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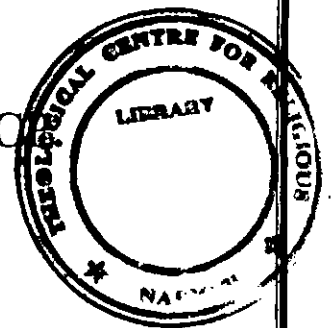
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
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GOD'S UNIVERSAL LOVE AS IT IS EXPRESSED IN THE PARABLES TOLD BY JESUS

By

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used here in has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution; all sources have been cited in full.

Signed *Roberto P C*

Roberto Perez Cordova, mcej.

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Roberto Perez Cordova

INTRODUCTION

When we realize that the parables are considered the master piece of Jesus' teaching and that they convey more accurately the mind and teaching of Jesus, one begins to wonder why Jesus said so and so. Some writers say that Jesus spoke his parables to people in order to awake in them a new understanding of God. The new understanding of what the kingdom of God is all about.

In this paper we will analyze the way Jesus used the parables and then I will take some parables, after analyzing them according to the new scholars of Scripture, I will also look at them in a new context. Our context is today as we prepare ourselves for the Jubilee of Christ.

I will also treat the parables in a missionary context. The mission starts from the Father, and is conveyed to us by Jesus Christ. The Church plays an important role in this teaching of Jesus. I will speak of the parables from a universal and missionary point of view in which God offers, gives, demands and is always ready to ask for our response.

We shall therefore realize that the parables are always a challenge to the hearer: "What do you say?" Each person must give his or her own response.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PARABLES IN THE GOSPELS

1.1 HOW JESUS USED THE PARABLES

To understand how Jesus used the parables we must first of all see what parables are and what they are not. In this we can say that many have viewed the parables as the means by which Jesus gave his teaching or instructions. It is important to note that the parables are not mere stories which are pleasant or intriguing to read or to hear but, far more, they are witnesses to the teaching of Jesus ¹

From this we may say that parables are not just a style in which something has to be said in order for others to see what they must know or do. On the contrary, the parables of Jesus are not primarily literary productions, and it is not their object to lay down general maxims.²

Jesus did not use the parables as a means of conflict by which he wanted to speak to his adversaries. True, Jeremias says that the parables were "mostly concerned with a situation of conflict, justification, defense, attack and even challenge. For the most part, though not exclusively, they are weapons of controversy, everyone of them calls for an answer on the spot."³ And many would agree that Jesus' way of using the parables was as a means of attack in order to make his listeners see that they are wrong and that he is doing the right thing.

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1. Cf. Wilfrid J. Harrington, Parables Told by Jesus, New York: (Alba House, 1974) p.15.
2. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, Rediscovering the Parables, London: (SCM Press, 1978). p 15.
3. *Ibid.*, p 15.

However, Linnemann and Dupont have shown that "Jesus was not a combatant, and that, with rare exceptions, he did not use the parables as weapons of warfare for defense or attack. Had he used them in this way, the parables would have accomplished nothing except to silence the adversaries and harden them in their opposition to Jesus."⁴

After these two views of Jesus' parables I can say that Jesus did not use the parables as a means to give information nor as a means of debate. Jesus' parables had a more positive purpose. Jesus spoke his parables in a context of dialogue; he spoke them to an audience that wanted to know his view on God's love for all. In this case he used dialogue in order to engage his hearer's attention, gain their assent, and enable them adopt his view of things.⁵

In this sense parables are further Jesus' determination to vindicate the good news. He wanted, as well, to show how unjustified, hateful, loveless and unmerciful the criticism of Scribes and Pharisees was.⁶

Now we may move to looking at what parables are and how they work. In this case analyzing the parable itself we could say that "the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in a sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."⁷

In this, parables quicken the understanding by putting truth in a vivid way, but always they are meant to challenge the hearer to action. By using parables Jesus will compel his hearers to make a decision. He was giving them a chance of changing their way of living and of understanding God's action and love.

The parables were instruments of genuine dialogue between Jesus and his audience. In this way the subject of the parable is a matter on which Jesus and his audience hold different views, and the decision to go over to Jesus' side can only be made by the hearers; but Jesus offers the possibility.⁸

4. Cf. Madeleine I. Boucher, The Parables, Wilmington (Veritas Publications, 1981), p. 35.

5. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

6. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 29.

7. Charles H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, London: (Fontana Books, 1971), p. 16.

8. Cf. Madeleine I. Boucher, *op cit.*, p. 35-36.

In his parable Jesus will give two views, one will be the audience's view, the other will be his. The audience will follow the story and will be led to Jesus' view, since his view will be the one he wants to convey and the one that brings people to take their own stand. These stories will be drawn from ordinary life, but show numerous unusual features, intended to arouse the attention of the hearers and carrying special emphases. In the telling of the story the audience is invited to take sides, and indeed to adopt the narrator's viewpoint. "The hearer is thus led to see things from a fresh perspective. The parable then moves from the story level to the religious or ethical subject under discussion. The parable has made it possible for the hearer's mind to be opened to new understanding."⁹

The parables will make the hearer take a stand, act and take sides. It will create a new understanding, new possibilities of action, and a new situation different from that of the speaker's view, giving the possibility of conversion to a new life.

Once the hearer takes his stand and acts, it follows the purpose of the parable, to enable him see things from a different perspective. However if he does not act, or ignores the parable, that is also his stand, his view; a decision has also been made, that of opposition or refusal of Jesus' view.

1.2 THE USE OF PARABLES IN THE GOSPEL

In what we have said already above on how the parable was employed by Jesus himself during his ministry, we encounter the problem of the incomprehension of the parables. On the one hand there is the case of how easy or difficult it is to interpret them, and on the other hand we see the difficulty to understand them. So there is the situation in which some are clear and are given little or no explanation at all and others that are obscure and need an interpretation of some kind.

9. Ibid., p. 36

The hearers of Jesus parables' at that time could have wondered and asked themselves what does the man mean? The meaning of the parable could be taken from the social situation when the parable was told or from the context before the parable was told.

Sometimes Jesus gave an interpretation following the parables. Old testament parables and rabbinic parables are accompanied by explanations. The rabbis interpreted their parables explicitly, at least sometimes. Jesus could have employed his parables in the same way, so that his hearers would have been able to grasp the meaning of the story Jesus told.

It appears however, that it was not the practice of Jesus to answer the questions to which His parables so often led; but it is the practice of the evangelists to point the moral of the parables.¹⁰ There are grounds for suspecting that "in many cases the application was not a part of the earlier tradition, but was supplied by the evangelist, or by his immediate authority, representing no doubt the current exegesis in that part of the Church to which he belonged."¹¹

The synoptic gospels were composed some forty to sixty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. During this time sayings, deeds, and the teaching of Jesus were used orally by the local churches or Christian communities. There was a recollection of narratives of Jesus' ministry and individual stories and sayings that were passed on by word of mouth. Some of these traditions went into the formation of the synoptic gospels.

