

Eschatology and the Parables

By

I. Howard Marshall

This lecture was delivered in Cambridge on 6 July, 1963 at a meeting convened by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research

[p.5]

In any attempt to understand the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, a consideration of the parables must take an important place. This is demonstrated not merely by the plethora of critical study and popular exposition to which the parables have given rise,¹ but above all by the place which the parables occupy in the Synoptic tradition. According to A. M. Hunter roughly one third of the recorded teaching of Jesus consists of parables and parabolic statements.² There are some forty parables and twenty parabolic statements (to say nothing of the many metaphorical statements) in the teaching of Jesus, and they are found in all of the four sources or collections of material commonly distinguished by students of the Gospels.³ Further, there is abundant evidence of Palestinian background and Semitic speech in the parables. So sceptical a critic as R. Bultmann can say that 'the main part of these sayings (*sc.* the tradition of the sayings of Jesus as a whole) arose not on Hellenistic but on Aramaic soil',⁴ and this verdict applies especially to the parables. The parabolic tradition is thus seen to be integral to the teaching of Jesus and to have a high claim to authenticity.

Although the fact that Jesus used parables in his teaching is thus beyond contest, it is strongly denied by many scholars that the original wording and meaning of his parables is identical with what is actually recorded in the Gospels. Every preacher knows the temptation to re-tell the parables in his own words and thus, consciously or unconsciously, to say more or less than is recorded in the Gospels, and there is plenty of evidence that

[p.6]

the parables have been misunderstood both in modern times and the patristic era.⁵ What many modern scholars contend is that the parables have been the subject of erroneous and biased exposition ever since they left the lips of Jesus, so that our written accounts in the Gospels already show the effects of this misunderstanding of the mind of Jesus. The attempt has

¹ See the lengthy bibliography in J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*⁵ (Göttingen, 1958). (The English translation of this revised edition of his book, *The Parables of Jesus* [London: SCM Press, 1963], was not available at the time of writing this lecture.)

² *Interpreting the Parables* (London, 1960). I should like to express here my deep indebtedness to Professors Hunter and Jeremias for their stimulating teaching and personal kindness to me as a student in Aberdeen and Göttingen, although I find myself adopting different conclusions from them at various points in this monograph.

³ The allocation of parables is roughly as follows: Mk. 6; Q 7; M 11; L 18. It must be stressed that these figures are only approximations, since source criticism is inevitably subjective in its conclusions.

⁴ *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition*⁴ (Göttingen, 1958), p. 179; *cf.* M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*² (Oxford, 1954), pp. 119-123, 139f., 141f.

⁵ M. F. Wiles, 'Early Exegesis of the Parables', in *Scottish Journal of Theology (SJT)*, XI, 1958, pp. 287-301; H. Montefiore (with H. E. W. Turner), *Thomas and the Evangelists* (London, 1962), pp. 40-78.

therefore been made to examine the parables individually in order to recover their original form and meaning; for only through a return to the very words of Jesus himself, we are told, can our message be invested with full authority.⁶

This aim cannot but be described as praiseworthy. It is a great gain for us to learn to interpret the parables of Jesus in the light of their Palestinian background, so that we may appreciate the full force with which they must have struck their first hearers. We owe a real debt of gratitude to J. Jeremias for the wealth of background material which he has brought to the interpretation of the parables.⁷ It is also a great benefit for us to be delivered from the fantastic allegorization to which the parables have been subjected in the course of the centuries.

On the other hand, the conservative scholar tends to be sceptical of the re-writing and reinterpretation of the parables as recorded in the Gospels, which has accompanied these positive results of recent scholarship. Naturally he must admit that there is a real problem here. The fact that the wording of the same parables varies from Gospel to Gospel indicates that there has been a measure of interpretation from the very beginning. Further, the undeniable truth that Jesus taught in Aramaic, whereas the Gospels contain his teaching translated into Greek, should be enough to prove to the most conservative of students that the problem of recovering the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus cannot be evaded.⁸ But, even when this is admitted — as it must be —

[p.7]

the conservative scholar must still be permitted to put several critical question-marks against the sweeping reconstructions of some of the parables of Jesus which have been suggested in recent studies, and to ask whether, after all, the Evangelists were so far astray in their understanding of the teaching of Jesus.

It will perhaps be said that the standpoint of this essay is ‘apologetical’, and that therefore its conclusions are determined in advance and its arguments are simply used to buttress up these conclusions; in short, that this is an attempt to bolster up the authenticity of the Gospels from a biased point of view, and that it therefore stands under critical suspicion from the very outset. We would assert, however, both the duty, and the honourable nature of the duty, of the counsel for the defence, whose task is to discover the truth and who does so from an entirely legitimate point of departure. The conservative’s standpoint is no more — we would prefer to say, much less — arbitrary than the *vielgetadelte Skepsis* of R. Bultmann,⁹ and he has surely an equal right to be heard. His aim is simply to discover the truth by honest study, and he is ready to stand by the results of such study even when they cut across his preconceived opinions.

[p.8]

⁶ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 3. This is not the place to discuss the relationship between the authority of the actual words of Jesus and the authority of the writings of the Evangelists. While we may well doubt whether only the very words of Jesus himself can give authority to our message, it remains true that the authority of the Evangelists would be seriously jeopardized if it did not rest on their fidelity to the actual words of Jesus.

⁷ Mention should also be made here of the great army of interpreters whose results are utilized by Jeremias, especially G. Dalman, W. O. E. Oesterley and E. F. F. Bishop.

⁸ Unless of course one blinds one’s eyes to the problem out of dogmatical prejudice, as is done by W. Broomall, *Biblical Criticism* (London, 1957), pp. 194-196.

⁹ R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 6 n.

I

MODERN CRITICISM AND ITS PRESUPPOSITIONS

There is no need to repeat here at great length the history of modern study of the parables. The story is a familiar one, and has been frequently recounted. But a brief reminder of the salient points, in order to indicate what are the crucial points at issue, will not be out of place.

It is generally agreed that modern study of the parables begins with A. Jülicher, who laid down that the parables were to be regarded as parables and not as allegories. They each contained only one point of comparison and not several, and their messages were interpreted as general truths of a moral nature. If we may pass quickly over R. Bultmann, who classified the parables from a form-critical point of view and drew attention principally to their formal aspects, we come next to C. H. Dodd who made progress along two important lines. First, he gave up the type of general, moralizing interpretation characteristic of Jülicher and emphasized that the parables were to be understood as teaching specific lessons in concrete situations in the ministry of Jesus. Second, he rightly saw the paramount importance of the eschatological element in the parables, and proceeded to give them an eschatological interpretation which was consistent with the other eschatological teaching of Jesus. He believed that the eschatological message of Jesus was centred on the present coming of the kingdom of God, and that the parables needed to be freed from that reinterpretation in terms of a future parousia to which the early Church had subjected them.

The work of Dodd was followed up with typical German thoroughness, and a modification of the understanding of the eschatological teaching of Jesus, by J. Jeremias. In order to pave the way for an exegesis of the parables as originally told by Jesus, Jeremias found it necessary to expose the various kinds of alterations made to the parables by the early Church. Altogether nine classes of alterations were analysed as follows:

a. The translation of the parables into the Greek language produced unavoidable alterations in their meaning.

b. The 'translation' of the material of the stories into Greek and Roman terms (compare, for example. Lk. 12: 58 and Mt.

[p.9]

5: 25 for the mention of Roman and Jewish officials) accompanied the translation of the language.

c. Slight embellishments, added to make the narrative more vivid, in some cases blunted the original point of the story.

d. Many of the parables were adapted to the needs of a new audience. Originally addressed to the crowd or opponents of Jesus, they were now used to instruct members of the Church.

e. This adaptation to a new audience led to reinterpretations of the message of the parables. Stories which originally were used as means of eschatological proclamation, and of vindicating the gospel of God's grace to sinners, were now used for hortatory purposes.

f. The situation of the Church influenced its teaching. In particular, the missionary situation of the Church was read into the parables, and the delay of the parousia exercised a far-reaching effect upon their interpretation.

g. The Church used the method of allegorization in order to put across its message, both by adding fresh details to the parables themselves and by appending allegorical explanations.

h. Through the collection of the parables into groups, and occasionally fusing two parables into one, fresh meanings might be attached to them.

i. Finally, the placing of the parables in their present contexts in the Gospels and the addition by the early Church of introductory and concluding formulae — the last often of a generalizing nature — altered the original significance and force of the parables.

As a result of this process Jeremias is able to give an exegesis of the parables which groups them into eight categories in terms of the message they bring: the presence of salvation, God's mercy for sinners, the great assurance (*sc.* that God's hour is approaching), the imminence of catastrophe, the demand of the hour, realized discipleship, the *via dolorosa* and glorious revelation of the Son of man, and the consummation.

Finally, the results of this phase of study have been set out for the general reader by A. M. Hunter, with his accustomed clarity and skill in penetrating to the essential points at issue, in his *Interpreting the Parables*. Working on lines similar to Jeremias, but with a closer sympathy for the eschatological position of Dodd, he suggests that the parables fall into four groups, and teach: the fact of the coming of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus; the vindication of the grace of God thus demonstrated; the kind of response demanded from men who wish to enter the

[p.10]

kingdom; and the urgent crisis and summons to decision which is inherent in the presence of the kingdom.

When the work of these scholars, and of many others not mentioned in this brief survey, is examined, three main points in their approach to the teaching of Jesus stand out for consideration. These are concerned with the use of allegory by Jesus, the degree of freedom assumed by the early Church in handling the sayings of its Lord, and the eschatological framework of the teaching of Jesus. It is proposed to concentrate attention on the third of these factors in the present study,¹⁰ but first a brief word must be said about each of the other two factors.

¹⁰ The 1963 meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship New Testament and Biblical Theology Study Groups, during which this lecture was delivered, had as its general theme 'eschatology'.

I. THE USE OF ALLEGORY

It now seems to be generally recognized that the presence of allegory in the parables of Jesus cannot be categorically denied. While Jülicher certainly did well to rid us of the 'the fatted calf is the Saviour' type of exegesis, his protest against all allegorization by Jesus, apart from on exceptional occasions, went too far. As far back as 1908 James Denney could write with justifiable sarcasm that the use of allegory by Jesus was 'a supposition which is nothing short of distressing to many honourable men'.¹¹ On the whole, Denney's own position seems to have won the day, and his views are cited by A. M. Hunter with full approval in the following abbreviated form: 'The golden rule is this: Don't try in the interests of an arbitrary theory to eliminate everything allegorical and so trim the texts into pure parables. On the other hand, don't allegorize to the point which mars the one lesson which every parable was meant to teach.'¹² A variety of other witnesses could be cited to the same effect.¹³ It is after all difficult to see why a considerable degree of allegorizing acti-

[p.11]

vity should be attributed to the early Church but disallowed in the case of Jesus himself; to deny the use of allegory to Jesus when it was practised both by the early Church and in contemporary Judaism would be highly arbitrary. One may be allowed to suspect that the denial of certain teaching to Jesus himself because it is allegorical is very often merely a device used by critics to question the authenticity of passages which they already believe to be suspect on other grounds.¹⁴

The parables of the sower and the tares will be discussed later, but it is convenient to glance at the explanations appended to them at this point, since these are commonly regarded as allegorizations of simple parables by the early Church. In the case of the sower the secondary nature of the explanation (Mk. 4: 13-20 and parallels) is pronounced by M. Black to be 'one of the secure results of modern criticism'.¹⁵ Our opinion on this point will largely depend on the interpretation which we assign to the parable itself, but at the same time it should surely be accepted as a principle of criticism that if the meaning given to a parable in the Gospels is an acceptable one it is wiser to accept it than to find for the parable another meaning which is in the nature of a subjective reconstruction and cannot be certainly substantiated. The sheer variety of the alternative explanations offered for the sower by scholars is some indication of how speculative and ill-founded these are. There are in fact no cogent grounds for surrendering the interpretation assigned to the parable in the context. Even if this point is granted, however, the question of the authenticity of the explanation remains unanswered. This has been attacked principally on the grounds that it presupposes the situation of the Church after the death of Jesus and that it employs a Christian vocabulary. Neither of these

¹¹ *Jesus and the Gospel* (London, 1908), p. 315; cf. p. 349.

