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A CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION
OF THE PARABLES OF GROWTH

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

Any careful appraisal of the parables of Jesus must account for the distinctive nature of his use of them. The uniqueness of the parables of Jesus, both in form and content, is remarkably obvious simply because of the singular personality of their author. According to G. V. Jones,

The parabolic teaching of Jesus consists in the main of short or extended similes and narratives, each appropriate to the situation eliciting it and told in response to controversial questions relating to his own person, or in judgments on situations, national, religious, or personal.¹

Metaphors, similes, and parables constituted a popular medium of expression which the rabbis of that day employed for the purpose of confronting their audiences with religious truths and ethical conceptions. For present purposes, we will limit our discussion to the way in which Jesus used parables. A parable is a story drawn from everyday life to describe some aspect of God's work in reestablishing his rule over and among men. Because the author does not create a fictitious story of his own but instead tries to establish his point by using a life situation as his means, we can say that a parable normally conveys essentially a single point in its delineation of what happens

¹ Geraint Vaughan Jones, The Art and Truth of the Parables, A Study in their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation (London: SPCK, 1964), p. 110.

when the powers of God's kingdom are at work among men in terms of grace.

The parables of growth, while are the topic of our present study, have a definite relation to the definition of parables that was given above. The concept of growth involved in all four parables is often the most imperceptible daily occurrence that takes place all over the world. The parables from nature, understood in the setting in which Jesus presented them before his hearers, are regarded as authentic by the criterion of coherence and precision.

The purpose of our study is to look at the canonical text of the four parables of growth; namely, the Sower, the Mustard Seed, the Weeds among the Wheat, and the Automatic Action of the Soil. We will do so in order to interpret them for their application for us today. The second chapter is devoted to a textual exposition of these parables. In the third chapter some basic motifs from the parables of growth receive some further discussion with a view to finding the significance of these parables for the growth of the Church.

The point of the fourth chapter we propose to offer a contemporary application of the concepts as presented in Chapters I and II to the church in India. In the first half, some discussion is devoted to explaining the situation of India as a nation: how India is involved in the process of growth from a secular point of view. In the second half, our main interest is to look at the India Evangelical Lutheran Church: how the Lord of the Church has blessed the humble efforts of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in India from the turn of the century up to the present day.

Before we go on with our discussion of the parables as recorded in the gospels, we must take a brief look at Jesus' use of parables, the setting of these parables in the gospels and the concept of the kingdom of God that is involved in these parables.

Jesus' Use of Parables

We are concerned about this aspect of our study because we want to uphold the truth that the parables of Jesus, as we have them today in the gospel accounts, are actual historical reminiscences of the ministry of Jesus and not the product of some Christian exegetical tradition. The authority of the Word is the strongest criterion for the authenticity of the gospel accounts.

In secular Greek a parable is used as a more or less developed comparison in which "two things or processes from different fields are set side by side, so that in virtue of the similarity the unknown may be elucidated by the known."² The Greek word παραβολή is in most cases the rendering of the Hebrew מִשְׁלָּה or of forms of the verb מִשַּׁל , which is used for all expressions containing a comparison, "whether directly or, in such a way that they illustrate a general truth for comparison with other unmentioned cases."³

The Hebrew word מִשְׁלָּה is used in the sense of a "proverb" or a "riddle" in the Old Testament. The verbal form is limited mostly to

²Gerhard Friedrich, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 9 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957-1974), 5(1967):745-746. Hereafter cited as TDNT.

³Ibid.

the notion of comparison. In all such cases the Septuagint uses παραβολή⁴ to translate them.

In the New Testament the word παραβολή is used only in the Synoptic gospels where it occurs forty-eight times and in the epistle to the Hebrews, two times. The word παροιμία, sometimes translated as "parable," is used thrice in John's Gospel and once in 2 Peter.⁵ In the New Testament sense a parable is more than mere metaphor or simile. Παραβολή is a word to "indicate the close relationship of the Word to God's work of revealing himself, suggesting that Christ came to be our wisdom. One of the means he used in revealing God's wisdom to us was parabolic teaching."⁶

Unlike the rabbinical parables, whose main function was to explicate the Law, the parables of Jesus are the finest expression of his teachings about the kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus used parables to affect the transforming power of the gospel in the life of the individual and community by describing the kingdom of God at work.

According to William Barclay, Jesus spoke in parables because that was the method familiar to people of Jesus' time. In spite of the fact that parables were an established method of teaching, Jesus "was speaking in the first instance to Jews, and it was a characteristic of

⁴ For a thorough description of these words see Martin H. Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 14-17.

⁵ John 10:6; 16:25,29. 2 Peter 2:22.

⁶ Scharlemann, p. 17.

the Hebrew mind to be intensely practical."⁷ When Jesus spoke of the seed that fell on different grounds, the mustard seed that grows into being almost a tree, and the weeds that often choke the wheat and challenge the growth of the wheat, he was helping his hearers to learn lessons about God's rule of grace from their own work-a-day world.

Jesus' use of parables has to be understood also in terms of his authority as the Messiah. This also helps us to understand the concept of the kingdom of God which we shall discuss later. The parables of Jesus describe what happens when God acts to establish his rule. An understanding of these parables presupposes listeners who are willing to accompany Jesus in his thinking and speaking as something new and stimulating to them.

Joachim Jeremias observes that the method of teaching that Jesus employed was easy for a child to understand. Tracing the history of the parabolic tradition, he accounts for the fact that Jesus presented an entirely new style in teaching. His parables are unique for the following reason:

The uniqueness of Jesus' parables comes out clearly when they are compared with analogous productions from the same period and cultural context, such as the Pauline similitudes or the rabbinic parables. Comparison reveals a definite personal style, a singular clarity and simplicity, a matchless mastery of construction. The conclusion is inevitable that we are dealing with particularly trustworthy tradition. We stand right before Jesus when reading his parables.⁸

In the whole context of the New Testament, the word *parable* is used "as part of a terminology applied to the instructional and

⁷William Barclay, And Jesus Said (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 11-13.

⁸Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 12.

revelatory activity of Jesus."⁹ The use is instructional in the sense that through these parables Jesus taught his hearers what happens to men when they come under God's rule of grace. It is revelatory in the sense that the expectation of the Messianic age is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, and that he maintains his Church to be the bearer of this revelation till the last day.

The Setting of These Parables in the Gospels

Mark's grouping of parabolic materials in chapter 4 constitutes the largest unit in his gospel devoted entirely to the teaching of Jesus. For that reason we list Mark first in our studies. Since the moment in which Jesus engaged himself in active ministry, he did not confine himself to a few places. He travelled all over, taught the people and performed miracles, announcing that the kingdom of God had come.

It is not fair to conclude that the parables under discussion are the first ones Jesus ever spoke. It is possible that he used the same method before. Even though the phrase ἐν παραβολαῖς ἔλεγεν is used only once before,¹⁰ there are clear examples of parabolic expressions used by Jesus prior to this point, particularly in Mark's Gospel.¹¹

In the accounts of Mark and Matthew we read that the parables of growth were told by Jesus at the sea side. The reference is to the Sea of Tiberias, otherwise known as the Lake of Gennesaret. When

⁹ Scharlemann, p. 17.

¹⁰ Mark 3:23.

¹¹ Mark 2:17a,19-20,21,22; 3:24,25,27.

people flocked around him to know about "his wonderful works, his wonderful words and his wonderful manner of life," he got into a boat and moved out into the sea, presenting himself visibly and audibly to all people.¹²

In the Lucan account we do not have a direct reference to the lake as the backdrop to Jesus' teaching activity. But we gather from the introductory remarks in chapter 8 that Jesus travelled through cities and villages bringing the good tidings of the kingdom. As against the mention of "multitudes" in Mark and Matthew, Luke has some detailed description of most of his listeners who were already with him, such as the twelve disciples and a group of women who express their gratitude for having received blessings from him. Until this point in Luke's Gospel the parables were more or less short comparisons, similitudes or proverbs. But from now on, parables become "the main vehicle of instruction, with the great parables which are the most characteristic and most familiar feature of our Lord's teaching."¹³

The two different contexts presented in the Synoptic gospels do not preclude the possibility that Jesus might have used the same parables more than once. Repeating important teachings is a necessary characteristic of any good teacher.

The early occurrence of these parables in Mark's Gospel is only proper because they help, at the outset, to present the whole thrust of the kingdom of God, the immediate coming of which is a chief point of that gospel. The arrangement of the parables of growth is

¹²James Morrison, A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, 11th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p. 222.

¹³Howley Bruce Ellison, A New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 222.

proper in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 13, because it is the parable chapter in that book. Concerning Matthew it may be observed also that he has placed the Sower and the Seed at the beginning of chapter 13 introducing there the whole parabolic teaching of Jesus. The immediate context of chapter 8 in Luke, the anointing of Jesus' feet by a sinner woman, explains why the parables should follow that event! This woman who was forgiven because of her faith is the perfect example of the ground that brings forth a hundred fold.

The Concept of the Kingdom of God in These Parables

In one of the most outstanding studies ever made in the area of our title, C. H. Dodd draws the conclusion that in the parabolic teachings of Jesus, "the hidden power of God has manifested itself, as the productive energies of the earth bring the harvest in its time."¹⁴ This statement has to be examined rather carefully.

As Dodd himself points out, in his preface to The Parables of the Kingdom, the above conclusion was reached as a result of his confrontation of the problems created by Albert Schweitzer's study on the Quest of the Historical Jesus, resulting from a theology of human experience. For this reason we might conjecture that Dodd's use of the term "realized eschatology" was one-sided within the whole context of the Biblical teaching of the kingdom of God.

The concept of the kingdom of God is interlinked with that of salvation. Salvation is a finished act as far as the activities of the Savior on earth are concerned. At the same time, the saved community

¹⁴ C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 160.

will enjoy the full measure of its blessings only at and after the end of the age. In this sense the kingdom of God is an already established fact and yet it is something that will be established at the second coming of Christ.

The basic New Testament meaning of the expression " βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ " is "the rule of God." On the basis of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ is the King of the new Israel, the true Israel. The kingdom of Christ and God are the same, the primary requirement for entering it being faith.

In his book on Proclaiming the Parables, Martin H. Scharlemann does an extensive study of the concept of the kingdom of God from a thoroughly Scriptural point of view.¹⁵ The main points may be summarized as follows:

The kingdom of God has to be understood in relation to God's election of Israel and the covenant he established with them. Israel is referred to as God's people on condition that they obey his voice and keep his covenant. There is no other direct reference to the kingdom concept in the Old Testament. However, the idea of the "rule of God" is explicit in Isaiah and in the Psalms.

God himself is the one who creates this kingdom. It does not come in response to man's achievement. In spite of man's repeated rebellion, God is willing to receive man into his kingdom through God's "undeserved favor." Therefore we establish that grace is the primary characteristic of the kingdom of God.

¹⁵ Scharlemann, pp. 31-46.

In the kingdom of God, God's people live in his presence. This is possible only because God himself chose to dwell with his people. Unlike the gods of the heathens, the God of Israel was not limited to any territory. Israel was able to enjoy the special privilege of being God's people because it was a special community set apart to do God's will. This meant that all other nations in the world were under God's judgment.

Israel, too, became subject to God's judgment when she disobeyed God. In order to redeem Israel from this fallen nature "God's true Prince" came down as the Suffering Servant. Then God established a new covenant with his people purely on the basis of the merit of the Suffering Servant who was the Messiah. This Messiah established a new rule which was "characterised by the forgiveness of sins, by fellowship with God, by the inwardness of God's law."¹⁶ The new community that is operated under this new rule was "an instrument of God's mercy, just as Israel of old had been called to be the vehicle for reestablishing God's rule over and among men."¹⁷

Jesus Christ, who came as an act of God's grace, is the fulfilment of the promises about the Messiah. Thus, in a very real sense, the person of Jesus is the embodiment of the kingdom of God. At the coming of Jesus, God himself dwelt among men. Jesus taught his disciples about the kingdom of God in parables. He identified himself with his redeemed community in accordance with God's will.

¹⁶
Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁷
Ibid.

Today the Church enjoys the privileged position of being this chosen community. The nature of the kingdom is reflected in this fellowship as each individual member carries out his responsibilities towards his fellow members. This kingdom awaits its fullest realization at consummation according to God's plan which was "devised in eternity," and which "sweeps through history and ends beyond history in the realm of everlasting life."¹⁸

In our study, especially in Chapters II and III, the use of the phrase "kingdom of God" and of related expressions has to be understood in the whole context of the above-mentioned points.

A vast majority of the parables recorded in the Synoptic gospels have the kingdom of God as their main theme. This is no surprise considering the coming of the kingdom that was the central point in the ministry of Jesus. The parable of the Sower is linked with the "mystery" of the kingdom of God in the gospels. "This parable is suggestive of the harvest image of the kingdom at the time of final consummation."¹⁹ The parable of the Mustard Seed is an answer to the burning question of the disciples of Jesus as to "how the kingdom of God could actually be present in such an insignificant movement as that embodied in his ministry."²⁰ This was another way of explaining the secret presence of the kingdom of God.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁹ Richard H. Heirs, The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Tradition (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970), p. 76.

²⁰ George Eldon Ladd, Jesus and the Kingdom, The Eschatology of Biblical Realism (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 231.

The kingdom which is present, at the same time hidden in the world, will manifest itself in glory. "Then the wicked will be gathered out and righteous will shine like the sun in the eschatological kingdom."²¹ This is the point in the parable of the Weeds among the Wheat. The final separation will come only in God's time.

Spontaneity of growth is the whole point in the parable of the Automatic Action of the Soil. At the coming of Jesus, people, with the eyes of faith, saw in him and his mission the advent of God's kingdom. Contrary to the expectation of the first Christians it was not completely revealed in their time. As we do not know what is involved in the growth of a seed from the time in which it is sown till the harvest, we are totally ignorant of the manner of development of this kingdom. We know one thing that "the kingdom is God's kingdom; everything is concentrated in the King of the kingdom, who is one with the kingdom."²²

We have reason to conclude that the idea of growth cannot be excluded from our study of the kingdom of God in the parables of growth. This concept of growth pictures the present life and work of the Church in this world. Like the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed, the church militant has grown from tiny beginnings until God brings it in, in all its fullness, as the Church triumphant. The two words to use for this distinction are fulfilment and consummation, respectively. The church militant will go through all the problems of the present world

²¹ Ibid., p. 230.

²² Gösta Lundström, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus, trans. Joan Bulman (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 232.

until judgment day, when God will separate the tares from the wheat.

As a visible manifestation of the kingdom of God, the Church is active in the world by means of Word and Sacrament. It is able to withstand any crisis as long as it upholds the "true treasure of the Church" which "is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God."²³ And the Church exists only where God's Word is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered.

