

# **The challenges of teaching Jesus' parables**

Submitted to

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***'I am more inclined to learn, then to teach'***

Aurelius. Augustinus

Some years ago I was invited to preach in a pentecostal church in a slum neighbourhood. In this small congregation it was possible to engage the audience in an dialogue over the parable of the *Fruitless Fig Tree* (Luke 13.6-9). After the service three women came to me and said that they were delighted to discover that it is possible to understand and interpret the Bible in a similar way as they do whilst teaching literature. They explained that, up to this day, they thought Bible texts could only be applied, but not interpreted.

This comment came as a surprise to me, as only then I realized that most of the preaching in our predominantly pentecostal evangelical context doesn't explain, but only teaches how to apply the Bible in our lives. I also became aware of the influence this approach exerts on students: they tend to find most biblical commentaries useless, because they tend to stop reading as soon as the text becomes explanatory. I got convinced that the biblical teaching must overcome this polarization between application without explanation and explanation without application. In my teaching, I seek to enable students to combine solid explanation with contextualized application of the word of God. This essay elaborates on how this can be done with Jesus' parables in the context of a school that prepares for missionary ministries.

### **A careful look at the students**

The seminar about the parables of Jesus is part of the program of the fourth year at FATEV. It is one of two concluding biblical classes of its bachelor program. The students already have had different classes on exegesis and biblical theology. The intention of this last approach on the New Testament is to explore one theme in a way that challenges the students to contribute the most by themselves. In some way it tries to consolidate the goal of life long learning, that the school pursues from the beginning of its program.

#### **1. Growing-up in an poor urban context**

The majority of our students come from a mission background. Most were not grown in an Christian context and have not attended Sunday school as children. They were reached by the gospel through evangelism, youth work or social projects. Many come from broken families. The most frequent pattern is that of growing up without the support of their fathers. Gilberto Freyre describes this as an inheritance of the Portuguese colonial system in which men were sent to the colonies without their families (wife and children remained in Portugal), and as a result they established informal unions with Indian and African slaves. This women ended up with the sole responsibility for their kids<sup>1</sup>. During the last two decades, after the legalisation of the divorce was introduced, a growing number of the students parents have gone through divorce. In Both cases, alongside the emotional stress, the main consequence to the families is the lack of financial support, if not poverty.

Emotional needs and poverty favour the exposure to a drug-ridden context.

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<sup>1</sup> Freyre, 1987.

'Cachaça', the distillate of sugar cane, is the cheapest and more widespread alcoholic drug in this context. But also the promises of easy money and richness from trafficking marijuana and cocaine are a big temptation especially to teenagers. So drug addiction is widespread and generates different forms violence. Most of our students have grown in such violent context at home and/or in their neighbourhood (abuse, murder). Their encounter with the gospel is often connected with the experience of becoming free from this oppressing vicious circle. Before arriving at bible school they are engaged in evangelizing, discipleship, missionary preaching, so perhaps they regard the classes as theoretical.

The poor background also implies that the students work at full-time jobs during the day to be able to attend classes at evening. This may be a stressing way of theological education and implies in deficiencies, but it can also enrich the classes with challenges from life with very different people.

*The teaching has to take into account the experiences and powerful changes that the Gospel has produced in the students life, as well as help them to work out an adequate living style to meet the struggles of everyday life. Therefore the teaching of the parables must become applicable for Christian's daily life and be useful for ministry. The focus of the teaching must contemplate essential issues and interact with challenges of the context.*

## **2. Taught by an oral culture**

The Brazilian oral culture resulted also from Portuguese colonial rule. For the first three centuries after colonisation started, all students — from secondary school to

university — were required to go to Portugal to study. It was only when the Portuguese king fled Napoleon in 1809 that the first secondary school was established in Rio de Janeiro. The first university was founded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a nationwide school system was established only in its second half. Up to today, books are expensive and normally people associate them with school, not with their everyday life. In most towns and slums there are no book stores or libraries. And many of our students come from homes where the only book they had was the Bible. Therefore reading and writing are not widespread habits. Even for the students that have completed secondary school, informal learning through what they have seen and heard continues to be predominant.