¹² *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 95. The reference is to J. Denney, 'Criticism and the Parables' in *The Expositor*, Series VIII, II, 1911, pp. 117-136, 219-239.

¹³ A. H. M'Neile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London, 1915), p. 186; E. Hoskyns and N. Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London, 1931), pp. 128f.; W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (London, 1957), pp. 132f.; E. Grässer, *Das Problem der Parusieverzögerung in den synoptischen Evangelien und in der Apostelgeschichte* (Berlin, 1957), pp. 197f.; M. Black, 'The Parables as Allegory' in *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library (BJRL)*, XLII, 1960, pp. 273-287; R. E. Brown, 'Parables and Allegory Reconsidered' in *Novum Testam. entum*, V. 1962, pp. 36-45. On the other hand, see G. Bornkamm, *Jesus von Nazareth* (Stuttgart, 1956), pp. 63f.

¹⁴ Cf. A. M. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 50 n.

¹⁵ M. Black, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-278.

points is fully convincing, and they have been fully examined by C. E. B. Cranfield who pronounces a verdict of 'not proven' upon the case against the explanation.¹⁶ Similarly, C. F. D. Moule has demonstrated the weakness of the argument against the authenticity of the explanation.¹⁷ The points brought forward by these scholars need not be repeated here, but in our opinion they are sufficient to make us very wary of accepting the dominant view of this passage. At the same time it must be pointed out that the later Evangelists, especially Luke, introduce changes in the wording of

[p.12]

the explanation,¹⁸ and the possibility cannot be excluded that the effects of this may already be seen in the form of the explanation given in Mark.

There remains, however, a formidable case against the authenticity of the explanation of the parable of the tares (Mt. 13: 36-43). This has been most fully presented by J. Jeremias, who bases his argument mainly upon the language of the explanation, which abounds in Matthaean characteristics.¹⁹ But even if one must accept the arguments of Jeremias,²⁰ these do not prove that the interpretation of the parable given by Matthew is a false one. In our opinion the one valid point which can be brought against it is that it ignores the command in the parable not to separate the wheat from the tares before the day of harvest. It is at least possible that it was unnecessary to explain this command in the interpretation, since its meaning was sufficiently obvious. There is also the possibility that this command is not the central element in the parable. Otherwise, the identifications made in the explanations are perfectly sound and consonant with the meaning of the parable.²¹

Modern scholars are inclined to deny that Jesus needed to explain his parables, but we may draw attention to an article by J. A. Baird which attempts to demonstrate the frequency with which explanations are provided for the parables in the Gospels, even when allowance is made for the possibility that some of the explanations are not original.²² While, therefore, it cannot be proved that Jesus did give an explanation of this particular parable, the possibility that he did so, and that his explanation was preserved in oral tradition, cannot be excluded.²³

[p.13]

¹⁶ *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 158-161.

¹⁷ *The Birth of the New Testament* (London, 1962), pp. 149.152.

¹⁸ See especially E. Grässer (*op. cit.*, pp. 143f.) for comments on the Christianizing of the language and the ethicizing of the thought in Luke. Grässer also holds that the explanation in Mark presupposes the continuing existence of the community of disciples and the delay of the parousia, and is therefore not authentic; see below for a criticism of this theory.

¹⁹ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-72. The explanation of the parable of the dragnet (Mt. 13: 49f.) comes under suspicion for the same reason. See also J. Jeremias, 'Die Deutung des Gleichnisses vom Unkraut unter dem Weizen (Mt. 13: 36.43)' in *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (Supplement to *Novum Testamentum* VI), 1962, pp. 59-63.

²⁰ On the other side, see M. de Goedt, 'L'explication de la parabole de l'ivraie', in *Revue Biblique*, LXVI, 1959, pp. 32-54.

²¹ See below.

²² 'A Pragmatic Approach to Parable Exegesis', in *Journal of Biblical Literature (JBL)*, LXXVI, 1957, pp. 201-207. The author's conclusions are to some extent vitiated by his failure to take note of all the cases where criticism has raised doubts about the authenticity of the explanations.

²³ For the possibility of oral tradition as a source of Synoptic variants see J. Jeremias, 'Zur Hypothese einer schriftlichen Logienquelle Q', in *Zeitschrift für das N.T. Wissenschaft (ZNW)*, XXIX, 1930, pp. 147-149.

The question of patently allegorical features in the parables themselves will not be considered at this point. Enough has been said to show that the real point at issue is not whether Jesus used allegory, but whether he was capable of expressing the teaching which is contained in the allegorical features of the parables.

II. THE CREATIVE ACTIVITY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The presupposition of much recent study of the Gospels is that the early Church exercised a considerable amount of freedom in its transmission of the sayings of Jesus. Not only were the actual sayings of Jesus modified in the course of oral and written transmission, but also the early Church created a substantial number of sayings which were attributed to Jesus. There was for the early Church, we are assured, no distinction between the earthly Jesus and the risen Lord, so that sayings of the former could be adapted to give the teaching of the risen Lord for his Church, and, similarly, words of the risen Lord, spoken through prophets and preachers in the Spirit, could be attributed in the Gospel tradition to the earthly Jesus. There was thus a constant interaction between the tradition of the sayings of Jesus and the teaching of the risen Lord through his Spirit-filled followers, and consequently it is the duty of the critic in the case of every saying attributed to Jesus to enquire into its possible *Sitz im Leben* in the early Church, and so to determine whether it may be adequately explained as a formation by the early Church.²⁴ It is essentially this process of form criticism which is applied to the parables, with results of a more or less radical nature, by such critics as R. Bultmann and E. Grässer on the one hand and J. Jeremias on the other.

There has always been a certain amount of reluctance in this country to accept the full-blown scepticism which is characteristic of so much form-critical study, and there is no need to recapitulate here the arguments which have led many British scholars to show caution in accepting its results. One or two points may be mentioned with particular reference to the transmission of the parables.

First, it must be admitted that the variations among the Synoptic Gospels indicate that there was a considerable amount of

[p.14]

freedom in the transmission of the wording of the parables. But at the same time it has often been remarked that the tradition of the sayings of Jesus displays a remarkable amount of fixity in comparison with the tradition of his deeds. The Church was obviously loth to alter the wording of the dominical sayings. In this connection attention must be paid to the arguments adduced by H. Riesenfeld in favour of an early fixation and limitation of the tradition of the teaching of Jesus.²⁵

What we wish to emphasize is that the admission of freedom in handling the sayings of Jesus does not of itself permit us to postulate that the early Church felt free to attribute later sayings to Jesus himself. There is clearly a difference between handing down sayings with alterations and enlarging the corpus with new sayings.

²⁴ A good summary of the viewpoint sketched in this paragraph will be found in G. Bornkamm, *Jesus von Nazareth*, pp. 11-23. See also F. Neugebauer, 'Geistsprüche und Jesuslogien', in *ZNW*, LIII, 1962, pp. 218.228.

²⁵ H. Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and its Beginnings* (London, 1957).

A second point is that the evidence outside the Gospels for the creation of sayings attributed to the risen Lord and then read back into the life of the earthly Jesus is extremely slender. The number of *agrapha* is after all very small, and there is very little in the New Testament which can be regarded as words of the risen Lord. Where such sayings do occur, they refer to specific events and occasions or are in a framework, such as that of the Apocalypse, which guards against the possibility of reading them back into the life of Jesus. Further, the activity of the Spirit is stated to be that of bringing the disciples into remembrance of what Jesus said (Jn. 14: 26) as well as that of teaching them all things. There is little evidence that there was a large-scale creative activity along the line of continuing the teaching of Jesus; the Epistles bear witness that the task of the apostles was theological meditation upon the significance of Jesus.

A third point is that the ultimate basis for this theory of creative activity is the fact that certain sayings in the Gospels appear to reflect the conditions of the life of the early Church rather than of the lifetime of Jesus. The theory is a speculative attempt to deal with this problem, and if it can be shown that the problem is much smaller than the form critics suppose, the theory will largely collapse also. This means that we must now look at the situation in the early Church which is supposed to have influenced the formation of the tradition of the sayings of Jesus.²⁶

[p.15]

II

THE ESCHATOLOGY OF JESUS AND THE EARLY CHURCH

The basic factor in the life of the early Church which is important for the study of the parables is its eschatological expectation. The question which lies before us concerns the nature of that expectation and its relationship to the expectation of Jesus himself. It is fair to say that at present there is no unanimity among scholars upon these questions, and there are three main schools of thought among contemporary scholars.

I. REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY

In this country, during the last thirty years, the dominant interpretation of the eschatology of Jesus has been that known as realized eschatology, of which C. H. Dodd is the most distinguished representative.²⁷ Its basic contention is that the decisive event in Jewish eschatological expectation, the coming of the kingdom of God, was regarded by Jesus as taking place once and for all in his own ministry; before his death he could declare that the kingdom had already come. From this it follows that there was no place — or, at least, no decisive place — for prophecies about the parousia in the teaching of Jesus. These are to be explained where they occur in the Gospels as misunderstandings of the teaching of Jesus

²⁶ See also R. Morgenthaler, 'Formgeschichte und Gleichnisauslegung', in *Theologische Zeitschrift (Th. Z)*, VI, 1950, pp. 1-15.

²⁷ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of Jesus*³ (London, 1961); *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London, 1936); T. F. Glasson, *The Second Advent*³ (London, 1963); A. M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (London, 1950); J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (London, 1957).

about his own imminent vindication; the early Church invested Jesus with a glittering apocalyptic robe to which he himself did not lay claim.

It is against this background, this school of thought holds, that the parables are to be interpreted. The application of several of them to the parousia of Jesus is a piece of mistaken exegesis by the early Church, and they must have their original meaning restored to them, namely their reference to the fact of the kingdom which had already come in the ministry of Jesus.

In his later work, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Dodd has accepted the suggestion of some such phrase as *sich*

[p.16]

realisierende Eschatologie or 'inaugurated eschatology' to describe his interpretation.²⁸ Such a phrase would imply that there are eschatological events which occur after the coming of the kingdom; nevertheless, the basic fact remains unaltered that the coming of the kingdom is something to which Jesus looked back rather than forward in his teaching, and Dodd still holds to his original interpretation of the parables.

Although this theory has commanded, and continues to command, considerable support in this country, it has found little favour elsewhere. Its principal weaknesses are that it has to explain away a considerable amount of the teaching of Jesus which is ineluctably future in its reference, and that it is reduced to the necessity of demythologizing those aspects of Jesus' teaching about the future which resist all attempts of the critic's penknife to pare them away.²⁹

II. THOROUGH-GOING ESCHATOLOGY

The second type of interpretation of the teaching of Jesus stands in lineal descent from the *Konsequente Eschatologie* associated with J. Weiss and A. Schweitzer at the beginning of this century. The famous view of this school of thought — that Jesus expected the catastrophic inbreaking of the kingdom during his lifetime (before the return of his disciples from their mission, according to Mt. 10: 23) — is no longer regarded as tenable. Instead of this, the view is put forward that Jesus expected the imminent coming of the kingdom of God to follow his ministry. This coming is identified with the 'parousia' and the Day of the Lord, although in this context the word 'parousia' does not mean the second advent of Jesus himself. This view of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God and the end of the world, these scholars hold, was consistently taught by Jesus right up to his last hours, and he taught this alone. He did not expect an interim period of any length to follow his death so that the development of the Church might be possible; he simply expected the end to come, and all his teaching was geared to this hope. 'So far as we can tell from the sources,' writes E. Grässer, 'Jesus' eschatological expectation was determined by the concept of the future end-time. As such it shows no trace of an expectation to

[p.17]

²⁸ *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 447 n.