Our study of the parables of growth will help us to understand the activity of God from beginning to end in establishing his kingdom. The coming of Jesus as the Son of Man has already inaugurated this kingdom. On the basis of the promise of the Holy Spirit which Jesus gave the believers at his ascension, the Church participates in the growth of the kingdom as she bears witness to it through Word and Sacrament. The Church looks forward to God's appointed time when his rule will be consummated in the world to come in all its fulness.

²³"Ninety-five Thesis, No. 62," Career of the Reformer vol. 1, Luther's Works, American Edition (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 31.

CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PARABLES OF GROWTH

Having discussed the setting of the parables of growth in the gospels in the first chapter, we must now take a closer look at four parables in particular; namely, the Sower and the Seed, the Mustard Seed, the Weeds among the Wheat and the Automatic Action of the Soil. Our main concern will be to capture the meaning of the text as we have it today in the various gospel accounts. For it is the canonical text that is authoritative in this matter. While form, source, and redaction (composition) criticism may raise some interesting questions, it is the Greek text, as given, which must decide issues.

The Sower and the Seed

Mark 4:1-9,14-20; Matt. 13:3-8,19-23; Luke 8:5-8,11-15

This parable is found in all three Synoptic gospels. We list Mark first because he has the longest account. The texts do not vary much except in the case of minute details. Mark and Matthew stop their introductory note by presenting the picture of the sower going out to sow seed. But Luke introduces also the seed in connection with his mention of the sower. The first sentence reads: ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων τοῦ σπεῖραι τὸν σπόρον αὐτοῦ . The sower and the seed both deserve much attention in a study of this parable. As Glover puts it, "The greatest power in the world still dwells with him who can sow living and incorruptible seed. Seed is the most vital form of matter,

that which transmits to its own nature earth, sap, sunshine, and changes these dead things into living beauty."¹

As they go on with the description of the first category of the seed that was sown, all three Synoptics have the same expression, ἃ μὲν ἔπεσεν παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν . The preposition παρὰ is much discussed by scholars. It is to be translated as "along" or "on."² According to C. E. B. Cranfield, παρὰ ("by") is perhaps a mistranslation of an ambiguous Aramaic 'al which here should have been rendered by ἐπί ("on").³ Soon after this Luke adds one clause peculiar to him: καὶ κατεπατήθη , "and it was trodden under foot." This is just a natural occurrence in Palestinian seed beds. Visitors to the Holy Land testify to this fact. People will make paths along the edge of a ploughed field or even across it where the seed that lies upon the beaten track.⁴ Chances are that such seed will not be able to grow up even if birds do not come and devour it.

Matthew states that the birds came and devoured αὐτά (them), referring to the seeds, that fell on the wayside. In the same sentence both Mark and Luke have only the singular αὐτό (it). The use of the singular could be understood in a collective sense clenching a bulk of material, in this case most probably, a handful of seeds as a unit.

¹ Richard Glover, A Teachers' Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), pp. 144-145.

² See Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark (Leiden: United Bible Societies, 1961), 2:129.

³ C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to St. Mark, The Cambridge Commentary Series, C. F. D. Moule, gen. ed. (Cambridge, Eng.: University Press, 1972), p. 149.

⁴ A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 1:105.

Matthew is very consistent in his use of the plural (vv. 5,7,8); so is Luke in his use of the singular (vv. 6,7,8); while Mark uses "other" in verses 5 and 7, and "others" in verse 8.

Scholars have called attention to the expression ἐπὶ τὸ πετρῶδες, "up on rocky ground."⁵ Here it does not mean that the ground in which the seed was sown was mingled with stones. If this were the case, it would not be hard for the root to have found some soft soil in between the rocks, with the instinct which the roots possess to find moisture within their reach. Fact is, that in this case there is only a very thin layer of soil upon the rock which is spread below like a sheet, prohibiting penetration of the root beyond a certain limit. Sometimes this is referred to as the hardpan. In this connection it may also be noted that Luke does not make specific mention of the existence of soil. He simply says ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν .

The seed by itself is good. Enough power to give birth to a new plant is contained in each seed. Both Matthew and Mark record that the seed sprang up (ἀνατέλλω). Luke goes one step further and says that it grew (φύω). But the seeds all met the same fate. Matthew and Mark add the scorching of the sun as an extra pressure which prevented further growth. Though Luke does not use καυματίζω , it is easily assumed that he also has in mind the calamity caused by the sun as he says that the seeds ran out of moisture (μὴ ἔχειν ἰκμάδα).

⁵
R. C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1855), p. 62; Cranfield, p. 149; F. G. Lisco, The Parables of Jesus (Boston: Sabbath School Library, 1846), p. 56.

The next verse (v. 7) in all three gospels is a description of the struggle for existence. The seed, is sown by the sower, and the thorns (ἀκανθα) both grow up together. As they grow up together the tension increases, and finally the thorns overcome the good seed. None of the Synoptics say anything specifically about the nature of the soil here. It is safe to imagine that the soil was good for growth, both for seed that was sown and for the thorns. We have here no mention of how the thorns happened to be there, as later in the case of the tares among the wheat, where we read "an enemy has sown it." But the thorns are there to hinder the growth of the good seed. R. C. H. Lenski observes that "their roots escape the plow, but soon they shoot up new growth, amid which the grain is soon choked, unable to maintain itself."⁶

Mark presents the story in the most appealing manner by adding one more clause, καὶ καρπὸν οὐκ ἔδωκεν , "and it did not produce fruit." This is quite contrary to the expectation of the sower. Cranfield comments that the idea of the "giving" of fruit is a Semitism, perhaps by way of the Septuagint which uses καρπὸν διδόναι to render פֶּרִי לְתַתֵּן⁷ . According to him, the ordinary Greek would be καρποφορεῖν or καρπὸν φέρειν .

The rest of the seed fell on good ground. This ground was free of rocky layers and thorns, as well as of pedestrians. It also had enough depth for growth. Luke says only that they grew and brought forth fruit a hundred fold. He accounts for the best result. Moreover, the return of a hundred for one is not unheard of in the East, though

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 103.

⁷ Cranfield, p. 149.

always mentioned as something extraordinary.⁸ Matthew allows possibilities for two more kinds, "some sixty and some thirty." So does Mark. As noticed before, the latter is very careful in his detailed description of the whole process of growth. He accounts for two more stages of growth, growing up and increasing, ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ ἀυξανόμενα.

In both Matthew and Mark the use of ἄλλα in verse 8 has a distinct meaning. The plural here, unlike the previous case, directs attention to the individual seeds. Cranfield offers the best explanation:

The best explanation of the variants ἄλλο , ἀυξανόμενον , ἀυξάνοντα , is that first ἄλλα was altered to ἄλλο by assimilation to the previous verses, and then ἀναβαίνοντα was taken as masculine singular referring to καρπὸν , and ἀυξανόμενα altered to the singular accordingly.

The purpose of Jesus' parabolic teaching is very explicit in the parable of the Sower and the Seed. The explanation that follows a few verses later, as given by all the three Synoptics, is sufficient proof for the fact that Jesus wanted his disciples to understand what he was talking about. In this case he does so because an interpretation of his teaching has been asked for by the disciples themselves.

Here again, Mark has the most detailed account. Mark has a most intriguing question as a preface to the whole interpretation. One who fails to understand the implications of this parable will not be able to understand any other parable. So Jesus helps his disciples to see what his parable really means.

⁸ Trench, p. 68.

⁹ Cranfield, p. 150.

On linguistic grounds Joachim Jeremias finds it unavoidable to conclude that the interpretation to this parable was a product of the growth of the material passing through three stages; namely, Jesus, the primitive church and the evangelist Mark.¹⁰ The primary reason behind his argument is the use of ὁ λόγος which is "absolutely a technical term for the gospel coined and constantly used by the early Church." This is the only place in the gospels where Jesus is quoted as using ὁ λόγος . But this argument is correct only to a limited extent. The fact that the early Church discussed the word λόγος does not allow us to conclude that the same word was not in existence in any form before they started looking at it rather carefully. At this point we can not overlook the fact that Jesus spoke Aramaic and that use of Greek is already an interpretation. Moreover, the parabolic style of Jesus' teaching itself shows that his words were and are the representation of a different kind of truth. This is the only place where Jesus attempts a direct interpretation of his parables. No wonder he used very clear expressions to help the disciples understand his teaching.

Commenting on the interpretation of this parable, David Hill contends that the center of interest in this parable is neither the sower, nor the seed, but the various soils. So, "just as every Palestinian sower does his work in spite of many frustrations, so the kingdom of God, inaugurated by Jesus, makes its way, and will be established in its fulness only after much apparent loss."¹¹

¹⁰ Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 77-80.

¹¹ David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible, (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), p. 225.

In one very short sentence Luke gives a clear definition, ὁ σπόρος ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ : "the seed is the Word of God." Mark goes on with the style in which he started and then, in a very pregnant way, takes it for granted that the reader has already understood what he is talking about. Thus he says, ὁ σπείρων τὸν λόγον σπείρει: "the sower sows the Word." Matthew is completely silent on this matter.

The first cause that hinders the growth of the seed is the adversary. Matthew calls him ὁ πονηρὸς , the evil one. Σατανᾶς is the name given to him by Mark. In Luke's vocabulary it is the devil, ὁ διάβολος, which is the Greek for "satan." He is enemy number one of the kingdom of God. The whole purpose for which the Son of God became man was to set humanity free from the thralldom of this enemy who is restlessly at work in the world. The seed is already under a handicap because it fell in the wrong place. In spite of that, the enemy comes and takes it away. Here Matthew uses ἀρπάζει = "snatches."

Morgan suggests a very interesting interpretation here. He says that the seed which the sower sows is not the Word but men who have heard the Word.¹² For him, the sower is the Lord himself; the soil is the age; and the seed means the men who have become acquainted with the Word of the kingdom. This is a possibility only according to the accounts in Mark and Matthew. When we come to Luke, we have the clear equation from Jesus himself that the seed is the Word of God (v. 12). Also Matthew's use of ἀρπάζω , in verse 19, could be understood of the adversary snatching away the seed and not allowing the ground to keep or possess the Word of God: the seed. At the same time Morgan

¹²G. C. Morgan, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907), pp. 60-62.

best explains the grammatical construction. The same may be said of the explanation that follows.

Mark keeps up the flow of his language by using the expression καὶ οὕτοί εἰσιν ὁμοίως , ("and these are in the same manner"). He does so in keeping with the same principle of interpretation.¹³

The seed that is sown upon the rocky ground lasts only for a while (πρόκαιρος) because it can not take root. Jones calls this a "total lack of spiritual appreciation" on the part of the hearer.¹⁴

Hobbs is of the opinion that this suggests "superficial hearers who are joyful in committing themselves to the kingdom without recognizing what is involved."¹⁵ In both cases, the kind of enthusiasm that is expressed to hear the word when it is preached disappears abruptly, fatally hurting the growth of the seed that was sown.

Both Matthew and Mark record θλίψις as the stumbling block that hinders the growth of the seed. The word θλίψις , taken in the sense of "oppression" or "affliction," could mean that there is at least a degree of struggle for existence involved on the part of the plant that springs up, whereas Luke says that the people as described believe for a while and in the time of temptation (πειρασμός) fall away. In this case, faith seems to be very temporal, fragile and weak.

¹³ Cranfield, p. 162.

¹⁴ Alexander Jones, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1965), p. 161.

¹⁵ H. H. Hobbs, An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 170.

The seed that fell among the thorns tries to continue its life; but its fate is no better than that of an unarmed soldier in an enemy camp. Cares (μέριμνα) and riches (πλοῦτος) are the two things that act as enemies here. Except for one other place in Luke, the noun μέριμνα is found in the gospels only in this context.¹⁶ Πλοῦτος is used nowhere else in the gospels. The use of these two special expressions is sufficient proof to the fact that these are the chief enemies that retard the growth of the seed.

Special attention should be given to Mark's additional use of ἐπιθυμία in this connection. This is the only place in the gospels where ἐπιθυμία is found to be used in a bad sense, meaning "lust." This is a very general expression and therefore is intended to cover all actions and objects of desire other than riches.¹⁷

In this case no blame can be put on the soil itself. The soil is understood to be basically good. Lack of soil is not the problem here. But what was lacking was a "careful husbandry, a diligent eradication of the mischievous growths, which, unless extirpated, would oppress and strangle whatever sprung up side by side with them."¹⁸ The difficulty is caused by some unwanted elements that are able to spring up and compete with the growth of the Word.

The fourth group of seed falls on good ground. In fact, Luke defines this ground to be honest and good (καλῆ καὶ ἀγαθῆ) heart.

¹⁶ Luke 21:34.

¹⁷ Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1953), p. 261.

¹⁸ Trench, p. 65.

Having heard the Word they understand (συνίημι), accept (παραδέχομαι), and hold it fast (κατέχω). In all three cases the Word of God becomes personal and real to the individual who hears it. Care should be taken to underscore the fact that the gospel writers, when taken together, allude to the three important aspects of faith; namely, knowledge, assent and trust.

Luke says that the seed which falls on good ground brings forth fruit ἐν ὑπομονῇ . This is translated as "persistence,"¹⁹ "perseverance"²⁰ and "patience."²¹ One of the dictionary meanings of ὑπομονῇ is "steadfastness." By this Luke means that fruit-bearing is exceptionally good and not subject to change. Matthew and Mark use more graphic language. They use the vocabulary of the agriculturist who gathers the grain and measures it. Speaking from an Oriental background, for seed to yield a hundred fold means achieving the greatest expectations a farmer could possibly entertain. By today's standards, even a twenty-fold yield is considered to be above average. Commenting on the three-fold description of the harvest, Lisco observes: "As the degrees of hearing without fruit were three-fold, so also the abundance of fruit is three-fold."²²

¹⁹ Good News for Modern Man, Today's English Version (American Bible Society, 1966), p. 155.

²⁰ The New English Bible (Oxford and Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 106.

²¹ The Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1952), p. 814.

²² Lisco, p. 59.

The Mustard Seed
Mark 4:30-32; Matt. 13:31,32; Luke 13:18,19

In Mark's gospel, the parable of the Mustard Seed is recorded in chapter 4, which is known as the parable chapter. Matthew does the same: in his case it occurs in chapter 13, coupled with the parable of the leaven. Luke, unlike Mark, has these twin parables recorded in chapter 13 in an entirely different context. Normally we would expect it to be in chapter 8 together with the parable of the Sower as in the case of Matthew and Mark; but that is not the case.