*Teaching must help to overcome the lack of reading and writing habits, but without despising the oral culture. It must integrate it as complementary tools. Two aspects need special attention: First, the expected volume of reading and writing must be feasible, otherwise the culture of 'jeitinho' will induce to seek for short-cuts. Second, the selection of literature must take in account that the reading of translated European and American theological literature generates an additional challenge, because of its lack of understanding of the Brazilian context.*

### **3. Connected electronically**

The spreading of TV, mobile phone, computer, DVD-player and other electronic devices is every year more overwhelming, even in poor neighbourhoods and specially between young people. As they become cheaper these devices enable people to jump over from illiteracy to post-modernity. The flood of information, especially in the form of

visual information (films, You Tube), is changing the learning culture all over the world. The interests of those who are growing up now is focused on short headlines and synthetic information in the form of a picture or a film. Also the writing is affected by the way people interact in telegraphic writing style on electronic messengers.

*The every day enlarging access to information is a blessing, especially in a context where the access to books and libraries is limited. Through internet a wide horizon is opened, but it requires urgently competence to select what is really useful and consistent. Therefore the teaching has to enable the student to evaluate and process the flood of information and train students to express a topic clearly and coherently orally and through writing.*

#### **4. Shaped by a pentecostal Christian context**

In Brazil, Pentecostal and Neo-pentecostal Churches have flourished especially in the last 50 years, and they are currently reaching more than 20% of Brazil's total population and 90% of the Evangelical population. This omnipresent pentecostal context must be focused adequately because there the access to ministry is more driven by practice than by traditional means of theological education. In the past theology was at best seen with suspicion by most of the pentecostal churches, when it was not strictly forbidden by them. Only since the 1960's they established some elementary training programs, distance learning and on a secondary level. This critical approach to theological education however remains a background noise in every classroom, especially if some matters become more abstract.

In addition, the preference of the pentecostal environment for a 16<sup>th</sup> century Por-

tuguese Bible translation from the Vulgata as the 'inspired version', and the 'infallibility' of the senior pastors of the congregations are major roadblocks for exegetical teaching. As mentioned in the introduction, there is a vacuum of Bible understanding. In the words one of the first pentecostal pastors with formal theological training: “We challenged our churches to read the Bible, but we were not able to teach them to understand it!”

*The challenge to overcome the common opposition between the experience of the power of God and theological reflection requires respect and tactfulness. This frame of thinking has many different roots, but between Brazilian evangelicals the main ones are the opposition to the Catholic theology (e.g. to recommend a Catholic commentary may be perceived by evangelicals as very disturbing). So the teaching must help students to discover the need of theological thought that interacts with the amplitude of all Christian traditions as well as the value of connecting faith and experience in a proper way.*

### **How should the parables be taught?**

Since the report of the International Committee about Education for the 21<sup>th</sup> Century from UNESCO, coordinated by Jacques Delors, was published in Brazil in 1999<sup>2</sup> its 'four pillars of education' were used deliberately by the Brazilian education ministry in its policies for all levels of education.

These 'four pillars of knowledge' are also useful for theological education, not only because they are a governmental requirement, but also for their expertise, wisdom, and the fact that they are situated in the same cultural environment. In some ways all education in the country is influenced by these pillars and therefore it makes sense to let them guide also the planing of theological teaching.

The four pillars of knowledge are *learn to know, learn to do, learn to live together and learn to be*. “...every one of the 'four pillars of knowledge' must receive equal attention from the formal education, in order for the education to become a global experience at the cognitive and practical levels, at the individual level as person and as member of the society.”<sup>3</sup>

#### **1. 'Learn to know'**

The purpose of this first pillar is not so much the acquisition of a set of organized knowledge, as to master the instruments that enables knowledge. So every teaching has to combine a larger cultural horizon with the possibility of the detailed research of a specific matter in order to promote the intellectual curiosity and independent understanding by the students. The intention is to enable them to use their apprenticeship

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<sup>2</sup> Delors, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, chapter 4.



skills throughout their lives. This includes to introduce students to specific concepts, instruments and methods of research, interdisciplinary connections, goals for memorization and to exercise connected and disciplined thought.<sup>4</sup>

The parables of Jesus themselves contain a very rich and wide range of themes and they also have been read and investigated by many interpreters over the last two thousand years. In order to help students to fulfil the objectives of accessing, understanding and autonomously processing this wide knowledge about the parables, I selected four main goals:

- to promote a careful reading and assimilation of the content of the parables by heart; (Bible knowledge in our post-Christian era can't be presumed);
- to motivate a detailed study of the language, structure and 'logic' of selected parables to discover their meaning in order to exercise the exegetical methods;
- to encourage students to discover the connections between the parables and their biblical context and their function in Jesus ministry;
- to present an overview of the history of their interpretation with emphasis on their (philosophic) background, main ideas, understandings and influence on commentaries and study-bibles.

