

THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS AMONG THE WHEAT (MATT 13:24–30, 36–43) AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH AS PORTRAYED IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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The parable of the weeds among the wheat provides an ideal vantage point from which to examine the distinctively Matthean concept of the kingdom of heaven. By any measure, this parable and its interpretation are distinctively Matthean, for besides being unique to the first Gospel, they contain several characteristically Matthean themes.¹ Moreover, the most appropriate interpretation of the parable has long been debated in the secondary literature. This debate often centers on the issue of the kingdom, and the parable may almost be considered a litmus test for the best approach to take for analyzing the Matthean concept of the kingdom of heaven.

The parameters of this study are set by a desire to investigate the *Matthean* theology of the kingdom. As a consequence, though it is normally relegated to matters of secondary importance because of doubts as to whether it

¹ Take, for example, the following phrases: (1) ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων (v. 42), cf. Matt 8:12; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; it is found elsewhere in the NT only in Luke 13:28. (2) συντέλεια αἰῶνος (v. 39) and ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος (v. 40), cf. Matt 13:49; 24:3; 28:20; elsewhere in the NT the phrase is used only in Heb 9:26, there with the genitive plural. (3) τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν (v. 41), cf. Matt 7:23; 23:28; 24:12; the noun ἀνομίαν, used four times in Matthew, is not used in the other Gospels, although elsewhere in the NT it is used in Rom 4:7; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:14; 2 Thess 2:7, 14; Heb 1:9; 10:17; 1 John 3:4; the adjective ἄνομος is used only in Luke 22:37 in the Gospels, although it is found in Acts 2:23; 1 Cor 9:21; 2 Cor 2:8; 1 Tim 1:9; 2 Pet 2:8. (4) οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας is used six times in Matthew, and elsewhere in the NT occurs only in Luke 12:32. In his monograph *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1972) 82–85, Joachim Jeremias finds thirty-seven examples of “the linguistic characteristics of the Evangelist Matthew” in Matt 13:36–43. See the further evaluation of Johannes Friedrich, *Gott im Bruder?* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1977) 67–81; and Michel de Goedt, “L’Explication de la Parole de l’Ivraie (Mt. xiii, 36–43),” *RB* 69 (1959) 34–44. While some of Jeremias’s examples are open to debate, these statistics do serve to underline how distinctively Matthean is the language used in the interpretation of the parable. Furthermore, this paper will go on to argue that the theme of this parable is shared by three other major parables that are unique to Matthew.

can be attributed directly to Jesus, the interpretation of the parable will be considered to be an integral part of the evidence. Indeed, the interpretation grows in importance, because it is particularly within it that many of the specifically Matthean emphases are found.

Two broad approaches to the kingdom of heaven are discernible in the literature on the parable. These might be described as the universalist interpretation and the ecclesiological interpretation. This paper will evaluate each of these two positions in turn, after which some attention will be given to the wider picture of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew and the contribution the parable makes to that picture. First, then, the universalistic interpretation of the parable.

I. The Universalist Interpretation

Interpreters following the universalist interpretation frequently take as their starting point the phrase “the field is the world” (13:38). The parable thus has a worldwide, or universal, scope. This viewpoint fits naturally with understanding the kingdom of heaven in terms of God’s reign on earth which, in any event, is the concept of the kingdom of God² as understood by the majority of scholars.

According to this approach to the parable, and in the light of the interpretation provided in 13:36–43, the parable should then be understood in the following manner: Jesus, the Son of Man, who is working also through the community of his disciples who continue his work, is the one who sows the good seed that produces the children of the kingdom. As God’s reign is universal, the church’s proclamation takes place on a worldwide basis, and the children of the kingdom are found scattered throughout it. The devil also works with a worldwide scope, and his “crop” is called the children of the evil one. While God’s reign is established on earth through the activities of the Son of Man, it is not

² That kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God are synonymous in the Gospel of Matthew is shown by two things: the parallelism between the two terms in 19:23–24 and the frequent occasions where Matthew has the term “kingdom of heaven” where the other Gospels have “kingdom of God” (e.g., Matt 4:17 and Mark 1:15; Matt 13:31–33 and Mark 4:30–32, Luke 13:18–20). So BAGD, 134. J. C. Thomas has argued that when the Gospel of Matthew diverges from its customary usage “kingdom of heaven,” it does so for emphasis (“The Kingdom of God in the Gospel According to Matthew,” *NTS* 39 [1993] 136–46). On the other hand, Margaret Pamment argues that the kingdom of heaven has an exclusive future reference in Matthew, while the kingdom of God has a present reference (“The Kingdom of Heaven According to the First Gospel,” *NTS* 27 [1981] 211–32). Willoughby C. Allen also believes that the kingdom of heaven has a future reference and that it should be distinguished from the kingdom of God, although he does not locate the kingdom of God with as much precision as Pamment (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* [3d ed; ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1912] lxvii–lxxi). This paper will subsequently give reasons why the kingdom of heaven should be viewed as a present reality in the parable of the weeds among the wheat, and this is but one of several counterarguments that could be advanced against the thesis of Allen and Pamment.

until the final judgment that those who are evil are removed from this world (God's kingdom) and destroyed.

On this reading, the parable acts as reassurance to the faithful that while God's rule appears to be hidden in the present, there is coming a time when the wicked will be destroyed, and when God's rule will become dominant. It answers the basic question: if the kingdom of God has come, why has it not been accompanied with the destruction of the wicked as had been predicted in the apocalyptic literature?³

This reading has several notable strengths. First, it takes as its starting point one of the more specific aspects of the interpretation provided in the Gospel, namely, the identification "the field is the world" in v. 38. Indeed, the phrase is most naturally read in terms of a universalistic meaning. Second, it corresponds well with the wider missiological pattern in the Gospel of Matthew. The mission of Jesus and his disciples is initially restricted to the nation of Israel (10:5–6), but after the resurrection it is expanded to include all τὰ ἔθνη (28:19). As the saying in 28:19 is positioned within a few words of the end of the Gospel, a universalistic outlook with regard to mission quite clearly represents the evangelist's ideal. Third, the understanding of the kingdom of God as God's reign fits well with the OT roots of this concept.⁴ Finally, while this consideration does not determine the exegesis of the passage, this reading of the parable maintains a strong distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the church.