Here also, as in the instance of the parable of the Sower, Mark has the longest account, although all three narratives have the same content. All of them, in their prologue, offer a statement regarding the kingdom of God.²³ Mark and Luke use interrogatory statements to arrest the attention of the hearer (reader) and to get him involved in the discussion!

In his notice on the setting of the parables, Jeremias accounts for two possible interpretations of the introductory formulae. He comes to this point on the basis of the fact that the parables of Jesus have two basic forms, similar to those of contemporary parables in Judaism. In the first case, the parable begins with a noun in the nominative, as in the instance of the parables of the Rich Fool, the Great Supper, the Wicked Husbandmen and others, as these occur in the Gospel of Thomas. In all of these instances the parable begins with a simple narrative without any introductory formula. In the second case, there

²³ Matthew has the expression ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. The Concept of the kingdom of God will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III.

are those parables which begin with a datival introduction. This is in line with most of the rabbinical parables which begin with the words: masal 1^e. This is occasionally replaced by a bare dative (1^e). This second kind is used in the New Testament in places such as Mark 4:30-31 and Luke 13:20-21. Jeremias' study reveals the fact that the best way to translate such an introductory statement would be not with the phrase "it is like," but with "it is the case with." This is important because "in many cases the content of the parable forces upon our attention the shifting of the real point of comparison which is caused by this ambiguity in the introductory formula."²⁴

To identify κόκκῳ σινάπεως in exact botanical categories has been a concern of scholars for a long time. A common consensus has developed that it is rather difficult to determine specifically the species of mustard seed described in the text. Harold Mare gives a summary of the different possibilities reached by scholars. According to him most of them identify this as being brassica (or σίνιπης) nigra (black mustard).²⁵ It is also thought to be sinapis alba (white mustard), sinapis orientalis, sinapis arvensis, salvadora persica, and so forth. At any rate, Jesus calls it a σπέρμα , a seed from which something springs. Our interest is not in comparing the mustard seed with all the σπέρματα in general but in comparing it with garden herbs, in contrast to wild plants.

²⁴Jeremias, p. 100-101.

²⁵W. Harold Mare, "The Smallest Mustard Seed--Matthew 13:32," Grace Journal 9 (Fall 1968):3-9.

The word μικρότερον is used only five times in the New Testament.²⁶ In all five instances it serves as a superlative. In this context Mare's observation deserves much attention:

In contrast to the rather distinct and separate categories occupied by the comparative and superlative in classical Greek, these two forms of comparison in the New Testament are less distinctive and tend to overlap. Actually the superlative form is on the decline in the New Testament.²⁷

In the opinion of Cranfield, this kind of comparative use for the superlative is common in Koine Greek.²⁸

In point of fact, a mustard seed is not the smallest seed ever known. Yet the significance of the parable lies in the fact that the mustard seed is used as a synonym for the smallest thing imaginable. Moreover, the smallness of the seed in comparison to the size of the plant that grows out of it is proverbial in the Talmud.²⁹ All these things point to the central message of the parable which lies in the contrast between the relatively small size of the seed and the height which the plant attains.³⁰

With reference to the size of the plant, Matthew records that, when it is grown, it is greater than herbs and becomes a tree. In

²⁶ Matt. 13:32; cf. Mark 4:31; Matt. 11:11; cf. Luke 7:28; Luke 9:48.

²⁷ Mare, p. 5.

²⁸ Cranfield, p. 170.

²⁹ Alan Hugh McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1957), p. 198.

³⁰ H. B. Swete, The Gospel According to St. Mark, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1909), p. 86.

Mark's words it grows up and becomes greater than all the herbs and puts out great branches. Luke summarizes the whole concept in the words, "and it grew and became a tree." We might observe that Mark cares most for the botanical specificity as he calls the mustard plant greater than all the herbs.

The use of ἀναβαίνω by Mark is observed to be a rather strange term for describing growing plants. In classical Greek and in the Septuagint the word is used of the springing up of vegetation.³¹ It may be considered as "an over-literal reading of the Aramaic original."³²

However, whether the mustard is a tree or just a herb, the point of the parable is well established in the following statement that the birds of the air come and nest on its branches. Visitors to Palestine bear witness to the fact that the plant "has often been found growing to a height of eight to twelve feet, and great numbers of small birds alight upon its stalks to pluck the seeds."³³ W. M. Thompson claims that the common mustard plant is about eight to ten feet high, and that he had seen it on the rich plains of Akkar as tall as a horse and his rider.³⁴ Hackett makes another exciting remark that he saw stalks seven and nine feet high, and before his eyes a bird came and perched on a branch and sang.³⁵

³¹Taylor, p. 253. cf. Gen. 41:5; Deut. 29:23; Is. 5:6.

³²Taylor, p. 270.

³³Ibid.

³⁴W. M. Thompson, quoted in James Morrison, A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, 11th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p. 234.

³⁵Ibid.

As the tree grows larger, the birds of the heaven (τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) come and roost in its branches. The expression, "birds of the heaven" recalls the passage in the Book of Daniel, "the beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the air dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it."³⁶ In the interpretation that follows in Daniel, we read that the tree became strong. Its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the ends of the earth. Here reference is made to the rule of the Most High in establishing his kingdom.

The parable of the Mustard Seed is a description of how the kingdom of grace is extended to the ends of the earth. According to God's plan, men of all nations will enter the church and then when he comes in his glory, who is himself the King, he will be not only the Judge of all men but also the one under whose shadow all who have truly trusted in him will find shelter.³⁷ Jeremias' remark that the kingdom of God is not compared to the grain of mustard seed, but to the tall shrub in whose boughs the birds make their nests has to be limited to the above framework.³⁸

More importantly, from the Old Testament passages that have been referred to, we might derive the fact that the tree symbolizes the protection given to subject peoples by a great empire. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that Jesus had Gentile nations in mind while he was using the parable of the Mustard Seed.³⁹ In that case, the birds

³⁶ Dan. 4:12; cf. Ps. 104:12; Ezek. 17:23; Hos. 14:17.

³⁷ Cranfield, p. 170.

³⁸ Jeremias, p. 102.

³⁹ Taylor, p. 270.

of the air are definitely the Gentiles from all over the world who participate in the great feast at Abraham's feet through the coming of Jesus Christ on earth.

The mystery of the kingdom, then, here revealed to the disciples, can be no other than this, that the kingdom of God founded by Jesus presents indeed at first an outwardly insignificant form; but this very beginning, small to diminutiveness, possesses an inherent force of extension, in virtue of which it will grow unceasingly until it attains to vast size.⁴⁰

Jesus' use of the mustard seed to explain the mystery of the kingdom of God becomes very real, logical, and reasonable. The power of his parabolic teaching is explicit in this case in its full measure. However, it is to be realized that Jesus, in using the common Jewish proverbial expression of the mustard seed as a figure of smallness, did so only because the metaphor was a true and accurate statement, including those implications involving scientific data regarding the mustard seed both as to its very smallness as a seed and as to its moderate size when grown.⁴¹

In conclusion, we establish that the message of the parable of the Mustard Seed is not the greatness of the coming of the kingdom. Neither is this parable an attempt on the part of Jesus to reiterate the fact that the kingdom will come; no child of Israel would doubt such an important fact. But the parable points out the fact that even the mustard plant is one that gives shelter to the birds, and yet the seed from which it grows is very, very small.⁴² In the same way, as far as the

⁴⁰ Siegfried Goebel, The Parables of Jesus, A Methodical Exposition, trans. Prof. Banks (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883), p. 97.

⁴¹ Mare, p. 7.

⁴² N. A. Dahl, "The Parables of Growth," Studia Theologica 5 (July 1952):148.

kingdom of God is concerned though its presence is often left unnoticed by ordinary man because of its apparent smallness and insignificance, its outcome will be as obvious and world-embracing as the full grown tree. Into it people from all over enter and live together with their Lord.

Weeds Among the Wheat
Matt. 13:24-30,36-43

This parable is peculiar to Matthew. As in the case of the parable of the Sower and the Seed, this parable has two parts: one, the parable itself, and secondly, its explanation. In the instance of the first parable Jesus himself takes the initiative to create a situation to explain the parable for the disciples. In the second the disciples take the initiative. When they saw that Jesus had left the multitude and was having a little privacy, they come close to him and ask for an interpretation of the parable of the Weeds among the Wheat.

Matthew starts out this parable with his characteristic introductory phrase, "ἄλλην παραβολὴν παρέθηκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων", "Another parable he set forth before them saying," and so on. In passing it may be remarked that such a phrase contributes a great deal to maintaining the continuity of the parabolic chapters. The whole issue that becomes the point of the parable is discussed in the first two verses, verses 24,25. The owner of the field sows good seed. But in his absence, while he is asleep, his enemy comes and sows tares in the same field among the wheat.

Commenting on the use of ὁμοιωθῆναι, McNeile makes the point that, strictly speaking, the kingdom is not like the man. Rather, his experiences illustrate an aspect of it.⁴³ This is made more

⁴³ McNeile, p. 196.

explicit as he says that the man's field represents that part of the world in which the message of the kingdom is being preached. This interpretation helps us to substantiate the point that the concept of the seed has to be emphasized in all the parables presently under consideration.

The action taken by the enemy (ὁ ἐχθρός) to hinder the growth of the seed is rather extreme. His burning desire to harass the growing seed is contained in his reference to the kind of weed he sows in the field. Ζιζάνια are the lolium temulentum, so named from its effect of creating dizziness in men and cattle. It is sown secretly and in spite. The weed is indistinguishable from the wheat until its more slender ear appears.⁴⁴ On the point of terminology Morrison states that Ζιζάνια is not a Greek word, but the Grecised form of an Oriental word. It is called zuwân in the common Arabic of Palestine today and is referred to as zunin in the Talmudic writers. He draws his conclusion from W. M. Thompson that, when this darnel is eaten separately, or even when diffused in ordinary bread, it causes giddiness, and often acts as a violent emetic. It is a strong soporific poison, and must be carefully winnowed and picked out of the wheat, grain by grain, before grinding. Otherwise the flour is not healthful.⁴⁵

The servants were able to notice that tares were sown in the field only when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit. This shows that

⁴⁴ Jones, p. 163.

⁴⁵ Morrison, p. 231.

the presence of the tares has been left unnoticed for a while. The darnel must have all the external features of the wheat to a certain point in its growth. When, finally, fruit-bearing time comes, it is easily distinguishable from the true wheat.

The relationship between the owner of the field and the servants deserves special attention in this parable. Verse 27 pictures the whole drama. The servants were supposed to watch over the field and the growth of the crop. In the Orient, where even today much of the cultivation is done through manual labor, this verse has a special meaning. In most cases it is the servants who prepare the ground, sow the seed, watch for the weeds and finally harvest the crop. The owner or master of the field is just an overseer. At the same time, all the activities that go on in the field are considered to be done by the owner of the field. It is a corporate effort, done under the supervision of one man. Having come across an enormous amount of tares among the wheat, the servants come and ask the householder, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?"

The servants consider the presence of the tares among the wheat in their master's field to be something that happened to them in terms of a nuisance or loss personally. Even the servants do not want the darnels to be in the field. Therefore they ask their master: θέλεις οὐν ἀπελθόντες συλλέξωμεν αὐτά ? The expected answer is "Yes." Goebel's explanation substantiates this fact: the subjunctive of deliberation συλλέξωμεν is here, as is usual in verbs of wishing or permitting, connected directly with θέλεις .⁴⁶

⁴⁶Goebel, p. 61.

The servants anxiously wait for a decision. But the owner of the land, who, naturally, should be more concerned about his crops, is pictured here to be very passive in his attitude. It is not because he is interested in the growth of the darnel in his field, but he foresees that, if the servants were to interfere in the whole process of growing, this would hinder the growth of the wheat. That, in turn, will mean more damage. Morrison gives the reason why the master did not agree with the servants' plea: since the field was covered over with the noxious weed, so that the roots of the two species of plants were intertwined throughout, it would have been impossible to pluck up the one without to a large extent rooting out the other.⁴⁷

The master came to a wise decision. It fit the situation best. He had planned ahead of time what he was going to do with the tares at the season of the harvest. He said to the reapers: συλλέξατε πρῶτον τὰ ζιζάνια καὶ δήσατε αὐτὰ εἰς δέσμας πρὸς τὸ κατακαῦσαι αὐτά, κ.τ.λ. The tares will be gathered first, even before the harvesting of the wheat, bound in bundles and burnt. Jones describes the event recorded in verse 30 as an "unusual operation to meet an unusual case."⁴⁸ He sees how this can be beautifully done at the time of harvest. This is possible because the wheat grows higher than the weed, and therefore, may be cut near its head while the sickle leaves the weed untouched.

⁴⁷ Morrison, p. 232.

⁴⁸ Jones, p. 163.

The explanation of this parable is given by Jesus himself to his disciples in a private talk. The most amazing thing about this explanation is that this is a special case in Jesus' parabolic teaching where parables can be drawn out in minute detail. After the question has been posed by the disciples, Jesus takes the floor to give the full explanation in a continuous statement.

If this parable and its explanation are attributed to Jesus himself, the troubles caused by modern critical scholarship may easily be avoided. Some scholars claim the interpretation to be a later interpolation. It is even said that some parables are a product of the early church after the pattern of the parable of the Sower and the Seed. From the text itself, the following equations may easily be derived:

Sower of Good Seed	=	Son of Man
Field	=	World
Good Seed	=	Sons of the Kingdom
Tares	=	Sons of the Evil One
Enemy that Sowed the Tares	=	Devil
Harvest	=	End of the World
Reapers	=	Angels

Against the views of some modern critical scholarship, C. H. Dodd sees this parable to be one that stands "on its own feet." He understands that it depicts in characteristic fashion a perfectly clear situation. In his frame of reference, characterised by eschatology, he learns a lesson from this parable that there are good and bad members in the Church, and it is not the Lord's will that any attempt should be made to expel the bad before the final judgment.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), pp. 147-148.

In conclusion, we may note Philip Melanchthon's comment on this parable in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. According to Melanchthon, this passage

shows that the true and spiritual people will be separated from the physical people . . . He (Christ) teaches us that the Church is hidden under a crowd of wicked men so that this stumbling block may not offend the faithful and so that we may know that the Word and Sacraments are efficacious even when wicked men administer them. Meanwhile he teaches that though these wicked men participate in the outward marks, still they are not the true kingdom of Christ and members of Christ, for they are members of the kingdom of the devil.⁵⁰

The Weeds among the Wheat is a perfect example of how the kingdom of God works here on earth before the consummation. Those who labor in this kingdom at times can hardly wait to see the destruction of those who do not belong to the kingdom. But God waits till the harvest whose season he has set ahead of time.

