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MATTHEW'S RESPONSE TO AN EARLY MISSIONARY ISSUE

Meaning and Function of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1-16)

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PREFACE

This present paper on the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard is the published edition of my doctoral dissertation in Biblical Theology defended at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in December 2011.

A doctoral dissertation is always a labor of steadfast love and patience. Thus, I give thanks to God for the grace to have been inspired by the Scriptural text I researched and the physical and mental strength to achieve it. I come from a Religious Order, the Discalced Carmelites, born and nurtured in the land of Jesus Christ. The Rule of life that inspires us, the Rule of St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, instructs Carmelites «to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ and to ponder the Lord's law day and night». Therefore, I'm deeply grateful to the Order of Discalced Carmelites for having formed and imbued me with a love for Sacred Scripture. This dissertation bears witness to my life as a Discalced Carmelite Friar. Without the support of my religious community, I would never have been able to complete this work.

Of course, my Christian faith and love for the Bible has its roots in a faith-filled family. I am forever grateful to my father and mother, Ivan and Anica, who have passed onto eternal life. They were people of deep faith who gave me a living example of what it means to live the Good News of God's love for all people. Along with my parents, I am deeply grateful to my brother and sister, Miroslav and Milkica. Their love and support during the difficult moments of research and writing encouraged and heartened me to persevere.

Reverend Professor Massimo Grilli, director of my thesis, deserves particular gratitude. His availability, his wise and scholarly knowledge, specifically in the area of methodology, as well as his patience and gentleness, supported and inspired me during the long process of research and redaction.

It is not possible to acknowledge everyone who played an important role in the achievement of my doctoral studies, but I would be remiss if I didn't give particular appreciation to my religious brothers of Province of St. Joseph whose fraternal support during my academic years assisted me in the completion of my doctorate.

Last but not least, I wish to acknowledge Mary De Quardo for her generous and patient help in correcting the English text of this scholarly work, and all my friends whose friendship and love have enlivened my journey.

Vinko Mamić, OCD

INTRODUCTION

1. Subject Matter and the Importance of the Research

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard is one of the most remarkable of the Matthean gospel.[1] Throughout history this parable has shown resistance to a comprehensive and holistic interpretation.[2] In fact, it has been interpreted in various ways, which shed light on certain aspects of the narrative, but contemporaneously aroused different theological and hermeneutical problems.[3] Even in modern times there is no consensus among scholars in terms of the parable's meaning or in respect to its

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[1] A. FEUILLET, «Ouvriers», 5, first claims that this parable is one of the most difficult in Matthew and then explains, «Ce n'est pas seulement en raison de sa difficulté que cette parabole demande à être examinée de près, c'est aussi parce qu'à notre avis elle exprime un aspect fondamental, et néanmoins très peu remarqué, ou, en tut cas, souvent mal compris, de la doctrine évangélique». Similarly, A. JÜLICHER, *Gleichnisreden II*, 471, considers the parable the core of the Matthean gospel, or, as he says, «evangelium in nuce». From the literal standpoint, this parable is one of the most accurate, one of those «wunderbare, raffinierte und suggestive» accounts of the first gospel (C. MÜNCH, «Form», 458).

[2] For the list of interpretations from the patristic to the modern times see K. WEISS, *Frohbotschaft*, 27-56; J. DUPONT, «Parabole», 786; D.L. GRAGG, *Parable*, 10-46; J.M. TEVEL, «Labourers», 356-380; U. LUZ, *Matthäus 3*, 155-156. V.G. SHILLINGTON, «Saving Life», 90-95, presents and briefly comments on the major readings of the parable in the last century. W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *Matthew III*, 67-68 offer an overview of the advantages and weak points of all principal interpretations of the text.

[3] According to M.A. TOLBERT, *Perspectives*, 71, the «*preservation of the integrity of the parable story should be the guiding principle of all interpretations*. [...] Hence the interpretation must "fit" the parable story. Further, it must deal with the entire configuration of the story and not just one part of it, although not all parts may be of equal importance» (italics by the author). This affirmation «draws force from the disclosure by the semiotic model of the need for congruency between the second-order signifier, the story, and the second-order signified, the interpretation».

function in its present literary context,[4] or – in the terminology used in this paper – in its actual cotext.[5] This dissertation offers a thorough research of these issues. It does not deal with the form and redaction criticism. Consequently, the questions such as: was the parable originally said by Jesus; or is it the fruit of later tradition; or who was the original audience; or why and when the story was first pronounced are not examined in this paper. It considers the parable in its present textual setting and subsequently exposes its significance and function. Thus the meaning emerges primarily from the text itself, i.e. from the parable's cotext, and not from its supposed historical environment. Once the relationships between the parable and its cotext are established, though, the possible parallels with the world outside the text are explored. In other words, parting from the parable in its actual cotext, this survey examines its plausible historical context. The latter, in turn, provides an insight into the purpose and function of the parable as intended by the evangelist.