The obvious strength of this approach to the interpretation of the parable has meant its widespread acceptance. Interpreters adopting it include several of those names most widely respected in Matthean studies today.⁵ Yet it has

³ So George Eldon Ladd, *Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 232–33. Cf. D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1985) 81.

⁴ This background is summarized later in the article.

⁵ In addition to Ladd and Carson, the following all adopt this basic approach to the parable: W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1991) 2. 428, 430, see also 2. 409; Roy A. Harrisville, "In Search of the Meaning of 'The Reign of God,'" *Int* 47 (1993) 140–51; Hubert G. Housemann, "The Parable of the Tares," *Theology* 3 (1921) 32; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1993) 394–95; H. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969) 137, 179 n. 85, 345; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 351; R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: IVP, 1985) 224–25; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 132–35. In his monograph, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13* (London: SPCK, 1969), Jack Dean Kingsbury separates the parable from its interpretation. He understands the kingdom of God in terms of reign (pp. 17, 20), and exegetes the interpretation of 13:36–43 from a universalistic perspective (e.g., p. 71). Despite their basic universalistic approach, most commentators who adopt this perspective from time to time feel the need to speak of the church in their interpretations. For example, Kingsbury (*Matthew 13*) says: "Church . . . it is here that 'sons of the Kingdom' can be found (13:38)" (p. 18). Even Ladd, who is vehement in the need to distinguish between the church and the kingdom goes on to define the relationship between the two: while the church is not the kingdom, the kingdom creates the church, the church witnesses to

some significant weaknesses. The first of these is this: the universalistic interpretation does not fit as naturally with the phrase "they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers" in v. 41 as does the ecclesiological interpretation.⁶ This, though, is not an insurmountable objection. It is possible to interpret v. 41 in a way that fits the universalistic approach to the parable: if God's kingdom is this world, then any evildoer would of necessity be taken from out of his kingdom. The real problems with this type of interpretation lie in other areas.

A second weakness is that, no matter how sophisticated a face is put on it, the universalistic interpretation boils down to saying that there will be both good and bad in the world until the time of the final judgment.⁷ Now, while it is not impossible that a parable might make such a bland point, it does require an exercise in imagination to deem that the parable was given to illustrate a truism too trivial even to be described as a cliché. Furthermore, on such a reading, what is the point of the servants' desire to pull out the weeds before the harvest? In the symbolic universe set up by the universalistic interpretation, on what grounds would the followers of Christ imagine that they were capable of "uprooting" all the children of the evil one? Were they supposed to make war on the rest of the world? In the parable the servants are quite clearly told not to become involved in the process of sorting, but that it was to be left to God at the end of the age. Under the universalist interpretation, how could the servants

the kingdom, the church is the instrument of the kingdom, and it is the custodian of the kingdom (*A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 111–19).

⁶A. B. Bruce considers and rejects the universalist interpretation and uses v. 41 to establish that "the tares are Christians at least in profession" (*The Parabolic Teaching of Christ* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1882] 44–45). He apparently does this on the assumption that the kingdom of heaven is the church, which rather begs the question, but several important commentators who adopt the universalistic position also recognize the verse as a problem. For example, Ladd comments: "The only real difficulty for this interpretation is the expression, 'they [the angels] will gather out of this kingdom all causes of sin and all evil-doers' (Matt 13:41). His language appears to distinguish between the Kingdom of the Son and the Kingdom of the Father. Does this not plainly indicate that the wicked are already in the Kingdom (perhaps in the church) before the eschatological consummation?" (*Presence of the Future*, 233). Cf. the remarks of Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, 391 n. 38: "In our opinion, the only expression in this connection which might cause some uncertainty is the pronouncement made in Matthew 13:41." Ladd answers his own objection by pointing out that it is not possible to defend the differentiation between kingdom of the Son and kingdom of the Father. But in some regards, this is irrelevant, because, as will be seen later in the paper, the ecclesiological interpretation does not depend on this distinction. Other commentators raise further objections against the ecclesiological interpretation; these will be discussed in a later section of the article.

⁷"This parable . . . offers an answer to the age-long question, 'Why are the wicked permitted to remain and to prosper in a world governed by a righteous God?'" So Theodore H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew* (MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928) 121. One of three reasons William Hendriksen cites for stating that "the church visible is indeed definitely involved in this parable" is that the parables are dealing with mysteries, and while it is no mystery that evil and good coexist on the same earth, it is a mystery why God allows them to dwell side by side within the church visible (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973] 573).

even contemplate such uprooting? This problem may be diminished by the observation that the “premature separation of the tares and wheat in the parable does not come up in the interpretation,”⁸ but is not diminished by much because the question of the servants is surely one of the principal features of the parable proper.

Another feature that sits very uncomfortably with a universalistic interpretation is the indistinguishability of the two crops, which appears to be a central element of the parable.⁹ The weeds were not recognized until the crop matured, as would indeed be the case with bearded darnel, the likely reference of the term ζιζάνιον.¹⁰ On a universalistic reading, does this mean that the children of the kingdom cannot be easily distinguished from their pagan neighbors? Yet in the rest of the Gospel of Matthew there is perceived to be a big difference between a follower of Jesus and a follower of “the enemy.” Indeed, there is a clear conception of who is “inside” the community and who is not.¹¹

⁸ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 274. “Remarkable in this interpretation [vv. 36–43] is the absence of any reference to the householder’s patience. What was central to the parable is ignored in the allegorical interpretation” (Douglas R. Hare, *Matthew* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993] 155). Craig L. Blomberg, on the other hand, divides the parable into three parts and suggests that while the interpretation stresses the third part of the parable, the other parts should not be dismissed as of lesser importance (*Interpreting the Parables* [Leicester: Apollos (IVP), 1990] 200).

