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The Use of the Parables of the Weeds and the Dragnet in the Development of Reformed Ecclesiology

Ralph Cunnington

The relationship between the church and the kingdom of God has been the subject of intense debate for centuries. While many within the Reformed constituency have sought to equate the kingdom with the church,¹ proponents of the Social Gospel have sought to distinguish them, while dispensationalists have insisted that the church represents a parenthesis in anticipation of the future kingdom.² There are indications that these traditional lines of disagreement have become blurred,³ and it has even been suggested that a consensus has now been reached on the relationship between the church and the kingdom.⁴ While this is undoubtedly premature, there has indeed been a significant shift in the debate since the publication of George Ladd's work in the late twentieth century.⁵ His model of an inaugurated kingdom theology with the focus upon the rule of God rather than the realm of God has provided an attractive alternative to the traditional polarised approaches.

Discussion of the relationship between the church and the kingdom has inevitably focused upon particular scriptural texts and among the most important have been the parables of the kingdom recorded in Matt 13:1–52. This article examines the parables of the wheat and weeds and of the dragnet. The focus is upon how these parables have been applied in the history of the debate and how they have influenced thinking on the visible/invisible distinction, the purity of the church and the exercise of church discipline. The article is divided into two parts: the first provides a comparative overview of the use of the parables in the writings of Augustine, John Calvin, the Westminster Assembly, Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos and George Ladd; the second critically examines this use in light of contemporary exegetical scholarship.

The Historical Use of the Parables in Christian Thought

In a study of this kind it is necessary to limit the parameters of a historical overview. The theologians chosen here have been selected on the basis of their enduring influence upon Reformed ecclesiology.

Augustine

Aurelius Augustine (AD 354–430) is often credited with having established the distinction between the visible and invisible church. As Bishop of Hippo, his ecclesiological thinking was formulated against the backdrop of the Donatist schism which was wreaking havoc throughout the church in North Africa. The Donatists claimed that believers should secede from the Catholic Church because of the alleged ungodliness of certain leaders. In reply, Augustine identified the visible church (the outward organisation of the church) with the kingdom of God, insisting that throughout the current age the church was to remain mixed, consisting of both believers and unbelievers.⁶ For Augustine, it was clear that, ‘many who seem to be without are in reality within, and many who seem to be within yet really are without.’⁷ In determining the constitution of the invisible church, Augustine wrote that it was the position of the heart that had to be considered and that this was an assessment that only God could undertake.⁸

The parable of the weeds was fundamental for Augustine’s ecclesiology. In the *City of God*, he identified the field of the parable with the church which in turn he identified with the kingdom.⁹ He applied the dragnet in a similar fashion, using the parable to justify the view that the church is both the ‘true and the mixed body of the Lord.’¹⁰ Likewise in Tractate CXXII, he opined that the dragnet describes churches that are populated by men who undo in deed what they teach in word.¹¹

In view of the mixed nature of the church and Christ’s command that it should remain that way throughout the present age (Matt 13:29–30), Augustine considered the secession of the Donatists to be a serious error. They had forsaken unity and violated charity.¹² For Augustine, the church should be compassionate, labouring to gather together rather than scatter the members of Christ.¹³ He described the Donatists as those who had proven themselves to be tares by their separation before the time of the harvest.¹⁴

Augustine's reading of the parables inevitably raises the question of what role he saw for church discipline, in particular exclusionary discipline. He insisted that he was not arguing for the abandonment of all discipline and maintained that the church should indeed seek to correct as many as she can.¹⁵ But what the church should not do was abandon the unity of the good because of the wickedness of some.¹⁶ For Augustine, the separation called for by Jesus and Paul could be affected by means of a separation in heart.¹⁷ He applauded those who remained in the church continuing to have 'fellowship with [the wicked], not in their deeds, but in the altar of Christ' because 'in order to prevent the name of Christ from being reproached by odious schisms, they tolerate in the interest of unity that which in the interests of righteousness they hate.'¹⁸ Augustine distinguished between consenting to the deeds of wicked men and consenting to their remaining within the church. The godly should never do the former but should consent to the latter in order to 'shake themselves free from the crime of schism.'¹⁹

For Augustine, the parables of the weeds and the dragnet had direct application to the nature and unity of the visible church. The church was the kingdom of God and was mixed, consisting of both the righteous and the wicked. Moreover, it would remain that way until Christ returned. In Augustine's mind, there was no place for the concept of a regenerate church membership and church discipline was to be practiced cautiously and with an emphasis upon non-exclusionary measures. In other words, the unity of the church was to take priority over its purity.²⁰

John Calvin

John Calvin (AD 1509–1564) agreed with Augustine's distinction between the visible and invisible church noting that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed referred to both the visible church and to all of God's elect.²¹ While the former can be ascertained, the latter cannot because knowledge of the elect is the possession of God alone.²² For Calvin, the parables of the weeds and the dragnet were fundamental for this view since they taught the mixed nature of the church.²³ He recognised that verse 38 presented a serious obstacle to his view but insisted that 'although Christ ... adds that the field is the world, there can be no doubt that He really wants to apply this name to the Church, about which after all, He was speaking.' Calvin reasoned that, since the seed of the gospel was to be sown everywhere, Christ 'transfers by synecdoche to the world

what is more apt of a part of it.²⁴ We will return to the question of whether this explanation is persuasive in the second part of the article.