The parable poses a problem on the exegetical as well as the theological level. The former difficulty creates the awkward setting of the parable in between two reversal maxims (19:30; 20:16), whereas the account actually refers to an egalitarian issue. The introductory οὕτως in v. 16 makes this cotextual embedment of the parable more perplexing. The latter problem consists in the obvious disproportion between the human effort and the relating recompense, which, in turn, places a doubt the existence of any criteria in this respect.[6] This has led some renowned contemporary scholars to the conclusion that the text sustains the principle of *sola gratia*, and therefore should be seen as an argument against the traditional Catholic doctrine about merits.[7] Hence, there are still open

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4 Modern interpretations show a large scale of diversity and it is not easy to classify them. For this reason, in two latest monographs on the parable mentioned below, the authors do not report various interpretations of modern scholars, but prefer to speak of the various approaches to the text. Thus, C. HEZSER, *Lohnmetaphorik*, 1-44, offers an overview of eight different approaches to the parable according to the methodologies which scholars applied in their examinations, whereas D.L. GRAGG, *Parable*, 10-46, treats only the interpretations of the most influential interpreters.

5 In order to avoid the confusion between the literary and the historical context of the parable, this study employs the word «cotext» when referring to the former, whereas the word «context» is normally used for the latter.

6 V.G. SHILLINGTON, «Saving Life», 88, begins his survey of the parable with the following words, «To anyone who thinks of Jesus as a model of fair dealing, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard must come as something of a shock».

7 So, for instance, U. LUZ, *Matthäus 3*, 145, 153.

hermeneutical and theological questions that call for a reconsideration of the parable.

One more argument for the re-examination of the parable comes from the fact that its pragmatic aspect has been only sporadically analyzed, and always in the form of articles or short commentaries. In fact, there are three monographs that study the parable,[8] but none of them pays attention to its rhetorical function and pragmatic power. On the other hand, the account contains an irresistible rhetorical force that invites the reader to continue to communicate with the text once the parable is read.[9] The open-ended inquiry at the very end of the parabolic speech makes him or her reconsider the moral of the account and to offer an appropriate answer.[10] Evidently, the final purpose of this textual strategy is to bring the reader to the point of overcoming the distance between his or her standpoints and the norms proposed by the story.[11] Since the intrinsic narrative dynamism of the story recommends such a reading, this paper gives emphasis to the pragmatic character of the text and thoroughly examines its impact on the actual reader.

2. **Status Quaestionis**

Out of the three monographs on Matt 20:1-16, two are published works and one is an unpublished doctoral dissertation. In 1927 K. Weiss issued a study under the title, *Die Frohbotschaft Jesu über Lohn und Vollkommenheit. Zur evangelischen Parabel von den Arbeitern im Weinberg, Mt 20,1-16*. In the beginning of his research, Weiss notes the existing connections between the parable and the preceding Story of the Rich Young Man. Then he shortly examines the development of the narrative («Bildhälfte») and analyzes in detail the reality that stands behind the narrative tale («Sachhälfte»). In order to demonstrate the originality

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[8] See the Status Quaestionis.

[9] In this paper the term «rhetorical» – when referring to the analysis of the communicative character of a text – is always used in its classical, Aristotelian sense. M.S. CELENTANO, «Retòrica», 347, describes the expression «rhetorics» as follows, «Disciplina che concerne il discorso persuasivo e cioè quel tipo di comunicazione linguistica che un parlante (o scrivente), in determinate situazioni instaura al fine di coinvolgere uno o più destinatari». About the rhetorical strategies which increase the reader's involvement in Matthew's gospel see J.K. BROWN, «Direct Engagement», 24-33.

[10] I. BROER, «Gleichnisexegese», 25, explains that created gaps in a narrative actually emit a kind of open and nonspecific («Offenheit/Unbestimmtheit») signal, which instigates the reader to fill them in. Moreover, these blanks «*kann, soll* und *muß*» be filled out by the actual reader (italics by the author).

