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THE SEED PARABLES OF JESUS

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THERE are four pericopes which can be grouped as seed parables: (1) the sower in Mark 4:3-8; Matt 13:3-8; Luke 8:5-8a; Gos Thom 82:3-13 (= logion 9); (2) the seed growing secretly in Mark 4:26-29; Gos Thom 85:15-18 (= logion 21c); (3) the mustard seed in Mark 4:30-32; Matt 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19; Gos Thom 84:26-33 (= logion 20); and (4) the tares among the wheat in Matt 13:24-30; Gos Thom 90:33-91:7 (= logion 57).[1] This article will seek to study each of these parables separately, investigate the sequential steps of its tradition, and establish the earliest form of the story; then to ask whether this earliest version stems from the historical Jesus and, if so, what was its situational function in his ministry, and to see whether the basic theme of seed and sowing casts any common light on the four parables.

I. The History of the Tradition

The first step is to take each of the parables and attempt to write a history of its tradition so as to isolate the earliest version of the story.

(1) *The Sower.* The parable and its interpretation (Mark 4:14-20; Matt 13:19-23; Luke 8:11-15) appear in all three synoptics and also, but without the interpretation, in the Gospel of Thomas. What is the most plausible content of the earliest version?

(a) The Synoptic Tradition. It will be necessary to study the parable and its interpretation separately in order to get a fresh look at the parable itself.

(i) The Parable (Mark 4:3-8; Matt 13:3-8; Luke 8:5-8a). Mark is accepted here as the only source for this parable in the other synoptics.[2] The question to

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[1] A. Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel according to Thomas* (Leiden: Brill; New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1959). The more detailed enumeration of pages and lines in the photographic edition will be followed rather than the logia references. No general solution to the problem of the relationship between the synoptic tradition and the Gospel of Thomas is presumed in this article. Each parable is discussed on its own merits. On the problem of dependence on or independence from the synoptics and the major positions adopted by scholars, see J. D. Crossan, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," *JBL* 90 (1971) 451-65, esp. n. 12-15.

[2] Two important recent works on Mark 4 should be noted. For a source-critical discussion, see H. Koester, "*A Test Case of Synoptic Source Theory (Mk 4:1-34 and parallels),*"

be discussed is whether Mark's version shows any development either in its previous transmission or in its final redaction.

There are five elements in the parable in Mark 4:3-8: the opening (vs. 3), the path (vs. 4),[3] the rocks (vss. 5-6), the thorns (vs. 7), the good ground (vs. 8). Attention is immediately drawn to the rocky ground because it is much longer than the other elements and significantly longer than even the final and climactic unit.[4] There is also a triple repetition of the lack of the ground theme: οὐκ εἶχεν γῆν πολλήν ... διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν βάθος γῆς ... διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ῥίζαν. Again there is a discrepancy in the image of the unit and this is emphasized by the verbs used: ἐξανέτειλεν for the seed and ἀνέτειλεν for the sun. Two conflicting images are presented here. In 4:5b, 6b the picture is of seed that grows for a while, but in 4:5a, 6a it is of seed that does not survive the first morning's hot sun. No doubt the latter feature could be explained as terse narration,[5] but when it is seen in conjunction with the other anomalies in 4:5-6 the possibility of expansion must also be considered. The different reactions of Matt 13:5-6 and Luke 8:6 are rather significant. Matthew has no problem with Mark's text, but Luke drastically revises it. He changes the triple redundancy concerning lack of soil to a

Gospels Seminar, SBL Convention, Atlanta, 31 October 1971. His general conclusion is presumed throughout this study: "Mk 4:1-34 was one of the sources which Mt used in 13:1-54, and the only source which Lk used in 8:4-18" (p. 85). For a form-critical investigation, see H.-W. Kuhn, *Ältere Sammlungen im Markusevangelium* (Studien zum Umwelt des NT, 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971) 99-146.

[3] J. Jeremias (*The Parables of Jesus* [rev. ed.; New York: Scribner, 1963] 11-12) argues that the image is of seed falling *on* the path which is later to be ploughed under; that is, sowing precedes ploughing, and the birds steal the seed before it can be ploughed under. But in such an interpretation the mention of the path is unnecessary: the birds can steal seed from anywhere between sowing and ploughing. As Luke 8:5 was acute enough to notice, the real danger for seed which had fallen *on* the path was that it κατεπατήθη. It seems much better to accept the παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν of Mark 4:4 to mean seed which fell at or near the path and was never ploughed under since the plougher intended to leave the path untouched and was being careful close to it. This would apply even if ploughing preceded sowing, as K. D. White ("The Parable of the Sower," *JTS* 15 [1964] 300-7) has argued against J. Jeremias' position ("Palästinakundliches zum Gleichnis vom Säemann [Mark. IV 3-8 Par.]," *NTS* 13 [1966-67] 48-53). It has been stated that the ambiguous Aramaic ʿal ʾurḥāʾ is more accurately translated by "on the road" in Gos Thom 82:5 than by the παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν of Mark 4:4. But E. Haenchen (*Die Botschaft des Thomas-Evangeliums* [Berlin: Töpelmann, 1961] 45) argues that παρά can mean "on" in hellenistic Greek and that Mark uses it here in that sense. Moreover, even if this phrase is more original in the Gospel of Thomas than in Mark, it should not be concluded that the entire parable is in the same position, as was argued by G. Quispel ("The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament," *VC* 11 [1957] 189-207; "Some Remarks on the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 5 [1958-59] 276-90).

[4] As indicated, even in a word-count of the Greek text where the elements contain 6, 18, 33, 17, and 24 words respectively.

[5] E. Linnemann (*Jesus of the Parables* [New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1966] 116) says: "The story seems to suggest that even the sun of the first morning after the sowing scorches it, so that it withers away. But this can hardly be true. It is a sign of graphic narrative style, which is not concerned with the passing of time."

single διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ἰκμάδα. He solves the conflict of imagery by having the seed fall ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν, καὶ φυὲν ἐξηράνθη, thereby removing the sun from the picture. By these changes he reduces this unit to a length proportionate to the other four elements of the story. The hypothesis is that Luke's literary instinct has pruned the story back to a more original length even if not the more original content.[6] Its earlier content was καὶ ἄλλο ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸ πετρῶδες καὶ ὅτε ἀνέτειλεν ὁ ἥλιος ἐκαυματίσθη (4:5a, 6a)[7] and this was expanded by the addition of the sections in vss. 5b, 6b which thereby created the problems of length, redundancy, and divergent images. The reason for this expansion will be seen later, and this discussion will serve to confirm the choice of vss. 5a, 6a rather than vss. 5b, 6b as the more original image.

There is a second possible expansion in 4:8: ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ αὐξανόμενα. This is a strange and somewhat belated way of specifying the already noted ἐδίδου καρπόν.[8] Both Matt 13:8 and Luke 8:8 omit this phrase. As an addition its ἀναβαίνοντα is probably under the influence of the preceding ἀνέβησαν of 4:7.[9] Once again the reason for this addition will be discussed later.

Apart from these expansions in 4:5b, 6b, 8b there is one other feature of the Marcan text which must be noted. The distinction between the wasted seed in 4:3-7 and the fruitful seed in 4:8 is stressed in two formal features. The seed is described as ὁ μέν . . . καὶ ἄλλο . . . καὶ ἄλλο (4:4, 5, 7) and καὶ ἄλλα (4:8). Matt 13:4, 5, 7, 8 pluralizes this consistently as ἃ μέν . . . ἄλλα δέ . . . ἄλλα δέ . . . ἄλλα δέ; and Luke 8:5, 6, 7, 8 singularizes it consistently as ὁ μέν . . . καὶ ἕτερον . . . καὶ ἕτερον . . . καὶ ἕτερον. But the Marcan distinction of singular and plural might best be translated as "some . . . other . . . other . . . the others (= the rest)," and this seems a very deliberate distinction. Moreover, this distinction is underlined by the phrase καὶ καρπὸν οὐκ ἔδωκεν in Mark 4:7, which not only refers to the seed among thorns but serves as a negative refrain on all the preceding wasted seed. As such, it is in sharp contrast to the fate of the fruitful seed which follows with καὶ ἐδίδου καρπόν in 4:8.[10] This means that there is no even emphasis on the four situations (path, rocks, thorns, good ground) but rather a balance of wasted seed and fruitful seed which is strongly contrasted.[11]

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[6] On Luke's use of Mark, see I. H. Marshall, "Tradition and Theology in Luke (Luke 8:5-15)," *Tyndale Bulletin* 20 (1969) 56-75.

[7] M. Black (*An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* [3rd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1967] 63) notes: "in Matthew (verse 6) is a genitive absolute which replaces a 'when' clause, so characteristic of Aramaic subordination."

[8] For example, in the later seed parable of Mark 4:26-29 the growth process in 4:28 precedes the moment in 4:29 when the phrase παραδοῖ ὁ καρπός occurs.