⁹ “If by the bad crop had been meant merely bad men in general, why emphasise so pointedly the non-distinguishableness of the two crops till the time of the earing? and we may add, why select a plant to represent the evil element so like wheat in the early stage of growth? why not be content with the thorns, which in the parable of the Sower choked the good seed, and prevented it from bringing forth fruit unto perfection?” (A. B. Bruce, *Parabolic Teaching*, 46–47).

¹⁰ ζιζάνιον is identified as bearded darnel, or *lolium temulentum*, by Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 161; *Flora and Fauna of the Bible* (London: United Bible Societies, 1980) 194–95; Harry J. Baerg, *Bible Plants and Animals: Volume 3, Plants* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1989) 80; Winifred Walker, *All the Plants of the Bible* (London: Lutterworth, 1957) 208–9; Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1922) 667; Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1928) 407–9, and with the rare exception such as V. A. Holmes-Gore, “The Parable of the Tares” *Theology* 35 (1937) 117, who says that “darnel . . . is not an altogether different seed but a degenerate kind of wheat indistinguishable from true wheat,” is invariably so identified by twentieth-century commentators. Earlier commentators made various suggestions. John Albert Bengel, for example, considers that ζιζάνιον should be related to the Hebrew רִצָּא (“flower”) and thinks of the weeds as poisonous flowers (*Gnomon of the New Testament* [Edinburgh: Clark, 1877] 1. 289). The editor of Bengel’s commentary appears to have added a footnote identifying the ζιζάνια with darnel or “bastard wheat” (*lolium album*). Albert Barnes, while mentioning darnel, is still prepared to consider the possibility that ζιζάνιον is a form of degenerate wheat (*Notes on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark* [London: Gall & Inglis, (1832)] 195). Bearded darnel is hard to distinguish from wheat while young. It matures with black seeds. The grain normally carries a certain fungus that can sometimes cause severe illness in humans and animals, although poultry seem immune. John A. Broadus cites the comments of Robinson, who reports that as he traveled in Galilee in 1852 he saw bearded darnel sold in markets as food for poultry (*Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* [Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1886] 295).

¹¹ E.g., 18:7, 15–17. One of the characteristics of the Matthean community is its clear defini-

So how can the believers and unbelievers in “the world” be so hard to distinguish that it is not until they reach maturity that they can be separated? Further, those who are “burned” are described as πάντα τὰ σκάνδαλα καὶ τοὺς ποιούντας τὴν ἀνομίαν (“all the causes of sin and all evildoers,” v. 41), a phrase very like one found elsewhere in the Gospel but applied to those who take the name of Jesus but falsely (οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν, 7:23).¹² Surely it is no surprise when those who are not disciples pay scant respect for the law, as would be demanded by the universalistic interpretation, but it would be a significant problem if it were members of the community who had such a disregard for law.

A final problem, and perhaps the greatest for the universalistic interpretation, is that while the kingdom of God might be best characterized as “rule of God” in the OT, within the Gospels it is best understood in terms of sovereignty over a specific *territory*: indeed, a territory small enough and well defined enough to have “doors.” But more of this at a later point in the article.

Do the problems just enumerated compel the abandonment of the universalistic approach to the parable? Not unless there is at hand a more coherent approach to the parable that has fewer weaknesses. Does the ecclesiastical approach to the parable fulfill this criterion?

II. The Ecclesiastical Interpretation

The ecclesiastical interpretation has not been without its adherents.¹³ They

tion of boundaries. On this, see L. Michael White, “Crisis Management and Boundary Maintenance: The Social Location of the Matthean Community,” in *Social History of the Matthean Community* (ed. David L. Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 221–28; Robert K. McIver, “The Problem of Synoptic Relationships in the Development and Testing of a Methodology for the Reconstruction of the Matthean Community” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1989 [UMI 9007148]) 188–91.

¹² Jesus charges that the Pharisees, ἔσωθεν . . . ἐστε μεστοὶ ὑποκρίσεως καὶ ἀνομίας (“inside . . . are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”) in 23:28, although not quite in the same phraseology as τοὺς ποιούντας τὴν ἀνομίαν in 13:41.

¹³ For C. H. Dodd, while the interpretation is quite obviously secondary and “we shall do well to forget this interpretation as completely as possible” (p. 137), “the lesson taught [by the interpretation] is that there are good and bad members of the Church (the Kingdom of the Son of Man), and that it is not the Lord’s will that any attempt should be made to expel the bad before the final judgment” (*The Parables of the Kingdom* [1935; London: Fontana, 1961] 137). Joachim Jeremias also dismisses the interpretation as secondary but considers that in the interpretation provided in 13:36–43 “the ‘Kingdom of the Son of Man’ (v. 41), which at the *Parousia* (v. 40) is replaced by the Kingdom of God (v. 43), is simply a designation of the Church, an isolated expression in the Gospels” (*Parables*, 82). Ulrich Luz posits a complex history of application for the parable: initially it was used by the Matthean community to urge its members to stay within Judaism, but as it is found in the Gospel, it is probably used to refer to the church, and the problem of good and evil within it (*Matthew in History* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994] 78–79); cf. idem, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Zurich: Benziger, 1990) 320–41; and “Nom Taumelloch im Weizenfeld,” in *Vom Urchristentum zu Jesus: Für Joachim Gnlika* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989) 154–63. The following also support some variation of an ecclesiological approach to the parable and/or its interpretation: Kun-

explain the parable in terms of the community of faith. This community is faced with the dilemma of what should be done about evil members. Just as the bearded darnel could not be initially distinguished from the wheat, these members are also hard to distinguish from other disciples of Jesus. Yet their fruitage appears to be evil. Surely they should be rooted out of the community, as the servants wished to root out the weeds. But the message of the parable is that the community will remain a mixture of good and evil until the time of separation at the last judgment, and that the responsibility for the separation of good and evil belongs to God and his agents, not individual members of the community.

This reading also has several notable strengths. First, several themes emerge that are found elsewhere in the Gospel. For example, the problem of unworthy members is already evident in 7:21–23. Many of those who cry “Lord Lord” will be told ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (“on that day”), “I never knew you, depart from me οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν.” The false prophets of 7:21–23 share two characteristics with those represented by the weeds of 13:24–30, 41: they were indistinguishable from other Christians in that they worked miracles in the name of the Lord, yet at the same time they were ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν, “evildoers” (7:23, cf. τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν in 13:41).