## **2. 'Learn to do'**

The purpose of the second pillar doesn't focus only on a specific intended professional qualification, but, as education necessarily has to prepare for a rapidly changing world it must envision a larger spectrum of competences that enable a person to handle a pattern of very different situations and to work with teams. For this purpose the

<sup>4</sup> Delors, 1999, chapter 4; Guimarães et alii. and Mota.

engagement at workplace and in communities offer useful opportunities and experiences for the learning process.<sup>5</sup> Jesus teaching and also the gospels intended to enable listeners and readers to do what they were taught. The parable of the Good Samaritan never intended to remain on a mere theoretical level. Therefore to accomplish this objective of 'learning to do' the planning of the teaching must take into account two kinds of goals: the first refers to the ethical challenges implied in the parables, that will be the specific subject of third and fourth pillars; the second refers to the technical competences the student is expected to achieve in the seminar:

- to prepare and present orally in the class the interpretation of a parable assigned to him, being able to explain its details and to explore and evaluate the resources he has accessed;
- to apply the acquired knowledge of this parable to different contexts of teaching in church and in secular environments (discuss them at workplace; write an article for a newspaper; teach in Sunday school classes; prepare a preaching; plan a discipleship meeting).
- to write an 2000 word comprehensive essay about the assigned parable.

### **3. 'Learn to live together with other people'**

The purpose of the third pillar requires the student to discover other people. The ideal is not any more the isolated study, but the connected learning that enables to understand and respect others, to perceive our interdependency. This requires also an understanding of one's own personality. This can only be learned through being engaged in common projects. Only team work can teach us in a productive way to recognise the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibidem

different perceptions and gifts of every one, how to manage our differences and conflicts, etc..<sup>6</sup> To accomplish this objective the seminar is expected:

- to help the students to understand a different culture (as the parables themselves are from a different time and cultural context);
- to teach them to understand, and debate fairly, interpretations of the parables that sustain opposing views;
- to offer opportunities to research together and to discuss the matter in small groups as well as in plenary sessions;
- to promote the debate about the ethics and community life standards of the parables in relation to the challenges of modern urban life.
- to share the experience of the challenges Jesus parables made to the living together in the class and the society as well.

#### **4. 'Learn to be'**

The purpose of the fourth pillar focuses on the development of the personality of the student, enabling him to grow in autonomy, understanding and personal responsibility. This holistic development intends to avoid that the education neglects any individual potentiality of the student: his memory, thought processes, aesthetic perception, creativity, spirituality, communication and other practical capacities.<sup>7</sup> To accomplish this objective the seminar is expected: foment

- to encourage the student to share his insights and personal learning;
- to stimulate creative interactions;

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem

- to encourage the expression of disagreement as well as to share experiences of personal enrichment in faith and wisdom.

### **What should be taught about the parables?**

The planning of the seminar must fit the proposed content into the assigned time (three weeks with twenty hours of classes in the evening). As the students work on different jobs during the day, there must also be time assigned for personal reading and research. Practice has shown that the best teaching is done if the first week is dedicated to introduction; the second, to individual research and the last one to presentations and debate.

#### **1. Introduction classes (first week):**

The introduction has the purpose to give an overview on the subject, describe methodological issues and give an retrospective view of the history of the interpretation of the parables.

The first class should be dedicated to a selection of well known parables as well to one very unknown. Divided in small groups, students are assigned to read Luke 15.1-16.10, looking for details and connections they never noticed and to prepare questions. The next three classes are dedicated to a dialogue about this sample of parables. The challenge is to begin with the observations of the students, and then guide them through questions to a deeper understanding of them. Finally the process of reflection must also contemplate the challenge of how to translate the narratives to an urban and technical context. The idea is to establish a standard of what is expected from the students at the seminar. Therefore, at the end the teacher has to deliver a text of his own interpretation.

