

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN

DE PAUL UNIVERSITY, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, 60614

THE parable of the wicked husbandmen is found in Mark 12:1-12; Matt 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19, and in the *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 65, where it is followed by the corner-stone saying in logion 66.¹ The purpose of this article is (i) to establish the earliest form of the story; (ii) to argue that this earliest form is better read as a parable than as an allegory;² and (iii) to suggest the meaning of the parable on the lips of the historical Jesus. The primary motivation behind this general purpose is to seek a way out of "the impression of a stalemate when examining the parable's literature."³

I. *The Synoptic Tradition: Allegory*

The narratives of Matt 21:33-46 and Luke 20:9-19 derive from Mark 12:1-12,⁴ and in the synoptic tradition the allegorical nature of the story is clearly evident. In this first section we shall be concerned with whether any major

¹ A. Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel according to Thomas* (Leiden: Brill; New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 39, as 93:1-16 (= logion 65) and 93:17-18 (= logion 66). In this article the designation will be GT 93:1, etc. to enable more exact specification.

² As the terms will be used here, the basic and essential distinction is not that parable has one central point towards which all the story-elements lead, while allegory has many separate but connected points to which the story-elements independently point. The essential difference has to do with the necessary reducibility of the allegory and the fundamental irreducibility of the parable. See P. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), pp. 163-64: "The allegory can always be *translated* into a text that can be understood by itself; once this better text has been made out, the allegory falls away like a useless garment; what the allegory showed, while concealing it, can be said in a direct discourse that replaces the allegory. By its triple function of concrete universality, temporal orientation, and finally ontological exploration, the myth has a way of *revealing* things that is not reducible to any translation from a language in cipher to a clear language." This is taken here to be also the essential distinction of parable and allegory. See also R. W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 133-162. See notes 31 and 33 below.

³ R. J. Dillon, "Towards a Tradition-History of the Parables of the True Israel (Mt 21, 33-22, 14)," *Bib*, 47 (1966), pp. 1-42 (see p. 12, n. 2).

⁴ This seems more likely than the suggestion of M. Black ("The Parables as Allegory," *BJRL*, 42 (1960), pp. 273-87) that "Luke has preserved a version of the parable inde-

points of the story (literal level) seem to militate against the allegory (metaphorical level). The question is not whether every single element can be shown to have allegorical significance⁵ but whether any of the larger elements seem to distract from or even strain against the main thrust of the allegorical point.

(1) *Construction of the Vineyard* (Mark 12:1 = Matt 21:33 = Luke 20:9). The vineyard's structure is evidently based on that of the vineyard in the song of Isa 5:2. Matt 21:33 follows Mark 12:1 in mentioning the planting and the fencing, the digging of the winepress, and the building of the tower. All four points derive explicitly from Isa 5:2 (LXX). This derivation is much lessened in Luke 20:9 and remains only in the residual ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπελῶνα (ἐφύτευσα ἄμπελον in Isa 5:2). But it is still there, and one may presume that if Luke had wished to eliminate it completely he could easily have substituted an εἶχεν for the ἐφύτευσεν.⁶ In the second part of the verse all three agree: καὶ ἐξέδοτο αὐτὸν γεωργοῖς, καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν; Luke 20:9b adds χρόνους ἰκανούς. In context, this can hardly have any other purpose than to make the story "reasonable."⁷ There is only one slightly nagging question, and it is hardly strong enough to be an objection: Would a person who is taking over and expanding with a Christian application the allegory of the vineyard from Isa 5:1-2 call the owner (= God) either ἄνθρωπος (Mark, Luke) or even ἄνθρωπος οἰκοδεσπότης (Matthew)?

(2) *Mission of the Servants* (Mark 12:2-5 = Matt 21:34-36 = Luke 20:10-12). The mission of the servants is told more soberly in Luke: there are three successive servants (δοῦλον, ἕτερον, τρίτον) who are, respectively, beaten, beaten and treated shamefully, wounded and cast out. There are only three servants, nobody is killed; but there is a certain climactic increase in the gravity of the damage done as the cases proceed. The Markan account, of which Luke is a deliberate toning down, has three successive servants (δοῦλον, ἄλλον, ἄλλον) who are, respectively, beaten, wounded in the head (ἐκεφαλαίωσαν) and treated shamefully, and killed. Neither Matthew nor Luke follow Mark's mention of headwounding and it seems most likely a deliberate redactional insertion by Mark himself to allude to the fate of the Baptist (the ἀπεκεφάλισεν of Mark 6:27). This suggests that 12:4 is redactionally Markan and that his received tradition had three statements: a servant who was *beaten* (12:3), another who was *killed* (12:5a), and then, "many others; some they *beat*; some they *killed*" (12:5b). In Mark's tradition there were thus more than three servants sent on the mission but they were apparently sent singly and successively. All of this is drastically

pendent of Mark (though not necessarily uninfluenced at several points by the Marcan version)" (p. 280). On προστιθέναι as a "clear Septuagintalism," see E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS, 9; Cambridge: Cambridge U., 1969), p. 201, n. 2.

⁵ This would not be claimed even by those who consider it an allegory: cf. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (2d ed.; London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 472.

⁶ Cf. J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (rev. ed.; New York: Scribner's, 1963), p. 70: "This allusion to Isa 5 is, however, omitted by Luke (20, 9)."