[11] Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Gesù*, 228.

of his approach, the author reports the five main interpretations which were proposed up to his time. In his reading of the parable he comes to the conclusion that the text communicates that God will give the same reward to those who renounce the world (as the apostles did) and to those who remain in the world (as the rich young man), under the condition that the latter persist in their intent to work for God.

The second monograph is C. Hezser's revised doctoral dissertation, *Lohnmetaphoric und Arbeitswelt in Mt 20,1-16. Das Gleichnis von den Arbeitern im Weinberg im Rahmen rabbinischer Lohngleichnisse*, published in 1990. The author begins with the exposition of the existing methodological approaches to the parable, sorting them into eight groups: allegorical, religion-historical, psychological, historical, hermeneutical, literary-critical, sociological and redactional. She herself applies the following methodologies in her research: socio-historical survey, tradition-history, religion-history and redaction-history. The most accurate part of the monograph is a comparative study of the rabbinic parables (some of which were unpublished) and Matt 20:1-16. Hezser shows that the doctrine of divine grace that goes beyond human merit is not alien to the Jewish tradition. On the basis of such a conclusion, she claims that the theology of the Parable of the Workers should be considered a variant of Jewish theology. Regarding the meaning of the parable, Hezser asserts that Matt 20:1-16 is an affirmation of equal rewards for both wandering charismatics (represented in Peter) and settled Christians (such as the rich young man). The weak point of these two interpretations is that they distinguish the «first» from the «last» in terms of life-style of the disciples, and not in the sense of the time when they were called by God, although the latter is more palpable than the former.[12]

The third and the last monograph on Matt 20:1-16 is D.L. Gragg's unpublished dissertation, *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard and Its Interpreters. A Textual-Linguistic Analysis*. This thesis was defended in 1990, the same year when Hezser's book was issued. The author applies textual-linguistic analysis as conceived by T. van Dijk, W. Dressler, A.J. Greimas and others. Through the study of the syntactic-semantic structure of the parable, which he admits to be «somewhat complicated»,[13] and through the discernment of different semiotic phenomena in the text, he establishes several standpoints from which one can create the meaning of the text. Thus, the interpretation of the parable by

[12] So, R.H. GUNDRY, «Book Reviews», 341.
[13] D.L. GRAGG, *Parable*, 4.

itself falls into a second plan, whereas an examination of its textual structure and its semantic potential becomes the primary purpose of the dissertation. In fact, the author does not evaluate different interpretations (which he groups in allegorical, moral, historical, existentialist and literary-critical) as more or less convincing, but tends to clarify to what extent these various interpretative approaches respect the immanent structure of the parable. Analyzing the parable in its cotext, he argues that the story is aimed to warn the disciples against presumption.

The advantage of the aforementioned studies is that they consider the parable in its present setting. However, their disadvantage is that they are restricted on the examination of the preceding cotext beginning with 19:16, whereas the text that follows is not considered.[14] The present study examines both the preceding (19:16-30) and the subsequent cotext (20:17-28).

The analysis of the preceding cotext brought forward the historical context of the text, which, in turn, shed a new light on the referential reality the parable refers to. On the basis of this research, this paper defines the function, i.e. the rhetorical finality of the Parable of the Workers as suggested by its previous cotext. After that, this survey proceeds with the analysis of the impact of the subsequent narrative on the perception

