: 34.
- 25 Norman Perrin writes: "The parables represent by all odds the most markedly individualistic characteristic of the teachings of Jesus; both in form and content they were highly original and strongly stamped with the personality of their author." Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 22. Exception to Perrin's criteria and conclusion is taken by John G. Gager in "The Gospels and Jesus", The Journal of Religion, 54 (1974), pp 244-272. Bultmann, too argues that the parables offer no greater authenticity than other material in the gospels, in History, p. 202-205. Bultmann lists Jewish parallels and concludes some of the Gospel parables come from Jewish sources and not from Jesus. Bultmann's position has not gained wide acceptance. It is however quite possible that Jesus was indebted to the aphorisms of the wisdom literature. Cf. Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 86.
- 26 R. M. Lithgow, The Parabolic Gospel, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1914), p. 3.
- 27 Jeremias, op. cit., p. 11. Cf. H. Koester, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels", in Trajectories Through Early Christianity, ed. James M. Robinson & H. Koester, (Phila-

- delphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 175.
- 28 R. C. Briggs, Interpreting the New Testament Today, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 99.
- 29 Mt 13: 3-8, Mk 4: 3-8, Lk 8: 5-8, Thom 82: 3-13.
- 30 Mk 4: 3-8 Jerusalem Bible.
- 31 "Avec tous ceux qui se sont occupés de ce problème, nous ne faisons pas difficulté de reconnaître que le but des paraboles est une des questions les plus déconcertantes, peut-être la plus déconcertante de tout l'Évangile."
P. D. Buzy, Introduction aux Paraboles Évangéliques, (Paris: J. Gabalda & Co., 1912), p. 23.
- 32 There are other possibilities including that of Matthew and Mark relying on Q as their common source.
- 33 Mk 4: 10-13. (The Jerusalem Bible). Cf. Mt 13: 10-15 and Lk 8: 9-10.
- 34 Arguments on the relationship of Matthew and Mark's understanding are summarized in John Reumann, Jesus in the Church's Gospels: Modern Scholarship and the Earliest Sources, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 164.
- 35 Jeremias, op. cit., p. 13ff, cites the following evidence:
(1) The boat of vv. 1 & 5 is forgotten again until v. 36.
(2) The audience changes from a crowd to a narrower circle.
(3) Linguistic grounds suggest vv. 14-20 belong to a later date. (4) The question of v. 10 about the parables is doubly answered in a) v. 11 by "why" he speaks in parables and b) in v. 13f. the interpretation of the parable of The Sower at verses 11-12 breaks the connection between v. 10 and vv. 13ff. Further, in v. 11 kai elegen autois is one of Mark's link phrases, while v. 11 also shows signs of being adapted to the context with its description of the audience etc.
- 36 William Wrede, The Messianic Secret, tr., J. C. G. Grieg, (Cambridge: T & T Clark, 1971).
- 37 Dodd, Parables, p. 15, also Joachim Rhode, Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1968), p. 245.
- 38 Edward F. Seigman, "Teaching in Parables", Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 23, (1961), pp. 161-181.
- 39 For example: George A. Denzer, The Parables of the Kingdom: A Presentation and Defence of the Absolute Mercy Theory of

the Kingdom Parables with a Review and Criticism of Modern Catholic Opinion: A Dissertation, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945), p. 173.

- 40 Jeremias writes: "...the retranslation of the parables into the mother-tongue of Jesus is perhaps the most important aid to the recovery of their original meaning.", op. cit., p. 25.
- 41 Manson, op. cit., p. 78-80.
- 42 Ibid., p. 73.
- 43 Jeremias, op. cit., p. 18. Owen Barfield in Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., n.d.), p. 179f., imaginatively equates the planting of the seed with the presence of the logos in earthly "soil". Not to understand this parable is not to grasp the religious life - which is identical to the life of the imagination, the life of metaphor, parable, symbol, sacrament.
- 44 W. Robert Meyers, "Disciples, Outsiders, and the Secret of the Kingdom, Interpreting Mark 4: 10-13". Unpublished Thesis in the Faculty of Religious Studies Library, McGill University, 1960, pp. 90-92.
- 45 Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark, trans. D. H. Madvig, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970), pp. 85-86, 95, 106.
- 46 Dan Otto Via Jr., Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 27, 38, 134.
- 47 Cf. Barfield, op. cit., p. 179-180.
- 48 S. S. Curry, Vocal & Literary Interpretation of the Bible, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1922), p. 325.
- 49 Cf. E. Osborn, "Parable and Exposition", Australian Biblical Review 22 (1974), p. 11-22.
- 50 Vincent Taylor in The Gospel According to Mark (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1959), summarizes eight modern views of the meaning of the parable of The Sower, p. 250f. The Dodd/Jeremias emphasis on the harvest and non-allegorical interpretation is challenged by Matthew Black in "The Parables As Allegory", Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 42 (1959-60) pp. 273-287. Taylor argues for an allegorical interpretation with emphasis on the reception of the news about the kingdom received.

- 51 Cadoux, op. cit., p. 17.
- 52 A. M. Hunter gathers examples together op. cit., pp. 23-37. For specific criticism of Barth and Bultmann in this regard see Sally TeSelle, Speaking in Parables, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 33f, also p. 62, 82, and 84. See also Black art. cit.
- 53 James M. Robinson, "Jesus' Parables as God Happening" in Jesus and the Historian: Written in Honor of Ernest Cadman Colwell, ed. F. Thomas Trotter, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 134.
- 54 R. D. M. Derrett argues for a type of logical relationship between the various points that do not follow in the pattern of direct entailment but of overlapping and criss-crossing relationship in "Fresh Light on St. Luke XVI: I The Parable of the Unjust Steward; II Dives and Lazarus and the Preceding Sayings", New Testament Studies 7 (1961) 198-219, 364-380.
- 55 M. D. Goulder "Characteristics of the Parables in the Several Gospels," The Journal of Theological Studies NS XIX (1968), p. 67.
- 56 Ibid., p. 61.
- 57 Two lines of interpretation can be traced. On one we may place the Allexandrian school with its love of allegory and include Origen, Augustine and Luther. On the other we go back to the non-allegorizing Antioch school and include Theodore of Mopsuestia, Chrysostom, and Calvin.

He is always one step ahead of us;
the space-age calls for new maps
and its altars and holy places are not yet marked.

Amos Wilder, "Grace Confounding",
Grace Confounding, (Philadelphia:
Fortress Press, 1972), p. 1.

2 Parable As Aid to Understanding: Julicher

Studies of the contemporary approach to parable interpretation invariably begin with the name of Adolf Julicher¹ and the alleged constant treatment of the parables as allegories up to his time. Julicher is credited with delivering a death blow both to the idea that the parables are allegories and to the allegorical interpretation of scripture. He is also credited with initiating a return to the larger or macromeaning or single point of the parable.

Julicher's accomplishments are impressive. In his first massive volume he traced the history of interpretation up to his time.² This history clearly showed the varied interpretations that had been derived from the parables and this variation was considered by Julicher to be a sign that something was amiss. Two well-known examples illustrate the problem. The first dates from Origen in the early third century, and the second from England in about the year 1150:

The man who fell among thieves is Adam. As Jerusalem represents heaven, so Jericho, to which the traveller journeyed, is the world. The robbers are man's enemies, the devil and his minions. The priest stands for the Law, the Levite for the prophets. The good Samaritan is Christ himself. The beast on which the wounded man was set, is Christ's body which bears the fallen Adam. The inn is the Church; the two pence, the Father and the Son; and the Samaritan's promise to come again, Christ's Second Advent. 3

'"The priest passed down the same way, when the order of patriarchs followed the path of mortality. The priest left him wounded, having no power to aid the human race while himself wounded with sins. The Levite went that way, in as much as the order of prophets also had to tread the path of death... The Lord was The Good Samaritan. He went down this way when he came from heaven into this world."... "Two pence are given to the innkeeper when the doctors are raised on high by scriptural knowledge and temporal honour."' 4

With examples like this before him Julicher insisted on the need for a historical-critical methodology of interpretation and concluded that the reason for the great variety of parable interpretation was to be found in the example of the New Testament itself and particularly with the Evangelists' supplementation and interpretation of the parable of The Sower.

Following Aristotle, Julicher concluded that a parable is not an allegory with many points of comparison but should have only one clear point, a tertium comparationis. The image or picture-aspect (Bild) of the parable needs to be applied to the object or aspect (Sache) to be learned.⁵ It is a matter of going from the known to the unknown, the easy to the difficult - one comparison and one step rather than the several points that are made by the allegorists. The gospel writers and those who followed them misunderstood the nature of parable and the result was a green light for allegorical interpretation, a light that stayed on for nineteen hundred years.

Julicher's second volume was an impressive attempt to show how the parables should be interpreted. As an example of his

results, The Good Samaritan for Julicher is Jesus' "ideal good neighbour", and the parable means that self-giving love is of higher value than place or position; the compassionate Samaritan is more meritorious than the selfish Priest.⁶ So it goes for page after page as Julicher interprets each and every parable as a preface to a moral saying.

The essential problem is not whether we ought to have Julicher's single moral meaning, for example, or Augustine's multiple theological meanings, but whether Julicher's single point is correct or whether Augustine's allegorical detail is an authentic elucidation or expansion of the parable's meaning. In some ways if I may state the case boldly, Augustine's interpretation is the more attractive in that it appeals more to the imagination. At the same time I hasten to add that neither Julicher nor Augustine is very convincing when they attempt to explain the meaning of the parable.

It is a serious omission that Julicher did not consider the role of the parable in the Old Testament,⁷ for the parable in the Old Testament does not simply make a moral point but on occasion functions as a weapon of confrontation. This is even more true in the New Testament where the parables may have functioned as instruments to be used in warfare⁸ or "aspects of a campaign",⁹ "piercing through defences and laying bare hypocrisies".¹⁰ Moralizing the parables or speaking of them as "aids to understanding"¹¹ does not aid our understanding

of the parable, but at the most, our understanding of something that the parabler may or may not have been interested in.

Against Julicher there remains the strong possibility that he went further than he had to, or should have gone. First, there are different ways of treating the parables in the New Testament. Second, in addition to the allegorical interpretation of the early Church's Alexandrian School, there also existed a counterforce in the anti-allegorical (or positively, historically-motivated) Antiochan school.¹² Third, a distinction should be made between typology, which is the interpreting of a present event as a fulfillment of a similar event in the past, such as Paul on Hagar (Galatians 5: 21-5: 1)¹³ or the many examples in Hebrews including Melchizedek as a type of Christ, and allegory as that which does not attempt to trace the similarity of events but postulates an actual relationship.¹⁴ Fourth, it is by no means clear that a simple distinction between allegory and parable can be made.¹⁵ Language in parable functions as allegoreo - saying one thing to mean another.¹⁶

It simply does not matter that a woman lost a coin, frantically searched for it and subsequently found it with joy. This is a 'so-what' story unless it functions metaphorically - pointing to some other meaning. The literal meaning of scripture, at least in some cases, is not sufficient as an

explanation of a text's meaning.¹⁷ Allegorists at their best did not deny a literal and historical level of meaning but in affirming that level, added a level that was interpreted philosophically, ethically or psychologically.¹⁸ Origen may not have been too far wrong when he looked for the literal and the spiritual (and in theory, the moral) sense of scripture.

A distinction should be made between interpreters who presupposed and accepted the historical value of the text, or in this case, parable, and interpreters who were indifferent or hostile to the text and sought to avoid or deny the historical meaning by postulating a "real" spiritual meaning.¹⁹

Although it is not necessary, nor am I willing to defend past or present use of allegory as normative interpretation, I want to insist that it should not be excluded a priori as one means of interpretation.²⁰

We cannot but wonder if Julicher properly considered that the very variety of (allegorical) interpretations before his time may suggest that the specific applications were not of foremost importance to those early interpreters. In other words, a true allegory simply would not allow such a variety of interpretation. (There are not several ways of interpreting Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress or Spenser's The Faerie Queene). The interpreters of the parables were aware of the differences and allowed them, perhaps, and here I can only speculate, because

they were implicitly aware that it was impossible to explain the parables and therefore were content to lay alongside of them another story that left the original intact.

The acceptance of different "interpretations" makes theology more poetic or imagistic than philosophic. As there is no standard theological interpretation, photograph or painting of the atonement there is no single interpretation of The Good Samaritan, for example. The various views are complementary whereas narrow historical criticism sees them as competitive. Perhaps too the distinction that A. M. Brouwer has made between good and poor development of details - allegory and allegorese, would have been a helpful one if Julicher had made it.²¹ Julicher, with a somewhat literalistic approach, sought a single and universal meaning. Of course Julicher was somewhat bound by the critical understanding of his day, and could not benefit from the rise of the critical-historical approach. He was not as aware of the Old Testament influence in the New Testament and conversely, too impressed with the Greek influence.

Julicher was also a product of nineteenth century German liberalism and this outlook did not allow him to see anything radical in the New Testament; it simply affirmed German piety. Neither did it permit him to see the parables in the metaphoric and poetic tradition but rather as quaint ways of presenting

a rational argument for the moral and social status quo. That is, where the allegorists retold the parables in such a way that they participated in the "story of salvation", Julicher's parable interpretation aligned itself with a view of duty and moral demands as contemporary experience of the transcendent.

Although there is a moral dimension to art, that is, our preception of art/understanding of the universe leads to an ethical stance, art itself, and here I include the parables, is not about a moral system. J. Bronowski has expressed this well:

There are no morals in a poem; there are no morals in any work of art. There are no specific lessons to be learned and there is no advice to be followed. There are many implications in a poem which enrich our experience of life, but it is a many-sided experience...22

Julicher's Jesus was a pious German gentleman who attempted to convince others to be likewise through his speaking the parables.

In contrast to Julicher, when we discuss the allegorical method of interpreting the parables we should be aware that the early interpreters apparently did not think of the parables as true allegories, nor did they consistently apply an allegorical method of interpretation. Aware of the difference between poetry and prose, the allegorizers denied that the "literal" meaning was exhaustive or definitive. Indeed the

allegorical method, at least as practiced by Origen, was in part a polemic against literalists. There was a recognition of the language of symbols and the need for interpretation as divine gift. In the hands of the gifted interpreter the text must have come alive to those who listened: "Allegory is plot at play."²³

As I have also indicated, the allegorical approach was not the sole means of interpreting the parables. It may be that the early church too readily adapted to the communication method of its culture (including allegory), but Julicher turned the parables into a kind of philosophic argument for prudential morality in the way of the then German culture. In part this was fostered by his lack of appreciation for allegory and has given rise to a severely pejorative use of "allegory".

When Julicher argued that every parable was a homogenous whole that contained one theme and thought, he caused the little debate there was about the importance or otherwise of the details within, and multiple meanings of, the parables, to be, as it were, transferred to a debate about parable and allegory.²⁴ As a result the varied form of the parable has been obscured, much discussion has been unnecessarily spent on definitions, and the conviction arose that it is possible to reduce the parable to a single meaning, could we but find

that meaning. Such a meaning, I suggest, has so far successfully eluded our comprehension and expression.

- 1 For an introduction to Julicher in relation to others who wrote prior to and at the same time as him, see G. V. Jones, The Art and Truth of the parables, (London: SPCK, 1964).
- 2 A. D. Julicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu I & II, (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1888 & 1899). Also, Julicher "Parables" in Encyclopaedia Biblica Vol III, ed. T. K. Cheyne and J. S. Black, (Toronto: Geo. N. Norang & Co., Ltd., 1902), columns 3563-3569.
- 3 Hunter, op. cit., p. 25f.
- 4 Ibid., p. 30. For other examples see P. R. Ackroyd & C. F. Evans, eds., The Cambridge History of the Bible Vol I, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 41f, 435f.
- 5 Julicher, op. cit., Vol 1., p. 83.
- 6 Julicher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 596.
- 7 It is this point that Paul Fiebig argued against Julicher. Fiebig showed that Julicher's view of parable was too narrow. Julicher should have been aware of the Old Testament and Rabbinic background of the parable; originality of Jesus' parables was in content not in form. Fiebig also noted in contrast to Julicher, that the Rabbinic mashal was often followed by an interpretation. Paul Fiebig, Altjudische Gleichnisse und die Gleichnisse Jesu, (Tubingen: Mohr, 1904); Die Gleichnisreden Jesu Neutestamentlichen Zeitalters, (Tubingen: Mohr, 1912). Fiebig's debate with Julicher is reviewed in Jones, op. cit., pp. 22-24. Fiebig's argument should however, be read with an awareness of the paucity of first century parallels to the parables of Jesus. Cf. Neusner, op. cit.
- 8 C. W. F. Smith, The Jesus of the Parables, Rev. Ed., (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 12, passim.
- 9 Ibid., p. 194.
- 10 Ibid., p. 207.
- 11 Julicher, op. cit., Vol I, p. 73.
- 12 Ackroyd and Evans, op. cit., p. 507. Cf. p. 470 and 488. Also of interest is the different approach to "exegesis" as practiced for example by Augustine that made allegorical interpretation possible. See ibid., p. 557.
- 13 Though Paul calls his reference to Hagar and Sarah allegory (Galatians 4: 23) it would more accurately be called typology today.
- 14 Cf. R. P. C. Hanson, Allegory and Event, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959), p. 25.

- 15 Debate about the relationship between parable and allegory continues with the recent publication of Madeleine Boucher's The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 6, (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1977).
- 16 I have also found helpful Paul Ricoeur's article: "The Problem of Double Meaning as Hermeneutic Problem and as Semantic Problem" in, The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics, ed. Don Ihde, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 62-78.
- 17 On this one point I take exception to G. V. Jones' approval of Van Koetsveld's words: "Whatever meaning Jesus' words hold for us must be found in those words themselves" in Jones, op. cit., p. 13. It is not clear if it is Jones or Van Koetsveld who supplies the italics.
- 18 Cf. Philip V. Miller "A New Hearing for the Allegorical Method", Perkins Journal of Theology, XXIX (1976), p. 29. Miller argues that a new allegorical interpretation can correct literalistic interpretation, speak to educated and scientifically aware people, and as a substitute for rationalism, allow for the power and significance of symbolism.
- 19 Definitions of allegory, like those of parable, are legion and often contradictory, but whatever definition is used some distinction needs to be made between types of allegory. In an article entitled, "Is Typological Exegesis an Appropriate Method?" Walther Eichrodt usefully divides allegory into allegory as that which is history-denying, and typology as that which is history-affirming. In, Claude Westermann, ed., Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), pp. 224-245.
- 20 Cf. Jones, op. cit., p. 24, 137f, 140, 161.
- 21 Ibid., p. 36.
- 22 J. Bronowski, The Identity of Man, Rev. Ed., (Garden City: The Natural History Press, 1971 (1965)), p. 64.
- 23 John Dominic Crossan, Raid on the Articulate, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 125. Crossan's treatment of allegory is quite positive, cf. op. cit., p. 115-131.
- 24 Some references from Julicher's time to the relationship of detail to the whole or micromeanings to macromeaning can be seen in Jones, op. cit. Meyer, op. cit., p. 1 warned against the interpretation of descriptive details and unessential embellishments. Archbishop (Richard Chen-evix) Trench is in agreement with Tholuck that the details

of the parable are important, in Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1874), p. 8. E. P. Gould in St. Mark (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), p. 10, emphasized that there is one truth only in a parable and the details are incidental. Van Koetsveld, in reaction to the extravagances of other interpreters argued that details usually have no independent significance, p. 12.

He created symbols which through
their paradoxical form expressed the
inexpressible without betraying it.

Crossan on Politzer on Kafka in
Semiology and Parables: An Exploration
of the Possibilities Offered by Structuralism
for Exegesis, ed. Daniel Patte, (Pittsburgh:
The Pickwick Press, 1976), p. 250.

3 Parable as History: R Bultmann

It is generally assumed that any attempt at parable interpretation requires awareness of the critical problems - including the particular context in which the parable was spoken. Almost simultaneous studies of the history of the transmission of texts, and how that transmission may have influenced content and interpretation, or what became known in English as "Form-Criticism", by Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Dibelius and K. L. Schmidt provided important background for the line of parable interpretation here being considered.¹

Although not concerned with actual interpretation, Bultmann was interested in finding the original form of narrative, logion or parable, and thereby also to note secondary developments from it. Bultmann drew attention to those characteristics of parable that are shared with other kinds of folk narrative.² He distinguished types of parabolic material including: Bildworte, metaphor, Gleichnisse, Parabel and Beispielerszahlungen.

Although there is little debate about "metaphor", "simile" and "parable" as categories, such is not the case with Beispielerszahlung. Beispielerszahlung, or "example story" has, according to Bultmann "a striking formal relationship

to parables."³ As examples of this category, Bultmann refers to The Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 30-37), The Rich Fool (Lk 12: 16-21), The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16: 19-31), Pharisee and Publican (Lk 18: 10-14), The Wedding Guest (Lk 14: 7-22) and The Proper Guests (Lk 14: 12-14). So striking is this "formal relationship" in fact, that considerable debate has emerged as to whether particular parables are properly example stories or true parables. Much of the current discussion chronicled in several numbers of the experimental journal, Semeia, for example, is a record of this debate.⁴

Bultmann performed yeoman service by working through many stories and fairytales that led him to conclude that there was a technique to story telling that could be summarized in a series of laws. These important laws will be dealt with below in the chapter entitled "From Hearing to Reading".

Dibelius too distinguished between types of parabolic material including: commonplace images, typical images, extraordinary images drawn from real life and imaginary but improbable images. He drew attention to the often misleading parable applications in the gospels. The gospels for Dibelius were "compilations of tradition" and the parable story is determined by the didactic presuppositions that gave life to the story. Also, he noted that the parable exists in its own right and does not require a special application. He sugges-

ted that there was a misunderstanding of the meaning of the parables caused by the Church's application of exhortation to them. In other matters, such as the laws of folk narrative, Dibelius independently reached similar conclusions to Bultmann's. He too was convinced that an understanding of the 'givens' of folk narrative helps in reconstructing and understanding the parables of Jesus.

Karl Ludwig Schmidt in Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu (The Framework of the Story of Jesus)⁵ pointed out that Mark's Gospel for the most part consists of a series of short episodes that are joined together by "bridge passages" from the hand of the evangelist. A careful reading of the text, Schmidt suggested, would reveal that these compact, vivid, distinctive episodes give little insight into their actual time and place in the ministry of Jesus.

The work of these three "form" critics provides important but general background to parable interpretation. The sum of their insights led to an acceptance as premises of parable interpretation that: The parables were modified in their oral units that had been subjected to continued modification; applications accompanying the parables are secondary and display artificial contexts, expansions, interpretations and allegorical intrusions.

That the parables were restated (or in some cases may have arisen) in the preaching of the early church and that they are primarily apologetic or faith-evoking, led many other scholars to take a fresh look at the context and meaning of the parables.

A. T. Cadoux

A. T. Cadoux in a brilliant little book agreed with Bultmann, Dibelius and Schmidt that the primary setting of the parables is not to be found in their setting in the Synoptic Gospels. He also emphasized form as a criterion of authenticity. He went on to suggest that the meaning of the parable can be authenticated in the experience of Jesus; find the point of the story and then find a parallel experience in Jesus' ministry as a form of authentication and elucidation. Cadoux did this and then classified the parables according to what he saw as the historical experiences of Jesus: conflict, vindication, crisis and opportunity, ethical and eschatological teaching.

The problem is that in practice it was the exterior structure that determined and restricted the meaning of the parables for Cadoux - this in spite of Cadoux's assertion that the parable explained no longer functions as a parable.⁶

It is from Cadoux that the idea arose that the parables are,

for the most part, weapons of controversy. This was an insight for which other parable interpreters would prove grateful.⁷ It led slowly but surely to consideration of how the parable functioned - how the parable could be a weapon and as a weapon how it worked and with what results. Although the subject is mentioned by Dodd it is not until we turn to Jeremias, Wilder, Funk and Via that the matter is given more adequate consideration.

C. H. Dodd

C. H. Dodd's germinal book The Parables of the Kingdom emphasized the historical context of the parables in the ministry of Jesus. The parables are parables of Jesus. For this reason, Dodd insisted, the parables ought to be interpreted in their original Sitz im Leben. At the same time Dodd warns that some parables have been provided with applications that were probably not part of the earliest tradition. The parable of The Lamp, for example, occurs in Mark and Luke without application but in Matthew with application. Inconsistent applications are provided as in the parable of The Savourless Salt. In the case of the parable of The Unjust Steward the same evangelist has appended a series of applications.⁸ It is therefore not the context in which the early Church placed the parables that is most significant, rather the parable must be removed from this context and be seen in the ministry of Jesus.

Dodd's book is a short work that has been enlarged upon and commented on by many others, yet it contains powerful conclusions that are still being actively considered. For many years Dodd's distinction between similitude (metaphor developed into a picture) and parable (metaphor developed into a story) was noted but his conclusion that the distinction is difficult to make in practice, was ignored. Similarly his emphasis on the realism and vividness⁹ and correlated strangeness of the parables was heard, but the function of metaphor to lead the mind and capture the imagination was largely ignored.

Dodd's definition of parable is for me still the standard for all parable definitions:

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. 10

In considering the literary dimension of the parable, Dodd agreed with Julicher that the parables of the Synoptic Gospels are not allegories. In contrast to allegory, Dodd writes: "The way to an interpretation lies through a judgement on the imagined situation, and not through the decoding of the various elements in the story."¹¹

Dodd suggested that the parables were the "natural expression of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures rather than conceives it in abstraction."¹² He goes on to write of this

naturalness of the parables:

Each similitude or story is a perfect picture of something that can be observed in the world of our experience. The processes of nature are accurately observed and recorded; the actions of persons in the stories are in character; they are either such as anyone would recognize as natural in the circumstances, or, if they are surprising, the point of the parable is that such actions are surprising. 13

The realism of the parables is not merely analogical for Dodd but displays an inward affinity between the natural and spiritual orders.¹⁴ The parables also bear the character of an argument enticing the hearer to judgement and then challenging him to apply that judgement to the situation at hand.

As literary devices, Dodd writes that the parables have an imaginative and poetic quality about them, they are works of art and as art they have a significance beyond their original occasion. An understanding of the parables in their historical context will permit application in our contemporary situation. The theological conviction that the God who spoke "then" is the God who still goes "before" leads Dodd to conclude that the parables may be given a generalized teaching that is guided by their original and particular application.¹⁵ Dodd traces the original meaning and application of the parables to: (i) Not in ideas developed with the experience of the early Church, but in ideas supposed to be in the minds of the original auditors. These ideas will find their source in the Old Testament. (ii) The meaning of the parables must be congruous with Jesus' own interpretation

of his ministry as confirmed by his explicit and unambiguous sayings and found in his general teaching. Thus, the preliminary task for Dodd is not to listen to the parables but to study the non-parabolic sayings and to apply their meaning, or at least "general orientation" to the parables.¹⁶ That meaning, he concludes is the presence of the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus.

For Dodd the Kingdom of God as announced by Jesus and proclaimed in the parables means that the sovereign power of God is realized or has come into effective operation. It is not something that is to happen in the future but something that is a matter of present experience. It is not a "then" but a "now" experience. "Here," he writes,

...is the fixed point from which our interpretation of the teaching regarding the Kingdom of God must start. It represents the ministry of Jesus as 'realized eschatology' that is to say, as the impact upon this world of the 'powers of the world to come' in a series of events, unprecedented and unrepeatable, now in actual process. 17

He maintains that the parables originally reflected this eschatological teaching, but that they have been reapplied by the early Church. Rejecting Jesus was rejection of the Kingdom of God.¹⁸ Jesus' declaration of the Kingdom was the destruction of the old eschatological scheme and the making way or making room for new ideas - God's unqualified benevolence and beneficence towards all His creatures, His unlimited forgiveness, His seeking and saving the lost.¹⁹ This important idea of the

parable destroying the old order to make way for the new is not developed by Dodd but should not be lost sight of as we continue the search for parable meaning.

While emphasizing the eschatological meaning of the parables as their single point meaning, Dodd looked with disfavour at attempts to state or develop micromeanings. The details are not intended to have independent significance, he writes.²⁰ An interesting example of this is the parable of The Sower. Dodd faults the evangelist for turning the parable into an allegory (by stating the micromeanings). At the same time he suggests that the explanation of the parable of The Sower is not incongruous with the parable and even that it adds an illuminating commentary for homiletic purposes.

Dodd concludes that the parable is about the harvest, but surely it is possible that the parable is also "about" various kinds of soil and the manner in which that soil received seed. At any rate soil is insistently present in the parable and cannot be ignored or pushed aside. The harvest may very well be a meaning and one that is authentic to the parable but it is not the meaning.²¹ "To insist", G. V. Jones writes, "that there shall be one point and one point only, and that a parable shall be understood only as a whole, and not in relation to its parts (which is supposed to turn it into an allegory) is pure dogmatism."²² Further, the tendency in Dodd

(and others) to begin with a classification for the parables, that is based on a "pre-understanding", in his case realized eschatology, tends to distort and restrict interpretation. For example the "parables of growth" stress the end in the ministry of Jesus²³ and the parable of The Waiting Servants speaks of "the crisis created by His own coming, rather than an expected crisis in the more or less distant future."²⁴ Of course as Charles Carlston noted "one may be permitted more than an occasional doubt about a hermeneutic that tries to establish a plausible setting in history for a particular parable and then interprets the parable in the light of this (reconstructed) presumed situation."²⁵

Dodd clearly saw that Julicher's single moral point as the meaning of the parable was entirely inadequate as an explanation. At the same time Dodd opted for the single historical and eschatological point and the conviction that the parables can only be understood in the context of a particular historical time. Both Julicher and Dodd were conditioned by the then dominant view that the parables could be expressed clearly in simple, logical and unambiguous language. They differed only in the bias each man brought to his study: Julicher with his emphasis on German pietism, Dodd with his emphasis on the importance of time and history.²⁶ Neither scholar was enough aware of the ambiguity and power of language and the ways in which the parable functions. I

can only state here again that the parables have resisted being an illustration of an idea or concept - no matter how important that idea or concept.

J. Jeremias

Soon after Dodd's important and challenging work, another stimulating book, Joachim Jeremias' The Parables of Jesus appeared. Jeremias began with Julicher's insight that the parables are not allegories and that they are vivid, simple stories that make a single point. As with Dodd, Jeremias rejected Julicher's contention that the point the parables made was a general moral principle. With Dodd, Jeremias argued that the single point concerned the Kingdom of God, but where Dodd argued for "realized eschatology" - the Kingdom of God then present in the person and ministry of Jesus - Jeremias argued for "eschatology in the process of realization" - the Kingdom of God as present in and through Jesus but present with a future aspect about it as well. Jeremias' study is larger, more systematic and thorough than that of Dodd but A. M. Hunter's contention that Jeremias dots the "i's" and crosses the "t's" of Dodd's exposition is correct in relation to the Kingdom of God as being the single point focus of the parables.²⁷

Jeremias moved beyond Dodd however in understanding the way

in which the parables were changed from their setting in the life and ministry of Jesus to their setting in the life of the early church.²⁸ Jeremias carefully compiled ten "laws of transformation" that showed how the changed eschatological understanding of the early Church gave rise to modifications to the parables - both in detail and meaning. These laws by way of summary suggest that: 1) Translation of the parables from Aramaic to Greek caused changes in meaning. 2) Details were translated into somewhat equivalent terms in another culture. 3) Embelishment of details occurred. 4) Other passages of scripture influenced the parables. 5) The audience for the parables was sometimes changed. 6) A shift occurred from emphasis on the eschatological to the horatory. 7) The missionary motive and delay of the parousia interpreted the parables. 8) Horatory use led to allegorical interpretation. 9) Collecting and sometimes fusing parables changed emphasis. 10) Generalizing conclusions and supplied contexts changed, and often universalized the meaning of the parables.²⁹

Jeremias had been brought up in Jerusalem and because of his knowledge about Palestinian life, he not only supported Dodd's argument that the parables should be understood in relation to Jesus and the Kingdom of God but underlined it with many details about how life in Israel was actually lived. Jeremias carefully established the text to be interpreted and provided an amazing plethora of historical detail.

He showed that the parables assumed and spoke to a certain history, culture and experience and to understand the parable Jeremias went to great lengths to show the (hypothetical) world in which they were spoken. By way of illustration, in relating the parable of The Prodigal Son (Lk 15: 11-32) Jeremias indicated that with the return of the son the father gave three orders as in Genesis 41: 42 where Joseph received from Pharoah a ring, a robe of fine linen and a golden chain. The ceremonial robe is a mark of honour and distinction. A new garment is a symbol of the New Age. The ring signifies the bestowal of authority (as in 1 Macc 6: 15) and shoes are a luxury worn by free men, not slaves.³⁰ Detail is heaped on detail and it just may be that the point of the parable is smothered in history.³¹

At the same time Jeremias' historical criticism and disciplined imagination continue to provide significant help to all those who would appreciate the parables. The current discussion of the parables of Jesus is largely a discussion of the parables as Jeremias has reconstructed them.³² This is so even though much of the current debate has either assumed or denied the necessity of reconstruction.

Jeremias was critical of Julicher for not seeking the original setting or meaning of the parable.³³ In that original setting, he argued, the parables functioned as weapons of warfare, or goals for controversy in a particular historical

situation. That historical setting and the context for understanding the parables Jeremias subsumes under the following rubrics:

1. Now is the Day of Salvation, 2. God's Mercy for Sinners, 3. The Great Assurance, 4. The Imminence of Catastrophe, 5. It May Be Too Late, 6. The Challenge of the Hour, 7. Realized Discipleship, 8. The Via Dolorosa and Exaltation of the Son of Man, 9. The Consummation. 34

Although Jeremias denied the validity of the allegorical approach, and attempted to remove secondary accretion and embellishment, he tried to focus on the components of the parable, the details of micromeanings rather than the overall or macromeaning. At the same time but in a secondary way Jeremias attempted to force a single point meaning on all of the parables - viz., they proclaim the Kingdom of God and function as an aid to understanding the nature of that Kingdom.

I cannot but conclude that Jeremias behaves in the same way as the allegorizers whom he accuses. He deals with the components of the parable, but does not respect the integrity of the whole. He emphasizes the parables as parables of Jesus, and thus makes of them texts for dealing with Jesus' message, rather than respecting the integrity of the parable as parable, allowing it freedom to function as metaphor.

The results are little different from those obtained by allegorizing, or as has been previously said in relation to Dodd, What goes out the text's door comes back in the inter-

pretation's window.³⁵ Norman Perrin suggested that Jeremias' parable interpretation reduces the parables to a set of rubrics and makes them very much like a summary of a rather conservative Lutheran piety.³⁶ Although I have learned much from Jeremias, he has not been able to lead me to understand the parable any better even if I understand more about the parable. Reluctantly I must conclude that Jeremias understands the parables as the sum of historical details added to realized eschatology and modified by pietism. The imaginative theological details of the allegorists gives way to the imaginative historical details of Jeremias, but the allegorists' more modest habit of speaking of a truth in the parable gives way to the contemporary practice of speaking of the truth of the parable.

C. W. F. Smith

It is hard to place C. W. F. Smith in an attempt at an orderly scheme of parable interpreters, but he deserves mention if only for his provocative opening sentence: "Jesus used parables, and Jesus was put to death. The two facts are related, and it is necessary to understand the connection."³⁷ Smith is convinced that Jesus could not have given allegorical interpretation to the parables because an allegory functions differently than a parable and allegory would have put Jesus out of the warfare, allowed for defenses to be built up and enabled excuse-making to take place.³⁸ Presumably

therefore, there would have been no warfare and Jesus would not have been put to death.

What I find most significant here, and a pointer to later interpretation, is that Smith more than any one else before his time considers the possible or probable response of the original auditors. Unfortunately this insight is not sufficiently developed by Smith. Though I think him important, others like Norman Perrin, do not grant him mention in writing the history of parable interpretation.

Smith makes another significant point, though once again it is not well developed: The parable is simple, direct and naturalistic, but its interpretation in the gospels is awkward and unnatural.³⁹ This is not so much the beginning of a critique of the parables in their context in the gospels as a reflection on the nature of parable as a literary device. Smith maintains, for example that a parable is an analogy "between the things of God and the homely affairs of daily secular living..."⁴⁰ This sounds suspiciously like the once popular and now rejected definition of parable as an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Or if it isn't, we fault Smith for not developing his point.

Of even more interest is Smith's tantalizing remark that the teaching of Jesus and especially the parable is "thrown out with a divine carelessness permitting the hearers to make of

it what they would..."⁴¹ Along with this Smith suggests that, at least in the parables, Jesus was not a systematic theologian.⁴² Here was the opportunity seriously to consider whether or not Jesus' parables were designed to impart a particular and translatable outlook or point of view that could be expressed in a short sentence or so many words, but Smith does not develop his point.

Smith rejects Julicher's interpretation of the parables as prudential morality. Still, like Dodd and Jeremias, Smith sees the parables totally in relation to teaching about the Kingdom of God. In the parable of The Sower, for example, this results in Jesus stating, "the principle that his persistence is justified by the certainty of results."⁴³ Although Smith writes well with an arresting phrase here and there, his parable interpretation is only partly convincing.

Despite Smith's assertion of the parable's simplicity, more ink will be spilt on, for example, the parable of The Sower, Contrary to his own insights he makes the parables examples of the teaching of Jesus, the systematic theologian.

With those who follow Dodd and Jeremias and their emphasis on the historical details it often seems that one of those details is selected as the most important and from that a conclusion is drawn as to the single and reduced meaning of

the text. It is a theological form of fixed roulette: choose a point, a point that fits into a particular author's hermeneutical circle, spin the facts and stop at a predetermined conclusion.

- 1 A summary of the contributions by Bultmann, Dibelius and Schmidt may be found in Stephen Neill, The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 236-251.
- 2 Bultmann, op. cit., p. 166-205.
- 3 Ibid., p. 177f.
- 4 See especially p. 178. John Dominic Crossan, "Parables and Example in the Teaching of Jesus", pp. 63-104, and Dan O. Via Jr., "Parable and Example Story: A Literary-Structuralist Approach", pp. 105-133, Semeia I, (Missoula: Scholars Press 1974), ed. Robert W. Funk; also, Robert W. Funk, "Structure in the Narrative Parables of Jesus", pp. 51-73, Semeia 2, (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), ed. John Dominic Crossan.
- 5 Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu, (Berlin: Trowitzsch und Sohn, 1919).
- 6 Cadoux, op. cit., p. 39.
- 7 Both Dodd, op. cit., p. 21 and Jeremias op. cit., p. 21, give credit to Cadoux for this insight and the point is also stressed by C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., Eta Linnemann, Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition, trans. John Sturdy, (London: SPCK, 1971), pp. 22, 35, 41 and J. Stanley Glen, The Parables of Conflict in Luke, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962). Jeremias however takes exception to the way in which Cadoux attempts to place the parables in the life of Jesus "so that the value of his work was limited to acute comments on details." Ibid.
- 8 Luke 16: 1-7.
- 9 Dodd, op. cit., p. 5-7.
- 10 Ibid., p. 16.
- 11 Ibid., p. 21.
- 12 Ibid., p. 16.
- 13 Ibid., p. 19.
- 14 On this point Dodd is one with those of earlier centuries whose textual exegesis and interpretation was shaped by an épistémè of resemblance. On this resemblance see Maurice Cranston, Philosophy and Language, (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1969), p. 74.
- 15 Dodd, op. cit., p. 146.