²⁹ See R. H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (London, 1954); W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment*, pp. 19-87; E. Grässer, *Das Problem der Parusieverzögerung*.

be fulfilled in the distant future, of a delay, or of a feeling of being deceived by the failure of his expectation to materialise. There are no certain grounds in our sources which allow us to conclude whether the question of the terminus-day in the narrower sense played a role or not. All that can be said is that he knew the end to be very near. This expectation of a near fulfilment must be regarded as the sole form of his eschatological hope.³⁰

After Jesus had died and risen from the dead, the early Church awaited his near return. When this did not immediately take place as he had prophesied, the problem of its delay became increasingly acute. Expectation of an imminent parousia was replaced by uncertainty about the time, and the Church was bidden to remain watchful and to pray for the coming of the kingdom. The teaching of Jesus was modified to include statements of a long delay in the coming of the decisive hour. In various ways, maintains this school of thought, the Church attempted to justify and explain the delay; it created sayings of Jesus offering comfort to the disciples, and justified the delay by positing a considerable range of apocalyptic prophecies which had first to be fulfilled. A whole new theology of history was created, particularly by Luke, in which the hope of the imminent parousia was deferred, and the intervening time of normal life regarded as the age of the Church, with the Word and the Holy Spirit acting as present substitutes for the disappointed expectation. Not that the hope of the parousia was wholly given up; it was merely regarded as postponed for an indefinite period.

The theory thus outlined necessitates a very considerable, indeed radical, handling of the Gospel material. In particular, it leads to almost exactly the same criticism of the parables as that which is necessitated by the theory of realized eschatology. Any parables which teach the future parousia of Jesus himself or allow for the passage of any length of time before the coming of the kingdom of God must be explained as ecclesiastical revisions of genuine parables of Jesus or as entirely fresh creations made by the early Church to explain the delay of the parousia. Thus the advocates of both realized and thorough-going eschatology deny that Jesus taught the fact of his personal second advent after an interval of time.

Although this hypothesis is put forward with great learning and ingenuity, it is impossible to believe that it is a true interpre-

[p.18]

tation of the teaching of Jesus.³¹ The basic assumptions which are made are that the burden of Jesus' preaching was the imminent coming of the kingdom and that he assigned to himself no significance in regard to the kingdom beyond that of being the herald of its coming whose message would be vindicated at its coming.³² He did not discuss the time of its coming; all that he knew was that it was imminent. Against these basic assumptions a number of points can be made.

In the first place, the proponents of this theory have to adopt the very questionable view that Jesus did not foresee his own death, or at least not until the very eve of it. The arguments of J.

³⁰ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

³¹ See the comments of W. Michaelis, in *Th. Z.*, XIV, 1958, pp. 460f. and especially of O. Cullmann, *Parusieverzögerung und Urchristentum: Der gegenwärtige Stand der Diskussion*, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, LXXXIII, 1958, cols. 1-12.

³² It is assumed that Jesus did not identify himself with the Son of man, or even that the sayings about the Son of man are all inauthentic; cf. M. Black, 'The Son of Man Problem in Recent Research and Debate', in *BJRL*, XLV, 1963, pp. 305-318.

Jeremias³³ against this view are said to lack cogency; his argument that Jesus must have reckoned with the possibility of violent death is said to be only partly compelling, because it presumes that Jesus was expecting history to run its normal course, whereas in fact he reckoned with the catastrophic intervention of the kingdom of God.³⁴ But this counter-argument comes to grief on the fact that Jesus spoke of his death in *prophetic* terms.³⁵ Attempts to explain away the predictions as *vaticinia ex eventu* or to invalidate them in some other fashion are by no means convincing.³⁶ The further argument of Grässer that the disciples were amazed by what happened, since they expected the parousia to take place on their arrival at Jerusalem, surely gives no index to the mind of Jesus himself since he is represented as correcting their misunderstandings throughout his ministry.³⁷ Finally, we may urge that the fact that Jesus' anticipation of his death at the last supper cannot be explained away³⁸

[p.19]

— so that at this point even the exponents of this theory find it necessary to assume that he looked forward to the coming of the kingdom in close connection with his death — shows that there is no objection in principle to the view that Jesus could and did integrate the expectation of his own death into his eschatological expectation. If this point be granted, the whole case against Jesus' anticipation of his death at earlier points in his ministry falls to the ground.

In the second place, it is impossible on this view to account for that part of the teaching of Jesus which presupposes an interval between his death and the coming of the kingdom.³⁹ A number of texts which imply such an interval are examined by Grässer, but his attempts to work them into his theory cannot be called happy. For example, he rejects out of hand such texts as Luke 21: 6; 23: 29f.⁴⁰ The important sayings in Luke 18: 7f. have now been cogently defended by J. Jeremias.⁴¹ Grässer notes the difficulty of Luke 13: 35, and therefore does not take the text seriously.⁴² The passage Mark 14: 3-9 is regarded as probably legendary, and

³³ W. Zimmerli and J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (London, 1957), pp. 98-104.

³⁴ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-28, especially pp. 20f.

³⁵ See also E. Stauffer, *Jesus, Gestalt und Geschichte* (Bern, 1957), pp. 127-130, *et passim*.

³⁶ The attempt of Grässer (p. 24) to explain away Lk. 13: 31-33 is especially weak.

³⁷ The misunderstanding of the disciples can hardly be explained away as a late theological construction; it is too deeply woven into the oldest narrative.

³⁸ E. Grässer (*op. cit.*, p. 53) is unable to remove this feature of the narrative. It is unwarrantably sceptical to say that we cannot be certain whether the words of interpretation in their oldest form are authentic (so E. Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht*, Göttingen, 1955, p. 117); *cf.* J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Oxford, 1955), p. 132.

³⁹ See especially W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-87.

⁴⁰ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 36. Both texts belong to the strand of teaching which deals with the coming judgment upon the Jews, and which there is no good reason for denying to Jesus; *cf.* V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London, 1952), pp. 500f. The saying in Lk. 17: 22 (where the same phrase, 'days will come' is found) is also regarded by Grässer (*op. cit.*, pp. 35f.) as not authentic; the only real argument which he can adduce is that if Jesus expected the imminent parousia this saying is more easily explicable as a creation of the disappointed early Church. This argument is circular.

⁴¹ *Gleichnisse*, pp. 133-136. E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-38. See also below.

⁴² E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-40. Grässer follows the view that the time gap in this text between the destruction of the temple and the parousia is a secondary development; according to Mk. 13: 2 the two events are closely connected. This view of Mk. 13: 2, supported by W. G. Kümmel (*op. cit.*, pp. 99-102), is not convincing; it depends on the view that Jesus could not have prophesied the fall of Jerusalem as an event within history, and for this view there is no evidence in the Gospels; rather, it betrays a false dichotomy between history and eschatology.

verse 7 is evacuated of its obvious meaning.⁴³ Luke 6: 22f. is regarded as a *vaticinium ex eventu*.⁴⁴ The same verdict is passed on Mark 10: 38ff.⁴⁵ In all

[p.20]

of these cases there are good grounds for retaining the texts as genuine teaching of Jesus.

The question of whether Jesus looked forward to the existence of the Church after his death is generally answered in the negative by contemporary scholars,⁴⁶ although there is a sufficient opinion in favour of a positive answer to warn us against too swift a capitulation to the majority opinion.⁴⁷ One thing at least is clear — that to adduce the fact that the expectation of the Church stands in contradiction to Jesus' expectation of the imminent end⁴⁸ is a *petitio principii* of the first order. One must also bear in mind the command at the last supper to repeat the rite, which, although it is found only in Paul and the longer text of Luke, has strong claims to authenticity.⁴⁹ The larger questions in connection with the foundation of the Church cannot be discussed here, but perhaps enough has been said to show that the facts are not indisputably in favour of Grässer's position.

The ethical teaching of Jesus also raises difficulties for Grässer.⁵⁰ The basic difficulty is that this teaching is partly related to the eschatological teaching of Jesus and is partly 'timeless' in its reference. The existence of these two strains of thought in the teaching of Jesus creates perplexity for many scholars, and the alternatives suggested are either to deny the apocalyptic-eschatological side of the teaching of Jesus and thus to regard his ethic as basically timeless and motivated by general considerations (such as the demands made by the character of God upon his people),⁵¹ or to deny the timeless element in the ethics and regard it as an ethic for the brief interim period before the crisis

[p.21]

⁴³ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-42. Ultimately Grässer's difficulty here is his refusal to allow historicity to a scene in which Jesus speaks of his own (death and) burial.

⁴⁴ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 42. There is no reason at all why Jesus should not have prophesied persecution for his followers.

⁴⁵ The view that Mk. 10: 38ff. is a *vaticinium ex eventu* is shipwrecked on the simple fact that there is no conclusive evidence that the prophecy was fulfilled in the martyrdom of both James and John; cf. V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 440-442. C. K. Barrett (*The Gospel according to St. John*, London, 1955, p. 87) comments acidly with regard to John: 'We cannot martyr the apostle for our own convenience in handling critical problems.' Similarly, C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 47n.

Grässer also comments at this point (pp. 44-49) on Mk. 2: 18ff., and concludes that verses 19 and 20 are not authentic. But there are no grounds for the refusal to accept verse 20 as authentic beyond unwillingness to allow that Jesus could have anticipated his own death.

⁴⁶ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-68; W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-140. E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London, 1961), chapter 2.

⁴⁷ R. N. Flew, *Jesus and His Church*² (London, 1943); O. Cullmann, *Peter, Disciple Apostle — Martyr* (London, 1953). See the list of scholars cited by W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 138 n. 121.

⁴⁸ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 64. This is not the only place where the argument is put forward that because a certain text is inconsistent with the assumed eschatological teaching of Jesus it cannot be genuine.

⁴⁹ J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, pp. 159-165. It is not necessary to agree with Jeremias' interpretation of the saying in detail in order to retain it as authentic.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 68-74.

⁵¹ A. N. Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus*² (New York, 1950).

of the parousia.⁵² The former of these two alternatives is naturally ruled out for Grässer, since the eschatological teaching of Jesus cannot be simply ignored in this way, but we may observe that this theory does take proper account of the existence of non-eschatological elements in the ethic of Jesus. This means that it is impossible to accept the latter alternative as it stands, for the role of Jesus as a teacher as well as an eschatological prophet cannot be eliminated from the sources. Grässer has therefore to adopt the view that the ethic of Jesus is motivated throughout by the nearness of the kingdom; the decisive question is always: how may I become a participant in the kingdom? We may grant that this is a vital, if not the vital, question in the ethical teaching of Jesus, although there are other questions which must also be taken into the reckoning. But even if this is granted, the question of an interim period before the coming of the kingdom is not yet settled. Grässer holds, therefore, that significance is to be attached to the lack of instruction for many concrete occasions in life in the teaching of Jesus; in reality he does not teach an 'ethic' in the accepted sense but simply summons men to repent in view of the coming kingdom. The ethic is simply an expression of the meaning of repentance. But this interpretation of the ethic simply does not remove the need for time for its fulfilment; such instruction as that about marriage and divorce, or about the claims of God and Caesar, surely reckons with the fact of normal history continuing, at least, for some time.

We must conclude that the view that Jesus did not expect a period of time to intervene between his death and the parousia will not hold water. It is to be admitted that difficulties remain for those who take our position on this point. These are concerned especially with the place of the prophecies of the resurrection and vindication of Jesus in relation to those of the parousia, but these difficulties are by no means as great as those which face supporters of the alternative view.

A third point which must be made is that Grässer does not account satisfactorily for the rise of the expectation of the parousia in the early Church after the death of Jesus. He assumes that from the beginning, *i.e.* from immediately after the resurrection, the early Church awaited the parousia and was perplexed by its delay. Moreover, the hope associated with this parousia was that of the return of Jesus. Since Jesus himself had not

[p.22]

prophesied his return, whether in his own Person or in the person of the Son of man, it is difficult to see why — on Grässer's theory — the Church should have made so much of the fact that Jesus was to return in glory. This difficulty is perhaps overcome if it is allowed that Jesus did speak of his own coming, but if we are prepared to grant that these sayings are historical it is safe to say that we shall also find ourselves accepting as historical those parts of the teaching of Jesus which allow for a delay. This assumption, therefore, would not help Grässer in any way. He stands here in the same difficulty as J. A. T. Robinson whose attempt to account for the emergence of the parousia hope is scarcely convincing.⁵³

A fourth point is that Grässer tends to queer the pitch from the start by always speaking of the interval before the parousia as a 'delay'. It is far from certain that the interval was always conceived of as a delay; one would certainly not gain this impression from the Epistles of Paul. Certainly with the passage of time the question, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' would be asked, although even this question may not give such wide scope for theories of the

⁵² A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London, 1911), p. 352.