It is τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν who will be removed from the kingdom of the Son of Man (v. 41). In this verse the kingdom and the community of believers are closely associated. Until the time of the last judgment, this kingdom will be composed of good and bad. The servants who wish to uproot the tares from among the wheat correspond to those sincere believers who, faced with the problem of sin in the community, wish to eradicate it. The parable urges patience in this matter. This same issue is also addressed in 18:10–35, albeit with slightly different conclusions. While the parable of the weeds among the wheat seems to imply that the community simply has to put up with the problem of evil in its midst, in 18:15–17 it appears that there are some matters so serious that after due process the community will act against those individuals. Yet this apparent contradiction further serves to show that the issue of what to do with unworthy members of the community is a live one in the Gospel.

Chun Wong, *Interkulturelle Theologie und multikulturelle Gemeinde im Matthäusevangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992) 155–77, esp. 156–60; Daniel Marguerat, *Le Jugement dans l'Évangile de Matthieu* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981) 428–30; H. E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM, 1965) 69–73; J. G. F. Collison, “The Church in the Synoptics: The Gospel of Matthew,” *Indian Journal of Theology* 28 (1979) 163–64; William G. Johnsson, *Religion in Overalls* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1977) 69; L. Sabourin, “The Parables of the Kingdom,” *BTB* 6 (1976) 145; R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Interpreter* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989) 275; T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1957) 194–95; Leslie H. Bunn, “The Parable of the Tares (Matt. xiii. 24–30, 36–43),” *ExpT* 38 (1926–27) 561–64; H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1877) 364; Theodor Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (4th ed.; Leipzig: Scholl, 1922) 493–96. Nor is this list exhaustive. The ecclesiastical interpretation might be considered typical of the patristic age. This is nicely summarized by Broadus, *Matthew*, 300, esp. n. 1.

There are in fact four other parables, unique to Matthew, that appear to address the problem of good and bad within the kingdom of heaven: the parables of the net (13:47–50), the unforgiving servant (18:23–35), the wedding garment (22:1–14),¹⁴ and the ten maidens (25:1–13).¹⁵ Many commentators who are compelled to a universalistic interpretation of the weeds among the wheat will read the parable of the net in ecclesiological terms, for example.¹⁶ Just as the net draws all kinds of different fish into it, so does the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven bring all kinds of different individuals into the community of believers. The two groups will be separated at the time of the final judgment, but this will be done by divine agents.

Second, this reading fits well one of the curious aspects of the way the parable is presented in Matthew 13: the interpretation is directed at the disciples, not the crowds (13:36). This is underlined by the interposition of the parables of the mustard seed and leaven (13:31–33), and the sayings on the use of parables (13:34–35). Thus, the parable belongs to the followers of Jesus (the community of faith), not the wider “world.” Mind you, this observation does leave a problem for the ecclesiological reading: Why give the parable to the crowds at all if the parable is directed at the community of faith?¹⁷

This reading also meets many of the objections raised earlier against the universalistic interpretation. It fits comfortably with v. 41. It is from the midst of the church that τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν are taken. It gives the parable a

¹⁴ There are a few similarities between this parable and the parable in Luke 14:15–24, but there are also striking differences: for example, one is a marriage feast, the other a great banquet; the marriage feast is arranged at the instigation of a king, while the banquet is planned by a commoner.

¹⁵ “The four parables of the weeds, the unforgiving servant, the wedding garment, and the virgins, all of which are introduced by the same formula . . . deal with the apostasy of someone in the community” (Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* [London: SPCK, 1976] 302–3). Schweizer also points out that they are all introduced by the passive of the verb ὁμοιῶ followed by a dative (the first three parables are introduced by an aorist passive, the fourth by a future passive). He goes on to identify this construction as Matthean. Certainly, the preponderance of its uses are found in Matthew: of the fifteen uses of the verb ὁμοιῶ in the NT, eight occur in Matthew (6:8; 7:24, 26; 11:16; 13:24; 18:23; 22:2; 25:1). Further, while it is true that all of the occurrences of the passive of ὁμοιῶ are followed by a dative, Luke 13:18–19, 20–21 has a very similar construction in the active voice, and the word occurs so seldom it is hard to know if the change from passive to active is of significance (cf. Acts 14:11).

¹⁶ “For all practical purposes, then, the net becomes a picture for the Church, and the Church factually becomes the empirical representative of God’s kingly rule on earth” (Kingsbury, *Matthew* 13, 121). See also Gundry, *Matthew*, 279–80. Ladd, who is careful to maintain a difference between the kingdom and the church, still interprets the parable of the draw net in terms of the church, when he says: “The action of God’s Kingdom among men created a mixed fellowship, first in Jesus’ disciples and then in the church” (*Theology of the New Testament*, 113).

¹⁷ The interpretation of the parable of soils is likewise separated from its parable (13:1–9, 18–23) and directed at the disciples, rather than the crowds (v. 10). Kingsbury finds that there are so many differences between the parable and its interpretation, that he argues that they should be interpreted independently of each other, and does so (*Matthew* 13, 66).

point. There is no problem with those in the world outside the community who ποιοῦσι τὴν ἀνομίαν (“do evil”). This is a nonissue. But the issue of those within the community who ποιοῦσι τὴν ἀνομίαν (“do evil”) is very real. The parable has real significance for this matter. This interpretation is built on the similarity between the weeds and the wheat. Finally, as will emerge shortly, this interpretation of the parable fits remarkably well with the concepts of the kingdom of heaven developed elsewhere in the Gospel.

Yet despite these strengths, this interpretation also has some weaknesses. The most prominent of these has to be the phrase in v. 38, “The field is the world.”¹⁸ Proponents of this view have not always handled this phrase very well. For example, in an otherwise excellent article, Charles W. F. Smith says of this phrase, “The expression ‘the field is the world’ does suggest the problem of the church in the world but turns out to be that of the world in the church. . . . In its context in the allegory it may well be considered a temporal rather than a spatial term.”¹⁹ The first sentence, while rhetorically strong, simply begs the question. The second stretches the normal meaning of the word κόσμος to an unacceptable extent.