The second day (classes 5-8) focuses the methodological issues of interpretation. The first and most important aspect is their connection to the ministry of Jesus (his life,

his teaching and his acts); then comes their synoptic context, the relation of the parables to the Old Testament and to the apocryphal and rabbinic literature<sup>8</sup>; the classification of the parables and, last not least, the challenge to translate the parables to our modern urban context<sup>9</sup>. At the end the students should receive an useful summary of what they should observe at their research on parables.<sup>10</sup>

**The review of the history of interpretation** needs a more time to be done (classes 9-15). As Lesslie Newbigin has said, its main goal “above all is to expose the presuppositions behind the (critical) questions so there may be an open encounter between the ultimate commitments on both sides, between de word and the world”<sup>11</sup>. To show didactically how every interpretation reads the parables, it is helpful to exemplify every one of them on the same parable. Present students with texts from authors of every tendency of interpretation about the parable of the Good Samaritan. Then ask them to find out their peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses in order to discover their (philosophical) assumptions. It will be more effective if then only lecture about this subject.

**The interpretation of the parables by the Church fathers** normally is exemplified on Augustine<sup>12</sup>. It is not fair to quote a shortened version from some modern author, because this makes him ridiculous. Besides of quoting his allegoric interpretation of the Good Samaritan it is necessary to give access also to his literal understanding of the love to our neighbour. To complement this picture it is useful to report Tertulian's<sup>13</sup> opposition to allegoric interpretation, but also his heretic literal interpretation. Is may

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8 Westermann, 1990.

9 For examples of contextualization to modern context see Thielicke, 1987.

10 One useful example: Wenham, 1989, 237-238.

11 Lesslie Newbigin, at Wainwright, 2000, 309.

12 Augustini, Quaestiones, 2.19.

13 Tertulian, 1959, 75-79.

also be important to mention already here how allegoric interpretation is being reconsidered in the last decades<sup>14</sup>.

**The interpretation of the Reformation** can be exemplified with preachings of Martin Luther<sup>15</sup> and John Calvin's commentaries<sup>16</sup> about the parable of the Good Samaritan. For both the literal meaning has to guide the interpretation. The difference between them is that Luther was more tolerant to allegoric interpretation, when it did not contradict the literal sense, and Calvin rejected it (but sometimes he also used it). In relation to both reformers it is important to show that their commentaries and preachings are not “neutral” academic studies, but conscientiously faith based interpretation, that did not separate exegetical explanation from personal application.

**The review of the history of interpretation of the last century** is very important and has to be done very carefully, because most Bible commentaries are influenced by it. Without understanding the main tendencies and their assumptions, it is not possible to grow to a mature evaluation of the interpretations in the literature. The research on the parables can be portrayed through three main tendencies: the first one tried to look behind the text of the gospels to find out historically what Jesus really has said; the second one is more interested on what is going on in the front of the text, trying to understand the impact of the parables on their listeners, respectively on the readers of the gospels. Both have in common that they try to reconstruct more or less radically what they assume to be the 'original' parables. The third approach interprets the parables accepting the biblical canon as its authoritative context.<sup>17</sup>

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14 McDonald, 1997, 37-48.

15 Luther, 1959 (1966), 340-344, 373.

16 Calvin, 1972/1995, 36-38.

17 Useful synthesis can be found in: Wenham, 1989, 225-238 and Snodgrass, 2000, 3-29.

**The first approach can be characterized as the historical – eschatological approach.** In 1888 Adolf Jülicher's published his books about parables with his vigorous protest against allegorical interpretations. Influenced by the growing suspicion from academic theology that the gospels are not trustworthy historical sources, Jülicher tried to reach the layers of tradition behind the gospels. With this purpose he inaugurated the 'tradition' of reconstructing Jesus's original parables. Inspired by Aristotle, Jülicher defined that original parables are composed by an image and an object with only one point of contact. He was followed by Charles Dodd<sup>18</sup> and Joachim Jeremias<sup>19</sup> who accepted his main interpretations and refined his methods to reach the tradition behind of the gospel texts. But both changed his liberal moral view by an eschatological understanding of them. Specially Jeremias dedicated his life to researching the contemporary context and to establish the unique original context of every parable in order to reach the voice of Jesus himself (the 'ipssissima vox Jesu'). In recent days Martin Hengel<sup>20</sup> has contributed much to this approach by his life-long research on the connections between the New Testament and the Second Temple Judaism.