- 16 Ibid., p. 27.
- 17 Ibid., p. 41.
- 18 Ibid., p. 59.
- 19 Ibid., p. 61.
- 20 Ibid., p. 18.
- 21 In reference to Matthew's Gospel, arguments for the primary meaning as sower, soil and seed are summarized in J. D. Kingsbury, The Parables of Jesus in Redaction-Criticism, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1971, 1971), p. 144, n. 36, 37, 38.
- 22 Jones, op. cit., p. 140.
- 23 Dodd, op. cit., p. 191.
- 24 Ibid., p. 165.
- 25 Charles E. Carlston, "Changing Fashions in Interpreting the Parables", Andover Newton Quarterly 14 (1974), p. 29.
- 26 In a review of C. H. Dodd's Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel, F. W. Beare observed: "British scholarship has an unquenchable longing for brute historical and biographical fact, and there is a perpetual danger that the wish may give birth to the persuasion that the facts are more readily ascertainable than is actually the case." In N.T.S. 10 (1964), p. 521.
- 27 Hunter, op. cit., p. 39.
- 28 I would want to stress here that essentially Jeremias continued with Dodd's insights or, as E. C. Blackman has written, Jeremias' The Parables of Jesus, "stands on the shoulders of Dodd, in "New Methods of Parable Interpretation", Canadian Journal of Theology XV (1969), p. 3.
- 29 Jeremias own summary appears op. cit., p. 113.
- 30 Ibid., p. 130.
- 31 This is even more evident in the case of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Kenneth E. Bailey, The Cross and the Prodigal, (St. Louis: Concordia Press, 1973).
- 32 So Norman Perrin, Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 102f.

- 33 Jeremias, op. cit., p. 16.
- 34 Ibid., p. 5f.
- 35 M. Black wryly commented, "while thus showing allegory firmly to the door, one cannot but wonder if Dr. Dodd has not surreptitiously smuggled it in by the window." Quoted in Crossan, In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), p. 95.
- 36 Perrin, Language, p. 106.
- 37 C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 11. Cf. Linnemann, op. cit., p. 41. "A direct line leads from the parables of Jesus to his crucifixion."
- 38 Ibid., p. 17, p. 13.
- 39 Ibid., p. 45.
- 40 Ibid., p. 197.
- 41 Ibid., p. 199.
- 42 Ibid., p. 18.
- 43 Ibid., p. 44.

We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle
and knows.

Robert Frost, "The Secret Sits",
Complete Poems of Robert Frost,
(New York: Holt, Rinehart &
Winston Inc., 1960), p. 495.

Must then a Christ perish in torment
in every age to save those that have
no imagination?

George Bernard Shaw's Cauchon in
"Saint Joan", in Complete Plays with
Prefaces, Vol II, (New York: Dodd,
Mead & Company, 1963), p. 423.

4 Parable as Existential Sermon

Friedrich Schleiermacher argued that understanding a text requires more than an application of the tools of historical criticism. There must also be an intuitive grasp of the work as the life expression of its author. For Schleiermacher this was to be accomplished by an imaginative reproduction of the art by which the original communication took place. But can the gap between the original historical situations and the contemporary historical situation be bridged by this imaginative reproduction? Is what is intended to be communicated in the text in fact the inner feeling of the author's soul? Expressed another way, does what was said have validity apart from the psychic conditions that gave rise to it? Does this not shift the object of understanding from what was said to the author's psyche?

It indeed may be that the value of the text is primarily conveyed in the vision of the artist rather than the supposed "content" of the artist's message. At least this line of thinking is further developed by Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey agreed that the interpreter must experience in himself the original creative moment when the author gave expression to life. At the same time, historical events are seen by Dilthey to be occasions in which the contemporary interpreter also

participates. There is a continuity of being between the original author and the contemporary auditor. This psychological model for interpretation suggests that the text expresses universal human possibilities, hopes and fears. It also suggests that there is little or no room for that which is genuinely new and unrepeatable in human experience.

The argument, presented more recently by E. D. Hirsch,¹ is that the intent of the author must be the norm that measures the validity of any interpretation of the text. This intent is the same as, or is identified by, the meaning of a passage. This verbal meaning, for Hirsch, is changeless, reproducible and determinate - or self-identical. The verbal meaning is the objective "glass slipper" that separates authentic interpretation from inauthentic interpretation, Cinderella from the other girls.² Such objectivity and determinacy would be welcome indeed, were it available, but unfortunately I find the underlying notion of an independent and permanent verbal (Aristotelian) essence entirely elusive. So far at least, it has been impossible to discover a supra-historical meaning existing outside a relationship to the contemporary historical meaning. There is no mechanical objective mechanism to determine meaning. There is no acceptable way of separating meaning from significance. There is, or so it now seems, no a priori way to determine meaning apart from the presuppositions and questions that are part of the language that seeks meaning.

On the other side of the hermeneutical argument is the work of Heidegger and more directly Hans-Georg Gadamer.³ This approach, more compatible with my own understanding, argues both the impossibility of being master of a literary encounter, and the severe limitations of method.⁴ When a great work of literature is encountered, understanding is transformed, a fresh way of looking at life arises, but it is precisely this freshness that escapes analytical seeing and results in "analytical blindness".⁵ The attempt to separate "what is said" from the "way in which it is said", is an error arising from the attempt to see the encounter with a work of art only from the side of the perceiving subject.⁶

Rudolf Bultmann retained a continuity with Schleiermacher and Dilthey by focusing on the basic existential unity of author and auditor. Man exists in history as one who questions and who is addressed. The nature of the question shapes the response of the text; every interpretation implies a presupposition. Bultmann may be asked if there is not a presupposition to genuine interpretation of biblical texts that is not universally human, and therefore if the interpretation of biblical texts is as scientifically neutral as he claims. Could it be, he might be asked, that there is a preunderstanding that arises from a community of believers that is not a "given" of human existence? In fact it appears that Bultmann operates with an understanding of preunderstanding that is fraught with

the assumptions of faith. It may be too that the biblical text is expressive of more than the possibilities of human existence that give rise to understanding about God and world. It may be that the reverse is the case - understanding God leads to understanding human existence, or as Augustine said: "Our hearts are restless until they rest with God". Meaning arises from confrontation with Meaning.

Bultmann's many strengths and insights are followed through by a number of scholars who together are referred to as the new hermeneuticists. These scholars, beginning principally with Ernst Fuchs, Gerhard Ebeling and James Robinson, attempted to clarify and correct Bultmann's hermeneutics. Particularly, emphasis was placed on newer understandings of the nature and function of language. Where Bultmann had followed the "earlier Heidegger", these scholars followed the more poetic understanding of language of the "later Heidegger". Language, does not represent certain objects or ideas but performs, acts, sets in motion. It doesn't simply describe existence but brings into existence. We do not understand language but understand through language. Bultmann will be referred to again, below.

E. Fuchs

The number of people involved in applying the insights of the new hermeneutics to parable interpretation is large and

impressive.⁷ We can include James M. Robinson, Eta Linnemann, Eberhard Jungel and others, but Ernst Fuchs is the group's mentor. Fuchs himself is very obtuse,⁸ preferring rhetorical flights of fancy to the directness of plain speaking, but his ideas are nonetheless important. Fuchs and his students offer few additional insights in textual criticism, since by and large they follow Jeremias. At the historical level their emphasis is on Jesus as the author of the parables.

Unlike Jeremias, who gave onesided attention to historical details, they stress a close relationship between the existential decision made by Jesus and the parables that he taught. Unlike Bultmann, who emphasized the understanding of existence enshrined in the text, they stress the language (word) of the text which becomes event again within human language.⁹ For these scholars the degree with which an artist's work accords with his relevant experience is a measure of the degree to which it will arouse, and in the case of Jesus' parables, does arouse, similar experience in others. The parables reveal the teaching but also the mystery of the person of Jesus. They are expressive of the faith and conviction of Jesus and give rise to faith and conviction in others. His language creates a world (Welt) into which he draws his hearers.¹⁰

In the parable of The Prodigal Son, for example, Fuchs suggests that Jesus taught that God is gracious and forgiving. In teaching this parable, Jesus illuminated his own activity of

receiving sinners and thus identified his behaviour with God's will. If I may express it this way: Parable is the vehicle whereby the activity of Jesus is vindicated as the will of God. Through the parable, which is made intelligible through Jesus' conduct, the will of God is clarified. For Fuchs, it is Jesus-conduct-that-illuminates-God's-will that is the content of the parable.¹¹ In Fuchs' words: "It is therefore not true that the parables of Jesus first clarified his conduct, although Jesus defended himself by parable, but on the contrary that the conduct of Jesus clarified the will of God, with a parable referring to his conduct."¹² Faith, if I understand Fuchs correctly, is a prerequisite for understanding the parables.

This is a teaching derived from Fuchs' teacher, Rudolf Bultmann. For with Bultmann the text can be understood only when the exegete comes to it with a "prior understanding" of the subject. "The presupposition for understanding is the interpreter's relationship of his life to the subject which is directly or indirectly expressed in the text."¹³ Being rooted in existence raises questions for which God is the answer, and this is the prior understanding that makes exegesis possible.¹⁴

Understanding the parables requires a predilection or leaning that is basically natural or child-like,¹⁵ a general openness to the possibility of revelation.¹⁶ Like the prodigal son, and quoting T. S. Eliot,

The end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 and know the place for the first time. 17

Faith comes through the (parabolic) word, but word is not primarily informative statement but an event in which the speaker communicates himself in love. It is, in Gerhard Ebeling's phrase, "word-event".¹⁸

Preunderstanding does not imply that questions are answers however. It means that one must will to know, knowing that one does not know and that this knowing may not be simply an extension of prior understanding.¹⁹ This structure of active or dialectical openness gives rise to the new. There is a reciprocal relationship within the communication process. As the preunderstanding allows interpretation of meaning so the object of the understanding informs and alters that understanding establishing a new preunderstanding. For the new hermeneutists, interpretation of a text becomes at the same time interpretation of oneself,²⁰ and a response that involves disposition and language.²¹ That is, it confronts the interpreter with a criticism of his own self-understanding.²² It is a matter of address and response.²³ A. C. Thistleton has gathered together scattered references to one of the parables to illustrate how Fuchs sees the parable interpret the self and therefore the present.²⁴

Thus, in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 10.1-16), he calls attention to the drama of

events as they unfold. The last are paid first, 'so that we, too, share the inevitable reaction of the first'. The style of the whole parable, he argues, is significant: 'the circumstances surrounding the hire of the labourers; the minute attention to detail, almost from hour to hour; then the correspondingly quicker acceleration...its relentless course, leading to the release of tension in the dialogue...singles out the individual and grasps him deep down'. Its impact both 'effects and demands a decision', as Fuchs adds later concerning the same parable, that the hearer who is called 'is drawn over on to God's side, and learns to see everything with God's eyes. He then understands God, as a child understands his father.' 25

For Fuchs, preunderstanding that is at the same time dialogical with the text, involves an interpretation of the parts by the whole. Every part of a literary work requires the whole to make it intelligible, yet the meaning of the whole requires a careful analysis of its various parts;²⁶ "Somehow a kind of 'leap' into the hermeneutical circle occurs and the whole and the parts are understood together."²⁷

J. M. Robinson

James M. Robinson is probably the most important American interpreter of Fuchs. For Robinson the parable is not a form of rational argument; through its form it conveys vision, orientation and ultimate concern.²⁸ The parable does not communicate content but communicates in the sense of communion or participation.²⁹ When language takes place it is a happening that calls forth the hearer, engaging him in the movement of the story, then releases him back into his own situation.

In order to capture or engage the hearer the parable makes a concession to him. Robinson writes, "the prodigal son is as immoral as a sinner, is as unpatriotic as a tax collector, his older brother is as worthy as the Pharisee - insuring thereby that the hearer will get with it."³⁰

Through this captatio benevolentiae the hearer participates in the parable, is confronted there by true being, exposed, and released to his earlier situation. Through the parables Jesus opens up for the auditor a future that is actualizable in present decision, it is therefore God's happening and God happening.³¹

From a different but related viewpoint, the same ground can be covered another way. The parable demonstrates or exhibits, as Geddes MacGregor says of stories, "certain kinds of relationship within the structure of ordinary experience." This relationship through structure, is easier to demonstrate than to explain. Consider Henry Newbolt's "Vitae Lampada" for example:

There's a breathless hush in the Close tonight -
 Ten to make and the match to win -
 A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
 An hour to play and the last man in. 32

As MacGregor notes: "We need know nothing about cricket to appreciate this, and we certainly do not go to it to learn anything new about games..." He continues:

We go to it, rather, as we go to a quadratic equation: to see, worked out in form, a special kind of truth, a truth implicit in the knowledge we already possess about schoolboy games and the field of battle. Poetry and art, on the one hand, and logic and mathematics, on the other, have this in common: they formalize that which is already in some sense ours: in the former case the structure of the expression of our feeling; in the latter the structure of the formulation of our thoughts. 33

E. Jungel

In the context of a comparison between Paul's doctrine of justification by faith and the parables of Jesus as the key to understanding Jesus' proclamation as a whole, Eberhard Jungel³⁴ maintains that in the parables, Kingdom (basileia) enters into language. Jesus did not simply illustrate the eschatological reign of God but brought it into language. The Kingdom became, not a future socio-political possibility but a real and present event. Jungel reviews parable interpretation to his time and concludes that it is wrong to suggest (with Bultmann) that in the parables we can distinguish between an outer mythological form and an inner existential intent; rather are the parables a dynamic and engaging whole.³⁵ Nor are the parables Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God as a theme; rather do they mediate the Kingdom. They, in fact, bring the Kingdom of God into language as parable.³⁶

Also, Julicher's earlier understanding of parables as having a matter (Sache) and picture (Bild) with a tertium compar-

ationis misleads in that it suggests classroom lesson rather than confrontation with reality. Jungel's final significant point is that the parables have as their single referent human existence - though human existence has its point in the extra nos of the Kingdom of God. Good points indeed, though just what it means when he suggests that the parables bring the Kingdom to language (zur Sprache) as parable, is the anvil that must support the critical blows.

In dealing with specific parables Jungel shows how the parable draws the hearer into the story in such a way that the parable becomes a paradigm of God's activity and man's response to it. The Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price are challenges to the hearer to be drawn into the parable as a seeker of the Kingdom who is discovered by it. In The Good Samaritan, Priest, Levite and Samaritan experience "need of love" as event. Priest and Levite, caught in fulfilling the law, denied the "need of love" while the Samaritan, outside of the restrictions of the law, responded to "need of love" as event. As an analogy, the parable sketches an event that points the hearer to the needs of fellow man.

In the other parables that Jungel considers, he also refers not to the teaching of the parables concerning the Kingdom of God, but to God's reign as Parable. The parable of The Hidden Treasure does not call for decision but speaks of eschatologi-

cal joy and the hearer is thus enabled to participate in the "plus" of God's reign. The point of the parables of The Net and The Weeds, is not formal separation but the precedence of salvation over judgement. The parable of The Seed Growing Secretly grants time for relaxed trust in God's work, while The Mustard Seed brings the power of the glorious end into the unpretentious present. The parable of The Friend at Midnight expresses Jesus' experience of the power of prayer. The parable of The Unjust Steward calls the hearers out of judgement and grants them a time to adapt to the future. The Prodigal Son is the medium of the I-thou encounter in which love is mediated.

It is not too difficult to see that Jungel's parables are very much like contemporary preaching. Rather than an experience in which the reader struggles with meaning, the parable is presented as a moral lesson or at least lesson about loving, that is not far from the preaching of many centuries. Indeed one wonders what all the preliminary fuss is about when the parables finally speak in this manner. And despite all, it appears that the parables "say" in a manner that is far from Jungel's insistence that the parables mediate, engage, and confront.

E. Linnemann

Eta Linnemann is a student of Ernst Fuchs who has consciously

attempted to develop and apply the insights of her teacher. For Linnemann the parable is a form of communication that within its structure both seeks new possibilities and anticipates possible objections from the hearer.³⁷ By means of the parable the narrator throws a bridge over the chain of opposition compelling the hearer to decision but leaving the decision with the listener.³⁸ Through the correspondence of the parable with reality, the reality is brought "into language" and the possibility of understanding anew is opened up.³⁹ To hear the parable is to hear new possibilities of existence.

Linnemann's original contribution to parable interpretation is in her term "interlocking" (Verschrankung) and that which the word represents: the way in which the hearer of the parable relates to the narration itself. Linnemann explains:

In the parable the verdict of the narrator on the situation in question "interlocks" with that of the listener. Both evaluations of the situation go into the parable. The choice of material, the point of comparison, and with it the course of the narrative, are of course primarily determined by the verdict of the narrator. But the verdict of the listeners on the situation also leaves its deposit in the parable. The narrator takes it up by conceding something to the listeners, so that they must recognize the reference of the parable to the reality. The opposed judgements do not simply appear in the parable side by side, but they are interlocked with one another or interwoven in the concise single strand of the narrative. 40

As an example, Linnemann points out that the Pharisee's objection to Jesus eating with outsiders is not the same as the objection of the elder brother to the feast celebrated for the younger brother. Nor is it the same as the protest of

the day labourers who object that those who have not worked as long as they are equally rewarded. It is not the same, Linnemann points out, but also, she insists, "one cannot say either that the contrast as it is found in the parable has nothing to do with the historical situation!"⁴¹ Because of this interlocking Linnemann is confident that the parable throws light on the historical situation and the historical situation illuminates the parable.

This is a point that I have trouble with in Linnemann as with Fuchs, above. The parable, she seems to be saying, is not the same as particular historical events involving Jesus but is rather a type of the historical events involving Jesus. Parable is therefore a type of Jesus' saving activity. Have we moved from parable to typology?

As a form of argument the parable has a single point of comparison for Linnemann, but the point can only be grasped when we know what the parable conveyed to the original listeners in that concrete situation.⁴²

The parable has been passed down to us but the "language event" that the parable occasioned could not be passed down because we do not stand in the same situation as the original listener. Linnemann argues however that the original "language event" though it cannot be transmitted can be made intelligent through exposition, and can be repeated through

preaching:

Preaching repeats the event that happened to Jesus' listeners through the parables of Jesus. It is the word that comes from outside, the verbum externum, that alone makes this change of existence possible for man, that helps him from unbelief to faith, For "faith comes by preaching" (Rom. 10.17). Preaching, however, not only receives instruction from the parables of Jesus on how it is to be done rightly, but is grounded in what Jesus did when he risked his word. 43

When Linnemann interprets the parable, she does so in terms of her understanding of the radical thrust of the parables, and by using existential terminology. With the parable of The Good Samaritan, for example, there is a long and interesting commentary on such matters as relationship to the Law, the nature of the priesthood and the role of the Samaritan. Linnemann writes that Jesus "uses" the story of the good Samaritan to call man,

...forth from the place where he views the world simply as one that is basically controlled by a law that is as complete as possible, and on to the movement of authentic living. 44

She continues,

The story certainly leaves no doubt that what really matters is to act as the Samaritan did; and our conscience says a clear "yes" to this. But only in the same simplicity as he showed can we really act as he did, and let ourselves be governed completely by the need of the man who confronts us. And that is not a thing that can be "done". As soon as we let ourselves be called out of the shell we have made of the world into the unprotected life of real encounter, we shall unquestionably make the discovery that we are exposed to the possibility of failing in life, in fact are always doing so already. Then the question about our life makes us realize that we can no longer ourselves provide the answer to it. It is no longer this or that fault for which we need forgiveness; our whole life needs justifica-

tion. Perhaps one must say that only when this question of our lives finds an answer does life truly continue in real encounter, and that in Christian preaching what is at stake is precisely the answer to this question. 45

Indeed, as with The Good Samaritan, it seems to me that in practice Linnemann treats the parable as example story with a single point.⁴⁶ After reading only a little of Linnemann, it is predictable what she is going to say about the next parable before reading it. It may be true and good; it may even be interesting, but the parable gets lost. So it is that the other parables also "call forth" from "inauthentic existence" to "authentic living" and through preaching we find the "real encounter" that provides the answer to the "question of our lives."⁴⁷

For Linnemann it is with a sharpened awareness that the parable releases the hearer back to his own world, a world now interpreted by the truth of the parable, a world reappraised with the insights of the story. Linnemann's emphases on the eventful nature and radical thrust of the parables are both helpful. Her use of "existential" terminology is on occasion helpful and sometimes misleading. Her optimism about understanding the original parable and being able to repeat it through a sermon as a "language event" remains unproven to this writer.

By way of summary, Fuchs and his students concentrate on the language of the parables and the power inherent in that language. Linnemann placed emphasis on the role of the auditor

interlocking with the text. Jungel denied that the parable has a picture half and object half with a tertium comparationis but rather confrontation with God occurs when the auditor is confronted in the parable as parable.

In each case it is the strong (Lutheran) tradition of the sermon that has become the model for parable interpretation. And as with many sermons it is preaching designed to expunge mystery and to express the word with clarity. In practice the parable simply becomes the peg to hang one's theological hat on, the excuse for the expression of a particular viewpoint or bias. In this case the parables are simply used as a way of preaching about Jesus as revelation of God and disclosure of being. Amos Wilder is right when he accuses Fuchs especially of bypassing too quickly the wider symbolic or mythic elements that Jesus inherited and employed.⁴⁸ Virtually to ignore the meaning of Kingdom of God as an operative myth and a basic orientation of first century Judaism is surely to operate with narrowed vision. Justice to the historical and symbolic events in Jesus' life including the crucifixion and resurrection, is hardly granted with this approach. Though the intent in the new hermeneutics is to permit the parable to function as a form of disclosure, in practice the parables are treated as a form of rational argument. Once again the parable has successfully resisted transformation and once again the attempt to explain the parable has grounded on rocky shoals.

- 1 See E. D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Also, "Current Issues in Theory of Interpretation" in The Journal of Religion 55 (1975), pp. 298-312.
- 2 Hirsch, op. cit., p. 46.
- 3 For a helpful introduction to Gadamer, see Richard E. Palmer, "A Post-modern Interpretive Self-Awareness", in Interpretation 55, 313-326.
- 4 Ibid., p. 226.
- 5 Ibid., p. 233.
- 6 Ibid., p. 237.
- 7 For background and insight on hermeneutics see James M. Robinson & John B. Cobb eds., The New Hermeneutic Vol 2 of New Frontiers in Theology, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).
- 8 See A. C. Thistelton, "The Parables as Language-Event: Some Comments on Fuchs's Hermeneutics in the Light of Linguistic Philosophy", in Scottish Journal of Theology Vol 23 (1970), p. 437, n.1.
- 9 It has often been noted that this shift from existential understanding to linguistic event parallels Martin Heidegger's philosophic shift from existentialism to ontology. Cf. Carl E. Braaten, New Directions in Theology Today Vol. 2: History and Hermeneutics, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), p. 138.
- 10 Ernst Fuchs, Studies of the Historical Jesus, trans. Andrew Scobie, (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 97f.
- 11 Ernst Fuchs, "Die Frage Nach dem historischen Jesus", p. 155 quoted in Raymond Brown and P. Joseph Cahill, Biblical Tendencies Today: An Introduction to the Post-Bultmannians, (Washington: Corpus Books 1969), p. 68, n. 24.
- 12 Ibid., p. 154.
- 13 Rudolf Bultmann, Essays: Philosophical and Theological, tr. by J. C. G. Grieg (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1955), p. 241.
- 14 It does not seem necessary to assume that acceptance of Heidegger's view of existence is a necessary correlate of Bultmann's argument. This argument along with various criticisms of Bultmann's use of the early Heidegger's philosophy is summarized by William Hordern, New Directions in Theology Today: Volume 2, Introduction, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 44.

- 15 William Arnot suggests in relation to the allegorical interpretation of the parables, that, "the faculty of perceiving and understanding analogies is inherent in humanity and consequently coextensive with races (although) it is developed in a higher degree in some persons and in some communities than in others." The Parables of Our Lord, (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1882), p. 19.
- 16 Roger Lapointe, "The New Status of Language", The Catholic Biblical Quarterly XXXVI (1974), p. 233. Lapointe stresses in this essay, (following Heidegger, Fuchs & Ebeling) the foundational nature of language.
- 17 T. S. Eliot, "Four Quartets", Collected Poems 1909-1962, (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1963), p. 222. Cf. Ricoeur's call for a post-critical "second naivete", below.
- 18 Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith, trans James W. Leitch, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963).
- 19 Cf. Palmer on Gadamer, op. cit., p. 198 and p. 212.
- 20 John Macquarie, God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 149. Northrop Frye writes: "We do not judge literature, but...it judges us." in Anatomy of Criticism, (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 49.
- 21 Fuchs, op. cit., p. 198.
- 22 Robinson, N.F.T. Vol 2, p. 52.
- 23 Amos N. Wilder, The New Voice: Religion, Literature and Hermeneutics, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 68.
- 24 Thistleton, art. cit., p. 441.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Cf. Palmer, op. cit., p. 25, 51.
- 27 Palmer, op. cit., p. 87, interpreting Schleiermacher.
- 28 James M. Robinson, "Jesus' Parables as God Happening" in Trotter, op. cit., p. 135.
- 29 Robinson, art. cit., p. 142. Here he refers favourably to the same point made by Ernst Cassirer in Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, trans. Ralph Manheim, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).
- 30 Robinson, art. cit., p. 142.

- 31 Ibid., p. 144.
- 32 Henry Newbolt, "Vitae Lampada" quoted in Geddes MacGregor, God Beyond Doubt, (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1966), p. 145.
- 33 Ibid., p. 145f.
- 34 Eberhard Jungel, Paulus und Jesus (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1962), For a review in English see James Robinson, "The New Hermeneutic at Work", Interpretation 18 (1964), pp. 346-359.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 135-139.
- 36 For some reason Jungel does not note that there are few parables wherein the Kingdom of God is proclaimed per se.
- 37 Linnemann, op. cit., p. 19.
- 38 Ibid., p. 22.
- 39 Ibid., p. 25.
- 40 Ibid., p. 27.
- 41 Ibid., p. 28.
- 42 Ibid., p. 23.
- 43 Ibid., p. 33.
- 44 Ibid., p. 55.
- 45 Ibid., p. 56.
- 46 Via agrees that Linnemann's historical methodology with a single point conclusion attenuates the parables.
- 47 Perrin, Language, p. 115.
- 48 Amos N. Wilder, Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 77.

A man's reach must exceed his grasp or
what's a metaphor.

Marshall McLuhan,
Understanding Media: The Extensions
of Man, (New York: New American
Library, 1964), p. 64.

5 Parable as Extended Metaphor

The goal of the new hermeneutics, to use William Doty's apt phrasing, "is that the original situation is revitalized and revisited, and that the original situation is revoiced."¹ It simply has not happened and, as I have contended, may not be possible. Much of the same ground can be considered and expressed from a nontheological, or at least from a literary point of view when the nature of metaphor is considered. Some of the background might be helpful before we turn directly to the interpretation of the parables.

For Susan Sontag the western critical consciousness approaches art in search of "what is said" or "what is intended" or "the real meaning of the artist". That is, there is both an intrusion of prejudices on the interpretation and a demand for a content that can be extracted, as it were, from the form of the art. Or perhaps we should say with Sontag that it is the habit of approaching art in order to interpret that gives impetus to the notion that there is content apart from the form of the art.² The task according to Sontag, is not to squeeze content out of a work but to cut back on content so that the work can be seen.³ The critic shows what the work is, not what it means. "Interpretation", she pointedly writes, "is the revenge of the intellect upon art."⁴

And if art is assumed to be a model of a statement, then one simply searches for the appropriate statement that gave rise to the model. The art is simply taken as a pointer to content behind the form. The search for meaning, to use a value judgment, is a search for authenticity. It is an attempt to translate into the original tongue. It is an attempt to wipe away the merely decorative that the plain truth may become evident. Of course it is the case that such interpretation actually presupposes a discrepancy between the meaning as evident in the art, that is the literal or literary meaning, and the meaning as demanded by the later interpreter.⁵

For Sontag, any authentic work is a closed system that within its perimeter is direct and persuasive, discouraging the search for ideas and propaganda.⁶ It does not say; it shows.⁷ Like a poem it does not mean but is; it does not tell how to act, but how to be.⁸ The reduction of the work to its content and then to interpret that content is often an attempt to tame and manage the work rather than to grasp it.⁹ It is the text, not the interpreter, that should determine the interpretation, and the literary work should be allowed to speak its own "self". Art is seductive, but it cannot seduce without the complicity of the subject.¹⁰

A. Wilder

For many years Amos Wilder stood very much alone as he called

New Testament scholars to consider theology from the poetic rather than the philosophic point of view. Recently Wilder reexpressed his plea for the use of the imagination when he wrote: "We should recognize that human nature and human societies are more deeply motivated by images and fabulations than by ideas. This is where power lies and the future is shaped."¹¹ As a part of this call for a literate imagination Wilder attempted to show that the parable is a metaphoric story that avoids being captive to definition and paraphrase but through its *raison d'être* appeals to an understanding, teasing or leading the hearer to an awareness and awaking, shaping or mediating reality.¹²

For Wilder and for all those who hold that the parable is poetic, or at least theopoetic, God is creative and man who is the image-ing of his creation can best re-flect and reflect on God, when he moves to equivocal, poetic and metaphoric language, to places where parables punningly appeal to two significations at once, neither abandoning one nor the other,¹³ but capturing one with the other, and other with the one. Man reflects his origin when he imagines, when he re-creates metaphor and symbol,¹⁴ when he tells stories and invites the curious to walk through the looking glass to the real world beyond the mirror. Beyond the looking glass confession turns into narrative.¹⁵ Vision is given form; reality is transformed into symbol.¹⁶

The premises of this approach is that metaphoric language is not dead, that the poets have not been banished, that the story can still be told with the language of poetry. Chad Walsh asserts:

I will tell you a secret. The poets are returning. The poets. The holy men. The madmen. The men who cannot count to ten, but are the magicians to restore the long-sealed direct connection between the cosmic ocean of the collective unconscious and the waking life of the self. Eerie things are happening; strange beings move in the twilight - or dawn. Individualism is dying; the sleek impersonal collectivity of great enterprises is dying; here and there an individual man or woman is reborn as a living, breathing part of all men, even of blades of grass; and knowing this he knows himself and knows himself as himself. And knows Christ? 17

Not that such an approach is against reason. It is just that reason (and the strictly historical approach to parable interpretation) can not be held responsible for the whole of life; as Dostoyevsky said long ago:

I will admit that reason is a good thing. No argument about that. But reason is only reason, and it only satisfies man's rational requirements. Desire, on the other hand, is the manifestation of life - and it encompasses everything from reason down to scratching oneself. And although, when we're guided by our desires, life may often turn into a messy affair, it's still life and not a series of extractions of square roots. 18

Desire gives rise to poetry, to metaphor, to parable!

Truth is an evasive partner. Understanding is difficult. As an example, George Steiner points to the code of Justinian, the Summa of Aquinas, the world chronicles and compendia of medieval literature, and the Divina Commedia as grand but unsuccessful attempts at total containment of truth.¹⁹ Truth

cannot be walled-up with language despite what Steiner calls "the mirage that has haunted all rational inquiry since the seventeenth century" - the mirage of mathematical exactitude and predictability.²⁰ For Wilder both existentialism and demythologizing were attempts to bend to the desire for the rationalistic and positivistic.²¹ Indeed as is being contended in this paper, and with Wilder, the parables resist that exactitude and predictability, and challenge the rationalistic and positivistic mind.

For Wilder a parable is not an exemplary story but a revelatory image, not a simile, but a metaphor,²² or rather an extended metaphor, a metaphor that is effective in and of itself. It does not clarify but rather reveals. Like Fuchs, Wilder suggests that the parables mediate reality and life. He also refers favourably to Fuchs' assertion that the parables reflect Jesus' Selbstverständnis and intensity of vision,²³ but understands this more in relation to its being the power of the metaphor that bears Jesus' own faith.²⁴

Wilder's fascination with or at least deep interest in the parable and his desire to retain parable as metaphor has to do with his long standing rejection of attempts to divide the whole person, to make of him only a rational creature rather than a being of reason, feeling and will.²⁵ For Wilder authentic religion and art are intimately related and both require

incarnation that searches rather than soothes,²⁶ that convicts rather than propagandizes. The parables are particularly effective because of their prodding or questioning in relation to the saga of everyday life.²⁷

In an article entitled "The Parable of the Sower: Naiveté and Method in Interpretation",²⁸ Wilder observed that the full meaning of a biblical passage is not conveyed by philological, historical and theological expertise, but that there are "certain resonances and imponderables in language that are felt even though difficult to state."²⁹ The telling of a parable should be heard "naively and afresh", though attempts at understanding involve clarification of language-structure (its poetic) and how this language dynamically evokes response (its semantic).³⁰

Wilder then relates a personal experience (story!) of hearing the parable of The Sower for the first time and tells of its impact on him. He emphasizes that the subsequent allegorizing interpretation in the Gospel did not disturb "this prior visionary transaction". Indeed, he heard the meaning of the parable not in any single concept or theme but in the extravagant yield, the venture of the sower, and the various soils - all in combination as "the analogue for the inexorable and indefensible continuity and plenitude of creation of which man is a part."³¹ The parable proffers a vision of the selective

vivacity or exuberance of life over against its wide miscarriage. This for Wilder is confrontation by the naked text, and he writes: "let the naif speak to the naif and depth to depth".³² Even here though, Wilder's explanation of the meaning of the parable is too restricted and should not be interpreted as the total meaning. What Wilder successfully communicates is the impact of the parable on him, rather than the meaning of the parable.

Wilder also recognizes that it is human nature to organize, and I might add, conceptualize, experience: "Even the deepest layers of sensibility have their laws and structures. To trace them out and to become aware of them is to enter more fully into possession of our being."³³ If the parable of The Sower is not grasped as extended metaphor, Wilder observes, then the reader will look for a teaching or theme. If it is grasped, he suggests elsewhere, it is not enough to repeat the Biblical language or to allegorize that language, but the task is to re-possess the myth in contemporary ideas that speak to the "deep" of our imagination.³⁴

R. Funk

Wilder's brief discussion of the parables provided impetus for a considerable amount of discussion, including an important chapter on the parable as metaphor by Robert Funk. Funk argues that the parable is a particular kind of metaphoric story,³⁵

marked by brevity, focus, open-endedness and (with Dodd) the power to tease the mind into active thought. It is an apparently familiar story couched in hyperbole or surrealism,³⁶ and delivered with an unfamiliar twist or hook designed to catch the listener precisely at those places that he thinks of as important or that are characteristic of his existence.³⁷ The parable is not closed until the listener is drawn into it as a participant.³⁸ Unlike the exemplary story which already contains the application in the example, the parable calls for the hearer to make and/or apply a judgement to the matter at hand. Like all metaphors, the parable resists reduction or translation to other categories.

For Funk the parable is metaphor and must therefore remain open-ended. Parable does not merely make statement but through its (performative) language causes something to happen; it is an action.³⁹ No one apprehension of meaning or "transference of judgement" exhausts the parable's potential meaning. Against Julicher, Dodd and Jeremias, Funk maintains that the parable as metaphor is not amenable to ideational reduction. He expresses regret that the Church canonized interpretations as well as parables,⁴⁰ and argues that Jesus' audience was so diverse that the idea of a single audience or a single point to the idea is fallacious.⁴¹ In a particular historical situation the parable may have a point for the situation but will also have "as many points as there are situations into which it may be spoken."⁴² The original meaning, a meaning deter-

mined by historical criticism, provides "a control over reinterpretation" as the parable is spoken into new situations and new meanings are sought.⁴³ That is, the interpretation relates to the contemporary situation as the original related to the initial situation and therefore the most that can be said is that the Church interpreted the parables in such and such a way while one application in light of the contemporary situation is....⁴⁴

What Funk continually stresses is the need to allow the metaphor to be free to function with its power to interpret.⁴⁵ He writes: "...to grasp the parable in its fullness means to see what happens when parable occurs."⁴⁶

Funk demonstrates his theory when he discusses two parables, The Great Supper and The Good Samaritan. Norman Perrin has an excellent summary of Funk's interpretation of the parable of The Good Samaritan.⁴⁷ Perrin is obviously and outspokenly moved by Funk's interpretation but I find it lacking at one significant point. As Funk tells the story the listener identifies with the man stripped, beaten and left half-dead. It is much harder to identify with that man - "I wouldn't be so careless as to head down that road by myself." "I identify with the winners of life not the losers." "I would have defended myself." or simply "It wouldn't happen to me", than to identify with those in good health who approached. Of course

in a drama or, in this case, dramatic narrative, identification transference takes place, so it is quite normal for the listener to identify now, with one, then, with another character. The major transfer would take place in this order however: some identification with the victim, major identification with the Priest, then the Levite and then (surprise!) with the Samaritan. The shock is a compound one, since the listener desires to be identified with life's winners (helpers) but finds himself identified with the Samaritan (winner né loser) and not with the Priest and Levite (losers né winners).

Funk also has suggested that Jesus is the precursor of several contemporary literary figures including Kafka and Borges as teller of parables, Thoreau as saunter, J. Fowles's Magus as magician. He anticipates C. Castaneda as one on a journey to Ixthan. Driven to speech but tempted by silence, he anticipates Nietzsche and Camus. Bowed by decaying language, Jesus anticipates Samuel Beckett.⁴⁸ Perhaps what is here significant is Funk's conviction that Jesus is a literary figure of import. Identification with so many different literary figures however somewhat weakens Funk's case. Indeed my limited reading of these authors suggests that similarities, at least in some cases, are, as Ronald Christ wrote of supposed similarities between Borges and Kafka, trivial and fortuitous.⁴⁹

In the Parable Seminar as reported in Semeia I Funk criticized

Via and Crossan for overlooking that characteristic of parable that it "precipitates the hearer's judgment."⁵⁰ Narrative makes the audience observers,⁵¹ and "calls for an act of answering imagination."⁵² Funk develops this aspect of the parable by drawing attention to the way in which the hearer's judgement is precipitated, thus prompting the taking of sides.

In Semeia 2 Funk deals with structure in the "Narrative Parables of Jesus"⁵³ and then turns to developing his previous insight on parable as metaphor in relation to The Good Samaritan. The strange and surprising meaning of the parable, Funk reports, cannot be made more specific than, "comport oneself as the story indicates". Because the parable is metaphor, "it is non-literal; it lacks specific application." Funk continues:

The "meaning" of the parable is the way auditors take up rôles in the story and play out the drama. Response will vary from person to person and from time to time. The parable is perpetually unfinished. The story continues to tell itself, to "tell" its hearers. 54

Although Funk persistently maintains that the reduction of the parable to any single idea - moral, eschatological or Christological - is wrong, he also wants to maintain that it is possible by reflecting on the parable, to attempt to change or "raise" its meaning into discursive language and even though such a result will be abstract it should retain "some of the metaphorical quality of the parable itself."⁵⁵ To change the parable into discursive language presupposes a

mastery of the parable that in practice has evaded Funk.

My remarks are brief here, since it is not my primary purpose to argue with Funk or Perrin but rather to point out how resistant the parables are to interpretation even when, like Funk, we attempt to avoid their reduction to the ideational. That Funk's understanding of the parables is brilliant and helpful, I do not deny, but it is simply not as comprehensive as the parable itself. If Funk had only explained why the parable should not be reduced to explanation we would have no quarrel with him, but when he attempts to explain the parable, he falls short of his own theory.