T. W. Manson handles v. 38 in a different manner. He comments:

“The field is the world” . . . does not agree with the facts. The field of the activity of Jesus was Palestine. It does not agree with the M program of the mission (Mt. 10^{5f.}), where the field is Israel in the narrowest sense of the word. It does agree with Mt. 28:18–20, that is, it is early Christian dogma.

Manson understands the interpretation to deal with “the problem of a mixed community; a Church which contains genuine Christians and others,”²⁰ and he appears to feel no need to reconcile this position with the concept that “the field is the world” aside from noting that it is “early Christian dogma.”

Not all efforts to explain this verse from an ecclesiological perspective have been so open to criticism. John Calvin explained “the field is the world” in terms of the figure of speech called synecdoche, where the whole represents the part.²¹ Another explanation has been advanced by several commentators who explain this verse in terms of the extent of the church’s operations. Eduard Schweizer, for example, aware that “the field cannot simply be equated with the community on the basis of verse 38,” explains v. 38 in this way: “the Kingdom of

¹⁸ “Die von vielen Exegeten getroffene Gleichsetzung der βασιλεία des Menschensohns (v 41) mit der Kirche ist im Text nicht vollzogen. Das Wirkungsfeld des Menschensohns ist der κόσμος (v 38)” (Georg Künzel, *Studien zum Gemeindeverständnis des Matthäus-Evangeliums* [Stuttgart: Calwer, 1978] 132). A similar point is made by Pierre Bonnard, *L’Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1963) 199, as well as numerous other interpreters.

¹⁹ Charles W. F. Smith, “The Mixed State of the Church in Matthew’s Gospel,” *JBL* 82 (1963) 153.

²⁰ Manson, *Sayings*, 194–95.

²¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845) 2. 119–20.

the Son of Man encompasses the entire world, to the extent that it is proclaimed everywhere.”²² Nor is he alone in this type of understanding.²³ Others speak of the “world” as the field of missionary endeavor.²⁴

Perhaps this type of explanation might be strengthened with the observation that it is the *crop* that represents the believing community, *not* the field. Just as the crop exists within the field, so the believing community exists within the world. *The differences occur within the crop not the field.* Thus, on an ecclesiological reading of the parable, while the church exists within the world and, indeed, is scattered throughout the world, this is not the point of the parable. Rather, the parable points to the differences within the community of disciples—there are some who are children of the kingdom, and some who are children of the evil one. Initially it is hard to distinguish between the two groups. They both appear to be true disciples. But the fruitage of the two groups is different. The children of the evil one are τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν (“those who do evil”). In sum, v. 38 need not be an insoluble problem for the ecclesiological interpretation.

Matt 18:15–17 has been raised as a second problem for the ecclesiological interpretation. According to that interpretation, the point of the parable is that the separation of the bad from the community belongs to God and will not take place until the return of the Son of Man. But Matt 18:15–17 sets out the procedure for doing just that: separating somebody from the community. This appears to be in direct contradiction.²⁵ Yet while this is an apparent contradiction, it is possible to reconcile them as two different perspectives on the same problem: evil in the believing community. Matthew 18 itself, while allowing for the possibility of community discipline, is carefully constructed so as to make such actions a last resort. Matt 18:15–17 is preceded by the parable of the lost sheep (18:10–14), which in Matthew is used to make the point that the community leader should be prepared to risk the entire “flock” in his efforts to rescue “one of the least of these” who πλανηθῇ (“went astray,” v. 12). Immediately following

²² Schweizer, *Matthew*, 311; cf. idem, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1961) 56 n. 196.

²³ E.g., Wolfgang Trilling says “Der Kosmos als »die Sphäre«, in der sich das Reich Gottes verbreitet, ist *universal* gedacht” (*Das Wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthäus-Evangeliums* [Munich: Kösel, 1964] 126).

²⁴ E.g., “Le *lexique* interprète la parable à partir de l’expérience missionnaire de l’église matthéenne; la catégorie des semailles et de la semence le signifie de manière univoque. Par le terme de κόσμος (le monde des hommes, l’humanité), l’église de Mt dévoile l’universalité de son horizon missionnaire” (Daniel Marguerat, “L’Église et le Monde en Matthieu 13,36–43,” *RTP* 110 [1978] 116). Cf. Charles F. Schaeffer, *Annotations on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran, 1895) 321.

²⁵ So Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2. 428. Note also the words of R. C. H. Lenski: “Of supreme importance is the statement that the field is ὁ κόσμος, ‘the world,’ and therefore not ‘the church.’ This is so vital, because it cuts off two terrible errors: the one, that the sons of wickedness may remain undisturbed in the congregation (no church discipline, no expulsion) . . . Jesus . . . forbids no church discipline (18, 17–19; 1 Cor 5, 3–5)” (*Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* [Columbus, OH: Lutheran, 1932] 519–20).

18:15–20 is the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:21–35), which urges the followers of Jesus not to forgive seven times, but seventy times seven (vv. 21–22), and warns them that a fate similar to that of the unforgiving servant awaits all those who do not forgive their fellow believers (τῶ ἀδελφῶ) from the heart (v. 35). Careful readers of the fourth discourse will not feel entitled to desire to purge the church. Instead they will feel the force of the command to forgive and will recognize the strong imperative in 18:15–17 to go to extraordinary lengths to reconcile the “sinner” back into the community. In other words, the discourse in Matthew 18 actually supports the basic attitude recommended by the ecclesiological reading of the parable of the weeds. This objection is hollow.

The problem of context has been raised by W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison: “The identification of ‘his kingdom’ and the church is also problematic because it presupposes that our text has to do with false disciples; but at this point in the gospel the issue is the unbelief of Israel, not unbelief in the ecclesia.”²⁶ This suggestion brings with it the possibility of reading the parable in terms of Israel, not the “world” or the “church.”²⁷ But several things would militate against such a reading. For example, the phrase “the field is the world” (v. 38) would need to be explained. Further one has to ask how the “servants” would be able to contemplate ridding all the “tares” from Israel.²⁸ Surely such a task would be beyond the imagination of the Christian community in the first century, a minority within Judaism.