**The second approach of the parables is known as the “new hermeneutic” approach.** It began with Ernst Fuchs<sup>21</sup> and Eberhard Jüngel<sup>22</sup>, two German theologians influenced by existentialism. They apply Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutic understanding. Thus they assume that language is capable to create reality and therefore define the parables as 'language events' that “have the power to bring to expression the reality to which they appoint”<sup>23</sup>. They rejected the Aristotelian assumptions of Jülicher's,

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18 Dodd, 1969<sup>6</sup>.

19 Jeremias, 1975<sup>3</sup>.

20 Hengel and Schwemer, 2007, 343-460.

21 Fuchs, 1954, 346s.

22 Jüngel, 1979<sup>5</sup>.

23 Snodgrass, 2000, 11.



Dodd's and Jeremias's, asseverating that the parables didn't need explanations, but they challenge their listeners to discover in the parables Jesus as their “secret, but present content”<sup>24</sup>. Other existentialist interpreters started from the same understanding about what is occurring in front of the text, but with very different interests: Ricoeur understands the parables as fictions that enable to rewrite life<sup>25</sup>; Via and Crossan tries to identify in the parables structural codes; Scott and others borrow tools from modern literature critics, to read the parables. Robert Funk's interpretation connects the new hermeneutic approach with Dodd's view of the parables as metaphors. For Funk the parables, as metaphors, can't be reduced to illustrate an idea or be restricted to one single point of meaning, because they require the listeners to make their own application by its paradox settings or by its missing conclusion.<sup>26</sup> Bailey gives an useful example of structural analysis and listener/reader approach<sup>27</sup>; Herzog proposes to read the parables as instruments of liberation of the oppressed peasants adopting Paulo Freires pedagogic understanding.<sup>28</sup>

**The third main stream of interpretation is the 'canonical approach'.** One of its most outspoken representatives was Brevard S. Childs. He argues that “in a fundamental sense the New Testament canon established a context from which the evangelical tradition was to be interpreted”<sup>29</sup>. “The canon therefore provided a context for the gospel, but did not attempt a final formulation of its message. It marked the arena in which each new generation of believers stood and sought to understand afresh the nature of the faith. It did not establish one doctrinal position, but often balanced several

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24 Fuchs, 1954, 347.

25 Stern, 1989, 50.

26 Snodgrass, 2000, 13-14.

27 Bailey, 1983, 41-43.

28 Herzog, 1994, 10-12 / 50-51

29 Childs, 1984, 27.

or fixed the limits within which Christians might rightly disagree. This flexibility was possible because the New Testament in its canonical shape continued to be treasured by a community of faith and practice. It was read and sung in worship, and heard in anticipation of a fresh illumination from the Spirit. ... In sum, the canon of sacred scripture was the living vehicle through which the Lord of the church continued to address his people. It was not moored in the past, but was a word from the ever present Saviour.”<sup>30</sup>

From this point of view Childs attempts to guide exegetical investigation to understand the nature of the theological shape of the texts. His 'canonical approach' synthesizes an dissatisfaction other theologians also have about historical-critical and existential interpretations (von Campenhausen, Karl Barth). James A. Sanders simultaneously has elaborated a slightly different 'canonical criticism'. Not very known is that the Jewish theologian and philosopher Martin Buber had already expressed a very similar point of view in 1934-35 at a Bible course.<sup>31</sup> David Wenham's *The parable of Jesus – Pictures of Re-*