G. V. Jones

Although not always included in review of parable interpretation G. V. Jones deserves a place in any review because of his significant contribution to the study of parables from a very rich background in literature. He defines parables as "very short stories, given point and pungency...by surprise and risk."⁵⁶ Jones writes with an appreciation of Julicher and later interpreters but he is also critical, suggesting that interpreters before Julicher, "may often be of greater assistance to the preacher than are the microanalytical studies of those who have the whole of the modern critical apparatus at their disposal."⁵⁷ Of course, some distinction may

have to be made between preaching and exegesis but from a functional point of view, Jones may very well be correct. As an example, Jones suggests modern microanalytical study of the parables has been less successful than interpreters like A. B. Bruce in showing how the parables may be applied or related to what is permanent and changing in human existence.⁵⁸ He writes:

This is in great part attributable to the academic method, concerned as it is with the minutiae of documentary criticism, and often delighting in over-emphasizing the discovery of some new principle or method of interpretation. 59

This is a stinging charge and must be seen in relation to Jones' insistence on the parable as a work of art having independence in time and stimulating new responses and creative thinking. In other words, Jones insists that the meaning of the parable is not to be found or at least not only to be found in the historical details or Sitz im Leben but in the imagination that hears the parable and creatively retells the parable into new situations. Jones continues,

...there is much more to be found in them than would at first appear and which can be adequately elucidated only by an expanding understanding of them as creative symbols capable of general application. 60

In order for the parable to function in this way Jones suggests at least a degree of allegorical interpretation, "for without it the potential richness of the meaning of the parable is in danger of being forfeited."⁶¹ What he is after, it seems to me, is an awareness that the immediate application of the parable to its historical setting does not exhaust the parable

and the parable must be freed to speak in a creative (allegorical) way to current situations.

His description of the parables as "creative symbols capable of general application" sounds very much like Julicher when Julicher thought he was opposed to the use of allegory. Both Julicher and Jones are united in their conviction that the parables have a contemporary and general message. Where Julicher expresses that message in the clothing of German piety, Jones states it in the guise of existential thinking with correlated lessons from the world of English literature.

There is no real attempt to let the parable speak for itself, but as in the thirty eight pages devoted to The Prodigal Son it is protected by the presentation in terms of existential lostness, freedom and estrangement, the ambiguity of existence and the problem of suffering. In other words the freedom to speak, that Jones looks for, is defined by his existentialist understanding of the world. This is just too limited a view of the parable. It merely makes of the parable an illustration or example of existential insights.

S. TeSelle

In her very readable Speaking in Parables⁶² Sallie McFague TeSelle argues that the parables are extended metaphor and

metaphor is constitutive of language itself. Metaphor is a way of knowing and not just a way of communicating; it does not have a message, it is a message.⁶³ In the parable the hearer can participate imaginatively in, and identify with, the story. In the parables Jesus' vision is presented in categories that are sensuous, secular, suggestive, personal, participatory and anthropomorphic. "In the parabolic tradition", she writes, "people are not asked to be 'religious' or taken out of this world: rather, the transcendent comes to ordinary reality and disrupts it."⁶⁴

For TeSelle metaphor and parable provide a method of uniting life and thought. The parable in particular is a paradigm for authentic Christian communication. The strength of the parable is in the way the parable keeps "in solution" the language, belief and life that people are called to. The genres closest to the parable, the poem, the story and autobiography are prime resources for those attempting an intermediary or parabolic theology.⁶⁵ Such an approach is both risky and open-ended; it is not neat and comfortable but accepts the complexity and ambiguity of life in the world lived under God."⁶⁶

TeSelle's opening statement is most important in attempting to understand her book: "The purpose of theology is to make it possible for the gospel to be heard in our time."⁶⁷ Her second premise is that parable is not one of many literary forms in the New Testament but a central, if not the central

form.⁶⁸ A third premise is, with Cassirer and Barfield, that symbolic language points to our original unity with being. Metaphor shatters previous structures of reality and facilitates a restructuring and a knowing that is participative⁶⁹ and fulfills a desire to be united with what is.⁷⁰

Given these premises one can hardly expect, nor does one get, an entirely objective approach to the parable - the parable, as it was with the allegorists, serves the proclamation task of the Church through preaching. Though she rejects the treatment of parable as teaching device, moral illustration and allegory, it functions for TeSelle as paradigm for preaching.

TeSelle's approach is evident when she deals with the parable of The Prodigal Son. The story, she indicates, is not transparent; it does not immediately reveal meaning but is instead "thick"; like a painting, it is not looked through but looked at. Expressed more simply, one cannot go around the parable to what is being said; the parable is the meaning. "The story of the Prodigal Son is a sculpture, a metaphor of something we do not know much about - human becoming and God's extraordinary response".⁷¹

Illustrating the indirect way in which parables communicate and the way in which the ontological and existential assertions of the parables can be restated in our time, TeSelle repeats

Gerald Manley Hopkins' magnificent poem, "God's Grandeur". TeSelle's exposition of the poem leads to serious questions: Why, if the parable is thick and if it, or at least its meaning, can be illuminated by the juxtaposition of another literary form, is it necessary then to explain that work - viz, the poem? Is it necessarily the case that a 100 year old poem speaks more clearly to a "modern man" than the parable? But another more difficult and perhaps unanswerable question emerges: Why among the hundreds of thousands of poems in the English language does TeSelle choose this particular poem? Is there in fact a hidden agenda or presupposed meaning behind the choice?

TeSelle tells Franz Kafka's parable of a man attempting to find his way to a railroad station. She concludes that the meaning is not to be found in a separate realm but is the parable itself:

What this totality of all the processes of life and thought amounted to in Kafka's parables was the incomprehensibility of the incomprehensible; but this is not an extrinsic meaning - it is what the story says. 72

A comparison is then made with the parable of The Wedding Feast (Mt 22: 1-10; cf. Lk 14: 16-24). Initially, as TeSelle notes, there appears to be little in common between the parables but she makes a good case for the crack of surface realism that is a mark of Kafka's parable and the parable of The Wedding Feast, up to the point where the servants are murdered. A second movement begins however, she notes, and that second

movement issues in an extraordinary and apparently indiscriminate invitation to the good and the bad until the hall is filled. Like Kafka's parable this parable is, as Funk had noted previously, "a paradigm of reality" a "linguistic incarnation" that works by indirection and rather than being interpreted, interprets the hearers.⁷³ For TeSelle the historical critical questions are of importance⁷⁴ but apparently of secondary importance, in that she does not make reference to the considerable debate as to the source of this parable or what its "original" form might have been. As with the Kafka parable she apparently accepts it as a given and proceeds to interpretation. This is not an approach without difficulty but if it be understood that TeSelle is dealing with the parables as they appear in their form and context in the synoptic gospels, it is, for me, an acceptable approach.

"Jesus told stories to people" TeSelle writes,⁷⁵ and this suggests a triangular pattern of relationships that involves all three factors. Although TeSelle deems it important that it is Jesus who is the speaker of the parables, she also insists on the integrity of the parable as an aesthetic object, and concentrates on the parable as that which addresses people.⁷⁶ Agreeing with the new hermeneuticists, TeSelle suggests that the most important task of interpretation is to allow for the interrelation of the hearers by the parables.⁷⁷

This approach, parable as the model for theological reflection,

the use of metaphor to keep theology "in solution", and the use of poem, story, and autobiography as a source for parabolic theology, is stimulating indeed. One is only left asking where did the parables of the New Testament go? Especially we ask in light of TeSelle's correct assertion that a genuine parable is neither translatable nor reducible.⁷⁸ Is it possible to claim any kind of connection between the parables of the New Testament and the modern poem, story or autobiography? I think it is, but I do not think TeSelle has made a connection. Instead she has virtually substituted the poem for the parable. And if parable is possibly "the form for secular man",⁷⁹ then why not simply retell the parables in their original form or contemporary dress, or perhaps tell new parables?

TeSelle raises the interesting question as to whether the theologian is, "more like the aesthetician and philosopher or more like the literary critic?"⁸⁰ Is it to explain, interpret and organize the primary data or to help the preacher help the people hear the word of God today? In both cases TeSelle takes the last option. There is another option however, and that is that the task of the theologian is to be more like a poet than a critic or at least to recognize the creative and poetic aspects of theology. Use of the imagination should be a requirement of theology. The ability to unite form and content and elicit participation in the work should be applauded.

Although my criticism may seem negative I write with considerable appreciation of TeSelle's work. She makes no claim to having solved the problems and her talented writing at least asks the right questions. Though she ends with a reduction of the parable that leaves it as a poem (or substitute story or autobiography) it is a most instructive substitution.

- 1 William G. Doty, Contemporary New Testament Interpretation, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 43.
- 2 Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation, (New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1970), p. 15.
- 3 Ibid., p. 23.
- 4 Ibid., p. 17.
- 5 Cf. Ibid., p. 16.
- 6 Cf. Ibid., (in reference to film) p. 21.
- 7 Cf. William H. Gass, Fiction and the Figures of Life, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 39.
- 8 Such statements are typical of that school of literary criticism frequently called the new criticism, aesthetic, textual, ontological or formalistic.
- 9 Sontag, op. cit., p. 17.
- 10 Ibid., p. 31.
- 11 Wilder, Theopoetic, p. 2.
- 12 Wilder, Language, p. 130, and pp. 84-85.
- 13 Cf. Walter J. Ong, The Barbarian Within, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1962), p. 41.
- 14 A symbol for me may have either a single referent or a set of meanings that cannot be exhausted by a single referent. These distinctions are called steno-symbol and tensive symbol by Philip Wheelwright in Metaphor and Reality, (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1962), p. 92, and sign and symbol by Paul Ricoeur in The Symbolism of Evil, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 15.
- 15 Wilder, Language, p. 67. "When the Christian in any time or place confesses his faith, confession turns into narrative."
- 16 Cf. Jones, op. cit., p. 132.
- 17 Chad Walsh, God at Large, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1971), p. 45.
- 18 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 112. In sharp contrast cf. "I am in love with our era. This is the first time

when the supremacy of the intellect is total. Nothing can beat brain power." J. Servan-Schreiber quoted in R. Buckminster Fuller, I Seem to Be a Verb, (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 97A.

- 19 George Steiner, Language and Silence, (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 14.
- 20 Ibid., p. 19. For Steiner, Descartes and Spinoza are the chief culprits, p. 20.
- 21 Wilder, Theopoetic, p. 4.
- 22 Wilder, Language, p. 72.
- 23 Ibid., p. 85.
- 24 Ibid., p. 84f.
- 25 Amos N. Wilder, Otherworldliness and the New Testament, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 21 and 31.
- 26 Ibid., p. 28.
- 27 Ibid., p. 33.
- 28 Wilder, "The Parable of the Sower, Naiveté and Method in Interpretation", in Semeia 2, pp. 134-151.
- 29 Ibid., p. 135.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., p. 136.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Wilder, Theopoetic, p. 16.
- 35 Robert Funk, Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 137. "What it says is minimal; what it intends is maximal." p. 141.
- 36 Ibid., p. 161.
- 37 Ibid., p. 158.
- 38 Ibid., p. 133.
- 39 The term performative in Funk, op. cit., pp. 26-28 refers

to language that causes to happen such as marriage vows, declaration of war, naming, granting freedom etc. See John Austin, "Constatives and Performatives" in Problems in the Philosophy of Language, ed., T. M. Olshewsky, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 242-250.

- 40 Funk, op. cit., p. 135.
- 41 Ibid., p. 149.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., p. 151.
- 44 Ibid., p. 135.
- 45 Ibid., p. 152.
- 46 Ibid., p. 126.
- 47 Perrin, Language, pp. 139-141.
- 48 R. W. Funk, Jesus as Precursor, (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).
- 49 Ronald Christ, "A Modest Proposal for the Criticism of Borges" in The Cardinal Points of Borges, ed. Lowell Dunham and Ivar Ivask, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 10f.
- 50 Funk, Semeia 1, p. 187.
- 51 Ibid., p. 86.
- 52 Ibid., p. 187.
- 53 Funk, Semeia 2, p. 51.
- 54 Ibid., p. 80.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Jones, op. cit., p. 119.
- 57 Ibid., p. 6.
- 58 Ibid., p. 108, n. 1.
- 59 Ibid., p. 211.
- 60 Ibid., p. 212. Cf. p. 135.

- 61 Ibid., p. 212.
- 62 TeSelle, op. cit.
- 63 Ibid., p. 71f.
- 64 Ibid., p. 3.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid., p. 1. Those who argue for a Christological interpretation of the parables include Sir Edwin Hoskyns and Neol Davey, The Riddle of the New Testament, (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1963), p. 134. T. W. Manson, Jesus the Messiah, (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 48, Ronald S. Wallace, Many Things in Parables: Expository Studies, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 243ff.
- 68 TeSelle, op. cit., p. 80.
- 69 Ibid., p. 58. TeSelle suggests that this kind of knowing is more like that of sexual union than thinking.
- 70 Ibid., p. 56. On this point TeSelle follows Coleridge.
- 71 Ibid., p. 5.
- 72 Ibid., p. 67.
- 73 Ibid., p. 71.
- 74 Ibid., p. 68.
- 75 Ibid., p. 73.
- 76 Ibid., p. 74.
- 77 Ibid., p. 75.
- 78 Ibid., p. 66.
- 79 Ibid., p. 141.
- 80 Ibid., p. 87f.

Blessed be all metrical rules that
forbid automatic responses,
force us to have second thought,
free from the fetters of Self.

W. H. Auden, Epistle to a Godson
and Other Poems, (New York: Random
House, 1972), p. 47.

While you and I have lips and voices which
are for kissing and to sing with
who cares if some oneeyed son of a bitch
invents an instrument to measure Spring with?

E. E. Cummings, untitled poem, no. 23,
in 100 Selected Poems, (New York: Grove
Press, 1959), p. 29.

6 Parable, The Structuralist Approach

Structuralism is a term that sometimes refers to or at least implies a philosophic mode of thought that suggests that "beneath" appearances and contradictions there is a coherent system that unites thought and makes the world habitable. It is the conviction of the structuralists that the mind orders data and experience and gives it a sense of coherence and meaning; the mind structures reality, because it is structured in the same way as reality. More often in biblical studies structuralism is shorn of its philosophic base and is used in reference to a methodology that seeks through the relationship between disparate and primarily literary phenomena to find underlying principles and to formulate them in an organized and scientific way.

Structuralism as an integrative methodology for data handling has been applied to linguistics by Noam Chomsky,¹ history by Michel Foucault,² psychology by Wolfgang Kohler, and anthropology by Claude Lévi Strauss.³ Structuralists seek to discover the relationships that exist between parts and whole and to operate in an ecumenical and interdisciplinary synthesis. It is a new, disparate and growing discipline that has not been, and cannot be, ignored by those who interpret the parables.

Structural criticism is a mode of literary criticism that seeks a meaning below the surface structure of the text. It

seeks a meaning in the "deep structure", that implicit or unconscious structure that lies under, through, or alongside of the text. These elements, though unconscious, impose significations on the reader and at the same time impose constraint on the creativity of the author.

In structuralism meaning is expressed in (literary) terms in the relationship within the text, particularly in its synchronic connections, (language at a given time) and in the historical process that relates the text to other related texts in history, that is, diachronic connections. Structuralists insist that legitimate exegesis must be both diachronic and synchronic.

Structuralism also recognizes both the potential of, and the limitations in, the enunciation of a text. The potential is in the vast possibilities that are available as, to use an example by Daniel Patte, a weaver contemplates the interaction of the weaver's intentionality and the two structures of loom and set of coloured threads.⁴ The limitations include: (1) The weaver's creativity and its correlate, the cultural situation in which he exists. (2) Cultural structures or codes, such as design expectations. (3) Other structures such as the loom and the number, shapes, size and colour of the threads.

For the writer or speaker this suggests the possibilities of expression that is restricted by the creativity of the writer,

the restrictions, conscious and subconscious, imposed by a particular culture, and those constraints that impose themselves on any writer or speaker or indeed, person. These three limitations are respectively; structure of the enunciation, cultural structure, and deep structure.

Biblical scholars working in structural analysis have chiefly turned to the linguistic model of A. J. Greimas.⁵ Greimas suggests a narrative or syntactical structure that is a model based on universal law that governs that structure. Greimas, like structuralists in general, is not primarily interested in the meaning of a text but only in the text as it manifests semantic structures. He attempts to "deconstruct" as Jean Calloud calls it,⁶ to show how the narrative was built or to examine the structures that gave rise to its creation. Greimas' model is built on a series of polarities, so, for example, the text can be understood in relation to: Immanence versus Manifestation, Deep Structure versus Surface Structure, Deep Grammar versus Surface Grammar.⁷ On the level of manifestation, surface structure and surface grammar, the elements appear to have meaning in themselves and can apparently be defined in terms of their own content. At the level of immanence, deep structure and deep grammar, the elements are seen as being in relation to each other in an endless network of correlations,⁸ and the dominant question is: What happens on that stage or in that drama which is the text?

Similarly, as the variables of the surface structure are reduced to the invariants of the deep structure (technically "taxonomy"), Greimas posits a series of polar functions or qualifications including: Arrival vs. Departure or Departure vs. Return, Conjunction vs. Disjunction, Mandating vs. Acceptance or Refusal, Confrontation vs. Affrontment, Domination vs. Submission, Communication vs. Reception and Attribution vs. Deprivation.⁹ Actors or personages too can be seen as in polarity in relation to three sets of actantial roles including: Subject vs. Object, (Giver vs.) Sender vs. Receiver, Helper vs. Opponent. These actantial rôles are in their network of relationship, presented by Greimas in the following model:

Sender	Object	Receiver
Helper	Subject	Opponent

Three axes are included: Communication, - sender, object, receiver. Volition - subject, object. Power - helper, subject, opponent.¹⁰ Such, simply sketched, is Greimas' ongoing attempt to bring "scientific methodology" to bear on the study of narrative texts.

More will be said of structuralism below, but as a prologue I turn to a pioneer in this type of parable interpretation, Dan O. Via.

D. Via

Via is a pioneer in his use of literary canons, existential

philosophy and the methodology of structuralism! He is interested in the parable as to the way it functions, rather than in parable as an historical object. Parable for Via is an aesthetic object, a work of art - rather than an illustration of an idea. Via is somewhat difficult to categorize because of his broad interest in the nature of language, existential philosophy, and in common with G. V. Jones, interest in the literary nature of the parables.¹¹ More specifically, where Funk was concerned with metaphor, Dan Via is interested in plot action and the role of the characters, or what he calls configuration of action and meaning.

Via provides a critique of the "severely historical approach" to the parables, and concludes that the proper starting point for study of the parables is not the supposed historical situation but the text as an autonomous aesthetic object.¹² For Via, the severely historical approach only determines what the parables may have meant but has nothing to say concerning what the parable now means. Where the old approach, according to Via, stressed a single point in the parable, which linked it with Jesus' historical situation thus linking the meaning of the parable with a situation outside the parable, Via calls for an aesthetic approach which does not, as the existentialists express it, provide implications for human existence but rather allows existence to be mediated through the story itself.¹³ The parable as story allows the hearer to see life in a new pattern, a new gestalt.¹⁴ Jesus' parables contain

an implied understanding of existence and thus communicate the nature of faith and unfaith.¹⁵ Rather than first deriving the meaning of the parables from their historical context, or making them illustrations of ideas, the parable should be allowed to speak as a self-contained coherent unity.¹⁶ The parables present an autonomous world and make sense in themselves.

Although I am most sympathetic to what I may call the theoretical Via, nonetheless I also must say that such a discernment and reapplication of meaning outside of and perhaps uncontrolled by the meaning in historical context leave Via open to the criticism of making parable interpretation somewhat arbitrary. Charles Carlston has a worthwhile point too, when he maintains that the identification of a particular poet as Marxist, Fascist or non-political may not be important, "but it makes a good deal of difference that the parables of the New Testament have a context in the Christian faith in its earliest development." To say that the original context of particular parables has been irrevocably lost to us - an insight that form-critical studies have made abundantly plain - is by no means to say that the context is irrelevant or that we may treat the parables as if they originally did not have one.¹⁷

At the same time, Via does maintain that because we know from outside of the parables something of Jesus' ministry, the

parables, in a secondary way, become interpretations of his behaviour and part of the provocation of his conflict.¹⁸

The parables thus function as a language event calling us to decision and opening up the possibility of a new world. The language event is the indirect expression of Jesus' faith as a possibility for others.¹⁹

For Via, what the parable now says, or what its "translatable content" is, is an "understanding of the possibilities of human existence",²⁰ not interpretation of an historical situation but revelation of the possibilities of existence. The parable is an aesthetic object that through its internal coherence implies an understanding of existence, and as Biblical text communicates the nature of faith and unfaith. As language event, it conducts the listener to a place of decision. Via warns against the intentional fallacy of tying the meaning to the way that it affects a particular listener or listeners. Also Via warns of the difficulties inherent in attempting to translate the parable into other terms, a task that was as difficult for the first century hearers as for the contemporary hearer.²¹

Why as difficult? Via makes three points. First, it is not possible to determine the exact historical situation into which a parable was spoken. Second, the severely critical approach ignores the basic human element in the parable that allows it to speak to man, not just man in a particular his-

torical situation. Third, if left in the past the parable may have nothing to say to the present.²²

The most significant contribution by Via is probably in his turn to literary criticism, though in practice this also meant a shift away from the form-critical-historical approach to the parables. Nonetheless, Via's turn to a literary approach was a door opened to new possibilities in approaches to the parables. Particularly do I like his expression of the "pattern of connection" within the parable itself. Within the parable the listener enters a new world where meaning is found within the pattern of connection²³ and, if I may use my own terminology, re-members the world outside the parable. It is the happening or dynamic nature of the parable that is primary in its influence, while the understanding of existence implicit in the happening calls forth subsidiary attention.²⁴

It is because of Via's conviction that the translatable content of the parables, viz, understanding of existence, is found in the pattern of events, images and encounters within the parable, that he suggests both the need of, and difficulty in translation into other terms. Following Dilthey he writes: "Meaning resides in intelligible patterns of connections and relationships, and understanding in grasping these connections, that is, grasping the meaning."²⁵

Via attempts this by interpreting the parables as aesthetic

objects by the canons of literary criticism, then focusing on the narrative pattern of the parable as a key to the implied understanding of existence in a parable. As an example, the parable of The Talents (Mt 25: 14-30) is first interpreted according to the historical critical method or what Via calls "historico-literary criticism." Then a "literary-existential criticism" identifies the parable as tragic since the plot of the parable derives from the fate of the man with the single talent. Emphasis is placed on the decision of the one-talent man to understand himself in the world as he did and to act on that understanding. The plot is tragic because, "one cannot think and act as he did without losing his existence, that is being inauthentic or existentially dead. If the outcome of such an understanding is ultimately the death of the self, then death is implicit in it from the beginning."²⁶ The way the plot unfolds is then stated and the character of the One-talent man is revealed. Concerning the latter Via writes:

Although the one-talent man hoped to retain the favor of his master, he revealed an obscure and inchoate sense of guilt which is seen in the fact that he accused his master of hardness and thus tried to make the latter responsible for his own failure. 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. ²⁷

In presenting the characteristics of the literary characters, Via vigorously but unconsciously shows that in imaginative psychoanalysis he is not a one-talent man!

The third section of interpretation Via calls "existential-theological interpretation" which is amazingly like his "literary-existential analysis". After further elucidation of the point that the parable's world or "understanding of existence" is a pointer to the divine-human encounter Via concludes:

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.²⁸

Via starts with an acceptance of the results of historical scholarship, declares the parables as autonomous aesthetic objects, then begins an analysis based on the canons of literary criticism. In particular, Via divides the parables on the basis of plot movement either upward toward the well-being of the protagonist, the comic pattern, or downward toward catastrophe and the isolation of the protagonist.

Among the tragic parables Via includes The Talents, (Mt. 25: 14-30), The Ten Maidens (Mt. 25: 1-13), The Wedding Garment (Mt. 22: 11-14), The Wicked Tenants (Mk 12: 1-9), and The Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18: 23-35). Comic parables include: The Workers in the Vineyard (Mt. 20: 1-16), The Unjust Steward (Lk. 16: 19), and The Prodigal Son (Lk. 15: 11-32).

Division based on a tragic or comic thrust to the parables is helpful but not without difficulty. First, the classification of particular parables can be debated. For example if the

parable of The Prodigal Son is concluded with verse 24, the happy return of the son, the parable easily fits into the comic category but if with some, the parable concludes at verse 32, and the possibly implied criticism of the elder son it fits more easily into Via's category of the tragic. Though the parable is left open and does not in fact state the fate of the older son, it is nonetheless assumed by some interpreters that there is an implied criticism that suggests an unhappy fate.

Second, the category of comic or tragic should properly be outside of the story itself - that is in the response of the auditor to the story, for in different ways the parables divide the hearers into those who hear, understand and integrate (comic) and those who hear but do not understand or deny the validity of the vision (tragic).

More serious is the criticism that Via's understanding of the text is, except for his existentialist categories, little different from that of Julicher. As an example, consider the meaning of the parable of The Talents as proposed by Via (quoted above). Despite Via's sometimes exciting and helpful methodological approach there is "a surprising element of banality about his conclusions."²⁹ Via has too quickly adopted Bultmann's existentialist hermeneutic. Funk also accuses Via (in relation to his attempts to hang on to example story) of "a certain proclivity for reading the parables allegorically,

albeit in a very subdued form."³⁰ Eta Linneman also asserts, though not in specific relation to Via, that the aesthetic approach to the parables yields no more than a theological assertion of moral demands.³¹

While questioning the "one-point" method of parable interpretation Via in fact searches for a single and permanently significant element in the parable. Via has succumbed to the temptation to reduce the parables to a set of general or particular ideas. He does not allow the parable to function as metaphor as "extended and narrative metaphor", and once again the parable has successfully resisted explanation.

In Semeia I Via responds to Crossan's contention that The Good Samaritan and other alleged example stories of the gospels are in fact parables whose deeper levels and metaphorical points have been missed. Crossan distinguished between parable, with a literal (surface level) point, and a metaphorical (deeper level) point, and example story, with only one point and one level. The difference between parable and example story is therefore one of function and intention rather than formal content.³²

Via argues against Crossan from the side of formal literary consideration, including his understanding of metaphor and the organic unity of the plot. Via then turns to Greimas' model for narrative analysis as a further argument against Crossan.

Here is a case where structuralist meets structuralist and no resolution of the difference seems possible on strictly structuralist grounds. Although I can say that I find Via's structuralist approach interesting, I have not found it very helpful.

At the Pittsburgh seminar "Semiology and Parables: An Exploration of the Possibilities offered by Structuralism for Exegesis", Via, taking a new tack expressed parable meaning through Jungian psychology and structuralism. The parable of The Unjust Judge for example, is for Via the representation of a male problem of perhaps the "problematic relationship between consciousness and the unconscious as such, whether male or female".³⁴ Via concludes in relation to this parable:

If the judge had acted differently, he might have overcome his moral and existential estrangement, and thereby his religious alienation. But he acted as we have seen him act, and God is kept in the margin as one who does not have to be revered. Or ego and animal are not joined, and the Self remains unrealized.³⁵

Elsewhere Via also supplies psychological categories in discussing the parable of The Prodigal Son,³⁶ and M. A. Tolbert joins Via in applying psychological (Freudian) categories to the same parable.³⁷

As with the allegorical approach, it appears that Via sees the key, or at least, a key to parable interpretation as being something outside of the parable, namely the Jungian view of the self. Much more work will have to be done before the value of this approach can be properly assessed.³⁸ Still it

might have been better if Via had simply said, "this parable reminds me of a story...."

In another work, Kerygma and Comedy In the New Testament,³⁹ Via has moved away from his "programatically structuralist approach" to what he calls "a genuinely literary-critical hermeneutic...based on a synthesis of structuralist, phenomenological, and existentialist modes of interpretation."⁴⁰ In this book Via is influenced by the yes-no, stop-go of binary language, the semiotic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure, and Russian formalism. Via is by now convinced that no single method is suitable for interpretation.⁴¹ Although he does not deal directly with the parables in this book, he argues in relation to New Testament studies generally that the adoption of structuralism entails a relegation of the historical method to a more marginal position.⁴²

Via is not easy to deal with, not only because of his attempts to approach the parables from the point of view of several disciplines but because that approach is still changing. He has now apparently discounted, or at least modified the literary-existential hermeneutic of The Parables.

R. M. Frye accuses Via, and I agree with the accusation, of a tendency to re-enact the medieval scholastic preoccupation with making distinction, sub-distinctions and even finer sub-sub-distinction..."⁴³ I shall return to structuralism again

below.

J. D. Crossan

It is J. D. Crossan's contribution to the study of the parables that he has picked up and expanded on Wilder's insights into the parable as extended metaphor, particularly as metaphor that is narrative in function. Crossan's goal is to allow the metaphor to come alive and to come alive in relation to someone: It takes two to parable.⁴⁴

According to Crossan, Jesus, through the paradox and scandal of his stories, attempted to shock existing thought patterns and fixed expectations and as with Zen Koans and Kafka's paradoxes, awaken his hearers to the unthinkable and miraculous. Particularly in his latest book⁴⁵ Crossan notes the creative nature of playful language as it stretches, and challenges the forms and structures that articulate experience. At the limits of language the ineffable is confronted and the literary iconoclasts, (in reference to Jesus and Borges, and quoting Sypher) have the ability to "stand on the brink of nonsense and absurdity and not be dizzy."⁴⁶ This is derived from a comic eschatology that is manifest as a creative and playful "end run" of expectations and a restoration of the world sub specie ludi. The approach is negative questioning and discontinuous rather than linear and with logical answers. Parables were used by Jesus to subvert the imprisoning of God in language (including case law, proverb and beatitude).

Crossan writes: "Comic eschatology sends us out repeatedly into that chaos where alone we can encounter a God who is not just our own projected vanity."⁴⁷

For Crossan metaphor mediates advent, new possibility, new world. To be human and to be open to the transcendent requires a willingness to be parabled.⁴⁸ Parable overturns past experience, subverts the old order,⁴⁹ and drives language and experience to its limits.⁵⁰ Parable creates action by making the hearer aware and forcing decisions about the human tendency to reconciliation - reconciliation that "we made up".⁵¹ It prepares for transcendence by reminding us of limits,⁵² and enhancing our "consciousness of ignorance."⁵³ Using structuralist terminology Crossan writes of parables:

They are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the relativity of story itself. They remove our defences and make us vulnerable to God. It is only in such experiences that God can touch us, and only in such moments does the kingdom of God arrive. My own term for this relationship is transcendence. ⁵⁴

Three parables are identified as key parables, or parables that "show most clearly the deep structure of the Kingdom's temporality and which contain in themselves the entire parabolic melody."⁵⁵ These parables, The Hidden Treasure, The Pearl of Great Price, and The Great Fish, are structured like many experiences of the Kingdom of God. There is the advent of a new world, reversal of man's past, and action, which is expressive of the new world and the new possibilities.⁵⁶

As an example the parable of The Sower is placed in the category of Parables of Advent. Crossan carefully determines the text, arguing for the terse paratactic sentences of Mark and Thomas, and settling for a pre-Markan form of the parable.⁵⁷ Crossan notes the tendency to threes: the wasted seed of the path, rocks and thorns, and the fruitful seed, 30, 60 and 100 fold.⁵⁸ It is not a parable of growth but of miracle, the surprise of the ordinary. "It is like this that the Kingdom is an advent. It is surprise and it is gift."⁵⁹

In sharp distinction to Via, who looks at the timeless nature of parable, Crossan treats the parables as parables of Jesus and paradigms of Jesus' message. Jesus spoke as a poet⁶⁰ "in parables" - and "in parables" is a deliberate pun.⁶¹ "In parables" because the only way "information" may be obtained from the parable is by participating in or "through the metaphor in its new and alien referential world".⁶² One must risk entrance into the parable before one can experience its validity.⁶³ "In" parables because there is "an intrinsic and inalienable bond between Jesus' experience and Jesus' parable."⁶⁴

In theory Crossan does not interpret this or any other text for the listener. He states as clearly as possible what the text may have meant for Jesus. For the listener however, he simply reiterates the parable with the conviction that the metaphor is not dead; at most it is dormant, and therefore may become alive for the listener as he is open to poetic metaphor,

the authentic language of religious expression.⁶⁵ Good! But this is theory; in practice Crossan is only too willing to explain the meaning and to categorize the parables.

In his contribution to Semeia I Crossan expands his work on the Servant parables noting the way in which the hearer is drawn into the parable,⁶⁶ the dramatic aspect of the parables,⁶⁷ and the possible different meanings that the parables can have to the hearer.⁶⁸ He returns again to the parable of The Good Samaritan. Beginning with a distinction between metaphor and example, he concludes that The Good Samaritan is parable since it is based on metaphor.

Crossan makes the usual attempt to distinguish between parable and allegory⁶⁹ - though such distinctions are far easier to make in theory than in practice. He notes that some scholars now wonder if there are intermediate steps between the one point of the parable and the many points of the allegory.⁷⁰ Both parable and allegory have two points - a literal point derived from the surface level, and a metaphorical point derived from a deep level - with both points existing in "mysterious dialectic".⁷¹ Although in most parables there is little danger of confusing the two points, where morality is involved, as with The Rich Fool, The Good Samaritan, The Rich Man and Lazarus, The Pharisee and the Publican, The Wedding Guest and The Proper Guests, the literal level has been taken as a moral injunction and the metaphorical point has been ignored.⁷²

Crossan makes a convincing case with all of these parables. The distinction between parable and allegory is not to be found here. Crossan concludes that the difference between allegory and parable is that allegory is "fundamentally reducible to abstract proposition, and parable (is) essentially irreducible to such a statement."⁷³

In Semeia 2⁷⁴ Crossan writes of the problems and methods of applying structuralist procedures to a text. This leads to a discussion of parable, riddle and charm and the conclusion already reached by Funk that the final outcome of a parable may not be in the parable but in the parabled.⁷⁵ In The Good Samaritan as his example, there is a duel between the Speaker and the Hearer which is an attack on the hearer at the most profound level.⁷⁶ There is a polar reversal of the hearer's expectations, an attack on the structure of expectation. Crossan writes:

A parable is a story whose artistic surface structure allows its deep structure to invade one's hearing in direct contradiction to the deep structure of one's expectation. It is an attack on world, a raid on the articulate.⁷⁷

For Crossan the Parable does not create meaning but functions in the via negativa to destroy myth.⁷⁸ By way of illustration I am reminded of P. G. Wodehouse's succinct definition when he writes that a parable is a Bible story which at first sounds like a pleasant yarn but keeps something up its sleeve which suddenly pops up and leaves you flat.⁷⁹ The difference however,

is that Crossan does not see the parable as providing a connection or continuity with a difficult or elusive meaning of life but as that which underlines a discontinuity, disruption, or disconnectedness in relation to transcendence.⁸⁰

Crossan is most vulnerable to criticism when he relies on structuralism in order to demonstrate the meaning of the parable. The quest for deep structure, especially if divorced from the particularity of literary and historical context results in as culturally bound and subjective a meaning as in the patristic and medieval exegesis so roundly condemned by contemporary interpretation.⁸¹ What comes through most clearly is not the meaning of the parable but the ingenuity of the interpreter! I am not surprised that several participants in the parable seminar have expressed some hesitation in relation to the structuralist approach - especially as practiced by Crossan.⁸²

E. Guttgemanns

Recently there has been some interest in another scholar working from the structuralist point of view on the parables. Erhardt Guttgemanns,⁸³ although still developing his "generative poetic", intends to supersede both the historical-critical and existential-hermeneutical approaches to theology by a structuralist methodology that will reach to the speech of God. That is, the Word of God can be identified with the text and text, not history, is the prior category. Language

for Guttgemanns occurs only as text and text can be classified as Gattung (genre) and appear as either performance text (realized out of the possibilities) or competence text (repertoire of generative possibilities). Texts are not generated by history but by syntax derived from the deep structures of the mind. Genres derive from the nature of the mind.

Guttgemanns also criticizes Bultmann's existentialist hermeneutic. Especially is he critical of what he saw as Bultmann's tendency to translate the language of the New Testament into today's language almost exclusively by words (lexemes), such as body, heart, faith, flesh, world, freedom, light, darkness etc. Instead Guttgemanns would have had Bultmann also explain the relationship of the lexemes to the multilayered nature of the text and to its generative matrix.

It is not yet clear how important Guttgemanns will be in future parable interpretation. As of now there are many questions and little offered by way of future possibilities. Detweiler, for example, refers to an intricate exercise in quasi-mathematical reasoning...inadequate as a scientifically-based methodology,⁸⁴ and positively a metafiction, "whose main value lies in the decentered perspective, in the new angle of vision on the text it affords us and hence the possibilities for new interpretation."⁸⁵ It still seems that poets and prophets

can say more than philosophers can discover.

D. Patte

Before moving to a more general discussion of structuralism I shall discuss Daniel Patte very briefly. Patte insists that exegesis today must combine traditional and structural exegesis, not as a luxury nor fad but as a "must".⁸⁶ He does not suggest why today should be different than any other day. (How could he as a structuralist? Though not impossible, it would surely be difficult.)

I simply cannot appreciate that the work of earlier generations was for naught or that ours is the first generation to actually understand the text. Does Patte do better? In a lengthy article in Semiology and Parables Patte examines the parable of The Prodigal Son⁸⁷ in minutae, while in What is Structural Exegesis? he applies Greimas' actantiel model to the parable of The Good Samaritan. The actantiel model is represented as follows:⁸⁸

sender ?	Object Health	Receiver sounded man
Helper knowhow, oil, wine, donkey, money, innkeeper	Subject Samaritan	Opponent Robbers and effects of their action

For Patte, the relationships implied here take pages to explain; I'm not sure that his results are worth it. In Patte's extensive analysis of The Good Samaritan I leave the

analysis with the conviction that the elephant laboured and brought forth a mouse. Yes, it is an interesting mouse, but a mouse nonetheless.

Eventually, Patte argues that the parable is not an example story "go and do likewise" but a parable "go and be likewise" and as parable, what is the meaning? Patte writes:

If, then, the story of the Good Samaritan is not an example story, but a parable, a metaphor of the kingdom, what was its meaning? And what is its meaning for us? In other words, what are the hermeneutical consequences of our analysis? The only possible answer in the context of the use of Scripture exemplified in the New Testament is that the parable was proposed as a paradigm for discovering the "signs of the kingdom." When one can discover, in the concrete situation in which he lives, a "good Samaritan," one is in the presence of a manifestation of the mysterious kingly activity of God. Yet this identification of the "good Samaritans" must be performed and verified with great care. There are many people performing good deeds who are not "Samaritans" (indeed, the "priests" and "Levites" certainly perform good deeds). In order to fulfill the paradigm of the parable, the "new story" must present a similar actualization of the narrative and mythical structures.

These last remarks are intended as mere suggestions of the promising exegetical and hermeneutical results we can expect from structural analysis of the Bible. 89

To paraphrase: Good-Samaritan-like activity may be a sign of the Kingdom - though not all people doing good deeds are "Samaritans" and therefore are not signs. Alas, this is but the mundane in silver lamé!

When I turn elsewhere to Patte's structural analysis of the parable of The Prodigal Son, I am no less taken aback.⁹⁰ The

analysis is very full and quite complicated. At the conclusion of his analysis (nine feet of computer paper plus seventy-four pages of analysis) Patte concluded that the approach offers important hermeneutical possibilities. Also, Patte concludes the use of a computer (recommended language "forester") is essential. I understand that Patte has discontinued this approach to parable interpretation!

I find myself learning from the structuralists' approach to the parables, not very much about the parables but a lot about structuralism. I ask them to show me an elephant, and the structuralists produce a thousand rabbits.

