

THE PARABLES AS ALLEGORY ¹

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BEFORE the rise of modern Biblical study, it had been customary for centuries to treat the Parables of Jesus as allegories. In this respect they were not interpreted differently from other parts of Scripture, which was uniformly subjected to an allegorizing type of exegesis. But by their very nature, since they themselves conveyed ideas by means of imagery, the Parables inevitably yielded a much richer harvest of theological allegory than other Scriptural passages. Their vivid details were elaborately interpreted, requiring to be "decoded" in theological terms, which meant, in effect, that the Parables became convenient pegs on which the Church could hang most of its theological wardrobe. The stock example is St. Augustine's exposition of the parable of the Good Samaritan :

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho : Adam himself is meant ; *Jerusalem* is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell ; *Jericho* means the moon, and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes and dies. *Thieves* are the devil and his angels. *Who stripped him*, namely, of his immortality ; *and beat him*, by persuading him to sin ; *and left him half-dead*, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead ; he is therefore called *half-dead*. The *priest* and *Levite* who saw him and passed by, signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament, which could profit nothing for salvation. *Samaritan* means Guardian, and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name. The *binding of the wounds* is the restraint of sin. *Oil* is the comfort of good hope ; *wine* the exhortation to work with fervent spirit. The *beast* is the flesh in which He deigned to come to us. The *being set upon the beast* is belief in the incarnation of Christ. The *inn* is the Church, where travellers are refreshed on their return from pilgrimage to their heavenly country. The *morrow* is after the resurrection of the Lord. The *two pence* are either the two precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come. The *innkeeper* is the Apostle (Paul). The supererogatory payment is either his counsel of celibacy, or the fact that he worked with his own hands lest he should be a burden to any of the weaker

¹ A lecture delivered in the Library series of public lectures.

brethren when the Gospel was new, though it was lawful for him "to live by the Gospel".¹

Exegesis of the Parables of Jesus was not finally rescued from this traditional type of allegorical interpretation until the great work of Adolf Jülicher.² Jülicher not only rejected the traditional allegorical method *in toto*; he refused no less to admit the existence in the Gospels of any genuine allegorical parables of Jesus, or, indeed, of any allegorical element in the parables. There was only one case where he was prepared to consider making an exception, the Parable of the Sower (Mark iv. 3 ff., par.), for here the parable and the allegorical interpretation which follows it (verses 14-20) belong closely together: "We have no right to deny it (the allegorical interpretation following the parable) to Jesus, if we regard the story of the Sower, as the Synoptics give it, as His."³ This would, however, constitute a singular exception to the generally non-allegorical character of the Parables and this favours the view that it is not a genuine parable of Jesus at all, but an allegory of the early Church. One other parable, according to Jülicher, is first and last an allegory, the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Mark xii), but this too is not a genuine parable of Jesus, but an early Christian allegory.⁴

Having rejected all allegory Jülicher then sought to explain parables in other terms: each parable was to be understood as the transcript, as it were, of a fragment of real life, and was intended to convey one point or moral, and only one, and this was to be interpreted in as general terms as possible. Thus, the Parable of the Talents simply inculcates fidelity in every trust; the prudent use of present opportunity as the best preparation for a happy future the meaning of the Parable of the Unjust Steward; fear of the ultimate consequences of a life of pleasure of the Rich Man and Lazarus, etc., etc.

Jülicher's definition of parable and his rejection of anything

¹ Quoted from *Quaestiones Evangeliorum*, ii. 19 in the slightly abridged translation of Dr. C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 11 ff.

² *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, Freiburg i. B., 1886; *zweite neubearbeitete Auflage*, 1899, 1910.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 535.

⁴ *Op. cit.* pp. 386, 405 ff.

which might remotely suggest allegory in the parables has dominated their modern interpretation almost as tyrannically as the allegorical method of the earlier centuries. In his important study *The Parables of the Kingdom* Dr. C. H. Dodd accepts the conclusions and method of Jülicher without hesitation and as (more or less) self-evident propositions :

It was the great merit of Adolf Jülicher, in his work *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (1899-1910), that he applied a thoroughgoing criticism to this method, and showed, not that the allegorical interpretation is in this or that case overdone or fanciful, but that the parables in general do not admit of this method at all, and that the attempts of the evangelists themselves to apply it rest on a misunderstanding (p. 13).