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[14] Both Weiss and Hezser note that the parable is embedded in the account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, which begins in 19:1 and ends in 20:34. Nevertheless, they do not analyze Chapters 19 and 20. Weiss merely observes, «Daraus ergibt sich mit aller Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass Jesus die Parabel auf seinem Zug nach Jerusalem zum Todespascha vorgetragen hat, und zwar mit der nämlichen großen Wahrscheinlichkeit nicht vor dem Volke, sondern im engeren Kreise der Apostel» (p. 12). After he completes his research, he claims, «Um so klarer liegt die enge Verbindung der Parabel mit dem unmittelbar Vorausgehenden nach unserer Auffassung vor Augen; denn hier verheißt Jesus den der Welt nicht entsagenden Gläubigen mit ihren leichteren Arbeiten für das Reich Gottes den gleichen Lohn im Himmel wie den der Welt entsagenden Jüngern mit ihren bedeutend schwereren Arbeiten für Gott – in trefflichster Übereinstimmung mit der Parabel, nach welcher die Einstunden-Arbeiter auch den ganz gleichen Lohn erhalten wie die Zwölfstunden-Arbeiter» (p. 235). Hezser goes one step further, dividing the unit into three parts, 19:1-15 («Familienfragen»), 19:16-20:16 («Lohn der Nachfolge») and 20:17-34 («Jesus als Vorbild des Dienerseins; Blindenheilung»), but she examines only the second (pp. 251-290). Gragg, too, considers the broader context of the Matthean gospel from the «conceptual» or «thematic» viewpoint, and only in respect to the reversal logion in 19:30 (pp. 142-145). He argues that the saying is primarily meant to warn the disciples against boasting. On the basis of this conclusion he asserts that through the Parable of the Workers Matthew «wants his reader to consider the possibility that disciples of Jesus could find themselves playing the role of the first workers, whose concern with being "properly" rewarded receives the owner's rebuke» (p. 146).

of the parable.[15] None of the mentioned monographs pays attention to this perspective, either from the exegetical or from the theological vantage point. This study, however, finds multiple connections between the parable, i.e. the subsequence it belongs to (19:16-20:16), and the subsequence 20:17-28. It argues that the full mimetic and rhetorical potential of the parable and, in fact, the entire sequence 19:16-20:28, cannot be successfully achieved if the existing textual interrelationships among their various parts are not carefully examined.

As noted above, the three monographs are only concerned with the referential character of the text, whereas its rhetorical dimension is completely ignored. The survey in the first part of this thesis, however, explains that the rhetorical impact of the parabolic speech is actually the main reason Jesus/evangelists used them so frequently. Hence, the lack of such an analysis leaves the impression that something basic, essential to the Parable of the Workers is still to be explored. In fact, the focus of this study is its rhetorical purpose and its pragmatic impact on the actual reader.

In light of the aforementioned reasons the present paper examines the parable applying a holistic methodological approach, which pays close attention to both axes of communication. It also examines both the previous and the cotext that follows after the parable. Such approach to the parable, as explained below, resulted in the conclusion that the mimetic pointer of the text is fully achievable only if its rhetoric dimension is carefully examined.

3. Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on the conviction that any literary work, while representing certain realities, simultaneously communicates corresponding attitudes tacitly proposed to its reader. Only when both of these literary aspects are examined, the full literary rendering of a narrative can be properly understood.[16]

The survey of biblical texts develops in two steps: first, it determines the structure of the account, the existing syntactic and semantic links and intertextual relationships, and establishes its proximate cotext; secondly,

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[15] T.L. DONALDSON, «Guiding Readers», 47, rightly claims that one of the preconditions for grasping the meaning of a text is that there is a reader capable to «experience the plot as it unfolds» and then to «revise options and expectations in the light of subsequent events».

[16] So, among others, J.R. SEARLE, *Speech Act*, 17-19 and P. HERNADI, «Literary Theory», 369.

on the basis of the results of the analysis of the cotext, it examines the plot of the narrative and the ensuing historical context.

As a consequence of such a holistic literary approach, this study does not focus on one unique and distinct methodology, but engages different methodologies according to their suitability to disclose the inherent rhetorical and referential potentiality of the narrative. Thus, in order to unveil the mimetic import of a text this paper examines the semantic character of the vocabulary employed, the syntax and structural connections among the sentences, and finally the textual strategy that determines the movement of the story and the development of the plot.

This examination of the mimetic dimension of a text is followed by the survey of its pragmatic effect on the reader. Textual rhetorical performance is the core of this paper, and it is carefully scrutinized throughout the whole survey. However, the study of the reader's experience of the narrative is not the only purpose of this research. It examines the narrative's intrinsic illocutionary potentiality and, when appropriate, presumably authorial perlocutionary intention. Accordingly, different methodologies are employed. In order to determine the rhetorical impact of the text on its reader, this paper applies a reader-response criticism; to establish textual illocutionary and intended perlocutionary effects, the survey exploits the methodological tools of speech act theory.

In both the referential and rhetorical analysis, the method of synoptic comparison is sporadically applied. Its application does not presume the two-source theory. It serves only to individualize the peculiarities of the Matthean account, its particular mimetic interests, and its possible perlocutionary intents.