After spending many pages on the linguistic background of structuralism, its connection with romanticism and Russian formalism, and while discussing the views of leading critics in the field, Robert Scholes asks: Why do we need a structural approach? Doesn't it take something away from literature?⁹¹ The answer, Scholes writes, is that structuralism allows comparison of narrative structure with other fundamental structures and may help us understand the configuration of human mentality. Second, establishing the universal elements of narrative and a terminology for them will allow for clearer, more systematic comparisons and discriminations than is now possible. Third, the reduction to rules is destructive in that it makes technique mechanically available but is constructive in its organization of the particular prejudices of our age.

"We are condemned to inquiry by our status as human."⁹²

Although the goal of structuralism is that the configuration of human mentality may be discovered (the ontology implicit in linguistics),⁹³ it should be clear that this is or should be quite secondary to the task of understanding the parables. We should not go to the parables to discern the structures of the mind, or the structures of being, but to discover the meaning of parable - unless of course one agrees that the meaning of the parable is one with the meaning of the universe and that such meaning is hidden in the collective unconscious and therefore, as Edmund Leach writes: "Perhaps even in the age of space rockets and hydrogen bombs Paradise need not be wholly beyond recall."⁹⁴ It is also still too early to conclude that the deep structures of narrative have an ontological base in the mind.⁹⁵

The comparison of narrative structure with other fundamental structures is interesting. I confess to a love-hate relationship to it, sometimes treating it as mathematics, sometimes as a game and at other times as art. But even though interesting, I remain reluctant to conclude that it reveals the reality behind language. (Are we dealing with heredity or environment? Is the unconscious benign, or with Freud, malignant?) For me structuralism is primarily a translation into another and artificial language - a language that is related to mathematics but especially to computer language.

It is not at all clear to me that the meaning of the parable can be reduced to, or expressed in, its deep structures. The rich and subtle meanings that grasp the reader/auditor are elusive. Moving to deep structure may in fact change the balance of emphasis or even the meaning.⁹⁶ Where source and form criticism have often had the tendency to turn to content and form at the expense of form-content, structuralism has the tendency to turn to form at the expense of content. This, the so-called formalistic fallacy, is a very real danger for structuralists.⁹⁷

I am reminded that J. C. McLelland has referred to novelist John Barth's Scheherezade in Chimera who says: "Making love and telling stories both take more than good technique - but it's only the technique that we can talk about." In a nutshell this is the problem with structuralism - too much time is spent on explaining technique and too little time on the significance of the love-act. And of course the significance cannot be adequately explained, it has to be experienced and once it is experienced no explanation is necessary, and no explanation is recognized as adequate.

Another point made by Scholes is also stated positively by Amos Wilder: "It may well be that structuralism's often austere scrutiny of such texts will open our eyes to their import in ways that have long been obscured."⁹⁸ The danger is that the reduction of art to rules while clearly displaying the

prejudices of our age, threatens to make technique mechanically available⁹⁹ thus devaluating artistic and critical exercises.

Since language for the structuralists is a fundamental category, and never gets better or worse but only changes, it is possible to see in structuralism an anti-historical or perhaps the term might better be an ahistorical bias. Still the problem of history and the complex relationship between the synchronic and diachronic connections seem to me not yet to have been fully worked out.

While the subject-object schema of analytical thinking can and does produce positive and helpful results it can also miss the freshness of encounter (hearing the parable) and that relationship to metaphor that is playful and participatory.¹⁰⁰ To quote Philip Wheelwright by way of fair warning:

Meaning always flits mockingly beyond the reach
of men with nets and measuring sticks. 101

And W. H. Auden writes: "To find out what if anything, a parable means, I have to surrender my objectivity and identify myself with what I read. (If the critic)...tries to interpret a parable, he will only reveal himself. What he writes will be a description of what the parable has done to him; what it may do to others he does not and cannot have any idea."¹⁰²

The effect of structuralism is also to make a text intelligible but not, as Scholes notes, unique.¹⁰³ That is, what is individual and incidental in the narrative is excluded. In structuralist terminology performance (speaking) appears to be secondary to competence (language). There is little or no room for what is genuinely new, original, creative, revelatory.

It may be that structuralism's implied understanding of the world is quite at odds with the implied view of the parables. On the one hand I take structuralism to imply a world that is understandable from within. Robert Scholes writes:

Thus, from a certain perspective both Marxism and structuralism can be seen as reactions to 'modernist' alienation and despair. They are opposed to one another in many ways...but they share a 'scientific' view of the world as both real in itself and intelligible to man. Both Marxism and structuralism are integrative, holistic ways of looking at the world including man. 104

On the other hand I understand the philosophic or worldview behind the parables is that neither man nor God is entirely explicable nor intelligible to man.

It should further be noted that linguistics is in a state of rapid change and that there is considerable debate within the structuralist discipline concerning methodology and approach.¹⁰⁵

Also, structuralists have not expressed themselves very clearly. As Brian Kovacs observed:

Structuralists have not facilitated this necessary communication and translation of their discipline. They couch their work in an alien and impenetrable jargon, at once technical and highly metaphorical. Too, one sometimes suspects that Structuralists themselves may not be altogether clear about the methodological and philosophical issues which are at stake in their work. They have not concentrated on clarifying their intellectual history, and to some extent have, like many other disciplines, developed a kind of pseudo-history of the discipline, which conceals more for the outsider than it can reveal. 106

Why do we need a structural approach? The answer that a structuralist might proffer is that every isolation of the structural elements relates to and throws light on other basic structures and together they lend insight into the nature of mind or reality itself. Although it is obvious that the mind can understand something of itself, even psychology is often not much more than a relative incoherence that lends an illusion of profundity, and it is difficult to imagine how the mind can illumine the basic working of the mind, though some progress might be possible. Still, one does not usually go to the parables to learn analogically about the mind. This makes the parable an object for enquiry rather than an addressing subject. Reductionist indeed is that process that turns a parable into a **mathematical-like** formula. We might very well ask: What happened to the parable?

Some participants in the Vanderbilt Project "Semiology and

Exegesis" also voiced questions about, "the usefulness of the procedure" (Culley)¹⁰⁷ "semantic overkill" (Whittig)¹⁰⁸ and "a new notation but not new solutions" (Robertson).¹⁰⁹ Structuralism can be of some help perhaps, but in an indirect manner, as it allows for a certain space from which to view the parable. It may be that in this way structuralism serves primarily as an anti-reading of the parable as text. To some extent structuralism makes the familiar unfamiliar. Certainly as Robert Scholes insists structuralism will not read the text for us.¹¹⁰

Lévi-Strauss has himself criticized structuralism in his most interesting assertion that myth is man's way of making the unbearable an acceptable part of life and therefore structuralism is a myth "perhaps the myth for our time."¹¹¹ In other words, structuralism may be a way of avoiding (making the unbearable acceptable) reality. It may be a way of blunting the sharp edge of the parable. The case is still on trial and has not yet gone to the jury.

Paul Ricoeur's statement should summarize the defense:

...today this understanding of structures is the necessary intermediary between symbolic naïveté and hermeneutical comprehension. It is with this remark, which leaves the last word to the structuralist, that I should like to end, so that both our attention and our expectation remain open in his behalf. 112

- 1 As an introduction to Chomsky see John Lyon's sympathetic treatment in Chomsky, (London: Collins/Fontana, 1971 (1970)).
- 2 For a brief but helpful introduction to Foucault see Maurice Cranston, Philosophy and Language, (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1969), pp. 70-80.
- 3 Incisive criticism of Lévi-Strauss' approach can be found in Leach, op. cit.
- 4 Daniel Patte, What is Structural Exegesis?, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 21.
- 5 For a introduction to Greimas' structural analysis of narrative see Jean Calloud, Structural Analysis of Narrative, trans Daniel Patte, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), and Patte, op. cit.
- 6 Calloud, op. cit., p. 1.
- 7 Ibid., p. 3.
- 8 Ibid., p. 8.
- 9 Ibid., p. 17f.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 29-31.
- 11 Ibid., p. 90.
- 12 Ibid., p. 92.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 13-17, p. 88, and his references to Fuchs, pp. 19-21.
- 14 Ibid., p. 82.
- 15 Ibid., p. 40, n. 36, p. 193f, p. 197.
- 16 Ibid., p. 23f.
- 17 Carlston, art. cit., p. 232f.
- 18 Dan Otto Via, Jr., The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 192.
- 19 Ibid., p. 194.
- 20 Ibid., p. 39.
- 21 Ibid., p. 33.

- 22 Ibid., p. 21f.
- 23 Ibid., p. 82f.
- 24 Ibid., p. 88.
- 25 Ibid., p. 44f.
- 26 Ibid., p. 116.
- 27 Ibid., p. 119.
- 28 Ibid., p. 122.
- 29 As noted in Perrin, Language, p. 154.
- 30 Funk, Semeia I, p. 189.
- 31 Linnemann, op. cit., p. 34.
- 32 Dan Via, "Parable and Example Story: A Literary-Structuralist Approach", in Semeia I, pp. 105-133.
- 34 Dan O. Via, "The Parable of the Unjust Judge: A Metaphor of the Unrealized Self," in Patte, Semiology, p. 22.
- 35 Ibid., p. 27.
- 36 Dan O. Via, "The Prodigal Son: A Jungian Reading", in Semeia 9 (1977), Polyvalent Narration, pp. 21-43.
- 37 Mary Ann Tolbert, "The Prodigal Son: An Essay in Literary Criticism From a Psychoanalytic Perspective", Semeia 9, pp. 1 - 20.
- 38 Cf. John Dominic Crossan, "Waking the Bible: Biblical Hermeneutic and Literary Imagination", Interpretation XXXII (1978), pp. 269-285.
- 39 Via, Kerygma and Comedy.
- 40 Ibid., p. xi.
- 41 Ibid., p. xii, n. 1.
- 42 Ibid., p. 2.
- 43 Roland Mushet Frye, "'A New Criticism', Review of Dan O. Via; Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament," Interpretation XXXI, (1977), 299-302.
- 44 John Dominic Crossan, Dark Interval, Towards A Theology of Story, (Niles: Argus Communications 1975), p. 87.

- 45 Crossan, Raid on the Articulate.
- 46 Ibid., p. 33.
- 47 Ibid., p. 174.
- 48 Ibid., p. 56.
- 49 Ibid., p. 55. Crossan writes: "Parable is a story which is the polar or binary opposite of myth. Parable brings not peace but the sword, and parable casts fire upon the earth which receives it."
- 50 Crossan, Dark Interval, p. 59: "Myth establishes world ...Parable subverts world."
- 51 Ibid., p. 57.
- 52 Ibid., p. 60.
- 53 Crossan quoting Ben Beliff, Ibid., p. 77.
- 54 Ibid., p. 122.
- 55 Crossan, In Parables, p. 33.
- 56 Also, Crossan, Semeia I, p. 214.
- 57 Crossan, In Parables, p. 40ff.
- 58 Ibid., pp. 40, 43. Cf. Dark Interval, p. 115.
- 59 Crossan, In Parables, pp. 39-44, 50-52.
- 60 Ibid., p. 21.
- 61 Ibid., p. xiv.
- 62 Ibid., p. 13.
- 63 Ibid., cf. p. 18 passim.
- 64 Ibid., p. 22.
- 65 Ibid., p. 18.
- 66 Crossan, Semeia I, p. 24.
- 67 Ibid., p. 28, 32.
- 68 Ibid., p. 26.

- 69 Crossan, In Parables, p. 8ff.
- 70 Crossan, Semeia I, pp. 73, 87.
- 71 Ibid., p. 73.
- 72 Ibid., pp. 74, 77.
- 73 Ibid., p. 87. Cf. Example is not close to parable, "but on the other side of allegory." Ibid.
- 74 Crossan, Semeia 2.
- 75 Ibid., p. 95.
- 76 Ibid., p. 96.
- 77 Ibid., p. 198.
- 78 Ibid., p. 105.
- 79 Quoted by A. M. Hunter in "The Parable for Today", The Observer, April, 1975.
- 80 Cf. W. A. Beardslee, Semeia 12, p. 158.
- 81 Cf. John R. Donahue, "Response to John Dominic Crossan", in Patte, Semiology, p. 287.
- 82 See references below following the critique of J. D. Crossan.
- 83 Semeia 6, ed., Norman R. Petersen, trans., W. G. Doty, Erhardt Guttgemanns' "Generative Poetics", (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976). Semeia 10, Narrative Syntax: Translations and Reviews, ed., John Dominic Crossan, (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978). Critical comments on Guttgemanns' approach are also made by Via, Kerygma and Comedy, pp. 23-27.
- 84 Robert Detweiler, "Generative Poetics as Science and Fiction", Semeia 10, p. 142.
- 85 Ibid., p. 150.
- 86 Patte, Structural Exegesis, p. 2.
- 87 Patte, Semiology, pp. 71-149.
- 88 Patte, Structural Exegesis, p. 43.
- 89 Ibid., p. 83.

- 90 Daniel Patte, "Structural Analysis of the Prodigal Son: Towards a Method", in Semiology, pp. 77-150.
- 91 Robert Scholes, Structuralism in Literature. An Introduction, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 92, 169.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 In Claude Lévi-Strauss' Structural Anthropology, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), a book which is consistent with Lévi-Strauss' other writings, he postulates a structural method of strategy or interpreting man and culture in terms of underlying universals such as language, kingship, social organization, magic, religion and art. The human mind exhibits the same basic pattern since the beginning of human society and to grasp that pattern is to understand the mind and to understand man (and God?). That is speculative. It seems to me that such an approach implies a theology of immanence; there is no room for transcendent experience or experience of the Transcendent.
- 94 Edmund Leach, Lévi-Strauss, Rev. Ed., (London: Collins/Fontana, 1978 (1970)), p. 134.
- 95 Leach disagrees with Lévi-Strauss on this point. Ibid., p. 131f, et passim.
- 96 Robert C. Tannehill, The Sword of His Mouth, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 33.
- 97 Cf. Scholes, op. cit., p. 11.
- 98 Wilder, "Semeia, An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism: An Introduction", Semeia I, p. 7.
- 99 This is discussed by Robert Scholes, op. cit., pp. 92 & 169.
- 100 Richard Palmer forcefully argues this case op. cit., p. 200 and pp. 221-253.
- 101 Wheelwright, Metaphor, p. 39.
- 102 W. H. Auden, The Dyer's Hand, and Other Essays, (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 179.
- 103 Scholes, op. cit., p. 144.
- 104 Ibid., p. 3.
- 105 William Doty in abstracting Guttgemanns' article writes: "Generally the Semeia articles betray a lack of logical and theoretical strictness; the structural observations

are penetrating, but are of limited universality because the systems to which they belong are not demonstrated."

- 106 Brian W. Kovacs, "Philosophical Foundations for Structuralism," in Semeia 10, p. 85.
- 107 Robert C. Culley, "Response to Daniel Patte" in Patte, Semiology, p. 151. It should be noted however that Culley's general position is that the search for structure is more elusive than illusive. Cf. "Structural Analysis: Is it Done with Mirrors?" in Interpretation XXVIII (1974), p. 165.
- 108 Susan Whittig, "Discussion" in Patte, Semiology, p. 173.
- 109 David Robertson, "Structuralist Criticism of the Parables: Brief Response", in Patte, op. cit., p. 187.
- 110 Scholes, op. cit., p. 39, p. 142.
- 111 Quoted in ibid., p. 170.
- 112 Ricoeur, Conflict, p. 61. This statement of Ricoeur's is in contrast to earlier criticism of structuralism as a meaning of nonsense and "admirable syntactic arrangement of a discourse which says nothing." In Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis, R. Barthes et. al. (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1974, p. 6., n. 9.) Again to retain a balance, I quote a poem by Georges Crespy from the back cover of the same book:

In the beginning was the structure.
It was everywhere in the world and the
world was organized by it.

It was in the minerals, in the crystals
which always showed the same arrangement
of their facets.

It was in the plant kingdom where the
leaves are distributed along the stems
and the veins along the leaves with an
invariable regularity.

It was in the animal kingdom where
physiological systems are connected to one
another according to a schematic diagram
whose program was determined in the gametes.

It was in the rhetoric, skilled in
decomposing the discourse into its parts.

"...There is a time for the epic and a time for the satire; a time for iambic pentameter and a time for alliterative verse; a time for the allegory and a time for the philosophical poem; a time for free association and a time for the litany; a time for the tragedy and a time for the apocalypse. New epochs call for particular kinds of voices, rhythms, stances of the author; particular strategies with respect to the past; and highly diverse forms of publication, whether by public recitation, by handbills, by private circulation, by the printed book, by recordings, or by radio script.

Amos N. Wilder, The New Voice: Religion, Literature, Hermeneutics, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 133.

7 Parable as Model of Meaning

N. Perrin

It is rather difficult to place Norman Perrin in this orderly schema of interpretation, but since **I began to write this thesis** Perrin has produced an important critique of parable interpretation in the context of his continued interest in the Kingdom of God. I have included him here more because of the time in which his work was written than any supposed affinity to Paul Ricoeur.

Perrin has been consistently interested in a number of New Testament issues for all of his teaching years. These issues have centered on the Kingdom of God as the central aspect of the teaching of Jesus.¹ This has led him to consider such problems as the source of the Son of Man sayings in the synoptic gospels,² criteria for a quest for the historical Jesus,³ demythologizing - which he sees simply as another aspect of the question of the historical Jesus,⁴ and the parables as the most easily authenticated teaching about the Kingdom of God.⁵

In Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom, one of Perrin's

last books, he again argued that the message or ultimate referent of Jesus is the kingdom of God⁶ and it is the

parables that are the major carriers of that message.

"Kingdom of God" is for Perrin a symbol rather than a concept. As a symbol it functions to evoke the myth of the Kingdom of God,⁷ and that myth becomes constitutive or interpretative of experience. By symbol, Perrin follows Ricoeur⁸ with his contrast of sign and symbol and Wheelwright who makes the same distinction with steno-symbol (having a single referent) and tensive-symbol (having multiple referents).⁹ Perrin does not like Via, for example, treat the parables as individual aesthetic units with a life of their own but insists that the text, including parable, must be interpreted by the myth, 'Kingdom of God' **a symbol which** has power "to transcend, and even to transform, the particular text itself."¹⁰

Interpretation of the parable therefore implies, if I read correctly, the need for an understanding of something outside of the parable viz, myth of the Kingdom of God. "A parable...is essentially a comparison whereby one thing is illuminated by being compared to another, and the parable makes its point as a totality."¹¹ The point of comparison again, is the Kingdom of God; this is the outside referent and without it, Perrin implies, the parables would be misinterpreted.¹² The need of an outside key to interpreting the parables suggests to me something that is akin to the need for a key in the interpretation of allegory. Also, it is questionable that the parables can be reduced to recognizing

"the reality of the activity of God in the historicity of the hearer's existence in the world and especially in the experience of a 'clash of worlds' as the hearer comes to grips with the reality of everyday existence."¹³ Could we look for a single sentence to sum up the parables of, for example, Kafka? I think not, parables are too complex for this kind of reduction. Perrin also supports Crossan's use of the three parables: The Hidden Treasure, Costly Pearl and Great Fish, and the themes derived from them of Advent, Reversal and Action as being paradigmatic for the interpretation of all of the parables.¹⁴ This is not a suggestion without problems as I have suggested in the discussion of Crossan (above).

It is necessary to take Perrin to task for first of all underestimating the contribution of structuralism to parable interpretation. Perrin has simply waved structuralism away¹⁵ and though this is an approach that is understandable (structuralism requires learning a new language and vocabulary) anyone writing about the parables must take it seriously. It is also often difficult to determine exactly what Perrin means by words such as metaphor and symbol and therefore considerable guessing must occur. But the most serious problem in the book is its central thesis - the "Kingdom of God" is a symbol. A strong case can be made that the term is a metaphor rather than a symbol in which "kingship is the concrete vehicle and God the mysterious transcendent tenor".¹⁶ Kingdom of God is

a metaphor in relation to the myths about God's activity. As metaphor it may evoke but does not symbolize the myths of God's activity.

Colin Turbayne has suggested that it is possible for a metaphor to become a model, that is to suggest that "that is the way it actually is". When this happens the tensive nature of the metaphor no longer is effective; the metaphor is heard in a literal or non-ambiguous sense.¹⁷ It may be that Perrin has understood Kingdom of God as a model in Turbayne's sense of the word.

Parable in Perrin's scheme suggests metaphoric narrative giving rise to metaphor (Kingdom of God) which in turn evokes the myth of God's activity. This is an inordinately long way around for the evocative action of the parable. Implicit in this criticism is the view that Perrin has not taken seriously Jesus' challenge to contemporary understanding of Kingdom¹⁸ and the imaginative language and evocative function of the parable, and has implicitly attempted to transfer the parable to another logic - that of what he calls symbol.

P. Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur's writing on the parables is at once difficult and stimulating. Ricoeur is difficult in that his is a writing, if I may borrow a phrase, fraught with background. It is stimulating in that Ricoeur is charting a course that will

probably cause all interpreters of the parables to tack in his direction.¹⁹ Although Ricoeur is worthy of considerable attention I shall limit areas and amount of discussion in order to keep the work within reasonable bounds. Ricoeur's goal is to establish a comprehensive theory of interpretation. This theory, if and when it emerges, will not be a resolution of the conflict of interpretations but a comprehensive theory that will embrace the diverse interpretations. Towards this objective, as Loretta Dornisch points out, Ricoeur has thus far produced a theory of metaphor, language, imagination and action.²⁰ Ricoeur, mainly in opposition to Lévi-Strauss' structuralism, eschews that word and calls his own work hermeneutics. His interest is in the way in which the dead language of the text is brought to life, how the discourse of the text is prolonged.

For Ricoeur the parables are radically profane stories that involve ordinary people but in such a way that the extraordinary (Kingdom of God) is experienced in the ordinary and experienced in plot - what happens in the story. Assuming Crossan's schema of the meanings of parable and noting its source in Heidegger's ontology, Ricoeur suggests that all of the parables can be understood in terms of: (1) Advent, that is, a finding something or an encounter, (2) Reversal, the shift of meaning or focus that follows Advent. (3) Decision, the doing of something, perhaps even a good deed.²¹

Ricoeur borrows from Max Black the term "model" in relation to metaphor and proposes by it that "metaphor is to poetic language as model is to scientific language."²² That is, as model in science is a device that breaks up an inadequate interpretation and opens the way for a more adequate interpretation, metaphor re-describes by way of a heuristic fiction that organizes reality and becomes reality itself.²³ It is not however metaphor by itself, but metaphor in cluster. Functioning in this way metaphor displays the articulateness and stability similar to the way that model functions in science.²⁴

For Ricoeur, metaphor is not just a style of adornment of language nor does it have merely a referential dimension, but as a fiction²⁵ has the power of redefining or saying something new about reality.²⁶ Metaphor does not just register a resemblance but institutes or initiates a resemblance,²⁷ and, as invention, answers a novel discordance in a sentence.²⁸ Such "true" metaphor or tension metaphor, because it creates meaning, is untranslatable.²⁹ In the gospels, for example, the 'Kingdom of Heaven' is not described but it is presented in parable as "like". No translation into abstract knowledge is given but only the metaphor, "only the violence of a language that from the beginning to the end, thinks through the metaphor and never beyond."³⁰

Ricoeur, though somewhat sympathetic to Crossan's contention

that the parable should be taken metaphorically because it pretends to be plain and trivial, argues that the parable should be taken metaphorically because of the element of extravagance in **it**. The extra-ordinary is mixed with the ordinary,³¹ and it is precisely this extravagance that "delivers the openness of the metaphorical process from the closure of the narrative form."³² At other times, Ricoeur refers to an *époque* of the real, a state of non-engagement, a neutralized atmosphere where the fecundity of the imagination is linked to language.³³

Only recently, as Ricoeur notes, have scholars applied the concept of metaphor to parables.³⁴ But, he asks, since tense metaphor twists meaning and eventually dies, why haven't the metaphors of the parables died? Although willing to grant that some may be in that category, Ricoeur suggests that the reason the parables continue to retain their tension is because metaphor in the parable does not come alone but remains alive because of the mutual tension engendered by a network of metaphors.³⁵ God, for example, is called King, Father, Husband, Landlord, Shepherd, Judge, Rock, Fortress, Redeemer etc.

The parables should be considered together, not singly or isolated, according to Ricoeur. Indeed, an isolated parable is an artefact of the historical critical method:³⁶ "Parables constitute a collection - a 'corpus' which is fully meaningful

only as a whole"³⁷ Ricoeur argues that "there is no hermeneutics of a parable, but of the parables."³⁸ The network of mutually supporting and conflicting parables, he writes, discourages the establishment of theologies, whether good or bad,³⁹ and "taken together they say more than any rational theology."⁴⁰ Ricoeur does not stop at these statements but goes on to hypothesize that the proverbial sayings and the eschatological sayings must also be interpreted as a corpus.

The common element, or what designates the common horizon of these modes of discourse, Ricoeur argues, is the symbol "Kingdom of God". Further, this implies that these modes of discourse may be translated into one another. This, for Ricoeur, frees the hearer from the need to be restricted to the literal understanding: "It opens the eyes and the ears."⁴¹ And part of the definition of parable is that it is a narrative that can be converted into a proverb or eschatological saying,⁴² and these sayings as well as the deeds of the New Testament are intersignified within the Gospel form and mediated by the "main topic of the Gospel"⁴³ the narration of the passion.

In an interesting passage among many interesting passages Ricoeur writes:

This proximity...between all the "sayings" and all "the deeds"...and the story of the Passion has a tremendous importance. This proximity is not

only a proximity in terms of juxtaposition, of continuity, but in terms of mutual interpretation, of symbolic interference. My personal conviction is that the allegorical interpretation, which most modern historians of the text are so eager to disconnect from the parable as such, is motivated unavoidably by this symbolic interplay between the narrative of the passion and the parables. From now on the parables are not only the 'parables of Jesus', but of the 'Crucified.' 44

More succinctly the church read the proclamation of Jesus as God's parable into the parables of Jesus - as H. Richard Niebuhr wisely noted almost forty years ago.⁴⁵ The parable was interpreted in and modified by the Gospel form, and, Ricoeur writes, the tension between parable form and Gospel form is unavoidable.⁴⁶ This understanding places Ricoeur close to my own understanding of interpretation, and also closer to that of the allegorists as Ricoeur himself noted in the quotation above.

Further to this point of a theological bias to interpretation, Ricoeur notes that there is simply no reading of a text that is able to extricate interpretation from the contingencies of community, tradition, or living current of thought.⁴⁷ No wonder, especially when this is added to the theological bias, that Ricoeur favourably quotes von Rad: "Historical investigation searches for a critically assured minimum - the kerygmatic picture tends toward a theological maximum."⁴⁸

For Ricoeur, the weakness of structuralism as a hermeneutic is that for the structuralist language functions only internally or immanently, referring to another element in the same

system.⁴⁹ Not enough recognition is given to the way that language transcends itself. There is too much of the absoluteness of a closed system and sometimes a severely antihistorical bias.⁵⁰ "Structuralism," he writes, "...is a dead end the very moment when it treats any 'message' as the mere 'quotation' of its underlying 'code'. This claim alone makes structural method structuralist prejudice."⁵¹ Elsewhere he refers to structuralism's "for-the-sake-of-the-code fallacy."⁵²

In a way that is very much related to this argument, Ricoeur insists that structuralism distorts the tradition of a people who intentionally reinterpret and find new meanings in their textual tradition when confronted with unexpected and sometimes shattering historical events.⁵³ Speaking is an act involving free choice that produces the new. Where too is there sufficient room for what Ricoeur calls "l'esprit humain"? Ricoeur wonders out loud, if structuralism is applicable to a society that is different from the myth-making societies described by Lévi-Strauss.⁵⁴ Analysis of deep structure is of no help unless it leads back to insight on the crisis at the surface structure.⁵⁵ On this point Ricoeur agrees with Crossan (who often tends to ignore in practice the structural approach)⁵⁶ that it is plot, what happens, that is the bearer of the metaphoric process.

Ricoeur suggests that what is needed is an interpretation that respects the original enigma of the symbols⁵⁷ and that allows

movement from a pre-critical naiveté to a post-critical naiveté.⁵⁸ That is saying a lot indeed! Hermeneutics then is not so much an explaining as an allowing meaning to occur.

Just as "I" gains its meaning only when spoken, so Ricoeur suggests that interpretation moves beyond structuralism to a state of appropriation in which the text speaks to the world of the reader,⁵⁹ and the symbolism can be understood not only by what constitutes it but by what it says. This is what leads Ricoeur to conclude (with Greimas) that there is no mystery in language, but that there is a mystery of language.⁶⁰

Also, hermeneutics has a negative function, expressed so well by Schleiermacher whom Ricoeur quotes favourably:

L'herméneutique n'est pas alors une sorte de compréhension directe mais un art d'éliminer la mécompréhension; c'est une critique de la mécompréhension..." 61

This is not an insight that Ricoeur holds too consistently, but it is an important observation nonetheless.

Despite all his obvious strengths and stimulating suggestions Ricoeur does not have a strong position on several important matters that relate to parable interpretation. First, he argues that structuralism could be helpful in leading to a post-critical naiveté, but does not take it seriously enough

to use structuralism in parable interpretation. Second, examples of extravagance in the parables must necessarily include all of the parables yet even those that Ricoeur presents are often forced. The "unusualness" of the action of the host in the parable of The Great Feast is not the same as the small seed yielding a huge tree. To apply the word "extravagance" to these examples and others is to stretch the word beyond its normal meaning.

Third, the use of Crossan's categories for parable interpretation is not always helpful, but tends to press parables into molds that are too restrictive. Fourth, it is surely not the case that the parables all have to be listened to before a single parable can be understood, yet incredible as it seems, this is what Ricoeur suggests. Fifth, Ricoeur seems to be convinced, despite his protestations to the contrary, that he can find and conceptualize the meaning of the parable - for example, The Found Pearl is a parable that for Ricoeur means that in life we experience, and experience as a correlate of the kingdom of God, Event, (finding the pearl), Reversal (selling everything else), and Decision (buying the field).

Ricoeur has written a great deal and continues to write with a great creative outpouring. This chapter must therefore remain unfinished.

- 1 Norman Perrin's first book is entitled The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963).
- 2 Perrin argues that Judaism had no concept of a coming apocalyptic Son of Man in the sense of a pre-existent heavenly redeemer. Daniel 7 probably found its source in a Canaanite myth and this in turn led to further modifications in Ezra, Enoch IV and early Christianity. Perrin concludes that the Son of Man sayings in the Synoptic gospels are derived from the Jewish apocalyptic and especially the Daniel 7 sayings. These sayings were also the creation of the early Church, not genuine sayings of Jesus. In Rediscovering, pp. 164-202. Also in Kingdom, pp. 90-111.
- 3 Perrin in Rediscovering argues for: dissimilarity, coherence and multiple attestation.
- 4 Perrin states this directly in "The Challenge of New Testament Theology Today". In New Testament Issues, ed. Richard Batey, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 27.
- 5 Perrin, Rediscovering, pp. 82-108.
- 6 Perrin, Jesus and the Language, p. 1.
- 7 Ibid., p. 5.
- 8 Cf. Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 15.
- 9 Cf. Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality, p. 92.
- 10 Perrin, Language, p. 3.
- 11 Ibid., p. 6.
- 12 Ibid., p. 8.
- 13 Ibid., p. 196.
- 14 Ibid., p. 160.
- 15 Perrin has, for example, apparently no idea of why Georges Crespy, in his structural approach to The Good Samaritan, ("The Parable of the Good Samaritan: An Essay in Structural Research" in Semeia 2, 27-50) considers the triple level of communication: Luke-Theophilus, Jesus-Lawyer, Jesus-Luke - Circle of Interpreters. See Perrin's comments in Language, p. 176f., and p. 180.
- 16 Such a case is made by Dan Via, "Kingdom and Parable: The Search for a New Grasp of Symbol, Metaphor and Myth", in

Interpretation, p. 182.

- 17 Colin Murray Turbayne, The Myth of Metaphor, Rev. Ed., (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971). Turbayne writes: "The victim of metaphor accepts one way of sorting or bundling or allocating the facts as the only way to sort, bundle, or allocate them. The victim not only has a special view of the world but regards it as the only view, or rather, he confuses a special view of the world with the world." p. 27.
- 18 On this point see Earl Breech, "Kingdom of God and the Parables of Jesus", in Semeia 12, pp. 15-40.
- 19 This shift, if we can call it that, from structuralism to hermeneutics suggests to me the movement in Wittgenstein's thought from the question: What is the meaning of these words? to, What is the use of these words?.
- 20 Loretta Dornisch, "Symbolic Systems and the Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction to the work of Paul Ricoeur", in Semeia 4, Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 17.
- 21 Paul Ricoeur "The Metaphorical Process" in Semeia 4, p. 101.
- 22 Ibid., p. 85.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., p. 95.
- 25 Ricoeur uses the term fiction in the sense of a symbolic system and argues that fiction "makes" and "remakes" the world. Crucial to his argument is a theory of imagination that shifts from a framework of perception to that of language (p. 6) and posits fiction in contrast to image as a copy or replica. For fiction there is no original or already-there model, (p. 4). Paul Ricoeur, "That Fiction 'Remakes' Reality", unpublished MS.
- 26 Ricoeur, Semeia 4, p. 75.
- 27 Ricoeur, Semeia 6, p. 79. When dealing with theory of metaphor in relation to philosophy of the imagination Ricoeur writes of metaphor giving body or contour to discourse through the mediation of imagination. "Imagination is the apperception, the sudden insight, of a new predicative pertinence, specifically a pertinence within impertinence." When literal predication is ruined a new predicative pertinence can appear as metaphor; the previous incompatibility can be perceived through the metaphor as a new compatibility, or rather as a tension between the old incompat-

bility and the new compatability. Ricoeur, "Fiction", pp. 9-10.

- 28 Ricoeur, Semeia 4, p. 80.
- 29 Ricoeur attributes his understanding and use of metaphor to Max Black and Mary Hesse. It should be noted however that Max Black holds an interaction view while Mary Hesse holds to a monistic view of the function of metaphor. Cf. J. J. A. Mooij, A Study of Metaphor, (Amersterdam, North-Holland Publishing Co., 1976), p. 123f, n. 6.
- 30 Paul Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables: Once More Astonished", Christianity and Crisis, Vol. 34, (1975).
- 31 Ricoeur, Semeia 4, p. 99, also, pp. 115-118 and "Listen" p. 307.
- 32 Ricoeur, "Listen", p. 307.
- 33 Ricoeur, "Fiction", p. 13.
- 34 Ricoeur, Semeia 4, p. 89. (In reference to Perrin).
- 35 Ibid., p. 94.
- 36 Ibid., p. 100. Cf. "Listen", p. 306.
- 37 Ricoeur, Semeia 4, p. 100.
- 38 Ibid., p. 101.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ricoeur, "Listen", p. 306.
- 41 Ibid., p. 102.
- 42 Ibid., p. 104.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid., p. 104f. Cf. "In the entire mediaeval tradition of the multiple meanings of Scripture, it is through great wholes that the quadruple meaning is articulated." Conflict, p. 64.
- 45 H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1946 (1941)), p. 124.
- 46 Ricoeur, "Listen" p. 106.
- 47 Ricoeur, Conflict, p. 3.

- 48 Ibid., p. 45.
- 49 Ibid., p. 81.
- 50 Ibid., p. 29.
- 51 Ibid., p. 65.
- 52 Ibid., p. 67. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, Les Incidences Theologiques Des Recherches Actuelles Concernant Le Langage, (n.d.: Institut d'Etudes Oecumeniques, n.d.), especially p. 83f.
- 53 As noted by Via in Kerygma, p. 5, in reference to Ricoeur, Structure, pp. 599, 612-615.
- 54 Ibid., p. 5.
- 55 Ricoeur, Semeia 4, p. 98. Cf. p. 71.
- 56 Ibid., p. 96.
- 57 Quoted by Dornisch, Semeia 4, p. 6.
- 58 Ricoeur, "Listen", p. 306.
- 59 The role of the reader is largely suppressed in structuralism, but for narrative texts the reader or auditor is of obvious importance.
- 60 Ricoeur, Conflict, p. 77f.
- 61 Ricoeur, Les Incidences, p. 23.

III

Storytelling: Journey to the Metaphoric Woods

When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mazritsch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer," and again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient.

God made man because he loves stories.

Elie Wiesel, The Gates of the Forest (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1966), frontispiece.

8 The Power of Story

In this section of the thesis I shall consider the triadic relationship of text, speaker and auditor.¹ In the first instance the power of the parable as art and particularly as metaphoric story will be considered. I shall then turn to the problem of the auditor who now must attempt to hear the story but who is frustrated by the changes to the text wrought by the transfer from spoken to written word. The last chapter in this section continues this examination with further reflection on the difficulty of hearing the parable in the absence of the original narrator.

Pessimism about finding a single legitimate interpretation of the parables leads me to an examination of the continuing power of parable as narrative and metaphoric story.² I shall attempt this by stating in poetic and story-like language the case for story.

When we hear the words: "Once upon a time", we begin to relax and to smile inwardly. We relate, not so much to the speaker, but to the story that he is telling. When we hear the words: "The subject I have chosen to speak on is...", we grow a little tense, and we relate more closely to the speaker as being responsible for what is spoken. The telling of stories is one of the oldest and most powerful ways of appealing to the imagination. It is an antidote to the rigid abstractions

of purely analytical thought,³ and a delightful way to influence and be influenced.⁴ As Markus Barth has observed, man lives from stories as much as he lives from bread,⁵ and in J. D. Crossan's words as he stresses the universality and inevitability of narrative, "We live in story like fish in the sea."⁶

The parables are secular stories, or rather, they use secular terminology. The parables are about everyday life: a son leaving home, little seeds that become trees, violent robbery and the response of people to it, the relationship of tenants and landlord, losing and finding things - like sheep or coins.

What has been seen again in the parables, is that they are an effective mode of communication, full of humour, and replete with those everyday, yet important events that relate to our everyday lives. The primary mode of communication of the Gospel might be by doing what Jesus did, and did better than anyone else had or has done, by showing in everyday stories, told in down to earth language, that God is present in the trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, in a son leaving home or returning, in all those familiar incidents that constitute the lives of most people.

To be grasped by a story, by one of those short metaphoric stories called parable in particular, is to be emancipated from rehearsed responses; it is to discover (in Ricoeur's

phrase) a second naiveté. Even the freshness of meaning presented in a new word is subject to the flabbiness of familiarity and to unkind repetition. To quote Barfield:

Like sleeping beauties they lie there prone and rigid in the walls of Castle Logic, waiting only for the kiss of Metaphor to awaken them to fresh life. 7

The task of hermeneutics is to show what the parable is, not what it means;⁸ not the story-line but the story. It is to kiss frog metaphors to make them charming beauties, and to know that the metaphor is no longer, or at least only in a secondary way, frog or beauty, but kiss.

But why not simply explain the parable? The reason is that the explanation would need explanation, and that in turn would require explanation and so on until the point is finally misunderstood. A story is told of Albert Einstein that illustrates this point. It seems that Einstein was asked by a hostess at a party to explain his theory of relativity in a few words: "I will tell you a story instead," said the scientist. "I once was walking with a blind man, and remarked that I would like a tall glass of milk. 'What is milk?' asked my blind friend. 'White liquid', I replied. 'Liquid I know, but what is white?' 'The color of a swan's feathers.' 'Feathers I know. What is a swan?' 'A bird with a crooked neck'. 'Neck I know. But what is crooked?' Thereupon I lost patience. I seized his arm and straightened it. 'That's straight,' I

said, and then I bent it at the elbow. 'That's crooked.'
 'Ah', said the blind man triumphantly, 'now I understand what you mean by milk'. Do you still want to know about relativity?"