For Calvin, both parables taught that believers should bear patiently with the mixed nature of the church in the knowledge that the church will only be purified at the *parousia*.²⁵ In both his *Harmony of the Gospels* and *Institutes*, Calvin used the parables to counter those who wished to separate from the church due to its imperfection and impurity.²⁶ He wrote that they should listen to the parables and recognise that the church would be weighed down with the mixture of the wicked until the Day of Judgment.²⁷ Christ's intention in speaking the parables was to 'rein and moderate the zeal of those who think it is wrong to associate with any who are not pure angels.'²⁸

Calvin insisted that the parables did not exclude church discipline, noting in his commentary that pastors ought to be occupied in the task of cleansing the church. The point was simply that they will never absolutely succeed in this task.²⁹ Calvin did not seek to reconcile this understanding of partial cleansing with the parable's injunction to leave the weeds until the harvest, which for Calvin meant leaving unbelievers in the church. It is clear that Calvin endorsed excommunication through an act of 'public judgment,'³⁰ and in commenting on 1 Cor 5 he insisted that well-ordered churches 'will not bear the wicked in their bosom.'³¹ But for Calvin, church discipline was to be a corporate rather than an individual act. If the church was slack in its duty, the individual had no right to take the matter into his own hands by separating from the church.

Calvin shared much in common with Augustine in his understanding of the nature and unity of the church.³² Both relied heavily upon the parables of the weeds and the dragnet, identifying the church with the kingdom and insisting that the church would remain mixed. Unlike Augustine, however, Calvin exhibited a greater willingness to discuss exclusionary measures of discipline (excommunication) although he did not clearly explain how these could be reconciled with his reading of the parables. In particular, he did not provide an account of why v. 29 does not prohibit exclusionary church discipline.

The Westminster Assembly

In both the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and the Larger Catechism (1648), a distinction is drawn between the visible church (consisting of 'all those

throughout the world that profess the true religion and their children')³³ and the invisible church (consisting of 'the whole number of the elect').³⁴ The Confession describes the visible church as 'the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ' citing the parable of the dragnet as a proof.³⁵ Outside of the visible church 'there is no ordinary possibility of salvation' and to the church 'the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints' have been given.³⁶ Despite this, the visible church remains impure and its purity varies in accordance with its administration of the Word and sacraments. Indeed WCF 25.5 states that even 'the purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error.' The proofs given are the parables of the weeds, the dragnet, 1 Cor 13:12, and Rev 2–3.³⁷

Chapter 30 of the Confession deals with church censures and maintains that the church retains authority in government and discipline independent of the civil authority.³⁸ WCF 30.3 explains that censures are necessary, 'for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the like offenses, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honour of Christ, and the holy profession of the Gospel.' Interestingly, the proofs given in WCF 25.4 concerning the varying purity of particular churches are Rev 2–3 and 1 Cor 5:6–8 (dealing with church discipline). It is clear that, for the Westminster divines, the inevitability of a mixed church did not detract from the need for exclusionary church discipline. What is less clear is how this need for exclusionary discipline could be reconciled with the Assembly's use of the parables of the weeds and the dragnet. Again, no explanation is provided of how v. 29 could be interpreted on an ecclesiological reading without prohibiting exclusionary church discipline.

Geerhardus Vos

Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) continued the tradition of Augustine, Calvin and the Westminster Assembly in identifying the kingdom with the church. He argued that, while the Old Testament described the kingdom predominantly in an abstract sense (of kingship or rule), Jesus spoke in much more concrete terms of the kingdom as a realm or sphere of life.³⁹ With this concrete conception in view, Vos opined that the church was a form that the kingdom had assumed as a consequence of Christ's death and resurrection.⁴⁰

Vos maintained the distinction between the visible and invisible church,⁴¹ arguing that the invisible church could be identified with the kingdom since the membership of both was circumscribed by the line of regeneration.⁴² Moreover, since the visible church partook of the same character as the invisible church, it too was the embodiment of the kingdom.⁴³ For Vos, ‘the kingdom-forces which are at work, the kingdom-life which exists in the invisible sphere, find expression in the kingdom-organism of the visible church.’⁴⁴

In formulating this view, Vos relied upon both Matt 16:18–20 and the parables of the weeds and the dragnet. He acknowledged that the ecclesiological reading of the parables might be taken to limit the exercise of church discipline but argued that the parables need to be read against the context of the disciples’ expectation that a final and eternal separation of the good and the evil would take place at the first coming of the Messiah.⁴⁵ It is such a separation that is being denied and prohibited in the parables. For Vos, the process of church discipline to which Jesus refers in Matt 18:17 was quite different, it being preservative (of the church) and restorative (of the sinner). Such aims can continue to be pursued without forgetting the lessons of the parables: that it is not for men to judge the heart and that it is God alone who will infallibly cleanse the church on the Day of Judgment.⁴⁶ Thus Vos maintained the ecclesiological reading of the parables while insisting that church discipline remains unaffected.

Herman Ridderbos

Unlike his contemporary Vos, Herman Ridderbos (1909–2007) claimed that the abstract sense of the kingdom was the most prominent in the gospels and that the concrete meaning was only secondary.⁴⁷ When we read that the kingdom is at hand, Ridderbos argued, ‘we should not in the first place think of a spatial or a static entity ... but rather of the divine kingly rule actually and effectively starting its operation.’⁴⁸ The kingdom is to be conceived of in both a present and a future sense. It is fundamentally eschatological but in the coming of God into the world the eschatological has entered into the present.⁴⁹ Ridderbos favoured the terminology of ‘fulfilment’ and ‘consummation’; the fulfilment of the time and of the Scripture has begun with the coming of Christ, but its consummation still lies ahead in the future.⁵⁰

For Ridderbos, the ‘church’ describes the community that has been united together by the preaching of the gospel.⁵¹ The concept of the kingdom is neither

present in the idea of the church, nor is the church presented as a provisional manifestation of the kingdom.⁵² The parable of the weeds teaches nothing to the contrary.⁵³ Rather its central teaching is that ‘as long as the world exists in its present form, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the Evil One will both be manifested within it’ (a universalistic reading).⁵⁴ Application of the parable to the church ‘completely shifts the point at issue and deprives us of the right view of the parable.’⁵⁵ For Ridderbos, there are three main objections to the ecclesiological reading. Firstly, it conflicts with Matt 13:38 which states that the field is the world not the church.⁵⁶ Secondly, the view would prohibit church discipline which is emphatically commended by Jesus later in the Gospel. Thirdly, it implies that the servants’ request is for a provisional separation when in fact it concerns the final destruction of the weeds.⁵⁷ Ridderbos recognised that v.41, with its reference to the gathering of the causes of sin *out of the kingdom*, is often cited to support the ecclesiological reading. He insisted that kingdom is not being used in a future-eschatological sense in v.41 but rather in a general sense to describe the fruit of the good seed which has been sown throughout the world.⁵⁸ The parable thus sheds light on the eschatological tension of the kingdom explaining why judgment has been delayed even though the kingdom has already come.⁵⁹

