

Title: "He did not speak to them without a parable" (Mk. 4:34) – The Metaphorical Truth about God in Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels.

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During his religious conversion and subsequent pull away from literature, Tolstoy engaged in an exploration of primary Christian texts. The most involved project of this nature was his re-translation and harmonization of the four New Testament gospels, known as *Soedinenie i perevod chetyrekh evangelii* (henceforth *Perevod*). While this project would eventually grow into the ideological foundation for Tolstoyanism, it also served as an important poetic laboratory for Tolstoy's art. In his reading of the Gospels the author was often drawn to and highlighted ideas that appealed to him. At the expense of philological and translation standards, he often gave precedence to these ideas and underscored them in ways that exceed their original emphasis.

In this vein, a striking element about Tolstoy's reading of the Bible is the way in which he sidesteps the miraculous portions of the narrative and highlights the more ordinary instances of Jesus' teaching. Among these passages, the most favored were the New Testament parables. These narratives were bound to ordinary life and proved to be highly appropriate models of theological reflection for Tolstoy.

This paper will discuss Tolstoy's reading of synoptic parables and devote particular attention to the well-known parable of the Sower. In his commentaries, Tolstoy claimed to have read the parables in a "straight" manner. What he meant was not simply a literal reading. Over the years, the Church had built quite the exegetic tradition around the parable. In his reading of the parabolic corpus, Tolstoy would interact with this tradition, polemicize it and at times even hesitantly emulate it. He read metaphorically in the same ways that traditional theologians did, often discerning two things in one, and reconstructing the meta-symbols of God, life, and death from simple parabolic details. But if this type of reading had granted the Church eschatological insights, it allowed Tolstoy to lace the living world with rich symbolic signification. As this paper will show, the parabolic narratives served to make reality divine and granted earthly embodiment to both God and the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, from an artistic standpoint, Tolstoy's reading of these narratives provides important insights about the evolving nature of his realism. The symbolic field that he traced in these narratives credits the argument of some Tolstoy scholars – such as Eikhenbaum and Mandelker – that the late Tolstoy pushed his realism into the uncharted territories of proto-Symbolism.