Does this mean that the ecclesiological interpretation is now established as the superior reading? Not yet. It is perhaps closer to the truth that both the universalistic and ecclesiological interpretations have strengths and weaknesses. They both represent coherent interpretations of the parable, and from the perspective of the parable itself it is hard to distinguish which is the preferable interpretation. It is at this point that the wider context of the whole Gospel needs to be invoked and, in particular, the images associated with the kingdom of heaven.

²⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 430.

²⁷ This is the approach to the interpretation of the parable adopted by Kingsbury, *Matthew* 13, 63–76, esp. 74–75. Cf. J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (London: SCM, 1963) 220.

²⁸ Kingsbury has provided one of the most carefully worked out interpretations of 13:24–30 as a parable directed against Israel (*Matthew* 13, 63–76). Yet even for Kingsbury, “one can assert with ample corroboration that in the parable of the Tares it is the Church that is speaking through the mouth of the slaves (vv. 27f)” (p. 69). He understands the servants’ wish to pick out the weeds as implying “that Matthew’s Church is seriously occupied with the matter of forcing a formal and irrevocable separation between itself and the rest of Judaism” (p. 73). But is this fair to the imagery? In the parable, the weeds are to be removed from within the wheat, not the wheat from within the weeds. Thus Kingsbury’s reading may lead to the conclusion that the church contemplates throwing all non-Christians out of the synagogues! This was never an option in the church’s relationship to Judaism.

III. Kingdom as either Reign or Realm in Matthew

Associated with the two different approaches to the parable of the weeds among the wheat are two different conceptions of the kingdom of heaven. The universalistic interpretation understands the kingdom in terms of reign, or rule, while the ecclesiological interpretation sees a close connection between the kingdom and the community of disciples. Which interpretation is preferable depends in part on which understanding of the kingdom best fits the usage of the term in the Gospel of Matthew.

First, then, what is the case for conceiving of the kingdom as reign? This understanding has sound OT roots. The term מלכות can be translated as either “kingdom” or “kingship.”²⁹ In 1 Chr 26:31, for example, it is used in the sense of “reign” or “kingship”: “In the fortieth year of David’s מלכות . . .”³⁰ It can also be used of a territory (e.g., Ezra 1:1).³¹ One interesting usage is found in 1 Chr 28:5, where Solomon is said to sit on the throne of the מלכות of Yahweh (cf. also 1 Chr 17:14).

That this conception of the kingdom can also be found in the NT is witnessed by the fact that it remains the way that most exegetes approach it, though it is hard to find evidence for this usage that is as unequivocal as that cited above for the OT.³² In fact, in many ways NT usage is different from that of the OT. The Gospels very seldom speak of God as king; neither do they speak of the establishment or setting up of the kingdom. Instead of God as king, we find Jesus speaking of God as father; and while the concept of the kingdom of God/heaven is prominent, the Gospels never use the word βασιλεύς (“king”) or the verb βασιλεύειν (“to reign”) with the concept.³³

²⁹ Gerhard von Rad, “βασιλεύς, κτλ.,” *TDNT* 1. 570.

³⁰ This example is cited by J. C. O’Neill, “The Kingdom of God,” *NovT* 35 (1993) 131.

³¹ Other examples where kingdom is used of territory in the OT may be found in George Wesley Buchanan, *Jesus and His Kingdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984) 15–25.

³² Ladd cites several texts (*Presence of the Future*, 134–36). His first example, Rev 17:12, actually appears to be a counterexample. The seven kings have not yet received their βασιλεία. Why? Because they have not yet gained control over their territory! The parable in Luke 19:11–26, on which Ladd rests a good deal of his argument, also appears to be a counterexample. The king did not receive his kingdom until he had been given authority over it. In other words, his kingdom was the territory over which he ruled, not his ruling. Sverre Aalen admits only one book in the NT that has adopted the Jewish concept of βασιλεία—Revelation—and cites texts that identify God as king, such as Rev 11:15 (“Reign’ and ‘House’ in the Kingdom of God in the Gospels,” *NTS* 8 [1962] 219). I have not been able to discover, even in Revelation, a text where βασιλεία unequivocally means reign, although there are several places where it probably is best understood as reign (e.g., Rev 5:10; 11:15; 12:10).

³³ Aalen, “Reign’ and ‘House,” 217–19. Millar Burrows points to another difference in the usage of the term kingdom of God between the OT and the NT (“Thy Kingdom Come,” *JBL* 74 [1955] 1–8). With the possible exception of Mic 4:8, the OT nowhere speaks of the kingdom of God coming. The OT conception of kingdom of God is the reign of God. In fact, God already reigns, and what is needed is that humans recognize this.

This is but one line of evidence that tends to cast doubt on the general consensus that the best way to understand the kingdom of God is in terms of reign. Perhaps the gravest disquiet with such an interpretation is raised by several texts relating to the kingdom that are very difficult to interpret in terms of reign. Most of these texts occur in the Gospel of Matthew, and several are unique to that Gospel. These texts are most naturally read in terms of the image of territory or realm. Take, for example, Matt 16:18–19. In these two verses are closely juxtaposed the concepts of ἐκκλησία, βασιλεία, the giving of the keys, and binding and loosing. The expansion of the papacy in medieval times, the vigorous dialogue between Protestants and Catholics, and the enigmatic role of Peter in the Gospel of Matthew have all combined to produce an extensive secondary literature on these verses that stretches over several centuries,³⁴ but only two aspects of these verses are important for the purposes of this paper: the keys of the kingdom, and the juxtaposition of βασιλεία with ἐκκλησία.

In both ancient and contemporary times, keys allow or deny access to a localized region, be it a house, a large public building, or a walled city. When the keys of the kingdom of heaven are given to Peter, this can only mean that in some way Peter is given control over access to the kingdom. Note the underlying imagery, though. This kingdom cannot be conceived of in terms of reign but only in terms of territory that one can enter and from which one can be excluded. A reference to the ability to lock somebody out of the kingdom is also found in 23:13, where the Pharisees are said to lock the kingdom of heaven against others and to refuse to enter themselves.