For Ridderbos, the parable of the dragnet has the same purport as that of the weeds.⁶⁰ The difference is that, whereas the emphasis in the parable of the weeds is upon the Devil’s deliberate opposition to the kingdom, the point of the dragnet is that people respond to the gospel for a variety of motives.⁶¹ Ridderbos noted that some take the parable to refer to the coming church but dismissed the view.⁶² Unfortunately he provided little by way of exposition of his own view. In particular he did not identify what the group of mixed respondents represents. It is difficult to see how it can refer to anything other than the visible church since respondents to the gospel (whether for good motives or bad) are gathered into the visible church. If this is correct, then Ridderbos seems to have lapsed into the ecclesiological reading that he sought to deny.⁶³

On the basis of his exegetical work, Ridderbos distinguished the concept of the church from that of the kingdom: ‘The *basileia* is the great divine work of salvation in its fulfilment and consummation in Christ; the *ekklesia* is the people elected and called by God and sharing in the bliss of the *basileia*.’⁶⁴ In other words, the church is included within the kingdom but is not identical with

it.⁶⁵ This is because the kingdom has a much more comprehensive content; it is the consummation of all history, having cosmic dimensions and filling time and eternity. The church is the ‘soteriological goal’ or ‘fruit’ of the revelation of the kingdom.⁶⁶ The two are inseparable but should not be merged.

George Eldon Ladd

George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982) developed and popularised the distinction between the church and the kingdom in his work on inaugurated kingdom theology. Like Ridderbos, Ladd claimed that the central meaning of kingdom was the abstract idea of reign or rule rather than the concrete idea of realm.⁶⁷ For Ladd, the kingdom creates the church and works in the world through the church but the church is never identified with the kingdom itself.⁶⁸ Rather, the church is a witness and instrument of the kingdom as its members hold custody of the keys of the kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel.⁶⁹ The kingdom and the church are inseparable, you cannot have one without the other; but (in words echoing Ridderbos), ‘they remain two distinguishable concepts: the rule of God and the fellowship of men.’⁷⁰

Ladd dismissed the view that the parable of the weeds equates the kingdom with the church.⁷¹ Like Ridderbos, he pointed to v. 38,⁷² and argued that ‘it is a misinterpretation of the Word of God to say that the parable teaches that in the Church the good and bad, the regenerate and the unregenerate, are to grow together until the harvest and that we cannot exercise church discipline since it would disrupt the order of things.’⁷³ For Ladd, the parable simply teaches that good and evil are to remain mixed in the *world* until the time of Christ’s return, even though the kingdom has already been inaugurated.⁷⁴ Ladd noted that v. 41 appears to present a difficulty for this interpretation but insisted that the verse cannot be pressed to mean that evildoers have actually been in the kingdom. He relied upon Matt 8:12, where Jesus declares that ‘the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness.’ Ladd contended that the word, ἐκβληθήσονται (‘will be thrown out’), indicates that the Jews who are the ‘sons of the kingdom’ by history and covenant will be excluded from entering the kingdom, not expelled once they have already entered. Thus, Ladd claimed, the statement in v. 41 means no more than that evildoers will be prevented from entering the kingdom.⁷⁵

The ecclesiological reading of the parable of the dragnet was also rejected by Ladd on the grounds that it fails to appreciate the historical context of the parable and lacks exegetical support. Ladd noted the similarity of the parable with that of the weeds but suggested that the dragnet adds an extra fact, ‘that even the community created by the working of the Kingdom in the world is not to be a pure community until the eschatological separation.’⁷⁶ It is hard to resist the conclusion that Ladd here affirms the very point that he previously sought to deny—that the parable refers to the church.⁷⁷ Ladd anticipated this objection and sought to clarify: ‘While the parable has an application to the church which, as a later development of Jesus’ disciples, is indeed a mixed people, its primary application is to the actual situation in Jesus’ ministry.’⁷⁸ In other words, Ladd considered it to be anachronistic to view the church as the primary referent of the parable. While ecclesiological applications can be derived from the parable, its primary referent is the disciples gathered in Christ’s earthly ministry.

Significantly, Ladd’s restriction of ecclesiological applications to the parable of the dragnet meant that the parable of the weeds could not be used to support leniency in church discipline. The parable of the dragnet contains no prohibition equivalent to Matt 13:29, and thus its ecclesiological application merely ‘helps us to understand how a modern church, however careful it may be in its efforts to preserve a Biblical purity of membership, will nevertheless find people in its midst who turn out to be alien to the interests of God’s Kingdom.’⁷⁹

Exegetical Issues Raised by the Parables

Ridderbos and Ladd’s interpretation of the parables has exerted considerable influence over the past forty years with most contemporary commentators following their lead.⁸⁰ At the same time, the ecclesiological reading has waned in popularity except among those engaged in redaction criticism who claim that the parables are of Matthean origin and address the problem of Matthew’s own mixed community.⁸¹ In the remainder of this article, the key exegetical issues raised by our historical overview will be examined in light of this contemporary scholarship.