Explaining a parable is, as I have stated earlier like trying to explain a joke or pun. Catching the meaning is an "aha" experience, where symbol and experience become one. We don't interpret humour, we experience it. The same can be said of the parable.

The parable only takes on meaning when the hearer enters within its enchanted borders, its rational derangement, that organic aesthetic unity which is a "pattern of resolved stresses" and an "equilibrium of forces."⁹ The basic appeal of the story form is simply because our lives are stories. "We all love a good story", writes Sallie Te Selle, (after Amos Wilder), "because of the basic narrative quality of human experience."¹⁰ The story in its form relates to our experience of beginning, movement and end.¹¹ Story interests not because it is the story of what happens but because it is a story of choices that lead to results,¹² and of functions defined according to consequences. Christians have had a long interest in telling stories¹³ and have been credited with introducing to the western world, a new type of story, a type of story which is, as Erich Auerbach said, "fraught with background."¹⁴

The story, and here I especially include the parable, is not

a direct statement but direct evocation.¹⁵ It invites entrance into a familiar yet strange new world, and encourages a walk through fresh perspectives and startling possibilities. Not that we need understand the story with our minds for it is also and perhaps pre-eminently effective at the level of feeling.¹⁶ The hearer enters into the story, and in a sense, exits from the "real" world, but the vibrant magical world that is encountered in the story returns the hearer to the real world, perhaps more enriched.

The story can also be a way to taste the aperitif of the future, providing an image or model that allows us to pass judgement on the past, develop new or transferred models of the future¹⁷ and thus enable us to articulate when we were previously tongue tied.¹⁸ "We move", writes Sally TeSelle, "through metaphor to meaning."¹⁹ Even difficult theories, abstract philosophies, and carefully annotated viewpoints are but stories in fancy dress. Se we have the Story of Philosophy, The Story of History, etc. Ricoeur too asserts that metaphor gives rise to meaning and insists on the unavailability of language other than metaphor.²⁰

The choice of the story genre or any genre is a choice, perhaps unconscious but a choice nonetheless, based on attitude and outlook.²¹ "Every style is a means of insisting on something", Susan Sontag writes, and continues:

Thus form - in its specific idiom, style - is a

plan of sensory imprinting, the vehicle for the transaction between immediate sensuous impression and memory (be it individual or cultural). This mnemonic function explains why every style depends on, and can be analyzed in terms of some principle of repetition or redundancy. 22

With his usual insight Amos Wilder observes: "The new Christian speech inevitably took the form of a story. The believers wanted to tell the world the way of the world as they saw it."²³

What of the nature of story-telling in the Bible? Markus Barth identifies five characteristics that he deems important. Reduced to the bare bones they are: First, the stories deal with the relationship between God and man. Second, all the stories are about the provocative, challenging, judging and comforting Word of God. Third, the biblical stories are of epic rather than lyric character, that is, they do not set tone but tell of an event. Fourth, they contain at least one element of utter surprise. Fifth, the biblical story always calls for response. No wonder that von Rad wrote that the most legitimate form of theological talk about the Old Testament is its retelling.²⁴

In a paper teasingly entitled "The Cowboy in the Sunday School" Barth writes of the importance of the telling of stories in the Church's education program. Barth points to the continued importance of the hearing of stories in the lives of people.²⁵ The "Western" of television and film is an example of this

fascination. The story involves good guys and bad guys. The good guys are heroic and are rewarded. The bad guys are punished. The victory of good over evil, though always sure, necessitates mighty acts. The Western expresses faith in the law and in those who enforce it. The Western is also a historic re-enactment of the timeless myth of the good man's conflict and final victory.²⁶

Every story, including the Western, is a ritual.²⁷ Form and content are important; if we can speak of them at all we must speak of them as being virtually inseparable. But also, and contra Ricoeur, New Testament parables were not and should not now be told in competition with each other. Stories do not do well if they are in direct competition, for they cast different spells and their details may be mutually exclusive and in conflict.

Of course people can and do listen to their story, with minor variations week after week. Repetition and recurrence, or pattern and rhythm, as Frye points out,²⁸ are also part of the effectiveness of story telling. Important too is the need to imaginatively live a story, not just for those who listened to the Arabian Nights or the parables of Jesus, but those who watch "Love Story", "As the World Turns", "Gunsmoke", or the stories set to music that are the necessary circus to those who listen to country and western, folk or rock music, and of course, opera. Bill Withers, a popular folk-rock singer

has noticed this and identified his own role as story-teller:

People have to have stories, so the only thing we are is people who give people idealistic stories to identify with. 29

But let me underline that this is not just a popular phenomenon. Writing about art but in reference to stories especially, Alexander Solzhenitsyn planned to respond to his being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972 with a plea for a world value system, a value system that could be created in only one way:

It is art. It is literature. Art allows for experiencing someone else's experience with all its burdens, colors, juices...and (allows that experience to be) made one's own...30

Storytelling, central to the formation of identity and culture for preliterate man may be embarrassing for modern man, as Sam Keen notes,³¹ but as long as we experience a sense of temporality and succession we can hardly avoid living a story. And, whatever the story, it will be a story overflowing with theological implications.³²

Part of the appeal of the story is that it has a framework that is comprehensible, and in the case of the parable it is a framework marked by brevity.³³ Men constantly seek a meaningful framework in which to understand or at least to be reconciled to, the indignities of circumstance and the fact of death.³⁴ Stories reduce the proportions of reality to a manageable scale.³⁵ Men seek to organize experience into orderly sequences and coherent patterns. In Amos Wilder's words: "The story, the fable, the myth assume a context, an order of

some kind. They impose a graph upon chaos or nescience. They carve out a lighted space, a zu-Hause in the darkness.³⁶

The telling of a story presupposes the freedom and independence of the truth from the teller and the listener. Both stand under the story, as it were, and therefore are servants of the truth, and the better the story teller the more apparent it is that he is servant of the story, or even an extension of the story. Norman Huffman has formed conclusions similar to my own when he writes:

I suggest that when Jesus spoke of hiring workmen at the eleventh hour, of a mustard seed that grew into a tree, of a farmer reaping a hundred-fold, of a Samaritan offering to repay 'whatever more you spend' on a Jewish stranger, he made use of the actors' skills to convince his audiences. Otherwise, the atypical features might not have been accepted at the first hearing, to be remembered and repeated later. 37

Crossan too finds it hard to imagine that there was no conversation and discussion, no questions and answers, and goes on to point out that Jesus' parables were told: (1) outside of a group authority; (2) outside the synagogue by the lakeside; (3) outside the "canonical" texts."³⁸

Story-telling also involves a pointing beyond the self to the source of the Truth. The story "abstracts" in order for the story teller to step back and point. As the story teller is amazed, his telling of the story invites his listener to join in the amazement. As he is convinced of the veracity behind the story, he stimulates his listeners to add their

"amen".³⁹ This is an important point when we consider (below) that in the case of the parables, no longer is the Story Teller and his personal conviction with us.

This standing under the power of the story on the part of the speaker and the auditor is very important, for it presupposes that the God implicit in the story is not a captive to the understanding or imagination of the story teller or the listener. In practice this results in the story teller being more informal than formal in style,⁴⁰ and in showing what is, rather than telling what it means.⁴¹

The more obvious the truth and the more entrenched the listener, the more the need for the story "with a curve." The story, like art in general, provokes judgement;⁴² it is a calculated trap, a trap designed to beguile the listener with familiar words and a non-threatening setting that "beguiles antagonism." As the listener walks step by step into the metaphoric woods, the familiar is added to the known until the listener stumbles one step too many into the world of the unfamiliar. The familiar underbrush gives way at his feet and the listener falls into a new situation. The elements of the familiar have been rearranged in a new pattern; the extraordinary is seen in the ordinary;⁴³ and the listener's own feet have led him to the discovery! As we judge the story we judge ourselves.⁴⁴ We are seduced, but we are accomplices to the seduc-

tion.⁴⁵ We demand a conclusion even if that conclusion does not go down pleasantly.⁴⁶ It is as Yehudi Menuhin said: "In art, as in life, the elements of predictability and surprise are delicately balanced."⁴⁷

The telling of a story is also effective because it is the presentation of a microcosm of reality. Gestalt psychology asserts that we grasp the whole before we grasp the constituent parts. We see in patterns. Colin Wilson reports on this phenomenon in these words:

All this is to say that the human mind is not a passive receptacle, receiving stimuli as a slot machine receives pennies and then responding. It seems to operate on a basic hunger for form. 48

It is the shape of relationships that are important. This suggests for example that in interpreting a writing we do not understand the parts until we understand the whole. In a story, it is the story, in a parable, it is the parable, not the constituent parts, that has meaning.

Another important strength in the story is also associated with its wholeness. That strength is the story's internal cohesion and therefore resiliency to change and supplementation.⁴⁹ The story can be told and retold without loss of meaning, at least to a far greater extent than is possible with more discursive forms of argument. Similarly, because of the aesthetic nature of the parables there is both less need and greater resistance to interpretation and translation,⁵⁰

and, some argue, we can and must claim that metaphor is untranslatable. "Such terms as literal, univocal, or non-metaphorical language," Crossan writes, "designate only a convention (pun intended) within total metaphoricity..."⁵¹

Stories also tend to be in a common idiom and, as I have said, are themselves a commonly accepted mode of experience. Wilder has written concerning Biblical stories:

It is worth noting that they deal with just such material as we tend to make fun of as "sob stuff" when we meet it in modern form. Mother love in Hagar and Rizpah; pathos for the little lad (the "sonny boy" motif); the "my hero" routine in connection with David; and "do-or-die" heroics. Of course the stories in the Bible are not told in a sentimental way. But they have to do with these elemental relationships and natural yearnings like mother love, love of country and hero worship, which involve our very entrails. These stories lay bare the roots of human vitality, the cables which carry the powerful voltage of human impulse and action, whether creative or destructive. 52

The essentially dramatic nature of the story cannot be over-emphasized - this has already been expressed in several ways. Looking at the material, we can point to the way the parable as drama involves confrontation rather than instruction. If well done, the telling of a story makes the listeners wonder, gaze, laugh, shake, perhaps cry, weep and despair, but it also leaves them free to respond.

What is also important in the oral telling of a story is that all of the communication factors come into play at the same time; it is face to face, nose to nose, ear to ear, eyeball

to eyeball; and this is communication that has the most impact. As Merrill Abbey reported:

Studies of opinion formation in political campaigns offer further insight. Speeches and propaganda are shown to have less force in converting opponents than in rallying the faithful. Newspapers and broadcasts serve chiefly to focus attention on the issues. Once awakened to what is at stake, persons take sides on the basis of face to face relations and conversations within intimate groups. 53

Of course this does not deny the validity of other media. It simply recognizes that other media distort our sensory receptacles. This is not altogether and everywhere a bad thing. Sometimes the heightening of one sense at the expense of the others will permit if not heighten our reception of a story.

"The act of listening to stories is a basic training for the imagination",⁵⁴ writes Northrop Frye. And rightly he insists that anything that has a story should be read or listened to purely as a story. It is wrong to treat it as discursive writing or as a piece of disguised information. Instead, imaginative writing/speaking should be read/listened to with the imagination.

Storytelling has a long tradition and it has a long tradition in Christianity. We need to reclaim storytelling as an important mode of communication. Chad Walsh writes:

The Christian faith needs to reclaim its distinctive language. It communicates by telling stories.

The church, at its best, is a community of people who tell a particular cycle of stories to one another, and invite all curious onlookers to share the stories. 55

This is why members of some black churches apparently inquire of every minister: "Can the Reverend tell the story?"⁵⁶

Those who worry about allegory should still be moved by a sermon-story quoted by James Cone and entitled "Behold the Rib!":

The preacher begins by emphasizing the power of God. He is "High-riding and strong armed God" who "walk(s) acrost his globe creation...wid de blue elements for a helmet...and a wall of fire round his feet." "He wakes the sun every morning from its fiery bed wid de breath of his smile and commands de moon wid his eyes." Then the preacher moves to the essence of the story as suggested by his subject:

So God put Adam into a deep sleep
And took out a bone, ah hah!
And it is said that it was a rib.
Behold de rib!
A bone out of man's side.
He put de man to sleep and made wo-man.
And men and women been sleeping together ever
since.

Behold de rib!
Brothers, if God
Had taken dat bone out of man's head
He would have meant for women to rule, hah!
If he had taken a bone out of his foot,
He would have meant for us to dominize and rule.
He could have made her out of back-bone
And then she would have been behind us.
But, no, God Almighty, he took de bone out of his
side
So dat places de woman beside us.
Hah! God knowed his own mind.
Behold de rib! 57

I want simply to conclude by echoing Wilder, Novak and others that the story with its rhythm of present rising out of the past and moving into the future is an entirely suitable method of theological expression, and also to conclude that the para-

bles are part of this tradition.⁵⁸ True, story is not easily conformed to universal principles, general rules, or clear concepts deemed essential to the enquiring mind, but it is human, imaginative, creative, continually resisting reduction to a meaning. In short, the power of story is in its ability to create theology in life.

What is the purpose of story-telling? Why? And to what effect?

"Stories."

"But there must be more to it than that."

"Yes, there is more to it than that."

"What, then?"

"I am afraid of what will happen if the effort ends."

"What will happen?"

"Nothing."

"And that makes you afraid?"

"Exactly."

"But what if we make the effort?"

"I am still afraid."

"Why?"

"Because even in making it we may stop and rest with a conclusion."

"But isn't that the point, to draw a conclusion?"

"No, that's not the point."

"Then what is?"

"There isn't any . . . except to keep asking, 'What's the next step?' . . . except to keep wondering 'And yet? . . . and yet' . . . except to keep willing 'In spite of . . . because of . . .'"

"So how does God figure into this equation?"

"He doesn't, at least not clearly enough, and that's what makes our lives hang in the balance of our asking."

"Are you suggesting that encounters with God--whether and how we have them--make the future?"⁵⁹

- 1 The history of the notion of the triadic nature of interpretation is summarized by John MacQuarrie, op. cit., p. 74.
- 2 Robert C. Culley in "Response to Daniel Patte", Semiology and Parables, p. 151f., notes that though most of the well-known parables have an extensive narrative element, not all parables are narrative - his example is the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Though appreciative of his point that it is "not much of a story", I would like to respond that it is nonetheless a story.
- 3 Michael Novak and Stephen Crites argue this in James B. Wiggins ed., Religion As Story, (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).
- 4 Cf. Curry, op. cit., p. 59.
- 5 Markus Barth, "The Cowboy in the Sunday School", Religious Education, (1962), p. 46.
- 6 Crossan, Dark Interval, p. 47. Cf. his "Parable Gives Rise to Metaphor: Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and the Parables of Jesus", unpublished manuscript, p. 11 and Ricoeur in Semeia 4, pp. 30-33.
- 7 Owen Barfield, Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning, (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 115.
- 8 Sontag, op. cit., p. 23.
- 9 Cleanth Brooks, in references to poetry in The Well Wrought Urn, (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1947), pp. 203, 207.
- 10 Sallie TeSelle, op. cit., p. 138.
- 11 Cf. William A. Beardslee, Literary Criticism of the New Testament, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 17.
- 12 Ibid., p. 302.
- 13 The important role of biographical and autobiographical storytelling is examined in Sam Keen and Anne Valley Fox, Telling Your Story: A Guide to Who You Are, Who You Can Be, (New York: New American Library, 1974), James W. McClendon Jr. Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Theology, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1974), Michael Novak seeks a story (autobiographical-social-political-myth), for creative living in, Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove, Rev. Ed., (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).
- 14 Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 12.

- 15 Cf. Denise Levertov, "A Personal Approach", in Tony Stoneburner, ed., Parable, Myth and Language, (Cambridge: The Church Society for College Work, 1968), p. 20.
- 16 Cf. Barrett H. Clark concerning the audience for drama: "They needn't understand with their minds; they can just watch and feel". in Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays, (New York: Dover Publications, 1947), p. 106. For a philosophic appreciation of this position see Alisdair MacIntyre in Antony Flew and Alisdair MacIntyre, New Essays in Philosophical Theology, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1964).
- 17 Joseph C. McLelland, Toward A Radical Church, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1967), p. 58.
- 18 MacGregor, op. cit., p. 173.
- 19 TeSelle, op. cit., p. 32. Ms. TeSelle emphasizes that in metaphor meaning is a process; it is not a momentary and static insight but like a story leads from what is to what might be. Cf. p. 33 and p. 79.
- 20 Paul Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor, trans., Robert Czerney, et. al., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977 (1975)), p. 22f, 138, 286f. Cf. Crossan, "Unpublished MSS", pp. 5-13.
- 21 Wilder, New Voice, p. 20.
- 22 Sontag, op. cit., p. 43.
- 23 Wilder, Language, p. 57.
- 24 Quoted by Barth, art. cit., p. 42.
- 25 Ibid., p. 39.
- 26 Ibid. This outline is provided on p. 120f.
- 27 Of course there are always anti-stories, and now anti-westerns as well. These stories, though apparently denying the "regular" story, do so within the same framework and derive their strength from the "regular" story.
- 28 Northrop Frye, The Educated Imagination, (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1967), p. 18.
- 29 Bill Withers interviewed by Eleanor Moore "Everybody's Got a Grandmother" in Youth Magazine, March 1974, pp. 4-8.
- 30 Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, "Stories Unite" in Alive Now, March/April 1975, p. 12f.

- 31 Keen, op. cit., p. 87.
- 32 Robert P. Roth argues that the story-teller and the Bible are concerned with often identical themes and both present them in a way that returns the sense of mystery, in Story and Reality (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1973).
- 33 Crossan in "Parable Gives Rise to Metaphor," p. 4, emphasizes the brevity of the parable as a distinguishing characteristic that "will demand eventually as much attention as narrativity and metaphoricity." I think he is correct in suggesting that the brevity of the narrative provides an important clue to the metaphoricity of the parable - rather than, for example, the parable of The Sower being a lesson about agricultural technique. Ibid., p. 5.
- 34 John W. Gardner, Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 102. Cf. Isaak Dinsen " . . . Any sorrow can be borne if a story can be told about it." Quoted in John Shea, Stories of God, An Unauthorized Biography (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1966), p. 47.
- 35 Keen, op. cit., p. 97.
- 36 Wilder, New Voice, p. 56.
- 37 Norman A. Huffman, "Atypical Features in the Parables of Jesus," Journal of Biblical Literature 97/2 (1978), p. 220.
- 38 Crossan, "Parable Gives Rise to Metaphor," p. 15f.
- 39 Barth, art. cit., p. 44.
- 40 Harvey K. McArthur, "A Survey of Recent Gospel Research" in New Theology No. 2, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Perryman (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1965), p. 207. MacArthur's point is in contrast to the views of Harald Riesenfeld and B. Gerhardson that the process of formal teaching by rote was used by Jesus.
- 41 This is largely true of the interpreter too. Cf. Sontag, op. cit., p. 23.
- 42 N. A. Dahl, "The Parables of Growth," Studia Theologia 5 (1951), p. 138. I would not, however, use Dahl's terminology when he asserts that all the parables were used as arguments. Ibid. In this he adopts the views of Cadoux and Jeremias. Linnemann, op. cit., on the other hand argues that the parables were spoken to avoid opposition. The solution is suggested by Funk, who notes that Cadoux and Jeremias link character, function, and context together - transferring the argumentative character to a similar function and context. "Argumentative, on the other hand, may mean simply that the hearer's judgement is precipitated without the

- qualification that the hearer is hostile to or actively engaged in debate with Jesus." Funk, Language, p. 144.
- 43 Cf. Ricoeur in Semeia 4, p. 115, and Crossan, "Parable Gives Rise to Metaphor," p. 13f.
- 44 This is true of all great literature, observes Walter Stein in Criticism as Dialogue (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), p. 42.
- 45 Sontag, op. cit., p. 31.
- 46 The serial seems to me to be built on the idea that we demand a conclusion and will come back again and again until we get it.
- 47 Yehudi Menuhin, "Art as Hope for Humanity," Saturday Review/World, December 14, 1974, p. 83.
- 48 Colin Wilson, Beyond the Outsider (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1965), p. 101. Cf. Peter M. Smith, Third Millenium Churches (London: Galliard Ltd., 1972), p. 71: "The mind has a powerful consistency-demand, and it tends to impose congruity upon patterns of response which have a number of points of contact."
- 49 Wilder, Language, p. 82.
- 50 Via, Parables, p. 32. Also, p. 30.
- 51 Crossan, "Parable Gives Rise to Metaphor," p. 11. Cf. p. 7.
- 52 Wilder, Otherworldliness, p. 35f.
- 53 Merrill R. Abbey, Man, Media, and the Message (New York: Friendship Press, 1960), p. 79.
- 54 Frye, Educated Imagination, p. 49.
- 55 Walsh, op. cit., preface.
- 56 James H. Cone, "The Story Context of Black Theology" in Theology Today XXXII (1975), p. 146.
- 57 Cited in Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, Book of Negro Folklore (1969), p. 234, quoted in Cone, art. cit., p. 145.
- 58 Ernst Haenchen notes that in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke offers history in the guise of stories, or perhaps we should say stories in the guise of history. The Acts of the Apostles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 103.
- 59 John K. Roth, A Consuming Fire (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), p. 75f.

When I "hear a thrush singing", I am hearing, not with my ears alone, but with all sorts of other things like mental habits, memory, imagination, feeling and (to the extent at least that the act of attention involves it) will. Of a man who merely heard in the first sense, it could meaningfully be said that 'having ears' (i.e. not being deaf) 'he heard not'.

Owen W. Barfield, Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., n.d.), p. 20f.

9 From Hearing to Reading

As we try to understand why the parables have been under such pressure for redaction to the ideational, and also why they have largely resisted this effort, it may be helpful to review how we moved from spoken word to printed word and to consider the meaning of the movement. Since the parable, originally an oral work, took on written form it permitted a piecemeal scrutiny that resulted in a reduction of the parable to its parts or the "idea behind it." At the same time the sinister nature of the parable was dulled as the parable was read as parenthesis.

The printed word, instead of being a record of what someone said, and therefore for the ears, has now become an object intended for the eyes.¹ Book titles, instead of an address to the reader became a label of contents.² An early 18th century volume on the parables for example, is addressed to "the impartial reader" and sent "from my house in Horsely Down, Southward, August 20, 1701".³ The preface of a nineteenth century book on the parables reads:

The reader may be assured that the sentiments maintained in the following sheets, are according to the honest convictions entertained by the author, truths fully and clearly supported by divine revelation and of a character calculated to administer no small consolation to the sincere believer. 4

Other parts of the book include instructions on how to read the work. Another older scheme to make the book personal

was to include a biographical statement.⁵ Instead of the oral reading of the manuscript age⁶ the erstwhile listener became a silent and "objective" viewer of the words. Contrast this with an earlier day as reported in reference to Jonathan Edwards:

For more than a century Puritans had been so disciplined and sensitized to the physical reality of words that Edwards was effectively working along lines of response to which his hearers were well accustomed. That brilliant rhetorical trope of the spider's dangling by a thread over a candle flame as like the perilous state of any man's soul on this very instant was not a mere image, a digressive embellishment of the idea of men damned or saved: it was the living event of the human soul in the true, the actual situation of being ultimately and eternally lost and damned. Words convey and effect in human consciousness a true experience - an experience, indeed more true than one may have in daily life. 7

Luther too insisted on the primacy of the oral. He insisted that, "proclamation should take place by word of mouth, publicly in an animated tone, and should bring that forward into speech and hearing which before was hidden in the letters and apparent concealment."⁸

The invention of printing made books available to many people. The reading of books influenced the reader beyond the actual content of the books themselves. The form of reading, as it were, is a solitary and depersonalized act that stimulates the intellect more than the emotions.⁹ Further, the orderly and sequential nature of the printed page, word following word, line following line and page following page, one at a time and in order, results in what McLuhan called, "the linear struc-

turing of rational life of phonetic literacy."¹⁰ As a result, James White writes, "One thing comes at a time. Instead of the instantaneous impact of meeting a person and seeing and hearing him at the same time (with those mysterious interior resonances, as Ong notes), we read about these one item at a time, so the reader becomes doubly detached from the reality the book described," and the person addressed no longer becomes a part of the communication (or parable).¹¹ The instantaneity of communication gives way to the ordered and sequential linearity of print.¹² In contrast, St. Ambrose wrote:

Everything that we believe, we believe either through sight or through hearing. Sight is often deceived, hearing serves as guaranty.¹³

"No one," said Alexander von Humboldt, "can regard a written word as a real word; the real word is spoken."¹⁴ In the early second century, Papias could not imagine "that things out of books would help me as much as the utterances of a living and abiding voice."^{14b} In Sir Walter Scott's Heart of Midlothian, by way of example, there is a moving scene where Jeanie Deans proposes to set off to London to plead in person with the Queen for the life of her condemned sister. Reuben Butler, the schoolmaster, tried his best to dissuade her: Do you know, he asks, of "their magnificence, their retinue, the difficulty of getting audience?" London is a long distance away; the road is infested with robbers, and you are only a woman. "Why not send a letter?" And Jeanie answered:

"...but writing winna do it: a letter canna look, and pray, and beg, and beseech, as the human voice can do to the human heart. A letter's like the music that the ladies have for their spinets: naething but black scores, compared with the same tune played or sung. It's the word of mouth maun do it, or naething Reuben." 15

We are becoming increasingly aware (again) of the role of the reader as being essential for the completion of meaning.¹⁶ Dominic Crossan playfully asks: "...is the final outcome in the parable or in the parabled?"¹⁷ Eta Linnemann quotes Eicholz with approval: "The person addressed belongs...to the structure of the parable."¹⁸ The narrator or narration concedes something to the hearer such that there is an "interlocking" of meaning as the hearer and speaker meet in the story.¹⁹ Robert Funk writes:

The 'meaning' of the parable is the way auditors take up rôles in the story and play out the drama. Response will vary from person to person and from time to time. The parable is perpetually unfinished. The story continues to tell itself, to "tell its hearers." 20

The human mind insists on consistency, as I have noted above, and therefore seeks to impose congruity where divergent elements break the pattern,²¹ It is the establishment of this congruity that is the hearer's response to the parable.

The parable as story helps to re-establish the pre-eminence of the auditory over the visual. It helps the hearer to know in the sense of "to be in the know" or to "know what's what", (primarily in reference to speaking and hearing persons) rather than to intuit or envision intellectually,²² (primarily

in reference to observation or sight of objects.)

The "herald" of the parables is at least in some ways, at one with the raconteur of all ages.²³ Parables often share with contemporary jokes and sermons a structure involving three characters or points. Bultmann reminded theology that this pattern, or "rule of three", is found extensively in the parables.²⁴ The origin of this "rule" in human culture of psyche goes back so far, that it has not yet been found, though perhaps structuralism will help. The contribution of this rule to the text is in the seemingly natural reception or resonant harmony evoked in the hearer.²⁵ Somehow three of anything is at once "all" and "enough", a kind of Trinity. We say, "I'll give you three guesses", and three is supposed to be enough. Baseball gives the batter three strikes. The hero of a folk-tale often has three wishes, or three tries at a task, and the heroine has three suitors. Even nursery rhymes display this pattern. Goldilocks met three bears; there were three blind mice, and three little kittens lost their mittens.²⁶

This tendency as found in the parables is also more easily illustrated than explained: In the parable of The Vineyard, (Mk 12: 1ff, Mt 21: 33ff and Lk 20: 9ff), three servants were sent to collect the owner's share of the wine (though Mark and Matthew in what sounds like an aside say that there were other servants too). In the parable of The Talents (Mt 25, Lk 19) Matthew's version has the sending of three servants. In both

Matthew and Luke three servants appear to explain their employment of the talents. The parable of The Good Samaritan (Lk 10) has three travellers - Priest, Levite and Samaritan - going from Jerusalem to Jericho. Three times labourers were hired at the market place in the parable of The Labourers in the Vineyard (Mt 20: 1-16). In the parable of The Sower (Mk 4, Mt 13, Lk 8), there are three types of unfruitful soil and three varieties of yields. In Matthew's version of The Wise and Foolish Builders the house is buffeted by three elements. In Luke's version of the parable of The Marriage Feast (Lk 14: 16, cf. Mt 22:2) there are three excuse makers.

This is closely related to the role of repetition (and rhythm) which suggests that the main point is driven home by a retelling in different ways.²⁷ The vineyard owner did not just prepare his vineyard, he (1) hedged it, (2) dug a winepress, and (3) built a tower. That gives the reader time to identify with him. The first servant in Mark is (1) seized, (2) beaten, and (3) sent away. The rule of three could be considered a subrule of the rule of repetition. In the parable of The Two Builders (Mt 7: 24ff, Lk 6: 47ff) it wasn't just a storm, but in Matthew's version (1) the rain fell, the (2) floods came, (3) the wind blew.

There are three at the most, and often only two major characters in the parable.²⁸ These characters can and do change roles, as Georges Crespy notes,²⁹ and this is something un-

sual in popular tales. Subsidiary characters, when used, are neither described nor developed.³⁰

The rule of end stress suggests that the point to be made is made in relation to the last significant event to occur. This is easily illustrated in the parable of The Wicked Husbandmen in Matthew (20: 33-39), when at the end of the story the only son is killed and judgement is brought to bear on the vineyard workers. These "rules" of forms are, as Robert Curtius noted, "...configurations and systems of configurations in which the corporeal things of the mind can manifest themselves and become apprehensible."³¹

The parables are also marked by what Eta Linnemann calls "stage-production."³² For example, just after being forgiven his huge debt, the wicked administrator (Mt 18: 23-25) runs into a fellow servant who owes him money - thus providing the opportunity to point out the nature of mercy. The father sees the prodigal son (Lk 15: 11-32) at a distance and therefore can run to greet him while the elder brother does not return from the field until the feast is in progress. Here again the setting allows for contrasting the generosity of the father and that of the elder brother. By paying the last workers first (in Mt 20: 1-16) the first-comers see and can respond to the generosity of the vineyard owner. This "staging" is simply part of the normal and necessary simplifications and distortions that art requires in order to make clear.

Familiar themes or basic paradigms of man's experience are common in the parables. Our world may be different from the first century world in appearance, but beneath the surface we can still identify with: sowing, fishing, digging, mining, risking, investing, and gambling,³³ also journeys of search and discovery.³⁴ Still popular are tales of finding buried treasure³⁵ and stories of escape from prison.³⁶ Amos Wilder notes that this choice of material already implies the assertion of a correspondence between the parable and the reality to which it alludes.³⁷ A frequency in the parable causes a resonant frequency in the hearer, or as one of the similitudes asks, by way of illustration:

Is there is man among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to thee who ask him! 38

Yet another important rule is that of contrast or antithesis. Dives and Lazarus, rich and poor, faithful and faithless, wise and foolish virgins, wise and foolish builders, sick and "well", old cloth and new patches, old wine skins and new wine, good soil and poor, lamps hidden and exposed, mustard seed and tree, wise and foolish investors, religious leaders and Samaritans, old ways and costly pearls, "safe" and lost sheep, prodigal and presbuteros brother, a son who promises and does not deliver, one who does not promise but delivers. In a more general way the division or contrast is between what is right and what is wrong vis à vis relationship to God (or

later) with the Christian community. Here again structuralism's understanding of the "givens" of the human mind, particularly the binary patterns that are evident may help our understanding, though to be sure an intuitive appreciation of black and white in story does not reduce man to the stop and go/yes and no of a computer.

Related to the rule of contrast or antithesis, is the rule of stage duality. Speeches are limited to two people only; there are no three person or triadic dialogues. Direct speech and soliloquy are also used. Direct speech is obviously present in the parable of The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, Children in the Market Place, The Labourers in the Vineyard.

Motivation is completely lacking, while portrayal of characters by attribute only occurs when essential for the action or point of a parable. The unforgiving servant entreats the king and his fellow servant entreats the unforgiving servant. By and large however, feelings are inferred or left to the imagination.

Another "rule" of the popular story-teller is that of the single theme. The story tells one tale, not two or more, and it tells that tale with simplicity, symmetry, directness and from a single perspective. The parable of The Prodigal Son, is told primarily from the perspective of the son, and what the father thought is not mentioned. The parable is

marked by conciseness with only necessary people or events, and "props" used. (In getting people to act out the parable of The Prodigal Son I have noticed a propensity to include a "prodigal mother". . . . It may be that modern Canadians simply can't imagine a son not asking his mother too. Such an addition adds nothing to the parable, however).

The judgement of the hearer is precipitated and we often do not have conclusions where a conclusion would be self evident or irrelevant. We are not told if the good Samaritan returned to the inn; we are not told that the rich fool (Lk 12:16-21) died.

Time and distance are manipulated in the parable.³⁹ There is no attempt to spell out either the time in which something happens, the amount of time required for the events, or the distances over which an event occurs. Chronological time gives way to a kind of psychological once-upon-a-time, with its premise of "what is happening" and "what is going to happen next?".

Although it is impossible to know for certain the types of humour appreciated in Jesus' time⁴⁰ we can at least say that from our perspective the parables are humourous and were probably so to those who moved from the outside to the inside, but to those who stayed on the outside they were not funny! For those who heard the parables as humour: "A Joke bridges

the distance between two points hitherto apparently unrelated."⁴¹ This is not to suggest that the parables were addressed primarily to insiders and therefore "in jokes", but rather were they addressed to outsiders who on hearing them, either grasped the point and laughed at themselves, thus moving into the parable, or denied the vision and meaning of the parable and stayed on the outside where the parable did not seem funny at all!

Examples of disproportion and the implausible can be easily seen in the parables. In the parable of The Unscrupulous Judge (Lk 18: 1-8) the judge is reported to have neither fear of God nor respect for man, but gives in to a woman who threatens to pester him to death.⁴² Hyperbole and extravagance can be observed in the grain in the parable of The Sower. Surprise, sometimes an aspect of humour, is evident to the hearers - as the people who refused the banquet were replaced by the town beggars in the parable of The (Wedding) Banquet. Similarly, surprise would probably be registered at the Samaritan helping the man in need, and the father welcoming back the Prodigal. Related too is role reversal, as Ricoeur and Crossan noted in the case of Dives and Lazarus, the tax collector and the Pharisee, and the hired men and the employer.

Examples of paradox and irony, though more culturally bound within the text, are probably still evident in the parables.⁴³ Imagine ninety-nine who have "no need of a shepherd" against

Isaiah's background voice saying: "All we like sheep have gone astray." Imagine an eastern potentate running to his wayward son, and another son who refuses to attend a banquet sponsored by his father. The parables as a corpus suggest the ironic and paradoxical mind that gave rise to them.

In addition to the laws of folk narrative that have an application to the parables, there are also laws of change that suggest ways in which we can understand how the text has been altered. Already we have noted some of Jeremias' observations in this regard (above). Validimir Propp in his important work "Transformations in Fairy Tales" identifies the ways in which tales are changed in the retelling: 1. Redaction 2. Amplification 3. Deformation 4. Inversion (eg. masculine images for feminine) 5. Intensification and weakening (in reference to the action of the characters) 6. Internal substitution (one image in the tale substituted for another) 7. Realistic substitution (eg. fabulous house replaced by type known in real life) 8. Confessional substitution (eg. Christian symbols replace pagan).⁴⁴

Similarly G. W. Allport and L. Postman suggest in The Psychology of Rumor⁴⁵ three laws of distortion: (a) levelling or a tendency to shorten and become concise, especially as concerns details not deemed relevant to the basic issue; (b) sharpening or the selective perception retention, and reporting of details and motifs, again as they seem relevant to

the basic issue; and (c) assimilation of the material according to normal expectations, linguistic habits, emotional states, cultural stereotypes, occupational interests, self-interest, prejudice, and the like.

Both the changes that took place within the oral tradition and those involved with the change from oral to written word suggest the pressure on the parable to conform according to at least some of the "laws" that we have noted. These changes also underline the difficulty in determining the original parable.

Finally, the parable as a spoken tale shares with other stories a provoking of the hearer's judgement through surprises, coincidences, encounters and recognitions. The conclusion is not predictable, but for some at least, it is acceptable. In retrospect, the "meaning" is evident and the "aha" of the kingdom is experienced.

- 1 For a discussion of the oral traditions in early Christian writers see B. Gerhardson, Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity, trans. Eric J. Sharpe, (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1961), pp. 194-207.
- 2 Ong, op. cit., p. 75.
- 3 Benjamin Keach, quoted in Arnot, op. cit., p. 83.
- 4 Hosea Ballou, Notes on the Parables of the New Testament: Scripturally Illustrated and Argumentatively Defended, sixth ed., (Boston: A. Tompkins, 1848), p. 8.
- 5 As an example see the twenty page statement by Canon Bell in William Arnot, The Lesser Parables of Our Lord: Lessons of Grace in the Language of Nature, (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1884).
- 6 H. J. Chaytor, From Script to Print: An Introduction to Medieval Literature, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), p. 13ff.
- 7 Edward H. Davidson, Jonathan Edwards: The Narrative of a Puritan Mind, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 158.
- 8 Ebeling, op. cit., p. 212. Ebeling's comments are apropos of the same matter.
- 9 James F. White, New Forms of Worship, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 23.
- 10 Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), p. 87. White, Worship, p. 23. James M. Wall notes: "The average person I encounter as I lecture about film to church groups has little interest in film as an art form. He is accustomed to receiving film as he has been trained to receive all forms of communication - entirely in terms of linearity. What matters most to him, in other words, is the story-line - the plot - and the dialogue. His expectation when he goes to see a film is that it moves from A to B to C to D in orderly progression. Films like Petulia or 2001: A Space Odyssey or Little Big Man, which do not meet that criterion, merely irritate him." in Church and Cinema, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 28.
- 11 White, op. cit., p. 32. Cf. Ong, op. cit., p. 27f, Barfield, Poetic Diction, p. 47 and Linnemann, op. cit., p. 132, n. 12.