Later Dodd deals with the importance of this view for interpretation :

This leads us at once to the most important principle of interpretation. The typical parable, whether it be a simple metaphor, or a more elaborate similitude or a full-length story, presents one single point of comparison. The details are not intended to have independent significance. In an allegory, on the other hand, each detail is a separate metaphor, with a significance of its own. Thus in the *Pilgrim's Progress* we have the episode of the House Beautiful. It is a story of the arrival of belated travellers at a hospitable country house. Commentators even undertake to show us the actual house in Bedfordshire. But in the story the maid who opens the door is Discretion, the ladies of the house are Prudence, Piety and Charity, and the bed-chamber is Peace. Or, to take a biblical example, in Paul's allegory of the Christian warrior the girdle is Truth, the breastplate Righteousness, the shoes Peace, the shield Faith, the helmet Salvation, and the sword the Word of God. On the other hand, if we read the parable of the Importunate Friend, it would be obviously absurd to ask who is represented by the friend who arrived from a journey, or the children who are in bed. These and all the other details of the story are there simply to build up the picture of a sudden crisis of need, calling for an urgency which would otherwise be untimely and even impertinent. Similarly in the parable of the Sower the wayside and the birds, the thorns and the stony ground are not, as Mark supposed, cryptograms for persecution, the deceitfulness of riches, and so forth. They are there to conjure up a picture of the vast amount of wasted labour which the farmer must face, and so to bring into relief the satisfaction that the harvest gives, in spite of all (pp. 18 ff.).

The same position is taken by Professor Joachim Jeremias, of Göttingen, who points out, at the same time, that Jewish parables of the New Testament period are sometimes allegorical.¹

On purely *a priori* grounds there does not seem to be any reason why there should not be allegory in the teaching of Jesus.

¹ *The Parables of Jesus*, London, 1954, p. 16.

Dodd has noted an example from St. Paul. The Old Testament does not know of any distinction between allegory and parable, for the one can easily pass into the other as more than one detail comes to assume a symbolic significance. The Oxford Dictionary also fails to make the distinction, and, in fact, gives "allegory" as one of the meanings of "parable". Differences are of degree not of kind, and while we must beware of attaching absurd allegorical meanings to details which form no more than the scenic background of a story, we may well be impoverishing our understanding of the parables of Jesus by excluding allegory simply on the basis of the Jülicher canon that the parables are not allegorical. As Dr. Vincent Taylor has written: "The shade of Jülicher must not affright us from admitting allegory when we see it" (*Gospel according to St. Mark*, p. 210).

(1) It seems obvious that we must begin with the Parable of the Sower (Mark iv. par.).

In all three Synoptic Gospels the Parable of the Sower is followed by an interpretation addressed to the disciples (Mark iv. 14-20) which understands the parable as pure allegory. That the preceding parable cannot be properly appreciated except as allegory was convincingly argued by Johannes Weiss,¹ and Jülicher was the first to acknowledge the force of Weiss's arguments. The question has remained for the most part undisturbed since this nineteenth-century debate, except for a mildly dissenting protest of Dr. Vincent Taylor in his summary of modern interpretations: "Falling into good ground, the seed is bearing fruit amazingly, thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold. This is the main point, but it is not necessary to regard the birds, the thorns, and the rocky ground as simply 'the dramatic machinery of the story'." (*Commentary on St. Mark*, p. 251.)

Modern interpretations of the parable without exception begin with the assumption that the allegorical interpretation, verses 13-20, is a later addition of the Church and not an original part of the parable. Thus C. H. Dodd writes:

¹ According to Weiss (*Die Parabelrede bei Markus*, in *Studien und Kritiken*, 64 (1891) 308 ff.) Jesus told the Parable of the Sower from the start as an allegory: its meaning, however, has not been correctly reproduced in the Marcan interpretation.