The meaning of ‘the field is the world’ in Matt 13:38

For Ridderbos and Ladd, as for the majority of contemporary commentators, the fact that Jesus identified the field with the world proved to be a decisive argument against the ecclesiological reading.⁸² How then can v. 38 be reconciled

with an ecclesiological reading of the parable? As we observed in our earlier discussion, Calvin claimed that Christ ‘transfers by synecdoche to the world what is more apt of a part of it.’⁸³ The Reformer’s claim that he had identified how Jesus ‘really wants to apply’ the parable should make us extremely cautious about the approach. Calvin read the parable in an ecclesiological context without providing any justification for this approach. Moreover, his use of synecdoche is extremely expansive and lacks any fixed boundaries; given the universality of the ‘world,’ it is possible to argue that it represents virtually anything by synecdoche.

Charles Smith has suggested that the world in the context of the parable should be thought of as a temporal rather than a spatial term.⁸⁴ The problem with this view, as Robert McIver has shown, is that it unacceptably stretches the normal sense of the word κόσμος.⁸⁵ McIver himself argues that it is the crop that represents the believing community, not the field and that the identification of v. 38 merely sets the context for the church in which the differences occur.⁸⁶ The problem with this approach is that the reading renders the identification of v.38 redundant, as McIver himself appears to acknowledge.⁸⁷ While it is true that not every detail of a parable is absolutely necessary for its purpose, the detail in question is one that is identified in the parable’s explanation. It seems inconceivable that such an identification would be made if the detail bore no significance for the parable’s purpose. Moreover, the reading substitutes an identification on which the parable’s explanation is silent (that the crop represents the church) for an identification that the explanation explicitly makes (that the field is the world).⁸⁸

1. Robert Gundry argues that the world is ‘a space’ in Matthew’s Gospel while the church is ‘a certain kind of people.’⁸⁹ Thus to identify the field with the world does not mean that the world is a mixed community; it simply confirms that the kingdom extends throughout the whole world.⁹⁰ Gundry’s reading is susceptible to the same criticisms that have been levelled against McIver’s and should be rejected for the same reasons.

There has been no shortage of attempts to reconcile v. 38 with an ecclesiological reading, both in contemporary scholarship and historical, but none of the attempts have been persuasive thus far.

The alleged triviality of a universalistic interpretation

McIver has claimed that the universalistic interpretation, that the parable teaches that both good and evil will remain in the world until the time of the final judgment, is ‘a truism too trivial even to be described as a cliché.’⁹¹ He also questions whether there can be any explanation for the servants’ desire to pull out the weeds on such a reading. It seems that McIver has overlooked the significance of the Messianic expectation in first century Judaism which anticipated that the arrival of the Messiah would signal the removal of the Romans and all other enemies of God’s people. Such an expectation is evident in John the Baptist’s preaching (Matt 3:10–12), the Psalms of Solomon 17:23–32, and the expectations of the Zealots, Pharisees and the Qumran community.⁹² As D. A. Carson observes, the parable ‘explains how the kingdom can be present in the world while not yet wiping out all opposition.’⁹³ Moreover, it addresses what must have been a latent desire among many of Jesus’ disciples to effect such a Messianic purging.

The indistinguishability of the crops

It is sometimes claimed that the reason why the master in the parable forbids the removal of the weeds is because of their indistinguishability from the wheat. This, it is suggested, better comports with the view that the parable is describing the visible church since the rest of Matthew’s Gospel emphasises the big differences that exist between followers of Jesus and followers of the evil one.⁹⁴ The objection is based upon a fundamental misunderstanding of the central teaching point of the parable. The discussion between the master and the servants takes place after the weeds have manifested themselves (v.26). Thus the problem is not that of indistinguishability but rather the difficulty of removing the weeds without uprooting the wheat. As even representatives of the ecclesiological reading recognise, such difficulty was due to the roots of bearded darnel becoming intertwined with those of the wheat.⁹⁵ In light of this, the objection quickly falls away.

The meaning of the kingdom

As we observed in our historical overview, those who adopt an ecclesiological reading of the parables generally understand Jesus to use kingdom in its more concrete sense to refer to realm, while those who adopt a universalistic reading predominantly understand kingdom in its abstract sense meaning rule. Division along these lines continues in the contemporary debate although the question

is largely irrelevant for those who support an ecclesiological approach on redactional grounds.⁹⁶ A thorough examination of the issue is beyond the scope of this article. It suffices to note that the bulk of contemporary exegetical and lexical scholarship supports the primacy of the abstract meaning. For example, Bauer et al note both the abstract and concrete senses of βασιλεία, but identify over 130 NT instances of the former (including Matt 13:24, 38,41, 43) and only 9 NT instances of the latter.⁹⁷ Louw and Nida comment: ‘It is generally a serious mistake to translate the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ‘the kingdom of God’ as referring to a particular area in which God rules. The meaning of this phrase in the NT involves not a particular place or special period of time but the fact of ruling.’⁹⁸ The weight of evidence favours the primacy of the abstract meaning and there are no compelling reasons for adopting the concrete meaning in the parables of Matt 13.

The meaning of ‘gather out of his kingdom’ in Matt 13:41

As we noted above, the reference to the angels gathering ‘out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers’ (συλλέξουσιν ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ πάντα τὰ σκάνδαλα καὶ τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν, Matt 13:41) appears to present a serious difficulty for the universalistic reading of the parable.⁹⁹ In what sense can the causes of sin and law-breakers be said to be in the kingdom? The verse is difficult to interpret whichever reading one adopts. If one understands the ‘kingdom’ in v.41 to refer to the visible church this still leaves the reader with the problem of a realm of God that contains individuals who do not really belong.