[9] The combination of ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ αὐξανόμενα is appropriate as can be seen in the mustard seed parable where the Q text has αὐξάνω (Matt 13:32 = Luke 13:19) and Mark 4:32 has ἀναβαίνει.

[10] On this phrase as a "Semitism . . . familiar in Aramaic," see M. Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 138-39, 164; cf. Mark 4:29.

[11] The phrase "viererlei Acker" (with Dalman still haunting Aland) might be justified in Matt 13:3-8 or Luke 8:5-8 where both of these formal characteristics of Mark's text are

(ii) The Interpretation (Mark 4:14-20; Matt 13:19-23; Luke 8:11-15). This analysis presumes the correctness of the claim that the interpretation is from a later strand of tradition than the parable itself. The arguments are well known and need only be summarized here. The parable exhibits rather heavily the characteristics of translation Greek from an Aramaic original.[12] The interpretation is in ordinary Greek and replete with the language and concepts of the primitive church.[13] For the present purpose of tracing the history of the tradition back to(wards) Jesus the interpretation is accepted as unoriginal, but it must be studied to see if its presence has created changes in the parable itself.

It has often been noted that there is a pre-Marcan source in Mark 4 which consisted of three parables with the same general subject of seed and sowing; they are linked together by καὶ ἔλεγεν in 4:9, 26, 30.[14] It is much more difficult to decide whether (at least) the interpretation of the sower in 4:14-20 was added to the three parables simultaneously with their first unification[15] or at some time subsequent to this process.[16] For our present purpose this question will be left open, but with some prejudice towards the second alternative.

We now return to the parable of the sower and the suggested additions in 4:5b, 6b, 8b and pose the question more precisely: is it the presence (but not necessarily the first addition) of the interpretation which necessitated the changes in the original parable? The first section to be considered is 4:5-6. The picture of seed which falls on rocky ground, never takes root at all, and is burned by the next day's sun is not the best image for believers who are fruitful *until* the advent of persecution. The changes in 4:5-6 render more easily applicable the interpretation of 4:16-17: the phrase εὐθὺς ἐξανέτειλεν (4:5b) corresponds to the later εὐθὺς μετὰ χαρᾶς λαμβάνουσιν αὐτόν (4:16); and διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ῥίζαν (4:6b) prepares better for οὐκ ἔχουσιν ῥίζαν (4:17). In other words the changes in 4:5-6 were effected to bring the parable into closer alignment with the interpretation in 4:16-17. The older image of seed which immediately withered on rocky

omitted. In the interpretation in Mark 4:14-20 this twofold distinction has also given way to a fourfold division with the seed consistently plural.

[12] M. Black (*Aramaic Approach*, 63) says: "Here in Mark we may speak with confidence of a literal translation Greek version of a parable of Jesus." See also H. Koester, *Test Case*, 50-51.

[13] J. Jeremias, *Parables*, 77-79; E. Linnemann, *Parables*, 117-19. There is no presumption that such re-interpretation is in any way invalid. Indeed, modern attempts to preach the parable seldom reach the brilliance of this inaugural restatement: see W. Neil, "Expounding the Parables: II. The Sower (Mk 4:3-8)," *ExpT* 77 (1965) 74-77; E. Schweizer, "Du texte à la prédication, 2: Marc 4, 1-20," *Études théologiques et religieuses* 43 (1968) 256-64.

[14] J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 14) notes: "The Markan link-phrase καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς must be distinguished from the simple καὶ ἔλεγεν which occurs in the Gospel of Mark only in 4:9, 26, 30 and may be pre-Markan." See also W. G. Essame, "καὶ ἔλεγεν in Mk 4:21.24. 26.30," *ExpT* 77 (1965) 121.

[15] H.-W. Kuhn, *Sammlungen*, 136.

[16] H. Koester, *Test Case*, 53. Cf. J. Dupont, "Le chapitre des paraboles," *NRT* 89 (1967) 800-20.

ground (4:5a, 6a) is replaced by being swallowed up in the image of seed that eventually withered in insufficient soil (4:5b, 6b). This is worth special notice since, apart from this change in 4:5-6, the parable and its interpretation fit together quite brilliantly.[17] But the change stresses also the factors of time and growth even for seed doomed to eventual loss.

The second addition is the ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ αὐξανόμενα in 4:8. This is not so clearly under the influence of the interpretation in 4:20; it seems rather to introduce a new note to both 4:8 and 4:20. Its presence, awkwardly located *after* the ἐδίδου καρπόν, serves to introduce a warning note in 4:8 (and 4:20) concerning the process of growth and the necessity of perseverance. Indeed, the changes in 4:5-6 and 4:8 both effect the same type of emphasis: it is one of time and of growth, negative in 4:5-6 and positive in 4:8.

(b) The Gospel of Thomas. The narrative in Gos Thom 82:3-13 does not exhibit the anomalies noted above in Mark 4:5-6. In Gos Thom 82:6-8 the text is: "Others fell on the rock (πέτρα) and did not strike root in the earth and did not produce ears."[18] This is the earlier image of seed immediately withering: it does not even get started in growth. So also in Gos Thom 82:11-12 the text has no equivalent to the mention of growth and increase in Mark 4:8b. It states simply: "And others fell on the good earth and it brought forth good fruit (καρπός)."

Nor does Gos Thom 82:3-13 have the clear twofold division of lost seed and fruitful seed seen earlier in Mark 4:3-7 and 4:8. It has a fourfold division ("some . . . others . . . others . . . others") similar to that in the other synoptics and in the interpretation itself.

The most striking difference is between Gos Thom 82:11-13 and Mark 4:8 concerning the yield of the harvest. There are two main points. In the preceding elements in Gos Thom 83:3-10 the fate of the various seeds is under discussion but now the focus changes from the seeds to the entire field.[19] In Mark

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[17] B. Gerhardsson ("The Parable of the Sower and Its Interpretation," *NTS* 14 [1967-68] 165-93) argues from the congruity of parable and explanation (p. 187: "fit each other as hand and glove") that both may have come from Jesus himself. So also C. F. D. Moule ("Mk 4:1-20 Yet Once More," *Neotestamentica et semitica: Studies in Honor of Matthew Black* [eds. E. E. Ellis & M. Wilcox; Edinburgh: Clark, 1969] 95-113) claims that "the interpretation and the parable originally belonged together" (p. 111) and can be "at least plausibly attributed to Jesus himself, as far as the substance goes" (p. 113).

[18] H. E. W. Turner & H. Montefiore (*Thomas and the Evangelists* [SBT 35; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1962] 53) comment: "Thus the Parable of the Sower is intended by Thomas to represent the growth of true gnosis . . . the seed which fell on the rock and did not strike root 'sent no ear up to heaven' (82.8) . . . seems to be a reference to the heavenward ascent of the soul of the true gnostic." It is not correct to adduce 1 Clem 24:5 as evidence that Clement knew this reading. The statement of W. H. C. Frend ("The Gospel of Thomas: Is Rehabilitation Possible?" *JTS* [1967] 13-26) that this text has "seeds falling . . . on 'bare hard ground'" (p. 22, n. 4) is a misunderstanding of the quotation which reads: ἔβαλεν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἕκαστον τῶν σπερμάτων, ἅτινα πεσόντα εἰς τὴν γῆν ξηρὰ καὶ γυμνὰ διαλύεται.

[19] E. Linnemann (*Parables*, 117) states on Mark 4:8: "It is not the yield of the whole

4:8 the focus remains consistently on the seeds— on those which produce thirty or sixty or even one hundred seeds per ear on the stalk. Secondly, one notices the threefold yield in Mark 4:8 and the twofold measure in Gos Thom 82:13: 30, 60, 100 as against 60, 120.

(c) The Earliest Version. There are two versions to be compared: One in Mark 4:3-8 (but without the additions in vss. 5b, 6b, 8b), and the other in Gos Thom 82:3-13 (but with some doubts concerning 82:13 and especially concerning the fourfold division).

The most striking similarity is in the consistent presence of a threefold construction in both versions. This shows up even in translation and can be indicated rather easily by noting the verbs. Admittedly, this triple-strophic construction may no longer be discerned in perfect detail but the coincidence in form is striking. Five elements can be compared as follows:

σπείρων / σπεῖραι / σπείρειν	went out / filled / threw[20]
ἔπεσεν / ἦλθεν / κατέφαγεν	fell / came / gathered
ἔπεσεν / ἀνέτειλεν / ἐκαυματίσθη	fell / strike root / produce
ἔπεσεν / ἀνέβησαν / συνέπνιξαν	fell / choked / ate
καὶ καρπὸν οὐκ ἔδωκεν	
ἔπεσεν / ἐδίδου / ἔφερεν	fell / brought forth / bore
τριάκοντα	sixty
ἑξήκοντα	one hundred and twenty
ἑκατόν	

One notes in passing that this structural feature tends to confirm that vss. 4, 5b, 6b, 8b are not original since they would break the threefold structure; and that the phrase καὶ καρπὸν οὐκ ἔδωκεν does not just refer to 4:7 but to all the lost seed of 4:3-7.