⁵³ *Jesus and His Coming*. See the reviews by G. R. Beasley-Murray in *Journal of Theological Studies (JTS)*, n.s. X, 1959, pp. 134-140; and by A. J. B. Higgins in *SJT*, XI, 1958, pp. 316-318.

effect of parousia delay as is sometimes thought.⁵⁴ But if Jesus allowed for an interval before the parousia, we are quite unjustified in speaking of the delay of the parousia as a feature present everywhere in the early Church. On the contrary, the fact that an interval of time before the parousia is universally attested is much more likely to be evidence that Jesus himself had spoken in these terms.⁵⁵

Finally, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the motive underlying this eschatological theory rests ultimately in a particular Christology. In the writings of R. Bultmann and his followers Jesus is held to be a man who taught the imminent coming of the kingdom of God and summoned men to repent. He made no messianic claims for himself and was not conscious of standing in a unique relationship to God. He did not work any miracles of a character that merited the description of supernatural. This estimate of Jesus is not, of course, a new one; it is

[p.23]

essentially that of the rationalistic liberalism of an earlier period.⁵⁶ The important point is that it is still a living motive in New Testament study.⁵⁷ No doubt there are ways of covering up its existence or of attempting to justify it. We are told, for example, that form criticism makes it impossible for us to know anything about the self-consciousness of Jesus. But in fact it appears time and again that the root of criticism is simply the critic's refusal to accept the possibility of a supernatural Jesus. This means that any kind of genuine prophecy of the future is entirely ruled out; there is therefore no need to produce any real argument for labelling it a *vaticinium ex eventu*. Presumably, therefore, one ought to go on to argue that Jesus could not have foretold the imminent coming of the kingdom, but since this prophecy was not fulfilled it may be allowed to stand as genuine.

It is clear that this attitude lies at the bottom of the theory of thorough-going eschatology. In an important passage E. Grässer makes it clear that the question of Jesus' teaching about the future is inextricably bound up with the question of his self-consciousness.⁵⁸ He regards it as impossible for Jesus to look forward to his own return. For when we come to the question of whether or not he regarded himself as the coming Son of man, we reach the point where we have no secure historical information and must descend to unverifiable speculations. Elsewhere, however, it is clear that Grässer simply refuses to admit the possibility that Jesus gave warning about his own unsuspected (second) advent.⁵⁹ It is difficult to see any grounds for such a denial except, to quote words of J. Denney a *propos* of Jesus' self-identification as the Bridegroom (Mk. 2: 18-20), 'that it implies a consciousness on Jesus' part of himself and of his place in God's work which men are resolved, on grounds with which historical criticism has nothing to do, not to recognise'.⁶⁰ While the claims of the form-critical method must be

⁵⁴ W. Michaelis, 'Kennen die Synoptiker eine Verzögerung der Parusie?' in *Festschrift für A. Wikenhauser* (München, 1953), pp. 107-123.

⁵⁵ E. Stauffer, *Jerusalem und Rom* (Benn, 1957), pp. 74-87, has advanced the view that delay in the fulfilment of prophecies was a frequent experience in Judaism, but in no wise did it hinder the activity of prophets.

⁵⁶ Note the great influence which the writings of J. Wellhausen on Gospel criticism still have in contemporary study.

⁵⁷ It is still possible to find the assumption that 'miracles do not happen' regarded by some scholars as an axiom in New Testament study.

⁵⁸ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-59. Cf. H. Riesenfeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 28f. On Christology in the parables, see J. J. Vincent, 'The Parables of Jesus as Self-Revelation', in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, LXXIII, 1959, pp. 79-99.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁶⁰ *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 318.

carefully assessed, it still remains true that the results at which it arrives are often predetermined by the presuppositions of the critic.⁶¹

[p.24]

There is, in short, no *a priori* reason why Jesus should not have prophesied his own return, or why this prophecy should be less likely on his lips than the prophecy of the imminent coming of the kingdom. The whole theory of thorough-going eschatology can be shown to be vitiated by false assumptions and by a critical analysis of the Gospel material which is entirely arbitrary and unconvincing.⁶²

III. THE PRESENT AND THE IMMINENT KINGDOM

The two types of interpretation of the eschatology of Jesus which have been discussed are not the only possibilities which have been raised by criticism.⁶³ In a painstaking exegetical study W. G. Kümmel has demonstrated that Jesus taught both the presence of the kingdom and the imminent future of the kingdom; he also allowed for an interval before the future coming of the kingdom. It is not necessary to agree with every detail of the exegesis in order to accept the fact that this thesis is essentially correct. The objection that the ministry of Jesus is only the time when the anticipatory signs of the coming of the kingdom are to be seen, rather than the time of the actual presence of the kingdom,⁶⁴ is rebutted by such texts as Matthew 11: 12f.; 12: 28 and Luke 17: 21. What we have in the ministry of Jesus is the presence of the kingdom in his own activity; it is only later that the kingdom is openly to be revealed in power. The decisive manifestation of the kingdom is thus placed in the future, but already it is proleptically present in Jesus. In this sense we may perhaps use the phrase *sich realisierende Eschatologie* to designate the thought of Jesus,⁶⁵ although it will be apparent that we use the term in

[p.25]

a slightly different sense from Dodd.

⁶¹ An excellent example of this kind of procedure is furnished by E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 43. He writes of the saying Mk. 8: 34 ('Let him... take up his cross'): 'The assumption that Jesus himself spoke this word in prospect of his own crucifixion is to be rejected as very improbable.' What then is the origin of the saying? Grässer refers to a suggestion by E. Dinkler with the words: 'His question is aimed at a possible understanding of the word "as a word of Jesus without this *vaticinium* of the crucifixion".' The thesis proposed is far more improbable than the obvious meaning of the saying, and one wonders whether it would ever have been put forward apart from refusal to accept the possibility of Jesus' expectation of his crucifixion.

⁶² In our discussion above we have attempted to criticize the theory of Grässer merely from the texts which he himself cites in the first part of his book, in which he discusses Jesus' own teaching. This criticism could be considerably extended by discussion of the many passages in the second part of the book (on the early Church's reinterpretation of the teaching of Jesus) which are declared, with inadequate reason, to be inauthentic.

⁶³ For other possibilities, see E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 15, and W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 143-146, with particular reference to G. Delling and O. Cullmann.

⁶⁴ For this view, see E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8.

⁶⁵ The view of J. Jeremias, who uses this terminology, is not absolutely clear, but appears to be close to that of Kümmel. His views have undergone a certain amount of clarification, if not of change, as may be seen by a comparison of *The Parables of Jesus* (London, 1954, a translation of the 1954 edition of *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*) with the 1958 German edition.

The obvious advantage of this view is that it does not attempt to force all the evidence into one pattern (with the consequent necessity of rejecting as inauthentic whatever cannot be fitted into the pattern), but is prepared to admit a measure of paradox in the teaching of Jesus. Further, it is not forced to reject out of hand any evidence which suggests that Jesus expected an interval before the coming of the kingdom, although this certainly does not rule out the possibility that his sayings may have been reinterpreted by the early Church in the light of its experience; each case requires to be examined on its merits. The question as to whether Jesus expected his own return is not explicitly answered by this theory, which is basically concerned with the coming of the kingdom, but our earlier discussion has made it clear that we must not dogmatically rule out this possibility; here again, references to the parousia of Jesus must be considered on their own merits.

What must now be avoided is the danger of attempting to work the parables into any preconceived scheme of eschatological teaching. The purpose of our discussion of eschatology has been to show that certain presuppositions which affect the interpretation of the parables in the expositions of such scholars as C. H. Dodd and E. Grässer can be questioned and criticized from the point of view of their faithfulness in rendering the other teaching of Jesus. We are thus able to reject any interpretations of the parables which are patently due simply to the exigencies of some particular theory of eschatology which is questionable on other grounds. We must now seek to examine the parables in their own light in order to arrive at an integrated interpretation of the teaching of Jesus.

[p.26]

III

ESCHATOLOGY IN THE PARABLES

I. THE PARABLES OF GROWTH

We shall begin our examination of the parables by looking at those which are generally assumed to be related to the coming of the kingdom of God and are sometimes called 'parables of the kingdom'. Several of these are parables of growth and liken the kingdom to organic growth of some kind.

In its present context, the parable of the fig-tree (Mk. 13: 28f. and parallels) undoubtedly refers to the future coming of the kingdom, and probably in particular to the coming of the Son of man. But it is often regarded as referring to the present coming of the kingdom. 'The summer of God's salvation was at hand', writes A. M. Hunter.⁶⁶ Similarly, C. H. Dodd thinks that the parable is meant to rouse men to see that the crisis is already upon them.⁶⁷

It is not absolutely clear whether or not the exponents of 'realized eschatology' wish to regard the parable as referring to something that had already taken place. In any case the idea of

⁶⁶ *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 42. Earlier (*The Gospel according to St Mark*, London, 1949, p. 125), Hunter interpreted the parable as a warning about the coming crisis.

⁶⁷ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

futurity cannot be removed from the parable. Whether or not the spring is actually present, the summer is yet to come; by no possible method can the message, ‘Something is still to happen’, be excised from the parable.⁶⁸

What, then, is this future event; and are the signs of its coming present or future? It appears to be universally recognized that the parable does refer to the signs preceding the coming of the kingdom.⁶⁹ This is in fact its reference in its present context, except that here it refers in particular to the period of woes yet future which herald the coming of the Son of man for his elect.

[p.27]

It is no objection to this view to argue that the simile in itself is meant to direct the minds of the disciples towards the joyful signs of the time of salvation.⁷⁰ We do not need to press the simile to imply that the premonitory signs of the parousia must be joyful; it is sufficient that the simile does direct attention to the joyful advent of the Son of man.⁷¹ It thus points to the parousia. But are the premonitory signs to be regarded as present or as still future? It is common to assert that they are present, and that the present reference to the future signs of the parousia is due to the parable being placed in a secondary context. In support of this view attention is drawn to Luke 12: 54-56 which castigates men for not recognizing the significance of the *present* time.⁷² The parallel in thought may be admitted, but is not compelling. In any case, Jesus could have recognized the signs of the end as being already present in his own lifetime. Accordingly, we can find no adequate grounds for affixing a meaning to this parable other than that indicated by its present context.⁷³

The idea of growth from a small seed to a full-sized plant or tree is found in the parables of the seed growing secretly (Mk. 4: 26-29) and the mustard seed (Mk. 4: 30-32 and parallels), with which we must also include the parable of the leaven (Mt. 13: 33 and parallel). It is now generally agreed that these parables do not teach an immanent-evolutionary idea of the development of the kingdom in the world, as was thought by liberalism in its heyday.⁷⁴ The coming of the kingdom is God’s act and not men’s. But it is uncertain what the precise point of comparison is.

On the one hand, J. Jeremias has insisted that the kingdom is really compared in these parables to the final stage of growth, so that the certainty of its coming is emphasized. There is no emphasis on the idea of growth, but rather on the contrast between the tiny beginnings and the glorious result.⁷⁵ But while Jeremias is correct in maintaining that the traditional translation,

[p.28]

⁶⁸ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen* (London, 1957), pp. 94-98, especially p. 95.

⁶⁹ J. A. T. Robinson (*op. cit.*, pp. 71, 125, 129) thinks that the parable originally referred to the coming catastrophe upon the Jews. This theory is finally refuted by the fact that the symbolism of the parable is joyful.