A number of attempts have been made to explain the verse in a universalistic framework. As we saw in our historical overview, Ladd argued that Matt 8:12 provides the exegetical key to the verse. The problem with Ladd’s analysis is that the verb in Matt 13:41 is συλλέγω (‘gather’) while the verb in Matt 8:12 is ἐκβάλλω (‘cast out’). It is difficult to see how the meaning of ἐκβάλλω in Matt 8:12 bears upon our understanding of Matt 13:41.¹⁰⁰ The focus should rather be upon the preposition ἐκ and whether it necessarily indicates that the Kingdom is the source from which the causes of sin and lawbreakers are gathered. It is clear that, on occasions, ἐκ denotes separation rather than source (1 Cor 9:19; Rev 14:13).¹⁰¹ Thus, it is conceivable that the gathering is a separation of lawbreakers from the kingdom rather than a removal of those who are already in the kingdom. If so, Ladd’s conclusion may be correct although for a different reason to the one he posits. In any event, the case is far from proven.

Ridderbos' claim that the kingdom refers to the fruit of the good seed which has been sown throughout the world is also unconvincing. It rests upon the view that the good seed (Matt 13:38), 'stands first for the word of God' (as in the parable of the sower) and only derivatively for the sons of the kingdom who are 'the fruits of this seed.'¹⁰² This lacks any warrant in the text and is unsupported elsewhere.¹⁰³

The preferable view is that v.41 must be read in light of the abstract sense of the kingdom. This approach is exemplified by Carson who observes that '[t]he kingdom is flexible enough to be used simultaneously for the saving reign of God (so that 'sons of the kingdom' can refer to those who are truly God's people, v. 38) and for his reign more broadly considered (so that the kingdom in this sense might well embrace wheat and tares; see 3:2; 5:3; 28:18).'¹⁰⁴ When the kingdom is understood in this abstract sense, it is natural to conclude that unbelievers will remain within the inaugurated kingdom of God's rule until the time of Christ's climactic and consummative return.

Church Discipline

It is often suggested that the provisions for exclusionary discipline in Matt 18:15–20 constitute a fundamental objection to the ecclesiological reading of the parable.¹⁰⁵ As we observed in our historical overview, Calvin, Vos and the Westminster Assembly each insisted that church discipline remained unaffected by their reading of the parables although they provided no account of how the two could be reconciled. The fullest treatment of the issue was provided by Vos who asserted that the parable addresses the disciples' expectation of an immediate separation between the good and the evil at the time of Christ's coming.¹⁰⁶ While this is undoubtedly true, it collapses the ecclesiological reading into the universalistic.¹⁰⁷ To the extent that it addresses later ecclesiological issues by implication (and hence is truly an ecclesiological reading), it fails to reconcile Matt 13:29 with the NT provisions for exclusionary discipline.

Contemporary advocates of the ecclesiological reading (coming from a redaction critical perspective) are more willing to accept that Matthew contradicts himself,¹⁰⁸ or that he provides a context for the disciplinary provisions (sandwiching them between the parable of the lost sheep (18:12–14) and the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:23–35)) which empties them of any force. Charles Smith, a more moderate proponent of this view, suggests

that, ‘Matthew represents not the rejection of discipline but a modification in a Christian direction of its harshness, exclusiveness, and finality.’¹⁰⁹ Ulrich Luz proposes a much more extreme reading suggesting that ‘the idea of the “pure community” and the enforcement of church discipline were paralysed by the idea of the unbounded “great community” sheltered beneath God’s love.’¹¹⁰ In reply to such an approach, it should be observed that these scholars overstate the horizontal significance of the parable of the lost sheep and fail to give due weight to the provisions of Matt 18:15–20 which, even on their own redactional assumptions, confirm that discipline was practiced in the early church.¹¹¹

It has only been possible to present a brief sketch of the attempts that have been made to reconcile church discipline with an ecclesiological reading of the parables but from what we have seen it is clear that discipline (at least in its exclusionary form) is extremely vulnerable under it. Even those who seek to defend discipline find themselves in great difficulty. Given the importance of exclusionary discipline elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel this ought to make us extremely cautious about adopting the ecclesiological reading.

The parable of the dragnet

In our discussion of Ridderbos and Ladd we noted how perilously close they came to adopting an ecclesiological reading of the parable of the dragnet. Donald Hagner in fact does exactly this. While appearing to maintain a universalistic reading of the parable of the weeds,¹¹² Hagner claims that the dragnet goes further and explicitly teaches that the church is a mixed community.¹¹³ In some ways this is not particularly significant since the dragnet does not bear upon the issue of discipline (there being no prohibition equivalent to 13:29), but it is still important to consider the force of Hagner’s reading because of the close relationship between the two parables.

Indeed, the principal objection to Hagner’s reading is the lexical similarity between the parables.¹¹⁴ Both refer to the sons of the kingdom as *καλὸν* (‘good,’ vv 38 and 48) and *δίκαιον* (‘righteous,’ vv 43 and 49). Both describe the climactic event as *συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος* (‘the close of the age,’ vv. 40 and 49). In both, it is the *ἄγγελοι* (‘angels,’ vv. 39, 41 and 49) who carry out the separation and the process is described by the verb *συλλέγω* (‘gather,’ vv 40, 41 and 48). Moreover, the outcome of the wicked in both parables is described with exactly the same formula, *καὶ βαλοῦσιν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς*

καὶ ὁ βρῦγγὸς τῶν ὀδόντων (‘and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,’ vv. 42 and 50). The view that Matthew has a different focus in the two parables is extremely difficult to accept given the lexical similarity.¹¹⁵ If anything, the narrower focus of the dragnet—fixing upon the final separation instead of the period of mixture—makes it even less likely that Jesus is advising against seeking a pure community in this parable.

