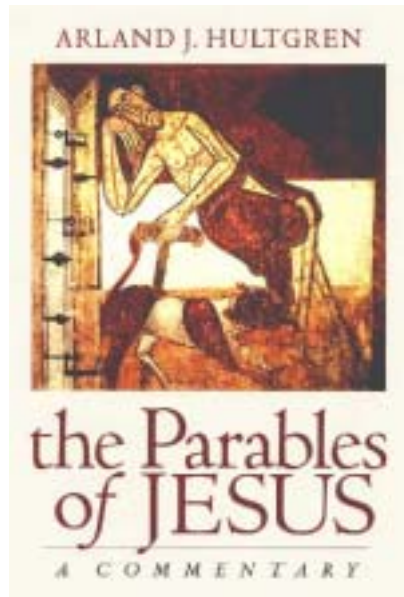


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Hultgren, Arland J .

The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. xxix + 522.
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Hultgren's commentary is written "primarily for the sake of interpreting the parables of Jesus within the Christian church" (17); "the primary interest within this volume is exegesis and theological reflection on the parables of Jesus as transmitted within the Synoptic Gospels" (19). After a brief introduction to parabolic form and to what is distinctive about Jesus' parables, Hultgren considers each of the Synoptic parables and their parallels in *Thomas*. He groups most of them under theological headings: God's grace, God's love for the lost, exemplary behavior, wisdom, life before God, final judgment, and the kingdom of God. Hultgren deals separately with three "allegorical parables"—the Great Banquet (Luke 14:16–24), the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1–14), and the Wicked Tenants. He also includes a chapter on parables in *Thomas*, offering brief discussions of parables unique to *Thomas* and explanations of why he does not consider them authentic to Jesus.

For each parable, the author provides a translation of the relevant texts, textual and etymological notes, exegesis, exposition, and a select bibliography. He discusses which parts of the parables are redactional and which parts original to Jesus. His conclusions on this score are fairly conservative. Sometimes, as in the case of the Wicked Tenants or the Talents, he postulates a shorter, less allegorical original parable that could have come

from Jesus. However, in most cases he accepts the parables, as is, as original. If the parable appears in more than one Gospel, Hultgren provides separate commentary and exposition for each Synoptic version and discusses the issue of a hypothetical version original to Jesus' ministry.

While the author often demonstrates how the parables do or do not reflect ordinary life in Palestine, he is admirably free from the cinema vérité approach; after reviewing all the options for why a first-century vineyard owner might hire workers at all hours of the day, he concludes that "the only sufficient reply ... is that it makes a grand story.... the story has been composed with its end in view" (37). Hultgren's theological approach smoothes some of the edges of the stories—"surely the parable [the Unforgiving Slave] does not teach that forgiving others is a prerequisite or means for gaining God's forgiveness" (29)—and is warmly Lutheran—"The point of the parable [the Workers in the Vineyard]—both at the level of Jesus and the level of Matthew's Gospel—is that God saves by grace, not by our worthiness" (43).

Hultgren's reading of the parables is much closer to Jeremias than to B. B. Scott or W. R. Herzog. He does not adopt provocative or subversive readings; he does not, for example, treat the father in the Prodigal Son as less than admirable or the vineyard owner in the Workers in the Vineyard as exploitative.

This commentary on the parables will be very useful to pastors or to seminary students.