The first conclusion is that the earliest version was strikingly paratactic[21] and worked with a threefold construction.[22] The second conclusion derives immediately from this characteristic threefold structure: The triple ending of Mark

field that is meant here — this is calculated after the threshing from the proportion of seed to harvest — but the fruit produced by the individual grain. In that country each ear bears thirty-five seeds on the average, but up to sixty are often counted and occasionally even a hundred on one ear." On the normalcy of this yield, see p. 181, n. 13; also K. D. White, "The Parable of the Sower," *JTS* 15 (1964) 300-7; against J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 150), who holds that the "abnormal" yield "symbolizes the eschatological overflowing of the divine fulness, surpassing all human measure." It is presumed that Mark 4:8 should read εἰς or ἓν rather than εἰς or ἐν. It represents a very strange translation of a Semitism: see M. Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 124; H. Koester, *Test Case*, 62.

[20] H. E. W. Turner & H. Montefiore (*Thomas*, 48) say that "there may be a Semitizing asyndeton" in this phrase. Note also 1 Clem 24:5 which reads ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων καὶ ἔβαλεν.

[21] H. Koester (*Test Case*, 59) notes this: "The paratactic construction is . . . in close proximity to an Aramaic speaking environment and background."

[22] See C. L. Mitton, "Threefoldness in the Teaching of Jesus," *ExpT* 75 (1964) 228-30.

4:8c is more original than the double ending of Gos Thom 82:13. Three arguments establish this point. (i) The triple format of the preceding elements is maintained in Mark 4:8c but is lost in Gos Thom 82:13. (ii) The focus on seed is carried over consistently into Mark 4:8c but shifts to the field in Gos Thom 82:13. (iii) The triple format of the conclusion rounds off the parable with excellent literary style so that its total structure has now six elements. The yield (30, 60, 100) forms the sixth set of three and is climactic both formally and materially.[23]

The third conclusion concerns the twofold distinction established formally between the losses of Mark 4:3-7 and the gains of 4:8 as compared with the fourfold distinction in the other synoptics and in the interpretation and in the Gospel of Thomas. Which is more original? The version in Mark seems more authentic not only because of the repeated Semitism in 4:7, 8 but because the fourfold division appears under the influence of allegorical interpretation, implicit and unspecified in Gos Thom 82:3-13 and explicit and specified in detail in Mark 4:14-20. There is of course no explicit allegorical interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas, but one can presume that the story was read as reflective of the failures and successes of true gnosis.[24] In the synoptic tradition this was explicitly present in the Marcan source they were using. Once such an allegorical interpretation entered in, the three losses, which were originally only a literary stylization of loss in general, became individually significant and tended to be stressed for their own sake. Hence the twofold division became a fourfold distinction. This has not yet happened in Mark 4:3-8 despite the presence of the interpretation but it has happened in the Gospel of Thomas even without the explicit interpretation.

The final conclusion concerns the interpretation. This was already accepted as not being authentically original on linguistic grounds. It is confirmed by the absence of any explicit allegorization in Gos Thom 82:3-13. One could argue that the interpretation had been present here but was removed in order to show the secret nature of gnostic theology.[25] However, it is not clear that this work set out consistently to remove allegorization. For example, the parable of the thief in Gos Thom 85:7-10 has a quite clear and explicit application to the gnostic readers in 85:11-15. In general, then, the absence of the interpretation

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[23] B. H. Smith (*Poetic Closure* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968] 92) says that "one of the most common and substantial sources of closural effects in poetry is the terminal modification of a formal principle." Later she discusses "the terminal modification of a systematic repetition" (p. 107). For the special problems of concluding a paratactic poetic structure, see pp. 98-109.

[24] R. M. Grant & D. N. Freedman (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960] 128) comment: "The Naassenes also quoted this parable and gave exegesis of it . . . presumably Thomas, like them, referred it to the salvation of the true Gnostic by knowledge." See also H. E. W. Turner & H. Montefiore, *Thomas*, 48 and 53.

[25] Ibid., 64. But, for example, the parable of the pearl in Gos Thom 94:14-18 is allegorized by the presence of lines 19-22 which apply it to the gnostic; all this forms logion 76.

in the Gospel of Thomas confirms the linguistic data in the synoptic tradition: it does not belong to the first stage of the tradition.

(2) *The Seed Growing Secretly.* The parable appears only in Mark 4:26-29, but there may be a remnant of it also in Gos Thom 85:15-18; "Let there be among you a man of understanding; when the fruit ripened, he came quickly with his sickle in his hand, he reaped it."

(a) *The Synoptic Tradition.* In viewing the parable within the synoptic tradition the basic question is this: Why was the unity of the three seed parables acceptable to both the pre-Marcan source and to Mark himself but not to either Matthew or Luke?[26] In the parable of the sower there were anomalies in Mark's text which were removed by Matthew and/or Luke and were absent entirely from the Gospel of Thomas. The present problem can be rephrased in the light of this to read: Are there anomalies in Mark 4:26-29 which might account for its total omission by both Matthew and Luke, and how does Gos Thom 85:15-18 compare with Mark on this point?

The major anomaly in Mark 4:26-29 is the redundancy between 4:27, ὁ σπόρος βλαστᾷ καὶ μηκύνηται, and 4:28, αὐτομάτη ἡ γῆ καρποφορεῖ, πρῶτον χόρτον, εἶτεν στάχυν, εἶτεν πλήρης σῖτος ἐν τῷ στάχυϊ. The expression βλαστᾷ is quite capable of carrying the contents of 4:28 all by itself: see the usage in Matt 13:26; Heb 9:4, and especially Jas 5:18, ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς. It might be answered that 4:28 is simply a more detailed specification of 4:27. This explanation is less convincing, however, when it is realized that the presence of 4:28 creates a major tension in the central image of the parable. In 4:26, 27, 29 the focus is very definitely on the farmer: ἄνθρωπος βάλῃ . . . καθεύδῃ καὶ ἐγείρηται . . . ὡς οὐκ οἶδεν αὐτός . . . εὐθὺς ἀποστέλλει; but in 4:28 the focus is on the growth of the seed. This means that we have here again the same problem seen earlier in 4:5-6: a redundancy which creates a conflict of imagery.

There were three seed parables in the pre-Marcan source, and yet there is a striking discrepancy between the emphasis on the fate of the sown seed in the sower and the mustard seed parables and the emphasis on the farmer in the central parable. For example, the sower is quickly removed from the focus of interest in Mark 4:3-4 by the sequence of ὁ σπείρων, ἐν τῷ σπείρειν (no αὐτόν in Mark), ἔπεσεν (this verb takes over thereafter in Mark 4:5, 7, 8).[27] Again, in the mustard seed there is no mention of the farmer in Mark, and the Q text mentions ἄνθρωπος (Matt 13:31 = Luke 13:19) at the start of the parable and thereafter ignores him. Against all this the parable of the seed growing secretly stands out with a clearly different focus, especially if one ignores this unfortunate title for it.

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[26] On the Matthean omission, see J. D. Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13* (Richmond, Va.: Knox, 1969) 64-65. The theory that Matt 13:24-30 is his reworking of Mark 4:26-29 is not persuasive, despite M. D. Goulder, "Characteristics of the Parables in the Several Gospels," *JTS* 19 (1968) 51-69.

[27] In the interpretation the emphasis is likewise on the seed as the Word, and not on the sower.

An hypothesis is therefore suggested that vs. 28 was inserted into the parable of Mark 4:26, 27, 29, in order to shift the emphasis from the action of the farmer to the fate of the seed; and that this was intended to bring all three parables into a greater unity, with all of them now primarily concerned with what happens to the seed in its growth. Two main arguments can be given for this hypothesis. First, there is the resemblance between this expansion in 4:28 and that seen earlier in 4:8b (and 4:5-6); both stress the time-growth factor and contain an implicit plea for patience and perseverance. Second, there is the καρποφοροῦσιν in Mark 4:20 (= Matt 13:23; Luke 8:15) and the καρποφορεῖ of 4:28. The former verb has already moved away significantly from the Semitic ἐδίδου καρπόν of the parable in 4:8. The latter verb, in 4:28, is the only literal use of the verb in the entire NT (cf. Rom 7:4, 5; Col 1:6, 10). This is an extremely important point and the conclusion is that 4:28 with its (allegorical?) καρποφορεῖ has been added under the influence of the interpretation with its allegorical καρποφοροῦσιν.[28] But the tension so created may well be one of the reasons why the other synoptics omitted it. For our present purpose Mark 4:26, 27, 29 represents a more original form of the parable with the focus on the farmer while vs. 28 is an addition which shifts the focus to the seed, bringing the parable more into line with the other two and also inculcating patient perseverance, as in 4:8b.[29]

(b) *The Gospel of Thomas.* Gos Thom 84:34-85:19 (= logion 21) contains three separate parables: the children in the field (84:34-85:6), the householder and its interpretation (85:6-10, 11-15), and the wise husbandman (85:15-18), which is here considered to be the same story as that in Mark 4:26, 27, 29. It is clear that 85:15-18 is taken as a parable both from its association with the other two units of the saying and also from the terminal statement in 85:19. "Whoever has ears to hear let him hear." This aphorism is used five other times in the Gospel of Thomas and in four of them it concludes parables: the wise fisherman in 82:2-3; the rich man in 92:9-10; the wicked husbandman in 93:16; the leaven in 97:6. The other usage precedes a parabolic saying in 86:6-7. Whether 85:19 refers only to the farmer parable or to all three preceding parables, it is clear that 85:15-18 must be considered as much a parable as those other ones to which this aphorism is appended.[30]

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[28] H.-W. Kuhn, *Sammlungen*, 107.