The Automatic Action of the Soil
Mark 4:26-29

The last parable that requires special attention in our present study is the one occasionally called the Automatic Action of the Soil. This parable is found only in the Gospel according to St. Mark. It compares the kingdom of God to the seed that is scattered upon the earth, growing stage by stage up to the time of harvesting. The sower sows the seed; he sends in the reapers only at the time of harvest.

Some scholars have tried to couple this parable with the parable of the Mustard Seed. Some others have reached the conclusion that this parable is a different version of the one of the Tares among the

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Theodore G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 171, par. 19. [Apology of the Augsburg Confession]

Wheat. Martin H. Scharlemann, in his book on Proclaiming the Parables, summarizes the four different interpretations given to this parable in the past.⁵¹ These four interpretations suggest that the main point of the parable could be "the divine seed which Christ implants in the heart and in the Church," "the gradual evolution of the kingdom in human society," "the picture of the harvest signifying the speedy in-breaking of the kingdom," or "the immediate crisis brought on by the coming of Jesus." As Scharlemann concludes all these four items have some truth in them but do not, in fact, exhibit the full impact of this parable.

The introductory statement of the parable carries with it the idea that the following is a description of the kingdom of God at work. Allen's interpretation of the phrase οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, finds a connection between the whole process of growth described in this parable and the ministry of Jesus Christ:

The good news is preached by Christ just as seed is sown by the sower. Then follows a period during which the preacher seems to take as little part in the effects of the preaching as the sower does in the growth of the seed from grain to ripe corn. But when the preaching has produced the disciples of the kingdom, then the kingdom will be inaugurated, just as harvest follows the appearance of the ripe corn.⁵²

Verse 27 is a description of the continuity of the event that is already set in motion. "When once the seed has been sown, the sower

⁵¹ Martin H. Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 47-56.

⁵² W. C. Allen, ed., The Gospel According to Saint Mark, The Oxford Church Biblical Commentary (London: Rivingtons, 1915), p. 84.

goes on with his daily routine."⁵³ The natural course of events is in no way barred because of the sowing of the seed. In our text, καθεύδῃ precedes ἐγείρηται and correspondingly νύκτα precedes ἡμέραν . The grammatical variations observed here are "probably so by attraction and are meant in the sense of present indicatives which make the narrative more vivid."⁵⁴ The grammatical construction of this verse is unique to the parabolic style of teaching. Such style is used to present a supposed situation. In this case the parabolic subjunctive is used in the present verse.

In this parable, growth is understood as a lifetime process during which sleeping and rising and night and day are common occurrences. Grammatically it may be said that "night" precedes "day" due to the fact that καθεύδῃ has already been put first. But the fact of the matter is that it is a Semitic sequence. In Jewish life the day begins at sunset, which means that night comes first.

αὐτομάτη ἡ γῆ καρποφορεῖ has been translated in many different ways: "the earth produces of itself" (RSV); "the soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit" (TEV); "the ground of itself is productive" (American Translation); "for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself" (KJV); "the ground produces a crop by itself" (NEB); "of its own accord, the ground yields increase" (R. A. Knox), and so on. All these translations have retained a reflexive force. The actual process of growth is beyond man's reach or comprehension. "He must leave it to the apparently spontaneous action of the soil."⁵⁵

⁵³ Cranfield, p. 168.

⁵⁴ Scharlemann, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Swete, p. 84.

αὐτομάτη is a very rare word in the New Testament. In Acts 12:10, the only other place where the word is used, it denotes the opening of a gate for Peter without any human agency. In the Septuagint, the same word is used for the growth of plants during the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, when no work is done on the farm.⁵⁶ Since these special years foreshadowed the Messianic age, there is a Messianic nuance in αὐτομάτη. In other words, it depicts in delicate gradations the progression of the kingdom of the Messiah.

Ὅταν δὲ παραδοῖ ὁ καρπός is a clause that points out the fact that the crop is ready for harvest. In sharp contrast to the parable of the Weeds among the Wheat, where the consummation is awaited at a later time, here the time of harvest is at hand. In a discussion on eschatology, both these aspects of the kingdom has to be kept in proper balance, as we have seen in the first chapter of our study.

Παραδίδομι carries the meaning "permit" in the classical Greek sense. The fruit has reached a stage in its lifetime so as to permit harvest. Παραδίδομι is used extensively in the New Testament, especially in the passion narratives, for the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, for his handing over to Pilate by the Sanhydrin, and for his delivering up by Pilate to the will of the people.⁵⁷ This shows that Jesus submitted himself to his crucifixion at the fulness of time. In the same way the crop yields the harvest when it is ready for it. Because the verb is in the subjunctive, we may decide that here the meaning is "allow";⁵⁸ or it may be a further case of the parabolic subjunctive.

⁵⁶ Scharlemann, p. 50.

⁵⁷ Refer to Mark 14:10 and par.; Mark 15:1 and par.; Luke 23:25 and par. etc.

⁵⁸ Scharlemann, p. 51.

Then, immediately the farmer intervenes again. This time his duty is to harvest the grain. So he puts forth the sickle. The expression ἀποστέλλει τὸ δρέπανον has its basis in Joel 3:13. The prophet calls for bringing in the sickle with the whole idea of eschatology in mind. He prophesies of the Day of Judgment, as witness the language about the darkening of the sun and the moon.

Swete summarizes this parable and draws an application from it for today in the following manner: "Christ came to sow, and will come to reap: the rest belongs to the invisible working of his Spirit in the Church and in the soul."⁵⁹ Goebel, retaining the terminology of the parable, states that, "all that lies between the sowing of the seed and its development through every stage of growth up to the ripe of fruit, is the business of the soil to which it is committed."⁶⁰ This parable tells the reader how God is at work in each individual instance in life and in the Church, the assembly of people who gather around Word and Sacrament.

Summary

This chapter was devoted to a study of four parables of growth. In the first parable we have seen that the seed that is sown yields a harvest according to the nature of the soil upon which it falls. As a case in point, those that fell on good soil yielded up to a hundred fold. God's word, once it is received in the heart of the hearer, reacts more mightily upon it, transforming the whole life of the individual and produces in him the fruits of the Spirit.

⁵⁹ Swete, p. 85.

⁶⁰ Goebel, pp. 86-87.

Such growth is true also in the case of the Christian community gathered around the Word and Sacrament. Because the Word of God is sown, through the power of the Holy Spirit the kingdom has started its growth among us. Small and insignificant as the kingdom may be, it grows until the day when those who do not belong to the kingdom will be separated from it for eternity.

In all these activities God is at work. Man can not understand this mystery as he is not able to understand how a seed becomes a plant. God, who causes the seed to grow and bring forth fruit, also guards and protects his Church in mysterious ways leading it to the day in which he will reveal all the mysteries to those who belong to him.

CHAPTER III

A SYNTHESIS OF MOTIFS FROM THE PARABLES OF GROWTH

Not many people of the world were in the privileged position to hear the life-giving words from Jesus' own lips, while he lived on earth. People who lived before the birth of Jesus looked forward to the day of the Lord when the Messiah would come and live with them. People who live after him look back to the first century of the Christian era and "bow the knee" before the "greatest teacher of all time."

Any student of the Bible interested in reflecting on Jesus' own words, will, first of all, look at the parables which are recorded in the Synoptic gospels. That is the best place to begin. There we come across statements from Jesus directed to the ordinary man of the day, who could understand what Jesus was talking about, except in unusual circumstances. Paradoxically, the average member of the modern technological society is not able to understand exactly what Jesus meant in those simple words. The fact of the matter is that, even in his day, people did not really understand unless they accepted him as their Savior on his terms. Small wonder that, starting from the church fathers, until the present day scholars are deeply interested in taking a new look at these words of Jesus as they have come to us through the Synoptics.

In this chapter we will draw together a few important concepts from the study we made in Chapter II and examine their value for us today

under various headings. Our study will help us to appreciate the method of teaching peculiar to Jesus in its fullest sense. While rabbis occasionally also taught in parables, their method fell far short of the creativity manifested by Jesus.

The Smallness of the Seed

The word "seed" has a three-fold meaning. In the botanical and agricultural sense it is that element in plant life which carries a species from germination to fruition. The usual Greek word used in the New Testament is σπέρμα . The same word is used in the parables of the Sower and the Tares among the Wheat. In Mark 4:26, σπόρος is used, which can mean either seed or seed-time. "Σπόρος , sowing or seed-time, is used in the later Biblical Greek as nearly equal to σπέρμα , where the reference is to the seed as used by the sower, not to the particular grain."¹

Secondly the word "seed" is used in a spiritual sense. The wisdom literature has the concept in the Old Testament.² The same sense is intended in 1 Peter 1:23 where Christians are said to have been "begotten again, not of corruptible, but of incorruptible seed."

The third use of the word "seed" in the Bible is considered to be metaphorical for offspring, whether of animals or of man. In such instances "seed" has the added meaning of genealogy or pedigree.³

¹H. B. Swete, The Gospel According to St. Mark, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), p. 84.

²James Hastings, ed., Dictionary of the Bible, 9th impression (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1934), p. 429.

³Ibid.

In the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Siegfried Schulz calls "seed," the "original or basic material," "basis," "element," "anything which has in it quickening or creative force."⁴ In a larger context, this refers to family and national life, as is evident from the Septuagint.

Gottfried Quell's attempt to discover the original meaning of the equivalent of σπέρμα in the Massoretic data has helped to see an element of future potential imbedded in it. He suggests that it means "perhaps more concretely and without eschatological emphasis 'new growth.'"⁵ The seed always aims toward the harvest. In the theological realm, the seed motif expresses salvation, blessing, or positive values. The whole process depends on God's hands, because it is he who has appointed seed time and harvest as a continuing order as long as the world endures.⁶

Abram, who could not see his progeny even in his old age, was privileged to receive the Word of the Lord. Abram brought his grievance to the Lord, and even went to the extent of suggesting a different way to God, to fulfil the promise he had made to him. He was challenged to number the stars in heaven, and the voice followed, οὕτως ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα σου .⁷ The American Standard Version (ASV) and the King James Version (KJV) retain the word "seed" in their translation of

⁴ Siegfried Schulz, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 9 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957-1974), 7(1971):538-541. Hereafter referred to as TDNT.

⁵ Gottfried Quell, TDNT, pp. 539-543.

⁶ Ibid., p. 541.

⁷ Gen. 15:56.

זָרַע (σπέρμα). But some modern translations, including the Revised Standard Version (RSV), use the word "descendant."

In Gal. 3:16 Paul refers to the promise that was given to Abraham.⁸ He reiterates that the promises were given to Abraham and to his seed (τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ). In the explanation that follows in the same verse, the point is made that this singular σπέρμα meant χριστός .

The promised son of Abraham was Isaac. Isaac was blessed with two sons, of whom only one was called Israel, for he was to become the father of the twelve patriarchs. These twelve sons of Jacob, as Israel multiplied, became the foundation of the whole nation. The blessing that was given to Abram was fulfilled in his "seed," Jesus Christ to the fullest extent.

The new Israel that has grown up and is still in the process of growth also fits very well into the Old Testament scheme of things. In Galatians we have the affirmative statement from Paul that the seed of Abraham is Christ. He himself being the head of the corner, Christ is building his church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. In this process he had twelve disciples to begin with. Now in him the whole building holds together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.⁹ The new Israel that was set in motion since the birth of the God-Man has amazed countless members because their number is like the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea.

For our purposes, the smallness of the seed can only be understood in contrast to the marvelous growth that results from it. This is the

⁸ Cf. this passage with Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 17:7; 22:18 etc.

⁹ Eph. 2:20-22.

point in at least two of the parables included in our study, namely that of the Sower and the Seed and that of the Mustard Seed. In the first instance, the contrast is observed in terms of the amount of corn produced; namely, thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. In the second instance, the contrast is seen in terms of the size of the seed that was planted to become a tree with branches to shelter the birds that grow out of it.

The gospel of Christ has always brought something significant into the world. There is hardly any place in the world where the seed of the Word of God was sown which did not bring forth fruit.

Preparation of the Ground

The word that is translated "ground" in the KJV is אֲדָמָה in Hebrew. "The soil," "the ground" so called from its red color, is frequently translated also as "earth" and "land." The LXX uses γῆ¹⁰ to translate the different Hebrew words consistently.

In the New Testament the common word for "ground" is γῆ, "earth," "soil," "land."¹¹ Other words are ἀγρός, "field,"¹² χωρίον, "estate," "spot," "place."¹³

"Ground" is used in the Bible in a figurative sense too.

"Figurative uses of 'ground' are those representing the heart in relation to its reception of words of truth and righteousness."¹⁴ Consequently,

¹⁰ For example, see Gen. 2:5; Ex. 3:5; 8:21; Ps. 74:7; Is. 3:26 (LXX).

¹¹ Matt. 13:8; Acts 7:33, etc.

¹² Luke 14:18 (RSV).

¹³ John 4:5.

¹⁴ James Orr, gen. ed., The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2:1307.

dry, parched, thirsty ground stands for a poor condition of the
¹⁵
 heart.

The effectiveness of Jesus' parabolic teaching lay partly in the simple fact that Jesus picked up the concerns and expressions that were part of first century life in Palestine. When Jesus explained the four-fold nature of the soil (ground) in which the seed fell, he was just citing a day-to-day experience of the Palestinian farmer. The nature of the ground is such that nothing grows easily in Palestine. "The entire year was one of unending toil, and it was literally in the sweat of his face not only that the farmer ate bread but that he was able to provide himself with most, if not all, of the basic necessities of life."¹⁶ At a time when no advanced machinery was available to till the ground in any part of the world, agriculture was wholly dependent on human effort.

The plow was the main instrument that was of great help to the farmer for preparing the soil. This sounds very strange to the ears of men living in our modern technological society. In almost all the villages in India, however, the plow is still widely used today as a way of preparing the ground. A plow is hardly more than a wooden stick with a small metal point, drawn by oxen.¹⁷ H. N. Richardson observes that until about the tenth century before our era the points were made of copper or bronze, but after that they were made of iron. Even though these

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Cf. Ps. 107:33,35; Is. 35:7; 44:3; 53:2.

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H. N. Richardson, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:57. Hereafter referred to as IDB.

¹⁷

1 Kings 19:19.

later instruments were larger and harder than the more primitive ones, they hardly ever went deeper than five inches.¹⁸

In the early days, agriculture was considered an enterprise in which both the owner of the land and his servants were fully involved. This is more true at the time of preparing the ground. Even the rich owner is no exception to this fact.