For Hagner, a key factor in deciding that the dragnet refers to the church is the indiscriminate gathering of fish ἐκ παντὸς γένους (‘of every kind,’ v.47), which he takes to refer to the ‘universality of the invitation to accept the good news of the kingdom,’ in reliance upon Matt 4:19.¹¹⁶ Undoubtedly, this presses the parable too far.¹¹⁷ The word γένος (‘kind’) can refer to races or tribes but it is equally suitable to describe different kinds of fish.¹¹⁸ Moreover, even if the referent of γένος is races or tribes, the fact that the focus of the parable is upon the final sorting means that ‘the point must rather be that ... no race or category of person will escape the final judgment.’¹¹⁹ There is no justification for Hagner’s conclusion that the catch must refer to those who have responded to the proclamation of the Gospel (from false motives and true)—a conclusion that Ridderbos also reaches.¹²⁰ As Snodgrass observes, ‘the rule of end stress requires that the concern of the parable is not the gathering process or Jesus’ implied association with sinners but the separation process (v.48b).’¹²¹ Therefore the parable has nothing directly to do with the mixed state of the church.¹²²

Concluding Remarks

Although it has great historical pedigree, the view that the parables of the weeds and the dragnet refer to the visible church lacks exegetical support. It rests upon the equation of the kingdom with the church and appears to have arisen from the projection of later church contexts back onto Scripture. It is concerning that this interpretation has led to the diminution of church discipline both in the past and the present. Moreover, even those who have sought to maintain the foundational importance of exclusionary church discipline have found it difficult to defend alongside their reading of the parables. By calling into question the identification of the kingdom with the church and re-examining the exegetical foundations of the traditional interpretation, Ridderbos and Ladd have posited a universalistic reading of the parables: they teach that good and evil are to remain mixed in the world until the return of Christ, even though the

kingdom is already present. While it is true that the church is of mixed character and will remain so until the eschatological consummation, the parables of Matt 13 do not address this issue and they provide no basis for neglecting the pursuit (however imperfect) of purity in the church.

RALPH CUNNINGTON is Assistant Minister at Aigburth Community Church, Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham and Research Associate at the Wales Evangelical School of Theology.

ENDNOTES

1. A view held in common with Catholic doctrine, see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (ed. Canon James Bastible; trans. Herder Lynch; 1952; repr., St Louis: Herder, 1955), pp. 270–324; D. M. Stanley, ‘Kingdom to Church: The Structural Development of Apostolic Christianity in the New Testament,’ *Theological Studies* 16 (1955): 1.
2. See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1948; repr., London: Banner of Truth, 1975), p. 399.
3. See the discussion in Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004), pp. 138–146.
4. Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2008), pp. 59–61. DeYoung and Gilbert also overstate the degree of consensus in this debate giving the impression that Ladd’s model of an ‘inaugurated eschatology’ is almost universally held and failing to acknowledge the divergence of views held throughout church history: K DeYoung and G Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2011), pp. 117–122.
5. See in particular: George E. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1959); George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1974); George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (London: SPCK, 1964).
6. Augustine, ‘City of God,’ in *St Augustine’s City of God and Christian Doctrine* (ed. Augustine; vol. 2 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff; London: T & T Clark, 1980), pp. 429–430.
7. Augustine, ‘On Baptism, Against the Donatists,’ 5.38, in *The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists*, NPNF, IV: p. 477.
8. Augustine, ‘On Baptism, Against the Donatists,’ 5.39, in *The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists*, NPNF, IV: p. 478.

9. In places, Augustine appeared to identify the field with the world: 'For it is the Church which the Son of man has sown as good seed, and of which He has foretold that it should grow among the tares until the harvest. For the field is the world, and the harvest is the end of time' ('Letter XCIII to Vicentius,' in *The Confessions and Letters of St Augustine*, NPNF, I: p. 394). It seems, however, that Augustine is here understanding the world to be synonymous with the visible church.
10. Augustine, 'On Christian Doctrine,' in *St Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, NPNF, II: p. 569.
11. Augustine, 'Tractate CXXII,' in *Homilies on the Gospel of John; Homilies on the First Epistle of John; Soliloquies*, NPNF, VII: p. 443.
12. Augustine, 'Sermon XXXVIII,' in *St Augustine: Sermon on the Mount; Harmony of the Gospels; Homilies on the Gospels*, NPNF, VI: 386.
13. Augustine, 'Letter XCIII to Vicentius,' in NPNF, I: p. 393.
14. Augustine, 'Letter LXXVI to the Donatists,' in *The Confessions and Letters of St Augustine*, NPNF, I: p. 343.
15. Augustine, 'The Three Books of Augustine in answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist,' in *The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists*, NPNF, IV: p. 598.; Augustine, 'Letter XCIII to Vicentius,' in NPNF, I: p. 384.
16. Augustine, 'Letter XCIII to Vicentius,' in NPNF, I: p. 394.
17. Augustine, 'Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen,' in *On the Holy Trinity; Doctrinal Treatises; Moral Treatises*, NPNF, III: p. 343.
18. Augustine, 'Letter XCIII to Glorius, Eleusius, the Two Felixes, Grammaticus,' in *The Confessions and Letters of St Augustine*, NPNF, I: p. 283. Augustine gives the examples of Aaron bearing with the people at Mt Sinai; Samuel bearing with the reprobate sons of Eli; Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah bearing with the people of their times; and Jesus bearing with Judas.
19. Augustine, 'Letter LXXVI,' in NPNF, I: p. 344.
20. Along similar lines, see Alexander B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ: a Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of our Lord* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1882), pp. 54–56.

21. John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeil; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; The Library of Christian Classics XX; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2001), 4.1.2. The distinction is further defined at 4.1.7: 'For we have said that Holy Scripture speaks of the church in two ways. Sometimes by the term "church" it means that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit ... Often, however, the name "church" designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ.'
22. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.2–3. This inability to identify the true church does not present a problem for believers because the identity of the church belongs to the realm of faith and 'our faith is no worse because it recognises a church beyond our ken' (*Institutes*, 4.1.3).
23. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke* (ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; trans. T. H. L. Parker; 3 vols.; Calvin's New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), II: pp. 74–75, 83.
24. Calvin, *Gospels*, II: p. 75.
25. About the parable of the weeds he writes: 'if we accept the prophecy we must patiently bear the confusion in which God's elect are mixed up with the reprobate for the time being' (*Gospels*, II: p. 78). About the parable of the dragnet: 'the admixture of good and bad must be patiently endured to the world's end, since the true and substantial restoration of the Church shall not be established before' (*Gospels*, II: p. 83).
26. Calvin had the Anabaptists of his own day as well as the Cathari (Novationists) and Donatists of earlier times in view.
27. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.13
28. Calvin, *Gospels*, II: p. 76. In the *Institutes* he writes that those who separate 'are vainly seeking a church besmirched with no blemish' (*Institutes*, 4.1.13).
29. Calvin, *Gospels*, II: p. 76
30. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.9.
31. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.15.
32. Calvin quotes Augustine extensively at *Institutes*, 4.1.16.
33. WCF 25.2; LC 62. See Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1976), pp. 107, 158.

