

THE PARABLE, VALUABLE PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN CHRISTIAN TEACHING

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***Abstract:** The parable represents a very complex form of communication, typical of Eastern civilization and very suitable for transmitting truths of faith to a heterogeneous audience, both in terms of intentions and reception capacities. The Savior uses this procedure with divine wisdom to proclaim all that is necessary to be revealed about the Kingdom to all, wise or simple people, using the same words. The parable refers to a world we do not know, using the most common everyday elements. There are limits to which the seen and the unseen meet, the common and the extraordinary. For open receptors, the words of the parable are clear and become a guide to life, based on revealed truth, not proven. For others, who remain petrified, the parable remains simple life stories. This type of communication proves to have multiple valences, being an inexhaustible source of meanings and landmarks of the spiritual life.*

***Keywords:** parable, parable, allegory, act of communication, suggestive speech / argumentative speech.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most emblematic and interesting features of the teachings of Jesus Christ is the abundance of familiar analogies, metaphors, or stories that the Savior uses to explain the nature of God or His Kingdom. We encounter this process called "parable" in the Synoptic Gospels.

Of the nearly forty parables in the New Testament, some are well known, becoming template-type models for other moral stories, used both for didactic purposes and as the central subject of literary works or art films.

Some of them are popular sketches of religious texts and, in this form, have entered the literature. From the point of view of their structure and extent, we notice a relative heterogeneity: some are short proverbs - such as the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13: 31-32) or the precious pearl (Matthew 13: 45-46), while others are longer and with a more complex structure, such as the example of the talents or the wandering son.

The fact that the Savior uses this pedagogical method represents, according to Matthew (13, 35), another example that His life actually

transposes a plan prepared in heaven, fulfilling the prescription we find in the Psalms (77, 2), according to which: *"I will tell my mouth in parables, tell me what was from the beginning"*¹. Jesus Christ used the parable because He addressed not only those in Palestine in His time, but all generations of people who were to learn His teaching, until the end of the ages. In fact, when addressing crowds, the Savior often uses such parables.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus Christ explicitly tells His disciples what the purpose of using this procedure is: it gives them the "key" to access the Kingdom of God, which only they - the privileged - can access directly: *"And when He was alone, those who were with Him, and the twelve, asked Him about the parables. / And He said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to them that are without, all things are done in parables"*².

All the others, not having this possibility, need a guide that will reveal their path, gradually and according to the capacity of understanding of each one.

Only the initiates, being within the group, can truly penetrate and understand the fundamental meaning of His words. For all the uninitiated, these stories remain at the parable level.

THE PARABLE

The parable, in Greek "παραβολή" (parables), in Latin "parabola", -ae, is a comparison, a juxtaposition, a resemblance or an allegory, it is a speech with a figurative meaning that aims at the concrete rendering of some ideas or teachings, generally having a didactic, moralizing role, like the fable, with the difference that the ideas in the fable are suggested by characters taken from the animal world. In Holy Scripture, the parable is a kind of teaching literature that we find in both the Old and New Testaments.

Through His divine nature, but also through the experience gained in His dealings with people, Jesus knew for sure that anyone could learn something from His parables, built on elements of their daily lives.

In general, it is wrong or not at all necessary to regard the parables of Jesus Christ as allegories. Only one of them - the parable of the sower - is interpreted in front of the disciples and other companions in the form of an allegory, drawing parallels between the various types of soils in the parable and the different responses to the Christian message.

¹ <http://www.bibliaortodoxa.ro/carte.php?id=65&cap=77>

² <http://www.bibliaortodoxa.ro/carte.php?id=53&cap=4>.

Without being a fable or an allegory, however, the parable contains allegorical elements. The process itself is not a novelty in the New Testament. We also find it in the Old Testament in certain acts of communication, such as the rebuke that the prophet Nathan gave to King David, to show him the injustice done against Uriah Heth, one of his army commanders. Uriah had a very beautiful wife whom he loved dearly, but because David liked her, he kidnapped her from Uriah, and sent him to die on the battlefield in a war with the Ammonites. David's deed was an iniquity before God, and to make him understand this, the prophet Nathan, one of the sages of the time, went to the king and told him the parable of the poor Oita: *"There were two men in one city, one rich and another poor. The rich man had many flocks and herds, and the poor man had nothing but a little lamb, which he had bought and kept and fed; and she grew up together with him and his children, and ate and drank of his bread, and slept in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. The traveler stopped at the rich man's house, but he could not bear to take from his flocks and herds to cook for the traveler who had come to him, but took the lamb of the poor man and cooked it for his guest. And David's anger was kindled against the man; And David said unto Nathan, The LORD liveth, and the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: seven times he will pay the lamb, since he did such a thing and had no mercy! Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man who did this."*³

In the New Testament, every parable told by Christ had its meaning and purpose, in order to make the hearers understand God's great love for men, but also the duties of men to Him, for salvation⁴.