- 12 Thus, as Eta Linnemann writes: "Many an obstacle which can make the readers of the passage stop to think does not strike a listener." op. cit., p. 29.
- 13 St. Ambrosius, Traité sur l'Évangile de S. Luc (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1971), Bk. IV, ch. 5.
- 14 Quoted in Curry, op. cit., p. 56f. Cf. Wilder on rhetoric: ". . . western man's voice has changed. Some literary forms and styles are obsolete. Some have come to the fore--the conversational voice, the stream of consciousness, the international-hero-narrative. So the theologian, for his part, observes the hard death of pulpit oratory, of the resonant prophetic diatribe, the Emersonian meditation, the sententious aphorism, the subjective hymn, the nostalgic cadence." In New Voice, p. 140.
- 14b Papias, quoted in Eusebius, The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine, trans. G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 150.
- 15 Sir Walter Scott, The Heart of Midlothian (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, n.d. [1818]), p. 319f.
- 16 Robert Scholes credits Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette for this emphasis in linguistic structuralism, op. cit., p. 72. Also pp. 143-147 on Todorov's "Theory of reading."
- 17 Dominic Crossan, "The Good Samaritan: Towards a Generic Definition of Parable" in Semeia 2, p. 95.
- 18 Linnemann, op. cit., p. 132, n. 12.
- 19 The explanation is mine, but the word "interlocking" is from Ms. Linnemann, op. cit., p. 27.
- 20 Funk, "The Good Samaritan as Metaphor," Semeia 2, p. 60.
- 21 Cf. Peter F. Smith writing on architecture, op. cit., p. 71.
- 22 Walter J. Ong points out this familiar distinction between Hebraic and Greek understanding of knowledge and illustrates it with the present-day Arabic Yadha' and the Greek ginōskō in The Barbarian Within (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1962), p. 70.
- 23 Wilder in Language writes: "Jesus was a voice not a penman, a herald not a scribe." p. 21.
- 24 In the balance of this section, I am especially indebted to Rudolf Bultmann, Synoptic Tradition, pp. 188-192. The "laws" of fiction according to Propp and Lévi-Strauss along

- with Raglan's "Laws" of heroic tales can be found in Scholes, op. cit., pp. 60-74.
- 25 Considerable difficult work remains to be done in this area in order to understand how Bultmann's "elements of style typical of popular story telling" are an element of story telling and why the elements function as they do in particular areas. Tannehill, op. cit., p. 9, observed, "Determining the background of a formal feature does not complete the task of understanding how it contributes to the text as discourse significant for man."
- 26 Man, Myth and Magic: An Encyclopedia of the Supernatural, Vol VII, ed. Richard Cavendish et. al., (Milwaukee: Purnell Reference Books, 1970), p. 2831f. Professor Robert Osborne of Carleton University has kindly pointed me to this and other references re the "rule of three".
- 27 An interesting comment on reading rather than hearing is made by John Greenway, Literature Among the Primitives, (Hatbora Penn: Folklore Associates, 1964), p. 113f: "Though repetition is still pleasing to us in literature, the substitution of reading for recitation has intellectualized poetry, with what effect on its popularity it is easy to see. The change has affected our appreciation of primitive song as well, so that the very repetitive nature of this material is likely to annoy rather than to please us."
- 28 See Robert W. Funk, "Structure in the Narrative Parables of Jesus, Semeia 2, pp. 51-73.
- 29 George Crespy, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" trans., John Kirby, in Semeia 2, p. 34.
- 30 Cf. Funk "The Good Samaritan as Metaphor", in Semeia 2, p. 53.
- 31 Robert E. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, Trans. Williard R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973 (1948)), p. 390.
- 32 Linnemann, op. cit., p. 10.
- 33 Wilder, Semeia 2, p. 142.
- 34 Part of the continued appeal of The Prodigal, The Good Samaritan and The Lost Sheep consists in the harmonics that resonate in the collective mind as we recall the journeys of Homer, Gilgamesh, the Buddha Dante, the Exodus of Israel and the journeys of Chaucer, Bunyan and the "long march" of Mao Tse-Tung.

- 35 B. T. D. Smith, op. cit., p. 143.
- 36 Geddes MacGregor writes: "The interest of stories of escape from prison camps, in which the heroes tunnel their way to freedom through months of patient and surreptitious digging, is that they typify the nature of the individual's struggle with Circumstance. The escape stories dramatically simplify, however, the nature of the deeper struggle to extricate oneself from captivity into freedom. Into the walls of the prison of Circumstance, against which the individual must pit all his resources . . ." Op. cit., p. 69. Cf. in the comic strip "The Wizard of Id" by Parker and Hart, the prisoner who continually escapes into the arms of his captors.
- 37 Wilder, Semeia 2, p. 25.
- 38 Matthew 7:9-11.
- 39 The manipulation of time, writes Doty in Semeia 2, p. 162, is "a crucial aspect of fiction."
- 40 Humour is dependent on understanding context, and, as Robert Scholes observes: "Ironic use of a language is the last thing the child or the foreigner understands. It is precisely the thing that varies with different readers and frequently distinguishes the 'good' reader from the 'bad.'" Op. cit., p. 36f. Jacob Jónsson's argument that there is considerable humour in the New Testament, including the parables, is on the whole persuasive. Humour and Irony in the New Testament (Reykjavik: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1965).
- 41 B. T. D. Smith, op. cit., pp. 20, 65, 83, 126, 137, 165.
- 42 Noted by William G. Doty (after Wolfgang Harnisch) in "The Parables of Jesus, Kafka, Borges and Others, with Structural Observations," Semeia 2, p. 171.
- 43 See Crossan, Dark Interval, pp. 93-101.
- 44 An example can be seen in detail in Mythology, ed. Pierre Maranda (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), pp. 139-150.
- 45 G. W. Allport and L. Postman, The Psychology of Rumor (New York: H. Holt, 1947), pp. 75-158.

My grandfather was lame. Once they asked him to tell a story about his teacher. And he related how the holy Baal Shem used to hop and dance while he prayed. My grandfather rose as he spoke, and he was so swept away by his story that he himself began to hop and dance to show how the master had done. From that hour on he was cured of his lameness. That's the way to tell a story!

Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim, Early Masters, (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), pp. v-vi.

10 The Missing Storyteller

A simple but basic and unsurmountable problem in trying to understand the parables is that we only have the words, and we are not always sure of them. What we have is third hand and beyond. In addition the parable rests on common cultural assumptions and experiences, shared apprehension and nuances. If these have to be explained, assuming they can be explained, the parable is atomized and no longer able to function as parable. The allusions of the parables do not reach us and in a measure they must remain enigmatic.¹ We know only that the stories were unsettling and divisive, what Clarence Jordan referred to as literary trojan horses,² or as a stick of dynamite.³ Some heard them gladly, some went angrily away. Both groups got a bang out of them.

Amos Wilder suggests, rightly I think, that it is not just Jesus' stories that were interesting, but the way they were told.⁴ The difficulty is that we have only the words and to some extent the response of the hearers. In the parables what is left out or tacitly assumed⁵ even in the words, is undoubtedly of great importance and what is implied is beyond our reach. John Greenway refers to the difficulty in translating Ojibway verse when he writes of "embedded meaning",⁶ and concludes, "...so much was implied and so little expressed."⁷ Writing

about the mythology of Ulithi Atoll, William A. Lessa observes that "...the raconteur galvinizes his hearer's cultural reflexes with verbal and visual stimuli well known to all from generations of storytelling.⁸ "What lies between the lines, what is felt and not spoken," Kenneth Bailey writes,⁹ "is of deepest significance. Indeed, it almost cannot be spoken, for it is not consciously apprehended. For what 'everybody knows' cannot be explained."

Communication takes place over a wide spectrum but our knowledge of communication is a narrow part of that spectrum. Recent research on the reception of news from television indicated only seven percent of the message received was in words:

All the rest - 93% - is conveyed by the newscaster's personality: 38% by vocal intonation and inflection and 55% by facial expression and physical posture. 10

It is of course also well known that perception varies from person to person and situation to situation. Two illustrations make this point with humour and clarity:

A hotel desk clerk received a long distance call about an overnight reservation. "Do you want a room with a tub or a shower?" the clerk asked. "What's the difference?" the caller replied. "Well," came the patient response, "with a tub you sit down." 11

Lady Chatterly's Lover means very different things depending on whether the reader is a devotee of indoor or outdoor sport, as the reviewer for the journal Field and Stream demonstrated: "Although written many years ago, this fictional account of the day-by-day-life of an English gamekeeper is still of considerable interest to the outdoor minded reader, as it contains many passages on pheasant raising, the apprehending of poachers, ways to con-

trol vermin and other duties of the professional gamekeeper.

Unfortunately, one is obliged to wade through many pages of extraneous material in order to discover and savor these sidelights on the management of a Midlands shooting estate, and in this reviewer's opinion, this book cannot take the place of J. R. Miller's Practical Gamekeeper. 12

A message embodies more than words. The complexity of communication can be seen by careful consideration of this long quotation from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Case of Identity":

He had risen from his chair and was standing between the parted blinds, gazing down into the dull neutral-tinted London street. Looking over his shoulder, I saw that on the pavement opposite there stood a large woman with a heavy fur boa around her neck, and a large curling red feather in a broad-brimmed hat which was tilted in a coquettish duchess of Devonshire fashion over her ear. From under this great panoply she peeped up in a nervous, hesitating fashion at our windows, while her body oscillated backward and forward, and her fingers fidgeted with her glove buttons. Suddenly, with a plunge, as of the swimmer who leaves the bank, she hurried across the road and we heard the sharp clang of the bell.

"I have seen those symptoms before," said Holmes, throwing his cigarette into the fire. "Oscillation upon the pavement always means an affaire de coeur. She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. And yet even here we may discriminate. When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or grieved. But here she comes in person to resolve our doubts." 13

"Sherlock Holmes" has simply observed and verbalized the silent communication that takes place around us every day. In a significant but seldom understood way, what we have and what we

do, communicate even when our tongues are silent. Our tongues are only the iceberg tip of communication process. Every person about to face a job interview is at least implicitly aware of this. His mind ranges through the possibilities: if I wear my green suit, how will that be seen? Maybe I'll wear a sports coat, but not with a loud tie. I must be sure to shine my shoes. Shall I communicate a polished personality? Shall I carry a book or briefcase? Shall I travel by car¹⁴ or take the subway?

Without stopping to consider why, the applicant knows that his clothing, his car, his brief case, all have a linguistic status that speak more or less independently of the words that he will choose for this situation. Of course it is not necessary that all things are signs to the interviewer or the prospective employee, and even where they are, they are not signs in exactly the same sense as is speech. Philip Wheelwright calls this language. He writes:

Somehow the broadly linguistic factor in human experience must be conceived and named, and English vocabulary provides nothing better (than "language"). In this broadest possible sense of the word 'language' I mean to designate any element in human experience which is not merely contemplated for its own sake alone, but is employed to mean, to intend, to stand proxy for, something beyond itself. 15

In addition to the "things" about us that convey a message, our culturally conditioned behaviour speaks volumes. For our prospective employee, what time is the best time to arrive for a ten o'clock appointment? Should he offer his hand when he comes into the office? Where should he stand in relation to

the interviewer? E. T. Hall reminds us that, "In addition to what we say with our verbal language we are constantly communicating our real feelings in our silent language - the language of behaviour."¹⁶ Our silent language and our verbal language are sometimes in profound disagreement.

But what is heard (and seen and smelled) during the interview? As everywhere else in the communication process, the possibilities of misunderstanding are many. Selective perception, the ability to screen out what is disagreeable or unfamiliar, facilitates communication to the extent that it frees us from pondering the "great blooming, buzzing confusion"¹⁷ that daily bombards our senses. It hampers communication to the extent that what is unfamiliar entirely escapes our attention. Merrill Abbey tells of an Italian photographer who was to make a pictorial representation of life in the United States. "His completed picture looked far more like the landscape of Italy. He intended no deception, but his eye responded chiefly to what was already familiar."¹⁸ Conversely, he did not respond to what was unfamiliar. When we see or when we hear we do so with more than our eyes and ears. We see and hear with mental habits, memory, imagination, feeling and to some extent, will.¹⁹ As a (photographic) storyteller the reality he portrayed was an extension of himself.

In addition to the above factors are those important and distinctive basic sounds (phonemes) that compose words, the

choice and arrangement of words,²⁰ grammatical relationships,²¹ inflection of voice, and the pitch and tone of voice projection. Indeed even the pauses are important as recent research has shown.²² Facial expression (especially, eye movement), body stance and gesture of hand and head also tell their story.²³ Who would underestimate the importance of timing?²⁴ Who would forget the importance of what is not told in the telling?²⁵

Speech behavior cannot be measured solely in words. The sounds that compose the words, the inflections of the voice, and the ways the words are composed and arranged are all essential elements of speech. In addition, a talker is most likely to accompany his speech with gestures and facial expressions that add emphasis or nuance. Of even more importance to a psychologist, the behavior of the talker represents some kind of message, and behind this message one is tempted to infer the operation of a host of psychological processes commonly identified under such names as perceiving, desiring, willing, thinking, believing, and feeling. 26

In listening to a work being read, usually by a flat monotonous voice bereft of the inflection of passion, we are or should be, very much aware of how much we are missing. This is certainly true of the New Testament. Without the loudness, tone and pitch, we are lost. Even the ipsissima verba of Jesus - if we could identify them, would only be more or less ambiguous words. If we were assured that Jesus himself said: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's"²⁷ we would be no further ahead. Without the tone, we would still have only ambiguity, for we do not know if Jesus was implying that the coin was Caesar's or if it was a sarcastic statement actually implying

that nothing belonged to Caesar, or, an ambiguity suggesting, "you'll not catch me on that question!"

Where a mark of the rabbinical parables is that they do not leave us in doubt as to their meaning, the opposite seems to be true for the parables of Jesus.²⁸ From the beginning, the ambiguity and paradoxicality of Jesus' parables resulted in their being read in a variety of ways, especially moral and apocalyptic (Q), gnostic (Gospel of Thomas), and from time to time, the carriers of ecclesiastical and political programmes. In the absence of the Story Teller they have, as Crossan observed, "notoriously mirrored the mind that read them."²⁹

If we were actually present, or if oral tradition were true to its source and we had that, there would surely be thousands fewer articles on the parable of The Sower and its interpretation. The words which Mark attributes to Jesus on the purpose of parables are ambiguous in print. They are, of course a quotation of Isaiah 6: 9-10 and in that context they are also ambiguous. Had we been present we would presumably have known how we were to understand those words.³⁰ This is not to say that they would not still have contained an ambiguity but we would have known how we were to understand the ambiguity. **As in the case of double entendre** or any pun we know by the speaker's inflection and other clues how we are to understand the word. We know too that that is it! No explanation is normally necessary or helpful.³¹ Confronted with this kind of problem we

can appreciate something of why previous generations preferred oral to written words.

Distance, and the senses that interpret it are also a silent but important aspect of communications. The United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. has produced a series of television spots that I have had occasion to show to many people. In one of the spots Jesus responds to the rich young ruler's question about eternal life. In the television frame Jesus "moves in" on the man, feeling the cloth, looking him in the eye and then says: "You really love it all, don't you? Don't you know a man must be rid of anything he loves more than God? You cannot serve two masters. Nobody can."³² Some people are visibly upset at this scene. Why? The apparent reason is that moving into the rich man's body zone is seen as a threat and it is upsetting to see Jesus threatening, although they have been familiar with the threat implicit in his words. This may be a clue as to the probable results when we translate the words of the New Testament into body language.

W. H. Auden's words speak amusingly but significantly about territorial aggression:

Some thirty inches from my nose
 The frontier of my Person goes,
 And all the untilled air between
 Is private pagus or demesne.
 Stranger, unless with bedroom eyes
 I beckon you to fraternize,
 Beware of rudely crossing it:
 I have no gun, but I can spit. 33

In addition to auditory, visual and thermal signals³⁴ it has been shown that animals communicate through their olfactory senses.³⁵ Minute droplets of a chemical substance called pheromes (also pheromones) are secreted by the exocrine glands into the external environment. In the case of ants, for example, different substances indicate food source, alarm, and death.³⁶ In the case of insects, these phenomes take precedence over auditory and visual signals.³⁷ Humans too secrete this information carrying moisture but little is yet known of its effect.³⁸ Still there are hints; in French, sentir, to smell, means to feel or be conscious of, and in German, Ich rieche Dich, I smell you, means I love you.

A cultural problem also emerges in that the language of the parables is so well known in our day as to sometimes lose its metaphoric qualities and with its metaphor sterile the meaning is deformed and distorted. Phrases such as "good Samaritan" and "faith like a mustard seed" prejudice and distort the meaning of the parable before it is given an adequate hearing.³⁹

All of this is a reminder that we simply do not have access to much of the "language" that was used by Jesus when he told parables. Without that data we are left with a relatively stilted paper record of what went on and why, and the parables as we have them both generate and undermine successive and multiple interpretations and applications.

- 1 Francis Wright Beare, The Earliest Records of Jesus, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 108. It should however be noted that Beare sees the parables as enigmatic illustrations of a well-defined body of teaching.
- 2 Clarence Jordan & Bill Lane Doulos, Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1976), p. 38.
- 3 Ibid., p. 59f.
- 4 Wilder, Language, p. 33. Wilder also insists that Jesus' creative speech was so fresh and significant that it could breed speech true to itself, in Language, p. 90.
- 5 Cf. MacQuarrie, op. cit., p. 149.
- 6 Greenway, op. cit., p. 23.
- 7 Ibid., p. 29.
- 8 William A. Lessa, "Discoverer-of-the-Sun: Mythology as a Reflection of Culture" in Maranda, op. cit., p. 71f.
- 9 Bailey, op. cit., p. 10.
- 10 Harry S. Ashmore, "Uncertain Oracles", The Center, Nov.-Dec., 1970, p. 17.
- 11 Christopher News Notes, No. 172, (April, 1969).
- 12 Greenway, op. cit., p. 107.
- 13 Quoted in Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language, (Greenwich Conn: Fawcett Publications Inc., 1959), p. 42.
- 14 In that delightful book How to Become A Bishop Without Being Religious, (New York: Pocket Books, 1966), Charles Merrill Smith warns the would-be bishop that the choice of car and wife are very important if one is to be unmistakably clerical. A little more scholarly approach to the significance of sign system can be seen in Roland Barthes, Elements of Semiology, trans Annette Lavers & Colin Smith, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969 (1964)).
- 15 Wheelwright, Metaphor, p. 29.
- 16 Hall, op. cit., p. 10.
- 17 William James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1950), p. 488.
- 18 Merrill R. Abbey, Man, Media and the Message, (New York: Friendship Press, 1968), p. 52.

- 19 Barfield, Saving, p. 20f.
- 20 Roland Barthes quotes Saussure to the effect that there is probably a whole series of sentences that belong to the language as sentences and which the speaker does not have to combine himself. Op. cit., p. 19.
- 21 The thesis that there are fundamental similarities in the grammar of all known languages is argued by Noam Chomsky and is outlined by Edmund Blair Bolles, "The Innate Grammar of Baby Talk", Saturday Review, March 18, 1972, pp. 52-55, and Lyons, op. cit., especially p. 22 and Lyons' critique p. 113ff.
- 22 Israel Shenker, "Scientists Study Pause That, uh, Expresses", The New York Times, Feb 2, 1973, p. M, 27. See also Steiner, Language and Octavio Paz, Claude Levi-Strauss: An Introduction, New York: Delta Books, 1974, the last chapter.
- 23 The popular and delightful book by Julius Fast, Body Language, (New York: Pocket Books 1971), is especially interesting in this regard.
- 24 We cannot imagine Bob Hope or Jack Benny without their timing. Similarly, to read Martin Luther King's speech "I've Got A Dream" properly, you have to remember how it sounded.
- 25 "Stylistic devices are also techniques of avoidance. The most potent elements in a work of art are, often, its silences." Sontag, op. cit., p. 44.
- 26 John B. Carroll, Language and Thought, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 2.
- 27 Mark 12: 17.
- 28 So Crossan, "Unpublished MS", p. 18f.
- 29 Ibid., p. 22.
- 30 "What stops a reader doesn't stop the hearer" observes Eta Linnemann, op. cit., p. 29.
- 31 Linnemann writes: "The parable narrative is all the narrator says to his original listeners", op. cit., p. 24.
- 32 Amplify, Vol. 11, No. 1, (February 1971), p. 6.
- 33 Quoted in Hall, op. cit., p. 113.

- 34 On thermal change as a key to detecting emotional response, see Hall, op. cit., p. 56ff.
- 35 "For example, female silkworm moths release a sex attractant so powerful that males are attracted to a single female from distances of two miles or more, even though each female releases less than 0.00000001 gram (0.01 milogram) of the attractant chemical. The males must be able to detect and respond to incredibly minute amounts of the attractant, perhaps single molecules." William T. Keeton, Biological Science 2nd Ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1972), p. 423.
- 36 Ibid., p. 424.
- 37 Claude A. Viilee, Warren F. Walker Jr., & Robert D. Barnes, General Zoology, (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1968), p. 39.
- 38 Lewis Thomas, The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher, (Markham: Penguin Books of Canada Ltd., 1978), and James Hassett, "Sex and Smell", Psychology Today, March, 1978, pp. 40-45.
- 39 Doty, op. cit., p. 34.

IV
RETELLING

"Give It Up!"

A Discourse on Method

"It was very early in the morning, the streets clean and deserted, I was on my way to the railroad station. As I compared the tower clock with my watch I realized it was already much later than I had thought, I had to hurry, the shock of this discovery made me feel uncertain of the way, I was not very well acquainted with the town as yet, fortunately there was a policeman nearby, I ran to him and breathlessly asked him the way. He smiled and said: 'From me you want to learn the way?' 'Yes,' I said, 'since I cannot find it myself.' 'Give it up, give it up,' said he, and turned away with a great sweep, like someone who wants to be alone with his laughter."

Franz Kafka

11 Towards A Method

In this chapter I shall consider a possible alternative approach to parable interpretation.

The parables are generally interpreted in relation to what they mean, but I would emphasize the elusive nature of meaning, the variety of possible meanings and that aspect of the parable that points to a mystery beyond meaning. Crossan too asks: "What does it do to the human imagination to imagine an unimaginable God?"¹ As happens so often, similar thinking can be found earlier, as when Barlach wrote of God that he "conceals himself behind everything, and in everything are narrow cracks through which he...shines and flashes... cracks so fine that we can never find them again if we only turn our heads."² And somewhere Reinhold Niebuhr wrote that the God Christians believe in is the God beyond the God Christians think they believe in. Interpretation arising out of a sense of mystery should lead, by way of ambiguity,³ playfulness and through a variety of images, back to mystery.

As I write this, I am listening to J. S. Bach's Concerto No. 6 in B flat major. If I do not understand the music, I shall learn, if I learn at all, to understand by additional attentive hearings. Learning of Bach's time and culture, and analysis of the form of his music will not help me very much.

If I understand the music, such an analysis might help my appreciation of the concerto in an analogical way. What I mean is that the musical notation can help me to play the concerto again in my head. There is no way around the attentive rehearing.

The meaning of the music is not the notation, but the music, the meaning of the parable is not the words but the story. Nor is the music or the parable reducible to a single idea or theme. Form and content cannot be separated without changing their nature. Nor should we allow that the text of the parable serves primarily as referent to an event or idea or meaning outside of the parable.

Historical exegesis appears to be confident that an exposition of the semantic dimension of the text (what the author meant) will lead to hermeneutic (what the text means). Yet it does not. Existential and literary criticism is of value to the extent that negatively, reduction of the parable is avoided, and positively, they playfully posit a model of meaning from which the parable can be seen. No single meaning is adequate, and I have faulted interpreters who have moved from their own understanding to a proposed (single) meaning of the parable. Parable meaning is elusive and is not reducible to a single idea.

Structuralism seeks to determine meaning from outside the text

viz., in language as a fundamental category of narrative structure or the nature of the human mind. If this is restrictive of the meaning of the text (and it usually is) and reductionist in relation to that text, it is unacceptable. To the extent that it posits a model from which the parable can be appreciated it can be helpful.

What Patte has said about structuralism can generally be said about historical and literary criticism in general: "Structuralism has not shown an ability to stir the imagination, to appeal to alternative images, to waken slumbering creativity, to interpret the world anew, to dress Reality in new clothing."⁴ Of course there are exceptions, but as with Amos Wilder, it appears to be when the critic speaks not primarily as critic but as poet.

Interpretation, then, is often nothing more than the translation of the parable into historical facts, new notation or theological proposition about the text or facts about the facts about the text. The proposed meaning of the text may be no more than an account of how the interpreter found meaning in it.⁵ We are no closer to the parable with Crossan's structuralism than with Augustine's allegory; perhaps we are not as close! Indeed in reading about the parables it was precisely on those rare occasions when the interpreter told a story or created a poem that the parable came closer to life.

The charms of music do not lie in, nor can they be explained or appropriated by the musical notation. Such a procedure is of limited value. Clear definition, mathematical exactitude, logical constructs are especially important when dealing with what Philip Wheelwright calls steno language but for the symbolic and expressive language of literature, and here I include the parables, it can even be misleading. Steno language is essentially inaccurate,⁶ in that it depends on abstraction and the ignoring of so much meaning.

Northrop Frye writes of poetry, but what he says of the poem can as easily and correctly be said of the parable:

We are always wrong, in the context of criticism, when we say 'this poem means literally' - and then give a prose - paraphrase of it. All paraphrases abstract a secondary or outward meaning. Understanding a poem literally means understanding the whole of it, as a poem, and as it stands. Such understanding begins in a complete surrender of the mind and senses to the import of the work as a whole, and proceeds through the effect to unite the symbols toward a simultaneous perception of the unity of the structure. 7

Frye has also noted that, "What the poet meant to say, then, is, literally, the poem itself."⁸ And our response, is not so much to the whole poem but to the whole in it.⁹ And W. Doty writes: "Modern parable interpretation has often been no less thick-headed than the evangelists, insisting upon the necessity to improve upon the parables and to spell out their metaphoric freshness into abstract theological systems."¹⁰

It needs to be stressed again that the parables of Jesus were not a form of systematic teaching or crystallizations or formulations, but occasional expressions of an attitude that was impossible to formulate as a fixed system.¹¹

The initial task of understanding the parable requires a listening and being open to what the parable has to say. It may be that the parable can be grasped at a single naive reading or hearing. More probably some understanding of the historical, cultural and literary context of the parable will prove helpful. It may also be that existential and structuralist criticism will add insight. But, all of this will be helpful in understanding the background of the parable and may not help in understanding the parable itself. Not the background and details but only the text can finally make us literate. There comes a time, in Kierkegaard's well-known words, "Where everything is reversed, after which the point becomes to understand more and more that there is something which cannot be understood."¹² Exactly. Or at least, even if in some way understood, not understood in a manner that controls or can lead to argument by proposition.

Some interpreters have wisely compared parable with joke and have concluded that attempts to explain the meaning of the parables are similar to attempts at explaining a joke, they fizzle and even though one might explain the constituent parts, one has not explained the joke. And like a joke, how can you

contradict a parable? Crossan for example, writes that, "a parable which has to be explained is, like a joke in similar circumstances, a parable which has been ruined as parable."¹³ Neither do we interpret humour but rather do we experience it. Both parables and joke require a certain expectancy and neither lend themselves very well to minds that resist the novel and attempt to make it submit to previous ways of perceiving.

Especially is it the case with the parables that a kind of openness or metanoia is required. Explanations, as Owen Barfield noted, are of no avail.¹⁴ The explanation would also need explanation and that explanation would be misconstrued in terms of a previous idolatry. The parable does not give information to be assimilated but a new consciousness or imagination: "When he opened his eyes Adam did not ask God, 'Who are you?' He asked, 'Who am I?'"¹⁵ You either understand or you do not, and to understand is not to have mastery over the parable but to stand-under it. It does not mean being able to explain the parable but to feel or to be grasped by the parable. Richard Palmer's observation is similar:

It is not the interpreter who grasps the meaning of the text; the meaning of the text seizes him... we are seized. This is a hermeneutical phenomenon which is largely ignored by a technological approach to literature; one wrongly interprets the hermeneutical situation if one sees himself as the master and manipulator. 16

Parable is that which chooses us rather than that which we choose (to paraphrase C. S. Lewis).¹⁷ It is that which is said

because it could not be said in any other way. Expressed in more familiar theological terms, the parable is revealed to the hearer who is in turn, inspired to receive it. This occurs in a participation in the parable through which the experience of "aha", wholeness, rightness and well-being, or new view or outlook is received.

Poetic (and parabolic) language is permeated with a sense of Presence, as Wheelwright maintained, an intrinsic ability to move back and forth from subject to object and from the particular to the universal, conveying a glimpse of the Reality which always remains unseen.¹⁸ Such a Reality is not reducible to mathematical formula nor is it explicable in a series of facts nor is it useful, nor finally is it translatable to other terms. The creative imagination appeals to feelings, intuition, the subconscious and conscious longings, hopes and fears.¹⁹ People are grasped and shaped by images, metaphor and analogies,²⁰ and communication takes place not by naming or denoting but by evoking the reality they embody.

I would suggest that since the principal means of understanding metaphoric language is the imagination, the principal means of interpretation should also be the imagination. Imagination operates at the cognitive level, but, more importantly, at the ontic level that involves a creative response to the subject. Imagination involves values and a similarity that exists in apparent differences. In Shelley's words:

Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the preception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. 21

Shelley's views on the imagination follow those of Coleridge, who saw imagination as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the Infinite. More recently it has been defined by Herbert Richardson as "a power of insight which receives the revelation of an expressive form..."²² Imagination involves a dissolution, diffusion and disruption of the sensory world to allow a recreation of what is.

The imagination then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. 23

Thus for Coleridge art is not morality but vision and a shaping of Creation. It is, I would suggest, related to what Batson, Baker and Clark ask for with their call to **commitment**, not ideology.²⁴ And it is based on the premise that man is a symbolic animal.²⁵

Faced with the wonders of a sunset the answering imagination doesn't attempt a literal description of the sunset. It paints or sings or dances a sunset. Or like James Joyce, the descrip-

tion of a sunset or landscape will be in words that describe the smell not the sight of the scene.²⁶ The sunset is only understood when it is met by the imagination of the viewer. Of course the sunset can be "described" in terms of light waves, reflection and refraction, but what is then described is not the sunset but the nature of light waves, reflection and refraction. Such an answering insight may be akin to if not identical with that which has been known as revelation. The creative imagination speaks in language that appeals but at the same time resists interpretation. Finally it leads back to the original experience, (the parable, the encounter), the sunset is seen as Sunset.

Imagination as a principle of interpretation suggests an overturning of the familiar; this, Shelley and Coleridge suggested, was a function of poetic language. It suggests an ordered chaos or condition of entropy. Shelley wrote:

It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. 27

And again,

It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar ... 28

When traditional methods of evoking an awareness of God are no longer effective and, even the parables of the New Testament become ossified, a new method of evoking the experience itself must be used;²⁹ the tension of yes and no, like and unlike, affirmation and challenge, old and new, has to be called into being. Because of what I may call an idolatry of form, there must be a constant state of change and disorientation so that the hearer will continue to strive to know and understand, or even reknow and reunderstand. Faith that is not creative and dynamic, atrophies.³¹

The retelling is or should be playful, witty, entertaining, re-creative.³² With a poison-tipped feather John Killinger tackles and tickles our imagination:

Seriousness is part of our bane. We are so dreadfully prosaic about spiritual things. What began in one generation as poetry-rhythmical, playful, witty (all adjectives constituent of the matrix of invention or discovery) - became the sodden, sullen, heavy prose of successive times. The fire was damped and banked and nearly smothered. Angels ceased to come. Devils were soon no more. Committees took over where artists and madmen had left off, the breath hardly cold in their lungs. 33

Rather than explaining the parable, a shift of medium and/or story may prove to be effective and necessary for communicating the story behind the story, the parable behind the parable. Amos Wilder suggests such an involvement with current forms of mass media³⁴ while in a more poetic way Corita Kent writes:

I suspect (if we play the game
'if Christ were here today')
Christ would tell his stories
on film
on tv
as well as in conversations
with small groups of friends.

"And they would be well told
not separate from life
not "religious" films -
but, as his parables were,
mixed up with the jobs and lives
of the people listening to him.

Not some ethereal doctrine
preached while dressed up
in special clothes
using different words
in special places,
but rather...
in their culture,
on the grass,
around the table with real food,
walking around with the unwashed,
the sinners,
in their ordinary haunts...

"I wonder how far
religious people may have gone
in removing God
from the developing world,
causing a great angry hunger
which has forced people
to desperate means
of searching for communion
with their fellow men
with God...

"We cut off the Christian artists
Fellini and all;
we instead wrap the message
in aluminum foil
so it can't be seen,
creating a split
in Christianity
between those who are using
the old official language
and the natives who by-pass
the message because
they can't understand it..." 35

No completely objective interpretation is possible. Despite philosophy from Descartes to Kant and what David Lochhead calls "this naive faith in the attainability of objective knowledge"³⁶ no neutral methodology has been discovered. Any reading is from a particular perspective or point of view. It is no wonder then that we have more than one gospel and more than one parable. Any interpretation will be at the expense of a certain reduction or even atomization of the text so that it can be presented through a certain interpreter as filter. To the extent that it is interpreted the interpreter will do so with his own glasses and these glasses limit colour, shape and size. "Revelation" has not meant reading without bias, but reading from the point of view and in the context of Church history.³⁷ What I am suggesting is that the imagination comes closest to retaining something of the vision of the text and leads back to the text itself. The hearing of the text includes faith and the revoicing of the text - involves a pointing through the medium in which we live for as Richard Niebuhr observed, "We are in history as the fish is in water..."³⁸ We cannot avoid reason as historically conditioned reason.

I have already noted that the re-telling that shifts from oral word to written words involves changes in meaning. Similarly a retelling that exploits drama, film, dance, song, picture, radio and records will not explain the parable but will distort the "original" parable and may breathe new life into the old metaphor - not just shadow nor just light but light and

shadow.

Any retelling will be untrue to the original or as Silberman observed, to read the Good Samaritan in English, Greek and Hebrew is to read three different stories.³⁹ As a further illustration, Fr. John Culkin indicates that The Caine Mutiny appears in four media: book, play, movie, and TV and each medium has a different hero!⁴⁰ Retelling will in itself be a distortion of the "original" parable - since the context has changed, but though this may be judged negatively from a historical-critical point of view, from a literary and theological point of view it can be seen positively.⁴¹

To some extent this is what always happens. That is, the critic recovers the meaning of a work by establishing a relationship between the work and some system of ideas outside of it.⁴² But the work remains intact. Although there is an inescapable element of the allegorical about this, there is less hidden allegory than those commentaries that silently attach ideas to the original parable without recognizing that such attachment is allegorical.⁴³ What I am suggesting is that the primary model for this be an art or poetic model rather than a philosophic or rationalistic model. Also that such an expression not be seen as the meaning of the parable and that which allows an antiform (a mirror perhaps!) from which the parable may be seen.

It is this imaginative answering of the parable that is the most effective way of communicating the "meaning" of the parables. As Ricoeur has observed:

Writing a poem, telling a story, constructing a hypothesis, a plan, or a strategy: these are the kinds of contexts of work which provide a perspective to imagination and allow it to be 'productive'. 44

It is the song and dance that the parable gives rise to that is the effective and responsible understanding. The Hermeneutic of parable interpretation is poetry and song and story and dance and drama and new parables and painting.

Interpretation must move beyond the fallacy of objectivity and recognize that perceiving is a determining process that includes the observer in the interpretive situation, and knows that there are many (psychological, historical and linguistic) factors that play a part in the relating to the text. Such an awareness should lead to an effort to "detechnologize" and "detrivialize" the view of what it is to encounter, receive and understand a text.⁴⁵ This may be what is implicit when A. M. Hunter urged a return to the techniques of Chrysostom, Luther, Philips Brooks, and James S. Stewart.⁴⁶

There is, let me repeat, no way to know beforehand whether a particular form will "work". The parable must be listened to with the imagination and then the hermeneutical response is to re-voice it by a new form - a form that will function primarily as anti-form; not the meaning of the parable, but a

meaning that sits somewhat in tension with the parable. The parable remains as an integrated whole that can be reheard again and again. The imagination turns the hearer toward a new form that allows a fresh perspective and a restructuring of expectation. This serves well the negative function of theology and orients by disorientation and says more about what God is not like than what s/he is like - or at least speaks parabolically.

The parable, to the extent that it can be interpreted, has to be imaginatively re-voiced in a tongue that is understood by contemporary people. Not in the language of academic theology, but the language of the street, the language of song and dance and story. The hermeneutical task is to speak the parable to life, and in so doing Life will be illuminated.

The appropriate response to the understanding of the parables is in a revoicing of the parable that is true to the complexity and richness of the original parable and expresses it in language or sign that is understood by contemporary people. Of course it is also the case that a work of genius needs a genius to re-voice it or as the music conductor James Levine has said of Verdi, "The problem in performing Verdi is the same problem in performing the work of any genius - you need a performer who's nearly a genius, and you almost never have one."⁴⁷

What I am proposing is that the primary means of communicating

the meaning of the parables be a counter-example or an anti-form, an alternative voicing that does not pretend to be the parable itself.

Parable retelling will sound more like the stories of C. S. Lewis, Kurt Vonnegut, Graham Greene and Elie Wiesel, the poetry of W. H. Auden and Robert Frost, and films such as Parable, the drama of Godspell and the music of Simon and Garfunkel and Chris de Burgh. This will be a recognition that the task of interpretation involves, not direct address, but indirect, not a hearing, but an overhearing.

Such communication does not pretend to compel an opinion, conviction or belief from the hearer but compels him or her to take notice.⁴⁸ The task is to keep the metaphors open and to permit the images to exist in tension.⁴⁹

And just as in an earlier period, several allegorical versions of the parables existed, so we must recognize the need for various voicings - voicings that will exist to some extent in competition but also in a tension of complementary signification. Some readings will be more appropriate, some less, but no single reading will suffice. As Frye notes: "The conclusion that a work of literary art contains a variety of sequence of meanings seems inescapable."⁵⁰ Thus the notation that no parable has escaped receiving many conflicting interpretations⁵¹ will not be seen as necessarily bad. Such an approach leaves

the text with a sense of mystery or at least with a recognition that there is an incompleteness about its reading. It leaves the parable itself to continue to function as parable,⁵² and as a bearer of the reality to which it refers.

What I am calling for then, can almost be called an anti-theology but "parabolic theology" would be a more suitable term. What I propose is that the parable not be interpreted but that it be allowed to speak to the imagination and from the imagination a new work may emerge that will in itself embody the tension present within the original parable.

- 1 Crossan, "Unpublished MS", p. 20.
- 2 In S. Paul Schelling, God Incognito, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 81f.
- 3 In my own work as a clergyman in a scientific and technical community I have grown increasingly aware that we operate with somewhat different approaches. Where they seek to reduce and abolish ambiguity, I nurture and applaud it. I hasten to add however that there is a common sense of wonder that is shared alike by theologian, poet and scientist. See on this Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation, (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1975 (1964)), pp. 32, 128, 132, 144.
- 4 Patte, op. cit., p. 13.
- 5 Tannehill, op. cit., p. 11. Tannehill noted that the interpreter may simply point to the text's inadequacies with a sense of his own superiority.
- 6 T. E. Hulme quoted in Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain, Rev. Ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1968), p. 86.
- 7 Northrop Frye, Criticism, p. 77.
- 8 Ibid., p. 87.
- 9 Ibid., p. 77f.
- 10 Doty, op. cit., p. 123.
- 11 On this matter see the remarkable and little known book by Willard H. Robinson, The Parables of Jesus in Relation to His Ministry, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1928), especially pp. 118, 149, 154, 62.
- 12 Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of, Trans. Alexander Dru, (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1960), p. 44. Cf., "The objective faith, what does that mean? It means a sum of doctrinal propositions...The objective faith - it is as if Christianity also had been promulgated as a little system, if not quite so good as the Hegelian; it is as if Christ - aye, I speak without offence - it is as if Christ were a professor, and as if the Apostles had formed a little scientific society." Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Trans. David F. Swenson & Walter Lowrie, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 193.
- 13 Crossan, Dark Interval, p. 102.
- 14 Barfield, Appearances, p. 180. Cf. Ricoeur, "Fiction", p. 4.

- 15 Elie Wiesel, Messengers of God (New York: Random House, 1976, p. 3).
- 16 Palmer, op. cit., p. 248f.
- 17 C. S. Lewis, quoted by Crossan, In Parables, p. 12.
- 18 Wheelwright, Fountain, pp. 153-173.
- 19 Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 63.
- 20 Ibid., p. 161.
- 21 Percy B. Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, ed. Albert S. Cook (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1903), p. 1.
- 22 Herbert W. Richardson, Toward an American Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 62.
- 23 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson (New York: Dutton, 1962 [1906]), p. 167.
- 24 Charles Daniel Batson, J. Christian Baker, and W. Malcom Clark, Commitment without Ideology: The Experience of Church Growth (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1973), p. 184.
- 25 Cf. Niebuhr, Responsible Self, pp. 151, 161.
- 26 James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: The Viking Press, 1962 [1916]). Examples from Joyce include: ". . . darker than the swoon of sin, softer than sound or odour," p. 101; "An evil smell, faint and foul as the light . . .," p. 137; ". . . the reeking odour pouring down his throat . . .," p. 138.
- 27 Shelley, op. cit., p. 42.
- 28 Ibid., p. 13.
- 29 An example of repetition leading to glibness is Christmas carols throughout December. They bring the gospel with clarity and succinctness, but they are heard and heard but not perceived. Cf. on preaching in Experimental Preaching, ed. John Killinger (New York: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 11.
- 31 Cf. William Lynch, Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973). Also Gregory Baum, "The Theology of Andrew Greeley," The Ecumenist, September-October, 1973, pp. 86, 89.