The methodological approach applied in this study offers a holistic insight into the text. It does not show any contradiction among the different methods in use.[17] On the contrary, as shown below, it resulted in a fruitful and unique reading experience.[18]

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[17] E. OLSON, «Outline», 8-9, makes clear that the proper choice of methods is of crucial importance for a successive pluralistic literary criticism; he underlines that this choice depends on the final purpose the literary critic wants to achieve and the adequacy of the selected methods in respect to a given text.

[18] In recent times an attempt at a pluralistic approach to biblical studies seems to be successfully accomplished. W.G. Olmstead, in *Matthew's Trilogy*, combines reader-response criticism and redaction criticism in his research. He states in his introduction, «In spite of rhetoric to the contrary, there is no necessary incompatibility between a method that devotes attention to the author's treatment of his sources and one that examines the consequent rhetorical strategies embodied in the final form of the narrative.

4. **Course of the Research**

The thesis is structured in two parts. The first consists of two chapters and basically deals with the parabolic literary genre as a means of communication. The first chapter is divided into two sections: the first explains the methodology applied in this paper; the second analyzes the parable from a linguistic vantage point and notes five ironies that are inherent in the parabolic way of communication. The second chapter approaches the communicative character of the parables as it is presented in the synoptic gospels. It results in the perception of two preconditions for a proper understanding of parabolic speech, and in an insight into Matthew's understanding for the reason why Jesus spoke in parables.

The second part, divided into three chapters, examines the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in its actual cotext and its historical context. The first chapter studies the parable merely as a fictional story, i.e. as an independent aesthetic object. The second chapter examines the proximate cotext of the parable and notes that the sequence it belongs to begins in 19:16 and ends in 20:28. It also explains that the sequence 19:16-20:28 is composed of two subsequences, 19:16-20:16 and 20:17-28. The structure of each subsequence is attentively analyzed. The third chapter studies the parable in its context, determining – at the same time – its meaning and function. The survey is based on the outcome of the research of the previous two chapters. It first examines the context of the parable in light of the preceding cotext (19:16-20:16), and then scrutinizes the impact of the subsequence 20:17-28 on the reader's previously acquired perception of parable.[19]

4.1 *First Part: Parable and Communication*

Part One is primarily intended to explain the reason why parabolic speech is so frequently used by Jesus/evangelists in communication with

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Nor [...] is there any incompatibility between focus on the author and his intent and reflection on the impact of the narrative upon the reader» (p. 9).

[19] The process of the analysis of the parable in this paper basically coincides with the J.R. Donahue's methodological approach to the parables of Jesus. He explains this point in the following way, «In the Gospels the parables are texts that are to be read "along with" other texts. What we propose is "an expanding contextual analysis". This will involve first attention to the immediate context of each parable, study of the pericopes preceding and following to see whether the location of a parable provides a clue to the evangelist's intentions. Similarly, the proximate context is important. That is, how does the parable in its immediate context fit into the larger context of a section of a Gospel» (*Parable*, 26).

their addressees.[20] The *first chapter* begins with an exposition of the methodology applied to this study. This methodology was carefully established to match up to the final purpose of this paper, which is to determine the meaning and the function of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard.

The description of the methodology starts with a short observation that the main approaches to literary work in the last century scholarship were regularly concerned only with one of the two axes of literary communication, either with the referential (as in socio-historical and text oriented criticisms) or to the rhetorical dimension of a text (as in a reader oriented literary criticisms). It proceeds with an explanation of the advantages of the above mentioned holistic literary approach. Although this research carefully examines both of the axes, its predominant focus is the rhetorical axis of communication. The reason for such a methodological choice lies in the intrinsic nature of parabolic speech. The linguistic study of parables, which follows after the explanation of this paper's methodology, shows that the parables are meant to increase the pragmatic impact on their reader. Consequently, the focus on the pragmatic character of the parabolic speech recommends itself.