"The Gospel parables consist, in essence, of a" picture "taken from everyday life and the application of this picture to the realm of spiritual realities, following the model:" This thing in the spiritual, religious is like anything or situation in the ordinary life ". The introduction of some of the parables in the Holy Gospels, in the form of **"the kingdom of heaven resembling..."**, highlights the idea that the parable is, in fact, a developed comparison. complete and make more vivid the "picture" of the parable⁵.

The parable did not end with the public activity of Christ, because parables were a very widespread pedagogical "technique" in the Jewish environment and remained relevant until late in the evolution of Jewish

³ <http://www.bibliaortodoxa.ro/carte.php?id=67&cap=12>.

⁴ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, Prof. Ecaterina Braniște, **Dicționar Enciclopedic de Cunoștințe Religioase**, Editura Diecezană, Caransebeș, 2001, pp. 341-342.

⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Mihoc, **Lumina Evangheliei. Exegeze la Evangheliile duminicale**, Editura Agnos, Sibiu, 2016, p. 180.

wisdom, but also in Greek and Latin literature. Following the Savior's example, the evangelists also used the parables in their expositions, with the intention of making those who listened to them meditate on the religious significance behind the first level of understanding of the story. Without coming up with arguments, explanations or justifications, the parable makes the receiver reach a profound truth.

“While the discourse is argumentative, the parable is indicative. It does not expose a theory, but shows a state of fact, relates a situation, without too explicit demonstrative intentions. It does not provide answers, but stimulates their search. In short, it would be said that the parable says without saying, let the throb between the words, beyond and above them, play before the one who listens to it. By showing instead of explaining, the story has an incomparably greater pedagogical functionality than analytical descriptivism. It is much easier to learn how to tie a knot or how to handle a machine, when someone shows you, without words, the stages of the procedure in question. And, not coincidentally, the education of each of us began not with elaborate lectures, but with the stories told by parents or grandparents”⁶.

The parable is, in relation to the logical argument, what the image is in relation to the concept. It is, like the image, less explicit but more comprehensive, or *“it is a generally accepted fact that images leave a deeper impression than abstraction.”⁷*

The parables refer to a world we do not know, using the most common everyday elements. There are limits to which the seen and the unseen meet, the common and the extraordinary. Thus, they represent the privileged space of a fruitful tension.

“The elements of a parable are intended to suggest something other than words. Speaking of parables, St. Basil the Great says that these are compositions by “twists of words”, which do not explain their meaning openly and directly, but indirectly, to the sprinters of the mind who can discover hidden in their depth, more meaning”⁸.

“With the parables of Christ we are in the territory of the narrative that replaces the argument. Their truth is not systematically exposed, it does

⁶ Andrei Pleșu, *Parabolele lui Iisus - Adevărul ca poveste*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2012, pp. 18-19.

⁷ Joachim Jeremias, *Parabolele lui Iisus*, traducere din limba engleză de P. S. Calinic Dumitriu, Episcop Vicar al Arhiepiscopiei Iașilor, Pr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Mihoc și Dr. Ștefan Matei, Editura Anastasia, București, p. 9.

⁸ Antonie Plămădeală, Mitropolitul Ardealului, *Tâlcuri noi la texte vechi*, Sibiu, 1989, p. 400.

not constitute a doctrine of a department, a didactic guide. They always say more than they say and often something other than they seem to say. This is the very essence of the parable, in contrast to the strictly intellectual statement"⁹.

The function of parables is twofold, affirmation and concealment.

Today's Western-type society places great value on precise information, on exact, mathematical rules. However, the use of allegories, parables and illustrations in the transmission of information and teachings is not compatible with the pragmatic spirit that has marked our generations.

Many literate people, biblical exegetes, psychologists, and teachers have wondered why Jesus spoke so much in parables. We can guess that this pedagogical approach was based on several reasons. One of these could be the belonging to the oriental type culture, in which the parable (parable) represents a way of relating to the very cultivated truth. If Westerners prefer precise answers, with a logical and well-argued substratum, cultured Orientals are accustomed to answering through a story.

Modern pedagogy argues that the most effective education is not through rules, commands and restrictions imposed, but through allusion. Human nature itself causes us to develop a rejection reaction when a series of rules and restrictions are imposed on us.

But if the same idea is dressed in a story, an allegory or a parable, reaching its morality not frontally, directly, but tangentially and allusively, there is much more chance that the receiver will be much more open.