It was perhaps only in the earlier times that he actually ploughed or even followed the oxen, and he would at all times be present on the cheerful harvest field and visit his vineyard to see the work of the laborers, give directions about the work when he would listen respectfully to the counsel of his men.¹⁹

The sincerity of the farmer and his concern to see the best yield in his plot of land is explicit in his voluntary engagement in all the activities right from the beginning of the whole process. Preparation of the ground becomes harder where the ground is filled with thorns and stones that mar the growth of the seed that is sown.

In the parable of the Sower a contrast is drawn between the three types of unfruitful soil and the good soil in which the seed grows to maturity. Failure in growth is not due to the seed being defective in any way, but because the ground is not prepared the way it ought to be. "The yield of the good soil, no matter in what proportion to the seed lost on unreceptive hearers, abundantly warrants the sower's faith and venture."²⁰

¹⁸ IDB, 1(1962):59.

¹⁹ T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, eds., Encyclopaedia Biblica, 4 vols. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899-1907), 1(1889):86.

²⁰ Interpreter's Bible, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952-1957), 7(1951):696. Hereafter referred to as IB.

A theological interpretation of the parables of growth very easily points out the fact that they all have one basic concept to which they bear witness; namely, that of faith. The interpretation given by Jesus himself to the parable of the Sower and the Seed substantiates this point.

The sower has only one purpose in mind: the seed must grow and yield good fruit. The Word of God is sown into the hearts of men with a view to creating faith in the One who is both the Word and the source of the Word. Thus it was revealed to the Christians at Rome, through Paul, that "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ."²¹ We have another assurance from God that the Word of God never returns void.²² It is sown in order to bring forth results.

Jesus gives the promise that the Holy Spirit would come and not only teach men all things but also bring to remembrance all that Jesus had taught.²³ This passage in John's gospel suggests that it is God the Father who sends the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. But later on in the gospel Jesus says that he goes away in order to send the Counselor.²⁴ Commenting on both of these statements from Jesus, the Interpreter's Bible states that "the paraclete is the alter ego of Jesus, continuing his work on earth, who, as the Spirit of truth,

²¹ Rom. 10:17.

²² Luke 16:17.

²³ John 14:26.

²⁴ John 16:7.

proceeds from the Father. This is the basis of his authority in
witnessing to Christ."²⁵

The teaching and reminding functions of the Holy Spirit show God's interest in the faith of the people. God wants good soil in the hearts of all people. He does not simply sow the seed and disappear, but, through his agents, he continues to work in the field. The grace of God in all its manifoldness is bestowed upon all individuals to be instructed by the Holy Spirit.

But the tragedy of not accepting the Word of God befalls the vast majority of the individuals who hear the Word today. This is not because God's plan to save mankind has failed in any sense. Paul, while writing to the Corinthians, expresses the fear that a person can accept (δέχομαι) the grace of God in vain.²⁶ This means that a person will have the opportunity to hear the good news of the kingdom and yet not profit from it. Nothing will come of this grace, if the human response is either refused from the first, or at a later stage ceases to be given.

Another concept that is related to our study on the preparation of the ground is the appeal from Paul not to grieve the Holy Spirit.²⁷ The immediate context of this statement in Ephesians suggests that "the Spirit is the bond of the corporate life, and that 'grieves'

²⁵ G. A. Buttrick, et. al., ed., IB, 8(1952):727.

²⁶ 2 Cor. 6:1.

²⁷ Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19; Rom. 8:23.

him which does not tend to the 'building-up' of the Christian society."²⁸
 In point of fact, it may be said that anything which occurs within the Christian community that does not contribute to the mutual building up of the saints grieves the Holy Spirit. Moreover, "the prohibition against grieving the Spirit is underlined by a motive, that is, by a reminder of the eschatological-missionary function and power of the Spirit."²⁹

In a theology of justification by faith through grace, man can do nothing to merit salvation. In other words, salvation is entirely an act from God to man, accomplished once and for all in an event in history. The Word of God stands as the living witness of that central event today. This Word is sown as the seed wherever it is proclaimed with the intent that those who hear the Word become heirs of the kingdom. This is possible only when man is ready to subject his own will to God's gracious will. The Holy Spirit that causes the inception of faith in the good ground continues to nurture it through teaching and by way of reminder. The other soils, the rocky ground, the ground with a foot path, and the ground in which there is no end to the growth of thorns, grieve the Holy Spirit because they do not make possible the growth of the seed of life.

The best ground that entertains the seed and fosters the growth of the seed stands in a rigid relationship to the Spirit. The other

²⁸ J. A. Robinson, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), p. 194.

²⁹ Markus Barth, Ephesians, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1974), p. 547. For a detailed discussion see also pp. 548-50.

soils that hesitate to receive the seed are declared to be heathen. They are held accountable on the day of judgment because God's messengers, including missionaries, have fulfilled their responsibilities in them. Hereafter they must answer for themselves.

Challenges to Growth

The idea of growth remains a mystery to human understanding. No man knows how a seed grows. But everyone knows that the seed does grow. A farmer, in any part of the world, takes care to see to it that his planting is able to cope with all the obstacles that come its way.

The Palestine of Jesus' time was no exception to this fact. Sowing was done by hand in most cases, as it is true in India even today. The seed, when sown, and the young plants, have many enemies in Palestine. "Not only drought, hail, mice, fire, but also grasshoppers and locusts often destroy promising harvests."³⁰

Drought brought disastrous consequences to agriculture in Palestine in the days of Jesus. Since surface water is scarce, a prolonged drought could make the land relatively uninhabitable, as recorded in the Bible.³¹ Most of the cultivation in this land is dependent on rain. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the arrogant and perverted people that "do not say in their hearts 'Let us fear the Lord our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain.'"³² Joel called on the sons of Israel to rejoice and praise the Lord for

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John M'Clintock and James Strong, Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, 10 vols. and 2 supps. (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1891), 9:505.

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1 Kings 17:1; cf. Ps. 32:4.

³²

Jer. 5:24 (RSV).

vindicating them by giving them the early and the latter rains as before.³³

In the New Testament, the letter of James uses the passive stance of the farmer as a specific example of patience: "the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain."³⁴ All these instances bear witness to the fact that the people of Israel were expected to trust in God with patience for a promising yield of their crop.

Hailstorms are also recorded in the Bible as ruining the crops.³⁵

Sometimes they were even powerful enough to cripple animals and men. A reference is made in 1 Samuel to mice ravaging the land. When they come in great numbers they can cause great havoc to agriculture.³⁶

Grasshoppers are the common enemy of agriculture all over the world. Even today the words "grasshopper" and "locusts" are often used interchangeably, but "locust" is more correctly used to designate only the gregarious phase of certain short-horned grasshoppers.³⁷ In the Bible, the word grasshopper is used to denote something very insignificant, or something the destruction by which is at hand.³⁸

When in swarms, they can damage the whole crop and leave the farmer in despair. The crops, then, needed extraordinary care from moment to moment.

³³ Joel 2:23.

³⁴ James 5:7.

³⁵ Cf. Ex. 9:18-34; Hag. 2:17.

³⁶ 1 Sam. 6:5.

³⁷ IDB, 2(1962):470.

³⁸ Judg. 6:5; Amos 7:1-2; Is. 40:22; Nah. 3:15-17.

Over and above these natural enemies, in the parable of the Tares among the Wheat, Jesus speaks of the threat from the enemy that purposely plans to poison the growth of the seed. As we have seen, in the early stages these weeds are so indistinguishable from the wheat that they have to be allowed to grow together with the wheat until the time of harvest. Here growth is challenged right from the beginning to the end. William Barclay says that there are three ways in which the darnel could be separated from the wheat: (1) because the wheat, at the end, grows higher than the darnel, the wheat is reaped on top of the darnel and then the whole field is burnt; (2) at the time of harvest, the reaper drops the darnel, and later all of them are gathered and burnt; (3) the wheat, before it was milled, is separated from the darnel (mostly by women) as the darnel is slate grey in color.³⁹

The challenges to growth are both external and internal. Just as it is true that no one knows how the seed grows so it is even more true that no one knows how the kingdom of God grows. We participate as believers in the ongoing growth of the kingdom of God, accomplishing God's great purpose, as it is revealed in his Son Jesus Christ.

As Hunter says

Just as in nature (which is God's creation) there is a freely-given power which man does not make or direct, so in history there is a divine power--the Spirit of God--which brings God's kingdom from seed to harvest.⁴⁰

This power from above constantly maintains the steady growth of the kingdom.

³⁹ William Barclay, And Jesus Said, A Handbook on the Parables of Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 38.

⁴⁰ A. M. Hunter, The Parables Then and Now (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 40.

But speaking specifically of the kingdom of God, we maintain that the powers of the kingdom are at work only in Word and Sacrament. History as such does not pave the way to God's kingdom simply because of man's fallen nature. From the Scriptural point of view, the Church which has the sign, witness, and seal of the covenant and grace will withstand all difficulties until it reaches its full measure of growth.

A modern interpretation of the parable of the Sower and the Seed points out the fact that the challenges for growth come from within. According to this view, the parable is directed to Jesus' disciples who were disillusioned and discouraged because they thought to themselves that the preaching of their master was going nowhere. So Jesus spoke to them with the assurance that "no matter how much seed may seem to be wasted, in the end a great harvest is sure."⁴¹ In this case the point of the parable is that the seed must be sown, even if some of the seed will never grow, because God will have a harvest of his people.

The rocky ground, the trodden path, and the thorns that choke the wheat are all deficiencies in the soil. When Jesus preached the coming of the kingdom of God, he had in mind the preparation of the individual heart to receive his message in its full measure. The growth comes from power in the seed itself, the Word, and invites to submission of the self to God, which means placing oneself under the impact of God's Word. As a particular case in point, this parable is "made to yield warning and encouragement to Christians."⁴² In spite of the repeated hearing of the Word, the desires of the flesh, and the

⁴¹ Barclay, p. 23.

⁴² C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 145.

cares of the world dominate it. In such cases faith does not always persevere because of the inherent determination of fallen man to resist the Word of God.

The challenge for growth that comes from without is the main point in the parable of the Tares among the Wheat. There is a definite statement in the narrative as to how the tares happen to be there: the enemy of the owner of the field came and sowed the weeds while men were asleep. The enemy (ὁ ἐχθρός), here, is the arch-enemy of the kingdom, Satan himself. According to Trench, the whole mischief

is attributed not to the imperfection, ignorance, weakness, which cling to everything human, and which would prevent even a divine idea from being more than very inadequately realized by men; but to the distinct counterworking of the greatest spiritual enemy.⁴³

This activity continues to the end of time, because the enemy is interested in doing what is hostile to God and his Christ. In the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Werner Foerster observes that the parable of the Tares among the Wheat is one of the two places in the New Testament where ὁ ἐχθρός is definitely used for the devil. In his detailed study, there are parallels for this usage in the Pseudepigrapha. "The devil is the enemy in the absolute sense. He is the enemy both of men and also of God and his kingdom."⁴⁴

The intent of God's Word is to propagate the good news of the kingdom as it spreads rapidly and wins many disciples. In spite of the varying degrees of receptivity of God's Word in the hearts of men, the end result will be God's kingdom established among men here and in eternity. In the meantime Jesus does not promise that all the difficulties

⁴³ R. C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of our Lord (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1855), p. 84.

⁴⁴ Werner Foerster, TDNT, 2(1964):814.

in life will be taken away when a person becomes a fully committed Christian. The darnel is retained in the field for the sake of the safety of the wheat. Trying to uproot the darnel from the field, in which its roots are intertwined with the roots of the wheat, will only do more damage to the wheat.

This seemingly contradictory state of affairs will go on till the appointed time. At that time, when the harvesters stand ready to do what belongs to their office, the householder will pronounce the final verdict. The gathering of the wheat will be done with full discrimination. The householder is interested in keeping only the good grain. So the reapers are asked first of all to gather the weeds and to destroy them forever.

In the eschatological setting of the parables of growth, we might observe that there are in the kingdom of God, intermingled with its real members, those who belong to it in appearance only. This is limited to the time here on earth, because such members are inwardly hostile to God's wonderful plan of salvation. So it is only proper to conclude that this parable speaks of the Christian community and not so much about the individual.

Time Element in Growth

The concept of time in the Scriptures has been an area in which much attention has been given to such words as χρόνος , αἰών , τότε , νῦν , καιρός . All of these terms are used in the Greek New Testament to express the idea of time. For our purposes, we will limit our study to some general differences in meaning between χρόνος and καιρός .⁴⁵

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For a detailed analysis, see TDNT, 9(1974):581-586.

Χρόνος in the common usage means "time in general," "time in its course." In this sense it is used to denote a life span or something that takes place over the years. It is understood that χρόνος is a "section of time," dealing mostly with the length of time involved. It begins at a certain point and is completed at the end of a specific period. Χρόνος can also mean a "point of time." For example, it occurs in the sense that sacrifices were made in the temple at a specific point of time in a day.

In the Septuagint, χρόνος is often distinguished from καιρός . This is mainly because "time as such is hardly an object of special reflection in the Septuagint. Yet in the writings composed in the Hellenistic diaspora we find some contacts with popular concepts or ideas even though only in a general sense."⁴⁶ Time is there from its creation till its cessation. The present reality is an extension of time between these two points. Χρόνος is a span of time.

Καιρός , speaking generally, denotes a decisive or opportune moment in history. "Καιρός connotes the destiny which demands decisive action from man. It thus determines the life of man by its challenge."⁴⁷ Καιρός is an established term in salvation history as it often means the "decisive time," or "appointed time" in the Scripture. In fact, καιρός is a gift from God, in the sense that it is a specific point in history where God intervenes, usually for a gracious purpose. It is ordained by God. There will not be any second chance for such an event. When Jesus came to redeem Jerusalem, for example, Jerusalem

⁴⁶
TDNT, 9:586.

⁴⁷
TDNT, 3(1964):456.

did not know him.⁴⁸ The proclamation of Jesus at the beginning of the gospel of Saint Mark that the time was fulfilled, (πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρός) proves the fact that at that particular moment in history the message that God was intervening to establish his gracious rule was made known to the world.

According to a schedule of relative development God lays down in advance the main points in the history of salvation. He gives them their content and believers may await them with confident assurance.⁴⁹

This is true in the life of the believer as an individual and as a community. According to Cullman, "not all fragments of ongoing time constitute redemptive history . . . but rather, these specific, these καιροί , singled out from time as a whole."⁵⁰

At this point, we have to bear in mind that this distinction between καιρός and χρόνος is not always that neat. In view of the evidence offered in modern theological literature we cannot draw a hard and fast contrast between these two concepts. In order to prove this point, the study of James Barr on Biblical words for "time" renders a lot of help. Supplying necessary background from a series of studies conducted in this area, the author observes that

if there is any difference between χρόνος and καιρός in New Testament usage, it cannot be correlated with the difference between "chronological time" and "realistic time," and in some passages of central theological significance there may be good reason to suppose that there is no real difference between the words.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Luke 19:44.