⁷ In the NT the use of ἰκανός for time is exclusively Lukan (8:27; 20:9; 23:8; Acts 8:11; 9:23, 43; 14:3; 18:18; 20:11; 27:7, 9), saye for Rom 15:23.

changed in Matt 21:34-36: there are no single servants but rather two clearly distinguished groups of servants ("his slaves . . . even more slaves than before"). The first group is beaten, killed, and stoned; and so is the second set. Matthew's addition to Mark's catalogue of evil is the stoning. At this point it is quite clear that the servant-messengers are being moved in different directions in the tradition. Mark does not seem so much interested in sharpening the allegorical servants in the manner of OT prophets as in inserting the Baptist among the rejected. Luke wants to tone down the allegorical allusions to the OT possibly from a lack of interest so as to focus on the son but also in order to keep the story more "likely." But Matthew is developing a precise allegorical application in which the first group is the early prophets and the second group the later prophets; hence the addition of stoning to their fate (cf. II Chron 24:21; Heb 11:37; Matt 23:37 = Luke 13:34). However, it might be noted in passing that the OT is not exactly filled with killed or stoned prophets. In conclusion, one wonders if the tradition in Mark 12:3, 5a (single servants: one beaten, a second killed) is even more original than that in 12:5b so that it was already expanded in the pre-Markan tradition.

(3) *The Mission of the Son* (Mark 12:6 = Matt 21:37 = Luke 20:13). Following through an allegory of "salvation-history," the son who is sent last of all is Jesus. Mark, followed by Luke but not Matthew, stresses this identity by the term *υἰὸν ἀγαπητόν* which recalls his earlier use in 1:11 and 9:7. But three points stand out with some strangeness against this allegorical background: (i) *ἐντραπήσσονται*; (ii) *ὁ κληρονόμος*; (iii) *ἡ κληρονομία*. These words are found in all three versions and yet they hardly seem normal in an allegorical setting. Did the Father expect only "respect" for Jesus? And was Jesus actually killed by those who wished to obtain thereby some divine inheritance? The allegory appears to be straining badly at the seams. The argument is not that every single element in an allegory has to be significant and meaningful; it is surely possible that some points render service to others which are themselves of direct symbolic purpose. But in creating an allegory one should not create elements on the literal level which positively clash with meanings on the metaphorical level. The son sent last of all is a perfect allegorical representation of Jesus and the idea of Jesus as the heir of God is not problematic: cf. the *ἐπ' ἐσχάτου . . . κληρονόμον* of Heb 1:2 with the *ἔσχατον . . . κληρονόμος* of Mark 12:6-7. The real difficulty is the weakness of the motivation theme: of "respect" from the Father, and of hopes for inheritance from the tenants.

(4) *The Death of the Son* (Mark 12:7-8 = Matt 21:38-39 = Luke 20:14-15a). It has been noted that the Synoptists agree on the motivation of the son's murder. The only significant change in the details of his death is again due to the intensification of the allegory. Mark had the tenants murder him and throw the unburied body outside the vineyard, but Matthew and Luke, independently changing Mark, bring the allegory closer to actuality by having the son thrown outside the vineyard and then killed, as Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem.

(5) *Punishment of the Tenants* (Mark 12:9 = Matt 21:40-41 = Luke 20:15b-16). The punishment of the tenants is told in question and answer form which, in itself, is quite common as a parabolic conclusion.⁸ In detail: (i) the Synoptists agree in terming the owner now ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος whereas earlier they had called him ἄνθρωπος (Mark, Luke) οἰκοδεσπότης (Matt); (ii) they agree in posing the question with τί ποιήσει; (iii) Mark and Luke agree on a two-point answer, from Jesus himself; but Matthew has a three-point answer, from the authorities: tenants destroyed, vineyard given to others who produce its fruits. Once again the allegory seems under considerable strain. The changes in Matthew can be easily explained as an allusion to the divided state of his own church and the mention of the necessary fruits as a warning against complacency. Compare, for example, 21:41-43 with the appended admonition of 22:11-14.⁹ But even the two-point answer in Mark and Luke is problematic: that an owner after such an experience would again give out his vineyard strains one's credulity, and its presence here is dictated rather by the actualities of the Gentile mission than by the possibilities and probabilities of agrarian experience. Indeed, the whole idea of the punitive expedition of the master is very improbable against the rest of the story. If such power had always been available to him, the pathetic hope for respect becomes somewhat ludicrous. The punishment theme is an allegorization of Israel's destiny and the influx of the Gentiles into the church. Finally, this theme has been formulated with two points consciously recalling Isa 5:1-7 (LXX): the κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος links with the ὁ γὰρ ἀμπελὼν κυρίου of Isa 5:7; and the τί ποιήσει follows from the τί ποιήσω of Isa 5:4,5. Hence the synoptic allegory is closed in these verses with allusions to the original prophetic allegory. Once again the major problem is that, while the allegory suits well the historical realities of primitive church experience, it is rather disharmonious with the "logic" of the story itself: Whence this sudden change from impotence to vengeance on the part of the vineyard's owner?

(6) *Citation from Ps 118:22-23* (Mark 12:10-11 = Matt 21:42-44 = Luke 20:17-18). The citation from Psalm 118 was an obvious necessity of the allegorical situation. The end could not be the death of the son even when this murder had been amply punished. The end would have to be the triumph of the son. The well-known apologetic of the rejected/chosen stone¹⁰ is added to effect

⁸ R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 182-83: "Some parables end with a question directed to the hearer . . . it is questionable on occasions when the similitude is given in a framework by the answer being provided in the text, whether the framework is as original as the similitude itself. Here the editorial work of the evangelists has to be taken account of . . ."

⁹ Cf. the internal problems of the Matthean community noted by E. Käsemann, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology," *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), pp. 82-107.