. . . this whole passage is strikingly unlike in language and style to the majority of the sayings of Jesus. Its vocabulary includes (within this short space) seven words which are not proper to the rest of the Synoptic record. All seven are characteristic of the vocabulary of Paul, and most of them occur also in other apostolic writers. These facts create at once a presumption that we have here not a part of the primitive tradition of the words of Jesus, but a piece of apostolic teaching.

Further, the interpretation offered is confused. The seed is the Word : yet the crop which comes up is composed of various classes of people. The former interpretation suggests the Greek idea of the " seminal word ", while the latter is closely akin to a similitude in the Apocalypse of Ezra : " As the farmer sows over the ground many seeds, and plants a multitude of plants, but in the season not all that have been planted take root, so also of those who have sowed in the world not all shall be saved " (2 Esdras viii. 41). Two inconsistent lines of interpretation have been mixed up. Yet we may suppose that the Teller of the parable knew exactly what He meant by it (pp. 13 ff.).

Interpretation is thus free to concentrate on the parable only and to look for its single point (according to Jülicher's definition). At the same time interpreters nowadays are quite unanimous in rejecting the platitude to which Jülicher himself reduced the parable, viz. that no labour can ever be sure of the same success. Here, however, unanimity ends and no two modern commentators seem to be agreed. Dr. Vincent Taylor lists no less than eight different modern views. The most recent (those of Dodd and Jeremias) concentrate on the symbolism of the phenomenal harvest : it typifies the miraculous coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry. Thus Jeremias sums up the parable in one sentence : " In spite of every failure the Kingdom of God is coming at last." ¹ The details of the parable, the wayside, the birds, the thorns, the stony ground, are not to be pressed. They are simply there (in C. H. Dodd's words) " to conjure up a picture of the vast amount of wasted labour the farmer must face, and so to bring into relief the satisfaction the farmer feels at the harvest ". ²

To attempt to challenge the view that the attached allegorical

¹ Op. cit. p. 92. ' The abnormal tripling of the harvest's yield (thirty, sixty, a hundredfold) symbolizes the eschatological overflowing of the divine fullness (verse 8). To human eyes much of the labour seems futile and fruitless, resulting apparently in repeated failure, but Jesus is full of joyful confidence ; he knows that God has made a beginning, bringing with it a harvest of reward beyond all asking or conceiving. In spite of every failure the Kingdom of God comes at last.'

² Op. cit. p. 19.

interpretation is secondary would be a waste of time and effort ; it is one of the secure results of modern criticism. But if the interpretation is secondary, the *principle* of interpreting the parable as allegory may be sound. It is from this fresh point of view I want to look at the parable again.

There do not seem to be any valid grounds for questioning the reliability of the Evangelists' reports about the historical situation when the parable was told. It was told in connection with Jesus' highly successful mission in Galilee, when vast crowds gathered about the shore of the Sea of Gennesaret to hang on his words. We are not obliged to assume that the sower is the Teller of the parable (though his hearers may well have done so) : it seems more likely that, in the situation in which it was told, the parable of the sower, like the other seed parables in Mark, was intended to portray what the Kingdom of God or its coming in the ministry of Jesus was like. This was its theme according to Mark iv. 11 and this is how Matthew interprets it (xiii. 19). What then is its main point ? Is it, as the modern eschatological school now maintains, concentrated solely on the symbolism of the harvest, i.e. the miraculous realization of the Kingdom of God in overflowing divine fullness, now in the ministry of Jesus ? There is no need to deny this modern insight : it seems at the same time necessary, however, to recall that the bulk of the parable appears to be describing *not* the miraculous rise of the Kingdom under the symbol of the harvest, but the kind of reception the *mission* of the kingdom got. In that case, the succession of vivid images describing this situation cannot surely be denied significance—the hard roadway where the traffic of men moves and the seed is trampled underfoot or snatched away by the birds of the air (Luke—the latter detail is perhaps an apocalyptic symbol for the Gentile nations), the stony ground where the seed springs up into vigorous life only to wither in the hot sun for lack of depth of earth and moisture, the thorns and weeds that choke the seed, and finally the good soil with its abundant harvest. This is the poetic imagery of oriental poetry and not just the dramatic machinery of the story, told to hearers or for readers steeped in the rich poetic inheritance of the Old Testament ; and all poetic imagery is a kind of allegory.