⁷⁰ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 102f. Cf. E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 164 n.

⁷¹ Cf. perhaps Jn. 16: 21.

⁷² W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 22. On the other side see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *loc. cit.*

⁷³ J. Schniewind (*Das Evangelium nach Markus*,⁸ Göttingen, 1958, p. 141) retains this interpretation while denying that the present context is original. Cf. E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*¹⁵ (Göttingen, 1959), pp. 280f. R. Bultmann (*op. cit.*, p. 216, and Supplement, p. 19) holds that the parable refers to the parousia.

⁷⁴ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁷⁵ *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, pp. 127-133; cf. C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-145; A. M. Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-47.

‘The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed’, should be given up in favour of some such wording as, ‘It is the case with the kingdom of God as with a grain of mustard seed’,⁷⁶ it by no means follows from this that the kingdom is simply being compared with the final stage in the process. Rather, the parables appear to teach both the certainty of growth, thanks to God’s care of the seed, and the greatness of the result. In the parable of the seed growing secretly the idea of a period between sowing and harvest can scarcely be excluded. Consequently, we find ourselves in agreement with N. A. Dahl who insists on the fact of organic growth as an illustration of the divine order and necessity in the coming of the kingdom.⁷⁷

Granted, then, that the idea of growth cannot be excluded, the question arises as to when the growth is regarded as taking place. The answer of C. H. Dodd is that the end of the process of growth is to be seen in the ministry of Jesus, so that the period of growth is to be set in the past. In support of this view he draws attention to Matthew 9: 37f. (and parallel) and John 4: 35, which use the imagery of *harvest* to describe the present situation.⁷⁸ Similarly, the harvest in the parables is to be taken as a present climax to the obscure period of growth in the past. The objection made by W. G. Kümmel, that the idea of a development of the kingdom from the time of the prophets to that of Jesus is contradicted by Matthew 11: 12 (and parallel),⁷⁹ is not completely convincing, since the kingdom itself may merely be likened to the last stage in the process; the earlier stages are concerned with the preconditions for its arrival. More forceful, perhaps, is the objection that the metaphor of harvest is used in the New Testament with other applications. Kümmel notes the reference in Mark 4: 29 to Joel 3: 13, where the harvest is a metaphor for judgment;⁸⁰ the fact that this meaning is also the most apt in Matthew 13: 30 indicates that the evidence of the parallels is not unanimous in favour of Dodd’s view.⁸¹

[p.29]

If this view, therefore, is doubtful, we must ask what alternative interpretations are possible. N. A. Dahl finds in the parables a contrast between the present, secret and tiny working of God and the future full manifestation of the kingdom. Thus they give comfort to the disciples who are perplexed by the apparent lack of success in the ministry of Jesus.⁸² But the question still remains: Is this period of present growth in the ministry of Jesus that of the preconditions for the kingdom, or of the kingdom itself? The former alternative is advocated by E. Grässer who holds that the kingdom itself cannot be described in terms of growth. Consequently, any parables which demand the latter interpretation must be pronounced inauthentic. Grässer then goes on to argue that the original sense of the parables of growth was obscured by the early Church, which interpreted them in terms of the growth of the kingdom on earth before the coming of the end. In support of his theory he regards Mark 4: 32 as inauthentic; denies the

⁷⁶ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁷⁷ ‘The Parables of Growth’ in *Studia Theologica* V. 1951, pp. 132-166; cf. E. Percy, *Die Botschaft Jesu* (Lund, 1953), pp. 208-210; V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 266. E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 61, pertinently asks why Jesus used parables of growth which were so likely to be misunderstood if he was not in fact referring to growth.

⁷⁸ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 133f., 139f.

⁷⁹ W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁸⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁸¹ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-191. The fact that the birds of the air in the parable of the mustard seed (Mk. 4: 32 and parallels) represent the Gentiles is further evidence that a future event is envisaged; cf. J. Jeremias, *Jesu Verheissung für die Völker* (Stuttgart, 1956), pp. 58f.

⁸² N. A. Dahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 147f. *et passim*. Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 167f., 169f.

original linking of the parable of the leaven with it; finds in the parable of the sower and its interpretation a history of the Christian mission; sees in the parable of the seed growing secretly a picture of the Church left to itself in the world; and rejects the authenticity of the parable of the tares, since it portrays the mixed character of the Church in the world.⁸³

A word will be said about the sower and the tares later, but so far as the other parables are concerned we may confidently reject the view of Grässer since we have already seen that his refusal to admit the fact of the present, secret working of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus is not well grounded. Nor are there any convincing exegetical reasons in favour of his view that the parables have been reinterpreted by the Church.⁸⁴ What, then, is their original meaning? A position basically similar to that of Grässer is taken up by Kümmel, who holds that the parables do not refer to the spread of the kingdom in the world but simply to the greatness of the kingdom which will certainly come despite the smallness of its beginnings. For the kingdom

[p.30]

is present only in the Person and works of Jesus and not as a developing entity in the world.⁸⁵ But is there not a certain confusion of thought here, due to the failure to recognize that the kingdom as God's act of saving Kingship postulates the existence of the realm over which he has sway?⁸⁶ When this fact is recognized, it becomes clear that a certain amount of development is a real possibility during the ministry of Jesus. From small beginnings God will bring in his harvest, and to deny a continuity between the planting of the seed and the resultant harvest is to deny an essential part of the simile.⁸⁷ Whether a development in this sense is envisaged as taking place after the death of Jesus is a point which is simply not raised in the parables, although it needs to be emphasized that they do not of themselves exclude the possibility. In other words, the imminence of the final coming of the kingdom is not at issue, and we must agree with C. H. Dodd that here the original school of thoroughgoing eschatology twisted the meaning of the parables.⁸⁸

We must now turn our attention to the other parables of growth which have so far been passed over. The first of these is the parable of the sower (Mk. 4: 3-9 and 13-20 and parallels). Despite a measure of doubt on the part of some scholars⁸⁹ the authenticity of the parable itself is to be accepted, and there is widespread agreement that it reflects the experience of Jesus himself.⁹⁰ The despair of R. Bultmann concerning the possibility of discovering its original meaning is surely somewhat premature.⁹¹ Two main possibilities of interpretation arise. The first is the view that the plentiful harvest is there to be seen; God's harvest is already under

⁸³ F. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-63, 141-149.

⁸⁴ There are no grounds for denying the authenticity of Mk. 4: 32; see note 7 on previous page, and in addition N. A. Dahl, *op. cit.*, p. 147; V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 270. It is not clear why Grässer (p. 143) emphasizes the original independence of the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed, since their meaning is clearly the same. For the parable of the seed growing secretly, see W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 128f.

⁸⁵ W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-138.

⁸⁶ Cf. G. E. Ladd, 'Kingdom of God — Reign or Realm?', *JBL*, LXXXI, 1962, pp. 230-238, for the recognition of these two possibilities.

⁸⁷ N. A. Dahl, *op. cit.*, p. 148; cf. F. Percy, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-206, 210f. According to Percy, the parable describes the process of growth of the kingdom in a hidden manner by the coming to faith of those who will — when the process is complete — participate in the future kingdom.

⁸⁸ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁸⁹ Cf. E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 143 n.

⁹⁰ V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 250f.

⁹¹ R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 216; E. Grässer, *loc. cit.*

way and the kingdom is already come.⁹² This interpretation fits in excellently with the view that the parable was spoken to reassure the disciples who were perplexed by the mixed success of the Galilaean ministry.⁹³ The second interpre-

[p.31]

tation sees the parable as a summons to men to listen to the message of Jesus with care.⁹⁴

The first of these possibilities is exposed to a number of objections. It is noteworthy that the parable is addressed to the multitudes, and there is no good reason to suppose that originally it was addressed primarily to the disciples.⁹⁵ Again, the interpretation of the parable given in Mark definitely favours the second possibility of exegesis. The stress in the parable itself is also on the sower rather than on the harvester, and the way in which Dodd tends to transfer the bare patches from the time of sowing to that of reaping looks rather like trimming the facts to fit a theory. Further, the amount of space devoted to the unfruitful ground is too great to allow us to regard it all as mere 'dramatic machinery', and suggests that this part of the description is not simply a foil to that of the great harvest.⁹⁶ The parable itself is not described as a parable of the kingdom,⁹⁷ and therefore we should perhaps resist the tendency to be influenced in our interpretation by the other parables of growth. The sum total of these points thus favours the second interpretation. We may also add that the instruction to listen carefully (Mk. 4: 9) reinforces this view, and the further teaching in Mark 4: 24f. also substantiates it, although it might be objected that in neither of these cases is the connection original.⁹⁸

The second parable which remains for consideration under this heading is that of the tares (Mt. 13: 24-30 and 36-43). Here again the authenticity has been denied by certain scholars,⁹⁹ but if a reasonable explanation of the parable is possible it may be accepted as genuine. According to C. H. Dodd the parable teaches that the presence of sinners in Israel is no sign that the kingdom of God is delayed. 'As little as a farmer delays his reaping when harvest-time is come, because there are weeds among the crop, so little does the coming of the Kingdom of God delay because

[p.32]

there are sinners in Israel. The coming of the Kingdom is itself a process of sifting, a judgment.'¹⁰⁰ On this view the judgment represented by the harvest is already taking place. It is more than doubtful whether any unbiased reader would draw this meaning from the parable;

⁹² C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-137; V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 250f.; J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, pp. 130f.

⁹³ W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables in the Light of their Jewish Background*² (London, 1938), pp. 39ff.

⁹⁴ A. M. Hunter, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, pp. 53-55, and earlier scholars; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, pp. 150f.

⁹⁵ This holds good, even if the present context is regarded as redactional. The tendency in the tradition, so we are told, was to apply to the disciples what was originally addressed to the multitudes.

⁹⁶ *Pace* C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 136. It is significant that J. Schniewind (*op. cit.*, pp. 391.) could come to exactly the opposite conclusion about the meaning and find that it teaches that 'the normal result of the Word of God is failure'.

⁹⁷ Except in Mt. 13: 19, which is secondary.

⁹⁸ *Cf.* C. E. B. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 166f.

⁹⁹ T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London, 1949), pp. 1921.; F. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-148; W. Knox, *The Sources of the Synoptic Gospels*, II (Cambridge, 1957), p. 130, regards the parable as the re-working of an older form.

¹⁰⁰ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-139.

it is exposed to the simple objection that the future tense is used of the harvest, which only comes after the period of growth (Mt. 13: 30).

The more common interpretation today is on the same lines. Jesus is replying to the criticism that he (and his disciples) were not making a separation between the righteous and the wicked by saying that this task is God's alone and is reserved for the last judgment. The thought that the failure to make this separation is no sign that God is not at work in Jesus may also be implicit.¹⁰¹ But does this mean that the kingdom is already come and is growing? Kümmel contests this view, but his opinion appears to be open to the same objection as was made previously.¹⁰²

The interpretation just discussed attaches considerable significance to the command not to separate the tares from the wheat. It is well known that this particular detail is not taken up in the Matthaean interpretation of the parable, and is the principal reason for denying that the interpretation accurately reproduces the meaning of the parable. It is therefore worth noting that Matthew regards the parable as being addressed to the multitudes — this is surely the force of Matthew 13: 36 — and we should seek an interpretation of the parable along these lines. The suggestion may be advanced that the meaning is not dissimilar to that of the parable of the sower, and urges the hearers to self-examination; it is true that the final separation will be made not by Jesus but by God, but this is no reason for not heeding the situation and taking care to be found as a stalk of wheat instead of as a tare. In other words, the emphasis is entirely on the eschatological judgment, and the parable is a warning not to be misled by the fact that judgment and separation are not taking place at present. On this interpretation the command not to separate the weeds from the wheat is no longer the key point in the parable, and we can understand why attention is not

[p.33]

drawn especially to it in the Matthaean explanation.