⁴⁹ TDNT, 3:461.

⁵⁰ Oscar Cullman, Christ and Time, trans. Floyd V. Filson, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 40.

⁵¹ James Barr, Biblical Words for Time, Studies in Biblical Theology, rev. ed. (Naperville: Alec R. Allerson Inc., 1969), p. 33.

Matthew uses *καιρός* to denote the time of harvest in the parable of the Tares among the Wheat. The owner of the field sets the time; and, at his word, the reapers are asked to gather the wheat. In the other three parables, that is, the parable of the Sower and the Seed, the Mustard Seed, and the Automatic Action of the Soil, the kingdom of God is present in the situation in which Jesus finds himself. But in this particular instance, as the *καιρός* is yet to come, we get the impression that Jesus thinks of the kingdom mainly as a community of believers established at the time of harvest, in a full-fledged form, with an experience of redemption in its full measure.

Understood eschatologically, from the parables of the Tares among the Wheat and also from that of the Mustard Seed, the supernatural character of the kingdom points more towards the future. At the same time, the parable of the Sower and the Seed, and that of the Automatic Action of the Soil, speak of a past event that occurs every year, every season of the year. The man sows the seed, sleeps, rises, and the seed springs up and grows. There is definitely a time element involved in the whole process of growth. The sower who is interested in the growth of his seed does not sit there and watch it grow, but he engages in normal activities in various other areas. Once the seed is sown the man continues his ordinary life.

This series of activities will go on for a period of time whose limits, for the moment, are not indicated, because we do not yet know when the *καιρός* will come.⁵² Matthew records Jesus' own words regarding the same issue; namely, "Of that day and hour no one knows,

⁵²
Mark 13:33.

not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father in heaven only."⁵³

Even though there is no detailed analysis of the part played by time in the growth of the crops, at least the different stages in growth are noticed, especially in the parable of the Automatic Action of the Soil. Growth is necessarily a mysterious process, independent of the planning and involvement of man. Very similar is the whole process of growth in God's kingdom.

The process of growth goes on unceasingly. Man has no special role to play in this case. At the same time there is a call to watchfulness for every Christian here; for, "with the same certainty as the harvest comes for the husbandman after his long waiting, does God, when his hour has come, when the eschatological term is complete, bring in the Last Judgment and the kingdom."⁵⁴ Man's efforts, in his hastiness, for the rapid coming of this moment in history will be futile if it does not go hand in hand with God's plan. God's beginning amounts also to a guarantee of his fulfillment.

Awaiting the future is a necessary responsibility in Christian life. The final consummation is something all Christians look forward to with a sure hope. In fact the whole creation awaits with eager longing for this event--for God's children to conform to the image of Jesus Christ, to become fellow heirs of the kingdom with him and also to be glorified with him.⁵⁵

⁵³ Matt. 24:36 (RSV). It may be noted that the word καιρός is not used here but instead, τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας κ.τ.λ.

⁵⁴ Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 151-152.

⁵⁵ Rom. 8:21.

The mystery of God's plan of salvation for the whole creation, was kept hidden through all the ages until in these last times it was disclosed in Jesus Christ and is now proclaimed by those who preach him as ministers of God's Word. A Christian is content because, through this gracious will, God has revealed so much to him. It also provides the comfort that the hidden things belong to God, and that no child of God is far from the final moment, when nothing will be hidden from him.

Hope in the Parables of Growth

Agriculture was not easy work in Palestine. As we have discussed in our section on the "challenges to growth," extra care should be given to the plant for its growth. This is true right from the time of the sowing of the seed. The farmer must have enough patience to look beyond the catastrophe his crop may have to face.

The farmer has to know that the growth of the seed he sows depends upon the nature of the soil it falls upon. He must also foresee the possibility of rocky ground in his field, the birds that fly around and pluck the seeds, the pedestrians that walk over the seed, and even the thorns that grow up with the seed and destroy it. Even in the good soil, the enemy is waiting for a chance to sow weeds. If a farmer cannot in advance see such hazards plus the possible climatic changes that might directly or indirectly affect the plantation, probably he will not sow the seed, even though he can. It is possible that the resultant harvest is not always proportionate to the bulk of seed that was sown. Yet the farmer continues to sow when it is time to sow.

In the parables of growth, the proclamation of the glad tidings become the central point at issue. The Word of God is preached all

over the world, regardless of the quality of the ground upon which it falls. Sowing is done so rapidly because this is a step that has to be taken before the harvest can even occur. Because the end result is so decisive, the sower is hopeful enough to face all the hazards along the way.

Matthew records that the preaching of the gospel in all the world is a necessary prerequisite for the end to come. It must be preached to all nations as a witness.⁵⁶ "The gospel or good news may be represented under a variety of phases, but in them all there must be, either explicitly or implicitly, a reference to the possibility and practicability of 'salvation.'"⁵⁷ The one who saves has compassion on those who are lost, and in his gracious will has resolved to save them. Those who participate in this grace have all the blessings of this new kingdom, according to the new order of things. The full taste of life in this new kingdom will be accessible to the redeemed on completion of God's atoning work in the consummation.

The gospel has to be preached all over the world wherever man is found, from pole to pole. The missionary nature of the early Church, which was reestablished in the modern era will be continued to hasten the coming of God's kingdom in its fulness. The pace of preaching the gospel to all the nations will simultaneously hasten the process of putting an end to the evil age. The growth and prosperity of God's

56

Matt. 24:14.

57

James Morrison, A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, 11th ed. (London: Hodden & Stoughton, 1902), p. 462.

kingdom will be affected in contradistinction to evil which will be brought to a fiery end. Both the sower and the field look forward to this end event.

While discussing the concept of victory that is hidden in the parables of growth, specifically the parable of the Automatic Action of the Soil, John Bright adds a special note to establish the point that

the stress of these parables does not seem to lie upon the length of time involved, as if to teach that the kingdom comes by a process of growth, nor upon the contrast between small beginnings and large results, although this feature may well be present, but upon the fact that forces have been set in motion which inevitably move to fruition.⁵⁸

The kingdom of God has, in a very real sense, entered the world. Anyone in the world who has the willingness and the desire to enter this kingdom can enter it right now, because "God comes to meet us in history and sets before us the open but narrow door into his kingdom."⁵⁹ The blessings of God's kingdom are made available to us as a present reality, in the sense that they are "instrumental" and "sacramental" in terms of the eternal order of things.

Christian faith is neither allegory nor illusion. It is a present realization of future fulfillment. Christianity does not advocate an evolutionary process which will culminate in the building up of individuals or of society after the pattern of the anti-type. On the other hand, Christianity describes a situation which has an immediate effect on each individual Christian's life and on life in the church. This only helps the whole creation move towards the set goal of returning to that state for which it was originally created.

⁵⁸ John Bright, The Kingdom of God (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 219n.

⁵⁹ Dodd, p. 169.

"The kingdom of God is self-developing. It grows on itself and is not brought in by the efforts of men."⁶⁰ This statement from Scharlemann points out the fact that the farmer securely trusts in the fruitfulness of the earth, which, to the sower of the seed of the kingdom, pictures the inevitability of the growth of the kingdom. This is another fact that substantiates the hope inherent in the parables of growth. Human nature, basically, does not have the patience to wait for gradual development. Instead, it prefers quick change, even of a revolutionary character. In contrast to this, the coming of God's kingdom awaits the appointed time. God's kingdom brings forth fruit of itself. God nourishes the field with redemptive power that is his own. This goes on undefeated purely by the gracious power of God who sets things in motion for a definite purpose.

Interestingly enough, the Interpreter's Bible relates the whole concept of growth in the parable of the Automatic Action of the Soil to the gradual development of an individual from his childhood.⁶¹ The mystery that is inherent in the parabolic teachings of Jesus is very clear when it is studied in specific relationship to a person's own life. In this context we will do well to remember that this parable deals less with the individual than with the Church as the Christian community. As a child grows up to reach maturity in his personality and subsequent ability to decide between right and wrong, the Church grows as the community of believers to fulfil its purpose.

⁶⁰ Martin H. Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 53.

⁶¹ Halford E. Luccock, IB, 7(1951):704-705.

The hope that is reflected in the parables of growth has been the basis for the growth of all Christendom. Contrary to human imaginings, the glad tidings about the kingdom of God was preached and the work of redemption was completed in a humble and unnoticed way. Even the disciples of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus asked him the intriguing question, whether he himself was the one who was supposed to come, or if they should wait for someone else. Except for the disciples of Jesus, we do not know exactly how many more people were able to understand the mysteries of the kingdom when Jesus lived on earth. Even for them he had to explain the basic concepts. But we know for sure that the Word of the Lord was communicated to the multitudes through words and deeds.

When Jesus, having finished his commission, ascended above the horizon that is visible to the human eye, he promised the Holy Spirit to his believers so that they might be given power to proclaim this wonderful message all over the world. And only through this Holy Spirit can anyone become an heir of his kingdom.

Jesus does not leave his body, the Church alone as an orphan. The words of life he proclaimed to the disciples of his day are given to the Church to be proclaimed to the generations that follow. This promise reached its fulfilling stage on the day of Pentecost ever since missionaries were raised up and missionary journeys were made. Through the centuries saints have suffered martyrdom and crusades have been fought. The Church that is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, even now is still growing into a holy temple, in which we are also built into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Summary

In this chapter we have attempted a study of some motifs from the parables of growth such as the smallness of the seed, the preparation of the ground, the challenges to growth, the time element in growth, and the hope in the parables of growth. All these concepts were discussed with a view to explaining how the kingdom of God is at work among us.

The Church, though small and insignificant in terms of human predicament, is God's kingdom at work among men today. It continues its expansion as time goes by, through voluntary participation in the whole process of growth. Such growth is possible simply because God's Word is sown into the hearts of men with a view to create faith in the one who is both the Word and the source of the Word.

The Church anxiously waits for the final consummation, when the gathering of the wheat will be done with full discrimination. The hindrances that exist today for the growth of the kingdom are limited to the time here on earth. When the good news is preached to all the nations all over the world, God will bless the community of believers, the Church, to continue life in all its kingdom fulness.

CHAPTER IV

AN APPLICATION OF THE PARABLES OF GROWTH (INDIA)

In the previous chapter we attempted a discussion of some basic motifs from the parables of growth, such as the smallness of the seed, the challenges to growth, hope in the parables of growth and others. Our study was intended to pin-point certain aspects of the parables which are explanations of God's activity among us. Now we take a brief look at the Indian sub-continent to find direct applications of our findings to India as a political entity, on the one hand, and the growth of the gospel especially through The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LCMS), on the other.

The statistical details used in this chapter are meant to serve as eye-openers to see the gradual development of God's kingdom in India. The enormous number of people who have not committed their lives to participate in God's kingdom are shown to have us reconsider our own calls to be witnesses of God's good news.

The comprehensive description of agricultural setting, harvesting, and the consequent development of the Indian nation in terms of food production and others are meant to describe human involvement in the growth of the kingdom of God's left hand. Against this background the parables of growth are applied to the growth of the kingdom of God's right hand, the Church, which continues to grow in God's grace until it reaches perfection.

The parables of growth, as our Lord taught them, have a direct application to India as a nation, and more especially to the India Evangelical Lutheran Church. Chronic and growing shortage of food and other farm produce, on the one hand, and a continuous reluctance on the part of the vast majority of Indians to hear and inwardly digest the words of eternal life, on the other, have been the fundamental problems of this sub-continent for centuries.

The population of India is more than that of South America and North America put together. According to the 1970 census, both these continents had a total of only 510 million people. India had 530 million people at that time. The continent of Africa had only 340 million people, a little over two-thirds of the number of people in India. The population of Australia is hardly worth comparing. That continent did not have as many people as Kerala had; and that is one of the smallest states in India. In 1970 Australia had a population of 12.5 million, while Kerala had 21.3 million people.

Frightening are the results of statistics. The population of India is more than that of all the countries of Europe put together. The total population of both the United States of America and the Soviet Union is less than the population of India. In 1970 the U.S.A. had a population of 200 million while the U.S.S.R. was occupied by 240 million people.

There is only one nation in the world that has more people than India; and that is China. China had 680 million people in 1970. But China is three times as big as India in terms of land surface.

Scientists foresee that the world will face a crisis in the near future. They have come to this conclusion through their studies using

a new technique called "system dynamics."¹ This study raises the fear that, if the population explosion continues all over the world at the present rate, the limited resources of gold, coal, oil and others, will be exhausted in the near future. This, in turn, will have a direct effect on the production of artificial fertilizer and agricultural implements, thereby ruling out the possibility of increased food production. Thus the death rate will increase in the course of time, and populations will decrease automatically. Computer studies leave the future of the world in complete darkness and despair.

There is scarcely an end to the information furnished by statistics. Our task in this final chapter will be briefly to look at the food problem that the Indian nation faces, at the same time rejoicing in the Lord at the wonderful way in which he has blessed the Church in India to continue in the process of growth. Extra care has been taken not to conclude that the nation has to face so many problems because a majority of the people are non-Christians. We will attempt to see how Christians are growing in faith in spite of their lack of temporal and physical comforts.

Historical Background

In a presidential address to the sixth Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, Sir Manilal Nanavati directed the people's attention to a time in the last century when India had a

¹ "System dynamics" is a new technique in computer studies invented by Massachusetts Institute of Technology under the directions of the Club of Rome.

surplus of food stuffs to the extent of five million tons, and how that contrasted with the ten million ton deficit faced by the nation today.

Nearly thirty per cent of the population in India is said to be suffering from malnutrition and under-nutrition. The man-land ratio is steadily rising . . . In 1872, fifty-six per cent of the population depended on agriculture; this proportion has increased now to seventy-three per cent.²

According to a well-known British specialist, the average yield of rice and wheat per acre had steadily declined from 982 pounds and 636 pounds on the eve of World War I to 728 pounds and 636 pounds, respectively, in the thirties.³ In Draft Outline of the First Five Year Plan, the Planning Commission noted that while the area under cereals during the three years ending 1949-50 remained unchanged, the yield per acre suggested a decline from 619 pounds to 565 pounds.⁴

More systematic studies made by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics of the Union Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Agro-Economic Research Center of the Delhi University reveal that index numbers of agricultural production for undivided India had been declining at the rate of 0.02 per cent per annum during the 24-year period preceding independence. A detailed analysis of the data for the Indian Union covering the 15-year period preceding the First Five Year Plan reveals a higher rate of decline, at 0.68 per cent per annum.⁵

² Sir Marilal Nanavati, "Presidential Address to the Sixth Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics," quoted by Dr. P. C. Joshi.