- 32 "In literature, what entertains is prior to what instructs, or, as we may say, the reality-principle is subordinate to the pleasure-principle. In assertive verbal structures the priority is reversed. Neither factor can of course, ever be eliminated from any kind of writing." Alfred North Whitehead. I have not been able to find the source of this quotation.
- 33 Killinger, op. cit., p. 13.
- 34 Wilder, Rhetoric, p. 8.
- 35 Corita Kent, "The Artist as Communicator", The Critic, Aug.-Sept., 1967.
- 36 David Lochhead, "Hermeneutics and Ideology", in The Ecumenist, Vol. 15, No. 6 (Sept-Oct., 1977).
- 37 So Richard Nieubhr, Meaning of Revelation, p. 50.
- 38 Ibid., p. 48.
- 39 Silverman in Patte, op. cit., p. 381f. A well known Italian proverb reads: Traduttore traditore, the translator is traitor.
- 40 Quoted in Gerald Emanuel Stearn, McLuhan: Hot and Cool, (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1969), p. 54.
- 41 Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith: An Introduction to the Semantic Dilemma of the Early Church, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 161. So also Dahl, art. cit., p. 135.
- 42 Scholes, op. cit., p. 9.
- 43 Cf. Frye, Criticism, pp. 89-91.
- 44 Ricoeur, "Fiction", p. 7.
- 45 Richard E. Palmer, "Toward a Postmodern Interpretive Self-Awareness", Journal of Religion 55/3 (1975), p. 313.
- 46 A. M. Hunter, "The Proclamation of the Kingdom", Interpretation, XIV (1960), 440-454.
- 47 Bernard Jacobson, "James Levine on Verdi and Mozart" in High Fidelity, Dec. 1978, p. 98.
- 48 As I write this brief paragraph, I think of Soren Kierkegaard's work, especially, The Point of View for My Work as An Author, ed., Benjamin Nelson, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p. 35.

- 49 Cf. Roger Hazelton, "Theological Analogy and Metaphor" in Semeia 13 (1978). The Poetics of Faith, Pt. 2, 155-175.
- 50 Frye, Criticism, p. 72.
- 51 This is usually noted with a certain sadness as in W. J. Moulton, "parable" in A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, ed., James Hastings, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 315. This is akin to Ricoeur's approach of playing the metaphors, one against the others, in Symbolism of Evil.
- 52 Tannehill, op. cit., p. 30, writes: "The text itself wishes to preach, to call forth faith and obedience. We will miss the significance of the text's forceful and imaginative language if we do not recognize this."

On Parables

Many complain that the words of the wise are always merely parables and of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have. When the sage says: "Go over," he does not mean that we should cross to some actual place, which we could do anyhow if the labor were worth it; he means some fabulous yonder, something unknown to us, something too that he cannot designate more precisely, and therefore cannot help us here in the very least. All these parables really set out to say merely that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already. But the cares we have to struggle with every day: that is a different matter.

Concerning this a man once said: Why such reluctance? If you only followed the parables you yourselves would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares.

Another said: I bet that is also a parable.

The first said: You have won.

The second said: But unfortunately only in parable.

The first said: No, in reality: in parable you have lost.

Franz Kafka,
Parables and Paradoxes,
Ed., N. H. Glatzer,
New York: Schocken, 1961), p. 11.

First, appropriately enough, a poem:

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk
Cried, "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis very clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal
And, happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands
Thus boldly up he spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is very plain," quoth he;
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can.
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
 About the beast to grope
 Than, seizing on the swinging tail
 That fell within his scope
 "I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
 Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
 Disputed loud and long,
 Each in his own opinion
 Exceeding stiff and strong.
 Though each was partly in the right
 They all were in the wrong!¹

So the parable, like the elephant, is like a wall, spear, snake, tree, fan, and rope, but it is none of these things. Good descriptions of elephants, to say nothing of parables, are a rarity, and who has ever danced with one?

In practice, then, the task of presenting creative examples of parable retelling is not easy because of the many examples from various media that have to be reduced to print and therefore are changed or ignored and therefore are forgotten. But there is another reason too, and that is that there are few examples and even fewer good examples of creative parable retelling or creative interpretation. Most of what follows will be variations on what Wilder calls the characteristic and most effective modes of Christian communication: drama, narrative, and poem.² It should be remembered that in real life, even the worst of the examples sing, are colourful stories told, dance and play, sometimes tease the mind, occasionally attack what Crossan called the structure of expectation,³ and very, very rarely give room

for God to be God.

From the beginning I must emphasize that this is not a rich collection of the imaginative but rather a report on the "state of the art"--such as it is. Although I am glad to be able to bring together material from many sources and though I shall conclude that as creative attempts at retelling the parables the examples suffer serious inadequacies, I also conclude that they at least point in the direction that must be travelled.

Paraphrase

There are times when an open or disguised paraphrase has been employed to help the parable come alive with all of its resonances. Paraphrase, however, tends to emphasize the moralistic dimension of the parable. Consider the following examples, beginning with my retelling of the parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 11:1-9):

Once upon a time there was a Manager of Household Finance Company office who was fired because of poor management. "What can I do?" he asked himself. "Garbage collecting isn't my kind of work, and welfare isn't my kind of leisure. I'd better get in the right company fast." So he called his clients to his office and calculated the outstanding debts. "\$2000? I'll rewrite it for \$1000." "\$1000? Here is a new contract for \$400."

At least this retelling avoids moralizing and in practice led my auditors to shake their heads with the delight of agreement or to go away muttering or musing, and sometimes both.

Charles Carlston once told about a class of adults to whom he was "teaching" the parables. He suggested to them that they act out the parable of "The Prodigal Daughter." A slight change of content turned the group to a creative effort. The story they enacted was of a daughter who got money from her parents for a trip to Europe. While in Europe she spent all her parents' hard-earned money, got pregnant, and let out her baby for adoption. Penniless, desperate, and dispirited, she returned to her parents' home. The other sister of the household experienced shame, bitterness, and confusion. She simply couldn't understand why her parents arranged a welcome-home party. She couldn't understand grace. This retelling sticks to the deep meanings of the original parable, yet it also speaks with a freshness and vitality that throws light back on the original parable. Not that we could elucidate greater knowledge of the parable, but only that we come closer, at least, to an empathetic understanding of the parable.

I have wondered if the emotional impact of the original parable of the Prodigal would come closer to being realized

if instead the story, in our day, was told of a woman who insisted on her half of the assets accrued in a marriage and moved to Chicago to live "a free and independent lifestyle." With capital expended, the woman resorted to prostitution to pay her room and board. Waking up to her condition, she returned to her husband, who heard her car in the driveway and rushed out to greet her and welcome her--as his wife.

John Dominic Crossan offers outlines of two ways in which the parable of The Good Samaritan can be retold. In the first instance, Crossan establishes the context of the storyteller as a priest in a Roman Catholic pulpit in Belfast. Crossan writes: "The wounded man 'lived on the Falls Road,' that is, obliquely, he was one of us. A member of the I.R.A. passed him by. So did a Catholic nun. A Protestant terrorist stopped and helped him." In the second version the storyteller has just returned from Vietnam. "The wounded person is a woman correspondent for NBC. Those who pass by without helping her are, first, an American Green Beret and, second, an ARVN soldier. She is saved, finally, by a guerilla fighting with the Viet Cong."³

I have imagined telling the story in Kenora with the passers-by being a United Church minister and a Presbyterian elder-doctor and the helper an Indian. Of course, such a telling might lead to the same hostility and attempts to bargain for

a different "helper" that Crossan experienced in his attempts at retelling. Similar results might be obtained in some sections of Toronto if the helper is a Pakistani. Leonhard Ragaz, writing in 1944 (!) suggested the startling nature of the parable (Es gibts nichts Revolutionares als die Gleichnisse Jesu⁴) by proposing as participants a Nazi and a Jew and as another possibility a Pious Person (Frommen) and an atheist-communist.⁵

Another parable paraphrase that was often quoted a few years ago was written by a young person in jail (and very much reflects his perspective). It is the parable of The Lost Sheep and is entitled "The One Used Car That Was Snitched":

There was a used-car lot at the corner of Main and Fillmore. The owner had one hundred heaps on it. If one of the heaps was snitched would the owner go and look for it? You bet he would. He would never give up looking till he found it. Suppose he found it at North and Main. What would he do? Well, he would "rev it up, man" to see if it's O.K. When he gets it back to the yard he would show it to the gang to have it checked out. If it checks out O.K. they would all be happy, 'cause that one heap is just as important as the ninety-nine that no one stole. Well, this is the way it will be when one guy goes straight. One guy is just as important to God as ninety-nine who have always been O.K. This is for real--God is just as interested in you as the used-car lot owner is in his heap.⁶

As I write this, I am in Newfoundland and wonder how the parable would sound if told about a fishing fleet owner who had all ships return--but one.

Such retelling at least attempts to transfer the emotional impact of the original parable. It is also culturally conditioned in a way that perhaps cannot be avoided except in rare circumstances.

An unusual paraphrase of the parable of The Last Judgement (Mt. 25:31-46) has been much quoted:

For when I was hungry, you were obese
Thirsty and you were watering your lawn
A stranger and you called the police
and were glad to see me taken away.
Naked and you were saying, "I don't have
a thing to wear--I must get some new
clothes tomorrow."
Ill and you asked, "Is it contagious?"
In prison and you said, "That's where
your kind belong."⁷

It happened, so begins my own paraphrase of the parable of The Lost Sheep (Lost Coin), on a hot, humid day in July at the local beach. The place was crowded and confused. "My son!" the woman screamed. "Where is my son?" The alarm went up all along the beach; the air was electric with anticipation. The lifeguard, ignoring everything and everyone else, searched the sand and the waves until the child was found--alive. On the shore, the happy mother shouted her joy and offered hotdogs and cokes to all who would join the party.

A paraphrase such as this one is heard quite differently when read by a class of graduate students than when heard by the annual meeting of, for example, "The Independent Order of the Daughters of the Empire." Part of the bite is in the

context and in the delivery, a point I have underlined (above).

Clarence Jordan is well known for his effective paraphrasing of the parables. As an example, he retells the parable of The Treasure in the Field (Mt. 13:44):

The kingdom of God is like a man plowing in a field. He discovers a treasure, a box. He's plowing his old ox there. All of a sudden he hits something and he thinks it's a rock or a stump, and yet he sees it glitter like metal and he quickly throws his plow aside. He scratches around and finds it is a treasure box.

What does he do? Well, he might say, "You know, this is a very wonderful discovery I've got. I think I will go to school and write a Ph.D. dissertation on treasure-hunting." But this isn't what he does. In his great excitement, this guy has the ability to decide on a clear-cut decisive course of action. He says, "I'm goin' to sell all I've got and buy that field."

He's got a sign up in the classified ads. "For sale: one house; For sale: one fiberglass boat; For sale: this and that." He is goin' out of business. But is he? He's just gettin' ready to go into business. This man knows what he's doin'.⁸

Sometimes a kind of praying (that is related to paraphrase) is told with the parable and can be effective as far as it posits an imaginative dialogue that sits alongside of but, let me insist again, does not pretend to explain the parable. Rex Chapman has several prayers that fall into this category. As an example I quote a prayer that follows the parable of

The Last Place at Table (Lk 14:7-11):

Status.
 Academic hoods, Lord?
 Reserved seats?
 Jockeying for position?
 Those letters after a man's name?
 Some Christians more reverend than others?
 Titles?
 To want to be seen to be somebody is the
 real inferiority complex.
 It reveals the shifting source of our search
 for salvation.
 It reveals that we are still young on the road
 to maturity.
 Enable me to be myself, without side, without
 pretence.
 Strengthen my knowledge that I am accepted by
 you, Lord.
 This is the only ultimate status that I know.
 But there is more subtle play still, Lord,
 especially potent because it seems to be
 in keeping with the style of the parable.
 Playing down accomplishments, the forced
 humility, taking the back seat deliberately
 so as to be seen to be brought to the front.
 Then are not respect and status doubly sure?
 Enable me to put the other man first, Lord.
 Strengthen my knowledge that I am accepted
 by you.
 This is the only ultimate status that I know.⁹

Writing in and for and being part of an academic community,
 I dare not ask if the "prayer" finds response, let alone
 agreement.

Through the years commentators have sometimes retold the
 parables using biography or autobiography as a form of
 paraphrase. As an autobiographical version of The Lost
 Sheep and The Lost Coin, I was in a crowded lake in Indiana

when a girl cried out in despair that she had lost her contact lens. Dutifully, the lifeguards and others began to look for the lens, but it was evident that a tiny bit of glass could not be found in a mile of sand with hundreds of people trampling a constantly changing sand floor. Miraculously, the lens was found! The beach was ecstatic as we shared in the finding.

No, the parable is not as effective as the original, and the reason, it seems to me, is that the contact lens is an inanimate object and relatively easily replaced and does not have the same value as the coin or sheep of the gospels. It is simply hard to tell good stories, and the temptation is therefore to explain, or attempt to explain, the original.

A biographical story that I have spoken in relation to The Good Samaritan is written by Steven Truscott, a then fifteen-year-old convict, being transferred to another jail:

My (police) escorts chatted in the front seat and ignored me. In fact, the first words they addressed to me after leaving Goderich jail was when we stopped for lunch at a highway restaurant near Orangeville. The sheriff spoke then. He said, "Get out, we're going to eat."

I stumbled awkwardly out of the car into a parking lot crowded with cars. I dreaded entering the restaurant in chains and asked the sheriff to remove them. He refused.

I was to dream of that lunch many times over the years. Standing handcuffed and shackled before a dozen gaping faces does something to you inside. They can examine your armpits and spray you with disinfectant in prison. But when they denude you in public, they destroy you.

I'm going to give the sheriff and his deputy the benefit of the doubt. I'm going to say they got no sadistic pleasure out of walking me into that crowded place. Perhaps they were just too stupid to realize what they were doing.

But I could only shuffle my feet, and the shackles made an awful noise on the marble floor and suddenly everybody was looking at me. At one table a man even dropped his fork in surprise.

I was a freak, sitting at a table later with a steak I couldn't cut. I just couldn't use the knife and fork at all. My handcuffs kept hitting the plate.

And then the waitress came. She was in her late twenties, with deep red hair and a sad, warm smile. I had been aware that she had been watching me for some time. Anyway, she took the utensils from my hands, and cut the meat into small chunks. Then she returned the tools to me.

"Can you make it now?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," I said, thinking of the trouble I had caused her.

She glanced quickly at the officers and back at me. "I'm sorry, too," she said.¹⁰

Somehow this retelling is effective in being read or told to an audience. Is it the power of the story itself? Is it my voice, my conviction that comes through? It appears to be the latter, for it is possible to read the story in such a way as to reduce the potential emotional impact.

With footnotes the story can be quickly reduced to an object for scholastic anatomy.

The parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus may be effectively heard alongside biographical reflections about Alfred Nobel.

One morning in 1888 Nobel, inventor of dynamite, the man who had spent his life amassing a fortune from the manufacture and sale of weapons of destruction, awoke to read his own obituary. The obituary was printed as a result of a simple journalistic error--Alfred's brother had died, and a French reporter carelessly reported the death of the wrong brother. Any man would be disturbed under the circumstances, but to Alfred Nobel the shock was overwhelming. He saw himself as the world saw him--"dynamite King," the great industrialist who had made an immense fortune from explosives. This--as far as the general public was concerned--was the entire purpose of his life. None of his true intentions--to break down the barriers that separated men and ideas--were recognized or given serious consideration. He was quite simply a merchant of death, and for that alone would he be remembered. As he read his obituary with horror, Nobel resolved to make clear to the world the true meaning and purpose of his life. This could be done through the final disposition of his fortune. His last will and testament would be the expression of his life's ideals . . . the result was the most valued of prizes given to those who have done most for the cause of world peace.¹¹

These examples, seventeen in all, at once point up the problems and strengths of paraphrase as an imaginative approach to parable retelling. Sometimes the paraphrases are strained, as with the parable of The Last Place at Table and Rex Chapman's prayer. Sometimes the paraphrase is too culturally

conditioned, as with the parable retelling of Clarence Jordan. Very often the paraphrase stresses the moralistic, as with Duckworth's paraphrase of the parable of The Last Judgement. Most of the paraphrases also assume a knowledge of the original parable as well--thus limiting their effectiveness as parable. At their best they are like good allegory--allegory that does not displace the original story but alongside of it tells another story. Not one of the paraphrases is memorable, and not one of them is as good as or an adequate substitution for the parables of the New Testament, but together they suggest an approach that has merit and a potential yet to be realized.

Short Story

An occasional contemporary interpreter has noted the power of a particular story to illuminate a parable. It will be readily apparent that the short story told as a commentary on, or set alongside of, a parable will take on that relationship which in our time is called, in pejorative tones, allegory. There is, as I have maintained, no way around the allegory. There is good allegory and poor allegory, but in commentary of any kind there is always allegory.

Many years ago I was introduced to Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews, and after reading Book I, Chapter XII (containing many surprising adventures which Joseph Andrews met with on the road, scarce credible to those who have never travelled

in a stage-coach), I pencilled a marginal notation, "Good Samaritan." I was delighted to read J. D. Crossan's notation of the same chapter as an "indirect commentary" on the parable of The Good Samaritan. The story in Fielding reads that Joseph, travelling on foot, was met by "two fellows in a narrow lane" and was robbed. Joseph asked for a little of his money (a little mercy) and met the following response:

". . . and both together fell to be-labouring poor Joseph with their Sticks, till they were convinced they had put an end to his miserable Being: They then stript him entirely naked, threw him into a Ditch, and departed with their Booty." It is an eighteenth-century version of Jesus' summary, "fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead."

The successive arrival of Priest, Levite, and Samaritan is developed by Fielding into the arrival of a coach so that there is a simultaneous dialogue between the negative and positive reactions of the travellers to the man in the ditch. The coach has six main characters: Postillion, Coachman, Lady, her Footman, Old Gentleman, Young Lawyer. These engage in parodic debate over four major points (recall the Samaritan's action): to stop or not, to help or not, to transport or not, to clothe or not).

To Stop or Not? The Postillion wants to stop. The Coachman objects that "we are confounded late, and have no time to look after dead Men." The Lady wants to stop out of curiosity.

To Help or Not? The Coachman asks who will "pay a Shilling for his Carriage the four Miles": and the two gentlemen refuse to do so. But the lawyer's reiterated warnings of their legal responsibilities make them all agree "to join with the Company in giving a Mug of Beer for his Fare."

To Clothe or Not? Lawyer and Gentleman refuse because they are cold and wish to keep their overcoats. The Coachman ("who had two great Coats spread under him") and the Lady's Footman refuse lest their coats become bloody. Finally, it is the Postillion "(a Lad who hath been since transported for robbing a Hen-roost) had voluntarily stript off a great Coat, his only Garment, at the same time swearing a great Oath (for which he was rebuked by the Passengers) 'that he would rather ride in his Shirt all his Life, than suffer a Fellow-Creature to lie in so miserable a Condition.'"

Coachman, Lady and Footman, Lawyer, and Gentleman all refuse assistance or do so for self-serving reasons. But it is the Postillion, the lowest member of the Coach hierarchy, one whose rebuked swearing is an omen of his future penal exile, who stops, who goes to Joseph, and alone will clothe him with his own and only outer garment and so make transportation to shelter possible.¹²

Crossan calls this "the only adequate commentary ever written on Jesus' famous story."¹³ It is of note that this "adequate commentary" is a story, not a lengthy series of explanations. Still, it is not easily denied that the Fielding "version" of the parable is as moralistic as many sermons. It is allegory with a moralistic bent.

Crossan provides another example of an indirect commentary on the parable of The Good Samaritan. It is Leo Tolstoy's short example story "What Men Live By":

Simon the shoemaker sees something near a roadside shrine. "To his surprise it really was a man, alive or dead, sitting naked, leaning motionless against the shrine. Terror seized the shoemaker, and he thought, 'Someone has killed him, stripped him, and left him here. If I meddle I shall surely get into trouble.'" But he relents, covers the man with his own coat, and takes him home. He helps Simon so adeptly at his craft that "from all the district round people came to Simon for their boots, and he began to be well off." Finally, the stranger reveals that he is an angel but before he departs he recalls their first meeting. "When the man saw me he frowned and became still more terrible, and passed me by on the other side. I despaired; but suddenly I heard him coming back."¹⁴

Here again the allegorical and moralistic nature of the story as it is set alongside the parable is clearly evident.

Not all of the discussion nor all of the arguments belong to philosophers. Those who use poetic voices have something to say, and I suggest that that is an authentic approach, and if it appeals to the imagination, a very good approach indeed. Margery Williams does precisely this in her children's book The Velveteen Rabbit:

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day . . . Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stickout handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."¹⁵

On the surface there is no relationship between this story and any of the parables. Yet the reading of the story in relation to The Prodigal Son is very interesting indeed. If the parable is read alongside the story from The Velveteen Rabbit and then the parable is read again, the story functions as a better than average commentary. It is, in practice, a counter-parable that strongly leads back to the original.

The parable of The Watchful Doorkeeper/Servants (Mk. 13:34-37) springs to life when it is read beside a story entitled "The True Waiting" by Elie Wiesel. He writes:

Having concluded that human suffering was beyond endurance, a certain Rebbe went up to heaven and knocked at the Messiah's gate.

"Why are you taking so long?" he asked him. "Don't you know mankind is expecting you?"

"It's not me they are expecting," answered the Messiah. "Some are waiting for good health and riches. Others for serenity and knowledge. Or peace in the home and happiness. No, it's not me they are awaiting."

At this point, they say, the Rebbe lost patience and cried: "So be it! If you have but one face, may it remain in shadow! If you cannot help men, all men, resolve their problems, all their problems, even the most insignificant, then stay where you are, as you are. If you still have not guessed that you are bread for the hungry, a voice for the old man without heirs, sleep for those who dread night, if you have not understood all this and more: that every wait is a wait for you, then you are telling the truth: indeed, it is not you that mankind is waiting for."

The Rebbe came back to earth, gathered his disciples, and forbade them to despair:

"And now the true waiting begins."¹⁶

It is not suggested that the stories are the same but only that there are similarities enough that the resultant discord and harmony will give new life to the original parable. It becomes or can become again a paradigm for thought and life.

Sometimes, story is told in the guise of commentary, as can be illustrated with Karl Barth's exposition of the parable of The Good Samaritan. In reading the commentary I found it effective in that it appealed to my imagination; it connected my attention and carried my interest. The lawyer who introduces the parable is clothed with flesh, as it were, and becomes chief participant in the parable. The retelling is long and, as with most good stories, excerpting is both hazardous and difficult.

The lawyer ~~asks about~~ eternal life, because he is very much in the tradition of Israel, as a prominent member with special privileges. Jesus praises him for his knowledge of the two-fold commandment of loving God and neighbour and challenges him to do it. The lawyer in his sincerity asks, "And who is my neighbour?" He does not (Barth notes) ask, "And who is God?" The lawyer thinks he knows that. Luke regards him as mortally ill and unaware that he must live by mercy. Indeed, he seeks instead to live by his own intention and ability and to present himself as a righteous man before God. Barth underlines this and then asks, "Why does he not go on to ask: Who is God? What is loving? Above all . . . what is the 'doing' which these commandments require?" His question revealed that though he could recite the commandments he did not really know them. Had he known who his neighbour is, he would not

have wished to justify himself. Jesus' final question to the lawyer (who was neighbour in the parable) required the lawyer to answer "the one showing mercy."

And that is the only point of the story, unequivocally stated by the text. For the lawyer, who wants to justify himself and therefore does not know who is his neighbour, is confronted not by the poor wounded man with his claim for help but by the anything but poor Samaritan who makes no claim at all but is simply helpful. It is the Samaritan who embodies what he wanted to know. This is the neighbour he did not know. All very unexpected: for the lawyer had first to see that he himself is the man fallen among thieves and lying helpless by the wayside; then he has to note that the others who pass by, the priest and the Levite, the familiar representatives of the dealings of Israel with God, all one after the other do according to the saying of the text: "He saw him and passed by on the other side"; and third, and above all, he has to see that he must be found and treated with compassion by the Samaritan, the foreigner, whom he believes he should hate, as one who hates and is hated by God. He will then know who is his neighbour, and will not ask concerning him as though it were only a matter of the casual clarification of a concept. He will then know the second commandment, and consequently the first as well. He will then not wish to justify himself, but will simply love the neighbour, who shows him mercy. He will then love God, and loving God will inherit eternal life.¹⁷

Continuing at some length, Barth concludes that we do not hear what becomes of the lawyer or whether or not he finally learns the meaning rather than the mere recitation of the law.

Very effective is Barth's retelling, for the lawyer takes on a personality, is given a history and a possible future. The parable is told but told as if it were about the lawyer.

In Barth's commentary on The Prodigal Son, he seems to be aware of his tendency to move to story: He writes:

" . . . it is . . . possible not to do full justice to the passage, to miss what is not expressly stated but implied in what is stated, and therefore necessary to what is stated, as that which is said indirectly."¹⁸ On struggling with a possible way of retelling the parable (to include the Gentile world) Barth suggests the presence in the text of Israel as the elder son and the Gentile world as the younger:

There is no explicit mention of this relationship to the Gentiles in the text. But is it not there, as everywhere where the New Testament deals with this 'am ha'aretz? Was it not definitely in the mind of the third Evangelist with his very pronounced universalistic interest? Is it really read into the text? Is it not the case that we cannot really expound the text without taking it into consideration - not in direct exegesis, because it is not there - but in and with and under what is said directly? Do we not fail to do full justice to the passage if we ignore this relationship?¹⁹

Barth then asks about the presence of Jesus in the parable and suggests an "indirect exegesis." He writes:

In the parable, then, Jesus is "the running out of the father to meet his son." Jesus is "hidden in the kiss which the father gives his son." Jesus is the power of the son's recollection of his father and home, and his father's fatherliness and readiness to forgive.²⁰

Such an interpretation, Barth insists, is not allegorical but "legitimate." Still, he professes some hesitation with this approach (after making his points!) and therefore retells the parable from the side of the going out and coming in of the son whom Barth consciously raises to Everyman. For example, "the way of the latter is in fact the way into the far country of a lost human existence . . ." ²¹ Even the most cautious exposition, Barth suggests, will recognize the need for a typological and particularly christological exposition. What Barth, in fact, does is outline two different and legitimate ways of retelling the story and chooses a third option. Barth is not usually considered a storyteller, but to some extent at least, storyteller he is. ²²

In his popularly written The Cross and the Prodigal, ²³ Kenneth Bailey not only provides, from his years of living with Islam and in the Middle East, insight into the assumptions and subtleties behind the parable of Luke 15, he does so in a very interesting manner. Included are many fascinating and important comments, as, for example, in relation to the parable of The Lost Sheep. This should

be seen not as a strict historically based exposition but as biographical insights in the guise of interpretation:

A Pharisee owning a hundred sheep would hire a shepherd. He would lose them all rather than wander into the wilderness after them.²⁴

. . . it is the shepherd's willingness to go after the one that gives the ninety-nine their real security.²⁵

Property is owned communally. The loss of a sheep from the flock is a loss to the entire family community . . . the family group sustains the loss and then rejoices together when the lost is found.²⁶

Christ's subtle humor shows through in this verse (7). The 'righteous' who 'need no repentance' do not exist. Naturally heaven's joy over them will be minimal.²⁷

In reference to the parable of The Lost Coin, Bailey writes:

. . . village life is extremely dull. A woman finding a lost coin is a big event. It naturally merits a party. She could relate ad nauseam how she lost the coin, when she discovered her loss, where she searched, and how she felt when she finally saw it glinting there in the soft light of the oil lamp.²⁸

Alongside of several parables, Ewald Bash tells another related story. These are unfortunately too interpretative and specific to permit the continuance of the tension within the parables. On occasion, however, they have a suggestiveness that is somewhat effective. For example, Bash, before quoting the parable of The Good Samaritan, tells the story

of "The Samaritan Who Fell Among Friends."

The Samaritan went down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among friends. "Look," they said, "we're setting up a monument to your fine act of courage along this road. Many people are contributing. In fact, a Jerusalem priest and a Levite are co-chairmen of the drive for the memorial. As they said, 'We've walked that route many a time, and it's an honor to be identified with this brotherly deed.'"

The friends went on to say that the committee had been able to enlist the Jerusalem press and TV stations so that the memorial fund had grown staggeringly large in almost no time at all.

"It's surprising," said one, "how people respond when there's a worthwhile cause."

The largeness of the fund had prompted the campaign managers to hire a leading sculptor of the country to produce the memorial statue . . . The Levite was now racing ahead in the conversation. "You've got to think big about this. We're trying to sell the rights for your story to a place called Hollywood. Their spectaculars are phenomenal financially. We might be able to put statues and chapels all over the place if we clear the money I think we might."²⁹

Bash is a fairly good storyteller in his own right and tells a story as a way of interpreting the parable. The story he tells, however, tends towards the moralistic and misses the cutting edge of the parable.

In Barth's case, he tells a story about a lawyer, and in Bailey's he reflects on his experience in the Middle East as

he retells the parables in the form of a commentary. Though quite different, both efforts effectively arise out of, and appeal to, the imagination.

Music

Of course, parables can be told or retold in music as well, and music is well adapted for the transfer of insight through the strong emotions it generates in its own right. The following song reverberates with the parable of The Lost Sheep (Mt. 18:10-14 and Lk. 15:3-7). It is effective communication by an unknown black pastor (as previously noted by a nineteenth-century storyteller preacher):

De massa ob de sheepfol',
 Dat guards de sheepfol' bin,
 Look out in de gloomerin' meadows
 Wha'r de long night rain begin:
 So he call to de hirelin' shepa'd, -
 "Is my sheep, is dey all come in?"
 Oh, den says de hirelin' shepa'd,
 "Des's some, dey's black and thin,
 And some, dey's po' ol' sedda's,
 But de res' dey's all brung in, -
 But de res' dey's all brung in."

Den de massa ob de sheepfol'
 Dat guards de sheepfol' bin,
 Goes down in de gloomerin' meadows,
 Whar de long night rain begin;
 So he le' down de ba's ob de sheepfol',
 Callin' sof', "Come in, come," -
 Callin' sof', "Come in, come in!"

Den up t'ro de gloomerin' meadows,
 T'ro' de col' night rain and sin',
 And up t'ro' de gloomerin' rain-paf
 Wha'r de sleet fa' pie'cin' thin,
 De po' los' sheep ob de sheepfol'
 Dey all comes gadderin' in, -
 De po' los' sheep ob de sheepfol'
 Dey all comes gadderin' in.³⁰

An album that provides an effective counter-parable to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is Jethro Tull's Aqualung. Aqualung is the ragged drunk with rattling breath (deep sea diver sounds) who sits watching the world go by:

In the shuffling madness
Of the locomotive breath,
Runs the all-times loser
Head long to his death.³¹

Aqualung protests that the rich men "have got the whole thing all wrong," and in life and death Aqualung cries for justice in a world where God seems to be absent.

The Medical Mission Sisters have attracted great interest through their parable-songs that paraphrase, including "Ballad of the Prodigal Son" in I Know the Secret, "He Bought the Whole Field" on the same album, "The Sower" and "Knock, Knock" on the album Knock, Knock, Knock. I once began a list of songs that relate directly or indirectly to the parable of The Good Samaritan, but the list is long and still incomplete:

"When I Need a Neighbour," Carter, Songs for the Seventies, No. 50.

"Am I My Brother's Keeper," Ferguson, Songs for the Seventies, No. 39

"Reach Out to Your Neighbour," Copland, Folk Encounter, No. 17

"Love Them Now," Avery & Marsh, Folk Encounter, No. 41.

"They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love," Peter Scholtes, Folk Encounter, No. 20.

"Whatsoever You Do," Jabusch, Catholic Book of Worship, No. 366.

"Love, Love Your Brother," Boucher, Jesus Folk, No. 12.

"The Jericho Road," Ainger, New Life, No. 26.

"Creative Love," Kaan, Pilgrim Praise, No. 43.

"He Ain't Heavy," The Hollies.

"Who Is My Neighbour," Medical Mission Sisters, Seasons.

"I am a Rock," Paul Simon.

With the exception of the last song, which is "secular," it should be noted that church musicians tend to treat the parables as example stories, and this is reinforced by their usually being sung in a minor key.

A "secular" and popular song that illumines the parable of The Pearl, The Lost Sheep, and The Lost Coin is entitled "Rags to Riches":

I know I'll go from rags to riches
 If you will only say you care
 Although my pocket may be empty
 I'll be a millionaire.³²

The parable of The Foolish Farmer retains its sense of urgency when told alongside of a song from the musical "For Heaven's Sake." Cheerful Doer sings, "Use me, Oh Lord, but not just now":

As soon as I've paid the mortgage,
As soon as the kids are grown;
As soon as they've finished college,
As soon as they're on their own:

I want you to use me, Oh Lord,
Use me, Oh Lord,
But NOT just now . . .

As soon as I've reached retirement,
As soon as I draw my pension,
Just as soon as I am dead!³³

I have not been able to find many songs that effectively retain the tension within the parable, and examples of songs that establish a tension with the parable are also meager. A promising area for signs of creativity has only revealed the extent to which moralizing the parable is extant.

Few indeed are those who have answered the call of Marianne Moore for "literalists of the imagination" who can present for inspection "imaginary gardens with real toads in them."³⁴

- 1 John Godfrey Saxe, "The Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant," in Concern: Communication, ed. Jeffrey Schrank (Morristown, N.J.: Silver Burdett Co., 1970), p. 16f.
- 2 Wilder, Language, p. 51.
- 3 Crossan, Dark Interval, p. 106.
- 4 Leonhard Ragaz, Die Gleichnisse Jesu: Seine Sozigge Botschoft (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1971 [1944]), p. 8.
- 5 Ibid., p. 87.
- 6 Carl F. Burke, God Is For Real, Man (New York: Association Press, 1967), p. 63.
- 7 William C. Duckworth, "The Parable of the Last Judgement," in Alive Now!, March/April, 1975, p. 29. According to Dodd this is not a parable but a short apocalypse, op. cit., p. 65.
- 8 Jordan, op. cit., p. 18.
- 9 Rex Chapman, A Kind of Praying (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1970), p. 28.
- 10 "The Story of Steven Truscutt," Weekend Magazine, October 9, 1971.
- 11 Robert Raines quoting Nicholas Halasz in Creative Brooding (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1968 [1964]), p. 121.
- 12 Crossan, Raid, pp. 104-107, and in Patte, Semiology, pp. 260-263.
- 13 Ibid., p. 263.
- 14 Ibid., p. 260f.
- 15 Margery Williams, The Velveteen Rabbit (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 16f.
- 16 Elie Wiesel, "The True Waiting" in Imperial Messages: One Hundred Modern Parables, ed. Howard Schwartz (New York: Avon Books, 1967), p. 315.
- 17 Karl Barth, Preaching Through the Christian Year (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 189-191.
- 18 Ibid., p. 162.
- 19 Ibid.

- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid., p. 163.
- 22 Joseph C. McLelland writing of Barth says: "The refrain of freedom and humor runs throughout his work: theology is 'a peculiarly carefree and, indeed, gay science.'" In The Clown and the Crocodile (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970), p. 148.
- 23 Bailey, op. cit.
- 24 Ibid., p. 21.
- 25 Ibid., p. 22.
- 26 Ibid., p. 23.
- 27 Ibid., p. 34.
- 28 Ibid., p. 25.
- 29 Ewald Bash, Visit to Five Brothers and Other Double Exposures (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 85f.
- 30 Quoted in William M. Taylor, Parables of Our Saviour (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1898), p. 318f.
- 31 Jethro Tull, "Locomotive Breath," Aqualung, Warner Bros. Records, MJ 2035.
- 32 Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, "Rags to Riches" (New York: Sanders Publishing).
- 33 Helen Kromer, For Heaven's Sake! (Boston: Baker's Plays, 1961), p. 38.
- 34 Marianne Moore, "Poetry," in Ellmann, op. cit., p. 553.

What you never get in literature
are just the sheep that nibble the
grass or just the flowers that
bloom in the spring.

Northrop Frye,
The Educated Imagination
(Toronto: C.B.C. Publica-
tions, 1963), p. 25.

Audacity - reverence. These must mate
And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,
To wrestle with the angel - Art.

Herman Melville,
"Art" in The New Oxford
Book of American Verse,
ed. Richard Ellmann (New
York: Oxford University
Press, 1976), p. 305.

13 A Workshop for Hermeneutics II

For ease in handling, I have divided this section of the thesis into two parts. In the first part I have provided examples of parables in paraphrase, story, and music. In this section I shall consider some illustrations from poetry, audio-visuals, drama, and contemporary parables.

Again, I emphasize that good examples are scarce. Especially scarce, in both scholarly and popular books, are effective counter-parables and antiform. Most of the examples I show are not very good, and the reasons, as I have indicated (above), are many: first, the penchant for moralizing the parables over many years; second; the literal-mindedness (i.e., non-poetic or imagistic) of interpretation; third, the suppression of story in favour of the discursive and conceptual in the written word; fourth, the hegemony of abstract language in theology.

I shall attempt to avoid attaching meaning to the retold parables (and therefore will not attach meanings to the meanings, etc.). Likeness requires no explanation, and contrast creates a parabolic meaning that may or may not be effective.

Poetry

The parable of The Prodigal Son reverberates with meaning when it is told alongside of Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man." I quote the last part of this well-known poem:

"Warren," she said, "he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time."

"Home," he mocked gently.

"Yes, what else but home?
It all depends on what you mean by home.
Of course he's nothing to us, any more
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail."

"Home is the place where, when you have to go
there,
They have to take you in."

"I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve."¹

Who could not but relate the return of the younger son with the return of the hired man? The waiting father with the compassionate woman? The older brother with Warren? And is this not an example of the pervasiveness (some would say perversity) of allegorical interpretation?

A poem that leads back to and derives strength from the serendipity parables (especially The Found Pearl) bears the signature of William Shakespeare:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.²

I have tried my hand at writing a poem that draws its
inspiration from the parable of The Prodigal Son:

Old Man gasping down the road;
Old Man running like a fool,
Extravagant, lavish, abundant,
A spendthrift of love and caring.
Why should he love like this?
Reckless reaching!
Overflow of joy!
Ring and robe and fancy shoes,
Party dancing, barbeque, wine, and song.
Too much.
Too much.
Prodigal Father,
Excess of love.³

Let me rush to confession. The poetic road to hell is paved
with good intentions! As Chad Walsh has observed: "One
does not often create a poem by taking a sermon and making
it rhyme."⁴ This is precisely the approach of Thomas C.
Lane, who turns the parables into rhyming sermons. I shall
give only one example.

Ten virgins went forth in the night,
Each took a lamp as source of light,
Procession to illuminate;
The bridegroom tarries, so they wait.

Now five of these young girls were wise;
The other five were otherwise;
Indeed, of sense these were deficient,
The oil they brought was insufficient.

They waited, all, their vigil kept,
But, waiting thus, they nodded, slept;
Till, lo, at midnight came a cry,
'The bridegroom now is coming nigh!'