[29] H. Baltensweiler ("Das Gleichnis von der selbstwachsenden Saat [Markus 4, 26-29] und die theologische Konzeption des Markusevangelisten," *Oikonomia: Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie* [Festschrift O. Cullmann; ed. F. Christ; Hamberg-Bergstedt: Reich, 1967] 69-75) interprets this as a parable spoken by Jesus to a situation of disbelief and calls it "das Gleichnis vom ungläubigen Landmann." Mark *himself* inserted it here in Mark 4 as part of his theme of the failure of the disciples.

[30] H. E. W. Turner & H. Montefiore say that "an allusion to Mark 4,29 . . . seems probable" (*Thomas*, p. 31); and they note later "slight but significant echoes derived from Mark" (p. 35). J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 24, 151-52) ignores this parable completely. On the aphorism itself, see S. Muñoz Iglesias, "El evangelio de Tomás y algunos aspectos de la cuestión sinóptica," *Estudios ecclesiásticos* 34 (1960) 883-94. O. Cullmann ("The

The parable of the wise farmer in Gos Thom 85:15-18 does not exhibit any of the tension between the farmer and the seed noted in Mark's version. Here the focus is totally on the farmer and exclusively on the moment of harvest, i.e., only Mark 4:29 and not 4:26-27 has a parallel in 85:15-18.

(c) *The Earliest Version.* The opening of the parable in Mark 4:26a, οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς . . ., and in Gos Thom 85:15-16, "Let there be among you a man of understanding," represent the quite separate interests of the parable's use in the two texts. But the parable itself reflects a paratactic and three-fold structure rather similar to that noted in the sower. In Mark 4:26, 27, 29 there is the double threesome of βάλῃ / καθεύδῃ καὶ ἐγείρηται / βλαστᾷ καὶ μηκύνται and then παραδοῖ / ἀποστέλλει / παρέστηκεν. In Gos Thom 85:15-18 there is only the single threesome of "ripened / came quickly / reaped." The former may be considered fuller and more original.

This draws attention to the allusion to Joel 4:13, ἐξαποστείλατε δρέπανα, ὅτι παρέστηκεν τρύγητος, in Mark 4:29. This refers to the eschatological judgment of God upon those who oppressed his people and is thus an image of punishment as divine vengeance. Is this biblical allusion part of the original parable? The citation of Joel 4:13 creates a strong tension with the rest of the unit on two major points. First, since the eschatological reaper is God what is the meaning of 4:27 with its concluding ὡς οὐκ οἶδεν αὐτός? And second, is an eschatological judgment of vengeance in keeping with the positive image of the rest of the parable and of παραδοῖ ὁ καρπός in particular? These problems may also have contributed to Matthew's and Luke's decision to omit the parable.[31] Apart from the tension between the farmer and the seed as a central image there is now the far greater tension between the God of 4:27 and of 4:29. Finally, of course, Gos Thom 85: 15-18 does not have this explicit allusion to Joel. Most probably the biblical citation is a sharpening of an original conclusion which was something like that in the Gospel of Thomas with the threefold rhythm of ripening, coming, and harvesting. Originally, then, the harvest of Mark 4:29 was not the great eschatological consummation. In its present position the eschatologization of the harvest in 4:29 necessarily reflects on that in the sower parable at 4:8 as well. The line from 4:8 to 4:20 to 4:29 runs both ways.

(3) *The Mustard Seed.* Once again we can begin with the synoptic tradition which is much more complicated in this case.[32]

Gospel of Thomas and the Problem of the Age of the Tradition Contained Therein: A Survey," *Interpretation* 16 [1962] 418-38) suggests that Mark 4:29 was originally an "independent Logion" found also as such in Gos Thom 85:15-18.

[31] J. Dupont ("La parabole de la semence qui pousse toute seule [Marc 2, 26-29]," *RSR* 55 [1967] 367-92) argues that the sower is the center of the parable and represents God himself. But what does 4:27 mean in such an interpretation?

[32] H. K. McArthur, "The Parable of the Mustard Seed" (*CBQ* 33 [1971] 198-201) is an excellent literary analysis of this parable. His argumentation will be referred to rather than repeated here. But the separation of layers of tradition within Mark 4:30-32 can be analyzed beyond what is done in his article.

(a) *The Synoptic Tradition.* Most probably this parable was present in both Q and Mark[33] as the hypothesis of an overlap seems necessary to explain the literary phenomena of the synoptic tradition in Mark 4:30-32; Matt 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19.[34] This means that there are three versions of the parable to be considered: Q, Mark 4:30-32, and Gos Thom 84:26-33.

(i) *The Q Version.* What exactly was the content of the Q version still visible in the texts of Matthew and Luke? The evidence of Matthean conflation and of Lucan preference for Q, text and context, over Mark will be the main avenues of approach to the problem.[35] There are five major items to be considered: the opening, sowing, initial size, final size, the birds.

(1) The opening is a double question in Luke 13:18-19 and runs τίνι ὁμοία . . . τίνι ὁμοιώσω . . . ὁμοία ἐστίν. Matt 13:31 has a single statement instead of the double question, and only one ὁμοία. Most likely Luke followed Q's opening because had he added any part of the opening in 13:18 he would presumably have done so again in the following 13:20 which has τίνι ὁμοιώσω . . . ὁμοία ἐστίν (Luke's abbreviation?). This change to statement in Matt 13:31 is completely in keeping with his usage elsewhere.[36]

(2) The sowing in Luke 13:19 is presumably very close to Q with the exception that his εἰς κῆπον ἑαυτοῦ represents Greek rather than Semitic usage.[37] The conflation of Q and Mark 4:31 is clear in Matt 13:31.

(3) There is no mention of the initial size in Luke 13:19: was it present in Q? The note on size in Matt 13:32 is almost verbatim that of Mark 4:31b with the omission of the ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς from Mark 4:31b as an obvious change after having changed the earlier ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς of Mark 4:31a into the ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ from Q. Most probably Q had nothing on original size.

(4) The same argumentation indicates that final size was not in Q. It is not in Luke 13:19b, and its presence in Matt 13:32b comes from Mark 4:32. The conflation in Matt 13:32b of Q and Mark explains his clash of "tree" and "bush."

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[33] B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924) 246-47. For details, see H. K. McArthur, "Mustard Seed," 198, 201; also H. Koester, *Test Case*, 83-84; H.-W. Kuhn, *Sammlungen*, 99.

[34] It is not at all clear that the antithetical parallelism is more original in Matt 13:32 than in Mark 4:31-32, as M. Black (*Aramaic Approach*, 165) claims, and E. P. Sanders (*The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* [SNTSMS 9; Cambridge University, 1969] 290) accepts. Note the double πάντων present in Mark but broken in Matthew: see n. 46 below.

[35] B. H. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 187.

[36] See Matt 13:24, 33, 44, 45, 47; 18:23; 20:1; 22:2; 25:1. H. K. McArthur ("Mustard Seed," 200, n. 6) draws attention also to Luke 7:31 = Matt 11:16. H.-W. Bartsch ("Eine bisher übersehene Zitierung der LXX in Mark 4:30," *TZ* 15 [1959] 126-28) thinks that the double question in Mark 4:30 deliberately recalls Isa 40:18: τίνι ὡμοιώσατε κύριον καὶ τίνι ὁμοιώματι ὡμοιώσατε αὐτόν.

[37] See H. K. McArthur, "Mustard Seed," 201.