³ W. Burns, Technological Possibilities of Agricultural Development in India (Govt. of India, 1944), p. 55.

⁴ Govt. of India, The First Five Year Plan, Draft Outline, p. 76.

⁵ S. R. Sen, "Address to the Twentieth Annual Session of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics," Waltair, January 10, 1967.

A net importer of food grains even before World War II, India passed through acute food crises during the war years as a result of the cessation of food imports from abroad. This led to wide-spread famine in Bengal in 1943, in which more than three million people died of starvation. This shortage continued to grow during the post-war years; and the government of India had to arrange for the imports of food grains from other nations, including the United States of America.

The problems arising from the decline of agricultural production were further aggravated by the partition of the country right after independence. This entailed a loss of substantial sources of raw materials and food grains. While only 77 per cent of the area of undivided India fell within the boundaries of the Indian Union, 82 per cent of the population remained within its borders.

Decay of agriculture, the prime industry of the country, thus, gave rise to a host of problems facing the nation. On the other hand, in the course of the 25 years of planned development, the agricultural pattern of the country has undergone significant changes. An institutional framework which is more conducive to growth has emerged.

As two facets of the strategy of agricultural development, institutional reorganization and technological improvement were brought into effect in recent years. These are mutually interdependent, and as a matter of fact, the deficiencies of the institutional reorganization cannot but exercise an adverse impact on the technological improvements. A brief look at the measures of technological improvement and their effects on agricultural growth is not out of place here.

One of the objectives of the Second Five Year Plan was to "create conditions for evolving as speedily as possible an agrarian

economy with higher levels of efficiency and productivity."⁶ On this principle, the nation aimed at the promotion of agro-industries like fertilizer plants, irrigation projects, soil conservation, improved seed, more efficient agricultural implements, and scientific agricultural practices.

The main motif behind irrigation projects was to provide the basic in-put of water to as large an extent of land as possible. This was necessary because, in a country like India, where tropical conditions prevail, the extent of rainfall is uncertain, and, more often than not, uneven. Significant progress has been achieved in the area of speedier and fuller utilization of the potential created as a result of the efforts made in recent years. Statistical observations show that, to date, only one third of the nation's available resources are made use of in the best way possible; that is, one-third of the water resources, and one-third of the cultivatable land.⁷

Impressive progress has been achieved in the sphere of minor and major irrigation projects which have successfully contributed to an increased rate of agricultural production in India. Impressive though the progress is, a large gap remains between the full potential in the development of major and minor irrigation projects and the actual use of irrigation facilities. As a supplementary action to this step, soil surveys, the setting up of experimental farms for demonstrating scientific irrigation practices, and others, have also been undertaken.

⁶ Govt. of India, Second Five Year Plan, p. 6.

⁷ V. K. Natarajan, Agriculture, Indian Economy Since Independence Series (Calcutta: National Publishers, n.d.), p. 29.

Care is being taken also to plan ahead of time to supply fertilizers and improved seeds, to develop local manure, to provide credit and marketing facilities, to establish warehouses and storages, and to improve communications in the areas where irrigation projects are directly implemented.

However much irrigation and other facilities for cultivation may extend in India, there will be an enormous amount of land left that cannot be used for food production through any human means. In spite of the careful planning and the use of advanced scientific methods of agriculture in many parts of the country, the nation has not been able to meet the basic needs of the people for decades. Natural calamities, unforeseen floods and droughts, the wild attack of pests, and other disasters constantly retard advances in food production. There has never been a point in the history of independent India where enough food was produced in direct proportion to a population that keeps on increasing.

Population Explosion

The Indian sub-continent which covers about 2.4 per cent of the total area of the whole world has 15 per cent of the world's population in it. In this section of our study we will pay special attention to the percentage of increase in population since the year 1900 and the corresponding increase in the membership of different religions in India. In these cases special mention will be made of related incidents in Kerala state, because in the second half of the present chapter we will be discussing the growth of the Lutheran church particularly in that state.

Table 1 is a chart which shows the number of people in India according to the latest available census taken in 1971.⁸

TABLE 1
THE POPULATION OF INDIA (AND KERALA) 1971

	Total Population	Men	Women
India	547,949,809	283,936,614	264,013,195
- Villages	438,855,500	225,218,984	213,636,516
- Cities	109,094,309	50,717,630	50,376,679
Kerala	21,347,375	10,587,851	10,759,524
- Villages	17,880,926	8,852,350	9,028,576
- Cities	3,466,449	1,735,501	1,730,948

The percentage of population increase in the state of Kerala has always been more than that of the whole nation:

TABLE 2
POPULATION EXPLOSION (IN DECADES)

Decades	1901-11	1911-21	1921-31	1931-41	1941-51	1951-61	1961-71
India	5.73	6.30	11.00	14.23	13.31	21.69	24.66
Kerala	11.75	9.16	21.85	16.04	22.82	24.74	25.89

At the present rate the population of India increases by 13 million every year. A person who looks at the people of India in their

⁸
This, and the other charts that follow are taken from the Malayala Manorama Year Book (Kottayam: Manorema Printers, 1972).

quantity will indeed agree with what Jesus said: "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest."⁹

The good news of God's kingdom, at least according to tradition, was brought to India in the very first century of the Christian era. The Saint Thomas Christians of Kerala believe that one of the disciples of our Lord himself, Thomas, came and established churches in India. Today Christianity stands as the third major religion of India, next to Hinduism and Islam.

TABLE 3

THE RELIGIONS OF INDIA (AND KERALA)
SHOWN ON THE BASIS OF THEIR
INCREASE LAST DECADE
(In 1000's)

Year	Population	Hindus	Moslems	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Jains	Others
				India				
1961	439,073	366,393	46,439	10,724	7,845	3,200	2,027	1,497
1971	547,950	453,292	61,418	14,223	10,379	3,812	2,605	2,185
				Kerala				
1961	16,904	10,283	3,028	3,587	0.80	0.20	3.00	0.5
1971	21,347	12,683	4,163	4,494	1.00	0.60	3.00	0.6

In the last decade, the population of India increased by 25 per cent. At the same time, Christianity in India had a 33 per cent increase. In the case of the state of Kerala, the population

⁹ Luke 10:2 (TEV).

increase was 27 per cent. In this state Christianity also had a corresponding growth, namely 26 per cent. From a wider perspective, Christianity is found to be the fastest growing religion in India. We have noticed that not much progress was made in Kerala state in terms of the growth of the Christian faith during the last decade. This shows that the over-all growth of the Christian religion was due primarily to the fact that new areas had been explored where the gospel had not been brought before. Tables 4 and 5 will illustrate this point.

TABLE 4
ALL RELIGIONS IN INDIA IN PERCENTAGES (1971)

	Hindu	Moslem	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist	Jain	Other
India	82.72	11.21	2.60	1.89	0.70	0.47	0.40
Kerala	59.41	19.50	21.07	0.01	-	0.02	-

TABLE 5
THE PERCENTAGE-WISE INCREASE IN ALL THE
RELIGIONS IN INDIA (1961-71)

Population	Hindu	Moslem	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist	Jain	Other
24.80	23.69	30.85	32.60	32.28	17.20	28.48	26.10

The growth of the Christian faith is very promising in India. Christianity has grown by 8 per cent more than the total population of India has grown. Christianity has attained a margin of about

9 per cent over Hinduism in the last decade. In fact, many new persons were brought to Christ, definitely as the result of the missionary motif of the church in India. A Christian can rejoice on this occasion and thank God for keeping his church in India for a definite purpose.

Population explosion has been a specter to frighten the mind. Man has speculated that, if the human race kept on increasing at the present rate, there would not be enough room for all the people alive in the twenty-first century. With this view in mind, much attention has been given to the control of the birth rate in India. In the period between 1951 and 1971 approximately \$210 million was spent in India for this matter. As a result there was a 7.5 million decline in births in comparison to previous rates of growth. Of the \$210 million, \$50 million was spent during the fiscal year 1970-71 alone. The resultant birth decline that year was 2.2 million!

As we have seen earlier in this chapter the government has shown special interest in feeding the people as best as it can.¹⁰ As a particular case in point, when, in 1951, 55 million tons of food were produced, each individual was fed 12.8 ounces of food per day. Though food production was raised to 72 million tons in 1966, the individual's share was reduced to 12.4 ounces. This is because the population increased from 361 million to 500 million within a span of 15 years.¹¹

¹⁰ Supra, pp. 70-75.

¹¹ The statistical details in the preceding paragraphs are taken from a booklet published in Malayalam by Population Education Officer K. B. Bhaskavan Nair, Janam Janam (Bombay: Family Planning Association of India, 1974).

What is the significance of such details in our study of the parables of growth? These details will serve a purpose only if they can be of help in trying to understand the nature of the ground in which the seed of the gospel falls. Such details can help us also to look at the people of India in their own situation and explore new possibilities of communicating the gospel of life to them in a better way. Humble and insignificant as the beginnings may be, we have the comforting words from Scripture: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."¹²

A Brief History of the Missouri Evangelical
Lutheran India Mission

Our purpose in the following pages will be to place the LCMS in the context of the background that was the point of discussion in the preceding pages. Only a few minor references will be made to the interest shown by the mission to face the socio-economic problems of the country as our task here is specifically to look at the way in which God has provided opportunities for his Word to grow in this predominantly Hindu country, preoccupied as it is mostly with mythological ideals.

Presumptuous as it may sound, much of the interest of the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission (MELIM) right from the beginning lay in the establishment of educational institutions and health clinics wherever a gospel outreach station was initiated. Schools and hospitals became the best means through which doors were opened for MELIM to proclaim the "good news."

¹²
Rom. 8:28 (RSV).

In passing, it may also be remarked that the missionaries did not by any chance overlook the immediate needs of the people they came across, namely, food, clothing and shelter. The distribution of food grains, milk powder, clothes and so forth were reflections of the love of God which they were experiencing in Christ Jesus. In whatever way the missionaries were interested in the humanitarian concerns of their mission field, these were never allowed to subdue the primary function of their calling; namely, proclaiming the Word. In other words, the missionaries built their hope on Christ's promise to "seek first his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well."¹³

The first two missionaries to India, Karl Gustav Theodor Naether and T. F. Mohn were commissioned by the Mission Board of the Missouri Synod on October 4, 1894. In 1896 the Missouri Synod ratified the action of its mission board to establish a new mission in India. It took no less than one quarter of a century before Jesudasan, the first Indian pastor of MELIM, was ordained in 1921, after extensive private instruction.

The mission that was started in Ambur in 1895 took the form of a five-point star in the year 1963 spreading all over South India with a special branch in Bombay.¹⁴ In the half century that followed the ordination of the first Indian pastor, the Lord of the Church filled

¹³ Luke 12:31 (RSV).

¹⁴ The expression "five-point star" is used in the sense that mission stations were established in five different localities starting from Krishnagiri where missionary activities were centralized in the beginning. The idea is borrowed from the star of Christmas pointing to Jesus, a star of hope and victory.

the mission field with his richest blessings. In 1971 the Church had 785 national workers, 416 preaching stations, 41,000 souls, and 87 schools.¹⁵ The number of foreign missionaries kept on decreasing. In 1956 the mission field was named the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), and accepted as a sister church of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

God never fails to keep his promise. The membership of IELC has increased by 3,000 in the period between 1971 and 1973. In 1974, another 2,000 were added to the fold. Evidently, at this point, the parables of growth have a direct bearing on the IELC today.

A Humble Beginning

The way in which a new mission field gets started today is basically the same way as it was in Naether's time.¹⁶ As against Naether, today's preacher is in a more privileged position. He makes use of the newspaper, and all other modern equipment for the preparation of the ground. Christianity is no longer a strange religion to the average Indian citizen today. Necessary preparation is made by interested persons before a public proclamation of the "good news" is made in a village, or town, as the case may be. In most cases, especially in the surrounding areas of a local congregation, volunteers visit

¹⁵ The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Statistical Yearbook (St. Louis: LCMS Department of Research & Statistics, 210 North Broadway, 1971), p. 331.

¹⁶ In order to appreciate the single-minded efforts undertaken by the first missionaries, the reader's attention is called to a 75th anniversary publication of the MELIM, containing a report on 75 years of mission in India; Herbert M. Zorn, Much Cause for Joy--and Some for Learning (Malappuram: Concordia Press, Vaniyambadi, 1970).

families and introduce the gospel message to them through tracts and portions from the Bible.

The preliminary contacts are made by dedicated men, women and children through friendly visits. The hearers are encouraged to open their hearts to receive God's good news. After this stage is over, the whole community is confronted with the actual proclamation of the Word. The purpose of such public proclamation is not aimed at an immediate commitment which is often understood to be a spontaneous outburst from a certain kind of ecstasy of mind. Instead, such proclamation provides the hearer an opportunity to hear the Word, digest it in his own mind and then engage in fruitful conversation with a believer, which through the work of the Holy Spirit, will lead the individual to total repentance and finally to faith in his Savior.

The days of mass-conversion are gone. The generation of "rice-Christians" and "milk-powder Christians" has ended.¹⁷ The over-all improvement that has been brought into an individual's life, through educational and hygienic measures, has given him the kind of self-awareness that propels his mind to believe that man is the measure of all things. Primarily a country of high philosophical speculators, India was helped to propagate her ancient ideals through the introduction of the printing press and the consequent increase in the percentage of literacy. Hinduism, the religion of eighty-three per cent of the

17

The terms, "rice-Christians" and "milk-powder Christians" were used for those converts in the beginning of the modern missionary movement. Thousands of people joined the Church at that time, and were even baptised just because they were fed and clothed. Mass movements were easy at this time. Once the tribal chieftan was converted, the whole tribe followed him.

total population, has gone through a reformation in the modern era, equipping itself to be able to include in its own strategy the high ideals from any other religion. Hinduism became a teaching religion only after the advent of Christianity in India.

The universality and comprehensiveness of the Hindu religion is the weapon that is used against the basic tenet of the Christian religion; namely, justification by faith through grace. At this point, the teaching aspect of the Christian faith deserves special attention. Such instruction is intended to shift the emphasis from man-centeredness to God-centeredness. Christianity has only a child-like faith to offer. This idea is substantiated by Jesus himself as he says, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."¹⁸ Such a humbling experience is a necessary pre-requisite for every individual who becomes the good soil from which the seed will yield thirty, sixty or even an hundred fold.