Perhaps the clearest indication that this is not just simple parable is the fact that the crop reaped from the good soil is against all nature ; ¹ it is allegory which distorts nature for its own ends (one thinks, e.g., of St. Paul's excursion into the field of horticulture at Romans xi in his remarkable allegory of the wild olive).²

It seems to me that for a much sounder exegesis as a whole we have to go back to the older liberal tradition of this country which, while taking account of the Jülicher position, held firmly to the dictates of plain exegetical common sense. Typical of these is Professor Alan Menzies's treatment in his book *The Earliest Gospel*. The story arose out of Jesus' experience as a preacher.

He too has met with obstacles and feels that much of his preaching has been thrown away. Does he mean us to find in his work a species of failure answering to each of the failures of the sower ? Has his word fallen on hard places where it never could enter at all, and the birds of the air, in this case invisible, caught it away before it was ever thought of ? Has his preaching fallen on shallow soil where it was welcomed at first but could not strike root ? Has he also felt that he has made converts only to find soon after that the hearts he thought he had impressed were too much engrossed with worldly cares and struggles to belong to him permanently ? Perhaps he meant us to think of these details, perhaps not (p.107).

The parable closes with the words " He that hath ears to hear let him hear " (verse 9). Whether these words were original to the parable is a debated question. But " he that hath ears to hear " will still hear other words in the parable besides " And some fell on the good ground, and bore fruit as it mounted up and increased, and yielded as much as thirty and sixty and a hundred-fold."

(2) That the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Mark xii. 1-11, par.) is pure allegory not even Jülicher attempted to deny. As Jesus' parables, however, were not, in his opinion, allegorical,

¹ Cf. Jeremias, op. cit. p. 22, n. 7. A good harvest might show a tenfold return (sevenfold appears to have been normal), but thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold would be a sheer miracle. Cf. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, iii. 153 ff.

² St. Paul's ideas for the grafting of the branches of the wild-olive with the old cultivated olive are described by C. H. Dodd as " a truly remarkable horticultural experiment " (*Commentary on Romans*, xi. 17). The details serve, of course, the purpose of the allegory.

the parable must have been constructed by the early church with the death of Jesus in mind. A quite opposite view is taken by modern exegetes: the story in its most primitive form is pure parable without any allegorical features and is a genuine parable of Jesus. We do not, however, have this primitive form in any of the Gospels, all of which have allegorized the parable. Thus Jeremias writes:

A further example of allegorical interpretation is the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. This parable, linked up as it is with the Song of the Vineyard in Isa. v. 1-7, exhibits an allegorical character which is unique among the parables of Jesus. The vineyard is clearly Israel, the tenants are Israel's rulers and leaders, the owner of the vineyard is God, the messengers are the prophets, the son is Christ, the punishment of the husbandmen symbolizes the ruin of Israel, the "other people" (Matt. xxi. 43) are the Gentile Church. The whole parable is evidently pure allegory. Nevertheless this impression undergoes radical modification when the different versions are compared. (1) First of all it is to be observed that in Luke xx. 10-12 the sending of the servants retains the features of a simple story: a servant is sent three years in succession; the first is soundly beaten, the second is both beaten up and insulted, the third is wounded. Nothing here suggests a deeper allegorical meaning . . . the evidence of Mark confirms the fact that the decisive feature of Luke's version, namely, the thrice-repeated sending out of a single servant and his dismissal empty-handed, is the original form of the parable, since in Mark also (xii. 2-5) we find the account of the thrice-repeated sending out of a single servant. Nevertheless, by adding verse 5b the Marcan form has abandoned the popular triple formula, since there follows a summary account of a multitude of servants, some of whom are beaten and some killed. It cannot be doubted that we have here a reference to the prophets and their fate. This allegory, obscuring the original picture, can hardly be other than an expansion.¹

