

As any gardener knows, weeding can be the greatest threat of all to the life of the young seedling. At first, the problem is one of identification. The weeds must be left until the seedling can be clearly recognised. Even then, removing the weeds may pose an even greater threat. It might sever the seedling's root system. Often the weed brings the seedling away with it.

In the case of human beings it is an even more hazardous operation. "Weeding out" has no history of success – which doesn't seem to curb people's passion for it. Fifty years after Hitler's final solution, the horrendous weeding out of six million Jews in concentration camps, the Bosnian Serbs were attempting the brutal policy of "ethnic cleansing". Race, religion, colour, sex, politics are still considered ready-reckoners for identifying society's weeds. The unborn child, the seed of life, is threatened with abortion. At the other end of life, euthanasia is proposed as the final solution for the new Jews – the old, the maimed, the incurables and the burdensome. Right through life, the weeding out continues remorselessly. The handicapped are institutionalised, the delinquent are penalised, the deviant are ostracised and the poor are patronised.

Weeding out is not confined to faceless bureaucracy. We all try our hand at it. We like to think our judicious weeding-out has prevented many great personal calamities. We are very sharp at spotting the undesirables, the troublemakers, the misfits. We may admit reluctantly to lapses in our watchfulness but never to mistakes.

One shudders to think of the people who might have been weeded out if people had got their way and God himself had not chosen to intervene. Probably most of the saints !! Peter, after his triple denial in the crucifixion crisis should have been weeded out for failing the leadership test. Strange, isn't it, that Christ never weeded out Judas ? The Church did not always show her master's tolerance. Galileo could testify to that. The spirit of the Inquisition lives on. Excommunications and anathemas may be out of fashion but old habits die hard.

The lesson of the parable of the weeds is so uncompromisingly simple and so widely ignored. To the question “Do you want us to go and weed it out ?” the answer is a categorical “No”. And the reason is self evident. Only God has eyes sufficiently discerning and fingers sufficiently gentle for this job. Weeding out is God’s prerogative. Life would be so much better for everybody, if only we would leave it to God.