The survey of the first chapter proceeds with an analysis of parables from the linguistic standpoint resulting in the individuation of five ironies that are innate to this particular literary genre. They are the following: 1) the irony of the reader's independence; 2) the irony of distance; 3) the irony of the reader's disinterested objectivity; 4) the irony of intertextual interpretation; and 5) the irony of the coexistence of two implied readers. The five ironies explain that parabolic speech is intended to initially involve the reader in the fictional story, making him or her receptive to its inherent logic and moral consequences, and then to disclose the realities of the real world to which it refers.[21]

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[20] For the history of the interpretation of the parables of Jesus see C. BOURBECK, «Methodische», 11-45; H. WEDER, *Gleichnisse*, 11-98; W.S. KISSINGER, *Parables*, 1-230; R.H. STEIN, *Introduction*, 42-81; V. FUSCO, *Parabola*, 14-45; R. MEYNET, *Vedi questa donna?*, 63-97; R. ZIMMERMANN, «Gleichnisse», 87-102; R. MEYNET, «Parabola», 947-950. For a comprehensive presentation of twentieth-century parable research see J.C. Little's series of three articles («Parables. I», «Parables. II» and «Parables. III»). See also M.A. TOLBERT, *Perspectives*, 15-31; G. BAUDLER, *Jesus*, 15-314; J.R. DONAHUE, *Parable*, 1-27; C.L. BLOMBERG – D. COLORADO, «Poetic Fiction», 115-132; H.-J. MEURER, *Gleichnisse*, 21-733; P.R. JONES, *Parables*, 1-61; C. MÜNCH, *Gleichnisse*, 44-57; L. SCHOTTROFF, *Gleichnisse*, 109-146; K. SNODGRASS, *Stories*, 4-35.

[21] The notion of the irony of the coexistence of two implied readers, the one that perceives a parable as a fictional story, and the other that fully understands the story as

The linguistic study of parables offers a good comprehension of the tacit dynamism and inner potentiality of parabolic communication, explaining the reason for their frequent use by Jesus/evangelists, but it does not answer the question when these potentialities come to their full realization. For this reason the *second chapter* examines of the biblical texts that deal with the issue of the communicative character of the parabolic speech. The survey results in finding two preconditions for the proper reception of parabolic communication. The first, emphasized by the evangelist Mark, is that the reader is a member of Jesus' disciples, i.e. of a Christian community. The second, strongly underlined by Luke, is that he or she is practicing the teaching of Jesus.[22] The two preconditions facilitate the identification of the real reader with the implied reader of the parable, which, in turn, makes the real one more receptive to both its mimetic message and its rhetorical impact.

This chapter ends with a study on Matthew's approach to the parable as a means of communication and concludes that he is the only evangelist that confronts the question why Jesus spoke in parables. According to him, Jesus used parables in order to provide his disciples with a deeper understanding of God's kingdom and to prevent those who are not receptive to his message from knowing its mysteries. He, however, invites all his readers to join the group of Jesus' followers and thus arrive at a fuller understanding of his teaching.

4.2 *Second Part: Parable as a Story and Story as a Parable*

The second part examines the parable in its proximate cotext, the sequence 19:16-20:28. Such cotextual reading is the main consequence of the methodological approach of this paper. The analysis of the two axes of communication is possible, namely, only when the cotext of a text to be examined is closely considered. In fact, it is the cotext that determines

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being a parable was of particular help for the survey of the subsequent study of the Parable of the Workers.

[22] R. MEYNET, «Parabola», 949, concludes his encyclopedic presentation of the history of the interpretation of parables in the following words, «Solo può comprendere il senso della parabola colui che si è già messo al seguito del maestro, avendo già intrapreso un cammino di conversione. Chi rimanesse fuori della casa dove è stata accesa la luce non potrà mai vedere né capire nulla [...]. Il fare ha precedenza sul comprendere». Similarly, N. GATTI, *Perché*, 306, affirms, «Credo che questa [il fare esperienza del testo] sia una *condizione* fondamentale per l'interpretazione di un testo, che [...] chiede al lettore l'adesione, il "fare" [...], come *precondizione* per la comprensione» (my italics).

both of them.[23] Besides that, as explained above, redaction criticism and form criticism are not points of interest of this paper. It is concern with its present setting in Mathew's gospel and its actual function and meaning. Accordingly, the cotextual reading is the key factor in the survey of these issues.