A further point in favour of this explanation is that it fits in well with the interpretation of the parable of the dragnet which follows shortly after it (Mt. 13: 47-50). The fact that this parable contains a clear reference to the separation of the good from the bad in 13: 48 tells against the interpretation of Dodd that the parable is an injunction to the fishers of men to cast their nets widely,¹⁰³ and emphasizes that, although the gospel comes to all men, yet in the end a separation will take place;¹⁰⁴ men must therefore ensure that they are not in the category of rotten fish which are rejected. Here again the explanation given of the parable is generally assigned to the hand of the Evangelist,¹⁰⁵ but the fact that the interpretation which the parable itself suggests agrees with that assigned to it by Matthew is a strong point in favour of our

¹⁰¹ N. A. Dahl, *op. cit.*, p. 152; W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-136; J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-191; A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 46.

¹⁰² Kümmel's point is justified in that the emphasis in the parable is not on the growth of the kingdom but on the fate of the individual seeds which have been sown. The essential thing to note is that the passage of a period of time before the harvest is necessary, although the length of the period is not indicated.

¹⁰³ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 140; similarly, T. W. Manson, *op. cit.*, pp. 197f. A. M. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁴ T. W. Manson, *loc. cit.*, finds it necessary to deny the authenticity of verse 48, since it identifies the missionaries with those who separate the good and bad fish. Although elsewhere the role of the Church in judgment is taught (Mt. 19: 28, *et al.*), it is the angels who have this role here. In reality, however, there is no stress on this point in the parable.

¹⁰⁵ An important exception is R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 187 (and Supplement, pp. 26f.), who holds that the interpretation fits the meaning of the parable.

interpretation.¹⁰⁶ Hence the three parables of the sower, tares and dragnet all convey basically the same message.

The question of authenticity may now be examined. The two grounds which Grässer brings forward against authenticity are, first, the unlikelihood of the command to refrain from separating the good from the bad in the time of Jesus, and, second, the fact that the kingdom (or Church) is represented as a *corpus permixtum* in which the devil is active.¹⁰⁷ Neither of these points is convincing. It has been suggested that the command against separation is not the central feature in the parable, and in any case J. Jeremias¹⁰⁸ has shown that the command is entirely credible in the mouth of Jesus. It may also be worth noting that the direction for excluding certain men from the Church in Matthew 18 indicates that the Church in Matthew's day hardly took the command not to separate the good from the bad to mean that this was forbidden. Its origin can therefore scarcely be ascribed to the Church. Again, the kingdom is not identified with the Church and represented as a *corpus permixtum*. The field is the

[p.34]

world, and the problem is that of true and false disciples, a problem which was well known to Jesus himself. Moreover, Jesus was well aware of the activities of the devil in his own lifetime.¹⁰⁹ The two main grounds against the authenticity of the parable are thus seen to be weak, and we may accept the parable as genuine teaching of Jesus.

When we draw together the results of this first part of our discussion of the parables themselves, we see that the parables of growth do not all teach the same lesson. They are to be interpreted individually, and the hints offered by the Evangelists for their interpretation give an exegesis of them which is consistent with the general pattern of the eschatological teaching of Jesus. The parables of the seed growing secretly, the mustard seed and the leaven bear witness to the growth of the kingdom from tiny beginnings until God brings it in, in all its fullness. The parables of the sower, the tares and the dragnet deal not so much with the coming of the kingdom as with the response which men are required to make to the message of the kingdom. In the case of the tares and the dragnet, attention is also drawn to the judgment which is associated with the coming of the kingdom at the end of the age; this point also receives stress in the parable of the fig-tree as it looks forward to the coming of the Son of man. Although, therefore, the question of the time of the full manifestation of the kingdom is not explicitly raised in the parables of the seed growing secretly, mustard seed and leaven, it appears that the teaching of Jesus (including his parabolic teaching) did look forward to a future manifestation of the kingdom which was already being revealed in the Person and work of Jesus himself, and that this future manifestation is associated with the parousia of the Son of man. We must now go on to consider the parables of Jesus which deal explicitly with the expectation of a future crisis and inquire whether the authentic teaching of Jesus on this theme confirms the results already reached.

II. THE PARABLES OF CRISIS

¹⁰⁶ For the interpretation, see also J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 190f. and W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-138.

¹⁰⁷ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-149.

¹⁰⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 191 n.

¹⁰⁹ W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 135f.

There is a second group of parables in the teaching of Jesus the interpretation of which largely depends on eschatological considerations. These are parables which deal with an approaching

[p.35]

crisis for the hearers of Jesus and warn them to be prepared for it. Traditionally the majority of them have been understood as referring to the parousia of Jesus, but the modern interpretation of them is in terms of the crisis which the coming of Jesus produced for the Jews, and it is held that parables originally addressed to the Jews have been reinterpreted as warnings to disciples in the Church. It is also held that several of these parables, in their present form, reckon with the delay of the parousia — whether by indicating a lapse of time before the parousia, or by inculcating a watchful attitude upon the disciples — and that in this form they have been influenced by the early Church.

There is no doubt that Jesus saw his own ministry as a time of crisis for his contemporaries, and it is generally admitted that he looked ahead to a developing situation which involved disaster for the Jewish nation.¹¹⁰ This fact alone implies a certain interval before the parousia. Certain of the parables refer unmistakably to this coming disaster and warn the Jews about the dangerous situation in which they are placed. Into this context may be fitted the brief parable which likens the frivolous irresponsibility of the people to the behaviour of children at play (Mt. 11: 16-19 and parallel),¹¹¹ and the parable of the barren fig-tree (Lk. 13: 6-9).¹¹²

The parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12: 13-21) is also regarded by J. Jeremias as falling into this category. Its meaning is taken to be: fancy quarrelling about an inheritance when a much greater crisis — the eschatological catastrophe — may overwhelm you at any time.¹¹³ There is no reason to question the legitimacy of this command in the context of the teaching of Jesus as a whole, but we must ask whether it is really the original meaning of the parable. Although the opening dialogue is rejected by R. Bultmann on grounds which he calls form-critical, but which are more accurately designated as purely sceptical,¹¹⁴ the historicity is accepted by Jeremias. This means that the parable was spoken as

[p.36]

a warning against greed for riches. Jeremias, however, wishes to tone down this aspect of the parable, and to do so he must get rid of verse 21. This verse is in fact omitted by certain MSS (D a b),¹¹⁵ but elsewhere Jeremias has defended the originality of this verse as part of the original text;¹¹⁶ the only recourse left is to condemn it as a moralizing addition to the words of

¹¹⁰ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-55.

¹¹¹ For the interpretation of this parable see J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-141.

¹¹² The parable creates great difficulties for E. Grässer (*op. cit.*, p. 197), who can produce no grounds for denying the authenticity of this or the other parables in Luke which are not concerned with the teaching of an imminent parousia; the fact that these parables are peculiar to Luke is no argument against their authenticity as an integral part of the teaching of Jesus, so that Grässer is here unable to avoid a crippling blow being struck against his thesis.

¹¹³ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 142f.

¹¹⁴ R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-58, 208f. Bultmann holds that the introductory dialogue could in itself be genuine, but the analogy of other formations in Hellenistic communities casts doubt upon this case. Then verse 15 is taken to be a Lucan construction to join this dialogue to the parable.

¹¹⁵ A. M. Hunter (*op. cit.*, p. 77) is inclined to adopt the shorter text.

¹¹⁶ *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 96.

Jesus which tones down the note of eschatological warning.¹¹⁷ This looks suspiciously like arguing in a circle. Further, we may legitimately ask whether Jesus' warning is not in fact against the sudden approach of death, rather than having anything at all to do with the eschatological catastrophe. There is no *a priori* reason for denying such teaching to Jesus, and it is perhaps more in keeping with the language of the parable.¹¹⁸

We now come to a series of parables which in their present form refer to the parousia. In Luke 12: 35-48 we have the parables of the watchman or waiting servants (verses 35-38; cf. Mk. 13: 33-37), the burglar (verses 39f., parallel to Mt. 24: 43f.), and the servant in authority (verses 41-46, 47-48, parallel to Mt. 24: 45-51); in addition to these parables, the series of three in Matthew 25 must also be considered at this point.

The immediate question is whether or not the parables in Luke 12 refer to the parousia. Various considerations in favour of this assumption are given by W. G. Kümmel,¹¹⁹ and to them must be added the point made by T. W. Manson that the fourth section of Q, from which this passage comes, contained teaching on the future, and that these verses in particular were addressed to the disciples; they constitute a call 'to those who have already accepted the yoke of the Kingdom... to be watchful and faithful in the time that remains'.¹²⁰ In other words these parables were understood to refer to the parousia from an early date.

We may commence, as Jeremias does, with the parable of the burglar. According to Jeremias the imagery used here, that of a burglar breaking in by night, suggests approaching calamity rather than a joyful advent, and this is the way in which the imagery is used elsewhere in the New Testament. Further, the

[p.37]

question in Luke 12: 41 (which is regarded as Lucan in origin) indicates a limitation of the application of the parable in Luke to the leaders of the Church, as against the Church as a whole.¹²¹

In the earlier edition of his book Jeremias gave the impression that teaching about the parousia formed no part of the message of Jesus, and that all his teaching about the future was addressed to the multitude and his opponents, warning them of coming catastrophe; this context would then be the *Sitz im Leben* of this parable. It is of considerable interest and importance to find that in the later edition he has expressed himself much more carefully. He now states that the expectation of Jesus and the early Church were essentially the same, but, whereas Jesus addressed the crowds and emphasized the sudden outbreak of calamity, the early Church concentrated its gaze on the end of calamity and the coming of the Lord. Thus the Church's reinterpretation of such a parable as this does not contradict the teaching of Jesus but emphasizes a different aspect of it.¹²²

¹¹⁷ *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, p. 90.

¹¹⁸ Jeremias can adduce no argument for the view that the eschatological catastrophe is in mind here beyond the fact that this brings this parable into line with the rest of the teaching of Jesus. But Jesus also spoke of death and its aftermath in more general terms: Mk. 9: 42ff.

¹¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 54-56.

¹²⁰ T. W. Manson, *op. cit.*, pp. 114f.

¹²¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-42.

¹²² *Op. cit.*, pp. 42f.

Now the admission of this fact means that, at least as far as Jeremias is concerned, there is in principle no objection against finding a reference to the parousia in the parables of Jesus. In the event, however, he has not altered his interpretation of the individual parables on this point. But this makes it all the more pressing to ask how adequate are his other reasons for giving the parables an interpretation which *prima facie* they do not possess. In the case of this present parable of the burglar, it must be agreed that it warns against the parousia taking the form of an unwelcome surprise for the hearers. But there is no reason why the disciples themselves should not have needed such a warning. The later history of the Church shows that there was abundant need for such warnings; the view of Jeremias that ‘the children of light are prepared and will not be taken unawares’ comes to grief on such texts as Romans 13: 11-14; 1 Corinthians 6: 9f.; 9: 27; 10: 11f.; 11: 32; 16: 22; and Ephesians 5: 6ff., to quote examples from Paul alone. There is in fact a considerable quantity of material which warns believers against the dangers of falling away, and even of committing apostasy. We must also remember that the disciples of Jesus included a Judas, and that the dividing lines between disciples, would-be disciples and hangers-on among the hearers of Jesus must have been very fluid. There is, consequently, no good reason for denying the

[p.38]

possibility that Jesus spoke to his disciples about the future in terms of warning, or that he spoke to them about the parousia by means of parables. In the case of the parable of the burglar, the fact that the coming of a person is referred to may be used to substantiate the view that it is the coming of a Person, the Son of man, which is meant — whether his coming be for weal or for woe.¹²³ To say that this interpretation is allegorical is hardly reason for condemning it as inauthentic.