The original parable was a parable of judgement, of impending doom against the tenants of the vineyard, the rulers and leaders of Israel. Jeremias thinks that it was the Temple authorities, the priestly members of the Sanhedrin, to whom the parable's terrible threat refers: "God, who has waited with such inconceivable patience, is now about to demand his dues, and the last generation must expiate the accumulated guilt."²

It seems fairly obvious that Luke has preserved a version of the parable independent of Mark (though not necessarily uninfluenced at several points by the Marcan version); there are also indications that the Lucan parable goes back to a Greek prototype (L or Q?), in some respects more primitive than Mark's (Luke

¹ Op. cit. pp. 55 ff.

² Op. cit. p. 124.

retains, e.g. one notable semitism that has disappeared in Mark¹). As Jeremias rightly remarks, it is in Luke a simple tale which has been complicated, not to say confounded, first by the Marcan, then by the Matthaean tendency to allegorize its details.

Particularly noteworthy of the Lucan parable—and the point may be important for its interpretation—is that the Lucan story builds up gradually to a dramatic climax: the first servant is beaten up and sent away empty-handed (verse 10, οἱ δὲ γεωργοὶ ἐξαπέστειλαν αὐτὸν δείραντες κενόν); with the second, insult is added to injury (οἱ δὲ καὶ κέκρινον δείραντες καὶ ἀτιμάσαντες ἐξαπέστειλαν κενόν);² the third servant is not only beaten up, but wounded and forcibly ejected from the vineyard (οἱ δὲ καὶ τοῦτον τραυματίσαντες ἐξέβαλον). The climax of rebellion and iniquity of the tenants is reached when the owner's only son³ is also violently thrown out or ejected from the vineyard, but he only (according to Luke) is murdered. (καὶ ἐκβαλόντες αὐτὸν ἔξω τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος ἀπέκτειναν).⁴

Here we have a gripping tale dramatically told, built up to a tragic climax and no doubt true to the life of the time. But is

¹ The twice repeated προσέθετο at verses 11 and 12 which may be a Lucan "biblicism", but could equally well come from an original Aramaic.

² Here Mark (xii. 4) may preserve a very primitive translation-Greek text in his curious ἐκεφαλῖωσαν, "struck him on the head" (?). This verb is a notorious crux (see Taylor, *Comm.*, in *loc.*). The meaning usually favoured (though nowhere else attested) is "to wound or knock on the head", since it is some such meaning which the context requires. More than once it has been conjectured that "something in the original Aramaic suggested it" (Allen, *Mark*, *ad loc.*, *J.T.S.*, ii. 298 ff.).

It is tempting to conjecture that the original word was *meraṭ* (or in the intensive Pael *marṭeṭ*): the word, common in Aramaic, is also a Hebrew one, meaning "to make smooth, bare, bald", and idiomatically of "making bare" the cheek or head by plucking out the hair or beard; cf. Isa. i. 6, Neh. xiii. 25 (both acts of violence). (A synonymous expression is *gerah*; cf. Arab, *qaraha*, to injure.) Such treatment, the plucking out of the hair and beard, was considered to be the worst form of insult and of humiliation. (For a Greek parallel, cf. Herodotus, ii. 121.) It also involved personal injury to the head, and this may be what suggested the Marcan ἐκεφαλῖωσαν. Note that it is associated with dishonour and disgrace (καὶ ἡτίμασαν.) (An alternative to Burkitt's conjecture, ἐκολάφισαν, would be to read ἐφάλακρωσαν. Cf. Ezek. xxvii. 31.)