Nor is this the only language associated with the kingdom that is best understood in terms of territory. Take, for example, the frequently occurring image of entering the kingdom found in 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24; 21:31.³⁵

³⁴ Oscar Cullmann gives a brief history of the study of the passage, skipping from the Reformation to the end of the nineteenth century (*Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr: A Historical and Theological Study* [2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962] 164–76). Bernard Ramm's survey article covers to the period of the Reformation ("The Exegesis of Matt. 16:13–20 in the Patristic and Reformation Period," *Foundations* 5 [1962] 206–16). The published dissertation by Joseph A. Burgess deals with the modern period up to 1965 (*A History of the Exegesis of Matthew 16:17–19 from 1787 to 1965* [Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards, 1976]). See also Bédaride Rigaux, "St. Peter in Contemporary Exegesis," in *Progress and Decline in the History of Church Renewal* (ed. R. Aubert; New York: Paulist, 1967) 147–79; and Rudolf Pesch, "The Position and Significance of Peter in the Church of the New Testament: A Survey of Current Research," in *Papal Ministry in the Church* (ed. H. King; New York: Herder & Herder, 1971) 21–35. Interest in the passage has not diminished since these surveys were conducted as is shown by the bibliography and footnotes to pp. 36–42 of the book by Carsten P. Thiede, *Simon Peter: From Galilee to Rome* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), and the bibliography found in Arlo J. Nau, *Peter in Matthew: Discipleship, Diplomacy, and Dispraise* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 158–75.

³⁵ In the section of his article with the subheading "Numerical and Syntactical Tinkering in the General Direction of a Definition," Harrisville notes that used as an "object," "what 'happens' most to the Kingdom of God is that it is 'entered.' Next in order is the kingdom as 'preached.' . . . The kingdom as 'inherited' assumes third place. . . . The kingdom as sought or awaited, as given or

Now this language is natural if one conceives of the kingdom as a territory, or city, or household.³⁶ But how can one conceive of “entering” the reign of God. God already reigns over us.³⁷ Furthermore, while it is natural to suppose the poor in spirit might possess a territory or that the meek might inherit one (5:3, 5), it is difficult to conceive of them possessing or inheriting a “reign.”³⁸

If the kingdom of heaven is best understood in terms of the imagery of territory, how does one understand its relationship to various temporal references:³⁹ the kingdom as present (12:28), the kingdom as imminent (ἤγγικεν; 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), and the kingdom as future (26:29; 25:34; 16:28)? The references to the future kingdom naturally fit the concept of kingdom as territory. The best example of how this might be understood is found in Rev 12:10: “Now . . . the Kingdom of our God has come . . . because the accuser of our comrades⁴⁰ is cast out.” According to this verse, in effect the kingdom of God is established by means of conquest. It is noteworthy that in Matt 4:8 the devil considered that it was within his right to give the kingdoms of the world to Jesus. In the recorded response there is no challenge against the claim that the current kingdoms of the world are possessions of the devil and his to dispose of as he sees fit. It is not until the final destruction of the powers of evil that God’s rulership will be established over his territory.

received, is in next to last place; and the kingdom as seized, shut up, promised, prepared, assigned, or shared is in last place.” As subject of the verb the kingdom is said to be approaching or have arrived, and it is the subject of parables (70 percent of which are in Matthew!) (“Meaning of ‘The Reign of God,’” 143–45).

³⁶ “The kingdom is like a house or city or land. Only such a view would allow anyone to speak of ‘entering’ the kingdom” (O’Neil, “Kingdom of God,” 134). Cf. U. Luz, “βασιλεία,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. H. Balz and G. Schneider; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978–80) 1. 202. R. Newton Flew, although he considers that the primary meaning of kingdom of God is God’s reign, cites images of entering the kingdom, along with the statement about the keys, as evidence of a secondary sense of the term, in which it carries the idea of domain or community (*Jesus and His Church* [2d ed.; London: Epworth, 1943] 20–29, esp. 24–25).

³⁷ Joel Marcus (“Entering the Kingly Power of God,” *JBL* 107 [1988] 663–75) defends G. Dalman’s contention that when *malakut* is applied to God it always means kingly rule, never the kingdom, but he admits that the “NT sayings about entering the *basileia* . . . are . . . the most difficult sayings for this position.” He argues that it is possible to understand the imagery of entering the kingdom in terms of participation in God’s manifestation of his kingly power, but is this the most natural implication of the imagery? Furthermore, why must *every* use of the term be forced into either the category of dominion or domain. Both meanings are evident in the OT, and certainly the concept of domain is prominent in the NT.

³⁸ Pamment, “Kingdom of Heaven,” 213. Pamment uses this observation as the basis for insisting that the kingdom of heaven in these texts is still future.

³⁹ Armin Kretzer concludes his discussion of Matt 13:24–30, 26–43, with the following observation: “In den verschiedenen zutage tretenden Spannungsmomenten ist der zeitliche Aspekt der dominierende, und zwar als Blick auf Gegenwart und Zukunft,” although he admits “Dabei ist bereits ein räumlicher Bereich angesprochen” (*Die Herrschaft der Himmel und die Söhne des Reiches: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Basileiabegriff und Basileiaverständnis im Matthäusevangelium* [Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1971] 143).

⁴⁰ Following the NRSV translation of τῶν ἀδελφῶν.

It is possible to read Matt 12:28 in this light. The reason the kingdom of God has come upon Jesus' hearers is that Jesus is casting out demons. In other words, he is overcoming and disposing of the powers of evil, thereby beginning the process of conquering the territory of the evil one.⁴¹ Matt 11:12 is relevant to this issue as well: τῶν ἡμερῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ ἕως ἄρτι ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν βιάζεται καὶ βιασταὶ ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν ("From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force"). βιάζεσθαι has the implication of entering by violence.⁴² The kingdom of heaven is taking the territory of Beelzebulb by violence.⁴³

If such an understanding is true, then the references to the nearness of the kingdom would best be read as meaning nearness in terms of time. The final crises in which the forces of good destroy the forces of evil to reestablish God's sovereignty over the territory of the earth is imminent. But what of the presence of the kingdom? How is the kingdom of heaven a present reality? It is here that the ecclesiological reading of the parable of the weeds among the wheat makes its contribution.