¹⁰ On these texts in the early church, see B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), pp. 169-86.

this victorious conclusion. But it is also quite clear that the triumph of the son does not really "appear" within the allegory itself but only outside of it in this appended proof-text. It would seem unlikely that any allegorization of the story was possible until, first and above all, the death of the son was changed into triumph. This mention of victory was even more important than any note of punishment or replacement.

(7) *Application to the Authorities* (Mark 12:12 = Matt 21:45-46 = Luke 20:19). As the story concludes in the synoptic position the allegorical and the historical cross one another in the open. The authorities recognize that the parable is spoken against them; they are the wicked tenants.

The pericope is clearly an allegory: God's vineyard will be taken from the evil authorities of Israel and will be given to the Gentiles; these authorities have rejected the OT prophets and killed Jesus whom God has now made the cornerstone. The allegory of Mark is intensified in Matthew but muted in Luke. However, two very important questions are left unsolved. (i) If the allegory stemmed from Jesus (ending at the death of the son or, at most, at the mention of the master's vengeance), what was his purpose in mentioning the motivation of the father's sending of the son (respect) and of the tenants' murder of the son (inheritance)? (ii) If the allegory (including the citation from Psalm 118) came from the primitive church the above question would still stand, but there would also be a far more serious difficulty: Could such an allegory have been constructed in the early church without an allusion to Jesus' resurrectional victory built *intrinsically* into the story itself and not just added to it externally by the stone-text? For example, one might imagine a vague mention of the son's being rejected (as in John 1:11) so that thereafter he might return in the power of his father to take back the vineyard. In conclusion: even allowing for creative work with one eye on salvation-history and the other on Isa 5:1-7 there are problematic discrepancies in the narrative, and the point that sticks above all is the theme of inheritance.¹¹

¹¹ This would be the basic objection to seeing the pericope as an allegorical creation of the early church as suggested by R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 177: "not a parable but an allegory, for the course of events is intelligible only on that basis. The contents also show that the passage is a community project." So also W. G. Kümmel, "Das Gleichnis von den bösen Weingärtnern," *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne: Mélanges offerts à M. Goguel* (Neuchâtel/Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950), pp. 120-31: "nicht aus der geschichtlichen Situation des Lebens Jesu . . . ein wertvolles Zeugnis für die Geschichtsanschauung der Urkirche" (p. 131); and also in *Promise and Fulfilment* (SBT, 23; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1957), pp. 82-83: "This parable can only be considered to be an allegorical representation of salvation-history until Jesus' coming . . . the parable in the form handed down to us cannot be traced back to Jesus and we neither know nor can we reconstruct another form" (p. 83). This is a fair assessment of the situation before or without GT 93:1-16. If it were accepted as a creation of the primitive church, it would presumably have been done to explain the liturgical reading of Isaiah 5. See, relative to other parables, C. H. Cave, "The Parables and the Scriptures," *NTS*, 11 (1965), pp. 374-87.

II. *The Gospel of Thomas: Parable*

The preceding questions might not be sufficient to cast doubt on the allegorical interpretation of the narrative or to support the present contention that it is the attempt to turn parable into allegory that has caused them. One might easily object that inconsistencies could also be found in rabbinic parables. But the presence of a version of this story in GT 93:1-16 becomes extremely important at this point, precisely because no such discrepancies or inconsistencies can be found in its construction.

(1) *Thomas and the Synoptics*. This analysis neither works from nor concludes to any general relationship between the GT and the Synoptics. The obvious similarities between the two traditions can be explained in one of two basic ways: "Thomas was either using the Synoptic Gospels as his source, or . . . he was using a source or sources which were independent of the Synoptic Gospels, but which contained some parallel material."¹² Each explanation has found defenders: Thomas was using the Synoptics and hence is less original than these writings;¹³ or Thomas was using an independent source and may be more original than the Synoptics in certain instances.¹⁴ For the present discussion this will

¹² H. Montefiore, "A Comparison of the Parables of the Gospel According to Thomas and of the Synoptic Gospels," *NTS*, 7 (1961), 220-48 (= H. Montefiore & H. E. W. Turner, *Thomas and the Evangelists* [SBT, 35; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1962], pp. 40-78. See p. 42 for the quotation given). Montefiore concluded: "In many instances Thomas' versions have proved to be inferior and such instances of inferiority have usually been connected with Thomas' gnosticizing tendency. Nevertheless it is often the case that Thomas' divergences from synoptic parallels can be most satisfactorily explained on the assumption that he was using a source distinct from the Synoptic Gospels. Occasionally it seems to be free from apocalyptic imagery, allegorical interpretation, and generalizing conclusions" (p. 78).

¹³ R. Kasser, "Les manuscrits de Nag^c Hammâdi: Faits, documents, problèmes," *RTPPhil*, 9 (1959), pp. 357-70; R. M. Grant, "Two Gnostic Gospels," *JBL*, 79 (1960), pp. 1-11; R. M. Grant with D. N. Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), p. 116: "The Gospel of Thomas is largely based on the Church's gospels"; B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 66: "Most of the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas which reproduce canonical sayings of Jesus, either whole or in part, consist of material from the three synoptic Gospels."