It is natural that "during the period of oral transmission following the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christian communities, as a way of meeting their own needs, made adaptations and modifications in the material, and even contributed new material created by themselves. Finally, each evangelist edited or "redacted" the material he received as he composed his Gospel."¹²

This gives rise to an allegorical interpretation of the Gospel parables by means of giving them a different setting from their original one. We will see an authentic saying or

10. Cf. Charles H. Dodd, *op cit.*, p. 95.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

12. Madeleine I. Boucher, *op cit.*, p. 52.

deed of Jesus modified by the early church or shaped by the evangelist. We call this redaction.

Parables are the most authentic sayings of Jesus. These parables express the message and mission of Jesus. They show the coherence of Jesus ministry by action (works, deeds) and by word (sayings). Reflecting one single vision, he enacted what he preached about: God's reign.

It is certain that "Jesus did make use of parables to illustrate what Mark calls 'the mystery of the Kingdom of God'."¹³ Through the parables Jesus proclaims the coming of God's kingdom and its inauguration through his ministry.

Jesus ministry was concerned for the poor, sick, sinners, women, outcasts of society, and by his parables he showed how God's kingdom works. This is the good news: God is concerned for each one of them. By his parables Jesus confronts the hearers and challenges them to decision and action. We see in the parables how Jesus related to everyone and also to the religious authorities.

Generally the parables were used by each of the evangelists in different forms. The most important differences to be considered are changes in the setting, the social context in which the parable was spoken, and the interpretation or application of the parable. This could have been the result of remembering the parable itself, but not the setting. It would have been easier to preserve the parable alone.

We should recognize how much the setting of the parables is the work of the evangelists themselves. "Sometimes the evangelists give the same parable in different settings; and secondly, recent research has shown that the materials of the Gospels were at first transmitted in the form of independent units, the framework being supplied by the evangelists who wrote not less than a generation after the time of Jesus."¹⁴

Another tendency was that parables were modified. Sometimes two parables were joined together, so the task was to look for the setting of each. The tendency of the tradition to form collections of parables led to the fusion of two parables into one. The

13. Charles H. Dodd, *op cit.*, p. 28.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

clearest example is the Matthean form of the parable of the Great Supper (22:1-14). The invitation to the banquet is joined to the parable of the wedding garment.¹⁵

Matthew 13 is a prime example of this process because "its grouping of many parables shows how Jesus turns away from the Jews who had rejected him to the disciples who would receive him. This is the great 'turning point'."¹⁶

In one gospel we find that the parable of the Lost Sheep is addressed to the Pharisees and scribes, (Lk. 15:3-6) Matthew's audience for the same parable is the disciples (Mt. 18:12-13). Each evangelist gave his own setting. In Matthew's setting the parable is an exhortation to the community leaders to look for those who have abandoned the community. While in Luke's setting it is God's delight in forgiveness and in Jesus' association with sinners.

In Matthew the parable of the Lost sheep (18:12-14), and in Mark the simile of the salt (9:50) are addressed to the disciples; but according to Luke the first is addressed to Jesus' opponents (15:2) and the second to the crowd (14:25).

This tendency to change audience from opponents of Jesus to his disciples implied also the change or shifting of the meaning of the parable.

1.3 THE USE OF PARABLES IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

In Luke's gospel we find an extensive collection of parables, which contains the classic teaching of Jesus.

The parables of Luke differ in their atmosphere and tone from those of Matthew and Mark. Although Luke takes Mark's parables, Luke centres more in the mystery of human interaction, and with his use of soliloquy he invites people to become part of the parables.

15. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 74.

16. Wilfrid J. Harrington, *op cit.*, p. 18.

Luke "eschews allegory and expresses realistic sympathy for the dilemmas of ordinary human existence. His memorable characters offer paradigms of discipleship for daily Christian existence "¹⁷

It is true that in the parables that Luke has in common with Matthew and Mark, or only with Matthew, he gives a series of allegorical interpretations. These are less extensive than in Mark, and still less so than in Matthew. For instance, Luke interprets allegorically the parables of the Great Supper and of the Wicked Husbandmen (20:9-18). But these allegorizations are probably without exception the work, not of Luke, but of the tradition behind him, since they are almost all found in the other Synoptics. However it is worthy to note that "Lukan special material in its rich collection of parables shows no examples of allegorical interpretation. On the contrary, the special parabolic material in Luke, in so far as it has been worked over, has been expanded and interpreted with a different purpose, namely a direct hortatory application. Luke has thus taken over allegorical interpretations from an earlier tradition, but has not himself worked over his material with this end in view."¹⁸

According to Jeremias and Dodd the parables of Luke's gospel are closer to the genuine parables of Jesus than those found in the other gospels.

The Luke's parables speak for themselves. There is no need for a key to understand them. People act according to human behavior. What we need is just the knowledge of this same behaviour to grasp them.

Though Luke does not need allegory as others did, he is happy to use it within his historical realism. "It is as gross a mistake to think of Luke as unallegorical or anti-allegorical as it is to think of him as uneschatological or unapocalyptic. In both instances he has other preoccupations, the present-historical and the real, which change the tale and the tales. But equally he keeps and uses and even adds both apocalyptic eschatology and allegory."¹⁹

17. John R. Donahue, The Gospel in Parable, U.S.A.: (Fortress Press, 1990), p. 126.

18. Joachim Jeremias, op cit., p. 68.

19. John Drury, The Parables in the Gospels, New York: (Crossroad, 1985). p. 117.

Though many scholars think that Luke does not use allegory, some examples prove otherwise, and we must say that Luke uses it whenever he feels the need to use it.

Luke's stories are realistic and they serve as shocking examples of the behaviour that characterizes the followers of Jesus. This is especially true in the parables that take place in the journey section (Lk. 9:51-19:27), in which Jesus journeys to Jerusalem and instructs his disciples on Christian discipleship.

In Luke's parables we find different themes expressive of his theology, such as the merciful compassion of God (1:78). Compassion is very important in his parables (10:33; 15:20). Jesus announces the good news to the poor (4:18-19). In his parables the defenceless are vindicated (7:40-43; 18:1-7), and the complacent are challenged (18:9-14). Luke presents daily Christian living and understands discipleship as following Jesus' example. In his parables and by his deeds the Lucan Jesus becomes the paradigm of Christian life.²⁰

Major themes arise as Jesus approaches Jerusalem as his goal and the place from which God's saving action begins (1:5-13; 24:47, Act 1:8-9). The concern for non-Jews is shown in the positive view of the Samaritans (10:29-37; 17:16; Acts 8:25). There is the concern for the outcasts and those on the margin of society (14:13,21; 15:1-2; 17:11-19), and a strong emphasis on prayer (10:2; 11:13; 18:1-14). In this structure Luke portrays Jesus as teaching his disciples the way of discipleship, which they will follow as they spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8 cf. Lk 24:47).