34. WCF 25.1; LC 64. See Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Confession*, pp. 107, 160. See discussion of the distinction in Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, Pa: P & R Publishing, 2009), pp. 319–322; Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), pp. 311–313; G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (2d ed.; Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2004), pp. 243–246.
35. Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Confession*, p. 108.
36. WCF 25:2, 3. Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Confession*, p. 108.
37. See discussion in Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, p. 313.
38. See discussion in Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*, pp. 357–358.
39. Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (1903; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1998), pp. 25–30; Vos, *Biblical Theology*, pp. 375–376. Vos also distinguished between two forms of Kingdom: one invisible now and the other visible at the end (*Teaching of Jesus*, p. 61; *Biblical Theology*, p. 384).
40. Vos, *Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 158–159. He acknowledged that it was not the only expression of the kingdom since the kingdom was being manifested in every sphere of human life (*Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 162–163).
41. Vos categorically rejected the notion of regenerate church membership: ‘all the attempts which have at various times and in various circles been made to limit the membership of the visible Church to the regenerate, or to such as profess to have assurance of regeneration or real piety, must be adjudged to be wrong in principle and harmful in tendency’ (‘The Visible Church: Its Nature, Unity and Witness,’ *WTJ* 9 (1947): 147).
42. Vos, *Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 159–160.
43. Vos, *Teaching of Jesus*, p. 161.
44. Vos, *Teaching of Jesus*, p. 162.
45. Vos, *Teaching of Jesus*, p. 166.
46. Vos, *Teaching of Jesus*, p. 168.
47. Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (ed. Raymond O. Zorn; trans. H. de Jongste; Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1975), p. 24.
48. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 25.
49. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 55.
50. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 56. See also Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus: Origin and General Character of Paul’s Preaching of Christ* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1958), p. 29.

51. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 343. In his work on Paul's theology, Ridderbos identifies the church as both the continuation and fulfilment of the historical people of God and the body of Christ (*Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1975), pp. 327–395).
52. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 343.
53. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 345
54. Herman N. Ridderbos, *Matthew* (BSC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 266.
55. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 137.
56. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 179, n. 85; p. 345. For Ridderbos, the reference to the world serves to emphasise that the Kingdom is universal and is being preached throughout the world (*Matthew*, p. 266).
57. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 137. See also Ridderbos, *Matthew*, p. 266.
58. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 179, n. 85; p. 391, n. 38.
59. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 137.
60. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, p. 269.
61. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, p. 270.
62. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 140.
63. If so, this was certainly unintentional. Indeed, Ridderbos exhibited hesitancy about including the initial gathering within the *tertium comparationis* of the parable (Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 141)
64. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 354.
65. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 355.
66. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 355.
67. Ladd, *Future*, pp. 124–138. See also George E. Ladd, 'The Kingdom of God: Reign or Realm,' *JBL* 81 (1962): 230–238.
68. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 117; Ladd, *New Testament*, p. 111.
69. Ladd, *New Testament*, pp. 113–119; Ladd, *Future*, pp. 265–277.
70. Ladd, *New Testament*, p. 119.
71. Ladd argued that each of the parables in Matt 13, 'illustrates that the Kingdom of God which is yet to come in power and great glory is actually present among men in advance in an unexpected form to bring to men in the present evil Age the blessings of The Age to Come' (*Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 55).
72. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 57; Ladd, *New Testament*, pp. 96, 112.
73. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 57.
74. Ladd, *New Testament*, p. 112; Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 58.
75. Ladd, *New Testament*, p. 97.
76. Ladd, *New Testament*, p. 101.

77. Indeed, this view is reinforced when a little later Ladd writes that, 'the action of God's Kingdom among men created a mixed fellowship, first in Jesus' disciples and then in the church' (*New Testament*, p. 113).
78. Ladd, *New Testament*, p.101.
79. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 63.
80. See for example: Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), pp. 199–200; D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*; ed. Frank E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 324–327; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), II: pp. 428–431; R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: IVP, 1985), pp. 224–225; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), pp. 393–394; Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008), pp. 202–204; David L. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 352.
81. See particularly: John Dominic Crossan, 'The Seed Parables of Jesus,' *JBL* 92 (1973): 259–261; David R. Catchpole, 'John the Baptist, Jesus and the Parable of the Tares,' *SJT* 31 (1978): 557–570; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: The Religious Book Club, 1942), p. 183; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1994), pp. 265, 271–275; Charles W. F. Smith, 'The Mixed State of the Church in Matthew's Gospel,' *JBL* 82 (1963): 149–168.
82. Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, p. 179, n. 85; Ladd, *New Testament*, pp. 96, 112; Davies and Allison Jr., *Matthew*, II, pp. 427–428; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, p. 393; Carson, *Matthew*, pp. 325–326; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, pp. 203–204; Turner, *Matthew*, p. 352; Mark L. Bailey, 'The Parable of the Tares,' *BSac* 155 (1998): 274; Petri Luomanen, 'Corpus Mixtum—An Appropriate Description of Matthew's Community,' *JBL* 117 (1998): 471.
83. Calvin, *Gospels*, II: p. 75.
84. Smith, 'Mixed State,' 153.
85. Robert K. McKiver, 'The Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43) and the Relationship between the Kingdom and the Church as Portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew,' *JBL* 114 (1995): 651.
86. McKiver, 'Weeds among the Wheat,' 652 (emphasis in original).
87. McIver writes: 'Thus, on an ecclesiological reading of the parable, while the church exists within the world and, indeed, is scattered throughout the world, this is not the point of the parable' ('Weeds among the Wheat,' 652).