¹⁴ G. Quispel, "Some Remarks on the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS*, 5 (1959), pp. 276-90: "The importance of the Gospel of Thomas lies in the fact that it contains an independent and very old Gospel tradition. When I say independent, I mean that some sayings of the Gospel of Thomas were not taken from our canonical Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John but were borrowed from another source" (p. 277); J. Leipoldt, "Ein neues Evangelium? Das koptische Thomasevangelium übersetzt und besprochen," *TLZ*, 83 (1958), pp. 481-96: "Es dürfte vielmehr in unserem Texte eine selbständige Überlieferung synoptischer Art zu Grunde liegen" (p. 494); G. W. MacRae, "The Gospel of Thomas—*Logia Iesou*?" *CBQ*, 22 (1960), pp. 56-71: "Perhaps also an Aramaic collection of sayings of Jesus that was the product of a genuine Palestinian tradition parallel with but independent of the canonical Synoptic tradition" (p. 70); C.-H. Hunzinger, "Aussersynoptisches Traditionsgut im Thomas-Evangelium," *TLZ*, 85 (1960), pp. 843-46:

be considered an open question still under debate. One could conclude from the history of the debate that the final answer will have to be quite nuanced and more "complex" than either of these positions.¹⁵ But even if one opted for synoptic dependence in general it could always happen that a given saying or parable might reflect an independent and more original version than that found in the synoptic tradition.

(2) *GT 93:1-16 and 93:17-18*. In turning from the "strained" allegory in the synoptic tradition to the story in *GT 93:1-16*, we note that certain features are immediately evident. (i) There are no allusions to *Isa 5:1-7* at the start or conclusion of the story. (ii) Only single servants are sent; only two are sent, and nobody is killed (*93:7*: "a little longer and they would have killed him") before the murder of the son. (iii) There is no mention of "outside the vineyard" in *93:15*. (iv) There is no concluding question and answer and, therefore, no mention of the punishment of the tenants; after the murder there is only, "Whoever has ears let him hear" (*93:16*). From all this it is clear that there is no overt allegory in the *GT* version. But on the positive side it must be noted that *93:12-15* retains both the theme of respect and of inheritance as in the synoptic tradition, and in almost the same language: "He said: 'Perhaps they will respect my son.' Since those husbandmen knew that he was the heir of the vineyard, they seized him, they killed him." As the story stands here, there is no reason to look on it as an allegory,¹⁶ and the question can now be raised whether it makes better sense as a parable.

". . . ein später Ausläufer eines besonderen, von den Synoptikern unabhängigen Traditionsstranges . . ." (p. 843); K. Grobel, "How Gnostic is the Gospel of Thomas?" *NTS* 8, (1962), pp. 367-73.

¹⁵ J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Oxyrhynchus *Logoi* of Jesus and the Coptic Gospel according to Thomas," *TS*, 20 (1959), pp. 505-60: "When one asks how authentic these Coptic sayings are, it should be clear that the answer will not be simple, given the complex nature of the sayings" (p. 509 [= *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London: Chapman, 1971), p. 360]); R. McL. Wilson, "Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels," *ExpTim*, 72 (1960), pp. 36-39: "To rule out the possibility of independence at this stage . . . is as unjustifiable as to assume it without further investigation. In point of fact, the problem would seem to be much more complex" (p. 39); and six years later in "Second Thoughts: XI. The Gnostic Gospels from Nag Hammadi," *ExpTim*, 78 (1966), pp. 36-41: "Evidently the problem is more complex than appears at first sight, and much still remains to be done" (p. 39); A. J. B. Higgins, "Non-Gnostic Sayings in the Gospel of Thomas," *NovT*, 4 (1960), pp. 292-306: "Considerable caution . . ." (p. 306); W. Schoedel, "The Gospel in the New Gospels," *Dialog*, 6 (1967), pp. 115-22: "No conclusions, then, are yet possible" (p. 121).

¹⁶ It might be objected that the very figure of the vineyard would strike the hearer as a natural reference to Israel in view of the OT usage (e.g., *Ps 80:8-13*; *Jer 2:21*; *Isa 5:1-7*), and hence that allegory is inevitable in such a situation. But (i) in the OT the vine(yard) is Israel, the owner is God, and the problem is the vine(yard)'s failure to produce good fruit; (ii) in the present case the opening distinction between vineyard and *tenants* would block the immediate presumption of OT reference: the problem is not lack of fruit but the tenants' refusal of the produce due. It seems more likely that the real

An immediate and very obvious difficulty is that the story in 93:1-16 is followed by 93:17-18. Just as the stone-citation from Psalm 118 was appended in the synoptic tradition in order to complete the allegory, so too the GT has in 93:17-18: "Jesus said: Show me the stone which the builders have rejected; it is the corner-stone." It might be argued that this also reflects the preceding pericope, thereby allegorizing it and applying it to Jesus' life. But against this objection stands the presence of 93:16, "Whoever has ears let him hear." This is used to terminate the preceding logion introduced by "Jesus said" (93:1-16) before another new logion with "Jesus said" is introduced in 93:17-18. This is exactly the same usage of the aphorism as in 82:2; 85:19; 92:9; and 97:6, where it concludes a parable and precedes a new and independent saying with "Jesus said," or "Jesus saw . . . said" (as in 85:19). The only other usage of the aphorism is in 86:6, and there it introduces a parabolic saying.¹⁷ From this use of the aphorism it would seem that 93:1-16 is clearly distinguished by the author from the new and disconnected unit of 93:17-18. This does not necessarily deny that both pericopes may refer to true gnosis: to the persecution of the gnostic in 93:1-16¹⁸ and to the triumph of gnosis in 93:17-18.¹⁹

But it is rather too much to presume that the quotation from Psalm 118 just happened to be in exactly the same place in both Mark and the GT. It would seem much more likely that one of the earliest stages of the allegorization process involved the juxtaposition of this allusion to the triumph of Jesus to the murder story. Further allegorization could hardly have proceeded until the basic story no longer ended with the son's murder but with the son's victory.²⁰ In other words, the conjunction of 93:1-16 and 17-18 as the earliest stage of the allegorization was already available to the GT or to the source being used here. But, whether he understood it or not, he did not accept it and instead he made two completely separate pericopes out of it. The artificial joining of the story and the logion with its mixing of metaphors (Jesus as son, Jesus as stone) would have rendered their separation all the easier. Hence 93:1-16 must still be studied in and by itself, and the possibility that it is to be understood as a parable must still be investigated.

difficulty is for the reader who has first read the story in the synoptic tradition ever to consider it any other way than allegorically. Cf. E. Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomas-Evangeliums* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, 6; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1961), p. 64, where it is interpreted allegorically even in the GT.