Another important point is that Luke's "parables have a characteristic shape of which the most striking feature is that the crisis happens in the middle, not, as so often in Matthew's parables, at the end. For instance, in the Good Samaritan the crisis occurs when the traveller is left half dead at the roadside."²¹

It is in fact a pattern familiar to students of Luke from Conzelmann's work on *Die Mitte der Zeit*, the mid-point of time. It shapes Luke's work as a whole. Jesus is for

20. John R. Donahue, *The Parables of Jesus*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, London: (Geoffrey Chapman, 1990). p. 1368.

21. John Drury, *op cit.*, p. 112.

Conzelmann the central crisis of sacred history. Before him is the Old Testament. Beyond Jesus is the Church. Luke elaborates Jesus' apostolic witness up to his resurrection, and adds the vast appendix of the Acts of the Apostles.²²

The patterns in Luke's parables are deeply embedded in Luke's mind. "It is the pattern of the whole of his history. Jesus in his Gospel is not history's end but its turning point, setting it on a new course in which Judaism drops away and the Christian Church goes triumphantly forward."²³

For Jeremias Luke's parables and narratives are the vindication of Jesus' ministry to the least and the lost and of his table fellowship with sinners.

Another characteristic that we find in Luke's parables is the setting in the world of human beings. This is also a result of a previous development, since we see that in Matthew all the longer parables which he added to Mark's were about people. Matthew also adds many brief metaphors that he drew from nature to the Marcan texts.

We find two examples of development along the line of succession Mark-Matthew-Luke beginning from Mark's vineyard. "There is the development of the historical pattern into a greater and more conscious emphasis on Jesus' ministry as the crucial mid-term crisis: this at the expense of close and thoroughgoing eschatology."²⁴

Secondly there is development in the roles played by people. Luke's human parables contain people confused within themselves. In Luke people change. They adapt when confronted by crisis. He picks up the teaching from his predecessors and gives us examples of people who change their lives, becoming models for us (Zaccheus: Lk. 19:1-10, Repentant woman: Lk 7:36-50).

Luke's parables give clear insight into Luke's methods: "his historical patterning, his human interest, his continuance of the long allegorical, parabolic tradition which he inherited, in addition to his own more realistic narrative interest."²⁵

22. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

In the parables of the Journey Section, apart from the aspects mentioned above, we find another aspect. This is the "diminution of allegory, edged off by a narrative realism, but not excluded: an edging off similar to Luke's postponement, not cancellation, of eschatology."²⁶

26. Ibid., p. 132.

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGESIS OF SOME PARABLES

2.1 THE LEAVEN (Lk. 13:20-21)

The purpose of this parable is to compare the kingdom of God with the final stage of the process described, which is that of the mass of dough wholly permeated by leaven.

In this parable we find some elements that help us to understand it. First of all we find the figure of: a) Leaven b) woman c) the hiding activity d) three measures of flour.

a) Leaven: in the ancient world was a symbol for moral corruption. "In the view of all antiquity, Semitic and non-Semitic, panary fermentation represented a process of corruption and putrefaction in the mass of dough."²⁷

It is well-known that leaven or yeast is used in the bible most of the time as a symbol of evil. It also symbolizes unholy Israel but unleavened bread also symbolizes holy Israel (Ex. 12:15-16). In Israel there is an equation that leaven is the unholy everyday, and unleaven the holy, the sacred, the feast.

Leaven is in general, a symbol for evil influences carrying infection. In this sense Jesus used it when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees (Mk 8:15). However in the parable the emphasis seems to be on the great effect a little leaven can have.

b) Woman: as a symbolic structure was associated in Judaism as in other Mediterranean cultures with the unclean, the religiously impure. The male was a symbol of purity. "Characteristic of the traditional position and estimation of women is a saying current in different forms among the Persians, Greeks and Jews in which man gives thanks

27. Bernard B, Scott, Hear Then the Parable: a commentary on the Parables of Jesus, Minneapolis: (Fortress Press, 1989). p 324.

that he is not an unbeliever or uncivilized, that he is not a woman and that he is not a slave"²⁸

c) Hiding: instead of kneading (phyrao), the woman hides (krypto) the leaven in the mass of dough. The word Krypto emphasizes the subjective element, that the concealment is often for selfish reasons, e.g., to prevent others from using the object, to keep it for one's self. The woman's hiding confirms, not overturns, the leaven's negative connotations. Frustration is now intensified: How can the kingdom be like leaven, a woman, and hiding? Surely the proper terms are unleaven, a man, and open or revealed.²⁹

The parable insists on the hidden character of the leaven's activity. One would never suspect the presence of the leaven in the dough if it were not for the latter's rising.

d) In three measures of flour: the number of three measures "equal about fifty pounds of flour; in other words, the cakes from this baking would feed more than a hundred persons."³⁰ Jeremias points to Gn. 18:6, as a background for the amount. The same figure is described in Judges 6:19. when Hannah dedicates Samuel to the temple. Among her offerings is an ephah of flour, 1 Sam 1:24 (an ephah of flour is three measures). These examples suggest that not only are three measures much more than normal but that the amount is connected with an epiphany. In three measures, the parable presents a term that coheres with the announced referent, the kingdom of God. Yet how is a hearer to combine three measures with the already mentioned negative terms?

e) until all was leavened: points to the end of the process, when the dough is leavened. In the metaphorical structure of leaven, the conclusion of the process is not baking but the rising of the dough which represents corruption. In Hosea 7:4 'until it is leavened' denotes the inevitability of the process's end.

Traditional interpretations have ignored the negative aspects not only of leaven but also of 'woman', 'hid', and 'until all was leaven'. "The metaphorical structure of the kingdom

28. Ibid., p. 326.

29. Cf. Ibid., p. 326.

30. Ibid., p. 327.

of God implies 'holy and good' and so conflicts with leaven's metaphorical structure, which implies moral 'corruption'.³¹

The parable calls into question attempts to predict on the basis of our knowledge of the holy and good where the kingdom is active. "Instead it insists on the kingdom's freedom to appear under its own guise, even if it be the guise of corruption."³²

2.2 THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT (Mt. 18:23-35)

Matthew's allegorical transposition of the story is his most critic contribution, because "it draws attention to the King's mercy, in the story's beginning, at the expense of his revenge, in the end. As a result, subsequent exegesis has accepted themes of judgment, mercy, and forgiveness."³³

There are some elements that are worth explaining in order to understand this parable.

a) The King and his servants: these characters call the hearer to draw his attention at one of the most common figure of their times, and yet of so little personal knowledge.

In the bible and in the East "The king's servants is the term for his higher officials. The magnitude of the sum shows that the servant is to be thought of as a satrap (governor) who was responsible for the revenue from his province (v.34). "the line alerts a hearer to the story's expected development, namely as an accounting story in which the King (and audience) will sit in judgment on those who must give an account."³⁴

b) One of the debtors was brought: his debt was enormous, the size of the debt beyond all conception was intended to heighten the impression made on the audience. No one could owe such a debt, and no one could pay it.

31. Ibid., p. 328.

32. Ibid., p. 329.

33. Ibid., p. 269.

34. Ibid., p. 273.

In the biblical world ten thousand is the highest number used in reckoning, and the talent is the largest denomination. The almost fantastic amount distances servant and king from a hearer's point of view.