88. It may be objected that the crop is identified in the parable since it is simply the aggregate of the wheat and the weeds. This is true, but in no place does the explanation identify the crop as the church. This appears to be an insurmountable obstacle to the reading since the explanation explicitly identifies the field as the world.
89. Robert H. Gundry, 'In Defense of the Church in Matthew as a Corpus Mixtum,' *ZNW* 91 (2000): 161.
90. Or as Gundry has observed elsewhere: "'World" emphasises the widespread extension of the kingdom through evangelism' (Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 272).
91. McKiver, 'Weeds among the Wheat,' 646.
92. Pss. Sol. 17:21–32 states: '[The Messiah is expected] to purge Jerusalem from gentiles ... to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners ...; to destroy the unlawful nations...; at his warning the nations will flee from his presence; and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts. He will gather a holy people who he will lead in righteousness ... He will not tolerate unrighteousness (even) to pause among them ... the alien and the foreigner will no longer live near them ... There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord Messiah.' Cited in Snodgrass, *Stories*, p. 193. See further Snodgrass, *Stories*, p. 206. See also Vos, *Teaching of Jesus*, p. 166.
93. Carson, *Matthew*, p. 317.
94. McKiver, 'Weeds among the Wheat,' 647.
95. See Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 265; J Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1972), p. 225. See also Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, p. 384; Davies and Allison Jr., *Matthew*, II: p. 414; Carson, *Matthew*, p. 316.; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005), p. 546; Bailey, 'Tares,' 270.
96. The following adopt the universalistic reading and strongly insist upon an abstract meaning of kingdom: Carson, *Matthew*, pp. 100–101; 325–326; Snodgrass, *Stories*, p. 212; Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 199. McIver who supports the ecclesiological reading mounts a sustained defence of the concrete meaning: McKiver, 'Weeds among the Wheat,' 654–657.
97. Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed.; Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 168–169.

98. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; 2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), I: pp. 479–480. Friberg's Lexicon notes that βασιλεία is used '(1) abstractly, the power exercised by a king *kingship, royal rule, reign* (Acts 1:6); (2) concretely, the territory ruled by a king *kingdom, realm* (Matt 4:8); (3) predominately in the NT of the rule of God as promised, prophesied, and fulfilled through the spiritual rule of God in the hearts of people now (Rom 14:17) and ultimately to be fulfilled in the messianic reign of Christ on earth *reign, kingdom*' (Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000) p. 88). See also Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), pp. 702–706 and the sources cited in Ladd, *Future*, p. 127, n. 11.
99. However, as McIver (an advocate of the ecclesiological reading) notes, it 'is not an insurmountable objection' ('Weeds among the Wheat,' 646).
100. Ladd provides no evidence for his understanding of the sense of ἐκβάλλω and it appears to be unsupported by the major lexicons. BDAG lists the following senses of ἐκβάλλω: '1. force to leave, *drive out, expel*; 2. to cause to go or remove from a position (without force), *send out/away, release, bring out*; 3. to cause someth. to be removed from someth., *take out, remove*; 4. to pay no attention to, *disregard*; 5. to bring someth. about, *cause to happen, bring*' (BDAG, p. 299).
101. See A. T. Robertson, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (3d ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), pp. 597–598; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 371.
102. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, p. 266.
103. See Morris, *Matthew*, p. 356; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, p. 393; Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 559; Carson, *Matthew*, p. 325.
104. Carson, *Matthew*, p. 325.
105. Luomanen, 'Corpus Mixtum,' 478. Davies and Allison Jr., *Matthew*, II: p. 428; Turner, *Matthew*, p. 352; Snodgrass, *Stories*, p. 203.
106. Vos, *Teaching of Jesus*, p. 166.
107. Indeed, this is precisely the reading that Ridderbos and Ladd present.
108. Gundry, 'Corpus Mixtum,' 164.
109. Smith, 'Mixed State,' 166. See also McKiver, 'Weeds among the Wheat,' 652–653.
110. Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (trans. J. Bradford Robinson; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 107.

111. See Luomanen, 'Corpus Mixtum,' 477.
112. Although even this is in doubt, see Donald Hagner, 'Matthew's Parables of the Kingdom,' in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2000), p. 112).
113. Hagner, 'Parables of the Kingdom,' in Longenecker, *Challenge*, p. 119; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, p. 399.
114. See Snodgrass, *Stories*, p. 485; Smith, 'Mixed State,' 154; Davies and Allison Jr., *Matthew*, II: p. 442; Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 596; Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 201.
115. See Snodgrass, *Stories*, p. 489.
116. Hagner, 'Parables of the Kingdom,' in Longenecker, *Challenge*, p. 119. See also Dodd, *Parables*, pp. 187–189.
117. For criteria to be applied when interpreting parables see: Ralph Cunnington, 'A re-examination of the intermediate state of unbelievers,' *EvQ* 82 (2010): 217. It does seem that ἐκ παντὸς γένους is the focal emphasis of the clause since it is preposed before the verb, see: Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek* (2d ed. (revised); Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2010), pp. 37–38. What is far less clear is that the referent of the prepositional phrase is the respondents to the Gospel proclamation.
118. See Jeremias, *Parables*, pp. 225–226.
119. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 202.
120. Hagner, 'Parables of the Kingdom,' p. 119.
121. Snodgrass, *Stories*, p. 491. The rule of 'end stress' recognises that the crucial point of the parable is usually, although not always, at the end (pp. 19–20).
122. Davies and Allison Jr., *Matthew*, II: p. 440; Carson, *Matthew*, p. 330.