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<sup>30</sup> Childs, 1984, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Buber, 1964, 1185-1186: 'Biblical texts should be regarded as texts from the Bible, that is: as parts of a greater unity that - if originated from many and various complete elements and fragments - constitutes a legitimate organic unity and should be seen as such. The consciousness that gave origin to the Bible accepted a literary breadth that is probably much greater than what could fit into ordinary unity and selected the versions that were associated to her. This consciousness did not just emerge at the time the Canon was defined. Rather, it was acting much earlier in the gradual gathering of what was to be joined. Writing and composition were already "Biblical" even before the first notion of a Biblical profile emerged. The consciousness from which the Bible emerged aimed at the synopsis of all the different bits and pieces and already made connections between passages and books. It allowed that the key concept would be gradually defined from citation to citation and that the secret meanings of an event – that was mentioned just in passing in a given narrative – would be revealed in its fullness in another passage. It threw light on one figure through another, and on one symbol by the means of another. A substantial part of what we call "Midrash", can already be found in the Bible, in the witnesses of the work of selection and organisation towards a Biblical unity whose main instrument was a silent but coherent use of repetitions, key words and echoes. We are only at the very beginnings of a methodical perception. What matters is to fine tune our perception to this links, connections and above all to the unifying function of the Bible. When we eventually get there, we will have completely different results than the one that emerges from the "sources" methodology that the Old Testament science of the last centuries deduces in the construction of the Scripture. We will see greater diversity and greater unity, amidst a much more dynamic perception of the emergence of this unity from diversity. With this I do not intend to say that we should not acknowledge the different works of modern science. We should do it; but we should also be aware of what we effectively learn from it. Theses come and go; but the texts remain.'

*volution* analyses the parables from this perspective<sup>32</sup>.

The last four classes (17-20) are dedicated to exercise systematic evaluation and to detect transversal themes in the parables. This approach is needed to help to understand the essential aspects of the teaching of Jesus. As in the last week the students are expected to analyse and synthesize the anthropology, theology, eschatology and christology of the parables in their presentations and panel discussions, it is necessary to exercise it first. As the main objective of the bachelor studies is mission, but this is not a very investigated subject about the parables, it should be chosen for an exemplary investigation and reflection.<sup>33</sup>

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32 Wenham, 1989, 151-177.

33 Weingaertner, 2008.

### Diagram of the 1<sup>th</sup> week

Date	Objectives	Content	Activities	Didactic Resources	Competences and abilities to be developed <sup>34</sup>
Monday (Classes 1-4)	Exegetical exercise	Luke 15.3-10 Luke 15.11-32 Luke 16.1-9	Careful reading in small groups, dialogue and lecture		to read the parables: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listing their similarities, asymmetries, repetitions;</li> <li>• describing the narrative</li> <li>• asking questions to the text;</li> <li>• analysing their synoptic and Galilean context;</li> <li>• relating the parables to the teaching of Jesus and to Old Testament texts</li> <li>• describing and explaining their content;</li> <li>• applying the parables to the present;</li> </ul> to assess the different methodical approaches; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• classifying, identify and compare the main tendencies interpretation</li> <li>• recognizing and understanding their presuppositions;</li> <li>• examining and distinguishing the background of commentaries;</li> </ul> to formulate exemplary a systematic understanding of one central teaching of the parables and defend the conclusions theologically.
Tuesday (Classes 5-8)	Methodical approaches	-Why Jesus told parables? - Jesus' ministry - Galilean and Old Testament context - Definition of parables - Apocryphal and Rabbinic parables - Classification of the parables	Lecture, reading of selected texts and dialogue	Bible Power-point	
Wednesday (Classes 9-12)	Review of the history of interpretation	Interpretation of the Church Fathers, the Reformation and the XX century (historical-eschatological, new hermeneutics and canonical approach	Reading of exemplary interpretations of the Good Samaritan from each approach and lecture.	Photocopies of the interpretations of each main tendency	
Thursday (Classes 13-16)					
Friday (Classes 17-20)	Systematic analysis	Mission in the parables	Lecture and debate	Power-point	

## 2. Individual Research Exercise (second week)

Every student is assigned one different parable to interpret, and about which s/he must prepare a 2000-3000 word essay for oral presentation and discussion in class (+- 30 minutes). In his/her research s/he is expected: (1) to search for one commentary of the Church Fathers, one of the Reformation time and three modern ones; (2) to comment on the background and evaluate one assigned commentary; (3) to explain the details of the text and its biblical context and background; (4) to explore the systematic /

<sup>34</sup> The expected competences and abilities are shaped by a revised approach of the taxonomy of de Bloom also in the diagrams 2 and 3.

doctrinal insights the parable enables to do; and (5) to search for possibilities to contextualize it.