In the first chapter it was argued that the parabolic way of communication leads the real reader to identify first with the implied reader of the parable seen as a story, and then with the implied reader of the story seen as a parable. This is to say that the Parable of the Workers in its present cotext can be properly understood only if it is preliminarily examined – somewhat paradoxically – as an independent fictional account, without considering its actual cotextual setting. For this reason the examination of the Parable of the Workers begins with a survey of the narrative as an independent aesthetic unit.[24]

The analysis of the structure in the *third chapter* shows that the Parable consists of two parts, vv. 1b-7 and 8-15. The second part is divided into

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[23] In respect to the mimetic aspect of literature, K. MORNER – R. RAUSCH, «Context», *NTCDLT*, 44-45, affirm, «Context is important in clarifying, specifying, extending, or changing meaning. Removed from its surroundings, a word or phrase may easily take on meanings unintended by the writer and, as a consequence, may not be properly understood or judged. "Quoting out of context" and "reading out of context" are considered serious faults by a number of scholars of literary criticism». K. SNODGRASS, «Stories», 158, put sit in the following words, «Meaning is contextual, for meaning is the value assigned to a set of relations. If you change the context, you change the story». A.J. HULTGREN, «Interpreting», 632-235, discerns three cotextual referential elements that determine the meaning of a parable: 1) the introductory scene; 2) the referential remarks that surround a parable; 3) the internal elements, i.e. the elements outside the parables, which, however, belong to their internal integrity (such as Matt 7:11; 11:19; 21:31b-32 and alike). Regarding the rhetorical character of a text, M. GRILLI, «Autore», 454, explains, «Comunicare un'informazione è soltanto una delle funzioni del linguaggio [...]. Ci sono degli assunti che non possono essere resi in termini del contenuto, ma devono essere spiegati in termini di "funzione" che essi rivestano per il destinatario. Per scoprire la verità di un testo o il suo senso completo è necessario tener conto di quegli elementi che soggiacciono e interagiscono nel processo tra i partner: chi è il soggetto della comunicazione e con chi si sta comunicando; in quale contesto avviene la comunicazione; cosa si vuole trasmettere, quale effetto si cerca di ottenere, con quali soluzioni e valori l'emittente mira a far identificare i lettori». For more about «meaning as intent» see C. BIANCHI, *Pragmatica*, 11-22 (she examines the phenomena of verbal conversation, but her assertions can be applied in the field of literary conversation, as well). Cf. also K. Snodgrass' reflection on «communicative intent» in his article «Stories», pp. 156-157.

[24] For a brief presentation of the development and main features of the study of parables as an independent literary unit see V. FUSCO, *Parabola*, 48-57. Cf. also J. DELORME, «Récit», 124-129.

two subparts, vv. 8-10 and 11-15. The subsequent analysis of the plot shows that the parable essentially develops according to the plot structure of the classical narratives or novels: it begins with *exposition* (vv. 1b-7), supplying the reader with the important background information regarding the householder and the hired workers; the story proceeds with *complication* (vv. 8-10), building a tension between the expected and actual outcome in terms of the distribution of rewards; the «turning point», or *climax* (vv. 11-15) ensues, bringing out both the first workers complaint and the householder's response. Up to this point the analysis of the structure of the parable matched the results of the analysis of its structure. The last part of a plot pattern, the *denouement*, is missing. The unanswered questions at the end of the account (v. 15) make this omission more palpable. The survey concludes that, by leaving the story open-ended, the author wanted to involve the reader into answering the inquiry. Hence, the *denouement* depends on the actual reader.

The *fourth* and *fifth chapters* examine the parable first in its cotext and then in its context, respectively. The necessity for the study of the cotext emerges from the very nature of the parabolic speech. After arriving at the end of the story, the reader is challenged to reflect on what he or she had read. The awareness that the fictional account is a parable emerges, and one begins to identify with the implied reader of the story seen as a parable. This identification rouses the notion that the parable forms part of a larger textual cotext.[25]

The *fourth chapter* evidences that the parable is imbedded into a larger literary unit, the sequence 19:16-20:28. More precisely, it belongs of the subsequence 19:16-20:16. The analysis of the structure of the subsequence results in the observation that the narrative consists of three passages, 19:16-22; 19:23-26 and 19:27-20:16. Accordingly, the parable belongs to the last passage of the subsequence and makes the second part of Jesus' answer to Peter's inquiry, ἰδοὺ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν πάντα καὶ ἠκολουθήσαμέν σοι· τί ἄρα ἔσται ἡμῖν (19:27). The survey of the subsequent cotext, i.e. the subsequence 20:17-28, argues that the unit is divided into two passages, vv. 17-19 and 20-28. These two are closely related. The introductory τότε in 20:20 is the first indication of

[25] In a certain sense, parables in general can be considered as short framework-stories, «a story inside a story». The Parable of the Workers is a good example of such narrative units. The «frame» around the «inside story» is formed by the reversal logion which encircles the parable. For more about this literary convention see W. HARMON – H. HOLMAN, «Framework-Story», *HL*, 228.