From this point of view, the parable is one of the most efficient ways to convey a message, there is no risk that it will be rejected from the start.

Another advantage of this process is that it conveys universally valid symbols. The symbols used by Jesus Christ in His parables and parables almost 2000 years ago now have the same symbolic charge as then. The significance of the net, of the lost sheep, of the good shepherd, of the tares, of the prodigal son is the same today, in the age of technology, as in that time.

The complexity of the message, structured on levels of understanding, was essential in the context in which the crowds that listened to Jesus were made up of all kinds of people, and He could not speak to them in groups. The same message had to be addressed to everyone at the same time.

Even the interests of the audience were different. If some of them were probably sincerely seeking truth and salvation, it is not excluded that others were just curious, attracted by the Savior's notoriety. Certainly, they

⁹ Andrei Pleșu, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

were part of the crowd and just spying on Him, while others, hungry, were looking for Him for bread and fish. We can also suspect that some were open-minded to learn new truths, while others did not want to step out of their "comfort zone," but preferred to remain ignorant.

Jesus had to address all these categories of people with a single speech that could be received by all present. From this point of view, the parable was the ideal means of conveying a truth to all people at the same time.

From this perspective, the parable was both a means of communicating a truth, but also a means of hiding that truth.

Certainly, a good reason why Jesus Christ used these procedures so frequently to convey some truths is related to His divine nature. Starting from a fundamental principle, according to which God never forces man's free will, we understand that man is fully free and responsible in choosing his governing principles.

Also, the individual may sometimes be unprepared to deal with too complex information, which instead of enlightening him, could rather blind him. A gradual, progressive exposure is much more appropriate each time. The Savior Himself states, "I, have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).

We understand from these words of the Savior that He knows our limits and, with the greatest delicacy, tries to gradually bring us out of the darkness of our ignorance, into the light of truth and salvation.

The use of parables in the pedagogical approach of transmitting the truth of salvation is motivated by one thing, no less important than the other aspects. It is about the test value of the parable, which allows a justified and fair selection among the audience¹⁰.

We understand from Jesus' words about the purpose of using the parables that some people were not allowed to know the mysteries of the Kingdom because they did not have something specific. We may wonder why some do not and others do? The Savior's answer continues to clarify the dilemma: "That is why I speak to them in parables, because they, at least see, do not see, and at least hear, do not hear, do not even understand. And concerning them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; you will look with your own eyes and you will not see. For the heart of this people is hardened; and they closed their eyes, and closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes,

¹⁰ <https://www.loribalogh.ro/2017/03/de-ce-a-vorbit-iisus-in-pilde/>.

and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and heal them ”(Matthew 13: 13-15)¹¹.

That thing, which some have and some do not, is the willingness to do God's will. Some are receptive to the message and the truth, while others remain insensitive to the calls of the Holy Spirit with a hardened heart. The latter choose to live in darkness and ignorance, closing their own path to an authentic relationship with God.

Analyzing carefully what is told in the Gospels, regarding the reaction of the crowd after Jesus told a parable, we will notice two distinct directions: Most leave (the people), content with listening to a beautiful "story" (parable), in while only a small group of disciples gather around the Savior, asking Him for details of the profound meanings of His parables (Mark 4:10; Matthew 13:10; Luke 8: 9).

CONCLUSION

In this differentiation of the receiving public we see the value of test and selection that the parables have in the process of transmitting the truth. The same example provokes completely different reactions: it makes some dig deeper, trying to find the treasure hidden in it, while leaving others indifferent.

This attitude makes the difference between being "inside," among those close to Jesus, and being "outside." While for the former, the parable is a gateway to a deeper understanding of saving truths, for the latter it remains only a story, entertainment, or, in a happier case, a means of enriching one's general culture.

What is certain is that regardless of the variant, the purpose of the approach itself is achieved. This type of communication proves its multiple valences both by the fact that it becomes an inexhaustible source of meanings and landmarks of the spiritual life, and by the fact that, resorting to this genre, the Savior avoids any kind of coercion or conditioning of faith. It is clear that the Savior's intention was not to build a doctrine, but to ponder, to bring man out of metaphysical sedentarism, and then to provide all the landmarks that the man sitting on the Path needs. "By his totalizing invitation, Jesus virtually erases the line between 'in' and 'out.'"¹²

Jesus Christ does not come to intimidate us with His wisdom, nor to force our conversion by "signs," but He offers Himself as a chance, as a way out of selfishness and self-sufficiency.

¹¹ <https://www.wordproject.org/bibles/ro/40/13.htm>.

¹² Andrei Pleșu, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

From this perspective, the use of parables and parables as pedagogical tools only gives the receiver a chance and at the same time leaves him untouched the freedom to choose his own path.

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