(5) The birds were obviously present in Q as the agreement of Matt 13:32c and Luke 13:19c shows. The difficulties with the biblical citations (Ps 104:12; Dan 4:9,18; Ezek 17:23; 31:6) suggested as background for the Q verse are well known; they are not very literal and they are not very appropriate. If the allusion is to one of these texts or even to all of them one must admit that it is not a literal citation of any presently known source,[38] and it is cited with little regard for the original context. The image of a tree with birds resting and/or nesting under shady branches appears literally as an example of God's loving care for nature in Ps 104:12, and metaphorically for Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4:9, 18, for Pharaoh in Ezek 31:6, and for Israel in Ezek 17:23. Only the latter case is contextually appropriate for the Q verse, but in Ezek 17:23 the picture is of a cedar shoot which God plants, which grows branches, and which becomes "a majestic cedar" where the birds can shelter. It is possible, of course, to answer all this by stating that the text cites from memory and with no interest in original context but the point still stands that this biblical allusion is problematic on three major counts. Why begin with a *mustard* seed if one intends to end with a tree (δένδρον in Q)[39] rather than a bush (λάχανον in Mark 4:32)? Why use a mustard plant if one intends to have birds *nesting in*[40] its branches? Or if one intends an eschatological image at the end, why choose such an ambiguous one? Because of these difficulties it seems most probable that the biblical allusions represent a later addition to an earlier version of the parable. It must be stressed that the image of birds at rest in the shade had a *literal* basis in Ps 104:12 apart from metaphorical bases elsewhere as an image of good or evil with eschatological overtones. Ps 104:12 is also the only biblical location where the resting birds are not connected with a great *tree*.

(ii) *The Marcan Version.* The problems of the Q text reappear in that of Mark, but even more difficulties are found as well. The opening is a double question in Mark 4:30 as it was also in the Q text, but the questions are personal and plural (ὁμοιώσωμεν . . . θῶμεν) rather than impersonal (τίνι ὁμοία) and singular (τίνι ὁμοιώσω). It is possible that the Marcan plurals represent an explicit reference to the listening crowds in preparation for the concluding statements in 4:33-34.

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[38] Ibid., 203.

[39] J. D. Kingsbury (*Matthew 13*, 81) says that "the mustard plant cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be classified as a δένδρον (v. 32c), i.e., a tree proper."

[40] H. K. McArthur ("Mustard Seed," 201-2) comments: "Even though the mustard plant . . . grows to a height of 8 to 12 feet, and the birds do sit in its branches, it is questionable whether they actually build their nests there. The Greek term *kataskenaō* could mean something less than 'to nest' but this is its normal meaning in such a context." J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 148, n. 73) says that "the birds are attracted by the shade and the seed." In other words the mustard plant evokes an image of birds seeking shade, while the tree points to a picture of birds building nests. The OT citations agree with the latter image; see L. Cerfaux & G. Garitte ("Les paraboles du royaume dans l'Évangile de Thomas,'" *Muséon* 70 [1957] 307-27) who note that "l'arbre n'est pas un refuge pour les oiseaux (et surtout, ils n'habitent pas sous son ombre); ils nichent dans ses branches" (p. 312).

The grammar of Mark 4:31-32 is notoriously bad. This can be explained to a certain extent by postulating a fairly literal translation from an Aramaic original.[41] However, while Semitisms abound in all three seed parables,[42] the mustard seed seems to have the worst Greek of them all.[43] The question thus arises whether the difficulties in Mark 4:31-32 stem not only from translation Greek but also from editorial tampering with an earlier version of the parable?[44] In order to see this more clearly, Mark 4:31-32a can be lined up as follows:

    (*a*)   ὃς ὅταν σπαρῇ

    (*b*)   ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

    (*c*)   μικρότερον ὂν πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων

    (*b′*)   ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

    (*a′*)   καὶ ὅταν σπαρῇ

    (*d*)   ἀναβαίνει καὶ γίνεται

    (*c′*)   μεῖζον πάντων τῶν λαχάνων

    (*e*)   καὶ ποιεῖ κλάδους μεγάλους

One notices immediately the redundacy in *abcb′a′*, the balanced contrast in *cc′*, the use of ἀναβαίνει in *d*, and the rather anti-climactic note in *e* after the superlative comment in *c′*. These four points will be taken up separately.

It has been suggested that all of *abcb′a′* (and *c′*) is an insertion, but a pre-Marcan one.[45] But if it is an insertion, it is much more likely that it is a redactional addition by Mark himself. It has been noted that when Mark makes a redactional insert he very often copies the final expression which his source had before the insertion after the addition as well.[46] Two examples must suffice; the repetition of ἔγειρε καὶ ἆρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου in 2:9b and 2:11, thus framing the Marcan insertion of 2, 10, and the repetition of υἱὲ Δαυίδ ... ἐλέησόν με in 10:47b and 10:48b framing the Marcan addition between in 10:48a. Most likely, then,

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[41] M. Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 165-66.

[42] Ibid., 162-66.

[43] H. Koester, *Test Case*, 82.

[44] For example, does the double ὅταν σπαρῇ in Mark 4:31, 32 bespeak bad translation from an Aramaic original, as M. Black (*Aramaic Approach*, 165) suggests, or some rather crude expansion of an original text by a later hand, as V. Taylor (*The Gospel according to St. Mark* [2d ed.; London: Macmillan, 1966] 270) holds for 4:31b.

[45] H.-W. Kuhn, *Sammlungen*, 100, n. 8.

[46] Some recent papers have drawn attention in various ways to this literary technique: (i) J. R. Donahue's address ("Tradition and Redaction in the Markan Trial Narrative [Mk 14:53-65]" [CBA Convention; Sept. 1, 1970]) has been summarized by N. Perrin ("The Christology of Mark: A Study in Methodology," *JR* 51 [1971] 173-87) as advocating "tautologous repetition of key words or phrases as in Mark 14:56, 59 (47 instances of this in Mark) as 'a Markan insertion technique' (Donahue's own discovery)." (ii) Q. Quesnell's paper ("Repetition as Punctuation: A Redactional Solution to a Stylistic Problem in Mark" [CSBR meeting; Feb. 20, 1971]) moved in this same general direction. (iii) J. H. Elliott's talk ("The Markan Sandwiches" [SBL Convention; Oct. 28, 1971]) referred to the intercalation of larger units. Possibly this may be all part of one redactional and compositional methodology of Mark.

elements *ab* come from Mark's source but it is he himself who added in the elements *cb'd'*.[47]

If *cb'd'* is a Marcan redactional insert, it is also necessary to see *c'* as his own addition. In other words the entire superlative contrast of smallest/largest is from Mark himself.

Next, there is the use of ἀναβαίνει in 4:32. This is a very unusual verb to describe the growth of a plant.[48] It also appeared as ἀνέβησαν αἱ ἄκανθαι in 4:7, where Matt 13:7 accepted it but Luke 8:7 changed it to συμφυεῖσαι αἱ ἄκανθαι. The verb was also present as ἀναβαίνοντα in 4:8, but most likely this was added under the influence of the usage in 4:7. This would indicate that the verb ἀναβαίνει in Mark 4:32 belongs to the pre-Marcan source. In fact it is the element there whose function is fulfilled by the use of αὐξάνω in Q. This functional similarity appears also in the combination of ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ αὐξανόμενα of Mark 4:8.

Finally, there is the description of the large branches in *e*. If the superlative description in *c'* is taken as a Marcan insertion, then the phrase καὶ ποιεῖ κλάδους μεγάλους can stand quite well as the pre-Marcan description of the final growth situation.

The problems of the biblical citations at the end of the Marcan version are the same as those at the end of the Q text. But Mark does not have the problem of the mustard seed becoming a tree as had Q; nor does he have so clearly the problem of nesting in the branches as against resting in the shade. He has the verb κατασκηνοῦν, as in Q, but he uses ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ rather than ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ, as in Q. But apart from these points the basic difficulty of the OT texts (not literal, not appropriate) at the end of the Q parable reappears in Mark's version. Once again one wonders if they are original.

A moment of recapitulation is necessary at this point. It has been argued that Mark 4:5b, 6b, 8b and 4:28 were added to the original parables. It has also been concluded that 4:31-32 contains an insertion by Mark himself. What is the connection between these additions? Three successive steps have been postulated: the three seed parables; the three seed parables and the interpretation of the sower; all this with the additions in the individual parables. For the present purpose other traditional and redactional layers in Mark 4 will not be discussed. The most striking thing about all these insertions is their formal and material similarity. All stress a growth process during the passage of time and presumably all have the situational function of inculcating patience and perseverance and of warning against complacency and laziness. In this regard the meaning of the additions in 4:31-32 is not so much contrast (smallest/largest) in itself as contrast insofar as this underlines time and growth. Granted this similarity in all the insertions and granted that Mark effected one of them himself, the conclusion seems inevitable: Mark himself made all the additions to the parables. One presumes a shift in emphasis in the functional situation which first added in

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[47] The pre-Marcan ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς in 4:31a forms a link with the ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς of 4:26.