³ Cf. Taylor, in *loc.*

⁴ According to Mark xii. 5, the third servant is killed; Matthew (xxi. 35) kills off the servants from the start.

this gradually unfolding drama of Luke, told not with a popular "triple formula" only but with a more effective "three plus one" formula, necessarily without any underlying significance? It is this $3 + 1$ formula which is the decisive feature of the Lucan parable. Can it really be said that there is nothing in it that suggests a deeper allegorical meaning? Time and again—the parable appears to be teaching—and each time worse than the last—Israel's leaders have rejected the emissaries of the lord of the vineyard. Is this not, in fact, a vivid tale designed to portray the crescendo of rebelliousness and wickedness of the rulers of Israel now reached, after a long history of similar crimes, in the ministry of Jesus? If so, then this graphically presented climax of iniquity must be no less symbolic than the figure of the vineyard for Israel and of the husbandmen for her rulers. In that case it seems unnatural and illogical to deny a meaning to the remaining two "details", the "servants" and the only son; the former can only refer to the prophets whom the leaders of Israel had repeatedly rejected.¹

Mark and Matthew have undoubtedly taken liberties with the simple Lucan story in the interests of allegory; but they are not turning the story from parable into allegory; they are simply heightening and elaborating the effects in what was originally an allegorical tale.

The failure to recognize it as such and attempts to explain it as "pure parable" have left a curious gap in the interpretation of the parable. We are told about the crimes of the wicked husbandmen, and about their impending doom, but *nothing, on this interpretation of the parable, about those against whom these crimes were committed.*

This gap is filled in by Dr. Dodd who writes (*italics mine*):

The parable therefore stands on its own feet as a dramatic story, inviting a judgment from the hearers, and the application of the judgment is clear enough without any allegorizing of the details. Nevertheless, the climax of iniquity in the story suggests a similar climax in the situation to which it is applied. We know that Jesus did regard His own ministry as the culmination of God's dealings with His people . . . Consequently the parable would suggest, by a kind of tragic irony, the impending climax of the rebellion of Israel *in a murderous assault upon*

¹ Δουλος [θεοῦ κυρίου] is applied to the prophets from Amos onwards (cf. Sanday and Headlam on Rom. i. 1): Amos iii. 7, Jer. vii. 25, Dan. ix. 6(θ).

the Successor of the prophets. If now we concede that Mark has placed the parable in its true historical context (and in the Passion-narrative, to which this part of the Gospel is an introduction, the sequence of events is more clearly marked, and probably more true to fact, than we can assume it to be elsewhere), then the situation was one in which the veiled allusions might well be caught by many of the hearers. Jesus had, in the Triumphal Entry and the Cleansing of the Temple, challenged the public of Jerusalem to recognize the more-than-prophetic character of His mission. The parable might be understood as enforcing that challenge: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets . . .*" . . .—what will the next step be? This is not allegory. It is a legitimate use of parable to bring out the full meaning of the situation.¹

While thus showing allegory firmly to the door, one cannot but wonder if Dr. Dodd has not surreptitiously smuggled it in again by the window. For his exposition retains all the essential features of the Gospel allegory which both he and Jeremias reject: the vineyard is Israel; the tenants of the vineyard guilty of such terrible crimes are the rulers and leaders of Israel; a fearful doom is threatened for them for their crimes. But against whom were their crimes committed? "The parable", Dr. Dodd says, "might be understood as reinforcing Jesus' challenge to recognize the more than prophetic character of His mission: '*O Jerusalem that killest the prophets. . . .*'" Their crimes are, in other words, against God's servants the prophets and his beloved Son whom the crowds have just been hailing in the Triumphal Entry as Son of David. Dodd manages to get the benefit of allegory while denying that it is allegory—to run with the allegorical hare, as it were, and still hunt with the Jülicher hounds. This will not do. The straightforward answer is that the parable was first and last an allegory and that its main characters are to be understood allegorically.

The recognition that the Jülicher canon is a much too pedantic and mechanical rule of thumb to apply to the lively oracles and the living words of Jesus, encourages one to look further into this problem, and I turn now to two of the greatest of the parables, the Parable of the prodigal son and of the good Samaritan. Here again, it seems to me, it is the category of allegory rather than parable that helps us most in our attempt to understand them.