Because he is unable to pay the debt, his land and house property are to be sold. "Jewish law allowed an Israelite to be sold only in case of theft, if the thief could not restore what he had stolen; the sale of a wife was absolutely forbidden under Jewish jurisdiction; thus the king and his servants are represented as Gentiles."³⁵

Does the sale of the family make sense? as the average "value of a slave was about 500 or 2000 denarii the amount that would be realized from the sale of the family bore no relation to the gigantic debt of 100 million denarii, and so the king's orders must be understood mainly as an expression of his anger."³⁶

The servant sees that he is at the mercy of his king. He pleads with him for sometime in order to pay the debt.

c) The forgiving of the debt: The king's mercy far exceeds his servant's plea (for a postponement of payment). The master's response must have exceeded his wildest hopes, for he not only released the servant but let him off his whole enormous debt.

d) His fellow servants: In Greek translation of the Old testament this expression occurs in Ezra 4.7,9,12,23 and in it denotes high officials, among them the governors of Palestine and Syria.

When the servant goes out and meets a fellow-servant who owed him one hundred denarii (a denarius was the usual wage for a day's labour.)

He is a minor official for whom the payment of even a small sum will be difficult. His plea for postponement of payment corresponds word for word (except for everything in v. 26) with that of the debtor himself. The difference here is that the desperate promise in v. 26 can not be fulfilled, whereas that in v. 29 can.

The king's previous forgiveness, the smallness of the debt, and the common bond between fellow servants requires forgiveness from the servant, but his response is that he

35 Joachim Jermias, *op cit.*, p. 45.

36. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

will not forgive his fellow-servant. He would not even have had to forgive the debt, he only had to grant the second servant more time to pay. This situation leads the hearers to pass judgment on the servant 'see how these pagans treat one another'.

e) Judgment: The debtor is called back by the Master and judgment is passed. Punishment by torture was not allowed in Israel. It is again clear that non-Palestinian conditions are described here.

The form of punishment was not unusual among gentiles, A hearer's viewpoint remains that of the narrator: see how these gentiles go about their business with such cruelty. A hearer fills in the gap in the story, builds a consistency, in which the story illustrates gentile degradation and by implication, Jewish superiority.

'Till he should pay all his debt' can only mean that, in view of the magnitude of the debt, the punishment would be endless.

"The fellow servants' reporting is like the first servants' own activity. In the end the fellow servants have behaved the same way he did; they failed to forgive and demanded punishment."³⁷

In this parable we encounter God's mercy, by which Jesus says that there is mercy to those open to receive it. This forgiveness must be heartfelt and not an external attitude, that does not touch a person's life.

One point made in this parable is that 'love' won't automatically transform a person. Forgiveness and love are superior to any other attitudes we could have for one another.

2.3 THE GREAT BANQUET (Lk. 14:16-24)

This parable in its present Lukan setting illustrate the advice to invite the poor, the lame, the halt, and the blind, whereas "originally it was one of the numerous parables intended to vindicate the gospel message."³⁸

37. Bernard B. Scott, *op cit.*, p. 278.

38. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 77.

To enter into the parable's atmosphere it is worth mentioning that "when the Jews of Jesus' day dreamt of the time when God would finally set up his kingdom, they often pictured it as a great supper or banquet."³⁹

A man sends his servant to call those who were invited to the feast, but the three groups made excuses. Some of these excuses are mentioned in Dt. 20:5-7. All make excuses, and the reasons are less than convincing. The excuses given by the rich for not participating in the banquet do not really matter. What matters is that the invitation was not heeded.

The Master of the house grew angry. If the invited guests do not come to the feast something must be done to fill the vacant seats. Therefore he sent his servant to invite other people to the banquet

After the servant has called in from the city's streets and alleys the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame (v. 1), there is still room in the dining-hall (v. 22). He is then ordered to summon more guests from "the (country) highways and (vineyard) hedges' (v.23); that is, he must go outside the city gates and call in the tramps as well as the city's poor (v.21)."⁴⁰

Luke may have read more into the double invitation. He may have understood the first invitation to the uninvited which was confined to those in the city, to refer to the tax-collectors and sinners in Israel. "Those people brought in from 'the highways and hedges' probably represent the gentiles; Luke attached great importance to the gentile mission."⁴¹

The 'maimed and blind and lame' people who are 'ipso facto' beggars in the East. They are invited, not out of compassion or from a religious motive (as in v.23) but out of vexation. Verse 23: In addition to the beggars, the servant is to fetch the homeless from 'the highways and hedges'. 'Compel people to come in' "even the poorest, with oriental courtesy, modestly resist the invitation to the entertainment till they are taken by the hand and gently

39. A. M., Hunter, The Parables Then and Now, London: (SCM Press, 1973). p. 93.

40. Joachim Jeremias, op cit., p. 51.

41. Medeline I. Boucher, op cit., p. 103.

pulled into the house. 'May be filed': it is of the utmost importance to the host that even the last place shall be filled."⁴²

Beneficiaries of the eschatological banquet are precisely those whom Judaism excluded from the temple and its service (Lev. 21:18-20) II Sam 5:8). These categories stood for the outcasts of Israel who were attracted to and welcomed by Jesus.

The great supper suggests that "a person could refuse the most important invitation of his or her life and not even recognize it."⁴³

One point clearly made in this parable is that nobody is excluded from God's kingdom except by his own choice. The parable deals with God's plan for humanity as manifested in Jesus' ministry.

The parable is a message of grace. It speaks of an invitation to those who did not expect it or could not have expected it. "They are hauled into the banquet hall. The outcasts have nothing to hold on to and so, while there is nothing that makes them anticipate the invitation, they are open to it as a free gift when it comes."⁴⁴

2.4 THE GOOD SAMARITAN (Lk. 10:25-37)

First of all we see that the lawyer in our parable was a scribe or expert in the law of Moses with all its rules and regulations. And "the whole encounter between Jesus and this man spotlights, as we shall see the difference between the ethic of law and the ethic of love."⁴⁵

A certain man, goes down to Jericho, and from the structure of the story, he is Judean. "Jerusalem is some 2,500 feet above sea level and Jericho 700 feet below it, so travelling is downward."⁴⁶ He fell among bandits: "the term (lestes) is used by Josephus for

42. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 140.

43. Pheme Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus*, New York: (Paulist Press, 1981). p. 94-5.

44. Herman Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus*, Philippines: St. Paul Publications, 1987). p. 136.

45. A. M., Hunter, *op cit.*, p. 109.

46. Luke T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Sacra Pagina series, 3), Minnesota: (The Liturgical Press, 1991). p. 173.

organized bands of highway men who made travel perilous."⁴⁷ The man is stripped and left half-dead. Half-dead implies that he is only barely among the living and could be taken for dead.