¹⁷ "His disciples said: Show us the place where Thou art, for it is necessary for us to seek it. He said to them: Whoever has ears let him hear. Within a man of light there is light and he lights the whole world. When he does not shine, there is darkness" (86:4-10). Cf. S. Muñoz Iglesias, "El evangelio de Tomás y algunos aspectos de la cuestión sinóptica," *EstEcl*, 34 (1960), pp. 883-94.

¹⁸ H. Montefiore & H. E. W. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 56: "The true gnostic will suffer persecution (93.15)." It is also possible that there is a warning that materialism leads to murder: cf. how 92:34b-35 interprets 92:2-34a.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54: "Jesus himself is not the stone: the next saying makes it evident that the stone is the self-knowledge of the true gnostic."

²⁰ C. F. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament* (SBT, 2/12; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1970), p. 13: "It is evidently a later addition to the parable."

(3) *The Structure of GT 93:1-15*. The narrative in 93:1-15 has four movements: (i) the setting; (ii) the first servant; (iii) the second servant; (iv) the son. The setting is as terse as could be; the second servant is needed for the standard threesome, and remains without detail; the son's mission is rather similar to the synoptic tradition.

All of this focuses attention on the first servant and here certain features are strikingly different from the synoptic tradition. It can be seen that (i) 93:8-9, "The servant came, he told it to his master. His master said: 'Perhaps they did not recognize him,'"²¹ has no parallel in the synoptic tradition and is the only such unit in all of 93:1-15; (ii) the incident of the first servant in 93:4-9 is longer than that of the other three elements in the structure, and quantitative stress seems to be given to this mission even over that of the son;²² (iii) there are formal similarities between the narrative concerning the first servant and that of the son. There is (a) a sending, (b) a result, (c) a comment by the master. The sequence for the servant is abc; for the son it is acb. The formal similarity appears not only in the triple structure of the elements but even more precisely in the comparative content of the three elements: (a) the sending of the first servant leads to the sending of the son (93:4=11); (b) the clause, "a little longer and they would have killed him," prepares for the final statement, "they killed him" (93:7=15); (c) the clause, "His master said: 'Perhaps they did not recognize him,'" explains the later statement, "He said: 'Perhaps they will respect my son'" (93:9=12-13). All of this structural analysis serves to raise the question: Why so much space given and given so carefully to the first servant?

It is a truism in parable analysis that such stories must be true to life, either to the recurrent actualities or the recognizable possibilities of experience and existence. The problematic situation given in GT 93:1-16 is perfectly reasonable and, as we now know, quite possible against the historical actualities of Galilee's absentee landlords and rebellious peasantry at the time of Jesus.²³ But it might still seem totally improbable that the owner would send his son into such a dangerous situation without some greater protection than that available to the servants. It is here that the master's reaction to the first servant becomes vitally

²¹ Because of the parallel between the master's comments in 93:9 and 93:12-13, which will be further discussed below, the footnoted suggestion in the edition of A. Guillaumont et al. ("read: 'perhaps they did not recognize him'") is accepted as against that given in the text itself (" 'Perhaps he did not know them' "). The present argument would be but slightly modified in either reading. Cf. also E. Haenchen, *op cit.*, p. 27: "Herr sagte: Vielleicht < haben sie ihn nicht > erkannt?"

²² For example, and only as an indication: (i) setting: 93:1-4a, 3½ lines; (ii) first servant: 93:4b-9, 5½ lines; (iii) second servant: 93:10-11a, 1½ lines; (iv) son: 93:11b-15, 4½ lines.

²³ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (rev. ed.; New York: Scribner's, 1961), pp. 96-102; J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (rev. ed.; New York: Scribner's, 1963), pp. 70-77: "The arrival of the son allows them to assume that the owner is dead, and that the son has come to take up his inheritance. If they kill him, the vineyard becomes ownerless property which they can claim as being first on the spot."

important, and indeed indispensable, to the parable's credibility. The master presumes that the problem is that the tenants will not acknowledge, be it in good faith or bad, the authority of the servant to collect for his master; they will not recognize him.²⁴ Hence it is eventually necessary to send the son with the hope that they will accept his authority and respect his mission. From a literary point of view the excessive space given to the first servant is quite justifiable. It establishes credibility for the succeeding events and it prepares, in both form and content, for the final climactic murder of the son.

(4) *GT 93:1-15 and the Synoptic Allegory.* The question of dependence can now be raised with regard to the story of the husbandmen in the synoptic tradition and in the GT, and with reference to this pericope alone.²⁵ If the story in GT is dependent on the synoptic tradition,²⁶ one could argue that the author removed all the allegorical features to turn it into a parable warning the gnostic against persecution for himself or the results of material lust in others. This might be persuasive if that was all he had done. The abbreviation (i) has reduced the servants to precisely two and thereby attained the climactic threesome with the son, which is at least suspiciously coincidental;²⁷ but (ii) it has added the com-

²⁴ A. J. B. Higgins, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-99 notes: "The Coptic says, 'a good man (*χρηστός*) had a vineyard.' Does this Greek word indirectly reflect Isa V 1, 'my beloved'? If so, we may see in Thomas a hint of a very much earlier stage of development, in which the allusion to Isaiah is not totally absent, but in embryo form." It might seem more likely that the "good man" is to prepare the logical development of the story. It is the master's "goodness" which prevents him from understanding the lethal seriousness of the situation.