The parable is condemned by Grässer, however, not because Jesus did not command watchfulness, but because here the motive for watchfulness is not the imminence of the parousia but its unexpected suddenness. To Grässer, in dependence upon A. Jülicher, this is a sign of lateness.¹²⁴ But even if an event is to take place soon, and to be preceded by certain signs, this still does not mean that its date can be calculated in advance, or that men do not need to be continually watchful lest they be taken unawares by it. The discussion by G. R. Beasley-Murray should be sufficient to take care of this point.¹²⁵

But we are not yet out of the wood, for there still remains the problem of verse 41 in Luke’s version. According to Jeremias this is a secondary piece of material, the evidence for this conclusion being the absence of the verse from the parallel passage in Matthew, and the fact that the verse contradicts the meaning of the parable. In his earlier edition Jeremias also held that the verse displayed Lucan stylistic characteristics, but this judgment has now been modified, for the characteristics are in fact those of Luke’s source at this point.¹²⁶ The possibility that the verse was in the source used by Matthew was suggested by T. W. Manson, with the explanation that Matthew omitted the verse because it was obscure to him.¹²⁷ If, however, the verse displays the style of proto-Luke, this possibility is open to question. But to argue that the verse contradicts the meaning of the parable is a case of *petitio principii*. The

¹²³ W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 55f.

¹²⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 93f.; *cf.* p. 83 n.

¹²⁵ *Jesus and the Future* (London, 1954), pp. 172-183.

¹²⁶ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹²⁷ T. W. Manson, *op. cit.*, pp. 117f.

literary evidence, however, suggests the possibility of some modification in the course of transmission.

So we turn to the parable of the servant in authority, which follows. Its kernel is that a servant is entrusted with the care

[p.39]

of the household during the absence of the master and will be rewarded at the master's return if he is found doing his duty; but if, relying on the delay of the master, he behaves riotously his master's unexpected return will ensure his downfall. Kümmel points out rightly that this kernel is similar to that of the parable of the watchman (or waiting servants) in which there is the same injunction to be ready for the unexpected return of the master, although this does not necessarily mean that we have here two recensions of the same parable. He then states that there is, in principle, no reason for denying that the obvious application of the picture language to the relationship of the returning Jesus to his disciples is the work of Jesus himself.¹²⁸ The reason why Jeremias goes astray here is because he *assumes* that the original audience was not the disciples of Jesus,¹²⁹ and for this assumption there is no evidence. Moreover, the fact that the idea of departure and return occurs in other parables also (the talents and the pounds) shows that more is intended here than a simple warning about a coming day of reckoning for the leaders of Israel.

But what about the delay which appears in the parable? Kümmel follows Michaelis in denying that the parables teach delay; the alleged references (the night watches, and the words, 'my master delays his coming') are simply due to the imagery of the parable. The fact that delay also appears in the parable of the virgins is, however, suspicious, and it is perhaps more likely that the teaching about an uncertain interval is part of the parable.¹³⁰ But, in view of our earlier discussion, there is no good reason for denying that Jesus spoke in these terms. It also seems to be taken for granted that an allusion to the messianic banquet is impossible on the lips of Jesus,¹³¹ but this seems very questionable. The fact that Jesus speaks of the master returning from a wedding, which clearly cannot be allegorized as the messianic wedding, speaks in favour of the authenticity of the parable.

There is, then, no basic reason for denying the central core of teaching in this set of parables. But there may have been alterations by the Evangelists in the handing down of the material, as indeed a glance at the synopsis shows to have been the case.

[p.40]

These are of secondary importance in comparison with the basic elements in the parabolic teaching, and may accordingly be left out of account here.¹³²

¹²⁸ W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 54f.

¹²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹³⁰ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-92.

¹³¹ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹³² The differences between Mt. 24: 45-51 and Lk. 12: 41-46 are chiefly verbal and may be due in some cases to variant translation from Aramaic. Lk. 12: 47f. may be an addition. There is sufficient difference between Lk. 12: 35-38 and the parable just mentioned to make it doubtful whether they are variants of the same original parable. The greatest difficulty is caused by Mk. 13: 33-37 which contains echoes from other parables, and may be a homiletic compilation (so V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 524), or one parable which has been amplified in the course of

Three other parables follow at this point in Matthew. The first of these is that of the virgins (Mt. 25: 1-13). Critical opinion is divided about its interpretation. C. H. Dodd and J. Jeremias hold the view that when certain allegorical features are removed from the parable we are left with a simple parable by Jesus himself referring to the coming crisis.¹³³ R. Bultmann and G. Bornkamm think that the parable is pure allegory constructed by the early Church, and that it is unlikely that a simpler parable of Jesus underlies it.¹³⁴ Its form is controlled by the fact of the delay in the parousia.¹³⁵ However, a number of scholars maintain the possibility that the parable, in more or less its present form, is authentic teaching of Jesus.¹³⁶

It is doubtful whether the view of Jeremias can be sustained. It is not enough to discard the present context of the parable and the conclusion in 25: 13 so as to remove the reference to the parousia. For the coming of the bridegroom, when considered alongside references to a 'coming one' in other parables, seems to refer to the parousia.¹³⁷ In objection to this it has been said that the figure of the bridegroom was not a current metaphor for the Messiah, although it is allowed that Jesus may be making a veiled reference to himself. The basis of this objection is the fact that the bridegroom metaphor is unknown in contemporary Judaism and first appears in Paul. But the fact that it appears in Paul makes us ask why it may not have originated with Jesus himself. The metaphor is one which is attributed to

[p.41]

Jesus in Mark 2: 19f., and with regard to Mark 2: 19 Jeremias can say only that the words 'while the bridegroom is with them' *may* be a circumlocution for 'during the wedding'.¹³⁸ This is hardly a convincing argument, and we must say that it was possible for Jesus to refer to himself in this veiled manner.¹³⁹ Further, the words of the bridegroom in Matthew 25: 11f. are such a clear echo of Matthew 7: 21-23 that it is difficult not to hear in them the tones of the Son of man. Finally, the joyful nature of the event hardly fits in with the idea that the parable is simply a warning against coming catastrophe; it is warning against exclusion at the parousia. If, then, the parable is authentic, it is so only as a parousia parable.

The question of authenticity must therefore now be raised. We do not need to discuss here the objection that the details given do not fit a rural wedding.¹⁴⁰ It is sufficient to refer to the information assembled by Jeremias, which shows that, even if it is impossible to provide contemporary parallels for the customs described here, we cannot state that the picture is an unreal one constructed for its allegorical value.¹⁴¹ More weight must be given to the suggestion that the parable presupposes the delay of the parousia. Grässer states that the

transmission (so J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-47); see G. R. Beasley. Murray, *A Commentary on Mark 13* (London, 1957), pp. 111, 118.

¹³³ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 128f.; J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-45, 157-160.

¹³⁴ R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 125, 190f. and Supplement, p. 27; G. Bornkamm, 'Die Verzögerung der Parusie', in *In Memoriam E. Lohmeyer* (Stuttgart, 1951), pp. 116-126.

¹³⁵ E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-127.

¹³⁶ J. Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*⁵ (Göttingen, 1950), pp. 249-251 (but this was not his final opinion); W. Michaelis, *Kennen die Synoptiker...* pp. 1, 6-121; W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-59; R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (London, 1961), pp. 231, 234.

¹³⁷ W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 58f.

¹³⁸ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 44; *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, IV, pp. 1,092-1,099.

¹³⁹ W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 57 n.

¹⁴⁰ R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 191; G. Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, pp. 120f.

¹⁴¹ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-159.

failure of the foolish virgins lies in their not reckoning with a delay — otherwise they would have brought more oil with them; a certain delay is accepted as inevitable, as is evidenced by the untroubled sleep of both sets of virgins, and the real point of the parable is not to announce the approaching wedding but to ask who will take part in it.¹⁴² The reasoning appears to be convincing, and we must allow that the parable teaches a certain interval before the wedding, and that the interval may last longer than is expected. Hence, the lesson here is not so much the need to be ready for a sudden, soon coming, as the need to endure to the end in order to be saved. But there is no need to assume that Jesus could not have taught along these lines. If he foretold a time of crisis and tribulation yet to come, it is entirely credible that he warned his disciples against the danger of failing to endure.

There is, however, a further weighty argument against the authenticity of the parable. This is that it displays a number

[p.42]

of features which are descriptive of the parousia rather than of a wedding. Three of these are listed. First, the allegorizing of the bridegroom as the Messiah. It has already been shown that this could be the work of Jesus himself. Further, it is probable that some weight must be attached to the fact that the disciples are compared to the guests and not the bride. Since the later tradition always makes the latter identification, this is a sign of early tradition.¹⁴³

The second point is that the midnight hour is impossible for the beginning of a wedding, but night is the time for the coming of the Messiah and the end of the world. The negative part of this statement is sufficiently answered by the considerations brought forward by Jeremias. The positive part is found by examination to depend on a collection of texts which do not prove the point (Mk. 13: 33ff.; Lk. 12: 35ff.; Mt. 24: 42ff.; Rom. 13: 11; 1 Thes. 5: 1ff.; Eph. 5: 14; Rev. 3: 3; 16: 15). The mention of night in the parable of the burglar belongs to the imagery; in the parables of the watchman and servant in authority, the hours of the night are no more to be taken literally in application than is the command to stay awake. In Ephesians 5: 14 the reference is to conversion rather than to the parousia and in Romans 13: 11 the parousia is compared to the dawn. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that midnight is the hour for the parousia.

The third point is that the language used of meeting the bridegroom is said to be that used to describe meeting a high dignitary with prescribed ceremonial.¹⁴⁴ This is apparently regarded as Hellenistic by Grässer, but certain aspects, at least, of the imagery may be apocalyptic in origin;¹⁴⁵ in either case, however, the possi-

¹⁴² E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 119f.

¹⁴³ Here the view of J. Jeremias (*op. cit.*, p. 159 n. 1) is to be retained against the arguments of G. Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, pp. 122f. and E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 122. If the *varia lectio* 'and the bride' is original in verse 1 (J. Schniewind, *op. cit.*, p. 250; cf. T. W. Manson, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-245), it is a further proof of our point; but the reading is generally rejected.

¹⁴⁴ The primary study is E. Peterson, *Die Einholung des Kyrios*, in *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie*, VII, 1929-30, pp. 682-702; cf. G. Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, pp. 123f.; E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-125. The basic points are the use of ἀπάντησις (cf. 1 Thes. 4: 17), of ἐξέρχομαι, παρθένος and κτανγή. It is worth asking whether ἀπάντησις (verse 1) is used in this particular sense (see Moulton and Milligan on both words). It is difficult to see what other word than ἐξέρχομαι could have been used in the context. The reference to παρθένοι is found in a list of great comprehensiveness and is hardly significant.

¹⁴⁵ The attempt of E. Grässer (*loc. cit.*) to find eschatological associations for the shout in other New Testament passages is very far-fetched, although the apocalyptic use of the shout cannot be doubted. For the view that

[p.43]

bility that Jesus may have used such language cannot be excluded, and it is also possible that he consciously used the allegory. We must conclude that the arguments against authenticity are not compelling.

The second parable in this chapter is that of the talents (Mt. 25: 14-30). Its point in its present context is plain: it summons the disciples to fruitful activity during the absence of Jesus before his parousia. The fact of delay is presupposed by the reference to 'a long time' (verse 19). A similar indication is given by Luke (19: 11) before the parable of the pounds. The discussion of these two parables with a view to finding a basic core to the pair of them is a matter which lies beyond our present scope;¹⁴⁶ the point is whether the basic core is authentic teaching of Jesus and in line with the rest of his eschatological teaching. The essential story is that of a rich man who leaves his servants with responsibilities to fulfil, and rewards or punishes them upon his return. This is a pattern with which we are already familiar, and we have seen no reason for denying that Jesus spoke in this manner. Further, we have seen that Jesus could have spoken to his disciples in this manner. We must, therefore, enquire with H. P. Owen why it is necessary to invent a new and entirely speculative *Sitz im Leben* for the parable.¹⁴⁷ For here, once again, we find that Jeremias assumes that Jesus was not addressing his disciples. Although the proposed original application suggested by Jeremias is entirely feasible, it is equally feasible that the parable was originally applied to the disciples.¹⁴⁸

The third parable in this chapter, if parable is the right name for it, is that of the sheep and the goats (Mt. 25: 31-46). Its significance from the eschatological point of view lies in its association of the Son of man with the coming judgment at his parousia. Critical opinion has generally been prepared to accept

[p.44]

the authenticity of the parable as teaching of Jesus, at least in its broad outline.¹⁴⁹ R. Bultmann, however, holds that it is a story taken from Jewish tradition which originally applied to God himself; it was taken over by the Church and applied to the Son of man instead.¹⁵⁰ C. H. Dodd holds that the scene was composed to give a framework for the two sayings in verses 40 and 45, which have parallels in Matthew 10: 40-42 and Mark 9: 37,¹⁵¹

Paul's language (1 Thes. 4: 17) may be explained partly at least from Jewish sources, see B. Rigaux, *Les Épîtres aux Thessaloniens* (Paris, 1956), pp. 547f.