their cotextual interrelationship.[26] There are many other literary constituents that assure the internal cohesion between the two passages, but the conclusive logion in 20:28 is the most explicit, since it provides a «bracket back» to the prediction in 20:18-19.[27] On the other hand, the saying in 20:27, καὶ ὃς ἂν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος ἔσται ὑμῶν δοῦλος, recalls the theme of being the «first» that dominated the first subsequence, unifying the two subsequences. In effect, the cotextual analysis of the cohesive elements of 19:16-20:28 concludes with the notion that the whole sequence deals with those who are, or at least who want to be «first» in some way.[28]

The last, *fifth chapter*, examines the context of the two subsequences. The survey points out that the subsequence 19:16-20:16 refers to those who are called to leave, or who already have left all their belongings to follow Jesus. The parable's structural setting, the vocabulary employed, the rhetorical and conceptual links with the preceding cotext, the inner dynamism among the literary constituents of the story, the development of plot and the description of the activities of the characters suggest that the parable is intended to communicate that all those who left their properties for the sake of the kingdom, more specifically, the missionaries, will be provided with their necessary livelihood. The point of the parable is that the early missionaries, in spite of their being «first», should not demand more than that. Finally, this is what they were originally taught and asked by Jesus (10:9-10). Consequently, those who were called to become missionaries after them, even the «last» ones, are equal to them, since God wants all of them to be equally provided with their essential livelihood.

The following subsequence (20:17-28) further develops this «logic of reversal», applying it first to Jesus and his salvific mission (20:17-19), and then to the leaders of early Christian communities (20:20-28). The idea of glorification through service and humiliation is present in both. The wording and the syntax of the former tacitly indicates that fellowship actually means the participation in Jesus' faith and accepting the «logic

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[26] S.L. BLACK, *Sentence Conjunction*, 242-243, first notes that in Matthew's gospel in eight of nine occurrences of τότε followed by προσέρχομαι or προσηνέχθη/-θησαν are found at the beginning of a new paragraph in NA[27] (20:20 is one of them), and then affirms that «an element of continuity» with the preceding text is maintained in each of these sentences, «introducing an incident within a block of narrative discourse – usually one in a series of related pericopes – rather then a higher-level break in the narrative».

[27] So, J. NOLLAND, *Matthew*, 824.

[28] The most eloquent argument in this favor is that the word πρῶτοι appears seven times in the sequence: 19:30 (2x); 20:8, 10, 16 (2x); 20:27.

of the cross». The vocabulary and the intertextual relationship with the preceding subsequence, as well as with the rest of Matthew's gospel, suggest that the perlocutionary intention of the latter is to give instruction to the competing post-Easter communities' leaders: the «logic of primacy» (20:25-27) requires the competition in serving others rather than dominating others. Each of the two parts of the subsequence recalls the reversal logion of the preceding parable. Actually, they apply the same «logic of reversal» to different situations in the post-resurrection Christian circles. Contemporaneously, it makes the reader more confident that the Parable of the Workers, as referring to the «reversal» among the missionaries of the early Church, was properly understood.

The second part offers an insight into the Matthean socio-theological vision that stands behind 19:16-20:28, which could be defined as an «egalitarian ideology».[29] It notes that the same theological approach can be seen as a background for the preceding narrative, beginning already with the ending verses of Chapter 17. In 17:24-18:35, namely, Matthew gives some general instruction regarding the «comparative status»[30] of his disciples. Beginning with 19:1, Matthew focuses on some specific issues that apparently caused divisions inside the early Christian communities and had to be resolved. The basic cause of the disciples' disagreements was their discriminatory conception of community life. The Parable of the Workers forms part of the Matthean effort to propose a new vision of the disciples' life, more equably oriented.

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[29] W. CARTER, *Margins*, 398, claims that the Parable of the Workers invites the reader to embrace the «egalitarian lifestyle» as an alternative to «hierarchical and patriarchal» structures of the Hellenistic society in the first century (cf. also his comment in W. CARTER – J.P. HEIL, *Parables*, 132). A.J. SALDARINI, *Community*, 106-107, explains, «This egalitarianism is common to new religious and reform movements, but is quickly followed by the development of differentiated and hierarchized roles. The author of Matthew resists this natural development».

[30] R.T. FRANCE, *Matthew*, 675.

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