[48] So V. Taylor, *St. Mark*, 270.

the interpretation and that from which and for which Mark is writing. In the former case the emphasis is on the explanation of why some Christians are defecting and on a warning against such failures. In the second situation the changes admonish the community on the necessity of growth through time, i.e., of patience and perseverance.[49] In other words Mark is warning his readers that the promised παραδέχονται καὶ καρποφοροῦσιν of 4:20 is a matter of persistent and sustained growth and not an immediate blossoming.[50]

(b) *The Gospel of Thomas.* The parable in 84:26-33 does not have any of the problems noted above for the Q and Marcan versions. The double question is absent at the start but a single question from the disciples begets an answer which begins the parable in similar fashion to the ὁμοία ἐστίν of Q: "It is like . . ." in 84:28. But as in Q and in Mark the kingdom is explicitly mentioned. The contrast of initial smallness and terminal largeness, absent entirely from Q and emphasized strongly in Mark's redaction, appears in more sober fashion in 84:28-32 where the contrast is between "a mustard seed, smaller than all seeds" and "a large branch."

There is no explicit allusion to earlier biblical texts in the final phrase, "becomes shelter (σκέπη) for the birds of heaven," in 84:33.[51] Does this mean that they were present in his source and were then excised or muted in the adaptation?[52] It is more probable that the OT allusions were never present because they are problematic even in Q and Mark, and if one intended to eradicate all OT allusion the birds would have to be omitted as well. Most likely, then, there was no reference to the OT vision of eschatological consummation in Gos Thom 84:33. The image pertains to the normal world of nature as it is found, e.g., in Ps 104:12.

This lack of interest in eschatological imagery at the end is balanced by an emphasis on gnostic preparation in the present. The "tilled earth" on which the mustard seed must fall in 84:31 no doubt represents the necessary preparation which the true gnostic must undergo.[53]

(c) *The Earliest Version.* There are three independent versions to be compared: the Q text, the pre-Marcan text, and that in Gos Thom 84:26-33.[54] The most striking point about these three is their basic agreement. The earliest version had an opening with a double question in Semitic parallelism. This is

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[49] H.-W. Kuhn, *Sammlungen*, 127. He sees all this as one pre-Marcan situation.

[50] See also Mark 13:13b: ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος, οὗτος σωθήσεται. On this verse as redactional, see T. J. Weeden, *Mark — Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 91, n. 36.

[51] H. K. McArthur ("Mustard Seed," 203) notes that it "has the least evidence of Old Testament phraseology."

[52] H. E. W. Turner & H. Montefiore (*Thomas*, 51) contend that "Thomas, by abbreviating the parable, has omitted Old Testament allusions."

[53] Ibid., 34, 52-53, 55.

[54] It is unlikely that this is based on Mark because, above all, the ending in Gos Thom 84:33 is somewhat closer to birds seeking shade rather than birds building nests. The image moves gradually from shelter (Gos Thom 84:33), to shelter and nests (Mark 4:32b), to nests alone (Q).

still visible in the form of Q and of Mark, but it is changed to emphasize the disciples in Gos Thom 84:26-27.[55]

The four elements forming the heart of the parable are the initial sowing, the growth, the final size, and the shade for the birds. The pre-Marcan and Q texts agree on all four elements but the "large branches" of the former are more original than the "tree" of the latter. The Gospel of Thomas omits explicit mention of the growth and inserts instead the admonition of "tilled earth." It is also clear that some contrast in size was present in the earliest version. This was unavoidable, and therefore intentional, once a *mustard* seed was chosen. Hence the earliest version contained this at least implicitly and probably as explicitly as it is now present in Gos Thom 84:29 ("smaller than all seeds") and 84:32 ("a large branch"). This is still a long way from the formally balanced contrast of Mark ("smallest/largest"). Finally, the earliest version had no OT allusion in its picture of bucolic peace or, at the very most, there may have been some vague recall of Ps 104:12, but certainly not any idea of eschatological consummation as in the other suggested background texts. Indeed, the mustard plant would make a better burlesque than an image for eschatological plenitude in a tradition which usually invoked the mighty cedar of Lebanon for this function.

It is easy to see what happened to this earliest version. It has been moved in two quite different versions. Gos Thom 84:26-33 wished to apply it to the true gnostic and so made only minor changes in 84:26 ("disciples") and 84:31 ("tilled"). The version from which the pre-Marcan and Q versions developed moved the parable towards eschatological imagery, and did not find the process particularly easy: having started with a *mustard* seed there would always be trouble in having its final growth as a convincing image of the eschaton.[56] This version made the basic change of terminating the parable with a description more redolent of OT historico-eschatological imagery. Thereby the idea of birds nesting in the branches rather than of birds resting in the shade came to the forefront. This process is even more developed in Q than in the pre-Marcan text; but the Marcan redaction made up for this with its "smallest/largest" addition. One result of all this was that when the pre-Marcan editor put together the three parables and the interpretation of the sower, the final parables both ended with allusions to eschatological consummation, and this gave the entire section and especially the harvest of 4:8, 20 an intensely eschatological coloring.

(4) *The Wheat and the Tares.* The parable appears only in Matt 13:24-30, with an interpretation in 13:36-43, and in Gos Thom 90:33–91:7.

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[55] H. E. W. Turner & H. Montefiore, *Thomas*, 81-82.

[56] This increasing intrusion of OT eschatological imagery serves to delineate the successive stages in the history of the tradition: Thomas, pre-Mark, Q, Mark. J. Dupont ("Les paraboles du séneve et du levain," *NRT* 89 [1967] 897-913) traces the eschatological imagery back to Jesus himself. One can only repeat: the mustard plant is almost a burlesque of eschatological consummation in a tradition which had earlier used the mighty cedar of Lebanon for such a vision. See also O. Kuss, "Zum Sinngehalt des Doppelgleichnisses vom Senfkorn und Sauerteig," *Bib* 40 (1959) 641-53.

(a) *The Matthean Version.* There are six main elements in Matt 13:24-30: the opening in 24a, the sowing in 24b, the counter-sowing in 25, the result in 26, the first exchange of servants and owner in 27-28a, and the second exchange in 28b-30. There are no internal tensions, contradictions, or dislocations in this material. Both exchanges are important. The first dialogue in 13:27-28a makes it clear that the owner recognizes that inimical activity alone can explain the presence of (so many?) tares. His problem, then, is not only how to save his harvest but how to outwit his enemy. Hence the second dialogue in 13:28b-30 gives the solution which both protects the wheat and uses the enemy's tares *for fuel.*[57] The enemy's action is not only foiled but is actually turned to the farmer's advantage.[58]

If the parable in 13:24-30 is quite simple, its interpretation in 13:36-43 is more complicated. The linguistic arguments which indicate that 13:36-43 is a Matthean creation are well known and will not be repeated here.[59] But there still seems to be a conceptual discrepancy between 13:37-39 where the field is the world in which there are good and evil, and 13:41-43 where the field is the kingdom of the Son of Man (the Church) in which there are present both οἱ δίκαιοι (43) and also πάντα σκάνδαλα καὶ τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν (41). It is still possible that there was a traditional list of allegorical correlatives somehow available to Matthew and that he adapted this list into his own new creation but with more linguistic than conceptual harmonization. In other words 13:37-39 is basically pre-Matthean and taken up into the redactional interpretation created by Matthew in 13:36-43.[60] One notices, for example, that 13:40b-43 is very similar to 13:49-50 and in this latter case there is no preceding list of allegorical equivalents.

If 13:37-39 is pre-Matthean, how does it compare with the parable and could it be original with it? It explains most features of the parable but ignores the

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[57] J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 225) has noted this. The phrase δήσατε αὐτὰ εἰς δέσμας of 13:30 clearly derives from the story and not from the interpretation in 13:41-42.

[58] J. D. Kingsbury (*Matthew 13*, 65) suggests that "vv. 24b-6 represent the core of an original parable that Matthew has appropriated and revised to suit his purposes." But what was seen in the last note argues against this interpretation.

[59] J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 81-85) cites 37 examples and concludes that it is "the work of Matthew himself" (p. 85). So also H. Koester, *Test Case*, 20-22.

[60] On this separation between 13:37-39 and 40-43, see W. Trilling, *Das wahre Israel* (StANT 10; 3rd ed., Munich: Kösel, 1964) 124-26. For the kingdom of the Son of Man as the Church on earth, see G. Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (NT Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 43-45; H. E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (NT Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) 69-73. See also M. de Goedt ("L'explication de la parabole de l'ivraie [Mt. XIII, 36-43]: Création matthéenne ou aboutissement d'une histoire littéraire," *RB* 66 [1959] 32-54), who speaks of "un lexique utilisé par Matthieu pour les besoins d'une explication, donnée en vv. 40-43" (p. 41); J. Jeremias ("Die Deutung des Gleichnisses vom Unkraut unter dem Weizen [Mt. xiii, 36-43]," *Neotestamentica et patristica* [Freundesgabe O. Cullmann; NovTSup 6; Leiden: Brill, 1962] 59-63) admits that "gewiss ist es durchaus möglich, dass er eine Vorlage, ein lexique préexistant benutzt, eindeutig greifbar wird jedoch eine solche Vorlage an keiner Stelle der Liste" (p. 61).

servants. It explains the content of 13:24-25 and 13:30 but ignores all of 13:26-29. In other words even this list does not fit well with the entire parable. In summary, the interpretation of 13:36-43 is a Matthean creation with some assistance from traditional materials in 13:37-39. But none of this interpretation is original to the parable.