²⁵ R. McL. Wilson, "Thomas and the Growth of the Gospels," *HTR*, 53 (1960), pp. 231-50: "Each saying therefore must be examined by itself" (p. 248); O. Cullmann, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Problem of the Age of Tradition Contained Therein: A Survey," *Interpr*, 16 (1962), pp. 418-38 (= *TLZ*, 85 [1960], pp. 321-34): "As far as the possibility of an independent tradition . . . each Logion must be tested . . ." (pp. 434-35).

²⁶ R. M. Grant, "Notes on the Gospel of Thomas," *VigChr*, 13 (1959), pp. 170-80: "'Thomas' (or his source) has carefully examined the synoptic gospels . . . this procedure proves that 'Thomas' relies on the synoptic gospels" (p. 178); R. M. Grant with D. N. Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 172: "This parable . . . is derived from the synoptic gospels, with a few additions, as well as the significant deletion of an allusion to Isaiah 5:1-2. . . . This deletion seems to indicate the lateness of Thomas' version, for Luke (who certainly was following Mark at this point) left out some of the phrases derived from Isaiah. Thomas continues the process." Cf. also W. Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen* (BZNW, 29; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), pp. 137-45; E. Haenchen ("Literatur zum Thomasevangelium," *TRu*, 27 [1961], pp. 147-78, 306-38) concludes about this parable: "Dem Verfasser war bereits die kanonische Erzählung bekannt, wenn er auch nicht notwendig ein Evangelienbuch vor sich liegen hatte" (p. 175); O. Cullmann (*op. cit.*) suggests that a Jewish Christian "Sammler" may have omitted the handing over of the vineyard to others since he understood this to mean the Gentiles.

²⁷ R. McL. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 239: "It is a shorter version, and if it is based on our Gospels we should have to explain the changes; but the really important point is that Thomas presents precisely the form which scholars had postulated as lying behind the

ment of the master so that the first servant and the son are in perfect parallelism, as noted earlier. These additions remain unexplained on the hypothesis of synoptic dependence and abbreviation to change allegory into parable.²⁸ At this stage the far more probable solution is that, at least in this case, GT represents an independent tradition. It is not merely abbreviating the synoptics; it is giving a parable where they gave an allegory, and its parable betrays no "strain" where their allegory does. Finally, this "strain" can be most easily explained by their attempt to turn parable into allegory. The parable is the more original and authentic form.²⁹

III. *The Historical Jesus: Allegory or Parable?*

In the synoptic tradition the pericope is a "strained" allegory in which allegorical thrust and story-line fit somewhat uneasily together so that it is hard to imagine either Jesus or the primitive church creating it as such. In the GT the story is perfectly reasonable and quite possible at the time of Jesus. Its application to gnosis is rather extrinsic and contextual: for example, against the materialism of the tenants, as in the preceding 92:34-35, or as a warning to the gnostic about persecution, as in the following 93:21-24. But as 93:1-16 stands in and by itself, it seems much more original than the version in Mark 12:1-12 and must be taken as the earliest stage of the tradition. At this point the question is whether this earliest stage of the tradition is from the historical Jesus himself.

(1) *The Problem of Method.* Certain principles or presuppositions must be acknowledged in attempting to answer this question. (a) It is presumed that some knowledge of the teaching of the historical Jesus is attainable and that the "principle of dissimilarity" is the best methodological procedure.³⁰ (b) This principle applies not only to the content of Jesus' logia but also and especially

Synoptics." See also his *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Mowbray, 1960), p. 88. With regard to the folkloric threesome, see C. L. Mitton, "Threepfoldness in the Teaching of Jesus," *ExpTim*, 75 (1964), pp. 228-30.

²⁸ G. Quispel, "The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament," *VigChr*, 11 (1957), pp. 189-207: "It is hardly conceivable that this version of the Parable is due to an author who knew the synoptic Gospels: it is much less impossible that we have to do here with an independent tradition . . ." (p. 206). R. McL. Wilson, "Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels," *ExpTim*, 72 (1960), pp. 36-39: "It is remarkable that an editor summarizing our Gospels should have omitted just these details, when he adds the reflection of the master, 'Perhaps they had not known him,' to parallel that about the son" (p. 37). So also W. H. C. Frend, "The Gospel of Thomas: Is Rehabilitation Possible?" *JTS*, 18 (1967), pp. 13-26 (see p. 14, n. 2).

²⁹ In H. Montefiore & H. E. W. Turner (*op. cit.*, pp. 62-64) the former author concludes concerning this parable and that of the Great Banquet that "it is hard to resist the conclusion that Thomas has been using an independent and in some ways a more primitive source for these parables" (p. 63).