The anonymous half-dead man is now joined by two characters denoted by class as priest and Levite, who are making the same journey. They may be returning from their temple duties at Jerusalem for Jericho was well-known habitat for priests and Levites. Seeing the half-dead man they pass by on the other side. The parable does not say anything about their motives.⁴⁸ Given the upper-class status of the priest and Levite, "the anticlericalism of the audience, and the importance of tradition as an interpreter of the Torah, an audience would look at the scandalous merciless act of the priest and the Levite."⁴⁹

Then along comes the true hero of the tale, a Samaritan, a half-breed heretic, a man (it has been said) with a half Bible and mixed blood. The Jews did not speak to the Samaritans. Certainly a Samaritan would not be expected to show compassion to a Jew.

The audience would perhaps expect the Samaritan to look and see if the man is alive, and if so, kill him. Perhaps he will just pass by like the others, and the man will die an unlucky victim.

The relation between the Jews and the Samaritans, which had undergone considerable fluctuations, "had become much worse in Jesus' time, after the Samaritans, between AD. 6 and 9, at midnight during a Passover, had defiled the temple court by strewing dead men's bones; and there was irreconcilable hostility on both sides. Hence it is clear that Jesus intentionally chose an extreme example; by comparing the failure of God's servants with the unselfishness of the hated Samaritan, his hearers were to measure the absolute and unlimited nature of the duty of love."⁵⁰

The Samaritan 'sees and has compassion'. Compassion is the bridge between simply looking at an injured and half-dead fellow human beings and entering their world with

47. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

48. Cf. Bernard B. Scott, *op cit.*, p. 195.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

50. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 160.

Saving care. The Jew in the ditch is no longer an enemy but simply a helpless victim for who the Samaritan has compassion and the resources to help. One look at the victim is enough to move his pity. His compassion not only overcomes the enmity between himself and the Jew, but even the normal reluctance to spend ones' resources aiding a stranger. One could even say that he treats the man as though he were one of his own relatives.

All the actions of the Samaritan in aiding and in bringing the injured man to the inn is more than a narrative epilogue or an added indication of the excess of charity in a person we have come to admire. "Note how lavish is the Samaritan's solicitude. This is Jesus' way of saying that it is the nature of true love to be extravagant."⁵¹

Coming back to the lawyer's question, who is my neighbour? We find that "the right question is not, who may I regard as neighbour? but 'To whom can I be one?' and the right answer to that question is, 'To anyone whose need serves a claim on my help'."⁵²

2.5 THE WICKED TENANTS (Lk. 20:9-18)

Probably Jesus "during his last week in Jerusalem, used all the resources of his imagination to bring home to the Sanhedrin their awful responsibility before God in rejecting his Messiah."⁵³

In mentioning the vineyard the audience would certainly recognize the images of God's love care for his people from the tradition. This parable focuses on a metaphor very common to Jesus' audience, a landlord and his tenants.

It is possible that the parable was told in connection with cleansing of the temple. Addressed to the temple authorities especially the priests who were members of the Sanhedrin to whom the parable's threat refers.

51. A. M. Hunter, *op cit.*, p. 110.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 109-10.

53. A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables*, London: (SCM Press, 1974), p. 87.

A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to farmers (this word could also mean husbandman, vinedresser or tenants). The owner goes away 'for a long time', this might refer to the Parusia with certainty of Judgment, which is allegorically apt to Luke's eschatology.⁵⁴

When the time came, he sent a servant to the farmers to get from them some fruit of the vineyard. The shocking aspect of this line is that the tenants refuse to pay rent, breaking the implied contract. Instead, they mistreat the servant. This is the same as mistreating the master himself. "In narrative logic, the beating of the servant invalidates the implied contract of producing fruit and demands that the master reinstate the contract."⁵⁵

He sent another servant and they beat him. The audience could think that the master is a fool, that he should deal with the matter in a different way. In this line additional servants have been added, since all the evangelists see the parable as an allegory of salvation history.

Then the master sent his son, saying 'they will respect my son'. Possibly the tenants presume that the father has died, and they know that without the son there are no other heirs. In the sending of the Son it is up to the tenants themselves to break off the cycle of violence that they have been engaged in.

Matthew and Luke have the murder of the son outside the vineyard, which brings it into the line with the crucifixion of Jesus.

The parable closes, as a parable should with a question, 'what will the owner of the vineyard do?' The question refers to Is 5.5 'and Now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard'. Every body knew what was the end of such an affair, whether or not Jesus answered his own question (contrary to his custom). What do the tenants deserved? The answer is that they deserve the worst for their crime.

54. Cf. John Drury, *op cit.*, p. 157.

55. Bernard B. Scott, *op cit.*, p. 250.

The owner will come and give the vineyard to others. This illustrates “the doctrine of the rejection of Israel and the election of the Gentiles as it meets us in other parts of the N. T.”⁵⁶

Jesus presents an image which suggests that God will continue to appeal. He will go to any lengths even beyond those imagined by his audience to reach the original goal without violent intervention.

The parable as it has been elaborated, suggests that God has chosen himself new people. These new tenants must be faithful where the old ones were not.

56. Charles H. Dodd, op cit., p. 95

CHAPTER THREE

UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF GOD FROM THE PARABLES

3.1 GOD 'S UNIVERSAL LOVE

The figure of the parable of the leaven brings about the great message that God's kingdom has come upon you. It is a great power that works from within and nothing can stop it. No part of the flour can remain unaffected by it.

Jesus' vision was a wider one that could see in the small beginnings the power and the hand of God his father working on the world. There is no reason for us to control that fermentation. It is the power of God, we can not even stop it, and nothing can stop it. It will work until all is leaven, until all come to know and embrace the love of God shown in Jesus his Son.

Moreover this parable tells us that "out of the insignificant beginnings that are nothing to the human eye, God creates his mighty kingdom which will embrace all the peoples of the world"⁵⁷.

This is the great point of the parable, that God is and will be gathering all peoples, permeating, spreading his kingdom on earth.

The vision of Jesus Christ in this extraordinary short parable, shows us that the kingdom of God is here, and that the love that God pours on every person is his very love that will reach everybody in his kingdom. This is his love for all, first shown to his people Israel. It is shown today in the Church guided by the Holy Spirit like the little leaven that permeates and ferments the mass.

57. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 118.

It is important to examine how the kingdom of God spreads. In the parable we were told that it can appear under any disguise, undetected by the human eye, and anyone may lose sight of this kingdom. But Jesus assures us that the kingdom of God is here and works under the power of God, whose ways are mysterious.

Moreover as Jeremias says "Jesus words could say that God's miraculous power will turn my small band into the mighty host of God's people in the messianic age, embracing the Gentiles"⁵⁸

It is clear then, that this parable is related by Luke to the mission. It promises the world wide spread of the proclamation of the kingdom.⁵⁹ We can interpret it as true, because God's kingdom is to be spread. We believe that it is spread by the missionary activity of the Church.