(b) *The Gospel of Thomas.* The parable is much shorter in Gos Thom 90:33-91:7. Of the six elements in Matt 13:24-30 it has only the opening, the sowing ("a man who had [good] seed"), the counter-sowing, no mention of the result, no first dialogue, and a very abbreviated version of the second dialogue: The servants do not speak directly (91:2) and the master's solution is given very tersely, with no mention of the harvesters as such. This general brevity changes the emphasis of the parable so that it focuses on the fate of the tares rather than on the prudence of the master. So too the final statement, "they (will) pull them and burn them" (91:7), is not at all as clearly a triumphant use of the enemy's evil for the master's own good (i.e., fuel). It is significant, of course, that no interpretation of the parable is present in the Gospel of Thomas.

(c) *The Earliest Version.* The version in Matt 13:24-30 is superior to that in Gos Thom 90:33-91:7 which may even be an abbreviation of Matthew's own text.[61] Even the presence of the interpretation in Matt 13:36-43 does not seem to have made any important changes in the sequence of the story itself. The parable, without the interpretation, in Matt 13:24-30 is the earliest version obtainable for the parable.

II. *The Meaning for Jesus*

The final purpose of this study is to relate the earliest versions of these four seed parables to the teaching of the historical Jesus. But before any attempt to do this can be initiated, a very basic methodical problem must be faced. *How exactly does one get from the earliest version of a parable to the version and meaning given by Jesus?*[62]

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[61] H. E. W. Turner & H. Montefiore (*Thomas*, 51) speak of a "striking instance of compression to the point of absurdity, and in this respect Thomas' version is plainly inferior to Matthew." The absurdity of Thomas' version is not at all that clear, but it is certainly a compressed version. See R. McL. Wilson (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* [London: Mowbray, 1960] 91) who states: "This condensation would appear to indicate a later stage of development than that represented by the canonical parable, but does not decide the question whether we have here a summary made from Matthew or independent access to the same tradition at a later point." But L. Cerfaux & G. Garitte ("Paraboles du Royaume," 312) hold that "*Thom.* s'inspirait de *Mt.*"

[62] H. K. McArthur, "Mustard Seed," 209. — I suggested in an earlier article ("Parable and Example in the Teaching of Jesus," *NTS* 18 [1971-72] 285-307) that non-parabolic logia should be ascertained first and then used to interpret the parabolic images. But consequent thought has moved the present article towards a different method which will focus on the form (structure and situation) of the parables as ontologico-poetic metaphors and will, therefore, see Jesus' parabolic images as the primary data both conceptually and methodologically.

This article presumes that if there is any critical possibility of ascertaining Jesus' own teaching the way must be along the principle of dissimilarity: because of the constant creative restatements evident in the synoptic tradition (not to speak of the johannine tradition), that can be accepted as most probably coming from Jesus which exhibits divergences both from late Judaism and the primitive church.[63]

As the principle of dissimilarity has been used in recent scholarship, the emphasis has been heavily on content rather than on form. The focus has been on how and where the content of Jesus' sayings differed from late Judaism and the primitive communities. But surely this principle must also be applied to divergence in form. It has certainly been done in the reverse direction. Scholars have argued that certain sayings do not come from the historical Jesus because their form belongs to the primitive church.[64] The attempt must also be made to isolate ever more clearly those forms of Jesus' teaching where he differs from both late Judaism and primitive Christianity.

In the statements of the principle of dissimilarity noted above, special emphasis was placed on those cases where the primitive churches had attempted to reverse this dissimilarity by bringing Jesus' thought more into line with their own teaching.[65] When this principle, articulated with this codicil, is applied to the forms of Jesus' teaching one group stands out with compelling insistence: the parables. Not only is this form of expression strikingly absent from the epistolary literature of the primitive communities but the evidence of the synoptic tradition is that the communities were not exactly at home with Jesus' use of it. The magisterial work of Joachim Jeremias has surely established that the primitive church "modified" (to recall the term of Käsemann and Perrin) the parables of Jesus quite extensively.[66] At this point it would seem that we have attained the methodological basis that is needed for the transition from the earliest version to the historical

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[63] For statements of this "principle," see E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SBT 41; London: SCM, 1964) 37; N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (NT Library; London: SCM, 1967) 39. See also the comment of N. A. Dahl ("The Problem of the Historical Jesus," *Kerygma and History* [eds. C. E. Braaten & R. A. Harrisville; Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1962] 156) that "whatever is discovered in this way is only a critically assured *minimum*." For more recent discussions, see W. O. Walker, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Discussion of Methodology," *ATR* 51 (1969) 38-56; H. K. McArthur, "The Burden of Proof in Historical Jesus Research," *ExpT* 82 (1971) 116-19; and D. G. A. Calvert, "An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus," *NTS* 18 (1971-72) 209-19.

[64] See, for example, E. Käsemann (*New Testament Questions of Today* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969] 77) on Mark 8:38 as a sentence of holy law; N. Perrin ("The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition," *BR* 13 [1968] 3-25) who discusses the various forms in which the apocalyptic Son of Man teaching is presented by the early church.

[65] See note 63 above.

[66] J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 113-14) talks of "laws of transformation." Earlier he had claimed that "the fundamentally important insights which we owe to the Form-critical school have so far received no fruitful application in the field of the study of the parables" (pp. 20-21). The question of this article is whether the form of Jesus' parables has been correctly isolated and identified.

Jesus. When dissimilarity is applied to the form of Jesus' teaching and not just to the content,[67] the parables are vindicated as authentic because the primitive church does not use this form itself, is not at home with Jesus' usage, and extensively modifies that usage in different ways.[68] However, there are still two questions to be faced: What exactly is the form of Jesus' parables?[69] And what is the relationship between this form and that of the rabbinical parables of late Judaism?

It is sometimes forgotten in practice that the term "form" as used in the technical discussions of form-criticism involves both linguistic structure and situational function (*Sitz im Leben*). The methodology drives towards the life-situation whose needs and necessities gave rise to this or that formal linguistic structure.[70] The question, then, is what precisely was the situational function in the life of Jesus which gives birth to the form[71] which we call a parable. What was it intended to do and in what situation of life?[72]

The answer can begin with a negative comparison which takes up the question of the relationship between Jesus' parables and those of the rabbis. The major difference which emerges from this comparison is much more profound

[67] Notice that R. Bultmann (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* [New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963] 205) talks of content rather than form: "We can only count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus where, on the one hand, expression is given to the contrast between Jewish morality and piety and the distinctive eschatological temper which characterized the preaching of Jesus; and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features."

[68] For example, they tended to allegorize Jesus' parables. The argument is not that Jesus could not or should not have used allegory but that allegorical features have not stood up well to traditio-historical investigation. On the relationship of parable and allegory, see M. Black, "The Parables as Allegory," *BJRL* 42 (1960) 273-87; R. E. Brown, "Parable and Allegory Reconsidered," *NovT* 5 (1962) 36-45; E. J. Tinsley, "Parable, Allegory and Mysticism," *Vindications: Essays on the Historical Basis of Christianity* (ed. A. Hanson; London: SCM, 1966) 153-92; "Parable and Allegory: Some Literary Criteria for the Interpretation of the Parables of Christ," *Church Quarterly* 3 (1970) 32-39; "Parables and the Self-Awareness of Jesus," ibid., 4 (1971) 18-26.

[69] J. M. Robinson ("Jesus' Parables as God Happening," *Jesus and the Historian* [Written in Honor of E. C. Colwell; ed. F. T. Trotter; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968] 134-50 says, "When one speaks of Jesus' parables, one would seem to have shifted attention from the content of Jesus' message to its form" (p. 134). And again, "Thus, because of their form distinct from the allegorizing proclivity of the primitive church, the parables have become the segment of the teachings of Jesus most widely accepted as authentic by scholars today" (p. 136).

[70] See the classical formulations of M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (rev. 2nd ed.; New York: Scribner, 1935) 7; R. Bultmann, *History*, 4.

[71] Obviously the term "form" was created by form criticism in reference to the life-settings within the primitive communities. But there seems to be no intrinsic reason why it cannot be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, both to the historical Jesus and/or to the final redactor. See, on the one hand, G. E. Ladd, "The Life-Setting of the Parables of the Kingdom," *JBR* 31 (1963) 193-99; on the other, W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1969) 23.