³⁰ See, e.g., N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (The New Testament Library; London: SCM, 1967), pp. 15-53; also W. O. Walker, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Discussion of Methodology," *AnglTR*, 51 (1969), pp. 38-56.

to the very *form* of Jesus' parables; that is, when form includes, as it must, the functional life-setting, the form of Jesus' parables is dissimilar from both the didactic forms of allegory and example-story used by both late Judaism and the primitive church. This has a very important result which is applicable immediately to the present problem. When one attains to the earliest stage of the tradition, and it is a parable (i.e., neither allegory nor example), the presumption must be that it stems from the historical Jesus.³¹ (c) It is methodologically valid to use modern terms, categories, and distinctions, even if the ancient authors did not articulate their activity in such expressions as long as our modern words correspond to ancient realities and differences both formal and functional within the text itself.³² (d) The term *παραβολή* had a very wide sense and can best be translated as "figurative language." But further more accurate specification is needed to correspond to the functional forms included in this general rubric.³³ (e) However one wishes to name the form the historical Jesus would have been using in the present case, it can be specified negatively as neither historical allegory nor moral example-story.

These principles serve cumulatively to answer the initial question positively. The tradition's earliest stage is neither synoptic allegory nor gnostic example-story (either against materialism or preparing for persecution), but it is a "parable"; and this functional form, distinctive of Jesus' teaching activity over against that of late Judaism and the early church, drives towards participation rather than information. It seeks so to articulate the speaker's experience as to draw the hearer into a like encounter.

³¹ Cf. G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 69: "The rabbis also relate parables in abundance, to clarify a point in their teaching and explain the sense of a written passage, but always as an aid to the teaching and an instrument in the exegesis of an authoritatively prescribed text. But that is just what they are not in the mouth of Jesus, although they often come very close to those of the Jewish teachers in their content, and though Jesus makes free use of traditional and familiar topics. Here the parables are the preaching and are not merely serving the purpose of a lesson which is quite independent of them." That parable is not the style of the primitive communities is clear from their inability to understand Jesus' own parables and from the lack of any such definitely stemming from their own creativity.

³² Form criticism does not presume, for example, that an evangelist consciously said to himself that he was here dealing with an apophthegm, etc.

³³ A tentative hypothesis for further discussion: If language be considered as literal and non-metaphorical ($A = A$; $B = B$) as against figurative and metaphorical ($A = B$), the latter might be differentiated as that which seeks *participation in* the experience of the speaker/writer rather than, or as well as, *information about* it. Within such figurative language, driving towards participation, there is a fundamental difference between (i) allegory and example, on the one hand, which *presume* participation and are hardly persuasive without it, and are therefore intrinsically reducible to and dependent on a non-figurative language so that they are ultimately quite expendable, and (ii) parable, on the other hand, which *creates* participation and, as such, is never expendable. If reduced to literal language, it becomes informative rather than participatory. Allegory and example pertain to didactic metaphor, parable is from the world of poetic metaphor. Cf. A. N. Wilder (*The Language of the Gospel* [New York: Harper & Row, 1964], p. 92) on

(2) *The Problem of Meaning*. If the parable came from the historical Jesus, what is its "meaning"? Obviously the answer to this must be fundamentally reductive and accepted as such. It is raised only so that its answer leaves the hearer or reader more open to the direct experience of the parable itself.³⁴

The discussion of the parable would seem to vindicate the need for some more sophisticated understanding of the terms involved. It is of great importance, of course, whether the original story is taken to have included the Isaiah allusions or not, and where exactly it ended: with the crime or with the punishment. C. H. Dodd includes both the Isaiah references and the question, but not the answer which ends it, in the authentic parable of Jesus. He then interprets it as a warning concerning his coming death.³⁵ J. Jeremias considers both the allusions to Isaiah and the question/answer conclusion as being secondary; but then, in a rather flagrant contradiction, he uses the former implicitly and the latter explicitly to explain the parable as Jesus' vindication of the gospel's being offered to the poor.³⁶ D. O. Via, Jr. takes a position between these two authors

verbal and non-verbal figure: "a true metaphor or symbol is more than a sign; it is a bearer of the reality to which it refers. The hearer not only learns about the reality, he participates in it. He is invaded by it." J. M. Robinson, "Jesus' Parables as God Happening," *Jesus and the Historian* (ed. F. T. Trotter; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), pp. 134-50: "This understanding of language (i.e., in the new hermeneutic) focuses attention not upon the conceptual information communicated, but rather upon 'communication' in the sacramental meaning of the term: communion or participation. Its interest is in what happens when language takes place, the happening it calls forth" (p. 142); and J. D. Crossan, "Parable and Example in the Teaching of Jesus," *NTS*, 18 (1971-72) [forthcoming].

³⁴ Cf. the statement of M. Heidegger, "Remembrance of the Poet," *Existence and Being* (ed. W. Brock; Chicago: Regnery, 1949), pp. 234-35: "But whatever an explanation can or cannot do, this always applies: in order that what has been purely written of in the poem may stand forth a little clearer, the explanatory speech must break up each time both itself and what it has attempted. The final, but at the same time the most difficult step of every exposition consists in vanishing away together with its explanation in the face of the pure existence of the poem."

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 101: "Consequently the parable would suggest, by a kind of tragic irony, the impending climax of the rebellion of Israel in a murderous assault upon the Successor of the prophets." For all practical purposes this renders the unit an allegory; and one agrees with M. Black ("The Parables as Allegory," *BJRy1L* 42 [1960], pp. 273-87) that "while thus showing allegory firmly to the door, one cannot but wonder if Dr. Dodd has not surreptitiously smuggled it in by the window" (p. 283).