IV. The Parable's Contribution to the Matthean Theology of the Kingdom

The introductory formula of the parable of weeds among the wheat would lead the reader to suppose that the parable deals with the reality of the kingdom in the present. In other words, if the future tense of the phrase Τότε ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν δέκα παρθένοις ("then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten bridesmaids") in 25:1 should be taken seriously, so should the present tense of the phrase Ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ("the kingdom of heaven is like . . .") found introducing the parables of the mus-

⁴¹ This concept is also explored by Rudolf Otto, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man* (rev. ed.; London: Lutterworth, 1943) 97–107; reprinted as "The Kingdom of God Expels the Kingdom of Satan," in *The Kingdom of God in the Teachings of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 27–35. Cf. Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 76–77. Gustav Aulén's well-known work, *Christus Victor: An Historic Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931), describes this NT concept of the dramatic triumph of Christ over the evil powers of the world as the "classic" theory of the Atonement. His survey of the NT data (pp. 77–96), though dated, is still valuable for its tracing of the concept throughout the rest of the NT. The words of Howard Clark Kee are also apposite to this point: "That background was nothing less than the cosmic plan of God by which he was regaining control over an estranged and hostile creation, which was under subjection to the powers of Satan. Jesus' exorcisms are depicted in the oldest layers of the gospel tradition as contributing to the fulfilment of that eschatological goal" ("The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories," *NTS* 14 [1967–68] 246).

⁴² In the middle voice, at least. In the passive it means be violently treated or oppressed. So BAGD, 140.

⁴³ See V. S. Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

tard seed, leaven, the hidden treasure, the merchant, and the net in 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47, and the aorist tense of the phrase used to introduce the parable under consideration ὁμοιώθη ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (13:24; cf. 18:23; 22:2). There is some discussion in the literature as to whether the aorist tense of 13:24 is to be distinguished from the present tenses introducing the other parables in the chapter. Some, citing both as possible translations of the underlying Aramaic preposition ܠ used in comparisons, consider the two to be synonymous,⁴⁴ while others consider that the differentiation in tense is deliberate and should be maintained in exegesis.⁴⁵ Either reading shows that the parable has reference to the kingdom of heaven manifest in the *present*. If the two forms are synonymous, then this is self-evident, while if the aorist tense does have reference to the past, then this is but stronger evidence that the parable is dealing with the manifestation of the kingdom of heaven in the present, because it speaks of present conditions brought about by past events.

Now, if the parable is speaking to the present reality of the kingdom of God, what exactly is that present reality? Which of the two options canvased earlier in the paper best fits the data of the Gospel of Matthew? On the evidence thus far, it would have to be the ecclesiological interpretation. In other words, the kingdom of God is manifest in the present in the community of Jesus' disciples. It is this community that is the realm or territory that corresponds to the kingdom.

According to the parable, the membership of this community is not co-terminus with the membership of the future kingdom. The present "kingdom" has a membership where the children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one are so inextricably intermingled that they will not be separated until the last judgment which will usher in the future kingdom. At that time the children of the kingdom will shine as the stars in heaven. But till then, the community of faith will be made up of both types of individual.

Thus it is that this parable makes several contributions to the Matthean portrayal of the kingdom of heaven. First, the kingdom, a future reality, has

⁴⁴ Jeremias, *Parables*, 101. M. Zerwick and M. Grosvenor suggest that the aorist form might represent the Semitic perfect with a present meaning (*A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1942] 42).

⁴⁵ D. A. Carson, "The OMOIOΣ Word-group as Introduction to Some Matthean Parables," *NTS* 31 (1985) 277–82; Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971) 214; Kingsbury, *Matthew* 13, 67; Broadus, *Matthew*, 294; Leopold Fonck, *The Parables of the Gospel* (Rome: Frederick Pustet, 1915) 128. Neither are these the only two linguistic possibilities that are canvased. Allan Hugh M'Neil notes that ὁμοιώθη is used in the LXX to translate the perfect of דָּמָה ("be like," "resemble") in such places as Ps 48[49]:13, 21 (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew* [London: Macmillan, 1915] 196); A. B. Bruce considers the aorist to be used proleptically for the future (*The Expositor's Greek Testament* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910] 199); while Matthew Black (cited by Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 411) also considers that the aorist represents the Semitic perfect (*An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* [3d ed.: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967] 129).

made itself manifest already in the present in the community of disciples. The presence of evil in the community shows that this is but a partial representation of the future kingdom, but this should not distract from the fact that the blessings of the future have come into the present and are to be found in the community of disciples. Second, and perhaps this is the primary thrust of the parable, the separation of evil from within the community will not take place by human action, nor will it take place until the end of the age. This is one of several places where the Gospel of Matthew has addressed practical issues faced by any community that espouses high ideals of behavior.⁴⁶ What does one do when members of the community fail to measure up to the standard they should achieve? Should the faithful rise up to expel such from the membership? The teaching of the Gospel on this practical issue is clear: there are occasions when the problem is so severe that the individual should be excluded from the community (18:15–17), but any dealings like this should be tempered by the realization that a disciple of Jesus acts out of forgiveness at all times (18:21–35), and by the other consideration that right till the end of time the community of disciples will remain a mixture of good and evil. In the Gospel of Matthew, while there is considerable alarm as to the presence of those who are ἀνομία, the purifying of the community is not a prerequisite to the return of the Son of Man with his angels.

⁴⁶ One thinks of 5:31; 19:9 as a further example of this. Both texts reflect Jesus' strong opposition to divorce that is found in the other Synoptic Gospels (Mark 10:1–12; Luke 16:18), while at the same time recognizing that there are times when this ideal cannot be maintained in the face of the reality of πορνεία.