[72] For a fuller discussion of this problem, see J. D. Crossan, "Parable as Religious and Poetic Experience," *JR* 53 (1973) 330-58.

than a mere question of superior literary achievement.[73] What is most striking is that the rabbinical parables are closely tied to ethical problems of life or to exegetical difficulties in the biblical text. In other words the parabolic referent is very clearly delineated and can be seen in its quite separate existence apart from and prior to the parable itself. Recent scholarship has been drawing forceful attention to the fact that this is exactly what the parables of Jesus are *not* doing.[74] This negation, however, only increases the urgency of the positive question: What was the precise life-setting of Jesus' parables?[75]

The answer to be proposed here can be seen more clearly against the other dominant answers which scholarship has suggested in this century. Since the positions are well known they can be summarized in a few brief sentences. (i) The parables of Jesus are essentially moral stories inculcating universal ethical truths.[76] (ii) Jesus' parables are basically eschatological challenges pointing to the kingdom's advent either in (a) imminent eschatology,[77] (b) realized eschatology,[78] or (c) (as a mediating position) progressive eschatology.[79] The dominant critical method is still that of Joachim Jeremias. This presumes that Jesus announced the kingdom as a progressive eschatological event, linking together present and future, and that the parables are to be located within the polemical reaction which his proclamation aroused.[80] From the form-critical aspect their

[73] G. V. Jones, *The Art and Truth of the Parables* (London: SPCK, 1964) 79.

[74] G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1960) 69. Also B. Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus* (rev. ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1964) 166. Compare, for example, Jesus' parable of the treasure (Matt 13:44; Gos Thom 98:31–99:3) with the rabbinic *māšāl* cited in J. D. Kingsbury (*Matthew 13*, 4) where the content is explicitly related to an interpretation of Exod 14:5. Jesus' parable refers to the kingdom and that means that a *mystery* reveals itself in an *image*.

[75] It may be necessary to repeat that it is not sufficient to say that their life-setting is the proclamation of the kingdom, as if we knew automaticallly what that meant for Jesus apart from and prior to its articulation in parable.

[76] A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1888, 1899). See, for example, the summary of this position in J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew 13*, 1-3. The present article intends a much more radical reappraisal of Jülicher's basic distinctions between simile/similitude, which is literal language with the referent explicitly named (A ran away like B); and metaphor/allegory, which is non-literal language with its referent unnamed (B ran away); and between the picture-part and the referent-part in the simile/similitude categories. How valid is all this for poetic metaphor in general, and for any metaphor containing God in particular? Especially in the latter case are we not dealing with what Beda Allemann ("Metaphor and Antimetaphor," *Interpretation: The Poetry of Meaning* [eds. S. R. Hopper & D. L. Miller; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967] 103-23) has termed "antimetaphor" or "absolute metaphor"?

[77] For example, see A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 355-56.

[78] C. H. Dodd (*The Parables of the Kingdom* [rev. ed.; New York: Scribner, 1961] 82-84) gives this classical expression.

[79] J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 230) states that "the parables . . . are all full of . . . the recognition of 'an eschatology that is in process of realization' . . ." A footnote adds: "The above form of expression (in German: 'sich realisierende Eschatologie') was communicated to me by Ernst Haenchen in a letter. C. H. Dodd has, to my joy, agreed with it."

[80] J. Jeremias (*Parables*, 21) formulates it thus: "each of them was uttered in an

life-setting is this or that controversial situation within the ministry of Jesus. For example, the prodigal son (or the father's love) is "primarily an apologetic parable, in which Jesus vindicates his table companionship with sinners against his critics."[81] Put crudely, the controversial or homiletical situation is to the parable as cause is to effect. The hypothesis which this article purposes is exactly the opposite: parable is to controversy as cause is to effect. Parables are neither ethical nor eschatological but rather *ontologico-poetic* and as such strike at a far more fundamental level than either of these former alternatives.[82]

The dominant methodology of locating parable either in didactic difficulty or inimical controversy has been sapped badly from two different directions in recent scholarship. The compromise of eschatology "in the process of realization" is already being questioned and the entire problem of Jesus' view of time is again under discussion. When Jesus is held never to have referred to the (coming) Son of Man,[83] his interest in the future diminishes quite drastically, and, unless one wishes to slip back into realized eschatology, the question must be raised whether Jesus is operating at all in a concept of linear time as we know it.[84] A second major revision comes from the emphasis on the parables as literary and poetic creations and from a reluctance to explain them as "used" for this or that polemical refutation.[85]

The thesis proposed here is that Jesus' parables are the primary and immediate expression of his own experience of God. They are the ontologico-poetic articulation of the kingdom's in-breaking upon himself. This is the life-setting or

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actual situation of the life of Jesus, at a particular and often unforeseen point. Moreover . . . they were preponderantly concerned with a situation of conflict. They correct, reprove, attack. For the greater part, though not exclusively, the parables are weapons of warfare." This presupposition appears also in E. Linnemann, *Parables*, 33-41; N. Perrin, *Rediscovering*, 82-87.

[81] J. Jeremias, *Parables*, 132.

[82] The question might be raised whether Jesus is anti-apocalyptic or anti-eschatological. Or, in other words, is the eschatology of Jesus radically different from any in late Judaism and/or the primitive church?

[83] For example, N. Perrin (*Rediscovering*, 198) concludes that, "Jesus could not have spoken of the coming Son of man, either in reference to himself or in reference to an eschatological figure other than himself . . . they all reveal themselves to be products of the early church." See also the works of Vielhauer, Käsemann, and Conzelmann cited on p. 259.

[84] R. W. Funk, "Apocalyptic as an Historical and Theological Problem in Current New Testament Scholarship," *Apocalypticism* (New York: Herder & Herder; *Journal for Theology and the Church* 6 [1969] 175-91); and J. M. Robinson, "Jesus' Parables," 134-47. A similar problem with linear time is present in the prophets: see G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; Edinburgh; Oliver & Boyd, 1965) 2. 99-102. See also G. Ebeling, "Time and Word," *The Future of Our Religious Past: Essays in Honour of Rudolf Bultmann* (ed. J. M. Robinson; New York/London: Harper & Row, 1971) 247-66.

[85] D. O. Via, Jr., *The Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967; G. V. Jones' work in note 73 above; R. W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1966) especially 133-62; "Beyond Criticism in Quest of Literacy: The Parable of the Leaven," *Int* 25 (1971) 149-70. For comments on this new emphasis, see R. Summers, "Setting the Parables Free," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 10 (1968)

situational function in which they are to be located. Jesus' actions and controversies, and eventually Jesus' death, are the result and not the referent of the parables, they are the effect and not the cause of these images. The referent is the ineffable mystery of the kingdom's presence to Jesus and of his own experience of it. The parables are then the primary language of a religious experience and as such they are part of the experience itself.[86] In classical form-criticism the analysis of the various forms used in the primitive church was assisted by comparison with similar forms in other life-settings and other literatures.[87] If the above thesis is correct, the parables of Jesus are not to be compared with didactic stories or polemical examples or allegorical images. They are to be compared with and understood against the background of primary religious language and the life-setting closest to them is the experience of radical religious break-through or, if one prefers, of religious conversion at the deepest level.[88]

It is against this background that the seed parables are to be interpreted. The sower and the mustard-seed articulate the gift of the kingdom's advent and the joyful surprise of its experience: despite all the problems of sowing there is the abundant harvest, and despite the smallness of the seed there is the shady peacefulness of the grown plant. The seed growing secretly and the tares are images of resolute and prudent action, of the farmer who knows how and when to move. They are parables of the response demanded by the kingdom's advent. Together the four parables contain in contrasted images the revelation of the kingdom's presence and the resolution that presence demands.

7-18; E. C. Blackman, "New Methods of Parable Interpretation," *CJT* 15 (1969) 3-13; N. Perrin, "The Parables of Jesus as Parables, as Metaphors, and as Aesthetic Objects: A Review Article," *JR* 47 (1967) 340-47; "The Modern Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus and the Problem of Hermeneutics," *Int* 25 (1971) 131-48.

[86] T. Fawcett (*The Symbolic Language of Religion* [London: SCM, 1970] 171) comments that "the ability to symbolize the experience derives from the experience itself, for in a sense it provides its own forms of expression."

[87] See, e.g., R. Bultmann (*History*, 6-7) who says: "There are analogies to hand both for the form and history of the tradition."

[88] When J. Jeremias (*Parables*, passim) explains Jesus as consistently controversial, no discussion is made concerning the origin or center whence this Galilean turbulence arises. If parables are poems, however, the following comments of a poet may be helpful. Ezra Pound (*Gaudier-Brzeska, a Memoir* [London & New York: Lane, 1916]) argued: "In writing poems, the author must use his *image* because he sees it or feels it, *not* because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed." Again: "All poetic language is the language of exploration. Since the beginning of bad writing, writers have used images as ornaments. The point of Imagism is that it does not use images as *ornaments*. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language." And again: "The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing" (pp. 99, 102, 106). See note 74 above in the light of this: compare Pound's "the image is itself the speech," with Bornkamm's, "the parables are the preaching itself." But before one is ready for all this some philosophic rethinking may be necessary, as R. Jordan ("Poetry and Philosophy: Two Modes of Revelation," *Sewanee Review* 67 [1959] 1-27) suggests: "The important philosophic task is to rescue metaphor from the manipulators of the psychological image and restore it to its relevant ontological status."