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 71: "The connection with Isa 5 must therefore be due to secondary editorial activity"; and on p. 74: "If the final question is secondary . . . then so is the answer to the question. Neither of them is part of the original parable." But then on p. 76: "Like so many parables of Jesus, it vindicates the offer of the gospel to the poor. You, it says, you tenants of the vineyard, you leaders of the people! you have opposed, have multiplied rebellion against God. Your cup is full! Therefore shall the vineyard of God be given to 'others' (Mark 12.9). Since neither Mark nor Luke give any further indication who the 'others' may be, we must, following the analogy of the related parables . . . interpret them as the *πρωχοι*." Once again one tends to agree with the comment of J. J. Vincent, "The Parables of Jesus as Self-Revelation," *Studia evangelica*, I (TU 73; eds. K.

by eliminating the detailed reference to Isaiah while retaining the punishment theme. Hence he understands it as referring to the Jerusalem authorities and, once again, it is an allegory of the historical Jesus.³⁷ But, *methodologically*, J. Jeremias was surely correct in eliminating both Isaiah and punishment, as in the GT, from the original narrative. Why then did he slip them back into the interpretation? The answer would seem to be that otherwise Jesus is telling a most disedifying and immoral story, even if it is quite possible or even historically actual within the Galilean experience of his time. But is it not at least as likely that Jesus is doing this as that he is rather awkwardly allegorizing his own death?

One of the major themes of Jesus' parables is the crisis in which his hearers stand and the necessity that they recognize it, decide about it, and act appropriately.³⁸ Among such parables one finds, to the tradition's ancient dismay, the quite immoral³⁹ story of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8).⁴⁰ It is a graphic

Aland et al.; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959), pp. 79-99: "Does Jeremias in fact avoid the allegorization which he seeks to root out? If 'the others' are 'the poor' and the tenants are the leaders of the people, why should not the servants be the prophets and the son Jesus?" (p. 85). This author considers it a "parable of self-revelation . . . Jesus as son repeats in His own body the fate of the prophets" (p. 87).

³⁷ *The Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), p. 134: "Even so, just the allusive reference to the vineyard and the beating of the servants must have referred subsidiarily to Israel and her rejection of God's messengers. And the 'son' possibly refers to the climactic coming of Jesus. . . . Thus this parable is more nearly allegorical than (most of) Jesus' other narrative parables. . . ." Irrespective of whether the term used is allegory or parable or both, recent commentators have usually *explained* it as an allegory of Jesus' destiny. See G. V. Jones, *The Art and Truth of the Parables* (London: SPCK, 1964), pp. 44 & 66, who considers both the Isaiah allusions and the punishment theme as original and concludes: "The point of the parable . . . is the giving away of the vineyard . . . a judgment on Israel" (p. 91), and so, "both allegory *and* parable" (p. 97). E. Linnemann (*Jesus of the Parables* [New York: Harper & Row, 1966]) neither treats the story in detail nor considers it an allegory (see p. 8). She seems to interpret it as an attack on the murderous intent of the authorities: "Jesus' parables . . . do (not) . . . make it their object to convict the listener of something" (p. 22); and she footnotes: "Mark 12.1-12 is probably the only example of this" (note c). M. Hengel ("Das Gleichnis von den Weingärtnern Mc 12:1-12 im Lichte der Zenonpapyri und der rabbinischen Gleichnisse," *ZNW*, 59 [1968], pp. 1-39), who argues for the contemporary realism of the incident, interprets it thus: "Wie die heimtückische Ermordung des Sohnes durch die Pächter das sichere Eingreifen des Weinbergbesitzers zur Folge haben wird, so wird die—beabsichtigte—Ermordung Jesu, des eschatologischen Bevollmächtigten Gottes, das Gericht über die verantwortlichen Führer des Volkes heraufbeschwören" (p. 38). X. Léon-Dufour ("La parabole des vigneronnes homicides," *ScEccI*, 17 [1965], pp. 365-96) also interprets it of the fate of Jesus and the destiny of Israel.

³⁸ See, for example, N. Perrin, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

³⁹ Whatever the historical actualities of the legalities and illegalities involved, the tradition has always seen the transactions as somewhat disedifying: cf. J. D. M. Derrett, "Fresh Light on St Luke XVI: I. The Parable of the Unjust Steward," *NTS*, 7 (1961), pp. 198-219.

⁴⁰ J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Story of the Dishonest Manager (Lk 16:1-13)," *TS*, 25 (1964), pp. 23-42; F. J. Moore, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward," *AnglTR*, 47

(actual?) example of prudent grasping of one's immoral chance. This seems to be exactly the point made by the original version of the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, as contained quite accurately in GT 93:1-15(16), with no OT allusions and no mention of the punishment of the tenants. The attempt of the tradition to moralize (alms!) the former parable works even less successfully than its efforts to allegorize the latter one, and both processes are early at work. But the parable of the historical Jesus stands as a deliberately shocking story, certainly possible and possibly actual, of some people who recognized their situation, saw their opportunity and acted resolutely upon it. They glimpsed a way of getting full possession of the vineyard and, with murderous speed, they moved to accomplish their purpose. "Whoever has ears let him hear" (GT 93:16).

(1965), pp. 103-105. J. Jeremias (*op. cit.*, p. 182) has an excellent commentary on this parable: "The shock, much discussed, naturally produced by a parable which seems to present a criminal as a pattern disappears when we consider the parable in its original form (vv. 1-8), and disregard the expansions (vv. 9-13). . . . Jesus is apparently dealing with an actual case which had been indignantly related to him. He deliberately took it as an example, knowing that it would secure redoubled attention, so far as his hearers did not know the incident. They would expect that Jesus would end the story with an expression of strong disapproval, instead of which, to their surprise, Jesus praises the criminal . . . he recognized the critical nature of the situation . . . he acted, unscrupulously no doubt . . . but boldly, resolutely, and prudently, with the purpose of making a new life for himself." The logic of Jeremias' methodology should have led him to an exactly similar interpretation of the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen; but, once again, the hortatory fallacy dies hard.