As we reflect on this, we may say that if now we "lift all this to the divine level and perceive what Jesus is implying. When the reign of God invades history, nothing can be unaffected by it. It creates a disturbance from which nothing is secure. In other words, the ferment has begun - God's great ferment - which no time or society can escape."⁶⁰

Comparing the leavening of the mass with "the disturbance which Jesus' gospel of the kingdom created is still with us. The crises and upheavals of our time often upset the simple faith of many Christians, making them doubt if the gospel is true. But if they can only be made to see that God is a living God and that in these events he is at work, that his judgments are abroad in the earth, they can be saved from cynicism and despair."⁶¹

When we talk about this ferment we can say that "still God's leaven is working, working not merely in the church as it tries to match its message and ministry to a rapidly changing world. But often elsewhere in ways unrecognized by many in the turmoil and confusion of our time (e.g. the revolt against racialism, the quest for world-peace, all that can be included under the name of 'Christian Action')."⁶²

58. Ibid., p. 118.

59. Cf. Herman Hendrickx, *op cit.*, p. 49.

60. A, M, Hunter, The parables Then and Now, p. 44.

61. Ibid., p. 44-5.

62. Ibid., 45-6.

The parable encourages us in our faith and the faith of all those who strive to spread the kingdom of God. It tells us "ye fearful 'saints fresh courage take', God is alive today in his world. The ferment begun in Galilee is still spreading."⁶³

When we speak of how the kingdom is spread, how God is receiving all people, when we wonder about God's action, the "parable calls into question ready attempts to predict on the basis of our knowledge of the holy and good where the kingdom is active. Instead it insists on the kingdom's freedom to appear under its own guise, even if it be the guise of corruption."⁶⁴

Perhaps all we need to know is that God's gracious activity is already working. As Boucher says "God's reign does not grow; neither is it brought about by human effort."⁶⁵

When the leaven is hidden into the flour, Jesus may be saying to us that we might not see its effects at first. And so it was with his very preaching and deeds, God's reign is already at work. We might not see God's works but its already working. All he assured us is that it will come upon all, and it is for all.

The parable articulates a very radical vision of God. This love of God permeates and ferments all and so his love is for all. It will permeate all people and all will recognize him as God.

This image demands faith, for it expresses a new vision of the kingdom or we might lose sight of it and be missed.

"The eschatological perspective should continue to give Christianity that dynamism which flows from awareness that in a sense, God's kingdom at present continues to be hidden, not recognized by the world, but nevertheless constantly transforming that world towards its final destiny."⁶⁶

The kingdom grows especially through activities that are mostly deliberately 'hidden' as contrasted with well-known facts.

63. Ibid., p. 46.

64. Bernard B. Scott, *op cit.*, p. 329.

65. Medeline I. Boucher, *op cit.*, p. 68.

66. Herman Hendrickx, *op cit.*, p. 49.

3.2 GOD DEMANDS MORAL VALUES

The reality that the love of God, his care, his faithfulness and that his service is a call for everybody is an important aspect that I would like to dwell on. In this sense this second parable deals with the person himself or herself who is the receiver of God's love. This love on the part of the receiver is to be exercised when such a receiver meets someone.

This is to say that everyone is called to love as God loves. In this parable the king forgives the unimaginable debt owed by the servant. This is a big surprise to the hearers of the parable. How could it be possible for a king to forgive such amount of money? He was supposed to punish the servant. That is what justice is about.

But this King showed an extremely high moral standard. Here we have a gentile King giving us an example that love and mercy are values to be transmitted to everybody.

So it is with the kingdom of God. God grants his mercy and love and calls us to act with that same mercy and love. God reveals to others in that love that everyone has received.

This standard was asked by God of this King. So there is no excuse for anyone to say that he is not really responsible for other people or for the way he relates to others.

In this parable Jesus is telling us that the moral standard of love and forgiveness for each other is shown in the love that gentiles shared for each other. This parable calls us Christians to realize the image of forgiveness and love shown by the Gentiles.

The audience was surprised to hear the King's answer of forgiveness. He was not supposed to act like that and yet he did so. So it is with us, and for everyone, that sometimes we are not supposed to do certain things regulated by customs or cultural values. No one has an excuse for not showing love. Everybody is expected to do so, even those who do not declare themselves Christians. There is no way we can make distinction of groups or organization. We should not put barriers in front of one another. The love of God does not accept this. It accepts forgiveness and love.

No one is excused. It is like the previous parable of the leaven, all will be influenced by the love of God.

Mercy is required of everyone, regardless of what others do. When we feel discouraged, limited and hurt, the parable reminds us that mercy and forgiveness are still possible. It is a call for everybody and for every situation.

This standard is expected of everybody, even those that we call non-Christians or non-believers. We are not to judge them as God works also in them. We are to look at their situation with eyes of faith.

What is more, forgiveness and love are interrelated. Having love is shown in the way we forgive others' faults and this is a call for total forgiveness. It is not the classical phrase "forgive but never forget". This is against God's call for everybody. This is contrary to what forgiveness is all about. We proclaim the love and forgiveness of Christ words on the Cross 'Father forgive them because they do not know what they are doing' (Mk?).

We are called to break the patterns of the way we go about certain acts in our life. To break that routine is what God is calling as to do as shown in the King's pronouncement of forgiveness. There is no superiority of one person over another. No matter the social, cultural, or religious beliefs, all are equal under the eyes of God, and all are to manifest this love to others.

The Parable is a comment on the fifth beatitude. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Mt. 5:7)

Revenge is natural and, proverbially sweet. Real forgiveness from the heart is never easy. In the call to be forgiving Jesus is appealing to the nature of God. He is challenging us to 'risk our lives on mercy' because it is God's way and nature. Yet have we any alternative as Christians? The risk must be taken, or we will be false to 'the truth as it is in Jesus'.⁶⁷

67. Cf. A. M. Hunter, The Parables Then and Now, p. 69.

If this is the way the gentiles are, there is no excuse for us or for anybody, for this love is a responsibility for everyone. If we act out of justice and not out of love we will go far from the King's example . He acts out of mercy and is ready to change the world.

What is called for is a totally new way of viewing the world, this view shatters misunderstandings.

This parable suggests that "Jesus did not consider 'Love of enemies/neighbour' as a piece of unrealistic magic. An experience of such compassion should certainly but well might not change the person who is the object of it."⁶⁸

The point of the parable is the example of the King, not the behaviour of the one who is not moved by this mercy.

In our own context we can say that "the hostility that the disciple encounters does not release him or her from the obligation to love. Nor is it an indication that the love of neighbour/enemy is powerless to transform relationships based on violence and aggression."⁶⁹

Jesus insists that it does not have to be that way or that we have to be a victim. "Compassion and forgiveness are the expression of the rule of God precisely in a world marred by inequality, enmity and victimization."⁷⁰

3.3 GOD INVITES ALL TO PARTICIPATE IN HIS KINGDOM

This is another important parable that the early Church interpreted as a missionary command, saying: 'let all participate in God's kingdom'.

In the parable the master invites all people to share in his banquet, so God invites people to participate in his kingdom.