These virgins rose, their lamps they trimmed:
The foolish five? Their flames had dimmed:
Their lamps with oil they would refill -
They cried out - with entreaty shrill -

Unto the prudent five they cried -
 'Some of your oil to us divide,
 Our lamps have dimmed, are going out,
 'Tis lack of oil will soon them dout.'

The prudent five gave them rebuff,
 Said sadly, "We have not enough
 'Twixt you and us to thus divide;
 Go buy, and thus your needs provide.'

And so, with anxious haste they went;
 To buy some oil now their intent;
 But, while they'd gone, the bridegroom came,
 To wait for them he did not deign.

Procession-wise he brought his spouse,
 And passed they on into the house;
 Who ready were, all entered; but -
 But then? but then the door was shut!

And then the foolish five came back,
 Who, for their lamps the oil did lack,
 And found themselves debarred, shut out;
 'Sir, Sir,' they cried then, from without.

Their clamorous calls were all in vain,
 Their cries did not them entrance gain;
 The bridegroom said, 'I know you not;
 This I declare, I know you not!'

Our Lord here says, 'Be watchful then,
 The day, the hour, you know not when
 Will come the bridegroom - Son of Man.'
 Him, Son of God ere worlds began!⁵

The parable of The Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18) is set alongside Robert Frost's poem "Mending Walls" most effectively by H. H. Straton:

He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours."
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 "Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
 Before I build a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out.
 And to whom I was like to give offence.
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That wants it down." . . .⁶

A moving poem by Achterberg that echoes the parable of The Lost Sheep is quoted by de Jonge as he struggled with the parables:

For a while man is a place for God.
When an equals-sign no longer keeps things
together,
Then he is written off on a tombstone.
The agreement seems to move to
This conclusion, this abrupt end.

For God goes on, swerving away from him
With his millions. God is never alone.
There are others bidding for his attention.

For him we are full fuel cans.
When we are empty, he leaves us behind! He must
get rid of it.
All the refuse that is not in agreement with his
true being.

Since he distinguishes himself from the creation,
We die and lie scattered along the road.

If it were not for Christ, dealer in old junk.
Who had to find us in just such condition;
As though he had whispered with the Father.⁷

If we should ask "What is the meaning of this poem?,"
the proper answer is to read the poem again! We should not
attempt an explanation for it is as Archibald MacLeigh
insisted: "A poem should not mean/But be."⁸

A retelling of the parables for children in a poetic manner,
and with colourful pictures, is in a booklet-only or booklet-
and-cassette edition published by the Concordia Publishing
House. Stories include: The Good Samaritan, The Boy Who
Ran Away, Eight Bags of Gold, Jon and the Little Lost Lamb,
The House on the Rock, The King's Invitation, The Unforgiving
Servant, Two Men in the Temple, The Pearl That Changed a Life,
and Sir Abner and His Grape Pickers. The parables are

attractively presented and effectively relate to children--at least as stories that will continue with them for many years. Such a retelling, however, runs the risk of being counterproductive over the longer period, because of being, perhaps, an effective inoculation against an adult or mature understanding of the parable.⁹

Audio-Visual

Kenneth Bailey offers Arabic calligraphy as a way of beautifying and symbolically representing the text--I would think it to be, potentially, a visual trap for contemplation. An example, and its interpretation, follows:

"Behold, I" is repeated in Arabic above. All the rest of the speech is written within the "I." Everything this older son says and does is within the big "I."

He sees himself as faultless. The frame is the word "I" in Arabic. His father stands in the courtyard trying to get him to break out of the black lines of the big "I." Does he succeed? The climax of the story is missing.¹⁰

أَلَمْ
 تَعْطِنِي
 قَطُّ
 وَأَنْتَ
 لَمْ تَكُنْ
 تَعْبُدُنِي

Gave Me Anything
 And You Never
 Have Served You

Parables can be retold or new parables can be made using the visual arts such as paintings like Paula Mondersohn-Beeker's Good Samaritan and Christian Rohlf's Return of the Prodigal Son.¹¹ Motion pictures and television are of particular importance. Here a warning must be issued. Such telling or retelling must avoid the attempt to say all (and therefore to say nothing).¹² It should also be noted that, implicitly at least, films already deal with significant religious themes.¹³

Several attempts have been made to retell the parables on film. The parable of The Lost Sheep is retold (most effectively) in a twelve-minute film called The Stray.¹⁴ With thirteen children at the zoo, one of them gets lost (what tension!), but when he is found there is a great celebration. Another film of twelve minutes retells the parable of The Talents. In A Talent for Tony, Tony's artist-father was preparing for an art festival, and when problems develop, Tony learns that his talent is of great import.¹⁵ The difficulty is in transferring this visual experience to print.

A retelling of The Prodigal Son using the human voice combined with a slide set has been attempted by Swazis, produced by the Bible Society of Western Germany and

distributed by the All Africa Conference of Churches in
 2. Nairobi.¹⁶ In order to be understood by the Swazis, the
 parable was retold with many variations. The "mother"
 is consulted concerning the inheritance. The family
 wealth is in cattle. The lowest job is not that of feeding
 pigs but of sweeping the streets. The son is given a
 necklace, not a ring. Since a calf represents life, a goat,
 not a calf, is slaughtered. A print sample of the slides
 with commentary follows:

Here lives a rich man
 who has two sons, an
 elder one and a younger
 one. They are their
 father's pride.

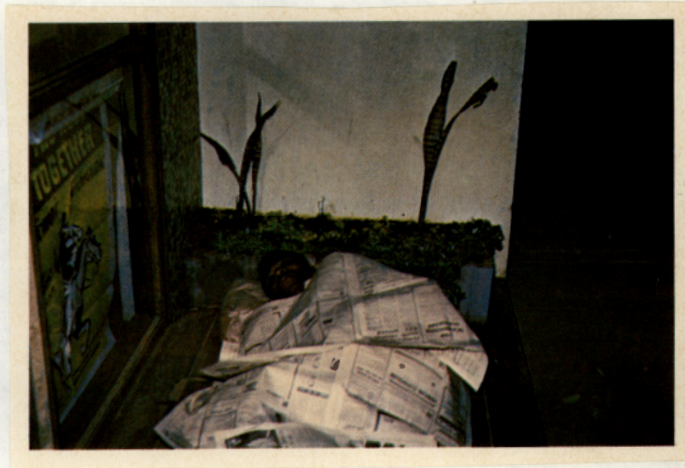


So the father consults
 with his wife about
 the request of his
 younger son. She
 advises him to give
 him his share of the
 property and then . . .
 wait and see.



He is lonely. All his friends have deserted him. He has no bed, no shelter where he could lay his body to sleep and rest.

Now he knows want and hunger.



"Who is that coming? Is that my son? Yes, he is coming back!" and he ran towards him.



"My son is back. Quick, bring new clothes for him, the best I have. Let's dress him and celebrate this day."



I am not in a position to know how effective the retelling is in Swaziland, but only to see it as an antiform for contemporary viewing of the parable--or at least the parable as example story. I should note that the parable in its retelling is no doubt much more effective with the slides and sound than in print. It is also the case that the retelling is more of a paraphrase than an attempt at a new telling of the parable and is obviously moralistic. Ah yes, as J. D. M. Derrett observed in relation to understanding the parables: "The pious are a problem."¹⁷ Indeed.

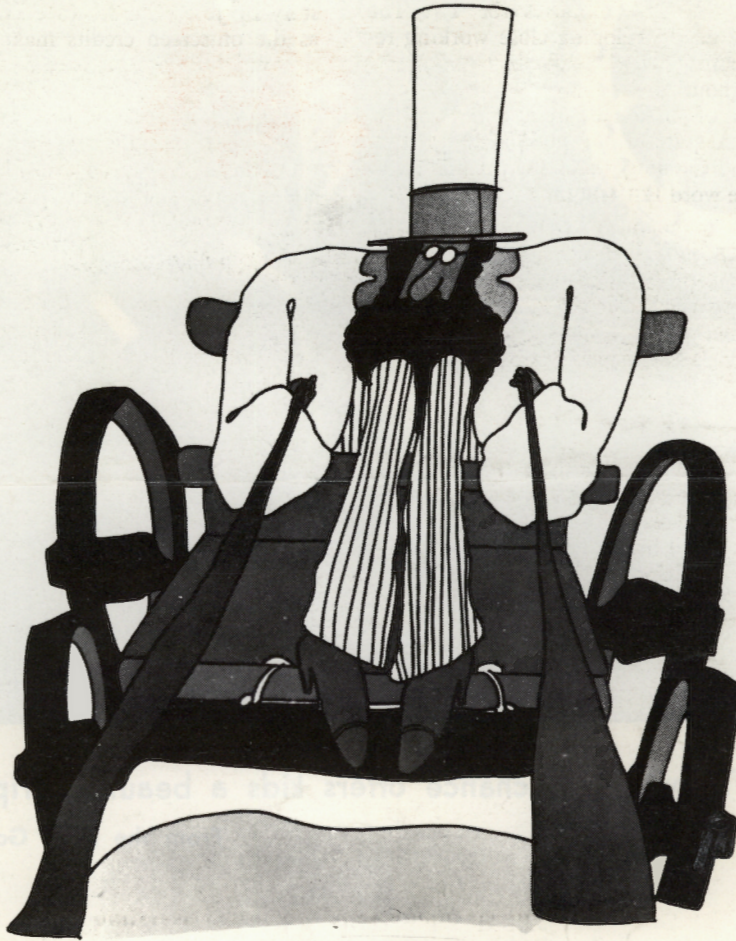
Other filmstrips explicitly re-presenting the parables include 99 Plus One (the parable of The Lost Sheep) and A Festival of Art (the parable of The Talents). Both filmstrips are designed for children and use photography as the visual medium.¹⁸ The American Bible Society has a number of parables, including The Good Samaritan, that are retold by Annie Vallotton, the illustrator of Good News for Modern Man. Ms. Vallotton tells the story while illustrating it from behind a glass panel.¹⁹ Another retelling for children is a series of six filmstrips that use contemporary children's art and, based on my experience at least, awaken interest on the part of children. The series is, appropriately enough, called Parables,²⁰ though

there is little tension in the story and no division of listeners.

The one-minute (or less) radio and television commercial offers an example of how a message can be delivered with a minimum of time and a maximum of effect. Stan Freberg, perhaps the most creative of commercial writers, turned to writing a series of radio commercials ("Out on a Limb Without Him," etc.). The results were assessed by Dennis Benson:

It seemed that he opened with a "tease" to get attention. He then introduced the message and concluded with a hook or something clever as a way of getting out. His spots sometimes delayed the message until interest had built up to a desirable level. The group was surprised to see that a religious message could be delivered through the use of humor.²¹

In the United Presbyterian Church television spot "The Good Samaritan," a cowpoke named Dan heads for town on a Saturday night. He is beaten, robbed, and left by the roadside. A parson and a judge go by but avoid involvement. A modern-day Good Samaritan, Paco Diaz, helps the unfortunate victim. The credits roll with the words "from an original story by Jesus Christ." The lyrics to the radio version carry the same message:



Judge McBee

One day a cow poke name 'o Dan
Got set on by an outlaw band.

They stole his horse, they stole his pay
And left him there half-dead that day.

Soon Parson Jones came by that way
There's Dan, he's drunk again today.

Along came Judge McBee who said,
Why get involved, he's almost dead.

Then last came by ol' Pancho Balu
Now he'd been down a time or two.

He stopped. He helped Dan come around
And saw him up and into town.

The Parson, the Judge, or Pancho Balu
Now which 'o them is most like you?

The problem with this controversial parable retelling is: Who wants to be in the position of the outsider (Samaritan)? Mexican-Americans, who had long been subjected to stereotyping,²³ objected very strongly, and as a result the spot was withdrawn from the television networks. Effective communication overcomes some conflict but engenders others. The trick is to create the right conflict. W. H. Auden: "Rummaging into his living, the poet fetches/The images out that hurt and connect."²⁴

In the theatrical (and later cinematic) musical "Godspell," the parables are told with humour and song.²⁵ The Good Samaritan is narrated by one actress while others finger-walk a broomstick. Two men engage in minstrel-style repartee as they relate the speck in your brother's eye and the plank in your own. In the film version of the same parable, the posterboards at Lincoln Center, New York, are the visual means of printing the parable while it is narrated in vaudeville patter. The parable of The Sheep and the Goats is told and acted in the context of a children's game. The Prodigal Son is pantomimed in wild exaggeration as a narrator tells the story. In the film version, a montage of old film clips (Mac Sennett, Laurel & Hardy, Mae West, and others) is combined with live mime with telling effect. In the film version, the parable of The Sower is retold in a free-form interpretation at Lincoln Center, including the singing of "All for the Best," and concludes

with a soft-shoe dance in front of the Accutron sign (!) at Times Square. The creator-director of "Godspell" reports that the idea for the show arose out of negative reaction to a dull Easter morning service. The result is stimulating indeed. Arthur Knight writes of the Columbia Pictures film version: "'Godspell,' with no religious trapping whatsoever, provides a religious experience of extraordinary intensity."²⁶ I found the parable retelling especially effective.



The unusual techniques of "Godspell" led to both a reappraisal of the hearer's religious understanding and a concomitant division of people based on the challenge to understanding. Such a division seems unavoidable when and where significant communication occurs. In an even more striking way the problem can be illustrated by the reception of the film Parable at the New York World's Fair in 1964. Not only did Robert Moses, the President of the Fair, ask the Protestant Council of New York to withdraw it,²⁸ but the parabolic presentation of Jesus as a Marcel Marceau-like clown involved in the circus of life caused members of the Fair's Steering Committee to resign over the "sacrilegious" portrayal and the "impropriety," "good taste," and "validity" of such a presentation.²⁹

Drama

Parables can be, and occasionally are, told and retold through the rich network of communications already existent in most countries. Storytellers, puppet shows, and theatre companies still retain the human dimension in communication and allow for dialogue between the informer and the informed.³⁰ If such retelling takes place, it is not readily available to the contemporary critic. There are, however, some examples of drama that we now turn to.

I do not include those simple and often effective dramatic readings or mime or dramatic readings with song or action that are a possibility for the simplest revoicing of the parables.³¹ Nor shall I do more than indicate that some people have used the simulation game technique (the parable enacted without rehearsal and with various roles assigned) as a way in which the parable can be better appreciated. Rather, I shall turn to longer and more explicitly dramatic works.

In his book Banquets and Beggars,³² W. A. Poovey dramatizes and retells six parables: The Great Feast, Lk. 14:15-24, "Excuses! Excuses!"; The Tower Builder and the King, Lk. 14:27-33, "The Costly Life"; The Rich Man and Lazarus, Lk. 16:19-31, "What If . . .?"; The Alert Servants and the Burglar, Lk. 12:35-40, "Easy Does It"; The Lost Sheep, Lk. 15:4-7, "The Lost Child"; The Patient Farmer, Mk. 4:26-29, "What's the Verdict?"

I have not found these little dramas very effective, and the reason is that the metaphoric and parabolic nature of the parables has been entirely eliminated. Instead, Poovey states, underlines, reinforces, explains, and generally leaves nothing to the imagination. Perhaps the best of the dramas is "The Lost Child," but even here the lesson is tortured. A couple with a child are talking (over many pages!):

Norman: . . . this universe is too big, too impersonal for us to expect any personal care. I believe God designed everything but now it runs like a vast machine. And you and I are just tiny unimportant cogs in the whole set up.³³

Norman: . . . It flatters our vanity to think that there's someone up there who's concerned about us. But you and I are just two among some three or four billion human animals on this unimportant little planet. We're like microscopic amoebas in a vast ocean, like specks of dust floating in the sun's rays.³⁴

Norman: . . . Elaine, he's not there. The window in his room is wide open and there are scratches on the window sill. Buzz isn't there.³⁵

Buzz is eventually found.

Norman: Whew (mopping brow).

Elaine: . . . But why were you so excited and worried when we couldn't find Buzz? Did it make any difference?

Norman: What a silly question!

Elaine: But you had just gotten through telling me that human beings are cogs, amoebas, specks of dust. Isn't Buzz that? Can't God make millions more like him?³⁶

Norman: I don't see - (Stops and thinks. The idea dawns on him.) Oh, I'm beginning to get it. You're saying we're not just specks of dust to God. We're his sons and he loves us.³⁷

Although, as I pointed out, I have not found these plays effective, they have two merits: First, they do not pretend to explain the parable. The original parable sits intact, and the play sits alongside of it. Second, they

appeal to the imagination to a far greater extent than commentaries about the parables.

As part of a family cluster approach--the learning together of people of all ages--Ted Nutting has presented several parables that he suggests can be acted out in many ways.³⁸ For example, Nutting sets the scene for the parable of The Lost Sheep by pointing out the fear and panic that children have experienced when separated from their parents in a shopping mall or crowd. Teenagers know the lostness expressed in the words: Does anybody care? Adults, too, know the lostness that is experienced with the trauma of a career or job change.

Nutting suggests several approaches to experiencing this being lost and found in a study programme. This includes "losing" and searching for a "valuable" item, role-playing being lost, children telling of their experiences at being lost, rewriting the parable in a contemporary setting, discussing how to find a "lost" friend, preparation of a collage, and finding examples of lost people (senior citizens, the poor, the rich, etc.). This approach suggests the ongoing tension in theology between those who stress the "being found" (grace) and those who first make sure that the subject experiences the lostness (sin).

Through drama, Kenneth Bailey also tells the parable of The Prodigal Son in a play he calls "Two Sons Have I Not." Although it lacks subtlety for a modern western reader, it is perhaps as interesting as structuralism and probably yields greater results. A sample may suffice: Obed is the younger son; Antipas is a sympathetic friend and fellow swineherder:

Obed: Think about it, and you'll figure it out! Before I hit the outskirts of the village, a crowd will begin to gather. First ten, then twenty, soon fifty or more children will surround me and start chanting and clapping. (He walks in a circle around the stage, chanting and clapping. He emphasizes in each case the word idiot and the word here in the following refrain.) The idiot is here, he's here, he's here. The idiot is here, he's here! (With greater intensity.) The idiot is here, he's here, he's here. The idiot is here, he's here! Then will come the taunts, mixed with thrown chunks of dried manure and garbage.

Antipas: Yes, I know. We have the same thing in a lot of little villages around here. Now mind you, in the Greek cities it's different!

Obed (continuing): Some of them will run up and tear these rags a bit more while they all laugh. When I finally reach the gate, I'll have to squat there while the doorman goes in to see if Father is home and if he is willing to receive me. At least then I will be facing them. Soon some of my old friends will assemble. Then the taunts will get more brutal. Each one will be followed by cruel laughter that will clang and vibrate like a cracked bronze gong.

Antipas: Well, can't you defend yourself at all?

Obed (exploding): Defend myself?! That's all they would need. Do you want them to roll me on the ground and start kicking me as they shout, "That'll teach you not to insult your father"? Father doesn't have to move a finger to punish me. All he has to do is wait. (Pause.) Oh, how will I endure it?³⁹

In terms of that aspect of hermeneutics that suggests making contemporary an ancient text, with its correlate of appeal to the reader/auditor, Bailey has accomplished more than most interpreters and provides an example of the effectiveness of the person with creative imagination.

The short, powerful, and well-known play "Waiting for Godot"⁴⁰ shares in this notion of waiting for one who is to come, as in the parable of The Watchful Doorkeeper/Servants (Mk. 13:34-37). In this connection I agree with the words of Martin Esslin. According to Esslin,

. . . the Theatre of the Absurd, by a strange paradox, is . . . a symptom of what probably comes nearest to being a genuine religious quest in our age; an effort, however timid and tentative, to sing, to laugh, to weep - and to growl - if not in praise of God (whose name, in Adamov's phrase, has for so long been degraded by usage that it has lost its meaning), at least in search of a dimension of the Ineffable; an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to instil in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish, to shock him out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical, complacent, and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness.⁴¹

Much contemporary drama is like parable in its function of challenging the audience in a brief format. For example, in addition to Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," we can include his "Endgame," "Krapp's Last Tape," and Eugene Ionesco's "The Chairs," "The Bald Prima Donna," and "Rhinoceros."⁴²

Parables

In his book Imperial Messages: One Hundred Modern Parables, Howard Schwartz identifies the marks of a contemporary parable as: (1) being brief (a mini-story); (2) having obvious allegorical implications; (3) being serious in intent; (4) being dependent on imagery and symbolism; (5) displaying a conscious style; (6) inspired by universal elements; and (7) having no single meaning. To this he implicitly adds (8) often having a dream-like quality and (9) not with an explicit but an implicit moral.⁴³ It is obvious from reading the book that not all of the parables fit this schema and indeed apparent that Schwartz experienced considerable difficulty in getting one hundred sometimes-not-so-brief stories that would be acceptable under the heading "parable."

Nonetheless, even with this wide net there are few fish that can be gathered as we sweep modern and ancient studies of, or sermons on, the parables of the New Testament. Other than contemporary references to the parables of Kafka and Borges and the occasional reference to Rabbinic parables (usually to illustrate the superiority of the parables of Jesus), I have drawn a blank in finding parables in books written about the parables of the New Testament. Only in German literature, and even then in a most modest manner, have I

found references to, or examples of, parables that relate to the parables of the New Testament.

Werner Brettschneider notes that Wernher de Gartenaere's thirteenth-century epic poem, "Meier Helmbrecht," is a conscious retelling of The Prodigal Son.⁴⁴ The son leaves home and after many years returns blinded, only to be driven away and killed by other farmers, after first being allowed to say his prayers. Several poems and stories of the Middle Ages allegorize the story so that home is the Church and emphasize the need not to attempt to change one's station in life.

André Gide in his short story "Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue" saw in the young son the child in himself and all people. The son searches for "new things" to become a "new man" but never finds what he is looking for. The older brother challenges him to come home, and so he must, for he can never get to the "end of the way" in his search. The story ends with the father still waiting. Rainer Maria Rilke's parable-story stresses the sense of aloneness that is experienced in the contemporary city. The son lacked the ability to love or be loved. He was driven away from his home, by his father, and could only find himself when he learned to consciously and fully accept his childhood.

In Franz Kafka's "The Homecoming" (Heimkehr), the son waits at his father's home outside the door. He will not knock, and the door does not open. Inside he thinks he hears a clock and voices. He asks himself what he would do if someone should open the door and ask for something. Wouldn't I be the same, he asks, as someone who wants to protect his own secret? The world, for Kafka, is a prison without bars. Ich am the center of the parable existing in a world full of enemies and life without accessible meaning.

"Der Verlorene Sohn" by Hans Sahl consciously echoes the biblical parable, but in what I would call an obverse manner. The son is thrown out of his father's house and after ten years returns to the sound of laughter and song. The father sends him away again:

Geh fort, mein Sohn,
fliehe diesen ort des Unheils und der Schande.⁴⁵

There is no guilt or despair or meaning, for, it appears, God is dead.

Brettschneider, in this book and an earlier book, Die Moderne Deutsche Parabel,⁴⁶ has been helpful in gathering some materials for comparisons. His conclusion that the parable as a literary form is experiencing a renaissance in Europe may be correct; it is still too early to tell. The

parables, or rather those retellings of the parables that he notes, move from the cynicism of der Gartenaere, the moralizing of the Middle Ages, the psychologizing of Gide and Rilke, to the defiant Ich of Kafka and the dead god of Hans Sahl. Here, at least, is a sharpening of the debate that always must be in theology!

In turning to the explicit use of parables in English literature, I am reduced to two parables from my own sermons: the first one I have related to the parable of The Lost Sheep, and the second, the parable of The Rich Fool:

A small boy stopped twice a day at the construction site and, raising himself to his maximum height, looked through the peephole at the rising structure. Above the peephole was a sign in three languages: No Loitering. One day the building was finished, and they came and put him into it. Above the door was a sign reading, "Reform School."⁴⁷

It happened that in a small east-end garret a certain painter decided to record his wife's great beauty with the vivid colours of his palette. Day after day she sat before him, and stroke by stroke, he brought the canvas to life. Weeks passed to months and months passed to years, and still he worked. At last, one more touch of the brush and the portrait was finished. Not just finished but alive. "It is finished!" he announced and turned to her who had given her secret. Alas, she was no more. "Dead," they said.⁴⁸

Although tempted to provide illustrations of contemporary faith-provoking or provoked-faith parables from outside overtly Christian theological writing, I shall restrict myself and limit my reader to one. This story is by Elie Wiesel:

Facing the inmates assembled on the Appel Platz, the two men seem to be acting out an unreal scene.

"Deny your faith and you will eat for an entire week," the officer is yelling.

"No," says the Jew quietly.

"Curse your God, wretch! Curse Him and you will have an easy job!"

"No," says the Jew quietly.

"Repudiate Him and I will protect you."

"Never," says the Jew quietly.

"Never? What does that mean? A minute? In a minute you will die. So then, you dog, will you finally obey me?"

The inmates hold their breath. Some watch the officer; others have eyes only for their comrade.

"God means more to you than life? More than I? You asked for it, you fool!"

He draws his gun, raises his hand, takes aim. And shoots. The bullet enters the inmate's shoulder. He sways, and his comrades in the first row see his face twist. And they hear him whisper the ancient call of the martyrs of the faith: "Adoshem hu haelokim, adoshem hu haelokim--God is God, God alone is God."

"You swine, you dirty Jew," screams the officer. "Can't you see I am more powerful than your God! Your life is in my hands, not in His! You need me more than Him! Choose me and you'll go to the hospital and you'll recover, and you'll eat, and you'll be happy!"

"Never," says the Jew, gasping.

The officer examines him at length. He suddenly seems fearful. Then he shoots a second bullet into the man's other shoulder. And a third. And a fourth. And the Jew goes on whispering, "God is God, God is . . ." The last bullet strikes him in the mouth.

"I was there," his son tells me. "I was there, and the scene seems unbelievable to me. You see, my father . . . my father was a hero . . . But he was not a believer."⁴⁹

It is ironic that there are virtually no examples of parables in writings about the parables of the New Testament!

There has been, in relation to the parables, little of the hermeneutics of freedom that sees in the parables not so much a text to be preached but a paradigm to be emulated. Parables should lead to parables.

By way of a conclusion to the two "workshop for hermeneutics" chapters, I note that this varied listing provides but a small sample of the ways in which the parables have been and can be seen through the mutual illumination that takes place when creative works are placed side by side. Some of the examples work better than others; too many of them are moralistic and without the tension of the original parable. I have attempted merely to illustrate what has been done and to indicate that the best commentaries on stories are usually other stories, even stories in hidden form and

especially stories that sing and dance.

The paucity of good examples has been disappointing, but here and there we have been led back to the parable itself-- with insight. The purpose of the parabolic retelling is to lead back to the parable and should be seen as such. There is, it seems, no way around the allegorical method. The question is not allegory or not but appropriate and inappropriate allegory. Again, the retelling is not a substitution for the parable, but an attempt to retain tension and to avoid attempting explanation of the unexplainable.

No one has yet done for the parables what T. S. Eliot has accomplished for the story of the birth of Jesus in his poem, "Journey of the Magi":

'A cold coming we had of it,
 Just the worst time of the year
 For a journey, and such a long journey:
 The ways deep and the weather sharp,
 The very dead of winter.'
 And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
 Lying down in the melting snow.
 There were times we regretted
 The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
 And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
 Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
 And running away, and wanting their liquor and
 women,
 And the night-fires going out, and the lack of
 shelters,
 And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
 And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
 A hard time we had of it.

At the end we preferred to travel all night,
 Sleeping in snatches,
 With the voices singing in our ears, saying
 That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate
 valley,
 Wet, below the snow line, smelling of
 vegetation;
 With a running stream and a water-mill
 beating the darkness,
 And three trees on the low sky,
 And an old white horse galloped away in
 the meadow.

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves
 over the lintel,
 Six hands at an open door dicing for
 pieces of silver,
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
 But there was no information, and so we
 continued
 And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
 Finding the place; it was (you may say)
 satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down
 This set down
 This: were we led all that way for
 Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth
 and death,
 But had thought they were different; this Birth
 was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our
 death.
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
 But no longer at ease here, in the old
 dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I should be glad of another death.⁵⁰

No one has yet done for the parables what W. H. Auden has
 accomplished for the story of the crucifixion of Jesus in
 his poem "Friday's Child":

He told us we were free to choose
 But, children as we were, we thought -
 'Paternal Love will only use
 Force in the last resort

On those too bumptious to repent' -
 Accustomed to religious dread,
 It never crossed our minds He meant
 Exactly what He said.

Perhaps He frowns, perhaps He grieves,
 But it seems idle to discuss
 If anger or compassion leaves
 The bigger bangs to us.

What reverence is rightly paid
 To a Divinity so odd
 He lets the Adam whom He made
 Perform the Acts of God?

It might be jolly if we felt
 Awe at this Universal Man
 (When kings were local, people knelt);
 Some try to, but who can?

The self-observed observing Mind
 We meet when we observe at all
 Is not alarming or unkind
 But utterly banal.

Though instruments at Its command
 Make wish and counterwish come true,
 It clearly cannot understand
 What It can clearly do.

Since the analogies are rot
 Our senses based belief upon,
 We have no means of learning what
 Is really going on,

And must put up with having learned
 All proofs or disproofs that we tender
 Of His existence are returned
 Unopened to the sender.

Now, did He really break the seal
 And rise again? We dare not say;
 But conscious unbelievers feel
 Quite sure of Judgment Day.

Meanwhile, a silence on the cross,
 As dead as we shall ever be,
 Speaks of some total gain or loss,
 And you and I are free

To guess from the insulted face
 Just what Appearances He saves
 By suffering in a public place
 A death reserved for slaves.⁵¹

The way is not through a resolution of tension by explanation,
 but a methodology that retains the tension of the original
 parable. Granted the way is hard; with Auden we see the
 double task: "The first half of art . . . is perceiving/The
 second half of art is telling."⁵² Granted we shall still
 have problems, but we will have "traded-up" our problems.
 The way is, as I have insisted, through the imagination.
 The call and the task is to the poet:

He is the Way.
 Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;
 You will see rare beasts, and have unique
 adventures.⁵³

Follow, poet, follow right
 To the bottom of the night,
 With your unconstraining voice
 Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse
 Make a vineyard of the curse,
 Sing of human unsuccess
 In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
 Let the healing fountain start,
 In the prison of his days
 Teach the free man how to praise.⁵⁴

- 1 Robert Frost, Robert Frost's Poems (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1963), pp. 164-166.
- 2 William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act 4, sc. 3, L. 217-220. This application was suggested to me by Prof. J. C. Kirby.
- 3 L. E. Siverns, "The Prodigal."
- 4 Chad Walsh, "Poetry and Religion," in The New Review of Books and Religion III/3 (1978), p. 3.
- 5 Thomas C. Lane, "The Ten Virgins," in The Parables (New York: Vantage Press, 1964), p. 83f.
- 6 Straton, A Guide to the Parables of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 139, quoting Frost, op. cit., p. 94f.
- 7 Quoted in M. de Jonge, Jesus: Inspiring and Disturbing Presence, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 13.
- 8 Archibald MacLeigh, "Ars Poetica," in Collected Poems, 1917-1952 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952), p. 40.
- 9 Although children are skilled in analogical understanding, they resort to moralizing at a very early age. See Ruth Ann Beechick, "Children's Understanding of Parables: A Developmental Study," doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University, 1974 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1974).
- 10 Bailey, op. cit., p. 64f. (10b Ibid.)
- 11 R. Williamson suggests a relationship between parables and art in "Expressionist Art and the Parables of Jesus" in Theology 78 (1975) 474-481.
- 12 High definition works, whether spoken, written, sung, in pictures or on film, limit and inhibit the work of the imagination and consequently short-circuit understanding.
- 13 "At least nine 'religious' ideas are explored in motion pictures: relationships, faith, reverence for God's creation and life itself, sin (original and otherwise), the nature of evil and the devil, the freedom of man, the nature of love, alienation, and celebration." Roger Kahle and Robert E. A. Lee, Popcorn and Parable (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), p. 44.

- 14 The Stray, A Teleketic Film produced by Franciscan Communication Center, Los Angeles.
- 15 A Talent for Tony, A Teleketic Film produced by Franciscan Communication Center, Los Angeles.
- 16 Unlimited Love, All Africa Conference of Churches, Nairobi, Kenya.
- 17 J. D. M. Derrett, Jesus' Audience: The Social and Psychological Environment in which He Worked (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), p. 163.
- 18 "Tree House," 99 Plus One and A Festival of Art, filmstrips, 1971.
- 19 Story Line, 13, 6-minute films, The American Bible Society, New York, 1969.
- 20 Parables, George A. Pflaum, 1967.
- 21 Dennis Benson, Electric Evangelism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 46.
- 22 Amplify, Vol. 9 (October, 1969), p. 8.
- 23 Concerning this case and others (such as Frito Bandito, Jose Jiminez, etc.) see the unpublished "brown position paper," "Chicanos and the Mass Media," by Armando Rendon and Domingo Nick Keyes, June 29, 1970.
- 24 W. H. Auden, "The Composer," in The English Auden, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), p. 239.
- 25 The popular rock album and later rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar is not dealt with here because it only deals with the last seven days of the life of Jesus and therefore does not present the parables. Nonetheless, a comment on Superstar that is insightful and relates to the parables should be shared. James M. Wall writes, ". . . Superstar is a fitting marriage of message and medium. This film works because the gospel story is meant to be told in poetry rather than prose. All previous Bible films (even Pasolini's rather successful Gospel according to St. Matthew) were hung up on narrative prose, with each episode presented in lurid and literal detail. Superstar sings its message in a contemporary idiom; the familiar characters have been deliberately cast in unexpected guises to reveal new insights into the Gospels." James M. Wall, "Jesus Christ Superstar, Surprising Film Success," in The Christian Century, XC (1973), p. 693f.

- 26 Arthur Knight, "'Godspell': Dancing in the Streets," Saturday Review, p. 72.
- 27 The parable of The Good Samaritan in Godspell. Photograph from Youth, April 1972, p. 12.
- 28 "Jesus as a Clown," Newsweek, 63 (1964), p. 96.
- 29 "Christ in Grease Paint," Time, 83 (1964), p. 58.
- 30 On this paragraph see Nora Armando, "Preparatory Note No. 2," Sodepax Consultation, in Church Communication Development: Papers from a Sodepax Consultation (Driebergen, Holland, March 12-16, 1970), p. 15f.
- 31 For example, see Peter A. White, Let the Bible Live (London: Stainer & Bell, 1973), pp. 5, 27, 29, 30, 31, 36, 39, etc.
- 32 W. A. Poovey, Banquets and Beggars, Dramas and Meditation on Six Parables (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974).
- 33 Ibid., p. 97.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., p. 98.
- 36 Ibid., p. 101f.
- 37 Ibid., p. 102.
- 38 R. Ted Nutting, Family Cluster Programs: Resources for Intergenerational Bible Study (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1977).
- 39 Bailey, op. cit., p. 98.
- 40 Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (London: Faber & Faber, 1966).
- 41 Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1968), p. 390.
- 42 The two plays of Bertolt Brecht published under the title Parables for the Theatre (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971 [1966]) are rather long and allegorical to qualify as "parable."
- 43 Schwartz, op. cit., p. 320ff.

- 44 Werner Brettschneider, Die Parabel vom verlorenen Sohn (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1978).
- 45 Ibid., p. 59.
- 46 Werner Brettschneider, Die Moderne Deutsche Parabel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1971).
- 47 L. E. Siverns.
- 48 L. E. Siverns, with apologies to Edgar Allan Poe and his short story "The Oval Portrait."
- 49 Elie Wiesel, Legends of Our Time (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 130.
- 50 Eliot, op. cit., p. 68f.
- 51 W. H. Auden, "Friday's Child," in Homage to Cleo, p. 78.
- 52 W. H. Auden, "Poetry, Poets, and Taste," in The English Auden, p. 359.
- 53 W. H. Auden, "For the Time Being," in Collected Longer Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 196f.
- 54 W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," Shorter Poems, p. 143.

V

CONCLUSION

All the irrationality of art,
its blinding sudden turns, its unpredict-
able discoveries, its profound impact on
people, are too magical to be exhausted
by the artist's view of the world, by
his overall design, or by the work of his
unworthy hands.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn,
Nobel Lecture (New York:
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
1972), p. 5.

I know nothing,
 except what everyone knows -
if there when Grace dances,
 I should dance.

W. H. Auden, "Whitsunday
in Kirchstetten," About
the House (New York:
Random House, 1965
[1959]), p. 84.

Conclusion

It has been reported that Gerhard Ebeling remarked in a class that a professor's students are always his pallbearers also.¹ Such has been my argument concerning the students of the parables. The parables have not been allowed to state their own "self" but have been explained, paraphrased, revoiced, translated and generally suffered all kinds of surgery "for the sake of the patient". It is, as I stated above, a case of studying the patient/professor from the vantage point of anatomy, and somehow in the post-mortem to stand astonished that the patient no longer speaks, and to still the silence, we as critics must speak more and more words on his behalf. Interpretation buries the parable.

My criticism has been that the parables of the New Testament have been mistreated through the constant effort to reduce them to the ideational. The task of the interpreter is not to attempt to repeat the original language event but to let the parable speak with all its multi-valent imagery. The task is to trust the metaphoric nature of the parable and to let it speak immediately to the contemporary auditor. In response to the parable, the proper response is not, at whatever level of sophistication, "what this parable means", but a new creation, a new emerging of being and perhaps the words, this reminds me of a story.... Such an approach retains a sense

of awe for the original work, and allows the reality therein, somehow grasped, to endow new metaphors with life. The premise of such an approach is in the need to experience as much of life, or Life, as possible so that deep may speak to deep and the magic that is constitutive of the creative word, or Word, will speak again. It is to live in friction with the original parable.²

The nature of Reality is hidden from finite eyes, and it must remain problematical. The parables give us diverse and partisan glimpses that reveal, but do not explain. Parable interpretation, I have argued, will for many reasons be more wrong than right. The best we can hope for is that which will lead us back to the parable or at least to the "hints and guesses" that the parable provides. With Philip Wheelwright, "If we cannot hope ever to be perfectly right, we can perhaps find both enlightenment and refreshment by changing, from time to time, our ways of being wrong."³

My hope is that by considering the reductionist trend of parable interpretation through the years, that I have contributed a little "refreshment" and "enlightenment" and changed a little bit at least our way of being wrong. Wasn't it Alfred North Whitehead who said that it is not as important that a theory be right as it is that it be interesting? I conclude with a story:

"Yes, indeed: the gem is as bright as a star, and

curiously set," said Clara Pemberton, examining an antique ring, which her betrothed lover had just presented to her, with a very pretty speech. "It needs only one thing to make it perfect."

"And what is that?" asked Mr. Edward Caryl, secretly anxious for the credit of his gift. "A modern setting perhaps?"

"Oh, no! That would destroy the charm at once," replied Clara. "It needs nothing but a story. I long to know how many times it has been the pledge of faith between two lovers, and whether the vows, of which it was the symbol, were always kept or often broken. Not that I should be too scrupulous about facts. If you happen to be unacquainted with its authentic history, so much the better. May it not have sparkled upon a queen's finger? Or who knows but it is the very ring which Posthumus received from Imogen? In short, you must kindle your imagination at the lustre of this diamond, and make a legend for it."⁴

- 1 Quoted by Doty, op. cit., p. 150.
- 2 Cf. Laeuchli, op. cit., p. 159, "...the language of the church is in friction with the language of the canon."
- 3 Wheelwright, Metaphor, p. 172f.
- 4 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Antique Ring", The Complete Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne, (Garden City: Hanover House, 1959), p. 533.

VI

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