(3) The parable of the prodigal son, or, as we may prefer to describe it, the parable of the merciful father and the two sons,

¹ Op. cit. pp. 130 ff.

is found in Luke only (xv. 11-32). It is introduced by the words, "Now there were approaching him all the publicans and sinners to hear him, and the Pharisees and scribes were complaining 'This fellow is receiving sinners and consorting with them at table'. Therefore he told them this parable."¹

"The Lucan setting is surely so far right", Dr. C. H. Dodd writes, "that (these) parables refer to the extravagant concern (as it seemed to some) which Jesus displayed for the depressed classes of the Jewish community" (p. 120). It is not difficult with our knowledge of this situation to see in the lost son a symbol of those depressed classes, the publicans and sinners, who crowded to hear him. Nor does it seem likely that the Pharisees and scribes would have any difficulty in discerning who was meant by the elder brother. The *Sitz im Leben* of the parable, that is, assists us in understanding the symbolism of the two sons. What of the identity of the father in the parable? In his recent exposition Dr. Jeremias begins by telling us that the parable might more correctly be described as the Parable of the Father's Love, since the father, not the returning son, is the central figure. In this he is surely right and most students of the parable will endorse his conclusion that "The parable describes with touching simplicity what God is like, his goodness, his grace, his boundless mercy, his abounding love" (op. cit. p. 105): yet he insists, "The parable is not an allegory, but a story drawn from life . . . the father is not God but an earthly father; yet some of the expressions used are meant to reveal that in his love he is an image of God" (p. 103). It is true the father in the story is not God, yet if he is portrayed as the image of God it seems simplest to regard this central feature of the story as intended to portray the love of God as that of a merciful father—and this is surely as close to allegory as makes no difference.

The twin parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin are both directed to the same point and the fact that in the story of the lost coin the central figure is that of the distraught housewife

¹ What in fact follows are the three Lucan parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and two sons, but the twin parable of the lost coin and lost sheep is probably a Lucan insertion, the singular *τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην* referring originally only to the third parable.

prevents us from allotting any symbolic significance to this feature. Yet, as Dodd himself admits, there is a suggestion of allegory in the parable of the lost sheep; the home-keeping sheep are the righteous, the strayed sheep the sinner, the strayed sheep found the repentant sinner. Moreover, "the hearers of the first parable could hardly fail to be reminded of the familiar Old Testament allegory of Jehovah and his flock" (op. cit. p. 119, n.). The border line between parable and allegory is a very narrow one.

(4) The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke x. 29-37), told in response to a question asked by "a certain lawyer" (at the close of an interview in which he had come enquiring about "eternal life" (25-8)), does not fit very well into its Lucan context.

The lawyer's question "Who is my neighbour?" is not one which is given any clear or logical answer in the parable. The reason for this almost certainly is, as scholars have widely recognized, that the connection of the incident with the parable is entirely artificial; as with all the six Lucan Parables in chapters x-xix, the Parable has been supplied by Luke with a context in the ministry of Jesus. It is best in this case to forget altogether the Lucan context for the parable, and to look for the meaning of the story, its *raison d'être*, within the parable itself.

It has been suggested more than once that the story was originally told, not of a Samaritan, but of a good "Israelite", i.e. a Jewish layman to contrast with the Temple priest and Levite. But to turn the central figure of the parable, the good Samaritan, in this way into another Jew, and a co-religionist of the man who fell among thieves, clearly a Jew going from Jerusalem to Jericho, is surely to rob the parable of its main—if not its only—point. The truly remarkable element in this unforgettable story is that it is a Samaritan, an avowed and bitter enemy of the Jewish people, who is found rendering such an unheard of act of mercy and humanity to a Jew. It is like the act—even stranger in its Old Testament context—narrated at 2 Chron. xxviii. 5 ff.: a large band of Ephraimites, the ancestors of the Samaritans, in response to a word of the Lord from the prophet Oded, not only spare the lives of Judæan captives taken

in a large and successful raid on Jerusalem but show them mercy and humanity by clothing and caring for them and restoring them to their brethren in Jericho : “ And the men (the Ephraimite leaders) . . . took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked amongst them, and arrayed them and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren : then they returned to Samaria.” It seems impossible to deny that we have in this story one of the sources of inspiration of the parable—and a clue to its main point, the unexpected, indeed one might also say totally unnatural conduct of the Ephraimites at 2 Chron. and their descendant the Samaritan at Luke x. 29 ff.