68. PHEME PERKINS, *op cit.*, p. 126.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Love of God is like the banquet, he invites everybody. In the beginning he chose his people Israel, but now he has opened his arms and receives everyone. As the parable says he even compels them to enter. He tells them, 'please enter into my mystery, enter into my love, let me share my love with you all'.

The mission of Christ, and his disciples, was to involved men and women, of every class and type.⁷¹

The early Church saw that when "the multitudes of the outcast and neglected in Israel, perhaps even of Gentiles, on hearing the call is a sign that the process of obscure development is at an end."⁷²

"But in Luke the doubling has given the picture more colour, he is particularly concerned to stress the introduction of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God. As the Church was in a situation that demanded missionary activity, it interpreted the parable as a missionary command."⁷³

When we read the several invitations we find that there is a controversial point. It is that because of the refusal of some, then God invites other people. It is a interpretation given only by the evangelist. In this regard Jeremias says "that does not mean that the admission of the Gentiles to share in the Kingdom of God lay outside Jesus' vision; but, as we can do no more than indicate here, he envisaged their participation in a different way, not in the form of the Christian mission, but as their coming en masse in the eschatological hour that was now imminent (Matt 8:11). The primitive Church perceived it with its own missionary situation"⁷⁴

This would contradict Jesus' message; "which does not teach that the kingdom is given to tax collectors and sinners because of the refusal of the Just. The God whom Jesus proclaims does not turn to the poor because of the contempt of the rich. It is because God calls the poor to the banquet that the rich stay away, and not the other way around!"⁷⁵

71. Cf. Charles H. Dodd, *op cit.*, p. 140.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

73. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 51.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

75. Herman Hendrickx, *op cit.*, p. 133.

'Constrain them to come in', He told his servant, 'For I want my house to be full'. This is a hint at the universal inclusiveness of God's kingdom. Because now God opens the doors of his kingdom to all the despised and lost children of God.⁷⁶

"One point clearly made in it is that no body is excluded from God's kingdom except by his own choice."⁷⁷ Jesus could be saying that since God now proposes to find places at table for sinners and Gentiles, you have only yourselves to blame if you do not attend. It is not God who has excluded you; you have excluded yourselves.

And God invites men and women into his kingdom, their salvation depends on their accepting his invitation. One thing is the invitation and other is the response to this invitation.

This is the point Luke makes in his narrative immediately preceding the banquet discourse. Luke explicitly mentions the eschatological banquet when people will come from East and West, and from North and South, and sit at table in the kingdom of God (Lk.13:29)

Luke's two-volume work has a definite missionary thrust, with the urgency to spread the Good News from Jerusalem to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Luke makes the parable into an exhortation for the community to become inclusive. The outsider must be present when the community gathers to celebrate its supper.

"Contemporary Christian bodies have also erected barriers Between 'clean and unclean' perhaps different from those of the first century but not less exclusive. There is often little urgency to enlarge the community by the addition of unacceptable outsiders."⁷⁸

Should one conclude that their substitutes were chosen because they were better prepared or better disposed to receive the call? The parable does not give this impression. The privilege of the disinherited is due solely to the will of the master of the house, not to the readiness of those who will ultimately participate in the banquet. All the attention is concentrated on the host and his determination not to let his plan fail.⁷⁹

76. Cf. A. M. Hunter, The Parables Then and Now, p. 94.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

78. John R. Donahue, The Gospel in Parable, p. 146.

79. Cf. Herman Hendrickx, *op cit.*, p. 135.

We (Gentiles) have been included in the people of God as all have been included by good fortune we had no reason to expect.

3.4 EVEN THE LEAST EXPECTED IS INCLUDED

The background for the Parable of the Samaritan in Luke's Gospel, was that many people were coming to join his community. "Since the Christian Community itself brought together people of such widely differing backgrounds that none of the usual social norms of defining the neighbour and my obligation to him or her would apply."⁸⁰

This gives the hints to the fact that Luke speaks that even a Samaritan is to be included in the community.

In the love that God has for each one of us we discover another dimension which is that this love does not have barriers. It is his love that welcomes anyone.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan as I have mention before there is the great "Difference between the ethic of Law and the ethic of Love."⁸¹ Once we let ourselves be moved by law, there is no way love can enter. It is love instead that gives light to interpret the law. The Scribe's theological knowledge will gain him nothing unless he puts love into practice.⁸²

In other words, Jesus could be saying 'stop theorizing about love and get down to practice it'.

Yet we find that the Lawyer wonders whether a Samaritan is a neighbour whom he must love. He now finds that the Samaritan is the one who teaches the true meaning of the law of love of neighbour⁸³ and love of God.

80. Pheme Perkins, *op cit.*, p. 117.

81. A. M. Hunter, *The Parables Then and Now*, p. 109.

82. Cf. Madeline I. Boucher, *op cit.*, p.119.

83. Cf. John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, p. 129.

That is why when we see the figure of the Samaritan we expect that for the audience "they could not have in mind that a Samaritan was a neighbour or what is more difficult to understand that a Samaritan could show to be a neighbour to an Israelite.

Whom may I regard as a neighbour. The Parable of the Good Samaritan will show that even that heretical person will even welcome the love of God by transmitting this love to an Israelite.

Even that person we do not consider a neighbour is welcomed and is already doing the will of God.

What is more "love knows no bounds of race. It only asks for opportunities of going into action."⁸⁴

Jesus says 'think of the sufferer'; put yourself in his place, and consider, who needs help from me? Then you will see that love's demand knows no limit. In other words, there is no limit in which the law of love is to be observed.

Even the Samaritan is called to love in this manner and he has already done it. He is not excluded from the love of God nor from showing it to others.

Moreover, it was unexpected to be told that where priests and Levites failed to fulfill the duty of love, there is a Samaritan that fulfills it. "By comparing the failure of God's servants with the unselfishness of the hated Samaritan, his hearers were to measure the absolute and unlimited nature of the duty of love."⁸⁵

Even if you do not want to pronounce the name Samaritan, he is already including and showing you the love of God that you are suppose to be practicing.

Therefore "no human being is to be beyond the range of his charity. The law of love calls him to be ready at any time to give his life for another's need".⁸⁶

In our own context "the Samaritan stands for those who are outside the official circle of God's people but who nevertheless truly do God's will. The meaning of the exemplary story is that official membership and even high position in the established religion

84. A. M. Hunter, *The Parables Then and Now*, p. 111.

85. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 160.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

can be no substitute for the concrete deed of love for someone in need. This is a hard lesson for some to hear but one of supreme importance."⁸⁷

The Samaritan's action is the kind of action that God requires from everyone.

The parable challenges us to move beyond our social and religious constructs of good and evil. It challenges "our tendency to divide the world into insiders and outsiders. It makes us realize that goodness may be found precisely in those we most often call evil or enemy."⁸⁸

The parable does not view people in categories. Anyone who is compassionate will not respond to others in terms of social or racial classes. "Nor is it possible to excuse failure to act with compassion on the grounds that the victim is an enemy, or not of a particular sex, racial or ethnic group."⁸⁹

The literal point of the story challenges the hearer to put together two impossible words for the same person Samaritan and Neighbour. This confronts the hearers with the necessity of saying the impossible and having their world turned upside down and radically questioned in its presuppositions.