### Diagram of the 2<sup>th</sup> Week

Date	Objectives	Content	Activities	Didactic Resources	Competences and abilities to be developed through the research project:
<b>Monday (Classes 1-4)</b>	Do research and write an exegetical essay	An parable assigned to every student for individual research	Research Writing	Library Internet	<p><b>to recognize</b> the main exegetical issues of the assigned parable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifying its narrative structure;</li> <li>explain the details of the text and it's biblical context and background;</li> <li>recognizing the synoptic and Old Testament context;</li> <li>distinguish systematic / doctrinal insights from the parable;</li> <li>contextualize them in an urban and technician reality;</li> </ul> <p><b>to demonstrate</b> the understanding of the methodological approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviewing the interpretations of the parable in the accessible commentaries</li> <li>examining the influence of the main tendencies of the history of the interpretation on, at least, one commentary;</li> </ul> <p><b>to write</b> an comprehensive essay about the results of the research.</p>
<b>Tuesday (Classes 5-8)</b>					
<b>Wednesday (Classes 9-12)</b>					
<b>Thursday (Classes 13-16)</b>					
<b>Friday (Classes 17-20)</b>					

### 3. Sharing the learning (third week)

**During** four evenings five to six students present their work and answer questions from colleges. The teachers role should be restricted to final comments, if necessary. The last class of each evening is reserved for a panel to discuss one of the systematic, transversal approaches. A different group of five to six students will debate the anthropology, theology, eschatology and histology of the parables presented on that evening. The last four classes on the fifth day are reserved for concluding commentaries, evaluations and worship.

### Diagram of the 3<sup>th</sup> Week

Date	Objectives	Content	Activities	Didactic Resources	Competences and abilities to be developed through the research project:
<b>Monday (Classes 1-4)</b>	Presentations and debate of 20-24 parables; Panels to analyse the parables about systematic themes	Quick written test about the content of the parables	Presentations Panels	Data-show, black-board, sketches,	to recall de content of the parables; to interpret the parable orally: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explaining the main issues;</li> <li>• appraise different interpretations</li> <li>• formulating its teachings;</li> <li>• answering questions</li> <li>• contextualizing it;</li> </ul> to synthesize the main doctrinal teachings form the parables: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comparing the parables' teaching;</li> <li>• evaluating and organizing the arguments;</li> <li>• enlarging the horizon of their understanding;</li> </ul> to examine the need of parables for our modern technological urban context.
<b>Tuesday (Classes 5-8)</b>		Each day 5-6 parables			
<b>Wednesday (Classes 9-12)</b>		Anthropology of the parables			
<b>Thursday (Classes 13-16)</b>					
<b>Friday (Classes 17-20)</b>	Final comments and worship	Jesus parables and our technician urban reality	Take a meal together	Garden at teachers home	

### Assessment

The final mark will consist of a combination of the following:

- 30% related to engagement in group work and panels (through a combination of mutual and teacher's evaluation);
- 60% related to the individual exegetical presentation (30% oral performance, 30% for the written text), and
- 10% for personal self-evaluation.

## Conclusion

Teaching the parables is a gratifying and never ending challenge. The purpose I pursued in this essay is expressed very precisely by Lesslie Newbigin, when he says: “My task is to make clear to myself and (if possible) to others the world which is spoken in the Gospel in such a way that it may be heard in the language of this culture of which I am a part with all its power to question that culture.”<sup>35</sup> The process of encouraging students from a variety of backgrounds (cultural as well as social) to make good quality contributions always results in surprises to all participants. The students as well as the teachers are blessed with new questions as well as insights. The suggested teaching programme outlined in this essay is however not guaranteed to work, since the ultimate understanding of the parables only God himself can confer to each person, through his Holy Spirit - as He has promised to do. Our approach has to be open for His approach, because only He can make us “surprised by joy” (C. S. Lewis). For this we should hope and pray. Amen.

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<sup>35</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, at Wainwright, 2000, 309.

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