The most effective way of communicating the gospel to an average Indian today is to confront him with the Word of God on an individual basis. Because of the already established personal relationship both parties learn to respect each other better and to appreciate what has been shared between them. It is wrong to conclude that only the tragic moments in life will help a person to think about his need for a savior. At the same time, life situations bear witness to the fact that a mere verbal witnessing relationship that develops between a Christian and a non-Christian, in the course of time, leads the latter to a fuller understanding of what Christ has done for him as an individual. This

¹⁸
Matt. 18:3 (RSV).

is made more possible through the former leading a life with Jesus moment by moment.

The need for a personal faith and the effectiveness of a person to person evangelism have a definite relationship to the parables of growth. Here we have a specific example of the mystery of growth. The conversion of one individual is often left unnoticed. Such individual members who are brought to faith through the preaching of the Word in one year will become a considerable number. Such individual conversions are decisive in the growth of God's kingdom though they seem to be negligible.

Individual conversions point to humble beginnings as we have seen in the parable of the Mustard Seed. This is more true in the case of villages and towns where a few persons or a few families alone are brought to faith. The establishment of local congregations in such places, and the related interest shown by the few people to share the gospel have been in the background of many a local church in the IELC. As a case in point the growth of a new town called "Luthergiri," which means "Lutheran mountain," with a predominantly Lutheran population today, is the result of the work done by one missionary family forty years ago.

Sunday School for Hindus

Growing in faith must start right at home. By the same token, evangelism begins at home. The IELC has become an effective instrument in this area of witnessing. When man begins to think that certain things are impossible, God provides him with wisdom from above to overcome such situations.

The concept of Sunday School for Hindus is of very recent origin in South India. This is the most informal, and unofficial school for which a set curriculum has never been established. Not many Bible scholars are involved in this adventure. Such schools come into being only on the basis of the interest shown by a group of Christians in fervent prayer and successful sharing.

Sunday School for Hindus are meant for children below junior-high school age. As the name implies, such schools are established to provide opportunities for children from high class Hindu families to hear God's Word. In most cases such schools are held on Sundays. A school building or an administrative staff is not necessary for this establishment because it follows the pattern of the early church by meeting in a Christian home, at a riverside or even under a tree shade.

The setting of a Sunday School for Hindus pretty well corresponds to that of the parable of the Sower and the Seed in its fullest detail. Children from all kinds of religious backgrounds are accepted in this school. Opportunities are provided for the children to put the Word of God in perspective. All of them are taught what Christian life is all about. Object lessons, visual aids, literature and art are used to explain what the words of Jesus mean to them at that time.

A decade of experimentation in this area of witnessing has brought tremendous results. It may be said that 10 per cent of the children who were attending such Hindu Sunday Schools in the last decade have come to a certain point in their lives where they accept Jesus as their personal Savior. The work of the Holy Spirit has to be thankfully acknowledged in this respect. Another 40 per cent of the children have become inquirers of the Christian faith, more often

uncertain about what to do and what not to do. Evidently their case is that of the seed that had to grow among the thorns. They are the people who have not been able to decide which path to tread. The conflict arises between the traditions in which a person is brought up as a child and the entirely new concept of life which is presented through the gospel. Such persons, as they grow up, may enroll in a Bible correspondence course, followed by continuing visitations by Christian friends allowing opportunities for discussion. In most cases they end up with the tragic instance of not being able to decide for the right one.

The rest of the people withdraw from such schools in the course of time. For them, the Word of the cross is a stumbling block and "sheer folly."¹⁹ An openness to change their own frame of reference is far from reality to them. No fruit can be expected from such persons.

We have enough reason to rejoice in the Lord for the few people who continue to grow in God's grace and give themselves up for him. In point of fact, let it not be forgotten that Concordia Seminary, Nagercoil, is enjoying the very unusual privilege of training one young man for full time ministry in the Church, who was brought to faith through Sunday School for Hindus. The 10 per cent conversion from such Sunday Schools is five times higher than the percentage in the growth of the Christian Church in India.

The kingdom of God continues to grow following the orderly development set by God. This seed of the divine Word always grows in a mysterious manner in India even in our lifetime.

¹⁹
1 Cor. 1:18 (NEB).

Work Among the Moslems

A parallel to our study of "Hope in the Parables of Growth"²⁰ is the growth of work among Moslems in India, started in 1924. The preachers of God's Word had to wait for not less than a quarter of a century to see the first convert from Islam in the state of Kerala.

Small wonder that delegates who attending synod conventions have repeatedly questioned the purpose of continuing missionary efforts in the Moslem dominated areas. The few who retained the patience to work among the Moslems kept on sailing their ship as if undisturbed by the whirlwind. The commitment that they have shown to their calling has substantiated the promise of God that his Word never returns void.

The Moslem mission of IELC has grown up to three congregations and nine preaching stations today. They are located in Malappuram, the most thickly populated Moslem area in the whole of India. An impossible dream to many, not only individuals, but also Moslem families are open to hear what Christ has to say to them. The promises of God in the Old Testament, most of which are familiar to an average Moslem, help him to find their fulfilment in the unique person and work of Jesus Christ.

In an experience similar to the conversion experience of St. Paul of the New Testament, K. K. Alavi, a staunch Moslem, was confronted with the gospel as he was trying by all means subdue all missionary efforts in his homeland. But God chastised him and made him his instrument to spread his kingdom. Today Alavi has grown in faith. Before he joined Concordia Seminary, Nagercoil, to be trained as a full-time missionary to work among the Moslems, he was instrumental in bringing two more

²⁰Supra, pp. 61-65.

Moslem families to Christ. Pioneering efforts like these, which were possible only through foreign missionaries once, have become feasible to anyone who has the zeal to share the good news. God acts in mysterious ways. Man has to wait and see what God has in his treasure for him.

The Jewish expectation of the kingdom of God was a full grown tree to begin with. Contrary to their ideas, the coming of Jesus gave the Gentiles access to the kingdom. The mustard seed that was planted in India has grown up and brought forth branches. The Church that had most of its members from a few traditional classes of people is spreading out its branches to new fields. Today the Church is open to the "birds of the air" to come and rest on its branches.

A Call for the Future

The proclamation of the glad tidings is a time consuming task. It has to be earned out in all humility and thankfulness. Those who dedicate themselves to participate in this tremendous task are thereby hastening the coming of God's kingdom because this is a necessary prerequisite for the Paraousia. In a private talk with the disciples on the Mount of Olives, Jesus told them that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."²¹ Those who have become partakers of God's blessings are equipped to abide by this prophetic message.

In the total scheme of sowing the seeds of the kingdom all over India through various means, much attention needs to be given to the fields of art and literature. The Christian Arts and Communication

²¹ Matt. 24:14 (RSV).

Service (CACS), a branch organization of "Bringing Christ to the Nations," has been the first fruits of this attempt. The only one of its kind in India, CACS has been able to establish the highest number of radio clubs of all the private broadcasting companies in the nation.

Literacy combined with the consequent increase in the means of communication through the press has been one of the greatest achievements of modern times to contribute to the unity of the Indian nation. The credit for installing the first printing press, the establishment of the first academic institution and the editing of the first encyclopaedia dictionary of the Malayalan language goes back to those who came to India for the purpose of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Any historian who looks at the history of modern India with an objective point of view has to take account of this fact.

More than ever before, printing is one of the best ways of sowing the seed in India. The IELC has made remarkable contributions to meet this need. Christiani, the official publication of the Church, and the Youth Digest, the most widely read magazine among young people, are some humble attempts that contribute to the big cause. Youth Digest, which came into being through the interest of three individuals in 1970 has been blessed with more than seventy-five writers today. As far as preparation of the ground and sowing are concerned, such instruments are a great asset to the Church.

Youth rallies, organized on a zonal level, are basically mission motivated. The over-all purpose of youth rallies is to provide opportunities for growth. Interested individuals who show up on invitation are exposed to God's Word in a series of meetings; and attempts are made to answer burning questions of concerned individuals. Such rallies

give birth to local congregations, subject to the gracious will of God.

The concept of Ashrams is found to be one of the most effective means by which the Word of God can be brought to millions in India. This has been proved since the sixteenth century when Robert De Nobili started to lead the life of a monk, denouncing all his German background. In the present context, the same concept has to be used with considerable variations, by giving an entirely new connotation to it. The Ashram is an indigenous effort to sow the seed and nurture it to produce a multitude of results. The Ashram method builds up a community of believers who live with one another participating in the visible means of God's invisible grace.

The Christian community in India needs the continued blessing of the guidance of the Holy Spirit to live a life of witness to the people around. At a time when all kinds of philosophies and empty deceits are eagerly waiting to brain-wash people, the Church needs to stand steadfast in the Word which is folly to those who perish but the power of God to those who are being saved.²² The reconciliation of the world unto himself accomplished by God through the Word-become-flesh is good news to the whole world. In each and every witnessing situation, the marvelous calling of a Christian to proclaim this Word is accomplished. Each believer becomes a witness by his own life to the spoken Word given by the Holy Spirit for every situation.

To watch for the tares is one of the greatest challenges that the Church has to face every day. The authority of the Church to take

²²

1 Cor. 1:18 (RSV).

disciplinary actions on its members does have a direct bearing of the parable of the Tares among the Wheat. Such authority is exercised on the basis of Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that, when the Holy Spirit comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.²³ The Church can engage in these activities because the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church. The Church must exercise its power to judge people only after careful searching through the Scriptures, meditation and constant prayer. Such action is taken by the Church in behalf of Christ upon whose Word the tares will be separated from the wheat and burnt.

God's ways are different from man's ways. Contrary to human understanding,

God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to put wise men to shame, and what the world considers weak in order to put man's might to shame. He chose what the world looks down on, and despises, and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important.²⁴

Even though the Church in India is willing to give herself up for the cause of Christ, accepting all kinds of hardships and shame, she can only say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty."²⁵

Summary

India is a fascinating country for scholars in any area of research. Research done in the area of population explosion has led people to

²³John 16:8-9 (RSV).

²⁴1 Cor. 1:27-28 (TEV).

²⁵Luke 17:10 (RSV).

believe that India is the first nation to suffer from the consequences of over-population. The uneven distribution of wealth, the failure of the nation in supplying its people with the basic necessities of life and the unforeseen natural calamities that negate human planning have only helped politicians and scientists to stand in awe and misery.

From a very practical point of view, India has many problems which do not have an easy solution. The religious heritage of India which promotes the idea of reincarnation is good to the point of reminding people of values that are transcendental. Communism with the promise of even distribution of wealth, structured in the form of a classless society, is being proved to be a failure in India mainly because of the "religious" attitude of the people based on caste and communal feelings.

Amid these competing systems of thought the Word of the Lord grows in India. This is simply because Christian faith has something to offer for this life and for the life to come. When compared to the total number of non-Christians the Church in India is negligibly small and insignificant. But the growth of the Christian Church is very promising in India when compared to that of other religions.

A church that is founded of God's Word is able to face any challenge posed by any adversary. The road to responsible churchmanship is often uneven and rocky. Still, the Church in India is equipped through Word and Sacrament to subdue the enemy and run the race that is set before her. God has blessed this Church as an effective tool to explore new possibilities for reaching caste Hindus and Moslems against all kinds of presuppositions. The Church continues to rejoice in the way in which the Lord of the Church has blessed her ministry in India.

CONCLUSION

The parables are the most effective tool Jesus used for teaching. Jesus chose this method mainly because of the heuristic value in it. Jesus always had his hearers involved in his teaching as he talked to them within their own frame of reference. The parables of Jesus were meant to help the people to be on guard against tribulations and anxieties of the world in which they lived, at the same time motivating them in the important concepts of forgiveness, patience, prayer, and so on. The parables, as Jesus used them, were the most straight forward way of communicating by way of a method still unmatched by the most modern methods of education formulated on the basis of developmental psychology. In most cases the parables of Jesus were short. He did not have to repeat them because they had direct relationship to the lives of the hearers. In a few cases such, as the parable of the Sower and of the Weeds among the Wheat further explanation was furnished by Jesus upon asking.

In the parables of growth Jesus gave his disciples the indication that the whole mystery of the kingdom of God will be revealed on completion of the growth of the kingdom that is in process, when the veil will be lifted forever. The parables do have some secret concealed in them. That secret is the fundamental secret which is common to all of them, since it concerns the person of him who composed the parables.¹ In a very real sense the incarnate Jesus was and is "the

¹ T. A. Burkill, "The Cryptology of Parables in St. Mark's Gospel," Novum Testamentum 1 (Summer 1956):250.

mystery of the kingdom." An understanding of the secret of God's kingdom is possible in this world, if only through faith; for faith is the acceptance of Jesus on his own terms.

The parables of growth have a direct relationship to the concept of Jesus as the Messiah. Citizenship in the new kingdom is based on the relationship that is established between the individual and the Messiah. On this basis it is proper to say that the kingdom is already established among the community of believers gathered around Word and Sacrament. The Messiah reigns over this kingdom, himself being seated at the right hand of God.

The extension of the kingdom continues all over the world through the continuous sowing of the seed which is the Word of God. This is accomplished in continuation with what Jesus initiated during his active ministry on earth. The preaching of God's Word is effective today in just the same way as it was effective at the time of the early Christian Church because the same Jesus commissioned his first disciples and today's Christian Church for this purpose.

Thus, there appears to be no cogent reason for modifying the mission of the Church even in the twentieth century, since in Jesus' conception the kingdom of God is primarily and essentially religious. It is learning to appreciate the gracious rule of God, to recognize and honor the Lordship of Jesus who came to this world not only to announce but also to establish the kingdom through his cross and resurrection. Man can participate in the building up of this kingdom only by announcing to other people what God has accomplished for the world in his Son.

The essential content of the parables of growth has a direct application to the work of the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission.

The Indian nation is consciously involved in finding means to effect rapid growth in all areas of human life. Since the time of independence, considerable amount of progress has been achieved along those lines. But that is all the story of the kingdom on God's left hand (power). At the same time the growth of the kingdom on God's right hand (grace) is remarkably great considering the challenges this kingdom has to face in a country where anything is considered to be a god.

The growth of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church itself is a parable for us today. Eighty-five years of God's grace has brought forth fruit in South India thirty-fold and sixty-fold, if not hundred-fold. In almost every place where a preaching station was established it was at first an object of mockery. Despite this fact, God's promise strengthened this Church and it continues to grow today. The increased number of proselyte baptisms every year and the varied new approaches adopted to present the Word substantiate this fact.

In all these activities the supernatural power of God is found to be at work. The church in India together with all of Christendom faces the tension between history and eschatology. She looks forward to the future with hope as the husbandman patiently waits for the harvest. The day in which she participates in the blessed kingdom in its full splendor is nearer than when she first came to faith in the gospel.

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