"The metaphorical point is that just so does the kingdom of God break abruptly into a person's consciousness and demand the overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgments, and established conclusions... if he can accept the literal level and come to say 'Good Samaritan', then the kingdom of God has come upon him in this experience."⁹⁰

In our context we could see that "the parable of the Good Samaritan is timeless. Substitute occupations, nationalities, and races for modern equivalents, and nothing has changed since the day of Jesus taught the Parable. Therefore, the parable is not a story of someone who did a good deed as if he were member of the Boy Scouts. It is an indictment against anyone who has raised protective barriers in order to live a sheltered life."⁹¹ Perhaps the message is timeless. Perhaps Luke had no one group in mind. The parable claims that

87. Medeline I. Boucher, *op cit.*, p. 121-22.

88. John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, p. 134.

89. Pheme Perkins, *op cit.*, p. 121.

90. Herman Hendrickx, *op cit.*, p. 91.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

love is not mere words, but deeds. And these deeds involve risks, sacrifice and sharing of one's possessions.

3.5 THE CHURCH FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S MESSAGE IN FAITH

After discussing the parable itself, the final point is the Church's faithfulness to the message of the parable.

This is to say that the Church is also to be called for Judgment and will have to give answer and give the fruits due to the owner, to God. The Church may be called for this answer at any time.

God called people of different nations, the gentiles, to be recipients of his message and to live the new life offered by his only Son Jesus Christ. Now the Church is to manifest herself faithful and ready at any time to give accounts of what she has been doing and performing.

The Church is to give a missionary animation and to gather many fruits for the owner (the harvest is ready pray the owner of the vineyard to send workers. Lk. 10:2).

If the church fails to carry out her missionary task, then only the last sentence of the parable will apply to her. Once Israel was called to give accounts of his fruits and the tenants fail to do so. Now what shall the owner of the vineyard do? The Church is God's vineyard. What will God do if the Church's leaders are not ready when he comes?

Yet the kingdom of God comes with judgment. "The religious leaders, who censured Jesus for His work and teaching, were at that very moment pronouncing judgment upon themselves, by the attitude they displayed, by their self-centred caution, their exclusiveness, their neglected responsibilities, and their blindness to the purpose of God. In their hands the salt of the religion of Israel had lost its savour, it lay under a bushel."⁹²

92. Charles H. Dodd, *op cit.*, p. 149.

The judgments of the Lord are present here and now. "It is the business of the Church, to which is committed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, to interpret the crises by the light of the supreme crisis of the past, which is continually made present in Christian experience and worship."⁹³

It says, "you tenants of the vineyard and leaders of the people, you would not listen, but have opposed God again and again, and now you reject the last of his messengers. The cup is full. God's vineyard, therefore, will be given to 'others', as neither Mark nor Luke indicates who the 'others' may be."⁹⁴

This parable was addressed, as we have seen, apparently to the leaders of the people, especially to the Scribes. "God has entrusted them with much the spiritual leadership of the nation, the knowledge of his will, the key to the kingdom of God, Now God's judgment is at hand; now it will be decided whether the theologians have justified or abused his great trust, whether they have made good use of his gift or turned it to their own advantage and to the imposition of burdens on their on fellow-men, whether they have opened the door of the kingdom of God, or shut it."⁹⁵

Jesus speaks not about the vineyard but about the tenants. "God has waited with such immense patience, is now about to demand his dues, and the last generation must expiate the accumulated guilt."⁹⁶

The subject-matter of the parables "God's will, the nature and growth of his kingdom, the centrality of his mercy, and the response required of his people are obviously themes which still concern to us today, for the simple reason that the Church as the new Israel is faced before God with the same responsibilities as the old Israel, as it is ever liable to the judgments which fall on 'the household of faith'.⁹⁷ Since we belong to the "new Israel which is the Church of Christ; and if the church has inherited Israel's place, it inherits also the danger of God's Judgment."⁹⁸

93. Ibid., p. 153.

94. Joachim Jeremias, *op cit.*, p. 63.

95. Ibid., p. 131.

96. Ibid., p. 132.

97. A. M. Hunter, *The Parables Then and Now*, p. 27.

98. Ibid., p. 106.

Despite opposition the ministry of Jesus went on. It goes on still. The Owner's son is no longer 'cribbed, cabined and confined' within the little land of Palestine. Through the Holy Spirit's work, he has become the living Lord of some nine hundred million followers. Moreover, God's vineyard is now co-terminous with the globe itself. Its tenants are no longer the Jews but the leaders of the Church of practically every race under the sun. And to us in this twentieth century the parable comes with its Word of God for our time.⁹⁹

Now "God looks for the fruits of faith and love and obedience. Of us he requires that we do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with our God. Dare we say that we are producing these fruits?"¹⁰⁰

God has chosen new people. We have seen that these new tenants must be faithful where the old ones were not. Otherwise he will have to hand over his vineyard to others.

99. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

CONCLUSION

The way Jesus spoke the parables to his listeners, as well as their context in the gospel narrative, and their audience, has influence on our understanding of the parables. For many generations the parables were taught us the teaching of Jesus in form of allegories. Thanks to the contribution of modern Scripture scholars we have a better possibility to more fully understand parables, and then to make them relevant to the people to whom we preach the Word of God.

In my theological formation learning has been my main task, and now as I exercise the ministry of Diaconate, I discover every day that I am called to the ministry of the Word of God, and this implies getting in touch with the Word of God.

In this Long essay I have try to do this. I have tried to get in touch with the word of God, especially as it is presented in the parables, and after analyzing them, I also did make an application of them to the present situation for the Church and for all its members.

Through the parables of Jesus we come in contact with what God could be asking from each one of us. First of all we realized who he is, and how his love is to be for everyone. This also asks us to put into practice what he teach us. In the Gospel of Luke we found parables that speak of the universal love of God, that reveal his demands of each one of us, and that challenged us to give our own response to his demands. Either we

ignore the parables or we wonder about them and then begin to think of what could be their possible implication and application in our own lives.

Either of the two is already our response to the parables. We give our response and we judge ourselves.

The purpose of this essay has been to reread the parables and to read them in our own context. Our context is the world of mass Media which puts us in contact with any part of the world and with any culture. Little by little we come together as the global village. Our Christian understanding of each other is challenge. How is it possible that this one or even that one could be teaching me or challenging my faith, my Christian way of living?.

Jesus in his parables challenges us, and challenges his Church to be active and to spread his Good News so that she may bear abundant fruit, to be given to the owner of the Vineyard.

We are to understand the universal love of God and the universal mandate of the church to preach to every one and to show that Jesus speaks to us every day of our life in our own context. This is a challenge for all the Church's ministers. Are we ready to give our own response? There is the danger of missing the point of what Jesus really pronounced in the parables, so let us open our hearts, our ears and let ourselves be moved by the word and love of God.

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