Since there seems to be little doubt that we are dealing with a genuine parable of Jesus, it is natural to go on to ask, To what part of the teaching of Jesus could such a story belong ? Is there any obvious *Sitz im Leben* in the ministry of Jesus ? In general, if the main point of the parable be the extraordinary act of humanity of the Samaritan, then it fits most naturally into Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount on *Love of Enemies*, and might be regarded as a concrete illustration of that teaching. It is probably idle to speculate about any one particular place or context in the Gospels, but it is perhaps worth noting how appropriately the story would come after the Lucan version of the teaching on *Love of Enemies* at Luke vi. 27 ff. The Good Samaritan is showing a compassion such as God Himself has shown (vi. 35, ὅτι αὐτὸς χρηστός ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀχαρίστους) : he is fulfilling the threefold injunction of verses 33-5 of love to enemies, doing good to those that hate us and lending without hope of return ; the good Samaritan had compassion on his traditional enemy (verse 33, ἐσπλαγχνίσθη) ; he did good to him (verse 34) and he lent without any security or possible hope of return (verse 35).

If this is how the parable is to be understood in general, then it furnishes a close parallel to the Parable of the merciful father and the two sons in so far as it is a story which assumes a familiar historical situation—the ancient feud between Jew and Samaritan. The Jerusalem priest and Levite are representative of the

Sadducean class, the bitterest enemies of the Samaritans (the feud was fundamentally a religious quarrel about priestly succession). The fact that their representatives, the priest and Levite, leave a fellow-Jew to die, brings into sharper relief the extraordinary act of the Samaritan to his traditional enemy. The parable not only illustrates Christ's teaching about love to enemies : it does so by scoring a point against the (well known) inhumanity of the Sadducees. It is, indeed, even possible that the parable was originally addressed to Sadducees and was one of the ways in which they were silenced (Matt. xxii. 34).¹ In other words, the story is holding up a mirror to a real situation familiar to all its hearers. But it is not a simple parable ; it is much more of the nature of allegory.

What conclusion are we to draw from this discussion ? It seems to me that the most sensible word on the subject was said by A. H. McNeile :

" When more than one truth is illustrated (in a parable) the picture approaches an allegory, and it is not always certain which details are intended to illustrate something, and which are merely part of the scenic framework. The tendency to allegorize every detail, seen notably in Philo, but also in Christian writers, e.g. Origen and Hilary, often led to strained, and even grotesque methods of interpretation. . . . The best modern exegesis avoids it. But the opposite extreme must also be guarded against, i.e. the refusal to admit that more than a single point can be illustrated in a parable, as, for example, by Jülicher. . . . The principal object in the foreground of a picture is not the only object visible. Jewish utterances must be judged by Jewish not Greek rules of rhetoric . . . Parables differ widely in their nature and will not come under a single rule. And although the admission of this leads to differences of opinion in some cases, the gain exceeds the loss ; flexibility of treatment is psychologically safer than rigidity in dealing with language so ζῶν καὶ ἐνεργής as that of the Lord's parables " (*The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, p. 186).

¹ The lawyer who wishes " to justify himself " reminds us of Luke xvi. 15, οἱ δικαιοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς, identified by Luke as Pharisees, but, more probably, for a group so described, Sadducees (cf. T. W. Manson, *Sayings of Jesus*, p. 295). Cf. further 1 Enoch (Greek) 102. 10, ἴδετε οὖν, οἱ δικαιοῦντες[ἑαυτ]οὺς ; *Ass. Mos.* vii. 3 and the note of R. H. Charles, *in loc.* " et regnabunt de his homines pestilentiosi et impii, dicentes se esse iustos "—they were Sadducees ; Ephraim (ed. Moesinger, p. 288) : " Saducaei diebus Ioannis inchoarunt, velut iustes a populo se separantes et resurrectionem mortuorum negantes . . . " ; *Ps. Clem. Recog.* i. 54. This popular explanation of the name was evidently well-known to the Christian Fathers.