¹⁴⁶ See the discussions in R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 190, 212; T. W. Manson, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-248, 312-317; C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-114; J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-55; E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-119.

¹⁴⁷ H. P. Owen, 'The Parousia of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels', *SJT*, XII, 1959, pp. 171-192, especially pp. 178f. Granted that Lk. 19: 11 is a Lucan formation (Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 84 n.), it may still be a correct interpretation of the purpose of the parable.

¹⁴⁸ The fact of an interval before the parousia is implicit in the parable, if it is addressed to the disciples. But in view of the difficulties in isolating an original form of the parable it is impossible to say how far the expression of this goes back to Jesus himself. Although Mt. 25: 19 may be due to the Evangelist, the whole form of the parable suggests an interval for activity. Yet it must be admitted that this interval could be interpreted as a time in the past, on the analogy of the parable of the vineyard, in which case the original application is to the Jews and their leaders.

¹⁴⁹ T. W. Manson, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-252; J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-175; A. M. Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-90, 118.

¹⁵⁰ R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 130f. and Supplement, p. 19 similarly E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, p. 168. Against Bultmann see J. Jeremias, *Jesu Verheissung für die Völker*, p. 41 n.

¹⁵¹ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 65 n.

and this suggestion has been developed at length by J. A. T. Robinson: two sayings of Jesus have been fused and allegorized by Matthew.¹⁵² One may grant that there has been a certain amount of editorial activity, but the considerations advanced by Robinson are not sufficient to overthrow the general impression of unity and originality which is made by the parable. It is possible that the introductory verse which links the parable with the parousia is Matthaean, but in fact this link is implicit in the parable, since the parousia and the judgment are inextricably linked together. Admittedly this link depends on the identification of the King and Judge with the Son of man, but this identification is assured by the echoes of Matthew 10: 40-42, which show that Jesus is the speaker, and by the fact that the consciousness of Kingship is part of the messianic consciousness of Jesus himself.¹⁵³

With our discussion of this parable we have reached the end of the parables which occur in the context of the Synoptic apocalypse. There remain one or two other parables which also contain eschatological teaching and these require brief mention. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16: 19-31) occupies a position on the fringe of the parabolic teaching, similar to that of the sheep and the goats. It does not raise any points of eschatological or Christological interest which affect our estimate of the other parables, and we therefore pass over it at this point.¹⁵⁴

[p.45]

In Luke 12: 57-59 we have the parable of the man on the way to the judge. The setting is undoubtedly eschatological, and the parable is a warning to men to observe the signs of the times and act before the crisis comes upon them. The meaning is undoubtedly that men should prepare now for the last judgment. It may be wrong to press the details and ask who it is that the adversary and the judge represent. This question must, however, be asked with regard to the form of the parable in Matthew 5: 25f. Here it is commonly regarded as a piece of almost trivial advice to be reconciled to an earthly adversary before it is too late.¹⁵⁵ While the context in Matthew may appear to support this interpretation, it is much more likely that there too the reference is to the last judgment by God. The danger against which Jesus warns his hearers is that of some wronged person standing up on the day of judgment to accuse us before God. This is by no means trivial, and it shows that Matthew has not lost the eschatological point of the parable.¹⁵⁶ It may be granted that the point is not exactly the same as that made in Luke, where there is more emphasis on the need to be reconciled at once, but it is essentially the same teaching.

One parable contains a reference to the parousia in its conclusion and not in the parable itself. This is in the comments concluding the parable of the importunate widow (Lk. 18: 1-8). With the parable itself we are not concerned here. Its lesson is that God will hear his people when they call to him, and it therefore inculcates the task of prayer.¹⁵⁷ The fact that God hears the

¹⁵² 'The "Parable" of the Sheep and the Goats', in *New Testament Studies*, II, 1956, pp. 225-237 (reprinted in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, London, 1962). His interpretation is criticized by Bultmann, Supplement, *loc. cit.*, as *allzu scharfsinnig*.

¹⁵³ For Jesus as Judge and King, see Mt. 19: 28 (*cf.* Lk. 22: 291.); Mk. 8: 38; Mt. 10: 32f.; Lk. 9: 26; 12: 8f.; Mk. 15: 2; Jn. 18: 37; W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 92; J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, p. 174.

¹⁵⁴ See the full discussion by J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-154.

¹⁵⁵ W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 56; J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 32 f.

¹⁵⁶ J. Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, pp. 61f.; E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*² (Göttingen, 1958), pp. 123-125. See also A. H. M'Neile, *The Gospel according to St Matthew*, p. 64.

¹⁵⁷ T. W. Manson (*op. cit.*, pp. 305-308) and J. Jeremias (*op. cit.*, pp. 133-136) both hold that the parable is more concerned with the character of God than with the manner of prayer. But since a true understanding of God's

prayers of his elect is stressed in verses 7-8a; then verse 8b adds the question, But when the Son of man comes will he find faith on the earth? Scholarly estimates of the authenticity of verse 8b, and indeed of verses 6-8, vary, but it is significant that J. Jeremias has recently come to accept the authenticity of the whole section.¹⁵⁸ It is then taken to be a means of encouraging

[p.46]

the disciples as they face the difficult times which lie ahead of them before the consummation. They should fear not that God will fail to hear their prayers, but that they may cease to pray and thus be found unfaithful when the Son of man comes. What emerges from this is that here we have a definite instance of a parable which is addressed to the disciples and which treats of eschatological events connected with the coming of the Son of man.

Finally, we must mention the parable of the king's marriage feast (Mt. 22: 1-14) or the great supper (Lk. 14: 16-24). Here we have a case very similar to that of the talents and the pounds, where two parables show such close resemblances that they obviously represent one original parable theme worked out (whether by Jesus or by the Church) in two different directions. There is the further complication that additional matter may be present in both forms of the parable.¹⁵⁹ The point which concerns us, however, is the fact that both Evangelists regard the feast as the messianic meal. Can we take this as the intention of Jesus himself? The possibility appears to be denied by Jeremias, who takes the parable to be a means of vindicating Jesus' gospel for the poor and needy, and to be without allegorical features.¹⁶⁰ But the fact that 'the symbol of the heavenly banquet was a traditional one for the bliss of the good time coming, when the Kingdom of God should be revealed'¹⁶¹ simply demands that the parable be understood to refer to the messianic banquet, and if the coming of the kingdom is taken to be a basically future concept, then

[p.47]

the interpretation of the Evangelists must be accepted as the right one. The possibility of some allegorical allusions by Jesus is thus a real one and cannot be rejected out of hand.

readiness to hear is the greatest incentive to prayer, it is difficult to see why Luke's comment in 18: 1 should be regarded as mistaken.

¹⁵⁸ J. Jeremias, *loc. cit.* Cf. W. L. Knox, *The Sources of the Synoptic Gospels*, II, Pp. 113f.; G. Delling, 'Das Gleichnis vom gottlosen Richter', in *ZNW*, LIII, 1962, pp. 1-25. On the other side, however, see R. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 189; W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 59 n.; E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-38. Grässer argues that there is no parallel application in the companion parable of the friend at midnight (Lk. 11: 5-8); it is difficult to see the force of this argument, especially since the passage in Lk. 11 has a different purpose. Nor is it easy to see why the parable should not be allowed to have a particular application; in fact, however, the application is entirely general, since it is concerned with the principal fact in the future situation of the disciples. Next, it is stated that the plea for the punishment of the Church's enemies is unlikely on the lips of Jesus. This objection overlooks the fact that the parable is concerned with the *vindication* of God's people, and the topic of vindication is a well-attested one in the teaching of Jesus; see C. F. D. Moule, 'From Defendant to Judge — and Deliverer', in *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, Bulletin III, 1954. Finally, Grässer suggests that verse 8 implies that the delay in the parousia is due to the lack of faith in the Church; this reads too much into the text.

¹⁵⁹ The analysis of these two parables is too complicated to be discussed in detail within the present limits. While it is generally recognized that Mt. 22: 11-14 is an independent parable (so even R. V. G. Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 207), K. H. Rengstorf ('Die Stadt der Mörder (Mt. 22: 7)', in *Beihefte zu ZNW*, XXVI, 1960, pp. 106-129) has recently made out a case for the authenticity of Mt. 22: 5-7.

¹⁶⁰ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-40, 56-59, 110-113, especially pp. 58f.

¹⁶¹ C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

From this brief survey of the parables of Jesus which deal with the coming crisis, we may draw the conclusion that the *prima facie* interpretation of many of them in terms of the parousia of the Son of man after a certain undefined interval is not only the most natural interpretation of them individually, but is also in keeping with the teaching of Jesus as a whole. Jesus not only warned the Jews about the crisis which threatened them (parables of the children at play and the barren fig-tree); he also exhorted his hearers to make certain that they would qualify for admission to the kingdom (parables of the virgins, the king's marriage feast and great supper), especially by living as true disciples (parables of the sheep and the goats and the man on the way to the judge) and by occupying the intervening time in the service of their Master (parables of the talents and the pounds); they were to remain faithful during the interval before the parousia with its persecutions and hardships (parable of the importunate widow) and to be watchful for the coming of the Son of man (parables of the burglar, the watchman and the servant in authority). Within the limits of this monograph it is not possible to develop this summary of the eschatological teaching of the parables more fully, but enough has been said to show that this teaching may be accepted as that of Jesus himself. One further comment may be permitted. It is that, although this teaching is concerned with the future, it is relevant at every point to the life of disciples in the present time and urges them to live a life here and now in which the imminence of the parousia and of the open manifestation of the kingdom of God is the controlling factor; to men who have already accepted the call of Jesus to discipleship comes the call to endure faithfully until the return of their Lord.

[p.48]

CONCLUSION

The subject which has occupied us here has been the limited one of considering the eschatological teaching of the parables of Jesus. We have provisionally adopted the interpretation of the eschatological teaching of Jesus given by W. G. Kümmel and others, and it has proved possible to interpret the parables in a satisfactory manner along such lines. We have also seen that on the one hand the interpretation of the parables in terms of realized eschatology leads to forced explanations of many of them, and on the other hand the interpretation of the teaching of Jesus in terms of an imminent coming of the kingdom fails to do justice to the parables and leads to an unnecessarily sceptical estimate of their authenticity. Our study has also shown that criticism which rules out the possibility of allegory is unnecessarily arbitrary, and that form criticism of the parables with a view to determining their *Sitz im Leben* in the early Church is a study which must proceed with the greatest caution. In particular, the theory that the early Church adapted or invented several parables under the influence of a delay of the parousia has been shown to be insecurely based. At the same time, the possibility of some reinterpretation by the early Church has to be admitted, and may be regarded as certain, even if it is difficult to say with precision what are its limits.

In a sense the aim of this monograph has been a negative one. We have not attempted to open up a new way of understanding the parables, but have attempted rather to show the mistaken interpretations which arise out of adopting views of the eschatological teaching of Jesus which fail to do justice to his teaching as a whole. Such negative work, however, is an important part of Gospel criticism, and prepares the way for further advance in positive understanding. Our indebtedness to the valuable insights of modern scholarship must not blind us to the places where it is necessary to set a critical question mark against some of its

conclusions. Only by rigorous self-criticism will the study of the Gospels bring us into a deeper understanding of the words of Jesus.

Originally published by The Tyndale Press in November, 1963. Reproduced by kind permission of the author.

Prepared for the Web in July 2005 by Robert I Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>
